

Emerald Empire

The Essential Guide to Rokugan



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18th Day of the Month of Hantei, 1122, on a Road in Eastern Yama Province

Daidoji Narisawa had never been a particularly pious man, but he wondered if offering incense to the kami of the mountains rising abruptly from the plain would convince them to stop glaring at him. The maps claimed this was part of the same range that guarded the back of Daidoji Castle, but here, the late spring sunlight reflecting off the snowcapped peaks felt distinctly less warm.

That was certainly true of the people he passed. The peasants of Lion Clan lands knew the crest of the Crane Clan well, and they paused their backbreaking labor in the rice fields to scowl as Narisawa's entourage passed by. If he complained of their insolence, the Lion would only beat or behead the ones responsible, then laugh behind their sleeves at the delicate Crane who couldn't even endure a nasty look.

The Daidoji were no frail flowers. And if Narisawa did not show his strength to these people, the suffering would extend far beyond a few peasants.

"We should reach Last Breath Castle by the Hour of the Horse," his companion Hiramichi Asao said.

She had mistaken Narisawa straightening in his saddle for impatience. He would happily have ridden for days more through this relative tranquility, with the sun glinting off the water in the fields and the songs of the farmers in the distance, rather than arrive at his destination—a truth he would not shame himself by admitting. Narisawa said, "I was only thinking of the welcome we are likely to receive."

Asao's lips pressed together. "If they are interested in seeing this match succeed, even the Matsu can recall their manners. If not…"

"If not, they will throw me before Matsu Chieko-san without even permitting me a bath first." He'd taken the precaution of washing himself at the last inn, but it would still be humiliating to meet his future wife while covered in the dust and sweat of the road.

But the Lion had agreed to this marriage. Narisawa had no illusions that it would end forever the strife that had given the nearby Lake of Sorrows its name, but the Matsu would not have offered up one of their own if they were not willing to consider a temporary peace.

A sharp whistle sounded, a signal from one of the *ashigaru* escorting Narisawa. Taro had the sharpest eyes in the whole group and had spotted something ahead.

There was surely no danger. If blood watered the ground this close to Last Breath Castle, it would be because a Crane army had pressed the Matsu nearly back to their own walls. No bandit was foolish enough to rear their head this near to the stronghold of the family that trained both the berserkers and beastmasters.

No *physical* danger, Narisawa amended. Other sorts were not only possible, but likely.

Soon after that, he saw the same cloud of dust Taro had spotted. The ashigaru trotted back toward him and said, "It's a patrol, my lord. I make it half a dozen, all mounted, and in armor."

Narisawa nodded and raised his voice. "Halt! And kneel to whomever is coming."

His ashigaru obeyed, moving to the edge of the ditch that lined the side of the road and then pressing their faces to the ground. Narisawa and Asao remained in the saddle. He waited, breathing in the scents of rich mud and spring flowers, watching the Lion approach.

The woman at the head of the patrol was not surprised to find a group of Crane along the road. No doubt the Matsu had been receiving reports of his progress ever since he had crossed the border into Lion lands. She said curtly, "I am Matsu Hideji, magistrate of the Lion Clan. Would you be so kind as to show me your travel papers?"

He'd shown the same papers at the bridge across Three Stone River, only a few miles back. But challenges of this sort were routine when in hostile territory, and Narisawa had them ready to hand. He reached inside his kimono and removed the packet, encased in hard boards to protect it. Asao dismounted, took it from him with a bow, and carried it over to the magistrate.

Matsu Hideji spent far more time examining the papers than they required, but finally she closed the boards and bowed. "Daidoji-san. I hope your journey hasn't been too tiring."

All the way from Kyūden Doji—but compared with the full sweep of the Emerald Empire, that wasn't far at all. In a fit of courtly inspiration, Narisawa said, "How can any journey seem long, when happiness waits at the end?"

Hideji didn't rise to the bait. She said only, "I will escort you to the castle."

No doubt that was why she'd come to meet him. "I am honored by the offer," Narisawa said, and he ordered his ashigaru to rise. Together they continued toward the high walls of the Matsu city, and the frowning mountains beyond.

And so my duty begins, Narisawa thought. If he failed, then the Lake of Sorrows would grieve for more fallen samurai…and he would be the first of them to die.

Welcome to Rokugan

The Emerald Empire reaches from the Twilight Mountains in the south to the Great Wall of the North Mountains, and from the Shinomen Forest in the west to the Sea of the Sun Goddess in the east. This is Rokugan, a feudal empire under the divine rule of the Celestial Heavens' representative and dominated by the Great Clans, themselves founded by the first Emperor's divine siblings.

Rokugan is a land of strict social stratification. The Empire's innumerable peasants are utterly subservient to the samurai caste, which is divided between the more numerous *buke* and the *kuge*, the landed nobility, whom the buke serve without question. Each samurai is sworn to the service of their daimyō, and this loyalty is a fundamental component of the Code of Bushidō, by which all samurai conduct their lives.

Rokugan is a land of great beauty and great horror, of great joy and great tragedy, and of great honor and great injustice. From lush plains to crowded cities, peasants toil in fields and rice paddies, and samurai duel for honor and glory. The seven Great Clans share a culture and history, but each hold sacred its own, often radically different, traditions and beliefs. Adherence to the Code of Bushidō unites the clans, yet their interpretations of and priorities placed on its tenets divide them.

WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

Emerald Empire is a guide to Rokugan, including the land, its culture, and its people. While this book provides the information players and game masters need to understand the Emerald Empire and create exciting and dramatic roleplaying experiences set within it, it is far from comprehensive. Rokugan is a vast land, and to detail every town and valley, every tradition and social role, is beyond the scope of any single volume.

This book is divided into seven chapters exploring the length and breadth of Rokugan as a setting for roleplaying campaigns. The first six chapters deal with the fundamental locations—both natural and civilized—that make up the Emerald Empire, these locations' place in the fabric of society, and the people who inhabit them. In addition to general information about life in these places, each chapter looks at specific locations and provides profiles for NPCs associated with them. Adventure seeds provide an easy way for GMs to incorporate these locations and NPCs into their games.

The seventh chapter provides new options for player characters, drawing from the diversity of Rokugan to expand on the possibilities in the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* Core Rulebook.



Chapter 1

Strongholds of Power explores the castles and palaces of Rokugan, from the pragmatic edifices of the Crab to the elegant architecture of the Crane. This chapter examines the role and purpose of castles as the centers of both warfare and politics in Rokugan. In addition to information about typical castle features and purposes, and regional variations, this chapter looks at the nature of diplomacy and warfare in the Emerald Empire.

Chapter 2

Centers of Trade looks at cities and towns in Rokugan, their origins, their common features, and their importance to commerce and society. This chapter discusses harbors and ports, which are a common feature of many of Rokugan's most influential and wealthy cities. No city is without crime, and **Chapter 2** concludes with information on the nature of law and enforcement in Rokugan.

Chapter 3

Heart of the Empire examines the villages and farms that underpin Rokugan's civilization, as well as the roads and rivers that connect them and allow their vital produce to reach the more populous cities and towns. This chapter also explores more closely the relationship and interactions between samurai and the different classes of peasant found throughout the Emerald Empire.

Chapter 4

Sacred Spaces details the cosmography of the universe as Rokugan understands it, from the Celestial Heavens, to the trickster realm of Senkyō, to the hell of Jigoku. This chapter explores the place of Rokugan's traditional veneration of the kami and Fortunes, and the place of religion in the Emerald Empire. It provides detail on the structure and function of shrines in Rokugan, and describes several such places of worship. Finally, this chapter looks at forbidden practices, such as curses and the dreaded blood magic.

Chapter 5

Paths to Enlightenment describes the mysterious and revered Shinsei and the ongoing debate regarding his teachings' true meaning. It details the reasons for and process of becoming a monk or priest, and how Shinseist clergy and their temples and monasteries fit into Rokugani society. This chapter looks in detail at monasteries and temples throughout Rokugan, their form and function, and what makes each unique.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

Throughout this book, you'll find sidebars like this one presenting adventure seeds for GMs. If you're a player, you might want to avoid reading these, as doing so could spoil things should your GM the ideas! If you're a GM, you can expand on these seeds to create fully fledged adventures, take bits and pieces, or simply use them for inspiration.

一 **Hook** The hook provides the context for starting the adventure and introduces the important NPCs. We also provide a suggested way to involve the PCs in events, which you can tailor to fit your campaign.

二 **Rising Action** In the next part of an adventure seed, we briefly describe the most likely way for events to escalate, further embroiling the PCs and raising the stakes.

三 **Climax** Finally we offer a likely climax for the adventure, whether that is a decisive encounter with an NPC or a difficult choice the PCs must make. By this point, the events of the adventure are likely to have taken unexpected turns based on the PCs' actions, and you should feel free to modify the climax or resolve matters in whatever way fits the ongoing adventure.

Chapter 6

Wilds of Rokugan examines the wild places within the bounds of Rokugan, from forests, to mountains, to coastlines. It describes the places where civilization and the wild meet, such as mountain mines and logging villages, and even forgotten ruins.

Chapter 7

New Player Options presents a number of new options for player characters, including samurai of the Imperial Families and their schools, such as the Miya Herald and Seppun Astrologer. New advantages and disadvantages illustrate the wide variety of personalities and backgrounds possible for samurai. New titles, from Daimyō to Yoriki expand the possibilities for characters' stories.


Great Wall of the North Mountains
HIGH HOUSE OF LIGHT
Dragon Lands
SHRINE OF THE KI-RIN
RED HORN VILLAGE
KHANBULAK
HYŌZENSHŌ
Unicorn Lands
PLAINS WIND MONASTERY
TEMPLE OF THE BURNED MONK
CITY OF THE RICH FROG
VIOLENCE BEHIND COURTLINESS CITY
Phoenix Lands
Spine of the World
BUZZING FLY VILLAGE
Lion Lands
TEMPLE OF LISTENING GHOSTS
SEPPUN PALACE THE FOUR TEMPLES
SILENT ONES MONASTERY
CITY OF LIES
OTOSAN UCHI
Shinomen Forest
Northern Crane Lands
SILK AND SHADOW PALACE
ESTEEMED PALACES OF THE CRANE
SHINDEN KASAI
Scorpion Lands
BENTEN SEIDŌ
Rokugan
FORGOTTEN VILLAGE
CAVE OF THE STONE CHILDREN
KAORI TEA FARM
WALL ABOVE THE OCEAN VILLAGE
THE SUMMERLANDS
Twilight Mountains
Crab Lands
Southern Crane Lands
WEST MOUNTAIN VILLAGE
PALACE OF THE MANTIS
CLEAR WATER VILLAGE
SWIRLING POOL VILLAGE
The Shadowlands
Islands of Silk and Spice

The Age of Heaven and Earth

THE WRITERS OF HISTORY

This section recounts the Rokugani telling of history: the story that the citizens of Rokugan know, and that countless Imperial chroniclers have decreed to be truth. However, one's truth often depends where one stands, and readers should look not only for what is said, but what is left unsaid. Foreigners, the Yobanjin, and even secret groups within Rokugan have their own accounts of ages past, and these do not always align with the official Imperial history

As compiled by Imperial Scribe Miya Chinatsu

The long and glorious history of our Emerald Empire traces directly from its founding by the divine Kami. Thanks to the many wondrous gifts they bestowed upon humanity—including art, learning, and the Code of Bushidō—Rokugan endures as the shining epitome of civilization. And it is thanks to the gifts of the Celestial Heavens that Rokugan had strength to weather the great threats that assailed it at the dawn of history.

THE CREATION OF THE WORLD

In the beginning there was Nothing. This was not the nothing of the Void, for that is unchanged, unchanging, and unchangeable. This Nothing was the source of all, but first it was empty and alone. After uncountable ages, Nothing realized it was alone, and it became afraid. This created a third of the world. Then Nothing longed for a companion, and this longing created another third of the world. Then Nothing realized what it had done and regretted fear and longing, and the last third of the world was created. Then there was no more Nothing, and in its place was the world.

The world then did not have the form we know today. At that time, it was formless and fluid, like dark oil swirling in water. Eventually, the lighter parts separated out and became the Heavens, and the heavier parts sank down and became the earth. Then the Three Nameless Gods appeared, and they saw that while Heaven and earth had been formed, everything within them was still wild and unshaped. After taking counsel with themselves they created two gods, and sent them out to give shape to the world. The beings meditated on how this could be done, and then they bowed down, kissed the earth, and named it.

Now that it was named, the earth was filled with life, and new gods and beasts appeared: the ocean lord Suijin, the wind god Kaze-no-Kami and the Four Cardinal Winds, the Elemental Dragons, and many others. The two gods who named the earth also gained names: the man became Onnotangu, the moon, and the woman became Amaterasu, the sun. Attending them in the Heavens was the *shinzoku*, or tribe of the gods, while the *mazoku* demons of the underworld toiled beneath the earth to oversee the souls of the dead (few though they were in those days).

There were no humans yet, and the earth was populated by the Five Ancient Races: the tengu, the kitsu, the ningyo, the trolls, and the zokujin. We know very little about those times, for their empires rose and fell and left no record. The last of the kitsu married followers of Lord Akodo and founded the Kitsu family, but if they bequeathed stories of their past to their descendants, Lion historians have not shared them. The Kami Shiba, founder of the Phoenix Clan, married a ningyo woman, Tsumaru, and her granddaughter later published an account of her grandmother's stories.

The Unicorn Clan historian Ide Takauji claims that after the Five Ancient Races another race, serpentlike, dwelled in the lands that later became Rokugan. He bases this on certain ruins that have been found in the Shinomen Forest, which have many statues and carved murals of snakes with humanlike features.

THE DESCENT OF THE KAMI

Across the span of ages, Amaterasu and Onnotangu were blessed with children: the nine Kami. For a time, the Celestial Heavens were joyful, but as the children grew, Onnotangu noticed how strong and talented they were, blessed with both his blood and that of Lady Sun's, and he began to fear that one of them would usurp his power. Envy and fear grew in his heart, until finally, he resolved to make sure that this would never come to pass—by devouring his children. Amaterasu wept bitterly at the thought, her tears falling to the earth below and forming large pools. Being unwilling to tear apart the heavens by warring with her husband directly, she sought a different path. Each time Onnotangu swallowed one of the children, she offered him a cup of sake with a single drop of poison in it. By the time he came to the youngest child, Hantei, Lord Moon was so muddled by his drinks that Amaterasu was able to swap a stone wrapped in Hantei's clothing for the real child and her husband swallowed it instead. Then he fell asleep.

Amaterasu smuggled Hantei out of the palace and hid him. As he grew, she taught him of honor and war. When he had learned everything, she armed him with a sword made of starlight and sent him to rescue his siblings. Onnotangu was awakening from his sleep as Hantei strode to the palace. Seeing his shining son, Lord Moon roared with anger, seized his sword, and rushed out for battle. Their duel lasted many ages, Hantei deftly evading his father's strikes but landing his own blows. As Onnotangu's blood fell from Heaven, it landed in the pools of Amaterasu's tears. From each pool, two humans stood up and looked around in wonder—for humanity is made from the tears of Lady Sun and the blood of Lord Moon.



After an interminable time, Hantei found his opening. Gathering all his strength, he cut deeply across his father's stomach, and his siblings came tumbling out fell to earth. Fu Leng was the last, and Onnotangu caught him as he fell. Hantei swung again and cut his father's hand off, leaving Fu Leng to fall with the others. Howling in despair, Fu Leng grabbed for Hantei, and both brothers fell. As the glory of the Heavens receded, the brothers tumbled apart, and Hantei did not know where his brother fell. Hantei, Akodo, Doji, Hida, Togashi, Shinjo, and the twins, Shiba and Bayushi, all landed close together.

When they reached the earth, the Kami were doubly amazed: First, they were astonished to discover that they were now mortal and could die. Then, they were amazed by humanity, which, despite its connection to Lady Sun and Lord Moon, was in a pitiable state.

THE UNCIVILIZED TIMES (PREHISTORY–5 IC)

At the dawn of the age of humanity, humans lived scattered across the world in tribes, as the Yobanjin in the north still do. They worshiped the Fortunes, the gods of human endeavors, and their priests traveled the spaces between human and spirit and beast. These peoples lived in small villages, although in a few places there were towns. They made pottery without pottery wheels, and they forged crude tools and weapons from bronze. They clothed themselves in hides and woven grasses, and they hunted in and gathered their sustenance from the forest. A few tried their hand at cultivating small swaths of the wild grains and beans they found. Yet the crops were as delicate as petals on the wind, and the fury of the young gods of storm and sea could wipe them out in an instant.

For all this, humanity's heart had yet to be stirred to the creation of true art. Without letters to record their past, humans relied on stories passed down from one generation to the next. Without dyes or the cultivation of rice, their garb was crude and their harvests meager. The tribes danced and sang to the beat of drums, but they did so wildly, knowing neither melody nor harmony. Warfare, most commonly raiding, was conducted with little strategy and no honor.

The Kami took counsel among themselves and decided that they would each travel through the world and judge its worth. As they were all beautiful, strong, and wise, they attracted a great deal of attention from the tribes they visited. Soon, each of them had a retinue of humans who desired to learn more of the arts of Heaven from them. Writing and calligraphy, forging tools of iron and steel, stringing instruments, acquiring the strength that comes from honor and loyalty, and many other practices and ideas spread through the land as the Kami traveled.

THE TENTH KAMI

Certain shugenja and wise monks believe there was another Kami, Ryoshun, who perished in Lord Moon's gut. Many priests of Osano-wo believe that when Hantei cut open Onnotangu, this Tenth Kami fell to the underworld, where he assists, or even serves, the Fortune of Death. Others have called such claims blasphemous, leading to bloodshed on occasion. Perhaps fittingly, those who have fared poorly in such matters soon visited the underworld, where they can confirm the truth of the matter personally.

THE LIGHT OF A NEW DAWN (5 IC–39 IC)

Finally, the Kami reunited at the place where they had landed. Once again they took counsel and decided that although humanity had great worth, it must be organized and governed with wisdom so that its worth could blossom. That settled, they then held a tournament to determine who among them would become the leader of this new land. Lord Togashi did not participate in the tournament, for it is said that in his great wisdom, he foresaw that Hantei would be the victor.

Having determined who would be Emperor, the Kami set about creating an empire. Except for Emperor Hantei, all of the Kami established clans made up of their followers. Emperor Hantei allotted land to each of the clans, giving them permission to farm it so long as they paid taxes to him. Each of Hantei's siblings organized the tribes in their lands and began to establish schools, which taught the ways of Bushidō. All of them started schools for warriors, because the land was still dangerous to travel in. Many people did not understand the great blessings that the Kami had brought to earth and resisted their rule. But some had other schools as well. Lady Doji's was the most famous, for she was the first patron of the arts, and her students spread through the new Empire carrying stories and other works of art about the Kami and the Celestial Heavens. Soon towns swelled into cities, and roads met to link the territories. The Emperor chose as the site of his capital the hill where the Kami first fell to earth, and Otosan Uchi was built.

THE WAR AGAINST FU LENG (39 IC–42 IC)

For many years, all was well in the new Empire. The clans grew as people across the Empire became aware of the great wisdom and nobility of the Kami, and Emperor Hantei established laws that reflected the perfection of the Celestial Heavens.

One day, Fu Leng arrived in Otosan Uchi and reunited with his siblings. The other Kami were at first joyous to learn that their brother had survived, but worry clouded their joy, as the Crab Clan knew well of the evil stirring to the south, from where Fu Leng had come. Fu Leng raged against his siblings for having excluded him from the tournament that had decided who would rule Rokugan, though they assured him they had not known he yet lived. He accused them of lying, of leaving him to die, and of choosing not to search for him. The other Kami soon saw, wisely, that Fu Leng had been corrupted by the evil of Jigoku, the twisted counterpart of the true underworld.

Fu Leng demanded the right to challenge Hantei for leadership of Rokugan. Sadly, Hantei accepted the duel, but chose Togashi as his champion. When Fu Leng told Togashi to choose a weapon, the wise but forlorn founder of the Dragon Clan chose all of Rokugan and all who dwelt within it. Further enraged, Fu Leng retreated to the Shadowlands, vowing to return with his own army to fight their duel.

Soon, word came from the South of towns and villages overrun by armies of creatures born of nightmare: goblins, demonic oni, and other creatures both feared and unknown. Warriors sworn to defend the new Empire gathered to do battle against this terrible host, but all were defeated. Fu Leng was using evil sorcery to summon his armies and lead them to victory. Slowly, the armies raised by Hantei and his siblings were pushed back.



A Kami Kneels

It was during this time that the tribe of Isawa joined the Empire. Previously, Isawa, who was a spiritual leader of great ability and held the confidence of the Fortunes and the kami, had seen no value in placing himself and his tribe under the protection of the Children of the Sun and Moon. As the war proceeded, the Kami Shiba went to the tribe and asked them to help in the war. Isawa refused, as he did not want his tribe to lose their traditions. Shiba then knelt before Isawa and swore that he and his descendants would serve and protect Isawa and his tribe if they agreed to become part of Shiba's clan. Isawa was much impressed by this display of sincerity and accepted. So it is to this day that while a Shiba is always the Champion of the Phoenix Clan, the Phoenix are ruled by the descendants of Isawa.

The Little Teacher

One day, an old man dressed as a monk came to Hantei's camp. He said his name was Shinsei, and that he knew how the Emperor could defeat the armies of Fu Leng. Hantei would not listen at first, but after Shinsei defeated—unarmed—the guards sent to remove him, the Emperor because curious. The two talked the whole night, and Shiba diligently copied down all that was said. These scrolls became the Tao of Shinsei, and they contained all of the Little Teacher's wisdom concerning the world, the Five Elements, and Enlightenment.

Shinsei told the Emperor that fortune favors the mortal man, and so he would gather seven human warriors to defeat the Dark Kami. Hantei gave his permission, and so one warrior from each of the clans was chosen. Shinsei led these warriors, the Seven Thunders, into the South. For many weeks, nothing was heard from them. Then one day, in the midst of a great battle, the armies of Fu Leng suddenly became confused and disarrayed. The warriors of the Empire took heart and fought even more fiercely, driving their enemies from the field. It was clear to all that the Thunders had won—the Day of Thunder had arrived. Hantei ordered a great feast to be prepared to honor the heroes, but only Shinsei and Shosuro, the Scorpion Thunder, returned. Shosuro carried twelve scrolls that she said bound the defeated Fu Leng. Hantei ordered that these scrolls never be opened and gave them to the Scorpion Clan for safekeeping.

The Thousand Years of Peace

Now we come to the start of the era justly celebrated as the Thousand Years of Peace. Under the gracious rule of the Hantei emperors and guided by the descendants of the Kami, the people of Rokugan have enjoyed unbroken centuries of peace and prosperity. Gaijin travelers, were they permitted within our glorious empire, would gaze in envious admiration at the elegance, wisdom, and plenty that could be found throughout our lands.

The Spread of the Emperor's Benevolence (42 IC–390 IC)

The Ki-Rin Depart

With the threat of Fu Leng's armies gone, the people of Rokugan returned to the matter of building the Empire. Hantei did not forget the harm an enemy from outside Rokugan had caused, however, and he called his sister Shinjo before him. Lady Shinjo had always been the wanderer of the family, and she always met new peoples with interest and curiosity. The Emperor gave her and her followers, who at the time were known as the Ki-Rin Clan, the mission of exploring outside the Empire and seeing what threats might lie beyond its borders. Lady Doji was very sad to see Shinjo leave, as the sisters had always been close, and she gave Shinjo a beautiful fan that she herself had painted to serve as reminder of their bond.

The Reign of the Shining Prince

Shortly after Shinjo's departure, Hantei passed beyond Ningen-dō, the Realm of Mortals. Some records state that he died from the lingering effects of a wound he had suffered in the war against Fu Leng, and some that he simply tired of the mortal world and returned to the Celestial Heavens in a flash of light. This is a matter best argued by priests, and not by historians, so we will move on.

ISAWA CALENDAR

The calendar developed by Isawa counts years beginning with the Fall of the Kami, which marks year 1. The system has been widely adopted throughout Rokugan, as it provides a more accessible context than the system of Imperial Right used in official records, which records events by the year of an Emperor's reign. Some have questioned why Isawa would use such a system, considering his opposition to the Kami's rule; however, claims that the calendar initially marked some other occasion during the year the Kami fell from the Heavens receive little serious consideration.

Hantei was succeeded as Emperor by his son Hantei Genji, known to all as the Shining Prince. Genji was an elegant and accomplished man who, in his youth, pursued numerous adventures and escapades, thus blessing storytellers of the time with an abundance of material. As Emperor, he sponsored the building of many temples and monasteries, so that the knowledge of the Five Elements and the Tao of Shinsei could spread throughout the Empire. He also continued the building of a great network of roads between the cities of the Empire. Upon his death, he passed the throne to his eldest daughter, Murasaki, whose reign as Empress was long and prosperous.

Imperial Law and the Emerald Magistrates

It was during Genji's reign that Doji Hatsuo and Soshi Saibankan reformed and codified Imperial Law. These laws had been formulated by the Kami Hantei and thus were perfectly just and without omission, but judges around the Empire, as flawed mortals, varied in their ability to apply them. By issuing annotated versions of the original laws, Hatsuo and Saibankan made it possible for magistrates in every part of the Empire to hand down consistent rulings. They also established the Emerald Magistrates, officials with Imperial writs of authority to investigate crimes and pass judgments on criminals.

The Blessings of Daikoku

Peace having been restored, the farmers of the Empire could apply themselves to improving agriculture. The first great advance came with the spread of iron tools, which were cheaper and sturdier than those of bronze. With such tools farmers could clear and tend more land. With the canals and ditches such tools could produce came reliable irrigation and the introduction of wetland, paddy-grown rice. Rice paddies produced greater yield from the same amount of land. Clans with access to flat, well-watered land soon enjoyed increases in both population and wealth.



The last great innovation was the discovery that one could make noodles from wheat flour. Wheat is a hardy grain that flourishes in areas too cold or dry for rice, but it takes a long time to cook as a whole grain, and ground-wheat porridge has little to recommend itself as a food. Noodles, however, are delicious and quickly became popular everywhere. More and more land was cleared and planted, giving the Empire a larger and more stable food supply.

As populations grew, so did trade. Merchants found the system of barter limiting, however. In many areas, small plates or bars of gold or jade were used in place of actual goods, but they were subject to problems of size variation and falsification. As the technologies behind mining and casting proliferated, coins facilitated trade between merchants, and the Emperor declared that the *koku* would represent the amount of rice needed to feed a person for one year. With koku and smaller coins, merchants could easily buy and sell their goods, and soon food, fabric, dyestuffs, and many other items were flowing over the roads of the Empire.

The Blessings of Fukurokujin

Literacy grew rapidly among the samurai class. The Crane, Phoenix, Dragon, and Scorpion Clans had always prized wisdom and the spread of ideas. They had embraced the Kami's gift of writing since the beginning, finding it indispensable in the pursuit of their duties. Now, the lords of the Crab and Lion began to see the value of it for all of their warriors. Annotated maps made planning campaigns easier. Written orders did not depend on a messenger's ability to remember exactly what a commander had said. Reports written after battles preserved knowledge for future commanders to learn from.

As the ability to read grew, so did the number of written works. In the very early days of the Empire, Akodo wrote *Leadership*, his treatise on war and generalship. Kakita, husband of Lady Doji—and the first Emerald Champion—wrote *The Sword*, which explains his techniques and philosophy of swordsmanship.





Perhaps in reply, his rival Mirumoto Hojatsu wrote *Niten*, which describes the two-sword technique he and his adopted father, Mirumoto, developed. *The Tao of Shinsei* needs no further explanation, and Isawa's treatise *Elements* was also written in this era. Toward the end of the first century, *Lies* appeared; its true authorship has been disputed, but tradition credits it to the Kami Bayushi.

In the second century, works of literature appeared. Seppun Namika wrote *The Shining Prince*, a series of loosely-linked stories about Hantei Genji. Many books were written about Hantei Genji at the time, but Namika's was considered the finest, and it is still read today.

The people of Rokugan also expanded on the understanding of the Celestial Heavens that the Kami and Shinsei bestowed on them. The Dragon Clan and the Seppun family made great advances in astrology. By studying the movements of Lady Sun, Lord Moon, and the other celestial bodies, astrologers could interpret the desires and actions of gods, and even anticipate them. In this way, wise individuals might predict momentous events, or determine the most auspicious time for their lord to undertake a certain action.

The Blessings of Jurōjin

The shugenja Agasha, a follower of Togashi, was among the first to clearly see that there is no contradiction between Shinsei's teachings and the ancient Fortunist beliefs long held by the people. Drawing on the new understanding granted by the Little Teacher and continuing her studies of the kami and the natural world, Agasha discovered many healing practices that are foundations of medicine to this day.

In the early decades of the Empire, Agasha's disciples and scholars throughout Rokugan made great advances in medicine and alchemical arts. They discovered restorative properties of herbs and other plants, taken alone or as part of an alchemical concoction. They also developed methods of harnessing a person's ki to aid the healing process, such as by piercing the body with needles to correct imbalances of energies. Among the most influential scholars was Genjirō, a blind monk who traveled Rokugan, identifying herbs by smell and spreading the teachings of Shinsei.

The Blessings of Tea

It was also in this era that the tea ceremony, invented by Lady Doji, began to spread beyond the Crane Clan. It caught on among the Phoenix and Dragon Clans first, as they both appreciated the calm, meditative state it fosters. The tea ceremony also became highly popular in the Imperial Court, where courtiers of the Lion and Scorpion Clans learned it and took it back to their home provinces. It would take centuries for the Crab Clan to adopt it, but eventually they stopped regarding it as a dull affair for empty-headed courtiers to show off their pottery collection and started regarding it as a mental discipline that clears the mind and readies it for battle.

The Time of Greed (390 IC–435 IC)

The Dimming of the Chrysanthemum

Near the end of the fourth century, altercations occurred between the Crane and Crab Clans over which clan had the right to control certain areas of land on their mutual borders. The conflict escalated when, for reasons of its own, the Yasuki family renounced their loyalty to the Crane and swore fealty to the Crab Champion. An Imperial decree could easily have resolved the entire matter, but at the time, while a Hantei sat on the throne, they did not rule the Empire.

Three samurai—the champions of Crane, Phoenix, and Scorpion Clans—had brought everlasting dishonor to their names by conspiring against the Emperor. Calling themselves the Gozoku, they banded together and kidnapped the Emperor's heir, forcing the Emperor to grant them certain political concessions. After the Emperor's death, the Gozoku prepared to install that heir on the Throne as their puppet emperor.

An Empire Restored

While the Emperor's sons had all been fostered to daimyō in the Crane, Phoenix, and Scorpion Clans to be raised to be subservient to the Gozoku, his youngest child, Yugozohime, had been raised by the Lion. The clan of Akodo taught her the arts of war and instilled in her a reverence for Bushidō and the honor of her Imperial ancestors. When the Emperor died, Yugozohime challenged her eldest brother to a duel, killed him, and claimed the Throne for herself. The Gozoku were completely unprepared for this turn of events, and the new Emperor quickly broke their hold on the Imperial government. Once again, Lady Sun's radiance shone upon her descendants and reinforced their right to rule.

A City Ascendant

During the time of the Gozoku, Otosan Uchi underwent a period of great growth. Before then, it had mostly consisted of the Imperial Palace and various houses maintained for the courtiers of the clans and the commoners who served them. Gozoku officials arranged to have the city's harbor improved, and they extended the network of roads to the city. As a result, more samurai, craftspeople, and merchants traveled to the city—even some from lands beyond the horizon.

The Blooming of the Lotus (435 IC–442 IC)

The Ways of the Brotherhood

By the fifth century, the organization of monks known as the Brotherhood of Shinsei had begun to make significant advances in healing and medicine. As a result, both commoners and nobles increased their support for monks across Rokugan. Due to the Brotherhood's burgeoning resources and the respect it commanded, it was able to greatly expand its membership and teach an increasing number of commoners about the Tao and the path to Enlightenment. While even the most remote peasant farmers knew the various folktales about the Little Teacher, solid knowledge of the Tao of Shinsei was lacking in many areas of the Empire.

Determined to spread correct teachings as widely as possible, the Brotherhood sponsored festivals in cities and towns across the Empire. The festivals featured dramatizations of events from the life of Shinsei interspersed with sermons and readings from the Tao. These performances soon gave rise to the form of theater known as Kabuki. Kabuki's use of elaborate costuming and high-drama plots quickly made it a favorite among wealthy *heimin* and lower ranks of samurai. As writers of greater skill became interested in the form, it gradually became more acceptable to high-ranking samurai.

In addition to spreading the Tao, monks taught the tea ceremony to anyone who showed interest, whether samurai or heimin. Geisha learned the art as well, so as to perform the ceremony with their clients. Some samurai were aghast at the idea of mere merchants performing the tea ceremony, but many priests argued that it did no harm and might help them cleanse their spirits of the effects of dealing with money. In the present day, geisha and well-off artisans and merchants in cities cities are the commoners most likely to conduct the tea ceremony; one rarely finds farmers interested in such things. Over the years, several heimin have become known for their skill at the tea ceremony. Later in the seventh century, the tea master Risa, the daughter of a prosperous dyer, had a Crane lord as a patron.

The Blossom of Friendship

In the fifth century, foreigners came to Otosan Uchi seeking an audience with Emperor Yugozohime. This created a great stir in the Imperial Court. Prior to this time, the only gaijin within the Empire had been desert tribes from the West and merchant fleets from the Ivory Kingdoms and beyond. The gaijin seeking an audience with the Hantei came from Pavarre, a kingdom across the Sea of the Sun Goddess, and they hoped to conduct trade with the Empire. In her great compassion, Emperor Yugozohime allowed them to remain in Otosan Uchi for two years so that they might demonstrate whether they could adopt civilized behavior.

This created much political consternation as the leaders and courtiers of the clans debated how to react to the strangers. The Mantis, a minor clan, were especially active in this debate, as they saw an opportunity to increase their own wealth and influence. Many others were put off by the visitors' strange customs or their ignorance of the Celestial Order.

Treachery Without and Within (442 IC–610 IC)

In the sixth century, steel was drawn and blood shed within the bounds of the Emerald Empire, though these conflict could never disrupt the Thousand Years of Peace. In truth, these incidents can scarcely be considered wars at all, for war requires humans to face their fellow humans with honor. For samurai to cut down gaijin and the corrupted denizens of the Shadowlands is no more warfare than for a magistrate to strike down a criminal.

A LION MASTER

Each clan has its own institutions and traditions, many of which have changed little in centuries. Yet even in the hidebound strictures of Rokugan, exceptional individuals can defy convention.

In the Lion lands, a peasant child was born with the gift of speaking to the elemental kami. He was discovered by the Kitsu family while still young and was immediately adopted into that family and given the name of Kitsu Taiko. Taiko had a great affinity for the element of Fire and made great advances in invoking and manipulating that element. His talent was so great that when he retired from service with the Lion, the Phoenix Clan offered him the position of Master of Fire on the Council of Elemental Masters. He accepted, becoming the first non-Phoenix (and one of few non-Isawa) to have held a seat on the council.

Gaijin Treachery

After two years of controversy, the Hantei grew tired of the uproar caused by the gaijin. In her wisdom, and as was her right, she abruptly commanded that the gaijin cease their trade with the people of Rokugan and leave her lands immediately. As the Emperor's decree was law, the pleadings and protests of the gaijin went unheeded. It was then that those ungrateful guests revealed the depths of their barbarous nature and took up arms against the Empire. In the ensuing clash, the Hantei herself was killed. After this, no mercy could be shown to the gaijin, and any found on Rokugan's soil were immediately killed. This conflict became known as the Battle of White Stag, named for the cliffs from which vengeful samurai launched their counter attack. Those who managed to flee to their ships were confronted by the massed fleets of the Crane and Mantis Clans. If any managed to escape back to their homelands, they bought with them tales of the courage and skill of the Emerald Empire's warriors.

Rise of the Blood Sorcerer

Perhaps enabled by the imbalance the gaijin had brought to Rokugan, a wicked practitioner of *mahō*, the forbidden blood magic, gathered a coterie of unclean followers and undertook honorless deeds against the Empire. The sorcerer known as Iuchiban came to light in the beginning of the sixth century, when the samurai artisan Asahina Yajinden presented swords he had forged to the champions of the Crab, Crane, Lion, and Scorpion Clans. Soon afterward, the Lion Clan Champion launched a disastrous winter battle against the Dragon Clan, the Crab Clan Champion murdered his children, and the Crane Clan Champion confessed to a love affair in front of his entire court. All three took their lives with these blades. Only the Scorpion Clan Champion escaped such a fate, soon revealing the smith's corruption, and the presence of the Bloodspeaker Cult.

This cult was led by a Iuchiban, whose family and clan remain unknown. The vile sorcerer raised an army of the undead to march on Otosan Uchi—at that time in the Empire, corpses were buried, not burned. Thanks to the warning provided by the Scorpion Clan Champion, the Imperial Legions and the armies of the clans defeated the undead forces.

After his execution, Iuchiban was buried in a tomb specially warded to prevent his spirit from escaping. This gives him the distinction of being the last person in the Empire to be buried; after this the Emperor issued a decree that all corpses must be burned to prevent them from being desecrated by foul magic.

A Lamp Relit

The years of peace that followed saw the revival of Nō theater, which had begun to decline in the face of Kabuki. The playwright Kakita Iwane wrote a stunning series of plays about the lives and deaths of the Kami, which reignited interest in the form. For many samurai, after the tragedies of the Battle of White Stag and the Bloodspeaker assault on Otosan Uchi, Nō offered a connection to Rokugan's glorious past, fulfilling a longing for those legendary days. Iwane's plays focused on the actors' ability to communicate vast emotional ranges with minimal action and served to differentiate it from its younger, showier rival.

As samurai embraced the tradition of Nō, Kabuki declined in popularity among the noble class, even as it ascended among the peasantry. Urban *bonge* revered popular Kabuki actors almost as much as the mythical characters they portrayed. The recently developed technique of woodblock printing first saw wide use during this time, as prints circulated depicting popular actors and their most famous characters. To the samurai, these mass-produced images were perversions of true art, lacking in soul and identity. The fact that they portrayed *hinin* in such a celebratory way only added to the indignity.

A Stark Lesson

In 533, during a moment of high optimism and dubious strategic logic, the Scorpion Clan launched an attack on Ikoma Castle. The attack failed, and in retribution, the Matsu attacked the Scorpion fortress of Meiyo no Shiro. After taking the fortress, they killed every single Scorpion in it and, to underline the point, renamed it Kenson no Gakka—Humility's Lesson.

Heaven's Judgment

The final years of the century saw the coronation, reign, and death of Hantei XVI, the only Emperor to have lost the Mandate of Heaven. While the first few years of his rule were promising, the Steel Chrysanthemum, as he is now remembered, descended into paranoia-fueled violence. Seeing treachery everywhere, the Emperor executed thousands of samurai for nonexistent crimes. The entreaties of courtiers, shugenja, and monks to show mercy were met by even greater displays of bloodshed. Finally, after Hantei XVI had ordered his mother to be strangled to death in front of the Imperial Court, his son led a rebellion of the Imperial Guard against him. That this was successful is clear indication that Amaterasu had withdrawn her favor from him.

After raising his hands against his father, the son of Hantei XVI shaved his head and retired to the Brotherhood of Shinsei, while each Imperial Guard involved in the deed committed seppuku. The youngest brother of the Steel Chrysanthemum became Hantei XVII, and his long, peaceful reign is proof that the Hantei line still holds the Mandate of Heaven.

TIDES OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS (610 IC–815 IC)

After centuries untroubled by the creatures of the Shadowlands, most people of Rokugan all but forgot about the threat. To most outside of Crab territory, the Shadowlands were a part of Rokugan's origins, historically important but even further removed from the Empire of their time than the Kami, who hear their prayers daily. Many believe that the reemergence of the Shadowlands and the Blood Sorcerer in the eighth century was punishment from the Heavens—though whether for the crimes of the Steel Chrysanthemum or the blasphemy of the guards who turned against him, not all agree.

Advancements in the Arts

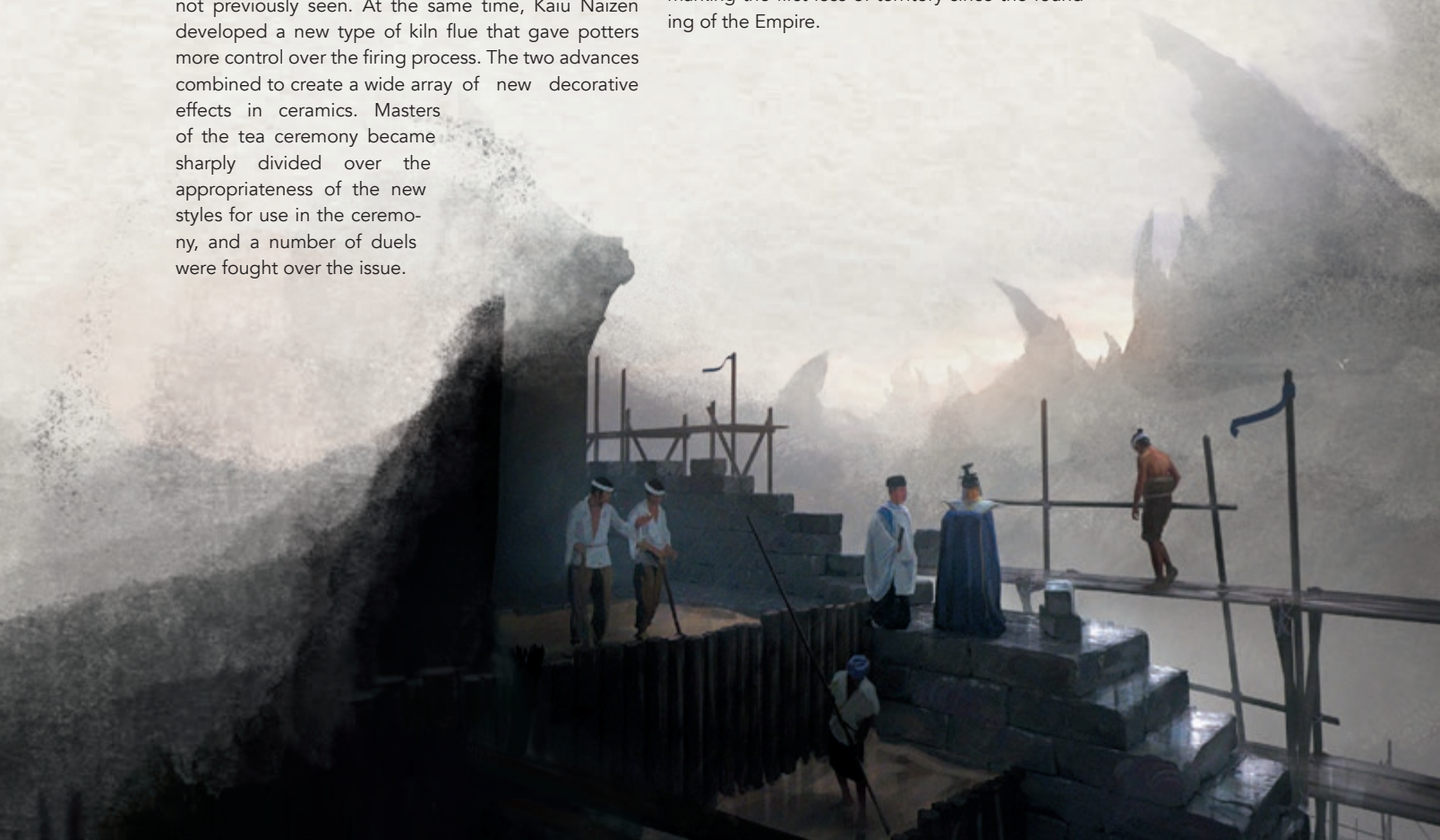
Toward the end of Hantei XVII's reign, a Dragon alchemist named Agasha Hyuotaru developed a number of new ceramic glazes that possessed a depth of color not previously seen. At the same time, Kaiu Naizen developed a new type of kiln flue that gave potters more control over the firing process. The two advances combined to create a wide array of new decorative effects in ceramics. Masters of the tea ceremony became sharply divided over the appropriateness of the new styles for use in the ceremony, and a number of duels were fought over the issue.

Darkness in the South

The evil of the Shadowlands intruded upon the Empire twice in the eighth century. In what would later be called the Battle of the Tidal Landbridge, a large Shadowlands attack distracted the main forces of the Crab while a second force led by Kinjiro no Oni attacked the watchtower near Earthquake Fish Bay. The watchtower defenders were nearly overwhelmed before reinforcements arrived in the form of the Daidoji daimyō, Daidoji Masashigi, and his personal guard. They charged across the bay at low tide and eventually drew the Shadowlands forces back out into the bay, where the rising tide engulfed them.

No Crane survived the battle, and when Masashigi's battered *kabuto* helmet washed up on shore, the Crab built a shrine in which to house it. Crab survivors began to refer to the Daidoji as "Iron Cranes," a sobriquet that eventually spread to the rest of the Empire.

As later became apparent, the invaders defeated at the Battle of the Tidal Landbridge were only a harbinger of the threat to come. The next year, the forces of the great oni remembered as "The Maw" swept across Crab lands, pushing the clan's lines so far north that Daylight Castle, the ancestral fortress of the Hiruma family, was lost entirely. Eventually, the combined forces of the Hiruma and Hida, reinforced with Kuni Purifiers and Witch Hunters, stopped the foul advance, and the Kaiu built the Carpenter Wall as we know it today. The Hiruma lands were never recovered, marking the first loss of territory since the founding of the Empire.



The Return of the Blood Sorcerer

The incursions of the Shadowlands might have been remembered as the greatest misfortunes of the century (even outside of Crab lands), had it not been for the events of year 750 IC. At that time, the spirit of the sorcerer Iuchiban escaped his tomb and possessed a body to serve as his own. Gathering an army of mahō cultists and reanimated corpses, he again attacked the Empire. The armies of the Great Clans stopped the advance of Iuchiban's forces at the Battle of Sleeping River, and one of the mysterious monks of the Dragon Clan's Togashi Order succeeded in trapping Iuchiban's spirit in the monk's own body long enough for both to be sealed into a tomb.

In the aftermath, magistrates found that in the years since Iuchiban's first defeat, many villagers, village heads, and even priests, largely in small or remote settlements, had defied the Imperial edict against burying bodies intact. For placing their traditions above the will of the Hantei and thus endangering the Empire, these people faced harsh punishments.

A New Wind Blowing (815 IC–1123 IC)

The return of the much-changed Ki-Rin Clan to Rokugan began a time of great change and social upheaval within the Emerald Empire. For the first time since the founding of the Empire, Great Clans nearly came to true war against one another. Gaijin goods and people entered the Emerald Empire in numbers unseen since the Battle of White Stag. Some scholars wonder if these great changes are the cause of the current elemental imbalance observed by shugenja and demonstrated in the cataclysmic earthquake and tsunami of 1120.



A Clan of Horses and Samurai

In the year 815, the children of Shinjo returned from their wandering in a highly dramatic fashion. Due to a peculiar set of circumstances involving gaijin magic, they found themselves within the northern edges of the Shadowlands. In their haste to escape that Tainted wasteland, they ignored diplomacy and simply used their powerful cavalry to overrun the Crab defensive lines. The Empire was thrown into an uproar, for at first first, its people did not recognize the Ki-Rin as Shinjo's clan. Along their journey, they had changed their name to Unicorn, and had adopted bizarre clothing and customs. Their language had also degraded away from pure classical Rokugani, even as the language within the Empire had developed over the centuries. Their horses, however, were a wonder to behold: large, well-formed, and swift. When the Scorpion armies attacked them, the Unicorn cavalry employed tactics never before seen in the Empire, crushing their opponents.

As the Unicorn hordes slowly made their way across the Spine of the World Mountains, the Lion Clan mobilized their armies. However, with the winter snows halting the imminent clash of armies, representatives of the Unicorn were able to make contact with the Crane. One of the treasures they bore was an ancient fan that they said had been Shinjo's. The Crane declared that it was the fan that Lady Doji had given her sister and that the intruders were in fact Shinjo's clan. The Emperor accepted this and forbade the Lion from attacking them. He also gave the Unicorn Clan the old lands of the Ki-Rin to settle upon. This created some animosity on the part of the Lion, as they had been given stewardship of the Ki-Rin lands, and this represented a considerable loss of fertile farmland. They were, however, obedient to the Emperor's command and allowed the Unicorn to travel to their lands unhindered.

Despite the testimony of the Crane, at first, many in Rokugan regarded the Unicorn as little more than gaijin. They had odd names, unpleasant-tasting food, uncouth manners, and garish fashions. To make things worse, during their journey they had acquired a new family, the Moto, who were kin to the Ujik tribes of the western wastes. Some courtiers suggested that the Moto family should be expelled in accordance with the law forbidding gaijin, but the Unicorn Clan Champion appealed to the Emperor on their behalf. The ancestors of the Moto family had been adopted into the clan by command of Shinjo herself, he said, making them Rokugani. The Emperor agreed that a Kami's authority could not be denied, and the Moto remained.

The Crane undertook the task of making the Unicorn more civilized, with mixed results. Shinjo's children enthusiastically adopted theater (especially Nō), the tea ceremony, current teachings of the Tao and the elements, Rokugani cuisine, and incense appreciation. They refused to give up their foreign names, their own food, their clothing styles, or their custom of shaking hands as a greeting. When traveling outside of their lands, their courtiers and emissaries began to behave as proper Rokugani, but even today, to visit Unicorn territory is to travel into a foreign land.

Nevertheless, the Unicorn entered the life of the Empire. While at first, their political sway was nonexistent, they had a powerful effect on the economy. They brought with them new techniques of metalworking, leatherworking, and fabric dying. Along with fast, powerful horses the likes of which Rokugan had never seen, the Unicorn brought stirrups and advanced riding techniques. Soon, Unicorn horses were in demand throughout the Empire, though the clan parts only with geldings and the occasional mare, which ensures their control of the supply. Their travels gave them contacts with countries outside of the Empire, which they proceeded to develop in order to establish profitable trade routes. It was not long before ivory, rare woods, jewels, and costly herbs and spices were pouring through Unicorn hands and into the Empire.

Perhaps most importantly, the Unicorn brought with them the practice of *meishōdō*. Using this name magic, the Unicorn shugenja bind spirits within talismans, achieving similar effects to those that other clans obtain through making offerings to and beseeching the kami. To many shugenja and other priests, meishōdō is a blasphemous gaijin practice.

The Flower of Sleep and Dreams

One of those costly herbs was the opium poppy, source of the drug opium. The Unicorn had used it for centuries for relieving pain, and it was adopted by the healers of the Empire. As its use in medicine spread, however, some began smoking it as an amusement. It was quickly noticed that samurai who used opium in that fashion became less devoted to their lords, and soon there was an outcry against it. The herbalists of the Yogo family discovered that the opium poppy grew very well in the lands surrounding Ryokō Owari Toshi, so the Scorpion Clan Champion petitioned the Emperor to make the growth and use of the poppy subject to Imperial regulation. The Emperor granted this request and also gave the Scorpion the sole right to grow and manufacture opium.

Over the next ten years, the City of Lies quadrupled in size, and it continued growing, as the opium trade brought an endless stream of merchants and money to the city. While the Scorpion control of medical opium brought them much wealth, it did not, some magistrates complained, stop the misuse of the drug. Magistrates of the Kitsuki family at one time pointed out that the amount of land around the city dedicated to growing poppies was far larger than needed to produce the available supply of legitimate opium. The governor of the province explained that the extra was grown to assure a high-quality supply and the that the low-quality material was destroyed, and no one challenged him on this point. To this day, the lands surrounding Ryokō Owari are filled with vast fields of poppies.

The Rise of Cities

The tenth and eleventh centuries saw the biggest expansion of urban areas since the early days of the Empire. A number of factors contributed to this growth, including the many innovations brought by the Unicorn Clan. The renewed popularity of horses increased overland travel between the various provinces and cities, much to the consternation of the lords responsible for the upkeep of the Empire's roads.

A number of advances in agricultural techniques and tools improved crop yields, allowing villages to meet the demands of the tax assessors even as youths left for the cities in greater numbers. The harnesses and yokes brought by the Unicorn made oxen and other beasts significantly more useful, while improvements in hand-operated pumps allowed for more efficient irrigation of fields. Some farmers began to trade their own goods in neighboring towns and cities, becoming merchants themselves.

To some traditional samurai, the upward mobility of the peasant merchants continues to represent an offense against the Celestial Order, yet to even speak of such matters is often seen as improper. The samurai of the Lion Clan fought strongly against these changes, visiting harsh punishments upon peasants who attempted to abandon their ancestral village for a new life in the city. Farmers who traded their own produce were accused of stealing from their lord and were treated accordingly.

After four centuries of Imperial isolation from gaijin, the importance of the Unicorn city of Khanbulak demonstrates that outsider influence is still on the rise in Rokugan. Encouraged by the Unicorn's trading success, the Mantis Clan increased their own trade in gaijin goods with the Rokugani mainland. The official acceptance of the Unicorn back into the Empire was seen, in a way, to condone the gaijin practices and

bloodlines they brought with them. As a result, gaijin goods, practices, and even travelers have slowly begun to meet with greater acceptance—or at least weaker resistance—in trading ports and even inland cities throughout the Empire. Once-small coastal communities such as Clear Water Village and Lonely Shore City grew tremendously during this time.

The Perfect Land Beckons

In the late ninth century, a young monk of the Shrine of the Seven Thunders formulated the controversial doctrine that gave rise to the Perfect Land Sect. Yuzue believed that the conversation between Shinsei and Hantei had initiated an Age of Celestial Virtue that lasted eight-hundred years—a century for each Kami who heard Shinsei's teachings—and that the ninth century began the Age of Declining Virtue, marked by corruption and difficulty in following the Tao. To beseech Shinsei to return, the monk ceaselessly chanted the mantra *Shoshi ni kie* ("devotion to the Little Teacher" or "absolute trust in the Little Teacher"). Yuzue came to believe that if enough people chanted this mantra with sincerity, Shinsei would return to usher in a new Age of Celestial Virtue.

Yuzue's student Gatai founded the Perfect Land Sect following Yuzue's death, based on a sutra she had written shortly before her passing. This scroll claimed that Shinsei did not return to the Void when he departed from Ningen-dō, but instead dwelt in a Perfect Land within Tengoku, the Celestial Heavens. The Perfect Land Sect believes that those who chant the kie, as Yuzue's mantra became known, can join Shinsei in the Perfect Land upon their death, rather than face judgment in Meido and rebirth based on their karma. In the Perfect Land, under the tutelage of the Little Teacher himself, the faithful can achieve Enlightenment without suffering on the wheel of rebirth.

To many in the Brotherhood of Shinsei, these beliefs are heresy, defying Shinsei's own Tao and the Celestial Order. The Perfect Land Sect quickly gained popularity among the peasantry, as it offered something previously unknown: freedom from the trials of this mortal life, and the next. Many heimin believed the Age of Declining Virtue was a reference to corruption among the samurai class. This belief led many samurai to further denounce the sect. By the middle of the tenth century, the Perfect Land Sect was outlawed in Phoenix lands, driving many believers to seek safety and isolation in the Dragon mountains.

A New Glory

The arrival of the Unicorn also had a profound effect on the arts of the Empire, enriching it with new techniques and materials. Since that time. some Rokugani have decried the effect of "gaijin pollution," and some artisans have been overly enthusiastic in incorporating the new techniques, but the reasonable critic must admit that the overall effect has been positive.

It is a fact that by the eighth century, most of the artists of the Empire had stopped copying the classics and started copying each other, with lamentable outcomes. Of that era only *The Days of Salt and Sun*, the journal that the duelist Ikoma Honzo kept of his warrior's journey, displays any real merit. Honzo's brushwork is deficient in several technical areas, but his sense of composition was flawless, and he had a real talent for capturing his subjects in midmotion. His wry humor was a brilliant match for the art. A lesser talent would have made the account of the two peasants, the wine jug, and the trout a matter of farce, but in Honzo's hands, it is a delicate and sparkling bit of humor. Only Kakita Ayano's poetry journals, filled with wan desire and sensitive descriptions of the passing seasons, comes close in quality. There is no third.

All of that changed in the ninth century. Whether an artist chose to embrace the new ideas brought by the Unicorn or to reject them, they were forced to look at the world as if it were new. Kakita Ume's screen paintings for Kyūden Doji incorporated some of the new perspective techniques into classical subjects, showing how the new need not destroy the old. Many painters followed where she led. Shiba Kanko's *Plum Blossoms at Dusk* and Doji Suko's *Red Steel* inspired new interest in novels, and the recent publication of Kakita Ryoku's brilliant novel *Winter* shows that the quality of the art has yet to wane. Also in this time, Bayushi Kiko and Kakita Mako began their long poetry competition, bringing both delicate insight and biting wit to the form. A scroll could be filled with further examples.

Unfolding of Glorious Promise

And so ran the first thousand years of our Empire, a land resplendent with honor and courage. We have entered days in which the favor of Lady Sun shines down upon the Hantei and our lands bask in the peace, prosperity, and justice of the Emperor's rule.

CHAPTER

1

Strongholds of Power

The samurai reins in his mount, tilting his head back and squinting against the blaze of Lady Sun's late-morning strength. The light turns the plastered walls of the castle a blazing white. The gates stand open, welcoming those attending Lord Doji Sabato's court.

The parade ground is empty at this hour, the afternoon breeze stirring chalky dust from the hard-packed surface. More guards are posted there, bowing as he approaches. One of them holds the reins while he dismounts. "Lord Sabato awaits you in the court chambers, Daidoji-sama."

Sunlight pierces the court chamber through the upper-floor windows, and small dust motes float in the light above the heads of the courtiers. A dozen fans flutter, showing the colors and mon of five different clans, as the guests assess the newcomer. Perfume and silk, the odors of court, permeate the air.

At long last, he reaches the dais at the far end of the chamber and hesitates for the merest fraction of a moment before he prostrates himself before the lord. The assembled courtiers exchange knowing nods: this one has been away from the civilization of court for too long.

Rokugan is an Empire ruled by a warrior class, and from its earliest history, those warriors have built castles from which to protect and control their lands. Although these structures are first and foremost military strongholds, they also serve as centers of government, administration, diplomacy, and civilization. While some samurai oversee small fiefs in the countryside, it is almost always considered a promotion to be invited to live in a castle town or, better yet, within the walls of the castle itself. The closer a samurai is to their lord, the greater their influence—and their perceived status.



Lordship and Governance

Feudal governance in Rokugan, from the Emperor down to the lowliest regional *daimyō*, is centered on castles, which serve both as the symbolic seats of power for lords and as the administrative centers for those lords' rule of their lands. Taxes are brought to castles for collection, soldiers and magistrates patrol from castles to uphold order, and commoners who wish to petition their lord for help must travel to the local castle to do so.

Each Great Clan's territory is divided into a number of provinces, and each province has a daimyō whose seat of power is usually at the province's strongest castle. The clan champion and the various family leaders may reside in the most prominent of these castles or they may have separate castles of their own, depending on tradition; these highest-ranking lords officially rule over one province directly, but typically they delegate that task to an underling such as a seneschal or *hatamoto*.

Major cities in a Great Clan's lands have governors of their own. These governors also generally reside in castles, although sometimes they may dwell in an unfortified residence within the city proper. Regardless, both city governors and provincial governors have ruling authority over their lands, upholding laws, maintaining order, and collecting taxes.

This system doesn't end at the level of governors. Below them are lesser lords, known as *shugo*, who rule over smaller pieces of territory in their lords' names. These regional lords are the lowest-ranking samurai who can claim the title of daimyō. They tend to be ambitious and fractious, prone to quarreling with their neighbors—especially if those neighbors happen to be across a family or clan territorial border. Naturally, every one of them resides in a castle, since to do otherwise would mean a loss of face. Thus, the nature of Rokugan's feudal system ensures there are hundreds of castles scattered across the Empire.

The feudal system extends to the local manor lords who serve under the regional lords. These samurai rule over very small regions, typically a few villages or perhaps even a single one. This is a lowly responsibility, but it still allows them to consider themselves part of the landed gentry and to collect taxes from their lands. A manor lord ruling a single remote village is higher in the social order than a samurai guarding the border or fighting in the clan's armies. However, these samurai are far too lowly to have castles, instead residing in manor houses of various levels of fortification.



CASTLES OF ROKUGAN

The Rokugani have been building castles since the earliest days of the Empire. If certain ancient texts are to be believed, the tribe of Isawa was doing so before the Kami fell from the Heavens. Like most aspects of the Empire's culture and civilization, Rokugani design and construction of castles is governed by traditions going back to those earliest days. Its methods and styles began when Hantei I founded the Imperial City of Otosan Uchi and thus are still considered the only "correct" way to build. At that time, Hantei and the other Kami brought new understanding of architecture and engineering to the lands that made up Rokugan. They instructed their new people in the construction of castles that resembled those of the Celestial Heavens. These design elements—sloped tiles that top walls and cover roofs; the vertical, pagoda-like structure of towers and keeps; the plaster-smooth, lightly sloped outer walls—are found in nearly all castles of Rokugan. This imitative custom has other aspects as well. For example, because the main keep of Hantei's palace was ten stories high, no other Rokugani keep has more than nine stories, lest its daimyō be accused of presuming to place themself on a level with the Emperor.

In a society where appearances matter as much as reality, castles serve a dual role: they are centers of military power, cultural activity, and administrative government, but they are also symbols of each clan's power, wealth, and ideals. While all castles conform to certain basic design principles, each clan modifies those principles to reflect its needs, values, and aesthetics. Crab castles are brutally practical, Lion castles austere and traditional, Crane castles airy and beautiful, Scorpion castles filled with hidden passages, and so forth. Moreover, specific families and individual lords construct their castles based on their own duties and values, which may diverge somewhat from the general tone of their clan. The castle of the Kakita family is different from that of the Daidoji family, despite the fact that both are Crane castles.

The castles of the Unicorn Clan, in keeping with many of that clan's undertakings, diverge more significantly from the conventional designs of Rokugan. The Unicorn were absent from the Empire for eight centuries, encountering many different foreign influences during their long journey. Consequently, their architecture merges those foreign concepts with Rokugani designs from the very early days of the Empire, and it has only gradually begun to adopt modern Imperial-standard aesthetics. Far Traveler Castle is a single large three-sided keep, while Battle Maiden Castle tops its multiple towers with bell-shaped domes, and the palace of the Moto family in Khanbulak is not a solid structure at all, but a series of magnificent tapestries hung between great columns. The one major Unicorn stronghold that conforms to the Empire's expectations is Great Day Castle, which the clan built with the specific goal of forming good diplomatic relations with the rest of the Empire.

DUTIES OF LORDS

The chief duties of any lord are to maintain order; protect their lands and assets from external invasion and internal threats such as bandits, pirates, and rebellions; and collect taxes. To this end, each lord maintains a force of *jizamurai* who garrison their holdings, patrol the roads and borders, and protect the lord's castle. The richer and more powerful the lord, the more jizamurai they can maintain under arms and the more secure their holdings are. Lords also appoint lower-ranking officials such as tax assessors, magistrates, and local landholders to maintain the law and administer their lands. In the event of war, the lord is responsible for raising and training *ashigaru*, or peasant soldiers, to serve in battle.

If a region is poorly defended or plagued with lawlessness, the lord is considered responsible for this failure and must rectify it promptly. Failure to do so is punished, perhaps only with a shaming public rebuke but possibly with demotion in rank or even the prospect of seppuku.

Lords are responsible for the welfare and fortune of their vassals; however, the level of concern and commitment varies among clans and families. Some lords will go out of their way to ensure their vassals have good lives, to the point of personally ensuring they receive good marriages, or bestowing gifts on them at every important event; at the other extreme, there are lords who believe their only responsibility is to pay their vassals' monthly stipend. Most rulers fall somewhere in the middle.

Because a lord's castle is both the most defensible place in their lands and the central point of their administration, it is the preferred location for their most important governing activities. Taxes are brought to the castle every fall and then counted and held secure until the proper shares can be passed on to higher lords and the Emperor. Captured bandits and criminals are often brought there for execution, and if they are slain elsewhere, their heads may be displayed outside the castle as a warning to others. Most importantly, castles host both diplomatic engagements and the planning of war.

Lords also have duties of hospitality. A lord is expected to provide safe and civilized housing to any samurai who visit the castle as guests, whether they are low-ranking passersby or senior nobility. The level of hospitality that is considered proper varies among clans: a Crab or Lion lord considers their duty done if their guests have food to eat and a room to sleep in, whereas a Crane lord makes sure the guests have a well-appointed room, fine meals, art and music to entertain them, and pleasant conversation to pass the time. Clans also disagree on how important it is for a lord to make their castle a center of art and culture. Here again, the more martial and ascetic clans tend to minimize or outright reject such things, while others regard them as a duty just as crucial as the rest.

Lords in all lands are responsible for coordinating and hosting the various religious festivals and celebrations held throughout the year. This involves working with local temples and their own clan shugenja to ensure that observances are carried out properly and that nothing inauspicious mars these events. The Rokugani are a pious people, and commoners are intensely superstitious. A lord who fails to properly venerate the kami and Fortunes, or whose reign is marked by bad omens, will soon face growing discontent.

The final aspect of a lord's primary duties is maintaining good order among the *heimin* and *hinin*, ensuring those humble peasants carry out the simple but vital tasks that keep the Empire running smoothly. A lord who permits disrespect or outright lawlessness among the lower castes, or who callously fails to protect them during dangerous times, is failing in their duty and may well face the humiliation of a peasant revolt. In that case, the lord's castle becomes a prison, a place where the ruler and their vassals are trapped by the wrath of the common folk.

COURT BANNERS

Even if it is free of any other decoration, a castle's court chamber always displays the banners of the lord's family and clan on the wall above the dais; if the lord has a personal mon, it may be displayed as well. When guests of rank are present at the castle, their banners are hung in the court directly across the chamber from the lord's banners as a show of respect. Lords of a petulant nature, or who are seeking war, sometimes display these banners in a way that subtly insults the guests, such as by hanging them slightly lower than the lord's banners or placing them along a side wall instead of directly across the room.

When a castle hosts the Imperial Winter Court, an elaborate system of etiquette dictates the hanging of family and clan banners. By tradition, the Imperial banner—bearing the chrysanthemum symbol chosen by Hantei at the dawn of the Empire—is the largest present and hangs directly over the dais, flanked to the right and left by the Seppun and Otomo banners. The Great Clan banners are hung on the left and right walls, the order of their placement revealing which clans are in the Emperor's favor. (Traditionally the Crane and Lion, the Left and Right Hands of the Emperor, are placed closest to the Imperial banners, but this can change if the Hantei is truly displeased with them.) The banner of the Dragon Clan is normally set directly opposite the Emperor's banner, reflecting Togashi's refusal to participate in the ancient Tournament of the Kami.



COURT AND ITS INHABITANTS

Any castle that is more than a mere military outpost contains a court chamber, even if it is a very small one that represents aspiration more than reality. At the most basic level, a court is a place where a lord assembles the local samurai for open discussion, including both pleasant conversation and serious diplomacy. As with everything in Rokugan, long-standing conventions usually determine what a court chamber looks like and what roles it fulfills.

Traditionally, a court chamber is a large, two-story room with a balcony encircling it at the second-floor level. The main floor is left largely empty of furnishings, its notable feature being a dais at one end, opposite the main entrance, where the presiding lord or their deputy is seated. The upper level usually has a few tables placed around its circumference. Courtiers and other diplomats circulate through the chamber at both levels, forming conversational groups while observing each other. Artistic performances and formal presentations also take place in the court, usually in front of the lord's dais.

The ideal court chamber is large enough for at least two hundred samurai to gather on the main floor for major events. However, only a handful of castles can boast a court so large. More commonly, even the combination of the lower and upper floors cannot accommodate so many, and lords make additional rooms available or move large events outdoors, to gardens or the parade ground.

The court chamber is open to visitors throughout the day, but its official role traditionally occurs in the morning, when the lord presides over the room and the diplomats gather for formal discussions. Guests may ask the lord for permission to address the court at large, especially to announce important events such as marriages and formal alliances or to make declarations of war. These typically take place in front of the dais, where the speaker addresses the presiding lord while expecting to be heard by all.

Special events such as artistic presentations can take place at any time during the day or evening. Outside of formal court hours, they are more likely to be held in some other location in the castle, such as a garden, dining hall, dōjō, or private room. When court is not in session and the chamber is needed for other purposes, shōji screens can divide the space for other uses. In times of war, this might be done to provide additional barracks for prestigious samurai, or even to let the room serve as an infirmary for the wounded.

ROKUGANI COURT JESTERS

Jesters in Rokugan are a very unusual type of artisan, as their art is essentially a performance conducted in court. To train for this occupation, jesters study and master a wide range of artistic forms, including poetry, dance, song, and Kabuki acting. They also study politics and human nature, for their role in the courts is to puncture the pretensions and expose the hypocrisies that surround them. They are a socially licensed exception to the Rokugani principles of ignoring spectacles and "killing with silence": they call out the things that others must endure without comment. Their function is thus similar to that of the Lion Clan's Ikoma Bards: to express the human feelings that others are not socially permitted to reveal.

Like so many aspects of Rokugani culture, the concept of the jester seems to have been pioneered by the Crane, probably in the second or third century. However, there is no requirement for a samurai to train in a particular school to become a jester: they merely need to show an aptitude for the job and earn an appointment from their lord. (Attempting to act as a jester without a lord's appointment, and the implicit protection that appointment grants, is likely to end in disgrace and death.)

Rokugani jesters are not jovial or madcap. They are sardonic, often sour, their humor biting and harsh. They speak in double meanings, puns, and riddles, drawing attention to others' dishonorable behavior and satirizing the polite conventions of the courtly world. As long as they rely on such mockery, they are permitted to call out others' bad behavior without risk of a duel. Of course, such social protections only go so far—a stern Lion or surly Crab is unlikely to put up with a jester's needling forever—and wise jesters know when it is time to back off and leave their targets alone.

THE INVISIBLE SIDE OF A COURT: SERVANTS

Every castle is home to an entire community that is largely invisible to samurai: the servants, who labor from before dawn until well after dark to keep life in the castle clean, orderly, and reliable. Servants even enter and leave a castle through special doors that go unnoticed by nearly all samurai. Indeed, in some ways, they have more freedom than their social superiors. Samurai are restricted with regard to where they can go in a castle: only those of the highest rank, such as the lord and their family, can move where they wish. But servants go everywhere, throughout the day and night, all but unseen by their masters…and they see and hear everything. Samurai are adept at keeping secrets from each other, even within the close confines of a castle, but no one can keep secrets from the servants.

Ironically, the very social blindness that keeps samurai from noticing servants also tends to keep them from exploiting the servants' intimate knowledge of castle affairs. After all, talking to a servant for any reason other than to give orders is demeaning for a samurai. The small minority of samurai who are willing to lower themselves in this way, however, gain a significant advantage over their rivals. Bribery, threats and blackmail, or simple charm can serve to evoke useful information from servants. Similarly, servants' entrances provide a potential point of ingress for those who wish to avoid attention, for few would even conceive of a samurai entering a castle in such a way. Unsurprisingly, it is the Scorpion who are most proficient at such underhanded methods.

The particular arts and entertainments presented in a court vary from one castle to another. Some lords arrange for musicians to play on the balconies. Others place bonsai trees, shōji-screen paintings, or *ikebana* flower arrangements around the chamber to provide topics of conversation. Jesters may be present to supply a humorous relief from tension or to subtly goad visitors from the courts of rival lords. Lords who are wealthy (or ambitious) may arrange for more elaborate displays of art such as an indoor koi pond or the performance of a play. Conversely, lords who are poor or ascetic in temperament may deliberately minimize the decoration of their court chambers, perhaps making an occasional remark on Shinsei's teachings about the danger of worldly distractions.

Notable Figures within the Court

Any court is dominated by the presence of the samurai known collectively as "courtiers," samurai trained and oriented toward the unique world within a castle's secure walls. Courtiers are relatively few in number and found overwhelmingly in the cloistered, hothouse world of politics, diplomacy, and intrigue. Within their ranks, there are a number of specialized roles. The following are a few of the more common or important, but the ranks of courtiers include a dizzying number of specialized bureaucrats to maintain the machineries of Imperial power.

Ambassadors

Although most clans try to maintain a diplomatic presence in other clans' courts, the specific position of ambassador carries additional prestige and responsibility. An ambassador is empowered to speak on behalf of their lord, to make agreements that bind the lord as though they were there in person. The position of ambassador is a prestigious and very demanding one, since such samurai are entrusted with their clan's future and repute. If an ambassador fails, loses face, or otherwise shows weakness, they bring harm to their lord and their entire clan. This is one of the major reasons why court emissaries use veiled, indirect language. Not only is speaking bluntly considered rude in samurai society, but ambassadors who speak too clearly may be committing themselves unwisely. A samurai's word is their bond, so a clear statement by an ambassador can be as binding as a written treaty. Ambiguous or indirect statements leave room to maneuver and, if necessary, to withdraw while avoiding discourtesy or loss of face.

Seneschals (Karō)

A seneschal, sometimes known as a *karō*, is a samurai assigned to serve as a senior aide to their lord. They can function as an advisor, but their most important role is to manage the lord's affairs, supervising the castle, keeping records, passing on orders to the head servant, and attending to similar matters. Additionally, the karō is expected to act as the lord's stand-in when the lord is absent, running the castle and holdings, hosting the court, and issuing orders in the lord's name. Appointment as a karō is a significant honor and a mark of trust; often, the office is passed down from one generation to the next. When possible, the position is entrusted to a hatamoto to ensure maximum loyalty.

Personal Vassals (Hatamoto)

A hatamoto is a samurai who is a personal vassal to a very senior lord such as a family daimyō or clan champion. Only lords of such exalted rank can name hatamoto, whose loyalty is directly and entirely to that lord with no intervening distractions. Socially, a clan champion's hatamoto is considered to outrank a provincial lord, allowing them to serve as troubleshooters who can be dispatched to the castles of troubled or disloyal provinces and enforce their own lord's will.

Artisans

Many samurai engage in artistic pursuits, civilized activities that set them apart from the crude world of the heimin. However, only a few train specifically in the arts instead of undertaking the martial training that is the traditional focus of samurai life. Artisans and artists tend to operate mainly within the world of the courts, since the courts offer the best opportunities for showcasing their work and finding patrons to support them. Premieres of new artistic works—plays, paintings, sculptures, and the like—are highlights of any court. Most lords who strive to maintain a civilized court in their stronghold try to have at least one or two artisans resident at their castle and work to attract prominent artisans from elsewhere to visit their court and exhibit their works.

Matchmakers (Nakōdo)

Marriages in Rokugan are almost always arranged, and samurai families traditionally rely on matchmakers, called *nakōdo*, to make those arrangements. A skilled nakōdo's services are much in demand, especially since marriages are often forged as part of diplomatic agreements. Any lord of note will try to have a talented nakōdo in their court, and the services of these matchmakers are themselves a useful diplomatic bargaining chip. When they aren't fulfilling their duties as matchmakers, nakōdo perform many of the same tasks as courtiers.

Instructors (Sensei)

Castles serve as centers of training for the samurai who serve their lords. Thus, every castle will contain at least one dōjō, and large ones boast several of them. The most prestigious schools and the most honored sensei nearly always are located within the major castles of their clans, making those castles centers of learning as well as of military power. Even a minor castle has at least a small dōjō and a resident sensei to train its bushi. Sensei often serve a secondary role as advisors to the lord, especially if they taught the lord personally. Their words are always given weight, since they are responsible for training the clan's samurai and passing on the ancient secrets of their school.



Life in a Castle

REGIONAL VARIATION

Samurai diets and lifestyles vary considerably based on regional topography and cultural trends. In the high mountains of Dragon lands, rice is a luxury and barley is a common staple, and meat occupies a small but important part of most people's diets. The Unicorn have an extremely varied cuisine, with recipes drawn from across the span of their journey. Even relative traditionalists like the Scorpion and the Lion prepare their meals in unique ways, Scorpion cuisine favoring rare spices and jarring flavors and Lion meals being notoriously large to support the extremely active lifestyles of their warriors.

Life in a castle, like life anywhere else in Rokugan, is a thing of ritual and tradition, in which the same actions are repeated daily, yet always performed with precision and care. This is as true for a servant as for a samurai, as true for a simple soldier as for a courtier or a lord. The Rokugani value serenity and harmony in their lives, and they refuse to do things in a casual or lackadaisical fashion. Although they have many specific religious rituals, in a sense their entire lives are an endless succession of rituals, conducted with the same reverence as their prayers.

THE BUSHI

Consider the life of a bushi who serves in the garrison of an archetypical Crane castle such as Kyūden Doji. They rise with the dawn, at the Hour of the Hare, and immediately bathe to remove the sweat of the night. If they are a simple soldier, they wash in the communal bathhouse adjacent to the barracks; if they are an officer, they will have a bathing chamber in their personal quarters, and servants to assist them. Cleansed and dressed, they eat a spare and simple breakfast of rice, tea, miso soup, and dried fish. If they belong to a clan known for strict discipline or limited resources, the breakfast may be nothing more than rice and tea. Even in rich clans such as the Crane and the Unicorn, it is considered proper to avoid gluttony and to eat modestly, especially in the morning.

Much of the morning is given over to training, individually in the castle dōjō or in group exercises on the parade grounds. This can last through midmorning, to the start of the Hour of the Serpent or even later. When it is done, the bushi will bathe again, then don armor (itself a ritual taking up to thirty minutes) and begin the duties of the day.

For a low-ranking soldier, these may be nothing more than watching from the castle wall or standing guard in an empty hallway; however, they are expected to remain alert and focused at all times, scanning for danger even when all seems calm and safe. (Of course, few samurai can live up to the ideal in its entirety: the sleepy or distracted guard is the bane of every castle's defenses.) An officer may have more complex duties, such as reviewing reports from subordinates, scheduling the upcoming guard rotations, or leading a punitive mission against a local bandit gang.

Lunch is eaten at midday, the Hour of the Horse. It is a brief meal of rice or noodles with vegetables and some fish or bean curd, and of course tea, which is served with every meal and during meetings. Alcohol, naturally, is inappropriate for a soldier on duty.

The bushi's active duties come to an end in early evening, at the Hour of the Rooster. They bathe once again, visit the family ancestral shrine to pray for guidance, and eat dinner, the only generous meal of the day, although the stricter clans will keep even this meal simple. Bushi may return to duty after the evening meal, especially if their clan is at war, or they may be free to spend time on personal matters. Often this means spending some time with friends drinking *sake*, although married samurai may choose to spend the time with their family instead.

Sometime in the Hour of the Boar, before midnight, they pray once more and retire for the night.



THE ARTISAN

In that same castle, an artisan follows a very different routine, but one no less structured. Like the bushi, they awaken early, seeking artistic and spiritual inspiration from watching the sun rise. After a bath in their private quarters, they eat the same simple breakfast as the bushi, then go to their study to spend the morning working on current artistic projects. Later in the morning, during the Hour of the Serpent, they may attend the castle's court chamber to make an artistic presentation. They likely eat lunch at the court alongside the other diplomats, artisans, and guests, taking the opportunity to subtly pick up on the latest gossip, check on the activities of rivals in the court, and perhaps start a rumor or two of their own. The quality of this midday meal will probably be somewhat higher than that of the bushi, and they may even indulge in a bit of sake if opportunity arises.

In the afternoon, the artisan seeks inspiration for future works. The Rokugani view nature as the ultimate source of artistic beauty, so the artisan may visit the castle garden or even leave the castle altogether to stroll in the surrounding lands, seeking out places of beauty and tranquility and spending time in them. Of course, in some lands or times, this may be dangerous, requiring that they are accompanied by a bodyguard from the castle garrison.

They also visit several shrines over the course of the day, praying to the Fortunes who watch over the important aspects of their life and artistic pursuits. Preferred Fortunes for artisans include Benten, the Great Fortune of Arts and Romantic Love; Tenjin, the Lesser Fortune of Stories and Secrets; and Sadahako, the Lesser Fortune of Artists.

In the evening, they attend a formal dinner hosted by another resident of the court or even by the lord, if they are not hosting a dinner of their own. They must bathe, dress, and arrange themself for the event with the same meticulous care as a bushi donning their armor. As an artisan and a resident of the court, they likely have several household servants to assist with such things. The meal is not overindulgent, but it offers considerably greater quality and variety of food than a bushi's simple dinner, perhaps even including a few exotic items with rare ingredients and spices, imported by Unicorn traders or Mantis ships.

They spend the after-dinner hours in the pastimes of the courtly world: gossip, flirtation, and intrigue, all pursued with the restraint and delicacy that is the heart of Rokugani civilization. Their night probably ends later than the bushi's, after midnight and well into the Hour of the Rat, especially if inspiration strikes and they go back to work in their study once more.

THE STUDENT

A student at the castle's dōjō awakens well before sunrise, in the Hour of the Tiger. Their day begins with various mundane chores, tasks that would normally be performed by servants: cleaning the barracks, washing their clothing, and so forth. This humble work is intended to instill in them a sense of humility, discipline, and obedience, putting them in the correct frame of mind for their studies. Once the work is finished, the student bathes and eats a brief and modest breakfast, often no more than rice, miso soup, and tea.

From the Hour of the Dragon onward, the dōjō's students are in the courtyard performing their daily exercises: calisthenics and basic fighting stances, the latter performed with a wooden practice weapon in hand. In some dōjō, archery or unarmed combat may be practiced at this time as well. The students do these exercises in unison, standing in ordered ranks, under the supervision of a sensei or, perhaps, a senior student chosen for the honor. Typically, each ritual move is accompanied by a shouted *kiai* (war cry). The students may also go inside the dōjō to engage in one-on-one sparring under the supervision of a senior sensei.

The student takes a brief lunch break at the Hour of the Horse, again eating sparingly and simply. After the meal, a new round of chores begins: cleaning up the practice ground after their work there and preparing the interior of the dōjō for the afternoon's training. This typically includes sweeping, washing, and polishing the floor. Depending on the dōjō, these tasks may be shared equally among all the students or divvied up according to age; in the latter case, the youngest students get the hardest work.

The afternoon is spent in focused training on a specific topic. This may be a particular aspect of swordsmanship, such as clan kata or dueling techniques, or it may be a secondary field of study such as another weapon, archery (in clans that do not consider archery coequal with swordsmanship), riding, or so forth. Academic and theoretical studies, such as of the writings of famous clan samurai or of the ways of battle and warfare, can also take place at this time. Typically, the student will study a single topic intensively for a month at a time and then move to something else.

The afternoon classes end after sunset, during the Hour of the Rooster. The student bathes again to cleanse the sweat and dust of the day's work and performs ritual prayers. They eat with the other students, although younger students eat separately from the older ones, who may be honored by the presence of the sensei at their tables. This meal will be somewhat more generous than those earlier in the day, but it is still kept simple in content, and sake is normally not

THE HOURS OF ROKUGAN

The Rokugani day begins with the Hour of the Hare at dawn (or 6 a.m. by modern, real-world Western clocks) and proceeds through the constellations to the Dragon, Serpent, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, Boar, Rat, Ox, and Tiger. Because there are only twelve divisions instead of twenty-four, each "hour" actually lasts two hours in terms of modern, real-world timekeeping.

served; the students are not yet adults and thus are not permitted to drink alcohol. If there is a special event, such as a ceremony to honor older students or to show reverence to ancestors, the students may be allowed a single cup of sake to perform a ritual toast.

After dinner, the student is permitted a brief period of "free time" without any required work or study. However, many dōjō expect their students to use this time for self-improvement, such as by reading educational books like Akodo's *Leadership* or Kakita's *The Sword*. Prayer and meditation are also considered acceptable ways to pass this time. Regardless, the student must remain on-site at the dōjō unless their sensei grants them specific permission to leave. Rambunctious or dishonorable students sometimes sneak out at night for one reason or another, risking punishment or expulsion.

The day comes to an end at the Hour of the Boar, with the students going to sleep on simple futons or—in the harshest dōjō—bare tatami mats.

THE SERVANT

As a contrast to these three samurai, consider the life of one of the servants at the same castle. This servant awakens well before dawn, during the Hour of the Tiger, eating a small bowl of cold rice or barley and washing their face and hands before dressing in a simple kimono and sandals. They enter the castle through a side entrance, going to the kitchens where other servants are already hard at work preparing rice, dried fish, and miso soup. The servant delivers trays of food to the chambers of a half-dozen different samurai, each time kneeling, sliding open the door, carrying the tray inside, then kneeling again as they close the door behind them. They are careful to move silently and gracefully, avoiding any noise or sudden motion that might bother the samurai. Later, they repeat the process with the same meticulous care when they retrieve the trays and carry them back to the kitchen, where they help wash all the plates and bowls. The fish bones and other garbage from the meal goes into a barrel outside the servants' entrance, along with the contents of samurai chamber pots; all this refuse, unfit for even a heimin to touch, will later be collected by hinin.

Once the work of serving breakfast and cleaning up afterward is finished, the servant starts on the rest of the cleaning and maintenance work for the day. The head servant assigns a particular task, such as cleaning the castle's polished wooden floors by wiping them with thick linen cloth. The servants run back and forth across the floors while doubled over, pushing the cloths down with both hands for maximum effect. Naturally, this is only done in rooms where samurai are absent, since such work would be distracting to them. Keeping the castle's floors clean is a massive and continuous labor, with the servants cleaning different rooms on a rotating schedule.

At midday, the servant assists in serving lunch to the samurai, then returns to the kitchens with the rest of the servants for their own later lunch. This is a communal meal, served at a large table with everyone sitting cross-legged or standing around it, and it consists of rice or noodles, pickled vegetables, and tea. On lucky occasions, or in castles ruled by exceptionally generous lords, the servants may be fortunate enough to get a little dried fish or bean curd to supplement their diet. Conversely, if the clan or the lord is poor, the meal may substitute millet for rice. Regardless, the meal offers a chance for the servants to briefly relax, gossip, flirt, and otherwise indulge in the human emotions they must keep hidden when in the presence of samurai.

The afternoon is again spent in work, the task depending on the majordomo's requirements for the day and the servant's particular skills. This servant is talented with sewing and spends several hours mending and altering the garments of the castle's resident samurai.

PERSONAL SERVANTS

Servants fill a variety of functions in Rokugani society. A castle's many servants toil at a variety of duties to maintain it from day to day, regardless of who is lord of the castle or what political machinations or outright warfare might engulf it. Other servants fill similar functions within the estates of other samurai. In addition, many samurai have personal servants who travel with them wherever their duties might lead.

These servants, who might work individually or as part of a group, depending on the prestige and wealth of the samurai, must attend to whatever needs arise. Common duties include helping their master to dress, apply makeup, or don armor. They deliver and receive messages for their master, go shopping on their behalf, and arrange for their meals and lodgings. To succeed as a personal servant, a person must be able to anticipate their master's every need; failure to do so might see one consigned to the most unsavory duties back at the estate, or dismissed altogether.

After serving dinner—which involves not only delivering meals to individual samurai but also helping with a dinner party hosted by a resident courtier—the servant eats a late dinner of their own with the other servants. This is again a simple meal, but it may be livened up with a few leftovers from the samurai. Finally, well into the Hour of the Boar and approaching midnight, the servant bathes in the servants' communal bathing chamber, then leaves the castle and returns to a simple one-room house in the village to sleep. Other servants operate on a later schedule, ensuring that there is always someone ready to serve the samurai at a moment's notice.

CASTLE GUESTS

Because castles are centers of government and diplomacy, it is quite common for visiting samurai from other provinces, family territories, or clans to be guests within them. Hospitality, like all other aspects of Rokugani culture, is subject to strict rules and ancient traditions.

When samurai first arrive at a castle, they are expected to present themselves to the castle's lord, introducing themselves and thanking the lord for their hospitality. Failing to seek this meeting promptly is a show of disrespect to the lord and can result in the guests being expelled from the castle if the lord is particularly angered.

Depending on their rank, visiting samurai may have to wait quite some time for the required audience to be granted, and it is entirely possible that the lord will not meet with them, instead delegating the task to a family member, the karō, or someone of even lower rank. This meeting can serve as an opportunity to show esteem or deliver insults in a variety of ways. A long wait indicates the lord has little regard for the guests or wishes to establish that they are less important than other matters occupying the lord's time—a gesture that is especially insulting to guests of significant rank. Likewise, refusing to greet guests in person can be seen as a snub, especially if the person who does meet them is of lower social rank than the guests. Conversely, a lord who meets quickly and personally with low-ranking guests is showing them favor—which may insult other guests who were not so well treated.

A lord can convey other symbolic messages during this meeting. For example, if the lord's family is present, this shows friendliness and trust, while if the lord is alone, the situation is more formal and distant. If the lord is armed—or even more so, armored—it shows distrust and hostility toward the guests, a clear insult.

Conversely, a lord who does not even have the usual symbolic guards at the audience demonstrates trust. A lord may require guests to set aside their swords before the audience. This is a legitimate demand, but many samurai still view it as insulting. It is common practice for samurai to leave their blades with "sword polishers." This saves face for all concerned, as it avoids any unsavory implication of potential hostility.

Rights of Guests

Once a samurai has been welcomed into a castle as a guest, they are entitled to the lord's full hospitality and protection, even if they are bitter enemies. For the lord to do otherwise would be a violation of etiquette and indeed of Bushidō itself (specifically the tenet of Courtesy), dishonoring the lord and insulting the guest. Thus, even in the midst of bitter war or personal blood feud, a visiting samurai is safe within the walls of the castle and is expected to leave their weapons in their chambers. Indeed, to wear their swords in the castle halls would be to insult the host by implying they feel unsafe. (Of course, samurai who are serving as *yōjimbō*, or bodyguards, are expected to wear their swords at all times, since they may have to champion their charges in a duel.)

Guests can also expect to be free of open harassment and mistreatment. Part of the reason why the "art of the insult" is such a subtle and delicate skill in Rokugan is because it must be conducted without technically violating the rules of etiquette, which include the rights of guests. A samurai who crudely insults or physically attacks a guest not only offends the guest but also dishonors themself and their lord, and the lord will be expected to take punitive action against their ill-mannered vassal. Of course, this does not render the guest immune to the rules of etiquette. They, too, cannot freely insult others or openly disrupt the harmony of their host's court: to do so would be to incur dishonor. Such offenses not only are a just basis for duels but also grant the lord permission to expel the guest from the castle for violating etiquette.

All castles have guards posted strategically throughout their hallways and in major rooms such as the court chamber. This is partly for practical reasons—access to the lord's personal quarters must always be guarded, for example—but it is also a symbolic reinforcement of the lord's responsibilities to their guests. The presence of armed and armored guards allows all other residents of the castle to know they are safe under the lord's protection.

BLADE PLACEMENT

Whether one is visiting a court, a samurai's home, a teahouse, or a geisha house, it is considered polite to leave one's weapons at the door. If a samurai does retain their weapons in the presence of their host, it is customary to lay them on the floor. The side to which a samurai sets their sword is of great significance. To the right—where it cannot be easily drawn—implies trust, while to the left indicates a potential need for it—a blatant sign of distrust, if not outright hostility, and thus highly insulting.

Castles and Palaces

Castles and their associated fortifications are among the few structures in Rokugan that make extensive use of stone in their construction, particularly in the foundations and the outer walls. Wood is often used for the upper levels and interior structure, but the exact ratio of stone to wood in different castles depends on the traditions and resources of the clans who built them. The Crab have made by far the most use of stone, relying on it overwhelmingly to construct their massive castles and the monstrous edifice of the Kaiu Wall. The martial Lion also make use of stone whenever possible; more surprisingly, so do the Dragon, though this is mainly because their mountainous lands have far more boulders than trees. The Unicorn, despite being a highly militaristic clan, make relatively little use of stone due to their nomadic traditions and the abundance of forests in their lands. The other clans also use relatively little stone, preferring wood for its greater ease of construction; clans like the Crane and Phoenix, in particular, view castles more as works of art than martial strongholds, favoring wooden designs that emphasize beauty and elegance over martial practicality.

LOCATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF CASTLES

Rokugani castles are usually placed to guard important travel and communication routes, such as major roads, mountain passes, and navigable rivers. The ideal location is an elevated position within the mountains or, in the absence of a mountain, atop a hill. If no hill is available, the castle will at least be placed in a wide-open area where attackers cannot use the local terrain for shelter. The Rokugani have specific terms for castles depending on their location: castles built in the mountains are called *yamajiro*, those atop hills are *hirayamajiro*, and those on open ground (the most common type) are called *hirajiro*.

Castles are designed individually by clan artisans, who incorporate their own unique style while operating within the strict confines of Rokugani tradition and clan aesthetics. Often, a lord selects an architect by holding a competition. In such contests, each architect is backed by a different patron who seeks advancement and power within the clan by sponsoring the winning design. Merely deciding which architect may present their plans first may take weeks of behind-the-scenes negotiations involving all the intricate maneuverings and influence games seen in any other courtly intrigue. The architects and their sponsors also present gifts to the lords, ostensibly as a way of demonstrating their seriousness and dedication to the project, though in practice, these are often bribes.



SHIRO AND KYŪDEN

Strongholds in Rokugan are designated by the Imperial Cartographers as either *shiro*—castles—or *kyūden*—palaces. The distinction is supposedly that a kyūden is capable of hosting the Imperial Winter Court. By a tradition going back to the Empire's first century, the Emperors never hold Winter Court in Otosan Uchi, but choose one of the Great Clans to host them for the winter. It is a tremendous honor to be the Emperor's host for the season, but it requires tremendous effort and expense, and it is a "gift" that cannot be refused without a fatal loss of face. (More than one Emperor has used the expense of hosting Winter Court to punish a troublesome lord.) During the Empire's first two centuries, the Seppun family established the traditional requirement that a kyūden be able to accommodate at least two hundred and fifty guests: thirty for each Great Clan, plus the Emperor's own considerable entourage.

Like many things in Rokugan, however, the distinction between shiro and kyūden is far more theoretical and symbolic than it is real or practical, driven by considerations of face, honor, symbolism, and political influence. Whether to assign the title "kyūden" to a castle is a decision of the Emperor, subject to all manner of courtly maneuvering and subtle influences. As a result, in modern Rokugan, many castles that should be considered kyūden—including more than a few that have hosted the Emperor's Winter Court—are designated merely "shiro" on the Empire's maps, while other castles that have never seen the Emperor's face, and indeed are wholly incapable of hosting an Imperial Court, are nonetheless honored with the title of "kyūden."

Examples of the first sort of castle are numerous. Shiro Mirumoto in the Dragon lands, for example, has hosted the Emperor on at least two occasions, and Pale Oak Castle in the Phoenix lands has been favored by the Hantei line for many generations. In the lands of the Unicorn, one may consider the plight of Shiro Ide, a vast and beautiful castle built for the specific purpose of hosting an Imperial Winter Court, yet not honored with the title of kyūden.

Examples of the second sort of castle are also plentiful. Kyūden Togashi, also known as the High House of Light, is probably not physically capable of hosting an Imperial Winter Court, being little more than a vast complex of religious shrines, temples, and monastic chambers, not to mention its remote location and the mysterious spiritual forces that ward its approaches. In fact, as far as anyone knows, it has never even been seen by any members of the Hantei line. Kyūden Hida in the Crab lands is theoretically large enough to handle the event, but it would be truly bizarre for the Emperor to inflict the bleak harshness and deadly danger of the Hida lands on an Imperial Winter Court. (The novel *Meifumado* claims Hantei XXXI did indeed choose to spend his winter with the Hida, but this is not confirmed by any official history.)

Such practices are not universal, of course: the Crab and the Lion, for example, seldom, if ever, allow such courtly games to intrude on a matter as important as building a new castle. The manner in which architects present their designs to the deciding lord (and whether that presentation is public or private) also varies between clans. Crab architects build accurate scale models of their proposals, Crane offer beautiful drawings of the castle's exterior, and Scorpion discuss the more delicate aspects of the designs with the lord in a private meeting.

The actual work of constructing the castle is performed mainly by peasant laborers conscripted from the local population. The architect and other samurai artisans oversee the work and select skilled tradespeople—carpenters, stonecutters, and so forth—to assist them. The Crab Clan is known to sometimes put heimin craftspeople directly in charge of some parts of the work, a pragmatic approach that the other clans regard with distaste. At the other extreme, the Scorpion tend to use condemned criminals as laborers on their castles, and rumor claims many of these laborers leave their bones in the castle foundations.

Keep (Tenshukaku)

The heart of any castle is the keep, built atop a strong stone foundation. A typical keep is three to six floors in height, not counting the foundation and sublevels within it, although the castles of high-ranking lords can have up to nine floors (only the Imperial Palace in Otosan Uchi has ten floors). The keep is the home of

the castle's daimyō, whose personal residence is always on the highest floor. This has both a practical role and a symbolic one: it makes the lord's residence the hardest area for an attacker to reach and demonstrates the lord's higher station to those below. (Shugenja like to say it also symbolizes the relationship between Tengoku and Ningen-dō—the Celestial Heavens and the realm of mortals.) Lords who fear spies or assassins often install special "nightingale floors" on the upper levels of their castles; these appear to be the normal polished wooden floors used throughout Rokugan, but they are designed in such a way that they "sing"—creak and groan—when someone walks on them.

The lower floors contain guest quarters, audience halls and court chambers, shrines to Fortunes and ancestors, offices for the lord's officials, libraries, and artist studios. Most castles include at least one shrine dedicated to the land's spirits. By venerating and placating the kami of the lands on which the castle has been built, its occupants ensure the castle does not fall victim to natural disaster. The sublevel floors, secure within the massive stone foundation, contain storage, archival records, supplies, an armory, and sometimes barracks. Where possible, a keep will have a well in its basement, or a cistern if no well is available, to help occupants withstand a siege. Most castles also have one or more hidden escape tunnels.

Outer Walls (Maru)

Any substantial Rokugani castle comprises not merely a keep but a large complex of different structures. The entire complex is surrounded and defended by the outer walls. A smaller castle, or one oriented more toward politics than war, may have only a single set of these walls. Larger castles and those with a more martial purpose have multiple layers of walls, with narrow passages, isolated courtyards, and periodic gatehouses to make any assault nightmarishly difficult.

The outer walls are usually made entirely of stone unless the surrounding lands are extremely peaceful or the clan is extremely poor. The size and thickness of the walls, and the balance between artistic elements and practical defenses, likewise vary depending on the clan. Walls are traditionally covered with an outer layer of plaster—usually painted white or a near-white and then decorated with the clan colors—in order to present a beautifully smooth and bright surface to the outside world. The Crab Clan generally forgoes this practice, leaving their walls undecorated. Walls always have at least a few arrow slits (called *yasama*) for defense, although these may never see use in the castles of peaceful clans.

Unlike those found in gaijin castles, Rokugani walls are built with sloped sides. The steepness of the slope varies among castles and clans, but purely vertical walls are unknown. The slope could conceivably make the walls easier for attackers to scale, but if the tight-fitting stones of Rokugani masons offer few handholds, the smooth plaster that covers many walls provides even fewer. Like many aspects of Rokugani design, sloped walls originated in Otosan Uchi and were probably originally intended to make buildings resistant to earthquakes (to which the Imperial City is prone).

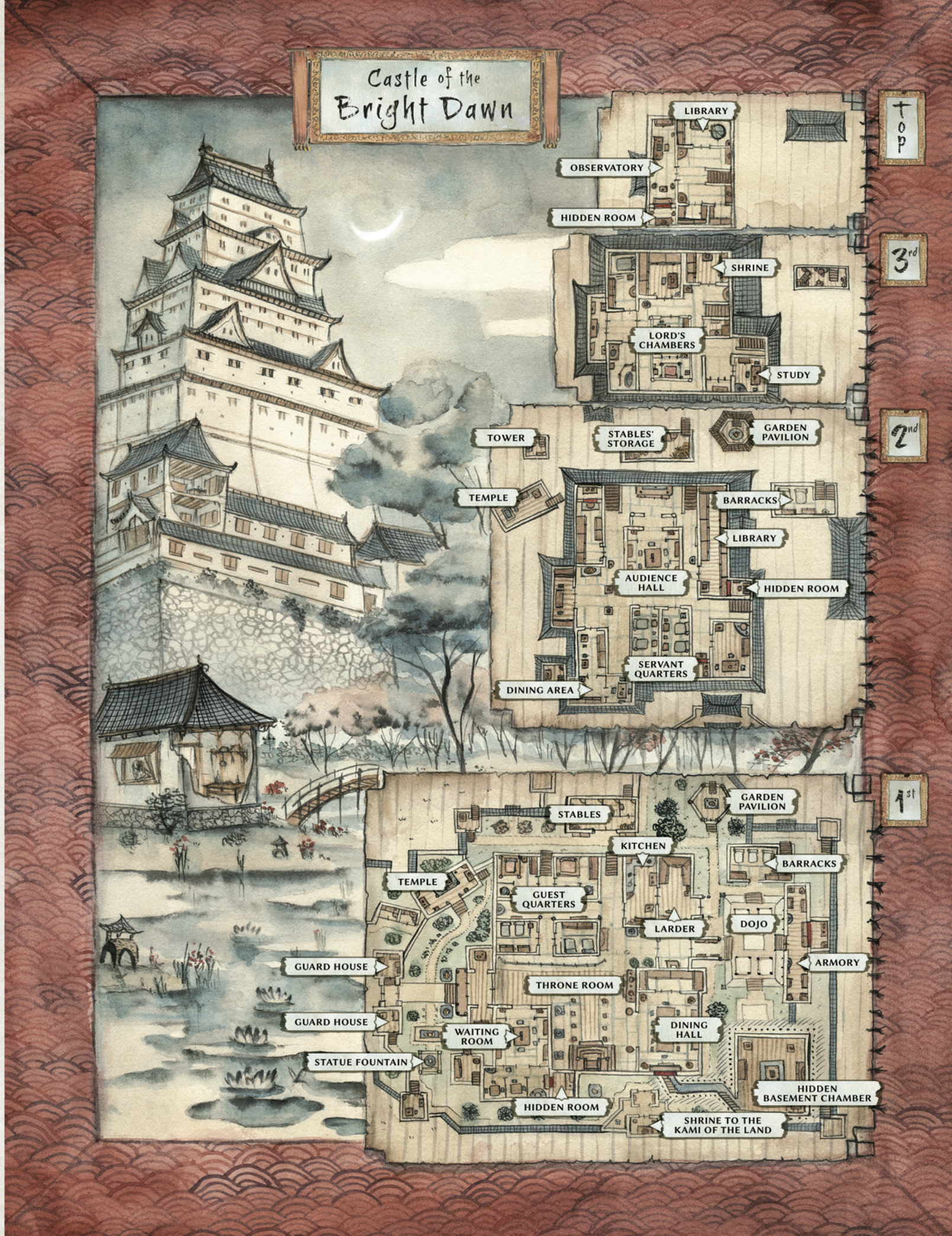
Most Rokugani castle walls do not have walkways built into them. Heavy timbers are incorporated into the walls, sticking several feet out on the defensive side, and wooden planks are placed across these timbers as needed to create positions where bushi can stand. These movable and replaceable parapets are known as *ishi uchi tana*, or "stone-throwing shelves." Although most castle walls incorporate them, there are two notable exceptions: Crab walls, and the outer walls of the Forbidden City in Otosan Uchi, both of which incorporate broad parapets with walkways.

Towers (Yagura)

Any significant castle complex reinforces its outer walls with towers. The main gate is nearly always flanked by a pair of towers, and additional towers are placed at corners and other key defensive positions. The more martial the clan and the more practical the castle, the more towers are built. Thus, the vast complexes of Kyūden Doji and Kyūden Kakita each boast only a pair of towers at their entrance, whereas relatively small Lion and Crab castles have five or six towers.

Towers serve a variety of functions. Their height allows the garrison to spot approaching foes at a greater distance and better outrange them with archery. They are defensive strongholds for repelling attacks, and they are rallying points for defenders in the event the castle is breached. The Crab also mount siege weapons on towers, but this is rare elsewhere.

Physically, a tower is essentially a miniature keep. Its lower floors typically house troops and store food, while the upper floors are fighting platforms with arrow slits. The larger the tower, the more sophisticated its facilities and the more troops it can house. The most formidable examples are the twelve great towers of the Kaiu Wall, each of which is a fortification as powerful as any castle in Rokugan. By contrast, towers in the Crane, Scorpion, and Phoenix lands are fairly small and sometimes more ornamental than practical. The Unicorn rarely build towers for the same reason they seldom build other large-scale military fortifications: they prefer fighting on the open plains to standing behind walls.


Castle of the Bright Dawn
Top
LIBRARY
OBSERVATORY
HIDDEN ROOM
3rd
SHRINE
LORD'S CHAMBERS
STUDY
2nd
TOWER
STABLES' STORAGE
GARDEN PAVILION
TEMPLE
BARRACKS
LIBRARY
AUDIENCE HALL
HIDDEN ROOM
SERVANT QUARTERS
DINING AREA
1st
STABLES
GARDEN PAVILION
KITCHEN
BARRACKS
TEMPLE
GUEST QUARTERS
LARDER
DOJO
ARMORY
GUARD HOUSE
THRONE ROOM
GUARD HOUSE
WAITING ROOM
DINING HALL
STATUE FOUNTAIN
HIDDEN BASEMENT CHAMBER
HIDDEN ROOM
SHRINE TO THE KAMI OF THE LAND

HOUSING FOR ASHIGARU

The barracks in a castle is intended for the use of samurai soldiers and, in a pinch, rōnin mercenaries. Requiring samurai to share their sleeping chambers with peasant soldiers is an insult that most bushi simply cannot endure (except, perhaps, those among the pragmatic Crab).

The clans do not maintain their ashigaru under arms during peacetime, in the manner of bushi; instead, they recruit and train ashigaru when war erupts. As a result, castles are not designed with built-in housing for ashigaru soldiers. Typically, ashigaru are not even trained on castle grounds, but instead are assembled and trained in the open fields beyond the walls. Likewise, they are housed not in barracks but in tents or other temporary shelters, maintained only as long as is needed for them to remain under arms.

GEMPUKU

Samurai children enroll in their chosen school somewhere between the ages of eight and ten, spending the next several years in the dōjō learning the skills they need to serve their clan. When they have mastered the first technique of their school, typically between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, their full-time education is considered complete, and they begin their adult service to their family and clan. This moment is celebrated in a coming-of-age ceremony known as *gempuku*.

The gempuku ceremony is a crucial moment in the life of a samurai: the moment when they take up the true duty of a samurai and assume the full burden of upholding their ancestral name. As a result, every family and clan has elaborate customs and traditions associated with gempuku, often quite rigorous and unique ones. However, there are three elements that all gempuku ceremonies share in common:

- **The Challenge:** Every gempuku ceremony incorporates some sort of test or challenge in which the student must display mastery of their training and a proper dedication to the ideals of their family and clan. The degree of difficulty involved varies widely, and in some cases can be extremely harsh or outright dangerous. For example, the Hida family of the Crab requires its students to go alone into the Shadowlands and return with the severed head of a Tainted creature. However, more commonly, the challenge is a display of prowess in the skills of the school, such as demonstrating the school kata, or a display of the student's education, such as a recitation of the names of their ancestors.
- **The Naming Ceremony:** Once the challenge is successfully completed, the young samurai undergoes a ceremony in which they choose their adult name. It can be the same as their childhood name if they wish, but many samurai prefer to pick a new name that shows their intentions as adults. The student swears oaths of fealty to their family and clan. A high-ranking samurai from their family or clan receives the oaths on behalf of the clan champion; the higher this person's rank, the more honor is done to the student (and the more will be expected of them as adults).
- **The Daishō:** At the conclusion of the ceremony, the now-adult samurai receives a *daishō*. This may be a new pair of swords forged for the event, or it may be an ancestral set passed on from a family member. Either way, the bestowing of these swords, which represent the samurai's soul and honor, mark the final transition into adulthood and full membership in the samurai caste. It should be noted that even courtiers, artisans, and shugenja receive a daishō at their gempuku, although they generally leave their katana on a display stand in a place of honor at their home rather than carrying it about as a bushi does.

BARRACKS

Any sizable castle includes one or more separate barracks to house its defensive garrison. Barracks are typically utilitarian, providing little more than a small living space for samurai who are off duty. Only unmarried samurai live in barracks, which also house rōnin employed in the daimyō's service. Typically, barracks include small shrines to the ancestors and a secondary armory. Most barracks are separate from the main keep, but smaller castles house the barracks within the bottom two floors of the keep proper, while extremely large castles often have secondary barracks within the keep in addition to the main ones elsewhere.

Barracks (and other such smaller buildings within the walls of a castle) are usually built of solid wood with a layer of plaster on the outside, making them stronger and more fire-resistant than conventional Rokugani wood-and-paper construction.

The style of a barracks varies depending on the clan that built it. Dragon barracks provide small chambers for prayer and meditation, with copies of the *Tao of Shinsei* easily accessible. Lion barracks are notoriously austere, with little more than bedrolls and a mess hall; the Lion believe a samurai should only be in barracks to sleep and to eat. The Crab share this mind-set, but out of necessity rather than choice. Crane, Phoenix, and Scorpion barracks provide their inhabitants with many more amenities, including artwork and literature, as these clans believe bushi should know more than just the way of the sword.

Dōjō

The term "dōjō" can be used for any training facility of any school, but usually it refers specifically to those that train bushi, who make up the vast majority of samurai in Rokugan. All castles have at least one dōjō for the training of their soldiers. In a castle of any significant size, the dōjō is not within the keep but instead is a separate structure located elsewhere in the complex, usually adjacent to the parade grounds. Extremely large castles have multiple dōjō to accommodate their substantial garrisons.

Dōjō vary somewhat in design, the most traditional styles being found in the lands of the Lion, Crane, and Dragon. Still, the broad patterns are the same across all clans. A dōjō normally comprises a central building, a training courtyard (separate from the main parade ground) that surrounds it, and one or more student barracks. The student barracks are connected to the central building and are separate from the castle's barracks for adult soldiers. The main building, considered the dōjō proper, has a single large chamber with a polished wooden floor, worn ever smoother by succeeding generations of trainees. The walls are lined with practice weapons, such as the wooden swords called *bokken*, and with plaques listing the names of past students. Even in the lands of wealthy clans such as the Crane, the dōjō is traditionally kept spare and simple to prevent any distraction from the study of the martial arts. Most dōjō also have a small ancestral shrine dedicated to the school's founder and its past sensei; students are expected to bow and show reverence to the shrine each time they enter.

A dōjō's students traditionally live on-site during their training, residing in the connected barracks. These are stark and simple affairs: large, open rooms filled with tatami mats, with only a few shōji screens for privacy.

Moats (Mizuki)

A moat is not a universal feature of Rokugani castle design, though it shows up often enough to be worthy of mention. When a moat is used, it is typically placed either outside the main exterior wall or between two layers of walls as part of the complex's multilayered defense. Putting a moat directly around the keep itself is rare (and often impractical).

Rokugani moats forgo stagnant and dirty water in favor of "dry moats," mere empty ditches. However, skilled architects have been known to redirect mountain streams in order to provide a clean and constantly renewing moat, where prayers to the water's kami or wards in the stone foundation prevent the waters from eroding the rock. Bridges across moats are constructed so that defenders can easily collapse them in the event of an attack.

Moats are most commonly found in the castles of the Crane, Scorpion, and Lion and those of the Imperial families. They are rare to nonexistent among the Unicorn, Dragon, and Crab, although the River of the Last Stand functions rather like a moat for the Kaiu Wall.

Guest Housing

Smaller castles house guests within the keep, but any large complex has one or more additional buildings that serve as dedicated guest quarters. In a major castle that expects to host significant diplomatic gatherings (or the Imperial Winter Court), there are separate buildings to house each Great Clan's delegation, allowing them to meet, discuss their plans, and hold private events without being overheard by other guests.

Such guest quarters are essentially large samurai houses with all the amenities that might be expected, although the level of luxury varies widely; the guest quarters at the palaces of the Crane and, of course, at the Imperial Palace are the most beautiful and spacious, while those at Lion and Dragon castles are the most austere. The Crab generally do not bother with dedicated guest houses at all, except in the palace of the Yasuki family.

Courtyard

All castles have at least a small courtyard area within their main gate, usually in front of the entrance to the keep proper. This open space—typically hard-packed bare earth, closely cropped grass, or, more rarely, fitted stone—is where arriving guests can leave their mounts, the lord's soldiers conduct drill, and the lord can address their soldiers before they ride forth to war. In a large castle that has many structures, this open space is correspondingly bigger, often going by the title of "parade ground" due to the large number of soldiers who conduct drills and reviews within it. In a castle like Kyūden Hida or Shiro Sano ken Hayai, this parade ground is large enough to marshal a thousand or more soldiers at once.

Gardens

Gardens are an almost obligatory element of a samurai's home, allowing the samurai to seek harmony and calm by gazing on the (carefully curated) beauty of the natural world. Castles are no exception to this, but the size and importance of gardens varies widely. In smaller or simpler castles, there is often only a single modest garden, most likely on the first floor convenient to the court chamber. Larger castles typically have secondary gardens, often including a garden on an upper balcony that is the exclusive purview of the lord and their family. Of course, gardens require considerable maintenance and upkeep by the castle's servants, perhaps supplemented by a samurai artisan who specializes in the art of arranging and designing them, so lords must weigh the expense of such things along with all other artistic embellishments to their domain.

In a truly grand castle, an entire section of the complex is dedicated to an outdoor walking garden complete with ponds, streams, walkways, bridges, and shrines to the Fortunes or the ancestors. Probably the most famous examples of such gardens are Kyūden Bayushi and Kyūden Doji, but many other great castles boast similar facilities.

Castle Towns (Jokamichi)

Although there are some castles that stand alone, far from any other human settlement, it is far more common for a castle to coexist with an adjacent town. This is because most castles are both the safest location in their lands and the local seat of government, inevitably drawing commoners to settle nearby. Some clans encourage this practice, especially the Crane; by contrast, the Lion actively discourage it, believing that such towns weaken their castles' defenses.

Castle towns are magnets for the merchants, artisans, craftspeople, and other skilled heimin in a lord's territory. They are also home to many of the servants who work in the castle, although some servants dwell within the castle walls.

Farmers tend to be less common, since castles rely on food shipped in from elsewhere rather than living off their immediate surroundings. The presence of samurai in a castle also draws certain classes of hinin—geisha and actors—to supply entertainment.

Some castle towns eventually grow large enough to become outright cities with thousands of inhabitants. When this happens, the local lord usually builds a defensive wall around the city; this is separate from the defenses of the castle itself, so if an enemy captures the city, the castle may still be able to hold out.

Stables

Any castle has at least a small stable for housing the mounts of the lord, their family, and their senior retainers. In a castle that regularly receives visitors or hosts diplomatic gatherings, the stables are much larger and include extra mounts for the use of the guests; these stables have dedicated staff who are skilled in the care and treatment of horses.

In the Unicorn lands, the stables are among the most important facilities in a castle and are far larger, more elaborate, and more generously staffed (including by samurai who are experts in the training of horses).

TOSHI RANBO

Toshi Ranbo wo Shien Shite Reigisaho, or Violence Behind Courtliness City, was built around a modest castle of only four stories. Yet, the settlement has been a focal point of Lion-Crane conflict for centuries, and has grown impressively to match its importance. Its very name is the result of these ongoing clashes, which spurred numerous diplomatic gatherings to settle disagreements and sign peace treaties.

Physically, the castle complex is fairly standard for a medium-sized fortress on flat lands. It consists of a four-story keep with a modest assortment of support buildings: barracks, guesthouses, a small court chamber (added by the Crane), an ancestral shrine, and impressive shrines to Hachiman and Bishamon, the whole surrounded by a wall with two towers. Beyond this inner fortress, a larger walled compound with its own gates and towers houses additional barracks, training grounds, dōjō, officers' quarters, and servants' quarters.

A Bloody History

How did a minor castle in the northern Lion lands become so fought over? An accident of the Empire's early history granted the Crane Clan control of the Kintani, the Golden Valley, an isolated but valuable holding near the Imperial City. In the fifth century, the Lion Clan built a castle called Kita no Yosa (Northern Fortress) to keep an eye on the nearby Crane. Rule of the castle was granted to a new vassal family, the Goseki, who fought the Crane many times over the next half millennium. A peak in conflict took place at the dawn of the seventh century, with the Crane twice making major attacks (including capturing the town for eight days, although the castle held out) and the Lion retaliating with an offensive of their own, which fell just short of capturing the Kintani outright.

The castle town thrived enough to become city-sized and gain its famous name, but by the twelfth century, a new round of fighting caused it to shrink back down to a modest village with only a few hundred inhabitants. It was this small settlement—almost a mockery of the name bestowed by earlier generations—that fell to Tsume no Doji Retsu, the ruler of the Kintani and daimyō of the Crane Clan's Tsume vassal family. Seizing the castle in a daring surprise assault, he eradicated the Goseki vassal family and claimed Toshi Ranbo for the Crane, a claim subsequently upheld due to the Crane Clan's dominance of the Imperial Court. The Daidoji family assumed control of the castle and, anticipating Lion counterattacks, improved the castle's defenses and added a set of gated walls around the village, ensuring control of the primary road through the province.

Subsequent Lion campaigns to retake the holding were thwarted as much by Crane political maneuvering as by battlefield action; both sides escalated their commitments, culminating in a major battle in the year 1123 that took the life of Lion Clan Champion Akodo Arasou. Toshi Ranbo thus exercises a grossly outsized influence on current events in Rokugan, far out of proportion to its actual size or strategic importance.

CONTESTED TRUTHS

- A number of servants within the castle retain their age-old loyalty to the Lion Clan and await an opportunity to sabotage the Crane defenders from within.
- Toshi Ranbo contains a number of significant documents and items that were hidden away when ownership of the castle changed hands violently.
- Restless ancestral spirits sometimes wander the halls of the keep and the battlefields where they died many years ago.

RUMORS

Throughout this book, you'll find sidebars like this one presenting just a few of the rumors in circulation about a particular location. As a GM, you might use these for inspiration when PCs inquire about the local gossip. Following up on such rumors could even form the basis for an adventure.

As with all rumors, it is not always clear which are true and which are false. We've left it up to you to determine which are which. Of course, even the most outlandish stories might have a grain of truth.



Kakita Sukenobu, Steward of Toshi Ranbo

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 2 4

Kakita Sukenobu is the current steward of Toshi Ranbo. A handsome young man just a few years past his gempuku, Sukenobu wears the traditional long, white-dyed hair of his clan. Sukenobu was thrust into a position of power suddenly and unexpectedly after the recent ouster of Daidoji Yoshiya, the castle's previous steward. In stark contrast to the militaristic Daidoji, Sukenobu has the soul of an artist and a romantic, and few think him prepared for the weighty duties he now holds.

Having inherited a court of belligerent tacticians and responsibility for a castle under siege, Sukenobu finds himself bombarded by advice that runs contrary to his own inclinations. Torn between a desire for peace—and a life of artistic pursuits and leisure—and his own duty, Sukenobu is eager to build his own circle of companions and advisors. He seeks the acquaintance of samurai who show an artistic temperament or who seem similarly repelled by the militant attitudes that dominate the court of Toshi Ranbo.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
60	HONOR	ENDURANCE	10
50	GLORY	COMPOSURE	10
45	STATUS	FOCUS	7
+2, –2	DEMEANOR · SHREWD	VIGILANCE	3



ARTISAN 3 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 3 | TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Impeccable Brushwork: Artisan; *Mental*	**Hopeless Romantic:** Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Katana: Range 1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Razor-Edged

Gear (equipped): Wakizashi, elegant kimono (Physical 1, Ceremonial)

Gear (other): Lacquered armor (Physical 4, Ceremonial, Wargear), yumi

ABILITIES

PEACEFUL HEART

When Kakita Sukenobu or an ally at range 0-4 fails an Attack check using a weapon, they remove 2 strife.

ADVENTURE SEED: TREACHERY AT TOSHI RANBO

Hook The PCs have come to Toshi Ranbo, where tensions run high after the recent death of Lion Clan Champion Akodo Arasou at the point of Crane Clan Champion Doji Hotaru's arrow. Kakita Sukenobu seeks to prevent further violence, even as the Lion, encamped nearby, maintain a state of constant readiness, clearly eager to avenge their fallen champion. Sukenobu spends much of his time with a mysterious rōnin called Hanako, and rumors of a romance scandalize the court.

Rising Action Within the court at Toshi Ranbo, the courtiers and advisers clamor to shore up defenses against the next Lion attack, or even to take the fight to them, to drive them from Crane lands. Amid the intrigues that accompany any court, the PCs overhear (possibly through a paper wall) the rōnin Hanako speaking with an unknown associate about a plot to help the Lion overtake the castle. Whether by confronting her, investigating the castle's records, or speaking with Crane who were present at the assault in which Doji Retsu claimed the castle, the PCs can learn that Hanako is the last living scion of the Goseki vassal family. Having escaped the massacre perpetrated by Retsu, she was raised as a warrior. Hanako intends to assist the Lion in retaking the castle, in order to reclaim her family name of Goseki. Despite her access to Sukenobu, Hanako has no plans to murder the lord of the castle, and it seems her fondness for him is no act.

Climax Time is running short, and without the PCs' intervention, Hanako will use both the information she has gathered as a guest of the Crane court and her own considerable skills with a sword to give the Lion the advantage in their next assault on the castle. The PCs must choose whether to warn the Crane or to help Hanako reclaim the castle and her family name. Complicating matters, the PCs cannot warn Sukenobu about Hanako's threat without admitting to eavesdropping, a major breach of etiquette. Further, Sukenobu's fondness for Hanako causes him to dismiss such claims and even to turn against the accusers.

KYŪDEN BAYUSHI

Silk and Shadow Palace, home of the Scorpion Clan's ruling family, is unusual in that it seems, outwardly, fairly ordinary: a large, conventional nine-story keep located within an expansive and beautiful (but seemingly only lightly defended) walled complex atop a low plateau. In many ways, it resembles the Crane Clan's famous Kyūden Doji—another large complex atop a height with minimal fortifications—but the comparison is only an outward one. As it is so often with the Scorpion, the beautiful face presented to the rest of the Empire is a lie.

The interior of the keep is quite pleasant and comfortable, again very much like a Crane castle. Attentive servants make sure every guest is well cared for and even pampered. However, guests quickly become aware of the unique physical oddity of Kyūden Bayushi: the interior of the keep has no walls save for a few key load-bearing structures. Instead, all the rooms and hallways are created from shōji screens and easily moved partitions, allowing the floor layouts to be changed at will. Many guests who spend the night in Kyūden Bayushi awaken to find that they seem to be in a totally different part of the palace than before. The Scorpion sometimes use this trick to put guests in an embarrassing position (for example, finding themselves unable to find the meeting room they used the day before) or simply to make them uneasy and set them off-kilter.

The keep is surrounded and accessed via an elaborate maze that appears to be constructed of trimmed hedges, but these in fact conceal strong walls. Known colloquially as Bayushi's Labyrinth, the maze incorporates moving pathways and hidden entrances to the network of tunnels beneath the plateau. During times of peace, the Scorpion use the maze as a source of entertainment for their guests, inviting them to test their cunning against it. During warfare, the many traps hidden within the maze are activated, forming a lethal obstacle to anyone unauthorized trying to approach the keep.

Kyūden Bayushi also boasts an expansive garden that fills all of the plateau that is not occupied by the palace complex. The garden centers on a large artificial pond and incorporates its associated streams, with pathways and bridges connecting the various sections. Numerous ancestral shrines are located throughout the garden; curiously, all of them are dedicated to Scorpion who attained attention throughout the Empire.

TALES OF THE SCORPION

- Bayushi's Labyrinth was designed at the dawn of the Empire by Kaiu himself at Bayushi's request.
- A network of tunnels riddles the plateau beneath Kyūden Bayushi. These tunnels extend throughout the Scorpion lands, linking all the clan's strongholds together in a secret network.
- A mysterious glowing lake lies somewhere deep within the tunnels below Kyūden Bayushi. The spirit of Bayushi himself can sometimes be seen floating above the lake.
- Anyone who steals personal items from Traitor's Grove is cursed with ill fortune.

TRAITOR'S GROVE

The most notable feature of Kyūden Bayushi is located not in the palace complex itself, but outside the walls and just beyond the plateau: the sinister, haunted copse of trees known as Traitor's Grove, held by tradition to be the responsibility of the castle's lord. It was created in the fifth century when Bayushi Tesaguri sold three of the legendary Black Scrolls to the Phoenix Clan; for this betrayal of the Scorpion Clan's sacred duty to protect the scrolls, he was punished with a ritual that bound his soul into a tree, trapping it in eternal torment. His personal belongings were hung from the tree's branches, forming a macabre "decoration" that served as a warning to any visitors. Since then, many other traitors have met with the same fate. Although they conceal many other aspects of their clan, the Scorpion make no secret of Traitor's Grove, preferring to openly display the way they punish disloyalty (though the ritual they use is, of course, utterly hidden).

Shosuro Sanae, Go Master

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 2 4

Though less than a decade past her gempuku, Shosuro Sanae is one of the top Go players in Rokugan. She regularly travels around the Empire to represent her clan in tournaments for the game. She usually wears a full face mask that shows only her eyes and mouth. Sanae is a charming conversationalist, but her glib tongue hides an underlying inner conflict. Though she shares the general Scorpion view of Bushidō as a nicety for idealistic samurai and possesses a deep underlying cynicism toward humanity, she also feels a certain envy and even a touch of admiration toward those who can sustain a more idealistic outlook. As a result, she often seeks out such people for conversation. She is a loyal ally to those who impress her, but anyone who betrays their own ideals will find her an especially dire enemy, as she punishes them for confirming her dour view of the world.

Because of her life as a traveling Go player, Sanae has friends and contacts across the Empire, including daimyō, magistrates, courtiers, and fellow Go players. She can be an outstanding friend, capable of offering all manner of help and information…or a terrifying enemy, able to call down trouble on her foes in lands far beyond her own home.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
25	HONOR	ENDURANCE	10
65	GLORY	COMPOSURE	12
20	STATUS	FOCUS	7
+2, –2	DEMEANOR · SHREWD	VIGILANCE	3



ARTISAN 3 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 4 | TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Small Stature: Martial; *Physical*	**Disdain for Compassion:** Social; *Mental*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Wakizashi: Range 0–1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Concealable, Razor-Edged

Gear (equipped): Extravagant Robes (Physical 1, Ceremonial), Go set

ABILITIES

MASTER OF GAMES

When Shosuro Sanae exploits an opponent's disadvantage during a game of any kind, she may reroll up to four dice (instead of just two).

ADVENTURE SEED: CHOOSING THE MASTER

一 Hook The Scorpion Clan is hosting a Go tournament at Kyūden Bayushi. Representatives from several different clans are participating, and the two favored competitors are Shosuro Sanae and her longtime rival, a Dragon named Kitsuki Taizo. Courtiers maneuver in the background, seeking to use the tournament to bring glory to their clans, and the competitors and other guests are inevitably drawn into their machinations.

二 Rising Action The PCs are caught up in courtly schemes to influence the outcome of the tournament, from subtle disruptions and sabotage to outright bribery or blackmail. However, at a key moment in the tournament, Kitsuki Taizo falls deathly ill, apparently the victim of a poisoning attempt. Accusations quickly fly from the Dragon delegates, who claim that Sanae had Taizo poisoned rather than risk defeat.

三 Climax The actual poisoner is a third party, another tournament participant who is an obsessive rival of Kitsuki Taizo and hopes to both dispose of him and cast the blame on Sanae and the Scorpion Clan. If the PCs can uncover the identity of this rival (as chosen by the GM to fit their ongoing campaign), they can earn the gratitude of both the Dragon and the Scorpion, including personal alliances with Sanae and Taizo. Of course, depending on their own clan loyalties or beliefs, the PCs may prefer to keep the blame on Sanae or even to frame another for the crime.



KYŪDEN DOJI

The seat of the Crane Clan's ruling family stands atop a high, cliff-edged plateau overlooking the Sea of Amaterasu. Below the palace's height, nestled on the seashore, is a "castle town" that is in fact a large port city with thousands of inhabitants. From the city, the keep is a vision of astonishing beauty that can make a viewer catch their breath even if they have lived below it all their life.

Kyūden Doji was not built for military defense; the top of the plateau is encircled by a simple but lovely wall that is little more than a boundary marker (and insurance against guests falling off the cliffs). The keep itself, just barely shorter than the Imperial Palace in Otosan Uchi, is likewise built for aesthetics rather than defensive strength. The Esteemed Palaces of the Crane is a stronghold of art and culture, not of military power. However, the palace's location deep within the heart of Crane lands means it has never been threatened by attack.

A rocky outcropping on the seashore below Kyūden Doji is the site of the Lady's Rest, the most sacred place in Crane lands: the place where Lady Doji herself was last seen in the mortal world. Lady Doji had long outlived her mortal husband, Kakita. When she learned of the death of Hida, the last of her divine siblings, she walked out onto the rocks at sunset and raised her arms, awaiting the waves. It is said she was carried away by a great wave just as Amaterasu's final rays fell upon her. In modern times, all Crane Clan Champions are expected to spend a night at the Lady's Rest, praying for wisdom and guidance from their divine ancestor. During the annual Chrysanthemum Festival, youths from all of the clans gather here and adorn the rock with flower blossoms in veneration of Lady Doji.

The Fantastic Gardens of the Doji

One of the greatest attractions of Kyūden Doji is the palace's legendary gardens, which originated as the personal flower gardens of Lady Doji. This interlinked series of story gardens, sand gardens, rock gardens, and floral displays is larger than many villages and takes up almost half the space within Kyūden Doji's outer walls. Master gardeners from the Kakita Academy watch over the grounds, making the subtlest of changes over the course of the year to ensure the gardens are always showing something new. Although the Crane maintain the gardens' splendor purely for the sake of keeping such beauty in the world, they are well aware of their value in diplomacy: other samurai pay many favors merely for the chance to visit the place.

The Eternal Second-Best Palace

The palace's original design is said to have come from Lady Doji, who created it in tribute to the Emperor's palace in Otosan Uchi. In the centuries since, the Crane Clan has made a point of ensuring that Kyūden Doji is always second only to the Imperial Palace in its appearance. To actually match the seat of the Divine Hantei would be an insult, of course, but at the same time, it would be a great loss of face for Kyūden Doji to be inferior to any other castle in the Empire.

Kyūden Doji has hosted more Imperial Winter Courts than any other castle in the Empire: so many, in fact, that the Crane long ago constructed a magnificent guesthouse for the Emperor on the grounds, along with numerous other guest residences of great size and luxury. Even in years when the Imperial Court goes elsewhere, a winter spent in Kyūden Doji is a great privilege, and samurai from other clans exert tremendous effort to gain an invitation.

FLAWLESS STORIES

- Lady Doji herself can sometimes be seen at dusk or dawn wandering the gardens.
- There is a secret museum of artistic failures hidden beneath the palace. It serves as a reminder of the cost of imperfection. New pieces are added only rarely, but to be featured is a fate worse than death.
- Certain palace servants gained enough wealth to create new lives in distant cities by revealing secrets of upcoming trends in fashion and art to other clans.
- Crane magistrates and their servants strictly monitor the port city below Kyūden Doji to ensure no disreputable elements mar the experience of worthy visitors.

Kakita Shijin, Famed Poet

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 2 4

The elderly Shijin is one of the most famous living poets in the Empire, having spent a long lifetime perfecting his art. Stooped and thin, with a long wispy goatee, Shijin spends most of his days in Kyūden Doji's famous gardens, meditating on the beauty around him and writing down the poems it inspires. Although he prefers to avoid the distractions of politics, his long and successful life as a poet has brought him into contact with thousands of samurai from across the Empire, and he can call on innumerable allies and favors at need.

Shijin is rumored to be seeking a student, a personal apprentice he can teach in the ways of poetry. Whether this rumor is true or not, it has made him a focus of attention; his infrequent visits to court always result in samurai eagerly (or desperately) maneuvering for his attention and friendship.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
60	HONOR	ENDURANCE	10
70	GLORY	COMPOSURE	10
25	STATUS	FOCUS	7
+1, –2	DEMEANOR - DETACHED	VIGILANCE	3



ARTISAN 5 | MARTIAL 0 | SCHOLAR 3 | SOCIAL 4 | TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES

Famously Successful: Artisan; *Interpersonal*

DISADVANTAGES

Incurable Illness: Old Age Martial; *Physical*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Wakizashi: Range 0–1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Concealable, Razor-Edged

Gear (equipped): Extravagant robes (Physical 1, Ceremonial), writing kit

ABILITIES

WORTHY APPRENTICE

Once per session as a downtime event, Kakita Shijin may spend several weeks mentoring a student who suitably impresses him. A character who commits themselves to the master's lessons gains 3 glory and may purchase the All Arts Are One shūji technique regardless of the normal prerequisites

ADVENTURE SEED: THE CURSE OF LOVE

Hook An artistic competition is slated to take place in the Fantastic Gardens between two of the more prominent young artisans of the Crane Clan: Kakita Shiko, daughter of the famed poet Shijin, and Kakita Torikago, recently honored with an appointment to the Crane guest home in Otosan Uchi. They are competing to create a work of art that will be given to the Emperor's son, so the stakes are high, with patrons lining up behind both samurai. However, Shiko and Torikago are actually lovers—and the night after the competition begins, someone steals Shiko's collection of Torikago's love letters. Shiko and her father covertly seek allies who can recover the letters, without revealing their reason: exposure of the affair dishonors both lovers.

Rising Action If the PCs can identify the culprits, they find that the thieves are working for the patron of a Crane courtier whose appointment to Otosan Uchi was derailed by Torikago's promotion. The rival intends to blackmail Torikago into losing the competition, hoping this will discredit him enough that his assignment is rescinded. Learning the truth behind the theft might embroil the PCs in a conflict of honor, since it means they have been asked to cover up a dishonorable love affair.

Climax If the PCs still decide to go through with retrieving the letters, there are different approaches they can take. They can simply try to steal the letters back, an approach requiring dishonorable stealthy maneuvers. Alternatively, they can meet privately with the rival and attempt to counter-blackmail them with proof that the rival arranged the theft. The latter approach makes the rival into a long-term enemy who will seek to destroy the PCs in order to remove the threat they pose.

THE IMPERIAL PALACE

In the center of Otosan Uchi, within the enchanted walls of the Ekohikei, Otosan Uchi's inner districts, lies the Forbidden City: the Emperor's personal domain, an irregularly shaped piece of land surrounded by its own low but thick and well-defended wall. Only two gates allow passage through this wall: the main gate that the Emperor and their visitors use, and the much smaller Necessary Gate, used by servants and hinin.

Only the Emperor, the Emperor's immediate family, and the handful of elite samurai who run the Imperial Court are permitted to live within the Forbidden City. The Hantei resides here for eight months out of the year, hosting the Imperial Court and receiving the petitions and requests of the Empire's citizens. All others, including the guards who defend its walls and the heimin and hinin servants, are required to live outside, entering each day to perform their duties and then leaving.

The heart of the Forbidden City is the Imperial Palace, the Emperor's ancient and magnificent residence, a ten-story keep that is itself larger than many entire castle complexes. It is located atop an artificial plateau known as the Imperial Mound, which it shares with two smaller buildings that are managed by the Otomo and Seppun. Access to the mound is via several ramps. The most prominent ramp, which leads directly to the front gate of the palace, passes beneath a series of huge torii arches and connects to the main elevated road (the so-called Road of the Most High) that the Emperor uses to arrive at and depart from Otosan Uchi.

To fully describe the interior of the Imperial Palace would require a book of its own. Every room, every detail, is a masterpiece of aesthetics. The art and architecture are of the greatest possible quality, but also of the most traditional and conservative design; many parts of the palace are completely unchanged from the original structure built in the first century. An army of servants labors day and night to ensure that the palace is always impeccably maintained and perfectly clean; shugenja of the Seppun family conduct daily purification rituals to purge any spiritual contamination, however slight.

Away from the Imperial Mound, the rest of the Forbidden City's interior is taken up by a sprawling complex of gardens and the official guest homes of the seven Great Clans. Each clan's delegation to the Imperial Court resides in these guest homes, a supreme honor and one limited to only a handful of samurai. These samurai are among the Empire's political elite, and they can call on vast resources of favor and support simply by being able to attend the Imperial Court each day.



RUMORS OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE

- A secret door is hidden in the back of the Imperial Court Chamber, allowing the Hantei to enter and leave without notice and even to spy on the court from hiding.
- A tunnel connects the Imperial Palace with the caverns and passages beneath Otosan Uchi. If an enemy ever managed to capture the Forbidden City, the Emperor could use the tunnels to escape.
- The torii arches that stand over the steps to the Imperial Mound are protected by Scorpion wards. Anyone who ascends the steps without an Imperial invitation who is not of Hantei blood becomes hopelessly lost, unable to reach the palace.
- Those who fulfill their duty to the Empire receive a great blessing when they visit the Temple to Hantei. One person even vanished from sight, taken up to the Celestial Heavens by Hantei himself.

The gardens are also home to the Temple to Hantei, built by Hantei Genji to commemorate his divine father; it has never needed the slightest maintenance or repair in all the centuries since. The shrine is actually quite small, barely large enough for a single person to stand within. It is located on an island in the largest pond in the gardens and is reached by a single long bridge lined with statues of all the Hantei emperors. As each Emperor dies and ascends into the Heavens, the bridge is redesigned to add another statue.

Winter Customs

Each winter, the Emperor and the Imperial Court depart Otosan Uchi to spend the season with one of the clans. When this happens, the Forbidden City becomes a quiet and empty place, tended for the most part only by servants, guards, and those bureaucrats and functionaries too lowly to accompany the Emperor to Winter Court. A few inhabitants of the guest homes may remain as well, for personal reasons, but this is unusual.

ADVENTURE SEED: MISSING HONOR

一 **Hook** A memento of the Emperor's late first wife goes missing from his chambers in the Imperial Palace. The discovery of the theft means the member of the Seppun Honor Guard assigned to watch that portion of the palace will have to commit seppuku. Seppun Ishikawa believes the guard is an honorable and capable woman who does not deserve such a fate, and he seeks allies who will quietly locate and retrieve the item.

二 **Rising Action** The item, a golden netsuke inscribed with the Hantei mon, was stolen by a servant and taken out of the Necessary Gate. Tracking down the servant is relatively easy, and he will readily confess, but he no longer has the treasure: he gave it to the master of the gambling den in the outer city to pay off his sick father's gambling debts.

三 **Climax** The gangster who runs the gambling den is not about to cooperate with the PCs, especially since he recognizes what the item is and the leverage it can grant him. Even worse, he is in contact with a *mahō-tsukai* cult that wants a Hantei heirloom for its own sinister purposes.

Despite this exodus, the Emperor's home must still be watched over, supervised, and kept pristine for the Hantei's return in the spring. The responsibility for ensuring this is done is granted to the Miya family. Accordingly, at the beginning of each winter, the Miya daimyō names a set of *kanrinin* (caretakers) to oversee the Imperial Palace. Typically, these are relatively low-ranking samurai of the Great Clans who have earned the favor of the Miya family in some way. For the duration of the winter, the kanrinin have full authority over the Imperial Palace: they are in charge of not only the servants but also the guards and any samurai residents who remain there. This is not a very exciting duty, consisting mainly of endlessly reviewing the servants' reports, inspecting the palace and grounds over and over, and overseeing any necessary repairs. However, it is considered very honorable, and performing it successfully can mark the kanrinin as trustworthy samurai who can be granted more significant duties in the future. On the other hand, failing to keep the Emperor's

palace in pristine shape results in an immense loss of honor and face; at minimum, the failed kanrinin are disgraced for life, and they usually commit seppuku to purge their shame. Earthquakes have caused the demise of no few kanrinin over the centuries.

Seppun Ishikawa, Captain of the Seppun Honor Guard

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 5 4

Born in Otosan Uchi during a New Year's festival, Seppun Ishikawa showed martial skill from an early age, and his parents arranged for him to be trained by the Kakita. Initially posted as an ordinary member of the Imperial House Guard, he soon drew positive notice from his superiors, especially Emerald Champion Doji Satsume. Satsume appointed him as an Emerald Magistrate and, after Ishikawa distinguished himself in that role, named him captain of the Seppun Honor Guard.

Ishikawa is a deceptively ordinary-looking man and a surprisingly gentle one, noted during his tenure as an Emerald Magistrate for the consideration he showed to the lower castes. A romantic at heart, he secretly longs for a woman who is already betrothed to another—though he knows such emotions could compromise him in his duties. Nevertheless, he is an honorable and dedicated bushi and takes his duty to the Hantei Family extremely seriously. Due to his past experience as a magistrate, he knows the value of having trustworthy allies and contacts throughout the Empire and is always on the lookout for more, assessing honorable visitors (perhaps including the PCs) from this viewpoint.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
60	HONOR	ENDURANCE	16
70	GLORY	COMPOSURE	12
45	STATUS	FOCUS	5
+1, –2	DEMEANOR · DETACHED	VIGILANCE	4



ARTISAN 2 | MARTIAL 4 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 3 | TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES

Paragon of Compassion: Martial; *Courtesy*

DISADVANTAGES

Painful Honesty Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Katana: Range 1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Razor-Edged

Gear (equipped): Lacquered armor (Physical 4, Ceremonial, Wargear), badge of office

Gear (other): Formal kimono (Physical 1, Ceremonial), yumi (bow), wakizashi, steed

ABILITIES

NEVER IN DARKNESS

When resisting a Social skill effect that would distract him from his duty, Seppun Ishikawa rolls two additional Skill dice.

KYŪDEN GOTEI

"Kyūden" Gotei in many ways epitomizes the Mantis Clan: grandiose, even garish, daring others to take offense at its display of vast wealth and foreign influence. It is built primarily from stone quarried on Gotei Island, on which it stands. Much of this stone exhibits strange dark-green and rusty-red colors; the wooden sections likewise are made from the island's exotic tropical trees rather than mainland oak, pine, or maple. The castle roofs are sheathed in copper instead of the traditional clay tiles.

Inside, the castle is even more spectacular (or, from the traditional Rokugani viewpoint, grotesque). Instead of the traditional narrow corridors, low doors, and shuttered windows, it has wide, tall, and open ones to encourage airflow and weaken the damp tropical heat of the islands. Throughout, it is decorated with semi-precious and precious stones, gold and silver plating, displays of flowering tropical plants, and cages with strange birds and brightly colored lizards.

The Lair of the Great Wind

Caves and tunnels riddle the ground beneath the castle. Caused by ancient volcanic activity, they have been expanded and developed by the Mantis Clan. Access to these passages and knowledge of the safe routes through them is restricted to Mantis Clan leadership and the elite unit known as the Storm Legion. In addition to providing multiple covert routes into and out of the castle and access to hidden ports where Mantis smuggling ships operate, these tunnels also provide access to Heaven's Bank Hold, a massive vault deep underground where the Mantis keep their greatest and most notorious treasures. Rumor claims that much of the wealth in the hold is gaijin in its origin and nature, but no one knows for sure.

Humble Beginnings

Kyūden Gotei and its associated city were founded in the late first century. At the time, they comprised no more than a village and a simple defensive keep that the fledgling Mantis Clan, true to its nature, proclaimed to be "Kyūden Mantis." (It may be noted that this "Kyūden" appellation has never been recognized by the Imperial cartographers, who still refer to the castle as "Shiro Gotei.") The name was changed to "Gotei" at some point in the fifth or sixth century, by which time the modest keep had already grown into a grand, sprawling palace.

Koharu, Mantis Mercenary

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 3 2

The muscular and sun-bronzed Koharu was born a rōnin and spent her youth as a pirate and a sword-for-hire, alternating roles as opportunity dictated. She attracted a following of other rōnin drawn to her combination of charisma and ruthless skill. Eventually, her success drew the attention of the Mantis Clan, who recruited Koharu and her followers. Koharu has not changed her lifestyle since swearing fealty to the Mantis, but now has the clan's support behind her when things go wrong.

Koharu can be encountered in many parts of the Empire, working as a mercenary or conducting pirate raids. She judges people as individuals, admiring those who are strong or successful while showing contempt for weakness; she is a deadly enemy to those who personally hurt her or her friends, but otherwise she views her mercenary work as purely business and free of any emotional commitment. She is an untrustworthy ally, ready to switch sides at the drop of a coin bag, but a loyal personal friend who will fight to the death for those she actually cares about.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
35	HONOR	ENDURANCE	10
30	GLORY	COMPOSURE	12
30	STATUS	FOCUS	6
+2, –2	DEMEANOR - AMBITIOUS	VIGILANCE	3



ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 1 | TRADE 2

ADVANTAGES

Famously Professional: Social; *Interpersonal*

DISADVANTAGES

Covetous: Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Kusari-gama: Range 1 [2–3 two-handed], Damage 3, Deadliness 3; Concealable, Snaring, Wargear

Gear (equipped): Ashigaru armor [Physical 3, Wargear], wakizashi, coin string, lucky cricket

Gear (other): Katana

ABILITIES

SAILOR'S LEGS

While on the deck of a ship, when performing a check or targeted by a check, Koharu may suffer up to 2 strain and choose 2 rolled dice. Those dice are rerolled.

ADVENTURE SEED: TALES OF THE BAT

Hook While visiting Kyūden Gotei, the PCs encounter an eccentric, stooped old man who claims to be lonely and wants someone to listen to his stories. He is oddly perceptive about the PCs and knows more than he should about their lives. PCs with an affinity for the spirit world may notice something about him: this old man is a *kōmori*, a shape-shifting bat spirit, native to the Islands of Spice and Silk.

Rising Action The old man tells the PCs a series of stories about ancient treasures lost in a cavern deep within the jungles of the Mantis isles. If the PCs realize who and what he really is, they may wind up seeking out the cave, braving the perils of the island's wilderness.

Climax The cave does indeed contain many ancient, pre-human artifacts. However, it also contains many dangerous traps and hostile spirits. If the PCs treated the old kōmori with respect, he warned them about these threats, giving them a better chance of getting in and out of the caves unscathed. Of course, the artifacts themselves may be hazardous, since they are relics from the pre-human age marked by the power of ancient beings.

War and Diplomacy

The Code of Bushidō is known as the "Way of the Warrior," and all samurai are warriors. The vast majority of samurai are bushi, trained in the physical arts of war, but all samurai—including courtiers, artisans, and shugenja—approach their duty to fulfill their lord's commands by establishing dominance through force of will and skill, if not by force of arms. All samurai are warriors on a battlefield. Death stands three feet away from all bushi, but in court, death comes from a glance or a fluttering fan.

In Rokugan, political struggles primarily take place in the courts of the Empire. Every daimyō and governor maintains a court in their castle, palace, or manor. They invite courtiers and artisans from other families and clans to attend and discuss important business, negotiate treaties and trade deals, and generally work to increase the power and prestige of their lord through social maneuvering. The higher ranking and more prestigious the host, the more powerful and important the court, and the greater danger—and potential gain—for attending samurai. The Imperial Court, hosted by the Emperor and the Jeweled Champions, is the greatest and most important court in the Empire. In the winter, it is called the Winter Court, which is held at a different noble's palace each year. The Winter Court is the more prestigious to attend. Many courtiers spend a lifetime trying to win an appointment to it, which would let them spend months in close proximity to the most powerful samurai in the Empire discussing matters of the weightiest import for the coming year.

HANDS OF THE EMPEROR

Two Great Clans are designated the Hands of the Emperor, ceremonial positions recognizing their importance to the Emperor and the Emerald Empire.

- The Left Hand, traditionally the Crane Clan, drafts laws in the Hantei's name, issues edicts on their behalf, and exerts political influence upon others in support of the Throne. In this, the Left Hand is supported by the Otomo, the Miya, and the Emerald Magistrates. Should the Emperor ever deign to meet with foreign dignitaries (as unthinkable as it seems in these times), members of the Left Hand are the Hantei's representatives.
- The Right Hand is a position traditionally filled by the Lion Clan. Its members serve as the Emperor's personal army and martial enforcers. They march across the Empire to settle skirmishes between armies and defend Rokugan against foreign invaders like Yobanjin; in this, the Right Hand is supported by the Seppun and the Imperial Legions.



REGIONAL COURT PRACTICES

In each region, courts have unique trends and traditions that change and evolve over time.

Crab: In Crab lands, courtly and bureaucratic functions are often done during meals, rather than before or afterward, so that those involved may return to their tasks more quickly.

Crane: In the wake of the tsunami, talk of natural disasters is considered uncouth, and most courtiers go out of their way to avoid directly discussing storms, instead using euphemisms.

Dragon: At the court of a Dragon lord, it is not uncommon for the hosting daimyō to begin with a koan or other riddle and ask each attendant for their interpretation.

THE ARTS OF DIPLOMACY

Rokugan is a land concerned with appearances. Knowing the importance of preserving one's reputation is crucial to understanding the civilization built by the Kami to mirror Heaven: in the eye of the divine, perception is everything. Courtesy to others will grant a person much, while being discourteous can cost them everything. To contradict appearances without proof or just cause is deeply embarrassing to both the one who stumbles and the one who witnesses it, for both the contradiction and the witnessing of it disrupt the harmony of the world. Honorable and respectful samurai always give others ample opportunity to save face by backing down from an unseemly outburst or giving the other samurai the opportunity to recognize and correct their mistaken action.

In Rokugan, what matters is often not what one says but rather how one says it. Even making an accusation or pointing out poor behavior must be done precisely so as not to dishonor oneself. As long as a person is respectful, propriety is preserved and society endures.

This applies to every battle, whether in the court or on the battlefield. In Rokugan, many social customs center on maintaining appearances and demonstrating sincerity rather than being honest or blunt. Some clans are more skilled at this game than others: the Crab are infamous for their brusque nature and the Dragon for being unpredictable, while the Crane and Scorpion are famed for their grace and subtlety, and the Lion are known for their stoicism in both war and peace. These social customs extend to every level of behavior.

Court Structures

Court attendees encompass an assortment of samurai from radically different walks of life. Courtiers are ubiquitous, but military officers (generals and captains for the highest courts and sergeants and lieutenants for lesser courts) are generally expected to attend if their duties permit. In higher courts, representatives from the Great Clan schools are present, usually sensei. Prominent temples send monks, major strongholds or cities send representatives, and virtually any group worth noting ensures they have a representative in court to listen to the proceedings to help their group know how next to act, if nothing more.



Courts ascend in importance from city and provincial courts up to the Imperial Court. Clan courts are primarily attended by prominent personages of that clan and family daimyō when they aren't in attendance at their own courts. A clan court is held at the residence of the clan champion, though the task of managing the court can be relegated to a trusted hatamoto. Delegations from other clans (both allies and enemies) make a point of attending clan courts, and frequently an Imperial guest attends to demonstrate the power and importance of the Throne. A court held by a Great Clan family is much like a clan court, albeit at a smaller scale. Guests at a family court primarily come from other families within the same clan, but a court might more rarely host representatives from another clan.

The courts of the Minor Clans are considered to be of equal importance to Great Clan courts in theory, but in practice, they're rarely better attended than family courts, as Minor Clans only control a small amount of land. Consequently, many courtiers from Minor Clans try to achieve semi-permanent positions within the courts of the Great Clans.

There is no higher court in the Empire than the Imperial Court. While it is the personal court of the Emperor, the importance of the court for the political activities of the Great Clans is such that it meets whether or not the Emperor deigns to attend (and the Hantei often does not). The modern Imperial Court is an imposing arena where the foremost leaders and representatives of a clan are fully empowered to make decisions without needing to consult their clan champion, and thus only the most trusted and competent attend.

The Imperial Chancellor represents the Emperor's interests when the Hantei is unavailable to appear in court. The chancellor leads court, assisted by deputy chancellors and heralds, determining the speaking order of delegations and ensuring that all in attendance abide by protocol and etiquette. The chancellor's various duties and privileges allow them to steer the agenda of the court in ways both subtle and overt. The informal position of Imperial Advisor is relatively new. The person in this role serves the Emperor with nearly any task they may require. Bayushi Kachiko is the current, and first, Imperial Advisor. The other clan delegations whisper that Kachiko has undue influence over the Emperor, yet none have so far risked any open attempt to weaken her position.

During much of the year, the Imperial Court is located in Otosan Uchi, but during the autumn months, the Emperor announces a location where the members of the court will winter; this clan castle hosts the Imperial Winter Court for that year. It is a tremendous privilege, and clans compete fiercely for the right to serve as the Emperor's host for the season. The Crane and Imperial families have hosted the greatest number of Winter Courts throughout the centuries, so much so that Kyūden Doji and Kyūden Seppun contain permanent guest quarters for the Hantei, but all of the Great Clans have hosted a Winter Court at least once, and the Fox Clan played host to the Emperor twice in the early centuries of the Empire.

Courtly Practices and Perils

Those who follow the courtier's path must do so with the courage of a warrior facing down enemy steel, and a failure in court can be more damaging to a family than the mere death of a samurai or a lost battle. Courtiers' victories are commensurately greater: bringing honor to their family through risk and reward without loss of life is highly prized. In a land where honor is defended with steel and insults are answered with lethal challenges, even bushi serving as yōjimbō find court to be a harrowing experience, as their lives or the lives of their charges can be placed in supreme danger with a glance and tittering laugh. Skilled courtiers must find ways to obstruct, undermine, and destroy their opponents without the same fate befalling them or their clan.

More than any other part of Rokugani life, court bears the weight of these social customs, and in it, everything is heightened by power and import. Every moment in court is suffused with graceful movement, delicate etiquette, and indirect speech to convey meaning where words will not suffice. Words are specifically chosen to offer everything and promise nothing, thus providing negotiators flexibility for differing interpretations while saving face. Even deeper meaning is hidden between the lines; as much or more is conveyed by what is left unsaid. In the void between what is said and what is meant, agreements are made, and wars are won, though alliances and treaties are never spoken of in such an uncouth manner.

Even a minor daimyō who insults or ignores a courtier without cause or with undue rudeness might disgrace their family with such breach of etiquette. Nearly every court is honeycombed with private chambers and gardens where private speech can occur and details of agreements can be confirmed. Courtiers return to their clans in the off seasons or send a messenger to relay the news of such agreements; few alliances or treaties are written in Rokugan, for a samurai's word is enough.

REGIONAL COURT PRACTICES

Lion: Military exercises are a frequent staging ground for political discourse, as lords mingle in the war camps and inevitably talk of politics. Requesting joint exercises or a mock battle with the forces of another lord is a common way to open negotiations.

Phoenix: At the end of meetings with their advisors, Phoenix daimyō traditionally leave the room, so that their advisors may speak freely. When they return, a designated speaker delivers the group's concerns, so that the daimyō does not know who voiced them.

Scorpion: When serving sake or tea at court, it is customary that the guest who arrived last drink first. If two guests arrived at the same time, they drink together.

Unicorn: In the city of Khanbulak, modern Rokugani poetry has become very fashionable among the members of the Unicorn clan who live there, and many court meetings begin with such recitations.

PRIVATE SPEECH

The use of paper walls throughout Rokugan has, combined with other matters of etiquette, naturally led to the adoption of certain conventions. Fundamentally, people must ignore anything they hear behind a paper wall, no matter how clearly audible it is. To make any mention of a private conversation would be to admit to eavesdropping, a dishonorable act that undermines anything one might hope to gain. And because the folding, movable shōji screens are treated just like permanent walls wherever they are placed, the same rules apply. This is a great boon for samurai in a castle crowded by the seasonal arrival of courtiers, as they can arrange for privacy simply by stepping behind a shōji screen.

Perhaps a less obvious result of this situation is the practice of treating paper fans with the same gravity. Hiding one's mouth indicates a private conversation, the words meant only for the person to whom they are addressed. Decorum requires that anyone who should overhear such an exchange must ignore it, just as if it were heard through a shōji screen or other paper wall separating rooms. Of course, in practice, this primarily limits a person only from admitting they overheard; samurai often act on such information. Many courtiers count on this and make delicate and exacting use of fans, as well as shōji screens, to spread rumors and otherwise manipulate the flow of information in such a way that it can never be attributed to them, even if everyone at court knows the source.

Exchanging Hostages (Hitojichi)

The exchange of hostages dates to the dawn of the Empire, and it has been used (and abused) by the Emperor in order to enforce the peace. Hostage exchange among samurai occurs frequently in the aftermath of court negotiations and as a consequence of war maneuvers.

The hostages who are exchanged are treated extremely well by the host clan. They are always young, well before the age of gempuku, and often they are youth of acclaimed lineage and great talent. They are sometimes even enrolled in one of the schools of the host clan as a sign of great favor, or as part of the hostage exchange. Still, their primary purpose is to ensure the good behavior of their clan. This is by no means an ironclad guarantee: rather, it is merely another circumstance that is taken into consideration when a samurai is choosing whether or not to break a deal.

Giftgiving

A lord provides their samurai retainers with every reasonable need; thus, giving a samurai a gift with any kind of utility is an insulting insinuation that their lord is incapable. In theory, only a rōnin or a peasant would even consider accepting a monetary gift, but bribery is one of many problems magistrates must sometimes investigate.

Gifts are given for a variety of reasons: to celebrate a past event or a happy occasion, when meeting a superior for the first time, as a recognition of merit, or during a special event. Despite the traditional thrice-refusal, the recipient has no socially acceptable way of turning down a gift; thus, a gift can be used as a carefully crafted insult to the receiving samurai and their lord. Giving a samurai something they surely should already have—such as giving a Bayushi a copy of *Lies* or an Akodo a copy of *Leadership*—sends a clear message.

Marriage and Adoptions

Unions between families are a vital part of politics in Rokugan, and adoptions and marriages are the tools by which such political unions are achieved. Betrothals and adoptions are negotiated contracts between two families, and might or might not include consultation of those to marry, adopt, or be adopted. Most samurai families hire a professional nakōdo to find a good spouse for their heirs, or to identify prospective heirs for adoption, and to conduct the negotiations.

Matchmakers consider a number of factors in arranging a marriage, such as temperaments, age differences, sexual orientations, and skill sets, but the most important factor is whether the political needs of the clans are met through the marriage—not love nor romance. The desires and wants of the individuals come second to the needs of their people, if they are considered at all.

Good nakōdo do consider these desires and wants, however. Benten, Fortune of Arts and Romantic Love, is one of the Seven Great Fortunes, and none in Rokugan deny the power of love or the raw passion of romance. This Fortune does not discriminate on the basis of social class or gender in the love she inspires, and the Tao of Shinsei clarifies that love and romance are natural expressions of human nature. Yet, free expressions of love are for peasants: a samurai's first duty is to clan and lord, and neither love nor romance needs to come into play during a successful marriage (though a lack of abject loathing is certainly necessary). It's not impossible for a samurai to marry someone they love, but it takes a certain amount of luck for the other family to be amenable, as well as convincing the matchmaker that it's favorable.

The most important part of the contract spells out which part of the married couple will join the other's family. Usually, whoever has the lower social station will join the family of the higher-status partner; most families use this as a way to select talented samurai from those of lesser rank, elevating them into power and prestige through marriage.

Adoption is as important as marriage for solidifying political unions between families. As with marriage, considerations of temperament, age, and other factors are important, but outweighed by the needs of the political situation. The adoption of very young or very promising samurai from vassal families or lower-status bloodlines is common, and it is a great honor for all involved. These adopted samurai take on the family and clan names, and they are treated as natural children for all concerns. Adult adoptions are not uncommon, and are used when sexual orientations (or an existing marriage) preclude the possibility of marriage.

Some families have different customs; the Utaku family forbids its daughters to marry men of higher status, and the Matsu family discourages it, while for the Doji, sons and daughters are often married to spouses of higher-status. Such family traditions pertaining to adoption are extremely rare, which is another reason it often provides an alternative to marriage. Regardless, the higher-status family that gains a new member traditionally makes payment to the family who loses a member; this is another contractual duty for the matchmaker to arrange, and it can lead to highly elaborate political concerns beyond a simple—and shameful—exchange of money. Among the most powerful lords, exchanges of land, castles, personnel, artwork, and rare commodities such as herds or horses may all be included in these negotiations.

WAR IN ROKUGAN

War is possible in Rokugan only during the spring, summer, and autumn. To march in the winter is folly, for the heavy snows, fierce ice, and bitter cold in most parts of Rokugan make travel perilous for a marching army. Where it doesn't snow, such as on the coasts and the Islands of Spice and Silk, the passage of armies is often difficult or impossible thanks to thick jungle, sandy or rocky beaches, cliffs and bluffs, or river deltas. Few battles occur in the spring, as honorable Rokugani forces refrain from making war by ancient custom and common wisdom. The heat and humidity of summer see the most battles, samurai and peasant blood mixing in the dust brought on by the frequent droughts. Particularly long campaigns may last until autumn, though the crop harvest and tax collection provide a strong incentive to bring wars to a swift conclusion.

Battles in Rokugan most often take place along roads or outside fortified castles, providing an advantageous retreat for the losing side. Protracted sieges are rare, because they are extremely costly for both sides—feeding an entrenched army is expensive, and logistics become nearly impossible during the winter. Most armies in Rokugan are ill-equipped to break sieges—and while the Crab do have large numbers of dedicated siege specialists, they are usually preoccupied with the defense of the Wall.

Emerald Armies

Armies in Rokugan are primarily infantry forces of ashigaru, or semi-professional peasant soldiers, and conscripts. Ashigaru are usually part-time soldiers who return to their villages when not serving. Conscripts, by contrast, are generally ill-equipped and untrained, sent to the front line with a spear, often to die.

Many of the Great Clans have families of hereditary ashigaru who have served them as guards and magistrates' *dōshin* assistants in peacetime for generations. These ashigaru take a fierce pride in their work. Still, in war, ashigaru must rely on divine fortune or overwhelming numbers to have any hope against fully armored bushi, and only then under competent leaders.

True cavalry tactics are only possible with Unicorn steeds, bred from full-size stock found outside the Empire. The native Rokugani pony isn't hardy enough to support full-scale cavalry warfare, although it sees use with scouts and mounted infantry. In the centuries since the Unicorn returned to the Empire, other Rokugani armies have instituted effective anticavalry training and tactics—usually after a brutal and humiliating defeat—but few field a large-scale cavalry force.

THE ARMY OF THE EMPEROR

The Imperial Legions differ greatly from their clan army counterparts, given that they represent a single, unified force drawn from all the clans and led by the Emerald Champion. There have always been ten distinct legions with the capability of fielding up to ten thousand soldiers each, although the actual size of the legions has varied over the years, and such a force has not been seen in centuries. Each legion is subdivided into ten regiments, which are further separated into five companies each, with platoons below that. Commanders are drawn from the Seppun family as well as the best and brightest the clans can offer. Most of the samurai in the legions are fielded from the Lion Clan, and lords may choose to send peasants to help fill out the legions' strength as well. The ashigaru who make up these legions are as close as one can get to career soldiers among the peasants, as they sign up for a renewable six-year term and do not return home until their assignments are complete.

The bureaucracy required to maintain, coordinate, and equip so many soldiers is the province of the Otomo family, with help from the more analytically inclined Miya and Seppun, with additional support from the Great Clans that waxes and wanes with the overall size of the army. There are estimated to be twice as many bureaucrats toiling in the capital as there are soldiers marching in the field, and even more peasants who assist the legions in the field with cooking, cleaning, and gear maintenance.

In times of peace, the Imperial Legions may be repurposed to complete public works, making it even more important that the courtiers of the clans are able to catch the ear of an Otomo official or the Emerald Champion

Rokugan is a feudal society, and this forms the basis for its armies' organization. Each provincial daimyō is responsible for calling up, training, and equipping their own forces drawn from the villages and the manor lords under their rule. These forces also include any guards they choose to redeploy from their castle. The result is forces of various strengths comprising spear-wielding ashigaru, sword- and bow-equipped samurai, and possibly mounted contingents and shugenja. Each unit has a designated leader, or *kashira*, who directs it in accordance with the general's instructions. In addition to fighters, units include horn blowers, drummers, and banner bearers, who are all integral to the kashira's direction of the force during battle and for providing identification to the tacticians overseeing the fight. In particularly large armies, the number of pikemen or samurai necessitate an expanded command structure in which captains (*taisa*), sergeants (*gunsō*), or both assume command over the kashira. While many daimyō are trained in the art of warfare themselves, they may defer to an appointed general, such as their hatamoto, to determine strategy and tactics in their stead.

When more than one daimyō are called to the field, their forces fight together but preserve their original command structure, with each lord relaying instructions to their subordinates. Regardless of the size of the force, however, the formation of the units remains predictable. Spear ashigaru deploy in rectangular blocks, wider than they are deep. Rows of archers arrayed behind the ashigaru rain missiles down upon onrushing forces, but once these forces collide, each breaks apart into masses of soldiers fighting in brutal and bloody personal combats of a thousand tiny melees. This continues until the general signals a surrender, until every soldier is dead, or until the peasant ashigaru break and run—a samurai who flees prays every bushi is equally without honor.

The number of foot soldiers and samurai a lord can field is restricted by Imperial edicts meant to mitigate the risk of outright war between hostile neighbors. Violating these restrictions without permission may result in censure, loss of status and holdings, or even direct intervention from the Imperial Legions. They are rooted in the might and authority of the Hantei, who holds the Mandate of Heaven.

Dust of the Battlefield

Following the conflict of the fourth century, when the Yasuki War between the Crane and the Crab rent the Empire and caused lasting damage, Emperor Hantei Fujiwa declared that the Great Clans could not loose their full might upon one another. Since that time, all conflicts between the Great Clans have been "minor" border skirmishes and limited wars. Although the sages deem the current era to be the "Thousand Years of Peace," battles are a constant presence in Rokugani life. Between court and battlefield, winter and summer, the Great Clans struggle for dominance and the favor of the Hantei.

Most wars are fought with relatively small armies of a few hundred or thousand on each side, but these are a near-constant occurrence in the spring and summer months. Only rarely do the Great Clans unleash their full might, and this is traditionally against foes they view as inhuman: Shadowlands armies, the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban's forces, or gaijin legions. The Crab exist in a state of constant readiness, while the Lion cross the Empire to enforce the will of the Emperor when the Imperial Legions are unavailable or insufficient in their duties. The Lion Clan takes its duty to protect the Empire seriously, and over the centuries has engaged gaijin forces both within and beyond Rokugan's borders. Battle is ever present, and it is a rare year that all of the Great Clans do not engage at least in small skirmishes during the warm months. No few of these are internal civil wars between clan families over some piece of land or point of honor.

Lion-Phoenix War

In the early centuries of the Empire, the Lion had exhausted their own food resources, and too many of their farmers had been conscripted as ashigaru. As a result, the clan champion decided to expand into the Crane lands in the waning summer months and claim the harvest. The Crane maneuvered for months in the Imperial Court until they forced the Lion to sign a non-aggression treaty. The Lion promptly invaded the Valley of the Two Generals, marching upon Phoenix lands: their true intent all along. Trapped by their own non-aggression treaty, the Crane watched helplessly as the Lion besieged their Phoenix allies at Shiro Shiba. The Lion slaughtered much of the tiny remnant of the Ki-Rin Clan, who had stayed behind while the rest of their clan traveled, eventually settling near Shiro Shiba under Phoenix protection. The Crane did, however, attempt a tactic that would continue to serve them extremely well in later centuries: they bled the Lion dry in the courts, ensuring that the Crane's surplus of rice did not benefit the Lion economically. Cutting off Lion supply lines in other lands, the Crane forced the Lion to attempt to cross their lands. The Crane promptly cited a violation of their agreement and threatened full war.



Faced with a two-fronted assault, the Lion called a truce, and peace was restored. The Lion were granted the Ki-Rin lands, and the remnant Ki-Rin samurai became the Fox Clan and were given independent status and new lands in another part of the Empire. The war is also notable for a display of compassion: when Isawa Tomokazu sought vengeance against the Lion for their aggression, the Crane Champion Doji Ritsuko rode to stop him, but she refused to duel. She endured his elemental assault, yet refused to fall, and after days of her passive resistance, the kami refused Tomokazu's requests to smite her. With this, the Phoenix forces lost the will to fight and surrendered. This was hailed by all three belligerent clans as a masterful display of strategy: the Victory with No Strike, achieving one's goals on the battlefield by breaking the enemy's will.

Crane-Crab War (the Yasuki War)

In the waning years of the fourth century, Emperor Hantei Fujiwa sought to check the power of a secret cabal of samurai called the Gozoku, which had usurped his own authority. He decided to do so by breaking the internal unity of one of the chief Gozoku backers, the Crane Clan, driving a wedge between the courtly Doji family and the mercantile Yasuki family, which was then a part of the Crane. Under Fujiwa's bidding, the loyal Crab Clan expanded its borders, encroaching upon Crane lands and emboldening the Lion. Open warfare erupted when the Crab seized the Yasuki lands, claiming the Crane had no need for them.

In truth, Fujiwa's machinations had worked too well. The Yasuki daimyō had a longstanding rift with the Crane Champion. Having been told repeatedly that he was "of no service to his lord," the Yasuki daimyō decided to interpret the comment as a commandment and not an indictment. Swearing service to the Crab Champion, the Yasuki family defected, and all attempts at peace negotiations failed or were sabotaged by outside forces.

Ultimately, the war became a massive economic drain on all of Rokugan, as the Yasuki and the Crane locked down a major portion of the Imperial rice crop. The war, which would have long-lasting consequences, demonstrated the power of open and full-scale warfare. In the war's aftermath, Fujiwa issued an edict declaring that no clan could bring its full forces to bear against another. Still, for all the long-term damage it did, the war was of little benefit to the Emperor even in the short term: the Gozoku had not been checked, and they grew in power until they eventually rendered Fujiwa a figurehead. The Yasuki have remained a Crab Clan family ever since the war, and little love is lost between Crab and Crane to this day.

Dragon-Lion War

It is not spoken of in the Imperial Histories, but those scrutinizing the ledgers of families during the seventh century see a horrifying decline in the fortunes of every clan, both material and abstract in bloodlines. This was the result of the Great Famine: a decade of starvation, disease, and open and total warfare, exacerbated by a tyrannical Emerald Champion and a weak Emperor. When heavy rains ruined crops across the Empire, the already-poor Dragon Clan asked for a lien on their yearly taxes to stave off starvation. In response, the Emerald Champion levied further fines upon them, and refugees streamed from the Dragon lands into those of the Lion in search of food.

When the Lion confronted the Dragon over their failure to act, the incensed Clan Champion Togashi Toshimasa led an attack into Lion territory, seizing great amounts of food. The Lion, though taxed by keeping the peace and putting down a full-scale peasant revolt, easily overthrew the Dragon invaders, who were ill used to defending themselves within unfamiliar lands. Only the intervention of the Phoenix kept the Lion at bay, and the Dragon refugees were allowed into the lands of Shiba and Isawa's clan.



War and the Clans

The clans of Rokugan vary greatly in both doctrine and degree of militarization. All maintain standing armies and a system of command, but each clan approaches battle strategies and tactics from a different view.

Crab Clan

The Crab are an extremely militaristic clan, but this is a tradition maintained out of necessity. The corrupted creatures that dwell in the Shadowlands are dangerous beyond compare: innumerable hordes bolstered by invulnerable giants and emboldened by the insidious power of the Taint. Crab military units are small, tightly knit, and paranoid, clad in Kaiu-forged steel and wielding heavy weapons like *ōtsuchi* or *tetsubō* alongside the more fragile but traditional katana. The Crab have molded their weapons and tactics to fight an inhuman enemy, and while they adapt poorly to battling other samurai, Crab bushi see more battle in a year than most see in a decade. Masters of both laying and withstanding siege, the Crab rarely step away from their duty at the Wall to make war in Rokugan, but their raw strength and determination are terrifying when they do.

Crane Clan

The strengths of the Crane are in court and in the art of the duel, not on the battlefield proper. These strengths are reflected in their strategy and tactics: a Crane commander might challenge their counterpart to a duel and deprive the enemy of a leader while Crane bushi maintain a defensive scorched-earth posture and courtiers grind the economy of the enemy clan to a halt in courts across the Empire. This approach, and impeccable training of their heavy infantry, helps to ameliorate the greatest weakness of the Crane: numbers. Although the clan proper approaches the battlefield with unimpeachable honor, its bannerless scouts are infamous for employing questionable tactics, such as sabotaging weapons, laying traps for marching columns, and poisoning supplies in advance of the opposing army's main force.

Dragon Clan

More so than any other clan, the forces of the Dragon Clan are unique reflections of the lords who lead them. Some daimyō focus on the teachings of the Tao of Shinsei to achieve victory, while others place their hope in the Agasha family's extraordinary talent for metallurgy and weaponsmithing. Still more daimyō focus on drilling troops in a wide variety of environments, and some lords even deploy warrior monks from the Togashi Order into their battle lines. With this esoteric training and the tendency of the Dragon to train their bushi alongside shugenja and *ise zumi*—warrior monks—small units of the clan are terrifyingly effective and unique opponents. With fast and powerful attacks, Dragon armies separate their enemies and defeat each individual unit over lightning-quick campaigns.

Lion Clan

The only school dedicated to the study of war exists within Lion lands, bearing the name of the clan's founder, the most militaristic of the Kami. True to Akodo's teachings, the Lion are the most heavily militarized clan in the Empire, boasting a massive army, a relentless drilling routine, and an economy designed to support war. Every aspect of a Lion bushi's life supports this focus: harsh duty rotations and the daily practice of kata interweave with prayers to martial ancestors at highly elaborate shrines, broken only by pursuits such as Go or *shogi* to hone the bushi's tactical and strategic instincts. When the Lion call upon the full force of their vassals, their armies are huge, and they use their strength in numbers to overwhelm their opponents with classic and time-honored stratagems. They show great pride in their accomplishments throughout the long history of their clan; as a consequence, the Lion are slow to innovate, and they discourage unorthodox strategies. Still, they develop counterstrategies with alarming alacrity.

Phoenix Clan

Peace is the way of the Phoenix, not war. Their engagements in conflict are few and limited, designed to end the conflict with a settlement and a recognition of peace as the wiser course. However, when they are forced into total war, the Phoenix march to war alongside the very powers of nature. The Phoenix Champion, normally subordinate to the Elemental Masters, assumes a voice equal to the entire Council of Five. The champion and the Elemental Guard personally take the field for important engagements, unleashing the prayers of master shugenja and the full might of the kami upon opposing armies, warping the land and permanently altering the nature of the area's spiritual makeup. Such is the skill of the Elemental Guard that they can gain the blessings and favor of the kami within the enemy's own territory. It's customary for every Phoenix to pray for forgiveness prior to a battle.

THE ELEMENTAL GUARD

In times of grave trouble, the Elemental Academies of the Isawa deploy their most talented shugenja into units each dedicated to a single element. Although they have not had to call upon the raw power of a firestorm or tsunami in generations, these shugenja and their dedicated Shiba protectors are a truly terrible force to behold.

THE GODS OF WAR

As shugenja must beseech the spirits for their aid, the limitations of the kami's support becomes particularly pronounced in warfare. Because they are appealing to the local spirits, the defending army has a serious "home-field advantage" for the simple fact that their shugenja have existing relationships with their region's kami. In other words, it is hard to convince the local earth kami to rain stone death upon the inhabitants who routinely give them offerings and maintain their shrines. The blood and death that taint a battlefield may even attract the attention of *kansen* —Tainted kami—as the carnage wears on, disrupting elemental forces and hindering shugenja. There are a few notable exceptions, however, among the Fortunes. Hachiman, the Fortune of Warfare, and the Fortunes of swords and bravery are much more likely to answer the prayers of non-local shugenja in battle and intervene on their behalf to secure victory.

As a result of these limitations, shugenja cannot be treated as regular assets in most armies. Instead, they often work closely with the commander, using their own expertise in dealing with the spirits to determine how they can be most effective. A commander who tries to order their shugenja around like bushi will quickly discover that their their miraculous powers are limited by the willingness of the spirits to act, and oftentimes, the best way to use a shugenja is simply to let them act on their own discretion. Regardless of where they are placed in a battle, shugenja are accompanied by one or more yōjimbō, who are dedicated to preserving the shugenja's life even if the rest of the unit were to fall.

Scorpion Clan

Deception is the way of the Scorpion, and this applies in war as well as in peace. Scorpion commanders delight in confounding enemy scouts, spreading false battle plans, and sending opposing armies in divergent directions, revealing the Scorpion force only when it is time to draw blade from scabbard. The Scorpion's own scouts are impeccably trained, buoyed by an array of spies and informants in a network that stretches across class and rank, field and palace. Those facing the Underhand of the Emperor must guard their plans with zeal and caution, adopting the ways of their enemy lest battle secrets be strangely anticipated or a commander fall prey to a poisoned bowl of noodles. Naturally, this can never be traced back to the Scorpion. When they do engage in battle, the Scorpion field a well-trained yet largely traditionalist army reminiscent of both the Lion and Crane armies and suited for warfare on the battlefield and off, whether in the dead of night or the bright morning.

Unicorn Clan

Among the most militant clans in the Empire, the Unicorn have a spirit of steel forged in the fires of distant suns. The absorption of foreign peoples such as the Ujik made the clan far more aggressive. Since their return to the Empire, the Unicorn haven't changed their battle tactics, yet their superior bows and steeds mean that few can truly equal them. Cavalry has always been the heart of the Unicorn, and every engagement and tactic reinforces this point. The Unicorn pin their enemies with rapid-marching infantry and rely on decisive charges of heavy cavalry to win the day, a spearhead of steel and steed slamming into its foes without mercy. Talisman-wielding shugenja enhance the mobility of both infantry and cavalry, and the Utaku war steeds are the finest horses in the Empire, their breeding and heritage a closely guarded secret. No Rokugani pony can equal the horses of the Unicorn.

The Minor Clans

Each Minor Clan has the relative strength of a single Great Clan family. While some are more martial than others, few are able to field an army of any great strength or marshal more than a few hundred to fight at any one time. Only the Hare, Falcon, Dragonfly, and Mantis Clans have sizeable forces, and these fall far short of those of the Great Clans, with the exception of the Mantis navy. The Minor Clans are largely protected by an edict of the Emperor, distinct from other rules limiting the military powers of the clans, established when an aggressive and expansionist Lion Clan tried to seize the lands of the Fox Clan. Absent this edict or in violation of it, the Minor Clans are shockingly vulnerable.

CHAPTER 2
Centers of Trade

The samurai picks her way along the crowded street, ignoring the clamor of heimin merchants shouting from doorways and stalls, hawking their wares. Her stomach tightens at the spicy aroma wafting out of a noodle shop, but food has to wait. She has important business here in the Merchant Quarter of Ryokō Owari Toshi, business that must be concluded before darkness falls. Lady Sun already peers from behind the towering bulk of the great Temple of Daikoku. So she has another hour, perhaps—

Her foot splashes into a puddle, and the samurai scowls. A hinin boy struggling under a basket loaded with refuse immediately recoils and ducks back into the alley. The samurai ignores him and carries on.

Wending her way around a caravan laden with rice, the samurai reaches the next street. The sharp, cloying reek of opium tells her she nears her destination, a nondescript building among many along the street. Bracing herself, the samurai resumes her walk toward the door and the predatory heimin leaning against it, a tattered badge sewn to his kimono. So the firefighters are involved in this after all, *the samurai thinks, and her hand drifts toward the hilt of her katana.*



The Hub of the Empire

Prior to the Fall of the Kami at the dawn of the Empire, the human population of what would become Rokugan was primarily nomadic groups and small agrarian communities. The remnants of some of their settlements still exist within the foundations of the oldest cities in Rokugan. The Kami formed Rokugan in their image, leading their new subjects into an era of great change as they swept across the land and created the cities and towns of the Empire today. Now, almost all of the important political, cultural, social, and economic happenings of Rokugan revolve around these places.

Most Rokugani cities are surrounded by strong walls that separate their samurai and commoners from the attached hinin village and from the exterior roads, rice paddies, and fields of grain that directly support them. Buildings are made primarily of wood and paper, just as they are in the rest of Rokugan's settlements. Whenever the inevitable typhoon, hurricane, or fire destroys large portions of a city, the city springs back up in a pattern reminiscent of, but subtly different from, its previous configuration.

Almost all cities are internally demarcated with smaller walls and a system of well-patrolled gates that close off districts from one another. Districts that house merchants and trade and temple districts full of shrines and holy places are typically open to all but hinin, who rely on hidden paths through the densely packed cities to move from place to place where they are needed. Moats and defensive fortifications cut through castle towns but are easily bypassed by those who live there. Cities are divided into areas for high- and low-ranking samurai, with separate areas for soldiers, craftspeople, and merchants passing through—generally, this last section is near the dirty and dusty road, and thus is closed off by a small encampment of tents and tarps to help keep wares clean.

Rokugani cities are crowded. Millions live within the Emerald Empire, and cities house a major portion of that population. Samurai wandering through cities can expect to see peasant servants of samurai, craftspeople, and merchants of every stripe, along with heimin guards overseen by low-ranking samurai. Formality relaxes somewhat in these close quarters, for no one wants to cause too much trouble. Samurai and peasants share the streets with one another, but all who wandering the streets must deal with crowds, dodging litters carrying powerful lords or rich merchants.

Many cities connect to the north-south system of overland trade routes in some manner, as befits their primary purpose to facilitate trade. Despite the samurai distaste for monetary matters, merchants have come to be recognized in modern Rokugan as a sort of necessary evil, procuring goods directly with koku and exchanging goods and money with their counterparts in the lands of other clans.

In order to thrive, merchants cross the entire Empire, brandishing well-stamped travel papers and running brightly colored caravans between different regions where different merchandise are available cheaply or are highly sought after. They suffer disrespect from samurai and pay stiff tariffs to the clans that allow them in their territories, cutting into the profit margins. The slow-moving caravans are a perennial favorite target of bandit gangs. During times of war, merchants may find roads and trade routes closed or even have their wares seized by passing armies without recompense. Merchants who work only in a city's merchant district are largely protected from these indignities, relying on other traders and traveling merchants to handle that side of the business.

Cities are also a center of religious life. Most contain important temples and innumerable shrines to Fortunes both of local repute and revered across the Empire. It's not uncommon for a district to be set aside solely for temples. These areas are places of gardens, tranquility, and devotion to the kami where monks may roam freely. Temple districts are often adjacent to those of the nobility, providing a buffer between the bustling market districts and theater spaces and the nobility. The symbolism is not subtle: Rokugani cities are built such that crude matters involving money are kept at a distance from spiritual and religious centers. This is despite the fact that money ultimately flows into those same temples and shrines; in large or prestigious cities, places of worship can amass great wealth.

The gardens of a temple district are often the focus of landscape gardening competitions when they aren't handled by the monks themselves, and even the smallest cities have an extensive rock garden and ikebana display. Dance salons and Kabuki theater are closer to merchant districts than temples are, but monks have been known to foster performances of exceptional piety within the temple district's public spaces.

Inevitably, cities have darker sides as well. Areas with gambling houses and cheap brothels, obvious imitations of the licensed quarters, are endemic in areas frequented by peasants. Opium dens are an essential part of any sizable city; no few samurai descend into underground spaces decorated with images of smoke and dragons to lose themselves in a pleasant haze for several hours. Gangs of commoners run these areas, sometimes even indebting shame-filled samurai in their schemes and crimes.



Urban Life

Lady Sun's light falls upon everyone in Rokugan, from the lowest hinin to the Hantei. Yet, their daily lives can be very different depending on their social status. Hinin, heimin, monks, and samurai have radically disparate existences, whether they live in a city, town, or village. While people of all social status exist beside one another in population centers, they mix like oil and water.

On the most superficial level, daily life for every class is similar: hinin, heimin, and samurai are all mortal and must eat and sleep. All pray to their ancestors, and all find satisfaction and comfort in such things as family, friends, entertainment, or hobbies. Yet, this is usually where similarities end.

A samurai's daily life revolves around the court of a city. While samurai have ample opportunity for leisure time, the needs of their clan must be attended to on a daily basis, so the ebb and flow of traffic on the streets beats in time to the workings of the noble district. Constant activity marks the life of an urban dweller, with respite coming only after the sun sets and the city quiets. Even then, evening parties with sake and decadent court intrigues keep samurai occupied, while cleaning and preparing houses for the activity of the next day keeps peasants busy, and merchants work through the evening to ready their wares.

HININ

Hinin, also called *burakumin*, are at the very bottom of the Celestial Order, and that is apparent in their treatment by others. As hinin are considered unclean, most samurai and other peasants avoid the indignity of speaking with them. With notable exceptions such as geisha, hinin almost never address a samurai (and generally try to

THEATER IN ROKUGAN

There are three main types of Rokugani theater: Nō, Kabuki, and Bunraku (puppet theater). Samurai of all ranks enjoy the theater, as do peasants, though the latter see a Nō play extremely rarely, and the former are rarely seen at a puppet show.

Nō is the oldest and most respected form of theater, essentially a long, chanted poem presented by a handful of actors accompanied by music and signing, and cloaked in heavy symbolism. The form relies on the actors to stylize their movements and on minimalistic masks to convey emotions and portray specific characters. Nō plays tend to depict tragic accounts of history or legend, and *kyōgen*, or short comedic plays similar to pratfalls, are performed between Nō plays to lighten the mood. Nō is considered a high art in Rokugan, with several clans having artisan schools that specialize in their own Nō traditions. Day-long performances are popular during court season and seasonal festivals.

Kabuki is a younger art form, considered more garish than Nō (and more popular with the middle class), having evolved out of the kyōgen. Nevertheless, many samurai lords patronize Kabuki troupes, and samurai artisans have tried their hand at writing plays for the style. Kabuki features gorgeous and elaborate costuming, skilled dramatic action including stage fighting, and a mixture of traditional stories and stories with thinly disguised plots based on current events. Kabuki plays are highly improvisational, and skilled actors contribute a great deal to the script and performance, making the success of a play more about the troupe than the playwright.

Bunraku is puppet-based performance. A chanter relays the plot to the audience while the puppeteers hide behind a small screen and manipulate elaborate, well-crafted puppets. The flexibility and small size of puppets allow them to act out feats impossible for a human actor, and elaborate mechanisms or small pyrotechnics can rapidly change scenery or decapitate puppets for shock value. Supernatural beings are easy to represent, and a dragon puppet looks properly looming to a tiny human puppet. Puppet theater is considered the most lowbrow of all theater, but it's still wildly popular.

THE TERM "ETA"

Some samurai and heimin might refer to hinin as "eta." This term dates back to feudal Japan, where it was used to describe the people now more commonly referred to as "burakumin." It is considered a derogatory slur in modern Japan, and so most speakers do not use it. While L5R is a fantasy setting, this is one of many concepts that have historical baggage that players should critically assess.

Groups will have to decide for themselves if the term "eta" should be avoided at the table while roleplaying. As always, it is best to be respectful of others and make sure that everyone feels comfortable. Even though L5R is inspired by history and myth, that does not mean that all aspects of history and myth must be included without questioning them.

avoid them when possible), and they only address peasants with the greatest respect and obeisance. They often dress in rags and live in their own slum villages, which are connected to cities by winding and well-trod dirt roads. In rare cases, their villages exist within city walls, but always with a physical separation from the rest of society.

Nevertheless, hinin villages are not ill-kept; the uncleanliness is largely societal and spiritual, not physical. Their homes are large, one-room affairs with dirt floors and walls of cheap wood. While hinin do the detestable work that no one else will, they may still have moments of happiness amidst the fear and grueling work. They work leather, prepare the dead, clear battlefields, and perform other loathsome tasks, almost all of which involve touching dead flesh, but they also enjoy time with their families. Some tend to personal gardens, and perhaps even enjoy simple pastimes like drinking, singing, and playing dice games.

Regardless, the life of a hinin is hard, and can be cut short by a samurai's whim. Some of the more martial clans, like the Lion, consider a blade properly tempered and tested only when it has been used to cut down living flesh, and burakumin provide an adequate test. Hinin villages provide some safety, as others avoid them under almost any circumstances.

Entertainers and criminals are also hinin, though geisha are a peculiar exception in terms of how hinin are treated. As samurai are not permitted to let down their face in society, they can only feel comfortable doing so before someone who is not considered part of that society; geisha exist to give them that outlet, and thus are permitted to address samurai and even afforded a certain level of respect or warmth.

When they are not required to be in other areas due to their work, hinin keep to their own communities, where their lives are not much different from those of heimin. Gossip sweeps through hinin communities faster than wildfire, and when their duties are complete, they gamble and talk and eat (even meat on special occasions) and live their lives free of the constraints of Bushidō. Their marriages are civil affairs without the benefit of a priest, yet the community recognizes them as valid, and even hinin bow and pray at shrines to their honored and departed ancestors.

HEIMIN

Heimin, also called bonge, are in the social class between hinin and samurai. In urban areas, heimin servants, craftspeople, laborers, merchants, and

other city-dwelling peasants work every day to perform household chores for samurai, labor for the coffers of the lords of Rokugan, and increasingly, trade and exchange bu among themselves. Merchants and other wealthy commoners often live in houses similar in quality to samurai residences. The ideals of Bushidō require that commoners are treated with courtesy and compassion by their social superiors despite the abject submissiveness demanded of their position. This ideal is rarely realized, however.

Many heimin have houses of their own, kept clean and elegant by any standards save those of the great nobles of the Empire. For some bonge wealthy enough to live in mercantile districts, homes may function as places of business. In modern cities, they are usually townhouses that are narrow and deep, as space for street-facing storefronts is in high demand. Heimin homes often are more reminiscent of those of samurai than of hinin, featuring details such as decorative alcoves, built-in desks (in the homes of literate merchants), tatami mats, and sliding doors, and shōji screens. Where samurai homes feature a sitting room for receiving vassals, bonge homes use this space more informally, to greet guests or conduct business.

While all peasants and samurai wear some variant of the kimono, a robe-like outfit with full sleeves kept closed with a belt called an obi, peasant garments are simple and made of cotton, or more rarely silk worn in the heat of summer. It is common for heimin to tuck small pouches and other items under their obi or hang them from it, while samurai tuck their wakizashi and katana through the belt with the blades facing skyward. Most peasant women try to have at least one colorful kimono they can wear to festivals and celebrations, but most often they wear a very simple, practical kimono with a shorter skirt offering less obstruction for walking and labor. Peasant men wear a similarly short kimono, with short cotton leggings extending down to the knee and a cotton overcoat called a haori. Many peasants, especially those who work in the fields, wear conical hats made of straw to protect them from the sun.

Bonge have little respite from their daily work, whatever it may be. Those who clean or maintain an estate, or perform any type of personal work for samurai, have to rise before samurai do and may only rest long after their social "betters" retire. Heimin who work in a shop or as a street vendor may have more discretion in their schedule, but those who fail to make themselves available should a samurai (or more likely, a samurai's servant) come calling could face severe consequences. Bonge families live under the same roof, and while children are allowed freedom to play, they're also required to work. Although rural heimin have no schooling save for occasional religious lessons from a priest, those living in urban areas may have more options. Some cities and even towns are home to private academies run by generous samurai or to temple schools run by the Brotherhood of Shinsei. For heimin families successful enough to afford the tuition, these schools offer instruction in reading, writing, mathematics, theology, and philosophy.

While those who live in country villages enjoy a life mostly free of social responsibility save to the occasional wandering samurai, bonge servants in a city live under a constant and unceasing pressure to conform and serve the samurai. The idea that an errant word can result in death is largely overstated, but it can be supremely difficult to exist in these spaces. Bonge servants share the streets with samurai, but take great pains to stay out of the way of their betters. In some prestigious cities, many peasants lurk in back rooms waiting for samurai to summon them, or take alleys and side streets to avoid the main roads where samurai walk. Yet peasant money, when they have any, is still good. Granted some amount of leave and free time, peasants might use their money to indulge in dumplings or see a Kabuki play, or they might engage in gardening, prayer, or if they are one of the few literate peasants, light reading.

Merchants fare better than other peasants. They awaken early in the morning to prepare their storefront or transport goods from their quarters far from the noble district to set up areas of trade. They employ servants to carry their goods, or they move their wares via pack animals like oxen. To avoid having to walk, wealthy merchants may even employ additional servants to carry them in a cloth litter called a kago. While merchants are still restricted in their interactions with samurai, many become wealthy by any standard, exceeding the temporal might of jizamurai or even some poorer lords. Such merchants' homes display often-tasteless art and ostentation beyond their station, enough to draw the ire of most samurai. These merchants may eat rice and even meat often, and they brook few challenges to their pride—perhaps not even from samurai, and certainly not from less successful peasants.

SAMURAI

For samurai who live in a city, daily life follows a similar pattern in every season save winter, when the most prominent nobles and courtiers may depart to attend the Imperial Winter Court. The work of samurai in the city revolves around the governor's court. These samurai's duties to their clan require them to attend to

matters of trade or war or to protect those who engage in those discussions.

City courts only deal with trade through the liminal social strata of merchant patrons, but the ability of cities to support a large number of samurai and their retainers also makes them seats for the powerful who don't yet have houses or holdings of their own. Samurai in cities are ambitious and talented, often pursuing their own goals, yet all too aware they face an ultimate social ceiling without performing some great act of merit for their clan. Even without the need to keep trade flowing, cities are hotbeds of intrigue.

A typical samurai's home is set apart from the rest of society by a masonry wall around the perimeter, with a gate and service entrance facing the road. Within these walls, a courtyard or garden surrounds a house with a square foundation of stone, walls of wood, and windows made of shōji screens. The gate faces the outdoor stairs to the main floor and wooden storm doors. Inside, the main reception room features a floor covered in tatami mats, a deep alcove for hanging scrolls or displaying other art, and built-in desks.

The style of decor varies by clan, the understated simplicity of Lion and Dragon homes contrasting with the gilded and carved columns and beams of the Crane and Phoenix clans. Decorated or austere fusuma sliding doors lead deeper into the home, where six or so multipurpose rooms of various sizes are used for sleeping at night and the activities of everyday life during the day. All but the poorest samurai have household servants who live in the house or in a smaller building attached to the main home, where food is also stored and prepared before being served to the samurai of the main household.

Samurai kimono are always a finer quality of cotton or silk. Samurai favoring mobility, such as bushi and other more hands-on samurai, typically wear a flowing and pleated skirt called a *hakama*, a sort of divided garment that allows for ease of movement. These they wear with *kosode* robes with smaller sleeve openings than a kimono, and often with a single-color haori coat for extra warmth or to identify their allegiance to a particular clan or organization. Daimyō and courtiers of high status may wear an outer vest or jacket called a *kataginu*. Samurai frequently incorporate their clan colors into their clothing, but they aren't restricted to those colors, and artistic or fashionable samurai make creative use of design and color to draw attention and remain at the height of fashion.

All samurai are careful not to wear another clan's colors while in their lands, as this can be construed as an insult—unless that's precisely what a samurai intends. City samurai display a wider variety in their clothing, and they are freed of the need to wear traveling footwear, heavy socks, and a cloak to keep them safe from the elements.

Traveling samurai arriving in a town or city are expected to pay a visit to the magistrate, samurai lord, or governor who is in charge, notifying them of their presence and intentions. It's a grave breach of etiquette to fail to do so in a timely manner—usually right after one has washed the dust of the road off themself. Powerful samurai rarely even have much dust, as they are carried in enclosed litters called *norimono*.



FOOD

The samurai of Rokugan's cities have a varied diet, rich in vegetables, fish, meats, and always rice. White rice is always served plain in its own bowl, with chopsticks laid sideways across the top—never left inside the bowl, for that is too reminiscent of funeral rites. Sushi and rice balls are made from the sticky white rice, sake is brewed from rice, and rice vinegar is used in virtually every meal. While brown rice is occasionally eaten and used to make mochi, or rice cakes, and aromatic rice (brought to Rokugan and grown by the Unicorn) exists as a regional variant, white sticky rice is far and away the most common, present at nearly every samurai meal. The diet of peasants is decidedly less varied, consisting largely of barley. The poorest make due with millet, while merchants and other wealthier urban peasants may enjoy rice nearly as often as samurai, and even indulge in fish or meat on occasion.

Second only to rice dishes are noodle dishes, made from buckwheat or wheat flours and sometimes even yams. Seafood is heavily consumed in all coastal areas, and in inland areas, river and lake fish are eaten whenever possible as a significant part of the diet. Poultry (chicken, pheasant, and some turkey) is also widely used, for both meat and eggs. Soybeans make up the remainder of the protein eaten, especially since they can be grown in most parts of the Empire. Most of the soybean crop is turned into tofu, but a significant fraction of it is used to make salty, fragrant soy sauce and thick miso paste.

Besides fish, the sea also provides fresh and dried seaweed, while the land provides squash, cucumbers, cabbage, kale, yams, burdock, carrots, radishes, and onions, and the orchards produce plums, apricots, pears, cherries, and apples.

Social ideals hold that red meat is unclean, and so many samurai abstain from eating it, especially in coastal provinces. Most Unicorn largely ignore this stricture, and in the face of deprivation, the Crab cannot always choose their meals, and tend toward viewing things pragmatically anyway—if something is unclean, they can always be cleansed later. Dragon have been known to insist that their smoked and cured delicacy is "mountain tuna" and definitely not goat. Individual samurai sometimes break this taboo based on circumstance or preference, and the social repercussions range from minor disgust to significant loss of standing, depending on one's company.

ROKUGANI ALCOHOL

"Sake is the jeweled broom that sweeps away all care," goes the Rokugani proverb, and few can resist letting go in so pleasant a manner in the company of close friends or geisha. Though the most popular drink in Rokugan by far is tea (*cha*), and serving tea to guests is one of the most basic forms of Rokugani hospitality, sake is not far behind and is nearly as ritualized. It's often served in specialty bars called sake houses.

Sake is an alcoholic beverage made from fermented rice and was popular even before the Kami fell, retaining its appeal to samurai and commoners alike across centuries. Sake usually is served hot, but the highest-quality sake is served chilled.

A more powerful and harsher distilled beverage known as *shōchū* is also available, coming in varieties fermented from sweet potatoes, barley, or rice, but only heavy drinkers partake of it (particularly among the Mantis Clan); others often look down on those who drink shōchū.

Other beverages are popular in certain regions or clan territories. The Crane are fond of the plum wine known as *umeshu*. A favorite of the Unicorn is *airag*, but this drink of fermented mare's milk is unknown outside their lands.

Everything save soup is eaten with chopsticks or the hands. Everyone in Rokugan, from hinin to the Emperor, has their own pair of chopsticks. Although chopsticks normally are made from a simple wood such as bamboo, the wealthy use chopsticks of expensive or aromatic woods, ivory, or even jade. Spoons are used for soups and stews, though more often, the solid elements of a soup are eaten with chopsticks and the broth is drunk directly from the bowl afterward. While knives are used extensively in the kitchen to prepare food, they are never used at the table. There are no banquet halls as such; food is always served in whichever room suits the purpose (though never in the kitchen). Various kinds of snacks sold by street vendors are served on wooden skewers.

Cities and Towns

Cities and towns in Rokugan serve the same purpose they do in any civilized society: they are centers for trade and commerce, as well as foci for politics and governance. Each has reasons to be where it is, usually some combination of geographic, historical, cultural, economic, and religious factors. Cities are frequently built in defensible locations such as atop a hill or adjacent to a river. They are densely populated and supported by a large network of farms and trade villages, developed over Rokugan's history in part as a means of streamlining the ungainly economic system of rice-based taxes.

ROKUGANI CITIES

Although cities are home to a significant portion of the Empire's population, there are actually few large cities in Rokugan. In general, "city" refers to any single settlement with more than ten thousand inhabitants, although this number simply provides a convenient threshold for categorizing settlements. Legally speaking, true cities are only those with appointed governors. In practice, it's not unheard of for some towns to exceed ten thousand inhabitants without being appointed a governor, whether due to lack of adequate economic or strategic importance, political maneuvering, or bureaucratic inefficiency.

Cities in the Empire represent the pinnacle of a social, cultural, and economic pyramid based on the structures of a largely agrarian society. Peasant farmers, woodcutters, miners, and other laborers form the broad base of the pyramid, growing the food and providing the other resources upon which the economy relies. A percentage of these resources are funneled into a multitude of villages across the Empire, which form the next, narrower level of the pyramid. From the villages, resources are further gathered into the regional hubs of towns and, from these, into the cities at the top of the pyramid. At each step, value is added as resources are refined and manufactured into various types of finished goods. Taxes, in the form of a portion of resources and goods, are collected at various levels of the pyramid to provide for the machinery of political governance and military power.

CITIES IN CONTEXT

While official Imperial maps list only a few large cities in Rokugan, a GM may wish to include more for their particular game. As noted, though, cities don't simply appear in arbitrary places. The pyramid model broadly shows how cities are embedded in the economic, social, cultural, and political context of the Empire. Understanding this can help a GM portray a city to the players in an interesting and exciting way that also follows a realistic logic. For example, PCs traveling to a city will likely encounter merchants on the roads moving caravans of food and other raw materials such as lumber, stone, and oils into the city and caravans of finished goods out of it to the towns and villages in the surrounding region. Seeing this sort of activity associated with the city will help bring it to life for the players and further immerse them in the setting of Rokugan.

The Birth of a City

One of the most important factors affecting the origin of a city is geography. Cities tend to be located in areas that are relatively flat, accessible, and well drained. In the militaristic culture of Rokugan, defense is another consideration. A large river, forest, or mountain range that will limit approaches helps make a location attractive for settlement. Some cities have cropped up around castles, while others serve as sprawling way stations along important routes.

The locations of routes for trade and travel also affect where cities form, especially in places that aren't close to fertile farmlands. Moving food and other goods and resources around the Empire is an important but difficult task. Troops also must be able to travel. The locations of mountain passes, navigable rivers, land suitable for road networks, and natural harbors all tend to affect where cities are located. For example, Ryokō Owari Toshi is located in the gap between the rugged Spine of the World Mountains and the Shinomen Forest, close to the Seikitsu Pass through the mountains and at the northernmost extent of the River of Gold's navigable waters.

A final consideration for a city's location is more cultural than practical. Rokugan is steeped in the divine and the supernatural, and these aspects of an area may play a part in a decision to locate a settlement there. The most notable example is Otosan Uchi, the Imperial Capital. Although the city is located on a major, natural harbor, it originally grew around Seppun Hill, the revered and holy place where the Kami fell from the Celestial Heavens and entered Ningen-dō.


CASTLE OF THE ENDLESS SKY
SHRINE OF THE HILL KAMI
MAGISTRATE'S ESTATE
SAMURAI ESTATE
TEMPLE OF AMATERASU
SHRINE KISSHŌTEN
FALLING PETAL DŌJŌ
BREEZE OF DAWN TEAHOUSE
MARKET
STARLIGHT TEAHOUSE
DRUNKEN FROG SAKE HOUSE
WAREHOUSES
MELODIOUS WILLOW GEISHA HOUSE
FISH MARKET
TEMPLE OF EBISU
INN OF THE SLUMBERING GOOSE
BLACKSMITH
GUARD HOUSES
TANNER
CREMATORIUM
Peaceful Hill City

FIREFIGHTERS

The lower portions of castles are made of stone, but most buildings are made entirely of paper and wood, making fire one of the greatest dangers any Rokugani settlement can face. A vigilant fire squad, armed with large buckets of sand and maps of wells and water pumps, is the best way to minimize damage. Where these are insufficient, firefighters must demolish adjacent buildings in order to prevent a blaze from spreading. Most cities delegate oversight of this duty to minor officials, paying them a small stipend to recruit a local group of heimin.

Almost inevitably, firefighter gangs in cities where order is lax become involved in crimes such as gambling and prostitution. The signature crime for these groups is the protection racket: intimidating citizens and shopkeepers into paying a bribe or suffering violence at the hands of the gang, or losing their home or business when the gang "fails" to quell a fire in time, or even as a "necessary" demolition. The flip side is that the gangs rarely allow anyone else to encroach upon their turf, and those who pay can expect a measure of safety. Of course, samurai never suffer these consequences, and they may be incredulous upon hearing that they occur at all.

Urban Navigation

In terms of their layout, Rokugani cities tend toward chaos. Most large cities have grown from a central core that is typically a defensive structure of some sort, such as a castle. This structure is the home and court of the governor who rules over the city. Most of these centers of governance are surrounded by the estates of the city's wealthiest and most powerful citizens. This central or "noble" district is in turn surrounded by districts commonly characterized by their general function:

- A temple district containing various holy sites as well as living quarters for priests and shrine keepers, who minister to congregants and tend to the sites.
- One or more samurai districts, where most of the lower-status samurai live. Services for those who reside there are provided by myriad sake houses, noodle shops, tailors, weaponsmiths, and similar businesses.
- An entertainment district, where theaters, geisha houses, and luxurious inns are located. Related institutions, such as schools for performers and workshops for the craftspeople who support the performances, are also found there.
- A merchant district, where commercial and mercantile activities are conducted and goods are warehoused.
- One or more commoner districts, where heimin live and work. These make up the bulk of most cities. Hinin are usually confined to their own district or live outside the city.
- Depending on the wealth of the city, walls may separate and defend the exclusive districts (those samurai live in and visit) from the more common neighborhoods. Where this is the case, gates control access from one district to another, and posted guards ensure that not just anybody can travel to certain high-class districts. From a militaristic perspective, this helps the city's samurai to endure attacks until reinforcements from their clan arrive.
- If the city is located on a river or harbor, it will also have districts devoted to related activities, such as a river docks district, a fishers' quarter, or a harbor district.

As cities grow in importance and their populations increase, they expand, at least to the extent that geography allows. Within the districts of a growing city, construction is often haphazard. Preexisting roads that a city grows around remain relatively straight and become the major city thoroughfares, but usually much of the city becomes a warren of narrow, twisting streets and alleys, particularly in more crowded areas populated by commoners. Some of the most labyrinthine and confusing streets are found within Scorpion cities, and it is widely believed that this erratic appearance is in fact intended to confound and discomfit outsiders. Some districts, however, tend to be more strictly and centrally controlled, such as temple districts and noble districts. In these, streets and buildings are usually carefully laid out according to plans that incorporate social, political, or spiritual hierarchies and take access and security needs into account.

Architecture and Dwellings

Most of the buildings in Rokugani cities are made of wood, stone being reserved for larger and more significant structures such as palaces and temples, important defensive works like towers and city walls, and

buildings owned by powerful people such as daimyō and magistrates. In all types of buildings, most interior structures and partitions are made of wood and paper and can be easily moved to change the interior layout; permanent rooms and walls are the exception, unless needed for structural or security purposes. Because of the large proportion of flammable materials in their constructions, Rokugani cities are highly vulnerable to fire. Cities therefore maintain elaborate fire-protection precautions, and arson is a serious crime indeed.

Lordship and Governance

Most Rokugani cities are administered by a governor who is appointed by the clan champion or family daimyō whose territory encompasses the city in question. In many respects, the governor is similar to a daimyō, but with a jurisdiction limited to the city and usually the area immediately surrounding it. The governor presides over a municipal court, where they hear petitions and make proclamations. The court bureaucracy is responsible for administering the city's affairs, including road maintenance, public works such as city wall construction, and the collection and archiving of data on the city's population. A chief magistrate, who reports to the governor, oversees a contingent of magistrates who are responsible for overseeing tax collection, maintaining law and order, and ensuring that the governor's mandates are carried out throughout the city. (For more information about magistrates, see page 89.)

In the largest cities, individual districts may also have governors. In Otosan Uchi, senior members of the Imperial Court and other notable samurai who govern a district report to a central council that, in turn, reports to the Imperial Court.



Gangs and Criminals

Criminal operations in cities span the range from individual, petty lawbreakers to large and sophisticated underworld syndicates. Big cities tend to attract the larger criminal syndicates, such as the opium cartels of Ryokō Owari Toshi, which find it easier to hide their nefarious operations in the bustling chaos. Similarly, street gangs thrive in the packed quarters of a city. In some cities, again most infamously Ryokō Owari Toshi, firefighters—groups of commoners organized to quickly fight fires before they spread out of control—form the basis of some of the most powerful and intractable street gangs (although they generally still do genuinely fight fires).

Another surprisingly organized group found in most large cities are "beggars' societies": large, coordinated groups of scroungers, vagabonds, street urchins, and similar sorts who practice all manner of petty crimes, then pool the spoils for the benefit of all members. Blasphemous cults may also have a presence in large cities, but these groups tend to prefer the anonymity of more remote places in the Empire.

Of course, not all criminals are members of organized groups. Every city has its share of pickpockets, muggers, burglars, petty extortionists and blackmailers, and myriad other small-time lawbreakers. The magistrates and their deputies work very hard to keep criminality from becoming rampant, but wherever humans come together to engage in commerce, greed will eventually win out in the hearts of the weak willed. Many magistrates actually cultivate contacts throughout the criminal underworld of their jurisdiction, sometimes overlooking minor crimes in order to keep tabs on, and thwart, larger ones.

ROKUGANI TOWNS

In Rokugan, "town" usually refers to a settlement of between a few hundred and ten thousand people. (A smaller settlement is considered a village.) Towns are much more numerous than cities and, in some respects, they collectively have as much influence on the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the Empire—and perhaps more.

Towns occupy a place in the social, cultural, and economic pyramid immediately below the top triangle occupied by cities. Towns fill the role of regional hubs. Food, raw materials, and simple finished goods flow into them from surrounding farms and villages in the form of both trade and taxes. From these hubs, some of the gathered food and resources, as well as more elaborate finished goods, flow out to other towns and the nearest cities. Some of this outflow is commercial trade, and some is in the form of taxes ultimately destined for the Imperial Treasury.

Expanding Settlements

Trade needs are more influential than defensive needs in determining the locations of towns, which are much more numerous than cities. Geography is still a factor: towns tend to be located along trade routes such as rivers, on land suitable for easy road construction, or in or near farmland. A location merely adequately defensible may be preferable to a more defensible position farther away, simply because the first location is better positioned with regard to fertile lands, farms, and villages.

Like cities, some towns began as a simple defensive structure, such as a small keep or watchtower. Most, however, started as a small village that happened to be best positioned to attract growth. Although they are usually no more formally planned than cities, towns tend to have a less chaotic layout due to their smaller size. If a town is located on an Imperial road, that road is usually the main street and the nucleus for development. Other parts of the town are built as local geography allows.

Most towns are less cramped than cities in their layout. They develop more organically than cities and have fewer demands placed on them by lords and bureaucrats during their growth. As a result, buildings are constructed with more space between them compared to the claustrophobic proximities found in cities. Nevertheless, pedestrians must usually stick to the alleys, as streets are given over to carts, which leave little room for passersby and seldom heed their safety.

It is rare for a town to be subdivided into formal districts like cities are. Still, towns are far from homogeneous. Wealthy, powerful, and otherwise influential citizens tend to live close to the court and estate of the town's head magistrate or lord in the best-defended part of town, while commoners are relegated to the fringes or other less desirable areas. Hinin typically live in separate settlements entirely, located a short distance away from the town, and usually downwind.

The architecture of towns is broadly similar to that of cities, although there are fewer large buildings and fewer buildings made of stone. The latter are normally restricted to buildings related to governance and defense. The vast majority of the buildings are of wooden construction, with wooden and paper interior partitions, and most are no more than two floors high.

Town Administration

Whereas cities have a governor, towns have a clan magistrate or samurai lord in their senior leadership role. The prestige of the position depends greatly on both the reputation of the town and the samurai's previous station. Appointment as the head of a remote or obscure town is, in fact, often a punishment for samurai who have proven themselves incompetent or untrustworthy but have not acted in a manner deserving of more serious censure.

Town leaders live in large estates that tend to vary in size according to their town's importance. Magistrates invariably maintain a manor house within the town in order to more easily conduct the affairs of government and law enforcement, while it's not uncommon for samurai lords to maintain their estates outside of town or substantially isolated from the surrounding citizenry; this is especially true of those samurai who view their town as beneath them.

Crime and Conspiracy

Criminal activity in towns echoes that occurring in cities, albeit on a smaller and more local scale. Large criminal syndicates may have a presence in particular towns, but generally for a specific reason. For example, a large opium cartel based in Ryokō Owari Toshi might have an outpost in Kudo, a port town located downriver from the city along the River of Gold, a convenient location to support smuggling operations.

Other criminal activity in towns is usually of the minor sort: the myriad assaults, robberies, thefts, and other common offenses expected in any settlement of several hundred people or more. One type of serious crime, often organized nonlocally, however, is more likely to be found in a town than in a city. Blasphemous cults might arise within or base at least some of their foul operations in towns and villages, well away from the immediate attention of Emerald Magistrates and other groups involved in combating their profane activities.



CONCERNS OF THE DISTRICT GOVERNORS

Each district governor in the Ekohikei is concerned with a particular element of Sentaku bureaucracy, and each post is traditionally held by particular clans:

Kanjo District (Phoenix, Scorpion, and Lion): Religion and ceremony

Chisei District (Crane, Dragon, and Minor Clans): Law and interclan relations

Hito District (Unicorn and Lion): Defense and logistics

Karada District (Crab and Crane): Trade policies and the treasury

OTOSAN UCHI

Otosan Uchi, the oldest city in Rokugan (though the settlements of the Isawa predate the Empire itself), is the ultimate example of how a "castle town" can grow over time. Originally a modest village close to where the Kami fell to Rokugan, it is now officially the largest and most populous city in Rokugan. While in truth, Ryokō Owari Toshi might cover a greater land area and hold more residents, few would be so disrespectful as to voice these facts.

Otosan Uchi is divided into three major sections: the Toshisoto, or outer districts; the Ekohikei, or inner districts (including Seppun Hill); and the Forbidden City itself, a unique castle complex containing the Imperial Palace and associated structures. The inner districts, protected by the legendary Enchanted Wall, were built in the first century of the Empire's history and jointly designed by all the Great Clans, giving them a structured and traditional feel. The outer districts developed more naturally over the subsequent centuries. While an outer circle of walls was built later, it was never fully completed, and the city eventually grew beyond it. In more recent times, those walls have been neglected to the point where they are crumbling in many places, weakened by the earthquakes that occasionally shake the city.

The different layers of the city promote a social and cultural divide that mirrors the physical one. The outer districts, open to all who are not burakumin, have a mixed population of commoners and lower-ranking samurai (and a not-insignificant number of gangs), while the inner districts are dominated by high-ranking samurai and those who serve them. The inner districts house the Great Clan embassies, each a splendid structure in itself, and other famous structures such as the Imperial Museum of Antiquities, the Temple to the Kami, and the Hito Water Gardens. Seppun Hill is the most important of the venerated locations in the Ekohikei, and it remains a hallowed and unspoiled mount: the sacred place where Seppun herself, a holy woman of her tribe, met the eight Kami when they fell from the Celestial Heavens.

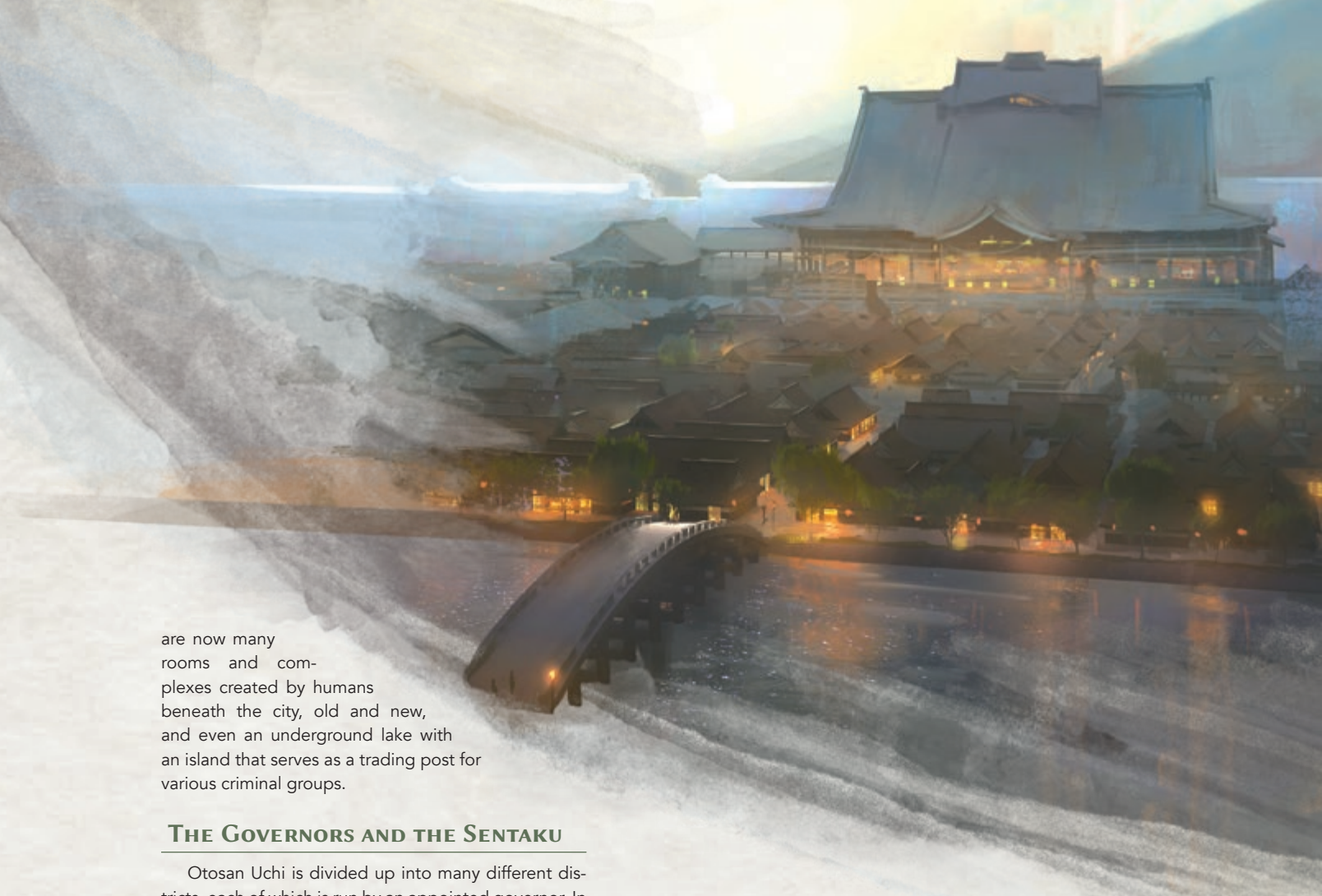
Architecture in the inner districts is highly traditional and conservative, even by Rokugani standards, but this is unsurprising given that the inner districts exist in the dominating shadow of the Imperial Palace. The Emperor's palace, built for the first Hantei in the Forbidden City, is considered to be perfection manifest; no other structure is permitted to rival it in height or splendor. (See more about the Imperial Palace on "The Imperial Palace" on page 45.)

The Tunnels

Otosan Uchi suffers modest but not infrequent earthquakes, the result of earth kami agitated to this day by the Fall of the Kami. These, combined with the work of the ocean and the occasional typhoon on the seashore, have caused natural tunnels to form beneath the city. Over the thousand-year history of Rokugan, these tunnels have been utilized in secret and sinister ways by criminals; smugglers; Mantis, Scorpion, and Tortoise samurai; and even the Emperors themselves. There

RUMORS AND LEGENDS OF OTOSAN UCHI

- The Sentaku Tribunal contains a number of criminal syndicate leaders in its ranks, each of whom is the cat's-paw of a prominent Great Clan or Imperial courtier.
- At the Sorrow's Falls, a young Ikoma samurai is said to have flung herself to her death in order to protect dark secrets of the Hantei line. Some claim her ghost still haunts the waterfall, while others believe her body (which was never found) carried records of the shameful secrets she died to protect.
- There is a teahouse in the Karada District of the Ekohikei called the Field of Sharp Returns. It is a modest and rather cramped building, but the tea it serves is of unique and perhaps legendary quality, brewed from a plant that is grown only in the garden that surrounds the building. No doubt there are many who would love to get their hands on that plant.
- The Imperial Museum of Antiquities contains the dried (or perhaps petrified) body of a mysterious creature, supposedly brought there by the museum's founder, Kuni Hazu.
- A passage within the Imperial Palace leads to the Bay of the Golden Sun, but it is warded so that anyone not of Hantei blood will become hopelessly lost within it.



are now many rooms and complexes created by humans beneath the city, old and new, and even an underground lake with an island that serves as a trading post for various criminal groups.

The Governors and the Sentaku

Otosan Uchi is divided up into many different districts, each of which is run by an appointed governor. In the outer city, the district names are changed to match those of their current governors, while the names of the four inner districts are unchanging. The governors are considered to be roughly equivalent to provincial daimyō in authority and prestige, so these appointments are considered great prizes. The governors report to the Sentaku Tribunal, a specialized element of the Imperial bureaucracy.

The tribunal was created by the Otomo family in the fifth century. It has a number of duties, but its most important task is controlling access to the inner districts and the Forbidden City and thus ensuring the Imperial Court is not overrun with petitioners and sightseers from across the Empire. Within the domain of its authority, the Sentaku Tribunal's word is law, and it can only be overridden by the Emerald Champion or the Emperor themself.

The Enchanted Wall (Miwaku Kabe)

The famous Miwaku Kabe, the Enchanted Wall of the Forbidden City, was originally built during the First War at the command of Hantei himself. Hantei chose four of the Great Clans—the Crane, Crab, Ki-Rin, and Phoenix—to build the walls to hold the city against Fu Leng's forces. Fortuitously, the wall's blessings held most of it sturdy throughout the war, and ever since, it has proven equally resilient to the rumbling powers of the earth kami who often test the city's resolve. Isawa shugenja were heavily involved in the construction of the wall, and as a result, all four sides incorporate spiritual powers that have maintained them through the centuries.

THE SOUTHERN GATE

The Southern Gate is the main gate into the Forbidden City. It is located at the juncture of the Southern Wall and the Eastern Wall, allowing entry from the Chisei and Kanjo Districts. A massive torii arch crafted entirely out of sacred crystal surmounts the gate. It is said the arch glows with sacred light in the presence of the Shadowlands Taint. (Whether this is true or not is uncertain: there is no recorded instance after the first century of the archway doing this.)

The Eastern Wall

The Eastern Wall is said to draw its strength from the gloriousness of those who have stood to defend it. Golden kanji adorn the wall's surface, naming every samurai who has fallen defending it. It is believed that their spirits reside within the wall, ready to take up arms in defense of the city when they are needed again.

The Southern Wall

The Southern Wall was consecrated by the lives of a shugenja named Isawa Naigama and his pupils, and when the forces of Fu Leng assaulted the city, the wall seemingly came to life to strike them down. Or at least, the horde seemed to have disappeared. In the intervening centuries, the Asahina Artificers have tried to determine what became of the lost horde, for the spirits of the wall have so far been silent on the matter.

The Western Wall

This wall is believed to contain the bound and imprisoned spirits of the Shadowlands creatures that perished while assaulting the city in the First War. A faint, eerie wailing sometimes emerges from the outside surface of the wall, audible in the nearby districts of the Toshi-soto. Over the centuries, many shugenja have studied the wall, but no one has yet determined whether it is dangerous or not. The closest neighborhoods tend to be sparsely populated.

The Northern Wall

The Northern Wall was actually destroyed by Fu Leng's forces during the First War and rebuilt afterward. Although it is officially considered to be the equal to the other three in power and prestige, it has not exhibited any supernatural capabilities in the centuries since that time. This wall was built primarily by the Crab and is riddled with tunnels, mazes, traps, and ambush areas—very similar to what the Crab would later do with the Kaiu Wall.

Ryokō Owari Toshi—"The City of Lies"

The City of Ryokō Owari Toshi has many names: Journey's End, for its ambition to check an expansionist Crab presence in the fifth century; the City of Green Walls, for the color of the quarried limestone used to build the city's defenses; and the City of Stories, for the cosmopolitan population, to name a few. But the "second-largest" city in Rokugan is most often referred to as the City of Lies. The city's character is dominated by an empowered burakumin caste whose people tend the massive fields of bright red poppies outside the city walls, and by an overly strong and corrupt firefighter presence within. Both are tolerated by the ruling Scorpion Clan. The city's presence as the major source of opium—a vital medicinal drug and a dangerous narcotic—for Rokugan has required the Scorpion to organize the drug trade into three vast cartels controlled by the Bayushi, Shosuro, and Soshi families and stretching across the Empire.

Ryokō Owari is divided into six quarters: the Fishers' Quarter, the heimin-dominated main population center on the western side of the Bay of Drowned Honor; the Merchant Quarter, heavily populated and receiving shipments of goods from three great wharves; the Temple Quarter, home to the massive Temple of Daikoku and equally resplendent Temple of Amaterasu; the Noble Quarter, where the city's court and Scorpion nobles reside; and the Licensed Quarter of Teardrop Island, the pleasure section of the city. The final quarter, the Leatherworkers' Quarter, sprawls outside the city's southwestern walls and provides leather goods as well as waste collection and crematorium services for the city. The three Scorpion cartels control the entire city in one way or another, and by extension the great majority of the opium trade throughout the Empire (certain Mantis and Tortoise holdings make up the remainder).

Celestial Disorder

Class structures blur within Ryokō Owari. Merchants and craftspeople hold power above their station compared to the rest of Rokugan due to the power of wealth in the city. The firefighter gangs, made up of heimin tasked with fighting fires within their neighborhoods, are efficient protection rackets that fight fires only when it doesn't interfere with their criminal activities. In addition to the protection rackets, they run opium dens, prostitution rings, and numerous gambling activities, all often under the guise of an ordinary sake house. The merchants quietly complain about the extortion, but they dare not complain about the kickbacks the gangs pay to the governor's personal troops, the elite Thunder Guard. The Thunder Guard maintains peace within the city, but not justice: its purpose is to avoid and avert violence, rioting, and other such disruptive events. Governor Shosuro Hyobu is perfectly happy to ignore the endemic corruption of the city, especially since virtually every guard and noble has some source of illegal money. Even the hinin of Ryokō Owari are altogether too familiar and too powerful. Their role of transporting the dung and trash out of the city to fuel the expansive poppy fields means they are wealthier and wield more influence than virtually



any village of burakumin in Rokugan. They stalk the areas outside the city, and some even presume to sneer in the general direction of samurai.

The Licensed Quarter

Teardrop Island, a densely populated island in the center of a smaller bay, contains the pleasure district of an indulgent city. The quarter is open to any people of quality who wish to wander the streets, their anonymity protected by basket hats, as long as they leave their weapons at the docks—allegedly for polishing. Countless geisha houses, opium dens, sake houses, and other such establishments—including a residence illegally run by gaijin—are all available for paying and discerning samurai who wish to escape their duties for a time. This is but the merest example of Ryokō Owari's

ADVENTURE SEED: THE PRICE OF POWER

Hook The PCs learn that Shosuro Jocho, the son of Ryokō Owari Toshi's governor, has died of an opium overdose. This deeply shames his family, and it threatens to undermine the influence of the Shosuro family within the city; for one of their own to be undone by opium is a sure sign of weakness. The circumstances of his death are unusual, and the PCs are soon asked to uncover the truth.

Rising Action As the PCs pursue their investigation, it soon becomes clear that someone is sabotaging their efforts. Witnesses are scared to talk, physical evidence goes missing, and the PCs suspect they are being watched. Ultimately, through interrogating witnesses or even examining Jocho's body, the PCs discover that Jocho was poisoned. They trace the poison back to Shosuro Giichi, a close friend of Jocho.

In truth, Giichi murdered Jocho in order to weaken Hyobu's influence; it doesn't look good for any Shosuro to die from their own product, and particularly not the son of the family's leader within the city. Giichi hopes to fill the void left by Jocho while simultaneously damaging Hyobu's reputation enough that he can maneuver into her place as governor.

Climax Giichi offers to reward the PCs once his plan succeeds, if they conceal the truth. If they don't accept his offer, he preemptively accuses one of them of murdering Jocho, and several influential Scorpion allies of his testify to this. The PCs must not only prove the guilt of the unlikely culprit, but also clear their own names—no easy task in a city of lies, where everyone has their own agenda.

offerings, for outside Teardrop Island, vice and opium flow without respite. Red lanterns illuminate the island, washing the bay in red and cloaking the area with a tinge of unreality that eases a samurai's mind and lets their façade drop without shame.

Shosuro Hyobu, Corrupt Governor

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 5 12

Hyobu is the governor of the city by virtue of her marriage to the previous governor, but she is a Scorpion still, and she rules the Shosuro cartel with an iron fist. The city is unruly and disorderly because she prefers it to be so: a perfectly just and orderly city would not provide the societal outlet that the City of Lies does, and the economic powerhouse of the opium trade would be crushed, having devastating effects for the entire Empire.

Prestige and appearances are everything in the City of Lies. Hyobu is patient and intelligent, and fiercely protective of her son, Jocho. She overlooks the minor excesses of the city's residents and visitors even as she dutifully records them. Ryokō Owari is a web of lies, and Hyobu fancies herself the spider.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
35	HONOR	ENDURANCE	12
70	GLORY	COMPOSURE	18
65	STATUS	FOCUS	7
+2, –2	DEMEANOR:- SHREWD	VIGILANCE	4



ARTISAN 1 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 3 | SOCIAL 5 | TRADE 4

ADVANTAGES

Impeccable Appearance: Social; *Physical*

DISADVANTAGES

Keeps Hands Clean: Martial; *Mental*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Wakizashi: Range 0-1, Damage 3, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Concealable, Razor-edged

Gear (equipped): Elegant kimono, chop of office, cloth mask, fan.

ABILITIES

WEB OF LIES

Once per session, as a Support action, Hyobu may spend a Void point to reveal one of her many lies that will change the course of an ongoing intrigue. At the end of the next round, she exchanges momentum points with one PC (or a group of PCs) of her choice.

KHANBULAK

The City of the Khan—Khanbulak—is the chief city of the Moto family, the beginning of the Sand Road, and the westernmost terminus of Rokugan. Because half of the city technically lies outside the boundaries of the Empire, it is one of the only places where gaijin merchants can trade their goods. Khanbulak is at least as large as the Shinjo capital, and its prestige and prosperity have facilitated the growth of the Moto's military and political power. Other clan courtiers have begun to wonder if the Moto will attempt to claim the mantle of clan champion, currently held by the Shinjo.

The shining white walls of the square city look out on the empty wastelands that eventually give way to the Burning Sands, al-Zawira, and the Ivory Kingdoms. The city is the terminus of the Sand Road to the Burning Sands and the Ki-Rin's Road to the Ivory Kingdoms, receiving overland caravans from both. It is the seat of the Moto family and the White Guard, which patrols the official Rokugani border.

Behind the city walls, dreamlike tapestries stretch high into the sky, suspended by massive columns: these are the walls of the palace of the Moto, from which the Unicorn defend Rokugan from outside threats. Despite being the seat of the Moto's power—or perhaps because of it—Khanbulak is a hardship posting for Utaku or Ide samurai, who consider themselves closer to Rokugani society. The rare ambassadors to Khanbulak from the other Great Clans consider the city a dead end for their career. With the exception of Dragon and Crab Clan representatives, most are forced to find new lives for themselves in the city when their tenure ends, for those who do return are met with extreme disdain by their fellow clan members. For all the trade value of Khanbulak, Rokugan is still an insular society, and an outward-facing city is an aberration in the Emerald Empire.

A Tent City

In addition to the dangerous and uncouth samurai of the Moto family, Khanbulak hosts a vast and shifting tent city on the lands outside the walls, with banners bearing a thousand different crests and sigils. This is primarily a place for merchants, both from the Empire and from foreign lands, especially the lands along the Sand Road and Ki-Rin's Road but extending far beyond. These disparate groups mingle freely with the Moto. The Moto also station many of their more hot-blooded soldiers here, recognizing in their fiery temper and fierce passions, though they may at times offend the more traditional families of the clan, a deep communion with their steppe heritage.

Khanbulak, then, is a place where the civilized and the uncivilized mix and harmonize, much as the Moto family does at large. Despite being samurai, the Moto barter with passing merchants, just as their ancestors did. Foreign goods and mysterious strangers pass through the gates of the city every day.

When the sun sets, all foreigners to Rokugan must move outside the walls of Khanbulak. This includes tribes of the Ujik who have not yet sworn themselves to the Moto family khan and officially accepted the Kami

ADVENTURE SEED: BEYOND THE WALLS

1 Hook While traversing the city on their own evening business, the PCs come across a gaijin trade caravan officer with bodyguards still inside the walls of Khanbulak after dark, in blatant violation of the city's laws. The trader is meeting with Moto and Ide samurai, who are, like the PCs, honor bound to report this transgression and ensure the gaijin interloper does not escape punishment.

2 Rising Action If the PCs confront the strangers, the Moto pleads for them to let the matter slide, claiming the gaijin is swearing fealty to the Unicorn. The PCs should realize that the locale and timing of the event are hardly auspicious for such an oath, and that all parties involved seem furtive or nervous. If the PCs do not accept the lie, the Moto goes so far as to threaten violence. Ultimately, the Moto and Ide may offer to cut the PCs in on their deal or otherwise let the truth slip—the merchant is set to sell them a large quantity of slaves, illegal within the Empire.

3 Climax The Unicorn samurai and the gaijin all realize the penalties for their crimes, and they become desperate if the PCs do not accept a deal. If the PCs do not yet know their identities, the three may flee the scene, possibly leading to a chase through the dark city alleys. If, however, they believe the PCs can identify them to the magistrates, the three and the gaijin's bodyguards become violent. The gaijin trader also possesses a bottle of an alchemical mixture that, when shattered, creates a cloud of thick, obscuring smoke.

Shinjo's offer to join her clan, as well as traders from the Burning Sands and beyond. It is a demand of honor, but also a demand of practicality, for it makes the city far easier to guard.

This is more than a polite fiction: gaijin are harshly treated in the Emerald Empire and are, technically speaking, barred from the entire country. The city's authority only officially extends to its walls, and local priests bless the city every morning, proclaiming that all within the walls are citizens of the Empire in homage to the first Hantei. Any gaijin found inside the walls after dark are, officially, to be killed without mercy.

Moto Rurame, Restless Commander

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 7 3

Moto Rurame, the Noyan of the Scarlet Banners and sister of Moto Ogödei, the Moto khan, feels the city is a shackle on the family. Her Scarlet Banners, a *minggghan* of the White Horde, patrol Khanbulak and the rangelands north and east of it. Yet, she bridles at the relatively stationary nature of her post. A traditionalist among the Moto, she believes they should return to their Ujik roots and ride beyond the city and over the steppes. Rurame views the Ide as symbolic of the weakness of the Unicorn, sycophants who would betray everything that makes the horde strong to the placid Rokugani. Nevertheless, she has remained loyal to her khan so far. She watches over Khanbulak as though it were one of the grand encampments of old, and encourages her soldiers' evening wrestling matches beside campfires cooking red meat.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
45	HONOR	ENDURANCE	13
64	GLORY	COMPOSURE	9
60	STATUS	FOCUS	8
+2, –2	DEMEANOR · ASSERTIVE	VIGILANCE	3



ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 5 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 2

ADVANTAGES

Steppe Warrior: Martial; *Physical*

DISADVANTAGES

Impatience: Social; *Mental*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Scimitar: Range 1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5, Durable, Razor-edged

Shinjo Horsebow: Range 2-4, Damage 4, Deadliness 5, Wargear

Gear (equipped): Lamellar Armor (physical 4, Wargear)

ABILITIES

RIDERS OF DOOM

Once per scene, as a Support action, Rurame may command any Unicorn samurai within earshot to strike without mercy on the battlefield. Until the end of the following round, any affected Unicorn samurai who perform an Attack action while mounted increase the damage and deadliness of their weapons by 2.

If the affected samurai are Rurame's Scarlet Banners, they increase the damage and deadliness of their weapons by 4 instead.

RED HORN VILLAGE

Located in the southeastern corner of the Dragon Heart Plains, Red Horn Village is a center of trade and diplomacy, albeit a small one. Visitors from the Lion, the Unicorn, and the Phoenix (whose constant presence gives the town its name) travel through the town frequently, and the road that leads through it connects to several more heavily populated parts of the Empire. The Isawa maintain a permanent embassy and trade center called the House of the Jade Dawn in the unassuming village. Red Horn is also something of a festive destination for certain types of outsiders, as it boasts several gambling houses A commons, a hinin village, and several noble houses complete the picture of a burgeoning and bustling town.

The trade center and embassy is just a façade, by and large, despite its high volume of legitimate business. "Jade Dawn" is an oblique reference to the Sun Goddess, not in homage but referring to her as the greatest enemy of humankind. The sect known as the Kolat inhabits the village, and nearly every permanent resident plays a part in the conspiracy, whether knowingly or not, from hinin to Isawa and Shinjo nobility. Kolat members carefully scrutinize each samurai who comes into the village, subjecting them to a number of subtle questions to determine their piety and loyalty to the Emperor—and thereby gauging their potential use to the conspiracy.

Like the Empire, the Kolat was born from the Kami's fall to Rokugan. While others bow to the might of Heaven, the Kolat chafe at being ruled by those descended from gods. The ultimate goal of the Kolat is

nothing less than the overthrow of the Hantei Dynasty, and a humankind that rules itself, free of the strictures and bloodlines of the order founded by the Kami. To this end, they long ago established a network of spies, secret cells, and deadly assassins, and they protect their communication by using ciphers.

Among the Kolat's most terrible weapons are sleeper agents, who may operate under an assumed identity for years, even decades, collecting information and awaiting the call to more severe deeds. These consummate spies are conditioned to resist torture. Red Horn Village, despite its small and innocuous nature, could be the grand nerve center of a conspiracy that covers all Rokugan, but none know how far the Kolat's reach truly extends.

Chinoko, Deceitful Geisha

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 6 6

Born in the poverty of the slums, Chinoko naturally took to the crimes and intrigues of the streets. She loathed the Celestial Order that kept her and hers down. The Kolat became her second home, and they trained her in the arts of assassination and intelligence. Chinoko wraps her muscular frame in fine black silks, and she wears exotic Unicorn jewelry. Her skills as a geisha rival those of any in the Empire—but this respectable occupation is only a disguise for her true activities. From Red Horn Village, she controls a small criminal empire: gambling houses, opium dens, and prostitution rings. A number of sleeper agents throughout the northern Empire serve as Chinoko's eyes and ears and—when occasion warrants—her murderous hands.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
28	HONOR	ENDURANCE	12
25	GLORY	COMPOSURE	14
30	STATUS	FOCUS	6
+2, –2	DEMEANOR · INTIMIDATING	VIGILANCE	3



ARTISAN 3 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 4 | TRADE 4

ADVANTAGES

Dangerous Allure: Social; *Interpersonal*

DISADVANTAGES

Dark Secret: Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Tessen: Range 0–1, Damage 4, Deadliness 3, Ceremonial, Concealable

Gear (equipped): Silk kimono, expensive perfume, knife, three vials of Night Milk poison

ADVENTURE SEED: FALSE OVERTURES

Hook A PC finds a mysterious cipher in their belongings, enough to create an air of mystery, challenging but not impossible to decode. It belongs to the Kolat, and it contains an invitation for the PC to join them in their war against the Celestial Order. It's a test, but it's also a trap: the Kolat expect the PC to run to their daimyō and tell them about the Kolat and talk about some secretive society.

Rising Action Should the PCs do so, the Kolat's spies in the daimyō's household take note of their lord's semipublic reaction and carefully scrutinize the lord's samurai for sympathies with the Kolat. By eliciting their lord's expression of disdain for a "secret sect," the PCs may have flushed out a half-dozen other samurai ripe for recruitment.

Climax If one or more PCs actually respond to the invitation, they are given anything from a simple to a deadly mission to infiltrate Otosan Uchi. If they're particularly competent or well placed, however, the Kolat may simply induct them as sleeper agents who must wait for some signal to strike in the future. Do the PCs take the bait, and what is the sect's endgame?

ABILITIES

DISCOMFORTING HINTS

When making a Social skill check, Chinoko may spend ✲ in the following way:

> **Air ✲+:** One target within earshot suffers the Disoriented condition until the end of the following round, plus one additional round for every ✲ spent this way beyond the first.

UNEXPECTED DEMISE

When making an Attack action against a Disoriented or unaware target, Chinoko may spend ✲ in the following way:

> **✲+:** If she succeeds, the target suffers a critical strike with severity equal to twice the deadliness of her weapon plus 1 per ✲ spent this way beyond the first.

Harbors

Synonymous with safety, harbors are protected areas of calm waters where ships dock. In a harbor, cargo and passengers can transfer without fear of choppy waters or piratical attacks. Ports built at harbors generally break down into two types, river and sea ports, and focus on fishing, defense, shipbuilding, trade, or a combination of these functions.

Regardless of their primary role, harbors also serve to facilitate and protect trade. Many villages and cities would starve within a generation if not for the network of ports for shipping and receiving necessary staples. Local daimyō appoint governors and magistrates to oversee trade, inspect cargoes, collect tariffs, and administer any relevant licenses or permits. While many lower-level bureaucrats and agents are easily bribed to overlook small-scale infractions, actual magistrates often aren't as easily (or at least as cheaply) convinced.

Most harbors are part of a bustling town or city, in which they might be the dominant feature or merely a district, and they are always an important economic asset. They provide employment for peasants as laborers at docks and warehouses, through support businesses that repair and stock ships for voyages, or by entertaining and providing hospitality for visiting sailors and merchants.

PORT LAYOUT

Local geography, water conditions, intended function, and desired berthing capacity all determine a port's design. Ports might grow around natural harbors and inlets, or should coastal geography be problematic, they might use artificial basins. Regardless, a port and its harbor serve to protect ships from weather, currents, and waves. In addition to the natural protection a harbor provides, this is often accomplished through the use of breakwaters: protective barriers of wood or stone rising from the water to insulate harbors against the crash and wear of the waves. Some ports go further, maintaining seawalls to help protect against tsunami and other fierce storms.

Ports allow ships to berth at a wharf or pier. Wharfs, sometimes known as docks or quays, are long wood or stone promenades along a



LIGHTHOUSES

Many ports and coastal areas of Rokugan feature a lighthouse to alert ships at night and in the fog to the presence of rocks, shallows, and other potentially deadly obstacles that might otherwise go unseen. A typical lighthouse consists of a small tower supported by steeply sloping walls, which are usually constructed of wood but may be of stone in some environments. The lantern room is at the top, under the long, gently sloping roof and curved eaves typical of Rokugani buildings. Many lighthouses broaden at the base in resemblance of a typical village house; the parts of such a house that extend beyond the footprint of its lighthouse tower typically are topped with a thatched roof. The lighthouse keeper lives in this house, ascending into the tower above as required by their duties.

Most lighthouses burn oil to provide illumination for alerting ships at sea. In more prosperous or fortunate ports, however, shugenja may invoke a fire kami to provide the blaze. By preparing a shintai to house a fire kami, a shugenja can provide a comfortable place for the spirit to reside as well as ensuring an everlasting flame—at least as long as the kami is properly propitiated. The keeper of such a lighthouse also serves as shrine keeper, and the lives of mariners hinge on their diligence in appeasing the kami.

natural coast or artificial basin where ships can tie up. Piers, used in shallow waters or to increase capacity, extend perpendicularly from the coast into deeper waters. When a ship arrives, agents of the local magistrate inspect cargo and assess tariffs, applying their seal to approved cargo. Then, dockworkers form human chains from below decks to the wharf or pier, loading goods onto carts and wagons bound for other vessels or nearby warehouses.

In order to make the most of rocky coastlines, some ports include warehouses and shops built atop small islands up to a hundred paces or so from the mainland. Wooden bridges span the distance to connect these buildings with each other and with the rest of the town. When such natural islands are insufficient for a town's expanding needs, inhabitants desperate for space sometimes construct buildings atop wooden stilts anchored below the waves.

Just inland of the docks, administrative facilities issue licenses and permits and provide flags for at sea communications, as well as maps and charts. Nearby businesses support ships by offering supplies and services for voyage preparation. Ship parts and maintenance materials, such as sail patches, pitch, tar, rudders, and more, are also available. Guild houses typically offer storage facilities close to the docks and sell livestock, rice, tofu, and even seeds and soil.

Farther inland are businesses catering to merchants and sailors, including inns and places to seek drink and entertainment. Such harbor facilities are rarely visited by those of the higher classes, who see them as places for the dishonorable and crude to congregate. The town or city beyond the harbor serves to house and support the local workforce.

Port Types

Ports are located either on freshwater rivers or on the sea, each requiring key design differences. River ports accommodate only rafts and flat-bottomed river craft, and they are protected by a single breakwater upriver. The larger river ports might have sprawling wharfs or artificial basins along the riverbanks, but smaller river ports require craft to beach in the mud. Alternatively, amid salty coastal air filled with crying sea birds, sea ports host fleets of fishing boats and mammoth junk ships, necessitating a pair of long breakwaters to maintain calm harbor waters. Long piers from the shore reach for deeper waters and maximize berthing space along a wharf.

PORT FUNCTIONS

A port's function—to serve the military, fishing, trade, shipbuilding, or a combination of these—determines its form. Each capability a port needs brings with it specific facility requirements. A single port can serve any number of these functions as long as the proper facilities are allocated.

Fishing Ports

Fishing ports focus on smaller craft with crews ranging from a dozen to a lone sailor. Commercial fishing in Rokugan relies primarily on two techniques: gillnetting and cormorant fishing. Gillnetters use a net to catch saltwater fish, usually small schools of fish like sardines, halfbeak, and horse mackerel along the coast, or larger catches like tuna, salmon, snapper, and sea bass on the open ocean. Cormorant fishers utilize a trained bird to catch freshwater fish, predominantly salmon and trout.

HARBOR SHRINES

Most ports host a variety of shrines, which are built along river banks, on breakwaters, at the ends of piers, or on wharfs. Such shrines are most commonly dedicated to one or more of the Seven Great Fortunes or of the numerous Lesser Fortunes, or to kami local to the river, a seaside boulder, or another element of the harbor or its environs. Shrines may be built to benefit fishing or trade, or to encourage favorable winds and fair seas. Some of the most frequently seen harbor shrines are dedicated to the following Fortunes:

Hamanari: The Fortune of Fish and Generous Meals is often depicted as a sleeping fisherman with a half-empty bowl.

Daikoku: The Fortune of Wealth and patron of merchants and farmers, Daikoku is one of the Seven Great Fortunes. Daikoku's shrines often feature a rice bowl and rat or the Fortune's signature hammer.

Suijin and Isora: The Fortune of the Sea and the Fortune of the Shore feature in shrines both together and individually, for the lovers are often distant from each other. Shrines often depict a jade *kobune* ship for Suijin and eternal flames for Isora.

Wind Shrines: Kaze-no-Kami, the Fortune of Wind, governs the Fortunes of the four winds: Tamon (North), Zocho (South), Jikoju (East), and Komoku (West). Shrines at many coastal harbors are dedicated to one or more of these Fortunes.

ASSESSING TARIFFS,

Tariff assessments on shipments average around five percent of the cargo value. However, they vary based on the assessor's whim, the relationship between the assessor and captain, and the nature of the relationship between the ship's and harbor's clans. The type and value of the goods and the demand for them can also impact the percentage.

For gillnetting, relatively small vessels sail into waters with crews of three or four people. They then extend chains of typically four to six gillnets, each of which may be more than sixty feet wide, deep into the water. The openings in the nets are sized based upon the fish that are currently in season. The nets' placement varies according to the fish in season and the current. At different times of year, different fish are much more readily available.

The small rowboats used for cormorant fishing, typically crewed by two to three people, set out before the dawn. A smoky torch is held aloft over the front of the boat, while the bird handler holds ropes tied to the necks of between five and ten birds. The ropes are tight enough to prevent a bird from swallowing a fish, while the torch disturbs the fish, making it easier for the birds to catch them. When a cormorant captures a fish, the handler brings it back to the boat and retrieves the catch from the bird's throat. With skilled handlers, cormorants can catch upward of 150 fish an hour.

Fish are highly perishable, so fishing ports require a large docking capacity to help ensure that fish don't rot while a ship awaits an open berth. Even so, fishing ports and workers reek of half-dried fish and rotting innards. These ports have extensive facilities for cold storage, salting, and drying to preserve fish, as well as a fresh fish market. Mountain river-fishing ports utilize ice, as do a handful of large Phoenix fishing ports. In the latter case, student shugenja propitiate the kami of the air and water, who provide ice.

Military Ports

Military port facilities provide security and are a major deterrent to bandits and pirates. Their soldiers also assist magisterial agents with inspections. Military ports require fortified and secured private berths that could otherwise support additional merchant ships, and they need barracks and storehouses for arms and soldiers. Most military river ports have an antipiracy bridge-gate downriver staffed with archers, and sea ports have extensive counterpiracy facilities and take measures against the threat of hostile naval forces. Such measures can include fortified breakwaters with archer towers, battlements, or—particularly in Crab ports—even heavier equipment like catapults. Military vessels often patrol coastal harbors and the sea lanes between them to both deter and combat piracy.

Shipbuilding Ports

Shipbuilding ports can perform major repairs even beneath a ship's waterline. Dry docks are different from piers in that they are surrounded on three sides by rock walls that extend into the sea floor, with a reinforced pitch-and-bamboo gate that seals the ship in. A large wheel built into one wall removes the water, which lowers the ship onto blocks to allow access to a ship's ventral surface.

Shipbuilding ports have substantial stores of lumber, pitch, tar, sail, line, and rope, as well as specialized preformed metal and wood ship parts, and they employ skilled artisans who can make ship parts. Repair yards also hire hull divers, who are capable of holding their breath for long minutes to scrape away barnacles and perform other maintenance below the waterline. The variety of work at these ports tends to attract unskilled heimin hoping to learn a trade.



Trading Ports

The vast majority of ports in Rokugan were built for the purpose of trade or have come to support it in addition to serving in their other functions. Trading ports employ hordes of dockworkers to shift cargo, and they have a strong guild presence for any number of commodities. The tariff magistrates have a small agent house at every berth so that inspections and tariff assessments don't unduly delay commerce. Trading ports tend to have slightly better market prices and selection than inland cities and villages, which rely on guilds and merchants to transport goods to them. The abundance of goods and money trading hands at these ports makes them a tempting target for pirates and bandits.

Port Towns

Ports require great numbers of laborers and administrators in order to run smoothly. It takes a robust town or city to house, feed, and entertain such a large workforce.

Government

Most port towns are controlled by a single clan, which installs the governor or magistrate. Even smaller ports are considered vital strategic assets, drawing representatives of important families. To organize and run the port and town, governors and chief magistrates hold court, where they interface with magistrates and important nobles, particularly those involved in trade or public works projects. The heimin of the trade guilds also appear in court; however, as they are members of a lower caste, their ability to formally participate is limited to mingling between sessions, observing, and delivering reports. A small number of ports are on clan borders, but because ports are so vital a resource for the Empire, the Emperor often maintains Imperial control of border ports to alleviate clan tensions and encourage fair trade.

Locals

Port towns are among the most diverse places in Rokugan, featuring visitors from other clans and—rarely—even gaijin. Most port towns also have far greater diversity in religious practices than similarly sized inland cities. Unlike in smaller villages where everyone knows everyone, most people in port towns are strangers, which makes them guarded around each other. Denizens are wary of thieves, scams, and distractions, all of which are plentiful. Violence is also a problem, especially at businesses catering to sailors, where fights break out with alarming frequency.

Town Life

Virtually every manner of entertainment is available in a port town; establishments with atmospheres ranging from raucous to elegant promise the finest tea, sake, and sushi. Music and theater, whether Kabuki drama, bunraku puppetry, or Nō plays, are performed at dedicated theaters, in court, and even on the street. Port towns are remarkable for the large itinerant population to be found at any time. With the possible exception of the busiest market cities, nowhere else in the Empire sees such a constant flux of travelers coming and going, as ships arrive and depart. Many ships and sailors ply fairly regular routes, resulting in familiar faces who become a part of the community, even if they are only seen once or twice a year.

GOTEI CITY PORT DISTRICT

SOCIAL MOBILITY

Although it occurs rarely, even the lowliest heimin can leave port as a deckhand and return a ship's captain. Control of a ship in the islands is equivalent to land ownership in Rokugan, which is to say it is the province of the noble class.

While heimin ship captains are not recognized as anything more than commoners on mainland Rokugan, on the Islands of Spice and Silk, ship captains are treated as minor nobles regardless of blood. That said, the vast majority of ships in the Mantis fleet are captained by samurai.

Gotei City is the capital of the Islands of Spice and Silk, located just one day's sail east of the Crane Clan's coastline. Located within a natural inlet on the westernmost island in the Mantis Clan's archipelago, Gotei City is undoubtedly Rokugan's busiest international trading port, thanks largely to the clan's relative acceptance of gaijin merchants. The traders of Gotei City act as intermediaries between traders in Rokugan and those from the Ivory Kingdoms and beyond.

Culture

The Mantis Clan has an openness to trade and interaction with gaijin beyond even that of the Unicorn Clan. This is especially true in Gotei City, which is among the most multicultural locales in all of Rokugan. Gaijin religions and practices from far-off lands are incorporated into a loose series of superstitions observed informally across the city. In Gotei City, decorum is barely observed when compared to the mainlander obsession with etiquette and protocol. Scorpion Clan members joke that the behavior in Gotei City makes Khanbulak look like Otosan Uchi.

Honorable Cutthroats

Most permanent residents of Gotei City are honorable, even if they have few social graces. The sailor's code might not always adhere to Bushidō, but most of Gotei City's sailors ultimately adhere to a twisted version of its tenets. That said, denizens consider the distinction between merchant and pirate to be a fluid concept. Still, Yoritomo and his ancestors hold safe harbor as an absolute. Serious and lethal crimes are punished harshly—and few occur within Gotei City—but no laws exist on the sea.

Bay of Bandits

Gotei City is split into two areas. The Palace of the Mantis serves as a fortress for the Mantis Clan samurai. To the north—separated from the palace by the Path of Thunder—is Gotei Harbor, where one can find sailors from faraway lands and the strange perfumes, clothing, and trade goods that accompany them. Gotei Harbor is rowdy, but it rarely crosses the line into dangerous. It is often said that its most violent aspect is its riotous skyline, which lacks any unifying aesthetic or city planning, though it is said its lanterns shine bright enough to be seen from half a day's journey away.

The 750-yard-long wharf incorporates at least a half-dozen architectural styles, varying in height and construction materials. The wharf uses piers to increase capacity, and no two are quite the same. There are no harbor masters here, no one to direct ships to available berths, and no one to assess tariffs. The major players pay tribute to Yoritomo, but smaller operators have free reign, only paying tribute when they need a favor or an audience with the mighty clan champion.

Gaijin's Path

This long street of shops, opium dens, barrooms, houses of worship, and inns contains the densest collection of foreign-run businesses in Rokugan. While Rokugani still make up the majority of the population by a narrow margin, many businesses are run by and for gaijin. An Ivory Kingdoms temple topped with the notched stone disk of an amalaka might fight for attention with a neighboring minaret and domed temple established by travelers from al-Zawira. Wares and teachings from overseas are available here in a concentration found nowhere else in Rokugan.

WHAT GAIJIN?

Despite their many eccentricities, the Islands of Spice and Silk are part of the Emperor's lands—if they weren't, the Mantis could scarcely claim the status of a clan of Rokugan, and their piratical actions might be viewed as an attack on the Emerald Empire itself, and not merely economic competition between clans.

This means that the Emperor's ban on gaijin is in full effect—in theory. In practice, enforcement of this edict within the Isles of Spice and Silk is usually applied only when it is to somebody's advantage to expel a particularly successful foreigner.

To avoid any unfortunate perception of violations of the Empire's laws, the Mantis take certain measures that extend to the gaijin residents of the islands. Most of these practices concern the correct responses when speaking to an Emerald Magistrate or other representative of the Imperial bureaucracy. For instance, all gaijin who remain on the islands for an extended length of time know that they should claim to be faithful vassals of the Mantis Clan—whether or not this is true.



Sen'in Brew House (The Napping Sailor)

Sen'in Brew House, also called the Napping Sailor, is an infamous brew house in Gotei City. Sailors flock to it to celebrate a successful voyage. Its downstairs is always packed with sailors no matter the hour, sometimes five or six entire crews at a time, drinking sake or the much stronger *araki*, date liquor mixed with tea or honey and hot water. Upstairs, patrons lie around as if in an opium den, listening to peaceful music and enjoying straight araki or the local version, a date-based variety of shōchū. The peaceful environment and strong, sweet liquor often lead customers to fall fast asleep.

BREW HOUSE HEARSAY

- I saw Captain Fumiko with a map of secret passages between the Library of Kanidoko Itte and the Vault of Heaven. I think they're going to rob the vault!
- Did you notice that all the Ivory Kingdoms ships left port? I heard they came to pay a debt to Yoritomo, but one of their treasure ships went missing last night. It seems every captain in Gotei City is trying to find it first!
- Some ambitious new Emerald Magistrates have been asking a lot of questions lately. They're trying to enforce the Imperial laws against gaijin and shut down gaijin businesses and temples.

The Library of Kanidoko Itte

Located in a quiet back alley along the Path of Thunder, Chartmaster Kanidoko Itte's offices are marked by a door with a Pavarrese compass rose. Itte is an elderly woman known to have a sharp cane and an equally sharp tongue. Despite her ill humor, she has a secret fondness for many local captains. Most experienced captains consult with Itte before undertaking important or dangerous journeys.

Rumor has it that beneath Itte's home is a basement linked to a network of secret passages that run to the far corners of the world. Her visitors are described as anything from bloodthirsty gaijin to demons made of shadow. One thing people say is certainly true: the underground complex houses Captain Itte's chart library. Only Itte's most favored captains are invited downstairs, where she provides rare charts and maps to those willing to visit far-flung ports to deliver messages or small cargoes on her behalf.

Captain Byakko of the Takarabako

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 3 2

Captain Byakko is fifth cousin to Mantis Clan Champion Yoritomo, and the two spent a fair amount of time together as boys. Despite Byakko's relative inexperience, his powerful cousin favors him. Byakko captains the *Takarabako*, a gleaming new three-masted kobune ship. Yoritomo has assigned Lady Aguri, a young but gifted shugenja adopted by his uncle, to watch over Byakko and keep him out of trouble.

Byakko has much more interest in exploration than in piracy or running Yoritomo's errands, though he is fiercely loyal to his cousin and desperate for his approval. He hopes that if he can amass enough status, he can convince Yoritomo to approve an expedition south, to a rumored land of vast deserts, endless coral reefs, and savage creatures that drop from trees and emerge from the seas in hordes. Byakko hopes to be the first to map its coast.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
40	HONOR	ENDURANCE	13
52	GLORY	COMPOSURE	12
41	STATUS	FOCUS	6
+1, –1	DEMEANOR - BOLD	VIGILANCE	4



ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 4

ADVENTURE SEED: HONORED GUARD

Hook Captain Byakko seeks able samurai to safeguard Yoritomo's gift for the Emperor after his own retained samurai mysteriously fall ill. Although he is loath to trust outsiders with such a task, he contacts the PCs due to their reputation. Allegedly the cargo is the lost Kaiu Blade, the sacred weapon of legendary Crab Clan hero Hida Daisuke. The gift may improve the Mantis's relationship with the Emperor and the Crab.

Rising Action Captain Byakko leads the PCs to the Vault of Heaven to transfer the blade to them in great ceremony, and with stern words from Yoritomo. While the PCs escort the sword through the city toward the wharf, gaijin bandits with curved swords attack, seemingly aware of the PCs' cargo and purpose.

Climax Rōnin block the path just as the PCs near the Takarabako's pier. The rōnin leader, clad entirely in white, is an infamously disgraced samurai of the Crane Clan. Surely the followers of Doji could not lie behind a plot to steal the sword. Her companion is a Scorpion poisoner thought long dead.

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Ally (Yoritomo): Social; *Interpersonal*	**Inexperienced:** Social; *Mental*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Kama: Range 0–1, Damage 3, Deadliness 3, Concealable

Gear (equipped): Sailing clothes (physical 2, Durable, Mundane)

ABILITIES

BRASH ADVENTURER

Once per scene after making a check involving sailing or exploring, Byakko may choose to re-roll all dice in the check before deciding which to keep. If he does so, any strife suffered as a result of the check is doubled.

CITY OF THE RICH FROG

One of the most vital river ports in all of Rokugan, the City of the Rich Frog, located at the junction of the Three Sides River and the Drowned Merchant River, facilitates trade between several clans. The Dragon, Lion, and Unicorn Clans as well as the Dragonfly Minor Clan all see the city as being of vital strategic and economic importance.

History

Long ago, the City of the Rich Frog was known as the Village of the Rich Frog, and even then it was one of the largest river ports in Rokugan. For centuries, it was violently contested for by the Lion and Dragon Clans. When the Unicorn Clan returned from their self-imposed exile, they laid claim as well. Weary of their infighting, the Emperor declared the City of the Rich Frog an Imperial holding and dispatched an Imperial governor to run it. Now, it is considered neutral ground. Its governor relies on rōnin deputies instead of clan samurai to ensure that law and order is maintained in the city. As there is no shortage of conflict to be found there, several generations of rōnin have been able to serve the governor and their magistrates. They have claimed the family name Kaeru for themselves over the years, and accept capable warriors and administrators into their ranks no matter their past.

Despite the moratorium on fighting over the port, the clans still compete for economic advantage. It is common for clans to conspire to learn the nature of their rivals' cargo, then leak the valuable manifests to bandits. The local rōnin are another point of contention between the clans, as each clan attempts to co-opt the deputies to advance their agenda. The rōnin take great care to retain the appearance of neutrality while playing the different clans off of one another for maximum profit and influence.

City of Intrigue

The city has three clan-controlled districts, each with its own facilities and security. The Imperial Governor's manor is on an island at the center of the river junction, and it is the governor's Imperial agents who collect taxes and issue tariffs.

Unicorn District

The Unicorn Clan controls the entire western bank of the Three Sides River. Its impressive wharf is made of polished black granite with softwood inlays for traction. Most incoming goods—primarily textiles, lumber, and coal, when available—are immediately moved by wagon deeper into Unicorn lands for storage.

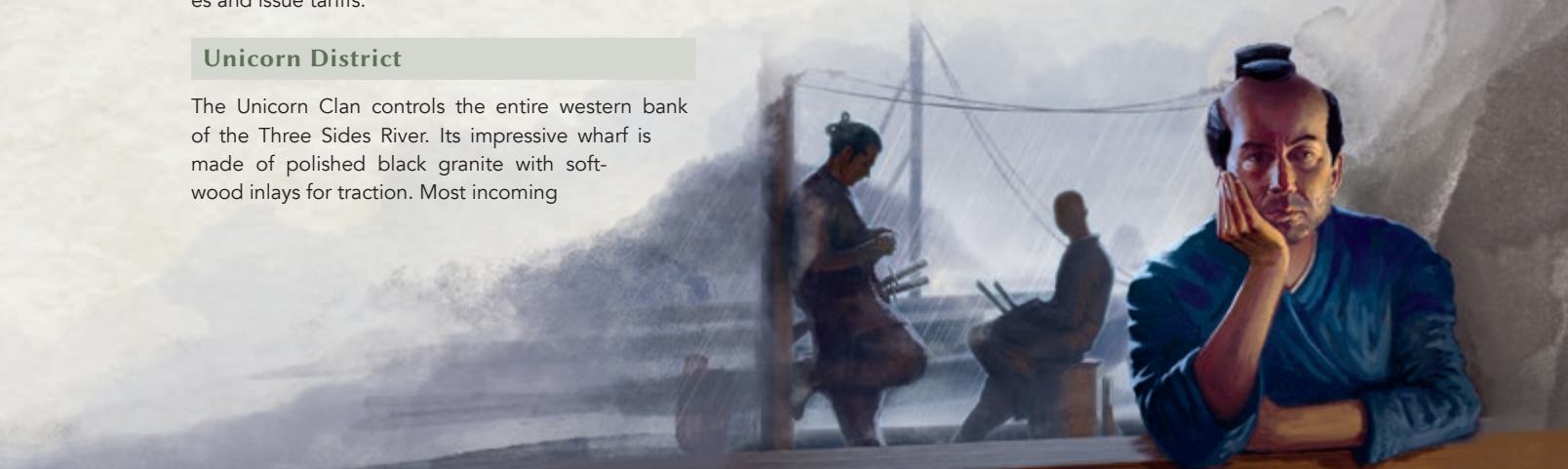
The Unicorn maintain a handful of violet-roofed stone buildings, including a single tower at the southern end of the wharf that is tall enough for arrows shot from it to cross the Three Sides River. Here, the elderly Iuchi Shichiro oversees the Unicorn trade flowing into and out of the city via Ide caravans. He has held his post for over twenty years, and he speaks of passing the post on to one of his seven sons and going on one last great ride.

Lion District

Along the east bank of the Three Sides River south of the Drowned Merchant River lies the Lion's district in the City of the Rich Frog and one of their most important trade hubs. There, the Lion trade foodstuffs and clothing for iron and stone used in construction and arms. Young and eager for combat, the ranking Lion Clan samurai is Akodo Minami, who obsesses over security daily. She prays to the Fortunes for a valid cause for sending her

MERCHANT SPECULATION

- Iuchi Konomi, Iuchi Shichiro's daughter, was caught with Miya Tetsua—and she was promised to Tonbo Kuma already, no? For shame! Surely the marriage is off if the Dragonfly Clan finds out.
- Have you noticed all the soldier activity today? I heard a ninja smuggled the Phoenix's Nest down the Drowned Merchant River!
- Did you see all the floated Unicorn shipments today? I heard they found a new source of jade and are shipping far more than they can protect, just floating it downriver!



ADVENTURE SEED: GHOST SHIP

一 **Hook** The PCs are asked to attend a court dinner with Governor Miya and important local clan representatives. During dinner, the governor learns that a strange ship has caught on one of Saibanshoki's docks. There is no crew, and the deck is laden with large pieces of jade. All present clans lay an immediate claim to the mysterious ship. After much arguing, the governor asks the PCs to investigate and determine which clan the ship belongs to.

二 **Rising Action** The ship's deck is loaded with treasure, but as the PCs go belowdecks, they find nothing. Then, when they emerge, they find that the ship is sailing through Gaki-dō, the Realm of the Hungry Dead. A number of hungry ghosts attack!

三 **Climax** The ship, sailing in the Realm of the Hungry Dead through an undefined organic mass, eventually comes to a thick, rotting tree that looks like a dark reflection of Saibanshoki. A large, phoenix-like bird spirit is perched atop it. The PCs can return to Rokugan by healing the spirit tree or destroying it, though its destruction unseals a passage to Gaki-dō within the governor's manor. Healing the tree seals away the evil for another century.

army of three thousand across the Drowned Merchant River against Dragonfly soldiers.

The Lion Clan has no traditional riverbank wharf or nearby storage facilities. Instead, the river banks are marked with a defensive wall that dates from the port's violent history. Instead of a wharf, there are a half-dozen canal gates. This ingenious canal network uses the river current to move goods to massive storage complexes for foodstuffs and textiles that straddle the canals farther inland, where unloading is done in the shade.

Dragon District

As is typical of the Dragon, their presence in City of the Rich Frog confuses the other clans. They grant use of their potentially profitable riverbank lands to the Dragonfly and instead focus on a strange collection of shrines at the junction of the two rivers. Fifty soldiers garrison near the shrines, as if expecting some threat to emerge from the water. Their leader is the mysterious Tonbo Kuma, a powerful Dragonfly shugenja whose family line has overseen the Dragon holdings in the city for as long as anyone can remember. A thin but powerful shugenja of androgynous aspect, Kuma says little, leaving many to wonder about their motives.

On the northern and eastern banks of the Drowned Merchant River lies a modest wharf that occasionally sees use by travelers from the Phoenix Clan. Any goods they purchase are floated downriver toward the sea, where they are shipped up the coast back to Phoenix lands. On the north side of the Drowned Merchant River, west of the Phoenix wharf, is a sizable artificial basin with eleven wharfs and one open side, forming a dodecagon. Each side corresponds to a month of the year, featuring identifying animal statuary and iconography. A large lantern is moved one bollard clockwise each sunrise, acting as a communal calendar.

Saibanshoki

Growing straight from the water at the river junction is Rokugan's largest and oldest willow tree, named Saibanshoki. Its thick trunk is over twenty yards across and covered in mysterious, centuries-old carvings. At its base are five berths for small rivercraft and steps winding up to the governor's manor. Legend has it that the willow tree shades the home of a mischievous frog spirit, the god of the river junctions, and that the evening song of croaking frogs is that same spirit's love song for the *kodama* spirit of the tree.

The manor house extends over the river and is shielded from the heat of the summer sun by the willow's massive boughs. Above the intimate courtroom are the offices of the governor's agents, who use flag signaling to communicate with tariff assessors and customs agents along the riverbanks, especially when the sound of the frogs makes shouting impossible.

Imperial Governor Miya Tetsua

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 2 5

For seven years, Miya Tetsua has served as Imperial Governor on behalf of the Emperor in the City of the Rich Frog. While the *otokodate* ably handle inspections and assessments with little oversight, Tetsua finds much of his time taken up with local clan disputes over fair use of the river, damages to cargoes, and other tedious and mundane difficulties. The only thing that has stopped him from leaping into the rivers is his exploration of the arts and the mysterious Tonbo Kuma. Tetsua struggles with his duty to govern impartially despite his fondness for Kuma. The two have a weekly game of Go, when Tetsua tries to learn more about the enigmatic shugenja.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
45	HONOR	ENDURANCE	12
55	GLORY	COMPOSURE	12
60	STATUS	FOCUS	8
+2, –2	DEMEANOR - SHREWD	VIGILANCE	4



ARTISAN 3 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 4 | SOCIAL 4 | TRADE 1

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Kuge Lineage: Social; *Interpersonal*	**Irrepressible Flirtation:** Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Wakizashi: Range 0–1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Concealable, Razor-edged

Gear (equipped): Court hakama (physical 1, Ceremonial, Resplendent), personal chop, Imperial seal

ABILITIES

EMERALD AUTHORITY

Once per scene when making a check, Miya Tetsua may count his ranks in the skill used as being equal to his status rank.



Crime and Punishment

In a seedy sake house in Toshi Ranbo, one samurai kills another in a fit of drunken rage. Nearby, a heimin farmer takes advantage of the confusion to steal a bag of rice from a merchant's stall. Both have committed crimes under Imperial law and now face the brutal, unforgiving machinery of the Rokugani legal system.

The Imperial approach to penal and administrative justice was established one thousand years ago. It is a complex mix of unbiased investigation, subjective testimony based on social status and standing, religious considerations, and pragmatic, brutal efficiency. It begins with investigations of crimes by magistrates. The presiding magistrate usually makes their judgment based on a combination of testimony by witnesses, whose credibility is based on their social status, and confessions—often obtained through torture. Physical evidence, no matter how compelling, often has little place in the process. When found guilty, offenders are subject to swift and often lethal punishments. In the end, the best way of dealing with the brutal vagaries of Imperial law is to avoid ever having to deal with it.

MAGISTRATES

Until the middle of the second century, an arbitrary and inconsistent patchwork of laws and punishments held sway over Rokugan. Many conflicts among samurai were settled with *iaijutsu* duels, a tradition that continues to this day, but it was not efficient to adjudicate every wrong with a sword strike. Finally, Emerald Champion Doji Hatsuo realized how haphazardly laws were being enforced in the Empire, and he tapped the renowned judge Soshi Saibankan to establish a consistent and comprehensive legal system that spanned the Empire. From their analysis of the current system, they realized they needed enforcers to mete out justice fairly and predictably, and together they created the system of Emerald Magistrates. These individuals, who are always samurai, would become the front line of the system, enforcing Imperial laws, investigating crimes against those laws and, in some cases, rendering and executing judgments.

The Emerald Magistrates

The Emerald Magistrates are the senior-level magistrates in Rokugan. They can be identified by their badge of office, a carved sphere of jade, and their unmistakable emerald-green haori coats. Their jurisdiction and powers, which are specified in the Charter of the Emerald Magistrates, spans the entire Empire.

They are, therefore, the "national" police force, reporting directly to the Emerald Champion. Despite their formidable powers, however, they don't normally involve themselves in local crimes. Instead, they focus on major crimes and unrest that represent egregious violations of Imperial law or otherwise threaten peace and stability on a regional or Empire-wide scale.

The Charter of the Emerald Magistrates, which was drafted by Soshi Saibankan, is a substantial document, but it can be summarized as follows:

1. Emerald Magistrates are concerned with major crimes: treason, crimes of a national scope, crimes involving organized blasphemy or the Shadowlands, the flight of fugitives across clan or territorial borders, and general civil disorder and lawlessness. If they become aware of lesser crimes, they are duty bound to inform authorities with appropriate jurisdiction.
2. Emerald Magistrates are empowered to oversee collection of Imperial taxes and tariffs, issue Empire-wide travel papers, and protect visiting dignitaries. They also have the right to enter any place in the Empire and arrest and question any person in performance of their duties. There is a caveat, though—if this involves samurai of higher social status or station than their own, they must obtain an appropriate writ from the Emerald Champion or from the daimyō or lord of the samurai in question.
3. Emerald Magistrates are generally not permitted to address purely local law enforcement matters, although they won't hesitate to intervene in crimes in progress. They also don't involve themselves in blood feuds, nor are they permitted to receive any gifts or other compensation in relation to their duties.

Emerald Magistrates therefore have considerable powers, but only in relation to major crimes with Imperial implications. Accordingly, Emerald Magistrates—who are appointed by the Emerald Champion on behalf of the Emperor—are selected from samurai who have proven themselves worthy of such an honored position. Emerald Magistrates can be drawn from any Great Clan—and rarely from a Minor Clan. While they maintain their clan affiliation, they are expected to maintain an Empire-wide perspective regarding their duties.

While they often work alone, it isn't uncommon for Emerald Magistrates to operate in groups, particularly if a significant threat or crime is suspected. Emerald Magistrates are also typically accompanied by a retinue of assistants and attendants, as described on "Magisterial Auxiliaries" on page 92. Finally, Emerald Magistrates have limited powers to levy bodies of troops if it is necessary to carry out their duties. In all respects, local lords are expected to assist Emerald Magistrates as much as possible, as long as the requested assistance is reasonable and conforms to their charter.

It should be noted that an additional magisterial office exists as a senior Imperial appointment: that of Jade Champion. This position was created early in the Empire's history in order to combat illegal and blasphemous magics. A contingent of Jade Magistrates was established to report to the Jade Champion. The position has been vacant for several hundred years, however. As a result, there are no Jade Magistrates, either. The duties of the Jade Champion and Jade Magistrates are currently assumed by the Emerald Champion and Emerald Magistrates, with assistance from organizations such as the Kuni Witch Hunters of the Crab, the Asako Inquisitors of the Phoenix, and the secretive Kuroiban, or Black Watch, of the Scorpion.

PLAYING EMERALD MAGISTRATES

Because Emerald Magistrates can be drawn from any clan, having PCs of different clans appointed in this capacity is a convenient way to bring them together in a more or less united party. Even samurai whose clans are at war are expected to put their rivalry aside when acting as Emerald Magistrates. Moreover, Emerald Magistrates are important individuals, so the arrival of a group of them at a town, city, or other holding is an excellent way of allowing PCs to interact with senior officials such as governors or even daimyō. Finally, having them appointed as Emerald Magistrates creates opportunities to have PCs engage with the organized criminal underworld and other lawless groups such as *mahō* cults, which are excellent focuses for roleplaying campaigns.

A word of warning, however: Emerald Magistrates are not omnipotent. If PC Emerald Magistrates transcend the constraints of their charter, or otherwise cross powerful NPCs such as governors or daimyō, they could easily find themselves similarly drawing the ire of the Emerald Champion.

PLAYING CLAN MAGISTRATES

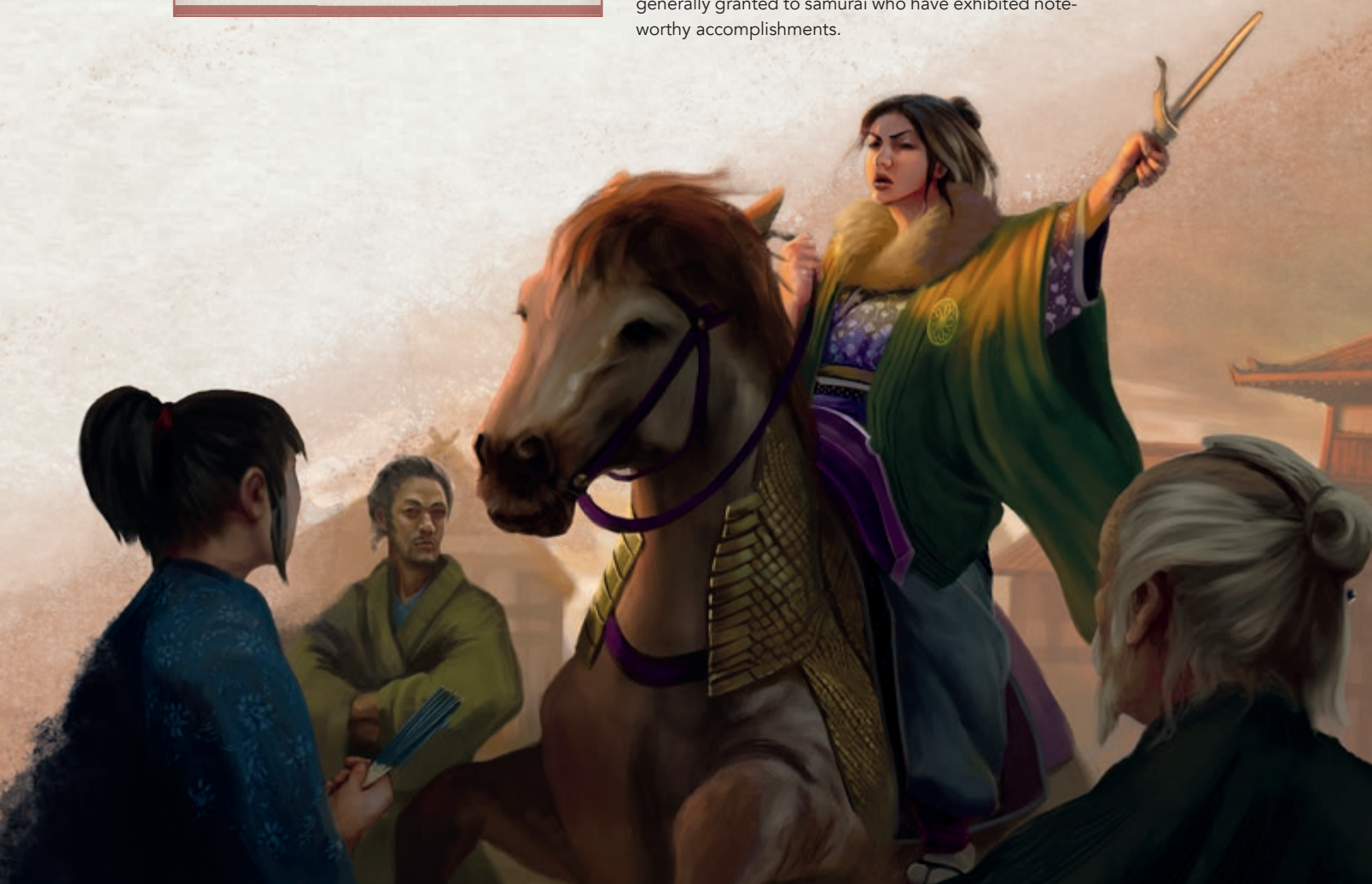
Because they are drawn from a single clan and only have jurisdiction in that clan's lands, having PCs appointed as clan magistrates offers less flexibility to a gaming group. That said, if all of the PCs are from a single clan and the campaign is primarily confined to that clan's holdings, the PCs can enjoy similar benefits to those of Emerald Magistrates. The main limitation will be the ability of the PCs to travel across the clan's borders; being a clan magistrate entails significant duties and obligations, which shouldn't simply be shrugged aside if the players want their characters to travel across the Empire.

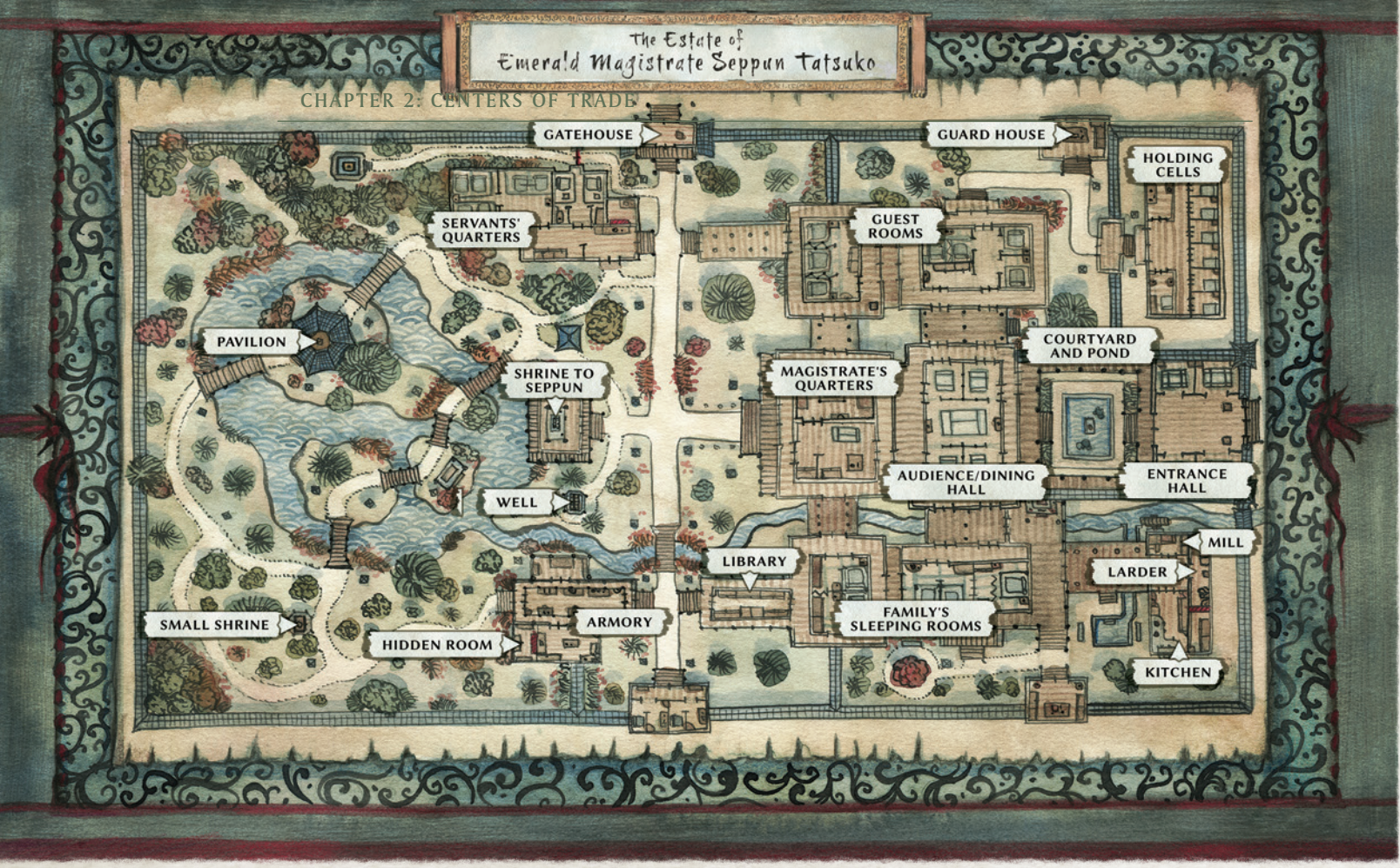
For groups that would like to begin with characters who are still in the first rank of their school, serving as yoriki, or assistants, to clan magistrates allows them to learn the ropes of the Rokugani justice system and pursue the excitement of eventually being promoted to the rank of full magistrate thanks to their honored service.

Clan Magistrates

Clan magistrates are similar to Emerald Magistrates, but with their jurisdiction confined to the lands and holdings of their parent clan. Outside of this jurisdiction, they have essentially no magisterial authority. They are also more likely than Emerald Magistrates to become involved in local crimes and investigations that occur within their jurisdiction, but generally only if local magistrates are not readily available or require assistance. Otherwise, many of the broad powers provided to the Emerald Magistrates by their charter are available to clan magistrates, again within the limits of the lands and holdings of their clan. Because of their complementary powers and jurisdictions, they often work in conjunction with Emerald Magistrates operating in their clan's territory. This is also a way for a clan's leadership to ensure that their interests are represented in any such investigation—and, of course, so that the leadership can remain aware of what Emerald Magistrates may be up to in their lands.

Clan magistrates are appointed under the authority of provincial daimyō, and they are assigned to either patrol assigned territories and the holdings that lie within them or to oversee important towns or other landmarks. As is the case with Emerald Magistrates, such an appointment is considered prestigious and is generally granted to samurai who have exhibited noteworthy accomplishments.





A typical Rokugani may only rarely, if ever, see an Emerald Magistrate, but clan magistrates are commonly seen walking down the streets of towns and cities or traveling the roads between them. As a result, these magistrates often have a better understanding of local issues and grievances, as well as relationships among members of the criminal underworld. This can make them valuable to Emerald Magistrates as sources of information that may be relevant to more serious and sweeping crimes and conspiracies.

MAGISTERIAL AUXILIARIES

Magistrates of all types are often accompanied by various "auxiliaries," subordinates who assist them in conducting investigations and enforcing the law. These include:

- *Yoriki*, who are samurai who serve as permanent assistants to magistrates. The judicial powers of yoriki are generally limited to routine matters of investigation regarding crimes committed by samurai; yoriki report their findings to their magistrate superiors. Their judicial powers regarding crimes committed by commoners are more expansive, and include investigation and, in most cases, the authority to render summary judgment and punishment.
- *Dōshin*, who may be samurai but are commonly heimin, are deputies to yoriki. Like yoriki, the powers of dōshin are normally restricted to routine investigation, but generally only for crimes involving commoners.
- Hinin assistants, who perform specific duties that are considered inappropriate for samurai, such as handling corpses and torturing suspects in order to obtain confessions.
- On occasion, magistrates may also temporarily draft samurai into service as yoriki, or even as formed bodies of troops. This is only done in consultation with local authorities, such as governors and daimyō, and to deal with a specific problem, such as a cult or criminal conspiracy, that poses a threat beyond the magistrate's capacity to handle alone.

THE JUDICIAL COURTS

Once a magistrate has investigated a crime, assuming they lay formal charges, the matter is referred to a judicial court. Normally, the most senior magistrate available in the jurisdiction in question convenes such a court and assumes the position of judge for the duration of the trial. If the accused is of particular importance or, in the case of a samurai, sufficiently high status, then the court may be convened by the governor of a holding or even a daimyō. The station of the judge is normally of little consequence, however, because in most cases, the accused has already confessed by the time the trial is convened, either voluntarily or by means of torture. The judge's role is mainly to lend a weight of formal authority to the proceedings and to pronounce sentence. That said, some magistrates—particularly those drawn from the Kitsuki family of the Dragon Clan—choose to put aside custom and actually sit in judgment against the accused. This is by far the exception, however.

Conduct of a Court

Most judicial courts in Rokugan are ad hoc affairs, held in places that happen to be convenient for the magistrates and witnesses involved, most often the receiving hall in the magistrate's own home. Only in a few locations—the large cities, such as Otosan Uchi and Ryokō Owari Toshi, and the most important clan holdings—are there are permanently established judicial courts. These generally take the form of an open courtyard with an adjacent shaded dais for the presiding judge, the judge's sergeants at arms, and the court scribe who records the proceedings. A second, smaller dais for witnesses and their retainers is nearby.

The courtyard, called the "white sands of judgment," is a flat area of white sand where the accused kneels to face the judge. The sand reflects and intensifies the heat and light of Lady Sun on the accused, symbolizing the ultimate role of the Heavens in overseeing the court's judgment. In inclement weather any suitable location can be used, such as a governor's or daimyō's court chamber, the grounds of a magistrate's station, or even a commandeered sake den.

EVIDENCE VERSUS TESTIMONY

In most judicial cases in Rokugan, the only factor that may be considered in addition to a confession is the testimony of witnesses. Reverence for the Celestial Order and recognition of the Bushidō virtues of Honor and Sincerity mean that Rokugani generally consider the testimony of someone with higher status to be "more true" than that of someone of lower standing. This effectively means that only the testimony of the highest-status witness attending the trial carries any weight whatsoever.

In the first few centuries of the Empire, this approach extended to testimony by kami or other spirits, which were often treated as the most influential witnesses by default. However, troubles with relying on the testimony of spirits came to light. Because elemental kami view reality in a way fundamentally unlike humans, their testimony could be vague, perplexing, and ultimately reliant on the interpretation of the intermediary shugenja, whose own biases might color their translation, intentionally or not. This practice of relying on the testimony of spirits changed after an infamous trial over the murder of a well-known general of the Lion clan. A Kitsu Medium summoned the spirit of the victim, who confirmed the Lion's accusations against a Scorpion samurai. Yet, after this testimony, the Scorpion produced the Lion general, alive and in the flesh. No one can say who or what the Kitsu actually invoked, but it is known that after this trial, Imperial decree forbade the testimony of spirits and other nonhuman entities in trial.

The Kitsuki family, of the Dragon Clan, tend to place considerable weight on evaluating physical and circumstantial evidence, and they may base a finding of guilt at least in part on their assessment of it. This has caused considerable consternation among more traditional samurai. Some particularly staunch traditionalists even refer to it as "blasphemy," because it implicitly undermines the primacy of the Celestial Order. It also suggests that evidence can outweigh the word of a samurai, impugning their honor and, by extension, Bushidō itself. Accordingly, outside the lands of the Dragon Clan, the use of the Kitsuki method is rare. Even so, to date, neither the Emperor nor the Emerald Champion have seen fit to forbid the practice, so it continues despite remaining a controversial approach to justice.

In any case, trials are normally public affairs, unless a particular judge has some reason to close the proceedings.

Once the accused is kneeling before the judge—whether upon the white sands of a permanent court or the ground or floor of a temporary one—the scribe reads aloud the crimes of which the defendant is accused, followed by the accused's confession. The judge may question the accused to clarify points in their confession or to learn more about their character and background. The judge may also allow witnesses to present testimony, which may influence the final verdict. It is at this point that judges who favor the Kitsuki method may diverge from the normal course of a court's events, examining evidence and sometimes even questioning witnesses. Once all of this is complete, the judge will render a verdict (in most cases, that of guilty) and sentence. The judge's decision is final, and the sentence is carried out immediately.

There is, however, an exception to these procedures when samurai are involved. If there is doubt as to the accused's guilt, either the wronged party or the accused may challenge the other to a duel. Unless the judge believes the challenge is being issued flippantly or in a desperate attempt to avoid what would otherwise be just punishment—itself a grave offense—they are likely to allow the duel to proceed. Such a duel is normally to first blood, but in especially grave cases, a duel to the death may be permitted. The result of the duel is considered to be the will of the Celestial Heavens and so is considered beyond reproach. If the accused wins, they are considered to have been exonerated and are immediately freed. Should they lose, though, then their guilt is irrevocably established, and whatever punishment applies to the crime is inevitable.

CRIMES AND THEIR PUNISHMENTS

Once an accused person has been found guilty, the judge pronounces sentence, which includes the punishment to be applied. The form of punishment is normally based on the crime committed. It should be noted, however, that the human foibles of politics and favoritism occasionally intrude into the process: daimyō, governors, and other powerful parties may influence sentencing, making it more or less serious if it suits their purposes.

Like trials, punishments are usually conducted publicly as a deterrent to criminal behavior by others.

Minor Offenses

Minor offenses are those conducted by samurai against those of inferior social status or against commoners. They include assault causing harm, including gratuitous or unwarranted harm to a commoner; public brawling; minor property damage; and minor cases of theft or smuggling. In many cases, the perpetrator may simply be ordered to apologize and make restitution to whomever they have wronged. Other punishments can include fines and periods of house arrest.



In the case of an offense committed by a samurai against a commoner—even if it would otherwise be considered a serious offense, the magistrate may not even bother with an investigation or may only perform a cursory one and then issue a summary judgment. In this case, the punishment would likely be little more than a requirement to make some sort of token restitution to the samurai of whom the commoner was a vassal. It should be noted, however, that samurai sometimes favor certain of their peasant vassals. For example, a samurai lord may be the patron of a particular artisan, craftsperson, or merchant. If a crime is committed against such vassals by another samurai, and the lord in question is sufficiently influential, the matter may be taken more seriously by the magistrate. It is still unlikely to be considered more than a minor offense, however.

Serious Offenses

Serious offenses by samurai are those that fall short of grave offenses, but still warrant a significant punishment. In general, offenses that occur "upward"—that is, against those of equal or superior social status—fall into this category, while those that occur "downward"—by samurai against those of significantly inferior social status or against commoners—are considered minor offenses at worst. Serious offenses by samurai include murder, unwarranted assaults on other samurai that cause serious injury, theft or smuggling of items of significant value or otherwise serious property crimes, and avoiding or escaping lawful custody. Note that a death caused by a lawful duel or dealt to an enemy in time of war is absolutely not a crime, but killing a samurai in an unsanctioned duel, or in one that was intended to be only to first blood, could be considered murder, depending on the circumstances.

Grave Offenses

With regard to samurai, grave offenses include crimes committed against the Emperor or their family or against senior Imperial officers such as the Emerald Champion, the Imperial Advisor, Great Clan champions or daimyō, or daimyō of Imperial families or Minor Clans. They also include treason against the Empire and crimes that have an Empire-wide scope, such as involvement in large criminal conspiracies. Being involved in the use of illegal magics and participation in blasphemous cults are also considered grave offenses, as is arson, given the vulnerability of Rokugani towns and cities to fire.

The punishment for grave offenses is almost always death. The specific form of execution varies depending on the crime and the character of the samurai convicted. For those of otherwise good character, a judge may order a quick death by beheading. A benevolent judge may even allow such an offender to commit seppuku, ritual suicide cleansing their honor and that of their family before they pass into Meido, the Realm of Waiting, for their next judgment. However, for particularly vile offenses and those perpetrated by samurai judged to be morally deficient and without honor, a slow, agonizing death by torture—including burning or boiling alive—may be ordered.

As an alternative to death, a samurai convicted of a grave offense may, instead, be cast out of his or her clan and family, becoming a rōnin. To most samurai, this is considered a fate worse than death. To lose one's clan and family is to lose one's identity, to slip dramatically in the Celestial Order, and to be consigned to eking out a miserable existence on the fringes of Rokugani society, despised and shunned by honorable samurai of the Empire.

For commoners convicted of a grave offense, there is only one punishment: death. The specific form of execution may vary, but is usually brutally swift, such as hanging or beheading. Commoners simply aren't considered worth the time for more elaborate ends.

A samurai convicted of a serious offense could still face execution. Normally, though, if a judge believes that such a samurai's death is warranted, the samurai is allowed to commit seppuku. Being cast out as a rōnin for a lesser offense would be extremely unusual. Much more likely punishments include imprisonment, significant fines, a requirement to make restitution to the wronged party, or a public reprimand. In the latter case, a samurai is required to appear in a public place, announce their crimes, and offer an apology to those they have wronged. In a society in which one's honor and reputation are of vital importance, the seriousness of a public reprimand is considerable.

Commoners convicted of lesser offenses still often face execution. However, other punishments are also used, such as imprisonment, public flogging, or a punishment designed to fit the specific crime, such as the loss of a hand as punishment for theft.

CHAPTER

3

Heart of the Empire

The farmer pushes yet another rice seedling—unhulled rice from last year's harvest, recently sprouted in water—into the flooded paddy, then straightens, groaning as he stretches his back. The wicker basket slung over his shoulder is nearly empty of seedlings, but there are many more in the oxcart standing on the nearby dike. Many more seedlings to plant by the hour of the Rooster.

Shading his eyes against the sun, he looks around. His family—his wife and children, and her brother and his children—bend and straighten around him, methodically planting seedlings in the murky water that covers their feet. Past them, in the village two paddies away, distant figures lumber among the cluster of rough huts and buildings, bringing yet more seedlings out to the fields. Others carry clothes to the stream for washing, sit and mend garments, carry water, or tend cooking fires. The farmer allows himself a smile. As long as the weather remains fair, there are no blights, and the Fortunes are content, the crop this year will be a good one.

Movement along the road catches his attention. A group of riders in the colors of the village's lord canter purposefully along. Magistrates—and they are early, probably to get an estimate from the village head of the expected size of the rice crop—and what portion of it they will claim as taxes for their lord. The farmer's smile fades, and he mutters a quick prayer to Inari, the Fortune of rice, for a good crop indeed.



The Foundation of a Civilization

No matter how powerful a civilization is politically or militarily, or how sophisticated it is culturally, socially, or economically, without a solid foundation based on a reliable supply of food, clean water, and basic goods, it is doomed to fail. The Emerald Empire is no exception. The Kami knew this, and although each imparted different lessons to their new followers after their fall from the Heavens, all of them emphasized the importance of agriculture and the essential crafts. With advances in agriculture came the fuel needed to build an empire. The population grew explosively, and the Kami lead their followers into large towns, then eventually massive cities supported by the infrastructure surrounding them. It is from this simple and straightforward beginning that the modern Empire was born.

THE LAND

Shortly after the Kami Hantei won the tournament to select the first Emperor, the Kami established the basic laws governing the new Empire. One of the first, and most important, stated that all lands and resources in the Empire belong to the Emperor, who acts as their custodian on behalf of the Celestial Heavens. This has remained a bedrock principle ever since, giving rise to the fundamental structure of governance in Rokugan.

It is obviously unworkable for a single person, even if they are the Emperor, to directly administer all of the lands in the Empire. Accordingly, a system of tenancy was developed by which the Emperor delegates to the clans portions of the Empire, which are administered by the clan champions. The champions, in turn, further subdivide the lands granted to their clan and have each such piece overseen by one of their clan's family daimyō. These daimyō further divide and delegate lands to samurai lords who are their vassals, and so on. At the very bottom of this cascade of land allocation are the commoners: the farmers who actually turn the soil and plant and harvest the crops. It is important to emphasize that despite this progressive allocation of land to vassals, none of them actually own the land they've been granted: ownership of the land belongs exclusively to the Emperor.

Obviously, not all lands are of equal value for all types of use. Fertile, arable lands suited for farming are not rare, but they tend to be concentrated in particular parts of the Empire: notably, along large rivers and in coastal areas. Other parts of the Empire are either too mountainous, too wet, too dry, too heavily forested, or too barren to support meaningful agriculture. This doesn't mean these lands are entirely unproductive, however. For instance, forests provide lumber, and a wide range of plants are used for medicinal, decorative, and other purposes; mountainous and rocky areas often contain valuable mineral deposits and are quarried for stone. Even in these cases, it is the commoners who generally act as the woodcutters, miners, and other workers exploiting these resources. More detailed information about the land and its resources is provided in **Chapter 6**.

FARMS AND VILLAGES

At the bottom of the system of land tenancy in Rokugan is the farm, the basic building block of the Empire's economy. Farms are the most common institution in the Empire, simply because they are necessary for growing the food consumed by all of its citizens, samurai and commoners alike. The food that farms produce is collected and transported to villages, then from villages to towns and from towns to cities. In return, the villages, towns, and cities provide other types of goods and services, such as finished products and even military forces deployed to defend smaller population centers and outlying rural areas from attack. This continuous cycle of activity from farm to village, village to town, town to city, and then back again is the foundation of the Empire's economy.

Wherever possible, farms cluster closely together within fertile areas to provide for mutual security and defense and to allow farmers and their families to achieve efficiencies by pooling their labor and resources. Long ago in many of these clusters of farms, people began to create items and facilities that helped them increase their farms' production and more effectively process, store, and transport their yield. These included everything from ropes and rice-drying racks to baskets and barrels to mills and granaries. These groups of farmers and the craftspeople who made the items and buildings they needed for their farms formed the first villages in the Empire.

Some villages continued to grow, becoming towns and cities, but most remained as they were: small, relatively isolated communities consisting almost entirely of commoners. Of course, some farms were located far from these new and growing villages and remained dotted throughout the landscape. This is still the typical character of a rural, agricultural area in the modern Empire: isolated, individual farms scattered through the lands and farms surrounding the villages that are the focus of everyday life for most of the common people of the Empire.

OTHER RESOURCES

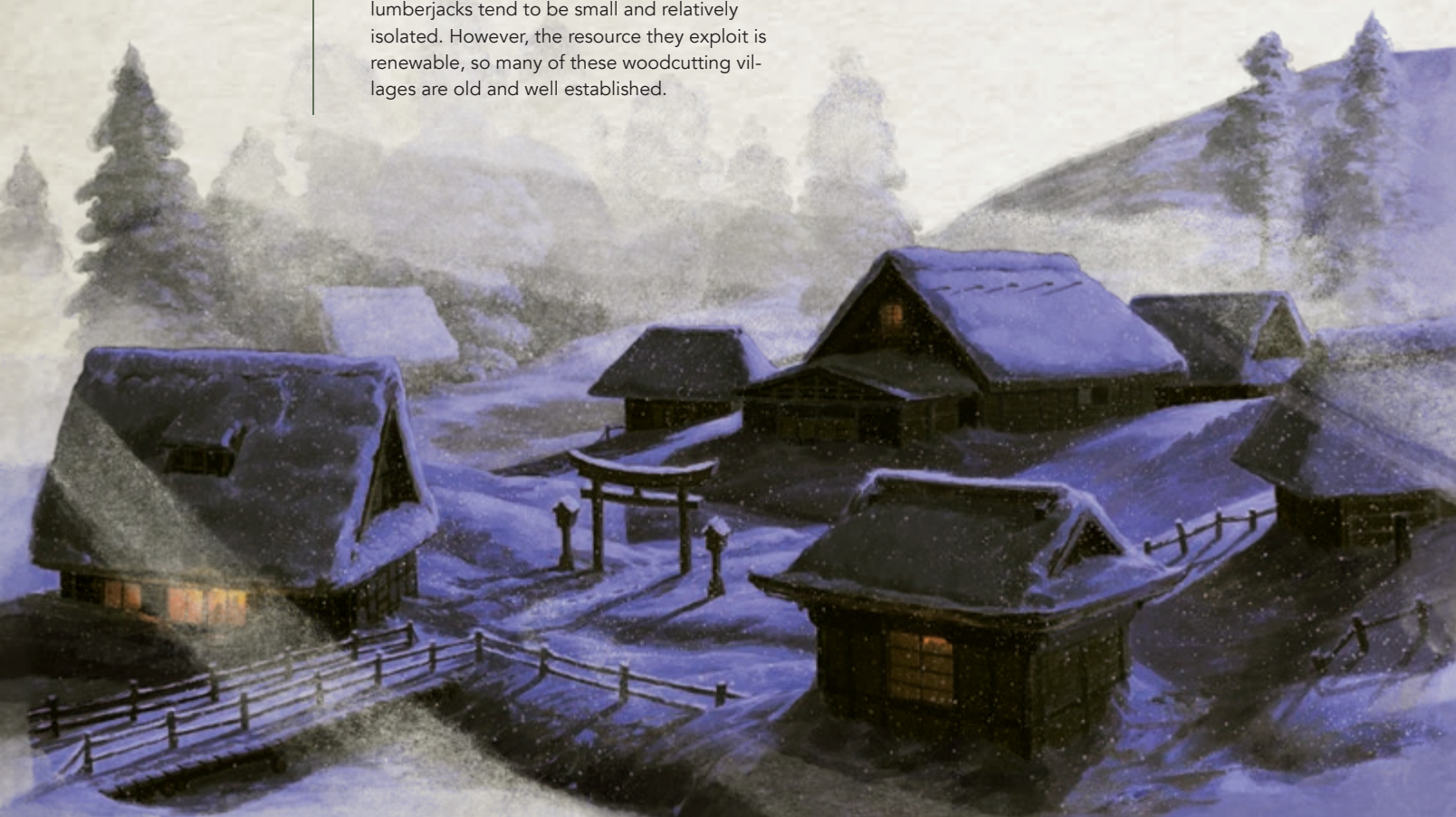
Much of Rokugan is not particularly suited to agriculture, and farms are rarely found in such areas. However, these rocky, forested, or otherwise infertile regions still provide valuable resources to the Empire, and as such have villages to support their extraction.

- **Fishing Villages:** The sea provides many staple foodstuffs for the Empire, including fish, shellfish, and seaweed. Those who extract these things from the sea live in villages that are located on rivers or coasts and are otherwise similar to farming villages. These villages' locations are dictated by proximity to favorable fishing grounds and the availability of sheltered harbors.
- **Mines:** Iron, copper, tin, silver, and gold are all essential to the Empire, and other mined commodities can be vital for specific purposes, such as the jade used to combat the creatures and effects of the Shadowlands. Deposits of these materials tend to be relatively small and discrete, and mines have limited lifespans before they are exhausted. As a result, mining villages are often small and isolated and have a temporary character to them.
- **Lumber:** Most Rokugani structures are made of wood, with paper interior walls. Lumber is, therefore, an important commodity in the Empire. Like mining villages, communities of lumberjacks tend to be small and relatively isolated. However, the resource they exploit is renewable, so many of these woodcutting villages are old and well established.

COMMUNICATION

The clans and Imperial families use a number of methods (of varying effectiveness) to attempt to maintain at least sporadic communication with the more far-flung parts of the Empire.

- Clans dispatch their own couriers, or obtain information from samurai traveling on other business.
- The Imperial Heralds of the Miya family travel throughout the Empire to promulgate new Imperial edicts and laws.
- The Barefoot Brethren, a sect of the Brotherhood of Shinsei devoted to Koshin, the Fortune of Roads, travel throughout Rokugan at the behest of samurai and commoners alike to gather and deliver news.
- Carrier pigeons, originally used by the Crane and subsequently reintroduced by the Unicorn, are a rare communications method used by more pragmatic members of some clans.



GRASS AND SNOW

The lands of the Emerald Empire cover a great span, encompassing deep forests, wide plains, and high mountains, and the climate of Rokugan varies just as greatly. Some people even say that each clan is deeply shaped by its surroundings, although many Great Clan samurai resent such claims.

Much of Rokugan is temperate. The lands of the Lion and Scorpion enjoy the full range of the seasons, from sweltering summers to snowy winters. Scorpion lands on the windward side of the Spine of the World Mountains receive more rain during the warm months and more snow in the winter, while Lion territory enjoys clearer skies overall, with sufficient rainfall to nourish its fertile plains.

The cool northern lands of the Dragon and Phoenix experience mild summers and biting winters. While the coastal lands of the Phoenix are more temperate, the high elevations the Dragons favor are even colder; some Togashi monasteries remain snow covered throughout the year. Despite their northern position, the lands of the Unicorn remain much warmer than those of their neighbors, thanks to the warm winds that blow down from both the western end of the Great Wall of the North mountains and the Spine of the World Mountains.

The southern lands of the Crane and those of the Crab are generally the warmest in Rokugan, with climates reaching the subtropical. The coastal region and the Crab lands at the foot of the Twilight Mountains are particularly humid and rainy, which some outsiders blame for the Crab's dour attitudes and architecture.

CHALLENGES FACING RURAL COMMUNITIES

The Empire's farms and villages face many of the same challenges as its towns and cities. However, thanks to their remoteness, isolation, and limited resources and expertise, rural communities are less able to withstand and recover from damaging events.

Weather

Weather is, by far, one of the most important factors in the life and health of farms and villages. While winters are somewhat more moderate in coastal areas of Rokugan, inland regions tend to have winters that are long, cold, and windy, with heavy accumulations of snow. Farmers and villagers begin preparing for the upcoming winter as soon as the previous one has ended. As winter nears, food must be stockpiled and stored in such a way that it won't spoil during the long, cold winter months. The difficulty of living through this period in inland regions must be factored into tax collectors' calculations, to ensure that the Empire derives maximum value from its farms while leaving farmers with sufficient food to survive. Samurai lords must likewise be careful regarding how much of their farming vassals' crops they put up for sale or trade.

Even the most careful and conservative reckonings cannot account for all of the vagaries of the weather, though. During the growing season, periods of heavy rainfall can flood and damage fields, while too little can result in drought and crop failure. Storms can batter crops with hail. The elemental imbalance afflicting the Empire has only accentuated these effects, threatening to turn local weather problems into regional or even Empire-wide disasters.

Natural Disasters

Many parts of the Empire are prone to natural disasters, and with the ongoing elemental imbalance, these catastrophic events appear to have become worse and more frequent. Coastal regions are vulnerable to tsunami, massive waves triggered by underwater earthquakes. The coastal plains of the Crane Clan, some of the most fertile lands in the Empire, were flooded three years ago by a series of tsunami that contaminated vast tracts of soil with mud, silt, and salt water, necessitating that they be left untilled. Earthquakes also occur in inland areas, damaging buildings and roads as well as the dikes and irrigation systems essential for rice production. Volcanoes occasionally erupt in the Spine of the World Mountains or the Great Wall of the North mountains, spewing ash over huge areas, while wildfires can ravage forests and grasslands, particularly during the dry, hot months of late summer.

ISOLATION

While some remote villages only see a samurai when the time comes to collect taxes, even those in better-traveled parts of the Empire may only rarely be visited by the nobility. Even then, most samurai simply pass through on their way to business elsewhere. Accordingly, the arrival of samurai in a village of heimin and burakumin is almost always an important event; in the most remote places, it may be a profoundly significant happening indeed.

Most villages do not allow themselves to be surprised by the unexpected arrival of samurai. Unless it is the depths of winter, when few Rokugani travel any great distances, heimin are generally at work in the fields and forests around their village. Using a discreet system of signaling particular to each community, those who first spy approaching samurai pass news back to the village center. This typically prompts many heimin, and virtually all burakumin, to quickly find a reason to be elsewhere in order to avoid unwanted attention from these imposing visitors. Similarly, if some villagers happen to be up to nefarious business—anything from trying to cheat on taxes to participating in heretical cults—then the culprits take this opportunity to attempt to hide the evidence. This is not always successful, of course. Having samurai PCs discern incriminating evidence of such an activity can be an interesting story hook.

The remaining commoners, normally including the village leadership, place themselves in a position to respectfully greet the traveling samurai, offering hospitality that is unlikely to be accepted. If the samurai are magistrates and it is time for tax collection, then goods representing the taxes owed are generally made readily available. In any case, the objective of the commoners throughout the visit is to avoid offending their samurai guests while giving them every reason to be on their way as quickly as possible, so the commoners' lives can return to normal.

The people hit hardest by such catastrophes are the commoners in the rural and remote parts of the Empire. Those who survive must cope and then rebuild almost entirely on their own, at least initially. Aid may eventually arrive, but it may take many days or even weeks. Even then, the provision of aid depends on its availability and on the importance the samurai lord attaches to the area and population in question.

War

Rokugan is a militant place, its culture and society steeped in battle and war. Invasions from outside the Empire are extremely rare, the exception being attacks from the evil hordes of the Shadowlands. These are doggedly held back by the heroism and sacrifice of the Crab Clan. A successful incursion by the Shadowlands would result in destruction far beyond that of any mortal conflict. Strife between and sometimes even within the clans is common, however. The inevitably grim result is land trodden and churned up by marching armies and their battles, destruction of property (both accidental and deliberate), and mass displacement of refugees. Commoners forced to flee their farms and villages cease to be productive servants of the Empire—in the eyes of its rulers—and their continued need for food and other resources further strains the available supply.

The Code of Bushidō and simple practicality mean that samurai usually try to avoid inflicting excessive harm on the peasantry. Not only does doing so violate the Bushidō tenet of Compassion, but it effectively means damaging the means of producing food and other resources upon which those same samurai rely.

Unfortunately, in the face of war, harm can only be minimized, not eliminated altogether. Moreover, particularly aggressive or thoughtless samurai may sometimes specifically target an opponent's commoners, seeking to undermine the opponent's ability to wage war by striking at them logistically and economically. Such shortsightedness is rare—after all, the rule of the peasantry changes with that of their land—but it does occur. Not surprisingly, samurai place great emphasis on restoring the peasantry to their productive labors as quickly as possible after hostilities cease.

SAMURAI AND RURAL ROKUGAN

The relationship between samurai and commoners in Rokugan is a complex one, with much more nuance than it may first appear. (See **Samurai and Their Lessers**, on page 117.) Some specific aspects of the interactions between samurai and commoners are unique to the farms and villages of the rural Empire.

GOSHI

Most samurai are expected to remain close to their lord, near their castle or court and apart from the vassal commoners. Those who do not are normally exiled to remote, rural places as a form of punishment. A few samurai, however, choose to live in rural areas, among the commoners. They are known as *goshi*, or countryside warriors.

While goshi retain the status and authority of their position, it is not uncommon for them to tie up their kimono sleeves and work alongside the peasants they oversee. Samurai of the Sparrow Clan take this to an extreme, all samurai of this Minor Clan effectively being goshi. Due to their rustic nature, goshi are derided by more urbane samurai, who use the term as a slur.

In exceptional cases, a peasant may be given specific privileges of the samurai caste and gain the authority of a goshi. They may even be given the right to bear swords, have an audience with their lord, or use a family name. These goshi are found only in the most remote locations, where appointment of a true samurai vassal is impossible.

Goshi tend to have a greater degree of closeness to the heimin they supervise than other samurai do. Because of this, heimin loyalty to goshi runs deep, and these rural samurai enjoy considerable sway over their local area.

Samurai among the Commoners

In general, samurai prefer not to spend more time than absolutely necessary in the Empire's rural areas. Not only do these remote places have few of the amenities to which most samurai are accustomed, but even the lowest ranking samurai will find few, if any, social peers there. Bluntly put, there is little to interest most samurai in rural Rokugan.

In a broader sense, most samurai believe that little of importance occurs outside the towns and cities, which reveals a disconnect in their thinking, as it is from these "unimportant" and "uninteresting" places that the food they eat and other resources they consume come. That said, most samurai do recognize that without the labor of the common people, the Empire would quickly collapse into chaos.

The main reason why samurai do leave the relative comfort and engagement of a town or city and travel among the farms and villages is that their duties require them to do so. For example:

- Samurai who are acting as couriers or messengers must travel, sometimes for great distances, across the Empire. This naturally takes them through rural areas. Some samurai—particularly Miya Heralds—do this routinely as part of their duties. These samurai can become quite accustomed to the hardships and privation of long periods spent on the road and among farms and villages. Some even come to prefer it to the business and bustle of the urban Empire, although such samurai are generally considered odd by their peers.
- Samurai who are simply traveling from one castle to another likewise must pass through rural areas, but they generally do so as quickly as possible.



- Magistrates frequently travel the rural roads and byways of the Empire in performance of their duties to uphold Imperial law and to collect taxes owing to samurai lords and, ultimately, the Emperor.
- Some unfortunate samurai are given duties that require them to reside in remote villages and similar places. For example, a samurai may be permanently assigned as magistrate to oversee a string of villages, a duty that forces them to take up residence in the countryside. Generally, such assignments are a form of punishment for incompetence or wrongdoing that doesn't warrant seppuku or similarly dire consequences. They are also used to neutralize political opponents or deal with embarrassing relatives by placing them in out-of-the-way locations.
- During times of war, samurai naturally spend time—sometimes lengthy periods of it—living, marching, and fighting in the fields, forests, farms, and villages of the rural Empire.

Taxation

Generally speaking, samurai do not pay taxes in Rokugan. Taxation is derived from wealth; wealth results from things being created through labor, and samurai do not engage in "labor." In reality, though, many samurai do engage in commercial enterprises, albeit normally at arm's length through intermediary retainers, such as heimin merchants. Such enterprises often do get taxed, but this represents only a small part of the revenue realized by the clans and the Imperial authorities. The vast majority of taxes are a proportion of the real goods, including food and other resources, produced by the commoners of the rural Empire.

These types of taxes are normally taken as a fixed portion of goods produced. For example, farmers may be required to pay one of every ten koku (one koku is about five bushels) of rice they produce as taxes to their samurai lord. The actual amount varies based on factors such as the quantity of rice and other commodities produced that year, the effects of droughts or blights on crops, and the needs and even whims of the lord in question. Most lords make a good-faith effort to balance the amount of taxes they levy against the needs of the commoners; overtaxing peasants to the point of starvation is counterproductive and may lead to unrest among them.

That said, most samurai lords are uncompromising regarding the taxes they do demand. Any attempts to avoid paying the full taxes owed are considered serious crimes and usually result in severe punishments, including execution of the miscreants, as a deterrent to other would-be tax cheats.

UNREST AMONG THE COMMONERS

The official Imperial histories record only a few instances of revolt among the peasantry, generally describing them as local and quickly put down. In fact, however, there have been more than a few eruptions of riot and revolution among the commoners, some of them quite widespread.

The most common reason for unrest is poor treatment of the commoners by their samurai masters. The Celestial Order notwithstanding, commoners are just as given to resentment over things like cruel treatment, poor living conditions, and excessive taxation as samurai would be. Moreover, the tedious, laborious life of commoners in Rokugan makes them fertile ground for incitement by charismatic leaders and populist causes. A current example is the Perfect Land Sect, a heretical movement claiming equality among all castes, samurai and commoner alike, through Shinsei's salvation. Once the spark of rebellion against injustice or the passionate fervor of a dynamic figure ignites the fires of unrest, it can quickly spread, leading to full-on revolution against the authority of the samurai.

The response from those samurai is, of course, generally swift and brutal; this is, after all, a crime against the Celestial Order and, by extension, against the Heavens themselves. Armies are dispatched to put the rebellion down, and those known or believed to be the leaders of the revolt are summarily put to death. Most samurai recognize that potential unrest among the commoners is never far away—and that the price of avoiding it is constant vigilance and merciless punishment for anyone even contemplating turning against their samurai lord.

Rural Life

The majority of Rokugan's population dwells far from its cities and the relative convenience of urban life. Instead, they live in small communities that must be largely self-sufficient. Small villages and isolated farms cannot depend upon regular merchant traffic. Instead, they need to be able to grow or make everything that they need to maintain their community.

Villages near a major road may see frequent visitors, while more isolated communities can go years without seeing any outsider except the tax collector. With permission from the head or the area's samurai lord, inhabitants can visit neighboring towns for trade or to see a skilled craftsperson, but such journeys require time and entail dangers that make them impractical for most bonge. Consequently, the world becomes a smaller place for those who dwell in rural communities. Many spend their entire life never traveling more than ten miles from their place of birth. Over generations, neighbors become extended family, as the lack of travel leaves most residents of a permanent village related.

Foods and other goods that are produced within the village are the staples of peasants' lives. Anything that cannot be made or grown nearby is precious or a delicacy. Tuna, which makes up the majority of the protein for coastal village residents, might be a completely foreign food for the residents of an inland mining town. A metal plow could be a prestigious tool passed on to succeeding generations in one village, while every family in a town with a skilled blacksmith might have their own. Differences in the scarcity of various mundane goods play a major factor in distinguishing villages and regions from one another.

When visitors arrive in a town, it may be a cause for celebration or dread. In less secure regions, outsiders often mean brigands. Not surprisingly, villagers in these places are seldom welcoming, but rather suspicious of anyone they don't recognize who approaches their homes. Some isolated outposts, however, are accustomed to seeing traveling merchants as their most likely visitors. When an outsider arrives, these villagers gather to hear stories of distant places and carefully peruse whatever goods are on offer. The clan that administers a village's land also affects its residents' reactions to visitors. Villagers in Crane lands are often generous hosts, while those with Crab lords tend to come across as standoffish.



While villagers almost universally show proper respect and reverence for the Emperor and the government that he commands, they often have only a limited practical relationship with the Empire. They identify themselves as members of their village first, often making this a more important part of their identity than their clan, as both clan and Empire can seem far away for a rural peasant. This is partly due to their isolation, but it is also due to the limited number of services that the Empire directly provides. Heimin villagers are expected to pay taxes and, if ordered, submit to military service. In return, they receive little. In many parts of the Empire, roads are poorly maintained and the military does little to keep the brigand population in check. Consequently, some citizens might quietly resent the rice they must pay to samurai while they struggle to survive. Often, the combination of religious teachings and fear of retribution provide the strongest reasons for them to remain true to the Empire.

Regions with a generous daimyō—or at least a sympathetic one—tend to have bonge who feel a greater connection to the Empire. Heimin who regularly receive protection or other assistance from their lord are less prone to resentment for the taxes they pay and the responsibilities they must fulfill. In some cases, communities may even receive assistance from their samurai for capital improvements, particularly roads and irrigation systems. While such assistance is not common, when it occurs, it is instrumental in improving loyalty.

SAMURAI TRAVELERS

The nobility have few reasons to visit rural communities. Tax collectors serve as their primary representatives to isolated communities. Rarely, samurai may decide to take tours of their holdings, visiting all of the lands over which they hold authority, but this is not a standard practice. Consequently, visits are most likely to occur if there is a significant problem—insurrection, banditry, or the like—or if the samurai is simply passing through a region and stops to obtain lodging and hospitality.

A visit normally begins with a stop at the local village leader's home. As recompense for their added responsibilities, their dwelling contains a secondary room for hosting visitors, particularly noble ones. For the duration of the samurai's visit, the leader attempts to be a generous and gracious host. The village's other bonge are drafted into service to assist with hosting responsibilities, which include providing the samurai with any comforts they require.

Those comforts are, naturally, limited to the goods that the village has available. A samurai with a refined palate is certain to find the available cuisine limited and disappointing. Most farms would at best have a single seasonable vegetable, such as carrot or radish, to add to any available rice, and no spices. In fact, the rice that is served to the samurai is a luxury to the bonge, who must make do with millet.

Just as the food variety is limited, the accommodations are unlikely to be up to the standards of a member of the nobility. A village leader's home is furnished with some of the best furniture and goods available to the area's villagers, but these are still crude, barring the presence of an exceptional craftspeople. A sleeping mat is certain to be uncomfortable, and any privacy is simply due to the placement of a paper screen between the leader's family and the guest's room, forcing the samurai to hear the night sounds of the peasants.



Under such conditions, few samurai choose to stay in a village for an extended period. Notably, an extended stay is likely to compromise the village's production, as many of the heimin must ignore their normal responsibilities in order to assist with hosting. Fortunately, the rice and other luxuries that are provided to visitors who are members of the local lord's clan are drawn directly from goods set aside to be paid in taxes to that noble. However, if a visitor draws too deeply upon these reserves, the lord responsible for the village may seek compensation of some sort from the lord of the visiting samurai at a later date. Similarly, the village leader is likely to become increasingly concerned at the depletion of tax reserves, recognizing that the depletion must be explained to the tax collector. These problems are exacerbated if the samurai taking advantage of the village's hospitality hails from a rival clan, in which case reimbursement from that clan is unlikely. If the village's lord does not kindly make up for the shortfall or otherwise take responsibility, the village leader may face punishment at the hands of the magistrate, their regional daimyō, or both.

ITINERANT CLERGY

Of the many monasteries across the Emerald Empire, most are deliberately located in isolated, rural areas. This grants the monks the opportunity to reflect without intrusion. Many villages have a monastery within a few days' travel. Religious rites, including funerals, weddings, and seasonal celebrations, may receive a blessing from an itinerant monk if no priest is available. Many of the shrines that become a central part of each village's identity have an assigned priest, but this is not always the case, and the smallest villages may not even have a shrine. Monks regularly visit with the bonge and hinin who dwell in these places to provide for their spiritual needs.

Due to their distinctive robes—particularly those of the saffron color popular among many sects—monks are easily recognized, even at a great distance. As a consequence, farmers working the fields usually spot approaching monks well in advance of their arrival. This gives them ample opportunity to gather and make appropriate preparations. This may mean cooking a special meal, alerting the parties responsible for the village's shrine, or simply cleaning a bit to make the village and its residents more presentable for the arrival of such a respected individual.

A visiting monk's arrival is usually greeted as a reason for at least a small celebration. The monk is treated as an honored guest. Residents are unlikely to deplete their reserves to the same extent that they might for a visiting samurai, but they do not hesitate to make a reasonable sacrifice. Any visiting monk is given an opportunity to visit the shrine, meet with community leaders, and speak to the gathered villagers. Villagers who seek special blessings, spiritual insights, or other advice may meet with a monk privately, sometimes in their own home or at the shrine.

Although the arrival of a priest or monk is a special occasion, many villagers are likely to continue their daily routine when it occurs. Unless the arrival coincides with a festival celebration, work remains that must be completed. Visiting with the monk may need to wait until the evening, during times normally set aside for prayer and reflection upon the day. Consequently, such a visit has a much less significant cost for the village than would the visit of a samurai.

HEIMIN

The vast majority of the people dwelling in rural communities are bonge. These residents perform the majority of the labor required to sustain each village. Their lives focus on family and community, which is often simply an extended family. The obligations to keep their villages functioning, meet their tax obligations, and keep their relatives healthy require a daily commitment that offers little time for leisure. Not surprisingly, this dictates that these people rarely travel far from their homes. Instead, they toil endlessly to take advantage of the limited resources they have, lest those be taken from them.

Water

Every village needs water. Often, a navigable stream or a reliable spring is the reason a village exists in a particular locale. Days typically begin when bonge retrieve the water that their families need to consume and use for cleaning. Water is also needed for any crops they grow or gardens they tend in order to supplement foods purchased or bartered for. Each village's water source is a precious shared commodity, taking the form of a well, stream, or spring.

Communal Labor

Each day's labor is planned out in advance and is based upon the seasons. During the growing seasons—all but winter—farmers must spend their days in the fields, which are often shared communally by the village. As long as they have sunlight by which to work, they plant new crops, tend to the ones already growing, and harvest those that have matured. Tools are typically made from bamboo and shell, as metal is precious and can corrode too quickly in the rice paddies.

When the need arises, villagers gather to help one another construct new buildings, including houses. In places where foraging or fishing are viable supplemental practices, bonge villagers often work together to engage in these tasks. During the winter months, farmers repair and maintain their tools so that all is ready for the next growing season.

Childcare is a shared responsibility as well. Some villagers care for the children of multiple families, so that more people can perform work in the fields or mines. This leads to closely shared upbringings, which further interweaves the lives of the villagers.

Artisan bonge, including blacksmiths, brewers, and weavers, are an exception to the practice of communal labor. While they may contribute to larger projects like building construction, the larger community does not participate in their work, as their duties require specialized skills.

HININ

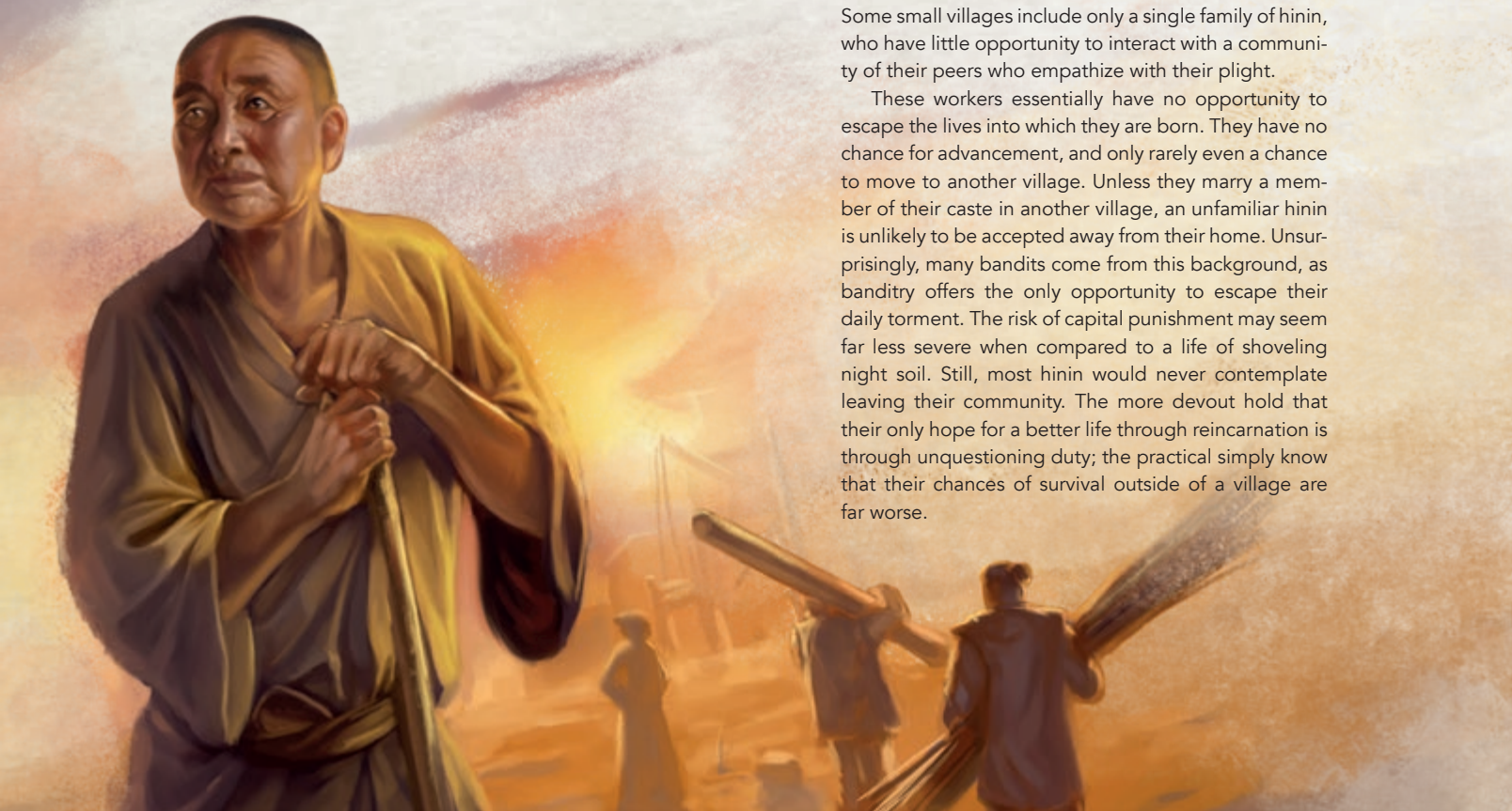
Every village requires work that only the hinin are fit to perform. Refuse must be hauled from each home on a regular basis. This includes night soil, which can be composted into fertilizer for the fields. The deceased must be properly prepared for cremation. Livestock must be slaughtered, and game animals must be hunted and prepared. Leather is a necessity for daily use, but only hinin work within a tannery.

These workers suffer daily miseries within their small communities. Their homes are apart from those of the heimin, and they have the lowest priority in all things. They can only fetch their water after all of their social superiors have done so, or they may have a separate well entirely that they must draw from instead, often farther away than the village's main water source. When going about their work, which usually involves dealing with foul-smelling waste, they must always be certain to avoid the paths of others. If they do not, they are certain to suffer abuse.

Given villages' small populations, each villager recognizes every other villager on sight, so hinin have no refuge from degradation. Not only is their daily work exhausting, but it must be performed under demeaning conditions. Even during a festival, when bonge have an opportunity to ignore their responsibilities, hinin suffer glares and verbal abuse.

Further, hinin represent only a small proportion of a village's population. Their duties must be performed, but there is not enough of this work to support a sizeable number. In the case of isolated farms, there might only be a single hinin who fulfills all of these duties. Some small villages include only a single family of hinin, who have little opportunity to interact with a community of their peers who empathize with their plight.

These workers essentially have no opportunity to escape the lives into which they are born. They have no chance for advancement, and only rarely even a chance to move to another village. Unless they marry a member of their caste in another village, an unfamiliar hinin is unlikely to be accepted away from their home. Unsurprisingly, many bandits come from this background, as banditry offers the only opportunity to escape their daily torment. The risk of capital punishment may seem far less severe when compared to a life of shoveling night soil. Still, most hinin would never contemplate leaving their community. The more devout hold that their only hope for a better life through reincarnation is through unquestioning duty; the practical simply know that their chances of survival outside of a village are far worse.



Villages and Farms

Most villages form to exploit a particular resource such as arable land or abundant fish, and most people who live in a village work at jobs linked tightly to that resource. The availability of various goods depends upon an area's mix of trades, crops, and other resources. If a particular crop is not suited to a local climate, then that type of food is unlikely to be available. Regional differences provide a distinct flavor to each community as well, differentiating the clothes they wear, the meals they eat, and the tools they use. The residents of a village that cultivates silkworms are much more likely to wear fine clothing than the residents of a mining village. Villages in arid plains cultivate wheat and millet, and tea and soybeans can also be grown in many regions that cannot meet the water needs of rice. Villages and monasteries in mountainous regions must rely more on hunting, and some even make scandalously extensive use of leather and other animal parts in their clothing, homes, and tools. Bamboo is cultivated throughout Rokugan, but particularly in the humid southern regions, and is used for everything from canteens and art objects to construction. Rice is, of course, cultivated nearly anywhere the climate can support it, and it can make a village relatively wealthy. Plum and cherry trees are popular among both peasants and samurai for their beauty as much as for their fruit.

Special buildings likewise reflect a village's purpose. A fishing village is likely to have a shipwright and a simple dry dock for repairing fishing boats. A mining village is certain to have a substantial smithy for preparing and repairing tools. A trading village sees enough traffic to maintain a dedicated inn for temporary lodging. Village size plays a large factor in the presence of specialists and specialized buildings as well. A hamlet of only fifty residents is unlikely to support the livelihood of a dedicated blacksmith, but a village of five hundred would be remiss without one.

TAX COLLECTORS

For most villages, the most consistent relationship with nobility is the scheduled tax collector visits. When the tax collector, often a magistrate, arrives, an assessment is made of the village's yield. A tax, typically in the form of rice—even for villages that do not produce rice—is then levied as a percentage of that yield, as determined annually for each province based on the often contradictory demands of the Emperor, clan champions, and other influential nobles and bureaucrats. If no rice is available, the village leader must negotiate with another village, possibly in a regional marketplace, to trade other goods for the necessary rice. An important factor to consider is that the tax collector is the person who makes the assessment of the town's yield. This evaluation is performed after a meeting with the village leader, during which the agent reviews the village's records. Particularly diligent tax collectors may also personally inventory the village's assets, including their food reserves.

The frequency of visits varies in different regions of Rokugan, based largely upon the preferences of the samurai. Annual visits are more common in domains where rice storage is difficult due to climate or infrastructure problems. Tax collection that takes place only once every five years is a regular practice in places where villages are less prone to significant change. This approach requires fewer tax collectors, but the villages and samurai must have the capacity to store much larger reserves of rice.

UNCHECKED AUTHORITY

Samurai are an uncommon sight within rural communities. Their social standing grants them essentially limitless power over rural residents. While a samurai faces potential consequences for engaging in dishonorable actions, isolated villages have no direct recourse should a samurai behave dishonorably there. They do not have the privilege of refusing any requests.

Upon arriving in a village, a samurai can simply walk to its center and shout for the attention of its leader. They can justifiably expect a prompt response and gracious service. If they do not receive it, then they have the authority to dole out punishment or take whatever they wish, in the event it is not freely offered.

While an honorable samurai would never damage a village in the course of a visit, not all strictly adhere to the Code of Bushidō, especially when they have little expectation of being caught in a dishonorable act. There is only limited security and oversight in rural communities. If an honorable samurai sees a dishonorable one act against a village's interests, the honorable one is obligated to rectify the other's misdeeds.


Laughing River Village
TEA FIELDS
ABANDONED HUT
HILLSIDE SHRINE
TEMPLE OF THE FORTUNES
PHYSICIAN
BARN
VILLAGE HEAD
WAREHOUSE
GUEST HOUSE
SHOP
FORBIDDEN CAVE
TEAHOUSE
RICE PADDIES
FARMHOUSE

While many tax collectors are just and fair-minded, this is not always the case. Similarly, some village leaders are more prone to inconsistencies in their bookkeeping, whether for good or for ill. In some villages, a tax collector visit may be a somber and stressful event in which villagers are concerned that hidden reserves might be uncovered or that the government agent might inflict a heavy tax burden upon the village. In other locales, the arrival of the tax collector may trigger a festival, with sake flowing freely, as frivolity proves the best way to appease the tax collector's baser nature.

DŌSHIN AND BANDITS

As samurai are rare and communication is limited, banditry can be a significant problem in rural areas. A group of bandits that carefully chooses its targets and stays on the move or well hidden can prey upon the villages in a large region for decades. In fact, some villages tolerate such relationships, seeing the bandits as little different from tax collectors. Others recognize that the thieves lack the divine mandate to function this way, and few monks or priests would condone such complicity.

Without an accessible samurai to provide protection, the responsibility to combat criminal activity falls upon the shoulders of dōshin. These are the lowest-ranking law enforcement authorities within Rokugan, and they often include bonge. Although magistrates must appoint dōshin, they usually do so based on the recommendation of the village leader. In a village that sees a magistrate's arrival only infrequently, the leader may sometimes appoint acting dōshin, who serve for some time before a magistrate officially confirms the appointment. By default, village leaders must often assume certain law enforcement duties.

Dōshin have the authority to take up arms and assemble enforcers, particularly to eliminate bandits. Their duties also include a responsibility to enforce Imperial law within their village and surrounding areas. Notably, this authority only extends to heimin and hinin.

VILLAGE COMPOSITION

Some buildings are essential to every rural community, such as homes, barns, and storehouses. Although these have the same functions throughout the Empire, these types of buildings vary in architectural style, location relative to the rest of the village, and sometimes construction materials. Such variations help distinguish one village from another.

The layout of a village depends largely on its function. To maximize land use, all of a farming village's homes tend to be clustered together in a small area. A common road leads to these homes through the surrounding farmland. Other shared buildings are kept within this same cluster unless there is a compelling reason to move them elsewhere. For example, a shrine dedicated to a specific tree or stream or boulder spirit cannot be relocated. A butcher, smithy, or other building that produces unpleasant or unclean odors or byproducts may also be placed farther from residences and other shared buildings.

Villages intended to serve travelers construct their buildings close to the road to make them easily accessible. In contrast, a fishing village may place some buildings a distance from the shoreline, especially if the area is prone to flooding.

Residences

All of the homes within a single village are normally similar in design, though they may have distinctive decorations. With the exception of the village leader's residence, each of these homes contains a single room, several paces across. To make better use of the space, the room is divided with shōji screens.

These paper dividers provide little privacy for inhabitants in different parts of the home. As a consequence, strict social rules dictate that individuals are expected to ignore everything that happens on the other side of a wall, no matter how clearly they might hear it. The shōji are commonly moved during the day so that the family has more shared space during the day and more privacy at night.

The village leader's home is easily identified upon a traveler's arrival in a village, as it is nearly double the size of the others. This is because the leader has a second room dedicated to hosting noble visitors. In particularly isolated regions, this room may see little use, but it must be maintained for those rare occasions.

In less prosperous farming communities, some homes have space set aside for livestock. While most farmers prefer to keep these animals in a barn or other outbuilding, constructing and maintaining those structures requires time and resources that may not be available. When weather conditions are favorable, the animals may reside outside in pens. In the event of extreme weather or other imminent dangers, or simply to share warmth in the winter, livestock may be brought into homes even in more affluent villages.

OUTBUILDINGS

Most villages have a use for specialized structures outside of homes. Village outbuildings may include a kura, *a storehouse used to secure precious items, often including rice, or a* koya, *a shed or pen, which may be used for keeping animals. Fishing villages may have dry docks for storing and servicing boats, while a mining community may need a building for storing ore until it is refined or transported. In many cases, these structures represent shared community assets.*

Shrine

Almost every village has at least a small shrine or temple. Farmers and other villagers are dependent on nature for their livelihood and are particularly vulnerable to its dangers, so it is vital that they appease the kami. In the smallest farms, this may be just a small nook where villagers can leave an offering and make a prayer. In larger villages and sites that have a particularly notable spiritual tradition, the temple may be the largest building in the village. Larger shrines often have a shrine keeper or priest who is devoted to maintaining the building and serves as a spiritual leader to the community. Exceptional shrines may draw pilgrims from surrounding villages or farther, serving as a point of pride for the community and driving growth.

The shrine is the normally the village's emotional and spiritual center. Major life events, especially weddings, take place at the shrine. Village festivals are also held at the shrine or on its grounds, intermingling spiritual gratitude with every celebration.

Shops

Successful village merchants and artisans may maintain a shop within their home. The more accessible portion of the building provides a customer-facing space. Sale goods are kept available here for prospective customers. A back room, typically separated by shōji screens, provides a workspace for the owner.

Merchants typically carry a range of goods geared toward the needs of the community. For example, a merchant is unlikely to have fishing goods for sale in a mining community. Similarly, gear that only a samurai could use would not be available in a village.

Gathering Places

The shrine may be the spiritual center of the community, but it is not always appropriate for every gathering. Many villages include other places for people to gather, and these vary depending upon the community's needs and resources. A village located near a natural hot spring may have a community bathhouse that takes advantage of those waters. One along a major thoroughfare likely has an inn, where travelers may rest for the night. If the village has a sake brewery nearby, then a sake house is a natural outgrowth. Similarly, a village that grows or processes tea may have a teahouse. Only a particularly large village would have more than one or at most two of these structures, as they are expensive for the community to maintain.

AGRICULTURE

Almost every village has at least some land set aside for farming, exceptions being those in locations where the environment truly prohibits it. For example, if most of a village's available water is brackish, then what little is not might be too precious to use for crops. However, even a steep hill can be terraced into arable land, provided the resources and labor to do so are available. Ultimately, for agriculture to be sustainable, the cost of growing enough food to sustain the village must be less than the relative cost of importing the food from elsewhere, assuming that is even an option.

Irrigation

Irrigation systems are vital for sustaining a village's crops, especially if they include a rice paddy. These systems include artificial ponds designed to collect rainwater, as well as systems of canals and dams that carefully redirect the flow of nearby rivers and streams. Some villages incorporate complex systems of wooden pipes, which can reduce the amount of water lost through evaporation. Occasionally, they even divert portions of the water flow to provide ready access to water within homes, typically in the form of small flowing pools or basins. Maintaining these systems is labor intensive, and the community shares this responsibility. Villagers regularly gather to perform the necessary maintenance work, including dredging irrigation ditches and reinforcing dams. In the case of emergency failures, the entire village convenes to make hasty repairs to the system.

Crops

Villages grow crops based upon a combination of environmental factors and their needs. Once the necessities are covered, preference is given to crops that cannot be easily acquired through trade and those that prosper in the village's location. In cases where two crops fulfill similar needs, such as apricots and plums, most villages are unlikely to grow both.

Beans

Beans are a critical source of protein for Rokugan's citizens. Most villages grow at least some soybeans, simply due to the sheer volume that are consumed and the ease with which they are grown. Mung beans and red adzuki beans are also common varieties. Once beanstalks have matured, they are gathered and then allowed to dry in the fields. After drying, the beans are threshed from the stalks and processed into miso and tofu.

Grains

Almost every village grows at least some rice, due to the necessity of using that grain to make tax payments. However, if water is too precious to sustain a rice paddy, then the rice must be purchased. Other grains, including wheat, barley, buckwheat, and millet, are grown throughout Rokugan. Most of these are less labor intensive than rice, and they require less water. However, they are generally considered less palatable and are significantly less valuable. Certain grains, such as barley and wheat, are more valuable for fermentation, and many villages that rely on these crops host breweries or distilleries.

Fruits

Many villages maintain at least a few fruit trees, but some farming villages are capable of supporting entire groves. Cultivated fruits include plums, apricots, peaches, persimmons, apples, pears, melons, citrus fruits, and cherries. Deep root networks dictate that fruit trees do not usually require regular watering efforts; however, even these trees can die off in the event of a drought. Because these trees can continue to offer fruit for generations, they are attentively cared for.

Vegetables

Fresh vegetables provide many necessary vitamins and add flavor to the diet. Common examples include cucumber, squash, cabbage, kale, yam, burdock, carrot, radish, and onion. Many of these require little cultivation, making them easy to grow in relatively small quantities in villages not devoted to farming. Preference is often given to vegetables such as onions that can be stored for an extended period before consumption.

Tea

Tea leaves are a vital crop, and they require dedicated plantations as well as a significant amount of post-harvest processing. Tea plants, like fruit trees, can continue to produce fresh leaves for generations. They are densely grown and kept cropped to roughly waist height. The tea harvest occurs on a biweekly basis throughout the growing season, requiring an ongoing effort from a large workforce. Tea must be processed near the farm, as the leaves begin to degrade unless quickly treated after harvest.



Fibers

Not all agriculture is for food. Fibrous plants provide the basis for textiles, and they are of great importance throughout Rokugan. Common examples include hemp, cotton, and flax. Bamboo also falls into this category, though it can also be used for construction as well as consumption. Mulberry leaves, which are required to feed silkworms, indirectly fall into this category. Many farmers who work with these crops also spend time spinning thread and weaving.

Livestock

Rokugan farms rely comparatively little on livestock. Poultry, particularly chickens, are the most common type of livestock. Oxen and cattle serve primarily as draft animals, as their meat is considered unclean. If the village has a tannery, there may be more cattle than would otherwise be expected, but the numbers are still relatively few. The other major type of livestock is silkworms, which are critical to textile production. Farms that maintain a large silkworm population must also grow mulberry leaves to feed them.

BUZZING FLY VILLAGE

Buzzing Fly Village is a small village within the Kitsu lands of the Lion Clan. It is located in Rugashi Province, just a few days' travel from Rugashi City, a major trading hub. Not far from one of main thoroughfares, the village enjoys regular traffic, particularly from merchants traveling after having completed business in the nearby trade center.

The Buzzing Fly Brewery manufactures distinctive sake that has garnered significant attention among traveling merchants. The brewing methods are kept secret but involve the use of an unusual strain of rice that the family of crafters does not share with outsiders. Merchant travelers heady with the success of their trading or wishing to drown their sorrows often visit the brewery and sake house. Many spend a portion of their profits purchasing extra cases of sake to give to friends and trading partners, which has only increased the brew's desirability.

Given its recent success, the brewery has grown, bringing on more workers and increasing its brewing capacity. However, the availability of farmland to grow the unique rice strain has begun to limit the size of its batches. Currently, the family is in negotiations to allow neighboring farmers to also grow the strain of rice.



OVER DRINKS

- Those who offer a bottle of Buzzing Fly sake at their favored shrine are certain to enjoy good fortune through the following season.
- Late in the night, someone has been searching the wares of merchants visiting Buzzing Fly Village. Nothing seems to be missing, but goods are often disrupted and poorly repacked. It is unclear who is doing this or why.
- Bandits have been preying upon merchants near Buzzing Fly, but oddly, only those who do not belong to the Lion Clan.

ADVENTURE SEED: LOOSENED TONGUES

Hook While journeying through Rugashi Province, the PCs encounter a fellow traveler who turns out to be a Lion bushi. He is a surprisingly pleasant fellow who extols the virtues of the region and invites the party to sample the local fare. He leads them to the Buzzing Fly Brewery, proudly proclaiming its brew to be the best in all of the Lion lands.

Rising Action During the course of the PCs' visit to the sake house, the Lion Clan member drinks far too much and begins spilling secrets about the Lion's current troop deployments. To the party's surprise, the brewmaster, Reiha, keeps the sake flowing, seemingly encouraging the irresponsible behavior. The party must decide if they should try to protect the Lion Clan member's honor or work to uncover the brewmaster's motives.

Climax The Lion bushi does not appreciate any player character efforts to sober him up and preserve his honor. He drunkenly attempts to challenge them to a duel for questioning his stamina. If the PCs accuse Reiha of duplicity, she may attempt to poison her visitors in attempt to preserve her business.

Originally a farming community, the village is still primarily focused upon that occupation. However, expansion of the brewery has seen the population grow to more than five hundred residents. The village's center is adjacent to a small stream, and a wooden bridge arches over the stream. The sake brewery and mill are also next to the stream, drawing water from it to power the mill and feed the brewery. The building is the largest structure in the village, and homes radiate out from it. The small village is surrounded by rice paddies in all directions and on both sides of the river.

As one approaches the village, the smells of steaming rice and fermentation overpower all other aromas. When the mill is running, the sound of the waterwheel turning the grindstones resonates throughout. In the evening, as more visitors fill the sake house, the sounds turn to laughter and occasionally ribald music.

Brewmaster Reiha

Reiha is in charge of the Buzzing Fly Brewery. She proudly preserves the traditions and recipes that her family has followed for twelve generations. The brewery's relatively recent success and expansion has been a challenging experience for her. She has been reluctant to make necessary changes, fearing that the additional demand might be temporary, but she has nevertheless overseen some expansion. The brewery's sales have kept up with production for several years, and she is now forced to consider mechanisms to expand production even further. She remains reluctant to take additional risks, but she feels compelled to do so.

A major factor prompting her to expand is the Scorpion spymaster who currently holds Reiha under his sway. When she initially began to expand, Reiha needed to secure capital and made some unscrupulous decisions in order to obtain it. Somehow, the Scorpion discovered this information and has used it to blackmail Reiha. Now, she is obligated to uncover secrets from any passing merchants and Lion samurai and pass them to the Scorpion. She is reluctant to continue the charade but is terrified at the dishonor she would suffer should any of these truths come to light.

ANBASUKAI VILLAGE

Located in the mountains of the Senseki Province, Anbasukai Village is a pleasant and relatively isolated mining settlement. It offers a charming view of the Great Wall of the North Mountains and overlooks distant open plains. The village's homes radiate out from a beautifully crafted shrine, Earth's Heart Shrine, dedicated to the local mountain kami. Earthquakes and landslides are the greatest threat to the region's stability, but most agree that without the completion of regular rituals and offerings at the shrine, the calamities would be even worse. The village's altitude within the mountains leaves it chill in even the peak of summer and extremely cold in the winter. This relief from the summer heat in conjunction with the beautiful temple attracts occasional pilgrims.

FROM BELOW

- Anbasukai Village has suffered tremors and landslides that keep growing in severity. The kami who resides at the Earth's Heart Shrine seems displeased, and its temper must be soothed.
- Anbasukai Village is seeking caravan guards. The work is relatively low risk, and the pay is remarkable for work within secure Unicorn holdings.
- Within Anbasukai Village, there is a secret dōjō. Its teachings encompass powerful gaijin techniques that cannot be learned anywhere else in Rokugan.

A trained observer might note that the village seems to have more residents, based on the number of homes, than the limited surrounding farmlands can feed. In order to support the workers required for the mines, especially in an inhospitable climate, the village depends upon a large volume of imported food as well as other mining goods. Further, there seems to be a disproportionate number of residents who move like trained warriors, including some who are seen to work in the fields and mines.

This is because the village is one of the Unicorn Clan's most valuable holdings within the province. A vast network of caves and tunnels beneath the village contain significant iron ore deposits. The Unicorn rely upon concealed defenders to keep the mine functioning and secure. More than half of Anbasukai's inhabitants are soldiers who must work the fields and assist in the mines when not training. Their training rituals are performed within the mine's tunnels, so as to keep them better concealed. Heavy security accompanies every ore shipment from the mines, and the security forces often return accompanying caravans of food and mining tools from the nearest trading posts.

The Unicorn Clan founded the village only after discovering its mineral wealth. Utaku Anbasukai stumbled across some valuable ore samples near the surface when attempting to find the mouth of a mountain stream. He was surprised to find the mineral reserves and reported his findings to the Unicorn. The Unicorn founded the village soon after they verified the extent and purity of the ore veins.

ADVENTURE SEED: DIFFERING PRIORITIES

一 **Hook** After visiting the Earth's Heart Shrine at Anbasukai Village, the player characters learn that the village needs more security guards for an upcoming ore shipment. The individuals assigned to the task were injured in a recent landslide and cannot travel. The mine's leader asks for the PCs' help, and it is clear that no one else is available. The precious ore is intended for Shiro Ide, a lengthy journey. The rōnin Uchida is also part of the security detail, but his intentions are not honorable.

二 **Rising Action** During the journey, the rōnin approaches the PCs about his plans to divert the shipment to Ryokō Owari Toshi and ship it downriver to the Kaiu Wall, so that his Crab contacts can put it to immediate use. Uchida explains that the Crab's need is far greater than the Unicorn's, and the ore could be put to immediate use to craft weapons and armor to secure the Empire. Ultimately, however, the material belongs to the Unicorn Clan, and no one has the authority to take it, regardless of need.

三 **Climax** If the PCs choose to let Uchida take the ore, then they will have failed in their duty to guard the shipment. They could suffer grave dishonor for failing an important task on behalf of the Unicorn. Alternatively, if they personally deliver the ore to the Crab, they will be honored as heroes for delivering it, though if the truth about how it was obtained were to come to light, their triumph would be badly tainted.

Uchida

The Unicorn Clan recruits the guards for Anbasukai Mura from a variety of sources, including rōnin who appear trustworthy. Uchida is one of these warriors. He has worked tirelessly in the village's mines to maintain the necessary appearance that he is just another bonge. He has remained upbeat during this work and has also demonstrated his combat proficiency during secret training drills. However, Uchida has his own agenda. Formerly of the Crab Clan, Uchida still fiercely believes in the necessity of the Crab Clan's defense of Rokugan, and he fears that the Unicorn effort to keep their iron ore for themselves is frivolous. Consequently, he feels that it is his duty to divert some of these resources so that they can better serve the Emerald Empire as a whole. (To represent Uchida, use the skillful rōnin profile on page 316 of the core rulebook.)

SWIRLING POOL VILLAGE

The Crab Clan depends upon its many fishing villages along the shores of Earthquake Fish Bay to keep its larders stocked. The vast quantity of dried fish that these small communities produce supply the soldiers stationed on the Wall, as the desolate region abutting the Shadowlands produces no food fit for human consumption. Swirling Pool is one such village. It is located at a junction where four small streams feed from the hills of Sunda Mizu Province into the bay and is under the authority of the Yasuki family.

FISHY STORIES

- The town's daily catches have been consistently bountiful ever since a fisherman at Swirling Pool recovered an unusual statue in his nets last season. The town has begun work on a new shrine to celebrate the statue.
- A colony of goblins has begun to establish a settlement on the shore a day's travel to the south. No one is safe traveling along the shoreline.

The village's homes are built at the very edge of the shore, standing upon piles sunk into the land and seabed. Each home has its own dock at water level, along with a working area where families can maintain their nets and clean and dry their catch. The tide draws the waste back out to sea. The pungent aroma of drying fish wafts throughout the village. The homes' living areas are roughly ten feet above high tide so that the residences remain secure even during rough storms.

The community maintains the Shrine of the Four Gifts to celebrate the kami of each of the streams that join at the inlet where the village was founded. The interior of the shrine has a statue to one of those kami on each of the four walls. Traditionally, residents must make equal offerings to all of the spirits, lest one become jealous of the others. It is believed that the village is most prosperous when all four are content and willing to work together in harmony.

Everyone who lives in the village is dependent upon the village's fishing success, because they either fish or support the success of the fishing fleet. In fact, the village uses dried fish to pay its taxes. Not surprisingly, visitors to the village often remark upon the quality and flavor of their fish, especially the fresh catches. While the majority of the village's fleet plies the waters of the bay directly, using gillnets to make their catch, some utilize cormorants to collect fish.



Murata Hisao

The priest who oversees the Shrine of the Four Gifts is youthful and enthusiastic. He sees the influence of the kami in every aspect of life and is always willing to offer his insights as well as his latest anecdotes. Unfortunately, he is very poor at keeping a secret, and he is also not particularly adept at achieving insights. Consequently, he often comes across as boorish and has accidentally revealed truths told to him in confidence by both visitors and locals. The community has begun to reach the limits of its patience for its young priest.

ADVENTURE SEED: SPOILED HARVEST

Hook When the player characters approach Swirling Pool Village, the stench of rotting fish overwhelms them. They soon notice that the inhabitants appear gaunt and miserable. In talking with the bonge, they discover that many of the fish caught have been sickly and have rotted before they could be properly dried.

Rising Action Murata Hisao, the priest at the Shrine of the Four Gifts, believes that a cleansing ceremony must be performed upon the bay. He asks the PCs to accompany him, sailing for several hours across the bay, so that the prime fishing waters can be cleansed. Along the way, the waters become increasingly treacherous, and many dead fish can be seen floating on the surface of the turbulent waters.

Climax When the ritual begins, a sea hag attacks the boat, attempting to prevent the rite's completion. The hag has taken up residence in this area, and her presence has contaminated the fish. The PCs must overpower the sea hag or convince her to leave the region.

KAORI TEA FARM

The Uebe Marshes are an inhospitable region in Anshin Province, under the authority of the Hiramori vassal family of the Daidoji. The powerful smell of decomposing vegetation permeates the humid air, and the dense foliage keeps any breeze from providing relief. Some communities manage to survive in the forests and swampland, but the marsh makes agriculture exceptionally difficult. Further, the cursed site of Dark Cloud Village is not far from these lands, and its legend dramatically limits visitors.

In spite of this, a family of farmers carved out just over fifty acres of land to establish a tea farm a decade ago. They continue to work the land, attempting to persuade their tea shrubs to grow in the exceptionally damp climate. The temperature is well suited to these plants, but the soil contains too much moisture. To combat this problem, the family has gone to great lengths to obtain sand, which they have mixed with the soil. Their efforts have begun to pay off, but it may be a generation or more before the plants truly thrive.

SOMETHING BREWING

- Tea leaves from the Kaori farm have unusual restorative properties, due to growing in the Uebe Marshes. Village healers might pay a substantial price for them.
- Something is preying upon travelers along the road near the Kaori farm. It ruined the last two shipments of tea leaves. The farm may not survive if it cannot garner a return on the next shipment.
- Recently, a traveling fortune teller insisted that one of the farm's workers was fated to transform the Crane Clan. Of course, fortune tellers say things like that all the time, and it's probably nothing.
- "Beware of the Kaori farm. There is something wicked and unnatural there. Nothing good can come from the swamps, where death is a constant fixture of the land itself."

Notably, the farm has a very limited workforce. In fact, the workers encompass only the closely knit members of a single family: Hirotaka and Noriko, their seven children, and Noriko's sister, Kotomi. Every member of the family contributes to keeping the farm operational, and it is clear that at times there is far more work than there are hands to accomplish it. At this stage, they lack the resources to hire additional laborers or even feed and house anyone who might wish to join the community. All wear clothing that shows significant wear and has been patched repeatedly or is poorly fitted.

The farm has a single house and one outbuilding used to dry and prepare tea leaves prior to shipment. Both buildings show signs of poor construction quality and limited efforts at maintenance. It is clear that both were built entirely of materials easily harvested from the surrounding marshes and that shortcuts were taken due to limitations in materials and construction time.

The only domestic animals on the farm are a few chickens, which cluck and scrabble within a pen to one side of the residence. A small vegetable garden grows adjacent to the poultry pen, and many of the plants have a sickly look. A cultivated stand of bamboo grows behind the vegetable garden, and it always shows signs of having been recently harvested.

Hirotaka

Together with Noriko, their children, and Kotomi, Hirotaka works the Kaori tea farm. He is happy to see visitors and is anxious to hear of any news from beyond the farm's boundaries. He is quick to invite them to share a meal, but he has only limited resources in that regard. In fact, visitors who accept his hospitality may notice his children missing a meal or sleeping outdoors. However, they also discern that Hirotaka seems particularly well educated. He can participate in philosophical discourse and military strategy discussions at a high level, though he is far less knowledgeable when it comes to agriculture.

Though the family is obviously struggling to maintain the farm, even outsiders notice the good cheer and love that the parents and children share. All of the adults give the children opportunities to participate in discussions and are exceedingly polite and careful in turning every interaction into a chance for a lesson. Interestingly, many of these lessons deal with philosophical or religious issues rather than topics relevant to working on a farm.

ADVENTURE SEED: A FAMILIAR FACE

一 **Hook** Upon first arriving at the farm, a PC who spent time in the capital finds Hirotaka's face familiar. The PC eventually realizes that the farm owner was once a noted member of the Imperial Court and a prominent member of the Daidoji family. He fled the court after accusations that he had redirected resources to a friend rather than to a military installation that needed them.

二 **Rising Action** The characters must first confirm Hirotaka's identity. Once they do, they must decide whether they can leave him to an obscure life without honor in this backwater area or if they must forcefully return him to the capital to face trial for his crimes. The samurai-turned-farmer has accepted that this rural lifestyle is the consequence of his past actions.

三 **Climax** If the characters choose to return him to face justice, they must recognize that his wife, children, and sister are unlikely to survive on the farm without him. However, if they were brought to the capital, they would undoubtedly suffer after Hirotaka faced punishment. If the children learn of plans for the family to leave, some flee into the marsh, where they could fall prey to its predators.



Samurai and Their Lessers

Despite the deep social divides that exist in Rokugani society between the noble and warrior castes and the common folk, samurai must still interact with heimin and even, on some occasions, the burakumin, or hinin. While both are considered socially inferior to samurai (the burakumin especially so), the relationship between peasants and samurai is considerably more complex than simply "lord and vassal."

GENERAL MATTERS

The overall attitude of commoners toward samurai can be summed up in a single word: deference. From their earliest age, commoner children are taught that samurai are to avoided as much as possible; when interaction with samurai is necessary, commoners are to be polite and respectful, to bow deeply and wait to be recognized, to speak only when spoken to or when their duties specifically demand it, to avoid eye contact, and never to act in a manner that could be considered disrespectful or threatening. In most cases, commoners will unobtrusively move aside to allow samurai to pass by them unimpeded.

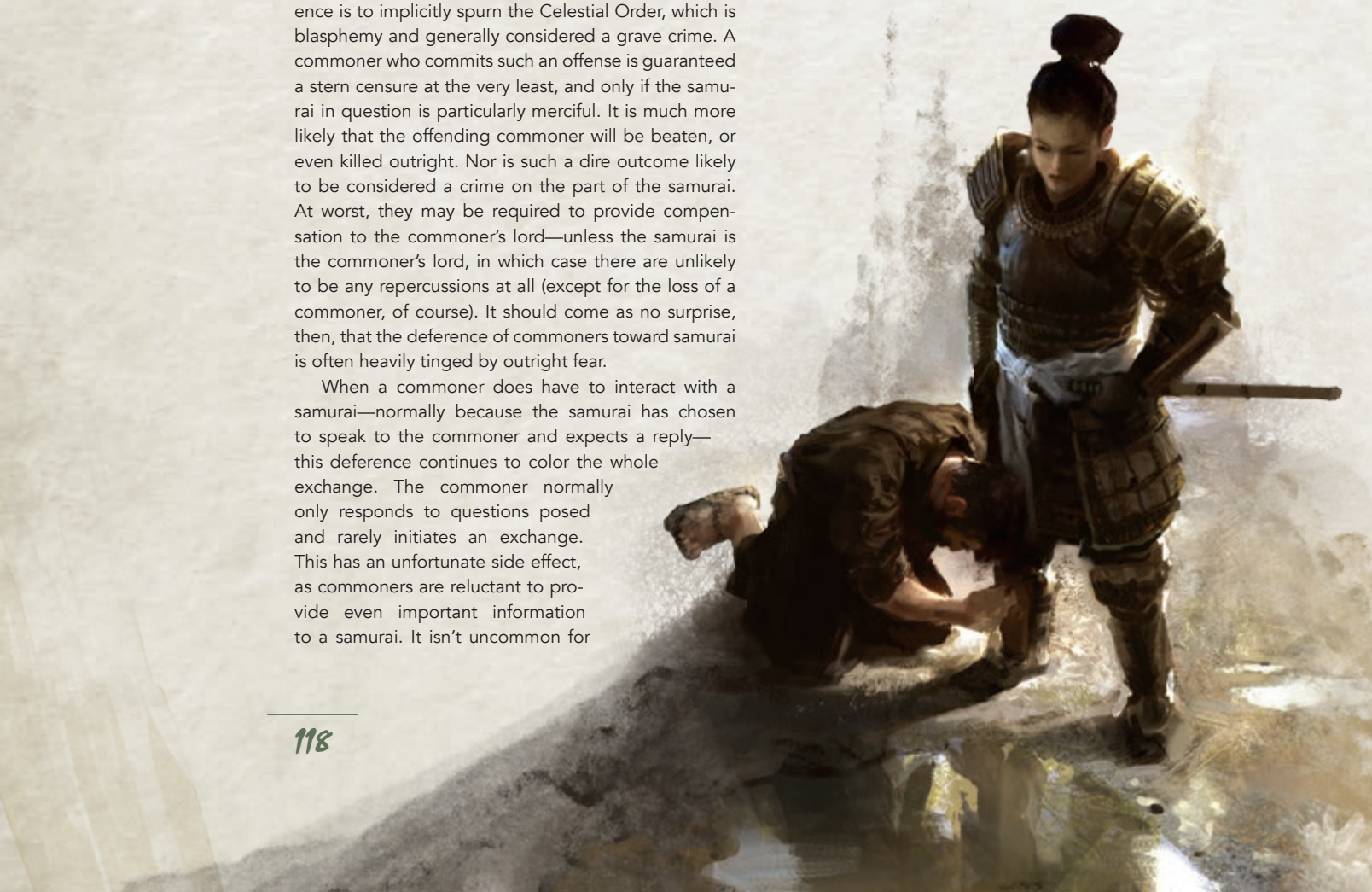
For a commoner not to offer this pervasive deference is to implicitly spurn the Celestial Order, which is blasphemy and generally considered a grave crime. A commoner who commits such an offense is guaranteed a stern censure at the very least, and only if the samurai in question is particularly merciful. It is much more likely that the offending commoner will be beaten, or even killed outright. Nor is such a dire outcome likely to be considered a crime on the part of the samurai. At worst, they may be required to provide compensation to the commoner's lord—unless the samurai is the commoner's lord, in which case there are unlikely to be any repercussions at all (except for the loss of a commoner, of course). It should come as no surprise, then, that the deference of commoners toward samurai is often heavily tinged by outright fear.

When a commoner does have to interact with a samurai—normally because the samurai has chosen to speak to the commoner and expects a reply—this deference continues to color the whole exchange. The commoner normally only responds to questions posed and rarely initiates an exchange. This has an unfortunate side effect, as commoners are reluctant to provide even important information to a samurai. It isn't uncommon for samurai in the Empire to be surprised by a crisis that the commoners have known about for some time.

Regardless of the samurai's actual status, a commoner always uses the honorific -sama, and then only following the samurai's family name (for example, "Bayushi-sama") or the generic term "samurai" ("samurai-sama"). While speaking to a samurai, a commoner almost always maintains a subservient posture and absolutely avoids making eye contact with the samurai.

A More Nuanced Reality

The actual relationship between samurai and commoners can be more complicated than the rules of etiquette might indicate. The vast majority of samurai are keenly aware that the Empire only functions because of the labor of the common people: burakumin handling dead bodies and disposing of refuse, heimin craftspeople making the things necessary for day-to-day life, merchants conducting the sordid business of commerce that underpins the economy, and most important of all, farmers and fisherfolk producing the Empire's food. For this reason, most samurai treat commoners with a civil indifference, recognizing their contributions to the Empire but otherwise largely ignoring them unless there is some specific reason not to.



GAMING INTERACTIONS BETWEEN SAMURAI AND COMMONERS

Samurai who are either particularly benevolent or cruel to peasants may be good candidates for related advantages and disadvantages. These can be gained during character creation or during play (see page 99 of the core rulebook). A benevolent samurai could gain, for example, Support of (the Common People) or Paragon of a Bushidō Tenet (Compassion); a cruel samurai might gain Whispers of Cruelty, Intolerance (for Commoners), or Disdain for a Bushidō Tenet (Compassion). In addition, the new advantages and disadvantages in **Chapter 7** of this book include appropriate options such as Adopted Peasant and Peasant Loathing.

A note of caution, however: while a PC may wish to play a samurai who treats commoners in a contemptuous or even cruel way, players and GMs should be wary of allowing roleplaying this contempt or cruelty in too graphic or explicit a fashion. A roleplaying game is supposed to be an enjoyable pastime, so describing actions that make those around the table uncomfortable and detract from that enjoyment should be avoided. A GM and players should discuss potentially contentious issues such as this one before beginning a campaign, to ensure that everyone has the same expectations and understanding.

Some samurai go further than this, however, taking the Bushidō tenet of Compassion beyond its broad sense of protecting commoners from large-scale harm, such as military incursions or natural disasters. Instead, they apply it to their individual dealings with the peasantry, treating them with a polite courtesy; some even go so far as to protect commoners from any abuse. Such samurai are rare—they are more commonly found among the Phoenix and Unicorn clans—and are often considered odd at best by their peers. They are sometimes even ridiculed for having sympathy for mere peasants. However, such samurai also tend to gain great favor from the commoners, even becoming considered a "hero of the people."

Conversely, some samurai have nothing but contempt for commoners, taking their "less than human" status in the Celestial Order as justification for mistreatment and cruelty. Some will even answer a slight, real or perceived, with death. This means that the samurai is failing to follow the Bushidō tenet of Compassion, and it can entail consequences, even dire ones. Killing commoners who are vassals to another lord can rouse the anger of that lord, leading the lord to demand compensation or even to apply pressure to the samurai's lord to take action. Other samurai may also take exception to mistreating or killing servants of the Empire, no matter how lowly, for what may be minor transgressions. Finally, the commoners themselves may be aggravated into action, despite their supposed subservience to samurai. A mob of vengeful peasants infuriated over harm done to friends and loved ones could easily overwhelm, injure, or kill even a skilled bushi. The threat of dire consequences afterward may not be enough to forestall commoners enraged to rash action.

Ultimately, the reality is that most samurai understand the important contributions made by commoners in service to the Empire, and all personally benefit from them. The following sections describe ways in which the relationship between samurai and commoners can be mutually beneficial, albeit with some potential for problems.

SAMURAI AND THE BONGE

Many samurai recognize the bonge, "those who work," as being valuable to the Empire and, potentially, valuable to themselves in turn. Some commoners work as servants in strongholds of power, such as castles and the various courts of the Empire. The vast majority of the bonge, however, live and work outside of castles in the farms, villages, towns, and cities of Rokugan, and it is in these places that samurai are most likely to encounter them.

Farmers and Fishers

Those who grow and harvest the Empire's food, such as farmers and fisherfolk, are considered the highest status of the bonge because of the vital work they do: without food, the Empire would starve. Accordingly, samurai lords tend to be particularly protective of their farmers, generally treat them well (or at least, not harshly) and often conspicuously reward those who work particularly hard or produce especially bountiful crops. Not only does this ensure the lord has enough food for their own household and vassals, and for the taxes they owe to their superiors, but they may have enough surplus to trade or sell.

Most samurai lords even treat farmers belonging to their enemies well. Not only is the wanton slaughter of farmers severely frowned upon by other samurai and the Imperial authorities (even if destroying an enemy's means of producing food could offer a significant advantage), but a lord who does so risks having the same done to their own farmers in retaliation. Moreover, in the event of victory over their foes, a samurai lord who hasn't hurt their farmers stands to come into possession of their lands and farms with a minimal amount of disruption and unrest.

By extension, most samurai treat farmers reasonably well, whether they belong to their lord or not. Samurai who do not mistreat farmers find the commoners accommodating in return, readily offering food and lodging when they are far from inns or way stations, or aid if they are in distress because of injuries or other mishaps. Conversely, samurai who mistreat farmers and their families may find accommodation scant, food suddenly "scarce," and other forms of aid simply not available.

Craftspeople

Commoners who make the tools and implements necessary for the basic business of the Empire—everything from baskets and barrels to rope and farm tools—rank below farmers in terms of status among the bonge. That said, skilled tradespeople and craftspeople are, in their own way, nearly as valuable, as their work enables the farming that is so vital to the Empire's survival.

Another important type of skilled bonge craftspeople are weaponsmiths. Note that they do not make the most important samurai weapons; no bonge smith would be allowed to manufacture a katana or wakizashi even if they had the knowledge to do so, nor would any samurai consider carrying such a weapon. However, weapons are needed in large quantities by ashigaru, and the multitude of yari and other weapons borne by the rank-and-file peasant levies are manufactured by bonge weaponsmiths.

From the perspective of a samurai lord, well-made tools, implements, and weapons are not only essential to the functioning of the lord's estates, but they represent another important source of income in trade and sales. Accordingly, just as with farmers, most samurai will treat bonge craftspeople reasonably well, as long as they show proper deference.

Merchants

Because they make nothing of value themselves and only deal in the commercial activities related to things made by others, merchants have the lowest status of the bonge. They are also those commoners with whom samurai have the most complex relationship. On the one hand, because they deal in matters of commerce—which most samurai consider distasteful and shun—they are generally treated with disdain, or even contempt. On the other hand, many samurai are quite happy to accrue and hold wealth, and having skilled merchants as vassals is an important means of doing just that. It isn't uncommon for a samurai to loathe merchants for the crass commercialism they represent and yet maintain surprisingly close relationships with them in order to benefit from their trade.

Not all samurai despise trade and commerce, however. The Daidoji family of the Crane Clan, the Yasuki family of the Crab Clan, and the Ide family of the Unicorn Clan all include samurai who engage in commercial activities. Among the other families of these clans, and among the other clans generally, there are also individual samurai who do so. Still, even in these cases, bonge merchants play an important role as those who actually conduct negotiations and directly oversee the shipment and receipt of goods and handling of currency on behalf of their samurai lords. In such cases, the samurai act as patrons to the merchants, giving them broad direction along with the support they need to be successful in their commercial enterprises. The merchants, in turn, drive the hardest bargains and make the most profit they can on behalf of their samurai patrons. This generally allows the samurai to maintain a distance from the unseemly conduct of business activities while still enjoying the benefits.

More traditional samurai may look upon this sort of arrangement with contempt, despairing that their materialistic peers will never live up to the true ideals of Bushidō. In doing so, they may fail to realize—or choose to ignore—that wealthy samurai live better and are often more influential in the Empire's affairs.

SAMURAI AND THE BURAKUMIN

The burakumin—those commoners lowest in the Celestial Order—do the unpleasant things that need to be done to keep the Empire functioning, such as disposing of refuse, handling and cremating corpses, and myriad other odious tasks. These commoners, also known as hinin, face a degree of contempt and disdain from samurai far greater than that experienced by the bonge. At least the bonge are considered to have a degree of humanity; hinin are not considered to be people at all, just property. It is extraordinarily rare for a samurai to deign to interact with hinin, and when they do, the outcome is almost always a bad one for the hinin in question. From a legal standpoint, killing a hinin is generally considered a property crime at worst, similar to vandalism, and may require some degree of compensation—if the lord owning the hinin cares enough to press the matter.

Still, the Bushidō tenet of Compassion isn't entirely abandoned when it comes to hinin. Their wanton slaughter in significant numbers can inconvenience a lord, while reflecting poorly on the samurai perpetrating it. Most samurai simply ignore hinin, giving them no more consideration than they would objects or animals. This suits most hinin, who are glad to draw no attention from samurai, whom they find terrifying for legitimate reasons—from their perspective, samurai are unpredictable and deeply dangerous, and becoming involved with them can spell disaster. Of course, this ignorance cuts both ways; if hinin are suffering in some fashion, only a samurai who is a true paragon of Compassion is likely to spare any effort to assist them, or even notice. Such is the injustice of Rokugan's social order, and hinin bear much of the brunt of it.

That said, there are some specific types of burakumin to whom samurai pay significant attention.

Geisha

The entertainers known as geisha, meaning "artful person," occupy a unique place in Rokugani society. They are hinin, so they are considered nonpersons, meaning one would expect them to be treated in the same way as butchers, tanners, and refuse collectors. Because they are nonpersons, however, samurai may seek out the company of geisha, and while they provide entertainment and companionship, the samurai can relax the rigid emotional control they normally maintain. Since the geisha isn't considered a person, there is no shame in showing open emotion, any more than when one is completely alone.

These individuals—who may be of any gender—undergo a grueling training process that takes years. Geisha are skilled at engaging samurai in conversation and in offering performances including signing, reciting poetry, dancing, and playing musical instruments. Beginners must perform to exacting standards before achieving the title of apprentice geisha, much less true geisha. Many do not succeed. Among those who do, the very best can become highly sought after. Most of these obtain the patronage of powerful samurai, who benefit from the prestige associated with their skilled vassal—not to mention the considerable income that can result. Contrary to certain gaijin misconceptions, geisha are not courtesans.

It is because geisha can be extremely proficient at providing samurai with entertainment and companionship, while allowing a safe venue for the release of pent-up emotions, that some samurai become enamored of particular geisha; some even fall in love. It isn't unheard of for children to result from the union of a samurai and a geisha. In most cases, such offspring go unacknowledged by the samurai in question and grow up as hinin themselves. There are some samurai, however, who may choose to acknowledge or even adopt the child, or arrange for the child to be adopted by others. In a few instances, the child may even be raised as a samurai—a dangerous secret indeed.

Despite their lowly place in the Celestial Order, some geisha are able to gain the trust of their samurai clients and become influential in ways far beyond those of other hinin. Some take advantage of this trust to learn their clients' secrets, which then become fodder for espionage and blackmail. A few are even cultivated for this very purpose, particularly by the Scorpion Clan. More than one samurai has let their guard slip too far while in the comfortable and intimate presence of a geisha, only to say too much and find their lives disrupted or even ruined as a result.

Torturers

In order to obtain a conviction in a Rokugani judicial court, a confession is normally required from the accused (see **Crime and Punishment**, on page 89). Magistrates and judges prefer that a confession be provided voluntarily, but if it is not—as is often the case—the accused often faces torture to make them give one. Since no honorable samurai would be willing to engage in such an unseemly practice as applying torture, hinin are used for the purpose. Further, the act of torture is unclean, beneath even heimin.

Hinin torturers form an important part of a magistrate's retinue—an unfortunate reality. These skilled torturers must be much more than just brutes. The objective is to obtain a confession, not inflict needless suffering. Accordingly, skilled torturers are, in a twisted way, "artists" in their own right; the very best can cause an accused person to provide a confession under the mere threat of suffering. Because of their deep understanding of human anatomy and the many ways harm can be inflicted upon it, some torturers also become quite adept at assisting magistrates in investigations, unraveling the types and sequence of injuries on a murder victim, for example. Such proficient torturers can become highly sought after among magistrates. In their own way, they can become as influential with their lord as the best geisha are with theirs.

SAMURAI AND GAIJIN

Gaijin, or "barbarians," are those humans who originate from places other than Rokugan or, in the case of the tribal peoples known as the Yobanjin, humans who originated in what is now Rokugan but refused to follow the Kami at the dawn of the Empire. Regardless of their specific origins, what characterizes gaijin to the Rokugani is that they are not part of the Celestial Order at all. This makes them actually less than hinin; even "nonpeople" have their functions within the Celestial Order. This belief helps fuel a profound xenophobia in the Empire, as most Rokugani samurai avoid any contact with gaijin whatsoever.

That said, there is some interaction between samurai of the Empire and gaijin. It tends to be limited and specific, occurring mostly between samurai of the Unicorn and Mantis, and foreign powers such as the Ivory Kingdoms, Pavarre, and the Mweneta Empire. The Unicorn and, occasionally, the Dragon and Phoenix Clans also have some contact with the various foreign nations in and beyond the great deserts lying north and west of the Empire. The Phoenix Clan has also interacted with the Yobanjin historically, though it generally disavows such contact publicly. The foreign gaijin are normally the ones to initiate contact, as they seek to establish trade and diplomatic relations with the Empire. Most samurai generally shun these overtures, seeing little value and only risk—including threats to both their social status and their spiritual purity—by allowing themselves to enter the presence of beings who are not part of the Celestial Order.

More progressive, curious, or opportunistic samurai, however, are known to sometimes engage with gaijin; a few go so far as to learn some of the customs and even the languages of these strange foreigners. Traditionalist samurai, of course, consider this akin to blasphemy, and may even see such interactions as crimes—though legal enforcement varies regionally, strict in some lands and lax in others. Accordingly, samurai who choose to engage with gaijin had best do so with utter discretion, or hold the power and influence needed to blunt any criticism directed their way.

USING FOREIGNERS IN A GAME

While Rokugan is, of course, the focus of the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game*, the Emerald Empire is only one nation among potentially many in the world. Two of the most prominent are the Ivory Kingdoms, which draws heavily on the ancient culture and folklore of the real-world Indian subcontinent, and the Mweneta Empire, which is based loosely on civilizations of ancient real-world sub-Saharan Africa. GMs are, of course, free to develop these nations for their game or to develop their own nations. The many and varied cultures of the real world can provide ample inspiration for creating interesting fictional nations, although GMs should do so in a respectful way to avoid turning a rich and nuanced culture into a potentially offensive caricature.

In any case, Rokugani xenophobia inevitably permeates interactions between samurai and representatives of any foreign power. If PCs choose to engage with foreigners, they should do so knowing that they run the risk of drawing the ire, or even hostility, of more traditional samurai who view them as dangerous barbarians regardless of their origin.

Roads and Rivers

The roads and rivers of Rokugan are the arteries that sustain the Emerald Empire. They carry food, mineral wealth, valuables, travelers, and soldiers throughout the provinces of the Empire.

HIGHWAYS (KAIDŌ)

The history and politics of the Emerald Empire can be read in its roads. The Crab and Lion Clans favor heavily built roads to support the rapid movement of soldiers and supplies, while the great plains of the Unicorn Clan are crisscrossed by soft dirt tracks: roads created more by horse traffic than by any engineering.

The largest and most well-traveled roads in Rokugan are known collectively as the Five Highways or the Emperor's Road (see page 130). These roads stretch into the hearts of all the clan lands, facilitating commerce, communication, and even war.

Branching off of the great highways are numerous smaller paths built to enable swift travel within a particular clan's territory. These roads are essential for samurai and lower classes alike, but they are not without their dangers. Bandits often lie in wait for merchant caravans, and heavy rains can turn a well-packed track into so much mud.

Travelers in Crane or Dragon territory may fall victim to more intentional dangers. The Crane build their roads with blind corners and sudden changes of direction. These slow down advancing armies and provide opportunities for the skirmishers of the Daidoji family to take larger forces by surprise before fading away to escape retaliation. The roads through the Dragon Clan's mountainous holdings are similarly treacherous, with narrow passes and steep climbs that help compensate for the clan's low numbers in the event of attack.

The Five Highways and major roads are dotted with toll stations and way stations where travelers can stop for the night if they cannot reach the next village. Roadhouses are simple buildings with sleeping futons, cooking firepits, and a well. It's considered gravely dishonorable to leave a roadhouse in disrepair, for anyone may have to seek shelter there. Most roadhouses are maintained by the nearest village or town, which they are considered to be part of. Most towns and villages are located on a road, or at least not far off from one, meaning that only the most remote of villages can safely ignore being prepared for travelers. If a road is well traveled, all the villages along it are sure to host a teahouse, though some may be larger than others.

The Emperor requires that the Great Clans maintain roads within their territory, and no clan champion or provincial daimyō would even think of shirking this duty. Nonetheless, maintenance of roads is a great drain on coffers and the heimin workforce. Consequently, most clans fulfill the Emperor's requirements, and do no more. However, on borders between clan holdings, the roads often fail to meet Imperial standards. Clan representatives are inevitably quick to reassure Imperial surveyors that such conditions are merely a temporary state of affairs due to bandits or weather, not willful neglect by a defense-minded daimyō.

THE TRAVELOGUE OF MIYA HISANO

Some samurai never leave their home province, bound there by duty, but even these samurai know the roads and rivers of the Emerald Empire through the Travelogue of Miya Hisano. This collection of thirty-six woodblock prints follows the artist's travels during her year as a rōnin.

Hisano's prints depict a range of scenes. Her view of the Kaiu Wall is a study in contrast, and she presents the rice fields of the Crane coast at the height of their pastoral glory. Perhaps the most poignant print depicts an ise zumi monk in meditation, almost appearing to be one with the mountain rising behind him.

Accompanying the prints are stories from the road, excerpts from Miya Hisano's journals, and folk histories collected from the various clans. The wealth of material has made the travelogue, first printed in 1088, an enduring work; most libraries boast at least one copy.

Travelers attempting to follow the path of Hisano's journey may wonder privately at the authenticity of her tales, and other travelogues often dispute the details of her account. However, no other document has managed to capture the spirit of the Empire in all its sacred totality.



ROADS AND TERRAIN

The purpose of a road is to facilitate safe, quick travel. However, there are times when, due to neglect or sabotage, a road may be as treacherous as the surrounding terrain, or even more so.

- Muddy or uneven roads may be considered Entangling terrain. Experienced travelers know to watch the weather and prepare for roads that steal sandals and trap pack animals.
- Less-traveled roads are sometimes allowed to decay precipitously. Broken cobbles can shatter axles or turn ankles, and wooden bridges soon succumb to rot. Invaded clans may even sabotage their own roads to slow an enemy advance. These stretches may be considered Dangerous terrain.
- The Taint of the Shadowlands is reaching ever deeper into the Empire, and Defiled terrain may be found anywhere. The sort of running battle that occurs on roads can easily lead to uncremated bodies and restless ghosts.
- Certain pilgrimage routes may become Hallowed terrain either through the prayers of priests and shugenja or simply through careful, honorable maintenance.
- In these troubled times, roads of Imbalanced terrain are becoming more common. Particularly in Phoenix lands, the preponderance of fire kami have left long stretches of road scorched and dry, even during a rainfall.

THE ROAD OF THE THOUSAND SHRINES

The Road of the Thousand Shrines lies in the lands of the Phoenix Clan. The roadside is dotted with frequent, small shrines—one for each Fortune, so it is said. Only the truly desperate or pious use this way, for to stop and pay homage at each shrine causes interminable delay in a journey, but failure to do so invokes the wrath of the spirits.

Everyone has heard a story about some heretic or criminal who sought to use this route to escape from pious pursuers. Such stories invariably claim the culprits were never seen again, but whether this is because they escaped to a distant place or suffered the wrath of the kami, no one can say.

Travel Times

Distances in Rokugan are hard to pin down. For most travelers, factors like the weather and the quality of the roads mean that travel times can vary greatly even along familiar routes.

The question is more fraught for those who have access to the Emperor's approved maps. The Imperial cartographers commissioned to map the Empire did their best, but their technology, the terrain itself, and time constraints made taking accurate measurements extremely difficult. Worse, some clans suspect that certain bureaucrats have tainted the maps as well, resulting in hidden villages and false shortcuts meant to protect or expose political allies or rivals.

Regardless, all official maps are approved by the infallible Emperor himself, and pointing out inaccuracies is an act of potentially fatal rudeness. If something isn't on an official map, it's best to acknowledge that it doesn't exist. To deal with these deficiencies, local lords have found it worth the investment to have their clan magistrates or spies create detailed—and proprietary—maps of their own provinces. They are very careful to keep these maps away from the eyes of any Imperial officials, lest they imply that the Imperial maps are somehow lacking.

Travel Passes

Traffic damages roads. That damage must be repaired, and regular maintenance costs money. In the Emerald Empire, this problem is addressed through a system of travel passes, which travelers obtain in exchange for a specified donation toward the upkeep of the roads they are traveling on.

Shrines, temples, inns, and other businesses issue *tsūkō-tegata* to commoners traveling on business, pilgrims, and occasionally even samurai on the road in times of peace. These issuers may be responsible for local road maintenance or may simply collect these fees for the local lord. Literally meaning "passage wooden pass," tsūkō-tegata are reusable wooden tablets inscribed with information on the route and sealed in red by the issuing party. There are no laws governing their use and thus no guarantee that magistrates or clan patrols will accept them; their authority extends only so far as a magistrate recognizes the issuer's seal and approves of the nature of the bearer's business.

Most traveling samurai obtain a passport, or travel papers, from their lord or the lord of the lands through which they travel. Emerald Magistrates, certain other members of the Imperial bureaucracy, clan champions and family daimyō have the authority to issue travel papers granting the bearer free permission to travel between the territories of different clans. Clan magistrates, provincial daimyō, and governors can issue only more limited passes, such as for travel to a particular location in another territory for a specific purpose, or to

travel freely within their own territory. Considering the importance of travel papers, it is no surprise that lords and magistrates of a more covetous nature can make considerable profit or acquire numerous favors.

Travel papers indicate the samurai's identity, describe the clothes they wear and weaponry they carry, and specify where they are coming from and where they are going. Each time the samurai crosses a checkpoint on their route, their pass is stamped or signed so that their progress can be tracked—and so that each pass can only be used once. Toll stations often serve as check points, and in turn may be located at a way station or inn. The frequency of check points—and roving patrols—depends entirely on the whims and resources of the local lord.

In practice, some lords use travel papers as another political tool. A daimyō who wishes to prevent a troublesome guest from returning to their own master might simply withhold travel papers for the return journey—often, by referring the samurai to a subordinate who is impossible to locate or who assures the samurai that the papers will be ready "soon."

Because horses' hooves are more damaging to roads than human feet, their use requires special travel passes with correspondingly higher fees. Most clans issue only a limited number of such passes each year, a contributing factor to the scarcity of horses within the Empire.

Travel papers and tsūkō-tegata are most strongly and consistently enforced on the major roads that the Emperor acknowledges and that appear on official maps. Peasant tracks are too poorly maintained and often too dangerous for magistrates to bother policing. These byways are even more dangerous without a local guide—they tend to twist and meet in unexpected ways, making it easy to become lost. Finding a trustworthy guide can be a task in itself, particularly as some enterprising bandits pose as guides, luring travelers into isolated and disorienting stretches of road before springing their trap. Many merchants and other wealthy travelers who must travel outside of the Emperor's Road choose to hire rōnin to protect them from bandits.

RIVERS (KAWA)

Many of the large rivers that cross the Emerald Empire serve as natural highways, carrying trade and military forces alike. When the weather is fair and the kami are kind, travel by boat can be significantly faster than by road. That the Empire's trading hubs tend to lie along these rivers has cemented the rivers' strategic importance.

Throughout history, major cities have tended to develop along major rivers. Rivers provide resources in the form of water and fish, as well as an all-important means of travel. Many heimin spend their lives on these natural highways. Their boats, flat-bottomed wooden craft with a covered shelter in the middle, typically propelled by poles, are a common sight.

Travel by river is highly dependent on the season, the weather, and the whims of the river spirits. Further, traveling by river instead of by land makes it harder to avoid way stations and other checkpoints, and it can leave the traveler vulnerable to blockades and to attack from river banks. Nevertheless, traveling samurai often have little choice but to embrace these dangers.

Rivers that are too fast or treacherous for boating act as important natural boundaries. Stretches of rapids can extend for miles, leaving individual travelers and armies alike to march well out of their way in search of safer crossing. Fordable shallows are of immense strategic importance and are typically fortified on one or both sides by local military forces.

Most of Rokugan's bridges are narrow wooden structures sufficient for no more than two or three people to walk abreast, and they often command high tolls for the privilege of passing. In the mountains, the Dragon Clan maintains great suspension bridges that sway in the wind over thousand-foot drops.

On the Islands of Spice and Silk, the Mantis Clan cultivates living bridges in the tropical forests. These bridges can take years to develop as the bridge-makers encourage vines planted on either side of a river or ravine to grow together. Their construction is typically carried out by monks who undertake the task as a meditation and to honor certain earth kami.

Rokugani rivers are home to one or more powerful water kami, and having a shugenja on board can greatly speed up a journey. Portions of a river with a weak or displeased water kami may be prone to shifting sandbars or drying up due to drought. A fire kami may delight in churning up violent rapids, while strange visions may dance in the spray of a waterfall where air kami have made their home.

The spirits of a river have turned the tides of battle throughout Rokugani history. In a river battle, flat-bottomed boats negotiate the narrow spaces, each trying to pin another so that it can be boarded. After an enemy boat is boarded, fighting is resolved hand to hand. During these desperate struggles, shugenja can call upon the kami of the river to suddenly shift the currents to allow for better maneuvering, raise sandbars to pin enemy vessels, or draw forth great waves to destroy boats entirely.

THE TIDAL LANDBRIDGE

The Tidal Landbridge connecting Crane and Crab Clan holdings is one of the wonders of the natural world. It crosses the mouth of Earthquake Fish Bay, and when exposed by low tide, it creates a valuable shortcut for traders.

Control of the landbridge has been contested for centuries, and both clans maintain a garrison on their side of the bridge, ostensibly for registering travelers.

In 715, the Hida garrison was attacked by Shadowlands forces and only saved by the timely intervention of Daidoji Masashigi, of the Crane Clan, who led his forces over the bridge. Masashigi died fighting as the tide came in, and the Crab erected a shrine in his honor that stands to this day.

WAY STATIONS

Way stations, also known as post stations or post towns, exist, at least in theory, for the sole purpose of supporting those who travel the Empire's roads and rivers on official Imperial business. Imperial officials and magistrates traverse the Hantei's domain and rest at these stations maintained for their needs. The smallest way stations provide for the basic necessities: food, rest, and shelter. The Great Clans and Minor Clans, as well as the Imperial families, maintain these stations for the Emperor.

At each way station, samurai may find porter stations, stables, inns and homes for lodging, a variety of local fare, equipment necessary for travel, and more. Local merchants, heimin, and rōnin intermingle—as much as that is possible—with clan samurai and provide a network of local knowledge impossible to tap into elsewhere. Magistrates may employ reputable rōnin as yoriki and yōjimbō at these stations, update their official maps, find entertainment, and obtain needed rest. Importantly, most way stations serve as check points and collect tolls—whether formally, or due to the proprietor's desire to keep out the riffraff and maintain their facilities.

FORGING AHEAD

In desperate times, a samurai may have to stoop to forgery in order to carry out their daimyō's commands.

Forging a set of travel papers is no great feat for a calligrapher with access to the correct inks and waxes, requiring a TN 2 Composition (Air) check. The TN to spot the forgery is equal to the bonus successes on the roll to prepare the document.

Particularly brazen samurai may be able to bluff their way through an encounter with an appropriate Courtesy or Performance check. After all, it is terribly rude to insinuate that a samurai is traveling without permission.

ADVENTURE SEED: BLACK MARKET

一 **Hook** On a small side road, there is an unofficial way station. Recently, there have been reports of strange, possibly Tainted, artifacts being traded through the black market there. The PCs must investigate, perhaps at the request of their lords, an Emerald Magistrate, or another ally.

二 **Rising Action** The proprietor of the way station is a disgraced rōnin shugenja, previously of the Dragon Clan. She swears that she has left the kami behind and that they no longer speak to her. Instead, she practices Perfect Land Shinseism and sees the way station as an extension of that egalitarian philosophy. On the PCs' first night at the station, they hear screaming as a brawl turns horrifically violent, peasants tearing each other apart.

三 **Climax** As events spiral out of control, can the PCs root out the source of the Taint before it drives the rest of the way station's residents to senseless violence?

Typically, way stations are found on routes between cities and major towns and at important intersections where several roads meet. Specialized stations provide safe harbor along high-traffic rivers. Way stations are larger than simple roadside inns and roadhouses. Their location requires them to be self-sustaining, so they may have extensive gardens, scholars or priests who can treat injury, and so forth. Many way stations keep a small garrison of guards in case of attack, but the banner of the Imperial Chrysanthemum has historically been protection enough against all but the most desperate of bandits.

Way stations may be a welcome sight to travelers with official documents, but for those without papers or passes, they represent a real danger. As much as they exist to help travelers, way stations often are also the most prominent Imperial presence in a particular area, and part of their mandate is to regulate travel. Depending on the particular station, a traveler without papers may be able to charm or bribe their way through, but often it is safer just to go around.

Unofficial way stations are technically illegal, but they are often tolerated for the services they provide beyond the remit of the Imperial stations. They are typically found far from the official roads, on treacherous tracks that serve as shortcuts for those in desperate hurry or alternate routes for travelers without the Emperor's blessing. These stations naturally attract the coarser elements of humanity, often hosting gambling dens, brothels, and black markets. High social standing is no guarantee of safety or welcome at an illegal station, for the proprietors and guests are the worst sort of people: the only thing they "honor" is money.

Despite their seedy reputation, unofficial way stations are popular among rōnin, heimin, and others who are often unwelcome in proper way stations. Even honorable samurai may find themselves in need of something that only the black markets can provide, such as forged documents, opium, poisons, or other rare, disreputable, or illicit goods.


Lost Monk Road
Station
TEMPLE OF DAIKOKU
KITCHEN
DINING AREA
SHRINE OF THE RIVER KAMI
TRAVELERS' LODGINGS
STABLES
KITCHEN
BEDROOMS
OFFICE
OFFICE
DINING AREA
STUDY
HOUSE
SIGNBOARDS
BEDROOM AND WASHROOM
BEDROOMS
SAMURAI LODGINGS
SHOPS
TEAHOUSE
FISHERS' HUT
MARKET
STORAGE
RESIDENCES

THE PLAINS

Rokugan's rolling plains can be a strong temptation to travelers. Why go out of the way by road when one can plot a course straight to one's destination? For the riders of the Unicorn Clan, the plains are just that: a friendly shortcut when time is of the essence.

Samurai of other clans avoid travel across open plains whenever possible, however, and for good reason. Though their terrain at first appears mild and easy to traverse, the plains hold many dangers. They are home to wild animals that may attack out of fear or herd instinct, and wildfires can spread quickly from a single lightning strike or careless spark. In places, the grass grows taller than a Crab bushi's head; these areas can stretch for miles, and they are almost impossible to navigate. Indeed, the lack of good landmarks makes navigating across the plains hazardous at the best of times.

On the plains farthest from the tempering forces of civilization, the spiritual landscape can be wild and unpredictable. Areas of desecration can fester for years, and the kami there may be unaccustomed to heeding the invocations of shugenja. There are many tales of powerful spirits that dwell in the plains, old ones that are best left undisturbed. Sometimes, these dangers manifest quite literally on the doorsteps of farmers and in rural villages.

SESSHŌ-SEKI

In Lion Clan lands, there is a story of a stone, a great boulder in the Plains of Battle. No grass grows near it, leaving a great ring barren all around, and animals that approach it die, fall, and rot where they lie. Even birds flying above the stone are stricken and fall from the sky, so that the bones of the dead are thick on the ground.

These tales are often told from the perspective of a traveling priest—the friend of a friend of the teller—and the teller relates that this priest saw something on the stone. A spirit. A fox with nine tails, some say, or a woman weeping into her hands. Some say that the spirit is chained to the stone, others that it paces back and forth across the circle, reaching out for help but killing all that it touches.

It is said that the stone is all that remains of an oni that plotted to kill the Hantei untold centuries ago. It was slain by the Emerald Champion—a Lion Clan bushi, according to local legend—who cut out its heart and buried the corrupt thing on the plain, sealing it away under a great stone. Perhaps it is this legacy of corruption and evil that calls to certain shadowed figures to come and camp on the edge of death.

THE RIVER OF GOLD (KIN NO KAWA)

The Kin no Kawa is a wide, slow-moving river with its headwaters in the mountains on the northern edge of Scorpion lands. It flows south before emptying into the ocean near the Yasuki estates. At one time, the river was the Scorpion's primary trade route, earning it the name River of Gold.

The waters of the river are clear and bright until it bisects Ryokō Owari Toshi, the "second-largest" city in Rokugan and the hub of the opium trade. The river widens there into the Bay of Drowned Honor before continuing south. According to legend, two samurai met to duel on the Moment's Edge Bridge, which crossed the bay to the north, but a storm blew up and a wave swept one of the samurai over. The other jumped after him to finish their duel, and both bodies washed up on shore the next morning.

There is a less romantic story to the bay: that it's where all the city's dung runs out. Regardless, the bay is lined with warehouses and docks. It serves a critical role in facilitating legitimate trade on the river, and also as a hub of the opium trade.

South of Scorpion lands, the river forks. The smaller branch runs east to the ocean, while the main trunk of the river continues to wind southward. The Fox Clan's palace is built overlooking this juncture. The Fox's inability or unwillingness to stop Mantis raiders from sailing in and attacking Scorpion shipping has been a sore point between the clans for some generations.

The last navigable stretch of the river ends at Clear Water Village—in truth, a city—and below that, the river becomes an impossible tumble of rapids and waterfalls. Clear Water Village is the Crab Clan's best trading port, and as such, it is heavily fortified, with conventional walls surrounding it on land and the immense Kaiu Wave Wall securing the harbor against attacks from the sea.

Innumerable towns and villages have sprung up between these major cities to profit off of the bounty of trade flowing along the river. Such is the temptation of wealth that many of these villages straddle the line between trading and plundering. Each season, merchants from the Scorpion's Bayushi family and the

Crab's Yasuki family have to raise funds and beseech their daimyō for aid to fight back the river pirates. With Mantis Clan raiders growing bolder by the year, the Bayushi and Yasuki have been forced to work more closely together. Meanwhile, the Bayushi use their vassal Rokugo family to control gaming parlors and black markets along the river, profiting off the very pirates that the public face of the family is devoted to fighting.

Yasuki Nobuko, Merchant

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 3 6

Yasuki Nobuko moved to Ryokō Owari Toshi—the City of Lies, the City of Stories—with dreams of making a name for herself. And in a way, she succeeded. Growing up in the Yasuki family, she had learned how to navigate conversations and contracts, how to walk the line between flattery and rebuke. Those skills have made her a central figure in the city's black market.

Nobuko can typically be found in a teahouse and opium den called the Blooming Flower not far from the docks. She conducts her business there, taking money up front with a promise of goods or services delivered by nightfall.

Yasuki Nobuko is a severe, thin-faced woman. She indulges a weakness for sake in the back room of the Flower. A dismal drunk, Nobuko refers to Ryokō Owari as "the City of Dung" when she's in her cups.

Despite her criminal life and connections, Nobuko holds her personal honor beyond reproach. She provides a valuable service to her clan, sending home funds as well as information that would otherwise be beyond their reach. This has allowed her to carve out a place in polite society, fueling her apparent sincerity in dealing with the other nobles in the city. Nobuko's ability as an actor to function in both realms has made her a popular point of contact between the honorable samurai and the underworld, and she has successfully covered for the questionable behavior of some of the city's best-known faces.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
64 HONOR		ENDURANCE	9
35 GLORY		COMPOSURE	16
45 STATUS		FOCUS	6
+2, –2 DEMEANOR · SHREWD		VIGILANCE	4

ARTISAN 2 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 3 | TRADE 4

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Heard Every Story: Social; *Mental*	**Weary of Lies:** Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Inlaid Kiseru: Range 0, Damage 2, Deadliness 2, Concealable, Mundane, Resplendent

Gear (equipped): Fine robes (Physical 1), wakizashi, drinking cup, half-empty sake bottle, pouch of koku and bu

ABILITIES

ANYTHING YOU NEED...

As a downtime activity at a character's request, Nobuko can acquire an item or service of rarity 9 or lower without raising suspicions. The character must pay for the item or service plus a gratuity equal to half the price. Alternately, a PC may make a **TN 3 Commerce (Air) check** to get it in exchange for a debt: if they succeed, they stake 10 honor upon their debt to Nobuko, to be determined by her at a later point, and she gives the item as a "gift."

USING YASUKI NOBUKO

Nobuko is a broker, and as any fence, smuggler, and thief in the city can tell the PCs, she can get them what they need—provided they pay her price.

Nobuko might approach the PCs if they have been looking for something in particular, or they might hear word of her when they are in need of an item or service that she could provide.



THE EMPEROR'S ROAD

There are many roads in the Emerald Empire, but five great highways surpass the others in scope and prominence. These highways are collectively known as the Emperor's Road and as the Five Highways. The Emperor's Road extends into the territories of the Unicorn, Scorpion, Phoenix, Lion, and Crane, where it links important holdings.

The Five Highways were built in the early seventh century during the rule of Hantei XVI, the Steel Chrysanthemum. The Hantei was always paranoid that people were working to usurp his authority, so he ordered the various daimyō of the realm to take on these and other enormous infrastructure projects in order to drain their coffers. The moves may have prolonged his reign, but ultimately he was killed by his own Seppun Honor Guard for the good of the Empire.

The Steel Chrysanthemum chose the locations of the roads with Imperial control in mind. They connected areas loyal to the Hantei with areas where rebellion was simmering, enabling brutal police actions. Since that time, many of these cities have grown into their roles as local extensions of Imperial authority—a trend that the Great Clans have suffered with varying degrees of frustrated silence.

The Five Highways are maintained to this day by Imperial edict and enable swift travel between some of the Empire's major cities. In addition to being broad and level, the roads are generally well guarded and blessed with an unusual number of way stations. Imperial agents, such as tax collectors and Emerald Magistrates, are a more common sight on the Emperor's Road than anywhere else—for better or for worse.

Virtually no trade flows along the Emperor's Road. Merchant wagons and carts are entirely disallowed. Merchants have to use special trade routes instead, which leave them entirely at the whims of the clans. Travelers on the Five Highways are most often courtiers, magistrates, pilgrims, scholars, and others who travel for some honorable purpose.

ASAKO TAISHI, ITINERANT SCHOLAR

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 5

One of many travelers on the Emperor's Road, Asako Taishi is a scholar without peer. Within his family, Taishi earned a reputation as a tenacious and creative researcher, one who uncovered truths that others could—or would—not. For a samurai, this talent can also be a curse. Taishi was expelled from his service in the Asako Libraries after unearthing a fragment of a letter written during the rule of Hantei XVI that would greatly shame the line if it ever saw the light of day.

Remarkably, Taishi took his expulsion in stride. He is an upbeat little man with a bounce in his step even after miles of travel. Unbeknownst to him, Taishi's skills aren't entirely natural but have been fostered by a spirit that has bound itself to him. It is constantly whispering to Taishi that his is a great destiny—that one day, his name will be known across the Empire.

Taishi travels the Emperor's Road on a whim, or so he believes, gathering folklore and songs along the way. Wherever he goes, libraries are open to him, and he has a seemingly endless capacity for memorization.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
40	HONOR	ENDURANCE	12
20	GLORY	COMPOSURE	8
42	STATUS	FOCUS	12
+2, –2	DEMEANOR - PASSIONATE	VIGILANCE	1



ARTISAN 3 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 6 | SOCIAL 1 | TRADE 1

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Perfect Memory: Scholar; *Mental*	**Possessed by Curiosity:** Scholar; *Mental*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Bō: Range 1–2, Damage 6, Deadliness 2, Mundane

Gear (equipped): Fine but neglected robes (Physical 1), wakizashi, tent (small), traveling rations pouch with several zeni and an assortment of interesting rocks and insect shells

ABILITIES

MANJIGEN'S FIXATION

Asako Taishi is driven by the spirit Manjigen, which uses him as a vessel to feed its ceaseless hunger for knowledge. Upon first encountering any PC or Adversary NPC who knows invocations, mahō, kihō, rituals,

or possesses a spiritual or curse type disadvantage, Asako Taishi must make a **TN 3 Theology (Void) check**. If he succeeds, he becomes fascinated by their connection to the supernatural, and seeks to learn more, heedless of the consequences.

ADVENTURE SEED: THE HERETIC'S OBSERVATIONS

一 **Hook** Asako Taishi is in trouble. Two groups he was traveling with have been attacked, and he is certain that the attackers were after him. He is afraid to leave the way station he is staying at without a capable samurai escort, such as the PCs.

二 **Rising Action** While on the road, Taishi is attacked by Daidoji skirmishers bent on retrieving something from his pack: a history of the Emperor's Road that casts doubt on the Hantei bloodline itself (or another heretical or shocking document that fits better with the campaign's focus). The Daidoji are not attempting to kill anyone, although they fight against the PCs if they interfere.

三 **Climax** Taishi is insistent that the document must be made public at court. The spirit that is bound to him seems to want that as well, more so than it cares for Taishi's safety. However, the consequences of such a revelation could be extraordinary, and the PCs' involvement entangles them in the outcome.



HYŌZENSHŌ

Kōbaku Province is a hard, desolate plain even at the height of summer. In the winter, the ground freezes solid and snow comes off the mountains to the east, driven by howling winds. In this least hospitable of Unicorn holdings sits Hyōzenshō, the Outpost of Ice.

Unlike other way stations across the Empire, Hyōzenshō doesn't overlook a road or conventional trade route, and it rarely plays host to Imperial agents. Instead, it sits on a small rise—barely a hill, but enough to set the outpost above the sprawling plain.

During the summer months, the way station sees relatively little use. The cycle of freeze and thaw makes the landscape deceptively treacherous, with sudden soft patches to break a horse's ankle or even swallow horse and rider whole. Most of the native vegetation is tough grass barely suitable for grazing, unlike on the fertile plains to the south and west. An occasional messenger comes through the outpost in need of a fresh steed and a warm meal: luxuries the warden, Utaku Sabuteki, does his best to provide, rationing out meager stores of rice supplemented with birds hunted out on the moor. The smell of burning peat fills the air but does little to drive away the lingering chill.

In the winters, the Battle Maidens arrive, and the thunder of their hooves fills the plain like mighty drums. They bring with them carts of coal for the outpost and rations to last the year, as well as wood for arrows and iron to shoe the horses.

The empty wastes provide a perfect training ground as the elite Utaku cavalry practice wheeling and charging in formation. They are terrible, the beauty of brutality given human form. Led by the fearless Utaku Kamoko, the maidens are ever ready for war.

Thanks to the needs of the Battle Maidens, Hyōzenshō has grown immensely, adding outbuildings like a smithy and extensive stables to what was once a simple watchtower on ground solid enough to pitch tents. Even though it stands nearly empty for most of the year, it could make for a staging area for a major military operation—such as a strike against the Lion to the south. Most clans would be deterred from that approach by the wide stretch of trackless wilderness between Dark Edge Village and the Drowned Merchant River, but such areas are highways for the Unicorn. A mounted force like the Battle Maidens, well supplied with steeds, could cover the stretch in a night and a day and still strike with fresh mounts.

USING UTAKU SABUTEKI

Sabuteki is the consummate quartermaster and an artisan in his own right. He can acquire, mend, or make most things the PCs might need, especially when preparing for a journey. He is not easily swayed by emotions, but appeals to duty resonate deeply with him.

The PCs might encounter Sabuteki when they find themselves stranded somewhere, or they might meet him in Utaku Kamoko's war camp when she rides to battle.

Utaku Sabuteki, Outpost Commander

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 5 4

Utaku Sabuteki, a distant cousin of Utaku Kamoko, handles the affairs of the Outpost of Ice with competence and grace, maintaining it always ready for war. These qualities have endeared him to the similarly warlike Utaku Kamoko. Where she is every inch the gallant leader, Sabuteki is a master of logistics who understands that a strike force without fresh mounts and full bellies is hardly a force at all. Sabuteki comes by his expertise in these matters through his experience as a stable master. Though this is an honorable duty for any Utaku man, Sabuteki's intelligence and reliability earned him the attention of Kamoko, who arranged to bestow upon him the role of warden of Hyōzenshō.

Unlike most Utaku, who are known for speed and intensity in all their undertakings, Sabuteki is measured, methodical, and stoic. Some of his family members find these traits unusual, even frustrating, but Kamoko sees the value of such qualities in the overseer of her outpost. While the position may seem to hold little glory, Sabuteki understands that by remaining year round at the isolated outpost to ensure its preparedness, he plays a vital role in any future battle.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
70	HONOR	ENDURANCE	16
40	GLORY	COMPOSURE	12
40	STATUS	FOCUS	6
+1, +1, –2	DEMEANOR · DEPENDABLE	VIGILANCE	3

5 2 3 2 2

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 5

ADVANTAGES

Equine Expert: Social; *Interpersonal*

DISADVANTAGES

Overly Cautious: Martial; *Mental*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Trident: Range 2, Damage 4, Deadliness 4, Snaring, Wargear

Gear (equipped): Leather-padded robes (Physical 3), katana, wakizashi

Gear (other): Rider's tack, bag of feed, tent (yurt), pillow book written in an unfamiliar but beautiful flowing script

ABILITIES

MASTER OF THE STABLES

Once per game session as a downtime activity, Utaku Sabuteki can prepare any number of horses for a journey, and outfit their riders as well. Each horse and each rider he prepares increases their endurance by 2 until the end of the game session.

ADVENTURE SEED: THE STRANGE EGG

一 **Hook** The traveling PCs come across a group of bandits—possibly rōnin—picking over the corpses of recently killed travelers, including at least one samurai, judging by her sword. Intervening to prevent further despoiling of the dead, the PCs can drive off the bandits with little difficulty.

二 **Rising Action** The only things of note they find are several dead horses—their stock indicating that the samurai was a Unicorn, possibly a Battle Maiden—and a strangely warm egg. The nearest Unicorn outpost is Hyōzenshō, and its inhabitants greatly appreciate the chance to reclaim their fallen comrade's body. In the night, the bandits return in greater numbers, some of them wielding mahō; it seems they have come for the egg.

三 **Climax** At the height of battle, the egg begins hatching. A young creature emerges, with the tail of a snake but the features of a human. Do the samurai treat it with respect and return it to the forest, earning the good will of the returning race? Or do they treat it as a monster or demon and risk making enemies of the ancient reptiles that slumber in Rokugan's forests?

CHAPTER

4

Sacred Spaces



A poor young samurai finds herself wandering a highland forest. As the evening dims, she checks the faded map she snuck out of her clan's library. Somewhere within this forest is a shrine consecrated to a local kami—perhaps she might find shelter there.

Before long, her horse starts at a rustle of bushes here, a flutter of wings there, a darting shadow just at the edge of her vision. She spurs her steed to a canter, then a gallop. Unseen voices rise to an echoing, rattling cackle in response. Beaks and steel identify them: a murder of tengu, on their own territory, each a master of fencing, certainly mischievous, likely murderous—and she is inexperienced, tired, hungry, and alone.

Exhaustion seeps from the samurai's shoulders down through her muscles. Her armor and weapons feel heavy. She tumbles from the saddle. If she must die, at least her horse might escape. Her legs weak and shaking, she kneels beneath an empress tree's leaves. The tengu surround her…and as one, they kneel and bow, thrice times thrice each, and then flee. Bewildered, she returns their bow—and only then notices the faded prayer strips circling the tree's trunk. Alone at last, she sits back among the tree roots, finally letting herself rest. She's found the shrine.

Shrines of the Emerald Empire

As long as these emerald lands have endured, long before even the fall of the Kami, there have been shrines. From the humblest peasant to the Emperor, every Rokugani understands the distinction between sacred and profane, pure and foul. Shrines are the waypoints of every life's journey, marking important events like birth, marriage, and death, as well as connecting the living to the dead. They tie Rokugan to an expansive universe of Heavens and hells, settlements and wildernesses, gods and demons.

Reclusive scholars, wandering ascetics, and revered preachers hypothesize and debate, from humanity's humble vantage point, the nature of the diverse realms that make up the cosmos around, above, and below Rokugan's people. Where did humans exist before birth? Where will they go upon death? What other beings live alongside them? Cobbled together from the best-informed shugenja throughout Rokugani history, what follows seeks to explain how supernatural forces and entities affect the course of human life.

DIFFERENT COSMOLOGIES

Many wise philosophers have noted that the truth can depend a great deal upon one's frame of reference. While Rokugani theologians have come up with a set of explanations that account for the way of the world, and have verified these as best they can, so too have other cultures. In the fantasy world of the *Legend of the Five Rings*, the truth might even literally depend on where one stands

Cosmography of Rokugan

The physical country of Rokugan—"Ningen-dō" in cosmographic terms—occupies a crossroads between several regions of spiritual import. Save for Yume-dō, which follows its own dream logic and dwells in human thought, these realms are not alternate dimensions, realities, planes, or universes. They occupy the same world as Ningen-dō, lying above, below, or beside one another. But their spatial relationship is hardly Euclidean. A map of these realms would resemble a sheet of paper, fragile and old and frayed, folded and crumpled and torn and repaired over and over since time began. One might wake up one day and find the land rent and ripped beside one's home as if by cosmic hands, another realm jutting upward through the gap in the world. Or the transition between realms might be subtler, like a gradual curve that eventually leads to a new perspective on reality.

Time has confused these regions' placement and relationship. Tales from long ago, for example, say the underworld comprised a gateway realm, called Meido; the *sorei*'s, or ancestor spirits', final resting place, called Yomi; and a forgotten hinterland where oni lived, called Jigoku. Humans spoke of Yomi as if it were the whole of the underworld, for Yomi's impregnable borders kept Jigoku's evils in check. But Fu Leng's fall into the underworld ruptured those borders, letting evil taint Yomi as a cadaver might taint holy ground. As Fu Leng, saturated in Jigoku's evil, increased his power and influence, Jigoku encroached further on Yomi, even capturing several unlucky sorei, who suffer there to this day.

Then came the Day of Thunder. Because they so loved the Thunders, the Kami petitioned Heaven that the fallen Thunders might ultimately live alongside them in Heaven instead of risking corruption in Yomi. The stewards of the Heavens went further, transporting the entirety of Yomi and all its sorei into the sky, where Jigoku's defilements could not reach them. Yomi was safe, but the underworld was lost to Jigoku, save for Meido. Emma-Ō, his Kings of Hell, and their loyal mazoku descended from on high to reconquer the world below. They seized the levels now known as Meido, Gaki-dō, and Tōshigoku from the forces of Jigoku, but keeping control of Gaki-dō and Tōshigoku has proved vexing even for one of the greatest gods.

To understand these worlds' relationship, one must understand the soul and karma. The soul of every extant human, demon, animal, ancestor spirit, and god (large or small) has always existed, repeatedly reincarnating upon death. Upon reincarnation, a soul's karma—the spiritual weight of its most recent life's deeds—determines their form and destination. The worst offenders become the underworld's demons and hungry ghosts. Those of middling stature become animals or humans. The most virtuous become sorei.

The Fortunist and Shinseist religions, while formally joined and reconciled by Emperor Hantei Genji's edict, interpret the concept of karma differently. The Fortunes hold that karma comes in good and bad varieties, and that positive and prosocial actions accrue good karma proportional to the effort spent on the action and its effect. Shinsei, the Little Teacher, on the other hand, theorized that all karma is "bad." He taught that every action generates karma, which binds the individual to the reincarnation cycle, although actions motivated by fear, regret, or especially desire generate more. No one has proved one or the other right. Probably, no one ever will.

ABOVE

The Heavens float far above the surface of the earth, above the clouds. Mystical creatures such as dragons and *ki-rin* can fly to the Heavens, and presumably could carry riders there if they deigned to do so—though few tales speak of any mortal worthy enough. The most direct route to the overworld, however, is via sky ladder: any feature, natural or artificial, that allows humans to climb to or descend from the Heavens without the



benefit of flight. The best-known sky ladders, divine gateways guarded and administered by Tengoku's servants, surmount sacred mountains. Others are magical artifacts—folding ladders, chains, grapnels, the feathers of sacred creatures—or even living things like tall trees. Many seem to exist only when the Heavens are in the proper alignment, revealed by the light of the crescent moon or a shining pattern of stars.

Tengoku

Tengoku is where Lady Sun, Lord Moon, the most important Fortunes, the Elemental Dragons, accomplished Emperors of times past, and their staffs of *shinzoku* live. Towering pagodas and bridges constellated with stars rise from dark, billowy clouds that double as rice paddies to feed those who walk above. Handsome shrines of gold, jade, and other stone receive offerings sent from below.

Rokugan's Imperial bureaucracy follows the form and organization of Tengoku's, whereby Lady Sun and Lord Moon rule a cascading pyramid of courtiers and administrators. Petty quarrels, bureaucratic inefficiency, scandalous assignations, and similar imperfections may occasionally spice celestial life, but Tengoku as a whole remains staunchly committed to the orderly operation of the cosmos and the progress of all sentient beings toward wisdom and virtue. Current throne-room debate often concerns the question of what to do about Jigoku. Once, long before the fall of the Kami, Jigoku was a bastion of just reward and rehabilitation, but it devolved into a breeding ground for evil plots. Corrupt demons who twist Jigoku's machineries toward selfish and destructive ends outnumber Emma-Ō's loyal servants, but dividing the honest and just mazoku from the villainous ones challenges even the Fortune of Death himself, whose ever-swelling workload sees him visiting his home in the Heavens less and less each year.

Since Tengoku crowns the literal sky, one of its most important functions is the maintenance of the weather. Elemental Dragons oversee giant divine machineries that cycle the seasons, adjust heat and cold, deliver rain and snow, clear away clouds, and mete out natural disasters.

Yomi

Since the Day of Thunder in the first century, Yomi has been a fine precinct of the Heavens, a sort of province of Tengoku. Sorei walk its halls, manors, and offices, where they fulfill their duties as tutelary caretakers. Most commonly, their duties involve watching over the families they had in their more recent lives. Occasionally, sorei may oversee regions or organizations. One woman, known as Chifune, a merchant without any living blood relatives, devoted her whole life to a large shipbuilding business, treating both employees and clients with the utmost fairness and paying her employees generously. As a sorei, she wound up watching over her shipbuilding business, and she has taken on the protection of similar shipyards, enjoying the veneration and sacrifices of various shipwrights and their laborers.

Yomi's edifices are largely sulfur yellow, a reminder of the subterranean Yellow Springs that originally gave Yomi its name.

BESIDE: SENKYŌ

The realms closest to human life are, paradoxically, the least understood. One might translate the term "Senkyō" as either "enchanted country" or "immortal country." There, in the forests and highlands beyond rice paddies and castle walls, capricious and unpredictable beings wield mystical powers toward ends humans may never grasp.

Legends and folktales describe humans wandering into Rokugan's backcountry, where wild entities either play tricks on them or aid them in their endeavors, depending on the tale. These sentient animals may take the shape of a beast, a human with bestial features, or something in between—or they may shift between these shapes. Souls whose karma rates them higher than common animals but below humans are reborn as these creatures, their mercurial natures tempting them to sow mischief and chaos and squander their shot at a higher rebirth.

Chikushō-dō and Sakkaku

The tales often identify these creatures' untamed territory as Chikushō-dō, the Animals' Path, and Sakkaku, Illusion. They have it almost right. Chikushō-dō and Sakkaku are in fact political categories, not regions—though their adherents do control certain territories. Chikushō-dō's animals are committed to living, and helping one another live, lives of virtue and service that will guarantee them better rebirth. Many, especially among their leadership, are lay Shinseists or even pursue ordination as Shinseist monks or priests. Sakkaku's adherents, though, want nothing of the sort: they believe their animal incarnations are ideal, their final and perfect forms. They think that embracing their animal natures (and all the mayhem they sow) and achieving immortality in their current life is the best use of their time.

Chikushō-dō and Sakkaku treat one another as foreign courts. Their interactions are usually neutrally diplomatic, although each undermines the other's influence through skulduggery, social engineering, and occasionally outright violence. Each one, while made up of individuals rather than territory, dominates some Rokugani wildernesses, keeps out of others, and struggles with their opposite numbers to claim contested territory. Some animal spirits swear allegiance to one or the other, while others walk the line between them or try to play them off each other for their own benefit.

Historically, a Great Tengu has usually been in charge of each court, though that office has sometimes passed to an animal spirit of some other species. Chikushō-dō's oral tradition maintains that one of these Great Tengu, who renounced his name and identified himself simply as "the High Shinseist Priest," learned the Tao of Shinsei personally from Shinsei and Shiba so he could bring Enlightenment to animals. Sakkaku, on the other hand, maintains he did so as an elaborate joke that Chikushō-dō has yet to comprehend.

Yume-dō

Yumeji, the pursuit of supernatural wisdom through dreams, is a fashionable and fast-growing activity among Rokugani of all social classes. Spirits both good and evil, high and low—from hungry ghosts tormenting living folk they blame for their sorry lot to Fortunes announcing great heroes' destinies to them—have communicated with Rokugani via their dreams since time immemorial. However, the era when a samurai might receive Hachiman's nod in their sleep, then wake up to find an enchanted bow and arrows beside their bed is long lost now.

Dreams provide a scandalous and thrilling escape from Rokugan's social conventions and niceties. In Yume-dō, a scholarly samurai and a curious farmer may interact as equals. A beggar may explore a palace in an Emperor's memory. A general may unburden herself to a child. Even lucid dreamers with a little practice can conceal their true identities and appearances beneath a disguise of intention and will. A mazoku may dream he is a lovely human geisha. A fisherman may dream he is a butterfly. Rumors even spread of spies and saboteurs filching secrets from privileged minds through dream.

The question of whether a given interaction was a mere figment of someone's imagination or a legitimate transmission from beyond the veil fascinates budding coteries of dreamwalkers, who practice lucid dreaming and divinatory techniques to explore the Path of Dreams more and more deeply. While interest in this field is growing, the most successful practitioners—the Dreamweavers of the Moth Clan's Kaikoga family—have explored Yume-dō for centuries.

Concerningly, since this pastime has caught on, the veil between the dreamworld and Ningen-dō has begun to fray. Stories of dream-born *yōkai* once thought apocryphal, such as the long-trunked *baku* who either torment sleeping souls or fight off their nightmares, have multiplied fast, particularly stories of sinister baku escaping into the waking world to bedevil the innocent. These stories greatly trouble the Kaikoga, who may ultimately be the only ones with the ability to clean up the mess created by careless dabblers.

BENEATH

Deep underneath the ground on which the people of Rokugan walk, deep beneath the crypts where they leave the honored dead's ashes, beneath the mines drawing ore from the earth, beneath the sea floor and the lava churning below it, deeper than anyone has ever dug, is the underworld. It is ancient, far older than human civilization, old enough that everyone wonders but no one knows what happened in this place before its current use. The underworld comprises stratum upon stratum, regions stacked one atop another like the floors of a crumbling building, or the pages of a decaying book.

A soul weighed down with karma at the end of a selfish and misguided life suffers rebirth as a demon, banished to a realm and an existence of cruelty and pain. Demons must struggle to remain virtuous despite such privations if they hope for a better rebirth. Many stripes of demon and many flavors of hellish dystopia make up the underworld's layers, most of them too remote and too unpleasant for discussion. The best of these worst beings call themselves mazoku: demons bound to serve Emma-Ō and his Kings of Hell and keep the underworld running efficiently and justly. Sacred texts depict these beings as humanlike, but with red or blue skin and sharp claws, teeth, and horns. Mazoku serve the reincarnation cycle as jailers, torturers, prison guards, judges, scribes, couriers, custodians, and sundry other roles. If they acquit themselves honorably, rejecting the savagery that comes easily to one so occupied, perhaps rebirth as an animal or human is in store.

Jigoku

Ancient documents and religious apocrypha claim that the maze of tortures and torments called Jigoku was once a place of rehabilitation rather than damnation, scouring oni souls of their villainy to prepare them for fresh starts. But Fu Leng and Jigoku brought out each other's worst tendencies, and the prisoners have conquered the dungeon. It is no longer a penitentiary, but a fortress.



Technically, all the present underworld is Jigoku, but in common parlance, that word refers not to the three sectors over which Emma-Ō claims dominion. Instead, it describes the numberless strata of woe beneath them, lost without hope of reclamation to Fu Leng, his oni lieutenants, and the evil spirits born into his service. These oubliettes are evil's foul country, where oni plot to undermine all the world above, literally and figuratively, and consume it in corruption and vice. Perhaps one day, heroes as great as Shinsei and the Seven Thunders may venture into the depths where even the gods fear to tread, wresting the underworld from their diabolical grip and reshaping it into a place of order, justice, and rehabilitation. But so far, no one has volunteered to go first.

Meido

All Rokugani dead go to the level of Meido before their eventual reincarnation. This gateway region is the seat of power of Emma-Ō, the Fortune of Death and Judge of the Dead. In Meido, the souls of the dead line up to be counted, recorded, judged, and assigned to a reincarnation befitting their karma. Emma-Ō presides over this process with the help of his nine Kings of Hell: Shinkō, Sokō, Sotai, Gokan, Benjō, Taisen, Toshi, Byōdō, and Tenrin. A king or subordinate judge reads the soul's karma and assigns them to reincarnation in a form and realm that befits their triumphs and shortcomings. Mazoku guards, scribes, judges, aides, bailiffs, and custodians facilitate the process, hoping to win a better reincarnation through loyal service in one of the universe's dirtiest jobs.

However, mazoku can stray from their path just like humans. Fu Leng's agents and influence hide even in Meido, offering weak-willed mazoku power or favors if they can influence how certain souls are processed: perhaps a great hero could wind up consigned to Jigoku proper, or a mix-up in paperwork could see a villain inclined to Fu Leng's service reborn as an influential samurai instead of a hungry ghost. Rooting out and punishing such corruption makes Emma-Ō's already stressful job even more so.

Gaki-dō

A soul corrupted thoroughly by desire is called a *gaki*, and is reborn into Gaki-dō. Although its name is sometimes translated as "hungry ghost," a gaki is not, strictly speaking, a shade that has failed to pass on; all gaki have been through Meido and been found…disappointing. Mediocre. Below average. Each gaki's previous misdeeds are neither so violent as to consign them to Tōshigoku, the Realm of Slaughter, nor so base and evil as to banish them to Jigoku proper, but they haven't done nearly well enough to warrant an animal rebirth, either. Instead, they pass into the vast subterranean slum surrounding and contrasting with Meido's handsome and austere citadels, office blocks, and gateways. Each of Gaki-dō's precincts and parishes is the size of one of Rokugan's provinces, administered by mazoku magistrates and guards. The weather is always bad. The air smells stale and foul. The gaki live, work, eat, struggle with one another, and expire in this miserable sprawl.

Emma-Ō does not readily admit it, but Gaki-dō's size exceeds his mazoku's administrative reach. In fact, it's all too easy to escape Gaki-dō. The edges of certain precincts seem to blur and merge into some of the worst parts of Ningen-dō: mass graves, the sites of battles and massacres, desecrated temples, fouled wildernesses, and the roughest neighborhoods of large cities. Rumors abound that if a traveler gets lost enough in a big city's most corrupt neighborhood, they might wander into Gaki-dō. Only grit and good luck could lead such an unfortunate to a demonic magistrate willing to hear their case before gaki accost them. While certain local shades are shrewd and generous enough to show a lost traveler a way out, most likely through a bargain, most are possessed of a terrible hunger, and the living smell especially delicious.

Tōshigoku

Emma-Ō originally created Tōshigoku, the Realm of Slaughter, as a special division dedicated to rehabilitating the overabundance of Rokugani dead who fell in unjust and unproductive war. He cleared out a particularly miserable neighborhood in Gaki-dō, built a castle there, and appointed an especially competent mazoku—Mujōki, the Ghost of Impermanence—as warden of its legion, whose ranks swelled swiftly with souls who died engaging in pointless violence.

But unbeknownst to Emma-Ō, treachery has befallen Mujōki. Fu Leng deployed crafty oni to squeeze through Gaki-dō's fraying edges, infiltrate Tōshigoku Castle, and kidnap Mujōki. An impostor now rules in Mujōki's place, taking his shape and sending false reports to Emma-Ō (who is, of course, too busy to check in with what seems to be a loyal minister). The false Mujōki, a sadistic oni who enjoys violence for its own sake, now trains Tōshigoku's denizens in increasingly brutal martial arts and tactics. Meanwhile, Fu Leng's minions seek out Ningen-dō's most ruthless warriors, manipulating them into bloodthirst and carnage in hopes that they will find themselves in Tōshigoku. Little do the tortured souls realize they are training to become Fu Leng's shock troops when he finally makes his move to drive out Emma-Ō.

VENERATION OF THE DEAD

While not every ancestor ascends to watch over their family from Yomi, filial piety ensures that their descendants will honor all but the worst of them as if they had. Every family, even among the peasantry, keeps a small altar with memorial plaques or statues to their beloved dead. Wealthy homes sometimes have a niche built into a wall, or even an entire room, specifically to shelter the ancestral altar; in other houses, the altar occupies a place of honor in a main room. Even those few Rokugani who have no interest in Shinsei or the kami maintain such an altar, appeasing their dead by bowing, clapping, speaking prayers or mantras, and leaving offerings of incense and rice with chopsticks jabbed vertically among the grains—the only time a Rokugani would ever dream of stabbing anything with chopsticks.

These altars exist in addition to, rather than instead of, cemeteries. Burial mounds are seldom built in contemporary Rokugan, but ancient ones—sometimes small, sometimes elaborate mausoleums full of clay grave goods and surrounded with moats—still dot the landscape, diligently tended by the land's current residents even if their occupants' descendants do not remember them. Since the Imperial proclamation mandating cremation, remains are often interred in a graveyard beneath a stone block inscribed with the deceased's name and perhaps a death poem. Families visit their predecessors' resting places to tidy up and remember from time to time, especially during the annual Bon festival.

Graveyards sometimes also feature statues; however, these represent not the dead, but Fortunes or exalted Shinseist figures, especially the Fortune Jizō, who is said to roam the underworld comforting the dead as best he can. Families sometimes decorate Jizō statues with clothing, jewelry, or toys to honor children who died before their time. As a wanderer, Jizō is also the patron of travelers, featuring in many small roadside shrines.

THE TENTH KAMI

Unbeknownst to the denizens of Rokugan, another of the Kami resides in Meido: Ryoshun, the first to be eaten by Onnotangu and the only one to perish before Hantei could free him. When Emma-Ō descended into the underworld to attempt to take back Jigoku from Fu Leng and the demons, he found Ryoshun, waiting. Now, Ryoshun oversees the defense of boundary between Jigoku and the other levels, but the oni who serve Fu Leng see in Ryoshun a potentially powerful ally, if only he can be turned against the Heavens.

A Rokugani rarely brings up other people's ancestors unless they're extremely close. Partly this custom is practical: a sudden mention of a friend's dear departed grandmother might plunge them into melancholy. Partly it is philosophical: who among the living can pretend to the wisdom of the elder dead?

This courtesy even extends to enemies. Any criticism to the effect of "you shame your sorei" is thought to reflect exceedingly poorly on the speaker rather than on the recipient, incurring the disfavor of the speaker's own forebears.



Kami and Fortunes

A Fortune is a type of powerful kami that governs a concept rather than a place or natural feature: strength, cats, crafts, and the like. The appellation "Fortune" is a contraction of their full, proper title, which may be translated "God of Fortune" or "Lucky God." Fortunes, like other kami, have watched over Rokugan and its people since the beginning of time.

Shinseism's introduction has changed the way many people conceptualize the Fortunes, though. As per official Imperial edict, the Tao of Shinsei and the goal of Enlightenment are supreme laws over both kami and human. Fortunes remain important, but as paragons of Shinseist wisdom and practice. Nevertheless, the festivals, rituals, and other traditional practices that propitiate and honor them have changed relatively little over the course of thousands of years. Further, the Emerald Empire is a vast land, and edicts around Shinseism are more recognized in some regions than others. Fortunism, ancestor worship, and even more ancient or esoteric traditions are still the primary religions of many people in Rokugan.

Fortunes divide their time between the Celestial Heavens and Ningen-dō. From their offices and mansions in Tengoku, they oversee Rokugan as a whole. They descend to Ningen-dō via places sacred to them—shrines, or regions that express their purviews, for example—when the time comes to get more personally involved in terrestrial affairs. Like other kami, Fortunes often make their earthly homes in natural, geographical, or human-built features called shintai, which are the focus of many shrines.

Folk tradition maintains that Fortunes can take human form as one of these shintai. The mythical prehistories of many Fortunes describe their lives as humans, either in Rokugan or some land to the west. Some act or expression of supreme excellence allowed these humans to ascend to become Fortunes, a blessing humans today may still receive through legendary effort or virtue. Currently, few Rokugani think much of these stories. The odds of running into a Fortune in human disguise are low indeed.

THE SEVEN GREAT FORTUNES

These are the most widely propitiated Fortunes in all of Rokugan.

Benten

Benten is the Fortune of Arts and Romantic Love, who appears as an elegant woman with dark-brown skin and wet, black hair. Her mount is the five-headed dragon, her symbol the *biwa*, and her sacred place the river. Benten is particularly popular with young samurai before gempuku, who are in the thick of their education and overwhelmed with poetry to memorize and calligraphy to practice—and who are also aflutter with romantic feelings for other youths. Playwrights, actors, puppeteers, and other entertainers venerate Benten as their patron.

Bishamon

Bishamon, the Fortune of Strength, appears in archaic armor, carrying a massive halberd in one hand and a Shinseist temple packed with sutras in the other. While cynics sometimes debate how much Shinsei really means to the Fortunes and their dedicated servants, Bishamon is known for his honest and assiduous study of the doctrine of Shinseism. Although when common folk run into him, he is frequently dressed as an armored warrior, he also has been said to appear as a wandering Shinseist priest toting a backpack full of heavy scrolls and tomes. He is always depicted with a broad smile, representing the joy and satisfaction that come from a balance of physical fitness and contemplative wisdom.

Daikoku

Daikoku, the Fortune of Wealth, embodies contradiction. He is cheerful and jolly, with plump lucky earlobes, but his skin is smeared with the ash of the grave. His great wooden mallet showers gold coins with every strike, but his association with death and cemeteries reminds people that their wealth will not follow them into Meido. He sits atop several fat bales of rice to represent riches and plenty, but a mischief of ravenous rats gnaws at those bales eternally to remind us that wealth means nothing if not invested and defended. Merchants and farmers are his most devoted followers. Fortunist monks devoted to Daikoku frequently remind well-born samurai not to take their wealth for granted: while money cannot buy happiness, the lack of adequate money, food, or shelter can certainly place one in debt to sorrow.

Ebisu

Ebisu, the Fortune of Honest Work, is a good friend of Daikoku, though far more mercurial. He teaches us that luck comes to the diligent most of all. He is a wandering fisherman by trade, representing the oldest job in all of Rokugan, which sustained humans before they learned to plant and harvest grain. He wears archaic clothes and carries a fishing rod and a big fish he has recently caught. Fisherfolk who find a stone among the fish in their nets venerate it with offerings of food and drink, since legend has it that such a stone is Ebisu in disguise.

Ebisu is the only major Fortune who does not have shintai in his shrines; there are icons of him, but he does not live therein, preferring to reside in the sea and take the form of a whale. While Ebisu has shugenja, he does not speak to them in his voice, and he is hard of hearing, so he is not beseeched with prayers spoken aloud, but with clapping and the ringing of bells. Ebisu's monks, while they pay lip service to Shinseism, are the furthest from orthodox Shinseists in their practices and traditions.

Fukurokujin

Fukurokujin is the Fortune of Wisdom. Popular legend—not to be confused with certain beliefs and practices in the Phoenix Clan—indicates that he was once a mortal who mastered the Way, learning to subsist on the breath of the universe instead of food and drink, and eventually ascending to his divine post. Martial artists often venerate him as representative of the wisdom they seek through combative practice.

He is an elderly bearded man, stout and diminutive but with a high cone-shaped forehead, leaning on a long staff with a book of lore. He is always accompanied by a turtle, a crane, a black deer, or some combination of these. His holy symbol is the needle, and his most devoted worshippers are tailors. It is said that Fukurokujin knows how to revive the dead but never uses or shares this knowledge for fear it would be misused.

Hotei

Hotei, the Fortune of Contentment, resembles Daikoku in that he is a jolly, rotund man with big earlobes, but he lacks Daikoku's coating of graveyard ash. His holy symbol is a sack—known as a *hōtei*—full of toys and gifts that he hands out to deserving children. He is, unsurprisingly, one of the most popular and well-loved Fortunes. He is also the only Fortune believed to have met Shinsei in person.

Legend has it that before anyone knew who Shinsei was, an eccentric old monk arrived at the Imperial Palace, walked right into the throne room, sat down in a corner, and started meditating silently. The Emperor waved off the hesitant guards who went to apprehend him, and he personally brought him vegetables and tea every day but otherwise ignored him. When Shinsei finally arrived, the monk stood and walked to greet Shinsei, and the two smiled and bowed to one another as if they were old friends. They had a brief private conversation. The monk sat quietly and listened with a beatific expression on his face as Shinsei expounded the Way, and then he exited with Shinsei and Shiba.

As the three parted ways in front of the castle, the old monk noticed a little boy playing nearby. From the bag he carried, he pulled a kemari ball too large to have fit inside. He kicked it toward the boy, who caught it, thanked him, and ran away. It was at this point that onlookers realized it was Hotei in a human guise. When they asked Shinsei if the Little Teacher knew him, he replied: "I do not, but something about him seemed familiar. I have a feeling I will see him again." Hotei's was the very first order of Fortunist monks to be founded, well before the Emperor fused the religions of Fortunism and Shinseism.

Jurōjin

Jurōjin, the Fortune of Longevity, is a thin old man, as old as the stars, who lives in a certain constellation that looks like him in the southern sky. Like Fukurokujin, he is an old man leaning on a staff accompanied by a deer, turtle, or crane, but he is very thin where Fukurokujin is stout. Jurōjin is known to be a patron of the visual arts; all of the Fortunist monks sworn to him are diligent painters and sculptors, producing fine paintings, screens, and sculptures large and small whose sale to wealthy patrons sustains their monasteries comfortably.

OTHER POPULAR FORTUNES

Though they do not garnish the same level of worship as the great fortunes, there are numerous other fortunes respected by Rokugani inhabitants.

Emma-Ō

It is said that Emma-Ō was the first human ever to die. Alone, he journeyed from the land of the living down to the underworld of Yomi (for Yomi, not Jigoku, was the underworld at that point in history). He became the Fortune of Death and Judge of the Dead, ruling fairly and justly. Some stories say that Emma-Ō built the facilities of the underworld himself; others say that he found the underworld already outfitted with buildings, dwellings, and palaces, even though he was the first one ever to arrive—how curious!

After Yomi and the sorei ascended to Heaven, Emma-Ō entrusted his charges to the gods of the sky and returned to reconquer Meido and Gaki-dō, reasoning that if someone didn't stick around to administer the underworld, Fu Leng would win. He seems to have been right, but everyone who looks upon Emma-Ō recognizes that the ruler of the underworld is a very, very tired Fortune. His face is scowling and red, with tusks and fangs. He wears a hat with the character for "king"

inscribed on the front, and he always carries an antique board to which he fastens the record of a soul's karma before he judges its reincarnation (or delegates such judgment to one of his subordinate judges).

He has priests, but receives few prayers; prayers are generally considered to annoy Emma-Ō, since he is so overworked he will never have time to get to them, and they'd just pile up in his office. "Emma-Ō will get to your prayer eventually" is an idiom that means to a Rokugani "your efforts are earnest, but pointless." Bureaucrats and administrators often place images of Emma-Ō in their offices; his fearsome visage is meant to be a bulwark against corruption and inefficiency.

Hachiman

Hachiman, the Fortune of Battle, is perhaps the most popular Fortune among the samurai class. As a human, he was born with an archery glove already on his hand. History honors him as the inventor of mounted archery; even today, many archers whisper a prayer to him as they loose their first arrow of the day. The monks of Hachiman keep in his greatest shrine a library of letters, poems, and texts that he reportedly penned himself. Read closely, many of them seem to predict the coming of Shinsei hundreds of years later. It is said that if an invading fleet from beyond Rokugan ever comes to its shores, Hachiman will descend from Tengoku in the form of a tornado to beat the invaders back.

REAL-WORLD TOUCHSTONES

As you may already know, many Fortunes and kami in *L5R* are not just based on real-world religious figures: they *are* real-world religious figures, venerated by real-world people. Regardless of your personal feelings on the significance of Benten, Hachiman, and other Fortunes in real life, others at your table—not to mention passersby who lack context for your game table's conversation—may feel more strongly. They may worship those entities themselves, have loved ones who do, or simply feel uncomfortable with what looks like nonfictional religious practice repurposed for sensation or entertainment. They may or may not feel safe voicing their discomfort to you.

You may have the best of intentions. Your words and actions may make perfect sense in your game's context. Neither of those circumstances prevents or excuses harm done to real people. Even if you're playing in private, seize these opportunities to practice speaking with courtesy and compassion for religious figures, practices, and individuals.

When characters in the game speak critically or reverently about religious matters, keep your voice low and even so that no one confuses passionate in-character feelings with out-of-character ones. If an in-game debate grows heated, summarize the opposing sides' positions and attitudes with third-person narration rather than shouting invective and skepticism aloud. For example, the GM might say "Lord Isawa denounces the Perfect Land Sect's doctrine while Abbess Myōkō lambastes flaws in his logic" instead of playing out the debate, lest they sound like they're actually denouncing or criticizing someone's beliefs.

Similarly, when characters pray or chant mantras, please describe them in third person rather than intoning prayers or mantras aloud. For example, a player might say "Hiruma Taro hails Benten's wisdom, asking that she bless his performance in an upcoming theater production." You thus avoid the impression that you are actually chanting a mantra or praying, which certain religions discourage or forbid outside specific situations, especially for nonpractitioners.

Outside research on Asian cultural expressions is a popular option for enriching your game. Although Japan received many influences from India, China, and Korea, you should nevertheless beware cultural conflation: that is, confusing distinct regions' and traditions' signifiers. For example, South Asian details might fit Benten and Daikoku, who have Hindu origins, but not the Japanese natives Hachiman and Ebisu. When in doubt, draw only from Japan proper.

If your game incorporates costumes, don't dress as the Fortunes. Instead, choose ensembles that are representative rather than exact: simple unadorned clothing and perhaps a representative item. Ebisu could carry a fishing rod, Benten a stringed instrument, Emma-Ō a clipboard.

Following these precepts both honors out-of-character experiences and aligns your game's attitudes with Rokugani (and Japanese) sensibilities toward the sacred. Please help us make the inclusion of real-world religious figures in *Legend of the Five Rings* a matter of respect and representation.



The Shrine of Life

Shrines are an important part of every Rokugani's life, regardless of social status, caste, or profession. A shrine's ceremonies ensure crops are healthy, keep disease away, and prevent natural disasters. A shrine's attendants bring one into the world, record one's birth, and divine one's purpose. After the fifth anniversary of life, one returns to the shrine, receives one's childhood name, and is formally introduced to one's ancestors. One is married at the shrine; one joins the ancestors at the shrine. When one stumbles and the soul is stained, it is rarely so bad that the shrine cannot cleanse it. The shrine is the axle of a person's life, all seasons turning around the sacred space within. This is where Heaven touches the earth, where priests lay offerings at the altar and snatch living souls from the mouths of fickle spirits. Rokugan is the land where gods once walked, where every thing is the home of a living soul. There is no village without some manner of shrine, be it a mighty complex of arched rooftops and vast blessed chambers, or a single grey statue flickering with the dim light of the kami.

WHY VISIT A SHRINE?

The presence of a shrine within a day's travel of a community is considered essential and practical, not optional and esoteric. If there were no shrine, the natural world would be out of balance, harvests would rot, and lesser Fortunes could not witness the devotion of the people. Daily life brings people into regular contact with spiritually staining substances that attract misfortune. Were it not for their shrine, these would accumulate and invite tragedy. By visiting a shrine, a person cleanses the soul of this dirtiness, as one might wash a stain from linen cloth.

Shrine services are invaluable to villages and cities alike. They offer midwifery services and are often a village's only obstetric choice. The shrine keeps records of every childbirth, including a map of the night sky at the moment of birth. Such records are useful for marriage arrangements, and happy marriages are often owed to the diligence of shrine attendants. Divinations by shrine keepers provide valuable insights, both for the farmer's harvest and the general's conquests. Most of all, the shrine is where one can find servants of the enshrined spirit and humbly ask for wisdom.

SERVANTS OF THE SPIRITS

The clergy of Rokugan occupy a special place in the Celestial Order. They are higher than the heimin class, but most are considered lower than the *buke* and *kuge*. The exception are shugenja, who are samurai by right of birth. As with other castes, there is a distinct order of social rank within the clergy. The highest-ranking member is the Emperor himself as the head of the Shintao, and therefore all, religion. Beneath the Emperor are the shugenja, who are in turn followed by the priests. At the bottom of the caste are the shrine keepers, who serve as religious assistants and protectors. Monks are also technically clergy, but they are not a part of the Celestial Order.

Most shrines are maintained by at least one shrine keeper. Although they are the lowest-ranked clergy, they are essential to the shrine's maintenance, keeping the grounds clean and sanctified. Shrine keepers are versed in basic rituals, herbalism, lesser divinations, and a collection of folk traditions known as *mikodō*. In addition, shrine keepers are charged with a shrine's protection, demonstrating some martial prowess with bows and *naginata*, or sword-staffs. Because of their martial duties, shrine keepers are usually drawn from the buke; often they are the children of ashigaru or jizamurai. However, there is no social requirement, so they can also come from the bonge. In that case, it is a great honor, as it is one of the only ways in which a farmer's children might ascend in the Celestial Order.

Priests are the shrine's administrators and primary caretakers. Their job is to undertake all necessary ceremonies, assist visitors with spiritual needs, and provide advice and guidance. Priests do not enjoy the same close relationship to the spirits as shugenja, but they are capable of basic blessings and auguries and can occasionally entreat the kami through ritual. One born into any caste can become a priest, although it is a difficult position to achieve. The priest must not only demonstrate adequate spiritual knowledge, but they must also demonstrate a rapport with the enshrined spirit.

Shugenja are priests of the samurai class. Only those who have been embraced by the kami can receive this title. They are sensitive to the invisible world of spirits, able to sense and influence the kami and commune with Fortunes and ancestors. A priest's rituals are mere shades of what shugenja are capable of. The kami only embrace one in a thousand, and this rare gift must be cultivated from an early age. This connection affords shugenja considerable power, as they are able to directly entreat the kami to manifest in myriad ways. Shugenja are not bound to shrines, unless they choose so.

SHRINE MAINTENANCE

The concept of spiritual cleanliness is central to Shintao beliefs. Things accumulate spiritual "dirtiness," and shrines are no exception. For this reason, priests and shrine keepers keep their shrines in a constant state of renewal. At any given time, a shrine is being cleaned, repaired, or rebuilt. Wards, blessing ropes, and icons are replaced regularly, and the enshrined spirit is released at least once a year to allow the shrine keepers to clean its shintai. Perfectly serviceable sections of the shrine, with nothing visibly wrong, must be torn down and rebuilt regardless. Some shrines go so far as to build an entire replica and move operations to the new shrine, ritualistically disassembling the old.

Because this constant maintenance creates a demand for materials, shrines are rather expensive. Some of the poorer rural clans, like the Sparrow or Hare, must make do with miniature shrines called *hokora*, which look not unlike stone dollhouses.

SHRINE ECONOMICS

Commerce is considered inherently dirty in Rokugan. Worldly concern over money and possessions is spiritually staining, further chaining one to Ningen-dō. Perhaps it is inevitable for the peasantry, but priests and samurai are expected to be above such things. It is therefore an uncomfortable truth that shrines are reliant on outside funding to operate.

For priests to openly conduct commerce would be disgraceful and could offend the enshrined spirits (especially blessed ancestors), but this only means that shrine leaders must be creative. Coins are commonly accepted offerings, with shrine keepers simply "borrowing" additional materials as needed. Wishing wells provide another source of income. Shrines also expect a modest donation in exchange for major services (like weddings), although they would never ask directly.

Major shrines enjoy the patronage of Great Clan families. For example, the Shrine to Hotei is funded by the Bayushi family, which pays for all its expenses. Such relationships are mutually beneficial, as the shrines provide valuable services to clan samurai, and the clans appear pious for donating large sums to the Fortunes.

One traditional source of revenue is the "Training of the Sainenshō," or youngest born. It is customary among some nobility to send their youngest heir to receive priestly training, along with a sum of money to cover expenses. As this sum is determined by the shrine (and accepted without question), many shrines compete for students. Just one samurai heir might supply the shrine with adequate funds for several years.

THE SHRINE, DAY TO DAY

What follows is a typical day at the humble Mezameta shrine, located within the outskirts of the city of Ukabu Mura, or Floating Village. It enshrines the kami of the nearby Kanawa Lake, which feeds the Drowned Merchant River. Legends say that Shinsei once drank from the neighboring waterfall, awakening the spirit of



those waters. Although the shrine is important to the growing city, it is relatively small, employing only one priest and a handful of shrine keepers.

Yōji, the shrine's priest, awakens at the Hour of the Hare and spends half an hour in quiet meditation. The shrine keepers are already sweeping the exterior steps, scrubbing the shrine, and refilling the cleansing basins with blessed water. At the Hour of the Dragon, the priest awakens the kami with a performance on the *shakuhachi*, a type of bamboo flute, and offers prepared rice cakes. Every day brings a different ceremony; on this day, after Yōji is convinced the offering has been accepted, he asks the kami to aid the farmers in the day's rice seeding.

The shrine grounds officially open to visitors at the Hour of the Serpent. The priest assigns chores, which today includes greeting visitors and crafting charms for an upcoming festival. Agasha Kiori arrives. After cleansing herself and making offerings, she requests use of the shrine's gardens. Due to her caste and status as a shugenja, she is afforded whatever she wants, and the keepers stay out of her way.

Halfway into the hour, the shrine keeper named Kokka finally awakens. She is the fifth-born child of an Asako lord, here to fulfill a family duty. For her lack of discipline, she is assigned the reviled task of laundry duty. Yōji pretends not to hear her murmured complaint.

At the Hour of the Horse, the priest takes his lunch, his first meal of the day. Thirty minutes later, Miya Boshin arrives for his daily lesson. Boshin's father, the local governor, makes regular contributions to the shrine, so Yōji sees to his spiritual education personally.

A rōnin arrives but is stopped at the front gate. He has recently partaken of a spicy hot-pot dish and is therefore not permitted to enter, as this has imbalanced the Fire element within him and he may offend the enshrined kami. The resulting altercation causes Yōji to interrupt Boshin's lessons to deal with the angered rōnin. Soon, the commotion draws the attention of Agasha Kiori, who approaches the rōnin and whispers in his ear. He grows pale, apologies, and leaves. Kiori then requests the use of the inner shrine, which the grateful Yōji readily gives. The remainder of Boshin's lessons are uneventful, and he leaves by the end of the hour.

At the Hour of the Goat, Yōji's paperwork is interrupted by another visitor. Matsu Nioko wishes to have her new sword blessed. As a few shrine keepers prepare to anoint the blade with Kanawa Lake's waters, the Matsu waits in the worship hall and prays to her ancestors. After the ritual is finished and the sword returned, the grateful Matsu "forgets" a small stack of coins as she leaves, which Yōji deposits in the shrine's funds.

Meanwhile, a student from the Ukabu Mura Dōjō arrives. After cleansing himself, he affixes a paper slip transcribed with a personal wish onto the branch of the shrine's plum tree. It is a romantic wish. He leaves an offering and then departs.

The Hour of the Monkey begins the shrine keepers' personal time. They practice their archery, play poetry-based word games, or study the shrine's scriptures. Kokka spends her time reading the wishes the plum tree has accumulated over the week, taking them down at the end of the hour.

Agasha Kiori is stopped at the gate; she is attempting to take a sacred object from the grounds. The priest cautiously requests that she leave it here, knowing there is little he can do if she does not agree. Thankfully, she does but she must continue her communion and thus announces she will stay the night. The priest accepts this as the best possible outcome, while the others inwardly grumble that they are now running a hotel in addition to a shrine.

The sun nears the horizon at the Hour of the Rooster, closing the shrine to visitors. Yōji plays his shakuhachi to call the kami back to the shrine. It is Kokka's turn to make the evening offering to Amaterasu. She impresses Yōji with her choice of song, and he mentally notes to personally tend to her development as a priestess. Afterward, the plum tree's wishes are burned so that they might rise to the Fortunes.

The keepers take their dinner, bathe, and then draw straws to see who will take the first patrol. Yōji ends his day with research in the sacred texts and quiet meditation on the day's events.

Religious Practices of Rokugan

Although all Fortunism is officially part of the Shintao religion, Fortunist practices vary greatly throughout the Empire. Fortunism is made up of hundreds of localized traditions that are unified by their mythology and a general agreement on foundational beliefs. Each clan follows its own flavor of religious worship, and regional practices vary based on local folk traditions and the spirits that most influence the area. Debates among shugenja schools are common, and the mortal understanding of cosmic forces is ever evolving. Still, while two regions that share a border may not hold the same religious interpretations, there are basic practices that are embraced Empire-wide.

APPROACHING THE DIVINE

Each enshrined spirit must be approached and worshipped in the way it prefers. With a thousand Fortunes and a thousand thousand other spirits, knowing them all would be impossible. Shrine keepers and priests are able to assist visitors in approaching the spirit in such a way as not to offend it, and there are general patterns of behavior that are dependable enough to fall back on.

Before entering a shrine, a visitor must pass through the torii arch, which cleanses and prepares them to enter sacred space. Bypassing the torii arch is a foul act that invites in the profane, akin to entering a home with muddy shoes. After entering, the visitor washes themself at a cleansing pavilion, rinsing their extremities and mouth, then finally the ladle they use for this purpose. Thusly cleansed, the visitor may now walk the shrine freely or enter the worship hall.

Prayer is usually assisted by shrine keepers or the priest, but those familiar with the shrine need no such guidance. First, the supplicant kneels before the spirit's icon and presents an offering. For ancestors, this may be something they favored in life, or it may be a symbolic offering of an object they once owned. Offerings to Fortunes vary depending on their nature: Tenjin, the Fortune of Stories and Secrets, accepts a personal secret written on a folded paper slip that is burned at the altar, while Sadahako, the Fortune of Artists, favors an offering of foundation makeup. Kami often accept any offering that pertains to their element. Some common kami offerings include sake, incense, sacred herbs, candles, salt, rice, and preserved fish. Offerings are always made with two bows: the first to pay respects, the second to prove the first was genuine.

After the offering is given, the pilgrim must attract the spirit's attention. Clapping twice is the most common method, as it expresses joy at being in the spirit's presence. Ringing a bell, raising one's voice in song, or performing a dance are also appropriate, although these are usually undertaken by shugenja or shrine keepers and not common pilgrims. Then, the visitor bows again and expresses their wish to converse. After the prayer is finished, a final bow is given, followed by rapid departure.

Unattended rural shrines and abandoned shrines present visitors with a unique challenge: how do they avoid offending a spirit that they know nothing about? With no keepers to guide pilgrims, this can be a risky situation, as behaviors or offerings that appease one spirit may offend the next. In the absence of shugenja to ask the spirit directly, the safest bet is to defer to humility. A supplicant should keep their eyes on the ground and their head lowered, apologize earnestly, and ask to make amends. Honest mistakes can be forgiven if the pilgrim means well and shows proper deference.



RELIGIOUS PROHIBITIONS

Spiritual cleanliness is Fortunism's primary concern. The soul is likened to a white cloth, and coming into contact with dirty conditions, known as *kegare*, stains the soul with filth. This makes one offensive to spirits, especially ancestors and kami, and attracts misfortune. To keep the soul unburdened, there are many practices one must avoid.

Sweat, blood, and other secretions are filthy and to be avoided. This is why manual labor is beneath samurai and the priesthood. The consumption of meat is also considered dirty; poultry and fish are the least filthy and are socially acceptable to eat, while red meat is widely reviled and forbidden. Certain other foods, such as spicy dishes and fungi, are also considered dirty if eaten to excess (a little bit is fine, though). When one comes into contact with these things, one must undergo a ritual purification to restore one's inner balance. For this reason, samurai purify themselves daily, and priests avoid them altogether (often priests are vegetarians and leave manual labor to the shrine keepers). Commoners are already assumed to be dirty due to their professions and lot in life. As such, while they still undergo shrine purifications, it is with far less regularity than samurai. Some only do so at festivals.

Handling dead flesh is among the highest religious transgressions. Death is a strong source of kegare, and it clings to things. Even if done by accident, touching dead flesh coats the soul with spiritual filth. If a samurai were to die in such a state, they would not be permitted into Yomi. However, even this condition may still be cleansed through a more complex purification ritual, one known by every shugenja and many priests. It entails passing through a torii arch, undertaking a ritualistic bath, and symbolically becoming "reborn" in the presence of an enshrined spirit. Hinin are not even allowed onto shrine grounds, lest their very presence offend the enshrined spirit and drive it away, invoking calamity on everyone.

Commerce is also staining, as it further entangles one with the physical world. Money in and of itself is harmless, and Daikoku, the Fortune of Wealth, is one of the Seven Great Fortunes. It is acts of regular trade and gambling, and obsession with transient material things, that sicken the mind and stain the soul. Pious merchants purify themselves regularly for this reason.

Finally, negative emotion is a source of spiritual stain. The three sins—fear, desire, and regret—attract misfortune and create evils in the world. Shrine purifications are meant not only to cleanse the body and soul, but also to calm the mind and release these thoughts in places where they will be obliterated.

THE SACRED SUBSTANCES

There are three substances that are more sacred than any other, for they came from gods.

The first is jade, which was created when Amaterasu's tears touched the earth. As a source of spiritual purity owing to its connection to both Ningen-dō and Tengoku, jade repels the denizens of other Spirit Realms and protects the soul from the Shadowlands Taint.

The second was formed where Lady Sun's tears solidified in air. This crystal, having captured the essence of the Sun herself, is capable of dispelling the dark and repelling corrupted beings.

The third is obsidian, which is formed from the blood of Onnotangu. It is the most powerful bane to denizens of other Spirit Realms, but it also carries with it a hint of Lord Moon's madness, which, through prolonged exposure, it passes on to the carrier.

Purifying Rituals

The methods of purification vary widely between shrines, depending on the enshrined spirit. Commonly, a visitor washes their hands and face, then rests in meditation while a shrine keeper or priest waves a wand covered in dozens of paper streamers. The wand attracts impurities like a duster might attract tangible filth. The visitor then takes the wand and burns it, symbolically cleansing themself of ills. Another method is sprinkling the visitor with salt, which absorbs impure essences. The visitor then sweeps the salt out of the shrine while repeating a sacred mantra.

Yet another common method is *misogi*, a ritual purification by water. After fasting for a short period, the participant stands bare beneath an ice-cold waterfall while chanting a sacred mantra. Negative thoughts and spiritual impurities are washed away. Misogi can also be performed with cold still waters, and most shrines have a well for this purpose.

It is also believed that the elements, in their purest forms, can banish spiritual impurity. Thus, shugenja will purify themselves through feats of elemental endurance. Walking across hot coals, plunging their hands into boiling water, or meditating bare on a cold, windy outcropping are all physical feats shugenja might attempt in order to purify themselves in the absence of shrines.

WORSHIP PRACTICES OF SAMURAI

Bushi cannot help but dirty themselves in the course of their duties, coming regularly into contact with blood, sweat, and other spiritually staining substances. Furthermore, the stresses of a warrior's life, including killing, can be spiritually imbalancing. Bushi must purify themselves regularly so that the consequences of their duties do not attract spiritual misfortune. Blessings and divinations are also useful for warriors seeking an edge in coming trials.

Samurai families venerate their dead and seek the guidance of those who came before. Samurai also worship their clan founders and legendary heroes, believing that these souls may favor them with supernatural aid. This is true for courtier and bushi alike; in court or the battlefield, the guidance of one's ancestors can tip the scales to victory. Every samurai home has a shrine specifically for ancestor worship, but ancestors can also be sought at the local shrine, where the keepers may divine answers to specific questions. If an ancestor is displeased with a descendant, they may make life difficult with curses and misfortunes, or even haunt their descendant.

When an ancestor has no living descendants to be worshipped by, they may feel that they have been forgotten. This can transform them into *muenbotoke*, listless spirits that haunt the living with curses. To avoid this, samurai may also worship ancestors who are not directly related to them. It is not unheard of to "claim" an ancestor as one's own, not because of blood relation, but out of admiration for their deeds. As it honors their history, this is considered a noble practice.

Ancestor worship is far more common among samurai than Fortune or kami worship. When samurai worship the Fortunes, it is often to gain a specific boon, such as Hachiman's favor in battle, Benten's blessing for a performance, or Jizō's aid in hastening an ancestor's time in Meido.

WORSHIP PRACTICES OF PEASANTS

For Rokugan's bonge class, religious matters are much simpler. When they need the assistance of a particular Fortune or spirit, they go to the shrine and make an offering. When something goes wrong, the priest identifies which spirit was offended, and the peasant makes

FOLK PRACTICES

From between the cracks within religious practice come folk beliefs that offer ways a common person might obtain spiritual aid. Of course, most shugenja regard them as ignorant nonsense.

In Crane lands, it is believed bad luck can be banished by throwing seven peas into a well and fasting for the rest of the day. The Shiba believe that tracing a kanji character over a diagram will grant them the virtue they transcribe. Unicorn samurai believe writing the name of a Fortune on their right arm will grant that Fortune's blessing. In the Scorpion provinces, drinking the fresh blood of a rooster is said to cure indigestion. When one does not have access to the religious experts of a shrine, local folk traditions offer alternatives.

SUPERSTITIONS

The uneducated peasantry are especially superstitious, but it is not unheard of for samurai to hold superstitious beliefs as well. Here are a few:

- **Crab:** Lightning is a good omen. Leaving the door open overnight will let ghosts into the house. Whistling at night is bad luck, as a ghost may confuse you for another ghost.
- **Crane:** Tickling a baby's feet will cause it to stutter when it is older. A tailor who pricks themself with their own needle will one day be unfaithful. If you break your sandal strap, you will soon suffer a misfortune.
- **Dragon:** Bowing to a vengeful ghost will give it pause. A blacksmith should never let the fire in their forge die, or blades made by the forge will fail. It should be noted that a common Togashi pastime is inventing new superstitions and passing them on to the peasantry to see which ones catch on.
- **Lion:** Bushi should always lead with the right foot, to awaken the martial spirit. Generals should only hold battles under auspicious stars or following specific omens. Spiders are lucky, and one should never kill a spider or it will haunt the home.
- **Phoenix:** The first day of snow each year is good luck. Spirits cannot cross an arched bridge. If you hear footsteps behind you and there is no one there, step aside and invite the ghost to pass, or else you will have nightmares.
- **Scorpion:** If you have no hatred in your heart, opponents cannot detect the intent to kill. If you dry your laundry where others can see it, your secrets will one day be exposed. Being struck by falling bird dung is good luck (the slang word for dung, *un*, can also mean "luck" if read another way).
- **Unicorn:** Hair should never be cut during a full moon, or you will go bald early. A promise made while on horseback can never be broken, on pain of death. Always bow to a wild horse, as it might be a ki-rin in disguise.

another offering. It is not necessary for peasants to be well versed in sacred texts or to know various rites. The priest and the shrine keepers handle all of that. Peasants need only participate in festivals, make regular offerings, and be reverent and respectful.

A peasant's worldly concerns rarely extend beyond their home and the land they cultivate. As a result, their view of the Fortunes is simplified and transaction based. By worshipping the Fortunes, they are either asking for boons, such as healthy crops, long lives, and good personal fortune, or they are appeasing Fortunes to avoid negative repercussions on these aspects of life.

Peasants also worship their ancestors, but to them it is a preventative and conciliatory practice. They leave offerings so the dead will stay in the realm where they belong. For peasants, seeking guidance from one's ancestors is unthinkable. Upon death, peasant souls do not go to Yomi. The life of a peasant is laden with worldly concerns that thwart this possibility; Yomi is only for samurai. Peasant dead instead go to Meido to await reincarnation, or a realm of punishment, like Gaki-dō or Tōshigoku. Therefore, peasants are fearful of their ancestors' ghosts for very good reason: if a peasant's ancestor returns, it is not to give blessings, but curses!

SHRINE RITUALS

Shrines are important places for samurai and commoners alike. Throughout their lives, they will visit shrines for important ceremonies and life events. Here are but a few:

Weddings

Weddings are especially joyous occasions and are almost always held at a shrine. Wedding ceremonies vary greatly between regions, incorporating different local customs, clan traditions, and accommodations for the enshrined spirit, who is also in attendance. Even so, there is a general ceremonial foundation for weddings held throughout the Empire.

For samurai, a shrine plays a large part in a couple's pairing well before the wedding ever takes place. Shrines keep records of every local birth and corresponding star maps. These help nakōdo, who arrange marriages, to fulfill their duties by comparing constellations and birth dates to find compatible matches. Marriages must be reported to (and approved by) a clan or Imperial nakōdo, a service a shrine willingly conducts on behalf of participants.

Peasant weddings are usually conducted by a priest, while the marriage of samurai is always overseen by a shugenja. During the ceremony, the couple bathe and are purified with salt, and then don the traditional wedding garments. The enshrined spirit is released and invited to join the ceremony. The priest or shugenja leads the commitment, and three oaths are exchanged along with three shared cups of blessed sake. Then, the betrothed approach the altar, make their marital vows, and express their gratitude to the enshrined spirit, leaving offerings as guided by the officiant.

At the start of this ceremony, the one who is leaving their family is dressed in white. This represents a symbolic "death" in their former family. As the ceremony continues, this participant sheds this outer layer

WEDDINGS IN THE GREAT CLANS

All Great Clan families have their own version of the wedding ceremony, so it is important that priests have some idea of how their traditions differ, lest offense be offered to either party. Following are some examples of these varying traditions:

- The Dragon rarely conduct marriages within shrines or temples. Instead, a traditional Dragon wedding is held in an awe-inspiring natural surrounding.
- Phoenix weddings are held in a shrine to a Fortune, usually Hotei (as contentment in marriage is considered more important than romance). Levity during the marriage ceremony is considered disgraceful, but the reception afterward is prone to joyous spectacle.
- A Soshi always officiates over a Scorpion wedding, since those conducted by Yogo are unlucky. An exchange of masks is often a part of the ceremony. Traditionally, Scorpion wedding banquets are open to all, even peasants (although the classes do not mingle).
- Minor Clans embrace their own esoteric traditions. For instance, the Dragonfly reject all arranged marriages, Sparrow weddings are held at home (there are no shrines large enough in Sparrow lands), and the Centipede conduct their weddings at sunrise. Mantis always get married on water (whether at sea on a ship or on a raft in a river) and ship captains often perform the marriage.

to reveal red, representing a "rebirth," and then finally this layer is shed, revealing the colors and mon of their new family. In the case of the peasantry, these garments are supplied by the shrine and are often the finest clothes the couple will ever wear.

When the ceremony is complete, a banquet is held in honor of the new couple. Unlike the ceremony, the banquet is open to guests. Speeches, poetry, performances, and games are common.

Funerals

Fortunist traditions regard death as chief among spiritual stains. This is because death clings to things; anything that is associated with the dead is "unclean." This is in contrast to Shinseist tradition, in which the contemplation of death is encouraged. Therefore, funerals are overseen by monks, not priests, and they are held in temples, never a shrine. Virtually no Fortunist funeral traditions exist, leaving last rites to be conducted according to the Tao of Shinsei. This is to protect shrines and their servants from the residual influence of death and the displeased attentions of their patron Fortune. Shrines are places of life, not death.

Even so, Fortunism stills plays an important role in the funeral ceremony, in the form of the priests of Emma-Ō. Sects that serve the Fortune of Death travel the lands for one explicit purpose: ensuring the souls of the departed can find their way to Emma-Ō's judgment and their proper destination.

Priests and Shugenja of Emma-Ō

Every Great Clan boasts a sect of priests of Emma-Ō in their lands, as do some Minor Clans. Although they all serve the same Fortune, these sects honor local customs and the traditions of their patron clan. Shrines staffed by these priests are rare, as they instead travel constantly, carrying their sacred artifacts with them. Because Rokugani do not commonly worship Emma-Ō (instead praying to Jizō, the Fortune of Mercy, in matters relating to death), the priests of Emma-Ō serve an important function: honoring the Fortune of Death so that no others need draw his attention.

Shugenja of Emma-Ō are especially rare, identified early by signs of the Fortune's blessing, such as jagged birthmarks. Distinguished by their white robes and ceremonial *sode* (shoulder guards), shugenja of Emma-Ō are trained exclusively to commune with their patron Fortune, to interpret his rare and cryptic replies, and most terrifyingly, to call upon his favor.

Among their greatest abilities is the capacity to sway Emma-Ō's decision regarding the deceased's next destination. As temple monks conduct a funeral ceremony, a shugenja of Emma-Ō, dressed as the Fortune to remind all of his presence, quietly witnesses the ceremony. Only after the rites have been completed, and all guests have left, does the shugenja step forward to perform their duty. Invoking the Great Judge, Emma-Ō, the shugenja conducts a ceremonial trial. The shugenja argues on behalf of the deceased, recalling their deeds in life and humbly asking for a better "sentence." The shugenja may request only a brief time in Meido for the departed, or even for an immediate delivery into Yomi, the Realm of Blessed Ancestors.

Although Emma-Ō's priests and shugenja are universally respected, they are held at arm's length due to the nature of their duties. Death's besmirching influence is ever-present with them, and after they have conducted their duties, they are honored, given gifts, and quickly sent on their way. Their presence outside of funerals is considered unlucky. Peasants avoid them, the superstitious fear them, and only foolish or desperate samurai seek them out. Theirs is a lonely existence, but also a necessary duty only they can embrace.

Battlefield Funerals of the Lion Clan

After a battle, dead samurai are gathered by hinin and cremated, and then their ashes and belongings are returned to their families. Once a family receives their loved one's ashes, a typical funeral is held at a temple.

The Lion, however, view the battlefield differently than do others. To die in battle is the greatest aspiration of a Lion samurai: to anoint the land with their lifeblood and mix their ashes with the bones of the earth. In the Lion's tradition, funeral rites are held on the battlefield, not by monks, but by priests of Emma-Ō. This ceremony is a closely guarded secret of the Kitsu-descended Emma-Ō shugenja. In the absence of family, the deceased's ancestors are summoned instead, and it is they who judge the departed soul first. If the ancestors judge the departed worthy, they accompany the spirit to Emma-Ō. Whatever happens to those the ancestors find lacking, the Lion will not say.



Festivals

Conducting the many annual festivals of Rokugan is an important function of a shrine. The Rokugani calendar is rich with annual festivals, to say nothing of the hundreds of unique local festivals celebrated throughout every province. Even the most remote village has at least one unique festival celebrating something important to the local culture. Some festivals date from the founding of the Empire and before, while others are recent inventions of daimyō or Emperors. Festivals acknowledge the changing seasons and commemorate important historical events, and they are held in honor of the Fortunes, honored ancestors, and other spirits.

While each festival has different customs, most are conducted in a similar way. The priest or shugenja performs a ritual purification of the shrine and the path where the venerated spirit is expected to travel. Shugenja also undertake grueling purification rituals, such as plunging their hands into boiling water or standing on burning coals. Then, the spirit of the festival is entreated to awaken. The shugenja explains why they have imposed upon the kami or Fortune and invites them to enter the shrine's shintai.

Once the shugenja confirms that the shintai is inhabited, it is placed within a portable container and paraded through the city or village, where citizens greet it according to local custom and conduct performances for the spirit's entertainment. Each festival has a different set of such entertainments, such as Nō theater, dragon dances, or firework displays. Different spirits each have their own preferences: Benten is said to enjoy Kabuki, while Bishamon prefers *sumai* matches, and Hachiman favors reenactments of battles. While festival goers enjoy these displays, they are ultimately meant for the enshrined spirit. The spirits are pleased when mortals drink, frolic, and enjoy themselves, so the entire village participates in the revelry, with unique festival foods and games offered throughout. With the enshrined spirit in attendance, the shrine can offer many special services that would otherwise require special timing: fortunes are told, conditions are treated, and spiritual consultations are freely given.

Near the festival's end, a great banquet is held in the spirit's honor. The meal is communal and shared by all who attend the festival. Blessed sake is a frequent feature, as are foods that are forbidden throughout much of the year but permitted during these feasts. For instance, the Festival of Hida is the only time when Crab samurai may consume the flesh of their totem animal.

Once the banquet has concluded and the enshrined spirit is presumably in a good mood, the shugenja petitions the spirit for its favor throughout the year. Good harvests, kind weather, and protection from plagues

ONE THOUSAND FESTIVALS

In addition to celebrating major festivals, every village and town boasts its own unique festivals that are observed nowhere else, honoring local spirits or something the people find vital to their way of life. Crossroads Village is the site of the Barefoot Festival, which honors Koshin, the Fortune of Roads. Coastal villages celebrate the Suijin Festival honoring the Fortune of the Sea. And everyone knows that Friendly Traveler Village celebrates a sake festival each year!

The families of the Great Clans also have unique festivals venerating their shared ancestors or important moments in their history. For instance, the Festival of Hida, celebrated only by the Crab on the third day of the Month of the Boar, honors their clan founder with the largest bragging competition in the Empire.

are common entreaties, as is the long life of the Emperor. Then, the final ceremonies are conducted and the spirit is sent on its way, returning to the shrine or from wherever it came.

While most major festivals follow this pattern, regional and minor festivals sometimes break from it, as do festivals of unusual origin. For instance, the Festival of the Moon's Wrath, which is celebrated during the first week of the Winter Court, features no entreaty to the honored spirit Onnotangu, nor any performances or merrymaking. Instead, businesses close, and courtiers refrain from all speech and song for one cycle of night and day, silencing the earth in honor of Lord Moon. Any who break this silence will suffer the god's wrath. Thus, some festivals are somber occasions rather than joyous ones.

Bon Festival

Held on the last day of the Month of the Dog, the Bon Festival honors the dead and appeases wandering spirits. It is the greatest ancestral festival, an occasion on which Rokugani recall their ancestors' greatest deeds. Yomi unites with Ningen-dō on this day, permitting blessed ancestors to visit and participate in the festivities. Families leave offerings for their departed loved ones, and a regional dance known as the *bon odori* is performed in their honor.

At the festival's end, attendees release floating paper lanterns along the rivers and streams, each lantern containing the name of one who died during that year. It is hoped that these lanterns will reach the sea, so that those lost souls who cannot cross the Bridge of Lights can instead follow the lights to the next world.

Cherry Blossom Festival

Among the most popular festivals is the one marking the start of the flower-viewing season (*hanami*), colloquially known as Cherry Blossom Festival. Local traditions surrounding this festival vary, as does the day on which it is observed each year. It honors Kan'o and Nagameru, the twin Fortunes of sakura trees. Special care is made to appeal to Nagameru, who is fickle and known to ruin the event with spring storms. Nagameru's name means "to gaze upon," but spelled differently, it also means "it rains a long time."

Cherry-blossom viewing is one of this festival's primary activities, as are picnics beneath the boughs. Festival attendees leave sake and poetry offerings to the oldest trees, especially those where the spirits called *kodama* may live. Priests divine the upcoming planting dates through the scattering of the pink blossoms, and evening flower viewing can last well into the night.

Shouting Day

Held on the fourth day of Month of the Tiger, Shouting Day is a festival honoring the Fortune of Fire and Thunder, Osano-wo. But instead of making entreaties and offering entertainments, participants stand on a designated stage and shout complaints at the top of their lungs. Anything is fair game, and however scandalous, it is expected to be immediately forgotten once spoken. Thus, peasants gripe about their lords, farmers and fisherfolk about poor harvests and weather, married folk about their spouses, children about their parents, and on occasion, the devout about the Fortunes. These complaints amuse Osano-wo and provide an outlet for the year's accumulated stress.

This festival is not observed by most nobility, as shouting gripes is beneath the dignity of samurai. However, some Minor Clans do observe the festival, and it is not unheard of for samurai to disguise themselves in order to participate.



Sacred Sites

Every shrine is a reflection of its enshrined spirit. A person can discern much about a spirit's nature by the layout of its shrine, the objects in it, and its traditions. A shrine is a spirit's home, designed to suit its preferences.

Shrines can appear anywhere a spirit is said to regularly visit or dwell. One can find them in cities or villages, in castles, or alone and far from civilization. Multiple shrines may share the same grounds, or they may even be incorporated into Shinseist temples. One may even find a shrine in the home of a samurai. The thing that ultimately identifies a shrine is the presence of a shintai, an object or feature capable of containing a spirit. Some shintai are objects crafted by shugenja, but the majority are natural features where spirits dwell. An ancient oak may be the home of a tree spirit (*kodama*), a waterfall may be the house of playful water kami, and Sengen Mountain is the palace of the Fortune that gave the mountain its name. In these cases, a shrine is erected nearby and designed to draw focus to the place of wonder where the spirits live.

SHRINE FEATURES

The following features and elements tend to appear in most (if not all) shrines.

Torii Arches

The torii arch marks the entrance to the shrine and the crossing point onto sacred ground. They are considered sacred gateways into blessed space. Crossing beneath a torii arch helps prepare the mind and body for purification. Visitors are required to enter a shrine through the archway, and some shrines are fenced off so as to make the torii the only possible entrance. Sometimes a path runs under multiple arches, forming a hall of sorts.

Usually constructed from blessed wood, torii can also be made from stone or plated with rare metals. Often they are very simple, consisting of two columns topped with two horizontal beams. The humblest consists of only the columns, replacing the upper lintels with a length of blessed *shimenawa* rope. Torii can also be elaborate, with pointed flanges, flared pillars, curved beams, and decorations like ropes, tags, and statues. If painted, torii are almost always a fiery red to repel malicious spirits.

Honden

The main hall, the *honden*, is the most sacred building on the shrine's grounds. This is where the shintai is housed and the sacred artifacts are kept. The honden is considered the home of the enshrined spirit. Only priests, shrine keepers, shugenja, and the Emperor may enter it. Others might inadvertently offend the spirit that dwells within.

Honden are sometimes built into the worship hall or set into a natural feature of the shrine, such as a cave or pond. Some rural shrines may not even have a honden, such as the Shrine of the Ki-Rin and the Shrine to Sengen, the Fortune of Mount Sengen. In these cases, a statue or other such object fulfills the honden's function.

Haiden

The *haiden* is the shrine's worship hall, where ceremonies take place. It is typically connected to the honden by a hallway, massive sliding shōji screen, or other such portal. The haiden usually consists of a main hall connected to several smaller inner shrines where visitors can worship in privacy. Icons of local Fortunes and smaller shrines to ancestors can be found there.

Some haiden incorporate architectural defenses, such as archer ramparts, hidden escape passages, and a sloped foundation. Such worship halls include shrines to Hachiman and Bishamon, as well as wealthy rural shrines at risk for bandit attacks.

Bell Tower

Bells repel evil spirits, so the *shōrō*, or bell tower, is considered a lucky building. Most shōrō are only "towers" in the loosest sense, rarely standing taller than two stories. Other types of "bell towers" include the one at the Shrine to Hotei, where the bell is incorporated into the main entrance gate, and the one-story "caged bell" at the Moshi family's seaside Amaterasu's Shrine.

Living Quarters

Shrine keepers live communally on the grounds in modular rooms formed by thin shōji screens, while priests often have their own one-room house separate from the other quarters. Amenities tend to be simple to avoid distracting from devotion to the Fortunes. Other parts of the shrine's residence might include a library, a dōjō (especially in shrines to martial Fortunes), and a kitchen.

Guest quarters are rare. Visitors are usually not allowed on shrine grounds after dark, and certainly not during the Hour of the Ox, when nighttime spirits are especially active. Fortunists believe the twilight hour is when the borders between Spirit Realms are at the weakest, so many shrines shoo visitors away at sunset. When a shrine must host guests, it is usually either in the bell tower (spirits avoid the bell) or in the residential quarters in a temporary room.



Performance Stage

Performances for an enshrined spirit are a daily part of shrine life, so some shrines incorporate some type of blessed stage. This is where keepers stage dances and plays. In larger shrines, this might even be an entire theater equipped for Nō.

Cleansing Pavilion

Known as the *chōzuya*, the cleansing pavilion is where guests purify themselves before entering the shrine proper. Usually this is a shallow roofed well, but it sometimes incorporates a natural water source, such as a stream or creek. Guests ladle water over their hands, mouth, and feet before rinsing the ladle itself.

Gardens

Shrine gardens offer quiet places for visitors and keepers to meditate in. The garden type reflects the nature of the enshrined spirit, such as stone gardens for martial spirits, flower gardens for nature spirits, sand gardens for ancestors, and so on. At the shrines of the Seven Fortunes, the gardens are cultivated to resemble landscapes of the Spirit Realms, so that the visiting Fortune may feel more at home.

SHIMENAWA ROPES

Shimenawa are straw ropes meant to encircle sacred spaces. Decorated with jagged strips of paper and straw tassels, shimenawa are commonly found around sacred trees and stones and throughout the shrine. Such ropes come in two varieties: blessing ropes, which ward against evil spirits and create "homes" for kami to dwell within, and binding ropes, which contain spirits and keep them from leaving. Priests sometimes encircle houses or even entire villages with shimenawa in order to bless them and keep them safe from supernatural harm.

Reflection Pool

A popular feature with visitors and a shrine keeper's nightmare to clean, the reflection pool symbolizes the illusionary nature of the world. The entire shrine is reflected in the pool, but only a slight ripple causes it to vanish and reveal the completely different reality beneath. Thus, the reflection pool serves as a reminder that the Spirit Realms are ever present.

Statue Guardians

Stone animal statues are common sights around shrines. Usually they stand at the entrance, but they can also be found on rooftops, carved into corners, or standing at the apex of curved bridges. The purpose of these statues is to scare away unwelcome spirits and guard the shrine against curses. It is believed the statues would come to life if certain malicious ghosts were to appear. The type of animal depicted varies between regions, but the most common are lion-dogs (known as *komainu*), foxes (such as at shrines to Inari), and boars.

KAMI SHRINES

Shrines to kami are generally simple, often incorporating the landscape or a geographical feature that serves as the kami's shintai. They can be as humble as a single lantern at the foot of a waterfall, a rope tied around a moss-covered stone, or a dollhouse-sized replica of a larger shrine. Whatever marks the sacred space is usually a *yorishiro*, an object that attracts and pleases kami and benevolent spirits. These blend in with their natural surroundings, preserving the harmony of the sacred space. Kami shrines are typically remote, lacking torii arches and purification basins, but they can sometimes be found incorporated into larger shrines, such as those to Fortunes.

SHRINES TO FORTUNES

Fortunist shrines are the most consistently similar, but they still vary among clans in layout and architectural features. Shrines to Greater Fortunes are spread throughout the land. Each Greater Fortune has a primary shrine, from which all others devoted to that Fortune derive their layout and teachings.

Fortunist shrines are often the largest, sometimes even as large as temples, and they almost always have at least one torii arch and a honden where the shintai is kept. This shintai is usually an object once held by the Fortune (especially at their primary shrine) or an icon bearing their likeness. A stairway or path leads to the torii arch, followed by a square-shaped enclosed space containing the shrine's other structures. Fortunist shrines are built to be as unobtrusive among natural surroundings as possible: creeks may run through them, the worship hall may be built around a sacred oak or stone, or the shrine's path may be carved dangerously into a mountainside.

Shrines to the Seven Great Fortunes are often incorporated into lesser shrines. These shrines to the Great Fortunes usually resemble shrine-shaped birdhouses and contain miniature versions of everything a full-sized shrine might require.

Ancestral Shrines

All major shrines devote a small space for worshiping one's ancestors. This is usually an empty altar on which visitors place the shintai of their ancestor, usually a small wooden tablet bearing the ancestor's name.

KAMIDANA

The *kamidana* is a miniature household altar to the kami or a particular Fortune. It rests within a little alcove just large enough to accommodate kneeling or on a shelf and contains small sculptures, charms, blessing ropes, and often a humble shintai of sorts.

Most Rokugani homes do not have a kamidana. Samurai and peasants both reserve such space for shrines to their ancestors. However, many urban shugenja find it useful to have a kamidana in their home so they can commune with the kami without visiting a city shrine. Samurai who work closely with shugenja or are especially reverent of kami, such as the Shiba of the Phoenix and the Mirumoto of the Dragon, also tend to have a kamidana in their home. Kamidana can be found on boats (especially those of the Mantis Clan) as well, so that sailors at sea can still worship the Fortunes.

However, every samurai family maintains an ancestral shrine on their grounds, either set aside in a quiet place, or incorporated directly into the home. Such shrines are unobtrusive and humble, incorporating likenesses of each honored ancestor, usually in the form of statues or paintings. Also enshrined is at least one object that belonged to each ancestor in life, which serves to attract the ancestors' presence.

Great Clan families also maintain shrines to their founders. These ancestral shrines are the grandest and could be easily confused for Fortunist shrines, as they incorporate similar layouts and consistent features, such as torii arches, cleansing basins, and a worship hall. Shrine attendants exemplify the founder's philosophies and seek to emulate them. The largest of these shrines are those of the clan founders and the Shrine of the Hantei.

THE SHRINE OF THE KI-RIN

On a remote mountaintop in westernmost Phoenix lands rests a modest shrine. This sacred place would be easily overlooked were it not for its massive torii arch, clearly visible above the surrounding lands. Some say ki-rin still linger here in small herds among the hidden glades and rapids. Those who seek their good favor leave offerings at the shrine's altar and hope for a glimpse of the mysterious creature.

History

Not much is known about the Shrine of the Ki-Rin's founding. According to local folklore, Lady Shinjo herself rested on this precipice before undertaking her journey beyond the Empire. As the sun set, she spotted a ki-rin, a mysterious equine creature born of the Celestial Heavens. A statue was erected on the spot where the encounter took place.

Ki-rin's Shrine is now a frequent destination of Unicorn pilgrims as an important place in their clan's history. A long-standing agreement permits Unicorn visitors to visit the shrine as they please, a courtesy extended even during times of strife and without need for travel papers.

Approaching the Shrine

The Shrine of the Ki-Rin is roughly a half-day's travel from Shiro Gisu in the mountainous Asako provinces. The climb is rocky and densely forested, bordering winding rapids that cascade in a webbed network down from the plateaus into narrow valleys. Only the fiery torii arch is visible in the distance. There is no main road; the path is subtly marked at regular intervals by stone lanterns, and guides are often required in order to find them. At dawn or dusk, travelers might hear the distant sound of *taiko* drums rolling down from the high crest of the mountains.

Eventually, the ground smooths into a worn path along the frequent cascades. The refreshing breeze grows colder as travelers push upward. At last, the forest gives way to bare rocks and lone pines in the chill mountain air. The path passes under a torii and leads up to the massive arch that dominates the rounded peak. Beyond the second peak is a plateau, offering a breathtaking view of Phoenix lands to the east and south, and the Dragon Heart Plains unfurling due west.

Those expecting the elaborately grand architecture typical of Phoenix shrines are likely to be disappointed. Instead, a handful of humble buildings encircle the mountain shelf: several buildings housing living quarters and a one-room administrative office. There is no worship hall, no meditative garden, and no honden to hold the shintai. Instead, the shrine consists of a single statue, a marble ki-rin entwined with sculpted flames facing the Great Wall of the North Mountains. Its eyes are set with jade, and a thick shimenawa rope encircles its neck. Across the stone pedestal, ancient words are carved: "Look to the horizon, for the visions there are footsteps of the future." Offerings sprawl around the statue's feet, including sliced cabbage, polished acorns, dishes of sake, and incense cones that coat the nose with anise and spicy clove.

The shrine's wardens are a small and tight-knit group. The head priest, a middle-aged man named Hinoki, has recently come into his position. He walks the status tightrope as a priest who is in charge of a major shrine but is not of noble birth. A handful of shrine keepers tend to the shrine's daily affairs, sweeping, blessing the grounds, and assisting pilgrims.

A new addition to the shrine is Kaito Hinowa, a rustic shrine keeper from the Kaito family. Pledged to defend shrines from spiritual imbalance, the Kaito's esoteric traditions have led Hinowa to Ki-Rin's Shrine. She feels the kami want her to remain here and protect the shrine's sacred ground. No priest would turn down a Kaito's protection. However, Hinoki wishes he could, for although Hinowa means well, she is unfamiliar with the shrine's unique customs and has made herself a nuisance. Out of respect for her station he dare not turn her away, but Hinoki's patience is reaching its limits.

THE KI-RIN

The ki-rin is among Rokugan's least understood mystical creatures. It is believed that ki-rin are native to Tengoku, but they roam throughout the Spirit Realms in herds. According to local folklore, they only appear before the very virtuous and the very wicked, bestowing blessings on the former and curses on the latter.

The ki-rin's most common appearance is that of a horse or deer wreathed in flame and smoke, with the head of a dragon and the tail of either a tiger or an ox. Some claim they have a single horn protruding from their forehead, while others say they have two backward-pointed antlers. Phoenix texts claim ki-rin can look into the hearts of mortals and know their karma. Unicorn folklore says they are so compassionate they walk on air to avoid harming even the smallest blade of grass.

Utaku Takeko, Wistful Pilgrim

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 3 2

The quiet Takeko is like a fallen oak leaf caught in the spring wind; she has no sense of place and knows not where she will land. The youngest of six and five months past gempuku, she feels lost and without purpose. Takeko hopes she might spot the legendary ki-rin and find an inspiration as to her purpose in life. Anyone who can show her a purpose will win her fierce and undying loyalty.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
60	HONOR	ENDURANCE	12
40	GLORY	COMPOSURE	10
39	STATUS	FOCUS	4
+1, +1, –2	DEMEANOR · DETACHED	VIGILANCE	2

3 2 3 2 3

ARTISAN 1 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Fiercely Loyal: Social; *Interpersonal*	**Suppressed Emotions:** Social; *Mental*

FAVORED WEAPONS

Katana: Range 1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Razor-edged

Gear (equipped): Plain robes (Physical 1, Mundane), wakizashi, a handful of bu

ABILITIES

PILGRIM'S DEVOTION

While following an omen or other divine sign, Takeko and her allies in the scene remove 1 fatigue each time they gain 1 or more strife.

The Setsuban Festival

Complementing the Setsubun Festival of spring, the annual Setsuban Festival celebrates the change from summer to autumn. Summer is war season in the Empire, and it is imperative that those evils created in summer do not follow and taint the crop before the upcoming harvest. Across the Empire, shrines symbolically summon "demons" as the focus of all the evil and ill that occurred during the year. These demons are "slain" by the priests, ensuring summer's evils die with them. Of course, the demons are just priests in costume, and their defeat mere pageantry that is nonetheless vital to the autumn harvest.

WHISPERED RUMORS

- The ki-rin appears to someone nearly every day, but only when they are alone.
- Strange cloven tracks were discovered near the shrine. They were burned into the ground, leaving scorches on stone and embers in the soil. But the next day, no trace of them remained.
- The border patrols from Shiro Gisu grow more frequent while Unicorn pilgrims are being shadowed by Shiba scouts. Effects of the rising tensions between the Phoenix and Unicorn are felt even here…

The most elaborate Setsuban Festival, held at the Shrine of the Ki-Rin, is home to one of the greatest displays of *kitō* in Rokugan. At this event, shugenja from across the lands gather to compete in a grand tournament. Each participant antes a treasured artifact or a scroll of sacred teachings from their dōjō, monastery, temple, or library. The shugenja compete against one another in a "battle" of invocations, a display of power to frighten any summer demons who witness it. The winner receives all of the anted scrolls and artifacts, along with the acclaim and respect of their peers. Because losing a scroll is a shame one can never live down, typical competitors are either confident, foolish, or desperate.



BENTEN SEIDŌ

Shrines to the Seven Great Fortunes are scattered throughout the Empire, and the largest and most impressive shrine to Benten rests in the domain of the Crane Clan. The first of Benten's shrines ever erected, it marks the border between the northern lands and the Crane's rustic southern provinces. Wayward lovers go there from across the Empire to seek Benten's guidance, and the road to Benten Seidō is paved with as many tragic stories as happy ones.

History

If the Fortune who embodies a virtue that samurai are expected to disregard has an unusual relationship with the people of Rokugan, then so too does her magnificent shrine. It was erected to appease the offended Fortune when a stone-hearted Crane Champion forced his daughter to choose between her lover and her life. She chose death, leaping off a cliff overlooking a sweeping river. But legends say a massive gust of wind erupted off the river, carrying her back up to the peak and into the arms of her lover. Taking this as the judgment of Benten, the embarrassed champion arranged for their marriage and erected this shrine to thank the Fortune for her intervention. Ever since, the shrine has served as a frequent stop for enamored pilgrims and muse-seeking artisans.

Approaching the Shrine

To reach Benten Seidō, pilgrims must travel through the narrow Cold Wind Pass and up the easternmost of the Seikitsu Mountains. Despite the shrine's frequent visitors, the approach is poorly maintained, uneven and littered with stones and tangled weeds. The shrine's priests leave the road in this sorry state on purpose: the path to true love is not easily traversed, after all.

The climb is a day's travel up the mountain. One hundred and eight torii arches form a tunnel around steep steps built on the slopes toward the end. Confession papers litter the stairs, along with pink blossoms and discarded love poetry. The top of the climb reveals a glistening lake surrounded by cherry and maple trees. The wind carries incense and the sound of bush warblers across the lake's warm waters. A crested wooden bridge with no guardrails leads to the small island where the shrine complex awaits.

Benten Seidō resembles a resort more than a true shrine, due in part to the hot springs that feed the lake. The frequency of visitors has necessitated the expansion of the guest hall, which is now a hotel in all but name. Proceeds from this inn directly benefit the shrine, as does the wealth of wishing coins glittering in the water. The shrine rests on irregular ground, so the staggered worship hall and adjoining buildings are connected by rope bridges and suspended flights of stairs. The honden is actually a cave with a cold stream winding through it, originating from melting ice at the Seikitsu's highest peak. The mingling of hot and cold water creates a steamy fog that gently radiates out of the cave.

The assistant priest of Benten Seidō is Kawana, an ancient man completely devoted to Benten's teachings. He is openly displeased with the increasingly commercial nature of the shrine, complaining to any who will listen that the commerce of running a hotel and hot springs taints the site's sacred nature. He frequently can be found playing the biwa and reciting mantras outside the cloistered guest-hall gardens, so as to remind guests of why they are supposedly there.

The head priest is Tsubaki, an orphan girl who was inexplicably elevated to the position at the instruction of her predecessor. Although she has only received shrine keeper training, she has proven extremely effective at managing the shrine since assuming her post. Perpetually joyful and patient, she refers to Kawana as "grandfather" and regards his displeasure at the shrine's commerce with open amusement.

WHISPERED RUMORS

- One of the enshrined relics in the sacred cave is the biwa Kakita crafted from a piece of driftwood, thereby "bringing the dead to life" and attracting the love of Doji herself. It is kept wrapped in cloth and almost never removed.
- The priest Kawana was once a Kakita family noble and a flagrant playboy. He left a trail of shattered hearts until something made him realize his cruelty. Ashamed of how he abused Benten's blessings, he now lives a life of atonement at her shrine.
- One of the shrine keepers is actually Benten in disguise, but no one is sure which one.

Suzume Hinagiku, Wayward Heart

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 1 3

Hailing from a rustic valley, the Sparrow Hinagiku is a bright youth with her whole life ahead of her. That is why it is so puzzling to see her sadly stalking the worship hall of Benten Seidō, speaking to no one. Her breaths are heavy sighs, her faint smiles are wistful, and her words are short and brief—quite unlike the long-winded rambling for which her family is famous. Whatever makes her haunt these sacred halls of the Fortune of Arts and Romantic Love, she will not say. But neither will she leave, not until she can make sense of whatever twists her heart.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
45	HONOR	ENDURANCE	8
40	GLORY	COMPOSURE	8
25	STATUS	FOCUS	5
+1, –1	DEMEANOR · DISHEARTENED	VIGILANCE	2



ARTISAN 1 | MARTIAL 0 | SCHOLAR 3 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 2

ADVANTAGES

Exact Memory: Scholar; *Mental*

DISADVANTAGES

Poverty: Trade; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS

Wakizashi: Range 0-1, Damage 3, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Razor-edged

Gear (equipped): Burlap kimono (Physical 1, Mundane), traveling pack, journal, charm of Benten

ABILITIES

BENTEN'S FAVOR

When Suzume Hinagiku speaks of her beloved or her emotions, she counts as having rank 3 in social skills. Once per scene, characters who hear Hinagiku speak from the heart may recover 3 strife.

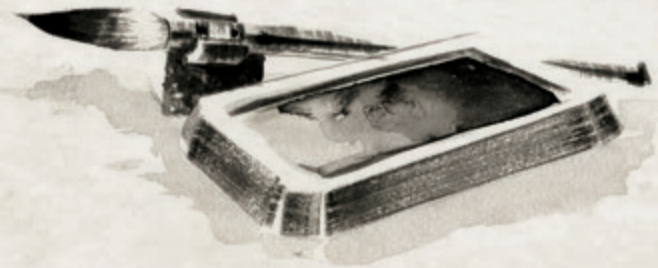
ADVENTURE SEED: A FORTUNE SCORNED

Hook Governor Daidoji Haranobu's son Hisao is getting married, and the governor couldn't be prouder. Because his son's Seppun wife-to-be will bring his house much honor, he has secured Benten Seidō for the wedding locale, sparing no expense. Unfortunately, the wedding has been postponed after nine straight days of rain. Haranobu is in great distress, and seeks the aid of skilled samurai to discover what has so offended the spirits and appease them.

Rising Action As the PCs investigate the weather, the head priest, Tsubaki, confirms that the storm is unnatural. If questioned, he conjectures that perhaps the Fortune is angry. But what could have offended the Fortune of Romantic Love?

Hisao may admit under questioning that he has no feelings for his bride Meiko, but he is prepared to do his duty. He may also let slip something of his affections for his childhood friend Suzume Hinagiku, who has been moping around the shine in great distress. Hinagiku doesn't want to speak of her sadness, but a sympathetic questioner may discover that she expressed her love for Hisao in a letter, only to be rebuffed.

Climax Through clever questions or subtle duplicity, the PCs discover that Haranobu intercepted Hinagiku's letter, and forged a written reply rebuffing and scorning her. Now, Benten herself is angered that Haranobu would dare hold a loveless wedding at her shrine, and may visit further misfortune on Haranobu's line for his audacity. But severing the marriage would greatly insult the Seppun and cause a tremendous loss of face. The PCs must decide whether to risk dishonoring themselves and Haranobu by revealing the truth, or if the wedding can be saved.



THE SHRINE OF THE WILLOW-HEALING KAMI

Clear Water Village is the largest port city of the Crab Clan and a major center of trade. It also contains one of the Empire's oldest shrines. Set on an outcropping just beyond the docks, little more than a stone lantern at the foot of a dappled willow, it is easy to overlook. But were it not for the Willow-Healing Kami enshrined here, Clear Water Village would not exist.

History

Now a village only in name, Clear Water Village was once a tiny speck, a minor fishing settlement at the mouth of the River of Gold, overlooking Earthquake Fish Bay. Despite its size, it was an important village to the Yasuki family, providing the wealth of the sea and feeding the clan with daily catches from its unusually warm waters.

History does not record what the denizens did to offend Ekibyōgami, but during the second century, the Fortune of Pestilence made its displeasure with the village known. A terrible plague swept through the settlement, causing fever, scaly fluid-filled bumps across the skin, muscle pains, weakness, and eventually death. Even the fish seemed affected by the disease, and as it swept unhindered through the village, priests gave daily offerings to Ekibyōgami and begged for the Fortune's mercy.

All would have been lost had it not been for the intervention of a lone kodama, the spirit of a humble willow shrub. When the spirit's daily visitor, a young girl who often played around its boughs, caught the disease and came close to death, the kodama approached the Fortune alone and bargained for the people's lives. It is not known what the spirit traded for Ekibyōgami's mercy, but when the disease miraculously vanished, the willow's once-strong boughs sagged, the bark became grey and soft, and its lush green leaves turned pale white. So it is to this day.

Approaching the Shrine

Because it rests on an outcropping beyond the busy docks, one must approach the Shrine of the Willow-Healing Kami on boat. A blessed kobune ship, decorated with paper streamers and a torii arch, is maintained for this purpose and is considered by many to be a part of the shrine.

WHISPERED RUMORS

- To appease Ekibyōgami, the kami offered its good health to the Fortune. The spirit grows weaker every decade as a result, and in fact may have died long ago. The tree is now empty, and the prayers spoken there are heard by no one.
- When there is an earthquake, an ancient water dragon is arguing with Suijin, causing the underwater volcanoes to erupt. Things would be much worse if the Willow-Healing Kami weren't there to calm them down.
- During the Willow-Healing Kami Festival, the kodama takes human form and mingles with mortal attendees.
- The shrine keeper is vexed by poor luck that always interferes with his friendships and potential romances. It's as if he's cursed!

On the farthest side of the tiny island rests the humble shrine: a knee-high stone lantern at the foot of a seven-foot dappled willow. This ancient shrub is perpetually in bloom, with splotchy pink flowers and colorless leaves gently shedding into the reflective sea beneath the sagging boughs. A thick shimenawa rope encircles the knobby trunk, designating this as the blessed home of an ancient spirit.

Shrine visitors are rare. There are few reasons to visit the Willow-Healing Kami, and the spirit has not manifested in ages. However, there are some who still leave regular offerings of incense and sake in order to thank the gentle kodama and humbly ask for its continued protection.



Kuni Kayo, the Willow Gardener

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 5 3

Descended from the first shrine keeper to tend the Willow-Healing Kami, Kuni Kayo has an obscure and lonely duty. He is the lone caretaker of the Shrine of the Willow-Healing Kami, as were his father, grandmother, and other ancestors before him. Fortunately, he has the kodama of the willow to keep him company. It speaks to him with great fondness, and their endless conversations draw many eyes (and lead some to believe he is a little odd). Determined, knowledgeable, and only mildly off-putting (for a Kuni, anyway), Kayo secretly yearns for greater things, but he could never abandon his duty or the kodama that has befriended him.

Unmarried and with no heirs, Kayo wishes for a betrothal, but his poor luck and obscure duty work against him, and he is at a loss regarding what to do. The kodama seems unconcerned, or even jealous, if marriage is brought up in its presence. It is almost as if it does not wish for Kayo to marry lest his attentions be drawn elsewhere, but surely it is not responsible for his poor marital luck…

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
40	HONOR	ENDURANCE	12
40	GLORY	COMPOSURE	14
25	STATUS	FOCUS	4
+2, –2	DEMEANOR · GRUFF	VIGILANCE	1



ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 4 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Analytical Mind: Social; *Mental*	**Can't Get A Break:** Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS

Bō: Range 1-2, Damage 6, Deadliness 2, Mundane

Gear (equipped): Kimono (Physical 1, Mundane), pillow book, bottle of sake

ABILITIES

JURŌJIN'S BALM

As a Support action, Kayo may make a **TN 1 Theology (Earth) check** targeting one character at range 0-1. If he succeeds, the target reduces the TN of all checks to resist the effects of poison and disease by 2 (to a minimum of 1) and cannot become intoxicated. This lasts until the end of the scene.

SUMMON THE WILLOW KODAMA

Once per scene as a Support action, Kayo may summon the willow kodama as long as he is within range 0-5 of the Shrine of the Willow-Healing Kami. The willow kodama appears to fight Kayo's enemies and otherwise protect him until the end of the scene.

The Willow Kodama

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 7 4

The willow kodama has not manifested in generations, but a strong entreaty may rouse it from its deep slumber. Should it appear, it may take the form of a hunched being with long white hair, skin of grey gnarled bark, and kind eyes.



ENDURANCE	12	FOCUS	3
COMPOSURE	8	VIGILANCE	3

+2, –2
DEMEANOR · CALM

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 1 | TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Strong Roots: Martial; *Physical*	**Unrequited Love:** Social; *Mental*

FAVORED WEAPONS

Whiplike Boughs: Range 0–2, Damage 6, Deadliness 3, deals physical or supernatural damage

Gear (equipped): Bark Hide (Physical 4, Sacred)

ABILITIES

KODAMA'S BLESSING

Once per scene, as a Support action the willow kodama may target any number of characters within range 0-5. Each character targeted removes 4 fatigue, and one condition of the kodama's choice.

LIVING WILLOW SPIRIT

The willow kodama is an Otherworldly being of silhouette 2. Additionally, once per scene as an action of the appropriate types, the willow kodama may perform any one Earth or Water invocation of rank 1 or 2. It counts as succeeding with 3 bonus successes and 2 .

Forbidden Beliefs

Shintao is not the only faith practiced in Rokugan. Cults to Lord Moon, who hates all mortals, seek to empower him and hasten his judgment upon his children. Blood-speakers, organized users of blood magic, work to free Iuchiban from his bindings. The selfish who seek power turn to curses and bargains with oni. The world is filled with many dangers, and the Spirit Realms are no exception.

DARK SHRINES, NOBLE GOALS

Not all spirits are benevolent. Some, like the dreaded oni, come from Jigoku to sow evil in Ningen-dō, the Realm of Mortals. Others are victims of imbalance, like the cursed dragon P'an Ku, who became trapped in Ningen-dō. Still others, like the dreaded Fortune of Pestilence, are simply performing their duty.

Such dreadful spirits are to be feared and held in reverence, just like any other. Clans maintain shrines to malicious spirits as well as good, and offerings are still made at their altars. Such shrines are common throughout the Empire. The Doji keep the largest of the Fortune of Pestilence's shrines, and a portion of every major crop is burned at Ekibyōgami's altar so that he will not seek his dues himself. In Dragon lands, the Agasha tend shrines to Tōshigoku and Gaki-dō in order to balance the benevolent shrines honoring Meido and Tengoku. Some may ask why anyone would keep cursed shrines, but some forces cannot be defeated, merely appeased. It is better that they dwell in a cursed shrine than roam the world free!

ENSHRINING THE FOUL

Hidden in the world, there exist secret shrines honoring spirits that are the enemies of the Celestial Order or all humankind. These are maintained by heretical cults devoted to dark forces. Such a cult might be nihilistically self-destructive, devoted to a corrupted philosophy, or simply desperate and disillusioned with the way of the Fortunes. Such shrines are wildly disruptive to the natural harmony and a direct threat to Rokugan's spiritual well-being. Their existence is a shame to any clan that harbors them, and they should be eradicated on sight.

CORRUPTED SHRINES

When a shrine falls into disrepair, the enshrined spirit flees, or a blighting element is brought into the sacred space and allowed to fester, a once-benevolent shrine may become corrupted. This also happens when a realm of punishment, such as Tōshigoku or Gaki-dō, takes hold of the shrine grounds and supersedes Ningen-dō. When this occurs, the spirits of those realms take the place of the enshrined spirit or turn it into a malicious entity.

Corrupted shrines are insidiously indistinguishable from normal shrines, except to those who can sense the corruption. Dust motes hang in the stale air, the blessed waters seem tepid, and no matter how diligently swept, the shrine never seems clean. The grounds resist consecration, as the Fortunes and ancestors abandon the site. The bound kami are not so lucky, becoming angry at the shrine's state, or worse, transforming into kansen, malicious spirits Tainted by Jigoku's influence.

A shrine can fall into disrepair if it is not cared for, but this alone is not enough to corrupt it. The corruption comes from outside the shrine. Sometimes it occurs by accident, such as when a person bypasses the torii arch and enters the grounds unclean.



MALICIOUS FORTUNES

All Fortunes have peaceful and wrathful aspects, but some strongly favor their unkind side. These are Fortunes whose attentions villagers would rather avoid, whose offerings are simply to appease the Fortune or hurry them on their way. Below is a partial list of such Fortunes.

- **Ekibyōgami, the Fortune of Pestilence:** A spiteful Fortune who spreads disease and blights, Ekibyōgami ultimately serves Jurō-jin, the Fortune of Longevity, and maintains balance so that life never overtakes death.
- **Hofukushu, the Fortune of Vengeance:** Said to be older than the Fortune of Justice, Hofukushu is prayed to by the desperately wronged and avoided by the desperately guilty.
- **Kamashi-Okara, the Fortune of Sorrow:** Her role is to make mortals acutely aware that their time is limited in Ningen-Dō, so that they won't waste the time they have.
- **Kirako, the Fortune of Torture:** In life, Suzume Kirako protested the torture of a samurai before the Steel Chrysanthemum. As punishment, she was tortured to death and then elevated to become the Fortune of Torture, so that she would embody and witness the thing she most despised forevermore.
- **Onnotangu, Lord Moon:** Father of the Kami, husband to Amaterasu, Onnotangu believes he was betrayed by his family, and his hatred of the Realm of Mortals is well known.

More often, malicious forces are to blame, such as mahō. A shrine's descent into corruption can be reversed midway by those who are wary, but once a shrine has fallen entirely, it becomes far more difficult to wipe the stain clean again. If the Shadowlands are involved, it is nearly impossible.

Haunted Shrines

Every shrine by its nature is at least partially "haunted," but by benevolent ghosts. However, the shrines that are called haunted shrines are choked by the grip of malicious spirits, and living beings are driven out. A number of things can cause this, including a botched funeral, an angered ancestor, or, in some cases, the release of a malicious spirit the shrine was intended to imprison. Whatever the cause, such a shrine becomes infested with ghosts, which foil consecrations and drive out its enshrined spirit. This renders the shrine useless, with rippling consequences on harvests, festivals, and blessings.

Fortunes value their shrines, and when one becomes haunted, often its Fortune tries to reclaim it. Earthquakes shake the foundation, floods attempt to wash the ghosts away, or storms erupt to drive the ghosts from the grounds. These attempts always cause collateral damage to nearby settlements, and the Fortune is not always successful in removing stubborn ghosts. Thus, it is in a shugenja's best interest to exorcize such a shrine, sparing innocent lives and winning the favor of the Fortune in the process. Of course, such a feat is easier said than done, as few ghosts can be combated directly. Many must instead be appeased.

Shadowlands Shrines

The most vile, profane shrines are those erected by mahō-tsukai for oni or kansen. Kept far from civilization, these shrines empower Jigoku's forces, creating places that attract kansen and where oni may manifest. The Shadowlands' corrupting touch can be felt here, and those who worship at the profane altar leave Tainted.

In these shrines, corruption and filth is desired, so dirty elements like bone or blood are incorporated into the architecture. Living beings may be entombed in the foundation, their torturous suffering giving birth to otherworldly guardians in service to the enshrined demon.

The purpose of these shrines is to create a power base for mahō-tsukai. In the shrine, they conduct their dark rituals undetected and experiment with kansen. An enshrined oni might be safely lobbied for an audience and bargained with; a supplicant might even offer the oni their own name in exchange for a fragment of its power. In such shrines, sinister libraries of forbidden knowledge lie beneath the twisted spires, while cursed objects wait patiently to be unleashed.

These brooding places are sought out by Kuni Witch Hunters, Phoenix Inquisitors, and members of the Scorpion's Black Watch, the Kuroiban. When one of these groups encounters a cursed shrine, they put it to the torch and salt its ground. It will be decades before the land can function again, and generations before it can be consecrated—if ever. Nevertheless, these consequences are far preferable to permitting the shrine to exist.

FORBIDDEN RITUALS

As the head of Rokugani religion, the Emperor has decreed a number of practices to be heretical. Engaging in any of the following practices is a supreme offense to the Celestial Order and highly treasonous. A Rokugani who embraces one is a living shame to their family, their very existence staining the honor of all who share their name. For attempting any of the following, a person can be killed on sight, erased from clan records, and forgotten by their descendants. Yet, those who are willing to risk such things in exchange for vengeance are seemingly without number.

Curses

A curse is any recurring misfortune caused by supernatural forces. A curse may be caused by a spirit, which follows the cursed person and invisibly incites calamities, or it may be tied to a person's karma, manifesting whenever specific behaviors occur. Powerful curses can last generations, afflicting everyone in the cursed person's bloodline. Because most methods for cursing others are rooted in folklore and superstition, they are not derived from the writings of shugenja. Therefore, they lie outside the realm of Rokugani religion and are not sanctioned practices.

Folk tales suggest numerous ways to inflict a curse, such as by driving nails into a tree on which the target's likeness is drawn during the Hour of the Ox, or leaving the ashes of one's hearth sprinkled at their doorstep several nights running. However, most curses involve making a deal with a trickster spirit or ancestor.

A shugenja's curses are among the most feared. Since they can directly bargain with spirits, the curses tend to be more potent. These curses affect the very karma of the target and could last forever. A well-known example is the curse of the Yogo family. For thwarting him, Fu Leng cursed Yogo's entire line. Members of the Yogo family are cursed to betray the one they love most. They can never tell when the curse will manifest, nor how minor or great the betrayal will be, but a thousand years and many generations later, the curse still affects every Yogo.

In the eighth century, the Grand Master of the Elements arrived at Kakita Palace to find the gates closed. Insulted, he laid a curse on the gates: any child born within the palace while the gates were closed would doom the family if they ever drew steel. To avoid the curse, the family has ordered that the gates be left perpetually open. Nevertheless, a few unfortunates have been born in the palace while the gates were closed. Such Kakita are not taught the ways of their family and are forbidden to even touch a blade.

THE FOX'S TALE

A common folk tale retold in plays concerns the summoning of a fox spirit by the disowned son of a samurai lord. The son bargains with the fox spirit, promising that if it will haunt his father, he will bring the fox a bushel of fried tofu every full moon. The fox torments the samurai lord with tricks and misfortune until his reputation and wealth are in tatters. One night, the young man leaves out a single piece of tofu from his monthly offering, enraging the betrayed fox, who reveals the arrangement to the samurai lord.

The lord confronts his son, and they argue and threaten throughout the night, much to the entertainment of the fox. Finally, however, the fox grows bored, at which point it settles the matter by devouring them both.

Mahō

The most profane practice is known as mahō, or "blood magic." Explicitly forbidden, mahō invokes kansen, kami that are corrupted by the Shadowlands Taint, and calls upon the forces of Jigoku itself to aid the caster. By practicing this art, a person can raise the dead, summon demons, inflict curses, and obtain favors from evil spirits. Every time mahō is invoked, it attracts Jigoku's forces and invites the Realm of Evil into Ningen-dō.

One does not need the shugenja's gift to use mahō. Instead, one offers the correct prayer to Fu Leng, followed by an offering of fresh blood, either one's own or someone else's. Blood is an unclean substance that stains the spirit, but for Jigoku, it is the essence of mortal life and the supreme offering. By giving their own blood, mahō-tsukai compel kansen to commit profane acts, and by utilizing blood rituals, they embrace the vile gifts of the Shadowlands Taint.

As an animal that has tasted human blood will forever crave it, so are users of mahō compelled to call upon it again and again. The power offered by mahō is great, but the cost is an addiction to power, harboring the Taint, and, ultimately, service to Fu Leng.

Name Giving

Blood is not the only offering the denizens of Jigoku prize. There is also power in a mortal's name. Oni are born formless, shapeless, and without identity. Because they come from a profane place, they have no name to call their own. Instead, they take the names of mortals. This increases an oni's power a hundredfold.

There are those who would trade their name in exchange for some of an oni's power. Because a samurai's name belongs to their ancestors, this is a terrible betrayal of their bloodline. The name becomes forever besmirched, and even writing it could draw forth misfortune and uncleanliness. In exchange for the name, the oni becomes linked to the name giver. The name giver obtains the powers of the oni and can summon it at any time. Each can hear the thoughts of the other, and they must heed each other. Nothing can break this bond except the banishment of the oni or—if the name-giver is fortunate—death.

CHAPTER

5

Paths to Enlightenment

After a forced march to a crucial bridgehead, a late-night council of war grows heated within a daimyō's tent. A hotheaded young captain wants to lead an all-out assault on the enemy. The ashigaru commissioner requests a night's rest before the exhausted rank and file take the field. The quartermaster, citing dwindling provisions, begs to plunder the countryside instead of confronting the army.

Throughout the argument, a bald-headed elder sits silently, until at last the exasperated daimyō asks his opinion. He quotes a line from the Tao of Shinsei: an exhortation to investigate suffering's root causes. Might the captain find glory in a less direct approach? Could the commissioner spare a few ashigaru for a smaller mission, while resting the remainder? Perhaps the quartermaster could keep the army fed if their supply train had time to catch up?

The belligerent officers lower their voices, take a breath, listen. The monk guides their discussion toward a middle way: the camp will dig in while the captain leads a small detachment of skirmishers to plunder the enemy's supply lines. As the council departs satisfied, the daimyō bows deeply to the monk, thanking him for an important lesson in both warcraft and Shinseism.



The Mystery of Shinsei

Shinsei, the Little Teacher, sparked a revolution in Rokugan's life, prayer, and thought. He prophetically explained how life, death, the elements, and society work together in a grand cycle that spins far beyond human perception. But Shinsei's lessons on cosmology only formed the backdrop to his greatest teaching, one that pivoted on human judgment and choice. Humans were no mere pawns in heaven and hell's shōgi game of good and evil. Humans were responsible for their own betterment, and that of the society around them, through contemplation and compassion. No Fortune, kami, or demon outshone Enlightenment.

There are certain things everyone in Rokugan knows about Shinsei.

Shinsei was a teacher, orator, and philosopher who traveled Rokugan to share truths. His most famous and influential sermon was a conversation with the first Hantei Emperor, dutifully recorded by Shiba as the *Tao of Shinsei*. It begins with an explanation of the cycle of the Five Elements, as a sort of preface. It goes on to describe how individuals' conduct could improve both them and their society. The text ends with an explanation of how karma and reincarnation affect the transmigratory soul—although Shinsei repeatedly said that focusing one's life and thoughts on achieving better reincarnation was folly, a waste of time, and even counterproductive.

As they walked together out of the Emperor's palace, Shinsei and Shiba had a short, private discussion. They declined to share the details of that discussion, yet hundreds of apocryphal documents purport to reveal the truth.

Following this momentous meeting, a reluctant but determined Shinsei assembled the Seven Thunders to confront Fu Leng on the Day of Thunder. At the battle's end, victorious, he wept.

But who was Shinsei, really?

A common saying notes, "Everyone who has ever told you who Shinsei is has lied to you." Another, more cynical, says, "Everyone who has ever explained Shinsei has murdered Shinsei." Both speak to the difficulty of understanding Shinsei's teachings, as well as to the years upon years and layers upon layers of interpretation and exegesis that priests, monks, emperors, lords, and elders have laid upon them, despite Shinsei's own taste for brevity.

SHINSEI THE PHILOSOPHER

The most conservative interpretation of who Shinsei is and what he believed—that is to say, the interpretation closest to the *Tao of Shinsei*'s text—describes the Little Teacher as a logician who expounded upon the nature of existence and the human condition out of compassion for others. Shinseists of this view say Shinsei's ethical lessons are the heart of Shinseist practice. Detractors may agree about who Shinsei is and what his teachings were, but disagree about their importance.

Key to this version of Shinsei is the doctrine of dependent origination, the belief that each phenomenon that exists has a cause, or origin. Each of the four manifest elements—Air, Earth, Fire, and Water—has its origin in another element, the elements all have their origin in the Void, and the Void that will come at the end of all things has its origin in the four manifest elements. Yet, the division of the elements is an illusion, as is all of the Realm of Mortals. All comes from the Void and returns to the Void: therefore, the Void is all. In this way, all existence is linked—the distinctions between the Elements, and between all living things, are an illusion.

Similarly, the cycle of rebirth, which necessitates suffering, comes from karma's accumulation in the human soul. Karma in turn has its origin in fear, regret, and most of all, desire. Shinsei the philosopher's followers



thus maintain that the solution to the human world's problems lies in finding those problems' sources and eliminating them. However, the path to Enlightenment lies in recognizing that life is illusory: suffering stems from desire, so one must recognize that there is nothing to desire, for all arises from and returns to the Void.

Suppose a daimyō's fondness for strong drink affects her health, judgment, and resources. What should a loyal samurai do? A clumsy interpretation of dependent origination would say that perhaps they ought to remove the problem's source, the liquor itself. So, they run themself ragged removing sake and shōchū from her castle. The daimyō then obsesses over finding more liquor, keeping her consumption concealed from the samurai. A more apt interpretation would find the problem's source within the mind: why does the daimyō feel the need to drink? Surely six cups of sake can't be that much more satisfying than three? Is she coping with internal melancholy, or bound to habits she wishes she could break? Is a friend or compatriot pressuring her? The classic Shinseist answer to this problem isn't about drinking or not drinking at all: it's about finding a middle way, about getting to a place where the need to drink or not to drink no longer affects one's judgment.

The Shinseists who embrace the line of thought attributed to Shinsei the philosopher tend to be introspective and thoughtful, whether through common sense or academic rigor. They meditate on truths and debate or talk with one another to emulate the Emperor's exchange with Shinsei. These practices allow the soul to thrive and escape suffering regardless of the nature of their reincarnation. After all, they say, dwelling overlong on issues related to reincarnation practically guarantees a worse reincarnation.

Samurai, wealthy merchants, cloistered monks, and others with resources, free time, and literacy get the most out of this interpretation of Shinsei. These individuals' authority faces them with ethical dilemmas on which to test philosophy and logic. Among the warrior nobility, Shinsei the philosopher enjoys the greatest following among the Crab and Scorpion clans, who appreciate a contemplative, no-nonsense approach to Enlightenment.

Followers of Shinsei the philosopher sometimes perform meditations focused on repetitive artistic or martial practices. In recent years, the practice of archery as a form of meditation has gained great popularity among samurai and monks, leading to the identification of this form of Shinseism with the bow: quiet, demanding, uncompromising.

SHINSEI THE HERO

One popular view of Shinsei comes from one of many documents about him that enjoys wide distribution (though still significantly less than the *Tao of Shinsei),* even though it postdates both the Tao and Shinsei's life: the *Dialogue with the Thunder Goddess of the Perfect Center,* more commonly called the *Thunder Dialogue.* According to this work, before the events leading to the Day of Thunder, Shinsei ascended Kite Mountain to expound upon his Way to a goddess of thunder and a congregation of devoted listeners. The *Dialogue* frames this event in hyperbolic terms: the sermon takes longer than Rokugan's recorded history, and the listeners (all of whom achieve Enlightenment) include not only the Thunder Goddess, but also every known Fortune and kami as well as monks, priests, and holy teachers, whose number exceeds the current population of Rokugan. Attempts to place the *Thunder Dialogue* at a specific date in the historical Shinsei's life have met with no success. Any connection between the mysterious goddess and the Day of Thunder, which her name might seem to imply, also remains unclear. The Thunder Goddess never appeared again.

This version of Shinsei goes beyond the soft-spoken, reasoned man whom the *Tao of Shinsei* and Shiba's introduction to it describe. This Shinsei reveals that the Tao of Shinsei's doctrine and path are adequate for reaching Enlightenment, but are inferior to the doctrine and path he now describes. Instead of focusing on freedom from the vicissitudes of the wheel of reincarnation, his new method advocates a life of right action and great compassion for others. Shinsei speaks of wandering the land performing miraculous feats to help the downtrodden. Monks who embrace this view of Shinsei prefer to wander among Rokugan's people helping others, particularly the poor and powerless, rather than sequester themselves in their monastery. Monastic orders that follow such beliefs take a greater involvement in politics and even warfare, intervening directly in events for the good of the people.

The heroic Shinsei enjoys far wider traction among Rokugan's common folk and certain samurai than the philosophical one, who probably hews closer to his historical persona. Statues, folding screens, plays, and other artworks depict the *Thunder Dialogue*'s Shinsei channeling and commanding the elements, radiating divine luminescence from every pore, or flinging thunderbolts at demons representing fear, regret, and desire. To many, his simple message of compassion and civic duty supersedes that of orthodox philosophy; even illiterate farmhands and porters understand the value of helping others. This view of Shinsei also rewards teamwork and organizations.

FOUNDATIONS OF SHINSEISM

Shinsei taught that the perceived distinctions between the Five Elements are an illusion. Everything comes from the Void, and all eventually returns to the Void. It is by embracing the unity of the elements and seeing beyond the illusory divisions between the physical and the spiritual that one begins the journey to Enlightenment.

Shinsei introduced several important concepts that forever altered the understanding of reality, even for the Kami. He taught that, just as ki comes from the Void and returns to it, the human soul does not linger in the underworld for eternity, but exists in a cycle of death and rebirth. Only through Enlightenment can one escape this cycle and all the suffering it entails.

The *Thunder Dialogue*'s framing brings Fortunes and Fortunism into the Shinseist fold. Because the Fortunes are present to listen to Shinsei preach, the *Dialogue* implies that the Fortunes are important, but primarily so as dedicated and successful Shinseists. The *Dialogue*'s bold claim about the Fortunes' true significance figured prominently in Hantei Genji's reasoning behind his assertion that Fortunism and Shinseism are in fact one religion. Rokugani common folk barely took notice, accustomed as they already were to practicing dissimilar religions without examining their contradictions.

The Crane Clan enthusiastically embraces Shinsei the hero. Always fashionable, the clan vocally and visibly promotes this view, donating generously to heroically inclined temples and monasteries. Dedicated Crane Shinseists have generated a great deal of literature on the concordance between Shinseist heroism and their clan's ideals of grace within and without.

Because of its associations with large groups of low-ranking folk, the *naginata* commonly represents the followers of Shinsei the hero. In addition, the monstrous *bisentō* (literally "brow blade" for its giant edge's resemblance to a human eyebrow) polearm enjoys popularity among these Shinseists.

SHINSEI THE GOD

Still a third interpretation of Shinsei's persona is that he was a god. Long considered heretical, this perspective is the fastest-growing one currently. According to popular interpretations of Shinsei, he had a superhuman knowledge of the workings of the elements and reincarnation. He foresaw the Day of Thunder and coordinated the resistance to Fu Leng. He demonstrated supernatural powers on Kite Mountain, if one takes the *Thunder Dialogue* literally—and many do. Accordingly, some say that Shinsei was no "mere" wise man, but instead the shintai—an object in which a kami or spirit resides—of a Fortune called Kongōten. They have reconciled the Fortunes and Shinsei with the claim that an enlightened being has transcended the distinction between god and human—that Enlightenment expresses a soul's destined divinity. Shinsei is a god, they say, and by following him, we can be as well.

These claims align with the views of the Perfect Land Sect, a populist movement that teaches that Shinsei now watches over humanity from a "Perfect Land" in Tengoku, where loyal Shinseists can join him if they chant the mantra "Shoshi ni kie" often and sincerely enough. Not all Perfect Land Shinseists feel comfortable describing Shinsei outright as a god, though some do. The Perfect Land dogma, which describes Shinsei as a benevolent immortal who guides and blesses humanity from not Yomi, but Tengoku, certainly supports that belief in theme, if not in all specifics.

The clan most enraptured with Shinsei the god are the Unicorn. In private conversations, Shinjo Altansarnai herself has opined that Shinsei's divine persona as Kongōten may point to a prominent god of the sky and storms from the land that named her. Many young Lion Clan samurai are also taken with this bold and dynamic Shinsei as a tempting counterpoint to their clan's entrenched conventions.

Several of the scandalized samurai who decry the Perfect Land's heresy would push for its outright eradication were they to discover the sect's vision of a commonwealth government overseen by populist preachers and peasant elders—a stark affront to Rokugan's entrenched feudal governance. The warrior-monks who serve the Perfect Land Sect are not monks in the traditional sense; they wear the white headscarves and uniforms of novice monks, but most are illiterate and ill-educated in the precepts and texts of their own religion. They care only to wield spear, naginata, and *kongōsho* in the service of their vision of Shinsei and the defense of what they see as the first province of the Perfect Land in Rokugan. They have unshakable faith that to die while fighting for those causes ensures a superior reincarnation.

The Brotherhood of Shinsei

In theory, all of Rokugan is united in the official Imperial religion of Shintao, which venerates both the Tao of Shinsei and the Thousand Fortunes. In practice, most holy people focus on one path of religion, possibly to the exclusion of the other. Broadly speaking, priests and shugenja practice *kami no michi*, the worship of the gods, fortunes, and other spirits, while monks focus on the Tao of Shinsei. It is these monks who form the Brotherhood of Shinsei, a sort of religion within the religion of Shintao.

The Brotherhood of Shinsei—which welcomes all genders—consists of numerous holy orders. An order is generally dedicated to a specific perspective on, or aspect of, Shinseism. Academic orders write, debate, and teach rich patrons; martial orders study weapons and tactics in order to defend vulnerable or peaceful Shinseists; medicinal orders maintain infirmaries in public locations; and exorcists keep demons and spirits at bay.

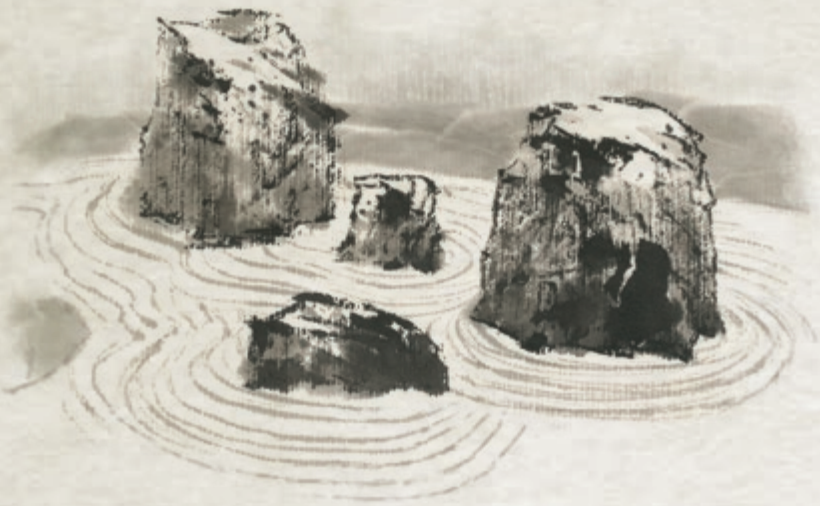
Some monks are outward-facing, not unlike priests: they minister to lay Shinseist flocks, conduct festivals and funerals, offer counseling, and maintain public temples. Other monks are inward-facing: they sequester themselves in monasteries and devote their entire life to contemplating Shinsei's lessons, recopying Shinseist texts for popular consumption, and undertaking other activities of meditation and improvement. Practically speaking, though, many monks occupy a middle ground, engaging in activities to further their own understanding of the Tao while working to spread knowledge among the masses.

JOINING THE BROTHERHOOD

Individuals—especially those of the samurai class, who have wealth and the luxury of choice—may become monks at any point in their lives. They must swear vows of nonviolence, poverty, chastity, honesty, temperance, and austerity (which individual orders frequently add to or subtract from); shave their heads; garb themselves in white, brown, or saffron; and dedicate themselves to a teacher. The vows are usually permanent but not necessarily so; monks who find that cloistered life disagrees with them may depart without stigma and may even return to try again at a later stage in life. At least, this is true on the part of the monastery. The Code of Bushidō is not so flexible, and some samurai who leave the life of a monk have no choice but to become a rōnin.

Technically, only faith in Shinsei's teachings should motivate an entry into monastic life. Practically speaking, any number of factors, even selfish ones, may propel an individual, and especially a samurai, into monastic life. A samurai might want to flee a bad family or marriage situation to enjoy the status and respect due to a monk of a well-known order. They might want to convert to a certain lineage of Shinseism to gain the respect of that lineage's followers. They might tire of constant strife and politics and wish to sequester themselves from it.





Monks who shave their heads to dodge politics would do well to research their chosen monastery carefully if they really want some peace and quiet, because many prominent priests and monks, and accordingly many temples, are major players in Rokugan's great political games. Shinseism's involvement in politics is a matter of furious debate. On the one hand, Shinsei himself spoke at length on how the principle of compassion links personal conduct to social good. Humans are inherently social creatures, and a person's Shinseist practice affects interactions with friends and family, with strangers, and with governmental and other authorities. Many of Shinsei's parables discuss, at least on the surface, ethical influences facing feudal authorities: Is there such a thing as a just war? How should one respond to a restive or rebellious populace if their grievances are valid? Thus, it is traditional and not particularly surprising for Shinseists at least to advise rulers; after all, that's what the Tao of Shinsei does.

At the same time, many Shinseists believe Shinsei's discussions with leaders and teachings on government to be surface-level illustrations or allegories about what really matters: the individual's introspective path. They point to the errors of Shinseist clerics who get involved in politics or business and are drawn into violence or treachery as evidence of the same.

WELL-KNOWN MONASTIC ORDERS

The vast majority of monastic orders vary only in minor ways: their monks practice with a certain weapon, brew sake, or paint folding screens, for example. But some monastic orders are more distinctive and have achieved greater recognition.

Bishamon Monks

Bishamon monks embody the contradiction inherent in modern Rokugani Shintao. As their patron is the Fortune of Strength, they belong to the category of Fortunist monks. Such monks embrace the unity of Shintao to the fullest, with two sets of interrelated duties. One is to study, meditate, and create art in the tradition of Shinseist monks everywhere. The other is to uphold and conduct all of the traditional rites for the propitiation and honor of Fortunes, including the maintenance of the Fortunes' shrines.

The Bishamon monks' headquarters is Bishamon's Divine Library, in the highlands near Otosan Uchi. These monks are particularly notorious for their habit of protesting in response to political decisions that displease them. For example, if the Emperor appoints a disliked abbot or priest to a prominent position of authority, they take Bishamon's shintai from its shrine in the library, place it in a traveling housing that can be carried on several burly monks' shoulders, and march en masse from their monasteries, waving armaments and rosaries and chanting slogans or sutras. They crowd into the streets of a town or city near where the offense took place and draw massive crowds of common folk. There, the loudest and angriest monks orate on the subject of the sins involved in whatever decision they believe is unjust, on the no-doubt-horrific consequences of such a decision for the Empire's future, and on the offending authority's inevitable reincarnation as a flatworm or similarly repugnant being.

Sending a garrison out to intimidate monks into going home often fails, since even warriors who can stomach attacking folk of the cloth are loath to march on the shintai of Bishamon for fear of offending the Fortune—especially not in full view of the worshipful common folk on whom they depend for food, drink, and material resources. Lords and Emperors have been fond of sending enterprising and charismatic young samurai out to find solutions to the intractable issue of a Bishamon protest.

Monks of the Seven Thunders

The Order of the Seven Thunders maintains the Shrine of the Seven Thunders. Its monastic practice is focused on the image, personality, story, and meaning of each of the Seven Thunders. The Thunders, as well as their relationships with one another and popular conceptions about them, are each studied and written about extensively. What does it mean to emulate Mirumoto? Or Matsu? While the Monks of the Seven Thunders have a considerable academic interest in the Thunders, even more important to them is the religious art they make to honor the Thunders and their relationship to Shinsei. The Monks of the Seven Thunders set the style, and are infinitely emulated, in the creation of statuary, paintings, landscape designs, and even plays representing the Thunders' persons, lives, and deeds.

The monks' works of art, studies, and travels have a secret significance. The monks are preparing for a day they are certain will come, a secret they have shared with few: a second Day of Thunder, when the Seven Thunders reborn will have to face Fu Leng once again. This could be the end of the world or the beginning of a new one—the monks know not which. Therefore, their study has a practical bent: they want knowledge about the Thunders to spread as broadly and evocatively as possible so that they influence those destined—if such a destiny is real—to become those Thunders.

Monks of Osano-wo

Late in his life, Osano-wo, the future Fortune of Fire and Thunder, founded a martial arts school to pass on his considerable martial knowledge. He built a fine dōjō using timber he cut himself from the forest, a simple task for so big and strong a man. He lined the walls with his favorite weapons and armor. Then, he waited for students. The very first was a diminutive old monk. She had no prior combat experience but had to travel frequently, and she wanted to learn to defend herself. At first, he offered her a two-handed weapon to make up for her lack of reach and power without taxing her muscles, but it was awkward for her short stature. Then he gave her two swords, but their weight tired her feeble arms. Finally, he suggested boxing.

This turned out to be the correct choice. As fast as Osano-wo was, the old monk was so small she could duck and flank his massive frame easily. He had to adapt techniques designed for large, burly soldiers to train the small, old monk. He taught her to use the hard parts of her body to strike the soft parts of his, so she learned to damage small bones, soft tissue, and muscles with careful aim. She needed impeccable precision to make these adapted techniques work, but she practiced diligently, and so prevailed. Eventually, she learned to handle heavier weapons like swords and cudgels, but her favorite weapons were small knives and weights she could conceal in her hands or clothes: ideal for evening the odds with overconfident bullies.

According to legend—and no one knows enough to verify it, save the monks of this school—the monk, Tamadora, became the second headmaster of Osano-wo's dōjō after his death. She expanded the school into a monastery—not to be confused with the temple to Osano-wo built on the islands of the Mantis Clan—to honor the memory of the Fortune of Fire and Thunder. Newcomers to the school, attracted by Osano-wo's larger-than-life reputation, are often frustrated by the precision required by their style, which requires even the biggest and mightiest brawlers to fight like someone small and weak, and which cannot be learned except through exhaustive repetition and practice.

Most quit, and learn to fight just as effectively with a style better suited to their strengths. But Tamadora-ryū allows physically limited fighters in a world bigger and stronger than them to keep up—if they're willing to work harder than everyone else. Sometimes it's not enough, but the style gives them a chance—and it is an excellent foundation should they choose to study something else once they've mastered Tamadora-ryū.

The ethical lessons of Osano-wo's monastery parallel its martial ones. Just as Osano-wo learned to grapple, literally and figuratively, with how to help someone without his physical advantages, the monks of Osano-wo study Shinsei's compassion and Osano-wo's might through helping the strong lift up the weak, the clever teach the foolish, and the small punch the large.



Shinseist Temples and Monasteries in Society

Shinseist sanctuaries—with the exception of cloistered monasteries—are community centers as well as spiritual centers, fulfilling diverse functions in Rokugani society at large. First and foremost, of course, they teach religious doctrine and practice to community members. Monks and especially priests officiate at offerings, scripture readings, festivals, weddings, and funerals. Local priests counsel Shinseists in mental or spiritual crisis. Mendicant monks carry news and mail from place to place. But Shinseist temples and monasteries also serve several less obvious functions.

FOOD AND DRINK

Nearly every significant monastery or temple grows grains like rice and millet and occasionally trades goods like indigo, mulberries, or silk. Many brew liquor as well. These crops and commodities keep their inhabitants fed and the organization's treasury stocked, minimizing reliance on fickle outside patrons. Novice monks sometimes work these fields, but their seniors usually prefer the more refined pastime of gardening: arranging plants around the sanctuary according to Rokugan's ancient manuals of sacred gardening and landscaping, or cultivating new and delicious vegetables to enliven their simple and usually meatless diets. Rich monasteries with expansive fields must rely heavily on peasant labor.

Natural disasters and wartime devastation often send destitute commoners flocking to a monastery's or temple's gates to beg for handouts. While large, efficiently operated monasteries have an easier time accumulating resources than peasants, such vicissitudes drain their stores swiftly. Then, some priest or monk must head to the local lord or magistrate begging for subsidies, cascading the perils of famine up the chain of feudal authority.

SHELTER AND DEFENSE

Natural disasters like floods, tsunami, earthquakes, and mudslides make short work of the paper-and-wood buildings of Rokugan. In contrast, stone, stout timbers, and expert joinery make a Shinseist temple the sturdiest (and most beautiful) edifice in most small towns. Locals flock to the temple in cases of torrential rain, dangerous creatures at large, or their own homes' destruction.

The fortified monasteries of martial orders offer even better protection, with moats, concentric walls with arrow slits, and thickets full of unpleasant surprises. Hot-tempered young monks spend their ample free time swinging polearms around and convincing themselves they are due for a fine reincarnation should they die in defense of other Shinseists. Bandits and enemy armies' scouts are loath to test such fearless foes.

SCHOLARSHIP, SCIENCE, AND MEDICINE

Temples and especially monasteries have long histories as repositories of scholarship. Priests and monks are almost always literate and frequently know multiple dialects through textual study or missionary wanderings to the most remote villages of Rokugan. Recopying and commenting on the *Tao of Shinsei,* the *Thunder Dialogue,* and other sacred texts occupies hours of many monks' days. Monastic libraries also accumulate scrolls of virtually every other type of literature, from poetry, novels, and plays to scientific treatises and fencing manuals. Monks and priests often occupy themselves with natural philosophy or medical research, and they open their infirmaries or surgeries to anyone—friend or foe, faithful or otherwise—in poor health. Several temples of philosophical bent explore illnesses of the mind as well, building on Shinsei's doctrine of dependent origination and analyzing suffering's root causes. These temples augment the counseling services priests have always provided with teaching meditation, mindfulness, and restorative exercise, and offering herbal treatments. These are of particular interest to samurai who endure leadership's stresses and battlefield trauma.

Funerals

Unlike Fortunist priests and shugenja, Shinseist monks do not shy away from the subject of death. In fact, Shinseist monks are foremost experts on the dying process. This is because death is not seen as inherently evil or unclean according to the Tao of Shinsei. Instead, it is another part of the natural cycle, the precursor to rebirth and the transition to the next life. Indeed, one purpose of the Brotherhood of Shinsei is to prepare retired samurai for their life's final stages, their practice involving meditations on impermanence and cultivating serenity in the face of death.

For this reason, funerals are conducted by Shinseist monks at temples instead of by Fortunist priests at shrines. This is also a matter of practicality, as many retired samurai spend their twilight years as monks,

REAL-WORLD TOUCHSTONES

Revered real-world East Asian and South Asian historical and religious figures inspired Shinseism. The itinerant professor debating the Emperor draws from Chán and Zen Buddhism's patriarch Bodhidharma. The mantra-chanting artisan of esoteric disciplines descends from Shingon Buddhism's originator, Kūkai. The political scientist detailing individuals' ethical relationship to society evokes Confucius, Hán Fēizǐ, and Nichiren. Metaphysical concepts like the cycles of reincarnation and the elements come from proto-Hinduism and Daoism. The Perfect Land Sect echoes the Pure Land School. And of course, there's the Nepali prince meditating beneath the fig tree, the Buddha himself.

A common Western stereotype casts Asian thought's archetypal figures—Confucius especially, but also the Buddha and Lǎozǐ—as abstruse mystics, inscrutable and impractical ad absurdum, often accompanied by mocking accents and facial expressions. These stereotypes owe much to Westerners who sought to legitimize and mysticize their own teachings by appropriating names, traditions, and meanings from Asia. Players of Asian descent will perhaps recognize such characterizations from bad experiences on the playground as children, or on the highway as adults.

Although some people may see these stereotypes as harmless and insignificant, they form the point of a long knife that twists when people marginalize, discredit, oppress, or injure Asian people and their beliefs. Players at your table—or passersby in convention halls, game stores, or other public places where you might play—may justifiably bristle at even mild versions of these stereotypes, after a long day's (or lifetime's) buildup of such insensitivities.

By taking care with how you speak in character as a Shinseist, you can help exterminate these stereotypes. First, you should never affect "Asian" accents or speak in broken English when you portray Shinseists (or anyone else in Rokugan). You should also avoid chanting prayers or mantras such as the kie out loud, lest others mistake them for actual religious practices misappropriated for entertainment value. Take note also that, for playability's sake, Shinsei's version of dependent origination is altered in emphasis and infinitely simplified from the real-world Buddha's.

Furthermore, Shinseism is confusing and contradictory enough without added layers of trite mysticism. The cryptic kōan of Zen has its place, but it influences Shinseism less than the comparatively straightforward and direct *Lotus Sūtra* and Theravāda discourses. Your portrayals of Shinsei and his proponents will ring truer if you focus on their practical lessons. Compassion, reason, moderation, and good citizenship kept Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism alive for thousands of years despite bitter competition from other religions and schools of thought.

Awareness of roots and stereotypes places you on the way to a Rokugan that respects and does justice to its cultures of inspiration. But pay attention to people as well as principles. Whether you're a player or the GM, watch those around you—especially those least familiar with *Legend of the Five Rings*—for discomfort with things you're saying. Create an environment where they'll feel comfortable asking you to change something that bothers them. Even if you don't understand their discomfort at first, don't dismiss it out of hand. Err on the side of compassion.

and therefore they may already be at a temple or monastery when they depart. The Brotherhood's funeral ceremony is derived from the Tao's teachings, varying only slightly between provinces when influenced by local custom. Because of death's profound karmic effects, the major purpose of the ceremony is to sever death's influence from the deceased's family and provide them with a way to mourn without loss of face. It is sometimes said that the Shinseist funeral is for the living, not the dead.

The funeral is held four days after the death. During this time, the body is prepared by members of the hinin caste under the direction of monks—safely outside the bounds of the temple. The body is washed, anointed, and rubbed with salt. Then, a featureless mask is placed on the face, so that any lingering spirit will not recognize its former body or attempt to reclaim it.

On the day of the funeral, the temple provides the family with a wooden marker displaying the departed's name and a list of their deeds. The family attends dressed in white clothes of mourning. A modest meal of special funeral foods, known as *otoki*, is offered to the family.

Imperial decree forbids the entombing of bodies. Instead, the body is carried to a pyre, where the family witnesses its cremation. It is widely believed that if too much open sorrow is displayed during this part of the ceremony, the spirit will feel troubled and remain behind, a fate few would desire for their loved ones. Therefore, those at funerals hide their sorrow behind veils and stony faces, lest they inadvertently doom the departed to endless wandering as a lost soul. Afterward, the family picks the bones from the ashes using ceremonial chopsticks, passing them from one family member to the next until they are placed to rest in an urn. Monks then light a string of candles to symbolize the rebirth of the departed through their many prior lives.

There is some variance to funeral traditions owing to unique clan traditions and local beliefs. For example, the Crane practice an exchange of funerary gifts known as *koden-gaeshi*. In this tradition, the mourner offers a small token to the family of the departed, usually something with personal meaning, and the mourning family later recompenses with a gift of their own. In contrast, formal funerals are a luxury the Crab can rarely afford, due to their proximity to the Shadowlands and the accompanying threats. When they do occur, Crab funerals are held indoors with all windows left open so the soul may escape, except for windows facing south, which are barred shut and sealed.

POLITICS AND DIPLOMACY

Monasteries and temples often function as neutral ground in negotiations between samurai clans and other parties in conflict. However, priests and monks who are truly politically neutral are a minority. Senior monks' and priests' learned opinions and broad social networks grant them significant influence over courts and war councils. The threat of protesting monks flooding into a town and riling up locals vexes magistrates and samurai, who threaten such monks' agricultural holdings, skimp on donations, or show favor to rival orders.

SHINSEISM, CASTE, AND CLAN

The Tao of Shinsei states explicitly that all walks of life and all families must follow the same path to freedom and Enlightenment. In pursuit of Shinsei's Way, an Emperor and a peasant—indeed, a Fortune and a mortal—are alike. Shinsei mentioned in passing that privileged or aristocratic birth denotes that a person had a lighter karmic load in their previous life, and that greater privilege carries greater civic obligation and opportunity for both heroic action and catastrophic failure. However, later commentators have emphasized the connection between karma and station far more aggressively than Shinsei.

Technically, at a reading of the sutras in a temple, a domestic servant of the Crane Clan and Bayushi Kachiko herself might sit side by side and treat one another with courtesy as equals. Practically speaking, prejudice and stereotypes plague the faithful as well as the secular. Samurai who take holy orders usually advance to leadership positions faster than peasants, either due to established social or familial connections to the clergy in charge or through prior education in the classics and other knowledge expected of a Shinseist abbot. Priests' manners, graces, and habits, which they generally learned before their ordination from others in their caste, tend to place them in ministry over people who share their social background—and aristocratic congregations donate more money. The Perfect Land Sect's legitimately populist reframing of Shinseism discomfits many high-ranking and samurai-born clergy, who, admittedly or otherwise, enjoy the comforts the status quo brings them.

Clan friendships and rivalries have similar effects on communities of the cloth, seeding holy places with factionalism and cliques. Differing approaches to Shinseism can cause discord among clans, but similar ones can sow harmony among those that otherwise might find no common ground. At philosophical roundtables, Crab and Scorpion who think of their approaches to life and problem solving as diametrically opposed get to broaden their horizons and learn in a safe environment how their opposite numbers think. Lion and Unicorn who expect only to see each other from opposite sides of a battle line are often shocked to find themselves side by side in the rare, clandestine Perfect Land congregations that admit nobles. Quite a few Crab and Lion who agree about everything else have learned not to bring up Shinseism over drinks.

The Phoenix are known as the "Keepers of the Tao" in recognition of Shiba's having recorded that document. Indeed, most other clans defer to the Phoenix's judgment on theological matters of Shinseism, and the Phoenix's approach to the study and practice of Shinseism is widely viewed as the proper one. When someone speaks of Shinseism and the meaning of the Tao, most individuals assume they are referring to the teachings of the Phoenix, unless they specify otherwise.

Daily Life

Religion plays an important part of everything in Rokugan, because it shapes the way people think, their morals, and their aspirations. From the lowliest hinin to the most powerful daimyō, everyone knows that only by fulfilling their purpose to the best of their ability can they progress in the Celestial Order. To fail is to be born in worse circumstances in the next incarnation. The Celestial Order extends into the Heavens, and so is sacred, with Lady Sun and Lord Moon at the pinnacle. Shinseist monks stand outside of this order, however. Rather than aspiring to a glorious life and being reborn in better circumstances, Shinseist monks aim to escape the cycle of rebirth entirely. To do this, monks must attain Enlightenment.

While for most people religion is a natural part of everyday life, for the monks, it is their life. The wisdom gained on a personal journey to Enlightenment can still aid others. Monks are sought for wisdom and guidance, just like priests and shugenja are.

While everyone abides by the official religion of Shintao, some focus more on Shinsei, some more on the Fortunes. This is also true of monks, though the Shinseist monks outnumber those of a more Fortunist bent. Fortunist monks serve the Fortunes as Shinsei prescribed, which sets them apart from Fortunist priests, whose traditional practices are older than Shintao. The Brotherhood of Shinsei connects most of the many temples and monasteries across Rokugan, of numerous orders, and its inclusive attitude (despite its restrictive name) means that it is growing all the time. The most extreme orders are deemed heretical and purged, though even an organization as large as the Brotherhood cannot monitor every monk across the Empire, and occasionally profane sects take root.

MONASTIC LIFE

While the lives of monks in different orders vary, in most monasteries, routine is important. Routine allows the monks to live in harmony, and it ensures that their duties are performed and their lives are dedicated to the order and its ideals. It is common for the monks to wake early, often before dawn, so that they can start the day with quiet reflection before using the daylight hours to work tending gardens, repairing the monastery, copying sacred texts, studying, and carrying out whatever duties the order deems important. Worship is involved in every activity, from the morning bell or gong ringing, to the little rituals performed around daily tasks, to the group chanting of the sutras that echo through the monastery at set times. In some orders, music and dancing might be used to celebrate Shinsei's virtues or please the Thunders. All activities become spiritual endeavors when undertaken mindfully.



MARTIAL ARTS

Though some monks never fight, and sōhei sometimes fight with weapons, monks have a reputation for being masters of unarmed combat. This is largely because of those tales of seemingly harmless old people who demonstrate unexpected fighting skill when threatened while they are on the road. There is nothing so impressive to the common people as a pompous, fully armored samurai being laid flat on their back by the wizened monk they insulted. The kihō practiced by monks appear effortless, despite the years of training required to perform them. The spread of such stories provide all traveling monks with an element of protection, as travelers treat them with caution.

In some orders, violence is avoided at all costs. While these monks may train using martial exercises, learning self-mastery and union of body and mind, they do not learn any practical techniques. This is rare, however: most peaceful orders nonetheless ensure their monks learn enough to defend themselves and others. With training, such monks can disarm opponents without harming them, and disable them long enough to escape danger. Many orders consider fighting for a just cause, such as defending a monastery, acceptable and necessary. Some are even willing to teach outsiders, though usually this is limited to common folk who are forbidden to carry weapons and so have no other way to defend themselves.

Yamabushi are a special case: these wandering warrior monks achieve Enlightenment through communion with nature. They seek isolation in the wilderness, keeping clear of roads and settlements. Because these monks are so toughened by their austere lifestyle and commitment to physical training, a desperate samurai might petition one for aid, but they must prove their worth to gain it. This involves finding the yamabushi, which is no easy task, as well as stating their case and persuading the monk of the nobility of the cause.

Many orders include some form of physical training in their routine, which often has martial applications, if only for self-defense. For orders of sōhei monks—warrior monks who fight with weapons—martial training makes up a large part of the day, but even peaceful orders usually devote some time for training. Shinsei taught that the perceived separation between the physical and spiritual worlds is an illusion. Even the most meditative monks must become masters of their own bodies, remaining fit enough to complete their duties undistracted and learning to control the flow of ki, or inner energy. By cultivating an awareness of ki in their bodies and the world around them, monks can eventually achieve seemingly supernatural effects through kihō techniques, as well as gaining a greater understanding of the world.

At a monastery, food is grown, prepared, and consumed together. The set times of meals depends on whether the order includes one, two, or three meals in the daily routine. Animal products of any kind are usually avoided, as is anything that comes from death and decay, such as mushrooms.

Many monasteries are at least partly self-sufficient, relying on gifts to supply what the monks cannot make or grow themselves. While most orders maintain vegetable and herb gardens or even grain fields, some toil to produce enough to supply nearby communities. The monks of some monasteries are renowned for their ceramics or metal work, while others brew sake. Some monasteries provide services, such as taking in the sick for healing, creating or copying important documents, or indeed anything in which the monks of an order are particularly skilled. Whether the monastery produces rice, sake, or porcelain, or offers a service, these things are given freely, though the recipients do of course make contributions to the monks in turn. Those who do not are unlikely to receive any further gifts, and face the karmic ramifications.

The most important part of any monastery is the shrine, temple, or repository of sacred relics. It is the sacred duty of the monks to tend and protect this, and it provides a focus for the monks' devotion—a connection between the physical monastery and the spiritual world. Other areas are set aside for training and learning. Depending on the order, a training ground or meditation hall may be the secondary focus of the monastery. If the monks' meditation is conducted while at work, the forge, brewery, or workshop may hold this position. Of least importance are the rooms the monks sleep in. Whether individual or communal, these meet the physical needs of the monks but offer no superfluous comforts.

TEMPLE LIFE

While monasteries are built primarily for monks to live, train, and worship in, temples are built as an act of worship and are for all people. Temples are usually far more open and accessible than monasteries, though some are built in hard-to-reach places, either because a particular area is sacred or because the act of reaching the temple becomes a pilgrimage in itself. Larger temples require more attention, and monks may reside within them, devoting themselves to the temple and the rituals conducted there. The smallest temples rely on visiting monks, priests, shugenja, or even local volunteers for their rituals and upkeep, but most have at least one resident monk who is entrusted with the temple's care.

The lives of monks are often less than private in a temple setting, where most are available to visitors at all times. In temples large enough, a private space is provided for the monks to meditate out of sight of casual visitors, but this is not always possible. Not all temples receive a steady flow of visitors, however. Some of the most remote or secretive temples actually function more like monasteries, while the most worldly monasteries might fulfill the purpose of a temple.

The resident monks maintain the purity of the air, ensuring incense burns continually, as well as the sanctity of the shrine or sacred relic repository. Many temples are built with the sole purpose of protecting a shrine or housing sacred items, which are locked away out of sight. The visitors come and go, some local, some pilgrims from farther afield, who may be granted overnight accommodation while visiting, offering donations in return. While people of all walks of life are welcome to enter a temple, the monks expel any who do not follow temple etiquette, which requires removing hats, shoes, and weapons before entry and speaking only in hushed tones.

Temples usually play a significant role in their community. Local residents may make daily visits to pay their respects and gain blessings. The resident monks or priests may conduct public rituals every day, or only on feast and festival days. Depending on the temple and the worshipped deity, the temple may serve other purposes as well, but the main role is to give people somewhere to go to revere that deity. Temples contain everything needed to do so, such as incense and offerings, which resident monks usually make themselves. One of the most important duties of the head priest, monk, or shugenja in a temple is to teach the laity about the Thunder, Fortune, elements, or aspect of Shinsei's teachings the temple is dedicated to.

The monks also maintain the delicate balance of the elements within the temple. Some temples are designed such that each side represents an element, with the roof signifying Void. For the temple to remain a sacred space, suitable for housing holy relics, no one element must be allowed to overcome the others. The representation is usually symbolic, with colors or images of each element incorporated in the temple design, but in some larger temples there is a pool for Water, a brazier for Fire, incense for Air, and a bowl of salt for Earth. Each of these must be kept full or burning at all times, and all can be used to purify a visitor before they approach the temple's icon and offer a bow of greeting to Shinsei or the Thunder or Fortune represented. The monks perform this ritual of personal purification each time they enter the temple.

ENCOUNTERING MONKS

Having devoted themselves to spiritual matters and given up their old lives, monks stand outside the Celestial Order. Both samurai and commoners can become monks, so most outsiders treat all monks with equal respect. Not all monks react the same to insults or even polite inquiries, however. Some monks eschew violence, while others are quick to take up arms, and some appear harmless but are masters of deadly kihō.

Monks met on the road are often in search of experience, walking the world while finding their spiritual path. They are usually quite willing to help those in need. As well as offering advice, monks often have some knowledge of medicine, and are able to defend themselves and others.

Monks in courts serve a different purpose. Some orders, such as monks of the Four Temples, try to use their wisdom to guide leaders to the benefit of the leader's people and the order's monasteries. Others send monks to court merely to observe and report back to the order for possible action if needed.

If a monk is armed, it is likely they are willing to fight. If tattooed, they may be *ise zumi*, a monk of the Togashi Order, but in general, monks are harder to identify and predict than samurai, who wear their clan colors and their mon with pride. Whenever monks are encountered by chance, the safest option is to offer polite respect and otherwise leave them to their business.

Temples

TOOLS OF WORSHIP

In addition to use at temples, many people keep incense and candles and such at home for use in the family shrine. They might also carry these on journeys in order to leave offerings at roadside shrines and help ensure safe travels.

Incense contains herbs and woods that please the spirits, purify or protect, or evoke an element. Temple incense has a mild fragrance, and agarwood and sandalwood are popular ingredients.

Extracting oil from local plants or berries and turning it into the pure, long-burning candles required by temples is a laborious process that only skilled artisans can properly perform.

Temple visitors who wish to petition the spirits can write their requests on ema, wooden plaques made by the monks. Visitors hang these in the temple or garden. At the end of the day, the monks gather and ritually burn the plaques.

Temples are commonly devoted to a particular Fortune, Thunder, or aspect of Shinsei, but some of the larger temples are dedicated to several Fortunes, all the Thunders, or all of Shinsei's many lessons. Temples are open daily for individuals to visit and pray, leave offerings, or ask resident monks for guidance. The monks conduct their own rituals to maintain the sanctity of the temple, and they sometimes lead group rituals on sacred or festival days. While some parades may begin inside the temple, public rituals tend to be held outside. Blessings for the dead can be said within the temple, but ashes are placed in an adjoining cemetery, and local samurai families may have a family shrine on site. Temples are places of quiet contemplation and worship, and a hushed atmosphere of reverence is encouraged.

While each temple is different, many share common features, such as tower gates for the entrances and pagoda-style architecture. Inside, a main hall contains an object of worship, and a meditation hall offers a space to pray. There may be a shrine or shrines within the temple, as well as altars where candles burn. There is at least one incense bowl, where the ash from the days' offerings collects. Most sacred items are housed within private rooms, inaccessible to common visitors.

WEALTH AND BLESSINGS

The Brotherhood of Shinsei is a resourceful organization, but rare is the occasion when the Brotherhood funds the construction of a new temple alone. Founding a temple is an expensive affair, but the blessings granted to those who fund or sponsor a temple are more than worth the cost. A daimyō who has a temple built on their land raises their own prestige and improves their karma, so they benefit in both the physical and spiritual realm. Many families and clans maintain temples on their lands for this reason, and often because the temple holds some special meaning for them.

While temples aren't as self-sufficient as monasteries, resident monks do find ways of increasing the donations of visitors. Monks often produce the items that worship in the temple requires, such as incense and candles, for use by any visitors. Of course, a suitable donation is expected. This also ensures that the manufacture of such items is performed in an appropriate way and the results are of the desired quality. Creating these items becomes a reverent act in itself, another way for the monks to serve the temple and focus their minds on the unity of the universe.

PILGRIMAGES

Pilgrims who visit temples may have traveled the length of Rokugan, or they may simply have come from the next town. A pilgrim might be a wealthy samurai or common peasant, and their journey could be motivated by the need for forgiveness, a blessing for a new venture, or some other cause. Monks also make pilgrimages at the behest of their superiors or of their own volition. The largest temples provide basic accommodations for visiting pilgrims, who must otherwise rely on the charity of strangers or their own resources.

A pilgrim's road might be hard, but the journey is as important as the destination, a chance for the traveler to prove their devotion. It is not uncommon for a monk to join a struggling pilgrim and support them on their journey, offering encouragement if their resolve weakens. Making a sacred journey should accord a pilgrim the respect of those they meet, and most honorable people offer hospitality to such travelers, whether it is a cup of water, somewhere safe to sleep, or company for a time. However, as some people abuse this fact, claiming a religious reason for their travels to hide some baser motive, there are those who are suspicious of pilgrims. Dishonorable thieves might target honest pilgrims traveling alone, especially those who aren't offered shelter.

Temples are sometimes built where there is already a shrine, on the site of a miraculous event, or in new towns with growing populations in need of somewhere to worship. New orders of monks may also raise temples for their own use and to attract the notice of the Brotherhood of Shinsei. In this case, the order seeks an appropriate site that takes the landscape into consideration. Ideally, temples are built somewhere pure, in an area of natural beauty or a well-kept area of a city. Placement with a mountain to the north, volcano to the south, or body of water to the east is considered particularly auspicious. The better planned the temple, and the better maintained, the more blessed it becomes. The greatest temples have a powerful aura that even commoners might feel upon entrance.

RELICS

The most important relic to the Brotherhood of Shinsei is the original copy of the Tao of Shinsei—or at least it would be, if the Brotherhood knew of its existence in the Phoenix's hidden city of Gisei Toshi. Several important temples hold early copies of the text, which are held in the highest reverence, as it is believed that the closer a text is to the original, the truer the words.

In addition to early copies of the Tao of Shinsei, there are innumerable relics across Rokugan, some yet awaiting discovery, others kept safely locked inside temples. These sacred items vary in form, but all hold some link to the past, and often to the spiritual world as well. Relics include texts filled with wisdom, weapons left behind by heroes or Thunders, statues with supernatural properties, items of clothing worn by Kami, and even certain funerary urns.

Great legends have arisen about some of these relics, especially the oldest and most mysterious. Many stories have been passed down for generations and may be as old as the relics themselves. Others are fabricated by visitors who witness unexplained phenomena. More begin with the monks who care for the relics, and who are keen to spread the fame of their temple. The Brotherhood keeps records of relics and their properties, but these are forever changing and growing. There is no set system for determining which are genuine, which are fake, which have supernatural properties, and which are simply fragments of history that serve as valuable reminders of the past.

SACRED THRESHOLDS

While temples vary greatly in their form and function, certain features have such symbolic importance that they are included in nearly every one. The first is the tower gate entrance, which marks the threshold between the outside world and the spiritual space of the temple. The most elaborate include two stories and a decorative roof, and some incorporate alcoves for the guardian statues to stand in. The guardians at the tower gate are important because they keep unwanted spirits out of the temple. Many creatures are used as guardians, depending on the temple. Komainu, or lion-dogs, are common across Rokugan, and lions or dragons are also considered especially effective, particularly within the lands of their namesake clans.

After they pass through the entrance, visitors usually follow a path through a temple garden. The path does not always lead straight into the main building but sometimes meanders or circles it before reaching the entrance. This serves two purposes: giving the visitor time to meditate before entering, which clears their mind in preparation, and confusing any spirits that might make it past the guardians. The garden itself is a sacred place, and everything that grows within it serves a purpose in the temple grounds' design. While not all temples have a garden, those that do use it as an extension of the temple, somewhere to tell the story of Shinsei or the Thunders and to meditate. As they are on the inside of the temple, the elements are carefully balanced in the garden.




Temple of the
Virtuous Thunders
LIGHTHOUSE
MAIN HALL
LECTURE HALL
SCRIPTURES DEPOSIT
SHRINE
GARDEN
RELIQUARY
BELL TOWER
DRUM TOWER
REFECTORY
STUDY HALL
RESIDENCES
ENTRANCE HALL
DOCKS
DOCKS
TORII GATE

Large temples often feature a main building built in the pagoda style, with a floor representing each element. In some temples, the hall nearest the entrance can be opened up, walls moved to create a space that connects the garden and inner rooms of the temple. Wooden temples are the most common, but those built in remote areas that make maintenance difficult may be built of stone. Stone is also more practical where the weather is harsher, and some stone temples have stood so long that no one can remember who first built them. Some temples, like those in Crab lands, appear fortresslike; within Rokugan, few would forsake all honor and attack a temple, but Crab designers naturally consider such possibilities.

GREATER PURPOSE

The presence of a temple gives locals and travelers a place to worship, and it may also serve the community in other ways. A large temple not only raises the prestige of an area but also attracts new settlers. Smaller temples might provide monks in areas where otherwise people would have to rely only on traveling priests for their blessings. Locals turn to resident monks for advice in times of hardship or when a spiritual opinion is required in a dispute. The temple is a place that peasants and high-ranking samurai might both use, though only the wealthiest and most prestigious will expect the temple to mark and bless the milestones of their lives. Most of the time, the temple is somewhere for people to go and concentrate purely on the spiritual.

Monks at temples devoted to the Tao of Shinsei and the many sutras that further study Shinsei's teachings might read aloud to visitors or even teach them to read the text themselves. Since basic education is available only to those of the samurai and merchant classes, this can be a great opportunity. In a land where religion requires that the Celestial Order remain rigid, such behaviors might seem a contradiction, but this is often how monks find new recruits for their orders. Once a promising peasant has taken monastic vows, they are outside the Celestial Order, and no harm has been done in teaching them.

SHINDEN KASAI

This temple to Osano-wo, the Fortune of Fire and Thunder, is unusual because many of the resident monks are retired Crab samurai. Built by Crab warriors on the Plains of Thunder, which storms ravage all year round, this temple is a formidable fortress of limestone. To reach it, visitors must scramble over rocks that no horse could traverse and navigate a maze fitted with deadly traps. This same maze is used as a training ground for initiate monks, ensuring that only the best survive to become fully fledged Thunder Sōhei. Lightning rods atop the walls create a blinding display during the regular storms. If they serve a greater purpose, the monks keep this secret to themselves.

The master sensei is a retired Lion samurai now known as Kusuburu. Smaller in stature than many of the Thunder Sōhei, he challenges and defeats them all regularly in order to maintain his position. His hairless scalp is heavily scarred and red. He wears a scarlet hakama and leaves his chest bare, displaying the welts he has earned in his long residence at the temple.

Building the Fortress

Two hundred years after the death of Osano-wo, the Brotherhood of Shinsei requested that Osano-wo's ono battle-ax, kept but not used by the Hida family, be given for safekeeping to Shinden Sandā in Mantis lands. As the Hida were unwilling to send the weapon such a distance, a samurai named Kaiu Tomoki was given the task of building a temple to rival that of the Mantis. The Plains of Thunder were deemed the most suitable

OSANO-WO

The myths surrounding the life of the Fortune of Fire and Thunder, Osano-wo, are many. He was the second son of the Kami Hida, and his mother is said to have been the Thunder Dragon, a patron of heroes. Osano-wo himself is a being of legend, reputed to have possessed the heroic qualities of strength, honor, and courage. While he was the Crab Clan Champion, he led his clan against the trolls and all but obliterated that ancient race.

Osano-wo had two sons by two mothers. He named one son, Kenzan, his heir, and through him, the Hida family can trace their bloodline back to the Kami. His other son, Kaimetsu-Uo, left to found the Mantis Clan in the Islands of Spice and Silk. Many Mantis sailors proudly claim to have descended from Osano-wo, not least the Mantis Clan Champion, Yoritomo. The Mantis built one of the two major temples to Osano-wo, Shinden Sandā in Inazuma Province, and this temple is famed for its treasures. The other major temple, Shinden Kasai, was later built by Crab architects on the Plains of Thunder.

TALES TOLD OF THE THUNDER TEMPLE

- The Kaiu engineers installed large metal rods atop the temple to harness the power of lightning itself, using it to power traps that incinerate those who stumble into them. The senior monks can use the lightning as a weapon!
- The monks claim to keep Osano-wo's ono for his safe return, but no one has ever seen it. Maybe they don't have it at all, and the weapon is lost.
- The monks scar their bodies, purifying themselves with flame. Many would-be monks don't survive the initiation process, and their burnt bodies are offered as a sacrifice to the Fortune.
- Some of the monks were dangerous criminals once, murderers and thieves who escaped justice by joining the order.

location, and Tomoki took engineers and bushi with him to build a structure to protect the weapon. The Crab warriors stayed, practicing their martial ways. Since that time, many warriors from all clans and castes have joined them rather than retiring to a quieter monastic life elsewhere. The Brotherhood of Shinsei was satisfied, though the sōhei of the temple remain set apart, governing themselves.

Ready for War

Shrines to Osano-wo and associated Fortunes exist in the bowels of the fortress, where the only light comes from flames kept perpetually burning. The monks sleep and train in barren stone rooms. Their rituals are physically intense, their training grueling, and even the successful initiates come away burned and scarred. Almost all artifacts kept in the temple are weapons, the most precious of which are kept locked away in the great vault where Osano-wo's personal ono rests, awaiting his return. Sōhei train with this type of ax, their signature weapon, but they are also masters of jūjutsu. They seek Enlightenment through reverence of their Fortune and adherence to his martial ways.

The Army of Osano-wo

As Shinden Kasai contains a battle-ready army of sōhei, several commanders have petitioned the temple for aid in the past. Few have persuaded the master sensei that the cause is great enough to warrant their intervention. Only the Emerald Champion can count on these monks, since they believe victory in the Emerald Championship demonstrates Osano-wo's blessing. The Emerald Champion is Osano-wo's chosen, and the Thunder Sōhei would follow them unquestioningly. Small groups or individual sōhei do sometimes leave the temple for a time to fight in their Fortune's name, but the Empire has not yet seen the full force of Osano-wo's sōhei army in all its glory.

Takeshi, Sōhei

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 4 2

Having lost his leg in battle against the creatures of the Shadowlands, Takeshi retired to Shinden Kasai, where he learned to fight all over again. He would have returned to the Wall, but he saw Osano-wo in a dream, so he stayed to teach others, taking the name Takeshi. He is a large and fearsome monk who wholeheartedly accepts his new life and considers himself fortunate. He has a prosthetic wooden leg under his hakama, and he is more acrobatic than his large size makes him appear. He trains hard alongside the other monks, remaining battle ready though he doesn't know when—or who—he'll be called upon to fight.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
55	HONOR	ENDURANCE	16
45	GLORY	COMPOSURE	10
25	STATUS	FOCUS	5
+2, –2	DEMEANOR · INTIMIDATING	VIGILANCE	3



ARTISAN 0	MARTIAL 3	SCHOLAR 2	SOCIAL 2	TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Hardened Physique: Martial; *Physical*	**Lost Leg:** Martial; *Physical*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Ono: Range 1–2, Damage 5, Deadliness 6, 2-Handed, Wargear

Gear (equipped): Worn robes (Physical 1, Damaged, Mundane)

ABILITIES

STRENGTH OF THUNDER

When making an Attack or Support (Earth) action check, Takeshi may spend ✵ in the following way:

> **Earth ✵+:** Heal 1 fatigue for each ✵ spent in this way.

ADVENTURE SEED: FAMILY RELICS

一 **Hook** Takeshi's family claims ownership of a relic he took with him to the temple, a Kaiu blade. They say he should have left this family heirloom behind, and that he only gave it to the temple once he was a monk, when it was no longer his to give. They employ the PCs to get it back, and they want it done quietly. The family provides them with an inferior katana to replace the original.

二 **Rising Action** If the PCs wish to sneak into the temple, they will have to navigate the deadly maze. Otherwise, they can announce themselves to the monks watching them from the top of the wall. If they persuade these monks to allow them entry to speak to Takeshi, a sōhei appears to guide them through the maze. Takeshi, of course, refuses to let them take the weapon. If they ask to view it, he tells them it's locked in the temple vault and that only the master sensei, who carries the key on his person, has access. If pressed, Takeshi could request the key on their behalf, but only if they duel him and prove their worth, letting Osano-wo decide the victor. The vault contains many sacred weapons and items, so identifying the correct sword would take time without Takeshi.

三 **Climax** If the PCs attempt to swap the blade for the fake while Takeshi is present, he may notice and attack. As with the duel, he would consider their victory over him as evidence they deserve to succeed. Alternatively, PCs could try diplomacy here, but must appeal to him as a monk, not as a former Crab.

TEMPLE OF LISTENING GHOSTS

On the edge of the Kitsu family's fertile plains, built high in the mountains, Temple of Listening Ghosts stands guard over the Lion Clan. Golden lions keep watch from each side with crystal eyes that blaze in the sunlight. Other temples in Lion lands often have replicas as shrine guardians, modeling them on these, the most lifelike images of the kitsu race. Some believe the eyes flare to warn of coming trouble.

The head monk of the temple is Shizuka. She has golden eyes, indicating the blessing of her kitsu ancestors. She rarely speaks, but when she does, all listen, and she embodies the wisdom and intelligence of the kitsu. She spends most of her time within the temple, and her skin is ghostly pale from lack of sunlight.

Ikoma Eiji is a visiting historian who sought permission from the Kitsu daimyō to live in the temple in the hope of learning more about the history of the Kitsu Clan—and their forebears. He spends his days waiting, hoping the kitsu spirits will grant him knowledge to add to the official histories. He petitions Shizuka for help, but she only tells him to listen.

Akodo and the Kitsu

Many myths circulate about the true nature of the kitsu ancestors, the lionlike race that walked the land before the Kami fell. The story told in this temple is that Akodo waged war on the kitsu, thinking them beasts, and only when the kitsu learned to speak Rokugani did he understand and ask forgiveness. To atone for almost exterminating their race, he offered them a place in his clan, and the surviving kitsu married his children and founded a new family. The monks at the Temple of Listening Ghosts place great importance on listening, understanding, and thinking before acting.

In Honor of the Kitsu

Painted red and built five stories high, the Temple of Listening Ghosts is visible for miles around, but reaching it is a test of strength and determination, as the approaching steps cut into the mountainside are steep and narrow. Inside, the wealth of the temple is on display, sacred items crafted from the gold given to it by Akodo after he first encountered and waged war on the kitsu race. Only members of the Kitsu family have free access to the temple. Other Lion families require permission to visit, and outsiders are rarely welcome.

WHISPERS ABOUT THE TEMPLE

- Strange creatures prowl the mountains at night, and they have lionlike heads, just like the kitsu! Maybe the kitsu didn't die out at all but live secretly in the mountains. The monks must know they're there, and they are probably in league with them.
- The Kitsu family carries the blood of those beings. That's why they're so strange.
- Anyone who sits long enough might hear voices, but how do they know if it's kitsu they hear or something else?
- The temple is there to protect the clan and the Kitsu family. Nothing bad can happen to the family while the temple stands.

Listening

While the Kitsu family contains many shugenja, including the *sōdan-senzo,* who speak with ancestors, none would dare invoke spirits in this temple. If the spirits of the kitsu wish to offer their wisdom, only with quiet will the whispers be heard. Thus the resident monks rarely speak, and spend hours in meditation listening for the voices of the kitsu ancestors. Young Kitsu Clan members make a pilgrimage to the temple for their gempuku, and they are sent into the mountains beyond to spend a night remembering how their ancestors were driven there by Akodo before he learned to listen.

ADVENTURE SEED: BESTIAL SPIRITS

一 Hook In the villages near the Temple of Listening Ghosts, complaints are surfacing of horses being killed, claw marks on doors, and people going missing. Locals fear that some malevolent beast or spirit is on the loose, and they look to the temple for aid. The Kitsu daimyō grants temple access to anyone who can help; there are no shugenja currently in the temple, so a shugenja PC may be approached directly.

二 Rising Action Shizuka tells the PCs that the kitsu spirits have fallen silent, a sign of their displeasure, and that nothing the monks have been doing to regain their favor placates them. This has involved meditating for long periods at the expense of eating and sleeping, and the monks are becoming exhausted. She also fears for Shu, a monk who went into the mountains and never returned.

三 Climax If Shu is found in the mountains, he acts like a wild animal, eating raw meat of dubious origin. When approached, he expects adoration, and anything less causes him to attack indiscriminately. A shugenja might realize that he has been possessed by an evil spirit, and if the PCs bring Shu to Shizuka, she can help him overcome the spirit. If they kill him, they can take his body to Shizuka so that he will receive the rites of the dead, and she is grateful for their help. If he is not found, Shu returns to attack the temple at night.



Shu, Possessed Monk

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 5 2

Shu was too eager to hear whispers, and after listening to the wrong spirit in the mountains, he has become possessed. He believes himself to be a kitsu and acts as he believes a lion would, but the spirit possessing him calls itself Sasayaki and makes him ferocious, strong, and violent. He wears ragged robes and walks barefoot, fighting with nails that have grown into claws. He believes himself special, chosen—and he believes the monks should worship him.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
30	HONOR	ENDURANCE	18
30	GLORY	COMPOSURE	10
10	STATUS	FOCUS	3
+2, –2	DEMEANOR · FERAL	VIGILANCE	5



ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 1

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Sure-Footed: Martial; *Physical*	**Hot-Tempered:** Social; *Mental*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Bestial Claws: Range 0, Damage 4, Deadliness 4, Razor-edged

Gear (equipped): Ragged robes (Physical 2, Supernatural 2)

ABILITIES

INHUMAN RESILIENCE

Attacks targeting Shu treat their Deadliness as 3 lower. In addition, the cost of any effect to inflict a critical strike on Shu is increased by one.

THE FOUR TEMPLES

These temples stand at the four corners of Kyūden Seppun, the Seppun family palace, towering over it as their Chimes of Purity peal out in harmony each hour of the day. Early copies of the Tao of Shinsei are kept here, a part in each temple. Valuable treasures are on display, but the most important and dangerous relics are locked away, in rooms with sophisticated traps to keep intruders out. From here, the temples' network of monks stretches out across Rokugan, as they believe in both advising at courts throughout the land, and keeping watch over rulers on behalf of the populace.

SECRET PURPOSES

- The chimes remind us of Shinsei's words, which are inscribed on the bells.
- The chimes keep evil away. If they ever stop ringing each hour, it will be a terrible omen.
- Monks of the Four Temples can be found in every court in Rokugan. They spy on everyone, and pass everything on to the Emperor.

The Brotherhood of Shinsei has no leader—the Emperor himself being the religious head of Shintao—but the Grand Master of the Four Temples is sometimes seen to speak for the Brotherhood. The current Grand Master is Dōri, who works tirelessly to keep the abbots of each temple from wasting their time in argument—a seemingly impossible task. She makes it her job to know as much as she can of Rokugani current affairs, as well as the minute details within her order. Although she dresses and acts as humbly as the lowliest initiate, she is easily identified, as other monks treat her with respect bordering on reverence.

Yoshi is head monk of the western Temple. This aged monk enjoys studying the Tao of Shinsei and wants to share Shinsei's wisdom with everyone. He is a cheerful monk, tall and thin, who retains the energy of youth despite his age.

Asahina Atsushi is a young, inexperienced courtier who has come to stay at Kyūden Seppun. He is a courtier because he showed no skill as a shugenja or a bushi, not because he chose the career. He dresses well but is not clever enough to do well at court without throwing some coin around. Fortunately, he has plenty of it.

Finding the Way

The Four Temples were founded by Seppun's four children, each with a different interpretation of her teachings and a differing opinion on what was the most important aspect of Shinsei. The bickering between the monks of these temples is legendary, but under the guidance of Dōri, they occasionally unite for a common purpose.

Four Aspects of Shinsei

The immaculate Four Temples demonstrate the wealth of the Brotherhood of Shinsei. In addition to housing parts of early copies of the Tao of Shinsei, each contains a statue of Shinsei that celebrates the teaching of that particular temple. In the eastern temple, the statue is in a meditative posture, in the northern one Shinsei walks with a stick, in the southern he demonstrates a fist strike, and in the western he reads aloud from a scroll. Each demonstrates the activity one of the temples considers paramount: introspection, understanding the world, mastering body and mind, and spreading Shinsei's wisdom.

Jun, Shinseist Monk

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 4 2

Jun is a plump monk of modest stature who travels the courts of Rokugan offering advice and returns to the Four Temples with news and gossip. She smiles, jokes, and enjoys being evasive if it frustrates those who question her. As a monk of the western temple, she never misses an opportunity to share Shinsei's lessons, and this is the one subject on which she talks freely. Her life among courtiers has made her prone to materialism, and she can be bought or plied with sake. While away from the temple, she believes the normal rules of her order do not apply. She wears a valuable golden lotus pendant beneath her simple robes..

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
55	HONOR	ENDURANCE	10
45	GLORY	COMPOSURE	12
25	STATUS	FOCUS	6
+2, –2	DEMEANOR - FLIPPANT	VIGILANCE	4



ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 3 | SOCIAL 3 | TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES

Subtle Observer: Social; *Interpersonal*

DISADVANTAGES

Bluntness: Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Walking Staff: Range 1–2, Damage 6, Deadliness 2, Mundane

Gear (equipped): Monk's robes (Physical 1), gold lotus pendant (When performing a Meditation check add one rolled Ring die showing result)

ABILITIES

ATTUNED TO THE WAY

When a character succeeds on an Attack or Scheme action targeting Jun, reduce their bonus successes by 3, to a minimum of 0.

Adventure Seed: Telling Tales

Hook A young courtier named Atsushi approaches the PCs for assistance with a delicate matter. He believes a monk known as Jun overheard him say something that a certain person might find insulting, and he wants the PCs to find Jun in the western temple and offer an apology—and a bribe if necessary—before the monk tells the insulted party. Atsushi is unwilling to repeat his offensive statement, but it is clear that if the PCs assist him, Atsushi will owe them a considerable favor.

Rising Action Jun is in the temple garden, apparently meditating. If PCs wait for her to finish, only when they give up does she laugh and talk to them. If they interrupt her, she scolds them and then laughs when they offer apologies. Jun admits to hearing Atsushi say many things, and she talks the PCs in circles. If one is offered, she accepts a bribe to never repeat what Atsushi said, but afterward she reveals she has already told the head monk of the western temple, Yoshi. She won't say more, since she has just agreed to be silent on the matter! If the PCs return to Atsushi and say Jun is successfully bribed, he asks them bluntly whether anyone else knows. They can lie, or make an enemy of him by telling him that Yoshi knows, in which case he threatens to slur their reputations at court.

Climax Yoshi is inside the western temple. He won't talk to them until they answer three questions on the Tao of Shinsei. The answers can be found in the other three temples. If they are successful, Yoshi reveals that he himself was the subject of the courtier's comments, but he forgives the slander. Both he and Atsushi will speak well of the PCs in future if they take this course of action.

Monasteries

Monasteries share a common purpose: to give monks a place in which to live and learn. In some orders, monks remain their entire lives inside their monastery, in which case the building requires the space and facilities to enable them to pursue Enlightenment. Other orders place more value on real-world experience, offering only what monks need to take shelter through a winter or wait out an illness. Some orders have hundreds of monks housed in several monasteries across Rokugan. Other orders consist of only a handful, requiring one small monastery. While some monasteries are large complexes that stand for generations, others may consist of a few huts and a shrine.

While the physical needs of the monks are met at a monastery, this is only to allow them to engage in more important tasks. The spiritual health of the monks comes before the physical, and the well-being of the order before that of the individual. The life of a monk is hard, but its spiritual rewards are manifold. This is what drives so many retiring samurai to join an order as they enter the final chapter of their life.

A SPIRITUAL FAMILY

As is the case with temples, many monasteries are supported or founded by wealthy daimyō looking to gain spiritual favor or to impress the Brotherhood of Shinsei. However, some of the smallest monasteries are founded cheaply when a monk or group of monks feel compelled to found a new, distinct order. These are connected to the Brotherhood, though the most isolated gladly fend for themselves, working together as a sort of spiritual family.

The head monk of each order is sometimes referred to as an abbot, while the other monks call each other "siblings," "sisters," or "brothers" to reinforce the feeling that the monks have left their old families behind and joined a new one. The importance of family in Rokugan is pervasive, and these terms remind the monks where their new responsibilities lie. While monks of differing monasteries may argue, those within rarely do more than debate. As the Brotherhood reminds everyone, all monks are siblings following Shinsei together.

NAMES

Initiates of a monastic order usually change their name as they leave their old life and family behind. Whether this is a requirement or not is up to the particular order. The choice of name may lie with the individual, or the order may bestow an appropriate one, such as in the High House of Light, where many initiates receive the Togashi family name.

Monks often go by simple names that have a personal or symbolic meaning appropriate for their order or monastery. For example, a Shinseist monk might pick Hideaki, which means "wise." A Fortunist monk might go by Ai, "love," to honor Benten, the Fortune of Arts and Romantic Love, or Kishi, "beach," for Isora, Fortune of the Shore. However, the new name is far less important than the fact that an old one has been shed. Changing a name implies the end of one life and the beginning of the next.

A NOTE CONCERNING NAMES

Once Japanese names are romanized, their meaning is dubious. Players can decide what they wish a name to mean within the game, but this does not necessarily translate to reality. Looking up the Japanese word for a virtue, element, or even a favored animal or bird can offer a name that sounds appropriate for a character. Though it's unlikely to be a name in the real world, it could be just right for Rokugan.




Earth's Breath Monastery
SLEEPING HALL
STORAGE
TUNNEL ENTRANCE
STUDY
WORKROOM
MEDITATION ROOM
LECTURE HALL
KITCHEN
SHRINE
LIBRARY
DINING HALLS
TRAINING GROUND
ROCK GARDEN
MAIN HALL
BELL TOWER

TAKING VOWS

Most monks choose their vocation, whether in their youth or when retiring from life as a samurai. However, some monks began as foundlings left at monasteries by families too poor to raise them. These monks have never known any other life.

The initiation process can be as simple as taking vows before the rest of the order, or it may involve physical trials or tests of will. Sometimes the initiate is not told of the test, and passes or fails before they know they're being tested. Secretive orders are particularly careful about who joins them; their initiation process may include several trials and last for years. Once an initiate is accepted, their head is shaved, as they must discard the distractions of vanity, rank, and other worldly cares.

The monastic life is one of purity, celibacy, and simplicity. The austere lifestyle and hard work does not suit everyone, though those with violent or romantic tendencies might channel these drives by serving Bishamon or Benten, whose orders have different rules. On entering an order, initiates vow to uphold its ideals and principles. To fail invites punishment from the senior monks or from a higher spiritual authority.

The decision to join an order is not to be made lightly. While there are cases of monks leaving their order behind and returning to their old life, there is no honor in such an act. Only in exceptional circumstances will a respectable family accept the return of a member from a monastery. There must be a good reason for desertion: divine intervention, supernatural danger only the former monk can prevent, or a case of corruption within the monastery itself.

Even monks of the largest orders know that their extended "family" shares a worldview, philosophy, and goal. Thus, monks demonstrate the ideal of a Rokugani family, as all members work together for one purpose. However, as in all families, there are occasionally problems among the members. The larger the order, the more likely the head monk will be forced to settle matters of argument and discipline monks who act against the order's principles. Expulsion from the Brotherhood of Shinsei is possible for serious transgressions and is considered worse than death. Usually, infractions are dealt with internally, with extra work, physical pain, and fasting and contemplation being popular methods for setting a monk back on the right path.

ARCHITECTURE

As Shintao is an amalgamation of two religions, many features of Fortunist shrines and architecture are included in monasteries, even those devoted to the study of the Tao of Shinsei. On the gates of any monastery, whether built of stone or wood, are quotes from Shinsei alongside riddles to confuse and repel evil spirits, warnings for the impure to keep clear, or kōan to stimulate the minds of passing monks. These are in addition to the torii arches that still guard the entrances to any shrines within the monastery. All monasteries have defenses on a spiritual level, whether they're fortified to resist physical attacks or not.

Almost all monasteries also have a gong, bell, or drum tower to mark the hours, call the monks together, wake them in the morning, and send them to bed at night. These may also be used to warn of danger, as well as to communicate with the kami or draw the attention of a Thunder. For this last purpose, the instrument requires careful handling and specialized skill. The assigned monks develop the art over years, first as an apprentice and then as a master. In practiced hands, the drum can be made to sound like an approaching storm, the gong can be used for sound meditation, and the bell can aid focus.

Monasteries—even for orders of sōhei—are likely to keep a library of sutras for the monks to study and contemplate, and many also have a scriptorium, where texts are copied. The transmission of Shinsei's teachings is rooted in the written word, and learning these texts is an important part of the training of any monk. Monasteries may also have a separate room for teaching initiates, locals, or visitors the wisdom of Shinsei's words. Spreading Shinsei's teachings is one of the most sacred duties of the Brotherhood.

Original texts are sometimes kept in a repository alongside relics and icons deemed precious enough to hide from view. Different orders hide or protect these repositories in different ways. While the wealthier orders are proud to make the presence of a famous katana or ancient statue known to increase numbers of visitors, who wish to be close to such items even if they cannot see them, smaller monasteries keep such things hidden beneath a shrine or locked within

a hidden room. That anyone would risk their karma by stealing sacred items is nearly inconceivable, but a chaotic mental state or desperation may lead people to do strange things. Most monks would give their lives to protect their order's relics, and losing them would be a heavy blow. The loss of relics would also be devastating to the local community, whose spiritual well-being is tied to the land and any monastery upon it.

THE OUTSIDE WORLD

The influence of the Brotherhood of Shinsei cannot be underestimated. Peasants and samurai alike trust monks to guide them in spiritual matters, and no mere lord may challenge that, no matter their wealth or prestige. The Emperor is himself head of the religion, so is theoretically immune to such undermining, but all others must defer to the Brotherhood in spiritual matters. And what matter could be considered entirely outside of spiritual concerns, in a society where religion is so pervasive in daily life?

Though monasteries do not provide them with tax income like other settlements, daimyō invariably welcome monks within their lands, showing proper respect and piety—at least publicly. The influence of a head monk, who like all monks stands outside of the Celestial Order that keeps all others in their place, is sometimes construed as a threat—perhaps correctly—by the daimyō of those lands.

VISITORS

Pilgrims visit monasteries to prove their religious devotion or seek spiritual answers. However, there are many other reasons to visit a monastery. While only initiates leave their names and old lives behind them, even casual visitors may find some relief from the pressures of their position in a place where worldly ranks have little meaning. A welcoming monastery is the perfect environment in which to find spiritual peace and time to think and contemplate, as well to as gain some guidance from residents. An element of obscurity might be a welcome change for a high-ranking samurai, and the right monastery can also be the perfect place to hide. Introspective orders are unlikely to ask questions of their visitor, and if a criminal is tracked down to a monastery, they may still have time to request initiation before being forced to face justice.

The Monks of the Four Temples in particular consider it their duty to follow and influence the political scene, sending representatives to every major court in Rokugan. They are the only order to attempt to direct the Emperor himself, offering guidance whether it is asked for or not. They not only spread the word of Shinsei, but attempt to ensure that it is followed, and nowhere can change be wrought so effectively as in the Imperial Court. Since this is where Shinsei himself began his teachings, the monks consider themselves justified.

Orders of warrior monks might affect the fate of Rokugan in a different way, by turning the tide of a battle or protecting an otherwise undefended settlement. The motives of sōhei are not always clear, and they rarely stay long enough to explain why they feel compelled to meddle in one battle but not another.

MEDITATION

One activity all monks engage in is meditation. Through this practice, they learn truths that cannot be acquired through mere study, and they pursue Enlightenment. The nature of this monastic practice differs wildly among orders and even individual monks. Some monks chant sutras, focusing on nothing but the sound of the words and the meaning behind them. Some empty their minds, trying to leave the world and their own thoughts behind. Some focus on an external image: a statue of Shinsei, a candle, or perhaps a view from a mountain peak. Monks meditate while sitting, or balancing, or going about their daily tasks. In some monasteries, meditation is strictly structured, with initiates being taught various methods of contemplation. In others, monks are left to figure methods out in the privacy of their own mind. Some meditate in large groups, some completely alone.

THE HIGH HOUSE OF LIGHT

Within the Togashi provinces of the Dragon Clan, the High House of Light clings to the side of a mountain, seemingly unreachable. Those who wish to join the Togashi Order must find and climb the thousand steps to reach the monastery, braving snow and ice as well as spiritual foes along the way. Visitors who wish only to ask Togashi Yokuni or his followers for wisdom may request a guide when they reach the hamlet at the base of the mountain, though whether this request is granted is dependent on the whim of the monk asked.

Togashi Yokuni is both the Dragon Clan Champion and the head of the Togashi Order. He may be seen meditating in or around the monastery, always in his full ceremonial armor and helmet. Petitioners are likely to receive cryptic wisdom in reply to any questions.

Togashi Gaijutsu is a blind tattoo master. His body and scalp are covered in images that appear to shift and change. He tattoos the ise zumi—the monks of the Togashi Order—in the fresh air and sunlight of his workshop's courtyard. His services cannot be bought. He occasionally receives visions, and he recounts these freely to inquirers.

Togashi Umu lives in a hamlet at the base of the mountain. Though not tattooed, she otherwise dresses and acts like an ise zumi. She is often found chopping wood outside her house or digging the garden, and she enjoys physical labor. She is a woman of few words but will give visitors a straight answer to any questions—usually an unexplained yes or no.

The Journey Within

The monks in the High House of Light pursue Enlightenment through contemplation, meditation, study of the Tao, and any other methods they deem appropriate. The monks train with their minds and bodies, and mastery of both is required to become an ise zumi. Inside the monastery is a maze of seemingly empty rooms, cold and bare, in which visitors may get lost. The same mysterious force that makes the steps to the monastery so hard to find means that only the monks can navigate the interior. What the structure really holds, beyond the numerous shrines on the upper levels, only the initiated can possibly say.

No one knows, or admits to knowing, who built the High House of Light. To construct a fortress of such size so high in the mountains is a major feat, but there are no records of who undertook the task, or when. Some say the ise zumi constructed their monastery themselves, others that the Kami Togashi built it single-handedly overnight.

Mystic Tattoos

Most ise zumi monks have tattoos that grant particular powers to the bearer, but the properties of these tattoos is often known only to Gaijustsu and the owner. Any visitor to the monastery is astounded by the variety of tattoos on the monks, who display them proudly, despite the chill of the mountain air. Some images are more common than others, such as the Lotus which is said to aid focus in meditation, or the Tiger for superior unarmed martial ability, but even these never look the same; each person's tattoos are unique, since they reflect the steps on their personal path to Enlightenment. None outside the order are aware that the unique power of these tattoos comes from an impossibly rare ingredient within the blessed ink itself—the blood of the Kami Togashi.



MYTHS AND LEGENDS

- The ise zumi can call down the elements, leap over mountains, and breathe fire.
- The ise zumi are mahō-tsukai. Their power comes from blood magic. They represent a danger to the entire Empire!
- There's some strange force inside the monastery, something you can feel even without going inside. Perhaps it is a captive spirit, a portal to another world, or a being older than humanity.
- If you sleep in view of the monastery you dream of the Celestial Dragons. The monastery must be blessed. Maybe the monks can travel to Tengoku itself.

CHIKAKO, INITIATE MONK

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 1 3

A girl devoted to studying the Tao of Shinsei, Chikako is determined to enter the High House of Light. Chikako is her given name; she has simply dropped her family name. She has been "called" to the monastery and is determined to stay there. She was raised as a samurai, so she has some knowledge of court games and combat. She is small but quick, quiet but willful. Despite her youth, she has a spiritual aura, and fate seems to favor her as though she has been chosen. She speaks with the wisdom and confidence of a more experienced monk, and if words aren't enough, she isn't afraid to fight for what she believes in.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
45	HONOR	ENDURANCE	10
45	GLORY	COMPOSURE	10
45	STATUS	FOCUS	3
+1, +1, –2	DEMEANOR - DETACHED	VIGILANCE	3



ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 3 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES

Seeker of Enlightenment: Scholar; *Mental*

DISADVANTAGES

Fanaticism: Social; *Mental*

ADVENTURE SEED: A HIGHER CALLING

Hook Zurui Chikako, the young daughter of a local lord, has gone missing. Her father is convinced she has been kidnapped. Her mother asks the PCs for help. A girl has been seen alone in the mountains near the High House of Light, but Lord Zurui has dismissed this as rumor.

Rising Action In the mountains, the monk Togashi Umu appears unexpectedly and questions the PCs. If Umu believes the PCs are genuinely concerned for Chikako's safety, they find a path after speaking to him. Otherwise, they become lost for some time, facing steep ravines, crumbling precipices, hungry predators, and even dangerous spirits before ultimately finding the path. The path takes them to a hamlet, where Umu waits for them. If they ask for his help directly, he reveals that Chikako has entered the monastery, and he leads them there. At the monastery, the monks make no attempt to conceal Chikako's presence, but the monastery is a mysterious maze, and finding her is difficult without a guide.

Climax Chikako is shaving her head, having been accepted into the Togashi Order. She explains that her family would never have allowed her to make the journey to the monastery, so she left in secret. She asks the PCs to tell her family she is where she is meant to be. The PCs must choose whether to respect Chikako's wishes and face a potentially angry samurai lord, or to attempt to convince her to return to her old life.

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Wakizashi: Range 0–1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Concealable, Razor-edged

Gear (equipped): Simple kimono (Physical 1), knife

ABILITIES

FATEFUL BLESSING

When Chikako spends a Void point as part of a check, she may spend ✵ in the following way:

Void ✵: Gain 1 Void point.

SILENT ONES MONASTERY

The Silent Ones Monastery, devoted to Tsugumu, Fortune of Secrets, is hidden near the City of Lies. Scorpions with secrets weighing heavy on their minds go there to unburden themselves, bringing messages and journal pages containing their secrets to alleviate the isolation of hidden knowledge. Those who bring their secrets often also bring donations to thank the monastery for keeping safe the information they cannot keep themselves. A small, walled complex built into the side of a hill, the monastery is easily overlooked. The monks are part of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, but some of their practices set them apart; for instance, most of them wear black and tie a black cloth over their mouth.

The head monk is identifiable by his scarlet robes, which distinguish him from the others. He is lean with sharp features and an unflinching gaze that makes even the strongest bushi uncomfortable. He is greedy for secrets, and he has a way of drawing them from people, even without speaking.

The Founding Secret

The details of the founding and building of the Silent Ones Monastery have been deliberately removed from all records and histories. Some even say that the engineers and builders involved came to abrupt ends after its completion, ensuring that the secrets of the structure remain hidden.

SCORPION TALES

- The monks don't burn the secrets they receive; they hide them inside their monastery, stuffing the statues of the Fortune with them. If anyone got their hands on even one of those statues they could blackmail half the clan, but nobody would risk stealing from the temple.
- The monks are completely silent: they never speak, and even their feet make no sound. They're like shadows, or shinobi. They leave their monastery when they haven't been given enough secrets and spy on everyone in the City of Lies.
- The monks don't speak because they don't have tongues; they cut them out when they're initiated into the order. Then, they burn them as an offering to Tsugumu.

False Impressions

Outsiders quickly find themselves lost and confused within the Silent Ones Monastery. Instead of the feeling of tranquility that pervades many monasteries, visitors feel only a sense of deep unease and anxiety. This is the result not of spiritual power, but of the strange techniques involved in the monastery's construction, and of the ceaseless actions of the monks to conceal and mislead.

The interior of the monastery is seemingly much larger than the outside, with concealed passages and secret rooms, entire stories hidden under the ground or between floors, and puzzles and traps to confuse and disorient. The many statues of the Fortune are identical, so that many rooms appear the same as many others. Any rooms in which the monks might sleep, train, or eat are hidden, further isolating visitors. Visitors wait in comfort in small chambers containing thick tatami and shōji screens in Scorpion colors, until a single monk eventually arrives, leading them to a statue to confess their secrets.

Aotora Akira, "Pilgrim"

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 2 3

Akira acts like, and claims to be, a well-born courtier. A typical Scorpion, he dresses in scarlet and black, never answers the same question with the same answer, and often arouses people's suspicions with his aversion to attention and slimy demeanor. He changes his mask more often than most samurai change their clothes. If anyone presses him too closely, he may slip poison into their drink or brush it onto their skin with a casual touch. He wears a wakizashi but no katana, and he has a number of knives hidden within his robes. While his primary aim is to reach the monastery and escape justice, he can't resist any opportunities to steal; it's in his nature. His companions had best keep a close eye on their valuables.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
15	HONOR	ENDURANCE	10
35	GLORY	COMPOSURE	8
35	STATUS	FOCUS	5
+2, –2	DEMEANOR · SHREWD	VIGILANCE	3



ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 3 | TRADE 2

ADVANTAGES

Patient and Subtle: Trade; *Mental*

DISADVANTAGES

Dark Secret: Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Wakizashi: Range 0–1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Concealable, Razor-edged

Gear (equipped): Courtly robes (Physical 1, Ceremonial, Resplendent), satchel of poisons (see page 244 of the core rulebook), two knives

ABILITIES

POISONER

For purposes of identifying, preparing, or using poisons, treat Akira's ranks in Medicine as 4. When Akira makes an Attack action check using a poisoned weapon, he may spend ✲ in the following way:

> ✲: The weapon remains poisoned. (The effects of the poison still apply to this attack.)

PLAINS WIND MONASTERY

Devoted to Kuroshin, the Fortune of Agriculture, the Plains Wind Monastery is a practical one that is particularly committed to helping its community. The monks and peasants farm alongside each other, assisting and learning from one another as they work the fields and paddies. The monks grow plants for healing as well as rice, and they store any surplus to help supply the Unicorn army with food and healing herbs when the need arises. The monks learn how to fight with farming implements to defend themselves.

Blessing the Fields

When the Ki-Rin Clan returned to Rokugan and eventually reclaimed some land, they built a small shrine to Kuroshin, the Fortune of Agriculture, hoping the Fortune would bless the land that they would come to farm as Unicorn. This was not an easy adjustment for the nomadic clan to make, and in their struggles, they decided to build a monastery around the shrine, housing monks who could ensure the Fortune's blessing. The monastery was constructed hastily, and the clan took some of its first steps since returning from its travels to foster a relationship with the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

Guiding the People

The Plains Wind Monastery is a large complex made of wood, with storage barns, an infirmary, barracks-style housing for the monks, and an open-air training area.

AIRY TALES

- All manner of strange plants grow at Plains Wind Monastery, including ones that produce poisons no Scorpion's ever heard of. It's a dangerous place.
- The monk Dai can heal all sorts of ills, but at a terrible cost. She invokes foreign gods, and her strange rituals risk the patient's soul.
- "It's not all about farming at all. There's a whole Unicorn garrison hiding there, pretending to be peasants and monks. They have no honor."

The buildings surround a shrine in the center, which stands in the midst of a large, exotic herb garden. The monastery is situated between a small peasant town and the fields they work, so they pass through the monastery grounds every day.

Dai, Fortunist Monk

ADVERSARY | CONFLICT RANK: 2 | 4

If there was a head monk, Dai would be it. Descended from the monk who suggested the clan build the shrine in the first place, she is the one the others look to for guidance. She treats the sick using recipes passed down for generations, ones that originated outside of Rokugan. She has learned to grow foreign plants in Rokugani soil, and the herb garden that surrounds the shrine is her personal project. If anyone feigns illness, she sees through it but says nothing. She "treats" them instead, with herbs that are unpleasant but harmless. If anyone tries to force information from her, others will fight in her defense, but if visitors ask politely, she is generous and cooperative.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
50	HONOR	ENDURANCE	14
45	GLORY	COMPOSURE	15
25	STATUS	FOCUS	4
+2, –2	DEMEANOR · ASSERTIVE	VIGILANCE	3



ARTISAN 3 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 3 | TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES

Indomitable Will: Social; *Mental*

DISADVANTAGES

Softheartedness: Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Bō staff: Range 1–2, Damage 6, Deadliness 2, Mundane

Gear (equipped): Robes (Physical 1)

ABILITIES

HERBALIST

When Dai makes a Medicine check targeting a character, she may spend ✠ in the following way:

> ✠+: The target removes 1 strife for each ✠ spent this way

ADVENTURE SEED: BENEATH NOTICE

Hook A Lion daimyō wishes to learn the truth about the Plains Wind Monastery, and he wants someone to pose as a peasant and uncover any secrets. He considers this task beneath his own honorable samurai, so offers the job to outsiders. He tells them that the monks offer food and shelter to the sick, hinting that the PCs should feign illness.

Rising Action Exploring the monastery, the PCs may find any number of things the Lion might want to know: poisonous plants in the herb garden alongside, perhaps more ruinously, plants none of them can recognize; peasants training to fight with farming implements; stores of food for the Unicorn army; a well-stocked infirmary, as if ready to treat casualties of battle. It is when they try to leave that the PCs find that they have been watched the whole time.

Climax Dai keeps the PCs from leaving and talks to them. She dislikes lies. She has herbs to make them reveal the truth, if they resist revealing their purpose. If they are prepared to negotiate, she tells them she does not mind the Lion knowing some things. She wants the Lion to know the Unicorn are strong, and she suggests the PCs could even exaggerate. If, instead of cooperating, they try to fight their way out, they find that not only the monks but also the farmers living nearby fight back, against Rokugani tradition.





CHAPTER

6

Wilds of Rokugan

The young shugenja missed home, a small coastal fishing village in the northern Nejiro Province. She missed the smell of salt in the humid air, and the sound of waves crashing into the cliffs outside her home.

But none of that mattered, now. All their sacrifices would have meaning when she returned home bathed in glory. Shiba Daigo had led them on a search through the Isawa Mori, locating a fabled water shrine, but it had not held the secret the shugenja sought. She prayed that their next stop would hold what she sought.

As the brilliant pink and orange of the sky faded, the travelers emerged from the forest to look out upon an open valley. She saw a small village encircled by pine trees, smoke billowing from communal fires glowing through the still air. Beyond, she could make out the leaning ruins of large, roofless towers breaking up the pine forest, like fingers of a buried giant. There was an electricity in the air she could almost smell. Whispers so faint they might be imagined urged her on: whispers of a secret trapped inside the central tower of the Korihaka Ruins.

Beyond the Walls of Civilization

To its people, Rokugan is the pinnacle of civilization, for it was modeled after the Celestial Heavens themselves. Nevertheless, within the borders of the Emerald Empire there are vast stretches of wilderness. One need not venture far beyond the walls of a town or the farmlands around a village before finding oneself in true wilderness. The wilds of Rokugan—dense forests, isolated valleys, forbidding mountains, and even the sea—hold magnificent beauty and splendor, but also great danger. One must not only admire nature, but respect it. Samurai view themselves as paragons of the civilized world, yet they must often traverse the wilderness. A bushi might prepare an ambush in a mountain pass, a shugenja might commune with forest spirits, or a courtier might seek out a remote pond for poetic inspiration.

UNSPOILED COASTS

The long eastern coastline of Rokugan has extensive beaches of white, gold, or black sand and cliffs that rise from the water like jade and ivory towers. Rokugan has more than a thousand miles of coastline—controlled by the Crab, Crane, and Phoenix Clans—much of which plays host to harbors and fishing villages. However, other parts of the coast are either too rocky or too prone to dangerous storms for permanent settlements. These unspoiled stretches are sometimes home to heimin hermits or small families seeking a quiet life.

Coastal Resources

A tiny community on a remote, isolated coastline might support itself through subsistence fishing; quarrying limestone, sandstone, salt, or chalk from the cliffs; or diving for pearls, which can be sold for a premium in town for basic necessities. They may also gather niche resources like algae, shells, or animal ink for trade.

Coastal Cultures

Those living on isolated parts of the coast are often poor heimin, but shipwrecked sailors, samurai under self-imposed exile, and shugenja or priests seeking to commune with water kami or build a shrine are not unheard of. Bands of pirates often build secret harbors and hidden lairs into craggy inlets with rough waters. They hope the rough seas and coastal caverns can hide their ships from view. While the amphibious *ningyo*, one of the Five Ancient Races, are rare, off lonely coasts are where they are most likely to build their underwater cities. Trolls dwell in coastal caverns, representing a danger to humans and ningyo alike.

MYSTERIOUS FORESTS

Rokugan is home to vast, sprawling woodlands that are both feared and necessary to civilization. Its forests house many dangers but also offer opportunities. For every poisonous plant, another feeds the hungry or heals the sick. For every ravenous or defensive beast, there is game to hunt for food, clothing, and medicine.

Perhaps the biggest concern in the forest is mystical in nature. Forests notoriously harbor spirits and lie close to the Spirit Realms. Ancient evils and ill-tempered spirits lurk within the tangle of brush and branches, leading samurai and heimin alike to ruin. Ogres, tengu, and kansen populate tree-shrouded lands to live far from the distraction of humans, and they are easily roused to violence should they be disturbed. Still, for all the risk, those attuned can commune with powerful kami in the forests.

Forest Resources

The most important resource to come from the forest is lumber. Northern forests have a tendency to favor coniferous trees, while the south has deciduous trees, bamboo, and some fruit trees. Island forests are similar to those in the south, but with lighter woods, palm trees, and a stunning variety of fruit-bearing trees. Wood is a vital resource for construction, decoration, tools, and weapons, so most forests have small villages dedicated to the lumber trade along their edges.

However, lumber is far from the only resource of the forest. Berries, mushrooms, herbs, flowers, leaves, bark, and even insects are all gathered from the woods for food and to serve as components in medicines and alchemical potions. Hinin hunters and trappers catch game for meat, fur, and leather, often deep within the forests, where it's easy to get lost. Forest game includes deer, antelope, hare, wild pig, squirrel, and pheasant.

Forest Cultures

Stories and superstition surround the forest more densely than the foliage. Folktales warn of its dangers, both to keep children away from its threats and as metaphors for the untamed wild within humanity. Still, despite the healthy fear and respect of the forest that most Rokugani have, there are those who make a life there. Some are exiles, while others are hermits eschewing society for a quiet, solitary life of self-sufficiency and contemplation in the woods.



Shugenja may travel and live in or near forests, erecting shrines deep within to appease local kami and hopefully spare nearby villages their displeasure. Some shugenja schools train within forests, where they teach emerging practitioners to hear the spirits and create scrolls from local wood.

Bandits are also drawn to forests, as the population's fear of their depths helps them avoid the authorities. They construct homes in the trees or find natural clearings in which to build small support villages. Where there are bandits, there are also rōnin; many rōnin camps can be found at the edges of forests, their inhabitants seeking serenity while staying near enough to logging villages to find work defending locals from bandits, ogres, or other forest threats.

UNFORGIVING MOUNTAINS

Three major mountain ranges loom over Rokugan. The Twilight Mountains—worn, rounded foothills in Crab territory to the south—separate Rokugan from the Shadowlands. The Great Wall of the North mountains form a border along the northern edge of Unicorn, Dragon, and Phoenix lands. The Spine of the World Mountains are a thin range of tall peaks and treacherous passes that divides Rokugan in two. This range runs through Unicorn lands down the Scorpion border with the Lion lands and then through Crane territory to the coast.

Mountain dangers are many, and travelers fail to stock adequate provisions can easily starve or freeze to death. The stones themselves are dangerous: loose rocks can create rockslides and start avalanches with little warning. In rainy seasons in the south, mudslides are possible. The Northern Wall Mountains have been known to shudder, shake, and spew ash and magma as though actively resisting a convoy's efforts. The higher one travels in the mountains, the more sparse and dangerous the wildlife, including bears, and mountain lions.

Mountain Resources

For all the mountains' dangers, their treasures are numerous. Pinewood, river fish, and some of the cleanest water in Rokugan are plentiful, and most Rokugani in the mountains are involved in mining. Basalt, granite, and marble are mined for construction, while veins of iron, copper, silver, gold, platinum, sapphire, diamond, and crystal are highly sought after. Jade can be found in large boulders among foothills, and caves host a number of types of rare minerals and gemstones. Rare flowers and other useful plants hide in mountain peaks and passes as well.

Mountain Culture

The overwhelming majority of those living near mountains are miners or those tasked with supporting or running mining operations. Resources such as iron and jade are vital to military efforts, while others are more important to achieving economic goals. Mining towns might range from a few dozen heimin to vast, permanent complexes of thousands of workers and merchants overseen and protected by ashigaru and even bushi.

Monks are no strangers to mountains, either, often building monasteries and schools there, where they can attune to the elements without distractions. In the mountains, they live a peaceful existence at one with nature, seeking Enlightenment. Hermits, elders, and exiles also immerse themselves in the sweeping vistas of the mountains, trading the dangers of their fellow humans for those of the wooded crags.

ABANDONED RUINS

Ruins include ancient abandoned cities, temples, and shrines whose inhabitants have long since passed into their next life. Ruins are rare finds, nestled deep in shadowed forests or high in craggy mountains, or simply undiscovered in out-of-the-way places along the coasts and plains. Architectural instability is the least of their dangers, though. Many ruins host ominous threats from before the Day of Thunder.

Ruins Resources

Ruins are often concentrated sources of mystical energies and spirits. When ruins are newly discovered by a clan, it is likely to keep them secret or even construct a temple within or nearby to take advantage of the site. Ruins are also potential sources of lost and forbidden knowledge; many a shugenja has recovered a lost technique after studying a scroll found deep within an ancient and crumbling temple. The lure of powerful artifacts also draws bandits and explorers hoping to trade discoveries for fortune and glory.

CONFRONTING THE WILD WITHIN

Survival in the wilderness is difficult under any conditions, but it is nearly impossible while strictly adhering to the Code of Bushidō. For example, samurai are not to touch dead things, but to do so may become necessary for survival. They may need to fish or hunt for food, or to make leather for constructing shelter or clothing if they are lost in the wild for an extended period. Because of this and other restrictions on behavior and hygiene, those samurai traversing the wilderness are often faced with difficult choices between a strict view of Bushidō's tenets and survival.

Samurai traveling with those of a lower caste can easily delegate such unclean duties, and those traveling alone without witnesses might forgo the code in the name of pragmatism, not unlike the Unicorn Clan. It is groups of samurai traveling without any heimin who suffer the most. Social pressure from peers to follow Bushidō make it difficult to do what is necessary to survive. Such desperate times may force samurai to look within themselves and pit their desire for survival against their dedication to Bushidō.

Ruins Cultures

Because many ruins are still empty and abandoned, a lone shugenja, monk, or scholar might take up residence within one for a time. Caravans of priests, monks, shugenja, and their servants might visit ruins to locate relics or items of legend, commune with certain kami, or even search for a passage to Meido, where the deceased await judgment. Such excursions might be undertaken by half a dozen adventurers or a convoy of several hundred. These groups might be guarded about their goals, but they are likely to extend customary courtesies to any fellow samurai whose paths cross.

Ruins, whether above ground, below the surface, or underwater, are sometimes home to small enclaves of one of the Five Ancient Races. Zokujin, tengu, trolls, ningyo, or kitsu might have dwelled within a structure before it became a ruin, and some might remain, guarding ancient secrets or items. The spirits and ancestors of those who once lived in such places might also linger, unwilling or unable to pass on to their next life without the help of outsiders.

Life in the Wilds

Life in the wilderness is a struggle for survival. Warm food, safety, and sometimes even clean drinking water are luxuries for many who live beyond society's reach. Others only pass through the wilderness on their way to someplace more civilized. Even then, travelers respect the wilds, stocking arms and provisions to help ensure a safe and successful journey. For all the dangers, many feel a strong connection to the elements while immersed in the natural world. The smell of unsullied air, the feel of unpacked dirt beneath one's sandals, the crisp taste of cool mountain spring water—those who prefer the wilderness find these things invigorating like nothing else.

SAMURAI

It is rare for a samurai to be in the wilderness for long. The majority only pass through on their way to the next court or battlefield. Such travel is usually done by caravan, often with a handful of heimin and hinin to perform those tasks prohibited for samurai. Many samurai spend travel days on horseback, talking to fellow samurai or to monks or priests, or steeling their mind for the journey ahead. Everyday tasks focus on optimizing the odds of a successful journey, which means considering route safety, food availability, and rest periods while choosing the path forward. Samurai are also expected to handle any threats, as well as to entertain any fellow samurai they happen across.

Rarely, samurai find themselves in exile. Many rōnin spend their time traveling the wilderness seeking purpose. Some rōnin might even settle down there to stand watch over a potential threat, protect a nearby village, or simply put down roots. Regardless of a rōnin's reasons for staying in the wilderness, their life is a combination of quiet contemplation and fighting for survival.

CLERGY

Monks, and more rarely priests, may spend a period of their life in the wilderness, living off the land in an effort to study or commune with the elements, Fortunes, and spirits away from the distractions of civilization. Priests often travel to far-flung shrines and temples to train and meditate, sometimes for months or even years, before returning to their clan. Monks, on the other hand, may remain in wilderness seclusion for years, if not their entire lives. There, they study the Tao of Shinsei, seeking Enlightenment in its teachings and a stronger connection to the spiritual planes.

Most monks seek Enlightenment through denying themselves basic comforts or undertaking great physical labors. The sharp, frigid winds and thin air of a mountaintop, the torrential storms of the coastal cliffs, the darkness of the forest floor: all bring monks closer to Enlightenment. Some monks might labor to feed others while fasting for a month or endure dangerous weather in still meditation for days. The more punishing a task, the better. Other monks might wander the wilderness instead of settling at a specific temple, seeking a variety of teachings on their path.

Monks, priests, and shugenja may also find themselves part of a larger caravan. The clergy is expected to lead if there is no one of higher status in the group, but otherwise, they advise the ranking samurai. Their advice often takes the form of divination or reading mystical signs and portents, but shugenja might instead commune with a local kami and relay any information they glean through mystical means. They might also seek the blessing of a Fortune or more direct means of supernatural assistance to ease the journey across the wilderness.

BONGE

The workforce of Rokugan gathers together into communities for mutual protection, but certain farmers and miners must brave untamed lands due to the nature of their work. Merchants move their wares along roads through uninhabited areas. Other workers serve traveling samurai or priests, performing menial labor and preparing meals. Even bonge craftspersons, at least those with eccentric natures, might visit or live far from society, seeking inspiration.

The wilderness is home to many unique resources, and while some are worth taming the land and building an entire town to access, others are exploited by small groups of skilled heimin laborers. Camps too small to be considered villages might conduct mining or logging operations, or they might harvest or gather other rare resources found only in far-flung regions that are difficult to access. These camps are often seasonal, and the workers travel with provisions from their hometowns, often several days' or weeks' travel distant. Heimin who work in wilderness areas focus on gathering enough resources to support their families during the off-season and to afford provisions for the next season's trip.



Other heimin might travel through the wilderness as merchants. Caravans overflowing with raw materials or finished goods must find their way from producer to buyer, often along unprotected roads. Many merchants are experienced travelers well versed in basic wilderness survival, though they generally stock enough provisions to eat comfortably. Still, their convoys are tempting targets for bandits, and without a protective escort, merchants must rely on speed and secrecy to reach their destinations unscathed. Most samurai who travel on official business require a staff, many of whom are heimin. Samurai might travel with armorers, personal attendants, cooks, general laborers, wagon drivers, animal handlers, and more, brought along to allow them to focus on matters of war and prayer rather than the rigors of travel. The heimin typically also manage any hinin within the caravan.

Craftspersons, one of the rarest groups to find in isolated areas, may take a sabbatical to seek inspiration in nature. Outside of the cities and towns they know, skilled crafters are inspired by bold natural skylines and the smell of fresh, clean air, untainted by humanity. Some artisans develop secret, advanced techniques—and perhaps an accompanying and unhealthy paranoia. Living almost as a hermit, such an artisan can hone their craft while dealing only with trusted apprentices, merchants, and patrons.

HININ

Among the most common wilderness inhabitants, hinin who live in these areas do so largely to eke out a living far from the wrath of the higher castes. A smaller number are career criminals or bandits forced to live outside society. Others fill important roles in caravans, where their low status enables them to perform duties forbidden to others. The duties of hinin living in towns and cities require them to spend at least some of their time in the wilderness as well, engaging in tasks such as hunting, charcoal burning, and disposing of waste.

Some of those low-born souls dwelling in the far and lonely places of Rokugan do so for their own safety. Many come from villages ruled by the cruel and callous, who execute hinin at random. Some prefer the dangers of the deep woods or treacherous passes to certain death at the edge of an angry katana. Hinin in this position can often eke out a somewhat comfortable existence on the fringe of society.

NATURAL ENCOUNTERS

The wilderness is full of creatures, spirits, and magical energies. On an appropriate failed check or spent ✲, GMs might include a scene of one of the following types. A resource scene leads the party to a valuable find. A danger scene might be a new conflict scene or a modification of an existing one.

Annoyance (failure): The wilderness is home to a number of nonlethal hazards. Brushes with certain plants, insects, and sea creatures can cause skin irritation and swelling. Berries and mushrooms can easily be misidentified, causing hallucinations, illness, or worse. Primates and birds have a tendency to steal small objects from humans they encounter. The sighting of certain wild cats or birds is considered an ill omen. Some spirits, too, seek to mislead or otherwise trick and harass travelers.

Dangers (failure): Bears, large cats, wild dogs and wolves, sharks and other predatory fish, and more can attack passersby on land or sea with little warning. Even primates can turn violent, throwing anything within reach if humans stumble into their territory. The most danger, however, comes from centipedes and spiders, some of which bear a lethal venom. Some spirits, whether through malice or ignorance of human frailties, can pose a danger to travelers as well.

Resources (✲): The wilderness can provide as well as threaten. Rare plants and herbs for use in medicines, edible berries, fruits, and mushrooms are all possible discoveries. A regional game animal might be spotted—an easy target for a bow. The abandoned cabin of a hermit might provide shelter for the night. Sighting particular creatures, like dolphins or certain insects, might be seen as a good omen, boosting morale for the day. A small quantity of a natural resource might also be discovered, whether it is a plant, mineral, or something more mystical.

Criminals thrive in the unexplored wilderness, evading capture and consequences for their misdeeds. For everyone from con artists looking for a place to hide to entire villages of bandits tucked into forests, caverns, and coves, the outdoors provides a haven from authority. However, most bandit camps struggle to provide basic necessities, and the threat of local wildlife is continual. Tales of the supernatural are a double-edged sword for these groups: regions rumored to host evil spirits or sinister forces may keep pursuers at bay, but bandits also worry that the rumors might have an element of truth. Some larger criminal encampments go to great lengths to invent supernatural stories, even fabricating token evidence to ensure their privacy.

The fact that they are the only people permitted to perform lowly tasks makes hinin invaluable on long journeys. Skinning game, gutting fish, handling the fallen, and accommodating waste management in camp are all vital tasks only acceptable for hinin to perform. On rare occasions, samurai with a favored geisha might exert their class privilege to bring their hinin companion along on a journey. So, too, might other entertainers find themselves accompanying a samurai through the wilderness, perhaps witnessing their great deeds to later regale a court or feast.

GAIJIN

Virtually unseen for generations on Rokugani soil, gaijin have enclaves within the Northern Wall Mountains and throughout the Islands of Spice and Silk. The gaijin tribes known as the Yobanjin live in the mountain passes and peaks north of Unicorn and Dragon lands. They dress in animal furs and in general are considered nonhumans living outside the Celestial Order. However, they weave intricate and beautiful rugs secretly favored by some Rokugani, particularly of the Unicorn Clan, which sees them as another intriguing culture on their long journey of discovery rather than as barbarians. The Islands of Spice and Silk are home to almost as many gaijin as Rokugani. Foreigners there hail from faraway lands like the Ivory Kingdoms, living in island settlements of their own or even alongside members of the Mantis Clan. There, the gaijin can freely engage in trade and exchange ideas in most circumstances.

Mountains

The mountains of Rokugan limn the horizon, whispering of a tumultuous age when the ground heaved upward until stone met sky. Once bringers of catastrophic change, they are now slumbering giants, insurmountable by even the ocean's winds. Their chaotic forms create expansive walls, defining the borders of Rokugan and its internal territories, but they are far more than just barriers. Mountains are keepers of secrets. They shelter those who wish to hide in their valleys and caves. Behind tons of rock, they conceal troves of precious minerals. In the experience of scaling them, they offer spiritual revelation. It is impossible to fully know a mountain in a single lifetime, and those who try do so at their own risk. Within every secret a mountain holds, there is the danger that someone, or something, has discovered it first.

WEATHER

Even as mountains slumber, they affect all that surrounds them. The Spine of the World Mountains bisect the Empire, and their icy peaks act like claws, ripping down the ocean winds that try to pass. Cooled, the moist air falls back onto Rokugan's eastern coast, helping to make the land richly fertile. Even the flat plains of the Lion Clan are profoundly affected by these mountains. Without rivers crossing the bulk of their territory, the Lion depend on rain to water their fields and feed their armies. Cisterns dot the Lion's plains, collecting water for irrigation, hydrating farm animals, and sustaining peasants without easy access to wells.

It can be argued that some of the Crane's lands are too wet. In the humid south, the Uebe Marshes stretch for thousands of acres. This wetland frequently overflows during storms, delivering its nutrients to the nearby fields and exhausting the farmers forced to wade through its waters. Bringing both fertility and toil, the east's precipitation is a mixed blessing. Along the Spine of the World, rich farmland is subject to erosion, and poorly cultivated fields could slough into a mudslide. In the frigid lands of the Phoenix, this rain falls as snow in terrible blizzards.

The western side of the Spine, though dryer, is not completely deprived of water. Unlike the storm-churned soil of the east, the ground in the west retains its volcanic rigidity. Within its craggy landscape, deep-cut rivers of snowmelt flow from the mountains into lower elevations such as Earthquake Fish Bay and Shinomen Forest. The Scorpion and Crab Clans divert the chilled water of these rivers to irrigate their meager fields. However, not all the water that trickles down from the mountain is safe. Shrouded in the shadow of the Spine, marshes bubble with toxic gases released by the water seeping through the black rocks. The animals that have adapted to this odious sludge are likewise poisonous, providing Scorpion assassins with a diversity of toxins. These marshes, therefore, supply the venom in the Scorpion's sting.

ORE

Without weapons, an army is nothing more than a mob. Any shortcoming, whether it is a lack of resources or political sway, can be overcome with riches. Gold, steel, and jade power the clans of Rokugan—though no honorable samurai would admit this.

The Great Wall of the North lies across the Empire's northern border like a spiky, ice-laden crown.



The section of the range known as the Dragon mountains provides the Dragon Clan with bounteous and often wondrous veins of ore. The Serpent's Tail Mine contains the invaluable trifecta of gold, iron, and jade. The Dragon Clan have such an abundance of valuable minerals that they are able to trade for most of their food, which is essential while dwelling on barren mountaintops. But there is one treasure that the Dragon do not trade, a mineral rarer than gold. Once a year at the summer solstice, the forge atop Iron Mountain resonates with the chanting of shugenja. Within clay blast furnaces called *tatara*, iron sand is layered with a mysterious substance. Most forges use charcoal made from white pine when forging iron into steel, but the Dragon have unearthed a more potent, ancient substance. This highly refined charcoal, called Dragon's Blood, occurs naturally within the Dragon mountains, cooked in air-tight volcanic chambers. When heated with iron, Dragon's Blood creates a uniquely durable steel that is perfect for blade edges. Alongside gold and jade, this singular metal is one of the Dragon Clan's most valuable exports.

Within the Spine of the World Mountains, there is another unique mineral used in the forging of blades. In the lands of the Crane, a twisting length of nearly pure iron plunges through the mountains like a giant, rusted spear. According to legend, this vein was indeed a weapon hurled from the sky by the Fortune Bishamon; thus, the Crane call it Celestial Ore. Within the Steel Crane Forge, the resulting steel only requires a few folds before it is rid of impurities and ready to become a sword. The unique grain of Kakita blades includes beautiful swirls resembling crashing ocean waves.

Not all clans have access to high-quality materials. The blades of the Crab are some of the finest in Rokugan, and their special ingredient is tenacity. With the exception of Celestial Ore, iron is found in rusted bands contaminated with minerals such as sulfur. Removing these impurities is a tedious process—what does not melt off in the tatara must be kneaded out in a series of folds. Like all masters, the Crab smiths at the Kaiu Forge craft each blade with three types of steel: durable *hagane* for the blade's edge, flexible *shingane* for its core, and medium *kawagane* as a skin between the two. Each type requires a different manner of preparation that is overseen by a specialist. Many Kaiu smiths dedicate their entire life to a single step of the process, such as polishing, sharpening, or tempering.

For all steel's utility, it lacks the beauty of copper or gold. This is why the Lion Clan's Blazing Forge, which specializes in these metals, is widely considered the most beautiful forge in Rokugan. In it, giant crucibles melt precious ore, separating it from impurities before the metal is poured, like liquid sunlight, into ingot molds. In the case of copper, this process leaves a beautiful byproduct: a green, glass-like slag that artisans carve into decorative inlays resembling gems.

TRAVEL

For most travelers, mountains are nearly insurmountable barriers. Days are lost navigating around a range, and lives are risked attempting to scale it. Due to this fact, trade between the east and west of Rokugan depends on mountain passes. There are several gaps through the Spine of the World Mountains, and more are likely to be discovered. However, the convenience of these routes comes at a cost. Passes funnel merchants through twisting passages surrounded by high ground, making them easy targets for bandits. Many thieves build their hideouts within caves and abandoned watchtowers adjacent to passes. Criminals benefit not only from the proximity of these locations, but also from the fact that mountain passes are territorial grey zones. Samurai and their servants are hesitant to overstep their boundaries and create an incident with rival clans. For instance, on either side of the Beiden Pass, the Lion and Scorpion are far more concerned with each other than with petty thieves.

Along with the danger posed by bandits, mountain passes are prone to natural hazards. South of the Phoenix lands lie the Mountains of Regret, and cutting through this chain is the aptly named Treacherous Pass. It is plagued with vicious beasts, mudslides, and floods. Only the desperate traverse this corridor, while others opt to sacrifice time navigating around the foreboding peaks.

Those who dare scale a mountain face even more challenges. In the Great Wall of the North range, not all of the mountains are slumbering. The Wrath of the Kami is one of several active volcanoes in the region. During the winter, this restless giant stains the snow black with ash and soot, while its frequent tremors shake loose avalanches. A similar quaking can be felt far to the south in the Wall above the Ocean Mountains. This range is small with blunted peaks that the unstable ground of Earthquake Fish Bay has torn apart, leaving deep ravines and precarious footing.

Even in stillness, a mountain is a dangerous adversary. The Spine of the World thwarts adventurers with its two distinct faces: the sheer, storm-buffeted cliffs of the east and the raw, bladelike jaggedness of the west. All mountains threaten explorers with their size and steepness, but modest peaks may also harbor perils. Mountains keep secrets, including the mystery of what lurks within their shadows.

MOUNTAIN HAZARDS

The scale of Rokugan's mountains presents cartographers with a monumental challenge; mapping a single peak in detail can take a lifetime. For generations, Hiruma scouts have surveyed the Twilight Mountains, making them the most thoroughly documented range in the Empire. In spite of this, the denizens of the Shadowlands still find secret paths into Crab territory. Miners are regularly interrupted by tunneling monsters that seek to bypass the Kaiu Wall. Once in Rokugan, some Shadowlands creatures create secret colonies within its borders. The Spine of the World Mountains hosts a collection of goblins, and hags can be found on isolated peaks throughout the Empire.

Deadly beasts are not unique to the Twilight Mountains, however. While traversing any mountain road, one might encounter a *chimi*, a malevolent spirit. These monsters surround themselves in unnatural mist and manifest as grotesque animals with human faces. Surviving an encounter does not guarantee a traveler's safety: chimi are capable of inflicting life-threatening illnesses upon their victims. Another common mountain beast is the *ōmukade*, giant human-eating centipedes that nest in caves. Their unbreakable exoskeleton protects them from everything but their one weakness: human saliva. Any weapon coated in spit will make quick work of these bugs. A less common, but arguably more terrifying, inhabitant of mountain caves is the *onikuma*, the demon bear. Giant, fast, and territorial, onikuma can easily rip horses in half and crush a samurai's armor like tissue paper.

In the Great Wall of the North mountains, on the elevated slopes above the timberline, various groups of humans and spirits live detached from Imperial society. Mountain forests are favored by the tengu, and solitary Great Tengu are said to dwell upon high summits. The rich game that sustains the Unicorn Clan in this area also enables the nomadic lifestyle of the Yobanjin, those humans who rejected the rule of the Kami; overlapping their territory are the hidden settlements of another group of religious outcasts, the Perfect Land Sect.

THE JADE MINE OF WEST MOUNTAIN VILLAGE

Every year, the heat of spring frees the West Mountain jade mine, melting the cagelike icicles blocking its entrance. Condensation beads on the tunnel walls and drizzles down, the trickling resounding as loud as a roaring river in the otherwise-silent dark. Soon after the thaw, the real noise begins. The miners return to West Mountain Village and proceed to purge the mine of darkness. Their initial entry is tense: during the winter, leopards, bears, or even hostile spirits might lair within the mines. What's more, the tremors from Earthquake Fish Bay may have loosened the support beams.

Once the *tōrō* have been lit and the tunnels deemed safe, the mine fills with cacophonous clanging. With cloth tied over their mouths and noses, the miners chisel apart huge slabs of grey rock to reveal the milky translucency of jade. It is tedious work, but it is vital. Instead of wielding swords and expiring in glorious battlefield deaths, these heroes wield chisels and slowly choke on dust. They supply the only material capable of striking down Tainted creatures of the Shadowlands; were it not for them, the Emerald Empire would fall.

WHISPERS IN THE DEPTHS

- Up north, iron miners dug into an abandoned underground city unlike anything else in Rokugan. The miners collapsed the tunnel soon afterward, and they refuse to speak of what they found.
- In the tunnels, miners have been hearing voices that sound like they are coming from inside the rock.
- Many of the West Mountain miners are really murderers and other criminals who have fled to the isolated mountains to escape justice.
- Most of the other jade mines have run dry. Only the West Mountain jade mine is keeping up with demand. If anything happens to the West Mountain mine, it would be dire for all of Rokugan!

Kuni Haruna, Sinister Witch Hunter

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 4 1

Haruna is a *tsukai-sagasu*, a Witch Hunter of the Crab Clan. Since childhood, she has studied the Shadowlands, becoming familiar with its many dangers. She apprenticed with an experienced tsukai-sagasu and quickly proved her worth as a fearsome warrior. Haruna is a lanky woman with few charms. Her crooked chin twists her thin lips so that they always smirk, sneer, or snarl. Like many Kuni, Haruna covers her face in white and red Kabuki-style paint, its brightness accentuating the unnerving darkness of her eyes.

Haruna is always analyzing her surroundings, and when the moment comes to make a kill, she pounces on her target with gleeful viciousness. She is insensitive and vulgar, and she has the abrasive habit of mocking social niceties. If Haruna believes that someone is not being candid with her, she badgers them into blunt honesty. However, as malicious as Haruna may seem, she is driven by a dedication to the truth. Throughout her time as a tsukai-sagasu, Haruna has seen horrors beyond most people's darkest nightmares. Like many Crab, she confronts this trauma with a desensitized acceptance. In forcing reality upon people, Haruna believes that she is doing them a favor. Of course, Haruna does not need to cackle and snort during the process, but it's best not to tell her that.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
40 HONOR		ENDURANCE	14
50 GLORY		COMPOSURE	14
39 STATUS		FOCUS	6
+2, –2 DEMEANOR · INTIMIDATING		VIGILANCE	3



ARTISAN 0	MARTIAL 3	SCHOLAR 4	SOCIAL 3	TRADE 2

ADVANTAGES

Fearsome Presence: Social; *Interpersonal*

DISADVANTAGES

Nightmares: Scholar; *Spiritual*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Naginata: Range 2, Damage 6, Deadliness 6, Cumbersome, Razor-Edged, Wargear

Gear (equipped): Warded robes (Physical 2, Supernatural 4, Sacred), wakizashi, prayer strips, sacred scrolls

ABILITIES

MERCILESS HUNTER

When Kuni Haruna makes an Attack action targeting a character that she has not previously attacked during this scene, she may spend ✵ in the following ways:

> ✵+: Increase the deadliness of the attack by 1 for each ✵ spent this way.
> ✵+: Increase the damage of the attack by 1 for each ✵ spent this way.



Asako Takahiro, Insightful Inquisitor

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 3 4

Takahiro is a lithe young man with high cheekbones and a strong jaw, and is by all standards quite handsome. The only thing odd about his appearance is the tattooed eyes on his palms—the symbol of an Asako Inquisitor. He frequently wears a serene smile, which has a calm and disarming effect on those who view it. However, once someone feels comfortable in Takahiro's presence, they have fallen for his trap. He plays the gentle fool, seemingly inexperienced and naïve. As his target's guard drops, he pushes them into incriminating themselves; then, upon their capture, he reveals his deductive genius through an enthusiastic monologue. In doing so, he also reveals his greatest flaw: his pride.

Though usually a keen investigator, Takahiro recently convicted an innocent woman, only to realize his mistake after her execution. Since then, Takahiro had been committing himself to the Noble Silence, a spiritual practice of some Shinseist sects. By keeping his mouth shut—as often as he can, anyway—Takahiro hopes to cleanse his soul and become open to cosmic truths. However, despite not talking, Takahiro is still highly expressive. His flexible eyebrows, dramatic facial expressions, and often exaggerated body language are more than enough to communicate his feelings. It seems unlikely that the Little Teacher would approve.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
45	HONOR	ENDURANCE	12
50	GLORY	COMPOSURE	14
40	STATUS	FOCUS	6
+2, –2	DEMEANOR · SHREWD	VIGILANCE	5



ARTISAN 2 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 4 | SOCIAL 4 | TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Excellent Liar: Social; *Interpersonal*	**Know-It-All:** Social; *Mental*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Jitte: Range 0, Damage 3, Deadliness 2, Concealable, Snaring

Gear (equipped): Sanctified robes (Physical 1, Supernatural 3, Ceremonial), wakizashi incense, sacred scrolls

ABILITIES

KEEP ONE EYE OPEN

Once per game session as a downtime activity, Asako Takahiro can brief any number of characters regarding his observations and suspicions about the nearby area. Each character who heeds his words increases their Vigilance by 2 until the end of the game session.

ADVENTURE SEED: BREAKTHROUGH

Hook There has been a cave-in at the West Mountain jade mine. Support beams have collapsed after a strong tremor from Earthquake Fish Bay. A miner approaches the PCs desperate for aid. Most of the laborers are trapped on the far side of the collapse, and some are surely injured.

Rising Action After clearing the rubble, the PCs discover that the trapped miners are missing. The remaining workers note that over the last few weeks, they have heard voices behind the stone, and suggest that the tremor might have unleashed something sinister. Characters who follow the voices echoing within the mines eventually enter a natural cave system and find the missing miners accompanying the tsukai-sagasu Kuni Haruna and Inquisitor Asako Takahiro. The two were in pursuit of a mahō-tsukai cult when the tremor opened a passage between the mines and the natural cavern. Now that the tunnel is clear, they intend to focus on catching the mahō-tsukai, and they welcome the PCs' assistance. Soon, the group tracks down the Bloodspeakers, who are diverting a subterranean river in order to flood the mine.

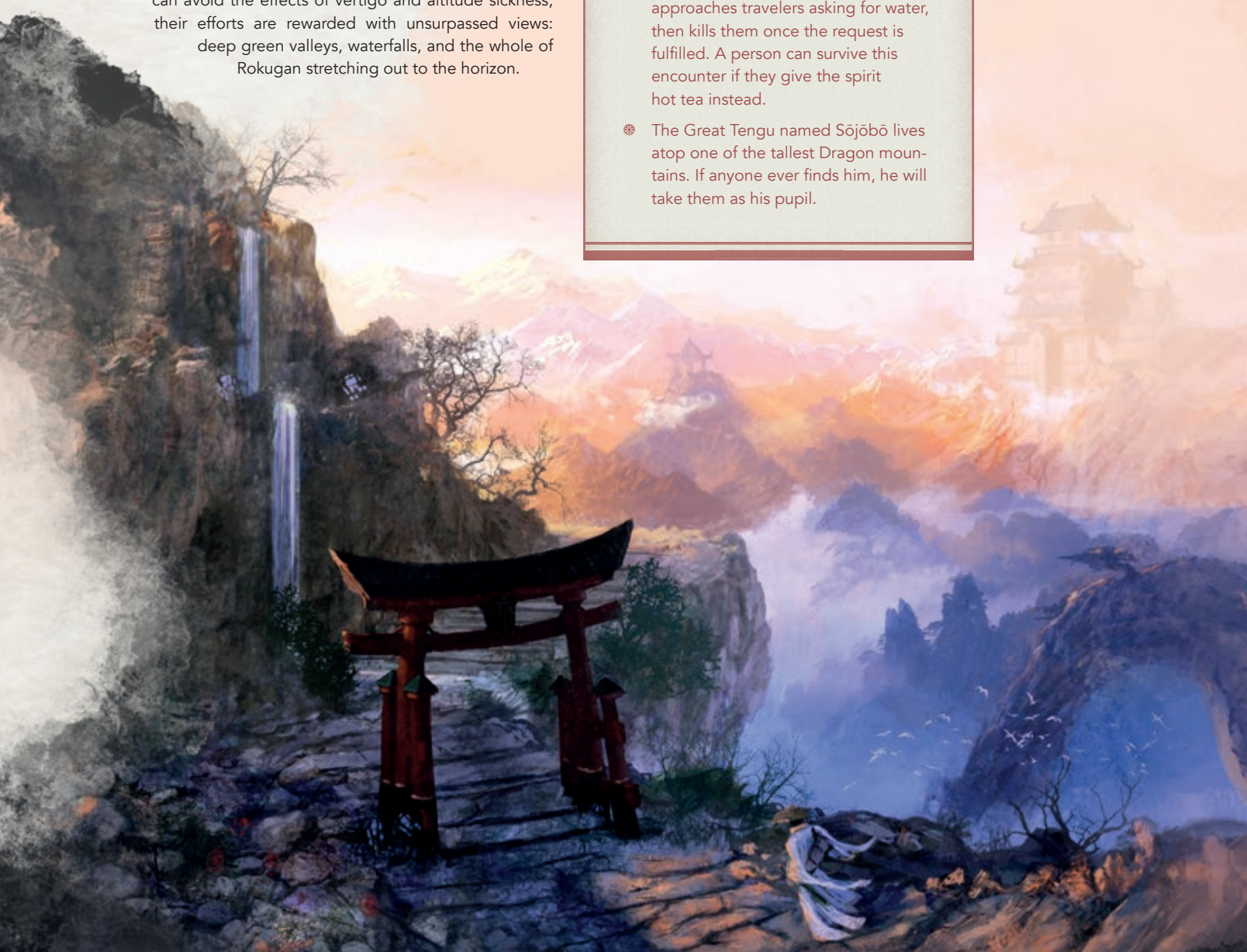
Climax A shoddily constructed dam is diverting the river. Haruna suggests that the group split in two: those who follow Takahiro should cause a distraction while those who follow her should try to destroy the dam. Failure to destroy the dam in short order will render the mine unusable, further compounding the jade shortage crisis.

THE DRAGON MOUNTAINS

If a person ever wishes to be humbled, they can stand at the base of the Dragon mountains. Compared to these gargantuan peaks, everything seems small. Many would-be mountaineers return home after simply looking up, embarrassed for entertaining such lofty ambitions. Undeterred hikers begin their trek in the forests that encircle the range's base. Accompanied by the chattering of birds, climbers ascend ancient paths made stair-like by tree roots and the occasional well-placed boulder. These woods are teeming with wildlife: deer, macaques, pheasants, hares, boars, and leopards, all of them robust and brave. Suddenly, it all stops. The trees thin, and the freezing northern air slices across the barren landscape, leaving the hikers with nothing but stone, mist, and cold. If they press on, the path becomes more treacherous. A single misstep could result in death, and depending on the time of year, there may be torrents of snowmelt or brittle ice. If they can avoid the effects of vertigo and altitude sickness, their efforts are rewarded with unsurpassed views: deep green valleys, waterfalls, and the whole of Rokugan stretching out to the horizon.

TRAIL TALK

- There is a colony of kitsu in one of the secluded northern valleys. They shapeshift into humans to conduct trade.
- Hunters have spied a large apelike creature, but they are unsure what type of monster they're dealing with. If the beast is a *hihi*, the ape will have huge lips that curl over its eyes when it laughs, giving its victims a chance to escape. However, if it is a *satori*, it will quietly stalk travelers and read their thoughts. Satori will not attack if their prey maintain a clear mind.
- There is an evil spirit called a *yuki-nobō* masquerading as a benevolent yuki-onna, a snow maiden. This spirit approaches travelers asking for water, then kills them once the request is fulfilled. A person can survive this encounter if they give the spirit hot tea instead.
- The Great Tengu named Sōjōbō lives atop one of the tallest Dragon mountains. If anyone ever finds him, he will take them as his pupil.



Agasha Susumu, Scholar and Guide

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 1 2

Susumu traverses the high Dragon peaks with boundless energy, collecting herbs to serve in his botanical experimentations. He is slight with sinewy legs, sloped shoulders, and a balding head. Under the wide brim of his *takuhatsugasa* hat, his sun-darkened face is lined with the wrinkles of frequent expressions of giddy excitement. Susumu is passionate about his work and jumps at any opportunity to discuss the various applications of mountain herbs. While collecting herbs, he also volunteers as a guide. He often becomes distracted, however, asking travelers to wait as he fearlessly scales cliffs to collect intriguing flora.

Upon request (and he will strongly hint that someone does request), Susumu offers lectures on a variety of subjects, from spirituality and poetry to metallurgy and, of course, botany. Recently, Susumu has spent more time collecting herbs than experimenting. When in the presence of his clanmates, Susumu finds himself embroiled in debates about the Perfect Land Sect. His clan's tolerance of the heretics embarrasses him. If Susumu had his way, they would be chased out of these holy mountains by any means necessary.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
45 HONOR	3 2	ENDURANCE	12
50 GLORY	4 3	COMPOSURE	14
39 STATUS	3	FOCUS	6
+2, –2 DEMEANOR · ASSERTIVE		VIGILANCE	3

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 4 | SOCIAL 1 | TRADE 3

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Exact Memory: Scholar; *Mental*	**Cantankerous:** Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Kiseru: Range 0, Damage 2, Deadliness 2, Concealable, Mundane

Gear (equipped): Rugged clothes, satchel of herbs

ABILITIES

CALMING REMEDY

Once per game session as a downtime activity, Susumu may share his personal admixture of mountain herbs with up to five characters. Those who partake increase their composure by 2 but reduce their vigilance by 1 until the end of the game session.

Forests

Among the forest birdsong and sighs of cicadas are echoes resonating from other realms. Ethereal forms dart about in the periphery of perception beneath the shifting canopy's shadows. Even in the absence of sounds, one can hear a forest breathe. Forests are living beings, each with its own unique temperament. Anyone, from hinin to kuge, would be a fool to enter a woodland without first learning its rules. Within untamed nature, humans are trespassers—and those who show disrespect receive no mercy. Inside the dark hollows of trees, the tangled nests of briars, and the gaps between toppled boulders, spirits are everywhere, watching.

LUMBER

There are few materials as versatile as lumber. It is an essential component in tools and construction, and it even has value when burned into charcoal. Every member of Rokugan society has a use for this material, and therefore access to harvestable woodlands is vital.

Forests are plentiful in the lands of the Crane Clan. With the exception of the sacred Needle's Eye Forest, the Crane's woodlands are filled with cooperative spirits who allow the Crane to harvest lumber as they need it. Osari Mori is a beautiful expanse of diverse vegetation. Inside it, hidden within a ring of elegant sakura, is Shizuka Toshi, home of the Doji Diplomat School. Farther south, Akagi Forest contains a stretch of pale-green bamboo with fluttering silver leaves. Kakita Duelists use these trees for *tameshigiri*—testing sword blades—and meditation, listening as the hollow shoots tap against each other in the ocean wind.

Some clans have limited options when it comes to logging. Over generations, the Lion Clan has watched their only forest, the Heart of Vigilance, slowly become smaller. Through restraint and reforestation, they have begun to repair the damage. Their struggle seems minor, however, compared to the desperation of the Crab and Scorpion Clans. Few forests grow on the west side of the Spine of the World—that is, with one very notable exception. Shinomen Forest is an ancient, unpredictable place, yet the Crab and Scorpion dare to provoke its anger. Their logging towns are accustomed to strange happenings, and every once in a while, entire settlements disappear altogether.

The applications of lumber can be beautiful as well as practical. The Unicorn Clan is renowned for their *yosegi* woodcraft, an art style that utilizes the trees of Dragon's Heart Forest to create intricate wood mosaics. Yosegi artists use slats of spindle-wood for white designs, aged katsura for black, mulberry for yellow,

cucumber tree for blue, and black walnut for all without the use of dyes. To their east, the Phoenix make the finest parchment in Rokugan with trees from the depths of Isawa Forest. To create their most sacred scrolls, Phoenix shugenja invoke kami to affect their work when they use *suminagashi*, a marbling technique. Willing spirits move the ink as it floats in a bath of water, and then their designs are soaked into the parchment's fibers.

SPIRITS AND SENKYŌ

The personality of a forest is determined by its spirits. Within hand-grown *satoyama* groves, there is very little spiritual activity. These lines of trees are planted along the edges of fields to prevent erosion and provide peasants with wood. These trees are felled while they are still saplings, for after the age of thirty, groves begin to show some character. Kodama spirits move into mature trees, and though their presence is not always guaranteed, loggers must be careful to check. Cutting down a kodama's tree kills the spirit, and the woodcutter responsible incurs a curse.

Kodama are one type among the thousands of types of kami, most of which inhabit undeveloped nature. The kami live alongside humanity unnoticed, but nevertheless subtly affect their mortal neighbors. It is an important duty of shugenja to identify natural shintai—kami dwellings—for people unable to perceive spirits' presence. Temples and torii arches are common markers of a spirit's territory, as is the use of shimenawa, thick ropes tied around sacred spaces.

Said signifiers are rarely necessary in forests. Like mountains, wild woodlands are filled with spirits, and it would be folly to trek within their boundaries without expecting their influence. Within untouched nature, Ningen-dō bleeds into Senkyō, the Realm of Spirits. Travelers traversing ancient forests like the Shinomen or Isawa Forest may wander unknowingly into the territory of Chikushō-dō, the Realm of Animals, and Sakkaku, the Realm of Illusion. Often the differences are unnoticeable, but a keen observer can spy discrepancies: paths that seem to trace impossible directions, trees from faraway ecosystems, or unseasonable weather. Travelers may become disoriented both directionally and temporally, though whether this is an inherent quality of Senkyō or is due to the actions of trickster spirits of Sakkaku is impossible to say. It is believed that if a traveler makes the mistake of eating the spirits' food, they become trapped forever.

Forests, in particular, contain the courts of the animal and trickster realms. The Needle's Eye Forest in Crane territory is a well-known dwelling of the mischievous beings of Sakkaku. During the full moon, the trickster spirits become energetic, the force of their presence causing the trees to glow. Luckily for the Crane, said spirits typically keep to themselves and have even demonstrated a kindly benevolence. Needle's Eye was the childhood play place of Emperor Hantei XXIII, who would sneak from the Imperial Palace to share the company of an ethereal silver fox. When he ascended to the throne, he proclaimed the forest sacrosanct, and to this day logging and hunting are prohibited within its borders. Neighboring the Crane in the south is Kitsune Forest, where the Fox Clan shares a similarly peaceful coexistence with entities from Chikushō-dō and Sakkaku. Their unity is emblematic of humanity's potential to live in harmony with nature.



KITSUNE FOREST

After the Day of Thunder, the majority of the Ki-Rin Clan rode out of Rokugan in pursuit of the Empire's enemies, leaving a small group to safeguard their land. Unfortunately, they were too few to withstand an invasion from the Lion. The remaining Ki-Rin were pushed southward until the Emperor himself intervened and declared the orphaned group a Minor Clan. They were given the territory encompassing Kitsune Forest and changed their name to the Fox Clan to reflect their new home. Despite this good fortune, the Fox Clan's troubles were far from over. Emperor Hantei Genji had given them land that he had no authority to give: it had already been claimed by spirits. The Fox Clan had to adapt to the rules of the forest, and through the guidance of the kitsune fox spirits of Senkyō, they achieved harmony. In return for the Fox Clan's respect and reverence, the spirits of Kitsune Forest give the clan their protection.

There are few forests as beautiful as Kitsune. The canopy filters the sunlight into an emerald glow that saturates everything, while the ground is carpeted with mounds of moss, fragmented by trickling streams, and freckled with tiny white flowers. Fluffy spores become visible in beams of light as they drift about trunks covered in step-like mushrooms. The Fox Clan keeps the forest floor clear of deadfall and tends to any sickly trees. As a result, there is only vibrant life. The plants exhibit creativity, twisting their branches to form elegant arched corridors and patterns. Everything within Kitsune Forest feels imbued with a playful intelligence, and though travelers feel watched, they rarely feel threatened. The spirits know to be patient with humans, but they have also learned that mortals make easy marks. Many spirits cannot resist pulling a (mostly) harmless prank, and if their mischief is met with good humor, they are sure to bestow gifts upon their forgiving targets.

FOREST TRICKSTERS

Kitsune delight in playing pranks on humans. After an odd, possibly embarrassing, occurrence happens to a character traveling through Kitsune Forest, they may make a TN 2 Theology (Void) check to determine if a kitsune was involved. However, kitsune are also often associated with good fortune; the character may spend ☆☆ from this check to accept the prank in good form and regain one Void point.

TIPS AND TRICKS

- Kitsune spirits are known for their love of gems. There are surely treasures stashed throughout the forest.
- There is a village of tanuki (raccoon dogs) who throw wonderful parties. Their sake is fantastic, and their pranks and performances are hilarious.
- Troublesome *kawauso* (river otters) are mimicking people's voices and reveling in the ensuing confusion. Some especially tricky youngsters appear as attractive humans, flirting with travelers then running away in a fit of giggles. No harm will come from ignoring them.



Ha Iwa, Kitsune Spirit

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 4 5

This kitsune takes the form of an elegant human whose gender is only hinted through the timbre of his voice. Iwa's visage is long, with close-set eyes, slanted brows, and high cheekbones, a perfect example of a *kitsune gao*, a fox face. If this isn't enough of a clue, a person encountering Iwa may notice his tail just barely sticking past the hem of his green kimono. However, Iwa is not out to fool anyone about his otherworldly nature. He finds glee in shapeshifting, and he will bound weightlessly along tree branches. When he speaks, his language is formal, but his manner is like that of an intoxicated courtier. At the slightest amusement he breaks out in peals of laughter, he encourages flattery, and he craves attention. However, if Iwa is not indulged, he changes. As he becomes frustrated, Iwa's human guise starts to fail, slowly taking on the aspects of a fox. His voice gains an unnatural loudness as he rants about whatever disrespect he has been shown. Upon reverting fully into a fox, he exacts his punishment.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
05	HONOR	ENDURANCE	14
25	GLORY	COMPOSURE	8
10	STATUS	FOCUS	9
+2, –2	DEMEANOR · MISCHIEVOUS	VIGILANCE	4



ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 3 | SOCIAL 4 | TRADE 3

ADVANTAGES

Dangerous Allure:
Social; *Interpersonal*

DISADVANTAGES

Impatience:
Scholar; *Mental*

Showoff:
Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Teeth: Range 0, Damage 3, Deadliness 5, Natural

ABILITIES

SHAPESHIFTER

As a Support action, a kitsune can transform into human form (or back again). While in their fox form, they have silhouette 1. While in human form, they are always curious and eager to learn more of human ways, but also seek to hide their true nature. When they become compromised, their fox feet, ears, or tails reappear.

ADVENTURE SEED: A TRICKY SITUATION

Hook While traveling through Kitsune Forest, the party is approached by a mysterious individual. Any character with ranks in Theology may recognize that the stranger is a kitsune, but even without this insight, the kitsune's playful display of supernatural abilities quickly makes his nature clear. If asked his name, the kitsune looks up into the trees and says "Ha" (leaf), then looks down at the ground and says "Iwa" (rock). He has clearly made it up on the spot.

Rising Action Iwa insists that the party join him for a game, and he will not take no for an answer. If Iwa is indulged, he commences a game of hide-and-seek. He shapeshifts into various forms, but like all kitsune, he cannot change his tail.

Climax If the PCs complete the game and show Iwa no disrespect, he rewards them with gems. Samurai might find this monetary offering insulting, but it would be unwise to turn him down. If PCs refuse to play the game or otherwise anger him, Iwa follows the them through the forest, hounding them with pranks and tricks, some of which might even prove dangerous to a mere mortal. A particular favorite of Iwa's is to impersonate one of the PCs or otherwise sow distrust and animosity among the group.

IMIKOTOBA (FORBIDDEN WORDS)

In every village near the Kitsune Forest, one can hear of the imikotoba. Long ago, the spirits of Kitsune Forest requested that humans refrain from using the following words while traversing their woods and instead employ the corresponding substitutions:

Death—Slumber

Illness—Rest

Tears—Salty Drips

Blood—Pain Sweat

Meat—Mushrooms

Grave—Dirt Pile

And of course, they ask for no discussion of cutting, sawing, hacking, or snapping in the least. Such talk stresses the kodama to salty drips.



VIOLENT SPIRITS

There are forests where corruption has twisted the trees into nightmarish distortions. When Senkyō is perforated by passages from Jigoku, the kami exposed to the corruption may become malevolent kansen. In the waning light of the evening, during a time called *ōmagatoki*, the boundaries of Senkyō dissipate and spirits roam free.

Below the Tower of Kelet lies an abomination against nature. The Dreamer's Forest is a Tainted stronghold of kansen, and every evening it tries to grab human victims. Not only do the kansen want to escape, but mahō-tsukai want to enter the forest, to bargain with the corrupted spirits. The Unicorn Clan maintains a double-sided barrier around the forest. Every night, Unicorn priests walk along the deep trench dug around the forest's boundaries, chanting sacred words and waving *Ōnusa* wands to purify the ground. Along their path stand pairs of komainu statues, lion dogs who face in opposite directions. As the priests approach, the statues emit a low growl, then return to silence upon recognizing their allies. Some komainu have been shattered, the spirit within lost. These weak points are fortified with lesser talismans that require replacement each time they are triggered by an intruder.

The Scorpion Clan harbors a dark secret within its lands: a grove too small to be called a proper forest but too dangerous to disregard. Unlike other corrupted woods, the evil in this grove did not seep in from another realm. It is the site of a horrific ritual. Traitors from the Scorpion Clan are taken to the grove for execution, and their souls are imprisoned within the trees. Unable to pass on to Meido, the souls languish in torment. This sadistic prison is simply known as Traitor's Grove.

Few are as adept at handling spirits as the Phoenix Clan, yet even they struggle with unmanageable forest spirits. The Isawa Forest is a peaceful woodland, but deep within its expanse exists a place inhabited by misanthropic kami. It is called Mori Kuroi, the dark forest. The kami here are not corrupted by Jigoku, but they have been traumatized by some unknown encounter with humanity. These spirits create illusions that drive mortal travelers into danger, or they even attack them directly. All attempts by Phoenix shugenja to soothe the embittered kami have failed, and the spirits cannot be convinced to voice their grievances. Kuroi Forest stands as a bleak example of what can happen if a forest is mistreated. All woodlands, from the exploited Heart of Vigilance to the kindly Osari Forest, have the potential to become an unwelcoming wilderness.

AN URGENT MESSAGE

I need a purification ritual performed at the Tsukuda farmhouse immediately. We live a mile away from the Dreamer's Forest, and I'm certain something got past the talismans. Late in the night, my husband and I were woken by scratching on the front door. He went to check, and I immediately fell back to sleep. The next morning, I found him sitting on the bed, and when he turned to look at me—I don't know how to describe it. I helped prepare my father's body for cremation: I know what a corpse looks like. Every so often, it pushes air through his throat and asks me my name. I haven't said a word. If I move, it follows me. After my daughter hands you this letter, please don't bring her back to the house. Not until we figure out what's wearing my husband.

SHINOMEN FOREST

Dwarfing some of the Great Clans' territories, Shinomen Forest is a sea of trees spanning multiple ecosystems. It is an unconquerable, ancient giant. Through its vast history, this forest has never given humanity a foothold within its borders. Shinomen watched the rise and decline of the Five Ancient Races, it saw the Kami tumble from their celestial thrones, and it will likely persist long after the Emerald Empire has crumbled. Shinomen is nature—wild and untamable. If the people of Rokugan are not careful, the forest could devour them all.

Within the forest depths, the tiered towers of a forgotten civilization sit in eerie silence, their massive size dwarfed by the surrounding trees. All is dark, even at midday. Not a whisper of the wind is heard, nor the rustling of leaves. The air is still, trapped between trunks and filled with the musty odor of decay. In Shinomen Forest, ancient trees grow beyond the limits of their species. They are giants to giants. The mood of the forest shifts without warning, unconcerned with the mortals creeping ant-like beneath its boughs. Shinomen is not a malevolent place; it does not aim to ensnare victims. It simply acts upon whims that do not accommodate human needs.

Among the many animals and spirits that dwell within Shinomen, there is one creature that defies easy categorization. The rat folk, known as the *nezumi* to those few Rokugani who acknowledge their existence, are certainly no spirits of Chikushō-dō, but neither are they ordinary animals. The nezumi not only walk like humans but also have their own culture and language. Individual nezumi are short-lived, but their cultural memory, maintained by the Rememberers, stretches back further than humanity.

Geography

In the eastern reaches of Shinomen Forest, the ground is made of porous black rock, the spillover from the Spine of the World Mountains' volcanic birth. Hemlocks drive their roots into this hard crust and their dead needles collect in pits, stewing into a decayed slime. Floating orbs of blue fire, *onibi*, drift across the landscape in numbers during twilight.

To the west the ground softens, making a bed for broad-leafed trees. Here maples act as ill omens. Their picturesque red leaves are a welcome sight in the fall, but during other seasons their bloody hue is more ominous in nature. They share these low elevations with isolated glades and lily-filled marshes.

TALES FROM THE PRIMORDIAL WOOD

- Somewhere in the Shinomen Forest is the stronghold of the Forest Killer Bandits.
- On the Shinomen border, an entire village sometimes appears. Its inhabitants are always in the midst of a festival, wear incredibly outdated clothing, and believe it is the year 735. It is pointless to try to convince them otherwise. Multiple accounts suggest that the villagers are reliving the same night and do not remember prior encounters.
- Bog hags are luring travelers to their death with illusionary inns.
- *Okuri inu* are stalking the paths. If you find yourself being followed by a black hound, take extra care not to lose your footing. If it sees you falling, the apparition will maul you to death. To avoid this fate, pretend any misstep is intentional. Call out "I'm tired, so I'm going to lie down now!" or try to pass off your tripping as an unsightly dance.

RULES POSTED IN A SHINOMEN LOGGING HUT

DO NOT answer the door after dark. NO exceptions.

If it's going to be a full moon, scatter roasted soybeans and repeat "demons outside, good luck inside" AT LEAST two dozen times.

NEVER forget to bring your omamori *talisman when out working.*

If the eyeless girl stands by the window again, just throw salt at her.

Make sure all ofuda *paper blessings are up to date and that one is placed on the ceiling, door, and EACH wall.*

NEVER PET FRIENDLY ANIMALS.

If a tree wasn't there yesterday, DO NOT TOUCH IT.

DO NOT EAT WILD FRUIT WHILE IN THE FOREST.

Farther north, the ground rolls into hills, sending streams into cascades as they cross the landscape. Evergreens dominate the view, littering the ground with huge seed pods. In the colder months, the sharp ,chilled wind from the north brings a thin blanket of snow. Travelers who find ponds frozen in the summer or thawed in the winter must be wary of nearby spirits.

The south contains a wondrous collection of fruit trees: groves of apple, plum, and cherry that work in concert to bait travelers into dooming themselves—it is said that any mortal who eats the spirits' fruit can never again leave the forest. Massively wide camphor trees sit like castles, their low, tangling branches wide enough to support houses.

On Shinomen's eastern border there exists a black blot within endless green. The Shadowlands Marshes are a festering wound, a pool of black mud filled with fan-based cypress and spider-legged mangroves. It is the gravesite of a Shadowlands army struck down several centuries ago by the serpentine guardians they foolishly awoke. Tainted souls writhe in the muck, corrupting the surrounding creatures and spirits.

Iht-zyk, Nezumi Forager

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 1 2

Iht-zyk is a nezumi, a species of humanoid rats that Rokugani have encountered on rare occasions in the Shinomen Forest and, some say, the Shadowlands. As a child, she carefully memorized the lessons of the Tattered Ear tribe's Rememberers: "A moving plant is a hungry plant," "When the spirits talk, smile and nod," "Humans grow old but rarely wise," and so on and so forth. She followed their wisdom and became a skilled forager, but after she encountered outsiders, her ambitions changed.

When foraging along Shinomen's eastern border, she approached a Crab Clan logging camp. To her delight, the humans found her as intriguing as she found them. Unable to speak each other's language, they still shared a meal together, and for the next few days she repaid their kindness with wild nuts. Very few members of her tribe spoke the humans' tongue, but Iht-zyk found an elder willing to teach her.

ADVENTURE SEED: WAYWARD CHILDREN

一 **Hook** The PCs make the mistake of attempting to navigate through Shinomen Forest. As they move through the trees, their path is suddenly blocked by a misplaced cypress. Upon looking around, they discover that the landscape has changed. They have passed through Senkyō and emerged, disoriented, in the Shadowlands Marshes.

二 **Rising Action** While the players come to terms with the new landscape, they hear a voice crying for help. A nezumi scurries out of the mangroves with two pups strapped on her back. In broken Rokugani, she begs the PCs to help her find her lost third pup. In return for their aid, she will safely lead them to Shinomen's border. Without Iht-zyk's help, the PCs undoubtedly face a long, arduous, and highly dangerous journey. With her guidance, the party avoids the strangling *fudoshi* vines, poisonous *tsumunagi* eels, and *nukarumi*—filth-covered Shadowlands ghosts. The pup's trail leads to a noisy scene: goblins encircle a mound of mud that is topped with a white-blossomed apple tree. Charging around its trunk is an ethereal stag, and in the branches hides the pup.

三 **Climax** The PCs can join the stag spirit in protecting Iht-zyk's child. If they are not successful, the pup is knocked from the tree then taken by the stag into the forest. Iht-zyk is grateful that her child is being protected by a benevolent spirit and will continue the search herself. Despite their failure, Iht-zyk leads the characters out of the forest. If the goblins are defeated, the stag stands aside and allows Iht-zyk to reclaim her pup. Iht-zyk not only leads the players out of the forest, but informs her tribe of their heroism, gaining the PCs allies among the Tattered Ear tribe.

During the course of her studies she found love, and soon after she had pups. Iht-zyk's loving nature extends beyond her family to every intelligent creature untouched by the Taint. She is immediately friendly, and she fears more for the safety of others than her own well-being. If she notices someone has a wound, she will fuss, and she attempts to soothe any apparent anxiety by gently stroking the sufferer's arm. Though Iht-zyk may appear to be a pushover, she is a skilled survivalist and a trustworthy guide.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
25	HONOR	ENDURANCE	12
10	GLORY	COMPOSURE	10
05	STATUS	FOCUS	6
+2, –2	DEMEANOR - NURTURING	VIGILANCE	5



ARTISAN 0	MARTIAL 0	SCHOLAR 2	SOCIAL 3	TRADE 4

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Keen Smell: Trade; *Mental*	**Meekness:** Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Claws: Range 0–1, Damage 4, Deadliness 2, Razor-edged

Teeth: Range 0, Damage 4, Deadliness 3, Snaring

Gear (equipped): Practical clothes, basket of nuts and berries

ABILITIES

FOREST LESSONS

Once per game session as a downtime activity, Iht-zyk may impart the wisdom of the Tattered Ear tribe to any number of characters. Those who choose to listen and apply the knowledge may forfeit 1 honor to decrease the TN of checks to identify or avoid natural or spiritual dangers within Shinomen Forest by 1 until the end of the game session.

NEZUMI INSTINCTS

When Iht-zyk makes a skill check to hide, climb, or move quietly, she increases her number of bonus successes by 3 or decreases her shortfall by 3 (to a minimum of 0).

A REPORT FROM SHINOMEN WATCHTOWER

My Lord,

I write to you regarding a matter of some concern. A long-range patrol recently came upon an unusual ruin in the Shinomen Mori. The narrow, domed towers are like nothing any of the patrol have seen before. The structures, which are greatly overgrown (and, I believe, partially buried), appear to be quite old. As they seem to be constructed entirely of stone, they have weathered the years. The structures are garishly decorated, and many of the carvings depict people with the features of serpents. Even worse, the central structure seems to be a temple of some kind, and within we discovered blasphemous depictions of Lady Sun.

I have heard whispers of a Snake Clan that was eradicated many centuries ago for its dishonorable and blasphemous actions, yet I cannot believe these ruins were built by Rokugani hands. Moreover, there is a feeling of great antiquity. I cannot say certainly, but I believe these ruins may be older than our glorious Empire. They remind me of certain tales that our ancestors brought back from their journeys outside of Rokugan.

As intriguing as these ruins are, I make this report because of a further matter, which speaks to a potential threat. Within the ruins (although the scouts hesitated to delve too deeply), we discovered egg shells of a size previously unseen. These eggs resembled those of serpents, yet were as much as two shaku across at their widest—considerably larger than any known snake. To all appearances, the eggs were recently hatched. The presence of a serpent of such size within the Shinomen Mori would, itself, be noteworthy. Yet, these eggs, found alongside the strange architecture and disturbing images, lead me to consider much more concerning possibilities.

In Service,
Shinjo Kazue

Ruins

Ruins never truly die. They hold the memories of their previous lives and the anguish of their decay. These memories infuse ruins with distinct personalities.

Stone ruins, leftovers from castles or noble estates, stand proud despite their disrepair. What remains of a crumbling structure provides a landmark for travelers and a refuge against wind and rain. A village may sprout around the old walls, giving an ancient former palace a new purpose. Children play in the shadow of a stone ruin, bringing life and laughter to its empty rooms. In this way, the ruin obtains recognition and respect like an elder sitting quietly in the village square, surrounded by life.

Wooden ruins decay and rot within a generation or two, becoming overgrown and oftentimes forgotten. Wooden temples and shrines accept their death in tranquility, much like the priests and monks that once attended them. Mighty and majestic trees often grow from these spots, wood begetting wood, continuing the cycle of life. Travelers sometimes describe these places of serenity without realizing that they have a human-made origin, as the artificial and the natural often blur in concept and reality in these forgotten locales.

The oldest of ruins tend to be packed-earth structures or burial mounds, the simplest of construction, almost indistinguishable from any natural structure. These ruins lean toward the subtle and profound, wise and unknowable, dreaming of ancient things. Even ancient burial mounds do not have an intrinsically evil attitude; the dead merely sleep, awakening only if disturbed or offered alms. Few such mounds remain, for many were defiled by Iuchiban during his war on Rokugan or by his Bloodspeaker followers in the years since.

The spirits of some ruins, such as lost villages, simply want an offering: rice, a bit of fruit, sake, the seeds for a new flower or tree, or something similar. Others have more exacting demands, compelling villagers to live there, give blood, or even—in violation of Imperial law—bury bodies to keep it company. Forgotten ruins become unmoored from the Realm of Mortals, growing closer in temperament to the Spirit Realms. Benign ruins may drift near Yume-dō, turning their land surreal and fantastic, or Chikushō-dō, which makes the ruins feral, lush, and a haven for wildlife. Ruins that resent their fate might lean closer to Sakkaku, playing pranks on heimin by changing the landscape. Most ruins grow closer to Gaki-dō, yearning to belong to a family, to a clan. The hungrier husks demand more, sucking the life and energy, sometimes literally, from visiting mortals.

Token offerings generally keep a benign ruin docile—or encourage it to provide a small boon—but any lapse in those offers starts the misbehavior all over again, usually with increased intensity. Over time, with continuous attention, a ruin can eventually settle, or sleep, contently. In a few cases, a builder has constructed a new building on a pacified ruin, reintegrating the spirit and its personality into the new construction. Architects must be cautious, however, as the previous ruin can continue to cause trouble.



Any good architect commissions a priest or monk to offer a cleansing before construction, usually with consecrated salt or blessed water, and a blessing after completion, by hanging over entrances and exits a number of spirit ribbons, wooden talismans, or cloth pouches containing prayers written on paper.

Heimin avoid ruins, as they are a source of terror and tragedy. Yet, commoners tell many stories of ruins, even if their tales contain as much fiction as fact. A wise traveler can sift through those fictions—everyone has a relative who found and lost a kitsune fortune—to come up with useful truths. Some of the more unhappy stories have kernels of truth. Missing relatives or friends, those who return from the wilderness not themselves, people fallen under a spell of depression, mania, or waking dreams—all point to a supernatural source.

EXPLORING THE ASHES

The clans view ruins as places of power, whether as resources to exploit or as dangers to their control. If a remnant of a building can remember the past, and a priest can successfully plead with its spirit, then the ruins may reveal their history and knowledge. If a priest can bring a spirit to heel, usually through rebuilding the ruin into a shrine, then the people who live there have received a guardian. The clans often place valuable relics and treasures in these sanctuaries.

A ruin can hold more mundane reasons for clan attention. If the history of a clan can be read on the walls of a proud, thriving building, the despair of a clan can be read in the ashes of a ruin. The Crane see ruins as an eyesore on their manicured territories, something to be cleansed and purified when possible. The Lion perceive ruins as symbols of failure. The Crab view them as an affront to their architectural skills. The unorthodox Dragon see them as places of raw power and seek to tame the spirits within or to drive them to serve the clan. Reclaiming the wild land, raising the clan's banner, and returning the ruin to its former splendor showcases a clan's commitment to its history. Such acts of restoration can be the tipping point away from a clan's descent into obsolescence and toward a reenergizing of its collective pride.

In addition, ruins can be a source of lost treasure, whether documents, jewels, precious metals, weapons, banners, seals, or other symbols of family pride. A ruin can provide clues about a samurai's inheritance, whether land, treasure, or a hidden lineage. A warrior may find a hidden connection to a family through a genealogy record, undiscovered descendants of survivors living among the villagers, wealth to elevate their family to a higher status, or a title to lands and villages for them to govern. At the same time, if a ruin has memory, it also can reveal secrets; a clan that has neglected a ruin may find its history revealed to an enemy who gives it a proper offering.

A haunted ruin may threaten the local heimin; only one of stout will and mind can appease the spirits. The personality of the ruin can slowly infect the surrounding area, turning a docile forest into a haunted wood or a utilitarian village into a place of bedlam. Cultists, drawn to this supernatural power, further drag the locale toward anarchy and corruption.

Samurai may visit a ruin seeking esoteric and spiritual answers. Such places have a connection to the spiritual world and may provide knowledge. Many fantastical stories depict a traveler stumbling into a lost ruin to receive a prophecy from the spirits within. Even without a supernatural presence, an empty ruin can inspire wisdom. After all, everything dies, and a samurai can find no better place in which to contemplate the ephemeral nature of mortality than in a place dead, destroyed, and forgotten.

DWELLERS

The wildlife of Rokugan uses ruins as lairs, places to hide from humanity. Even in a haunted ruin, animals can coexist peacefully with spirits unless the spirits express extreme hunger, rage, or pain, such as a ruin drifting dangerously close to Tōshigoku. Yet, an astute traveler may notice odd behavior in the animals—passive creatures acting aggressively, aggressive animals acting as if under someone's command, or wildlife purposefully warning or herding the traveler away—due to the influence of spirits.

Rarely, a troll or other monsters occupy a haunted ruin—or at least a ruin with a haunted reputation—specifically for the peace and isolation it affords from humanity. In some cases, a troll rebuilds parts to create a labyrinth, dead ends, and hidden passages to give them an advantage in hiding from or attacking intruders. Those with knowledge of troll culture may notice a pattern in such mazes: one of circles within circles, like their ancient cities.

Of similar rarity are the naga, and their lairs and cities remain well hidden. Time has taken its toll on their cities, and humans may stumble upon a naga ruin without realizing it. Usually cut directly out of stone in mountains or cliffs, the pillars, arches, and walls of a naga structure all incorporate intricate carvings of geometric patterns, images of naga life, and depictions of the sun, moon, and stars. As there are no stairs or obvious means to climb the multiple levels, most humans only recognize the single floor. Any naga that happen to be awake can easily avoid humans by ascending or descending via the spirals cut in the columns or the multiple jutting stone protrusions on the walls.

TEMPLE OF THE BURNED MONK

In Nanashi Mura, the village of rōnin on the border of the Dragon lands, warriors with unresolved inner turmoil sometimes test their fortitude and discipline by meditating overnight at the ruined Moeta Shūdō-Shi no Jiin—the Temple of the Burned Monk. Ages ago, a monk refused to surrender to some bandits, so they burned him along with the temple. The monk, sitting calmly, uttered not a sound as the temple turned to cinders. The bandits, their bloodlust sated, rode away without harming the rest of the village. When the villagers came out to clean up the wreckage, they thought they found the monk alive, covered in soot. The site smelled of flowers rather than smoke. The moment someone touched him, a beatific smile on his face, he collapsed to ash, or so the villagers say.

The story spread, and a rōnin decided that she could be just as brave as the monk, inadvertently beginning a new tradition among the lordless in Nanashi Mura. When a warrior needs to show that they have the discipline to serve or the self-control to follow orders, they meditate for a night on the temple grounds. Most rōnin encounter nothing during their meditations, but find their tempers calmed. Some engage the ghost of the monk and rededicate themselves to Enlightenment. A few run away screaming and disgraced, never to be seen again. The rōnin mentioned earlier emerged from the temple with a new purpose in life. She renamed herself Hasu, shaved her head, and wandered the land fighting bandits and spirits, giving assistance to the powerless and downtrodden.

From the outside, the temple's plot of land looks quite bare. A few support beams remain standing with the telltale scoring. The villagers have surrounded the plot of land with some stones, both as a sign of respect and to help assure that the temple's spirit doesn't disturb the rest of the village. Sometimes, the villagers leave a stool or a kneeling mat in the center of the plot, but most often, they don't have the nerve to traverse the stone boundary, citing the choking scent of burnt wood, ominous chanting, whispers that reflect their greatest fears, or visions of darkness and fire.

The leaders of the Dragon Clan have mixed feelings about this ruined temple. One good bushi has disappeared, but another, upon completing the night unscarred, inspired a band of rōnin to swear loyalty to the Dragon. While discussions about the ruins, and of Nanashi Mura in general, range from razing the village to the ground to officially bringing the land under the Dragon's banner, the Dragon's deadlocked leadership means it has no plans to purify, rebuild, or raze the temple grounds.

Kaiu "Shibito" Tsuneko

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 2 3

Kaiu Tsuneko felt constrained by her family's history. Her work didn't fit the mold, so to bolster her design decisions, she researched the history not only of Kaiu architecture, but of the ancient constructions by the beings that came before humanity. Each discovery only fueled her desire for stranger and more ancient works, and she soon abandoned her family's vocation in order to search ruins and ancient buildings.

Once merely consumed with discovering secret construction techniques, Tsuneko saw her fortunes and health take a turn for the worse after an encounter near Morikage Toshi. She refuses to discuss the event for fear of some supernatural retribution. Her family has disowned her, striking her name from the family record, but some relatives want to bring her back and cure her of her delusions.



Whether deluded or inspired, "Shibito"—the name that villagers call her, though she responds to her given name equally well—now believes that the dead remember the details she needs about long-forgotten buildings. She spends more time with them than with the living. She appears wan and emaciated, her hair long and unkempt, and unless she comes across an offering at a grave or shrine, she often forgets to eat or drink.

Little interested in the affairs of mortal humanity, Shibito can be found talking to herself—or to the spirits, as she claims. She remains a scholar at heart, and a living person can get her talking if they can teach her something new about the spirits, architecture, history, or any craft.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
30	HONOR	ENDURANCE	14
40	GLORY	COMPOSURE	14
35	STATUS	FOCUS	4
+2, –2	DEMEANOR: - DETACHED	VIGILANCE	2



ARTISAN 4	MARTIAL 1	SCHOLAR 3	SOCIAL 1	TRADE 3

ADVANTAGES

Secrets: Social; *Interpersonal*

DISADVANTAGES

Superstitious: Scholar; *Mental*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Wakizashi: Range 0–1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Razor-edged

Gear (equipped): Ragged traveling clothes, calligraphy set, scroll satchel, pack of offerings

ABILITIES

TOUCHED BY MEIDO

Activation: When making a check pertaining to spirits, Shibito may receive 3 strife to roll 1 additional ring die and keep 1 additional die as if she had spend 1 Void point.

ADVENTURE SEED: TARNISHED SAKURA

Hook A missing Crane samurai, Kakita Sakura, has been spotted in Dragon lands. Though she was once refined and stately, she now shouts, curses, displays her emotions openly, and she refuses to return home to her family. The Dragon Clan wishes to discern the reasons for this mysterious change. Her lord believes she has been possessed by a spirit and wants her returned for purification.

Rising Action Upon questioning the peasants of Nanashi Mura, the PCs discover that Kakita Sakura spent a night in the Temple of the Burned Monk to prove her bravery. At the temple ruins, they find the strange Kaiu architect "Shibito," who volunteers information about Sakura only if the PCs endure a challenge to stay in the ruins overnight. The PCs experience terrifying visions throughout the night, but the next morning, Shibito tells them she witnessed Sakura's purity and that she is certain the wandering samurai achieved Enlightenment at the temple. Shibito points them to the Crane village of Musume Mura.

Climax The PCs encounter Sakura surreptitiously training people at the Crane village to take up arms and tutoring the heimin in the tenets of the Perfect Land Sect. The PCs must decide if she needs to die to prevent rebellion, can be recruited by the Dragon Clan, can be returned to the Crane, or has genuinely achieved Enlightenment.

FORGOTTEN VILLAGE (WASURETA MURA)

In the Valley of Spirits, between the Shinomen Mori and Twilight Mountains, a long-dead village whispers for the residents of a nearby village to make a home there. Villagers tell of a beautiful person beckoning to join them for tea. Parents seeking lost children see a childlike figure running into the forest. Others see long-dead friends gesturing to them to walk among the trees. These are the spirits of Wasureta Mura, the Forgotten Village.

Stories of what caused the village's death suggest everything from fire to bandit raids to a curse, but no one has bothered to seek out the truth. "Easier to avoid trouble by not looking for it," as local villagers say. Yet, people disappear into the Valley of Spirits, especially those who have hearts weighed by troubles. Those disappointed by their lot in life, or who don't feel like they belong, hear Wasureta Mura more clearly the deeper they go into the woods.

People who have strong connections with the living, have found contentment in their lot in life, or have strong passions or commitments to uphold have difficulty finding Wasureta Mura. Their ties to the living world keep them from feeling or seeing the ruins of the village. This makes it difficult to rout out the spirits; the determination to eliminate them makes it hard to encounter them in the first place.

Samurai who have suffered a grievous injury, have lost a loved one, or have been fascinated with death may hear the village regardless of their other passions. Having an easier time finding Wasureta Mura, however, means having a harder time escaping it. A few well-meaning bushi have attempted to purify the village, but some have not returned, having suffered the ennui that the village thrives on. The others claim to have seen a ruined village out of the corner of their eye or caught whispers just beyond the edge of hearing.

WHISPERS OF SPIRITS

- If you see flames among the ruins or at the forest edge at night, run far away.
- Bringing offerings of toys to the ruins can improve your karma.
- Offerings actually tie the spirits more closely to this world and reflect poorly on the giver.

Priests believe that nearby villages might contain salvaged construction from Wasureta Mura, inviting spirits and infecting people with nightmares. A simple purification ritual can solve the problem, but the house owners defend their homes against one with incredible ferocity, claiming that their dead relatives speak to them.

Some misguided villagers sacrifice someone yearly to the Forgotten Village. In most cases, they only send volunteers, although the social pressure to volunteer is strong. Some villages have torn themselves apart with violence selecting an unwilling volunteer; a few embrace this practice too eagerly, strengthening the parallel to a mahō ritual. The pressure can turn uglier when the volunteer discovers that Wasureta Mura doesn't want them. Now they have no home, and they face even more violence from their home village for failing to uphold their duty. In the end, as they turn to despair, Wasureta Mura finally comes to accept them as a fellow lost child.



Kasai, Mournful Troll

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 8 4

This troll, who calls himself "Kasai," has lost so many members of his people that he has retired to the Valley of Spirits to get away from humans. He bears the scars, physically and emotionally, of centuries watching his people disappear into the Shadowlands, die by natural causes, or get killed by humans. Tall, but hunched over from age, every scar on his body and long, gangly arms comes with a story, a history lesson, of the betrayals and violence of the human race.

Yet, despite his misanthropy, he has refrained from deliberately killing humans. In the Valley of Spirits, he attacks intruders to drive them away, dressed in rags to appear as a spirit. He howls in the dark of night to frighten travelers, and he sometimes leaves animal carcasses to rot both to scare humans and to chase them away with the stench. He calls himself a base animal—assuming anyone can get close enough to listen—but continues to cling to civilization. He keeps the scrolls and books he finds on human corpses or dropped by frightened travelers. He takes stones and fallen wood to build structures throughout the forest. And if a wanderer listens closely, they can hear low, guttural singing, terrible and lonely throughout the night.

He wants to seek out more of his kind, but that requires him to make a long overland journey through human lands. His hatred of humans wars against his self-discipline; he refuses to turn into a monster and cut a bloody path home. So, he keeps himself in isolation.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
35	HONOR	ENDURANCE	18
15	GLORY	COMPOSURE	11
05	STATUS	FOCUS	4
+2, –2	DEMEANOR · MOROSE	VIGILANCE	3



ARTISAN 1 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 6 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 2

ADVANTAGES

Brute Strength: Martial; *Physical*

DISADVANTAGES

Pessimism: Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS & Gear

Massive Cudgel: Range 2, Damage 9, Deadliness 5, Cumbersome

Rending Grip: Range 1, Damage 4, Deadliness 6

Gear (equipped): Armor scraps and scaled hide (Physical 2, Supernatural 1), stolen sake and scrolls

ABILITIES

ANCIENT AND POWERFUL

Kasai is an Otherworldly being of silhouette 4.

TEMPER

Each time Kasai suffers 1 or more fatigue, he gains 1 strife. When Kasai's strife exceeds half of his composure, he gains the Enraged condition.

SUSTAINING FURY

Kasai cannot suffer the Incapacitated or Unconscious condition while he has the Enraged condition.

PRIMORDIAL WISDOM

As a downtime activity, Kasai can share ancient secrets with characters who have earned his trust. Characters who heed this wisdom can purchase the Channel the Fire Dragon kiho technique regardless of prerequisites.

ADVENTURE SEED: SMOLDERING FIRE

Hook A local priest went into the Valley of Spirits to add more spirit ribbons and talismans to quell the restless wood, but she has not returned. The villagers need her back for the usual blessings on new births and good crops, but they don't have the courage to venture into the haunted forest.

Rising Action If the PCs follow the trail of new wards, they encounter a mutilated deer carcass that is attracting a pack of starving wolves, a haunted tree imprisoning a villager who has been lost there for days, and finally a massive troll who is stalking them. Far from a mindless creature, the troll leaps from openings in the earth and strikes at the PCs, but then withdraws before doing serious damage.

Climax When the PCs reach the end of the trail, they discover the priest alive and well in the ruins of Wasureta Mura, but she refuses to leave with them. Though she was kidnapped by the troll, the priest believes she can convert him to Shintao and assuage his pain. The troll's anger and hostility doesn't help the priest's efforts. When some mercenary monster hunters enter the valley to kill the troll, the PCs must weigh the priest's safety, the troll's well-being, and the possibility of a bloody encounter between a rampaging troll and the savage mercenaries.

Coast

The industrious and practical Rokugani people have built villages, towns, and cities on the more accessible sections of the coast to facilitate farming, fishing, trading, and travel. The rest of the coast—the cliffs, crags, and crumbling shorelines— presents far more dangers than boons and remains isolated and uncivilized. These parts of the coast represent two different elements merging in harmony or warring and bringing destruction. Earth and water—the first solid and unchanging, the second surging and ever-moving—combine to give both life and death.

The unsettled lands of the north tend to be rocky, from their sheer cliffs to their beaches of stones. The massive cliffs, cold and blustery winds, and roar of the chilly ocean can give even the most stoic monk pause, as the elements whip and churn around them.

As a traveler moves south, the coast becomes flatter and more pleasant due to the warmer currents. With calm winds, temperate weather, and soft, sandy beaches, these coastal areas elicit tranquility, peace, and willful contemplation. A famous example is the Fields of the Morning Sun in Shinkyou Province, a place dedicated to sacred nonviolence.

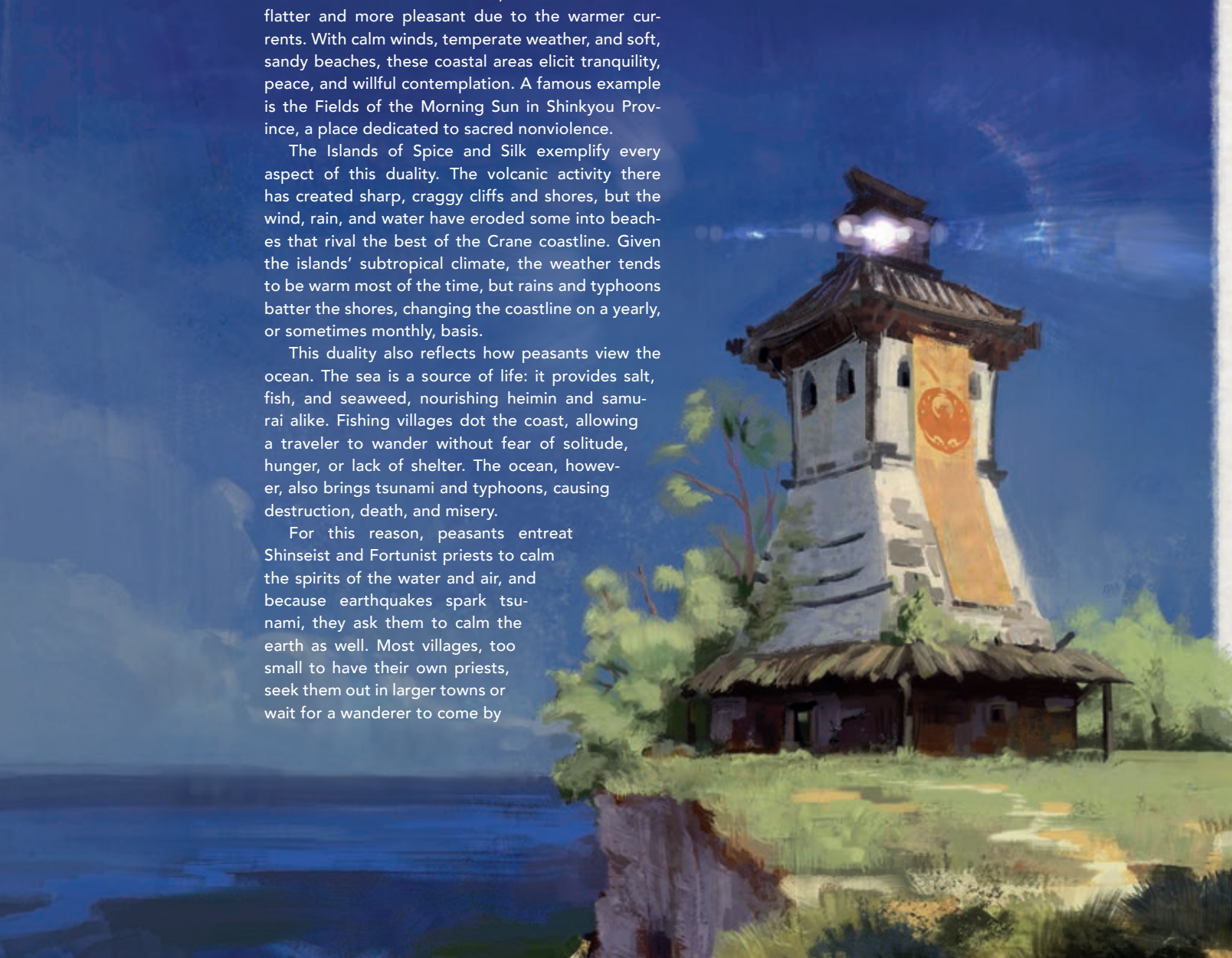
The Islands of Spice and Silk exemplify every aspect of this duality. The volcanic activity there has created sharp, craggy cliffs and shores, but the wind, rain, and water have eroded some into beaches that rival the best of the Crane coastline. Given the islands' subtropical climate, the weather tends to be warm most of the time, but rains and typhoons batter the shores, changing the coastline on a yearly, or sometimes monthly, basis.

This duality also reflects how peasants view the ocean. The sea is a source of life: it provides salt, fish, and seaweed, nourishing heimin and samurai alike. Fishing villages dot the coast, allowing a traveler to wander without fear of solitude, hunger, or lack of shelter. The ocean, however, also brings tsunami and typhoons, causing destruction, death, and misery.

For this reason, peasants entreat Shinseist and Fortunist priests to calm the spirits of the water and air, and because earthquakes spark tsunami, they ask them to calm the earth as well. Most villages, too small to have their own priests, seek them out in larger towns or wait for a wanderer to come by to help with blessings. Many an adventure has begun with a villager seeking out someone kind enough to visit and bless their village.

WATER AND SALT

Because the Elemental Masters are part of the Phoenix Clan, the Phoenix suffer less from natural disasters than do other clans. The knowledge and expertise of their shugenja mean that the villages of the coast can enjoy relative safety from the vicissitudes of the elements. Peasants in Phoenix territories are well aware of their dependence on even common priests, and they devote more resources than peasants in other clan territories to providing room and board to these blessed individuals. Coastal villages are also an excellent source of salt, and villages with the purest salt have a mutually beneficial relationship with priests, who come to consecrate it in exchange for a portion for traveling.



Traveling clergy should not overestimate a village's gratitude, however. Overstaying their welcome drains a village's much-needed resources, and many villagers seek out blessings only in times of trouble—though at that point, they have little money or food to donate. Clergy also face additional hazards. If their blessings fail to provide good fortune, they may be barred from returning, or worse, attacked by angry, starving heimin. Demands for priests' and shugenja's services may compel them to travel up and down the coast, making them vulnerable to attacks by animals, bandits, pirates, or the strange creatures that lurk in the shadows.

Villagers in Crane territory are more vulnerable to the whims of nature, as starkly illustrated by the tsunami three years ago. Even during a typical year, a severe storm can scatter friends and family. The land still hasn't recovered from the devastation, and some villages remain in ruin, if not completely wiped out. Refugees have wandered farther inland into farmland, and tensions exist between the farming villages and these coastal newcomers.

The displacement of the population has further disrupted food production, curtailing the collection of taxes. The Daidoji Trading Council, a group of intermediaries formed centuries ago to handle the Crane's economic affairs, provided some help in reestablishing trade after the devastation. However, it suffers from a combination of nepotism, incompetence, and negligence, forcing the Doji family to send representatives to both the council and the area devastated by the tsunami to ascertain details of the malfeasance.

Refugees may be the victims of bandits or villagers who don't want to help them, as people succumb to fear or greed, seeing the refugees not as poor souls but as vulnerable targets or a drain on their resources.

The Mantis Clan lives and dies by the sea. They have mastered the water, but they also have to manage earth and fire. The volcanoes on the Islands of Spice and Silk are a source of earthquakes, steam vents, and hot springs, though no eruptions have threatened the Mantis yet. Their wealth from trade and piracy and ambitions for greater Imperial recognition mean the clan has schools, a strong literacy rate, and a quality of education as good as those of any of the Major Clans. They see the water, air, earth, and fire not as disasters to overcome but as boons to their success.

DENIZENS

Fish, sea urchins, kelp and other seaweed, cuttlefish, oysters, and clams are just a portion of the variety of sea life that villages and sailors gather for sustenance. While these bring life, sharks, octopuses, and other predators of the deep pose a constant threat to fishers and divers. Stories abound of impossibly giant examples of these creatures dragging ships to their graves.

Water and air kami can also threaten the coast. The key to ending such attacks usually lies in how the people there have offended the kami. It can be difficult to see the difference between a natural storm and an angry spirit. A giant squid might be a spirit taken form. Sailors under attack often pour sake, sanctified salt, or rice into the ocean, along with constant prayers. Many fishing villages have a small shrine for these offerings. A village that takes care of and is favored by the kami not only receives bountiful fish and protection from the elements, but might also gain from a patron spirit some valuable lost knowledge of the coast or protection from pirates.

Sailors also tell stories of other denizens hiding in the depths of the ocean. These beings—which look part human and part fish—don't appear to be kami; no offering, blessing, or prayer attracts their attention. They swim in the wake of ships, watch as sailors drown, and seem to have no interest in the cargo. Villagers say they have seen these beings in inland waters also, such as White Shore Lake in the Unicorn lands. Some stories name these beings ningyo, and say they live in ruins of cities and palaces that have sunk into the sea, such as Kyuden Morehei. It is also said that if mortals eat the flesh of a ningyo, they can achieve immortality. When ningyo-sighting rumors spread, desperate or greedy hunters descend upon the hapless village causing chaos and misery in their wake.

THE CAVE OF THE STONE CHILDREN (ISHIKO NO DŌKUTSU)

The tsunami of 1120 destroyed a villagers' shrine used for good-luck offerings and childrens' blessings near Akagi Mori in the Umoeru Province. Days later, the shrine's name scrolls and placards washed up in a cove, along with small stones with pits and markings that resembled a sleeping baby's face.

A couple, Asaji and Taketoki, heard about the stones. Believing they were reincarnated children, they went there hoping to find the stone that was their own lost child. They took all the stones, scrolls, and placards and placed them in a cave entrance within the cove. In their grief, however, they now believe that all of these "stone children" are theirs. They prowl the area ambushing travelers, thinking them there to kidnap their family.

In addition, the two have taken to stealing food, offerings, and clothing from nearby villages, and a few villagers have gone missing. Those villagers are all



ones who have lost their own children, and most of their peers simply believe they have flung themselves into the ocean. While questioning Asaji and Taketoki about the missing villagers may reveal nothing, the couple has been planning on kidnapping real children. Whether to do so as a sacrifice or to raise as their "own" children, they can't agree.

The cove, rocky and treacherous, takes some skill and dedication to explore successfully. A misplaced step can twist an ankle, throw a climber onto the ground, or inflict a jagged scar. The sun never seems to shine on the cove, and even during the day, the light appears muted, sick, and hazy. The water in the cove has strange currents that both allow detritus to wash up onto the sand and can drag a person underwater, deep into sharp-edged tunnels. The look of the water mirrors the cove's unwelcoming environment, and bathing in it leaves the skin feeling sticky and unclean.

The cave where Asaji and Taketoki placed the belongings extends deep into the cliff face, the air becoming strangely ashy and thick like fog, yet not from heat or fire. The tunnels, some flooded, are small, claustrophobic spaces, full of stalagmites and stalactites, jagged stones, and random twists that disorient visitors. Even Asaji and Taketoki haven't sojourned deeper into the cave. If they did, they would hear children's voices, laughing and whispering for them to continue their acts of thievery and murder, until all the children of Rokugan have perished.

TALES OF THE COVE

- There is a certain rash that affects nearby villagers. It is a curse by the old, giant fish that sleeps in the cove.
- A kami saved a boat of drowning fisherfolk by turning them into ocean waves, but its neglected shrine keeps it from returning to free them.

THE SUMMERLANDS

Located in Wakiaiai Province, these wet, marshy lands teem with delicate reeds and cicadas. Travelers like to visit at the end of spring to await the cry of the insects. As it is a popular place to become inspired to write poetry, enough scholars, priests, and academically minded samurai visit that a cluster of inns has been built to house them. The mild weather, flat lands that allow a spectacular view of the sunrise, and warm temperatures suggest an idyllic retreat. However, those dedicated to experiencing the true Summerlands sojourn deep into the marshes for privacy and contemplation, surrounding themselves with the sounds of summer.

A traveler should be wary of con artists who sell maps to the Summerlands. Most are harmless, fakes that lead nowhere, but a few lead to bandit ambushes. If a wanderer travels deep into the marshes, sometimes they find a body or a skeleton of a poor victim of an attack or simply of someone who became lost. The bandits in the marshes exhibit strange behaviors. Some have a starved, frenzied look about them, more animal than human. Others seem desperate, constantly asking travelers the year and attacking when they don't like the answer. A few have come to resemble the forgotten dead, proclaiming doom while dragging their victims deeper into the marsh.

Most visitors say that a map is useless, since the paths change every year. Given the fast-growing reeds, this shouldn't surprise anyone, but some say that the land itself changes as do the seasons. At any point, the soft muddy ground might turn into a deep pool of water, the reeds hardly waving as an unfortunate slips out of view. One method of exploring the Summerlands includes joining a string of explorers. As long as each person remains in sight of the one before and after, any individual can follow the line back to civilization. The call to discover something new and unique, however, prompts many to forgo this human chain and wander the marshy lands alone.

Each solitary explorer has a different story to tell of their visit to the Summerlands. One has spoken of a perfect torii arch that leads to Enlightenment. Another claims to have visited a strange city, its people half snake or dragon and half human. The beings were welcoming and polite the explorer says, but they were reluctant to explain their existence and unable to acknowledge the visitor as a human. Still others say they found a unique treasure: a chest of silver, a strain of rice that can grow anywhere, or a sword made of dreams. In the end, the visitors also say they have never managed to discover anything like this again in the Summerlands: only the soft susurration of the reeds and the hum of the cicadas.

ADVENTURE SEED: LOST CHILDREN

Hook The PCs learn of a tsunami victim, Crane Clan courtier Asahina Hisayoshi, when a merchant delivers a *netsuke*, a carved decorative button, of Hisayoshi's found in the detritus of the disaster. The Asahina family desperately wants his safe return—or information about his fate—and entreats the PCs to assist. When the PCs seek out this person, however, strange events follow them at every turn. Winds blow them off course, storms suddenly threaten to drown their ship, and water spirits harry them at night.

Rising Action Adrift at sea, the PCs manage to communicate with the spirits and learn of the Crane noble's demise. When a Mantis pirate rescued him from the sea, he demanded that they also rescue the heimin children swept up by the tsunami. The pirate refused, so Hisayoshi attempted to save the children himself and was lost beneath the turbulent waves. The pirate and the water spirits nearby, moved by the man's sacrifice, pledged to protect the children.

Climax The children, and a few adults, have been living on a Mantis island since then. Though the pirate has treated them relatively well over the past few years, the Mantis Clan's patience grows thin, as no ransom or benefits are forthcoming from the Crane. If the Crane find out about Hisayoshi's death, they may seek retribution.

Uranaishi no Manami, Ambitious Pirate

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 4 2

The Mantis consider Manami one of their best pirates, but she hates her reputation and that of her clan, wishing she could be seen as a legitimate samurai. Torn between three impulses—to live a simple life of fishing and seafaring, to provide for her family and clan with continued raids, and to obtain the recognition and respect of the other clans—Manami leads her crew with a shrewd grumpiness. She chooses a single wealthy target over several smaller, easier ones to avoid as much bloodshed as possible. If she is challenged on a decision, she solves the disciplinary problem with some grappling, and her short, stocky, powerful body quickly proves her physical might. Her successful piracy count demonstrates her significant tactical insight.

When the tsunami hit Crane lands, instead of picking at the corpses and villages like carrion, Manami rescued several survivors. Informing her sailors that the Crane may pay a ransom for their people, she has treated these outsiders well, integrating them at a village near Toshi no Inazuma. This scheme has not paid off and may be an unflattering mark on her record, but her sailors remain loyal and well fed from their work, so they don't complain.

The Mantis Clan, however, has mixed feelings about this act of mercy, and especially about taking on responsibility for people loyal to the Crane; some doubt her dedication to piracy and to the Mantis. Those jealous of her success and popularity continually bring up this softening in her heart. What they truly fear is her ambition. She has openly discussed sending tribute and representatives to Otosan Uchi to turn the Mantis into a Major Clan. With each successful raid, the possibility becomes more real, with her name on top of the list to represent the Mantis.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
45	HONOR	ENDURANCE	10
65	GLORY	COMPOSURE	8
30	STATUS	FOCUS	5
+2, –2	DEMEANOR · SHREWD	VIGILANCE	3



ARTISAN 1 | MARTIAL 4 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 3 | TRADE 3

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Keen Sight: Trade; *Physical*	**Bluntness:** Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS

Katana: Range 1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Concealable, Razor-edged

Gear (equipped): Concealed armor (Physical 2, Concealable); wakizashi, sake jug; well-thumbed book on history, etiquette, or courtly romance.

ABILITIES

DIRTY TRICKS

When performing an Attack action check, Manami may spend ✵ in the following way:

> ✵+: One character at range 0-2 suffers the Disoriented condition.



CHAPTER

7

New Player Options

The Emerald Empire encompasses settlements ranging from small hamlets to sprawling cities, and terrain from snowcapped mountains to dense forests. The people of Rokugan are no less varied, from lowly hinin to mighty daimyō. The samurai class, though all members are sworn to the Code of Bushidō, includes a diverse array of specialists, each with unique duties and approaches to those duties.

This chapter presents new options for Player Characters in *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying*. These options include new schools, new titles, and new advantages and disadvantages. In addition, this chapter includes rules for creating a character of one of the Imperial families: the Miya, Otomo, or Seppun.



New Answers for the Game of Twenty Questions

When creating a character, a player may choose from the following new clan, families, and schools, in addition to those in the core rulebook.

The Imperial Families

Ring Increase: +1 Air
Skill Increase: +1 Government
Status: 40

It may be tempting to view the Imperial families as mere adjuncts to the Great Clans, similar to the various Minor Clans. Indeed, in terms of numbers, lands, and holdings, they are considerably smaller than the Great Clans. In many important respects, however, they are more powerful and influential than any of the Great Clans. As their name implies, the Imperial families have a direct connection to the rulership of the Empire, one that is tied much more closely to the Throne than any of the Great Clans. The Hantei family, which includes the Emperor and his immediate family, is truly "Imperial," insofar as the Emperors who have reigned over Rokugan have come from this family. Three other families are considered Imperial: the Seppun, the Otomo, and the Miya. All three stand close to the Throne by virtue of a combination of blood, duty, and history. All wield enormous political and cultural might, far out of proportion to their relatively small "footprint" on the greater landscape of Rokugan.

Because they are members of the kuge, the senior nobility of the Empire, the Imperial families stand apart from the bulk of the samurai, the buke. This distinction is expressed in a variety of ways. Most obviously, the Imperial families have a degree of access to the Emperor and the senior Imperial authorities, such as the Emerald Champion, Imperial Advisor, and Imperial Chancellor, that the Great Clans can only envy. They tend to have few lands and holdings, but those they do have are protected by standing Imperial decree from attack or seizure by the clans. When addressed, a member of one of the Imperial families is always entitled to be addressed by the honorific *-sama*, regardless of the status of the speaker. Also regardless of the relative status of a samurai and a member of an Imperial family, the latter is always treated with the same respect and consideration that would be given to a higher-status samurai. However, these rules don't apply if the other samurai in question is another member of an Imperial family, a senior Imperial official, or of course, the Emperor.

UNUSUAL SCHOOLS

Several of the new schools presented here are exceptions to the general guideline that a character must select a school from within their clan. The Fortunist Monk and Shinseist Monk schools represent broad approaches to the monastic life for samurai who have renounced their clan loyalties. A Kolat Saboteur may come from any family, and likely maintains a cover identity based on a legitimate school. Kitsune who dwell in human society mimic the traits of the family they join, so they choose a clan and family normally.

WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER KNOW?

All Imperial Family characters have a greater awareness of the following topics:

- You have a general awareness of the politics within Otosan Uchi. You can name Imperial family heads, ranking bureucrats, and other leaders, and you know their respective positions and allegiances.
- You know Imperial history quite well, particularly as it pertains to the deeds of the Emperor and the Imperial families.
- You know proper etiquette and protocal in the Imperial Capital.

WHAT DOES BUSHIDŌ MEAN TO THE IMPERIAL FAMILIES?

Duty and Loyalty to the Empire and the Emperor drives the Imperial families in all they do. The ancient ties of blood and service between them and the Hantei line bind the Imperial families together.

The good of the Emerald Empire outweighs all other needs, and samurai of the Imperial families must often act with little Compassion.

See page 301 of the core rulebook for more information on how these can affect your honor and glory.



The Miya Family

Ring Increase: +1 Air or +1 Earth
Skill Increases: +1 Courtesy, +1 Culture
Glory: 44 **Starting Wealth:** 8 koku

The Miya family is the youngest of the Imperial families, formed only after the passing of the first Hantei. Miya, a loyal follower of Otomo, was a young, quick-witted and charming man who quickly became a favorite among those close to the Emperor. When the war against Fu Leng was finally won, it was Miya who brought the news of the victory to the first Hantei, who lay dying. The Emperor commanded Miya to continue spreading the news of the war's end across the Empire. As he did so, he and his retainers assisted the war-ravaged Empire in rebuilding, leaving a sense of hope and purpose in their wake. When he returned to Otosan Uchi a hero, the wily Otomo saw an opportunity. He convinced the new Emperor, Hantei Genji, to allow Miya—still Otomo's loyal follower—to found his own family, and a new Imperial family was born.

The Miya have always been the smallest of the Imperial families, and the one with the least direct influence on and access to the Throne. They are, however, generally beloved across the Empire, so they wield their own brand of influence. Miya Heralds carry the edicts and pronouncements of the Emperor across the Empire, while Miya Cartographers survey the lands in order to create maps that properly delineate the various holdings of the clans. The Miya are, therefore, generally welcomed and trusted by all of the clans, which means they have acceptance in places that would view a Seppun or an Otomo much more warily.

This allows the Miya to act as the dispassionate eyes and ears of the Imperials, noting and recording events affecting the Empire with a minimum of bias and reporting them back to the Emperor and the other Imperial families. Their relatively guileless and open nature allows the Miya an unparalleled degree of access across Rokugan while also ensuring that they remain reasonably unscathed during their travels among the clans.

In terms of other roles in the Empire, the Miya are frequently found among the ranks of the Imperial Legions and the Emerald Magistrates. Their reputation for loyalty to the Emperor and impartiality in their dealings with others serves them in good stead in both of these stations. For the same reason, members of the Miya family are often found serving as arbitrators and judges, overseeing matters ranging from simple disputes over land and property, to sanctioned and formal duels between samurai, to complex trials over serious transgressions of Imperial law. It should also be noted that one particular Imperial office, that of the Imperial Herald, is a hereditary one traditionally held by the Miya family daimyō.

A final important role played by the Miya is the delivery of the Emperor's Blessing, the name by which Miya's original journey through the Empire came to be known. The Blessing is now a formal event of rebuilding and repair, an annual activity of carpenters and craftspeople drafted for the purpose and deployed to whatever places in the Empire are deemed to most need it. This typically includes areas affected by the aftermath of war or natural disaster. Competition to receive the benefices of the Blessing is fierce among the clans, but its final deployment remains solely at the discretion of the Emperor, in consultation with the Miya daimyō.

IMPERIAL FAMILY CHARACTERS

Although a character of the Imperial families is not a member of any Great Clan, they follow the same process for character creation, with one exception. For question 1 of the Game of Twenty Questions, on page 41 of the Core Rulebook, choose the Imperial Families instead of a Great Clan. Within the rules, this choice functions identically to that of a Great Clan. Likewise, within Rokugan, a samurai's identity as an Imperial Family member is akin to a Great Clan samurai's identity with their clan,

The Otomo Family

Ring Increase: +1 Air or +1 Water
Skill Increases: +1 Culture, +1 Sentiment
Glory: 43 **Starting Wealth:** 9 koku

The Otomo family was the second Imperial family to be founded, after the Seppun. The original Otomo, the younger son of a great tribal warlord, was glib, clever, and subtle. Thanks to his formidable powers of persuasion and manipulation, he was an expert at defusing conflicts that threatened to destroy his tribe. His wit and cunning soon proved of enormous value to the Kami Hantei as he sought to unite the disparate people of the nascent Empire of Rokugan. Otomo was instrumental in establishing the Miya family as an Imperial family, a move that only enhanced his standing in the young Imperial Court. His subtle and indirect approach to not only politics, but just about every aspect of life, has been the hallmark of the Otomo family ever since.

The particular role of the Otomo family in the Empire is to sow discord among the clans. Several times throughout the Empire's history, conspirators sought to gain control over the Throne. In order to prevent the clans from uniting and gaining undue influence—or even seizing control of the Throne altogether—the Otomo employ methods that are often vexatious and harmful, sometimes even to loyal samurai of Rokugan. They are never malicious simply for the sake of it, though. The Otomo recognize a greater good, that of the security of the Throne, and they devote themselves utterly to it. They employ flattery and favors, but don't hesitate to employ underhanded tactics as well, such as deception, bribery, and blackmail.



Many samurai consider such ruthless and unabashedly manipulative actions to be unworthy of samurai and the Seven Tenets of Bushidō, which they are expected to uphold. However, the Otomo see their role as absolutely essential, preventing the clans from ever coming together against the Throne by keeping them off-balance and, ideally, focused on one another as rivals and even enemies. There is no record of how many inter-clan conflicts during the Empire's history may have had an Otomo hand nudging it along. The great danger, of course, is that some among the Otomo themselves—also imperfect mortals—may succumb to the temptations of ambition and power. The Otomo, of course, deny that such a failure of duty has ever happened, and they acknowledge that measures are in place to prevent it. It is certain that there are watchers among the watchers, leading some to imagine that life among the Otomo family is constant intrigue and glancing over one's shoulder, to the point of paranoia. The Otomo do not deny this.

The Otomo fulfill other duties for the Empire as well. Many key positions in the Imperial bureaucracy are filled from the ranks of the Otomo family. The family rivals the Crane as a cultural leader for the Empire. Music, art, and literature created by members of the Otomo family are some of the most influential in Rokugan. Like the Crane, the Otomo realize that every note of every musical composition, every strike of a mallet on a sculpting chisel, and every brushstroke must serve a specific political purpose. To the Otomo, beauty is simply another tool for either gaining power or ensuring that power doesn't go to those who should not have it.

One important Imperial custom is the adoption of the Otomo name by those younger children of the Emperor who are not expected to inherit the Throne. Following the Ritual of Abdication, such younger Imperial siblings usually join the Otomo family, undergoing gempuku regardless of their age and taking the Otomo name. In this way, the Otomo helped preserve the Hantei bloodline, such that if an Emperor died without an heir, efforts could be made to trace the bloodline back to the most direct Hantei relative. Typically, this would be an Otomo, who would then reverse their abdication and assume the Throne as the new ruler of Rokugan. This is yet another subtle way in which the Otomo maintain their tight grip on power in the Empire.

The Seppun Family

Ring Increase: +1 Earth or +1 Void
Skill Increases: +1 Meditation, +1 Theology
Glory: 45 **Starting Wealth:** 6 koku

Like the Otomo, the Seppun family can trace its origins to the very dawn of the Empire. When the Kami fell from the Celestial Heavens, the eight who landed together did so at a place that came to be known as Seppun Hill, named for the first mortal to meet with the Kami after their fall, a woman called Seppun. Seppun was so moved by the sudden arrival of the Kami that she offered herself and her followers as servants. The Kami Hantei accepted her offer, making them the first mortal followers of the Kami. As a result, while others may vie for the Emperor's favor, the Seppun always have it simply by virtue of who they are. While some Seppun are courtiers, and many are functionaries in the Imperial bureaucracy, the Seppun are best known in the Empire as the Emperor's protectors.

When the divine Kami fell into the Realm of Mortals from the Celestial Heavens, they took on some of the vulnerabilities of mortals. The Seppun therefore took it upon themselves to guard and protect the Kami. This devotion has continued ever since, leading the Seppun to become the foremost defenders of the Emperor. They are therefore always prepared to sacrifice themselves to protect the Emperor. This isn't simply fanaticism: rather, this is their duty and their very reason to exist in the Celestial Order. To facilitate carrying out their duty, the Seppun have established two basic types of protectors: the Palace Guard, or Seppun Honor Guard, who form the personal bodyguard of the Emperor and protect the Hantei from physical threats, and the Hidden Guard, who guard the Emperor against spiritual and supernatural threats.

The Palace Guard are among the most accomplished warriors in the Empire. All of their considerable skill is focused on a single purpose: protecting the Emperor. Defense and acting as bodyguards are their ultimate purposes, and all of their combat tactics and techniques are designed to that end. Even their great skill in *iaijutsu* is intended only to allow them to draw their blades quickly against sudden attack, rather than during formal dueling.

The Hidden Guard, on the other hand, is made up of bushi and shugenja who have devoted themselves to understanding the kami and the teachings of Shinsei. They are just as prepared to place themselves between the Emperor and spiritual harm as the Seppun Honor Guard are regarding physical threats. Many members of the Hidden Guard are adept wardmasters capable of crafting durable defenses to guard areas frequented by the Emperor and their family from magical intrusion or attack. There is a close relationship—albeit a very discreet one—between the Hidden Guard and groups such as the Kuni Witch Hunters of the Crab, the Asako Inquisitors of the Phoenix, and the Kuroiban, or Black Watch, of the Scorpion.

Like the Otomo, the Seppun fulfill other roles aside from their primary one of guarding the Emperor. For instance, many members of the Imperial bureaucracy are from the Seppun family. More notable, however, is the devotion of the Seppun to the teachings of Shinsei. The original Seppun, having met Shinsei when he appeared shortly after the Fall of the Kami, became a fervent disciple of the "Little Teacher." Seppun advocated strongly for the teachings of Shinsei and after her death, her children started four temples venerating his philosophy in various parts of Rokugan. To this day, the Seppun remain among the most devoted adherents of Shinseism and the most fervent guardians of its teachings and records.

The Seppun also maintain a vast Imperial Library, one that is less focused on the facts of history and more on the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of those involved in past events. This Imperial Library contains many poems, stories, plays, journals, and diaries of those who lived at the times when certain historical events were occurring. Such documents are, of course, very subjective, but much can be learned about the people from these sources: how they interacted, how they viewed and subsequently recorded events from their own perspective, and how they judged events of history.



MAPS OF ROKUGAN

As Rokugan lacks a system of coordinates or other standardized method of recording location, cartographers use a variety of methods to measure distance and direction accurately, including pacing out distances and using prominent landscape features. They also use methods common to maritime navigation, such as noting the positions of stars, to check and confirm their measurements. As a result, Rokugani maps more closely resemble works of art than exacting, scaled charts, and they may incorporate a considerable amount of variability. The margin of error tends to increase the farther a place is from well-traveled and more densely populated parts of the Empire—particularly the Imperial capital, Otosan Uchi, which is used as the official origin point of all Imperial cartographic measurements.

Miya Cartographer School [Artisan, Courtier]

Miya Cartographers travel throughout the Empire, gathering information to update the Imperial maps and charts. Accordingly, they have standing authority to travel as they see fit, regardless of clan or other boundaries. Cartographers often travel to remote, inhospitable, and largely uninhabited parts of the Empire to make their observations and measurements. They must be self-sufficient, but frequently travel with groups of retainers and yōjimbō. The cartographer school puts great emphasis not only on the academic topics related to gathering and recording information, such as writing, drawing, and memorization, but on athletics, riding, and stamina. Cartographers must be prepared to face long periods of privation and hardship, away from civilization and at risk from any number of threats, from bandits, to wild animals, to hostile spirits.

Rings: +1 Air, +1 Earth

Starting Skills (choose five): +1 Aesthetics, +1 Composition, +1 Culture, +1 Fitness, +1 Government, +1 Seafaring, +1 Survival

Honor: 50

Techniques Available: Kata (), Rituals (), Shūji ()

Starting Techniques:

- **Kata (choose one):** Striking as Earth, Warrior's Resolve
- **Shūji (choose one):** Artisan's Appraisal, Civility Foremost

Well Traveled (School Ability): You always know which way is north, and you are always able to find a landmark useful for navigation.

When making a check to recall or ascertain geographical, political, or societal information, you may add a number of kept ■ set to ✲ or ◯ results equal to your school rank.

Starting Outfit: Traveling clothes, wakizashi (short sword), yumi (bow) and quiver of arrows, knife, calligraphy set, traveling pack, personal chop, an assortment of maps in scroll cases, an attendant (see page 64 of the core rulebook) or Rokugani pony (see page 326 of the core rulebook).

	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Artisan Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Culture	Skill
	Fitness	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Rank 1 Earth Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Slippery Maneuvers	Technique
	Threshold Barrier	Technique
RANK 2	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Games	Skill
	Martial Arts [Melee]	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Rank 1–2 Kata	Tech. Grp.
	The Wind Blows Both Ways	Technique
	Feigned Opening	Technique
RANK 3	Trade Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Culture	Skill
	Martial Arts [Ranged]	Skill
	Rank 1–3 Air Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Crimson Leaves Strike	Technique
	All Arts Are One	Technique
RANK 4	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Martial Arts [Unarmed]	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Rank 1–4 Kata	Tech. Grp.
	Bend with the Storm	Technique
	Regal Bearing	Technique
RANK 5	Artisan Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Culture	Skill
	Seafaring	Skill
	Rank 1–5 Earth Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Awe of Heaven	Technique
	Bravado	Technique
RANK 6	**Emerald Explorer (Mastery Ability, Action):** Once per scene as a Support action, you may make a **TN 1 Survival (Earth) check** targeting one character in the scene. If you succeed on the check, that character and an additional number of characters you choose equal to your bonus successes ignore all negative effects of terrain qualities until the end of the scene.	





Miya Herald School [Courtier]

Miya Heralds are the messengers of the Emperor. It is their duty to move throughout the Empire delivering Imperial edicts and messages accurately and succinctly. Miya Heralds travel across clan and other boundaries without question, and only a fool would delay them in their duties. While they are able to defend themselves as much as any samurai, they employ speed and evasion to ensure that their messages are delivered to those who must receive them. Miya Heralds speak with the words of the Emperor and the authority of an Imperial representative. Only the most influential or foolish samurai would openly gainsay a Miya Herald's word.

Rings: +1 Air, +1 Water

Starting Skills (choose five): +1 Command, +1 Composition, +1 Courtesy, +1 Fitness, +1 Seafaring, +1 Sentiment, +1 Survival

Honor: 50

Techniques Available: Kata (), Rituals (), Shūji ()

Starting Techniques:

- **Shūji (choose one):** Cadence, Honest Assessment
- **Shūji (choose one):** Shallow Waters, Weight of Duty

Voice of the Emperor (School Ability): Once per round, after a character at range 0–4 succeeds on an Attack or Scheme action check, you may cause them to receive strife equal to your school rank.

Starting Outfit: Traveling clothes, ceremonial clothes, wakizashi (short sword), yumi (bow) and quiver of arrows or tessen (war fan), calligraphy set, traveling pack, satchel of Imperial proclamations, personal chop, an attendant (see page 64 of the core rulebook) or Rokugani pony (see page 326 of the core rulebook).

	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Culture	Skill
	Fitness	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Rank 1 Water Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Feigned Opening	Technique
	Courtier's Resolve	Technique
RANK 2	Trade Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Culture	Skill
	Martial Arts [Melee]	Skill
	Rank 1–2 Air Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Ebb and Flow	Technique
	Tributaries of Trade	Technique
RANK 3	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Courtesy	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Rank 1–3 Earth Shuji	Tech. Grp.
	Awe of Heaven	Technique
	The Wind Blows Both Ways	Technique
RANK 4	Artisan Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Fitness	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Rank 1–4 Water Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Buoyant Arrival	Technique
	Pillar of Calm	Technique
RANK 5	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Culture	Skill
	Sentiment	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Rank 1–5 Void Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Sear the Wound	Technique
	The Immovable Hand of Peace	Technique
RANK 6	**Blessings of the Emperor (Mastery Ability, Action):** Once per scene as a Scheme action, you may make a **TN 4 Command (Air) check** targeting a number of characters in the scene up to your glory rank. If you succeed, until the end of the scene, the targets must forfeit honor equal to twice their honor rank and glory equal to twice their glory rank before choosing you as the target of an Attack action, and increase the TN of their Attack actions targeting you by 2. This effect persists until the end of the scene, or until you attack an affected character or their allies. +: Choose one ally per spent this way. The effects of this ability also apply to targets' attacks against the chosen allies.	

IMPARTIAL OBSERVERS

In addition to their duty of sharing Imperial proclamations, Miya Heralds also record and report their experiences with strict objectivity. They are intimately familiar with the Empire and keen observers of its goings-on. More than a few samurai in positions of minor power have attempted to deceive Miya Heralds or conceal activities. Congratulating themselves on their cleverness, they are later horrified to find that the Miya have dutifully reported exactly what transpired—including the attempts to deceive or obfuscate made by the hapless officials in question.

NEW TECHNIQUES INTRODUCED IN THIS BOOK

Most techniques found in the school curriculums here are detailed in Chapter 4 of the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying* Core Rulebook. New techniques, like **Awe of Heaven**, are indicated with bold type. These techniques can be found on page 248.



	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Composition	Skill
	Culture	Skill
	Government	Skill
	Rank 1 Air Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Civility Foremost	Technique
	Tea Ceremony	Technique
RANK 2	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Courtesy	Skill
	Martial Arts [Melee]	Skill
	Rank 1–2 Water Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Awe of Heaven	Technique
	Prey on the Weak	Technique
RANK 3	Artisan Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Commerce	Skill
	Courtesy	Skill
	Sentiment	Skill
	Rank 1–3 Fire Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Regal Bearing	Technique
	The Wind Blows Both Ways	Technique
RANK 4	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Aesthetics	Skill
	Command	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Rank 1–4 Fire Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Buoyant Arrival	Technique
	Wolf's Proposal	Technique
RANK 5	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Composition	Skill
	Culture	Skill
	Design	Skill
	Rank 1–5 Air Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Sear the Wound	Technique
	The Immovable Hand of Peace	Technique
RANK 6	**Majesty of the Throne (Mastery Ability, Action):** Once per scene, as a Scheme action, you may make a **Command (Water) check** targeting any number of characters at range 0–5 of you. The TN of this check is equal to the highest status rank among your targets. If you succeed, all targets suffer the Dazed and Disoriented conditions.	

Otomo Schemer School [Courtier]

Otomo Schemers are consummate politicians. They attend the various courts of the Empire, from the Imperial Court in Otosan Uchi to those of the Great Clans, and even smaller courts deemed worthwhile. They advance agendas across the spectrum of Imperial politics on behalf of the Emperor, the Imperial families, and other Imperial authorities. Successful Otomo Schemers are ruthless and manipulative, using their considerable political acumen to earn favors, cultivate allies, and destroy enemies. To the Otomo Schemer, the ends—preserving the power and authority of the Emperor and the Imperial authorities—almost *always* justify the means.

Rings: +1 Air, +1 Fire

Starting Skills (choose five): +1 Command, +1 Composition, +1 Courtesy, +1 Culture, +1 Design, +1 Government,+1 Sentiment

Honor: 45

Techniques Available: Kata (), Rituals (), Shūji ()

Starting Techniques:

- **Shūji (choose one):** Courtier's Resolve, Stirring the Embers
- **Shūji:** Slippery Maneuvers

Necessary Actions (School Ability): You never forfeit honor or glory in order to lie or deceive for the good of the Emperor and Empire (in your opinion). However, you must forfeit twice as much honor or glory to lie for your personal gain (again, in your opinion).

When a character stakes or forfeits an amount of honor or glory in order to act against your desires, you may force them to increase that amount by your school rank.

Starting Outfit: Ceremonial clothes, wakizashi (short sword), any one weapon of rarity 6 or lower, calligraphy set, traveling pack, a trustworthy attendant (see page 64 of the core rulebook).

	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Composition	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Tactics	Skill
	Rank 1 Water Invocations	Tech. Grp.
	◈ Heart of the Water Dragon	Technique
	Ancestry Unearthed	Technique
RANK 2	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Composition	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Rank 1–2 Air Invocations	Tech. Grp.
	◈ Ebb and Flow	Technique
	Symbol of Earth	Technique
RANK 3	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Sentiment	Skill
	Smithing	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Rank 1–3 Earth Invocations	Tech. Grp.
	◈ False Realm of the Fox Spirits	Technique
	Vapor of Nightmares	Technique
RANK 4	Artisan Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Sentiment	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Rank 1–4 Air Invocations	Tech. Grp.
	◈ Tomb of Jade	Technique
	A Samurai's Fate	Technique
RANK 5	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Composition	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Tactics	Skill
	Rank 1–5 Water Invocations	Tech. Grp.
	Sear the Wound	Technique
	The Soul's Blade	Technique
RANK 6	**Foreseen in the Stars (Mastery Ability):** Once per game session, you may spend 1 Void point to reveal that you have foreseen an event in the current scene. You may retroactively declare one or more preparations you have taken, subject to the GM's approval. If any preparations would require a skill check, such as the preparation of a ward, you make the check when you use this ability.	

Seppun Astrologer School [Shugenja, Artisan]

As the Palace Guard protect the Emperor and other Imperial authorities from physical threats, the Seppun Astrologers guard against supernatural and spiritual harm. To this end, their specialized training in astrology, practices of divination, and fortune-telling help to not only react to threats, but also anticipate and even preempt them. Beyond astrology and invocations of the elemental kami, they employ methods such as *kawaru* (the casting and discernment of patterns in coins, stones, etc.), the reading of omens, and even more esoteric practices. The Seppun Astrologers also work extensively with wards and similar measures to provide constant protection against magical intrusion. They work closely with the Palace Guard, coordinating their efforts and complementing one another's roles.

Rings: +1 Air, +1 Water

Starting Skills (choose three): +1 Composition, +1 Government, +1 Medicine, +1 Meditation, +1 Sentiment, +1 Theology

Honor: 40

Techniques Available: Invocations (), Rituals (), Shūji ()

Starting Techniques:

- **Invocation:** ◈ Bind the Shadow
- **Invocations (choose one):** Dominion of Suijin, Jade Strike
- **Rituals:** Divination, Commune with the Spirits, Threshold Barrier

Just as Predicted (School Ability): At the beginning of a game session or as a downtime activity, you may make a **TN 1 Theology check** using any ring. If you succeed, choose a number of kept dice up to your school rank to reserve. Until the end of the game session or the next downtime scene, when any character makes a skill check using the chosen ring, you may replace one or more kept dice with the same number of reserved dice of the same type.

Starting Outfit: Sanctified robes, concealed armor, wakizashi (short sword), bō (staff) or knife, calligraphy set, traveling pack, scroll satchel, divination kit.

SEPPUN INVOCATIONS

The Seppun Astrologer school teaches its students invocations by Alchemical names, for they combine a number of practices in their mission to protect the Emperor from all threats. (See ***Invocation Names and Traditions*** *on page 190 of the core rulebook.)*



Seppun Palace Guard School [Bushi]

The Seppun Palace Guard are the personal bodyguards of important Imperial family members and officials. The best of them are entrusted with the protection of the Emperor themself. Each Palace Guard is utterly devoted to the welfare of their charge; they will not hesitate to place themselves between their charge and danger, even at the cost of their life. To carry out their sacred task of protecting the Emperor, Seppun Palace Guard hone their skills until they are among the most accomplished warriors in the Empire and able to react instantly to any attack, no matter how sudden or unexpected. Palace Guard are supremely patient, trained to stand utterly motionless in their place of guard, yet remaining acutely aware of their surroundings and constantly ready to burst into action at the first hint of any threat.

Rings: +1 Earth, +1 Void

Starting Skills (choose five): +1 Fitness, +1 Martial Arts [Melee], +1 Martial Arts [Ranged], +1 Martial Arts [Unarmed], +1 Meditation, +1 Sentiment, +1 Tactics

Honor: 50

Techniques Available: Kata (⚔), Rituals (☸), Shūji (✍)

Starting Techniques:

- **Kata (choose one):** ◈ Iaijutsu Cut: Crossing Blade, ◈ Iaijutsu Cut: Rising Blade
- **Shūji (choose one):** Ancestry Unearthed, Honest Assessment

Speed of Heaven (School Ability): When you succeed on an Initiative check during a skirmish or duel, add bonus successes equal to your school rank.

Starting Outfit: Lacquered armor, sanctified robes, daishō (katana and wakizashi), naginata or bisentō, knife, traveling pack.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Government	Skill
	Sentiment	Skill
	Rank 1 Kata ⚔	Tech. Grp.
	◈ Crescent Moon Style ⚔	Technique
	Weight of Duty ✍	Technique
RANK 2	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Culture	Skill
	Games	Skill
	Rank 1–2 Kata ⚔	Tech. Grp.
	◈ Crimson Leaves Strike ⚔	Technique
	◈ Touchstone of Courage ✍	Technique
RANK 3	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Martial Arts [Melee]	Skill
	Command	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Rank 1–3 Kata ⚔	Tech. Grp.
	◈ Iron in the Mountains Style ⚔	Technique
	Threshold Barrier ☸	Technique
RANK 4	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Government	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Rank 1–4 Kata ⚔	Tech. Grp.
	◈ Soul Sunder ⚔	Technique
	A Samurai's Fate ✍	Technique
RANK 5	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Sentiment	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Rank 1–5 Kata ⚔	Tech. Grp.
	Rouse the Soul ✍	Technique
	The Immovable Hand of Peace ✍	Technique
RANK 6	**The Clouds Part (Mastery Ability):** Once per round, you may spend 1 Void point to add bonus successes equal to your honor rank to a successful Attack or Support action check.	

THE STEEL CHRYSANTHEMUM

Only once have the Seppun Palace Guard turned their steel on the Emperor. When Hantei XVI, the Steel Chrysanthemum, ordered the deaths of his own siblings, and then his mother, he was struck down by samurai who believed that the fate of the Empire hung in the balance. The Palace Guard in attendance either assisted in this regicide or chose not to intervene.

All of the Palace Guard involved then committed seppuku, recognizing that no matter how right their actions may have been for the greater good of the Empire, they had personally betrayed their ancient duty.





Fortunist Monk Order [Monk]

Fortunist monks revere and worship the Fortunes, a multitude of divine spirits ranging from the most powerful—Lady Sun and Lord Moon—to the Seven Great Fortunes who each embody an important aspect of humanity, to the myriad kami that exist in all things. This is a fundamentally outward-looking philosophy focused on understanding the surrounding world. These monks cannot see or hear the kami the way the shugenja of the samurai caste can, but they devote their lives to understanding and serving them. Although they lack access to the secret lore of the shugenja families, a monk who earns the favor of a Fortune may find that kami heed their prayers and requests, answering them with powerful elemental effects.

Rings: +1 Earth, +1 Water

Starting Skills (choose four): +1 Courtesy, +1 Culture, +1 Martial Arts [Unarmed], +1 Meditation, +1 Survival, +1 Theology

Honor: 40

Techniques Available: Kata (), Rituals (), Shūji ()

Starting Techniques:

- **Kata:** Open-Hand Style
- **Rituals:** Cleansing Rite, Threshold Barrier
- **Shūji (choose one):** Shallow Waters, Stirring the Embers

Blessing of the Fortunes (School Ability): You have gained the goodwill of the Fortune you serve, who grants you certain invocations. When you make a check to use an invocation you learned this way, add additional bonus successes equal to your school rank.

Select a Fortune to be the primary object of your veneration and choose one appropriate invocation (see the sidebar **The Fortunes and their Blessings**) for which you meet the rank prerequisite. You learn that invocation (without paying its XP cost).

Each time your school rank increases, you gain one additional invocation this way.

Starting Outfit: Sanctified robes, ceremonial clothes, bō (staff), traveling pack, scroll satchel.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Labor	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Rank 1 Earth Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Crescent Moon Style	Technique
	Commune with the Spirits	Technique
RANK 2	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Aesthetics	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Rank 1–2 Water Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	All Arts Are One	Technique
	Rushing Avalanche Style	Technique
RANK 3	Artisan Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Martial Arts [Unarmed]	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Rank 1–3 Kata	Tech. Grp.
	Regal Bearing	Technique
	Ebb and Flow	Technique
RANK 4	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Culture	Skill
	Fitness	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Rank 1–4 Air Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Buoyant Arrival	Technique
	Pillar of Calm	Technique
RANK 5	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Composition	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Performance	Skill
	Rank 1–5 Earth Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Rouse the Soul	Technique
	Soul Sunder	Technique
RANK 6	**Favor of the Fortunes (Mastery Ability):** Once per scene, you may importune one invocation without making the sacrifices usually required and without the usual TN increase. You use the Meditation skill in place of the skill check normally required to use the invocation (you must still use the ring required for the invocation).	

THE FORTUNES AND THEIR BLESSINGS

When creating a Fortunist Monk character, you should select a specific Fortune as the object of your character's veneration. The Seven Great Fortunes are listed below with some recommended appropriate invocations. These are only suggestions, and a monk might choose a lesser-known Fortune or local kami as the object of their worship, or simply take other invocations that represent their relationship to the Fortune.

Benten: *Call Upon the Wind, Ever-Changing Waves, Inari's Blessing, Path to Inner Peace, Stride the Waves*

Bishamon: *Armor of Earth, Biting Steel, Courage of Seven Thunders, Power of the Earth Dragon, Tetsubō of Earth*

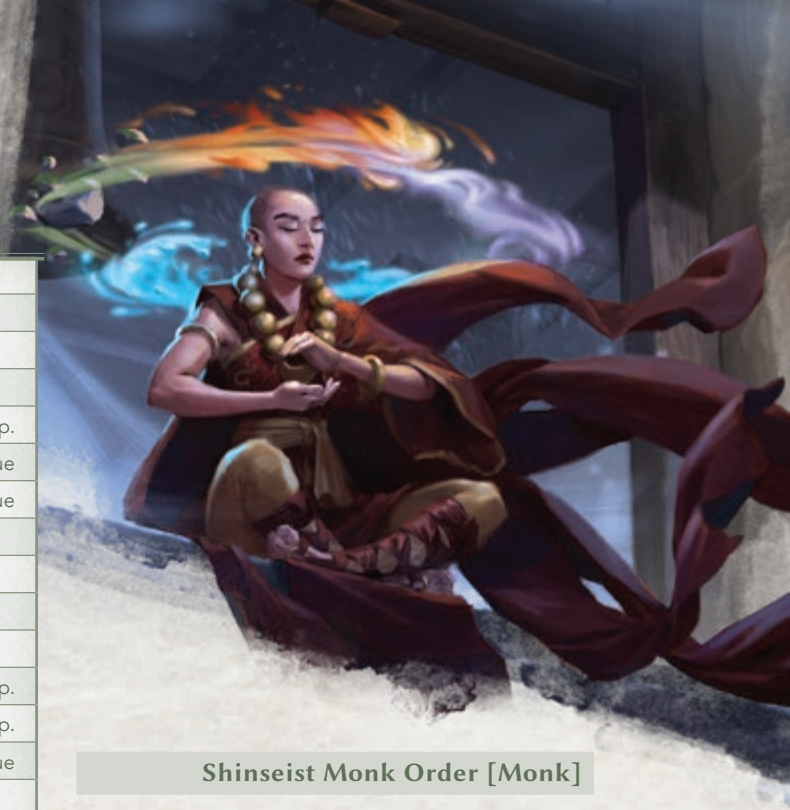
Daikoku: *Armor of Radiance, Caress of Earth, Grasp of Earth, Ravenous Swarms, Tomb of Jade*

Ebisu: *Bō of Water, Hands of the Tides, Inari's Blessing, Suijin's Embrace, Token of Memory*

Fukurokujin: *By the Light of the Lord Moon, Cloak of Night, Fukurokujin's Wit, Secrets on the Wind, Symbol of Earth*

Hotei: *Dominion of Suijin, Inari's Blessing, Matsu's Battlecry, Path to Inner Peace, Sympathetic Energies*

Jurōjin: *Dance of Seasons, Heart of the Water Dragon, Jurōjin's Balm, Path to Inner Peace, Power of the Earth Dragon*



MONKS

Monks are holy people who act as advisors, teachers and spiritual guardians. Many live their entire lives in shrines, temples, and monasteries. Many more, however, wander the Empire, learning about the world, teaching others what they have learned, offering insights and inspiration, and helping others. In this latter regard, most monks do not discriminate between samurai and commoners.

As a result, monks are generally viewed favorably by the common people, but sometimes with wariness by samurai, who view aiding and teaching commoners a possible trigger for eventual discontent among the peasantry. To support their ministrations, monks focus on observing and seeking to understand the world around them, and on methods of lecturing and teaching those to whom they are tending. Because they are generally ascetic in their approach to life, monks tend to be hardy and athletic so that they can withstand the rigors of a life of long, hard travel and privation. Their ultimate goal is to achieve that elusive state called Enlightenment.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Composition	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Rank 1 Kata	Tech. Grp.
	Riding the Clouds	Technique
	Earthen Fist	Technique
RANK 2	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Aesthetics	Skill
	Courtesy	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Rank 1–2 Earth Kihō	Tech. Grp.
	Rank 1–2 Rituals	Tech. Grp.
	All Arts Are One	Technique
RANK 3	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Games	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Rank 1–3 Kata	Tech. Grp.
	Grasp the Earth Dragon	Technique
	Way of the Willow	Technique
RANK 4	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Rank 1–4 Water Kihō	Tech. Grp.
	Pillar of Calm	Technique
	Way of the Falling Star	Technique
RANK 5	[Choose one skill group]	Skl. Grp.
	Martial Arts [Unarmed]	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Rank 1–5 Void Kihō	Tech. Grp.
	Rouse the Soul	Technique
	The Immovable Hand of Peace	Technique
RANK 6	**One with the Void (Mastery Ability):** Once per scene, you may use one kihō technique you do not know. You may use the Meditation skill in place of the skill check normally required to use the kihō (you must still use the ring required for the kihō).	

Shinseist Monk Order [Monk]

Shinseist monks are devotees of the teachings of Shinsei, "the Little Teacher," an enigmatic holy man who appeared to help guide the Kami and the people of Rokugan through the turbulent times at the dawn of the Empire. Shinseism is more inward looking than Fortunism, seeking Enlightenment from within. Shinsei taught that all came from the Void and all returns to the Void—that the divisions between the elements, and all things, are illusory. Monks who truly accept these truths can overcome the limitations of these illusions, utilizing the Elements to create seemingly supernatural effects. In truth, so a Shinseist Monk believes, to be one with the universe in this way is the most natural thing in the world.

Rings: +1 Earth, +1 Void

Starting Skills (choose four): +1 Aesthetics, +1 Composition, +1 Fitness, +1 Martial Arts [Unarmed], +1 Meditation, +1 Theology

Honor: 40

Techniques Available: Kata, Kihō, Rituals

Starting Techniques:

- **Kata:** Striking as Earth
- **Kihō (choose two):** Cleansing Spirit, Earth Needs No Eyes, Ki Protection

Embrace the Void (School Ability): When you spend a Void point to Seize the Moment (see page 36 of the core rulebook), you may also treat your ranks in the skill you are using as being equal to your school rank. If your ranks in the skill are equal to or higher than your school rank, or if you have 5 ranks in the skill, you may add one kept ■ set to an result instead.

Starting Outfit: Common clothes, bō (staff) or nunchaku (linked staff), knife, traveling pack.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Performance	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Rank 1 Air Invocations	Tech. Grp.
	Fanning the Flames	Technique
	All in Jest	Technique
RANK 2	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Rank 1–2 Air Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Dazzling Performance	Technique
	False Realm of the Fox Spirits	Technique
RANK 3	Artisan Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Culture	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Rank 1–3 Air Invocations	Tech. Grp.
	Crashing Wave Style	Technique
	Regal Bearing	Technique
RANK 4	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Meditation	Skill
	Sentiment	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Rank 1–4 Air Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Disappearing World Style	Technique
	Bravado	Technique
RANK 5	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Martial Arts [Unarmed]	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Rank 1–5 Air Invocations	Tech. Grp.
	Soul Sunder	Technique
	Buoyant Arrival	Technique
RANK 6	**Ninth Tail Ascension (Mastery Ability):** Your true form now has nine tails. While you are in your true form, your supernatural resistance and physical resistance each increase by 2, and when you make a skill check, you may alter the result of one die containing to a result containing . While you are in your true form, your Attack action checks gain the following new opportunity: : After resolving this action, if your target is Incapacitated or Unconscious, you devour or banish their body or soul, instantly killing them.	

Kitsune Impersonator Tradition [Courtier, Shugenja]

Kitsune are fox spirits from Chikushō-dō, the Realm of Animals. On rare occasions, one of these tricksters chooses to remain in the Realm of Mortals and live as a human. These kitsune may marry or fall in love with a human, and any descendants of such a union favor their spiritual heritage to a greater or lesser degree. While in human form, kitsune often appear radiantly beautiful or youthful and handsome. They generally can't avoid an attitude of good humor, and they tend to be inquisitive, even to a point considered rude and prying by most. More potentially revealing than their behavior are their tails, which sometimes reappear even in their illusory human guise. Kitsune gain additional tails throughout their lives, and the oldest and most powerful kitsune have nine tails.

Rings: +1 Air, +1 Fire

Starting Skills (choose three): +1 Courtesy, +1 Games, +1 Performance, +1 Martial Arts [Unarmed], +1 Survival, +1 Theology

Honor: 30

Techniques Available: Invocations (), Rituals (), Shūji ()

Disadvantage: False Identity (see page 247)

Starting Techniques:

- **Invocations:** Nature's Touch, Token of Memory
- **Ritual:** Commune with the Spirits

Fox Spirit (School Ability): Your true form is that of a large fox with up to eight tails if you are a full-blooded kitsune, or a human with certain vulpine traits if you possess human ancestry as well.

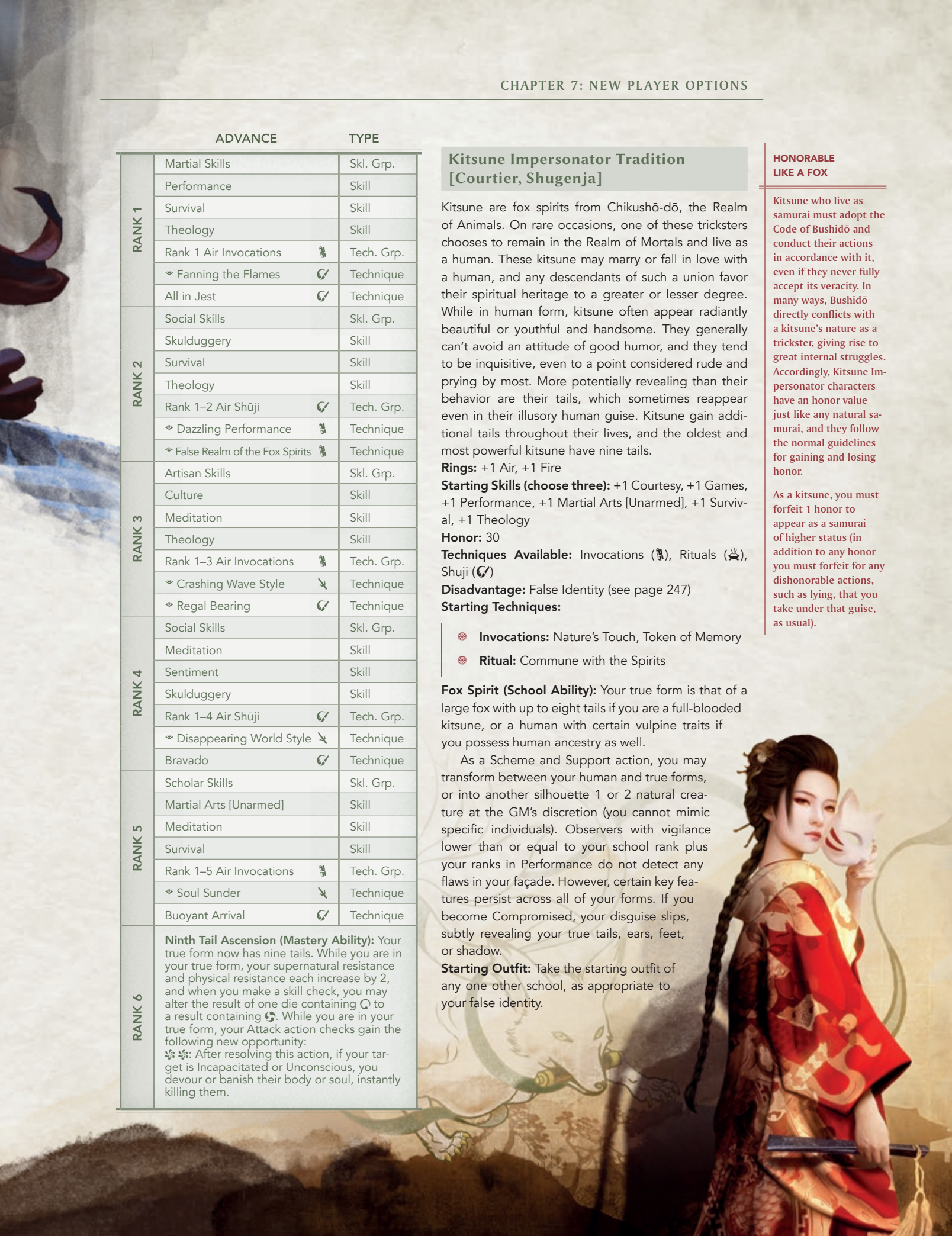
As a Scheme and Support action, you may transform between your human and true forms, or into another silhouette 1 or 2 natural creature at the GM's discretion (you cannot mimic specific individuals). Observers with vigilance lower than or equal to your school rank plus your ranks in Performance do not detect any flaws in your façade. However, certain key features persist across all of your forms. If you become Compromised, your disguise slips, subtly revealing your true tails, ears, feet, or shadow.

Starting Outfit: Take the starting outfit of any one other school, as appropriate to your false identity.

HONORABLE LIKE A FOX

Kitsune who live as samurai must adopt the Code of Bushidō and conduct their actions in accordance with it, even if they never fully accept its veracity. In many ways, Bushidō directly conflicts with a kitsune's nature as a trickster, giving rise to great internal struggles. Accordingly, Kitsune Impersonator characters have an honor value just like any natural samurai, and they follow the normal guidelines for gaining and losing honor.

As a kitsune, you must forfeit 1 honor to appear as a samurai of higher status (in addition to any honor you must forfeit for any dishonorable actions, such as lying, that you take under that guise, as usual).





Kolat Saboteur Conspiracy [Shinobi]

Kolat Saboteurs are known in the Empire's criminal underworld as some of the best assassins available for hire. In truth, these infiltrators and sleeper agents are devoted members of the Kolat, a secretive and subversive affiliation of sects devoted to ending Rokugani reverence of the Celestial Heavens, and establishing humanity as its own ruler. The earnings from these criminal activities provide a significant and largely untraceable income stream for the cell leader. Kolat Saboteurs pursue many different ends for different sects, but their overarching agenda is to bring about the "age of humanity." A saboteur's true purpose is to undertake missions for the Kolat, as instructed by their handler—another individual within their branch of the conspiracy whose identity may or may not be known to the saboteur, as many members of the sect live under a cover identity.

Rings: +1 Air, +1 Water

Starting Skills (choose five): +1 Commerce, +1 Fitness, +1 Martial Arts [Melee], +1 Martial Arts [Ranged], +1 Medicine, +1 Meditation, +1 Skulduggery

Honor: 20

Disadvantage: False Identity (see page 247)

Techniques Available: Kata (), Shūji ()

Starting Techniques:

- **Kata:** Veiled Menace Style
- **Ninjutsu:** Skulk
- **Shūji:** Cadence

Professional Saboteur (School Ability): Once per game session at the beginning of a scene, you may reveal that an NPC in that scene is the target of your current assignment. The GM then decides what your assignment entails, such as sabotaging the target's current activities, framing them for a crime, killing them, or even making sure they survive to play their part in a long and sinister plot. Until the end of the session, when you make a skill check targeting the chosen NPC, you may reroll a number of dice up to your school rank.

Starting Outfit: Ceremonial clothes, common clothes, traveling clothes, daishō (katana and wakizashi), knife, five shuriken, one vial of poison, traveling pack.

INFILTRATORS AND IMPOSTORS

The Kolat Saboteur Conspiracy and Kitsune Impersonator Tradition are not like other schools; in fact, they aren't formal samurai schools at all. Within the game rules, they function as any other school, but narratively they represent individuals from outside of ordinary samurai society.

It's not unusual for PCs in *L5R* to keep secrets from each other, and in that regard introducing a kitsune or Kolat PC into a group should not be disruptive. However, these characters are fundamentally different from "ordinary" samurai in unique ways, and may not be appropriate for all games. As always, GMs and players should collaborate to ensure that all PCs are suited to the campaign.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Performance	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Rank 1 Kata	Tech. Grp.
	Deadly Sting	Technique
	Shallow Waters	Technique
RANK 2	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Commerce	Skill
	Medicine	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Rank 1–2 Kata	Tech. Grp.
	Noxious Cloud	Technique
	Tributaries of Trade	Technique
RANK 3	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Composition	Skill
	Smithing	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Rank 1–3 Kata	Tech. Grp.
	Ebb and Flow	Technique
	Spin the Web	Technique
RANK 4	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Commerce	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Rank 1–4 Kata	Tech. Grp.
	Silencing Stroke	Technique
	Wolf's Proposal	Technique
RANK 5	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Commerce	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Rank 1–5 Kata	Tech. Grp.
	Rank 1–5 Ninjutsu	Tech. Grp.
	Buoyant Arrival	Technique
RANK 6	**Usher In the New Age (Mastery Ability):** As a downtime activity, you may overcome or bypass an NPC's guards or other security measures in order to gain access to them. Make a **Skulduggery (Air) check** targeting the NPC, with a TN equal to their highest conflict rank. If you succeed and the chosen NPC is a minion or an adversary the GM deems non-essential to the campaign plot, you accomplish your goal, such as assassinating the NPC or delivering an effective threat, in a method of your choosing (subject to the GM's approval). If the NPC is an important adversary, you confront the NPC alone, likely beginning a conflict scene. : Your efforts go completely unnoticed by anyone except possibly the target. : If you kill the target, their death appears to be the result of an accident or natural causes (although a skilled investigator may still uncover the truth).	

New Advantages

The premade advantages in this section provide additional options for players creating new characters. Characters can also gain additional advantages during play, as described on page 99 of the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* core rulebook.

SPECIFIC DISTINCTIONS

The new distinctions here follow the same format as those in **Chapter 2** of the core rulebook.

Animal Trainer (Water)

"Yuki. Sit!" She pointed to the ground, but the snow-white dog leapt around her instead.

The boys laughed.

"Yuki. Come here!" She hunched down onto her heels and spread her arms wide, but the dog instead tugged at a tuft of grass.

One of the larger boys picked up a rock and slowly walked toward the girl. "Looks like your runt won't help you."

"Yuki," The girl smiled as the dog growled. "Attack."

Types: Interpersonal, Mental

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Animal Trainer distinction:

- You are well versed in animal behaviors and effective techniques for training animals. You also know the telltale signs of hostility in both wild and domesticated animals.
- When performing a check for which your animal training expertise is a benefit (such as a Medicine [Water] check to diagnose a sick animal or a Survival [Water] check to teach an animal to respond to a command), you may reroll up to two dice.

Criminal Connections (Air)

Asumi slipped her sleeve down, baring her shoulder. They held their collective breaths when they saw the dragon tattoo snaking down her back. They all bowed, touching their heads to the floor.

"I apologize for establishing my credentials in this way, but can we end the posturing and talk business? Namely, the business of smuggling what I need into Crane territory."

Types: Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Criminal Connections distinction:

- You have cultivated useful allies and associates among Rokugan's criminal underworld. You can use these contacts to find information or obtain illicit goods and services.
- When performing a check that benefits from your criminal connections (such as a Skullduggery [Air] check to make contact with the underworld in an unfamiliar city or a Commerce [Air] check to sell stolen items at a higher price or without attracting attention), you may reroll up to two dice.

Expert Tracker (Air)

The wolves had rested there last night and had refused to abandon their wounded pack mate. *Even wolves have loyalty, a duty to clan.*

She heard growls ahead of her, but her heart did not quicken. "I am not hunting you, siblings. You can escape the hunters if you head toward the setting sun."

The growls receded into the woods as she saw one wolf limp away. She bowed, uttered a quick prayer, and slid her dagger back into its sheath.

Types: Mental, Physical

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Expert Tracker distinction:

- You can detect subtle signs of a person or animal's passage that others would overlook and can follow a trail across rivers, towns, and other obstacles that would cause most trackers to lose it.
- When performing a check for which your tracking expertise applies (such as a Fitness [Air] check to follow an animal without being noticed or a Survival [Air] check to follow someone's trail), you may reroll up to two dice.

Friend of the Brotherhood (Void)

The monk chanted as he sat with his alms bowl in front of him. Farmers and artisans offered a bit of rice here, a bit of fruit there. The merchants walked by without a glance.

"May I sit?"

The monk looked up. The young bushi held her own full bowl out for him to take. "I never liked lotus root. How foolish of me to purchase too much."

The monk smiled, took the bowl, and bowed his head. "You are hardly foolish, Satoko-kun, and you have never lied well."

Types: Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Friend of the Brotherhood distinction:

- You are known as a benefactor and ally of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, and others believe you to be a pious and generous person unless given evidence to the contrary.
- When performing a check for which you need to leverage your reputation for Shinseist piety (such as a Courtesy [Void] check to establish a spiritual connection with a monk or a Theology [Void] check to glean deeper wisdom from the Tao of Shinsei), you may reroll up to two dice.

Hero of [Village] (Fire)

The children gathered around Sofu as he sat on the rock in the village square. "Akio stood up straight and tall. He beat his bare chest and roared, 'I am no warrior, but I will make you all bleed.'"

A woman walking by glowered. "Tch. Sofu. Don't tell them that story. It's too bloody."

"Do you want me to lie? This is a true story. The children need to know how Akio saved our village."

Types: Fame, Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Hero of [Village] distinction:

- You have a heroic reputation for deeds you undertook that benefited a particular village. The residents of that village do their best to aid you with any request you make (and praise you at every opportunity).
- When performing a check for which your heroic reputation is a benefit (such as a Command [Fire] check to rally peasants to defend their village against bandits or a Performance [Fire] check to impress others with tales of your heroics), you may reroll up to two dice.

Kuge Lineage (Earth)

"You think this a privilege?" Uncle Daiki barked.

His nephew waved a dismissive hand. "Being an Otomo is a privilege. We don't have to dirty our hands dealing with heimin."

Uncle shook his head. "We have an additional responsibility. The clans have land and farmers to till that land, so they must be stewards of their people. We serve the Emperor and thus all of Rokugan itself. We are stewards of all of its people."

Types: Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Kuge Lineage distinction:

- By dint of your birth, you are a member of the kuge, Rokugan's nobility. Samurai of the buke caste must treat you with great respect
- When performing a check for which your hereditary authority is a benefit (such as a Command [Earth] check to silence a buke samurai or a Government [Earth] check to cite familiarity with the practices of the Imperial families), you may reroll up to two dice.

Spiritual Protector (Void)

The twins bowed in front of the polished stones stacked on top of the natural spring, hands pressed together in prayer.

"Miyū, please bless our family," they sang in unison.

An assassin crept through the trees. *Kill the children to unbalance the family. Grief*, the assassin thought, *is a powerful blade.*

His hand shook. His heart raced. He remembered his father, beheaded for his treachery. The memory changed to show his own head separated from his body. He ran.

Fear, Miyū thought, *is a stronger blade.*

Types: Spiritual

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Spiritual Protector distinction:

- For reasons known or unknown, a spirit watches over you and intercedes in subtle ways to protect you from harm. It may alert you to danger or interpose a mild obstacle to those who wish you harm.
- When performing a check for which your spiritual protector is a benefit (such as Fitness [Void] check to avoid a surprise attack through sheer instinct or a Survival [Void] check to notice an imminent hazard), you may reroll up to two dice.

Well Connected (Water)

"Remember to present a gift to your lord or lady on each solstice and equinox. One need not be sycophantic in this regard. The gift represents your relationship to them, your service, and your sword rising to their banner. But the gift also represents their relationship to

you, that good principles require them to guide you and defend you, as a parent does a child."

– Kōshi, *Words Regarding Family*

Types: Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Well Connected distinction:

- You have a number of influential connections among the courts and leadership of Rokugan, whose names you can subtly invoke to establish your own importance.
- When performing a check for which your connections are a benefit (such as a Courtesy [Water] check to impress someone at court or a Government [Water] check to identify a useful contact among the local aristocracy), you may reroll up to two dice.

SPECIFIC PASSIONS

These new passions follow the same format as those in **Chapter 2** of the core rulebook.

Bonsai (Air)

"No, don't clip that." He swatted her hand out of the way.

"But the branch is out of place."

"Nature does not think in terms of 'out of place.' It simply is."

"Then why do we spend all this time trimming these things? By our very action we go against nature."

"Ah, see, you think we are apart from nature. We do bonsai to remember that we are not."

Types: Mental

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Bonsai passion:

- You know a great deal about the art of bonsai, including the tools and techniques used in its practice. You can judge the quality of a bonsai tree and tell when a piece has been neglected.
- After performing a check to interact with a bonsai piece (such as an Aesthetics [Air] check to prune or maintain a tree or a Sentiment [Air] check to identify someone's emotional response to a bonsai work) you remove 3 strife.

City [choose one] (Water)

They walked through the gates of Toshi no Aida ni Kawa, and Kitsuki Moriko immediately embraced a man with loud shouts and laughs. Her companion shuddered. He looked about the street, muddy and crowded with horses, dogs, and people all intermingling.

Moriko returned, holding something white and soft wrapped in a cloth. "Here, try some."

"Tofu?"

"Cheese. Curdled milk from a goat." She smiled. "Isn't this city wonderful?"

"Yes. Lovely," he said as he struggled to suppress his gag reflex.

Types: Interpersonal, Mental

Effects: The following apply to a character with the City passion:

- You know a particular city extremely well and have extensive practical knowledge about it. You know as much about the city as any lifelong resident, including the popular locations, dangerous or disreputable areas, and open secrets.
- After performing a check to learn or share knowledge of the particular city (such as a Courtesy [Water] check to befriend a local resident or a Culture [Water] check to find an establishment offering a particular service), you remove 3 strife.

Gourmet (Water)

Near Higashi Chushin Mura, a farmer by the name of Daichi produces a sumptuous variety of *tsukemono*. His newer daikon comes with the simple flavors of salt and vinegar, but his older varieties of tsukemono have complex tastes, summoning memories of earth and the sea. The cucumbers have the deep, rich flavors of *shōyu*, for example. Generals make a point to purchase his pickled plums; their tartness provides an exhilarating spark to overcome sluggishness in the morning.

Types: Mental, Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Gourmet passion:

- You can identify regional variations in cuisine and know a great deal about techniques of food preparation. You can always identify the ingredients in a dish, including those that are potentially dangerous.
- After performing a check involving high-quality food (such as a Culture [Water] check to locate a place to dine in an unfamiliar city or a Labor [Water] check to prepare a fine meal), you remove 3 strife.

DŌSHIN

Commoners in the Empire must be policed, but they are far too numerous to be monitored closely by samurai. Dōshin, or "peasant enforcers," are heimin who have been given the duty of watching over other heimin and burakumin. Dōshin are responsible for anything from a single village to a city district—generally, areas with large populations of commoners or where samurai only rarely visit. They are permitted to carry certain types of primarily nonlethal weapons, but they are only legally able to employ them against their fellow commoners. Likewise, a dōshin's jurisdiction for investigating and punishing crimes only extends to other heimin and burakumin.

Dōshin normally report to yoriki, sparing a magistrate from having to get mired in the petty issues and crimes of the peasantry. Most dōshin have a second occupation, unless their area of jurisdiction is busy enough that it represents a full-time job.

Military History (Earth)

The samurai bowed his head. "I did not expect Matsu to strike so soon in the morning."

"You thought her lazy, undisciplined, unable to wake before a sunrise?" his sister said.

"No, but..." He shook his head. "Who would do such a thing?"

She looked at him with contempt while a scribe held out a pile of folding books in his arms. "Little brother, you should have known that we used the very same tactic against the Lion a generation ago."

Types: Mental

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Military History passion:

- You can quickly identify historical or traditional military ploys from memory and can almost always suggest an appropriate tactic for the situation at hand based on a similar historical situation.
- After performing a check related to your knowledge of military history (such as a Command [Earth] check to bolster troops' resolve with a story of a similar historical battle or a Tactics [Earth] check to prepare a defense based on the attacker's known strategies), you remove 3 strife.

Navigator (Fire)

The family records described her as a wandering ghost. Hunters would constantly find her dirty and disheveled, lost in the lands near Shiro Daidoji.

Her letters describe a different person. With a wolf's spirit, she had explored the plains, mountains, and rivers surrounding her family's lands unafraid. Far from being lost, she had communed with the earth and water. She had brought these skills to bear when she led her harriers to push back the armies of the Lion at Shiro Shiba.

Types: Mental

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Navigator passion:

- You can quickly make sense of even the most archaic, poor, or unfamiliar maps, and you always know which direction is north.
- After performing a check to navigate (such as a Seafaring [Fire] check to chart a formerly unknown route at sea or a Survival [Fire] check to extrapolate your location in the wilderness based on the stars), you remove 3 strife.

Researcher (Air)

Asako Akitoshi inhaled the scent of twine, ink, and paper.

"May I help you?" the bookbinder asked.

"I am looking for a book, written by Tendō."

"Phoenix samurai, you risk much coming to Ryoko Owari Toshi."

His eyes gleamed. "But I have been searching for this book for two years."

The bookbinder reached underneath the counter, not for her dagger, but for *The Work, the Water*. "It may not leave this shop."

Akitoshi immediately sat on a child's stool in the corner, the book in his lap, his eyes already far away.

Types: Mental

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Researcher passion:

- You can cite the most authoritative works on most topics from memory and are never at a loss for where to begin researching a matter.
- After performing a check to research a topic (such as a Culture [Air] check to locate a particular poem or a Medicine [Air] check to find all known records of a mysterious illness), you remove 3 strife.

Rock Gardening (Void)

Doji Kentarō allowed a tiny grin to sneak into his lips. He placed the stone—round, smooth, a comforting weight in his palm—gently in the middle of the rock garden. Though it stood out among the smaller, polished pebbles, it also belonged, a dark-gray shape amid the light-gray sea. *This stone is like me to my family.*

Types: Mental

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Rock Gardening passion:

- You know the proper methods of arranging a rock garden (*karesansui*) according to popular manuals on the topic, and you can explain the symbolism and significance of different arrangements and features.
- After performing a check related to rock gardening (such as an Aesthetics [Void] check to detect a hidden meaning in a rock garden's arrangement or a Meditation [Void] check to make sense of events while reflecting on a rock garden), you remove 3 strife.

New Disadvantages

The premade advantages in this section provide additional options to ground new characters in the world of Rokugan. Characters might also gain new disadvantages as the campaign story develops, as explained on page 99 of the core rulebook.

SPECIFIC ADVERSITIES

These adversities follow the same format as those in **Chapter 2** of the core rulebook.

Adopted Peasant (Fire)

Even though she sat with the rest of her adopted family, she had never felt so invisible.

"This is why we sweep the shrine of dirt. Any foreign intrusion violates its sanctity," her brother said.

Takako bowed her head ever so slightly. "Yes, but priests also sprinkle salt in the corners. So a foreign intrusion can sometimes strengthen its purity."

Her brother tensed up. The rest of her family refused to look at her. This transgression will not be forgotten.

Types: Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Adopted Peasant adversity:

- Although adopted by a samurai family, you were born a peasant. Other samurai who know this fact are likely to look down upon you and may use this fact against you socially.
- When you make a check to deal authoritatively or collegially with a samurai who knows of your peasant birth (such as a Command [Fire] check to give an order to a subordinate or a Courtesy [Fire] check to impugn another's honor), you must choose and reroll two dice showing ◌ or ⟳ results. After resolving the check, if you failed, you regain 1 Void point.

Allergy [choose one] (Air)

"Damnable flowers!"

The soldiers found the field beautiful, the bright colors taking their minds off the battle ahead, but as for the general, he sneezed instead. "I should order them to cut down the blooms."

His second knelt. "If that is your wish, though morale is high, my lord."

The general sighed. "No, let them enjoy...these accursed things."

Types: Physical

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Allergy adversity:

- Choose a common natural substance. You have a strong allergy to it, and exposure causes severe discomfort or even a life-threatening reaction.
- When you make a check that exposes you to the source of your allergy (such as a Fitness [Air] check to run through a swarm of bees or a Courtesy [Air] check to sample a dish containing your allergen without offending your host), you must choose and reroll two dice showing ◌ or ⟳ results. After resolving the check, if you failed, you regain 1 Void point.

Cursed Lineage (Void)

There are many reasons for the end of the —— family name. The shame alone for the assassination of the Emperor placed a dark mark on the ——. Misfortune, however, followed the —— at every turn. Offerings at the family graves rotted instantly. The ink on their contracts refused to dry. Any sake they stored turned to vinegar. To escape their fate, they scratched their names from every record. And thus, the short reign of the —— family ended and vanished into obscurity.

Types: Interpersonal, Spiritual

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Cursed Lineage adversity:

- Your family carries a curse. Decide with the GM how this curse manifests.
- When making a check that does or could invoke the curse (such as a Culture [Void] check to understand your family history or a Theology [Void] check to seek your ancestors' blessing), you must choose and reroll two dice showing ◌ or ⟳ results. After resolving the check, if you failed, you regain 1 Void point.

CURSES

The curses that could afflict a samurai family are nearly limitless, and the specifics are much more a matter of drama, story, and mysticism rather than rules. Curses are often couched in opaque or metaphorical terms, and a family might never truly understand the nature of their curse. The following are simply a few examples to inspire players.

Members of a family might be cursed...

...to die of old age, and never in battle.

...to be forgotten.

...to never know peace.

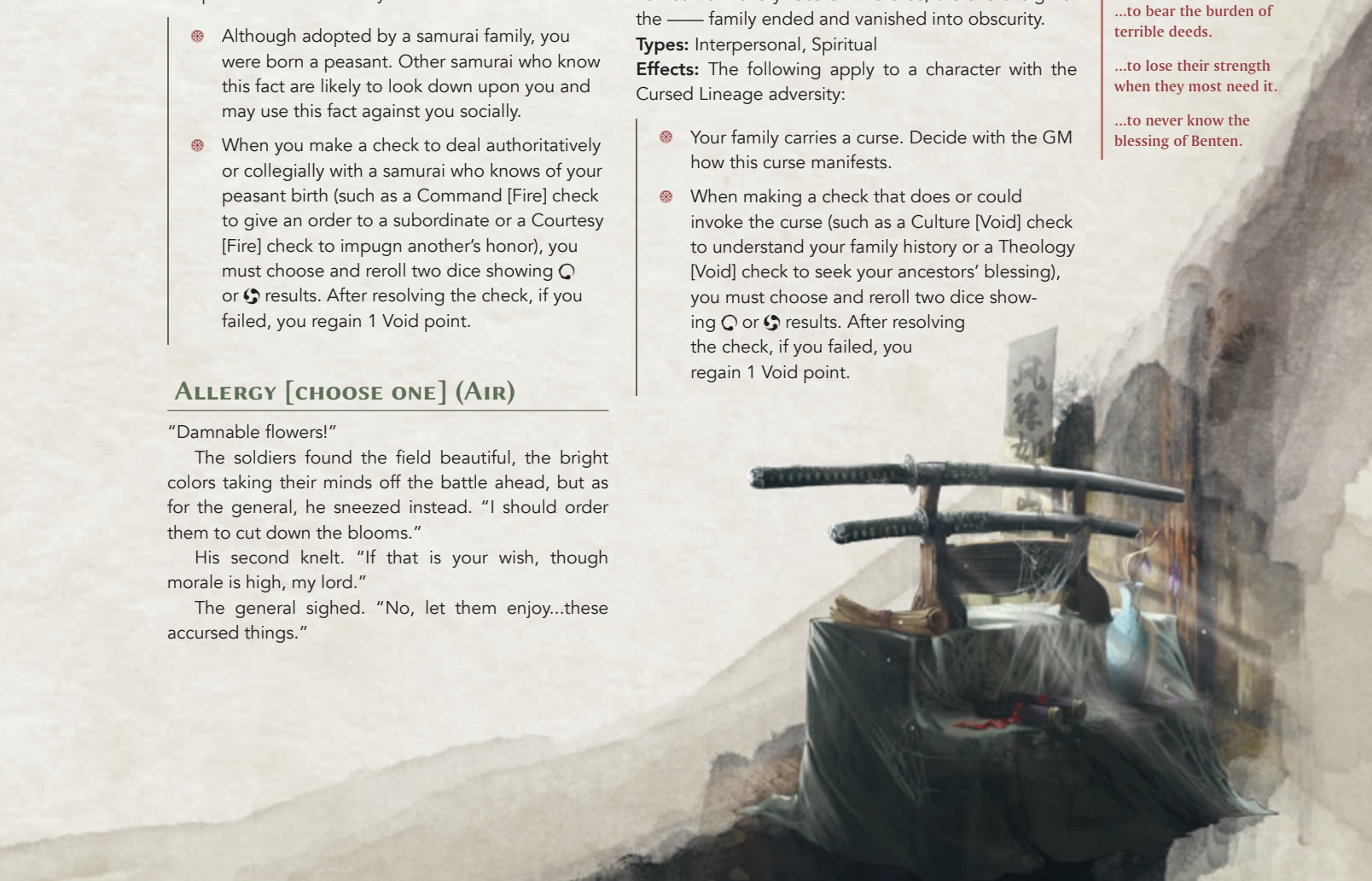
...to never fulfill their greatest duty.

...to feel the madness of Lord Moon.

...to bear the burden of terrible deeds.

...to lose their strength when they most need it.

...to never know the blessing of Benten.



Despised in [City] (Water)

"We cannot go to Toshi no Meiyo Gisei."

"What? Shinji, it's merely two days from here," Ichirō said.

The handsome man shook his head, but a grin escaped his lips. "No, no. I...caused a bit of trouble there. Let's say a woman was involved. Then a man. Then a jealous wife. Next a jealous husband. And lastly, the magistrate."

Ichirō threw his sword down into the dirt. "Damn it, Shinji. At this rate, we will have to sleep in the dirt."

Types: Fame, Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Despised in [City] adversity:

- You are infamous among the residents of a particular city (chosen with the GM). People within this city resist cooperating with you and may actively hinder your activities within the city.
- When performing a check to gain assistance or cooperation from a resident of the city that despises you (such as a Courtesy [Water] check to learn the latest sake house rumors or a Commerce [Water] check to purchase goods within the city), you must choose and reroll two dice showing ☾ or ☯ results. After resolving the check, if you failed, you regain 1 Void point.

Hunted by Chikushō-dō (Earth)

Kazuya drew his father's bow, but his thin, smooth hands shook, the arrow tip wobbling—unsure, unfocused. He thought of his father's hands: strong, thick, and calloused from war. He thought of his father's body, blood pooling in the snow.

He heard the boar grunt, but to him, it screamed for his blood. *If we both die here, there will be no one to lead the family.*

Kazuya saw the eyes of the boar reflecting the fading torchlight as it charged.

Types: Spiritual

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Hunted by Chikushō-dō adversity:

- Animals dislike you and show it in a variety of ways. Dogs bark in your presence, cats hiss, and wild animals flee from you or become aggressive.
- When performing a check to interact with an animal (such as a Survival [Earth] check to calm a frightened horse or a Fitness [Earth] check to go unnoticed by a hungry wolf), you must choose and reroll two dice showing ☾ or ☯ results. After resolving the check, if you failed, you regain 1 Void point.

Skepticism (Void)

A wise leader trusts their people. The farmer, after all, knows how to till and replenish the soil. It is his duty. A sailor understands her ocean. Even a beggar has a place in society, to teach us humility. To think existence has no point, to question one's place in the world, assumes a lack of trust in the natural order of things.

– Oi no Yama, Kodaido

Types: Mental, Spiritual

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Skepticism adversity:

- You do not believe in the divinity of the Kami, the existence of spirits, or the veracity of the Celestial Order. If discovered, this constitutes grave blasphemy and might even be a crime against the Emperor.
- When you make a check that relies on the existence of the Spirit Realms (such as a Medicine [Void] check to diagnose a malady of the soul or a Theology [Void] check to detect the presence of a kami), you must choose and reroll two dice showing ☾ or ☯ results. After resolving the check, if you failed, you regain 1 Void point.

SPECIFIC ANXIETIES

These additional anxieties follow the same format as those in **Chapter 2** of the core rulebook.

Accustomed to Luxury (Earth)

Architect Kaiu Ken'ichi refused to follow the family tradition to live and sleep on the construction site of his first building. "I will sleep in this castle on a futon, in fineries, and by the fire. Why should I spend a week frozen on a scratchy straw mat?"

Without this connection to his own work, he failed to notice the loose stone that fell and crushed him.

His mother, Tomoko, used that stone as his grave marker.

Types: Mental

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Accustomed to Luxury anxiety:

- You live a life of luxury and chafe at the idea of abiding the accommodations of your lessers or sleeping in the wilderness.

- After performing a check that requires you to remain in unacceptable accommodations for an extended period (such as a Survival [Earth] check to set up a campsite or a Commerce [Earth] check to make arrangements to stay at a rural inn), you receive 3 strife. If this is the first time this has occurred this scene, gain 1 Void point.

Claustrophobia (Water)

"We can escape through here!" Her companion pointed down the narrow, crowded, suffocating alleyway. Her heart beat against her chest. Her vision refused to focus on their escape.

"Go on ahead. I will fend them off."

"You are outnumbered twelve to one!"

I understand swords, she thought. *I understand blood and death.*

Her companion slid his way through the alleyway as their pursuers rounded the corner.

I hope I will live long enough to understand my fear.

Types: Mental

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Claustrophobia anxiety:

- You are intensely afraid of being enclosed in a small space or a space without an easy exit. You avoid entering such places if at all possible, and you feel anxious and distracted while in such a place.
- After making a check that requires to you enter an enclosed space (such as a Fitness [Water] check to crawl through a narrow passage or a Survival [Water] check to investigate a cave), you receive 3 strife. If this is the first time this has occurred this scene, gain 1 Void point.

False Identity (Air)

"Why did you write your name with these characters?" the scribe said.

The woman covered her mouth to hide her nervous smile. "Yes, sorry. My mother always said the family never had any skill with calligraphy."

The scribe frowned and blinked. "Wasn't she a famous calligrapher?"

"Oh? Of course! I was being modest. Ha ha." She snatched the scroll away from the scribe. "Never mind. I don't need the family records, Master Goichi."

"It's Giichi."

Types: Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the False Identity anxiety:

- You have an elaborate false identity that you have maintained over a long period of time. Many of the people you interact with regularly know you by this identity, and you may even have a family that does not know the truth.
- After performing a check to maintain your false identity (such as a Courtesy [Air] check to lie about your past or a Skulduggery [Air] check to surreptitiously hide evidence of the truth), you receive 3 strife. If this is the first time this has occurred this scene, gain 1 Void point.

Loathing for Peasants (Water)

The lord had ordered the villages moved out of sight of his castle. He detested the ugly, thatched roofs. Soon the villages starved, and the taxes dwindled.

The lord refused to eat any food handled by a peasant, so he hired attendants of noble lineage to feed him. His coffers shrank from paying their stipends.

Eventually, the lord died without even a single bu in his possession. He left the world poorer than any bonge and more forgotten than any hinin.

Types: Interpersonal, Mental

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Peasant Loathing anxiety:

- You find peasants to be repugnant, and even being around them makes your skin crawl. You do your best to avoid interacting with peasants, and your disgust is difficult to hide.

FAKING IT TO MAKE IT

Characters with the False Identity disadvantage often maintain a long-term deception as a member of a samurai school.

At the GM's discretion, a character in this situation who reaches rank 2 in their actual school may spend 2 XP to learn the basics of their false school's regimen through direct exposure. If they do, the character gains the capacity to use the school ability of their false school once per game session as if they were rank 1 in that school.

A character can only ever benefit from one false school in this manner.



- After performing a check that requires you to interact with peasants (such as a Culture [Water] check to observe the customs of farmers or a Courtesy [Water] check to question a village leader), you receive 3 strife. If this is the first time this has occurred this scene, gain 1 Void point.



Loneliness (Void)

A stalk of barley,
Plucked by a starving farmer,
Quickly forgotten.

Types: Interpersonal, Mental
Effects: The following apply to a character with the Loneliness anxiety:

- You derive energy and pleasure from social interactions, and being alone makes you uncomfortable or morose. You look for excuses to avoid being alone and find it difficult to turn down any social engagement.
- After performing a check that requires you to be alone (such as a Composition [Void] check to write a letter declining an invitation to the theater or a Meditation [Void] check to spend a prolonged time in dedicated introspection), you receive 3 strife. If this is the first time this has occurred this scene, gain 1 Void point.

New Techniques

The new techniques here can be selected by a character who meets the prerequisites, just like the techniques included in the *Legend of the Five Rings Role-playing Game* core rulebook.

Air Shūji

Spin the Web (Kolat) Rank 3

To advance their agenda, the Kolat must have eyes and ears—and hands—everywhere. Just as each Kolat conspirator receives direction from a superior, so each extends their reach through recruits of their own.

Activation: Once per game session, during a narrative scene or as a downtime activity, you may make a **TN 2 Skulduggery (Air) check** to recruit an NPC to the Kolat conspiracy.
Effects: If you succeed, you recruit a minor or previously unknown NPC (at the GM's discretion) as a Kolat asset. Record them under your Relationships. From now on, once per game session you may call on one of your assets whom you can reasonably contact. The NPC can aid you during a single scene, doing their best to perform tasks you assign them, or they can conduct a single downtime activity. If a profile is required, use an appropriate NPC of the GM's choice.

New Opportunities

Air : If you succeed, choose one skill. The NPC has a number of ranks in that skill equal to your school rank and can perform checks with that skill to assist you.

Void Shūji

Awe of Heaven (Imperial) Rank 4

With but a word or glance, a samurai of the Imperial families can invoke the power of the Chrysanthemum Throne.

Activation: Once per scene, as an Attack and Scheme action, you may make a **Command (Void) check** targeting any number of characters in the scene. The TN of the check is equal to the highest status rank among your targets.
Effects: If you succeed, each target suffers the Silenced condition.

Additional Titles

Titles, as described on page 305 of the core rulebook, represent an important narrative event for a character. As a result of the new duties imposed by a title, a character might study skills and techniques outside of their school, represented by the title's advancement table. A character who completes a title gains the listed title ability.

Advisor

Advisors serve daimyō, Emerald Magistrates, generals, and other notables with their minds and their words, giving them guidance, ideas, and counsel as requested. A great leader must have access to far more information than any one person can reasonably know, and therefore they employ various specialists and experts who keep them up to speed on dozens of vital topics. As a result, many military strategies, legal precedents, and trade deals are penned by advisors in the name of the one they serve, and these people wield great power as a result.

Assigned By: Daimyō, Emerald Magistrates, military leaders, high-ranking courtiers, and other individuals of import can appoint Advisors, and do so at their discretion.

Status Award: +10 (to a minimum of 40)

XP to Completion: 36

Skilled Attendant (Title Ability): When you provide assistance on a Scholar skill check, the character you are assisting may also roll ⬠ equal to your ranks in that skill instead of rolling ⬠ equal to their own ranks in that skill.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
TITLE	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Commerce	Skill
	Courtesy	Skill
	Design	Skill
	◈ Fanning the Flames	Technique
	◈ Feigned Opening	Technique
	◈ Stonewall Tactics	Technique

Clan Magistrate

Clan magistrates are similar to Emerald Magistrates but have a jurisdiction confined to the lands and holdings of their parent clan. More specialized (and lower-ranking) types of clan magistrates, called regional or municipal magistrates, have jurisdictions that are further restricted to a specific area or a particular town or city. Most crimes in the Empire are investigated by clan magistrates, although they often work with Emerald Magistrates operating in their clan's territory. This is particularly true in cases of serious crimes with Empire-wide implications, such as treason or use of illegal magic. Having a clan magistrate work with Emerald Magistrates conducting an investigation in their territory allows a clan's leadership to ensure that their interests are represented and to keep tabs on what the Emerald Magistrates may be up to in their lands.

Clan magistrates generally patrol their jurisdictions on a regular basis, inspecting travelers' papers to ensure they are in proper order. They also oversee the collection of taxes, including designated levies on the production of food and other commodities by commoners and tariffs on goods sold or traded by merchants.

Several clans maintain specialized groups of clan magistrates, such as the Asako Inquisitors of the Phoenix, the Kuroiban ("Black Watch") of the Scorpion, and the Kuni Purifiers of the Crab. Each of these groups deals primarily with illegal and blasphemous magics and incursions into the Empire by the Shadowlands.

Assigned By: Clan champions, daimyō, and other leaders within a clan may appoint magistrates to enforce the law within the clan's territories and among its vassals.

Status Award: +10 (to a minimum of 45)

XP to Completion: 30

Justice of the Champion (Title Ability): When you make a Command or Courtesy check targeting a member of your clan, you may spend ✵ as follows:

✵+: The target receives or removes (your choice) strife equal to ✵ spent this way.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
TITLE	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Fitness	Skill
	Martial Arts [Melee]	Skill
	◈ Coiling Serpent Style	Technique
	◈ Prey on the Weak	Technique
	◈ Truth Burns through Lies	Technique

RETAINERS

Many titles themselves include the authority to bestow other titles. For instance, daimyō can appoint advisors and gunsō, while clan magistrates and Emerald Magistrates choose their yoriki. PCs who receive a title from another PC are called retainers.

A player character in a position to award titles can have a number of retainers up to their status rank. (There is no limit to the number of titles an NPC can award.)

Daimyō

Daimyō are provincial rulers who oversee the day-to-day rule of vast swaths of the Emerald Empire. They are responsible for collecting taxes and, to expedite this process, for the general infrastructure of their realm and wellbeing of their citizens. Ultimately, however, it is rare for even the clan champion or Emperor to question a particular daimyō so long as their taxes are paid in full, on time. Thus, they are afforded a great deal of leeway in the rule of their domains. Some seek to better the lives of the commoners and samurai they oversee; others callously exploit these people to advance their personal ambitions.

Assigned By: Clan champions, the Emperor, and other high-ranking officials in the Imperial hierarchy can appoint Daimyō, and do so when a previous Daimyō retires or passes away, or when they see fit to change the ruler of a province.

Status Award: +20 (to a minimum of 55)

XP to Complete: 36

Voice of Authority (Title Ability): Reduce the TN of Command checks you make targeting your vassals by 1.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
TITLE	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Culture	Skill
	Government	Skill
	Tactics	Skill
	Courtier's Resolve	Technique
	Shallow Waters	Technique
	Stirring the Embers	Technique

Gunsō

While the vast majority of soldiers in a Rokugani army are ashigaru and conscripts, many samurai are called to military service, either in the armies of their own clan or in the Imperial Legions. When samurai do take to the field, they often these serve in leadership positions. While each lord's forces have their own structure and character, common titles are used throughout Rokugan to indicate similar levels of authority. When a lord gathers a large force for battle, they may nominate one or more gunsō to command the kashira who lead individual units.

A gunsō is responsible for all aspects of battle readiness for the troops under their command, including the troops' training, discipline, and equipment. When battle begins, gunsō direct their troops in accordance with commands from their superiors, meaning they have to maintain good awareness not only of their own unit but also of the broader battle unfolding around them. Perhaps most importantly, gunsō are expected to display conspicuous leadership during battle, leading their troops from the front and rallying their soldiers, keeping them in the fight even as losses mount and their morale begins to waver.

Assigned By: A daimyō may assign a samurai a rank within their military forces, and samurai serving within the military rank structure may be promoted by a superior officer.

Status Award: +5 (to a minimum of 20)

XP to Completion: 24

Lead from the Front (Title Ability): When you defeat an opponent in a clash, your cohort removes panic equal to the opponent's glory rank.

Once per round when you succeed at an Attack action check during a mass battle, your cohort removes panic equal to half of the attrition you inflict.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
TITLE	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Government	Skill
	Rank 1–4 Kata	Tech. Grp.
	Rallying Cry	Technique
	Stirring the Embers	Technique
	Touchstone of Courage	Technique



Monastic Acolyte

Most monks in Rokugan belong to either the Brotherhood of Shinsei or the Order of Ten Thousand Fortunes, having entered the order while young and making it their life's work. There is, however, a separate category of monks who are retired samurai. While they still generally enter one of these two orders, these individuals have spent their life in service to their clan as a bushi, courtier, artisan, or shugenja. Even samurai who spend time as a sensei, instructing and guiding a younger generation of samurai, eventually reach a point at which their age begins to make such service difficult. Many then put aside their clan affiliation, shave their head, and become a monk, living out their remaining days in quiet introspection and contemplation.

More militant samurai may prefer to meet a glorious end in battle, but there is no shame in retiring to become a monk. Without the intensive training young monks receive, such retired samurai seldom perfect the kihō commonly associated with monks. Nevertheless, such individuals are greatly revered, being sought by younger samurai for their guidance and wisdom.

Assigned By: Most monasteries accept anyone as a monk, as long as they take the required vows and shave their head. A samurai who becomes a monk leaves their old life behind, including both their clan and family identity, and takes a new name.

Status Award: Your status becomes 25.

XP to Completion: 24

Enlightened (Title Ability): When you are selected as a target of an action requiring a skill check, you may spend a Void point to increase or decrease the TN of the check by an amount up to your ranks in Meditation (to a minimum of 1).

TITLE	ADVANCE	TYPE
	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Aesthetics	Skill
	Composition	Skill.
	◆ Cleansing Spirit	Technique
	◆ Ki Protection	Technique
	◆ Still the Elements	Technique

Priest

When the term "priest" is used to describe a samurai, it is natural to think of shugenja, those rare and powerful individuals who are able to invoke the elemental kami directly and cause them to manifest potent effects in the Realm of Mortals. Most priests, however, are not shugenja. Rather, they are sincere in their devotion to and reverence for the kami, but their communion with the spirits is subtler. By no means does this diminish them or their importance, however. For most spiritual purposes, samurai seek the guidance and assistance of these priests. Such individuals offer prayers and devotions to the kami—and may, from time to time, even be rewarded with minor blessings by the spirits. They also conduct many of the rituals important to samurai and commoners alike, such as blessing fields and sanctifying ritual spaces, performing weddings and funerals, and crafting charms and talismans blessed by their favored deities.

Assigned By: Most priests train for their role from a young age. In rare cases, an individual who has shown a particular devotion to or affinity for the kami may take up duties at a shrine or temple, where the head priest assigns their title.

Status Award: +10 (to a minimum of 40)

XP to Completion: 24

Servant of the Kami (Title Ability): You may importune invocations even if you do not know any invocations.

When you importune an invocation, do not increase the TN by 1 (although you still increase the TN if the rank of the invocation is higher than your school rank).

TITLE	ADVANCE	TYPE
	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Composition	Skill
	Culture	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	◆ Rank 1–5 Rituals	Tech. Grp.
	◆ Civility Foremost	Technique
	◆ Rouse the Soul	Technique

FORTUNE TELLERS

Astrologers, diviners, and similar "fortune tellers" are specific types of priests who seek to gain insight into events to come. Astrologers seek to foretell future events by studying the movements of celestial objects, including exotic and portentous things like meteors and comets. Diviners employ other, more "down to earth" methods, such as casting kawaru: coins, sticks, stones, or similar objects that are thrown, the resulting pattern revealing something of coming events.

Fortune tellers rarely learn specifics about the future. Rather, they gain glimpses and impressions, which must be interpreted. This makes fortune telling a potentially useful but decidedly imprecise art.

Spy

Being designated a spy is problematic for many samurai. By definition, a spy uses deception and subterfuge to gather information, and they may even employ more sinister methods, such as blackmail or extortion, to achieve assigned objectives. Such nefarious and underhanded methods naturally fly in the face of the Bushidō tenets of Sincerity, Righteousness, and Honor. Indeed, some particularly honorable samurai will commit seppuku before acceding to their lord's wish for them to act as a spy, no matter how great the need. That said, many samurai have fewer qualms and accept the harm to their honor if that is the duty assigned to them by their superiors.

In reality, most spies do little more than simply observe and report on events and happenings of interest to their superiors. Some, however, go on to develop more sophisticated methods and techniques, including using stealth and disguises to enter places that are otherwise off-limits to them, and communicating crucial and sensitive information by means of complex ciphers and codes.

Assigned By: Daimyō, clan champions, magistrates, and clandestine organizations surreptitiously task a samurai with acting as a spy. Unlike other titles, of course, this is never announced publicly.

Status Award: –5

XP to Completion: 24

Ears Everywhere (Title Ability): Once per game session as a Scheme and Support action or as a downtime activity targeting a particular location or social group, you may gather and sift through the current rumors for credible intelligence by making a **TN 4 Sentiment (Air) check**. If you succeed, you discover the latest happenings relevant to your current location or social group, as well as which current rumors are false. If discerning someone's qualities is your social objective in an intrigue scene, you score momentum points equal to your Air Ring plus your bonus successes.

: You plant a rumor that spreads among the characters in the scene or the targeted group (although they don't necessarily believe it).

	ADVANCE	TYPE
TITLE	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Government	Skill
	Sentiment	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Rank 1–5 Air Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	Shallow Waters	Technique
	Skulk	Technique

Yōjimbō

Yōjimbō are dedicated bodyguards, appointed to protect a specific individual at any cost. While any samurai should willingly lay down their life to protect their lord, a yōjimbō is their master's last line of defense. They are also likely to serve as their proxy in duels of honor, and have the grim task of acting as their lord's second should they need to commit seppuku, decapitating them to end their suffering. Most follow their master even into death, should they not have the chance to die in their service.

Assigned By: Daimyō, Emerald Magistrates, military leaders, high-ranking courtiers, and other individuals of import can appoint yōjimbō, and do so at their discretion.

Status Award: +10 (to a minimum of 40)

XP to Complete: 36

No Sacrifice Too Great (Title Ability): One character is assigned as your charge; this character can order you to treat someone else as your charge instead until they lift this order. If your charge is at range 0–2, you may spend 1 Void point to replace your charge as the target of an Attack action. If you suffer a critical strike as a result of this Attack action, gain 1 Void point.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
TITLE	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Government	Skill
	Medicine	Skill
	Sentiment	Skill
	Iaijutsu Cut: Crossing Blade	Technique
	Iaijutsu Cut: Rising Blade	Technique
	Warrior's Resolve	Technique

Yoriki

Because magistrates are relatively few in number, they make extensive use of a variety of retainers and assistants. These include yoriki: samurai who function as permanent deputies. Generally, a magistrate may have one or two yoriki, but if needed, and their status permits it, they may have as many as a dozen. Yoriki have some of the same duties as their patron magistrate, such as investigating crimes, gathering testimony (and, in the case of yoriki working with Kitsuki Investigators, physical evidence), overseeing the torture of offenders to obtain confessions, and applying punishments. Their authority to engage in these tasks is usually limited with respect to offenders who are samurai, however, and is more broadly applicable to commoners. Yoriki report regularly to their patron magistrate.

Yoriki are normally drawn from the clan of the magistrate they serve, although some Emerald Magistrates employ rōnin as yoriki to remove any appearance of bias. Particularly competent yoriki may be considered "magistrates in training."

Assigned By: Magistrates of all kinds directly appoint their own yoriki as their needs require.
Status Award: +5 (to a minimum of 35)
XP to Completion: 24
Take Them Alive (Title Ability): When you make an Attack action using a weapon with the Snaring quality, you may alter any number of kept dice containing ◌ or ◌ to results set to ◌.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
TITLE	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Government	Skill
	Martial Arts [Melee]	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	◈ Rank 1–3 Kata	Tech. Grp.
	◈ Fanning the Flames	Technique
	◈ Shallow Waters	Technique



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