



Legend of the Five Rings

ROLEPLAYING



COURTS OF STONE

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO
CASTLES AND POLITICS IN ROKUGAN



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As the servant arrived, Doji Miyuki tucked the fan away, watching the wind rustle the short pines beyond the balcony, one of the rustic features that made the remote Kyūden Asako so famous. The servant bowed hastily, knees striking the floor with wincing force. She was a frail thing with bamboo-shoot limbs and a lean face, some farmer's eldest daughter. Even with Miyuki's back turned, she knew the servant girl was shaking like an autumn leaf. Miyuki's yōjimbō, Kakita crest on his shoulders and a blade tucked into his obi, doubtlessly made the servant nervous, even though his sword was tied shut with a peace knot.

"Y-you asked for me?" the servant managed.

"I am told you make tea for Shika Hisatsugu." Miyuki watched a bluebird perch on a branch below. "What is his favorite, the one he wants when he is wistful for home?"

"I...am not certain what you mean, my lady. He does usually ask for Silver Needle, if that helps?"

Silver Needle. An aromatic tea from Dragon lands, famous for its balanced flavor. Any supply here would have been imported at a high tariff. Miyuki tapped her chin. One could discern much from what tea a guest preferred, and what they felt comfortable requesting of their host.

"He has good taste," Miyuki said.

As if signaled, her yōjimbō scooped a handful of coins from his pouch without bothering to count them, and placed them on the railing in a neat stack. The servant gasped, the paltry sum more money than she'd ever seen at once.

It wasn't payment, of course. That would be disgraceful. This was merely something Miyuki had chosen to leave behind.

"That is all," Miyuki said, turning and finally showing the woman her smile. "You have my gratitude."

As the servant grabbed the coins, she cast Miyuki a grateful look before bowing steeply and departing on swift feet.

Servants were the easiest allies to make. They had no ambition. They wanted only to eat.

Miyuki laid a small pine stick on the railing and asked, "What next?"

"Garden," the yōjimbō replied.

Miyuki nodded and led the way.

The fan found its way back to her hands as she walked. It wasn't the finest she'd ever seen; its blue silk was faded, as was the crest of the Hiramichi family, a songbird in its cage. However, it had a sentimental value, and it smelled of sandalwood.

Miyuki spotted Kitsuki Daisaku as they entered the warbler garden. She tucked the fan into her obi as the governor approached.

"Good afternoon, Doji-san." He bowed, but no lower than propriety required. "I had hoped to run into you."

She returned the bow. "Likewise, Kitsuki-sama. I have something for you." Miyuki produced two envelopes, offering them with both hands. Daisaku peeked inside, and his eyebrows rose fractionally.

"These are invitations to the Aioi Theater!" he said. "I thought those invitations impossible to get!"

"They were a gift," Miyuki replied. "But I think you should have them."

Daisaku regained his composure. "I could never deprive you. The Aioi is the most splendid theater in the Asako lands. Please reconsider."

As expected. This was the game, after all.

"But I have another engagement, and I would hate to see them wasted."

"You must go, if they were given to you!" he insisted. "Your wit and beauty would be missed."

A knowing smile crept onto her face. "Well then, you should take Ayako-chan. Her beauty and jokes far surpass mine."

A blush painted his face as he slipped the envelopes into his kimono. "You...know about that, do you?"

"It is a *Bunraku*," she said. A puppet show. "Her favorite. Compliment the dragon's lifelike movement in Act 2, and she will be impressed. Order onigiri," She made a serious face. "But no sake."

This time, his bow was far steeper. "I am in your debt, Doji-san."

She smiled warmly. *I know.*

Outside the teahouse, Miyuki saw a plum blossom inside the cavity of the nearby stone lantern. Everything had gone smoothly, then.

The small table inside had already been prepared with cups and small trays, an iron kettle stewing on hot coals in the corner. As she waited, she pulled the fan from her obi again, turning it in her hand. The weathered thing didn't go with any of her outfits. But then, it wasn't hers.

She lifted it to her nose and inhaled. Sandalwood. His scent.

And his twinkling dark eyes, the sunlit silver of his bleached hair, the gold in his voice, the way he smiled when he thought no one was looking.

She lowered the fan into her lap. A breeze stirred the chimes hanging from the ceiling, echoes filling the room like an ancient bell.

She could still back out. There was time. If he ever learned that she'd been the one to arrange this, that she had cast his future, he would never trust her again.

He would find out someday. Three things were never long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth. Could she proceed knowing this?

She let out a low sigh. It was too late now. She could only move forward.

The opposite door slid aside. Shika Hisatsugu, honored Matchmaker of the Deer Clan, entered and bowed deeply, his bare feet peeking from beneath his flowing robes. "Fortunes' greetings, Doji-san," he said, words thick with a rustic dialect.

She returned the bow as Hisatsugu's yōjimbō entered a side room and closed the door. She could see his shadow against the paper wall. One of the clan's speardancers, no doubt. "Fortunes' greetings, Shika-san," she replied.

He worked a string of prayer beads from his sleeve as he sat, rotating them in his hand. He was a shugenja, she reminded herself, one who walked in the world of spirits. All of the Deer's celebrated *nakōdo* were.

She poured hot water into the teakettle and watched his face as the familiar scent arose. Silver Needle. He hid his surprise well, but perhaps he wondered how she knew.

They chatted for a time. He talked about his homeland, offered to show her the most beautiful waterfall within a fifty-mile radius. She offered to introduce his nephew to a Kakita artisan looking for an apprentice. Back and forth. The dance.

And then, "Forgive me, Doji-san, but you had wanted to discuss the matter of Asahi-san's match, yes?"

Hiramichi no Daidoji Asahi. The man who listened to her problems, who danced in the moonlight for her amusement. Who always smelled of sandalwood...

Her mouth twitched, and she inwardly scolded herself for showing that much. She'd heard things about Deer Clan matchmakers. There would be no concealing her thoughts, if the rumors were to be believed.

"I have recommendations," she replied carefully. "You see, he is a good friend of mine. And as such I am empowered by his lord to suggest fortuitous matches on his behalf."

The Shika's face didn't stir as she produced the scroll containing her proposal. She inhaled to slow the rapid thundering of her heart. "I believe this would make him happiest, and would be a most fortuitous match."

"He is a...good friend...you say."

She froze, hand suspended above the scroll. He knew. Somehow, as if her heart and mind were a tapestry woven together, and all he had to do was look.

He leaned forward. "Doji-san, I must speak frankly. I have known others who, similarly entrusted, attempted to arrange matches for themselves. Certainly you would not be among them."

The Kakita's shadow behind the nearby screen moved. Hisatsugu paled. A yōjimbō was also sworn to protect their charge's honor, even unto death.

"I've seen deer in the morning," she murmured. "They cross the stream so sure-footedly. But I've seen them stumble, too."

Hisatsugu stood. "That's quite enough. We've been watching for some time, Doji-san. I had hoped you would not try this. It seems I was mistaken." As he spoke, the shadow of his own bodyguard started to stir.

"Wait." Miyuki unfurled the scroll beneath Hisatsugu's gaze. "At least give it a look."

The proposed match was Ide Riku, a merchant lord with several holdings along the Crane-Crab border, including an inn that was his greatest pride. The proposal cited their compatible star signs and temperaments, and it included written testimony saying that he and Asahi had known one another since childhood. There is great mutual fondness between them, the statement candidly attested. Miyuki's name did not appear anywhere.

She lowered her gaze to the fan in her lap. Already, the sandalwood scent was fading.

"They would be happy together," she whispered.

Hisatsugu furrowed his brow. Uniting the houses of two merchant lords also meant unifying their holdings. Together, they would be a significant economic power in a region otherwise dominated by the Yasuki. The proposal named a war-orphaned Doji child to be adopted by the pair, ensuring that these unified holdings would be inherited by the Crane.

He hesitated, and she could guess the thoughts that ran through his mind. Agreeing meant bolstering Crane coffers. But then, wouldn't that tilt some wealth from the Yasuki, and thus bring some balance to the region? And naturally, as the ones officiating the match, some of that would be given to the Shika in thanks.

Besides, Riku and Asahi love each other.

The thought stung her heart. She faltered. That was the moment Hisatsugu turned his eyes upon her.

Nothing could be hidden from a Shika Matchmaker. He knew that her stormy heart matched his own, that she was as torn as he. But she did it for him, if also for the Crane.

He rolled up the scroll. "I see no reason to protest such a match."

Doji Miyuki hid her wistful smile with her seated bow. *Oh well*, she thought. *At least Asahi will be happy. And at least he'll owe me a favor.*

RUMORS AND
LEGENDS

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

As with all tales, 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.

Welcome to the Courts

Throughout Rokugan rise the clans' bastions of power: a myriad collection of palaces, keeps, and castles. From sprawling coastline estates, to tall fortresses, Rokugani castles are mustering points for a clan's might. However, this power is not purely military in nature. Hosting influential courts and powerful daimyō, they serve as beacons of Imperial culture and displays of political might. Yet of all castles, only a handful can boast the honored title of kyūden, or "palace," a castle large and prestigious enough to have been acknowledged by the Son of Heaven, the Emperor of Rokugan. Only a kyūden may host an Imperial Winter Court, and within its walls, the course of an Empire may be decided.

WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

Courts of Stone is a guide to the Empire's castles, keeps, and courts, where the political arena is a battlefield, courtiers are its warriors, and secrets are their weapons. In this book, players will discover the secrets of the Empire's largest seats of political power. Players will also find a wealth of information on the Crane Clan, the Left Hand of the Emperor and warden of Rokugan's high culture. With this book's new techniques, artifacts, weapons, apparel, and cultural information, player characters can navigate the treacherous halls of power and rise to prominence.

Courts of Stone is divided into three chapters:

CHAPTER 1

Imperial Strongholds guides readers through a few of Rokugan's greatest castles, offering examples of centers of military might, and bastions of political power. It covers the Crane, a clan that thrives amid the political arenas of the Empire, examining its lands and the traditions of its families. Lastly, the chapter covers the political arena, and the role espionage plays in the struggles between the Great Clans.

CHAPTER 2

Wars of Words and Shadows introduces the warriors and courtiers of the Deer Minor Clan, along with rules for creating player characters hailing from the Deer Clan's ranks. It also includes other new player character options, such as new schools and techniques, rhetorical shūji, stealthy ninjutsu, and courtly rituals. Further, it provides new advantages, disadvantages, and gear options for those who seek a subtler path to victory.

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 adopt 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.

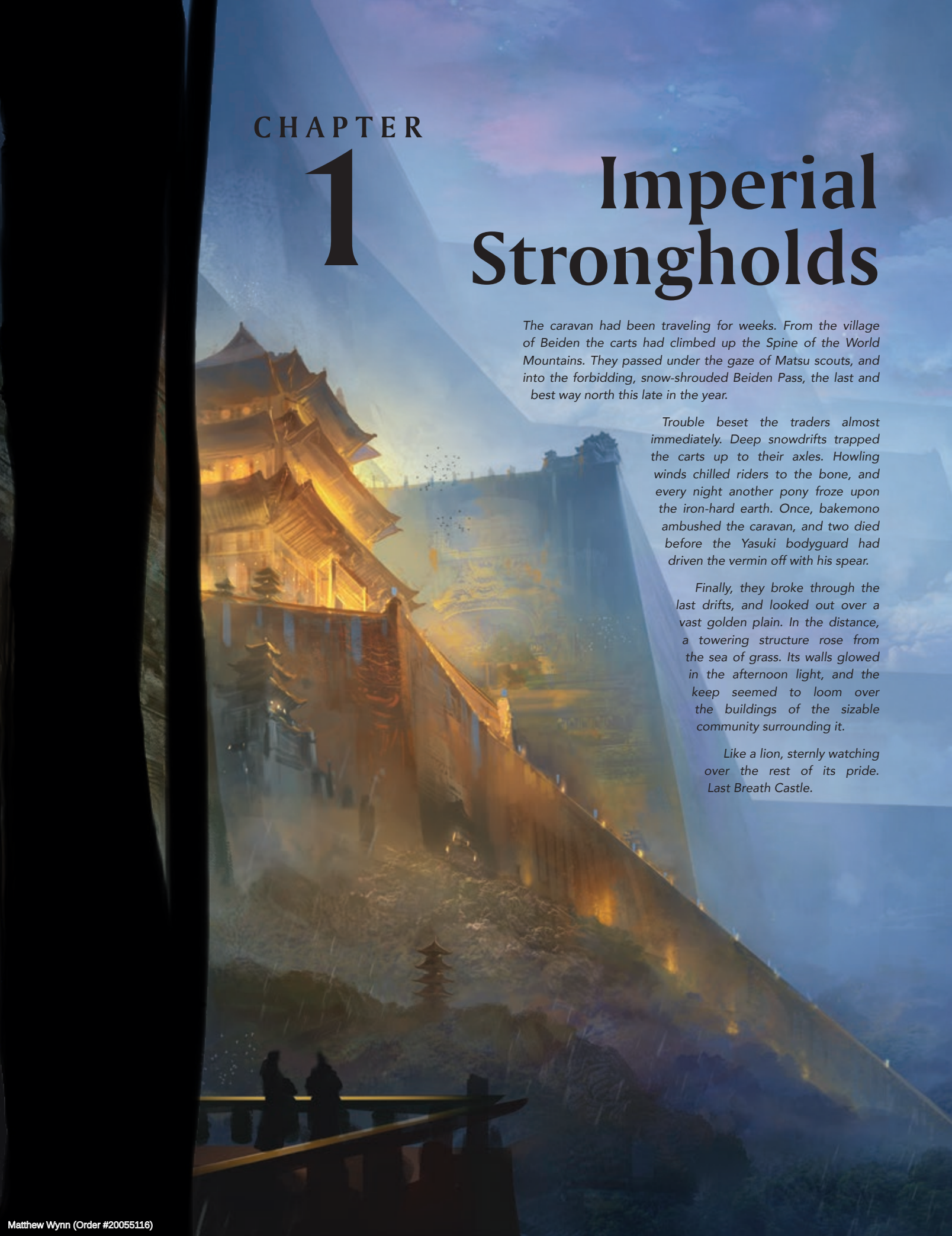
Hook The hook provides the context for starting the adventure and introduces the important NPCs. We also provide a suggested way to involve the PCs in events, which you can tailor to fit your campaign.

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.

Climax Finally we offer a likely climax for the adventure, whether that is a decisive scene 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 3

Games of Discourse offers game masters advice for running games set in the courts of the Empire, especially games that are heavy in political intrigue and espionage. New ways to spend ♫ in intrigue-heavy games are offered here. A focus on the Bushidō tenet of Courtesy is also provided, along with GM guidance on how to engage the players in assembling courts of memorable characters for intrigue-driven campaigns. Finally, new rules for governing and resolving bonds allow for deeper relationships in *Legend of the Five Rings* games.



CHAPTER

1

Imperial Strongholds

The caravan had been traveling for weeks. From the village of Beiden the carts had climbed up the Spine of the World Mountains. They passed under the gaze of Matsu scouts, and into the forbidding, snow-shrouded Beiden Pass, the last and best way north this late in the year.

Trouble beset the traders almost immediately. Deep snowdrifts trapped the carts up to their axles. Howling winds chilled riders to the bone, and every night another pony froze upon the iron-hard earth. Once, bakemono ambushed the caravan, and two died before the Yasuki bodyguard had driven the vermin off with his spear.

Finally, they broke through the last drifts, and looked out over a vast golden plain. In the distance, a towering structure rose from the sea of grass. Its walls glowed in the afternoon light, and the keep seemed to loom over the buildings of the sizable community surrounding it.

*Like a lion, sternly watching over the rest of its pride.
Last Breath Castle.*

Castles in Rokugan

Rokugan is rich with castles, the crowning architectural achievements of a grand history of military innovation. In theory, the castles of Rokugan have changed little throughout the Empire's history, for all castles derive from the Imperial Palace, constructed under the tutelage of the Kami according to the principles of the Celestial Heavens.

In truth, a millennium of development and the unique priorities of the clans have resulted in countless divergences from the fundamental and, it is said, perfect design of Otosan Uchi. In addition, the influence of the early keeps of pre-Kami Rokugan can still be felt, particularly among the Phoenix Clan. From those early palisades, those venturesome stockades on hilltops, castles have grown into enduring military installations and hubs of urban and political life.

THE ROLE OF CASTLES

It can be said that a castle's purpose is to serve as a daimyō's residence. In truth, it is indeed a secure place for a daimyō to live in and for housing their family and most trusted retainers. The castle also functions as a safe place in which a daimyō may do their work, overseeing the activity of their clan, their family, or their domain.

A castle is also a display of power and wealth. It speaks for itself: castle construction and maintenance requires the will, the resources, and the ability to train, organize, and mobilize thousands of laborers and craftspeople, to source materials, and to pay and protect those workers. It also requires the resources to likewise train, organize, and assemble a garrison of soldiers to protect the castle even in peacetime. By virtue of a castle's very existence, its daimyō announces their wealth and power to any who would challenge them.

The builder of a castle chooses its location based on its strategic value. Castles commonly overlook important trade routes or rivers or defend vital resources. Many are built in naturally defensible positions such as atop hills or bluffs. Daimyō build these castles in order to strengthen their control in that area. At other times, daimyō build castles in hostile territory, in order to subdue an uprising, to legitimize a claim on the land, or to otherwise exert control over the unruly area. The Crane Clan built Shiro Kandai, the castle complex at Jukami Mura, to bring law to the town's disorderly port.

BUILDING A CASTLE

A castle is far more than a single building, or even a single building surrounded by a wall. Most castles contain multiple buildings (and sometimes multiple fortified

walls) surrounding a towering keep that dominates the rest of the construction. Therefore, planning and erecting a castle complex is a massive undertaking involving incredible amounts of organization and labor. Castles may take years to construct and decades to finally complete. Castles can also expand organically. As time passes and a daimyō or family grows in power, they add improvements to the castle.

The earliest castles were fortified houses, simple hilltop forts that relied upon the terrain for defense. Innovators gradually improved these structures by surrounding the central keep, called the *tenshukaku*, with palisades, then with solid walls, then with towers. With each defensive innovation came a clever method to circumvent it, including the use of spies, fire, and siege. Naturally, castles toughened in turn. Daimyō built new castles of stone, they hired ditch diggers and soldiers, and they sought more defensible terrain. Most importantly, they invested in brilliant construction techniques, which define Rokugan's castles to this day.

COMMON FEATURES OF ROKUGANI CASTLES

Rokugan's castles share many common structural features. Among the most striking are gently sloping gables, which are ubiquitous in snowy areas. Gables also provide crucial protection from sun and rain, and they are often richly decorated with meticulous tiling. At the bases of Rokugani castles are *ishigaki*, or stone walls. These sloping foundations are similarly practical, providing a number of structural, administrative, and defensive benefits. *Ishigaki* are stunning geometric structures, built laboriously without mortar, such that every stone fits into the wall perfectly and harmoniously with every other.

The *tenshukaku* represents the castle complex's heart, the daimyō's home. Sprawled out beneath it, the castle grounds are no less impressive. Each castle has its own culture, buildings, and its own marvels: some have gardens, others have hot spring baths, and while most have *dōjō*, some may have elaborate schools protecting the deepest mysteries of a clan or family's traditions. Things the daimyō wishes to protect and keep close at hand are housed within the castle grounds. The entire complex is surrounded and defended by strong outer walls.

Daimyō choose high elevations for their castle estates whenever possible, and the highest point within the castle grounds is consistently where they choose to site their *tenshukaku*. The *tenshukaku* is thus the tallest building for miles, commonly boasting more than three stories. It rises high above the surrounding area, allowing anyone approaching it to spot it hours before arriving at its walls.

Mountain Castles and Flatland Castles

Building a castle in the mountains maximizes the political and strategic benefits of height. The mountain castle has high ground, long sight lines, and an impressive and intimidating facade. Further, construction on or near a mountain gives builders a ready source of stone, which saves a great deal of hard labor.

Plains offer their own unique benefits to a castle builder. Flatland castles can more easily cover a large surface area. In the absence of ridges and hills, they can utilize the natural defenses of rivers and lakes. Even on the plains, flatland castles typically have a close connection to water, as it is easier to dig wells there. Some coastal Crane castles are built with complex wet moat systems, which allow for control over the flow of water on castle grounds while avoiding unsanitary and offensive standing water. Residents can even use the moats as canals, silently floating small boats through secret channels under the walls.

Castles as Fortresses

Although a castle must be defensible, the majority of castles in Rokugan also serve nonmilitary purposes; for many, warfare is a distant afterthought to diplomacy, economic functions, and display of status. Each castle has a different daimyō, all of whom have different goals. For instance, many Lion Clan castles exist to train and garrison soldiers. The Crane, on the other hand, seek primarily to host distinguished guests, make a good impression on visitors, and tend to their gardens. The safety afforded by a castle makes it a good place in which to prepare the next generation of samurai, so many castles house schools and dōjō. As wealth declines farther away from the cities, so do the ambitions of some daimyō; many are content simply with protecting their family and storing enough food to get through the winter.

A castle is also a staging area for regional military power; a place where the daimyō can mobilize forces for offensive strikes, and a safe redoubt against counterattack. A castle implies to onlookers that its daimyō has deep pockets, the ability to marshal thousands of laborers, and the will to protect the surrounding population. It sends a warning to would-be troublemakers, speaking without words like a hand on a hilt: *this is mine, and I will protect it.*

PASSIVE DEFENSES

Choosing where to build a castle can be a complicated process, with many factors and opinions influencing the decision. Prevailing wisdom is rarely ignored: build a castle in a naturally defensible location. The majority of Rokugan's castles rest on hills, cliffs, ridges, by rivers, or on shorelines. These terrain features can drastically limit the directions from which attacking armies can reach a castle. However, the clans must protect their territory wherever it is, and many of the most important trade routes are, by their nature, in accessible and easily passable terrain. For a variety of political and practical reasons, castles can be found on flat plains or at the intersections of wide roads.

The most important step in castle construction is the process of creating a *nawabari*. After selecting a location and before breaking ground, the castle architect creates a "stretched-rope" plan, a *nawabari*, by placing stakes in the





usually built in the notoriously difficult Crane style with curved ishigaki, offering the best of both worlds.

Climbing the ishigaki is a favorite tactic of samurai invaders. Some ishigaki are gentle of slope, and some offer easy handholds. One solution commonly built into Rokugan's castles is drop chutes. From these holes, castle residents can drop heavy stones, boiling water, hot sand, or even whole logs onto climbers. Some drop chutes are permanently open, and some close with hinged doors, but all are too narrow for invaders to climb through. As an additional deterrent, many castles feature rows of intimidating spikes angled downward at the tops of walls and bases of windows.

earth and stretching rope between them. The architect measures and arranges the entire castle grounds, down to the last wall. The castle's very soul is born during this first vital step; its fate is half-determined, making the creation of a nawabari the castle architect's highest and most prestigious art. If a castle is majestic, or cunning, or intimidating, or mysterious, it is so in large part thanks to a good nawabari.

Castle design is a cunning art even on flat, dry land. Rokugan's castles deceive by design, confusing and disorienting outsiders from the first glimpse. Naturally, the best-kept secrets are the most valuable. Rarely will anyone know every last secret built into a castle. The daimyō may request the construction of confidential storage or a private entrance, but castle architects, construction workers, high-ranking staff, and even audacious visitors have been known to build mysteries into castle walls: hidden staircases and secret rooms that even the daimyō doesn't know about.

WALLS AND FOUNDATIONS

Castle buildings are built atop the *ishigaki*, the massive stone platforms that serve as foundations. Ishigaki can also be built as the bottom portion of a castle wall, so that half or more of the wall is a thick stone slope, with a more traditional vertical wall built above. Ishigaki demarcate the various areas of the castle grounds; the low areas between ishigaki are common footpaths.

Ishigaki are unmortared, allowing them to safely drain away rainwater from the foundation and to shake with the earth rather than crack during an earthquake. Steeper ishigaki are harder to build but also harder to scale. A shallower angle provides a much steadier base but a relatively untroubled climb. New castles are

GATEHOUSES

Cunning has refined the typical Rokugani gatehouse complex into its current form. The first gate in a gatehouse opens into an enclosed square called a *masugata*, which has the second, primary gate on its left or right wall. These two gates work together in stages, like locks on a canal, forcing anyone entering or exiting to spend time locked in the *masugata*. The *masugata* serves as a well-protected staging area for any departing expedition, and its angled gates force an invading army to rapidly change direction, which challenges the army's orderliness and quickly deadens a charge. Many castles employ several such gatehouses. The castles of the Lion Clan, for example, have as many as twenty *masugata* on their grounds.

OTHER DEFENSIVE STRUCTURES

In addition to the *tenshukaku*, a castle may have dozens of smaller towers, most of them military structures. Guard towers stocked with arrows and spears and staffed day and night with *ashigaru* or *jizamurai*, may pepper the castle grounds. Higher towers may serve special purposes: astronomy, falconry, or archery, for example.

Moats are a feature of some Rokugani castles. Most castle moats are placed beyond a complex's outermost wall or between interior walls, and they seldom directly surround the keep. The majority of Rokugani moats are dry. Their primary purpose is to slow attackers and restrict their movement. Additionally, a fall into a dry moat, onto its hard base of stone or earth, can easily kill or injure an enemy soldier. Wet moats are rare, utilizing diverted streams or rivers, or the aid of water kami, to keep the water moving and relatively clean.

Only the most desperate or poor daimyō would contemplate a moat of filthy, stagnant water. Moats require significant resources, but the results can be worthwhile for an influential daimyō. Wet moats are almost impenetrable by infantry, especially armored soldiers. Swimming is loud and slow, making unarmored soldiers sitting ducks on the water's surface. At the bed of a wet moat lies a layer of sticky mud, which ensnares and drowns unprepared invaders in heavy armor.

Castle towers and other castle buildings typically appear (from the outside) to have an odd number of stories, usually one, three, or five. However, only rarely does the frame match the facade. What appears to be five stories on the outside may conceal four to seven stories within. In addition, a castle may have secret

floors at the top or bottom—a hidden cellar built into the *ishigaki* or a concealed attic tucked up under a hollow roof. Secret floors can complicate an invasion, allowing a castle's inhabitants to hide vital resources in unexpected "invisible" stories.

Castle builders must think beyond heavy gates and confusing pathways. Frontal assault is not the only attack a castle may suffer. Rokugan's castles of wood are famously susceptible to fire, whether started by arson or lightning, so exposed wood is coated with a fire-resistant lacquer or white plaster. Assassins can be deterred from climbing into windows by the clever placement of spikes at window ledges. Castle floors can be built to creak loudly when walked upon. The chirping sound gives such floors the name "nightingale floors." Guards practice the rhythm of their footfalls in order to differentiate between the sounds of a friend and an outsider.

Occasionally a castle suffers a sapping attack, whereby a team of diggers destroys a section of its walls by digging a tunnel beneath it and then collapsing the tunnel. Enemy forces have also dammed and redirected rivers to



INTENTIONAL FLAWS

A castle builder's greatest trick is the intentional inclusion of a flaw in their designs—or the appearance of such. Of course, the more impenetrable a castle seems, the more it discourages invasion. Nevertheless, some may still seek to take the castle, and if they believe they could never breach the castle walls, they may settle into a siege, use incendiary tactics, or attempt another unconventional attack. In order to discourage these subversions of a castle's defenses, the architect must encourage an invasion by building a semblance of vulnerability into the castle. The architect usually slightly obscures this vulnerability in order to deceive prospective invaders into believing they have discovered a real weakness. However, should an invader take advantage of the vulnerability, they find themselves trapped, baited like trout.

flood a castle. These unconventional attacks can be caught early by watchful patrols, but preventative measures also can be taken during the building process. Sturdy *ishigaki* are less susceptible to sapping attacks, and architects aware of flood danger can build drainage precautions into the *nawabari*.

Siege is a serious threat to any castle. During a siege, the attacking force prevents the defenders from leaving and from acquiring supplies. A castle builder can plan for this contingency far in advance by constructing large and well-defended storehouses, digging deep wells, and building clandestine means of ingress and egress through which people and supplies can secretly make their way to and from the outside world.

ACTIVE DEFENSES

Effective castle defense relies upon more than just tricks and walls. Garrison soldiers are vital to the security of any castle. Garrison life is one of constant readiness and routine for both *ashigaru* and *samurai*, though each castle's routines may differ substantially. At the walls and in the towers day and night, vigilant warriors watch over a castle, protecting it from fire and invasion.

When diplomacy falters and the drums of war begin to echo, the daily lives of a castle's garrison and population change rapidly as the castle converts into an active military headquarters. All at once, the walls need new plaster, the moats need new depth, and the storehouses need extra reserves in case of siege.

The captain of the guard assigns soldiers extra shifts at watchtowers, bridges, and gatehouses. Guards must remain vigilant in their enforcement of castle security measures such as restrictions on how many retainers may follow a noble into the daimyō's private quarters or even more trivial rules like the smoking ban at Shizuka Toshi. Patrols are increased, and soldiers train even more constantly than before, their honor and their duty to their daimyō resting heavily on their shoulders.

Castle Residents

Alive with activity, the castle is the beating heart of a daimyō's territory. Much of noble life takes place in it: politics, courtly intrigue, wartime strategizing, trade negotiations, marriage and adoption arrangements, and debate. However, for peasants, castle life consists of hard labor, long hours, cooking and cleaning, and training and guard duty.

PEASANTS

In most cases, the castle's peasant staff live in the town outside the castle walls. Very few castles can house their entire staff, comfortably or otherwise. Some castle towns are populated almost entirely of castle attendants. In peacetime, remote castles, castles under construction, and castles high in the mountains are commonly staffed with just enough people on duty to keep them operating smoothly. At the outset of war, or if the daimyō expects special guests, workers are called back to their posts, packing into temporary lodgings inside the castle, and the castle kicks into full gear.

A castle stirs to life before sunrise, as the cooks and bakers arrive through a servants' entrance to prepare the day's meals. The quality of these meals is determined mostly by the wealth of the daimyō. Smaller castles and military fortresses tend toward nutritious but unromantic fare, prepared simply and served on a rigid schedule. The palatial halls of wealthier daimyō burgeon with sumptuous aromas; their kitchens may have a bountiful menu on offer at all times of day. The kitchen staff report to the head cook, who reports to the seneschal. Good head cooks are hard to find, particularly in far-flung regions of Rokugan. Reliable and skilled cooks are rewarded with substantial power over the kitchen, outranking everyone but the daimyō and *karō* regarding culinary matters.

Peasant stablehands, who report to the head groom, tend to the daily care, training, and breeding of the daimyō's animals. Peasant soldiers may serve as part of a castle's garrison; they are trained and assigned duties by a *samurai* captain, who is responsible for the

castle's defense. Castle staff may also include hunt masters, musicians, entertainers, gardeners, scouts, cleaners, sake brewers, and more. All the castle staff report, directly or indirectly, to the karō.

CLERGY AND SAMURAI

Virtually all castles maintain one or more shrines on the grounds. Priests can be found in most of Rokugan's castles, but especially influential daimyō might also retain a shugenja to see to the castle's spiritual needs. The religious advisor on site is tasked with maintaining the castle's relationship with the spirits, and in many castles is a close advisor to the daimyō.

As is to be expected, samurai hold the most important positions in a castle (although in some poor households, positions may be left "unfilled" while a peasant handles their actual duties). While these include a range of roles including the captain of the guard, the emissaries and diplomats, the heads of any military forces, and any shugenja that live in the castle, the most notable samurai in a household is usually the karō.

The karō is the advisor responsible for directing the castle's daily operation and upkeep. They supervise and manage the servants directly, they draft the budget, they orchestrate the schedule, and they closely consult with the daimyō on day-to-day affairs. In Rokugan, the karō is frequently a noble, offered the position for political purposes. Due to their broad discretionary powers, the respect they command among the castle staff, and their closeness to the daimyō, the karō's word is second only to that of the daimyō.

Castle Towns

It is said that a castle is the seed of a city. While a castle complex can itself be a small town tucked inside the castle walls, once a castle is established, a town is likely to form around it. A castle offers protection and employment to people in the area, encouraging urban growth. Eventually a castle town may become an important location on its own.

Each castle town grows differently, developing its own culture and industry along the way. Nevertheless, development often falls into familiar patterns, as the Celestial Order reflects itself in the town layout.

Samurai who do not live within a castle usually reside just outside its walls. The highest-ranking samurai tend to build their estates closest to the castle grounds. Most of these towns designate particular areas for merchants and artisans, and craftspeople settle where they will. Smaller temple districts grow on the outskirts of the town, while larger temples may be centrally located.

A daimyō depends upon the local population to support their castle. The castle town processes, prepares, and stores food grown in the surrounding lands, supplies recruits, and is responsible for the substantial work of castle maintenance.

The local population, in turn, depends upon the daimyō for support. The castle daimyō often works in tandem with a city or provincial governor to protect the castle town from disaster, disease, and crime. The castle succeeds if the town succeeds, after all. Many daimyō appoint a magisterial officer to represent the daimyō's interests to the castle town's administration.

SOLDIERS AMONG THE CLANS

Each clan and family takes a unique approach to garrisoning its castles, reflecting its particular priorities and tastes. An individual lord's personal preferences further color the makeup of their castle's standing soldiery, to the point that no two castles in Rokugan follow the same model. Not only does the number of soldiers within a castle's peacetime garrison vary drastically, but so does the nature of the warriors.

In the "ideal" castle of the Crane, not a single peasant ashigaru is to be found, but only trusted jizamurai, whose ancestors served in the same role for the previous ten generations. Among the fortifications of the practical Crab, hereditary ashigaru,

farmers displaced by the depredations of Shadowlands monsters, and samurai might train and stand vigil side by side. The Lion Clan invariably maintains substantial garrisons that drill constantly and often include a combination of highly trained ashigaru and bushi. The mountain castles of the Dragon Clan may host the most varied and unusual garrisons in Rokugan, where sōhei warrior monks might walk the grounds, and guards whisper of birdlike tengu who are said to patrol the skies above. However, stories of hidden Phoenix castles protected only by guardian kami hint at even more wondrous and nontraditional defenses to be found within the Emerald Empire.

Castles as Political Centers

REAL WORLD PRACTICES

Fū sui (or feng shui as it is called in Chinese) is a real-world practice and should be treated with all proper respect as such.

Across Rokugan, kyūden and shiro serve as monuments to the engineering prowess of the clans. Some castles are bastions of military might, like Yōjin no Shiro, with its majestic lion statues standing defiantly at its entrance. Others are sanctuaries, like Dragon's Breath Castle, hidden amid the jagged cliffs of Iron Mountain. The most dangerous lull visitors into a sense of false security with peaceful surroundings, like one of the Emerald Empire's crowning jewels, Kyūden Doji, the Esteemed Castle of the Crane. Its stark white cliffs and terraces lined with cherry blossom trees are a façade. Behind clan banners, masonry, and exquisite tapestries lies an intricate web of deception and political manipulation waiting to entrap the careless courtier. Only those armed with the cunning to avoid the assassins, ruthless courtiers, and powerful nobles inhabiting the treacherous political landscape within can hope to survive.

Castles' geographic locations may provide insight into a clan's mind-set. For instance, the isolation of holdings in the difficult-to-traverse northern mountains dissuades outsiders from visiting the aloof Dragon. The Unicorn, on the other hand, place their structures on open plains for both practical and tactical reasons. Such sites give their mounted warriors space to maneuver around encroaching enemies. Further, their placement at the confluences of trade routes serves to funnel business through Unicorn strongholds, enabling the Unicorn to bolster their economy while avoiding political ostracism.

IDENTITY BY DESIGN

The ancestral castles of Rokugan hold familial, political, and spiritual meaning, each an embodiment of its clan's and family's ideology and temperament. The layout of ancillary buildings and statuary, the craftsmanship and design of stonework and woodwork, and the selection of works of art all reveal elements of clan and family identity.

Design Elements

A daimyō who has a castle constructed or altered employs architects to translate their vision for its design, encapsulating their clan's identity. The stone archways of Lion castles, for example, feature intricately carved murals depicting great Lion Clan fables that

KARMIC STRUCTURE

The idea that balance should be found in all things is an ancient one, predating even Rokugan itself. Within Rokugan, a key element of this balancing act is understanding the kami, and so priests work with architects and builders to ensure that castles, fortresses, monasteries, and towers adhere to the principles of fū sui. According to these principles, each structure and room must provide balance to the kami who reside within. This is accomplished through sacred geometry, decor, and interior design, and may be done by the head priest, or even a prominent shugenja.

Beginning in the first century, spiritually directed construction became very important to the fierce and enigmatic Kuni family, who firmly believed in harnessing the energy around buildings and places to stave off evil creatures such as oni. Embracing this practice hundreds of years later, the Crane's Asahina family instead began using it to establish a balance between aesthetics, practicality, and spiritualism. This system of geomancy harnesses the natural energy of the land—its ki—and the favor of the spirits who inhabit it to positively affect a family's fortune.

convey the Lion's most cherished values of bravery, loyalty, and victory. The spindly high towers of Mountain's Anvil Castle represent the Dragon Clan's stoic nature and resilience in the face of adversity. The Phoenix mix red tint from the redwood trees of their lands into all of their roof tiles to suggest that the Phoenix speak with a single voice.



Purpose and Placement

The closer a building or facility is to the central keep, the more important it usually is. Rooms within castles also follow this rule; the daimyō's quarters are centrally located, often on a top floor, and the most important spaces tend to be as near the daimyō's quarters as possible, the less important being sited nearer the outer walls. For example, libraries receive pride of place in Phoenix Clan keeps, a constant reminder that the Phoenix revere knowledge above all else.

Attention can also denote importance. Crab Clan fortresses elevate function over form, devoting the most space to towers, mustering rooms, and even fortified rooms in the interiors of castles. Their utilitarian,

battle-worn strongholds convey their singular focus on defense. Visitors to Unicorn lands may notice that their stables are more elaborate than their living quarters, reflecting the Unicorn reverence for their horses.

Sometimes, the true purpose of a building is concealed, or twofold. The Scorpion, for example, construct castle bathhouses for use by their nobles. In addition to using them for cleansing, they often host quiet meetings there, amid dripping walls or in steam-filled saunas. Exposing opponents physically can leave them off guard emotionally, providing hosts an edge in negotiations. The baths also allow a measure of safety, assuring everyone there are no hidden weapons among them.

Focused Decorations

During celebrations, festivals, and other social events, a daimyō might spend a small fortune remodeling their estate to communicate a specific message to visitors. Most of the Great Clans, but especially the Crane and Phoenix, curate displays of artwork before important visitors arrive to convey unspoken messages. If a Crab Clan emissary is visiting Crane lands, the local daimyō might hang a painting depicting the Kaiu Wall, Crab banners held high, and white-feathered cranes perched below, suggesting an offer of support. Before negotiations even begin, the astute observer receives a message of intent.

Elemental Decor

Spread throughout castles are dedications to the five elemental forces of Air, Earth, Fire, Water, and Void. Artisans who study the teachings of fū sui dedicate rooms, and sometimes entire floors, to single elements by hanging banners, paintings, and other decorations displaying elemental colors and iconography.

Arrangements of red camellias might represent the heat of passion and flame, while a blue-and-white urn might denote gentle waves of water. Artisans use art forms like ikebana flower arrangement to create these messages, while architects incorporate the cosmic hierarchy of the Five Elements into their major projects, starting from the ground with Earth and working upward to Water, Air, Fire, and Void.

FLEXIBLE DESIGNS

Adjustable walls give flexibility to rooms that may need to serve myriad purposes. Partitions and walls made from paper on wooden frames slide along tracks, allowing for speedy reconfigurations. Meeting rooms may quickly become a dōjō, then later a banquet hall. This is particularly useful during special events where space is limited, especially within smaller kyūden during major gatherings such as the Winter Court.

UNLUCKY NUMBERS

In the Japanese language, the word four can be pronounced "shi," which sounds like the word for death. Similarly, the word for nine, "ku," can also mean agony or torture. Much as the number thirteen is considered an ill omen in English-speaking countries, the numbers four and nine are considered unlucky in some contexts.

As the Rokugani language is primarily inspired by Japanese, these same phonetic coincidences can be reflected in certain ways in Rokugan, including:

- ⊗ Buildings with only four floors attract vengeful ghosts, oni, and other malignant spirits. This might lead to fewer buildings with only four floors, and including a building with four floors might foreshadow an scene with twisted supernatural beings.
- ⊗ Rokugani interrogators might refer to their chambers jokingly as the "ninth room." These rooms are located below ground to muffle the ghostly screams of hapless victims trapped within their bloodstained walls.
- ⊗ The number eight, the sign of infinite possibilities, confers good luck and prosperity, and architects regularly build structures with eight rooms per floor.

However, keep in mind that these are real-world cultural mores that have been adapted to the setting. Therefore, they shouldn't be utilized in a frivolous or disrespectful manner.

HONORARY KYÜDEN

While the mammoth Kyūden Hida can easily accommodate a Winter Court, its constant focus on fighting the evil armies of the Shadowlands make such a distraction dangerous and impractical. However, Rokugan's Emperors have understood the political stigma a clan faces when it has no kyūden. For the countless sacrifices the Crab have made to protect Rokugan, Emperors have honored the main castle of the Hida, along with several other Crab holdings, with the title kyūden.

KYÜDEN AND SHIRO: THE IMPORTANCE OF NAME

The walled castles housing the families of daimyō of regional or greater importance are known as shiro. Most daimyō work toward elevating their shiro to a kyūden, which requires an Imperial decree and usually means that the castle complex can hold an Imperial Winter Court. To host a Winter Court, a shiro or kyūden must be able to accommodate at least 250 guests, all at a level of comfort and luxury befitting the Emperor and Rokugan's most esteemed samurai, and it must provide ample space for activities and events, as well as spectator seating.

Although the Emperor can travel anywhere within the realm, such an august individual rarely leaves Otosan Uchi except to attend Winter Court, due to the risk of assassination, kidnapping, or ambush. As a result of such risks, geographical placement may also impact a shiro's eligibility to become a kyūden and host a Winter Court. Crab and Unicorn holdings, for example, rarely host Winter Courts since the Crab lands border on the Shadowlands and the Unicorn are isolated in the far West. Though long-established kyūden play host to most Winter Courts, the Emperor may name a qualifying shiro instead, usually granting it the title of kyūden.

HEART OF POWER

A kyūden or shiro is both a home and a political center for the aristocracy who reside within. Inside its walls, a family's political heavyweights do battle across the courtroom, negotiate alliances, parley with enemies, and discuss economic and social strategies impacting their provinces.

Daimyō are the heart of an estate, making daily decisions and focusing on the goal of strengthening their province or region. They establish a chain of command to help ensure that others follow their vision and edicts. Individuals within a daimyō's estate hold specific stations based on their standing within the greater Rokugani community. **TABLE 1-1: CASTLE STAFF ROLES** provides a breakdown of the administrative structure within a castle.

High ranking samurai advisors, or *hatamoto*, engage in rigorous debate before presenting ideas to their daimyō. Most of the issues they raise fall under one of three key areas of concern: administration, security, and spirituality. Administration encompasses the management of human resources, food, supplies, and trade. Security involves the fortification of the estate, the protection of the daimyō, and the disposition of any armed forces stationed there. Issues of spirituality are those that relate to satisfying the kami and understanding the Tao of Shinsei. Through this process, the daimyō becomes well informed about any points of

CLIMBING THE RANKS

PCs can become Estate Daimyō or Karō via titles (see page 128).

TABLE 1-1: CASTLE STAFF ROLES

POSITION	ROLE	RESPONSIBILITIES	STATUS
Estate Daimyō	Head of the estate	Responsible for the management of the estate and its holdings. Directly answerable to a daimyō in charge of the entire family.	59
Karō	The seneschal (head of staff)	Responsible for the actions of all staff within the estate. Expected to atone for all dishonorable transgressions within.	50
Hatamoto to an Estate Daimyō	Advisor to the daimyō	Responsible for a portfolio allocated by the daimyō. Estates may contain as many as five to eight such positions. Portfolios include defense, political relations, resources, religious observances, trade, and treasury, along with areas of responsibility specific to the estate (for example, an estate on a river may have a marine advisor).	45
Bugyō	A commissioner, or medium-level administrator and overseer	Responsible for managing staff assigned a specific task. Answerable to the hatamoto whose portfolio includes responsibility for the task. Upon completing a task, they are reassigned or become hikan.	40
Hikan	Samurai/noble	Answerable to bugyō. Although hikan are considered equal, they may have an unofficial pecking order based on experience and daimyō favoritism. Ranking may vary between clans; for instance, the Lion honor their brave warriors above others.	35-39



concern and can make decisions based on all the facts and considerations presented.

The effectiveness of a daimyō's administration is dependent upon collaboration among their advisors. Like many bureaucrats in Rokugan, a daimyō's advisors may possess conflicting agendas both dogmatic and personal. The courts of prospering estates are close communities, setting aside differences to work

together for common goals. Unfortunately, the more power an estate contains, the more likely it is that corruption and hidden agendas have crept into its court.

Individual advisors form alliances and clash as they jockey for position, smear each other to gain favor, or conspire to downplay a rival's concerns. Their motivations may include a desire for promotion within the court, to gain favors from opposition, or to establish an excuse in order to shift blame. However, those who are constantly at odds with their counterparts may well find themselves ostracized, with compromise their only solution.

ESTATE DŌJŌ

Most large estates house at least one dōjō where students train in the arts of a particular clan tradition. These schools vary in attendance, shape, and size depending on the needs of the school and number of students. For instance, the Crane students of the Doji Diplomat School require minimal space because most of their studies are conducted in courts throughout Rokugan. On the other end of the spectrum, the Unicorn's Utau Battle Maidens require large compounds for animal husbandry and horse training. Some schools have multiple dōjō spread across their clan's lands, while others have only a single location for training where all students congregate. A few have no formal dōjō at all, treating the world itself as their training ground.

Placing dōjō for multiple schools in the same place can be beneficial when they complement each other. For instance, the dōjō of the Doji Bureaucrats and Daidoji Spymasters are frequently collocated. Both traditions exist amicably, each

feeding the other's intelligence networks in a symbiotic relationship as they gather intelligence for their daimyō. Schools like this combine their resources and even facilities, giving the daimyō additional room for soldiers, staff, and supplies.

In contrast, bushi schools like the Lion's Akodo Commanders and the Matsu Berserkers are healthy rivals. Keeping their dōjō apart but periodically exposing the students to one another at shared training facilities feeds a beneficial competition between the two martial traditions. Instructors use this rivalry to breed competition which motivates students, drawing out hidden talents otherwise buried behind complacency.

Some other schools must be kept apart for the sake of harmony. Shugenja schools are notoriously covetous of their mystical secrets, and many prefer that knowledge of their invocations stay out the hands of other traditions—a risk that proximity would magnify.

LEFT BEHIND

Daimyō who are not invited to the Imperial Winter Court often hold their own court. These lesser affairs provide similar opportunities to strategize with neighboring leaders and samurai, even if less prestigious. Shiro Han-zoku of the northern Crane provinces hosts one such event. Daimyō Doji Tsuyo, a relative newcomer to the political stage, organizes the festival for Crane nobles, allowing him to ingratiate himself with those of higher standing.

The Winter Court

The winters of Rokugan bathe its landscapes in a sea of snow, hampering agriculture, trade, and travel. While farmers and merchants take refuge from the cold in their homes, the aristocratic elite take part in the time-honored tradition of the annual Winter Court, the most important social event in Rokugan. This event stems from the Emperor's desire to bring the Great Clan leaders together to hear their sovereign's vision for the coming year and plan its implementation. The Winter Court is a lengthy affair, commencing the first week of the Month of the Boar and ending when the first cherry blossom blooms, a few months later.

LOCATION, INVITATIONS, AND PREPARATIONS

The Winter Court's location is decided during the last week of winter, immediately following the end of the preceding Winter Court. The Emperor then carefully considers how to word each invitation to communicate favor, present the agenda and goals for that year's event, and prevent undue animosity or offence between clans. Once the invitation

list and wording is decided, the hosting daimyō begins sending invitations, each sealed by Imperial scribes.

Tradition dictates that each of the Great Clans receive thirty invitations that may be distributed amongst their leading families and vassal clans. Each attendee is expected to bring a small number of attendants, yōjimbō, and servants (although the size of the venue may force some of these retainers to stay in the communities surrounding the palace). The Emperor may reserve several invitations for smaller clans, individual samurai who attract notice, and in the rarest circumstances, even rōnin. Over the following months, nobles work to improve their clan's standing. Often, less established clans seeking recognition barter with invited daimyō for inclusion, offering favors, gifts, or even stipends in exchange for an invitation. No price is too great to attend Winter Court, thanks to the deals and social standing that can be gained there.

Meanwhile, schedule preparations commence in earnest. Daimyō face pressure to create unique experiences that outdo those of previous Winter Courts, often paying homage to Winter Courts of old, bringing back older events with new twists. However, organizers who plagiarize events risk scandal, as this may be seen as challenging the previous organizer's honor. For instance, in 1109, host Asako Tokawa, too preoccupied with a torrid affair, accidentally duplicated several events of the previous year's Winter Court. His family bears the shame of the mistake to this day.



EVENTS

Banquets, political engagements, and private meetings allow guests to verbally spar with rivals and forge new alliances. Games and challenges keep samurai entertained, and festivities allow nobles to socialize with the Rokugani elite.

Event organizers research their participants well in advance, establishing the desires of each attendee. Planners then design each event with painstaking effort, ensuring they satisfy the experiential thirsts of each participant. Ceremonies honor the deeds of individuals across the realm, while musical performances warm the hearts of participants. Political meetings aimed at settling disputes or brokering alliances occur daily, while nightly banquets satisfy the appetites of event-weary participants and provide nobles time to bond over their experiences.

The Business of Winter Court

Each day at Winter Court after a hearty breakfast, the Emperor issues decisions, decrees, and rulings covering a host of issues. Afterward, courtiers engage in a multitude of separate political discussions, trade negotiations, and backroom deals. The agendas for these meetings may include issues of diplomacy, finance, logistics, and war, among others.

Courtiers may also bring new issues to the Emperor at this time. Property claims, territory and trade disputes, proclamation of new laws and treaties, and business relating to the defense of the Kaiu Wall get preferential treatment when new business comes before the Emperor. Anyone who can silence the bickering between Crane and Lion Clan members quickly earns favor with the Emperor and any number of annoyed nobles.

Social Entertainment and Events

Winter Court also features tea ceremonies, lunches, lavish dinners, and performances, including at least one formal gathering per week. At these formal events, guests don their most exquisite attire, hoping to advance socially or even impress the Emperor. Fashion-conscious nobles set the Winter Court abuzz in unique garments and gowns, setting the trends for the year to come.

Other events include everything from masked gatherings where guests wear elaborate guises to poetry readings in snow-swept gardens full of artful ice sculptures. Plays, acrobatic performances, and music recitals play out under the backdrop of social pleasantries. Artisans shine in this environment, their masterpieces on display. Gifted orators and storytellers entertain audiences

at evening banquets, bringing news and creating excitement among patrons eager to hear their tales. Scribes and writers seize the opportunity to communicate their concerns or offer support on political issues, hiding their meaning in poignant verse. However, there are risks in performing for such an august audience—a catastrophic performance in front of the Emperor is likely to result in an appointment to an “extremely vital” post in some far-flung corner of the Empire or selection as an envoy to a particularly distant part of the world.

Contests and Games

Winter Court offers numerous games of chance, skill, and strategy, often organized into tournaments. Archery competitions, hunting trips, swordplay tournaments, and *sumai* wrestling matches are available. Each game emphasizes friendly competition, allowing guests an opportunity to relax and refocus before returning to their official duties.

COURT OF LIES

While the Winter Court might seem like a strange place to use shinobi, it is actually very common for courtiers to employ covert agents. At the behest of would-be kingmakers, shinobi employ their singular skills to surveil targets, procure private documents, intimidate rivals, and put words in the right ear. Some courtiers stoop to using assassins who lurk between alleyways and rooftops, interrogators who specialize in information extraction, and even practitioners of evil sorcery capable of carving details from a person's mind. The Winter Court might seem placid, but beneath the courteous façade, it is a battlefield where the fates of clans are decided and the wise use every tool at their disposal to ensure their success.

During Winter Court, each clan likely has several spies hidden within their retinue. Since direct covert interaction is usually impossible in crowded venues, operatives use secret sign languages and ciphered speech to communicate, and they leave behind carefully coded messages in everything from the poems passed during the Game of Letters to the artful flower arrangements placed on display each day.



Events that challenge the athletic abilities of attendees are popular, such as *kemari*, a ball-passing game requiring agile feet, and others favored by the host's clan. Shugenja compete in challenges that test their influence on the five elemental forces, while spirited courtiers compete in *sadane*, a game in which contestants take turns exchanging clever insults while maintaining composure. Strategic board games like Go and *shōgi* also keep the more cerebral visitors engaged.

Winners gain the title of Winter Court Champion for that event, earning all the glory that comes with their title. Sometimes, winning comes with additional duties at the next Winter Court, which offers further opportunities to gain favor from the Emperor. Most competitors revere such accolades, and winners make every effort to defend their title the following year.

GAINING GLORY

PCs can become a Winter Court Champion via titles (see page 128).

Ceremonies and Festivals

The Kangei Ceremony of Welcoming opens each Winter Court. Not limited to the grounds of the hosting kyūden, the ceremony spills forth as a week-long celebration throughout the castle town, pulling all inhabitants into the atmosphere of revelry. During the ceremony proper (which occurs on the first day, after all guests have arrived), each guest is announced, including the clan champions, and they present themselves before the Emperor for acknowledgment. The champions then address the assembly, often setting the tone for the next few months.

Festivals celebrating historical events, individual achievements, or religious occasions occur sporadically. Other ceremonial events, including *gempuku* coming-of-age ceremonies, weddings, and services honoring those lost throughout the year, are commonplace. One especially important event is the Greeting

of the Spirits, at which the hosting daimyō honors the spirits presiding over the kyūden and its guests. In a traditional ceremony near the beginning of Winter Court, the host bathes in purifying hot springs or walks barefoot across fiery coals to signify their cleansing by flame. The event quickly turns into a social gathering, serving as an icebreaker for those new to the Winter Court.

DINNER OF THE STALKING TIGER

A festival called Shouting Day occurs during the last week of Winter Court as part of its closing ceremonies. On Shouting Day, peasants scream their complaints to Osano-wo, the Fortune of Fire and Thunder. This takes place during the Dinner of the Stalking Tiger, organized for the nobility and samurai to honor of the peasants in thanks for their efforts throughout the year. The attendees dine on a humble meal of steamed vegetables and rice. Assigned seating ideally promotes cooperation between clans. However, all guests must remain silent, respecting the messages to Osano-wo being screamed by peasants throughout the realm. Breaking this silence is considered very disrespectful and results in immediate expulsion from the evening's activities.

Sample Castles

The following locations are examples of some of the more famous castles in the Emerald Empire. Each has its own elements that make it unique; while some are bastions of military might, others are dens of intrigue, centers of court politics, or home to even more esoteric activities.

Last Breath Castle

The Spine of the World Mountains arc across central Rokugan, dividing the Empire into north and south. Only one mountain pass opens wide enough to allow an army through: Beiden Pass, which connects the Lion Clan's southern provinces to the northeast edge of Scorpion lands. Beiden Pass is the most direct and safest route through the Spine and the most popular one for caravans. Historically, controlling the pass means controlling trade and travel in central Rokugan.

A low rocky hill rises just below the north end of the pass, and there, the orange-and-gold banners of Shiro Matsu, Last Breath Castle, flutter loudly in the high wind. Shiro Matsu's central keep perches atop the hill, while the rest of the castle sprawls out below it. From its position, it dominates Beiden Pass, staking a claim of control over the Crossroads of the Empire.

Last Breath Castle's footprint is one of the largest in Rokugan, exemplifying the sophisticated and effective castle design of the Lion Clan. The castle complex is very wide, spread across and alongside the hill. The pass opens around the castle. To the east lies the Lake of Sorrows, beyond which lie the Crane lands. Just to the west against a stony hillside rests the Hall of Ancestors, a sacred temple to the fallen warriors of every Lion family. To the north is the Valley of Storms, a fertile plain of rolling foothills and black earth, dotted with comfortable farming villages.

The castle is the home of the Matsu family daimyō, Matsu Tsuko, the Lady of Lions. From here, Tsuko claims command of Beiden Pass and strikes out against rivals seeking claim to Matsu lands. Tsuko is as renowned for her menacing fury as for her devotion to Bushidō and to the Empire. She takes no insult lightly, and she has a broad definition of what constitutes an insult. As daimyō, she insists that each of her senior staff deliver briefings with exceptional detail, which she hears out with trademark intensity. Likewise, her commands to castle staff are exhaustively specific and must be carried out to the letter.

Matsu Castle, or Shiro Matsu, is a military installation, a citadel devoted to the instruction of its garrisoned soldiers. But the castle's greatest strength does not come from its walls, its location, or its nawabari: its strength is found within its people. Last Breath Castle was founded not only on a low hill over a profoundly important strategic trade route; much more than that, it was founded on and continues to draw its strength from its denizens' sweat and toil, their labor and discipline. Calloused hands till the earth, ring the bells, and draw the water—and without them, the castle would fall. And so the Lion Clan invests in its people.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

One of the oldest castles in Rokugan, Last Breath Castle stands on the site where Matsu first met the Kami Akodo. Its walls, constructed with the aid of Crab Clan engineers, were built to withstand fire, earthquake, and, some say, even supernatural threats. The castle's high location not only aids in defense, but provides a vantage point over the pass and surrounding lands, offering a clear view of approaching threats. Its garrison is responsible for guarding the region's trade routes and Beiden Pass. Defense against aggression from the Scorpion and Crane has grown in importance, and stands as Shiro Matsu's primary duty in these troubled times. The daimyō has her soldiers train ceaselessly, maintaining more than enough force of arms to respond swiftly and overwhelmingly to any invaders.

Shiro Matsu has never fallen in battle, and those who visit it soon understand why. The grasslands surrounding it offer no cover on the approach, and the switchback road leading out of the pass—known as the Lion's Teeth—hosts more guardhouses than any other in Rokugan. If invaders managed to breach the towering outer wall, they would find themselves within expansive grounds subdivided by thirty-foot-high inner walls. Every building within the inner walls is built to be defended, with sturdy walls, thick doors, and thin windows that double as arrow slits. Finally, the keep itself is accessible only by lengthy stairways that would leave intruders exposed and vulnerable.

Outside the inner bailey, the castle's barracks, training grounds, and dōjō sprawl across the grounds. Guest housing provides only modest comfort, even by Lion standards; Shiro Matsu's importance as a political center is remarkably minor despite the considerable economic importance of the city that extends around it.

Even during times of peace, Last Breath Castle maintains a garrison of thousands of ashigaru and samurai.

Last Breath Castle

Labels in the illustration include:

- MAIN KEEP
- WEAPON TOWER
- SENTRY TOWER
- ELEVATED STAIRWAYS
- INNER WALL
- HALL OF ANCESTORS
- DOJO
- TRAINING YARD
- GUEST HOUSES
- STOREHOUSE
- BARRACKS
- SHRINE OF BUSHIDO
- SENTRY TOWER
- DOJO
- TRAINING YARD

Matthew Wynn (Order #20055116)

In fact, at nearly any given time, all of the Lion families have contingents present there. Of course, the notorious berserkers and beastmasters of the Matsu are in themselves enough to ward off any but the most determined or foolhardy attackers. These unusual and fearsome warriors maintain their own barracks at an almost-comfortable distance from those of samurai from other Lion families and of the ashigaru. The beastmasters sleep alongside their charges and servants are quite careful while working within the presence of such fierce mounts.

BEIDEN OVERLOOK

The lookout post on the southeastern end of Beiden Pass is only a few *li* from Beiden Province; in fact, the outpost falls within Scorpion territory. Yet, perhaps due to the proximity of Last Breath Castle and its substantial garrison, the Bayushi family seldom contests the Lion's claim to the mountainside watchtower. With no walls and no keep, the lookout post would make easy prey for any Scorpion force who sought to take it, however briefly, but defense against an assault is not its purpose. The bushi stationed at the Beiden Overlook are there to provide advance warning to Shiro Matsu of approaching attackers, and so are equipped with some of the fastest horses in Lion lands. Any warrior at the outpost would proudly give their life to protect a messenger.

CASTLE CULTURE

To courtiers accustomed to courtly life nearly anywhere else in Rokugan, life at Last Breath Castle is almost unbearable. Many dignitaries of the Crane, Scorpion, and Phoenix consider an assignment to Shiro Matsu a sign of their lord's great disfavor. It is true the Matsu care little, if at all, for diplomacy, art, or commerce—despite their castle's traditional role as defender of trade routes. The interior of Last Breath Castle is stark, lacking even much of the martially themed decor of other Lion holdings.

Matsu Tsuko and her samurai vassals are likewise blunt to the point of rudeness, and guests seldom feel welcome within the castle walls. Each morning, guests wake before dawn to the violent sounds of hundreds of soldiers engaged in practice drills. While the Matsu hold no malicious intent with this disruption, neither would they countenance putting off daily drills to a later hour simply for the comfort of soft guests who would prefer to rise only with the sun. The food and drink on offer is basic and utilitarian, in stark contrast to the expectations of pampered Crane or Scorpion courtiers.

BEIDEN, THE CROSSROADS OF THE EMPIRE

A small but strategically important town, Beiden is located on the southern side of the pass of the same name through the Spine of the World Mountains. The town is administered by the Scorpion, but the Matsu scouts on the nearby Beiden Overlook keep a close eye on all comings and goings. The pass is the only major route between the Scorpion lands in the south and the Lion territory on the northern side of the mountains for a hundred *li*. Beiden's strategic and trade value can't be overstated. This has made it a target during conflict, and the city has suffered greatly every time an army has decided to occupy it.

Within Beiden are markets, sake dens, and teahouses serving caravanners, but the town's chief feature is a shrine and temple to Tenjin, the Lesser Fortune of Stories and Secrets. Even among the *heimin* and *hinin*, there is a high degree of literacy, and the markets are constantly full of books and scrolls to a degree unseen in the rest of the Empire. The markets also benefit from smuggling; the Yogo family runs a small smuggling route through the pass that tends to avoid notice.

SHIRO MATSU TOSHI

As the stronghold of a Great Clan family located along a major trade route, Last Breath Castle has given rise to a thriving castle town. The city, known simply as Shiro Matsu Toshi, is among the largest in the Empire, and certainly in Lion lands. The Akodo, Kitsu, Ikoma, and Matsu families all have holdings there, and it is home to peasants who serve in the castle, merchants, and tradespersons of all kinds. Although many of these people work to support the castle, just as many find their business or duty tied up with the constant traffic through Beiden Pass.

In the spring, summer, and autumn, the city's population consists of nearly as many travelers and visitors as permanent residents, including traders, dignitaries, and samurai pilgrims to the Hall of Ancestors or Shrine of Makoto. The city is as raucous as any in the Empire, and traditions from across Rokugan and even beyond clash in the streets and markets.

The city is home to a number of *dōjō*, with some of the most respected *sensei* in the Lion Clan. As one might expect of a city under the purview of the Matsu, most of the schools represented train bushi, but schools of other types are also present. One of the most renowned bards of the present day, Ikoma Kanoko, accepts a single new student here each spring.

To remain continually on a war-ready footing, Last Breath Castle demands a constant supply of weapons, armor, and other matériel. Beyond the expert swordsmiths who reside within the walls of the keep, the city is home to numerous craftspeople who create arms and armor. These craftspeople supply legions of ashigaru and samurai who serve the Lion Clan not only at Last Breath Castle but throughout Yama Province and beyond. Even smiths who fail to meet the exacting standards of their Matsu lords can nonetheless make a brisk trade bartering their “Lion-made” blades with merchants traveling far and wide.

WHAT ATTRACTS VISITORS

Few have ever dared to attack Last Breath Castle directly, but this only underscores its importance—Shiro Matsu’s very presence deters threats to the Lion Clan’s southern border and vital trade routes. It is fortuitous that the site of Akodo and Matsu’s fateful meeting should have occurred in such a strategically vital area; Beiden Pass is not only the sole significant passage through the Spine of the World for more than a hundred li around, but is the sole route through any part of the Spine of the World large enough to accommodate an army. The pass is, effectively, the entirety of the Lion Clan’s southern territorial border requiring defense; the clan of Akodo appreciates this fact and devotes as much effort to its security as one might expect.

SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENA

As with any venerable castle, Last Breath Castle has seen its share of spirits throughout the centuries. Most notably, the Hall of Ancestors, the most sacred place in all of Lion territory, lies carved from the hillside nearby, its protection the responsibility of the Matsu family. In this sacred place, the presence of *sorei*—spirits of honored ancestors—is undeniable.

HALL OF ANCESTORS

Though all samurai venerate their honored ancestors, no others do so with the fervor and dedication of the Lion Clan. This special focus on the honored dead is exemplified in the Hall of Ancestors, a massive temple

complex that holds the earthly remains—the bones and ashes—of hundreds of the Lion Clan’s greatest heroes. Statues of these ancestors stand before each urn, serving as shrines to the *sorei*. If a Lion worthy of interment there dies and their remains cannot be recovered, the clan erects a statue and places an empty urn. This is the case with Matsu herself.

Plaques record the names, lineages, births, deaths, and deeds of many of these heroes. Others are so famous and revered that no details are needed beyond perhaps their name. Yet in the deepest corridors of the sprawling mountain complex are some ancient statues bereft of identification. Certainly, the keepers of the hall must know the names and deeds of these fallen heroes, for to forget and neglect the *sorei* would be shameful and surely invite the wrath of Heaven.

By tradition, the administrator and chief guardian of the Hall of Ancestors, known as the Defender of the Hall, is the second-born sibling of the Matsu family *daimyō*. This spiritual and martial duty is seen as a great honor.

The Lion Clan has no great love of the Tao of Shinsei, but it is no stranger to asceticism. Monks dedicated to Bishamon, Fortune of Strength, tend to the Hall of Ancestors under the leadership of the Defender of the Hall. These monks act as caretakers and stand ready to defend the honored ancestors from any threat, spiritual or mundane. However, they defer to the priests of the Kitsune family, who hold a unique authority here, for they can hear the voices of the *sorei* as no others can. The shugenja who tend the Hall of Ancestors are among the most venerated of their order, and the head priest holds a responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the ancestors just as weighty as the Defender of the Hall’s duty.

Though it is as quiet as any tomb, the Hall of Ancestors receives a steady supply of visitors. All Lion samurai make the pilgrimage to the hall at least once in their lives, and many, particularly those whose direct ancestors reside within, visit somewhat regularly. Lion visit the Hall not just to show the proper respect and piety, but also to seek the wisdom of the *sorei*, to find direction in important matters. Throughout the centuries, the ancestors have answered these prayers in a number of miraculous ways, from the subtle to the awe-inspiring. It is relatively rare for non-Lion to visit the Hall of Ancestors, and they must receive special dispensation to do so. The most likely such visitors are members of the Imperial families and accomplished shugenja from other clans. Regardless of the specifics, only a worthy guest receives permission to enter the hall; the occasion is invariably marked with ceremony, and the visitor is accompanied by an honor guard during their time among the Lion ancestors.



Ryūhei, Monk

ADVERSARY

CONFLICT RANK: 2 3

A man of graying hair and quiet disposition, Ryūhei is a Fortunist monk who venerates Bishamon in particular. He is younger than many of his fellow monks who tend the Hall of Ancestors, having retired from his life as a samurai of the Akodo family at a relatively young age. He is appropriately solemn and reserved for a person with his duties, and he engages little even with his fellow monks. Ryūhei avoids visitors as much as possible; when it is unavoidable, he answers their queries about the hall with polite but perfunctory answers.

In fact, Ryūhei entered ascetic life to escape his past and avoid the scandal and trial that the discovery of his crimes would bring. In a heated confrontation over the affections of a geisha, a drunken and jealous Ryūhei murdered his friend and superior officer, Akodo Hisayo. However, while he escaped punishment for his crime, the man now known as Ryūhei could not escape his shame, or his victim. Hisayo haunts Ryūhei, her spirit unable to move on to Meido and her next life until she finds some manner of satisfaction for her dishonorable death. As much as Ryūhei wants to be free of his former officer, he would do almost anything to conceal his past.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
15 HONOR	3	2	ENDURANCE 15
34 GLORY	3	4	COMPOSURE 7
27 STATUS	3		FOCUS 6
+1, +1, -2 DEMEANOR - DETACHED			VIGILANCE 3

ARTISAN 1 MARTIAL 4 SCHOLAR 3 SOCIAL 2 TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES DISADVANTAGES

Veteran Warrior:

Martial; *Physical*

Haunted:

Social; *Spiritual*

FAVORED WEAPONS

Hidden Knife: Range 0, Damage 2, Deadline 4/6, Concealable, Mundane, Razor-Edged

Gear (equipped): Monastic robes, incense, prayer beads

Gear (other): Katana, old love letters, half-empty sake bottles

ABILITIES

RESTLESS SPIRITS

While making a check, any character at range 0-5 of Ryūhei may spend as follows:

: Receive 4 strife to gain 1 Void point.

Hida Palace

Just north of the Kaiu Wall, in the mountains by the eastern shore, at the mouth of the River of the Last Stand, the immutable Kyūden Hida rises from the rocks. It is a fortress of unadorned granite, purely functional, with no intentions of subtlety or balance. While many castles are built to confuse invaders, to trap them and route them away from the tenshukaku and other vital castle buildings, Kyūden Hida is instead built in the Crab style—with layers of walls, forcing an enemy simply to breach one gate after another. It is an artless, dour, and brutal convocation of stone and steel; of towers, turrets, and gates; and of thousands of soldiers ready to die defending it.

While official histories record that Kaiu designed Hida Palace, legend holds that the Fortune Osano-wotore thunder from the Heavens and carved the palace into the stone of the mountain. These claims are not contradictory, nor does anything about Kyūden Hida's construction necessarily disprove the legend. Kyūden

Hida is built from the same granite as the mountain, and in many places its walls are indeed carved from the living stone. The biggest blocks in Kyūden Hida's walls weigh more than three hundred soldiers.

Much of Kyūden Hida's construction defies Rokugani castle convention. The palace compound is built mostly of stone. Wood, steel, and plaster are used only sparingly. The grounds are built in the curved-triangle shape of a quarter-circle or, more aptly, a folding fan. The curved southern edge, which faces the Kaiu Wall, zigzags like a multi-paneled folding screen, affording the archers within the kyūden a wider field of view and range of crossfire through the south wall's arrow slits.

Near the center of the fan lies a valley lake, from which the denizens of Kyūden Hida acquire potable water. Elsewhere within the palace grounds, Kyūden Hida houses a handful of heavily guarded wells dug deep into the earth. Still more water is stored within the palace's ample storehouses alongside many months' worth of food and other supplies. This kyūden has few secrets for escaping a siege, its people preferring to attempt to outlast one instead. In desperate straits, palace residents could even eat the floor coverings: the tatami mats are made of straw.

At the north end of the complex looms the tenshukaku, which serves as the main administrative building and the daimyō's residence. Kyūden Hida is the seat of power of the "Great Bear," Crab Clan champion Hida Kisada, whose interests lie mostly outside the castle walls. He delegates many decisions about the daily administration of the palace to his children and karō.



STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The ideal form of a defensive castle is demonstrated in Kyūden Hida, easily the most powerful fortress in Rokugan. It sits above a mountain pass that connects the southern and central Crab lands, giving it control over the most strategically vital communication routes for Crab armies and their supply lines. From here, Crab soldiers can move quickly to reinforce the Kaiu Wall during a crisis.

Like all traditional Crab castles, Kyūden Hida is a brutally practical structure, built primarily of stone, with no sheathing plaster to smooth the harsh, irregular lines of its walls. Those walls stand over 180 feet high, rivaling the sacred walls of Otosan Uchi's Forbidden City (the Crab officially declare they are just slightly shorter), but with none of the latter's elegance and beauty. The main gate is built of solid steel.

The castle complex is not designed around switchbacks and dead ends, and would not confuse an invader. The path from the gate to the tenshukaku is uncomplicated, but it is no less harrowing for being simple. Invaders would have to somehow breach the first gate, hike up the rocky hill to the second gate, breach it in turn, and so on, all the while fending off the Crab garrison at bridges and choke points and avoiding a long fall into the dry moats below.

After bypassing the seven walls of the outer baileys, the hypothetical attacker would reach the first interior gate and its soaring walls, beyond which lies the kyūden proper. Above the steel gate hangs the skull of the Maw, a gigantic oni that nearly destroyed the Crab more than three centuries ago. The teeth of the skull often turn jade green after a rainfall, likely an alchemical reaction with the steel of the gate they rest upon, though this phenomenon remains the subject of careful observation. Many at Kyūden Hida believe the Maw still has some connection to the Shadowlands, and that something can be learned about the threats developing beyond the Wall by studying the minor changes in the great oni's skull.

The Kaiu have lined the walls of Kyūden Hida with immensely powerful siege engines and warded every entrance with traps of fiendish design and lethal effect. Even the castle's central parade ground is fitted with hidden devices to turn it into a gigantic death trap if the outer walls should ever be breached, though that has never happened in Rokugan's thousand-year history.

CASTLE CULTURE

The skull of the Maw and its gatehouse are arguably the only symbolic or decorative features in the entire complex of Kyūden Hida. This installation perfectly demonstrates unwritten Crab Clan design principles: find the message and display it for all to see; nothing more is necessary.

Kyūden Hida's castle town rests mostly within the walls of the palace, another exceptional feature of this old stone giant. The layout of the palace grounds originally featured wide courtyards to serve as battle-grounds in which to trap an enemy army, forcing them to fight while surrounded. However, these courtyards have since been filled with buildings that serve as cramped residences for soldiers and staff, their families, and porters; as trade buildings for merchants and smiths; and as storehouses for food and for the Hida's many siege engines. The Crab Clan's standing armies there number three thousand strong.

In a sense, Kyūden Hida is beautiful. In spite of its slab-like architecture, there is simple elegance in the purity of its purpose, of its unbreakable focus. No one questions the palace's intent. Should all Rokugan fall, Kyūden Hida would be the site of the final battle, the last bastion.

NO SLEEP FOR THE WATCHERS

There is no true relaxation so near the Shadowlands; peace finds no purchase. Life there is marked by hyper-vigilance. Newcomers to Hida Palace often report difficulty falling asleep; they half expect to awake to the sound of screams, of warning bells and demon howls. Every footfall on stone, every predawn argument, every bump in the night echoes off the unadorned walls. Yet, as the inured citizenry will confess, one can learn to live there—to thicken one's skin, learn to cope, meditate—but can never truly escape the unease. Rather, they say, one should try to trust the instinct. Be thankful to sleep with one eye open. Fearlessness is folly. Rest cannot exist without surrender.

Kyūden Hida stands as the main operating base supporting Rokugan's campaigns into the Shadowlands. For generations, samurai have planned and staged reconnaissance missions, raids, and other sorties beyond the Kaiu Wall from the Hida Palace grounds. Until recently, the Crab Clan's attitude of resolute self-sacrifice pervaded the castle, seeming almost like confidence. The soldiers felt that their expeditions were generally well planned and well executed, and that they were prepared to defend themselves against the dangers of the Shadowlands.

While the Crab attitude more or less persists, it has soured in recent years. An increasing number of Kyūden Hida's expeditions have failed to return from the Shadowlands. Patrols have vanished; entire companies have disappeared without a trace. The battles at the Kaiu Wall have been more frequent and less certain than ever. Hida generals must acknowledge the worry that gnaws in the pit of the stomach, the fear that perhaps the truth of the Shadowlands is not represented by the skull of the Maw, is not a danger that they can anticipate and challenge. Perhaps this destructive threat is different, is unknown or unknowable. Perhaps this is far more than the Crab can bear, in their bodies and in their wills. Hida Palace is uncertain of its future; it desperately pursues allies no matter their form.

INHABITANTS OF THE FORTRESS

While the largest group of samurai at Kyūden Hida bear the mon of the Hida family, the palace attracts samurai from all of the Crab's major families. It also serves as the de facto home for the Hiruma family, whose own lands were lost to the Shadowlands during the Maw's invasion. As the seat of the Crab Clan Champion and the headquarters of the Crab army, Hida Palace is host to a number of quasi-diplomatic events, including the annual Kuni conference. At each winter solstice, the shugenja of the Kuni family trickle back to Kyūden Hida to privately present their research to one another, sharing their findings. During this time, the clan's Witch Hunters also return to Hida Palace in order to handpick apprentices from a field of young candidates.

Hida Palace also houses the Hida Defender School, famous for its consummate pragmatism and brutality in dealing with the monsters that lurk beyond the Wall. Instructors teach numerous martial arts, philosophy, and the art of war making, while also subjecting students to torturous physical and mental challenges. Students of this harsh curriculum are easy to recognize, training in full armor while carrying a heavy weapon and often attempting assigned tasks that cannot be completed—pushing down a stone wall, balancing on one leg until dawn, memorizing an endless text. These lessons teach the meaning of failure and the value of endurance. No individual can defeat the Shadowlands, but neither can any individual allow themselves to despair. A Hida-trained samurai must know how to soldier on, even knowing success is beyond their grasp.

Inhospitable as it is, Hida Palace rumbles with activity. The monolithic kyūden is the seat of the Crab Clan Champion and the heart of the Crab military; it is Rokugan's war against the Shadowlands written in stone. Steely expeditions into the Shadowlands rally in the castle baileys on their way south, and returning

survivors stop here to tend to their bruises. The daily reports from the Kaiu Wall are bleaker every day, and the Crab's courtiers and agents spend their days scrambling to forge ambitious and unexpected alliances, hoping they will do more good than harm. Each of Kyūden Hida's occupants has their own methods, but they all share the same goal: to ensure that Rokugan continues to endure in the face of a ceaseless onslaught by horrors beyond imagining.

WHAT ATTRACTS VISITORS

Kyūden Hida is not only the last line of defense for Rokugan should the abominations of the Shadowlands ever overrun the Kaiu Wall, but also an enduring symbol of the tenacity of the Crab Clan and their devotion to their duty. To those monstrous war leaders with the cunning and vision to grasp the palace's importance, it stands as a most tempting target and a goal in itself: should Hida Palace ever fall, surely the Emerald Empire would soon succumb to the vile servitors of Fu Leng.

Hida Palace has faced attack only a handful of times in Rokugan's history, and these incidents all predate the modern Kaiu Wall. Now, for Hida Palace to face an invading force of sufficient size to threaten it would surely mean the Wall had fallen. Such a situation would be grave in the extreme, and a Shadowlands horde of such power would sorely test Kyūden Hida's defenses. Still, the fortified keep might just hold where even the mighty Kaiu Wall fell.

SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENA

Above the main gate within Kyūden Hida hangs the massive purified skull of a horned oni. This is the skull of the Maw, an ancient terror, and its message is clear: This is the enemy we face. Visitors, aghast, pass directly under the skull, through ten-ton solid steel gates.

Its proximity to the Shadowlands means that Hida Palace is no stranger to supernatural events. For palace residents, nearly all of whom have served on the Wall and the majority of whom have patrolled in the Shadowlands, signs of the Taint of Jigoku are unwelcome, but not unexpected. Vivid nightmares, waking visions of bleeding walls, barely perceptible voices—such signs might indicate the intrusion of malicious spirits into Rokugan or the rise of an evil power within the Shadowlands. Even a lowly bakemono or other horror of lesser stature that manages to sneak past the Wall—for such incidents are not unknown—is a sign of the supernatural, for it carries the Taint. Patrols from Kyūden Hida strive to ensure such interlopers never make it out of Crab lands and into the wider Empire.

HIDA CHOBO, STOREMASTER

ADVERSARY

CONFLICT RANK: 2 3

Once, Hida Chobo was a soldier at the Kaiu Wall, until a massive oni shattered a tower Chobo was defending; Chobo's leg was crushed in the rubble. The Crab Clan, always practical, took note of his keen mind and re-assigned him to handling supplies and records at Kyūden Hida. There, Chobo has fulfilled his duties well. He's often willing to swap tales with outsiders, although they may tire of his endless war stories. Because Chobo manages the flow of supplies in and out of Kyūden Hida, he is in regular communication with officers and personal friends throughout the southern Crab lands.

SOCIETAL	PERSONAL
49 HONOR	ENDURANCE 13
43 GLORY	COMPOSURE 10
31 STATUS	FOCUS 5
+2, -2 DEMEANOR - GRUFF	VIGILANCE 3



ARTISAN 1 MARTIAL 3 SCHOLAR 3 SOCIAL 1 TRADE 3

ADVANTAGES

Famously Reliable:

Social; Interpersonal

DISADVANTAGES

Lost Leg:

Martial; Physical

FAVORED WEAPONS

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

Gear (equipped): Wakizashi, kimono, calligraphy set.

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

ABILITIES

WAR STORIES

As a downtime activity, Chobo can share his stories of defending the Wall with any number of characters. A character who chooses to listen to the stories suffers 3 strife and adds one kept set to an result to their next check that involves the terrain, lore, or denizens of the Shadowlands.

HIDA DOOR GUARD

ADVERSARY

CONFLICT RANK: 2 1

The guards who protect Kyūden Hida's many gates are stalwart warriors and dangerous foes. Traditionally, the Hida rotate warriors off the Wall and give them 'light duty' such as this to allow them a chance to recuperate from the horrors of the Shadowlands. This means Kyūden Hida is guarded by hardened veterans; but they're also gossipy, bored, and not good at keeping secrets.

SOCIETAL	PERSONAL
40 HONOR	ENDURANCE 12
38 GLORY	COMPOSURE 8
31 STATUS	FOCUS 3
+2, -2 DEMEANOR - GRUFF	VIGILANCE 2



ARTISAN 0 MARTIAL 3 SCHOLAR 0 SOCIAL 1 TRADE 2

ADVANTAGES

Large Stature:

Martial; Physical

Bored:

Social; Interpersonal

Dependable:

Social; Interpersonal

Bluntness:

Social; Interpersonal

FAVORED WEAPONS

Tetsubō: Range 1-2, Damage 7, Deadliness 3, 2-Handed, Cumbersome, Durable, Wargear

Gear (equipped): Ashigaru armor (Physical 3, Wargear)

ABILITIES

THIN DOORS

Activation: When a character makes a Scheme action check targeting a Hida Door Guard, the character may spend in the following way:

: The Hida Door Guard reveals the latest rumor related to the current topic of discussion.

: The Hida Door Guard unknowingly reveals one item of useful information not related to the current topic.



Shiro Kandai

Shiro Kandai rests high on the slopes over Jukami Bay, on the sharp northern promontory above Jukami Mura, the Port That Never Sleeps. There, it overlooks the water as though admiring its reflection. Designed to evoke the eagerness of youth, it once stood proud and handsome; yet, while it is still quite young for a Rokugani castle, its towers have begun to show their age; the lacquer is decaying in the sun, and sparrows have nested in the gables.

Still, as its outer brilliance has faded, its inner brilliance continued to reveal itself. Shiro Kandai's form and function are one; each decorative element is a functional one. The towers may grant moon gazers unrivaled height and grandness, but they also afford Crane naval strategists a panoramic view of the bay and the sea. Ships approaching can be spotted hours in advance, giving the castle ample time to prepare for its guests' arrival. The red-orange lacquer on Shiro Kandai's timbers hardens and fireproofs the wood, and the color helps mariners to see the outer towers from afar; many of the towers serve double duty as lighthouses. The castle's proximity to the shore puts its archers within an arrow's reach of the harbor and offers naval expeditions a rallying point within castle grounds.

Some Crane Clan design ideals persist within the castle complex. While the tenshukaku appears to contain five stories, it is in fact built with a six-story frame, and the complex spaces between floors add up to eight or nine separate levels, knitted together with intricate networks of staircases. Many corridors in the tenshukaku and other buildings feature nightingale floors, which chirp and creak as they are stepped on. The paper windows of Shiro Kandai are coated with oil, which protects against rain and allows a wealth of sunlight indoors. The castle grounds feature an impressive garden in an interior courtyard, with carefully tended flowers, bushes, and trees imported from across Crane lands.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Shiro Kandai is a modest castle complex in both construction and reputation. The Crane builders retained a number of preexisting structures on the castle grounds, most notably Jukami Mura's fortified lighthouses and defensive walls, enabling a quick construction time of only a few years. The castle incorporates the red color of the lighthouses into its design, yet still is identifiably a Crane Clan building even from afar: it is tall and thin, perched on curved ishigaki, and topped with an ornate hipped roof of gray-blue tile.

Shiro Kandai has not been substantially renovated since its completion twenty-five years ago. The provincial daimyō, Asahina Susumu, remains outwardly unbothered by his castle's fading luster, insisting that the young castle needs time to figure out who it wants to be. Susumu spent much of his quiet life learning falconry and raising a family before his appointment to Shiro Kandai, though he has taken well to the position in his age. Susumu openly seeks diplomatic access to Yoritomo, the leader of the piratical Mantis Clan.

The castle grounds are sprawling and extensive, extending from the northern edge of the port town up and out across the inner edge of the promontory. The tenshukaku, the castle's highest tower, is flanked by auxiliary buildings in the wall. A tangle of supporting galleries and low gatehouses interweave the towers at ground level, granting structure and symmetry to the complex. The castle grounds sprawl out below the tenshukaku, with a few modest gardens, shrines, storehouses, and stables protected by the outer wall.

The truth of Shiro Kandai's design lies somewhere between straightforwardness and density. It is much easier to feel lost than to be lost within the castle. The castle's layout at ground level engenders simultaneous feelings of unease and certainty, to encourage a visitor to feel confident about where they're going within the castle grounds but also to cause them to question that confidence. The puzzle of Shiro Kandai also helps conceal the castle's secret rooms and passages, including private baths, armories, and conference halls.

JUKAMI MURA

Deep on the southern coast in the Crane lands sits Jukami Mura, the Port That Never Sleeps, an eclectic old port town pulled up from the silt and the driftwood. The harbor squats at the bottom of an old crater basin on the coast, tucked between two high, arching promontories. This "spilled cup" forms an easily defended natural harbor. The town spreads across the basin and up either side. Jukami Mura tells its uncertain and desperate history in its winding alleys, its switchbacks, its dead ends, hovels, crooked streets and old, moldering houses.

Jukami Mura once seemed to be a town without a future. Piracy and invasion racked the port generation after generation. Each summer, they say, saw one enemy routed and another ascendant, threatening the old merchants of salt and wine. Thus the old walls were built, and the first red towers high over the water. With peace and time came stability and opportunity. Jukami Mura's districts coalesced, among them the infamous Merchants' Quarter down by the port. A mercantile hub for the Crane Clan, the quarter is rich

with caravans and storehouses, sailors and pirates, and rōnin and mercenaries.

Paths cross and uncross at Jukami Mura, where unexpected alignments and rivalries form, and for some, the ranks of the Celestial Order are just a bit closer together. Crane courtiers charter sleazy mercenary boats to convene with pirates upriver. Children sell courtiers oysters by the sack and scramble before the buyers notice they're mostly just wet rocks. Castle guards sneak out to the fighting rings just in time to place bets on their captain. Undercover magistrates investigate corrupt magistrates smuggling illegal goods. Veteran naval officers and mangy opportunist rōnin crews set sail from the harbor at midnight, racing for the same prize.

Day and night, the red lighthouses at the castle keep shining lights over the bay, keep ships docking safely, and keep the port awake. Travelers here may get lost or scammed, but before long, they're back on their feet, moving through the same streets as everyone else, not even noticing the fish scales and waste paper littering the street or the smells of the bog and gutters. Jukami Mura and Shiro Kandai are muddled but not chaotic.

THE PORT UNDER THE CRANE

In order to protect the stability of their hub, the Crane have fortified the port further. They have built watchtowers, established a guard patrol, and installed an unusual defense mechanism at the entrances to the bay: massive chains attached to either side of the harbor entrances that rest at the bottom of the sea until pulled taut. While taut, they're obscured just below the water and badly damages any ships that try to enter the harbor. In addition, the soldiers of Shiro Kandai's garrison are trained in sailing and naval warfare, and the daimyō's guard ships patrol the harbor and the docks day and night.

Several powerful merchants openly oppose Crane rule, and friction turned to resistance. With each act of rebellion, the Crane reinforced their rule, attempting again and again to strong-arm the town into submission with new laws and enforcement, leading finally to the construction of Shiro Kandai, the castle that centralizes and solidifies Crane authority there.

The Crane Clan and the castle daimyō, Asahina Susumu, would delight to see the rebellious will of the old town turn to submission under Crane law, and many magistrates are working to see this effort complete. Unofficially, however, many magistrates aren't trying terribly hard. A rowdy port can be a very valuable one. There's much to gain from dishonest trade, smuggled goods, and stolen trade secrets. The Crane Clan could certainly use the financial help.

WHAT ATTRACTS VISITORS

The Port that Never Sleeps is the place to go if one is looking for a particular item, or wants to find passage on a ship up the coast or out to the Islands of Spice and Silk. The town magistrate has also offered some legal protections to rōnin and mercenary groups looking for work in Jukami Mura, which means that plenty of swords for hire now call the city home.

Recently, Magistrate Shinako has begun to issue writs for vessels willing to hunt the pirates that prey on Crane shipping. More than a few pirate hunters in fast, well-armed ships have taken to the seas in response.

MAGISTRATE ASAHINA SHINAKO

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 2 4

Shinako serves as town magistrate to Asahina Susumu, the lord of Shiro Kandai. An elegant woman of middle years, she offers delicate, carefully nuanced counsel on a variety of matters. She has served Susumu loyally for many years, and her reputation is beyond reproach.

In truth, however, Asahina Shinako is thoroughly corrupt, having struck deals with a number of smugglers. However, Asahina Susumu ignores any rumors about his magistrate's activities, however. As long as

Shinako protects Crane interests in the port, he cares little about her other activities.

SOCIETAL

25 HONOR

57 GLORY

51 STATUS

+2, -2
DEMEANOR - SHREW

2

4

3

2

3

PERSONAL

ENDURANCE 10

COMPOSURE 16

FOCUS 6

VIGILANCE 4

ARTISAN 2

MARTIAL 1

SCHOLAR 3

SOCIAL 4

TRADE 3

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
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Friends in All Places:

Social; Interpersonal

Avaricious:

Social; Interpersonal

FAVORED WEAPONS

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

Gear (equipped): Extravagant robes (Physical 1, Ceremonial), calligraphy set

ABILITIES

JUDICIAL ADJUSTMENT

When adding a momentum point to an intrigue involving legal issues, Asahina Shinako adds one additional momentum point.



Shiro Kitsuki

Spires of green tile and gold fixtures pierce upward into the thin sky above the frozen mountain ridge ring- ing Dragon Clan lands. Thickly forested and abundant in wild animals, the forbidding peaks are to the Dragon as a stout bailey is to a fortress. Their gatehouse is Shiro Kitsuki.

Shiro Kitsuki straddles Last Step Pass, the broadest and most easily traversed in the mountains—and perhaps the only one viable without local guides. Observers in the castle’s highest towers can see troop movements across the entire province. A major road and a naviga- ble river, the only fast routes to the Dragon’s mouth, approach the foothills below. The shiro’s strategic value tantalizes foolhardy commanders who crave the glory and prestige of storming its unconquerable heights. The Dragon would have it no other way. However, Shiro Kitsuki’s first and foremost purpose is to train Dragon esotericists and specialists. Few non-Dragon ever think of Shiro Kitsuki, let alone visit. But Shiro Kitsuki’s trials confer fame and status on those members of the Dragon Clan who are tough and smart enough to over- come them, and trusted allies of the clan are sometimes invited to undertake the challenges as well.

Elemental mystics, shrewd investigators, and high- land soldiers all owe their mettle to time spent at Shiro Kitsuki in study and practice. But this remote loca- tion, so long occupied by eccentrics forced into close contact, is home to numerous long-standing grudges between its various residents. Shiro Kitsuki’s greatest weakness may be itself.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Last Step Pass is X-shaped, and Shiro Kitsuki’s four keeps rise from the heights to the north, south, west, and east of the pass. While the eastern keep is cam- ouflaged within the wilderness, the northern, western, and southern keeps are classic *yamashiro*, or mountain fortresses. Rings of ramparts give way to a literal maze of interlocking baileys, spiraling up the mountainside like a spider’s web. Most baileys have multiple gate- houses so attackers cannot be sure which leads to a keep. The gatehouses and baileys themselves are full of puzzles and traps designed both for use in training Dragon cadets and to confound attacking forces. The primary structures surmount each peak in *hashigokaku* layout, consisting of three rectangular structures ascending the keep like stairs and connected to the others via several sky bridges.

THE TOP OF THE WORLD

Outside the baileys, Shiro Kitsuki’s first line of defense is the surrounding terrain. Few non-Dragon know how to navigate the mountains without falling victim to ava- lanches, rock slides, frostbite, or wild animals. There are traps and training grounds outside the walls as well. A stone maze of narrow paths carved into a rocky mesa confounds one approach. Another looks like an ordinary mountain forest but is full of hunting traps including covered spike pits, swinging and rolling logs, and tripwires.

Attackers climbing to a keep must also face the cruel obstacle of altitude sickness, a set of symptoms that low barometric pressure and thin air inflict on those who ascend too quickly. The Dragon defenders, accustomed to the height and well provisioned, can take advantage of their foes’ shortness of breath, nau- sea, dizziness, and dehydration.

Shiro Kitsuki’s remote location has its drawbacks, however. The quartermaster carefully rations provi- sions, since inclement weather and bad harvests can take a serious toll on the valley farms that support the castle. Forage and game make up a significant quantity of the food served there. But Shiro Kitsuki’s greatest weakness is the disunity among its various factions that practice different disciplines. Few outside the Dragon Clan, even among their trusted allies who visit Shiro Kitsuki to train, understand the long-running buildup of petty squabbles that make the castle’s inhabitants their own worst enemies. An infiltrator who understands these divisions could easily play them off one another, forcing the castle to devour its own tail.

CASTLE CULTURE

Everyone at Shiro Kitsuki is involved in a journey of self-improvement—either their own or someone else’s, as an instructor or mentor. These journeys are physi- cally, mentally, and spiritually demanding, to the point where many residents and guests—particularly those on the younger side, in the thick of their own train- ing—have little energy for social life and casual con- versation. Those who thrive in quiet and wild places tend to feel at home on the castle grounds, where the wind, trees, and animals are generally louder than the people. A person who passes someone on a path will receive a respectful acknowledgment, but small talk is unlikely unless one goes hunting for it. People tend to be a little blunt and abrupt when they begin conver- sations, thinking nothing of introducing serious topics without the customary buildup.

The instructors, staff, and garrison soldiers are more garrulous and relaxed than trainees. Cold winter nights often give rise to gossip sessions or impromptu

MOUNTAIN DANGERS

Climbing around Last Step Pass can be ex- tremely dangerous, and GMs are encouraged to treat much of the ter- rain outside of cleared paths as Dangerous (see page 267 of the core rulebook).

In addition, during the first week a non-Drag- on Clan member is in the mountains, they increase the TN of all their checks to move, for Movement actions, and for other physical activity by 1.

RECREATION

Low-key activities make up much of the Shiro Kitsuki social life: board games, music, poetry circles, or visits to nearby valley *ryokan* for tea ceremonies or hot-spring bathing. Once visitors become accustomed to the altitude, wandering in the highlands brings them to unparalleled views of the valleys below, the stuff poetry is made of. Bears, macaques, sable, serows, foxes, boars, and wild cats are visible on such hikes, but hunting for sport rather than for food is strictly prohibited for fear of angering the mountains' kami.

debates around the hibachi braziers, with plenty of strong shōchū to keep everyone warm. Visitors sometimes struggle with the Dragon habit of turning what seems like an innocent conversation into a discourse on philosophy or religion, an off-the-cuff lecture, or an elaborate thought experiment of the kind most people prefer to avoid after hours.

Shiro Kitsuki is not a densely populated castle, and most of the instructors have worked there for a very long time. Accordingly, old rivalries and grudges have had a long time to develop. Teachers compete with one another to secure the admiration of the most promising students. Successful students boost a teacher's reputation and are therefore an investment in the teacher's family's success. Positively influencing promising students also means the teacher gains access to favors from those students as they rise in status after they leave.

While anyone committed to "eating bitter"—toughing it out and staying focused—at Shiro Kitsuki may train in any of the teaching divisions' chambers, focusing on one line of study usually yields the most reliable results. As they spend more time at the castle, many of the students and teachers assigned to each division grow cliquish and inward focused, to the point that rivalries pop up between the different divisions. A prominent visitor to Shiro Kitsuki may find themselves with invitations to three or four simultaneous social events hosted by the different divisions of the castle complex. While the visitor may simply think they have a choice of events to attend that evening, the conflicting events are in fact efforts by the division heads to undermine one another. By choosing to attend one, the visitor ingratiates themselves with their host and frustrates those they turned down.

THE COMPASS KEEPS

Each of the four keeps organizes and administers a curriculum of training procedures to prepare their trainees for a certain calling. A curriculum consists of a series of "chambers," each of which is a challenge or set of related challenges that a trainee must attempt and eventually complete. Each chamber has a proctor who oversees it, sometimes with the aid of assistants, and decides when a trainee has mastered the chamber sufficiently that they may be graduated to the next chamber. Some chamber challenges take place within a single room built for the purpose, such as one of the outer baileys' gatehouses—hence the name "chamber." Some of them tend to take a few days to clear, others multiple weeks or even months. While students often sing the praises of whoever completes the chambers fastest, instructors admire a trainee who succeeds only after weeks or months of hard work at a chamber that does not come naturally to them.

The southernmost keep of Shiro Kitsuki houses its military academy. The academy teaches conventional and unconventional warfare techniques (especially those related to alpine warfare), didactic methods for drill instructors, and the philosophy of war, including concepts like just war and the application of Shinseist thought to martial arts, tactics, and strategy. War-games, involving field exercises in warm weather and Go, shōgi, and miniatures exercises in extreme cold, take place year round.

The western keep is the home base of the Kitsuki Investigator School as well as the residence of the current castellan, Investigator Emerita Kitsuki Ma'aya. The multistory library and Kitsuki family archives are housed in this keep. Most of the interior consists of small offices and lecture halls in which Kitsuki Investigators hone their craft and train the next generation.

The northern keep is a Shinseist monastery maintained by the Dragon Clan's tattooed monks. The monastery is in charge of Shinseist services for the entire castle complex and liaises with the small temples in the valleys that minister to the lower-class laity. It is austere and spare even by monastic standards, many of its halls and walkways exposed to the bitter mountain weather as a means of teaching the monks perseverance and stoicism. Stairways rimed with ice and courtyards buried deep in powdery snow mark the northern keep, giving it the appearance of an abandoned facility even when fully occupied.

The eastern keep looks strangest of all. Viewed from afar, visitors might think it no keep at all; the structures are smaller, and fewer of them protrude through the trees that cover the peak it sits upon, in contrast to

the stepped towers surmounting the other three. Many of the keep structures are built into the mountain's caverns and under its rocky overhangs. The eastern keep's arrangement reflects the shugenja who occupy it and their quest to eliminate the difference between the physical self and the elemental self. Every winter, some rooms and cells must be abandoned to massive bears who decide to settle in for their winter torpor there instead of bothering to dig their own dens. Visitors are often advised to remember that bears do not truly hibernate but rather wake every now and then in search of choice morsels—and to bears of this size, a human is a choice morsel indeed.

WHAT ATTRACTS VISITORS

Shiro Kitsuki houses many important facilities for the Dragon Clan, including archives, an armory, a sword-smith's forge, several vegetable gardens, and a modest dōjō for Mirumoto fencers. That said, the entire castle's most important role is as a training facility. It primarily serves the Dragon Clan, but trusted Dragon allies are occasionally invited to join in maneuvers or spend a year training alongside Dragon Clan students. These out-of-clan visitors need a great deal of patience to weather not only the harsh environment and the difficult training, but also the idiosyncratic, philosophical culture the Dragon Clan fosters in its members.

SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENA

Shiro Kitsuki teems with rumors of aspirants who looked too deep into the abyss: trainee shugenja and monks who fell too far into their meditations, who traveled out into the mountains and never came back. Lost in their own heads, infused with powers beyond the human norm, they lost the ability to relate

to standard society and gave themselves over to the wilderness. Most of these stem from the sudden disappearance of students who tired of Shiro Kitsuki's frustrations and left to rejoin lowland society. A few of the stories, however, are true.

Agasha Pōsan was once the most promising shugenja studying at Shiro Kitsuki. One of her explorations to find a remote location for meditation and practice took her into the domain of a demonic entity, deep within a mountain cave. The ravenous being from Gaki-dō, the Realm of the Hungry Dead, had long been stranded without prey. As Pōsan reached the end of her meditation, her resolve and clarity faltered, and the ancient evil was able to trick her into becoming its conduit by taking the guise of a kami.

The few shugenja at Shiro Kitsuki who went after her recognized the monster that had infested Pōsan's soul. They transformed the area around the cave into an icy tower to contain the hungering horror. Upon their return to the castle, they said Pōsan had died in her meditations, and they declared the mountain peak off-limits. That was a generation ago. Only one of the shugenja from the initial cover-up remains, wracked with guilt in her old age. Pōju is Pōsan's biological sister, and she dreams of freeing Pōsan before she dies. But her health will no longer allow her to consider climbing mountains. Unless she finds someone to confide in, someone courageous and capable enough to approach a possessed shugenja in her place of power, Pōju may leave this world with her heart still breaking with regret.



KITSUKI MA'AYA, CASTELLAN

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 4 5

Over the course of a long and storied career, Kitsuki Ma'aya has solved crimes and mysteries on behalf of the Emperor, the clans, and the religious institutions of Rokugan. She has operated as an agent of the Dragon Clan, an Emerald Magistrate, and even a rōnin, sometimes working in disguise under an assumed identity. Her skill in the subtle arts stands in contrast to her own temperament: she revels in glory, attention, and public recognition for her successes and investigative genius.

Ten years ago, a string of narrowly foiled assassination attempts drove her into retirement. She found safety as Shiro Kitsuki's castellan, but she nevertheless chafes at the solitude and quiet that surround her. Now that her husband has passed away, Ma'aya's greatest joy—beyond her children's and grandchildren's occasional visits—comes from the classroom. She teaches several classes on logic, forensic methodology, and other investigative arts, frequently taking class time to tell the stories of her own exploits.



ARTISAN 1 MARTIAL 2 SCHOLAR 4 SOCIAL 3 TRADE 4

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Keen Sight: Scholar; Mental, Physical	Vulnerable Students: Social; Interpersonal

FAVORED WEAPONS

Wakizashi: Range 0-1, Damage 3, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Razor-Edged.

Gear (equipped): Castellan robes (Physical 1, Ceremonial), calligraphy set, law scrolls

THE INVESTIGATORS' MASQUERADE

In addition to classwork and case studies, the Kitsuki Investigators use recreated crime scenes to give rookies the next best thing to on-the-job training. The annual culmination of these exercises is the Investigators' Masquerade. The senior leaders of the Kitsuki Investigator School leverage their skills in disguise and subtlety to adopt fictional personae and stage a simulated crime and attendant mystery, redecorating the Shiro Kitsuki grounds as the setting. Kitsuki Investigators and any allies they wish to enlist then have a week to uncover the truth behind the mystery. The first team to come to the masquerade committee with the solution receives a prize of great value. Recommendation for high-status placements, masterwork paired sets of katana and jitte, and renowned hunting dogs and warhorses have been prizes in the past, but the glory and respect winners receive are of equal value. This hands-on investigative exercise grows gradually more elaborate every time it occurs, and it always includes puzzles, social challenges, and athletic or martial tests that contain concealed clues.

ABILITIES

BOASTFUL INVESTIGATOR

When Ma'aya assists another character making a Skulduggery or Scholar check concerning a criminal matter, she allows the character to roll two additional instead of just one. If the character succeeds on the check, after resolving its effects, they receive 4 strife.

SKULK

Activation: When she performs an Initiative or Attack check using Air, Ma'aya may spend as follows:

: If Ma'aya is in Obscuring terrain, a crowd, or otherwise concealed from sight, one character with vigilance lower than or equal to 4 loses sight of her.

The Seven Fold Palace

The Crane Clan's approach to mastery of the sword takes the weapon from its genesis in iron ore and sand to its place within a deserving foe's body. To master mining ore, smithing blades, and fencing is a task too daunting for any single individual, but as a whole, the Crane Clan can do it all. One part of this endeavor begins at the Seven Fold Palace, which is not where Rokugan's finest blades are forged, but instead the forge in which the finest Rokugani smiths are tested. Many Kakita artisans who study the making of arms and armor find themselves at the Seven Fold Palace for some years as a part of their training.

The Seven Fold Palace is an architectural marvel, thanks to the influence of the castle architects who train and practice there. Every detail of the campus, from the joinery used to create the wooden fixtures to the quality of the food served to guests, is an experiment in crafting excellence. However, perfection has a price. Study at the Seven Fold Palace is punishing and nerve-racking, a gauntlet of constant judgment from peers and superiors alike. Apprentices should be prepared to eat bitter as they work toward mastery—and to weather social censure from everyone around them for the slightest missteps.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Having grown from a complex of smithing facilities, the Seven Fold Palace is not well fortified. Its primary defense is its location deep within Crane lands. The palace lies low in the foothills beside the Crane's most productive mines in the mountains. High-quality iron is rare in Rokugan; many of the most advanced metallurgic techniques developed as ways to compensate for the widespread impurities in Rokugani iron. The Crane Clan has access to those techniques as well as some of the best iron in Rokugan—mined under the watch of the Seven Fold Palace.

The palace's smithing facilities are excellent, although they are not the best in all Rokugan. They are meant primarily for teaching and learning, processes that require mistakes. The forges have space for many novice apprentices and journeymen to work side by side and observe each other's work. A master smith who wants only to craft the finest pieces as efficiently as possible would struggle there, with students bumbling about all over the place, but as the palace's motto proclaims, "This palace is the forge; the smith is the blade."

The palace's physical details and accouterments reflect its focus on artistic excellence. Every roof beam, every folding screen, every arrangement of rocks and plants on the grounds represents an attempt at excellence by the craftspeople in residence. From a perspective embracing a classical Rokugani aesthetic, however, the castle comes off as garish: instead of minimalist rooms containing a single beautiful object to give the impression of space, many Seven Fold Palace rooms are crammed wall to wall and floor to ceiling with students' works of beauty (or attempts thereat).

Seven Fold Palace teachers and staff destroy most of these works of art after a short period of display and critique. No trace or record remains of them. Cruel as it may seem, this policy encourages students not to dwell on their past accomplishments and mistakes, but rather to look to the future. Further, it teaches them the impermanence of all beauty—that beauty's worth is not in some unachievable ideal of eternity, but in the very inevitability of its passing. Nevertheless, a thriving black market exists for palace artifacts smuggled away from destruction, bound for the hands of collectors of lesser means.

CASTLE CULTURE

The Seven Fold Palace's occupants are divided into apprentices, journeymen, and masters. The masters primarily provide oversight and administration. They guide high-level operations, welcome important visitors, and adjudicate important tests and ceremonies. On the masters' council sits one master of each craft: a master swordsmith, a master *koto* maker, a master armorer, a master architect, and several dozen others. The journeymen who work under the masters do the bulk of the teaching and oversee the creation of individual pieces; the apprentices are their tools.

Life at the Seven Fold Palace is stressful, busy, and overstimulating. The palace is crowded, and many of the artisans training there come from noble backgrounds and are used to having servants wait on them hand and foot. At the Seven Fold Palace, however, apprentices do everything from cooking to cleaning to guard duty. They are even required to help obtain materials. An apprentice to a *koto* maker, for example, must plant, irrigate, and care for paulownia trees in the arbor; chop them down; and cart the wood to the carpenter. An apprentice smith must travel to the mines, living and working alongside miners for a portion of the year.

Still, as apprentices climb the ranks, they tend to look back with wistful fondness on their days of physical labor in preparation for learning their craft. While the physical stresses of craftwork become less about muscle and more about finesse as time goes on, the mental stresses only increase.

The apprentices are ranked in status from highest to lowest by their superiors. These rankings are posted for all to see and are revised weekly. Everything a student says or does can affect the rankings. Compounding the problem, the apprentices live in crowded dormitories with next to no privacy. The dormitories vary in quality, and the highest-ranked students get to live in the best ones. Another effect of the ranking system is that whenever a student is learning something new, they must decide whether to confer with other students to better learn the topic or to keep information secret lest they inadvertently help their peers rise above them.

Journeyman live in better facilities with more privacy and leisure time, but socially speaking, their lives are no less stressful or competitive. The masters rank and them just as the journeymen do the apprentices, but the rankings are no longer public. Only the masters know the true estimation of each journeyman's work. And not only is their work judged, but also their social conduct. Even journeymen's free time becomes part of their training: parties, plays, and garden or hunting outings are all opportunities for their social adroitness to be displayed and compared. At this stage of training, alliances and rivalries that began to spawn during apprenticeship now blossom into their more solid, adult forms.

THE PRICE OF SUCCESS

Due to the punishing lifestyle at the Seven Fold Palace, about a third of the apprentices do not make it to journeyman level, and about a third of the journeymen do not become masters. It is usually not a single stressor, but a combination of social, mental, and physical hardships, that makes advancement impossible. Realizing that one will not advance is heartbreaking in a culture that values glorious achievement and perseverance beyond reason. Nevertheless, the Crane Clan demands excellence, and those whose "impurities" cannot be removed with heat and pressure are cast aside as surely as scrap iron, or at least turned to more useful ends as tools. While some may make their way into other schools or gain appointments to bureaucratic positions, no few failed students take to monastic life to atone for their failure or even request seppuku. Most merely plod along as journeymen for the rest of their lives, accepting that their lot may not be glorious, but serves a greater purpose.



WHAT ATTRACTS VISITORS

Apprentices and journeymen are expected to participate in artistic and enrichment activities outside their specific fields. These activities include athletic training and competition, martial arts, theater, dance, study of the classics, and exchanges with other masters' apprentices. Due to the lack of direct competition between disciplines at the palace, apprentices have an easier time socializing and forming romantic bonds with other masters' apprentices than with apprentices in their own field. Students in different disciplines do compete socially sometimes, but this competition is less demanding and aggressive—a friendlier rivalry.

On the kemari field, however, bitter rivalries bubble up. Kemari is a Rokugani ball game with both cooperative and team rulesets. Students are responsible for organizing, training, and maintaining their own intramural kemari teams. While kemari takes significant time away from studies and practice, the teamwork and sportsmanship skills it imparts are a much-needed rarity at the Seven Fold Palace, and therefore the sport is highly regarded. The palace's style of play is quite rough and physical, affording students a socially acceptable way to knock down or publicly overcome their rivals.

SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENA

While the Seven Fold Palace does have an on-site Shintō temple, the adjoining Fortunist shrine is the major focus of religious life. The shrine is large and handsomely appointed, its every architectural and landscaping detail husbanded with the greatest care thanks to donations of labor and resources from Seven Fold Palace alumni. The shintai that sits in the shrine's sanctuary is a single coal that glows eternally without need for fire, heat, or tending. It is the earthly form of Kagutsuchi, a kami of fire and patron of ceramics and metallurgy. Particularly ambitious individuals—especially those trained at the Seven Fold Palace—are said to have Kagutsuchi's fire burning inside them.

While in centuries past, Kagutsuchi's high priest was also the Seven Fold Palace's master swordsmith or potter, nowadays the positions are separate. Priest Ezui and her assistant shrine keepers are among the few trustworthy confidants available to the palace's apprentices and journeymen amid a sea of judgmental peers and superiors. Students who volunteer to aid in shrine maintenance get a much-needed opportunity to vent their frustrations and take care of their emotional well-being.

KAKITA MOTOTADA, GARDENER

ADVERSARY

CONFLICT RANK: 1 5

Kakita Mototada is the leading master of Rokugan's oldest gardening tradition. He specializes in using garden layouts to recreate celebrated views from other parts of Rokugan, evoking the mountains visible from the highest tower at Shiro Kitsuki or the forest outside Kyūden Shika with careful layouts of flowers, shrubs, trees, and landscaping. These simulated views are extremely expensive and fashionable, and Mototada's work has granted him the ear of rich and powerful nobles across Rokugan. He uses his clout at the Seven Fold Palace to ensure that his family members and his friends' children have an easier time than other apprentices. The most successful trainees at the palace are historically Mototada's favorites. It would take a particularly canny investigative mind to expose this kind of quiet corruption in a way that would hurt the gardening master.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL			
50 HONOR		ENDURANCE 6			
81 GLORY		COMPOSURE 11			
62 STATUS		FOCUS 6			
+2, -2 DEMEANOR · SHREW		VIGILANCE 3			
ARTISAN 5		MARTIAL 0	SCHOLAR 2	SOCIAL 3	TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Famously Successful: Social; <i>Fame, Interpersonal</i>	Whispers of Treachery: Social; <i>Interpersonal, Infamy</i>
Social Connections: Social; <i>Interpersonal</i>	Weakness for Beauty: Social; <i>Interpersonal</i>

FAVORED WEAPONS

Gardening Staff: Range 1-2, Damage 4, Deadliness 3, Durable, Mundane.

Gear (equipped): Gardener's robes (Physical 1, Mundane), gardener's tools, large umbrella

ABILITIES

FORM OVER FUNCTION

Once per session, a character who performs a downtime activity within one of Mototada's gardens may remove all strife. Should they do so, if they later make a Martial Art (any) or Tactics skill check during the session they must reroll one result containing a symbol.

Kyūden Asako

Kyūden Asako rises from the site of a much older castle, one built thousands of years ago, before Rokugan's founding. The earliest foundation stones are said to have been set by a local ruler, positioned according to the counsel of traveling scholars from the Land of Four Rivers, and indeed, several stones are marked with the words and motifs of that distant land. Some of the ancient castle structures—raised wooden buildings and a thatch-roofed watchtower rising into the mist—survive to this day, carefully preserved and restored. Surrounding these monuments to history is a beautiful palace of gleaming pale walls and rich red tile roofs.

Kyūden Asako was built on a series of hills in a volcanically active region where hot springs dispense mineral-rich water into natural basins. The palace, which encompasses some of the springs, is devoted to leisure, comfort, and healing, offering a counterpoint to the trauma, violence, and stress that define many samurai lives. Historical scholarship, always a Phoenix Clan passion, thrives there. Still, among the healers, scholars, entertainers, and servants lurk spies and blackmailers waiting to catch powerful nobles with their guard down. There is trouble in paradise.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Kyūden Asako's original site was a classic ancient castle location: a craggy hill surrounded by wetlands that could easily be transformed into rice paddies. The castle's early occupants kept a wide ring of wetlands around the castle site intact, however. Legend has it that an ancient king who lived there vowed to leave the wetlands undisturbed after a turtle saved his child from drowning; of course, it is equally plausible that earlier inhabitants hoped the marshes would impede attackers. Unless they travel on one of the high roads approaching the castle, large parties—especially mounted ones—cannot avoid slogging through the muck, where defenders' arrows can pick them off easily.

However, because of the hills' low rise and the marshy ground, Kyūden Asako's physical defenses are less elaborate than those of many military castles. The palace has outer curtain walls and a central keep, but most of its structures are built as *yashiki* (single-floor mansions) rather than fortresses.

ASAKO SHILDBEARERS

Half of Kyūden Asako's palace guards are conventionally armed and armored archers and spearfighters.

The other half may look to outsiders like historical curiosities to go with the handful of ancient structures in the palace center. Called Shieldbearers, they train for hours every day in the use of shields that many samurai would view as archaic, armor, and *tsurugi*. They maintain this regimen in part to keep a nearly extinct martial art alive and in part because of their highly specialized role, their environment, and their dedication to their history. However, their seemingly outdated armaments are not truly bronze and iron: they are modern steel wrought in ancient patterns by skilled smiths. The Shieldbearers use the round shield and *tsurugi* as both offensive and defensive weapons, striking and bashing with the shield and parrying deftly with the straight sword, which is a far more apt defensive tool than longer and heavier *tachi* or *katana*.

On the rare occasions the palace has faced violence, its attackers have found its defenders' simple and adaptable weapons confusing to fight against. The traditional armaments are also highly effective at helping defenders maintain control over the natural choke points that the elevated paths above the rice paddies create while archers rain death from the rooftops. Kyūden Asako's Shieldbearers are highly sought after as *yōjimbō*.

Kyūden Asako's greatest defense is neither edifice nor environment, nor human. It is the certainty of social censure that attackers would face should they wage war against it. The palace is seen primarily as a place of healing and as a resort location. Every samurai in Rokugan who has ever enjoyed relaxing at Kyūden Asako or has recuperated from illness or injury there would vow revenge, as would every scholar of history who respects what Kyūden Asako represents. The diversity of factions with spies at the palace also functions as a deterrent: why upset the board when a trusted resource is already in play?

FUN AND ENTERTAINMENT

Kyūden Asako's natural hot springs are pools of fresh mineral water, naturally heated to various temperatures, that both feel soothing and aid in healing. The palace's attendants include an order of priests who study naturopathic restorative methods as an expression of Shinseist devotion. The priests use massage therapy and herbal remedies in their healing. They also guide visitors in discussion, meditation, therapeutic calisthenics, and the practice of arts such as painting and poetry in order to help them process stress, the horrors of war, and other demands placed on the samurai mind. The palace's permanent staff include tea masters and chefs as well, many of whom specialize in the intersection of cuisine and preventative medicine.



Kyūden Asako also features a rotating series of artists in residence, representing every form of entertainment popular among samurai. Nō and Kabuki troupes, puppeteers, champion kemari teams, musicians, and dancers perform and teach master classes daily. Flower arrangers, gardeners, and visual artists from calligraphers to sculptors display their work in the palace's chambers. The only common form of entertainment not found there is hunting, which does not agree with the swampy terrain. Competition among artists for residency is intense.

Finally, Kyūden Asako's library is excellent. Built into the central keep to guard against both attack and inclement weather, it has texts that date from the dawn of recorded Rokugani history, including a trove

of books written on bamboo strips and uncovered by Phoenix archaeologists. The library's historians are of a conservative bent, preferring silk scrolls to paper for their resistance to moisture damage. The palace's collection of medical texts is particularly robust.

WHAT ATTRACTS VISITORS

Kyūden Asako's on-site shrine honors Bentei, the Fortune of Arts and Letters, whose intellect blesses the flowing waters there. While Great Clan samurai and Imperial nobles are the palace's primary clientele, Rokugani from all walks of life make pilgrimages to Kyūden Asako to honor Bentei and carry her blessing



back to the waterways serving their homes. A peculiar love-hate relationship exists between the locals, the pilgrims, and the noble visitors. The nobles and pilgrims chafe at one another's company, but they must treat one another respectfully in the context of religion. The locals resent the visitors, who treat them like servants regardless of their station, but they recognize that the visitors' commerce and offerings are their home's livelihood. While the pilgrims are generally earnest in their devotion, they are far less economically beneficial than noble guests, who lavish Kyūden Asako with generous donations each year.

Kyūden Asako is also a hotbed of espionage, both amateur and professional. Despite the garrison's best efforts, spies from outside can easily sneak in and out among the pilgrims, visiting artists, and noble patrons. Some of the spies are shinobi or similar professional infiltrators. The majority, though, are simply folk with penchants for skulduggery and greedy hearts, taking advantage of Kyūden Asako's heavy traffic and distractions to gather information on unwitting samurai. Many visitors are wealthy, successful, well positioned, and surrounded by the palace's soothing waters and healers with calming bedside manners, they let their guard down. Those in a position to listen, through infiltrating

the palace staff or taking the waters themselves, can gain great insight into such visitors' character and business. A listener should keep in mind, however, that anyone around them may be there to learn their own secrets.

SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENA

Each of Kyūden Asako's dark caves and restorative hot springs are sealed for part of the day or night at the order of the priests who oversee the maintenance of the springs. If guests ask, they are told the springs need to be physically and spiritually cleansed between uses—which they do. But the real reason for this cycling of use is Kyūden Asako's frequent alignment with various Spirit Reams—and the unusual guests who tend to arrive during these cosmic confluences.

On misty evenings, ancestor spirits descend from Yomi on cloud palanquins. Set at ease by the archaic architecture, the spirits bathe in the waters and reminisce together about their time walking the earth. In the dead of night, the administrators of Jigoku and the employees of Emma-Ō and his Kings of Hell make the long climb from far beneath the earth to unwind from their stressful jobs judging and processing the

dead. Sometimes they find themselves joined by wicked demons and hungry ghosts from the less reputable regions of the underworld; the higher of station among even these foul creatures like to relax in hot water as well as any noble ancestor. Strange, shapeless creatures from Yume-dō, the Realm of Dreams, mingle with capricious animal spirits from Chikushō-dō and Sakkaku. Setting aside their day-to-day struggles, at Kyūden Asako, cosmic forces good, evil, and esoteric are often polite enough with one another to soak in the same tub or enjoy a round of shōgi. At other times, they can barely keep from one another's throats.

The presence of these spirit guests is often whispered about among the servants on Kyūden Asako's grounds, but few see them directly. Any bath attendant with several years of service, however, has likely noticed the strange footprints, heard the unearthly sounds, or even been sent by a priest to deliver sake to a "distinguished guest" upon whose face they must not gaze.

KYŪDEN ASAKO INHABITANTS

The prototypical Kyūden Asako resident is studious and observant, a careful student of human nature. Having spent significant time placing others' needs above their own, they listen more than they speak. When they do speak, they know what questions to ask to tease troubles, worries, and pains out of their interlocutor. They can use these skills to talk an enemy into revealing their vulnerabilities without even realizing it or to support an ally who suffers in silence. Many are as comfortable around books as they are around people, having spent time in the libraries studying medical texts or the classics.

Kyūden Asako dwellers sometimes struggle when swift, bold action must trump careful contemplation. Instead of listening to their intuition, they may wait, question, and gather information until the iron is no longer hot. They sometimes chafe when they have to work with impetuous peers who assume they have nothing to say just because they prefer to wait before asserting themselves. Moreover, they may be so used to putting others' needs first, that they bottle up their feelings and opinions to an unhealthy degree. Their allies would do well to learn from their thoughtful and perceptive approach to people and problems, treating them as they treat others to help them reach their full potential.

Asako Raikū, Castellan

ADVERSARY

CONFLICT RANK:  1  4

Asako Raikū is an elderly monk who oversees Kyūden Asako in general and the palace library in particular. The library is a massive structure that looks ancient on the outside but, alone among the structures at Kyūden Asako, has modern appointments and furnishings on the inside in order to keep books and scrolls in a safe, dry environment. Historical scholarship is Raikū's passion; the scrolls in the library range from novels to religious texts to documentation of archaeological sites such as ancient tombs that the Asako family unearthed. However, he is the pawn of a shinobi infiltrator who has uncovered blackmail material on Raikū's immediate family from their own diaries.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL	
61	HONOR	8	ENDURANCE
58	GLORY	9	COMPOSURE
40	STATUS	7	FOCUS
 +1,  +1,  -2 DEMEANOR - DETACHED		4	VIGILANCE

ARTISAN 1

MARTIAL 2

SCHOLAR 4

SOCIAL 3

TRADE 4

ADVANTAGES

Fukurokujin's Blessing: Scholar; Mental, Spiritual**Blackmailed:** Social; Interpersonal

DISADVANTAGES

FAVORED WEAPONS

Wakizashi: Range 0-1, Damage 3, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Razor-Edged.

Gear (equipped): Castellan robes (Physical 1, Ceremonial), calligraphy set, two random books or scrolls

ABILITIES

POSSESSIVE LIBRARIAN

While in the Kyūden Asako library, when Raikū assists a character on a Scholar skill check, the character may reroll one die showing a blank result. However, if the character fails the check, Raikū receives 3 strife.

Kyūden Shika

Deep in the heart of spirit-haunted Aokami Forest, roofs of brown tile rise from the canopy, their alabaster fixtures catching the light of morning and evening, making dawn and dusk seem to last just a little longer. The points of spears glitter in the watchtowers and along the parapets. Within the grounds, three Rokugani cedars, each one several millennia old and the *shintai*—or home—of a forest kami, stand amid manicured gardens and ornamental pools. The lyrics to a popular song say that one's first glimpse of Kyūden Shika is the same feeling as falling in love.

Kyūden Shika's name features prominently in Rokugani literature, from romantic poems to scandalous novels. It is known primarily by two of its various reputations. "Kyūden Shika is a palace from a fairy tale, the ideal site to court one's soulmate," say the poems. "Kyūden Shika is a den of hedonism and iniquity, where the pleasures of the present eclipse any notion of the future," say the novels. Virtue and vice. Rosy light and seductive darkness. Just the way the Deer Clan likes it.

The truth about this palace lies in the dialectic between these forces, just as the Deer Clan's heart lies between its speardancers' bold acrobatics and its matchmakers' subtle machinations. Kyūden Shika is this little clan's most efficient tool for affecting the balance of power in Rokugan, for drawing friends into unbreakable alliances and ensnaring their enemies in webs of intrigue. All the stories about Kyūden Shika are true, and all the stories are false. How can the curious help but visit, to find out for themselves?

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Kyūden Shika does not appear extremely defensible at first glance. The outer wall is fairly small with very small ishigaki and occasional guard towers. Some of the gates are not even protected by proper gatehouses, and many of the interior buildings are also built with style and aesthetics in mind, rather than defense. Only the central keep is particularly fortified.

However, Kyūden Shika's main defenses exist beyond the castle grounds. The forest that surrounds it provides a better defense than any wall ever could. Outside the wall, hunting parties and speardancers sweep the forest for foes. Deer Clan military doctrine directs the speardancers to counterattack aggressively through the woods in case of attack, using their superior mobility and command of the overgrown terrain to outmaneuver offenders. In addition, the Deer Clan

shugenja maintain close alliances with several kami who make the forest their home. Ideally, unless a Great Clan dispatched one of their armies, any invaders would be dealt with long before they caught a glimpse of Kyūden Shika's walls.

The castle grounds and the buildings' and keep's interiors are all uncommonly roomy and spacious; even the corridors are broad and high ceilinged. These curiosities of design, which were the bane of the architects and construction workers who built the structures, allow the Shika Speardancers to command space easily. Knives and short swords usually have an advantage over weapons with greater reach indoors, but Kyūden Shika's open spaces allow one or two speardancers to control an entire hallway with sweeping and spinning motions.

CASTLE CULTURE

Many of the passionate young samurai who visit Kyūden Shika hope to indulge in the pleasures promised by the castle's reputation (which is fostered by the cunning Shika Matchmakers). What they find is more complex. It is true that stimulating entertainment and raucous parties occur, along with ill-considered affairs, jealous quarrels, and the embarrassing consequences of overindulgence. The senior Shika Matchmakers keep a sly eye on such proceedings, using them as the foundations of their own intrigues. In moments of excess and emotion, the castle's visitors reveal their true natures, their vulnerabilities, and their appetites.

Even more importantly, this culture allows matchmakers in training to hone their skills. These Shika insinuate themselves into the parties and dramatic interactions, training their own social skills and strengthening their ability to remain balanced and clearheaded when surrounded by chaos and temptation. A guest with patience, wisdom, and above all balance can begin to grasp the Shika's science, learning to listen, to de-escalate conflict, and to gently guide others towards a desired action or train of thought. These skills can serve a person well in maintaining healthy, mature relationships—or in manipulating those around them into irreconcilable conflict.

FUN AND ENTERTAINMENT

Kyūden Asako has no equal in attracting the best entertainers Rokugan has to offer. Kyūden Shika stopped trying to compete with it long ago. Instead, it focuses on up-and-coming artists who do not yet have fame or a following, giving many rising stars their big break. It also has a lower threshold for propriety than many other castles: plays that are just a little too lascivious, politically charged, passionate, or high concept for

the audiences at Kyūden Doji or Kyūden Asako find a happy home here. It is to Kyūden Shika's benefit to be talked about, even in negative terms. After all, the kind of impulsive, rebellious youths who have a taste for such tawdry entertainments are the easiest for the Shika family to mold into something more mature—or manipulate into something usefully negative.

NOTABLE FEATURES

Just outside of the walls stand the three great cedars and their shrines. Per the dictates of the spirits who inhabit each cedar, the shrines have no walls or enclosed structures. Gardens teeming with life surround each one, animals coming and going as they please.

Inside the outer bailey are a ryokan and its attendant hot-spring baths; yashiki for guests; auxiliary buildings where servants, artisans, and Shinseist priests live and work; and the speardancers' dōjō. At the center stands the keep. The keep's first story has a great hall used for receptions and social functions, and the higher floors are reserved for Deer Clan members and invited guests.

WHAT ATTRACTS VISITORS

One little-known service the Deer Clan offers other clans is their expertise as arbiters of disputes. For all their meddling, the Shika insight into relationship dynamics makes them excellent at wringing compromise out of conflict, a service they offer at Kyūden Shika in return for payment in

favors, gold, and the security of knowing that a major power whose indiscretions they have fathomed will think twice before moving against them. Two parties with a particularly delicate problem to solve—an embarrassing conflict they would prefer no one hear about, for example, or a struggle that has been deadlocked for so long that the opponents are willing to consider anything to end it—may go to Kyūden Shika to pursue peaceful resolution.

Despite widespread clan conflict in Rokugan, the Shika have not been overwhelmed with clients for their conflict resolution service. Several clans glorify stubbornness and conflict. Concessions and compromise are seen as synonymous with defeat, even among experienced negotiators. As such, it takes great courage for a samurai to fight the inertia of societal pressure and admit they need a third party's help.

Conflicts taken to Kyūden Shika for resolution are kept strictly confidential by the clan. All parties are offered temporary housing in second-floor apartments in the keep, where they need not reveal their presence by going outside. They may stay hidden indoors for days, weeks, or months while the negotiations take place. Those involved are sworn to secrecy. The clan keeps meticulous records of what goes on in these sessions, but no records remain in obvious places on-site. The volumes are distributed among the Deer Clan's other holdings, with instructions that they be burned or otherwise destroyed in the event of an attack.



SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENA

The forests outside the walls of Kyūden Shika are haunted by spirits who hale from Chikushō-dō, the realm of animals, and from Sakkaku, the realm of mischief. The speardancers of the Kyūden know how to placate (or at least avoid antagonizing) both factions, but unwary travelers have often been victims of strange pranks or sometimes even stalked by shadowy creatures.

Like many socially active castles, Kyūden Shika is vulnerable to infiltration. Frequent comings and goings create opportunities for trickster spirits such as kitsune to ingratiate themselves in their human forms with castle staff or visitors. Three foxes with snow-white fur have lived by the three ancient cedars for several centuries. Each of the kitsune has several different identities, mostly as groundskeepers, servants, and other individuals who tend to be invisible to high-ranking samurai. From time to time, they age current identities out and create new ones using their abilities to shape-shift, cast illusions, and influence minds.

SHIKA KATSUTERU, CASTELLAN

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 2 5

Shika Katsuteru manages the castle's day-to-day operations, answering to the Shika daimyō, Renji. Katsuteru is a veteran soldier and speardancer who bears their many battle scars proudly. Katsuteru feels most at home in the outdoors with a few trusted friends, hunting in Aokami Forest outside the castle or relaxing

in the shade of a tree. They may not have been the strongest or most talented speardancer, but they were definitely the hardest working and take the palace's security extremely seriously.

SOCIETAL

65 HONOR

45 GLORY

44 STATUS

+2, -2

DEMEANOR - SERIOUS

PERSONAL

ENDURANCE 12

COMPOSURE 14

FOCUS 7

VIGILANCE 4

ARTISAN 0 MARTIAL 3 SCHOLAR 2 SOCIAL 1 TRADE 3

ADVANTAGES DISADVANTAGES

Uncommonly Agile: Martial, Trade; Physical Withdrawn: Social; Interpersonal

FAVORED WEAPONS

Trusted Prongs (Yari): Range 2, Damage 5, Deadliness 3, 2-Handed, Wargear.

Gear (equipped): Castellan robes (Physical 1, Ceremonial), calligraphy set

ABILITIES

THOUGHTFUL LISTENER
During an intrigue or skirmish, when a character makes a check with Katsuteru's assistance, they may spend as follows:
+: Remove 2 strife for each spent this way.



Kyūden Doji

Kyūden Doji is neither as impregnable as the Crab's strongholds nor as luxurious as the Imperial Palace; yet, it is unquestionably the focus of social life across Rokugan, its halls and courts synonymous with courtly elegance and refinement. The Doji family claims to control access to the Emperor, social custom and fashion, and the standard of courtesy across Rokugan. Kyūden Doji, with its blue-tiled roofs and white stone, is an architectural marvel of staggering beauty. It radiates peace, security, and civilization. But the conflicts that go on within its walls have the highest stakes and the most sophisticated players in Rokugan.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Kyūden Doji lies on the coast of the Crane Clan lands, on a towering cliff overlooking the small port city of Heiwa Mura. The tenshukaku sits on the edge of the cliff overlooking the seas, with the rest of the palace stretching out on the mountain slope behind it. The defenses of the tenshukaku are standard, but nothing particularly special: bases of stone, high walls with arrow slits and walkways, well-guarded gatehouses. Kyūden Doji's guards are highly disciplined and suspicious, following clockwork schedules and allowing no one—not even the Emperor's retinue—to bypass their strictures and protocols. While the palace is unlikely to see attack in the economic and political heart of Crane territory, it also benefits from a friendly fleet in the harbor and from watchtowers placed inland to signal the approach of any unfamiliar party well in advance.

THE BEAUTIFUL CASTLE OF THE CRANE

The keep's interior is sumptuous and handsomely arranged: expansive corridors, elegantly simple rooms that each feature a single perfect work of art, and wide patios with gorgeous views. The walls, floors, and ceilings of the palace are nearly all hollow. Trapdoors and sliding panels conceal secret doorways leading to a warren of tunnels that fill the areas between the public spaces. Through these secret passages, skilled shinobi can move swiftly and silently, harder to detect than mice.

The true majesty of Kyūden Doji, however, can be found in the expansive gardens that surround the tenshukaku. The gardens of the palace are legendary, and range in styles from exquisitely tended perfection to those carefully cultivated to appear a wilderness grove or isolated pond.

PETTY TYRANTS

Servants at Kyūden Doji hold significant power over their samurai "betters." If a visiting lord is too presumptuous or angry with their underlings, the palace staff make their displeasure known in subtle ways. The lord's dinner arrives just a little too late, cold, and overcooked. Their progress through the palace is thwarted and slowed by "renovations," making them late for important meetings.

Each of these indiscretions has only a small direct impact, but together they rankle and stress. As they are distributed subtly and carefully by the palace staff, the perpetrators are too many and too well hidden for the lord to lash out at them. The lord must either improve their treatment of their servants or spend their entire time at court off balance and quite uncomfortable—vulnerabilities the vicious Doji courtiers will not fail to exploit.

Beyond the castle gardens and the outer walls lie the guest houses. These mansions have been constructed in a style that reflects the aesthetics of each of the Great Clans, which only further reinforces Kyūden Doji as one of the best locations to host a Winter Court. The finest of these houses is built up on a rocky promontory which is only accessible by bridge. This is the Imperial guest house, where the Emperor and his household stay during the time of the Court.

CASTLE CULTURE

Kyūden Doji is locked in a tense equilibrium between two schools of thought within the Crane Clan. The Doji's proximity to the Emperor and secure position within Rokugani high society grant them the ability to define and control courtly manners and social status with greater freedom and facility than any other family. However, some voices within the Crane Clan call for the Crane in general, and the Doji in particular, to end their historical practice of gatekeeping at Kyūden Doji. During the past few years, the Crane's intimidating practices there have begun to deter courtiers from heading to Kyūden Doji to conduct business. Knowing they would have to operate under the Doji's watchful eye, their slightest mistake incurring social censure and negative gossip, many courtiers have instead started taking their business to Kyūden Asako, Shika, or some other social hub.

In response to this decentralization of social power, some Crane have suggested that the time has come for the Doji family to shift the culture at its palace. They call for Crane courtiers to reframe social life at Kyūden Doji as an educational experience, whereby those unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the highest echelons of social grace may learn what makes the Crane the masters of courtesy. They argue that lowering the barrier to entering high society will ensure that the Crane and Kyūden Doji remain relevant. Adopting this practice, they hope, will also generate goodwill toward the Crane, indebted to them those they take under their wing.

The old guard of the Crane Clan, however, warn that this way lies disaster. Showing mercy toward other clans' fledgling courtiers would expend the Crane's social cachet and weaken their hold over the highest echelons of society, they argue. The Crane's carefully husbanded techniques of social maneuvering would percolate into the other clans, ending the Crane's social privilege and advantage. Attempts to extend Crane methods, the traditionalists admonish, would come off as patronizing and disingenuous.

For now, the old guard's way remains dominant. In public, at court, at social functions, and at major theatrical and musical performances at Kyūden Doji, the Crane expect everyone to display impeccable manners and to adhere to the strictest standards of grace and discretion. Then, under less formal

circumstances—in private apartments, at smaller gatherings in the gardens or on outings in town—the rules change. Social life becomes a battleground of glances, jokes, and gossip, where every word has two meanings and every casual comment raises one's defenses and jabs at the weaknesses in another's.

Nevertheless, the proponents of the new way, of lowering the barrier, have already begun to assert themselves in flagrant disregard of the old guard's protestations. Certain courtiers have quietly assembled entourages of clients whom they mentor in the subtleties of Kyūden Doji social life. A conflict between old and new is inevitable. It remains to be seen who will be the victor.

WHAT ATTRACTS VISITORS

The Imperial Court seats itself at Kyūden Doji more often than at any other kyūden short of the Imperial Palace itself. When it does so, courtiers descend on Kyūden Doji in droves, along with their staffs. This is the most reliable place to see or be seen, to forge alliances and to undermine enemies. Many of the courtiers who visit Kyūden Doji see it as a stepping stone toward having the ear of the Emperor. While the Emperor has time only for the highest-status visitors, supplicants may gain just as much benefit from ingratiating themselves with one of the Crane who fill out the Emperor's entourage.

To courtiers who feel assured of their own grace and excellence, Kyūden Doji is a proving ground. Spending the winter at court there is a



rite of passage. A courtier who manages to get through a season at court without making a fool of themselves will leave with several important new connections to bring credit and power to their clan. They may even get a chance to lure a rival into a critical misstep. Such events could happen at any other palace court, but Kyūden Doji magnifies all successes and failures. The risk is greater. So is the reward.

MICE IN THE WALLS

While courtiers see Kyūden Doji as an overwhelming challenge, shinobi tend to view it as the opposite: a relatively safe practice ground where they can easily hone their skills. Over the centuries, small modifications to the palace added by courtiers who wanted ways to avoid notice or get places quickly—a trapdoor here, a secret passage there—have accumulated to form a complex maze of shadowy pathways and secret doors. These kinds of modifications are common in many large castles, but few castles have as widespread a network of them as Kyūden Doji. While the shinobi know these passages better than anyone, they must beware: courtiers, servants, and guards know of some of them as well. A shinobi moving too quickly or heedlessly could run right into one of them.

An even greater asset to a spy's work is the enormous palace staff. Far more numerous than the samurai who occupy it, the palace's servants, guards, custodians, entertainers, and other staff are as highly trained as any bushi or courtier in how to keep the lives of their masters moving. They watch their employers sharply and carefully, noting their moods and intentions and sharing that information with other staff in order to anticipate needs. A Kyūden Doji servant who works there for any length of time inevitably learns a great deal of information which any spymaster or information broker would find invaluable.

Further, it is nearly impossible for anyone without a steel-trap memory to know the faces and names of all the residents and guests. Noble visitors may bring with them entourages of dozens, sometimes hundreds. "Sorry, I'm new here" is a particularly believable excuse for a disguised shinobi in the wrong place.

FUN AND ENTERTAINMENT

Kyūden Doji has geisha, musicians, and actors on site at all times. Some of the biggest musical and theatrical productions of the year coincide with Imperial visits. The rotating troupes of actors are excellent cover for infiltrators; several shinobi have managed to infiltrate the palace in the dark garb of stagehands. Actors often teach master classes to courtiers with a hobby interest in the stage, leading to frequent amateur productions

of lesser but still reputable quality.

Of course, the greatest attractions are the palace gardens, which can provide one with hours of diversion just walking from sheltered groves to carefully arranged flower beds and tranquil koi ponds. Intermingled with the garden grounds, Kyūden Doji also has several hot springs. A small shrine to Sarutahiko, kami of strength and purity, adjoins the bathing facilities, and the visitors may make an offering before they purify themselves.

THE FLOATING TEA HOUSE

In the midst of the Fantastic Gardens of the Crane, a teahouse sits in the middle of a picturesque pond. Cunningly disguised pylons and pillars make it appear as if the entire building floats atop the still waters. Unsurprisingly, inhabitants of the palace know it as the Floating Tea House.

The main rooms of the Floating Tea House maintain the same serene elegance as the rest of Kyūden Doji, and are the perfect locations to host formal tea ceremonies. However, the Floating Tea House also has a well-stocked kitchen and can be a place for courtiers and nobles to come, eat, relax, and enjoy the view.

Kyūden Doji's tea master, Doji Toshiyasu, lives in the Floating Tea House. One of the oldest people at Kyūden Doji, he is in excellent health for his advanced age, attributing his longevity to a healthy diet and frequent bathing in the hot springs. He is a staunch adherent of the philosophy that Kyūden Doji needs to open up more to the lower rungs of society.

On nights when the weather is poor and most people prefer the warmth of the main keep, Doji Toshiyasu holds clandestine salons inside the Floating Tea House to talk over the social events of the past weeks, explain their subtleties, and take questions. The only individuals invited to these salons are those whom he judges to be of generous character and the utmost discretion. He makes these decisions in conference with servants placed throughout the castle whom he pays to keep an eye out for promising young courtiers.

HEIWA MURA

Samurai who tire of the stresses of high society may also wish to venture into Heiwa Mura below the palace. While nothing stops anyone from visiting town in noble finery with bodyguards and servants in tow, doing so misses the point for many young samurai who need a break. More often, they adopt the tawdry dress of *kabukimono*—flamboyant troublemakers—and sneak out of Kyūden Doji incognito for a night of free spending and hedonism. The red-lantern districts of the city are aware of this noble predilection and cater to their appetites. Downtown, nobles can pretend they are commoners and interact with all

GUEST HOUSES

Although any kyūden can technically host a Winter Court, few castles have been as extensively developed for the purpose as Kyūden Doji. Much of the castle has been constructed with the comfort of its guests in mind, and nowhere is this more evident than with the castle's nine guest houses.

Sprawling across the lands outside Kyūden Doji's gardens, each guest house is an estate in its own right. Moreover, most have been constructed with a specific Great Clan in mind. Much of the Unicorn Clan's guest house consists of lavish stables, while the Dragon Clan's house has an attached but isolated monastery for meditation. The most extensive guest house, of course, is reserved for the Emperor and Imperial families. This lavish complex sits apart from the other buildings on a rocky outcropping overlooking the sea.

The Crane have also built a guest house for visiting minor clans, though these clans must share space during a Winter Court. In recent years, they have even begrudgingly built a separate house for the up-and-coming Mantis clan. Everyone, including the Mantis, assumes the building is full of secret passages and spy-holes.

manner of other folk without the restrictions of class or social expectations holding them back. This forces the proprietors of local establishments to be cautious. A tavern whose bouncer throws a drunken noble out into the street may find a squad of heavily armed samurai showing up to exact revenge the following night.

A night on the town often sees courtiers at their most loose lipped and least guarded. Anyone hoping to gather information or blackmail material on a courtier might well decide to shadow them into town, or fish for rumors at places they frequent. Rumors circulate around the palace that one of the more popular drinking establishments in the heart of town is in fact owned and operated as a honeypot for indiscreet visitors from Kyūden Doji, but no one has yet exposed whose agenda—or agendas—it serves.

SUPERNATURAL PHENOMENA

On a small rocky outcropping on the cliff beneath the palace, only accessible by a creaking wooden walkway and stairs, is a palace shrine consecrated to the kami of the cliff. Most visitors to Kyūden Doji stay away from the shrine, or are warned away by the more knowledgeable locals. This is because the shrine keeper, who calls himself the Danran Priest, is an elderly tengu, the chief of the small group of tengu who live in the nearby forests. The Danran Priest is thoroughly dedicated to the shrine's upkeep and the well-being of the mountain kami. If palace residents or visitors attempt to bring their problems to his shrine, Danran has no qualms about chasing them off at the point of his tsurugi; he is, true to form, an expert fencer, though he has only ever taken tengu as students to date, refusing even the most nobly born humans who have sought him out.

KYŪDEN DOJİ COURTIER

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 3 9

Imagine the perfect courtier. Well dressed. Beautiful. Graceful. Well versed in the classics, trained in the fine arts, capable of speaking with wit and insight on any topic. This is someone raised in Kyūden Doji.

SOCIETAL		PERSONAL			
65 HONOR		ENDURANCE 5			
55 GLORY		COMPOSURE 16			
45 STATUS		FOCUS 8			
+2, -2 DEMEANOR - INTIMIDATING		VIGILANCE 4			
ARTISAN 2		MARTIAL 0	SCHOLAR 4	SOCIAL 4	TRADE 0

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Incisive Scrutiny: Social; Mental, Interpersonal	Easily Scandalized: Social; Interpersonal
Perfect Recollection: Scholar; Mental	

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

Wakizashi: Range 0–1, Damage 3, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Razor-Edged

Gear (equipped): Sublime robes (Physical 1, Ceremonial, Resplendent), calligraphy set, folding fan

ABILITIES

PROTOCOL AND PROCEDURE

Once per round, when another character succeeds on a check to pursue a social objective (see page 254 of the core rulebook) a Kyūden Doji courtier may receive up to 4 strife to reduce the number of bonus successes on that check by that amount, to a minimum of 0 bonus successes (the check still succeeds).

TACTFUL RECOVERY

Once per Intrigue scene, a Kyūden Doji courtier may change their social objective to another social objective they could complete during the scene. They may transfer up to half of their current momentum points to this new social objective.

KAKITA RYOKU, ELDER CRANE

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 3 9

The honorable and elegant Kakita Ryoku is among the most distinguished—and dangerous—individuals one is likely to meet in Kyūden Doji. Her novel, *Winter*, has instructed entire generations of courtiers, and is rumored to be a record of her romantic relationships. Up until recently, she served the Emperor Hantei XXXVIII as his Imperial Advisor. Now that she has been released from her duties, she has returned to Kyūden Doji; the other heart of political power in Rokugan. Here she continues to weave her careful webs of intrigue, gossip, and influence.

Lady Ryoku's age has only made her more elegant and dignified. On the one hand, she strives for perfect politeness and protocol in everything. On the other hand, she is of such high status and glory that she can essentially say whatever she pleases, and no one can gainsay her without looking a fool. She particularly enjoys the clever turn of phrase, or a sudden blunt statement (especially if her audience is aghast at hearing such language come from the mouth of such a dignified elder).



MASTER OF THE KYŪDEN DOJI COURT

Lady Ryoku's influence is only amplified within the beautiful walls of Kyūden Doji. She has resided here for years, and very little that occurs in the palace happens without her knowing and accounting for it.

While in Kyūden Doji, Lady Ryoku gains the following abilities:

ALL THINGS FIND THEIR WAY TO ME

When attempting to start or spread a rumor or story in Kyūden Doji, a character may spend 1 equal to Lady Ryoku's Vigilance; if they do not she knows that the character is the source of the rumor or story.

A MINOR CONSIDERATION

Once per scene during an intrigue, as a Scheme action, Lady Ryoku may remove 2 momentum points from one side, and add them to another side of the intrigue.

SOCIETAL	PERSONAL
76 HONOR	ENDURANCE 4
85 GLORY	COMPOSURE 19
70 STATUS	FOCUS 8
+2, -2 DEMEANOR - INTIMIDATING	VIGILANCE 6

ARTISAN 3	MARTIAL 0	SCHOLAR 3	SOCIAL 5	TRADE 1
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ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
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Famously Successful:

☞ Social; Interpersonal, Fame

Love of Storytelling:

☞ Artisan; Mental

Broken Hearted:

☞ Social; Mental

Whispers of Treachery:

☞ Social; Interpersonal, Infamy

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

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

Gear (equipped): Ceremonial Clothes (Physical 1, Ceremonial, Resplendent), personal chop

Gear (other): Pillow book, calligraphy set, *omamori* given to her by Emperor Hantei XXXVII

ABILITIES

EBB AND FLOW (SHŪJI)

Activation: As a Scheme or Support action, Ryoku may make a **Courtesy (Water)**, **Command (Water)**, or **Games (Water)** check targeting one character. The TN of this check is equal to the target's vigilance. If

Ryoku succeeds (and chose Scheme action), choose one of the target's advantages that she know; whenever it applies, invert it. This effect persists until the end of the scene. If Ryoku succeeds (and chose Support action), choose one of the target's disadvantages she knows; whenever it applies, invert it. This effect persists until the end of the scene.

I HAVE MET YOUR LIKE BEFORE

When performing a Scheme action, Ryoku may spend 1 in the following way:

☞: Learn the target's ninjō or giri, or one advantage or disadvantage of the GM's choice.

☞☞: Learn the target's current motivation in this scene.

SPEAKING IN SILENCE

Once per scene when making a check to persuade or influence someone, Ryoku may add 5 kept ■ set to an ☞.

EVERYTHING TELLS A STORY

When performing an Artisan skill check, Ryoku may add 1 kept ■ set to an ☞ result.

The Crane Clan

When the Kami Doji arrived in the Mortal Realm, she found fragmented coastal domains, cities, and clans competing over resources and warring over borders. Some of these groups had arrived in long-forgotten days, and had developed their rich cultures in these lands. Others had arrived as settlers from distant lands within memory, or even within a scant few generations, and brought with them culture, languages, art, and even weapons technologies from their previous homes—distant regions such as the Land of Four Rivers and the Dawn Peaks to the north, and the Ivory Kingdoms to the south. While the official Imperial Histories state otherwise, the Rokugan that came to be was shaped by eons of human achievements at least as much as by the hands of the newly arrived Kami.

Doji became fascinated by the myriad human cultures before her, by the wondrous things they made and their individual traditions; however, she despaired at the violence humans wreaked upon each other, and despaired even more that she could not be everywhere at once to prevent it. Despite their short lives and limited power, humans had claimed an act Doji had thought the sole domain of gods: creation—of art, of music, and of civilization—and yet they could not find peace. Doji set forth to change this, and she accomplished in her long lifetime what might otherwise have occurred over millennia.

As she and her siblings laid the foundations of what would become the Emerald Empire, winning allies by performing great deeds and wielding terrible power to conquer the opposition, Doji took it upon herself to codify the cultures of these many peoples. She protected the arts she saw as most excellent, bringing them to the forefront where they might be further refined and preserving them for generations to come. In perhaps her most ambitious quest, Doji worked to codify, teach, and spread more broadly a single written and spoken language that all folk of the newly founded Empire could use. Working for nearly a decade with countless other scholars, Doji set forth numerous documents explaining this system of writing, grammar, and rhetoric and taught her first followers how to teach it to others in turn.

Ultimately, the language employed characters derived from the script of the Land of Four Rivers along with elements of other local languages. During this time, she spoke often of her hopes that a common means of communication would allow all peoples of her siblings' lands to understand one another and thus exist in harmony. Where she could not reach, she hoped,

her words would travel, and peace could be attained. This set the groundwork for the vast bureaucracy that would allow the Emerald Empire to establish itself and flourish—a bureaucracy that her descendants would master, assuring their place at the Emperor's side.

THE YEAR SCROLL

Honored guests of Crane households may notice a scroll displayed in a prominent place within the home. This is the “year scroll,” a tradition that unites the four families of the Crane and dates from the clan's founding. At the start of the year, the scroll is blank to represent the year's possibilities. As weeks pass, family members chronicle significant life events in poems, ink wash paintings, or simple prose. Anything can be recorded on the scroll, from joyful moments, to great events, to painful loss. All that is required is that the event be significant to the person recording it.

By the end of the year, the scroll becomes a collection of memories, fragments of daily life in the floating world. On the last day of each year, the family reads the scroll and recalls those moments together. Then, at the dawn of the new year, the scroll is carried to a brazier and burned, those moments turning to ash before the Hatsuhi, the “first sun” of the year. In this way, the Crane remind themselves of impermanence and recommit to live life fully, nobly, and presently.

THE COST OF GRACE

Without Doji, there would be no Emerald Empire, and yet there was also an awful cost to Doji's actions. Many arts, languages, and cultures that did not become threads in the tapestry she wove were driven to the wayside as the generations passed. Some divergent traditions managed to persist, such as the cultural and spiritual practices that the Isawa brought with them from the Dawn Peaks and the Asako's venerable ways they work so hard to maintain at Kyūden Asako. But others were lost outright, and many receded to the fringes of society, kept alive in regionalized pockets, in secret, or within groups that rejected the ways of the Kami. In preserving and elevating some elements of certain cultures, Doji set in motion the destruction of others. Her conquest of Rokugan's preexisting cultures was as absolute as her siblings' conquest of its peoples, and by the measure of some, no less terrible in its scope.

It cannot be said whether Doji foresaw these consequences of her actions—or if she would have approved of the extreme decisions some of her successors made in their efforts to spread and enforce the culture she helped codify. Still, in the year 451, an anonymous scholar wrote the treatise *The Cost of Grace*, not just chastising Doji's descendants for the destruction of vast amounts of beauty and knowledge in their rigid adherence to her traditions, but going so far as to challenge the Kami herself for failing to prevent this catastrophe. The document was banned under Imperial edict within a month of its mysterious appearance at the doorstep of Kyūden Doji, but copies of it still occasionally surface. Even some revered scholars among the Crane have been influenced by it, and seek to understand and preserve elements of the cultures that existed before the arrival of the Kami—though all would be quick to deny ever having read the actual text.

Ever since those ancient days, the descendants of Doji's followers have considered themselves to be the wardens of Rokugan's cultural heritage and the guardians of its beating heart. The Crane Clan's samurai seek both to elevate Rokugan's culture and to fulfill Lady Doji's vision of beauty, order, and civility, but different individuals do this in different ways. Some champion the arts, others contribute to the continuing cause of educating the citizens of Rokugan, others seek to elevate its traditions, and still others collect folklore and wisdom that has long been overlooked. And there are those who fight, that others may preserve the arts. Of course, some members of the Crane Clan have been truer to Doji's vision of a Rokugan unified by shared culture than others—some daimyō have earnestly sought mutual understanding through cultural exchange, but others have wielded Doji's teachings as a sharp sword to cut down any who stray from the "correct path."

As the Lion are known as the Right Hand of the Emperor and wielders of the Emperor's military might, the Crane are regarded as the Emperor's Left Hand, the stewards of the Throne's political power. They are traditionally the clan that is closest to the Imperial line and the architects of many courtly institutions, having played a role in establishing laws and political customs throughout the Empire. Although their influence has waned in the wake of a catastrophic tsunami, the Crane are still considered one of the primary political powers of the Empire, and with good reason.

Families of the Crane

The people of the Crane Clan are devoted to Doji's vision of an Empire held together by its culture, and even in times of hardship and war, each family strives to uphold her ideals. The Kakita embody the clan's spirit and pride, earning it glory and wealth with their good works while embracing whatever adventures come their way. Sworn to protect this wealth are the Daidoji, who serve tirelessly as the guardians of not only the clan's well-being, but also its honor. Promoting harmony throughout the Crane's lands are the Asahina, gifted shugenja and star watchers tending to the clan's very soul. Above them all rise the noble Doji, who unite the families and serve as both the voice of the clan and its guiding hand. Like the spokes of an unfolding fan, together these four families are the strength and stability behind the beauty and grace of the Crane.

When looking at the Crane families, one might be taken aback at the contrast between their ways. The Way of the Doji is living a noble life. The Way of the Kakita is living to the fullest. The Way of the Asahina is living in atonement. The Way of the Daidoji is living to protect. Yet while their different perspectives occasionally divide them, these families are united by bloodline, honor, and the obligating bonds of their clan. Their varying colors are ultimately feathers of the same brilliant wing: the Way of the Crane.

THE DOJI FAMILY MON

A crane displaying an eight-pointed snowflake in its beak.

DOJI

Lady Doji was discovered on a beach by residents of a village of fishers and craftspeople. Recognizing her otherworldly nature, the villagers took her in and tended to her wounds, hoping that she might bless and aid them in their conflicts with neighboring communities in return for worship. As she recovered, Doji became enamored with the people who'd found her, coming to see them as her own. She embraced them, learning their customs, practicing their crafts, and integrating into their ways. Her grace and insights won her the people's adoration, and as she learned from them, they learned from her as well.

Yet, this peace would not last, any more than the autumn leaves can resist the coming of winter. Power calls to the ambitious, and even Doji's kind blessings drew their attention. When neighboring communities discovered that a goddess now lived among their rivals, they united and made to claim her as their own, striving forth with spear and blade. With their superior numbers, they swiftly surrounded the town in which Doji dwelt.

It was then that Doji made her choice—she would preserve not just her people, but even those who now sought to do them harm. When the Kami stepped forth, none could raise a weapon against her. Her words pierced their hearts as surely as arrows. Instead of fighting, they listened. Tempers calmed in her presence. Conflicts ended in her wake. By the time her siblings rediscovered her, the coastal enclaves were united, all beneath Doji's gentle guidance. From this came the banner of the Crane.

Yet, although her people thrived, learning spread, and the arts bloomed around her, her heart still longed for the home she'd left behind. The Realm of Mortals was a transient world of suffering; mortals grew old and died while she remained unchanged. She found herself adrift and without meaning. She didn't belong there.

A MYSTERIOUS ENCOUNTER

One day, during a heavy snow at the height of winter, a mysterious beggar appeared at her palace gates. Made curious when he declined her invitation for shelter, Lady Doji instead went out and sat beside him in the snow. Their conversation made her realize the beauty inherent to an impermanent world, found even in the smallest snowflake. From this lesson, Doji resolved to live keenly aware of each passing moment, to transcend mortality through appreciation of beauty, and in so doing, show all what it meant to live a noble life.

REPUTATION AND VALUES

As the Crane Clan's leaders, the Doji stand at the center of the Empire's high culture. Their reputation for keen judgment and intellect, as well as their honorable and amiable nature, affords them considerable clout. It is a rare lord who does not value the opinions of at least one close Doji friend, on anything from mundane matters to those that affect the entire Empire.

This is the true strength of the Doji family; by conducting themselves with grace and civility, by embracing courtesy and generosity, and by always showing their best face, the Doji have constructed a network of friends and allies larger than that of any other family. There is no end to the favors a Doji can call upon, and a Doji's friendship is highly valued, even among their traditional rivals. It is better to make friends than enemies, as Lady Doji always taught, and the Doji take this to heart, often accepting short-term losses if it means an enemy can be made into an ally. Throughout the Emerald Empire, the Doji are generally well regarded, and those who do dislike them are hesitant to say so.



To understand the Doji, one must understand the purpose of living nobly. The mortal world is a world of impermanence, where the very act of living results in suffering. But by embracing transience and living with purpose, one transcends the pull of the Realm of Mortals, heightening one's appreciation for the inherent beauty that can be found anywhere. In short, by savoring each moment, one finds meaning in impermanent existence.

The Doji teach that no action is truly inconsequential. "Tiny winds make big waves," they commonly say; even the smallest kindness, the slightest gesture, can have momentous results. To this end, the Doji believe that a life should be lived purposefully and mindfully, moment to moment, with nothing taken for granted.

The Doji feel most at home in the courts, owing in part to their founder's hand in their creation. Even the bushi of the family are expected to have some political and oratory skill. Furthermore, the Doji are inexorably connected to the Imperial family; more often than not, the Emperor marries a Doji, and as a result, Imperial heirs are naturally sympathetic to the Crane. Doji can be found at all levels of government and even in rural courts, serving as advisors, diplomats, *nakōdo* (matchmakers), judges, governors, and especially magistrates.

However, the Doji are hardly unchallenged in this domain. They find natural rivals in the Bayushi family of the Scorpion Clan, whose skilled agents possess a mastery of the courts akin to their own. The Doji also compete with the Akodo family of the Lion for the Emperor's favor. The sway of the court is like a pendulum the Doji chase from corner to corner, for the well-being of their clan often depends on the Emperor's very word.

Among the Doji's staunchest allies are the Shinjo family of the Unicorn Clan. As siblings, Doji and Shinjo were extremely close. Before Shinjo and her clan left to explore the world beyond Rokugan, Doji gave her beloved sister a sandalwood fan to remind her of their homeland. Centuries later, when the Unicorn returned, the rest of the Empire assumed they were foreign invaders. Unexpectedly appearing in the Imperial Court, their leader, Shinjo Nishijin, approached Doji Ryobu, the Champion of the Crane Clan, and returned Doji's fan. Recognizing it instantly, Ryobu embraced Nishijin, and the Unicorn were recognized as a Great Clan shortly thereafter. The Shinjo have never forgotten the role that the Doji family played in restoring their ancestral lands and titles, and although their ways are vastly different, the two houses still maintain good relations.

CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

The Doji are among the most traditional families in the Empire, clinging to time-honored custom as a guideline for how to live their lives. As a result, Doji culture

is preoccupied with propriety. There is a proper way to do everything. Even the mundane act of pouring tea is methodical, precise, and performed exactly the same way every time. For this reason, many see the Doji as stuffy, haughty, and inflexible. The Doji simply don't see the point of doing anything in a way that isn't graceful or elegant.

Speaking without Words

Members of the Doji are well-known for their wit and cultured tongue. Every Doji is expected to be highly educated, weaving references to history, literature, and the arts seamlessly into conversation. The ability to speak well on a number of subjects, and to effortlessly choose poetic words and apt metaphors, is highly praised among the Doji and considered a sign of good upbringing. Even a Doji bushi is expected to be able to spontaneously compose or recite poetry on the spot. This is because the Doji know that they are only a piece of the rich tapestry of people at court. To retain their advantage there, they master the art of wordplay so that they can use a phrase or even a well-timed pause to communicate different meanings to different audiences. They employ implication and silence as effectively in their diplomacy as they do words.

Another hallmark of Doji culture is layered meaning. Every component of their interactions, from what is seen, to what is heard, to what is done, has unique significance. The colors of an outfit are commonly selected to evoke a season or specific feeling, for example, the serving of *ochazuke* (a dish of tea poured over rice) politely signifies the end of a gathering, for guests are expected to get the hint, decline the offer, and leave. Where the Doji are concerned, nothing means just what is said, and nothing is just as it appears.

The Doji are not the only family to appreciate the power of subtlety, but they are born into a culture rife with it. Messages are encoded into art and song and displayed or performed for an entire court, their secret meaning comprehended only by the intended few. Even as children, Doji are expected to be able to convey a message clearly to a specific person without onlookers realizing, simply through word choice or an innocent-looking gesture.

One example of this subtlety can be found in *hanakotoba*, the language of flowers. Flower arrangements are common gifts between courtiers, each flower purposefully chosen to convey a general feeling or tone. But when given by a Doji, the same *ikebana* arrangement might contain a more specific message, each bloom representing a specific word or emotion, its meaning dependent on its color, size, placement, and proximity to other flowers. To admirers, the surface meaning of the arrangement is all that is seen,

YASURUGI AND KONISHIKO

Lady Doji's and Kakita's eldest children, the twins Doji Yasurugi and Doji Konishiko are regional folk heroes immortalized in plays, songs, art, and literature. Stories of the pair often begin with the two trading friendly barbs over whether Yasurugi's blade or Konishiko's wits are sharper.

In addition to exceeding his father in the art of the duel, Yasurugi was an accomplished blacksmith. According to legend, Yasurugi was once walking in the woods wearing a fine robe with glittering adornments when he encountered a tengu. Fixated upon his resplendent garb, the bird spirit snatched him away to its kingdom in the clouds. After the tengu realized there was a man within the robes, it offered him a boon as recompense: it would teach a new way of folding steel not just with the hammer and tongs, but with the soul. In response, Yasurugi boasted that he would create the five finest swords the tengu had ever seen, and would not leave until he had done so.

And so Yasurugi forged five exquisite blades and presented them to the tengu. Yet, when the tengu asked their names, Yasurugi stopped. In silence, he

returned to his chambers and composed a letter to the one person he trusted to understand him in all things, even from afar—his sister, Konishiko. The tengu sent a crow to deliver the letter, and when Konishiko's reply came, it consisted of five names. When Yasurugi spoke the names to the tengu, the palace of air swirled around him, delivering him back to his home with the five swords. Among them was Shukujo, which became the ancestral sword of the Crane, and Kunshu, which became the ancestral sword of the Hantei.

When Shinsei called for heroes to face Fu Leng in battle, Doji Yasurugi was the obvious choice to serve as the Crane Clan Thunder. When the time came for him to join the others, a monstrous assassin overtook him on the road and slew him. All seemed lost until Konishiko, who had never studied the sword, picked up the fallen Shukujo and volunteered to take her brother's place. Because she was his twin, and because Yasurugi had folded a piece of his own soul into the steel of the sword as the tengu had taught him, when she held the blade, the Crane Clan Thunder lived again.

but to the intended recipient, it is no different than a written message, but one impossible to decode without the knowledge shared by the sender and recipient. The height of this practice among the Crane is Cadence, a secret code of gestures, colors, and poetic words that allows even the simplest inconsequential actions, like placing the tea ladle just so or holding one's fan in a specific way, to be rife with hidden meaning. It is never taught outside the Crane, lest rivals realize when subtle messages are being passed right in front of them.

With such opaque tradition and emphasis on propriety, one might assume the Doji to be standoffish or unapproachable. The truth is that Doji are conditioned to be as generous and as open as possible, to know the true value of every connection and extend the hand of friendship even to their own enemies. Even the lowly servant is likely to be greeted and given a token of kindness (but never so much that it would be unseemly). People are naturally drawn to beauty and grace, and the Doji exploit this to subtly increase their influence.

This simple approach opens doors for the Doji that otherwise might remain closed. Entire conflicts could devastate Crane lands are ended before they ever start. The Doji have long understood that mastery of social acumen is their single greatest advantage, and so they take great care in cultivating amiable

relationships, even with those who might be considered beneath them. Even beyond the courts, knowing the right person is always handy.

For this reason, members of the Doji closely guard their personal reputation to the point of obsession. Death may be preferable to a significant loss of face or a terrible indignity. Eroding one's clout or reputation is never worth it, even if it would result in a gain for the clan. Such gains are often "rewarded" with a new title and position, one that places the courtier in a distant and obscure court, far from the eyes and ears of the Empire, where they can contemplate the cost of their "victory." Unsurprisingly, embarrassing the clan with public failure results in the same. It is not uncommon for a disgraced courtier to request the right to retire to a monastery after such an appointment.

Family Traditions

While the birth of a child is a joyous occasion, the Doji rarely celebrate it. It is believed that to show pride in one's child is unseemly and may attract unwanted spirits. A newborn Doji does not even receive so much as a nickname until their fifth year of life. When a child is born, friends and relatives casually visit the new parents' home, offering gifts and complimenting the



newborn. The parents are expected to decline the gifts, which are set aside until the child's fifth year, after which they are finally graciously accepted.

Because Doji are chosen for Imperial spouses more often than members of any other family, the hand of a Doji is especially prestigious. A Doji spouse has become a sort of political bargaining chip as a result. Doji rarely marry out of their clan, preferring to have other families marry in, even if it runs counter to the social convention that a lesser-ranked samurai marries into the family of the greater. Family tradition dictates that the eldest child of a Doji couple never marry out of the clan, regardless of their social status.

Unlike in many other clans, honorable retirement is not dreaded among the Doji, but instead considered a reward for a life in service to the clan. Most retired Doji join the Brotherhood of Shinsei to contemplate the Tao or become monks devoted to their clan's patron Fortune, Benten, the Fortune of Arts and Romantic Love. It is not unheard of for an officially retired Doji to secretly remain in service to the Crane as a spy. After all, one cannot easily accuse a Brotherhood monk of espionage.

Schools and Dōjō

In service of the Crane, the Doji maintain several schools and dōjō. Students are held to high standards, and no matter the school, oratory ability and passable skill in the arts are considered essential, incorporated into all curricula. For instance, the illustrious

Doji Bureaucrat School expects its students to cultivate flawless calligraphy to lend authority to legal documents, while the Doji Rhetorician learns the power of apt poetic metaphor to drive home a point. Even the Doji's martial schools emphasize the arts; the Inner Court Guard—elite bushi and courtiers maintained by the Doji and sworn to protect the spouse of the Emperor from all threats—rely on skills acquired through study of the arts to maneuver the court and earn the trust and ear of the one they protect.

RECENT CONCERNS

The traditionally vast wealth of the Crane, accumulated over centuries and owing to the keen wisdom and investments of Lady Doji's children, has finally begun to dry up. Recent natural disasters have shaken Crane farmlands, and an unexpected tsunami has inflicted widespread damage along the Crane's coastal villages and docks. The cost of rebuilding, combined with sustained military struggles against the Lion Clan in the Crane's farthest territories, has stressed the clan's resources to their breaking point, and the Doji's once-overflowing coffers are starting to show their bottoms. Yet the Doji act as if they do not notice, pressing to take contested lands and continuing their comfortable lives as though nothing were wrong. To admit their tenuous position is to lose face, unthinkable for the proud Doji. It is only a matter of time before something gives.

More importantly, the Crane have begun to slip from their lofty place of power in the courts. The Bayushi claim numerous important positions that are close to the aging Emperor, positions that are traditionally occupied by Crane courtiers. Given this and the loss of their traditional ability to influence the court with a food surplus (and the favors such brings), the Crane have effectively lost control of the courts to their rivals in the Scorpion Clan. The Doji have redoubled their efforts to reclaim what was lost, focusing on befriending and influencing the Imperial Heirs, but they are frustrated by the Scorpion at every turn.

Recently, the Emerald Champion and former Champion of the Crane Clan Doji Satsume died under mysterious circumstances. Although urged by her brother, Kuwanan, to investigate his death, Crane Clan Champion Doji Hotaru has avoided such action for now. Instead, she tasks the clan with finding allies against the Lion and Scorpion in an attempt to restore the Crane to their former position.

DOJI RUMORS:

Every night I have heard a melancholy song coming from the moonlit beach, yet whoever sings it is gone by the time I arrive. Who would be singing alone at such an hour?

Even in the dead of winter, the lady of the palace leaves her courtyard window open. Perhaps this is why the lady always seems too tired to greet the sun in the morning.

A new flower arrangement appeared in the foyer yesterday: a bamboo shoot surrounded in orange lilies. The pot was once broken, but it's been repaired with gold lacquer. No one saw who put it there, and no one is taking credit. How mysterious!

This year's Winter Court is said to have unexpected guests—the Emperor invited Yoritomo and his Mantis delegation.

THE KAKITA
FAMILY MON

A white crane, cradling a drawn sword with its wing.

ENMITY BETWEEN US

The Matsu family have never forgotten the slight Kakita offered their founder at the first Emerald Championship. They have burned Matsu's words into their hearts: "Let there be enmity between us." This is the longest-running blood feud in Rokugan's history, and the centuries have done nothing to quell the flame. To this day, many among the Matsu would like nothing more than the destruction of the Kakita, for honor demands nothing less. For their part, the Akodo and Doji attempt to keep the two from warring at inopportune times. But inevitably one side provokes the other, leaving the other families to clean up the mess.

KAKITA

It was believed by all that Matsu, the revered champion of Akodo himself, would win the first Emerald Championship and become the personal champion of the Son of Heaven. Matsu swept every opponent aside, not offering so much as a bow or second glance to those she defeated. Her victory seemed inevitable. In the final round, she faced the only other undefeated warrior in the trial: a simple swordsman from a small village in the wild northern provinces. He fought in a strange style none had witnessed before, drawing his blade and striking in the same moment. In a single strike, the duel was over, the strange warrior victorious over Matsu. Although he had shown respect to each of his defeated opponents, he refused to bow to the defeated Matsu, for as she had shown no courtesy to those she had defeated, he would offer none to her. Insulted, Matsu demanded to know the warrior's name. The man softly replied, "My name is Kakita."

REPUTATION AND VALUES

Among the most renowned samurai families of the Empire, the Kakita and their exploits are the subject of many plays, songs, and tales. They are well-known not

only for the grand adventures of their heroes, but also for their artisans and dueling traditions. No other family is so devoted to the arts, and no family produces as many skilled artisans. The Kakita Academy is the most prestigious art school in the Empire, teaching mastery over all Rokugani high arts, including visual, performing, and practical. The works of the Kakita are consistently in high demand throughout the Empire, each piece adding to the Crane's wealth and glory.

Among the most venerated arts of the Kakita is the art of the formal duel. The Kakita Duelist School is among the largest within the Kakita Academy, and the Kakita regard the iaijutsu duel not merely as a martial practice, but as the foremost of all art forms. *The Sword*, Kakita's text on swordplay, is one of the most-studied martial texts in the Empire. As the descendants of the creator of the iaijutsu martial art, the Kakita are considered iaijutsu's stewards, and Kakita Duelists are rightly feared throughout the Empire for their skill. To face a Kakita Duelist is to face a student of the oldest dueling tradition in the Empire, the culmination of a thousand years of technique.

This elevation of the duel is a reflection of the Kakita's philosophy, that the purpose of a life is to be lived to the fullest. The family's founder, Kakita, lived a wild life, taking great risks without flinching and becoming one of the Empire's greatest heroes in the process.

THE SWORD

Kakita's treatise on swordplay, *The Sword*, is one of Rokugan's earliest such texts. It details not only Kakita's theories on *kenjutsu* and the basis for the *iai*jutsu quick-draw duel, but also his philosophical insights and way of life.

Some brief excerpts from this text, often quoted by his descendants:

"Those who seek advantage by wielding two swords have forgotten that the greatest weapon is oneself. The sword master has conquered their own self long before ever touching a blade—to disregard this in favor of a second sword is foolish. It dishonors you as surely as if two warriors struck the same opponent, and it does not allow strong grip or full motion of the blade. Attempts to achieve victory with a few more inches of steel are a weakness of spirit. In my school, it is a sign of cowardice. It is not The Way."

"The mind of the opponent cannot be contained. It flows beyond the body. It consists only of thought and is made of pure potential. This is

regarded by mystics as 'the Void.' When one is said to 'dwell upon the Void,' one is merely attempting to know the mind of the opponent. Therefore, to 'strike the Void' is to foil the opponent's action before it can even be conceived."

"Some will say that your opponent will defeat himself in the moment of your strike. This is not so. The defeat comes from the single imperfection within the opponent's soul. The perfect spirit, the soul that bears no stain, and the sword whose temper is true—this is the essence of One Strike."

"The world is constantly changing. Attributes of things exist only in comparison to other things; inherently, they are empty. Have no illusions in your heart, sharpen your spirit as you would a sword, and when you banish your own deceptive thoughts, the victorious path will be clear. People will lie, and your eyes will deceive, and your emotions will cloud the path. Steel never lies, nor deceives, nor hides The Way. In the sword, one finds truth."

Emulating their founder, the Kakita aim to challenge themselves, whether for the mastery of their art or at the end of a blade. Recklessly, they embrace whatever life brings their way. The poet Kakita Kenshiko once observed, “A lightning bolt is merely a brief flash, yet it breaks the very stone, and its thunder echoes long after it has faded. So too is a life lived well!”

It is for this reason that the Kakita have no fear of death. After all, when one has lived a full life without regret, what power does death hold? They understand that preoccupation with what one has to lose makes one a weaker warrior, and although they are cultured artisans, their role is foremost that of the samurai. To this end, the Kakita venerate the Bushidō tenet of Courage nearly as highly as they do Courtesy, for it takes courage to live a life balanced on the edge of a blade. Where others would hesitate, the Kakita dive right in.

The Crane’s Troublemakers

This attitude contributes to the Kakita’s reputation as cultured rouses. Where a member of another Crane family might hold their tongue to preserve harmony, a Kakita speaks their mind with a razor wit. Where a Daidoji might seek to leverage an advantage to even overwhelming odds, a Kakita recklessly dives into danger. Many see the Kakita as spoiled eccentrics, and the Kakita’s disregard of consequences have made them many enemies. For their part, the Kakita see little reason to hold back, for the very act of living is an art form. Besides, they believe they have the skill to back up their words. If others are insulted, they are welcome to draw their blades.

In fact, the Kakita are functionally the clan’s assassins. The only true difference is that the Kakita trap their targets in duels of honor and provoke opponents with slights. Instead of dishonorably killing in the dark, the Kakita slay in public, before an audience, in broad daylight, and then are praised for their skill. The mere presence of a Kakita yōjimbō accompanying a Doji courtier is enough to tilt negotiations in the Crane’s favor, as the other party second-guesses themselves, lest they “insult” the courtier and be challenged by the duelist.

Of course, the Kakita are not the only duelists in the Empire, and there are many other warriors who would cross blades with one to prove their worth. Kakita who gain sufficient renown for their deeds with the sword

commonly find themselves pursued and challenged by warriors eager to test themselves. Among their greatest rivals are the Mirumoto family of the Dragon Clan, whose unconventional two-handed style was once called “The Coward’s Way” by Kakita himself. The Mirumoto and Kakita schools have engaged in a rivalry for their entire history, with entire texts written to refute each other’s style. Each family has accrued numerous victories over the other and tends to seize on any excuse to show them up. Nevertheless, the foundation of the two schools’ rivalry rests upon centuries of a mutual, if sometimes grudging, respect that began with Kakita and Mirumoto themselves.

CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

The mind-set of the Kakita family is highly influenced by the concept of excellence. The Kakita pursue mastery not only over their chosen art, but over life itself. They believe, as their founder taught, that when one devotes oneself fully to an art and achieves excellence in that art, one embodies excellence in all that one does.

Thus, the Kakita are expected to devote their entire life to the pursuit of mastery over an art or skill. Often that craft is the duel, Kakita’s first art, but no artistic pursuit is considered beneath them. All that matters is complete devotion. “Excellence requires only one attempt,” Kakita sensei often quote, and students are expected to take this to heart.

As a result, the Kakita see their passions as assets, not something of which to be ashamed. This sets them against many other families in the Empire, who believe emotional displays to be unseemly and human passion to make the warrior’s heart weak. The Kakita feel the opposite is true: that pursuing one’s passions is how one lives a life without regret.

OPEN GATES

One unusual family tradition concerns the gates at Kyūden Kakita. Several centuries ago, when denied entry to the palace and consequently insulted, the Grand Master of the Elements laid a curse upon the palace gates. When a child is born within while the gates are closed, should that child ever draw steel, the blades of the Kakita will turn against their masters, and the palace will fall. Because of this, the gates of Kyūden Kakita are left open, and travelers pass through whenever they please.

However, an unexpected siege by the Lion Clan led to the gates being closed when Kakita Yoshi, current daimyō of the family, was born. As a result, he followed the path of the courtier, and to this day he refuses to even touch a blade, lest he invoke the curse and doom his family.



**BECOME A MASTER
DUELIST**

PCs can become a kenshinzen via titles (see page 128).

The traditions of the Kakita live in their works and the products of their dōjō. Kakita kōdō masters create scents that evoke emotion from even the coldest hearts. The Ashidaka vassal family, master smiths of the Kakita, are the forgers of the legendary Kakita Blades, exquisite swords that can only be made at a sacred forge.

The most famous tradition of the Kakita is that of the kenshinzen, the masters of the Kakita technique and most elite of the Kakita's warriors. Only a life of complete devotion to mastering the blade grants the skill necessary to achieve this rank, and one must defeat a kenshinzen in honorable duel in order to join. Although there are only a handful of kenshinzen, the head of the dueling academy is always a member. Any kenshinzen must expect to face challenges from the most ambitious sword masters across the Empire.

Kakita Master Artisans

If the essence of the Kakita's artistic approach could be summarized, it would be this: the artist surrenders a piece of themselves to the work, and in so doing, makes it real. Those who fully comprehend this secret have unlocked what elevates their chosen art beyond mere technique and skill. This is the ultimate goal of the Kakita Artisan School, and only a handful each generation ever reach this pinnacle, earning the title of Master Artisan.

With each masterwork these artisans create, they grow physically and spiritually weaker. This is because they surrender something of themselves into each masterwork, imbuing it with their very essence. This sacrifice allows a piece of them to live on in the work, granting it uncanny beauty.

These rare artifacts are known to transfix and delight the kami themselves. Legends and myths revolve around such works: paintings that come to life when bathed in moonlight, battle steeds made from folded paper that spontaneously animate, a flawless dance that enthralled an army until a snowstorm swept them, and the performer, into the next life. Many dismiss these tales as fanciful exaggerations, but when spirits are playfully drawn to a masterwork, one cannot ever know for sure what might happen.

THE HEART OF DOJI

Upon first encountering her, Kakita fell intensely in love with Lady Doji. Sensing this, Hantei offered his blessing for Kakita to court Doji, provided he could win her favor. But Doji was a Kami made flesh, and Kakita a mere mortal who would age, sicken, and die like all others. In hopes of dissuading him, she gave him three impossible tasks: to bring the dead to life, to measure how many days it would take to walk the world, and to present to her something whose beauty could not be matched. If he could accomplish these, she would agree to be his bride. Doji was surprised when he agreed, and Kakita set out that day across the Empire in search of the answers, stopping only to consult with his old friend Yasuki.

In the following months, Kakita's twin sister, Kiyamori, tended to Lady Doji, telling stories about Kakita's youth and revealing his true noble nature. Through these tales, Doji fell in love with Kakita, and she began to secretly hope that he would succeed.

Eventually, Kakita returned to the court to perform the impossible tasks. For the first, Kakita presented a *biwa*—lute—he had carved from lifeless driftwood. He played an enchanting song on it, and none could deny that he had brought the dead wood to life. For the second, he argued that a person guided by the sun goddess, Amaterasu, would take only a day to cross the world, and the court was amused by his clever answer.

Finally, to present something whose beauty could not be matched, Kakita held up a mirror and showed Lady Doji her own reflection. In that moment, a goddess's heart was won.

KAKITA RUMORS

A servant overheard insults exchanged between our mutual friend and a brash Matsu, and one challenged the other! If this unsanctioned duel is carried out, there will surely be dire consequences for all involved.

I heard that the dirty beggar getting handouts at the teahouse is actually a kenshinzen in disguise! She must be undergoing a masha shugyō—a warrior's quest—and is seeking a worthy opponent.

DAIDOJI

Doji Konishiko, the Crane Clan Thunder, never returned from the Shadowlands. For some time, it was believed that Shukujo, the sword forged by her twin, had been forever lost when she fell at the foot of the ninth Kami. Yet in her sleep, Lady Doji saw images of her lost daughter. She was convinced that Konishiko was somehow still bound to the realm of the living.

Swearing to find his older sister, Doji Hayaku embarked alone on a quest into the Shadowlands. As the seasons rapidly passed, all came to believe that the youngest son of Doji had joined his sister's fate. However, three years after he left, Hayaku returned, carrying the very sword Konishiko had wielded against the fallen Kami, as pristine as

the day she'd picked it up. Although Hayaku was alive and untainted, the toll of three years beneath Jigoku's shadow had changed him. Scars raked his throat, robbing him of his voice, and his raven hair had turned white. For his deeds, Hayaku was made a daimyō of the Crane and charged with the defense of the clan. To honor him, they called him "Daidoji."

REPUTATION AND VALUES

Compared to their kin, the Daidoji family are an oddity. Where the Doji are sunny, the Daidoji are dour. Where the Kakita are charming and boastful, the Daidoji are quiet and reserved, speaking only when they believe it will improve upon the silence. Where the rest of the Crane see no harm in occasional indulgences, the Daidoji abstain. They are the sentinels who guard the clan, sworn to safeguard Crane lands, lives, and honor.

The bleak attitude of the Daidoji is a reflection of their challenging duty. The Daidoji must protect all Crane provinces from invasion and neutralize military threats. Crane forces are among the least numerous in the Empire, after only the Dragon and the Phoenix, whose provinces are protected by both natural barriers and harsh climates. In contrast, Crane lands run nearly half the length of the Empire, from the provinces near the Imperial City to the Crab border in the South. Vast borders are shared with the Lion Clan, the ancestral enemies of the Crane and the greatest military force in the Empire. To the south, the Crane share borders with another militant clan: the armies of the Crab keep a

keen eye on their fertile fields from just across the bay. Is it any wonder the Daidoji cannot relax, even for a moment, when beyond the Crane's doorstep they are surrounded by enemies? Outnumbered in every conflict and flanked on all sides, the Daidoji's duty seems impossible.

But so too did the quest of their founder. Doji Hayaku faced impossible odds and certain death, yet he returned with his life and honor intact.

The Daidoji draw strength from the memory of their ancestor, emulating him in service to the Crane. Like Hayaku, they rely on their ingenuity, their resourcefulness, and also their honor. To defend the vast lands of the Crane, the Daidoji must do more with less. It is through this lens that they see the world.

To this end, the Daidoji value cleverness, watchfulness, and simple determination in their family members. They seek unconventional ways

THE DAIDOJI FAMILY MON

A flying crane clutching a spear in its feet, pinning a snake with the tip.



THE YASUKI GRUDGE

The Crab Clan's Yasuki family once served the Crane. In thanks for Yasuki's constant guidance, and especially for setting him on the correct path in his quest to earn Lady Doji's hand in marriage, Kakita made Yasuki's son a daimyō and granted him the southernmost of the Crane provinces. Late in the fourth century, the Yasuki defected to the Crab Clan, causing a wartime escalation so heated that the Emperor himself had to intervene. The Daidoji have never forgiven the Yasuki for this betrayal, and to this day, they seek to undermine the family whenever possible.

of defending the Crane, utilizing new tactics and tricks to stall enemies. They train constantly to maintain peak performance. Seeking to foster personal sacrifice in all of their members, they emphasize the Bushidō tenet of Chūgi (Duty and Loyalty) more than the other Crane families do. Doji Hayaku gave much for the Crane in his quest, but giving allowed him to survive. Consequently, the Daidoji have learned to accept losses without hesitating, to “sacrifice a finger to save the hand.” There is little the Daidoji wouldn't sacrifice for the survival of the clan.

However, the Daidoji do draw the line at dishonor. A Daidoji regards their honor as a source of strength and among their greatest assets. Doji Hayaku spent three years in the Shadowlands and achieved his goal without disgracing himself. He returned without a hint of the Taint. The Daidoji reason that if their founder could retain his honor while surrounded by dishonor and death, then certainly so can they.

This attitude and devotion to service has impressed many bushi families throughout the Empire. The Hida and Hiruma of the Crab have little use for the fawning Doji or the smug Kakita, but they speak of the Daidoji with great respect. They have faced the Daidoji on the

battlefield and have also fought beside them against Shadowlands horrors. In return, the Daidoji hold Crab warriors in high esteem, even when they must take the field against them. This mutual respect—and a certain shared pragmatism—is why Daidoji, instead of other Crane families, are usually sent to conduct diplomatic conversations with the Crab.

However, the Daidoji cannot hide their disdain for the Crab's Yasuki family, whom they regard as traitors. The Hida and the Doji alike wisely keep representatives of these families apart whenever possible.

CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

The Daidoji's duty and role within their clan shapes all aspects of the family's culture. They eat only with the left hand so that the right is free to draw a blade. They prefer subdued, unobtrusive furnishings and understated aesthetics. They venerate the arts as do the other families, but they practice them as a means of heightening their perception and coordination. Poetry is a part of martial training because it trains the mind to think spontaneously. Kōdō, the art of scents, is valued for its ability to calm the body and focus the mind. In music, while the Kakita venerate the biwa and the Doji prefer the zither, the Daidoji embrace the shakuhachi, a bamboo flute that is easily carried or stashed.



As samurai, the Daidoji seek to emulate their founder and demonstrate their primary function as warriors. Many dye their hair white in honor of Doji Hayaku, and some leaders take vows of silence to demonstrate the depth of their devotion. The preferred weapon of the Daidoji is the yari (the long spear), which is emphasized in the traditional family martial style even over the sword. Their secondary weapon is the yumi (the bow); Daidoji archers are among the most renowned in the Empire, known for the grace of their form as well as the accuracy of their shot. For indoor fighting, Daidoji train with the wakizashi, the tessen (metal war fan), and all manner of daggers. Some even remark that the Daidoji forget they have katana, and it is certainly true that the family regards the longsword as a “last option” weapon.

The Daidoji also maintain significant cavalry forces, which commonly serve as war heralds, light mounted infantry, and harassing archery units. Unlike the Shinjo, who are notorious for their feigned retreats and advancing assaults, the Daidoji tend to use their sturdy ponies as mobile artillery platforms, stopping or even dismounting to fire rather than shooting while advancing or retreating.

A proverb repeated among the Daidoji is this: “While you rest, your enemy practices.” To this end, Daidoji spend every waking moment in some productive activity, either training their bodies or improving

their minds. This is even true for Daidoji children. Games like shōgi, Go, and box puzzles are taught to children at a young age. Instead of whimsical folktales, children read strategy, history, and tactics. In this way, Daidoji children are raised into the warrior mind-set well before they ever grip a blade.

This rearing and philosophy are well suited to a warrior’s life, but they serve Daidoji on other life paths as well. Daidoji diplomats are stoic and keen, pragmatic enough to know when to give and clever enough to know when to push for leverage. Daidoji blacksmiths know how their weaponry will be used, and this practical knowledge influences their designs. Daidoji quartermasters keep Crane coffers filled and markets bustling without dirtying the clan’s reputation. Whether as magistrates, governors, or court liaisons for their armies, the Daidoji apply their philosophy to every role.

Daidoji Warfare

Conflict is inevitable in a land such as Rokugan, and the Crane have had their fair share of war. When it comes, the Daidoji bring their full training to bear, fighting defensively and stubbornly, buying time for the political machine of the Crane to do its work and end the fighting through diplomatic intervention.

Defending Crane forces are almost always outnumbered. But as the Daidoji often say, “Few can overcome many.” It is possible for a handful of Daidoji warriors to hold off superior forces without sacrificing their dignity or personal honor. They have even gained a reputation for it, through careful planning and tactics, superior knowledge of terrain, some clever resourcefulness, and plain old stubbornness.

The *Book of Sun Tao* says, “The astute warrior who lives reaps three victories over the foolish warrior who dies.” Even so, there are things that samurai consider to be disgraceful behavior on the battlefield: attacking an opponent while their back is turned or while they are unarmed, purposefully seeking weaker or unskilled opponents or avoiding skilled foes, feigning death to avoid a fight, sabotaging an opponent’s weapon, pretending to be an ally and then betraying those who trusted you, allowing yourself to be captured without a fight, and breaking conditions agreed to before battle all lead to dishonor. These are clear violations of Bushidō; the Daidoji abhor them.

Clever Tactics

But they do not abhor tactics. As Akodo once observed, “War is deception.” While the Daidoji observe Bushidō on the battlefield and do not compromise their principles, neither do they fight unintelligently. To prolong

THE CRANE’S FEATHERS

When Doji Hayaku returned from the Shadowlands, not only had he accrued numerous scars, but his once-raven hair had turned ghostly white. Today, many members of the Doji and Daidoji families choose to bleach their hair white in honor of his sacrifice. This is especially true of the Daidoji, who consider it disrespectful not to honor their founder this way.

A not-uncommon feature among the Crane, especially among the Doji, are blue eyes. It is said that Lady Doji’s eyes were the color of the sky in spring, and it is believed that blue eyes are a sign of descent from Lady Doji herself.

Very rarely, a Crane may be born with white hair. The cofounder of the Asahina family, Doji Kiriko, was one such individual, and occasionally one of her descendants will have white hair. It is seen as an auspicious mark among the Crane, but it is extremely rare.

DAIDOJI RUMORS

There is a place in the marshes near Motsureta Mura where crystal shards as tall as trees jut from the ground at random angles. I swear it is true, but I confess I've never been able to find it again.

I overheard two students from a rival dōjō say that their prior class captured our dōjō's old banner. They have hung it from their rafters as a sign of superiority! I wonder how long we are supposed to stand for that!

You heard this not from me, friend, but someone accidentally discovered tunnels beneath the village. They did not explore beyond a few steps, but they said it looks like the tunnels cross under the border into the neighboring clan's lands. Yet when they reported this, our lord did not seem concerned.

A shipment of materials has failed to arrive at its destination. A rather large squad of Iron Warriors have been sent to find it...what could warrant that much military might?

a fight results in needless bloodshed and wastes the Emperor's precious resources—is such a failure not dishonorable? On the other hand, to end a battle quickly, or even preemptively, brings great honor. For these reasons, the Daidoji seek ways to turn their enemies' strength against them.

Daidoji scouts covertly follow armies for miles, gathering intelligence for generals to utilize. They choose their battles carefully, outwitting their enemies and maneuvering them into vulnerable positions. They use the terrain and force targets into choke points. They use smoke to create temporary cover for advances and kites to signal units deployed beyond sight of their heralds. They separate enemy officers from their units to make them less effective. Before supplies can fall into enemy hands, the Daidoji set them ablaze, devaluing the opponent's victory and ensuring Crane resources cannot be turned against the clan. And when all else fails, the Daidoji stubbornly refuse to yield, invoking their founder's name with their last breath.

But while these tactics have earned the Daidoji a fearsome reputation and the threat of Daidoji defense is often enough to prevent incursions, the uncomfortable truth is that if their neighbors ever truly committed to a full-scale invasion, Crane forces would crumble like a folded origami bird in a rainstorm. In the end, Daidoji warfare is a collection of stalling tactics. The true power of the Crane is in their political prowess. When the Daidoji take the field, it is often to delay invaders until negotiations, economic pressure, devaluation of the attackers' potential victory, and Imperial intervention ends the fighting. Without these, true protection of the Crane homelands would be impossible.

FAMILY TRADITIONS

Their unique shared duty and daily pressures unite the Daidoji in a way no other Crane family can claim. When two members of the family meet for the first time, they regard one another as siblings or close friends. The bonds of the Daidoji are stronger than steel.

Among the most prestigious Daidoji warriors are the Iron Crane (also known as the Iron Warriors). Named for their heavy armor and unyielding nature, the Iron Crane spend at least one year on the Carpenter Wall alongside the Crab and train in a spear fighting style developed by Hayaku himself.

One tradition among the Iron Crane military units is to tattoo the image of a crane on the wrist or forearm, so as to proudly wear one's identity as a warrior. Some Daidoji continue to add tattoos as they age, each addition representative of a victory or hardship. This is considered a rite of passage within the Iron Crane. It is common for close friends to be tattooed in tandem with a design that is only completed when they clasp hands.

A lesser-known Daidoji organization is Kuranoko's Feathers. Founded centuries ago by Hanamofu Kuranoko of the Daidoji, the dōjō is publicly a cartography and merchant-trade school, but it also serves a lesser-known purpose—as a smuggling organization. Its brave souls bypass blockades and covertly move supplies. Kuranoko's Feathers view themselves as principled couriers and covert suppliers rather than as smugglers. They risk their lives to get medicine to battlegrounds and food to starving villages, or to smuggle artifacts, heirlooms, and people out of besieged cities. Without Kuranoko's Feathers, the distant territories of the Crane would never survive.

HONOR'S COST IS HIGH

The Daidoji Iron Crane are samurai who fight smarter and leverage every advantage, but they are taught time and again never to forsake their personal honor. After all, their honor is the source of their strength, and without it, they hold, existence is meaningless. A life after losing one's honor is naught but a prolonged death. That is a line no Daidoji will willingly cross.

Or so most believe, because they do not see the full picture as their leaders do. They are unaware of what exactly is required to keep Crane lands safe. Common samurai are unaware of the stakes their hatamoto and daimyō must weigh and the

decisions they must make. Such samurai have not faced the same grim choices their superiors have.

Champions such as Daidoji Uji present themselves as paragons of honor, and yet they go to lengths that would never even occur to their subordinates. Enemy supplies miraculously spoil, opposing generals go missing, and encampment bonfires inexplicably burn out of control. As leaders like Daidoji Uji see it, their soldiers don't need to know the details on how certain battles have been won. Let their leaders bear the price of war.

But if this were known, it would surely shake the family's very core.

ASAHINA

In the fourth century, before skirmishes and insults between the Phoenix and Lion could escalate into outright war, the Crane lobbied for Imperial intervention and negotiated peace. While most Phoenix were grateful that conflict was thwarted, Isawa Asahina, the Elemental Master of Fire, believed the Crane had robbed his clan of a chance to defend their honor. Overwhelmed by fury, he unleashed a fiery rampage throughout Crane lands, setting villages and farmlands ablaze.

As he terrorized the coastline, a lone samurai, Doji Kiriko, appealed to him to spare her village from his wrath. Ignoring her pleas, he razed it to the ground and called it justice. However, on seeing her grief at what he had destroyed, compassion moved him and he saw his own wanton cruelty for what it was. Asahina abruptly surrendered, devoting himself to repairing the lives he had destroyed. He forswore the path of Fire and promised that neither he nor his descendants would ever embrace violence again.

REPUTATION AND VALUES

For a family of the Great Clans, the Asahina family is not especially famous. Indeed, most citizens are only vaguely aware that Crane have a family tasked with speaking to the spirits, much less an entire school of shugenja. This is because, in contrast to the other Crane families, Asahina are reclusive, rarely leaving their temples in the southern Crane provinces. For the most part, the other Crane families leave them to themselves out of respect for their ways.

The Asahina are an ascetic, insular family of shugenja, monks, and seers. Living in atonement for their founder's sins, the Asahina are completely devoted pacifists, refusing even to fight in self-defense. Instead of fighting, they commit themselves to spiritual and artistic pursuits, seeking to promote harmony outside and within.

Those familiar with the Asahina know them through their works: wondrous illusions, beautiful art that invokes the power of the kami, and other such ephemeral creations of beauty. The Asahina are masters of Fu Sui, the art of arranging the environment to attract kami and other positive energies. Gardens and architecture designed by the Asahina exemplify its principles. The Asahina are also storytellers, collectors of lore containing esoteric lessons that they relate to enraptured audiences through displays of illusion. As astrologists, they map the stars and predict the weather, as well as divining the destinies of those who catch their attention.

But if they are noted for anything, it is for their talismans and trinkets. As artisans, tinkers, inventors, and smiths, the Asahina love to create, and their gifts for artifice marry well with the blessings of the kami. Their best-known art is called *tsangusuri*, the creation of *tsang*, items with a kami temporarily awakened within. These talismans contain powers that can echo and even match those of mythical *nemuranai*, but they can only be used for a short time before the kami returns to its slumber. This protects such items from abuse and is but one of the ways in which the Asahina take care not to unbalance the Empire with their works.

The Asahina's tendency toward pacifism is rarely seen as cowardice, as they are priests of the kami and devotion to harmony is expected of them. But few realize the depths of the Asahina's convictions on this matter. The shugenja of other clans use their gifts when necessary, especially in defense of the clan. But to the Asahina, to invoke the kami for violence is a distasteful act that defiles the kami and oneself. The same could be said of those who call upon the kami for personal gain. Such priests use the spirits as mere tools to an end, and they are not truly worthy of the gifts they have received.

The Asahina's focus on the creation of ephemeral beauty leads other shugenja families to regard them as prideful or even flighty. The Agasha of the Dragon, who are also known for their creation of wondrous items through alchemical arts and ancient secrets of the forge, see the Asahina ways as wasteful, producing minimal effect for maximum effort. And while the Kuni respect the Asahina for their vigilance against spiritual corruption, they see them as weak and aimless.

But the Asahina know better than most the violence of which one is capable. To refuse one's own dark nature, to resist the seduction of anger and passion, is the ultimate goal of Asahina's teachings. To the Asahina family, the greatest demonstration of power is using it for humble purposes, to enrich the lives of others.

CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

Most Asahina rarely leave their temples in the southern Crane provinces. Their lives are spent in quiet contemplation and veneration of the kami, seeking inner peace through pursuit of art and the appreciation of beauty. Samurai and even peasants with sufficient means (or sufficiently desperate need) make pilgrimages to Asahina temples for the wisdom and wondrous works of these reclusive priests, often leaving with new insight into their lives or some small token of miraculous assistance. The Asahina believe that by creating artifacts and performing good works, they promote harmony throughout the lands.

THE ASAHINA FAMILY MON

A white crane in flight, holding a peach blossom in its beak.

ASAHINA RUMORS:

A young child has suddenly started creating beautiful paintings and someone has noticed the mark of a long-dead master painter is showing up on each piece. Could this be the painter's spirit, reborn?

An Asahina wishes to journey to a remote shrine, along a road plagued by bandits. He looks for aid in his journey, but seeks someone who can convince the bandits to let him pass without a fight.



However, some Asahina choose instead to explore the Empire with the goal of lessening the suffering of others. These souls wander Crane lands, blessing crops, treating illness, invoking the weather, and entreating the kami for the benefit of all, both peasant and samurai. It is believed that every good act helps to rebalance the family's karma and to redeem their founder. Isawa Asahina was as skilled with the path of Air as he was with Fire, and it is his peaceful traditions that his descendants have embraced.

Tsangusuri, the creation of the charms and talismans known as tsang, is one major tradition of the Asahina. It is the art of bringing out the inner nature of a creation, of awakening the sentient spirit dwelling within. These spirits are said to have two aspects: the *shen*, a benevolent and harmonious aspect, and the *kuei*, a wrathful and malicious one. Thus, an object is no different than

a human being: it is capable of both good and evil. It is the goal of the Asahina to bring out only the benevolent side of objects and, appropriately, themselves.

The artifacts made by the Asahina are not to be confused with the *meishōdō* talismans created by the Unicorn. While *meishōdō* talismans bind a spirit to an object, tsang are made through the act of awakening the object's innate spirit, if only for a time.

While the Asahina shun fighting and warfare, they are still known to use their abilities in defense of the helpless. They do this in honor of Doji Kiriko, whose pain ultimately persuaded Isawa Asahina away from violence. Just as she sought out danger for the sake of others, so too will the Asahina, if provoked. Asahina shugenja use trickery to escape from battle, or they find other creative solutions that allow them to defeat enemies without harming them. Further, most Asahina allow the artifacts they create to be utilized in defense of the clan. Many Asahina are blacksmiths or armorsmiths in addition to practicing tsangusuri. When members of this family do engage in violence out of necessity, such as when facing Tainted beings, they usually undertake far deeper spiritual purifications afterward than other shugenja do, to make amends with the kami whose power they misused and to find harmony in their own hearts.

ASAHINA YAJINDEN

Asahina sensei who sense too much ambition in their students may tell them the tragic and cautionary tale of Asahina Yajinden. Born in the fifth century, Yajinden was a brilliant smith and talented shugenja, among the greatest students of the Asahina ways ever to have lived. Although each of his creations was more excellent than the last, he was never satisfied with his own works and continually sought to push his skills to greater heights.

Eventually his exquisite work was noticed, and he was approached by a mysterious stranger who promised to help him unlock his true potential. Intrigued, Yajinden accepted his offer, and with the help of the stranger's lessons, developed a new tsangusuri technique. The resulting swords and other works were the apex of his craft. He gave many away as gifts and offered others to people to whom he owed favors. Yajinden was recognized for his mastery, and soon he was regarded as a hero by his family.

But one day, the Crane Clan Champion, who owned one of his blades, abruptly and publicly

declared his love for a geisha. He slew her clients in a fit of passion, then killed his own family and threw himself from a cliff to his death. Yajinden soon learned that the sword he'd made had driven his champion to these heinous acts, and that every item created by his new technique was cursed. Unable to reclaim the tsang he'd given away and desperate to undo his mistake, Yajinden resolved to forge one final blade that would counter the other artifacts and end the evil he'd unwittingly unleashed. However, he soon died under mysterious circumstances, the sword left unfinished.

The Asahina took the blade and all the artifacts of his creation they could find, and sealed them deep beneath the Shinden Asahina temple. They removed Yajinden's name from the official genealogies, and now he is only a legend, the secret shame of the Asahina family. None can say how many of his cursed works are still at large in the Empire, or what his final blade might have accomplished.

Crane Lands

The lands of the Crane are among the most geographically diverse in Rokugan, from the clan's verdant northern fields and grasslands, to the rich temperate forests along its northwestern border, to the marshy wetlands dominating its southern provinces. The ancestral Crane lands stretch along the eastern territories of Rokugan, and Crane lands account for seventy percent of its coastline, encompassing rocky cliffs, offshore island clusters, deep bays, and serene, pale beaches. Rivers carve valleys through the ancient mountain range dividing the lands into northern and southern provinces. Abundant with rice paddies in the floodplains, docks and fishing villages on the coast, rich orchards around palatial estates, and bustling marketplaces in the cities, Crane lands are considered to be the breadbasket of the Empire. Even in poor growing seasons and with coffers empty, the Crane still boast a surplus of goods for trade.

THE COAST AND RIVERS

For most denizens of the Crane provinces, daily life is connected to the sea. The largest urban centers thrive near ocean bays and along the coastline, and the need for access to their docks provides a constant source of income from other clans. The Crane's population is most heavily concentrated along the coast, and the abundance of fishing villages and dockside markets make the clan the primary supplier of seafood to the Empire. The Crane also boast the largest navy, although only technically, as the majority of their ships are fishing vessels and pleasure boats.

Farther inland, plentiful rivers and streams teem with life, and rainfall is abundant. The fertile northern plains are rich with rice paddies, cotton farms, silk-works, and numerous other agricultural centers. Seasons are mild and temperate, and the rainy season is brief. Wildlife thrives in the lands of the Crane, and artisans have a wealth of natural beauty from which to draw their inspiration.

NORTH AND SOUTH

The northern Crane lands are the seat of the Crane's power and influence. Both Kyūden Doji and Kyūden Kakita are just a day's ride from the Imperial City, Otosan Uchi. It is said that the Emperor's own home in the Forbidden City within Otosan Uchi was built with Crane taxes. The southern Crane provinces are less developed and more rural, with a wilder reputation. Due to those provinces' remoteness, troublesome

samurai tend to be assigned there to remove them from the public's eye, which only fosters the region's wild reputation. Assignments to northern provinces are therefore considered an honor, while those to southern provinces are considered punishment. When Crane pass other Crane on the roads running north and south, they are advised to treat each other well, as one never knows when the trip might be reversed.

SHIZUKA TOSHI

The Osari Mori is one of the thickest forests in the Crane provinces. Around a series of cascades and waterfall basins, the rocky terrain is covered with lush maples, tall oaks, and thick bamboo groves. Logging is forbidden, and the lack of roads and villages means the forest teems with animal life. The seclusion of this untouched wood shelters one of the Doji's most important cities, Shizuka Toshi. Called "the Quiet City," it is the home of the illustrious Doji Academy, where students train in the Doji's courtly ways.

As far as cities go, Shizuka Toshi is rather small. Built around the academy with the transient student population in mind, it boasts a few distractions from daily life, such as a theater, a park, and some restaurants, as well as a vibrant nightlife in spite of its size. The permanent residents—mostly civil retainers, magistrates, and sensei—maintain estates close to the Osari Cascades, which wind through the forest. The predominant shrines include a shrine to Benten and one to Doji Nio, Lady Doji's second son.

The grandest structure is Shizuka Palace, a castle modeled after Kyūden Doji and containing the Doji Academy. In addition to the carefully dug lake and the pristinely shaped waterfalls flowing through the arches crafted into its foundations, the palace incorporates countless classrooms and dōjō into its layout, along with student dormitories, libraries, and a replica of the Imperial Court Chamber. Every student of the Doji Diplomat School spends at least four years within its halls, and dozens of students are in attendance at any given time. Even the servants of this keep tend to know more about court workings than the typical rural samurai.

Students begin their training around the age of ten, their unaccompanied walk through the Osari Mori to the city considered by the clan to be a rite of passage. Students learn the complex social mores of the courts at the feet of retired courtiers and masters of the Doji way. Artisans teach useful crafts while retired arbiters drill students on law and propriety. The rigorous curriculum is designed to hammer out the imperfections in each student while binding them together through their various hardships, creating a network of intraclan allies that will remain useful for life.



The Lands of the Crane
and the Islands of the Mantis

Some lesser-known dōjō also exist within Shizuka Toshi. The city magistrates take prospective students as apprentices in the course of their duties, and it is not uncommon for one to be shadowed by aspiring neophytes. The Daidoji also maintain a small yōjimbō dōjō there, where students are “assigned” to guard faculty or late-year academy attendees in order to supplement their training and acclimate them to a courtly environment.

Outsiders are rarely permitted into Shizuka Toshi. Traveling papers permitting entry to non-Crane are hard to come by, and there is little to attract visitors anyway, there being few inns and markets. It is believed that students benefit from the seclusion of the woods, where the influence of outside factors is limited. Students make mistakes, which is necessary in order to improve, and the Doji prefer that these beginners’ mistakes go unobserved by those outside the clan. As a result, Shizuka Toshi is a safe haven for those just starting on their path; it is an unspoken rule that whatever happens within never leaves the boundaries of the Osari Mori. This is why locals often say, “Humble beginnings are hidden beneath the leaves.”

While Shizuka Toshi represents exciting promise for new students of the Doji, and to teach there is a great honor, the city’s secluded nature makes it an unexciting post for other samurai, offering few chances for personal glory or advancement. Those who embarrass the clan may be assigned to this city, where they are unlikely ever to be noticed again. Ordinary samurai consider a permanent station there to be career death.

THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE

Just within the shadow of Kyūden Doji lies a curiosity of the Crane lands, a small forest colloquially known as The Eye of the Needle. Untouched by any ax for centuries, the magnolias and cherry trees along the border of this tiny wood are hugged by shimenawa ropes, and blessing tags hang from the forest canopy. Outsiders believe this forest to be the Crane Clan Champion’s personal hunting grounds, since the wood is abundant with deer, boars, goatlike serows, and pheasant. However, the truth is that the wood is sacrosanct, left pristine out of respect for Emperor Hantei XXIII.

In the ninth century, when Hantei XXIII was only a child, the Imperial family visited the Crane at Kyūden Doji. As the story goes, the young prince ran away from his retainers and hid in the forest at night. The Seppun Honor Guard searched the small wood but could not find him. The entire night passed without a sign of the prince, and the Seppun feared the worst. But when the morning came, they finally found him safe and sound just outside the forest’s borders.

When questioned, the prince claimed that a silver fox had appeared and led him to a hidden grove deep in the woods. There, he ate berries and listened to the fox’s playful songs until the sun rose. Few believed the child’s fanciful tale, but since he was a Hantei, none questioned him either. When he eventually ascended to the throne, Hantei XXIII declared the wood sacred, and the Doji have left the tiny forest and its denizens alone ever since.

In the centuries following, shugenja have verified the sacred nature of this forest. Whenever the moon is full for the third time within the same season, the barriers between the forest and the Spirit Realms grow weak for a time, allowing one of those realms to overlap with Ningen-dō, the Realm of Mortals. The specific Spirit Realm varies each time, with no discernible pattern. The Doji leave gifts at the forest border on the third full moon of each season to placate whatever spirit denizens may wander beyond the trees.

RIVER OF THE BLIND MONK

Winding from the Lake of Sorrows and forming a natural border between provinces, the River of the Blind Monk is named for a curious legend dating from the earliest days of the Empire. It is said that sometimes, if traveling alone, one may encounter a blind monk fishing by the side of the river. According to these stories, the monk will ferry anyone across who can answer his riddle, but if one attempts to pay for passage instead, one inevitably ends up tossed into the water. To many Crane samurai, the thought of such an indignity is as chilling as death.

While on the surface, this seems like nothing more than a peasant’s tale, the Crane have recorded sightings of the mysterious monk by famous samurai in their histories. One such record claims that Crane Clan Champion Doji Ryobu encountered the monk just before his gempuku, and another claims a Bayushi general’s ill-fated encounter with the monk all but thwarted a Scorpion attempt to grab Yufuku na Heigen Toshi. While local legends vary wildly as to the spirit’s origins, the true nature of this “monk” remains undetermined.

MOTSURETA MURA: TANGLED PATH VILLAGE

In sharp contrast to the grassy plains, mountain forests, and glittering beaches of the northern Crane provinces, southern Crane territory is dominated by marshes, swamps, and mangroves. While the southern region is not quite as productive as the northern farming zone, rice grows abundantly in its floodplains and marshes,



THE NIGHT OF FALLING STARS

Most Crane would rather forget the incident at Yōjin no Shiro, which has come to be known as the Night of Falling Stars. However, the Daidoji speak of it often to remind themselves what is at risk should they falter, and to remember an offense against the clan that has yet to be avenged.

Yōjin no Shiro, just north of Kyūden Kakita on the border of the Lion provinces, was once a castle of the Doji. Just over a century and a half ago, the Lion Clan attacked the castle with overwhelming force. Although the Daidoji fought valiantly, the Matsu overcame them and took the castle. The Lion intended to take the Doji occupants hostage to gain leverage over the Crane, but rather than surrender to the invaders, the courtiers, retainers, and even children of the Crane threw themselves from the castle's towers into the shallow river at

its base. Their lanterns, clutched close as they fell, appeared from a distance as falling stars, giving the incident its name.

It is not commonly known outside the Daidoji family that one of their greatest daimyō was born on the battlefield that very night. The vengeful Daidoji Yūrei dedicated his life to retaking the palace and redeeming his parents' failure, wearing ghostly white armor and even taking a name—Yūrei, or "ghost"—to suit his self-appointed purpose when he reached adulthood. However, although he led three assaults on the castle during his lifetime, he never succeeded in recapturing it. It is said that his angry spirit haunts the gates of the castle to this day, and on the anniversary of the Night of Falling Stars, one can see the ghosts of the Doji as they plummet to their deaths, trailing fire behind them.

and coastal fisheries dot the shore to its southernmost point. These settlements are relatively isolated, but they are of great agricultural importance to the clan.

One such settlement is known as Motsureta Mura, or Tangled Path Village. It is so named for the confusing and often-flooded roads that wind through the surrounding barrier swamps, but in true Crane fashion, the name has a double meaning. "Motsureta" also means "confused" and "embarrassed;" an assignment there is generally perceived as a punishment for disgracing oneself or the clan. While that is not always so—samurai are assigned there regularly for other reasons—that fact does little to dispel the stigma.

Motsureta Mura lies in the vast Uebe Marshes. To the northeast, just visible above the swampy canopy, the arched rooftops of the Songbird's Cage, an ancestral castle of a Daidoji vassal family, overlook the village. Once, the village served as a crossroads between the provinces of Ichigun and Sabashii, but that is no longer the case. Centuries ago, the Daidoji undertook a great effort to convert the southern marshes into useful agricultural developments, pouring a great deal of Crane wealth and resources into the engineering feat. While their efforts proved fruitful, resulting in villages such as Motsureta Mura and rice paddies converted from marshland, a sudden conflict with the Crab required the abandonment of the project. As new distractions arose, the project was never resumed. Nevertheless, the paddies around Motsureta Mura are still maintained by its villagers, as is the simple dam managing the flow of the nearby river.

Although Motsureta Mura has declined since its founding, it still boasts a healthy population for such a rural settlement, owing to the plentiful river fishing and rice farms. An abandoned section of the village still stands, empty teahouses and estates overgrown with weeds a testament to its more vibrant heyday.

When crossing the arched "lantern bridge" at the village entrance, a person is supposed to close their eyes until they have stepped again on solid ground, to demonstrate their trust in fate and to acquire good fortune. The bridge is the subject of a number of legends, most involving *kawauso*, shapeshifting river otters who sometimes take human form and inhabit the abandoned sector, or so the villagers insist.

The Daidoji maintain several small estates near the winding river, but given that Motsureta Mura is an isolated backwoods village, the samurai stationed there are never more than a handful. These samurai rarely become involved in village affairs, preferring to leave the peasants to their own devices while they focus on attaining more prestigious assignments. The Daidoji use the marshes as training grounds for scouts and new recruits, so passing Daidoji students are not an uncommon sight.

The only true attraction of Motsureta Mura is the Laughing River Otter ryokan, a hot-spring hotel on the outskirts of the abandoned section. The hotel, with its onsen (hot spring), is one of the only remaining businesses from the town's heyday that is still maintained. The onsen's salty water flows through the butterburs and is said to be good for one's complexion.

On cool nights, one can sometimes hear the singing sands of the nearby Uebe Beach, which lies to the east. When the wind passes through the sands, it makes a soft whistling sound, and when stepped upon, the sand makes a flat “wood-block” striking sound. It is believed that this sound comes from the spirits dwelling beneath the sand, trying to recall the beautiful song that a princess once sang while resting on the beach. A shrine to Isora, Fortune of the Shore, rises just offshore, doubling as a lighthouse and maintained by the priest and shrine keepers.

While the Uebe Marshes have their own unique beauty, they are considered less “civilized” than the rest of Crane lands, their people rougher and less refined. Speaking the rural dialect while in northern lands is stigmatizing, causing others to assume the speaker is “backwoods” or less educated. For this reason, visiting Crane are careful not to pick up the dialect. This has its own disadvantage, however, as locals consider those speaking the city dialect to be outsiders and less trustworthy.

MUSUME MURA: DAUGHTER VILLAGE

In the bay near Kyūden Doji is a small island known as Michi ni Mayotte Musume, or Lost Daughter Inlet. Stone tablets inside the island’s lone shrine tell the legend of how the first Hantei fell in love with Mioko, a simple peasant hidden and imprisoned on the island by her father, and how they overcame all obstacles to find each other on its sandy beach.

In those days, the nearby fishing village was known as Ikieto, but today it is called Musume Mura, or Daughter Village. The last significant settlement before a traveler reaches Kyūden Doji, it contains a bustling wharf and vibrant fishing industry. A small shrine to both Benten and Hotei stands outside the village, and devoted priests to Doji Mioko, who married the first Hantei, are found only here.

But the true value of this village is in the noble estates on the hill overlooking the square, for they contain the Doji’s most prestigious nakōdo school, and the Crane’s greatest matchmakers are said to reside there. Samurai parents make pilgrimages from miles around for the sage advice of Musume Mura’s nakōdo, whose reputation for happy pairings have spread far beyond Crane borders. The village also attracts those who have been unlucky in pairings or unable to obtain matches (with varying degrees of desperation). It is said that there are more eligible young adults in Musume Mura than in all the surrounding provinces combined.

This village also holds a special significance for the Imperial family. When the Emperor becomes engaged, their intended makes a pilgrimage to Musume Mura and spends a night alone in the shrine on Lost Daughter Inlet. It is believed that the enshrined spirit, that of the first Imperial Spouse, blesses the spouse-to-be and imparts them with ancient wisdom.

THE GREAT SEA SPIDER

At the center of an atoll off the coast of Daidoji lands churns a dark whirlpool, the cause of which is unknown. But obscure legends, known only to those well versed in Crane folklore, speak of an ancient being resting at its center, deep at the ocean floor, where no light can reach it.

The tales say that this whirlpool is the tunnel web of Daikumo-no-Kami, the Great Sea Spider. This monstrous spider, bound to the atoll by Asahina shugenja, is an ancestral enemy of the Daidoji family. Kumo, the spirits of shape-changing spiders, feed off the negative emotions of living beings. It is said that the Great Sea Spider bound itself to the Daidoji family, and the family’s feelings of anger and vengeance allowed it to grow to its massive size.

Most scholars speculate that this obscure piece of folklore is simply a tale created by Daidoji storytellers as a warning not to become obsessed with revenge. The regional colloquial saying “to feed the spider” refers to harboring such a negative emotion and allowing it to build up without productive outlets. Others say the story is merely a fantasy invented to explain the strange whirlpool phenomenon. But if the legends are true, then the Asahina have done the Daidoji a great service, for if the Great Sea Spider were freed, what could possibly stop it?

Masters of Court

Warriors who believe the courts are where pampered courtiers surrounded by opulence titter over tea are greatly mistaken. The courts are just another battlefield, and courtiers are its warriors. And just as on any battlefield, the future of the clan can ride upon the outcome of every battle at court. As a wise Doji once observed, “A warrior’s failure dooms only himself; the courtier’s failure dooms the clan.”

This is because the courts of Rokugan, from small pastoral courts to the Imperial Court, are where policy is decided and laws are made. The consequences of proceedings at court and decisions made there can ripple outward and affect the lands surrounding it. Economic decisions like where a province allots its taxes, or which river to dam, or which imports to permit from other clans, can drastically affect the lives of thousands.

Imperial Court decisions have the greatest impact, flowing throughout the Empire just as blood flows from the heart to the body’s farthest extremities. Due to the efforts of courtiers, enemies in summer can become allies by winter. New clan champions are not technically official until they are recognized and accepted at the Imperial Winter Court. Marriage agreements between samurai houses, even those beneath notice, are not legal until they carry the Imperial stamp. The difference between an illegal military invasion and a justified honorable strike is the approval of the court. At court, wars can end before they’ve even begun due to political pressure—and they can start with a single sharp word.

Even clans that do not prioritize the political arena, like the Crab and Unicorn, still want a say in how they will be governed and some influence on policy. Having no representation means others will decide the fate of the clan. When the Dragon have a poor harvest and other clans have a surplus, the difference between life and death hangs not only on the negotiating skill of the clan’s courtiers, but on their presence and clout at court. And perhaps on how much better they are than the courtiers of every other clan seeking the same thing.

When so much depends on how court sessions unfold, it is easy to see how the courts become battlefields on which the Great Clans strike at one another. Good courtiers use the courts to influence policy to their clan’s benefit, but great ones use them to strike at their clan’s enemies.

IMPERIAL FAVORS

The Tao of Shinsei says, “We only relate to pain that is our own,” and the courts are a fine example of this. Proximity to the Imperial families—the Seppun, Otomo, and Miya—is one of the primary reasons for maintaining a presence at court. By making personal connections with these families, a courtier can win their sympathy—a powerful deterrent against the manipulations of other clans—and access to Imperial resources. Marriage into an Imperial family is especially prestigious, bringing glory (and sizable resources) into the clan. Because of the Imperials’ considerable sway, rapport with any of those families is a great boon.

Imperial family members are not oblivious to this fact. They are wary of personal relationships and will not be used as step stools to power. They are born and raised in the courts and



know when a gesture of friendship is genuine. Many is the courtier who foolishly believed their bid for Imperial attention had succeeded, only to be justly “enlightened.”

The Crane enjoy one of the closest relationships with the Imperial families, owing to their close tie to the Emperor. Doji was famously Hantei’s favorite sibling, and the Emperor’s children have a Doji parent more often than not. Rokugani are nearly always sympathetic to a beloved parent’s clan, and the Crane use this to sway the Emperor to their favor. However, they sometimes find themselves in rivalries with the Otomo family and in competition with the Scorpion, so they are not always in Imperial good graces.

A FAVOR RETURNED

It is Rokugani custom to always bring a gift when entering someone else’s home, and to exchange gifts as tokens of gratitude. A gift may be offered to prove one’s sincerity, in exchange for a favor, or as a mark of affection. Regardless of the reason for the gift, it must always be repaid. To do otherwise insults the giver and disgraces the recipient, because it demonstrates greed and a disregard of the Bushidō tenet of Courtesy.

As a result, gifts and favors are the currency of the court. By performing favors, a courtier gains clout and sway over others. Arranging a good marriage for a friend’s offspring, officiating a duel to ensure neither party loses face, securing someone an invitation to an exclusive event, and introducing someone to a person of influence are all examples of favors a courtier can provide. Because a favor must be reciprocated, the more favors a courtier performs, the more strings they can pull when needed.

Gift giving is an art form of its own. A gift that is handmade or has some personal significance is valued more highly than one that is merely expensive or rare. A courtier who simply buys a pricey gift in the market shows no care for the one receiving the gift, but the courtier who spends hours handcrafting a piece of art or who offers a personal token once given to them by their sensei demonstrates true devotion. At the same time, a gift can be a subtle insult to the receiver, one that they must accept to save face. An inappropriate gift can disrupt a court when needed or stir the anger of a host while making the giver seem innocent. And of course, gifts can be weaponized, the high cost of a banked favor implied with the giving.

KEEPING THE GATE

Access to courts is paramount to the survival of a clan, so denying court access is a powerful weapon. Denying access can be done subtly, such as by occupying the time of a courtier so they forget to attend, or by

THE EMPEROR’S BLESSING

Based on tradition tied to their family’s founding, every year, the Miya bestow upon one clan a service known as the Emperor’s Blessing. The Emperor’s Blessing is a massive caravan of builders, engineers, artisans, and craftspeople who journey across the beneficiary clan’s provinces repairing roads and monuments, erecting new public works, and healing the ravages of disasters and wars. It is funded entirely by the Miya family, comes with a sizable gift of food and goods, and is deployed at the discretion of the fortunate clan.

Obtaining the Emperor’s Blessing each year is a priority for every clan, especially Minor Clans, which normally must endure the burden of every unlucky season. In privacy, so as to save face, each clan presents their case to the Miya; ultimately, however, it is closeness to the Miya family that decides where the blessing is given. Denying it to one’s enemy is a powerful move that can cost an opponent dearly and force an end to conflicts.

GIFT CUSTOM

The custom of receiving a gift is that it must be refused twice and then accepted on the third offer. This is to prove the sincerity of the offer and refute the desire of the receiver.

force, such as having an entire delegation expelled from court for a perceived slight. The reputation and comfort of guests is the responsibility of court hosts, so a clan may deny rivals access to a court they are hosting on the pretense of maintaining harmony. With no one to argue a clan’s perspective on policy, the clan is effectively at the court’s mercy.

Conversely, allowing access to a court is a potent bargaining chip and a valuable favor. For instance, a person may only attend the Imperial Winter Court with a written invitation from the Emperor, who only issues a finite number of invitations each year. Great Clan daimyō and important officials such as the Emerald Champion always receive personal invitations, but Great Clans also receive blank invitations to be dispersed, or given away as favors, at their will. A samurai who receives such an invitation as a gift is likely to be in the giver’s debt for some time.

CULTURAL INFLUENCE

Courts are where trends begin, which results in another form of warfare between clans. No one takes an out-of-fashion courtier seriously, and ignorance of the latest fad demonstrates that the courtier is not paying attention.

Courtiers who influence social trends wield a subtle power, but one that cannot be overlooked. By making the latest fashion prohibitively expensive, a courtier can deny a rival access to court or stress their resources. For example, the cost of one silk kimono suitable for court could feed a dozen families for a season; for the Sparrow Clan, the poorest samurai in the Empire, for one representative to attend court means others must starve.

A courtier can also create a demand for their family's goods and thus increase their family's influence, prestige, and wealth. A sake brewery whose latest brew becomes the favorite of influential courtiers will find its product in sudden demand, as offering the brew to guests will soon become a prerequisite for holding court functions.

DUELS AT COURT

Thanks to the prowess of the Kakita, it is extremely dangerous to challenge the Crane Clan's authority at court, for the law affords that the aggrieved may demand satisfaction by steel. While dueling customs vary somewhat by region and the temperament of particular daimyō even within Crane lands, all of the following terms are considered customary for an iaijutsu duel in a Crane court (and in courts where their diplomats hold sufficient sway):

- ⊗ The lord who sanctioned the duel must stand as a judge, and stakes 10 honor and 10 glory on the outcome proceeding honorably (or justice being done if it is not).
- ⊗ The lord who sanctioned the duel may nominate two additional individuals of the same status rank to stand as judges as well, who must also stake 10 honor and 10 glory. Any decision must have a majority.
- ⊗ It is considered uncouth for a duel to be fought within eight hours of the challenge, for combatants must steel themselves spiritually before battle and undergo ritual purification (this delay gives the skilled diplomats of the Doji family ample opportunity to capitalize on the duel as tension mounts).
- ⊗ Ever since a series of events in the 1st century, it is also considered uncouth for a duel to be fought outdoors at sunrise or sunset.
- ⊗ Ever since the same series of events, it is considered uncouth for a combatant to arrive late. If a combatant arrives late, the judges may choose to postpone the duel.
- ⊗ An appropriately scenic location must be chosen; a judge must make a **TN 3 Aesthetics check (Water 2, Fire 5)** to determine a suitable locale. If they cannot find one, the duel is postponed for one day while they continue to seek a location.

- ⊗ A duel may also be postponed should the judges determine the weather to be inclement.
- ⊗ The duel must be fought only with the daishō, and warriors must wear only ceremonial robes.
- ⊗ Only iaijutsu cuts and attacks with the unsheathed daishō are permitted. Strikes with other weapons—including unarmed blows—are considered cheating.
- ⊗ Blades must begin sheathed, and cannot be unsheathed before a combatant's first turn.
- ⊗ There are two acceptable victory conditions: first blood and judgment. (see page 258 of the core rulebook).
- ⊗ If either warrior is Incapacitated, their opponent may appeal for judgment by making Courtesy check as a Scheme action targeting the judges. The TN is equal to the highest vigilance among the targets. If the character succeeds, the duel ends and is scored. Target papers are sometimes attached to help judges in determining a clear victory by judgment.
- ⊗ Speaking discourteously to one's opponent incurs a penalty of –5 points.
- ⊗ Multiple strikes are permitted, but as waste is to be scorned, each strike after the first incurs a penalty of –1.

Given these terms, it should come as no surprise that other clans greatly value any diplomat who can convince a Crane lord to set in place rules that are less unfavorable to their own duelists. There have also been cases where a local ruler takes obvious pleasure in forcing a Crane iaijutsu master to follow some equally arcane set of *local* customs during a duel, rather than those set down by the Crane Clan.



Shadows of the Court

Information is power, and the courts are rife with it. But they are also rife with deception. Behind the open theater of court proceedings, diplomacy is conducted behind closed doors. Secret meetings, covert agreements, and coordinated displays are all orchestrated beneath a veneer of spontaneous civility. In such a climate, superior knowledge is the difference between victory and failure.

That courtiers would gather information and engage in espionage is not just expected, but openly accepted by court participants. Spying is disgraceful behavior unbecoming of samurai, but it is not dishonorable to “overhear,” and court is filled with attentive eyes and ears. One can assume that, at any time, one’s activities are being witnessed. Similarly, it is considered disgraceful to hide one’s activities at court. Successful

courtiers become experts at “the face one shows,” acting in the open without revealing their intentions. Even in the open, a courtier’s shadow is never noticed.

SPYING IN THE OPEN

Most spying does not involve listening closely behind shōji screens, hanging from dark rafters, or similar skulduggery. Quite the contrary: most spying is done in the open. Even though this is acknowledged, a samurai would take offense at the notion that they are “spying.” They are simply paying attention.

When two courtiers leave court together at the same time, it is something noteworthy. If court gossip revolves around a specific subject, that knowledge is worth tucking away. If voices behind a shōji screen are loud enough to be heard from the next seat, that is hardly the fault of the one occupying it.

Vigilant courtiers and other samurai simply watch and listen. When they are asked what they have observed, it is not dishonorable for them to simply recall what they have seen and heard. Even seemingly inconsequential details may add valuable pieces to a greater picture, but the courtier who made the observation never need know how that detail connects. By operating in such a way, a courtier's honor is preserved.

Courtiers are trained to infer based on observation. Skilled courtiers can tell at a glance who is really in charge, who owes who a favor, and which attendees were childhood friends. By observing body language and how individuals react to unfolding circumstances, they can gather a great deal of valuable information. When two courtiers attend court carrying one another's exchanged fans, an observer might conclude that they are involved. If a servant drops a cup and it shatters, and all turn to look save one or two, an astute courtier might wonder why they are trying so hard to look nonchalant.

Better information sources than samurai are those who move through the courts invisibly: namely, the servant class. Servants are everywhere in a keep, including restricted and sensitive areas, and they are never given a second glance. There are attendants, gardeners,

floor washers, cooks, hostlers, tailors, and many more. They are almost regarded as furniture, mere fixtures of the household. What a samurai would never say in public, they openly mention in front of servants. What peasants overhear can fill volumes.

Successful courtiers are able to discern who is supposed to be present and who is spying. Servants tend to fade into the background, so courtiers train themselves to notice them. If a courtier suspects a servant might be spying, they may say things in front of the servant that will lead them to draw incorrect conclusions. Wise courtiers speak in layers so as to obfuscate their meaning for anyone but the intended recipient of their message—so that, as a famous Otomo once put it, “the walls do not understand” what was truly said.

LETTERS

Because conversation is so easily overheard, most confidential communication is achieved via letters. However, even letter exchanges are not entirely secure. Due to paper's expense, the convention is to write one's reply on the same note. A letter can be hand delivered, but samurai rarely have time to do so, so they usually entrust delivery to a servant or leave the letter in an inconspicuous place where the intended recipient will find it. However, neither method guarantees that the letter will escape interception; a servant cannot refuse a samurai who demands it, and there may be spies who seek hidden letters throughout the castle. A samurai can only accept the fact that eyes other than the intended recipient's might see the letter.

There are countermeasures to deploy, however. One is origami, the art of paper folding. To use this method, the writer



THE GAME OF LETTERS

Constant streams of letters flow throughout Rokugani courts. At any given time, a courtier maintains a dozen or more correspondences. Their letters are carried by servants to their intended recipients, but such messages are hardly considered private. After all, it is not as though a servant could do anything if a samurai stopped them, plucked a letter from their hands, read it, and then gave it back. As a result, courtiers must obfuscate the meaning of their letters to prevent unwanted eyes from intercepting and understanding them.

The Game of Letters, utilized by allies, enemies, and lovers alike, takes advantage of this practice. In this game, a samurai follows a set of conventions to compose a letter containing a hidden meaning, the skillful uncovering of which can provoke (or amuse) the recipient. The letter writer

employs intricate symbolism not just in the writing, but in the style of calligraphy; the type, texture, and color of the paper; the kind of ink used; and items enclosed within the letter (such as a hint of perfume or a pressed flower), all of which suggest the secret meaning.

When such a letter is received, regardless of the writer's intention, the recipient must reply in kind. To do otherwise is to concede to the sender. The response may be written on the same paper, or a new letter can be deployed. Of course, the correspondents take it for granted that their letters can be read by anyone; that is just a part of the game. If an unintended reader gets the wrong idea from an intercepted message (and engages in ill-advised action as a result), well, that is hardly the writer's fault!

folds the letter into a particularly difficult origami shape, one almost certain to tear when unfolded. This way, if the addressee receives a torn letter, or an unfolded letter full of origami creases, they know it has been intercepted. Another countermeasure is decoy letters; a favorite court pastime of the Bayushi family is to deploy a combination of decoys and origami and then observe the frustrations of interceptors who unfold a letter only to find a drawing or meaningless poem.

A third countermeasure is to write in code. Every Great Clan family boasts a number of family ciphers in which they conduct secret correspondence. Decoding such a cipher is impossible or very difficult for outsiders who don't know the code. Some ciphers are obviously encoded, appearing as intricate symbols, like the Asako family cipher. Others appear to be regular writing, like the ciphers of the Bayushi. While fairly foolproof, a family cipher is rarely used for personal correspondence, as every letter written using the cipher gives interceptors another chance to decipher it, at great cost to the clan.

CASUAL MEETINGS

Even in court culture, in which every little act is scrutinized, people tend to relax at informal gatherings. These are the best places to gather information, as attendees reveal things without meaning to when their guard is down. Clan delegations often hold special events as a pretense for collecting intelligence. An innocent dinner, a kemari tournament, a modest party, or even a puppet theater (Bunraku) performance could

be an information-gathering operation in disguise. "The full belly speaks openly," as the saying goes. Simply by stationing vigilant observers throughout such an event, one can learn many useful details.

Of course, often the most valuable information can be revealed in the relaxed talk behind closed doors.

Unexpectedly, bushi-trained samurai tend to be better than courtiers at guarding important intelligence from a lover. The life of a bushi teaches constant vigilance, for it is said death awaits three feet away at all times. Even during an assignation, the warrior is always self-aware and observing their surroundings, their guard never fully lowered.

THE THEATER OF COURT

Most deceptive of all is the "theater" of court functions. Lobbying, debates, and other such activities occur in open court, before the eyes of all attendees. A clever courtier can manipulate court proceedings to their advantage. Publicly boasting of their deeds—or taking credit for someone else's—can focus attention on the courtier and away from something they wish to obscure. Theatrical displays create controversy, which is a weapon of its own, to shield their true activities or elicit condemnation of a rival. Those who enter court for the first time may feel as though they've stepped upon a Kabuki stage where all the actors are playing improvised parts and displaying masklike façades of civility or outrage. That feeling is not far from true.

CHAPTER 2

Wars of Words and Shadows

Yoshiro scrambled into the corner of his room, whimpering. "Y-you're that Shoshuro woman!"

A sharp laugh hissed through the masked shinobi's lips. "Quiet, Doji brat. Did you think you could tell such insulting stories about us without notice?"

She was on him before he could lift his hands. Hair yanked back, a glinting dagger held before his face, Yoshiro heard a gargled scream and briefly believed it his own. Suddenly freed, he looked down to find the woman by his feet, her throat slit. Before him stood a lithe man wielding a three-pronged yari, one of its hooks dripping in blood.

"Sorry about the mess," the stranger said. "Are you alright?"

Numb with shock, Yoshiro could only nod his head.

"Good. The court needs your stories, young Doji. But please, try to be more subtle," the stranger said with a smile. He turned toward the open window.

"Wait!" Yoshiro cried. "Who—who are you?"

"That is not important," he answered, resting a leg on the windowsill. "Just know that you are safe under my watch. Sleep well!" And with that, he was gone.



The Deer Clan

Treading softly, without grand accolades or the pride that accompanies them, the Deer Clan serves the Empire as a guardian of balance. Through divine vision, the members of the Deer Clan uncover threads of futures yet to come, and through artful stealth, they weave or sever these threads to make sure the delicate tapestry of the Empire is maintained. The clan's Matchmakers are shugenja blessed with unique insights into relationships. These help them to tie alliances between the Great Clans and Imperial families—or to unwind them, should any faction grow too powerful and risk upsetting the balance. The clan's speardancers are fleeting protectors, sent to guard individuals whose fates the clan deems important, yet they are rarely noticed by their charges. To an outsider, it might appear that they move at random, arriving to safeguard one life or end another before bounding silently into the shadows—but they move according to a grand pattern traced across all human hearts.

However, the Deer do not pursue balance in any sense of the word that implies passivity. To them, peace is not harmony, pacifism, or even unity. In a flawed world, the closest state to peace is a stalemate between opposing forces: balance. Duality governs the stability of the Empire and stability in every individual. Accepting the flawed world within themselves, the Deer believe that even violence has a role to play in maintaining balance. Their roles as mediators and guardians allow them to acquire the knowledge they then wield. For the sake of balance, the weak must rise, and the strong must fall. Society is a scale that the Deer constantly seek to bring into equilibrium. The weight of each person is magnified upon the societal scale by their connections. Discovering said links and then calculating the consequences of their preservation or removal is the primary mission of the Deer.

UNITY AND DIVISION

While commoners and samurai of lesser station more often marry for love, sentiment rarely plays a part in the selection of a match for the samurai of the Great Clans, for marriages are political opportunities far too valuable to pass up. The clans view such unions as contracts between allies, rather than as bonds between lovers. A samurai is expected to put their own desires after their responsibilities to family, clan, and Empire.

Even so, sometimes the human heart proves heavier than a samurai's duty. The Deer Clan draws its origin to one such rare marriage. In the fifth century, in defiance of the paths set before them by their families and

clans, the healer Asahina Takuya and the warrior Daidoji Kokoro married beneath an autumn cherry tree—an auspicious symbol of their unlikely bond, its petals blooming even as the skies brimmed with an early snow. As the ceremony concluded, a vision appeared to the pair: an unwinding cord, held together by the last thread. Kokoro and Takuya came to interpret it as a sign that they were bound by destiny, but they did not know the weight that would someday rest upon the strength of their bond. Knowing they could not return to their old lives, the couple became rōnin, journeying from town to town and plying their skills to get by and evading those sent by their families to return them to their duty.

But the vision did not fade for Takuya and Kokoro, and they began to see the cord as it wove through the hearts of all people they passed. Some bonds brought joy, others brought misery, and still others brought calamity. The pair found that a village's fortunes might be preserved through their intervention—or collapse through their inability to prevent certain matches and the alliances that resulted. And inexorably, the threads of the vision they had seen pulled the pair toward the Aokami forest.

TRIALS OF LOVE

Even as they sought to understand this strange gift they now held, Kokoro and Takuya struggled. Life was hard for rōnin seeking work in small towns far from civilization, and they were hounded by pursuers seeking the reward placed upon them by their families. Kokoro's skills as a warrior were pushed to their limit, and she grew skilled in the arts of stealth to avoid notice and win against overwhelming odds. And as he saw her shed her blood for their love time and again, Takuya refined his methods of healing, learning to use the thread binding them to align his ki to her own and bear some portion of her suffering.

After a particularly harrowing battle that erupted with their pursuers and endangered the lives of everyone in the inn where they had stayed, the pair made a hard choice: they would leave civilization entirely, following the threads into the depths of the Aokami forest.

THE FORTUNE OF WOVEN FATE

In the lore of the Deer Clan, it is said that amid the dappled light and shadow of the Aokami forest, Kokoro and Takuya discovered another autumn cherry tree. There Musubi, the Fortune of bonds whose countless spinning cords weave fate itself, revealed herself to them in full. Kokoro planted her spear, signifying that this would be their new home, and Takuya knelt, pledging his service to the spirit that had guided their love throughout

ROKUGANI PROVERB

*"A deer bows lowest
before it charges."*

DEER CLAN MON

A deer's head with a black antler and a white antler.

many trials. As the Fortune had preserved the couple, they would preserve the people of the Empire—subtly, and ever in the name of balance. Whether the original pair had the unshakable faith of their mythic echoes or not, an ancient spear does still stand at the sacred tree of the Fortune Musubi in Kyūden Shika, where the clan's shugenja undergo their training to this day.

According to the traditions of the Deer Clan, all things are connected. Gods unite to weave creation. Love, obsession, fear, and all strong relationships extend like a net from all but the most enlightened people. These connections, both the immediate and the cosmic, form a tapestry that is spiritual, material, and political all at once. Musubi is a Fortune most theologians associate with marriage, contracts, and collaboration, but the shugenja of the Deer Clan see the far greater depth of their influence. In the Deer understanding of the cosmos, Musubi does not direct fate—they serve as the material from which fate is woven. When bonds are particularly strong, like the love between Takuya and Kokoro, the Fortune Musubi has been said to intervene, preventing the bond from severing during a crisis. By studying the art, Takuya and Kokoro's descendants developed ways to observe, understand, and even use the bonds between people to protect balance within the heart, and thus within the Empire.

COMPLEMENTARY DUALITY: THE DEER PHILOSOPHY

The Mortal Realm is a place of contrasts: there are countless things weak and powerful, good and evil, beautiful and terrible. The Celestial Order rests on the existence of contrast: the poor and rich, the blissfully ignorant and the intellectually invested, the spiritual and the physical, the commoner and the noble, and of course, the sun and the moon—Amaterasu and Onno-tangu, whose eternal dance set in motion the Rokugan that exists today. To reject one aspect of the world is to reject its opposite force, or so the Deer believe. All is bound together. Thus, true believers among the Deer Clan do not dream of a world without evil, for that would be to dream also of a world without good. To give up suffering would be to give up joy, to banish shadows would be to snuff out all light.

The Deer Clan find little appeal in what they see as the stagnant harmony of the quest for Enlightenment that absorbs many mystics. Bonds are not something to be shed, in their eyes, but embraced and understood. Rivals inspire each other through their antagonism, and individuals are motivated to better themselves. However, if a rivalry becomes one-sided—if one rival

MUSUBU, THE UNION

Musubu is an intimate process of shared meditation in which a Deer shugenja attunes themselves to their meditation partner to learn about their state of mind and spirit. The shugenja must match the heartbeat and breathing rate of the person they are reading, so both participants must remain calm.

When Musubu is achieved, the shugenja observes ethereal threads reaching out from their companion's body. The anchor points of these threads are the ten ki meridians that flow through the body and correspond to the Five Elements.

- ☸ **Void Meridian Right:** Extends from head to astrological connections in ascension.
- ☸ **Void Meridian Left:** Extends from head to astrological connections in retrograde.
- ☸ **Air Meridian Right:** Extends from right lung to scholarly/intellectual pursuits.
- ☸ **Air Meridian Left:** Extends from left lung to things dumbfounding and frustrating.
- ☸ **Fire Meridian Right:** Extends from right kidney to passions and desires.
- ☸ **Fire Meridian Left:** Extends from left kidney to fears and doubts.
- ☸ **Water Meridian Right:** Extends from right hand to friends and loved ones.
- ☸ **Water Meridian Left:** Extends from left hand to enemies and rivals.
- ☸ **Earth Meridian Right:** Extends from right foot to practical projects and goals.
- ☸ **Earth Meridian Left:** Extends from left foot to frivolous interests and distractions.

One manifestation of Musubu is The Ties that Bind (a ritual found on page 117), but its study also grants the Shika Matchmaker access to several kihō techniques that represent a Matchmaker's refined control over their own inner energy.

overpowers the other, or an individual is stricken with despair, the beneficial relationship ceases to function. Balance is the key. In society and within themselves, the Deer's purpose is to maintain balance. The Great Clans and Minor Clans of Rokugan complement each other in their expressions of Bushidō. When equal in power, they bicker, but rarely go to war. The clans may prepare for the possibility of conflict, but in doing so, they create new weapons and techniques that benefit the Empire as a whole. Through subtle manipulation, the Deer seek to preserve power balances within the clans.

When the Deer empower the weak, they do so in part to promote an image of themselves as charitable forces for good. By fostering trust, the Deer collect information to aid their less scrupulous machinations. When they interject themselves into disputes between the Great Clans, the Deer commonly find themselves foiling skulduggery and assassination attempts by

covert agents or deniable mercenaries. The challenges they face often put the considerable skills of their warriors to the test.

Weakening the strong is an even riskier enterprise. The Deer prefer not to incriminate themselves; thus, they rarely use blackmail or assassins, both of which are traceable. Their preferred method of removing threats is by pitting them against each other. Only when it is absolutely necessary to remove a particular individual from the tapestry of fate, do the Deer strike directly. In this way, the hands of the Deer remain clean in their own eyes and in those of the world, despite the multitude of deaths they have caused.

GROWTH

Takuya and Kokoro made their home in the wilds of Aokami Forest, an unspoiled habitat set aside for wild game and sport hunting. In gypsum caves, behind curtains of emerald ferns, the couple planned their future.



Quietly, they took others into their fold—rōnin, friends they had made in their travels, and refugees fleeing chaos in the wider world. Takuya taught the Musubu technique, while Kokoro trained warriors to protect the fledgling group. Kokoro was already a master of *sōjutsu*, but beyond her skill with traditional spear-forms, years on the run taught her to be cunning and cautious. Training in the wilds taught her to mirror the balance of the natural world around her. As she observed the deer, she created an acrobatic new style of combat with a unique weapon. The *tsuno-yari* is a crescent-bladed spear with two hooks upon its outer curve, resembling antlers. Its design makes it ideal for controlling the flow of battle, allowing its wielder to easily pin opponents and ensnare swords. It also serves as a tool for vaulting, climbing, and spinning kicks. The grace of Kokoro's students eventually earned them the name Speardancers.

Protected by the Speardancers, the mystics trained by Takuya in the art of Musubu ventured out into the Empire. Whispers grew of a mysterious band of mediators and their protectors selflessly aiding those in need. They felled assassins, extinguished disputes, and possessed the uncanny ability to know a person's soul. These shugenja found their niche in the role of traveling Matchmakers, facilitating not just marriages, but adoptions, business partnerships, and minor political alliances. Interest rapidly grew in these representatives of the mysterious kami of union, and soon they caught the eye of the Emperor.

BECOMING A MINOR CLAN

In the year 618, as the Imperial heir prepared to ascend the Throne, court astrologers foresaw a catastrophe but could not pinpoint its source. Fearing the worst for the new Emperor's coming reign, they sought auguries across the Empire, from pronouncements by the Dragon Clan's mountaintop mystics, to the auspices of the Isawa. The sitting Emperor was forced to consider what should be unthinkable: abandoning the heir and choosing a different successor.

When a matchmaker claiming to be skilled in an unknown art arrived at the Imperial Court, they were met with much consternation. But this mystic offered an interpretation none had considered: perhaps the coming disaster lay within some matter of the heart. So the story goes that the Emperor was intrigued, and summoned the matchmaker. The matchmaker asked to speak with the heir directly, and to the surprise of the court, was granted an audience. The two conversed for several hours, and as they left, the matchmaker implored the heir to make a pilgrimage to see the sunrise at the Castle of the Centipede. Intrigued by this odd

suggestion, the heir undertook the journey—though it was an uneventful one, aside from a few new friends made along the road. Yet the malign portents lifted. Three years later, the new Emperor took the Throne and the newly formed Deer Clan was granted formal ownership of the Aokami Forest under the leadership of the matchmaker, the first to carry the family name Shika. No great calamity unfolded in the following years. Some claim the Deer Clan did nothing—perhaps, they say, there was never any disaster looming over the Empire in the first place. But the Deer know better. That the friends the heir made along the road became pillars who supported them through the hardest days on the Chrysanthemum Throne is a fact that is easily overlooked. If the Deer Clan's influence is invisible to all others, the clan's elders say, it is merely a testament to their success.

THE LIFE OF THE DEER

Aokami Forest is a place of contrasts. At first glance, it seems a wild place, barely touched by human influence. However, on its perimeter in the four cardinal directions, massive gates decorated with carved gypsum admit visitors to white-tiled paths that lead into the heart of Deer territory. As visitors travel these roads, the clan's namesake animals fearlessly bound through the trees in large herds, unafraid of predators that would usually haunt such a wood. And upon close inspection, many trees in Aokami Forest are modified to serve a purpose. Ropes, balancing pegs, and climbing walls make the wood an immense training ground. Speardancers, who train and live in the forest, surveil their lands from elevated platforms that criss-cross the trees. Their laughter often peals down from the treetops, for it is only in Aokami Forest, among their kin, that Speardancers are allowed relax and indulge their curiosity.

A small number of access roads merge onto the four white paths, leading from open glades populated by farmers or from the Deer's lucrative gypsum mines outside the forest. While gypsum is hardly as valuable as many of the more famous precious stones, the Shika family embraces it for its unique and somewhat ostentatious appearance.

Finally, the white paths converge onto Kyūden Shika, a palace of immeasurable beauty covered in delicate gypsum carvings. The sunlight illuminates the pale stone as the palace towers above the dark trees in a cascade of ornamental tiers. The palace and the surrounding estates are striking human-made marvels, starkly contrasting with the much subtler human alterations made to the surrounding forest. Hospitality is the residents' primary focus. Shugenja practicing Musubu sit beside tranquil pools and master controlling their

RUMORS

The daimyō of the Deer Clan is an elegant man named Shika Renji, also known as the White Deer. Skilled in the art of Musubu, Renji already knows of the person he is destined to fall in love with. Whoever this person is, Renji will recognize them when he first sees them. If they are not from the Deer Clan, that will make the young daimyō's job all the more complicated.

Beneath Kyūden Shika are caves containing a vast library of coded information about nearly every major noble in Rokugan dating back to the sixth century.

The Speardancers are not just yōjimbō and woodland guides, but also elite assassins, trained in the shinobi arts!



breathing and heart rates.

Songs ring out through the latticed rice-paper windows as twinkling chimes dance along the cornices. The entire place feels happy and safe—a carefully crafted illusion, balanced atop a knife's edge.

BALANCE WITHIN ONESELF

Traditional virtues are admired by nearly everyone in Rokugan, and things seen as flaws are rarely appreciated. The Deer, however, not only seek to accept imperfections, but believe that weaknesses are a vital part of human nature. Vulnerabilities balanced by strengths create a healthy person with realistic expectations, so only that which is less perfect can be more than perfect.

Whenever the Deer demand extreme behavior from their kin, they provide an opportunity to restore balance within. Speardancers, who are expected to betray as little information as possible to the outsiders they are assigned to protect, are given the freedom to speak their minds openly within Deer lands. Likewise, Deer shugenja, who keep an emotional distance from the people they manipulate, are encouraged to form close bonds with their clanmates. Samurai of the Deer Clan almost never marry for political gain. Just like their founders, they are united by the bonds of love.

Their attitude toward imperfection has gained the Deer a reputation for being quaint and even lax. They are elusive if a person attempts to get to know them, and they often display quirks that would be unacceptable within more rigid clans. However, the wise know not to dismiss them for their oddness, as it does not undermine the insight they bring. Other clans have learned that patience is required to reap the Deer's advice. A Shika Matchmaker may be obnoxiously verbose, timid, dismissive, or otherwise harmlessly difficult, but receiving their counsel is commonly considered worth it—and often, these flaws are affectations anyway, false vulnerabilities shown to diffuse suspicion. The deer walks gently in the forest, but its antlers are always much sharper than expected.

BALANCE WITHIN THE HERD

The Deer Clan is made of two distinct but equal parts: the Shika Speardancers, who walk in the light as yōjimbō and in shadow as shinobi, and the Shika Matchmakers, specialized priests who also act as the clan's courtiers. Both groups share a constant flow of information, and they leverage the politically neutral stance of the Deer to gain as much information about other clans as possible.

The Antlers

The Speardancers began as the clan's protectors, but as the Deer's mission grew in scope, so did the Speardancers' responsibilities. They became guardians of people beneficial for society, and ushers of death for those too powerful. In the pursuit of gathering information, the Speardancers offer their services as swift, discreet messengers. Love letters, confessions of guilt, and the like are handed off to the Deer for delivery, and through these missives, they acquire a great deal of information for the clan. Many Speardancers are trained in coded languages and keep thorough journals of what appears to outsiders to be obtuse poetry or mere observations on local wildlife, but can be read by other members of the clan. Additionally, because other clans often request them as messengers thanks to their clan's famous neutrality, their presence can be explained in almost any location. Whatever their real mission, a Speardancer can claim to be delivering a letter, the details of which obviously cannot be discussed for the sake of the recipient's honor.

The Head

To Speardancers, the woods are like a second home. They are most comfortable amid their own forest or their kin, where they can be their fully authentic selves. As Speardancers' training requires them to master survivalist skills in the Aokami Forest, these warriors do not struggle to find paths or scavenge food when away from civilization. Rather, it is unfamiliar social environments with other clans that most Speardancers find least comfortable. While they are trained enough in social niceties to function as *yōjimbō*, most Speardancers prefer the whisper of leaves and the chirping of birds to the breezy words of courtiers.

The words of a Shika Matchmaker are invaluable. These shugenja train not just in the mystical arts, but also in eloquence, and are always fashionably dressed. While the Speardancers dash through the shadows, the clan's shugenja publicly patronize the arts. Matchmakers are meant to be both heard and seen. The more events they attend, the more people



A MERE SUGGESTION

Shaping expectations is a powerful tool of manipulation. Suggesting that one has an admirer can put a positive spin on interactions between a couple. Alternatively, to claim someone harbors ill will can taint potential relationships. Heartbreak, overconfidence, insult, and hatred are potential results of simple suggestions.

Matchmakers' insight into the thoughts and desires of others gives them a substantial advantage as shugenja, allowing them to craft invocations that use illusion to play upon their targets' strengths and weaknesses or that help the shugenja quickly identify items of import to a person that might be used to track them. Additionally, the trust that is often placed in Shika Matchmakers gives them an extra advantage when seeking to drive someone toward a particular outcome or action.

they meet, gossip they hear, and Musubu readings they perform. This increases their stockpile of information. Yet they must tread carefully, for one misplaced word could cost their life or, even worse, jeopardize the Deer Clan's trusted reputation. Manipulations are therefore executed with precision. Matchmakers constantly plan ahead, calculating the effect of their words. Members of the Deer Clan aspiring to become shugenja are not just taught the Musubu technique, but also rigorously trained and tested with logic puzzles and memorization tests. Only the most skilled are allowed to venture into the Empire.

The Shika Matchmakers are generally vague about what information their meditations reveal. Maintaining this mystery gives them flexibility with their honesty. Most of the threads they can observe lead to concrete, present-day items and emotions. This allows a Deer shugenja to find the commonalities and differences that mold relationships, then select which facts will best help two people come together.

BALANCE WITHIN SOCIETY

Balance benefits everyone, except the individuals who must be destroyed to maintain it. Each person is a weight upon the societal scale. Therefore, removing a life can have dire implications. The Deer are never careless, especially with regard to killing. They prefer to lead people into destroying themselves or to incite their target's enemies to take deadly action.

Still, even though countering assassins is one of the Deer's primary areas of expertise, and the overt role of many Speardancers, assassination is also a tool in their arsenal. The Speardancers employ shinobi tactics while playing the role of guardians. However, Speardancers are taught that they should protect as many lives as they end. Taking life with purpose can preserve balance, but to kill without meaning is to descend into indiscriminate slaughter. When possible, the elders of the clan rotate Speardancers between tasks, to prevent any one warrior from having to bear too many unsavory missions—or from forgetting how to accomplish one. Many targets of assassins have found comfort in the presence of the stoic Speardancers sent to protect them, unaware of the lives the same Speardancers have taken in the shadows.

As for the shugenja, the methods of the Deer require them to become intimately familiar with other people's lives, but if that knowledge led to feelings of attachment—love in particular—it would compromise their purpose. Matchmakers must therefore balance extreme closeness with emotional distance. Seduction is a potent weapon of the Scorpion Clan, but the agents of the Deer Clan rarely use it. Even false romantic attachments can become real if one is not vigilant. The Shika Matchmakers accept that the human heart is unpredictable. If love blossoms between a Shika Matchmaker and someone outside of the clan, the Matchmaker is often reassigned to another location.

TIPPING THE SCALES

Ominous clouds are gathering over Rokugan. War, tsunami, and increased activity within the Shadowlands have plunged the Empire into imbalance. The Crane Clan in particular has suffered greatly in recent years. Historically, the Deer Clan usually intervenes on a smaller political scale. They commonly undertake actions such as aiding one potential heir ascendant over another to shift a clan's future leaders toward peacemakers, or undermining a particular daimyō whose tyrannical tax policies will eventually lead to an uprising. However, they do intervene in wider-scale conflicts from time to time, and in this age of mounting tension, they find aiding—and subverting—the Great Clans more necessary than ever.

The Crane

By and large, samurai of the Crane Clan are too wise in the ways of court to be fooled by the Deer Clan's placid façade, and they accept their help only out of necessity. The recent tsunami devastated Crane farmlands,

so they require the Deer's support in their weakened state. However, the Crane are not content to sit back and trust a clan they suspect may one day betray them in the name of a nebulous concept like "balance." They want the Deer to take their orders. In the eyes of the Crane, the Deer are a valuable asset against the Lion Clan's overt aggression. Further, some Crane still see the Deer as a rebellious offshoot that should return to the clan from which it sprung, or at least offer it a certain degree of deference. Of course, this would destroy the Deer's neutral standing. The young daimyō of the Deer, Shika Renji, must now decide what is more important: preserving the neutrality of the Deer, or stabilizing the power balance of the Great Clans.

The Scorpion

As the Scorpion Clan's strength has grown in recent years, it has become the Deer Clan's primary target. Unfortunately, the Scorpion Clan is perhaps the most challenging foe for the Deer Clan. With the resources of an ascendant Great Clan, and no concern about being seen as underhanded, the Scorpion seem to have nearly every advantage over the Deer. However, Shika Renji believes that the Scorpion Clan may intentionally withdraw its expanding influence if the Deer Clan can simply keep things from tipping over the precipice, for strength has always been the weakness of Bayushi's descendants, just as weakness has been their strength.

The Lion

Contrary to nature, Lion Clan samurai are often the Deer's easiest prey. Appearing harmless is one of the main tactics of the Deer, and straightforward Lion Clan samurai tend to believe their act completely. Due to the Lion's aggression against their neighbors, the Deer plot to weaken the Great Clan's internal alliances, specifically between the Matsu and Akodo families. However, the Ikoma family has proven troublesome time and again, and some among the Deer Clan's leadership suspect these bards and scholars are hiding a more sinister nature.

The Crab

The Realm of Mortals is a place of diversity, where the powers of the spiritual realms act against one another to maintain balance. However, the Festering Pit of Fu Leng is a vast imbalance, tipping the scales enormously toward the influence of Jigoku as the power

of the fallen Kami corrupts the earth, the sea, and even the sky. The Crab, therefore, are the only clan the Deer consistently support, though they generally do so surreptitiously, to avoid revealing their true military strength. The Deer clear bandit camps ahead of Yasuki supply transports, harry scouting forces that look hungrily at unguarded Crab towns, and sometimes even eliminate horrors that make their way into Rokugan.

The Unicorn

The return of the Unicorn disrupted all of the Deer's societal calculations at the time. However, this new power has now been part of the equation for long enough that Shika Renji sees the imbalance the Unicorn have brought to Rokugan as an opportunity to even other scales. Matchmakers busily build friendships between the Unicorn and Crane, hoping that the economic power that trade along the Sand Road represents will help to restore dwindling Crane coffers.

The Dragon

Historically, the Deer dealt very little with the Dragon Clan. Isolated and esoteric, the Dragon seemed not to affect the balance of power at all. However, the Dragon Clan's recent interest in marriages and adoptions has led the Deer to become increasingly curious what about the most reclusive clan of Rokugan. What secret do they hide, and might it be useful in leveraging them against their more active neighbors?

The Phoenix

The Phoenix Clan and the Deer Clan have little love for one another, perhaps because they are too similar in some ways and too divergent in others. Both seek balance, but each defines balance in a very different way. The Deer Clan's reverence for a somewhat obscure fortune whose signs they follow without overt explanation worries the theologians of the Phoenix enough—but the fact that they refuse to open their archives to examination is more concerning still. The Deer, for their part, believe the Phoenix's methods of preserving the balance of the world have fallen into decline, as evidenced by the disastrous imbalance of the elements and the rise of religious groups such as the Perfect Land Sect. Some among the Deer Clan have even been so bold as to wonder if now is the time for Rokugan's spiritual leaders to "step aside" so that the Deer can more openly pursue its goal of returning balance to Rokugan.

ADVENTURE SEED: VALUE OF POETRY

Hook An injured Speardancer stumbles into the PCs' path. She can barely speak, but she manages to reveal that the man she was protecting has been abducted. She begs for assistance finding him.

Rising Action As they search, the Speardancer reveals that her name is Tsuneko and she was protecting the poet Mirumoto Amano and whose works are enjoyed by both a Lion and a Unicorn general. This shared interest could facilitate peaceful negotiations by drawing both to the same poetry reading. The PCs discover the poet is being held by the Scorpion magistrate Shosuro Mokusei, who is operating outside of his jurisdiction.

Climax The Scorpion magistrate claims that the poet is a criminal who has key information about the murder of the Scorpion's lord—information that must be extracted at any cost. The Speardancer argues that even if this were true, bringing stability to the Empire is more important than seeing honor done. If the PCs take the Speardancer's side, she attempts to ensure that the Scorpion perishes. Siding with the Scorpion reveals that the Speardancer is much less hurt than she led on. If confronted, she tries to avoid harming the PCs as she escapes.

SHIKA TSUNEKO, FIRST SPEAR

ADVERSARY

CONFLICT RANK:  6  3

Although she often masquerades as a simple messenger of the Deer Clan, Shika Tsuneko is far more accomplished and dangerous than she appears. In fact, she holds the title of First Spear amongst her clan's bushi, meaning that she is a master of the yari and in times of war leads her fellow speardancers into battle. However, since the Deer avoid war at all costs, Tsuneko spends most of her time serving her clan daimyō Shika Renji. For his part, Renji sends Tsuneko on the most difficult missions, confident in her ability to succeed.

When not among her fellow Deer, Tsuneko affects an air of naïve confusion and innocence to mask her

considerable competence. However, she is genuinely good-hearted, and except when her duties call on her to kill, she tries to avoid dealing lasting harm to her opponents.



ARTISAN 0 MARTIAL 5 SCHOLAR 0 SOCIAL 2 TRADE 2

ADVANTAGES DISADVANTAGES

Innocent Appearance:  Social; *Interpersonal*
Softheartedness:  Martial; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS

Heirloom Kamayari: Range 2, Damage 4, Deadline 5, Durable, Snaring

Gear (equipped): concealed armor (Physical 2, Concealable), traveling rations, amigasa, wakizashi.

ABILITIES

SLICING WIND KICK

Activation: As an Attack and Movement action, using one readied polearm, Tsuneko may make a **TN 3 Martial Arts [Unarmed] (Air) check** with her unarmed kick profile (Range 1, Damage 2, Deadline 1) targeting one character at range 1–2:

Effects: If Tsuneko succeeds, the target suffers 2 physical damage plus additional damage equal to her bonus successes and the Disoriented condition.

Air : Tsuneko moves 1 range band.

Air  : One of Tsuneko's targets suffers the Prone condition.

Air   : Tsuneko may choose an additional target for each   spent in this way.

BEWARE THE SMALLEST MOUSE

Activation: When Tsuneko makes a **Social skill (Water) check** targeting one or more characters, she may spend  as follows:

Water   : While interacting with Tsuneko, the target treats their vigilance as 1 lower per   spent this way and decreases the TN of their social checks targeting her by 1. This effect persists until the end of the scene.

DEER CLAN PLAYER CHARACTERS

Characters from the Deer Clan often possess hidden agendas, and they must often walk a tightrope of weakening one side in a conflict just enough to balance it against its adversary, but without completely destabilizing it. As such, scions of the Deer Clan are taught that developing strong feelings for anyone outside their clan is a risk, for they may one day have to act against them. Of course, this aspiration is rarely achieved, and the Deer are accepting of flaws—including this one.

THE DEER MINOR CLAN

Ring Increase: +1 Air

Skill Increase: +1 Sentiment

Status: 30

The Deer seek societal balance. When the Great Clans are equal in power, they strive to outdo each other, but do not dare go to war. Oneness and harmony are impossible ideals in a world where differences and conflict are unavoidable. Therefore, when the Deer observe that one clan is strong and another weak, they strive to make them equal. They are manipulators, working for balance within the Empire. Shika Matchmakers mingle with high society to collect information and guide the courts, while Speardancers carry out secret missions in the shadows. They save and they destroy, all for the sake of balance.

THE SHIKA FAMILY

Ring Increase: +1 Water or +1 Fire

Skill Increases: +1 Courtesy, +1 Culture

Glory: 35

Starting Wealth: 5 koku

The Shika family are the descendants of the clan's founders and their first followers. Members of the Shika family support one another with encouragement and acceptance, but this love is reserved for the Deer alone. Outside of their borders, the Shika learn to silence their hearts and coldly observe people as means to their Clan's ends. They are taught they must be personable without letting their bonds with outsiders grow too deep, deadly without spilling too much blood, and flawed while remaining confident and calm. Unsurprisingly, many do not live up to these ideals.

WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER KNOW?

All Deer characters have a greater awareness of the following topics:

- ⊗ You have a strong awareness of the specific traditions and plans of the Deer Clan, including details about the Fortune Musubi; the hidden history of the clan; the clan's current goals and targets; and the groups it is seeking to reinforce.
- ⊗ You know about the general state of political and military affairs between the Great Clans and where the balance of power lies among them at the moment.
- ⊗ You have a working knowledge of survival in forested areas.
- ⊗ You are well aware of the traditions, etiquette, and processes of forming and breaking alliances, especially with regard to marriage.

WHAT DOES BUSHIDŌ MEAN TO YOUR CLAN?

The Deer believe that nobody can follow all aspects of Bushidō at once, as such would require an impossibly perfect person. Therefore, they believe that individuals and organizations should strive to embody one or more of Bushidō's aspects in each of their actions rather than maintain all at once. By making a particular action conform to one element of Bushidō and then taking a different action that conforms to another, the individual and the group alike can achieve true balance.

The Deer have a dual nature, so Sincerity is of lesser importance to them. Additionally, because the Deer can see the deep bonds between others, but must often blunt their own emotions to prevent forming such connections with future foes, Compassion is of less importance to them. What the Deer lack in Sincerity and Compassion they make up for in their sense of Duty and Loyalty—Duty and Loyalty to other members of the clan, to Musubi, and to balance itself.

See page 301 of the core rulebook for more information on how these can affect your honor and glory.

New Schools

The following are new schools that PCs can select as part of character creation.

Bayushi Deathdealer School [Bushi, Shinobi]

The school of warriors Bayushi founded trains under the principle that it is always better to be underestimated. Its doors are open to any aspirant who can survive its rigors, but its secrets are concealed to those who are not cunning and inventive enough to uncover them. Its curriculum includes the bow, the sword, and subtler weapons still. The school also teaches iaijutsu—but students are always reminded that it is merely a tool of power like any other. Every tool has its proper place and proper uses, and the Bayushi Deathdealer school gives its students the widest arsenal available.

Rings: +1 Air, +1 Fire

Starting Skills (choose five): +1 Command, +1 Courtesy, +1 Fitness, +1 Martial Arts (Melee), +1 Martial Arts (Ranged), +1 Tactics, +1 Sentiment, +1 Skulduggery

Honor: 40

Techniques Available: Kata, Rituals, Shūji

Starting Techniques:

- ✱ **Kata (choose one):** Striking as Air, Striking as Fire
- ✱ **Shūji:** Assess Strengths

Way of the Scorpion (School Ability): When you exploit a target's disadvantage (see **Turning Advantages and Disadvantages**, page 100 of the core rulebook) as part of an Initiative check for a duel or an Attack action, you do not need to spend a Void point, and you may reroll additional dice up to your school rank.

Starting Outfit: Traveling clothes, ashigaru armor, daishō, knife, shinobigatana or folding half bow, traveling pack.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Games	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	General Kata Rank 1 ✂	Tech. Grp.
	✦ Deceitful Strike ✂	Technique
	Spiteful Loss ✂	Technique
RANK 2	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Martial Arts (Melee)	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Air Shūji Rank 1–2 ✂	Tech. Grp.
	✦ Deadly Sting ✂	Technique
	Iaijutsu Cut: Rising Blade ✂	Technique
RANK 3	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Smithing	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Close Combat Kata Rank 1–3 ✂	Tech. Grp.
	✦ Cunning Distraction ✂	Technique
	All Shall Fear Me ✂	Technique
RANK 4	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Games	Skill
	Tactics	Skill
	Ranged Kata Rank 1–4 ✂	Tech. Grp.
	✦ A Samurai's Fate ✂	Technique
	Rallying Cry ✂	Technique
RANK 5	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Martial Arts (Melee)	Skills
	Martial Arts (Ranged)	Skill
	Tactics	Skill
	Kata Rank 1–5 ✂	Tech. Grp.
	✦ Stillness of Death ✂	Technique
	Hidden in Smoke ✂	Technique
RANK 6	Strike First, Strike Last (Mastery Ability): When you inflict a critical strike during a duel or skirmish, treat the deadliness of your weapon as increased by the difference between your initiative and your target's initiative (subtracting the lower of the two initiative values from the higher).	

NEW TECHNIQUES

Techniques with bolded names are new to this book and can be found starting on page 113.



Daidoji Spymaster School [Courtier, Shinobi]

Seen as nothing more than simple bureaucrats, clerks, or scribes (even to most members of their own clan), the Daidoji Spymasters operate as intelligence gathering agents who report directly to the Daidoji daimyō. They monitor other clan representatives, infiltrate organizations, kidnap potential threats for interrogation, and steal private documents—all to gather valuable information on their opponents' plans. A Daidoji Spymaster moves about the court with as much charm as any Doji Diplomat, but where the Doji form alliances and curry favors, the Daidoji look for vulnerabilities.

Rings: +1 Air, +1 Earth

Starting Skills (choose five): +1 Command, +1 Courtesy, +1 Culture, +1 Government, +1 Performance, +1 Sentiment, +1 Skulduggery

Honor: 35

Techniques Available: Kata, Rituals, Shūji

Starting Techniques:

- ✿ **Shūji:** Ancestry Unearthed
- ✿ **Ninjutsu (choose one):** ✧ Like a Ghost, ✧ Skulk
- ✿ **Kata (choose one):** Striking as Air, Striking as Earth

Incisive Insight (School Ability): Once per scene, when making a check for a Scheme action targeting another character, you may receive a number of strife up to your school rank to reduce the TN by that amount (to a minimum of 1).

Starting Outfit: Traveling clothes, ceremonial clothes, wakizashi, sokutoki, disguise kit, opening and closing kit.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Trade Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Culture	Skill
	Government	Skill
	Rank 1 Air Shūji	✧ Tech. Grp.
	✧ Lady Doji's Decree	✧ Technique
	Weight of Duty	✧ Technique
RANK 2	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Games	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Rank 1–2 Earth Shūji	✧ Tech. Grp.
	✧ What's Yours Is Mine	✧ Technique
	Treaty Signing	✧ Technique
RANK 3	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Culture	Skill
	Sentiment	Skill
	Martial Arts (Unarmed)	Skill
	Rank 1–3 Air Shūji	✧ Tech. Grp.
	✧ Hidden in Smoke	✧ Technique
	Open Hand Style	✧ Technique
RANK 4	Trade Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Government	Skill
	Tactics	Skill
	Rank 1–4 Water Shūji	✧ Tech. Grp.
	✧ Cunning Distraction	✧ Technique
	Wolf's Proposal	✧ Technique
RANK 5	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Martial Arts (Melee)	Skill
	Tactics	Skill
	Rank 1–5 Earth Shūji	✧ Tech. Grp.
	✧ Noxious Cloud	✧ Technique
	Bend with the Storm	✧ Technique
RANK 6	Spy Network (Mastery Ability): As a downtime activity in any place of human habitation, you may make a TN 4 Skulduggery check to find an agent of the Daidoji spy network. If you succeed, you find this individual among the inhabitants of the city and gain the Ally advantage for them (see page 101 of the core rulebook). If you succeed with 2 or more bonus successes, the individual may occupy a low-to-mid-level position in a household or organization of your choosing.	





Doji Bureaucrat School [Courtier]

The Crane Clan's Doji Bureaucrats are formidable negotiators and researchers capable of understanding complex systems of commerce, bureaucracy, and the esoteric laws that govern them. They scrutinize covertly obtained journals, ledgers, and private missives to maintain their mastery of history and culture. Their familiarity with Rokugani law allows them to better navigate the complexities of the Imperial Court while turning the intricacies of the law against their rivals in other clans. More so than members of any other school, Doji Bureaucrats have close relationships with the Imperial families, and they can use those relationships to amplify their authority in intrigues. Whereas Doji Diplomats use their charm and interpersonal savvy to earn the assistance of other courtiers, Doji Bureaucrats use their extensive knowledge base to outmaneuver opponents in intellectual debate.

Rings: +1 Earth, +1 Water

Starting Skills (choose five): +1 Command, +1 Composition, +1 Courtesy, +1 Culture, +1 Games, +1 Government, +1 Meditation

Honor: 55

Techniques Available: Rituals, Shūji

Starting Techniques:

☸ **Shūji:** Courtier's Resolve, Stonewall Tactics

Procedure and Protocol (School Ability): When you cause a character to receive strife as a result of a check using a social approach, that character suffers additional strife equal to your school rank.

Starting Outfit: Ceremonial clothing, wakizashi, legal primer, blank forms, calligraphy kit, scroll designating the bearer as an individual of decidedly moderate authority.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Commerce	Skill
	Composition	Skill
	Courtesy	Skill
	Rank 1 Earth Shūji	☞ Tech. Grp.
	☞ Treaty Signing	☞ Technique
	Beware the Smallest Mouse	☞ Technique
RANK 2	Trade Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Games	Skill
	Government	Skill
	Water Shūji Rank 1–2	☞ Tech. Grp.
	☞ The Wind Blows Both Ways	☞ Technique
	Unyielding Terms	☞ Technique
RANK 3	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Commerce	Skill
	Culture	Skill
	Sentiment	Skill
	Air Shūji Rank 1–3	☞ Tech. Grp.
	☞ Hidden in Smoke	☞ Technique
	All Shall Fear Me	☞ Technique
RANK 4	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Tactics	Skill
	Rituals Rank 1–4	☞ Tech. Grp.
	☞ The Immovable Hand of Peace	☞ Technique
	Rallying Cry	☞ Technique
RANK 5	Trade Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skills
	Performance	Skill
	Tactics	Skill
	Void Shūji Rank 1–5	☞ Tech. Grp.
	Bend with the Storm	☞ Technique
	Formal Tea Ceremony	☞ Technique
RANK 6	Post Facto (Mastery Ability): Once per game session as a Scheme and Support action, you may make a TN 3 Government (Earth) check . If you succeed, you reveal a huge legal loophole or arcane precedent that legally justifies the actions of you and your allies during the scene. Others can refuse to accept your logic, but must forfeit honor equal to your ranks in Government plus your bonus successes to do so.	

Ikoma Shadow School [Courtier, Shinobi]

The Lion Clan's Ikoma family is known for its bards, who shed the tears and express the emotions that stoic warriors cannot. However, this family also serves another purpose: hidden among the bards and other entertainers it produces, it also trains a small number of students in stealth, political subterfuge, and even battlefield sabotage. These are the Ikoma Shadows.

Ikoma Shadows infiltrate enemy camps in wartime and enemy castles in peacetime, stealing or altering messages, putting twisted truths in the right ear, and inflaming tensions between other clans. Their work is not exactly honorable, but most see their role as necessary and justified. War is an ugly affair, and prolonging it uglier still. Most Ikoma Shadows are unwilling to cross certain lines—such as the use of lethal poisons or the assassination of helpless targets—but if making an enemy general sick ends a battle quickly or ambushing an officer who has ventured far afield breaks the enemy's offensive, most don't lose sleep over it.

Rings: +1 Air, +1 Fire

Starting Skills (choose five): +1 Courtesy, +1 Culture, +1 Government, +1 Martial Arts (Melee), +1 Martial Arts (Ranged), +1 Skulduggery, +1 Survival

Honor: 40

Techniques Available: Kata, Rituals, Shūji

Starting Techniques:

- ✿ **Shūji:** Whispers of Court
- ✿ **Ninjutsu:** ✦ Skulk
- ✿ **Kata (choose one):** Hawk's Precision, Warrior's Resolve

Victory before Honor (School Ability): Once per scene when performing a check, you may stake an amount of honor no greater than your school rank to re-roll a number of dice equal to twice the amount of honor staked. For each re-rolled die result that does not contain a ❶ or ❷, you forfeit one staked honor.

Starting Outfit: Ashigaru armor or ceremonial clothes, daishō or wakizashi and kamayari, yumi, any one musical instrument or book of poetry, traveling pack.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Performance	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Rank 1 General Kata ✦	Tech. Grp.
	✦ What's Yours Is Mine ✦	Technique
	Rustling of Leaves ✦	Technique
RANK 2	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Martial Arts (Unarmed)	Skill
	Sentiment	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Rank 1–2 Fire Shūji ✦	Tech. Grp.
	✦ Crackling Laughter ✦	Technique
RANK 3	The Wind Blows Both Ways ✦	Technique
	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Commerce	Skill
	Labor	Skill
	Seafaring	Skill
	Rank 1–3 Water Shūji ✦	Tech. Grp.
	✦ Artful Alibi ✦	Technique
RANK 4	All Arts Are One ✦	Technique
	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Rank 1–4 General Kata ✦	Tech. Grp.
	✦ Deceitful Strike ✦	Technique
RANK 5	Bravado ✦	Technique
	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Martial Arts (Ranged)	Skill
	Martial Arts (Unarmed)	Skill
	Tactics	Skill
	Rank 1–5 Air Shūji ✦	Tech. Grp.
	✦ Silent Elimination ✦	Technique
RANK 6	Pin the Fan ✦	Technique
	Victory Is the Greatest Honor (Mastery Ability): Once per session after failing a Martial or Social check, you may stake up to 5 honor and immediately attempt the check again, adding ■ equal to the honor staked. If you fail, you forfeit all honor staked. If you succeed, you instead gain 1 honor and 1 glory.	



	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Performance	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	General Kata Rank 1 ✂	Tech. Grp.
	◊ Beware the Smallest Mouse ⚔	Technique
	◊ Like a Ghost ✂	Technique
RANK 2	Trade Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Fitness	Skill
	Martial Arts (Melee)	Skill
	Martial Arts (Unarmed)	Skill
	Ninjutsu Rank 1–2 ✂	Tech. Grp.
	◊ Silent Elimination ✂	Technique
	Veiled Menace Style ✂	Technique
RANK 3	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Martial Arts (Ranged)	Skill
	Medicine	Skill
	Smithing	Skill
	Ranged Kata Rank 1–3 ✂	Tech. Grp.
	◊ Feigned Opening ⚔	Technique
	Slicing Wind Kick ✂	Technique
RANK 4	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Seafaring	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	◊ Hidden in Smoke ⚔	Technique
	Breath of Wind Style ✂	Technique
	Silencing Stroke ✂	Technique
RANK 5	Trade Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Meditation	Skill
	Tactics	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Ninjutsu Rank 1–5 ✂	Tech. Grp.
	◊ Foreseen Need ⚔	Technique
	Striking as Void ✂	Technique
RANK 6	One with the Shadows (Mastery Ability): When you perform a check to use a Ninjutsu technique, you may add two kept ■ set to an ✂ result to your check. You may do this 3 times per session.	



Mercenary Ninja Training [Shinobi]

Without family, honor, or remorse, Mercenary Ninja move without a trace to ply their lethal trade in search of fortune. Consisting of highly skilled commoners and former Great Clan shinobi, they exist as disposable and deniable assets lying in wait among the shadows of Rokugan. Daimyō and nobles purchase the loyalty of Mercenary Ninja to have them kill and steal with ruthless efficiency—for unlike shinobi who serve the Great Clans, they serve only their own interests.

When not otherwise engaged, Mercenary Ninja generally live simple lives. No formal schools exist for such lawless individuals, but some Mercenary Ninja train under a mentor, while others create their own cadres.

Rings: +1 Air, +1 any one other ring.

Starting Skills (choose five): +1 Fitness, +1 Martial Arts (Melee), +1 Martial Arts (Ranged), +1 Martial Arts (Unarmed), +1 Medicine, +1 Skulduggery, +1 Survival

Honor: 20

Techniques Available: Kata, Ninjutsu, Rituals

Starting Techniques:

- ✂ **Ninjutsu:** Skulk
- ✂ **Shūji (choose one):** ◊ Cadence, ◊ Shallow Waters

Disciple of Darkness (School Ability): When you perform a check to hide, move stealthily, or deceive others as to your true identity, you may suffer a number of strife up to your school rank to choose that many characters targeted by the check. Treat each chosen character's vigilance as 1 lower while resolving the check.

Starting Outfit: Kusarifundo or tekken, kama or nin-jatō, 3 shuriken or blowgun, stealth clothing, peasant clothes, 50 feet of rope, tenugui.



Shiba Artist School [Artisan]

Renowned throughout Rokugan for their deeply spiritual works of art, the Phoenix Clan's Shiba Artists are highly sought after for festivals and special events, including the Winter Court. Artists expertly perform soulfully crafted song and verse to enthrall onlookers, create unique works of clay or stone for their hosts, or even forge armor before enraptured crowds. Whatever their art, Shiba Artists always make the act of creation a part of the work itself, whether it takes fleeting moments or days of labor. Most Shiba Artists train in a wide range of artistic forms, and they use each new lesson they learn to inspire them in their next endeavor.

Rings: +1 Fire, +1 Void

Starting Skills (choose five): +1 Aesthetics, +1 Composition, +1 Courtesy, +1 Culture, +1 Design, +1 Performance, +1 Smithing

Honor: 50

Techniques Available: Kata, Rituals, Shūji

Starting Techniques:

- ☸ **Ritual:** ♦ Tea Ceremony
- ☸ **Shūji (choose two):** Assess Strengths, Courtier's Resolve, Fun and Games

Architect of Tranquility (School Ability): Once per scene after you succeed at an Artisan skill check, you may choose a number of characters in the scene equal to your school rank. Each chosen character removes 3 strife.

Starting Outfit: Ceremonial clothes, common clothes, traveling clothes, wakizashi, traveling pack, calligraphy set.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Artisan Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Culture	Skill
	Performance	Skill
	Rank 1 Fire Shūji ☞	Tech. Grp.
	♦ Offend the Sensibilities ☞	Technique
	Fun and Games ☞	Technique
RANK 2	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Aesthetics	Skill
	Government	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Rank 1–2 Air Shūji ☞	Tech. Grp.
	♦ The Wind Blows Both Ways ☞	Technique
	Civility Foremost ☞	Technique
RANK 3	Artisan Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Government	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Rank 1–3 Water Shūji ☞	Tech. Grp.
	♦ Formal Tea Ceremony ☞	Technique
	All Arts Are One ☞	Technique
RANK 4	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Performance	Skill
	Composition	Skill
	Smithing	Skill
	Rank 1–4 Void Shūji ☞	Tech. Grp.
	♦ Rouse the Soul ☞	Technique
	Hidden in Smoke ☞	Technique
RANK 5	Artisan Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Culture	Skill
	Courtesy	Skill
	Performance	Skill
	Rank 1–5 Rituals ☞	Tech. Grp.
	♦ Bend with the Storm ☞	Technique
	Buoyant Arrival ☞	Technique
RANK 6	Sudden Clarity (Mastery Ability): When you use your school ability, you may remove one or more of the following conditions from each chosen character: Dazed, Disoriented, Enraged, Exhausted, Intoxicated. Additionally, each chosen character removes 3 fatigue.	

Shika Matchmaker School [Courtier, Shugenja]

Shika Matchmakers are shugenja guided by Musubi, the secretive Fortune who binds together the fates of people. While they are skilled in the art of invocation, their greatest power is their ability to see the bonds people form—with other people and with destiny. A practitioner of Musubu can sense the future results of fortuitous or inopportune matches, and they use this information to serve the Deer Clan's goal of achieving a balanced world. Although most of their matches prove successful for all involved, occasionally a couple's happiness must be sacrificed for some greater goal.

Rings: +1 Air, +1 Water

Starting Skills (choose three): +1 Composition, +1 Courtesy, +1 Culture, +1 Meditation, +1 Sentiment, +1 Theology

Honor: 50

Techniques Available: Air and Water Invocations, Rituals, Shūji

Starting Techniques:

- ☸ **Ritual:** ♦ **The Ties that Bind**
- ☸ **Invocation:** Yari of Air
- ☸ **Invocation (choose two):** Blessed Wind, Path to Inner Peace, ♦ Sympathetic Energies, Tempest of Air

Gift of Musubi-no-Kami (School Ability): You may perform The Ties that Bind ritual as an action, instead of as a downtime activity. When you make a check to perform this ritual, you may add kept ■ set to ✨ results equal to your school rank.

Starting Outfit: Traveling clothes, ceremonial clothes, wakizashi, tea set.

ADVANCE

TYPE

RANK 1	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Games	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Air Invocations Rank 1	Tech. Grp.
	Ancestry Unearthed	Technique
	Fun and Games	Technique
RANK 2	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Medicine	Skill
	Sentiment	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Water Shūji Rank 1–2	Tech. Grp.
	♦ Strike the Tsunami	Technique
	Civility Foremost	Technique
RANK 3	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Commerce	Skill
	Culture	Skill
	Government	Skill
	Water Invocations Rank 1–3	Tech. Grp.
	♦ Rise, Air	Technique
	The Wind Blows Both Ways	Technique
RANK 4	Artisan Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Meditation	Skill
	Sentiment	Skill
	Theology	Skill
	Air Invocations Rank 1–4	Tech. Grp.
	♦ Wrath of Kaze-no-Kami	Technique
	Treaty Signing	Technique
RANK 5	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Composition	Skill
	Performance	Skill
	Air Shūji Rank 1–5	Tech. Grp.
	Buoyant Arrival	Technique
	Formal Tea Ceremony	Technique
RANK 6	Curse of Musubi-no-Kami (Mastery Ability): Once per scene, after successfully performing the Ties that Bind ritual, you may spend 1 Void point to catch a glimpse of all major future consequences of the relationship identified by the ritual. You also learn of one other relationship between your target and another character that will guarantee that the consequences you predict will not come to pass.	

MATCHMAKING IN ROKUGAN

Shika Matchmakers are hardly the only matchmakers in Rokugan—while they possess unique abilities, the job is done by many people, and the process has certain similarities in many parts of Rokugan. A matchmaker, or nakōdo, meets with noble patrons who seek guidance in forming familial, financial, political, or romantic relationships. Using a method of introduction called hashikake, the matchmaker hosts meetings to determine the strength of a pairing. If the exchange goes smoothly, the matchmaker plays the role of mediator, eventually stepping back to monitor the relationship from afar.



Shika Speardancer School
[Bushì, Shinobi]

Shika Speardancers are yōjimbō and shinobi, but to the outside world, they are simply seen as messengers, known well for their swiftness and neutrality. They deliver urgent or romantic missives to both dignitaries and lovers throughout Rokugan. The Deer Clan directs its Speardancers to monitor targets deemed crucial to maintaining or restoring balance in Rokugan. Their cover as couriers frees them to work as bodyguards or assassins without drawing attention. Speardancers exude fierce independence and tenacity. These wild warriors focus on becoming an extension of their yari, practicing a unique set of kata that combine dizzying spins, lightning-speed twirls, and deadly accuracy.

Rings: +1 Air, +1 Fire

Starting Skills (choose five): +1 Martial Arts [Melee], +1 Meditation, +1 Skulduggery, +1 Survival, +1 Fitness, +1 Sentiment, +1 Courtesy

Honor: 35

Techniques Available: Kata, Rituals, Shūji

Starting Techniques:

- ❁ **Kata: Trip the Leg**
- ❁ **Kata (choose 1):** Striking as Air, Striking as Fire

Typhoon in the Bamboo Grove (School Ability): When making a Martial Arts [Melee] or Fitness check, you may spend ❁❁ to cause a number of characters no greater than your school rank and within range of your readied weapon to suffer the Dazed condition.

Starting Outfit: Traveling clothes, stealth clothing or ashigaru armor, yari or kamayari, wakizashi, traveling pack.

ADVANCE

TYPE

RANK 1	Martial Skills		Skl. Grp.
	Games		Skill
	Skulduggery		Skill
	Survival		Skill
	Air Shūji Rank 1	❁	Tech. Grp.
	❖ Like a Ghost	✧	Technique
	Soaring Slice	✧	Technique
RANK 2	Trade Skills		Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy		Skill
	Culture		Skill
	Martial Arts [Melee]		Skill
	Close Combat Kata Rank 1–2	✧	Tech. Grp.
	❖ To Float or Sink	✧	Technique
RANK 3	Crescent Moon Style	✧	Technique
	Martial Skills		Skl. Grp.
	Smithing		Skill
	Games		Skill
	Skulduggery		Skill
	General Kata Rank 1–3	✧	Tech. Grp.
	❖ Slicing Wind Kick	✧	Technique
RANK 4	Pole Vault	✧	Technique
	Scholar Skills		Skl. Grp.
	Command		Skill
	Martial Arts [Melee]		Skill
	Survival		Skill
	Fire Shūji Rank 1–4	❁	Tech. Grp.
	❖ Rouse the Soul	❁	Technique
RANK 5	Disappearing World Style	✧	Technique
	Social Skills		Skl. Grp.
	Government		Skill
	Sentiment		Skill
	Tactics		Skill
	General Kata Rank 1–5	✧	Tech. Grp.
	❖ Silent Elimination	✧	Technique
RANK 6	The Ties that Bind	✧	Technique
	The Lowest Bow (Mastery Ability): When performing an Attack action using Martial Arts [Melee], you may spend ❁❁ as follows: ❁❁+: Choose one character other than your target at range 2 with vigilance lower than or equal to ❁❁ spent this way. That character suffers a critical strike with severity equal to your weapon's deadliness plus your ranks in Martial Arts [Melee].		



Togashi Chronicler School [Courtier, Monk]

By learning and meditating upon the stories of the past, the Dragon Clan's Togashi Chroniclers see into the future. While most historians record events in detail to instruct future generations or study the stars, Togashi Chroniclers instead collect stories, folktales, and lore to capture truth. Not concerned with mutable details such as names and dates, they search for patterns to illuminate the conflicts of humanity that have unfolded time and again since the first sword was forged and the first edict written. Slowly, a new rhythm surfaces, and chroniclers are able to use the new insight it provides into human nature to foresee that which is yet to come.

Most chroniclers travel continuously, exploring the wonders of the world. Their insightful nature makes them welcome in many courts across Rokugan. However, they are just as often found outside a straw hovel trading stories with commoners for a bowl of rice.

Rings: +1 Earth, +1 Water

Starting Skills (choose four): +1 Culture, +1 Fitness, +1 Labor, +1 Martial Arts [Unarmed], +1 Meditation, +1 Performance

Honor: 40

Techniques Available: Kata, Rituals, Shūji

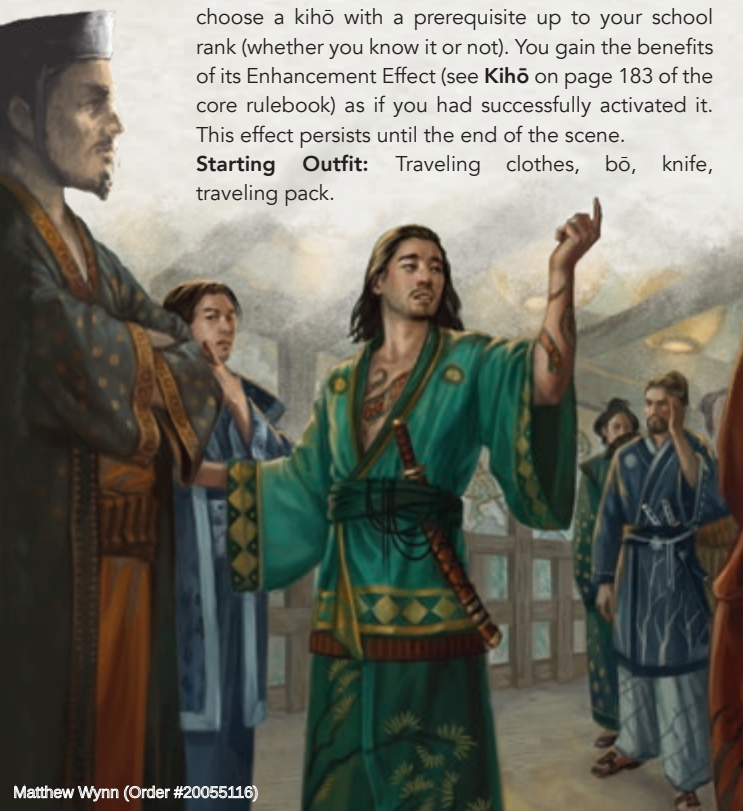
Starting Techniques:

- ⊗ **Ritual:** Divination
- ⊗ **Kihō (choose one):** Cleansing Spirit, Ki Protection
- ⊗ **Shūji (choose one):** Honest Assessment, Truth Burns Through Lies

A Grain of Truth (School Ability): Once per scene after you succeed on a Social skill check, you may choose a kihō with a prerequisite up to your school rank (whether you know it or not). You gain the benefits of its Enhancement Effect (see **Kihō** on page 183 of the core rulebook) as if you had successfully activated it. This effect persists until the end of the scene.

Starting Outfit: Traveling clothes, bō, knife, traveling pack.

	ADVANCE	TYPE
RANK 1	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Fitness	Skill
	Martial Arts [Unarmed]	Skill
	Performance	Skill
	Rank 1 Earth Shūji	✓ Tech. Grp.
	◊ Lord Togashi's Insight	✓ Technique
	Beware the Smallest Mouse	✓ Technique
RANK 2	Trade Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Medicine	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Performance	Skill
	Rank 1–2 Water Shūji	✓ Tech. Grp.
	◊ All Arts Are One	✓ Technique
	Open Hand Style	✗ Technique
RANK 3	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Culture	Skill
	Commerce	Skill
	Mediation	Skill
	Rank 1–3 Air Shūji	✓ Tech. Grp.
	◊ The Great Silence	✗ Technique
	◊ The Ties that Bind	✗ Technique
RANK 4	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Culture	Skill
	Medicine	Skill
	Performance	Skill
	Rank 1–4 Fire Shūji	✓ Tech. Grp.
	◊ Breaking Blow	✗ Technique
	Foreseen Need	✓ Technique
RANK 5	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Fitness	Skills
	Martial Arts [Unarmed]	Skill
	Performance	Skill
	Rank 1–4 Void Shūji	✓ Tech. Grp.
	◊ Death Touch	✗ Technique
	The Immovable Hand of Peace	✓ Technique
RANK 6	Echoes of Ancient Days (Mastery Ability): When you use your school ability, you may choose a number of characters up to your ranks in Performance who can hear you. Each chosen character also gains the benefits of the kihō's enhancement effect as long as it persists on you.	



Yasuki Yōjimbō School [Bushī]

Skillful and cunning warriors, the Yasuki Yōjimbō protect people traveling to, from, or within the Crab lands and escort caravans and shipments bringing vital supplies to the front lines. These skilled bodyguards travel alongside Yasuki Merchants and other courtiers across Rokugan. To combat any threat to their charges, the Yasuki Yōjimbō employ keen awareness and strong knowledge of the terrain they travel through. If a situation looks untenable, these warriors prioritize the safety of those under their watchful eye, cleverly using the terrain to lose pursuers or force groups of enemies to face them one at a time.

Rings: +1 Earth, +1 Water

Starting Skills (choose five): +1 Martial [Melee], +1 Martial [Ranged], +1 Tactics, +1 Commerce, +1 Courtesy, +1 Seafaring, +1 Survival

Honor: 50

Techniques Available: Kata, Rituals, Shūji

Starting Techniques:

- ☯ **Kata:** ☯ Crescent Moon Style
- ☯ **Shūji (choose one):** Honest Assessment, Well of Desire

Claws of the Crab (School Ability): When you successfully perform the Guard action (page 264 of the core rulebook), When you make a check to perform the Guard action, you may spend ☯ as follows:

☯+: If you succeed, you may guard one additional character in range per ☯ spent this way. You can spend a maximum number of ☯ this way up to your school rank.

Starting Outfit: Crossbow or spear, daishō, pony or ashigaru armor, traveling pack, map of Crab Lands, knife.

ADVANCE

TYPE

RANK 1	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Commerce	Skill
	Government	Skill
	Seafaring	Skill
	Rank 1 Earth Shūji ☯	Tech. Grp.
	☯ Iron Forest Style ☯	Technique
	Trip the Leg ☯	Technique
RANK 2	Trade Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Culture	Skill
	Government	Skill
	Rank 1–2 Water Shūji ☯	Tech. Grp.
	☯ Touchstone of Courage ☯	Technique
	Unyielding Terms ☯	Technique
RANK 3	Trade Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Martial Arts [Ranged]	Skill
	Sentiment	Skill
	Rank 1–3 Ranged Kata ☯	Tech. Grp.
	☯ Pillar of Calm ☯	Technique
	All Shall Fear Me ☯	Technique
RANK 4	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Command	Skill
	Medicine	Skill
	Survival	Skill
	Rank 1–4 General Kata ☯	Tech. Grp.
	☯ Soul Sunder ☯	Technique
	A Samurai's Fate ☯	Technique
RANK 5	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Commerce	Skills
	Seafaring	Skill
	Tactics	Skill
	Rank 1–5 Air Shūji ☯	Tech. Grp.
	Rouse the Soul ☯	Technique
	Striking as Void ☯	Technique
RANK 6	The Standing Death (Mastery Ability): Once per game session, when you perform the Challenge action (see page 263 of the core rulebook), you may choose up to 6 additional characters who can hear you as targets. These targets must have status lower than or equal to your original target's. If you succeed, each target must fight you in a clash one at a time in an order of their choosing (or flee the battle). Each clash lasts one round. After each clash, you regain fatigue equal to your Earth Ring. Until all of these clashes have concluded (or you have been killed), none of your targets can perform Attack or Scheme actions outside of their individual clashes.	



New Advantages and Disadvantages

A court is a battlefield of wits. Poor decisions reap deadly consequences. Rivals watch at all times, and the Imperial family scrutinizes each clan and their representatives. Falling victim to an assassin is preferable to falling out of the Emperor's favor. In order to promote one's clan or, at the very least, survive, court attendees must be as methodical as an army general. Risks are necessary for social advancement, and therefore anxiety, sacrifice, and other detriments are practically guaranteed. In their ignorance, hardened warriors perceive the luxurious Imperial Court as a setting of leisurely frivolity. In truth, many courtiers envy a warrior's lifestyle—the motivations of a Shadowlands beast are straightforward. At court, no one can be trusted.

SPECIFIC DISTINCTIONS

These distinctions follow the same format as those in **Chapter 2** of the core rulebook.

AFFECT OF HARMLESSNESS (AIR)

"Well, I...you do understand my meaning? I am sorry. I can be such a fool with words sometimes," Shika Kasumi sputtered, a deep blush on her cheeks.

"Calm yourself, Deer," Akodo Nanako said with a smile. Nanako had spent the last few weeks dreading the Shika Matchmaker's arrival. She had expected a severe old monk. Not this young woman, matching her age.

"I am sorry."

"You've spent more time apologizing than delivering advice," Nanako replied.

The two laughed, Nanako with a proud chuckle and Kasumi giggling behind her hand. No, Nanako found this matchmaker sweet and utterly harmless. She eagerly awaited the rest of Kasumi's counsel.

Types: Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Affect of Harmlessness distinction:

- ☸ You appear earnest and perhaps a bit hapless, and your flaws generally come off as charming, at least at first glance. Additionally, people tend to underestimate you, and this works to your benefit.

- ☸ When performing a check to ingratiate yourself with a stranger (such as a Courtesy [Air] check to be pleasant to someone of higher social status or a Performance [Air] check to conceal your true intentions toward a social equal), you may reroll up to two dice.

FAMOUSLY NEUTRAL (EARTH)

"I wish I could trust you, but experience has been a brutal teacher. Having that said, I do wish to arrange some sort of compromise. I will not risk travel into your lands, nor am I ready to invite you into my home. Kyūden Shika appears to be our only option. The Deer often host negotiations. They have no cause to interfere, and they shall see that everyone is safe. They may even provide counsel. We both could benefit from an opinion unfettered by selfish interests."

— Excerpt of a letter from Mastu Suzu

Types: Fame, Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Famously Neutral distinction:

- ☸ You are trusted to be unbiased and are therefore consulted by people looking for a fair perspective.
- ☸ When performing a check to convince others of your trustworthiness or provide unbiased advice (such as a Command [Earth] check to reason with two feuding subordinates or a Sentiment [Earth] check to determine how to set someone else at ease), you may reroll up to two dice.

WELL CONNECTED IN [CITY] (WATER)

"It is impossible to organize such a grandiose event on this short notice! We need master brewers, multiple top-tier entertainers, the finest florists—all contacted and assembled by the week's end!"

"I can arrange that," Daidoji Yori calmly replied.

Shocked, Doji Noa asked, "Really?"

"Yes."

"Within a week?"

"Dear Noa," Yori laughed, "I have served on the Trading Council for eight years. If I can't get something, I know someone who can. You just worry about the invitations."

Types: Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Well Connected in [City] distinction:

- ⊗ Your lifestyle or upbringing introduced you to a multitude of diverse people at all levels of society in a particular city (such as Friendly Traveler Village or the City of Lies), and you know how to find people who can get you the resources you need in that place. While they do not provide those resources free of charge, they are happy to give you information and can sometimes broker deals. Additionally, you occasionally meet people from this city during your travels, and when you do, you can strike up a friendly rapport to get similar benefits in other places.
- ⊗ When performing a check to gather information, find items for sale or loan, or interact with people from the city you have chosen (such as a Commerce [Water] check to buy or sell something in that city or a Culture [Water] check to learn what current events in the city are generating gossip), you may reroll up to two dice.

NEW PASSIONS

These passions follow the same format as those in Chapter 2 of the core rulebook.

DECORUM (WATER)

"When dining with the Imperial family, it is imperative that you do not spear your food like you have done. Any motion resembling that of a weapon is unacceptable," Yasuki Masaru explained, gesturing.

"What?" Hida Kotone grunted. "Do they think I'll assassinate them with chopsticks?" She chuckled. "I probably could, actually. Ack—" Kotone dug a hand into her armor and pulled out a rag, onto which she loudly blew her nose.

Masaru watched in terror. "You cannot do that."

Kotone sniffed. "What?"

"Blow your nose in front of company!"

"What can I do, Masaru? All you say is don't do this, don't do that."

"If you could," Masaru cringed, "be conveniently absent this evening?"

Kotone slapped his shoulder. "That is what I've been waiting to hear. There's an oni, or something..."

"Of course," Masaru nodded. "I will let them know."

Types: Interpersonal, Mental

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Decorum passion:

- ⊗ Polite society is your natural habitat. Etiquette, traditions, and all of the subtle courtly minutiae are second nature to you.
- ⊗ After performing a check to ensure that you or your allies adhere to all the strictures of courtly etiquette (such as a Command [Water] check to be formally polite to your guests or a Culture [Water] check to ascertain who is adhering to court etiquette during an audience and who is making a fool of themselves), you remove 3 strife.

LOCAL FLARE FOR [REGION] (EARTH)

"You absolutely must visit the coastline. There is a small village that prides itself on its paper making. To display this craft, they adorn their every dock and ship with the most beautiful lanterns. The view at night is fantastic.

"If that is not enough to convince you, there is a cliffside brewery overlooking the village. The path to its door is steep, and the sea mist is bitter cold, but it makes the finest sake I have tasted. The Winter Court is splendid, but you must explore beyond its gates if you want something truly breathtaking."

Types: Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Local Flare for [Region] passion:

- ⊗ Your knowledge extends beyond the court to the surrounding lands. You are familiar with secret scenic hideaways, undiscovered talent, and intriguing local customs within the region. Every clan boasts incredible palaces, but such settings can grow tiresome. A change of scenery works wonders for one's spirit.
- ⊗ After performing a check to remember information about the specific region you have chosen (such as a Culture [Earth] check to know what is currently going on in the region or a Sentiment [Earth] check to recall the attitudes and opinions of local inhabitants), you remove 3 strife.



POT STIRRER (FIRE)

"I don't care what anyone else says about you, Kakita-san. I respect you."

Types: Interpersonal, Mental

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Pot Stirrer passion:

- After spending a few minutes studying a room, you can extrapolate who might have a grudge against whom, which two people are on edge around each other, and other social pressure points you could exploit.
- After performing a check to stir up social chaos (such as a Courtesy [Fire] check to incite anger in someone about a perceived insult or a Theology [Fire] check to encourage two people to argue about the finer points of their religious beliefs), you remove 3 strife.

NEW ADVERSITIES

These adversities follow the same format as those in **Chapter 2** of the core rulebook.

OVERCONFIDENCE IN [FEATURE] (VARIOUS)

Ikoma Rikuto slid the door to the sake house open with enough force to grab everyone's attention.

"I am Ikoma Rikuto, the greatest singer you have never heard!" he proclaimed to the patrons as he entered. "My jealous brother banished me from the

WARS OF WORDS AND SHADOWS

Ikoma Bard School! But now you lucky people shall hear the voice he tried to hide!"

Types: Various

Pick One: Charm (Water) [Interpersonal], Creativity (Fire) [Mental], Toughness (Earth) [Physical], Spiritual Sensitivity (Void) [Spiritual], Subtlety (Air) [Interpersonal]

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Overconfidence in [Feature] adversity:

- You overestimate yourself dramatically in the chosen capacity. While truly talented people may worry that they fail to meet expectations even when they do, you are blissfully confident about some talent you do not possess. When faced with reality, you may entrench yourself in your delusion or take a devastating blow to your ego.
- When performing a check for which you need to leverage the capacity about which you are overconfident (such as a Fitness [Earth] check to run for several li without stopping or a Composition [Fire] check to draft an exciting new poem that will awe courtiers at Winter Court), you must choose and reroll two dice containing Q or S. After resolving the check, if you failed, you gain 1 Void point.

LACKCLUSTER (FIRE)

"So—did you like it?"

Doji Eiko stared at the young poet. "It was pretty."

Kei nodded and waited. After a long pause, "...just pretty, then?"

"Yes, pretty. Otherwise, it was..." Eiko shrugged, "inoffensive?"

Types: Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Lackcluster adversity:

- Try as you might, you cannot distinguish yourself within the court. Your talents or appearance cannot compete with those of the people around you. As a result, you are hardly noticed. When you try to leverage your reputation, even if people recognize who you are due to your glory or actions, they take far more interest in your companions than they do in you.
- When performing a check to impress others or perform better than those around you (such as an Aesthetics [Fire] check to create a new painting or a Performance [Fire] check to perform a role in a play that moves your audience to tears), you must choose and reroll two dice containing Q or S. After resolving the check, if you failed, you gain 1 Void point.

UNSAVORY PAST (WATER)

Kakita Hisa walked quietly into the courtyard. Her hair was impeccably styled, her new kimono folded perfectly, and her pose and stride measured and deliberate: the perfect picture of decorum.

But a hush descended on the bystanders all the same. Eyes darted to the blade at her belt, and when she turned her back, gossip courtiers flicked their fans to hide their mouths as they whispered, "Have you heard what happened during her gempuku..."

Types: Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Unsavory Past adversity:

- ⊗ Your servants and old acquaintances know all manner of gossip and embarrassing stories about you. Foolish, unsavory, or even bloody actions of your youth come back to haunt you. You have aged and changed, but knowledge of your history lingers within your family lands, and old associations continue to cause you problems.
- ⊗ When performing a check by which your past may come back to haunt you (such as a Games [Water] check to relax and play an enjoyable game with people who know your penchant for cheating or a Tactics [Water] check to lead troops who know that you once fled the battlefield in terror), you must choose and reroll two dice containing ☯ or ☳. After resolving the check, if you failed, you gain 1 Void point.



NEW ANXIETIES

These anxieties follow the same format as those in **Chapter 2** of the core rulebook.

ISOLATION (EARTH)

"I find myself unsatisfied with only knowing people. I want to care," Daimyō Shika Renji explained. "Such a pathetic human compulsion. I long to stab someone, or love them. Both, perhaps. These feelings are unavoidable, so we Deer lock them away, then redirected them somewhere safe. In the meantime, we cannot help but feel isolated from ourselves and others. We become a collection of masks crafted for a singular purpose. There is Renji the compassionate, Renji the unifier, Renji the protector. All lies. I fear if these masks were to break, there might be nothing underneath."

Types: Interpersonal, Mental

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Isolation anxiety:

- ✳ To best serve your clan's interests, you must ignore your own needs. You cannot sympathize with the people you intend to bring harm. Likewise, you cannot help people for selfish reasons. Your clan requires you to focus on the larger picture and to remove your individual wants from the equation. You are a tool for a greater purpose. The temptation to form genuine human connections is strong, and it can pull you away from your life's mission.
- ✳ After performing a check related to interacting with people you care for (such as a Command [Earth] check to issue orders to family members or a Sentiment [Earth] check to recall the feelings of your friends concerning a particular subject), you receive 3 strife. If this is the first time this has occurred this scene, gain 1 Void point.



WEB OF LIES (AIR)

Shika Kado felt his breath hitch in his throat. To his left was Akodo Hoshi, the man Kado had told to mistrust the Matsu family. To his right, Matsu Kagami, the woman Kado had encouraged to romance Akodo Hoshi. Kado had intended not to see them again, but here they were at the same wedding. His foot unconsciously tapped as he considered all of the possible excuses for leaving.

"Matchmaker!" Kagami grinned as she approached him. "Are you responsible for this happy union?"

"The Fortunes are. I just connected the threads," Kado replied, unsure if he should force a smile. In his periphery, Kado was sure Hoshi was looking their way. "Unfortunately, I am feeling ill."

"You do look pale."

"Yes." Kado's voice faltered. "I have no doubt I do."

Types: Interpersonal

Effects: The following apply to a character with the Web of Lies anxiety:

- ✳ You must be ever mindful of your elaborate, deceitful plots. You must know who was told what lie, which lies contradict each other, and what people are likely to say to one another. The more lies, the more intricate the web grows. One slip of the tongue could cause it all to implode, as you face a constant risk of contradicting yourself.
- ✳ After performing a check to deceive someone you have deceived before (such as a Courtesy [Air] check to convince someone that you are a member of a clan when other clan members have never heard of you or a Skulduggery [Air] check to convince the victim of one of your previous cons that you didn't mean to steal their money), you receive 3 strife. If this is the first time this has occurred this scene, gain 1 Void point.

New Samurai Heritages

A variety of unique heritages arise from having a bloodline derived—at least in part—from the Crane. This is true even for non-Crane characters, who may bear Crane blood because of the marriage of members of that clan into their family lineage. There are also more

mysterious heritages that might apply, if the family has some involvement in the secretive lives of shinobi.

Table 2—1: New Samurai Heritages represents these backgrounds when creating a new samurai PC who has ancestral connections with the Crane Clan or to the mysterious underworld of the shinobi. This table can be used instead of **Table 2—1: Samurai Heritages** on page 96 of the core rulebook, and is used in the same manner.

TABLE 2—1: NEW SAMURAI HERITAGES

ROLL	RESULT	MODIFIERS	OTHER EFFECTS
1	Dishonorable Cheat: One of your kin was caught cheating in a high-profile duel. Instead of committing seppuku to purge their dishonor and redeem their family, they ran away and became a rōnin, disgracing their bloodline.	Decrease your glory by 5.	Roll a ten-sided die to determine a skill to aid you in bringing your disgraced kin to justice (1–3: Martial Arts [Choose One], 4–6: Survival, 7–10: Government).
2–3	Triumph over the Lion: In your family line one of your ancestors held a decisive victory over the Lion. It may have been a duel, a critical game of Go, a battle, or any number of things. The circumstances are irrelevant; the Lion were embarrassed, and your ancestor brought honor to your clan.	Increase your honor by 5.	Roll a ten-sided die and add the resulting family heirloom to your starting items (1–3: a weapon, 4–6: a game set of your choice, 7–8: some other item relevant to your ancestor's victory, 9: a horse or another animal, 10: the deed to a small piece of land on the border of Lion territory). You choose one quality and the GM chooses one quality from the list of item qualities, on page 240 of the core rulebook; these are applied to the item.
4–5	Unforgivable Performance: In the recent past one of your kin gave a truly horrible performance in the presence of the Imperial line. Through their embarrassing acting in a scene they caused the Emperor to leave the theatre and now rumors abound of your family being cursed by the Fortunes for such a failure.	Decrease your status by 3.	You gain the Benten's Curse (Air) disadvantage (see page 116 of the core rulebook). Roll a ten-sided die to determine a skill that will help redeem your family (1–3: Performance, 4–6: Culture, 7–9: Command, 10: Courtesy).
6–7	Triumph During Gempuku: One of your parents was a Topaz Champion and brought honor to your clan and your family.	Increase your honor and glory by 3.	You gain the Support of the Kakita Dueling Academy distinction, where the Topaz Championship takes place.
8–9	A Little Too Close to Heaven: One of your ancestors is rumored to have had an illegitimate child with an Emperor. While you may be able to link your heritage to the Imperial line, the disgrace of such an affair stains this joy.	Increase your status by 5 and decrease your honor by 5.	Roll a ten-sided die to determine a skill that can aid you in discovering the truth about your lineage (1–2: Government, 3–4: Commerce, 5–6: Sentiment, 7–8: Meditation, 9–10: Theology).
10	Elegant Craftsman: Your ancestor was a truly gifted artisan and produced in their lifetime a masterwork that is still renowned today. You now live in the shadow of this ancestor, and your clan expects your complete focus in bringing glory to your line once again.	Increase your glory by 5.	You gain the Isolation anxiety (see page 103). Choose one of your character's rings; you may reduce the value of this ring by 1 to increase the value of your Fire or Air Ring by 1 (this still cannot raise it above 3).

New Gear and Items

Just as a soldier relies on their weapons, armor, and kit to keep them alive in the field, so a courtier relies on their apparel and the accouterments of high society to keep them afloat in the world of intrigue, vice, and politics.

ITEMS IN THE COURT

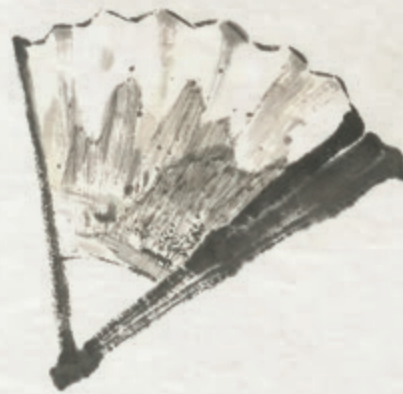
The following items are highly prized by courtiers, diplomats, and other people who see the courts as the highest-stake battlefields in Rokugan.

CEREMONIAL TEA SET

A traveling tea set is all well and good for lending a touch of civilization to the mess tent in a military camp, but no courtier of means would dream of using so mundane a set for a formal tea ceremony. The arrangement of dishes and the presentation of traditional foods and sweets in the tea ceremony follows a strict order meant to convey an austere aesthetic with items that nevertheless obviously cost a fortune. The trays, chopsticks, and dishes in such a tea set are far too delicate to move long distances in a traveling warrior's pack.

The most important items in the tea set are the tea bowls. Tea bowls are expected to be the *pièce de résistance* of the tea set, and to express the potter's artistic genius despite their simplicity. A tea bowl must look understated but should betray a wealth of technical expertise and care in construction. The most prized tea bowls come from potters foreign to Rokugan, highlighting their owner's worldly grace and access to expensive imported luxuries. As the sword is to the soldier, so the tea bowl is to the courtier.

When performing a Tea Ceremony or Formal Tea Ceremony ritual using a ceremonial tea set, the character adds one kept  die set to an  result to the check. (Cost: 7 koku. Rarity: 8. Qualities: Ceremonial, Resplendent.)



FOLDING FAN

Rokugan invented the folding fan to cope with the combination of hot, humid summers and stifling courtly attire. While it is customary to offer a guest a fan from one's own household when receiving them, nearly every samurai carries their own fan, made of cypress strips tied together with thread. Both all-wood fans (*hiōgi*) and wood-and-paper fans (*kawahori-ōgi*) are popular at court. Rich courtiers often commission renowned artists to adorn their fans with art or calligraphy, while daring artisans create their own. The gossip circles speak well of a courtier who appears at court with a striking design that complements their attire. While it is considered impolite to comment on another samurai's outfit in their presence, the same is not true of their fan. Interrogating the provenance and detail of the fan has thus become a polite way for courtiers to flatter or fence with one another in the context of casual conversation. And, of course, fans make it easy to obscure one's mouth—thus rendering anything one says deniable according to the rules of Rokugani etiquette. (Cost: 1 koku. Rarity: 3. Qualities: Resplendent.)

MAKEUP KIT

In Rokugani courts, wearing makeup is common for samurai of all genders. The most common type of makeup is powdered rouge, applied to the cheeks to simulate the blush of health even when the wearer is exhausted, hungover, or ill. Courtly makeup also involves *oshiroi* (white rice powder) layered on the face and neck, shaved eyebrows replaced with smudges of dark powder higher on the forehead, and bright-red lipstick. While some people, such as geisha and members of certain traditionalist institutions, still adhere to this regimen from day to day, modern courtiers in most courts do not usually wear the full complement of classic makeup, instead choosing the elements that they feel best suit their own personality and style. Appearing at court in traditional makeup, though, is a reliable way to impress older and more conservative courtiers. (Cost: 1–3 bu. Rarity: 2.)

MARI (BALL)

One cannot play ball without a *mari*, or deerskin ball. Ball games, their rules dating back hundreds of years, are a popular way for courtiers to get exercise and have fun. In team games, two sides of twelve to sixteen players each must keep the *mari* in the air between them as they attempt to knock it through a goal at one or the other side of the field. In noncompetitive games, a circle of players attempts to keep the *mari* in the air by kicking it up and between one another. Exhibitions of skill with the *mari* are a popular activity at outdoor festivals and parties. (Cost: 5 *zeni*. Rarity: 3.)

MONO IMI FUDA (TABOO PLAQUE)

The rules of purity and impurity are a constant concern for all Rokugani. A state of impurity, brought on by contamination (for example, with illness, death, or certain bodily fluids including blood) blocks an individual from participating in certain Fortunist or Shinseist rites until a priest or monk can perform a ritual of purification. The state is considered highly contagious; it can spread to another individual who comes too close. A *mono imi fuda*, or taboo plaque, is a spike-shaped wooden object with sacred inscriptions that both warn off people who see the plaque and help to block the spread of impure energies. The plaques are inscribed and blessed by a religious figure, then hung from a person's hat or driven into the ground to demarcate the impure space. In the absence of a properly trained cleric, these objects are considered a good first line of defense against impurity for most people. Their efficacy against truly potent creatures of evil, however, depends on the skill of their creator.

Some *mono imi fuda* have the Sacred quality, but others are shoddily made or insufficiently blessed. A character may make a **TN 3 Theology (Air) check** to assess whether a particular taboo plaque possesses this quality. (Cost: 8 *bu*. Rarity 6. Qualities: Sacred.)

NORIMONO (PALANQUIN)

One popular means of transport is the *norimono*, or noble palanquin. A *norimono* consists of a small covered chamber in which a single passenger may recline on a soft surface, shadowed on the left and right by curtains. The chamber is suspended from two beams that extend to the front and rear. Four or more tireless servants bear the *norimono* on their shoulders. A *norimono* looks more expensive and decadent than the faster horse- or ox-drawn cart, but it is in fact cheaper and more reliable. Animals require pasture,

which is not always easy to find, and wheeled vehicles can sustain damage on rough roads that sturdy humans navigate with ease. The *norimono* also allows the occupant to conceal their identity or show off their opulence at their discretion. (Cost: 12 *koku*. Rarity: 7. Qualities: Resplendent.)

PERFORMERS' BOAT

One enduring fashion in the design of gardens and grounds for opulent castles is the incorporation of ponds and streams, which are as expensive as they are beautiful. A perennial tradition at outdoor gatherings that allows the host to show off their wealth is the placement of hired musicians aboard a beautiful wooden raft with crew poling it back and forth across the artificial waterways. This allows guests to see and hear the musicians, but the water between them allows the guests to feel separated from the "hired help." These rafts are masterpieces of craftsmanship, incorporating elaborate carved dragon or waterfowl heads at the prow. Artisans often craft these boats as masterworks, competing to shape the most beautiful or most complex ornamentation. (Cost: 20 *koku*. Rarity: 6.)

SHINOBI ITEMS

Shinobi equipment is versatile, concealable, and surprising. The majority of a shinobi's work is intelligence gathering and harassment rather than outright assassination. Defeating a foe is therefore a lesser priority than escaping alive with the valuable data one has gathered.

AMIGASA

The easiest way to conceal one's face from both the sun and prying eyes is to wear a hat. The *amigasa*, a traditional hat made of straw and woven rushes, is an appropriate addition to various outfits. Folding the *amigasa* allows a shinobi to carry a concealed item in it without having a bulge in their clothing or carrying a bag, which guards at a checkpoint may be inclined to search. On wilderness missions, an *amigasa* doubles as a net to help the shinobi catch fish and frogs to eat. An even larger variant of this hat, shaped like a basket with a small window in front, is worn by a mendicant order of Shinseist monks in order to represent the unimportance of the self. While the basket version is an excellent way to conceal one's face, it has fallen out of favor among shinobi since the release of a Kabuki play featuring a ninja using it as a disguise. (Cost: 4 *zeni*. Rarity: 2.)

BAMBOO CANE

A hollow bamboo cane can be used in self-defense or to complement a disguise as a traveler or beggar. Its interior can double as a blowgun. It can also conceal objects, messages, or a flexible weapon, perhaps a rope or chain with a hook to aid in climbing or to entangle an enemy. Some canes even have mechanical catches that allow them to hide a thin spear blade within their length.

A bamboo cane can be wielded as a *bokken* (see page 231 of the core rulebook). (Cost: 6 bu. Rarity: 6. Qualities: Concealable, Mundane.)

DEMON MASK

These intimidating masks are not a particularly common tool for shinobi, but those who don them do so for several reasons: it protects and obscures the face, it intimidates foes, and like the imposing masks of many suits of samurai armor, it sends a strong message of the wearer's intentions. Rumors say that some demon masks are actually made from the severed and collected faces of oni, allowing an individual who wears one to access demonic powers at great peril to the purity of their soul. However, if such wicked artifacts truly exist, surely they were swept up long ago by the Kuni Witch Hunters or the Scorpion Kuroiban and hidden away from mortal hands.

A demon mask grants the wearer the following additional unarmed profile: Horned head butt (Martial Arts [Unarmed], Range 0, Damage 3, Deadliness 2). (Cost: 1 koku. Rarity 5. Qualities: Forbidden.) This profile reflects a mundane article, but if the GM wished to introduce a true demon mask into their story, they could use the rules for *nemuranai* from page 307 of the core rulebook, substituting a *mahō* technique for an Invocation and the Unholy quality for the Sacred quality—and obviously, such an item would be nearly unique.

DISGUISE KIT

Essentially a more practical and full-featured version of the makeup kit, a disguise kit allows a shinobi to alter their appearance radically. False mustaches and beards; hair extensions; prosthetics for ears, noses, and fingers; and concoctions for changing the appearance and texture of the skin by adding lesions or scars are all contained in a disguise kit. (Cost: 9 bu. Rarity: 6.)

HERBAL MEDICINES

Shinobi often must keep strange schedules. On castle missions, they sometimes stay up all night to gather

information or harass foes after spending a day working in disguise. In the wilderness, they must remain alert for long periods of time when working as scouts or sentries. Herbal medicines, kept in pill form in small medicine cases or as tea brews, allow the shinobi to stave off hunger, thirst, drowsiness, or pain.

At the end of a scene, a character with the Exhausted condition may use one dose of herbal medicine to remove strife and fatigue as if they were not Exhausted. They cannot benefit from this effect again until they remove the Exhausted condition. (Cost: 1 bu per dose. Rarity 5.)

INVISIBLE INK

Certain inks are visible only under specific circumstances: when exposed to a flame of a certain heat, when the surface they are written on is dipped in a specific chemical, or when held up against the light. Shinobi frequently use such inks to conceal secret messages on paper that appears to hold only mundane information. (Cost: 6 bu per inkwell. Rarity: 8.)

MAKIBISHI

Makibishi, or caltrops, are small sharp objects scattered on the ground to deter a pursuer. Sometimes they are made of four to nine iron points in a star shape, but a handful of water chestnuts can work in a pinch.

As an Attack and Support action, a character may scatter a handful of *makibishi* targeting a patch of ground at range 0–2. The terrain at range 0–1 from the point of impact gains the Dangerous terrain quality. (Cost: 1 bu per handful. Rarity 4.)

METSUBUSHI

The term *metsubushi* refers to any kind of tool or substance used to distract an enemy or impair their senses, most commonly blinding powder made from sand, lime, ash, or pepper. Blinding powder stings the eyes, causes sneezing and crying, making it hard for the victim to see or fight. Another type of *metsubushi* comprises mixtures of flammable substances that explode in distracting bursts of flame or catch clothes on fire when they strike a target. An eggshell emptied and then filled with such substances is ideal for throwing as a smoke bomb, or it can be attached to the end of a rope or chain in place of a weight for a particularly disorienting blow.

As an Attack and Support action, a character may throw a *metsubushi*, targeting a patch of ground at range 0–3. The terrain at range 0–2 from the point of impact gains the Obscuring terrain quality. (Cost: 6 zeni per dose. Rarity 5.)

THE SIX TOOLS OF THE SHINOBI

When a shinobi is unsure what tools to bring on a mission, the six tools are a good place to start. A spy who is caught and searched appears to be merely a well-prepared traveler if found with these. The six tools are:

Amigasa

Sekihitsu

Herbal medicines

Tenugui

Uchitake

Bamboo cane



MIZUGUMO (WATER SPIDER)

A *mizugumo* consists of five air bladders made of animal hide and pine resin and strung together. To use a *mizugumo* as a flotation device, the shinobi places it on the water's surface underneath their torso and paddles with their arms and legs. The item's name comes from the shinobi's appearance while using it: the shinobi skates along the water's surface like the Rokugani fishing spider.

While using a *mizugumo*, a character reduce the TN of their checks to swim by 2. At the GM's discretion, they can also wield weapons while swimming that they otherwise could not. (Cost: 3 bu. Rarity: 6.)

MODIFIED SCABBARD

Shinobi sometimes alter knives' or swords' sheaths to do double duty as another weapon or tool. Adding extra space lets the shinobi hide secret messages, money, or other items best kept concealed. Giving the scabbard a removable end allows the shinobi to use it as a blowgun or as a snorkel when hiding underwater. Loading a knife's sheath with *metsubushi* can make it easier and more efficient to throw into an enemy's eyes.

Up to one small item (such as one dose of *metsubushi*, a small blade, or one handful of *makibishi*) can be hidden within a modified scabbard. While hidden this way the item has the Concealable quality. (Cost: 2 koku. Rarity: 6. Qualities: Mundane.)

OPENING AND CLOSING TOOLS

When social engineering fails, there's always breaking and entering. An opening and closing kit includes pliers, drills, oil, a hammer, spikes, and cutting or sawing implements used for breaking into sealed locations. It also contains iron clamps of various sizes in a bracket shape with spiked ends; these can hold a door closed and require a pursuer to spend time forcing the door while a shinobi escapes. (Cost: 5 bu. Rarity: 3.)

PORTABLE BOAT

A portable boat consists of a number of wooden panels that can be stacked and transported easily in a compact box. When the shinobi needs to cross water, they disassemble the box and slot the wooden pieces into one another to create a small raft and oar. (Cost: 3 koku. Rarity: 2.)

ROPE LADDER

A rope ladder consists of rungs joined by braided cloth or hair with hooks at one end that folds up easily for portability. It can be a great way for shinobi to extract a target who lacks a spy's expertise in climbing. Some resourceful shinobi even learn to use rope ladders as weapons. Shinobi can cast a rope ladder at an enemy to entangle or distract them, or they can use it to tie up an incapacitated foe.

A rope ladder may be used as a thrown weapon with the following profile: (Martial Arts [Ranged], Range 1–2, Damage 0, Deadliness 0, Snaring). (Cost: 2 bu. Rarity 3.)

SEKIHITSU

A *sekihitsu* is a pencil made of soapstone, graphite, or chalk. It lets a shinobi blaze trails or write secret messages to others on the same mission. The shinobi may also jab the pencil into a vital point, using it as a weapon of last resort if caught undertaking skulduggery.

A *sekihitsu* may be used as a weapon with the following profile: (Martial Arts [Unarmed], Range 0, Damage 0, Deadliness 4, Concealable, Mundane). (Cost: 3 zeni. Rarity 1.)

SOKUTOKI

The *sokutoki* is an incense box, often beautifully lacquered and decorated. Incense boxes are one example of various forms of shinobi tools disguised as or doubling as everyday objects. They are beautiful but not distractingly uncommon, and guards and nosy acquaintances are unlikely to check them, as it would be rude to handle an item so personal to someone else unless they offered it. A shinobi can load an incense box with blinding powder. Then, once they have maneuvered close to their target, they can discharge the powder through a tube into the target's eyes with a quick, simple motion that is less dramatic and more accurate than flinging the powder from a pocket. (Cost: 2 bu. Rarity 4. Qualities: Concealable, Prepare, Subtle.)

TENUGUI

A *tenugui* is a rectangular cloth, usually around three feet by one foot. Shinobi customarily carry one or two extra cloths to replace part of a damaged mask, to filter water, or even to ensnare and choke out a sentry. (Cost: 3 zeni. Rarity: 2.)

UCHITAKE

An *uchitake* (lighter), which consists of a short bamboo tube full of coals, aids in starting fires quickly and efficiently. Arson is one of a spy's oldest and most reliable weapons. As an Attack action, a character with an *uchitake* can start a fire at a point at range 0–2, and if the flames catch somewhere flammable, they spread quickly, creating terrain with the Dangerous and Obscuring qualities. If a person is standing at the target point (or the coals are shot directly at them), they must resist with a **TN 2 Fitness check [Water 1, Air 4]** or suffer the Burning condition. (Cost: 12 zeni. Rarity: 3. Qualities: Forbidden.)

SHINOBI WEAPONS

Shinobi weapons tend to be concealable and easy to draw quickly to slay or incapacitate an unwary target. Most of them do double duty as a tool of some sort. Many of the weapons listed here can be used for some innocuous purpose, as described in their profile.

SWORDS

Honor may be stronger than steel in Rokugan, but the bite of a shinobi's blade is no less sharp than that of an honorable samurai's. Shinobi turn even their blades into instruments of deception.

NINJATŌ

The *ninjatō* is a single-edged sword that is shorter than a katana and sports a straight blade rather than the katana's traditional curve. This makes it easier to produce (the blade is often forged from a single slab of metal instead of folded, then sharpened on a stone) but also less durable and effective as a weapon than a katana. However, its small size means it can be easily carried while running across rooftops and climbing walls, and it is still quite good at slaying unwary targets.

SHINOBIGATANA

Everyone knows that shinobi carry a *ninjatō*, and that means that if one wears a *ninjatō* on a deep-cover assignment, anyone who sees the scabbard knows there's something suspicious afoot. While the *ninjatō* serves well enough in the field, it can give away a spy in an instant.

Ever eager to innovate on deception, the Scorpion Clan has developed a new form of *ninjatō*. Its name is written with the same characters but pronounced "shinobigatana." The *shinobigatana* is largely identical to an ordinary *tachi* or *katana* and worn in a full-length sheath, but it has a shorter blade, making it compatible with the aggressive, percussive style of swordplay the *ninjatō* favors. The shorter blade allows its wielder



TABLE 2—2: SHINOBI WEAPONS

NAME	SKILLS	RNG	DMG	DLS	GRIPS	QUALITIES	RARITY	PRICE
SWORDS								
Ninjatō	[Melee]	0–1	4	4	1-hand: – 2-hand: Deadline +1	Concealable, Forbidden, Razor-Edged	7	12 koku
Shinobigatana	[Melee]	0–1	4	5	1-hand: – 2-hand: Deadline +1	Ceremonial, Concealable, Razor-Edged	8	22 koku
BOWS								
Folding Half-Bow	[Ranged]	2–3	4	3	2-hand: –	–	5	3 koku
SPECIALIST WEAPONS								
Kamayari	[Melee]	2	4	3	2-hand: –	Durable, Snaring	7	8 koku
Kusari-fundo	[Melee]	1	2	2	1-hand: – 2-hand: Snaring	Concealable	5	4 bu
Kyoketsu Shoge	[Ranged]	1–2	2	3	2-hand: –	Concealable, Forbidden, Snaring	6	3 bu
Shakuhachi	[Melee]	0	3	2	1-hand: – 2-hand: Damage +1	Durable, Mundane, Subtle	4	3 bu
Tekagi	[Unarmed]	0	1	3	1-hand: –	Durable, Forbidden	6	4 bu
Tekken	[Unarmed]	0	2	3	1-hand: –	Concealable, Durable	4	3 bu

to draw it faster than a swordsman would draw a full-length longsword. While its short length is a disadvantage once swords are drawn, shinobi prefer to avoid pitched battles anyway; its advantage on the draw suits it to taking out a suspicious guard quickly and quietly. Even when drawn, it is easily mistakable for an ordinary katana or wakizashi without close inspection. The extra space in the scabbard can also hold messages, medicine, poisons, or other secrets.

A shinobigatana appears to be a katana until examined; a character examining it must either see it drawn or make a **TN 4 Smithing check [Air 2, Water 5]** to find the telltale details that betray the blade's duplicity. If its true function is discovered, it loses the Ceremonial quality and gains the Forbidden quality for anyone who knows its identity.

BOWS

While shinobi are not fabled for their archery, bows are excellent weapons of ambush, assassination, and generally sowing chaos in enemy lines.

FOLDING HALF-BOW

A *hankyū*, or shortbow, has a low draw weight and is accurate only at relatively short distances. However, combined with a shinobi's mobility, it can be very effective, especially for delivering toxins or incendiary material. Shinobi hankyū often fold in half for easy storage within a case.

While in its case or otherwise folded, a folding half-bow has the Concealable quality and cannot be fired. As a Support action, a character may prepare a folding half-bow for use.

SPECIALIST WEAPONS

The truest of shinobi weapons are the humblest and most esoteric—tools repurposed for subterfuge, stealth, and murder. From strange hooked spears and chains to weapons more bizarre still, the shinobi's arsenal is, above all, surprising. Most can still be used narratively as tools as described in their individual entries.

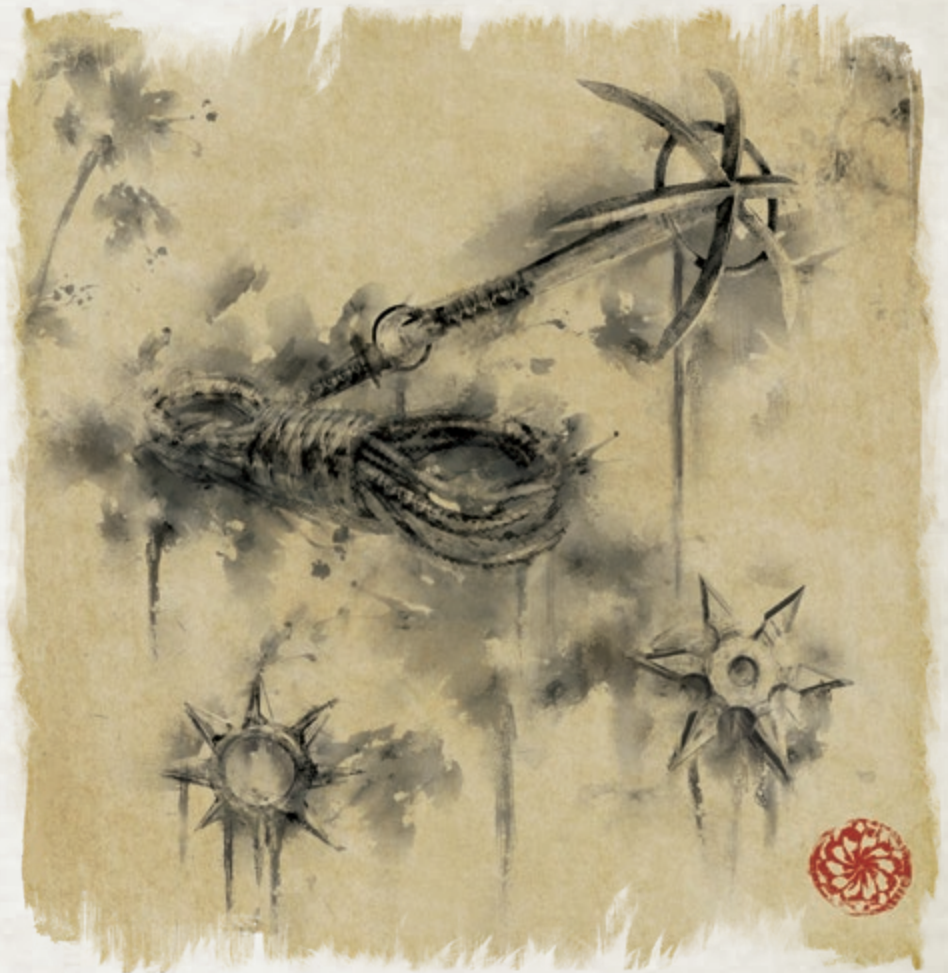
KAMAYARI

A *kamayari* is a spear with a hooked protrusion on one or both sides of the blade, similar to a *ji*. While the hook's most obvious applications are blocking attacks and dragging foes off horseback, it also has practical non-combat applications. A shinobi might swing from a sturdy tree limb using the hook or might use it to climb a high fence. If the spear shaft has holes in it, the shinobi can use the shaft to measure distances or can slot bars into the holes to use it as a ladder. Finally, the hook is useful for carrying items on long walks.

KUSARIFUNDO

When a shinobi begins training with flexible weapons, they first learn the simplest and most reliable: the *kusarifundo* (literally “weighted chain”). A *kusarifundo* consists of two weights shaped like hexagonal prisms and connected by a length of chain that reaches from the sternum to an outstretched hand when pulled taut. Some disguised varieties hide the weights in the head and body of a doll or similar item.

This weapon collapses easily so that it can be concealed in a small pocket or pouch, or held inconspicuously in the palm. To strike with the *kusarifundo*, the user can cast it out from the palm or swing it in one hand. They can also hold the chain just behind the weights with both hands, pulling the chain taut to block and deflect weapons, striking with the heavy weights, or entangling, throwing, or strangling the foe with the chain. While the bite of the chain links into skin is very painful, the *kusarifundo*'s strikes are not usually lethal. Magistrates intending to capture a miscreant alive for questioning also employ this weapon. *Kusarifundo* skills are an excellent foundation for learning more complicated weapons such as the *kusari-gama* or *kyoketsu shoge*.



KYOKETSU SHOGE

More difficult to use than the *kusarifundo* is the *kyoketsu shoge*. Its name literally means “to run around in the countryside”—the result of some inside joke no one quite remembers. A *kyoketsu shoge* consists of a long rope, usually made of hair, with an iron loop tied to one end and a dagger with an additional sideways barb (resembling the head of a *kamayari*) tied to the other. The loop can be thrown over hooks or protrusions, and the barbed dagger can be sunk into soft things, allowing the shinobi to scale a wall quickly.

Aside from that, this weapon can be used similarly to a *kusari-gama*. However, the loop and rope allow for certain difficult maneuvers that the chain of a *kusari-gama* does not. For example, if the loop is thrown over the blade of a sword or spear, or grabbed by a foe, a well-practiced *kyoketsu shoge* wielder can snap the rope to send a wave along its length, entangling the offender's hand or weapon in a square knot.

TABLE 2—3: SHINOBI ARMOR

NAME	R. VALUES	QUALITIES	RARITY	PRICE
Firefighter's Coat	Physical 2	Cumbersome	4	6 bu
Stealth Clothing	Physical 2	Forbidden, Subtle	7	4 bu

SHAKUHACHI

A *shakuhachi* is a traditional Rokugani flute. This popular musical instrument is particularly associated with an order of mendicant Shinseist monks who play it as a sort of meditation, as well to busk for alms. Shaku-hachi come in various sizes, but they are generally sturdy and heavy enough that a traveler may use them for self-defense if accosted by highwaymen. Shinobi who must travel long distances like to disguise themselves as these mendicant monks so that their comings and goings will not be questioned and they can carry a reliable weapon without raising suspicion.

TEKAGI

Tekagi are three back-curved barbs that protrude from a metal band wrapping around a shinobi's palm (or, less commonly, the sole of the foot). They are primarily a climbing tool, making climbs easier and allowing shinobi to attempt to scale surfaces they otherwise could not. But they can also be used to swing at and bludgeon a foe when they hang loose from the wrist, or to slash them when attached to the palm. Defensively, a pair of tekagi allow a shinobi to snap a metal blade by catching it and applying lateral pressure to the flat of the blade. Because shinobi are used to wearing tekagi, they sometimes punch with a strangely shaped fist, forming a blade with the fist's protruding knuckles and bracing the fingertips against the tekagi band.

When performing an Attack action with a tekagi, a character may spend  as follows:

+: If the target's vigilance is lower than or equal to  spent this way, choose one Razor-Edged weapon the target has readied: it becomes Damaged.

TEKKEN

Tekken are metal knuckles held in the hand or worn with one's fingers slotted through its holes. They are easily concealed, and deliver a little extra weight and cutting power to a simple strike. They come in various forms, the simplest of which is a hollow semicircle gripped like a handle. Others have individual slots for fingers or are simply rings with spiked protrusions on one side to cause pain, distraction, and bleeding. A hidden pocket in a robe or sleeve is an excellent place to conceal tekken.

SHINOBI ARMOR

Generally speaking, shinobi armor is simply the garb of whoever they are seeking to impersonate—ornate lacquered armor when spying on a general, ceremonial robes when at court, and unadorned common clothes when walking among commoners. However, some tasks call for specialized protection.

FIREFIGHTER'S COAT

Shinobi arsonists usually wear heavy quilted robe tops when attacking enemy territory to reduce the likelihood they catch fire or suffer burns. Firefighters wear this type of coat as well; firefighters in Otosan Uchi were the first to wear it.

While wearing a firefighter's coat, a character ignores the effects of Dangerous terrain created by fire and treats their resistance against flames (physical and supernatural) as 4.

STEALTH CLOTHING

Shinobi usually dress similarly to the people around them, disguising themselves as bushi, priests, farmers, or whatever type of person best helps them blend in. However, when hiding in plain sight is not an option, such as on wilderness scouting missions or when infiltrating a town or castle under cover of night, a shinobi wears special camouflage. This outfit consists of a cloth mask made of two three-foot rectangular pieces of fabric tied around the upper and lower head to leave the eyes visible, a short robe with a couple of hidden pockets, loose pants, and thick, soft *tabi* (socks padded for quiet movement).

This apparel is reversible. One side is dyed a dark color to blend in with darkness and mask blood or other stains; it is commonly rust red, but almost any dark hue (other than black, which blends poorly with most shadows) will do. The other side is a brighter color that matches the daytime surroundings of the mission: blue when operating near water, brown or green for forests, white for snow, and so forth.

While a character is wearing stealth clothing set to the appropriate side and in Obscuring terrain, they increase the TN of Attack checks targeting them by an additional 1 (for a total of +2).

New Techniques

The following are new techniques that can aid samurai in the courts of Rokugan, or aid those trying to infiltrate those courts.

CLOSE COMBAT KATA

The following kata are particularly useful when fighting with a spear.

Pole-Vault

Rank 3 Kata

The bushi uses the butt of their spear and the springy haft to propel themselves into the air, over obstacles, and into their foe from above.

Activation: As an Attack and Movement action using one readied polearm, you may make a **TN 3 Martial Arts [Melee] (Air or Water) check** targeting one character at range 3–4.

Effects: You move to range 2 of your target, ignoring the effects of any terrain you pass over. You may also pass over impassable terrain such as small ravines and low walls if your GM permits.

If you succeed, you deal physical damage to the target equal to the weapon's base damage plus your bonus successes.

If you fail with a shortfall of 2 or more, you suffer the Prone condition, and receives 2 fatigue and 2 strife.

Trip the Leg

Rank 1

The bushi's spear flashes out, aiming low to trip up their opponent and send the unlucky foe crashing to the ground.

Activation: As an Attack action using one readied polearm, you may make a **TN 2 Martial Arts [Melee] check** targeting one character at range 1–2.

Effects: If you succeed, your target suffers the Prone condition.

New Opportunities

✳: If you succeed, the target receives 2 fatigue and 2 strife.

✳+: If your target's vigilance is lower than or equal to ✳ spent this way, they suffer the Disoriented condition.

NINJUTSU

The following techniques are but some of the forbidden skills employed by shinobi as they go about their devious business.

CREATIVE USES

You can use techniques like Pole-Vault and Sweep the Leg for more than just attacking your enemies. Pole Vault could be a good way to resolve using a spear or long stick to leap across an obstacle, while Sweep the Leg could be used to knock over furniture or other objects. As long as your GM approves, feel free to come up with creative uses for your techniques!



Artful Alibi**Rank 3**

A cunning shinobi is always prepared with an alibi, whether it is a love letter to be sheepishly delivered in the dead of night or a work of art that surely must have taken all day to create.

Activation: When you make a Skulduggery check to surveil or engage in other clandestine activities during downtime, you can spend ✨ in the following way:

Air or Water ✨+: If you succeed, you also count as having made a successful downtime Composition or Design check to refine (Air) or adapt (Water) an item, with one bonus success per ✨ spent this way.

Cunning Distraction**Rank 2**

During a duel, the contestants are completely focused on each other's smallest moves, waiting for the slightest signal that their opponent is going to strike. This gives unscrupulous duelists a chance to distract by reflecting the sun off a piece of jewelry or their weapon into their opponent's eyes, flapping their kimono to simulate a sudden movement, or even kicking a small stone at their opponent's feet. Particularly devious individuals can perform these distractions from the sidelines to aid an ally. All such actions are considered cheating... but only if someone notices.

Activation: As a Scheme action during a duel or clash, you may make a **TN 2 Skulduggery check** targeting one character engaged in the duel or clash.

Effects: Performing this action is cheating. Any

character observing or engaging in the duel or clash with a vigilance of 2 or higher spots the cheating.

If you succeed, during the next round of the duel or clash, both characters engaged in the duel or clash swap their initiative order.

New Opportunities

✨+: The vigilance required to spot the cheating is increased by 1 per ✨ spent this way.

Deceitful Strike**Rank 1**

Knowledge of when and how to strike is not just mastered by the bushi, and assassinations can be made to look like accidents.

Activation: When you make a Martial Arts check during a duel or clash, you can spend ✨ in the following way:

✨+: Each observer with vigilance equal to or less than one plus the amount of ✨ you spend this way believes your attack was not meant to be lethal.

Like a Ghost**Rank 2**

Shinobi must move quickly and quietly, avoiding notice while scaling walls and obstacles, climbing over roofs, and hopping across gaps between buildings. The very best can seem to be in one location, only to "vanish" and reappear elsewhere a few moments later.

CHEATING IS DISHONORABLE!

Remember that cheating directly violates the code of bushidō, and your GM can require you to forfeit honor to perform techniques such as Cunning Distraction. If you are found out, you (or your ally) probably lose the duel, and could suffer even greater penalties for your deviousness.



Activation: As a Movement and Scheme action, you may make a **TN 2 Fitness (Air or Water) check**.

Effect: If you succeed, you may move one range band, plus one additional range band per two bonus successes. This movement ignores the effects of any terrain you pass through. You may also move up or down vertical surfaces or across gaps that could conceivably be jumped if your GM permits.

New Opportunities

✧✧: Your footfalls are so light as to be completely silent.

Slicing Wind Kick

Rank 3

The Shika of the Deer Clan have perfected the art of impairing their targets by using their momentum to launch themselves with their spears. Shinobi who make use of this technique can make precise attacks with their feet to knock the wind out of their opponents.

Activation: As an Attack and Movement action, using one readied polearm, you may make a **TN 3 Martial Arts [Unarmed] (Air) check** with your unarmed kick profile (see page 237 of the core rulebook) targeting one character at range 1–2.

Effects: If you succeed, the target suffers physical damage equal to your unarmed kick profile's base damage plus your bonus successes.

If you succeed, the target suffers the Disoriented condition.

New Opportunities

Air ✧: Before or after resolving success or failure, move 1 range band.

Air ✧✧: One target suffers the Prone condition.

Air ✧ ✧✧: Choose one additional target per ✧ ✧ spent this way.

Silent Elimination

Rank 3

Although shinobi have a reputation as ruthless and vicious killers, not all default to murdering everyone who stands in their way. Some shinobi prefer using a martial arts hold or ensnaring chain to choke their targets into unconsciousness, making these techniques perfect for subduing unwary guards and potential kidnap victims.

Activation: As an Attack and Movement action using one readied melee or unarmed weapon with the Snaring quality, you may make a **TN 3 Martial Arts [Melee or Unarmed] check** targeting one living character of

silhouette 0–2 in range of the weapon. If you successfully performed this action against the same target during the previous round, reduce the TN of the check by 2, to a minimum of 1.

Effects: If you succeed, the target suffers the Immobilized and Silenced condition, and is pulled to range 0 of you. If the target chooses to perform Attack actions, they are limited to making Martial Arts [Unarmed] checks targeting you, and they must increase the TN of these checks by 1.

New Opportunities

✧: If you succeed and the target is a minion, they suffer the Unconscious condition.

✧+: If you succeed, the target suffers 2 fatigue and 2 strife per ✧ spent in this way. If the target suffers fatigue exceeding their endurance as a result of this, they suffer the Unconscious condition in addition to the Incapacitated condition.

✧✧: If you succeed, you and your target move one range band, ending at range 0 of each other.

Stillness of Death

Rank 5

A favorite theme of stories featuring ninja involves an unaware character waking up in a house or castle keep. It is utterly still, no servants or hosts bustling around. As they move from room to room, they find the inhabitants—all dead. Each was killed so quickly and suddenly that they had no time to raise the alarm.

Activation: When you perform a check to use a Ninjutsu technique, you may spend ✧ in the following way:

✧+: Increase the TN of the next check a character makes to resist a critical strike you inflict by 1 per ✧ spent this way. This effect persists until the end of your next turn.

To Float or Sink

Rank 2

Shinobi are never knocked down for long. A trained assassin can bounce back from being prone in a moment, or with a quick roll and acrobatics, always manage to land on their feet.

Activation: When you make a Martial skill (Water or Earth) check, you may spend ✧ in the following way:

Water or Earth ✧+: Remove one existing Disoriented or Prone condition from yourself.

Water or Earth ✧: Do not suffer the Disoriented and Prone conditions if the check would cause you to suffer them.

What's Yours Is Mine**Rank 2**

Shinobi are adept at moving and striking swiftly in combat, and they often use the slow reactions and confusion of their opponents to steal from their targets and make their escape.

Activation: As an Attack and Movement action using one readied weapon without the Cumbersome quality, you may make a **TN 3 Martial Arts [Melee] (Fire) check** targeting one character at range 0–1.

Effects: If you succeed, your target suffers physical damage equal to your weapon's base damage.

If you succeed and your target is Dazed, you may steal one item that your target has on their person; the size and location of an object should be narratively reasonable and is subject to the GM's approval. If you choose to steal a readied weapon, the target may resist with a **TN 3 Fitness check (Air 5, Water 2)**.

New Opportunities:

Fire ☼: The target suffers the Dazed condition.

Fire ☼+: Move 1 range band plus one additional band per ☼ beyond the first.

Fire ☼☼+: If you succeed, you may steal one additional item per ☼ spent this way.

RITUALS

The following rituals play key roles in formal diplomatic functions, negotiations, and high society.

Formal Tea Ceremony**Rank 5**

The chaji (formal tea ceremony) shares some similarities with the chakai (informal) tea ceremony, but the chaji is two to three hours long and includes a full meal. The process has been passed down over generations as tea masters have infused meaning into every movement and word used in the ceremony. If one can truly attune oneself to the ritual, which takes many years of practice, it is said that the chaji can help participants reach Enlightenment.

Activation: Once per game session, as a downtime activity using a ceremonial tea set (see page 248 of the core rulebook), you may make a **TN 5 Performance (Void) check** targeting yourself and a number of other characters up to your ranks in Culture, who are also participants. Up to one other participant may assist, providing the usual benefits (see **Assistance** on page 26 of the core rulebook).

Effects: Each participant removes 6 strife plus additional strife equal to your bonus successes.

If you succeed, each participant also gains 1 Void point.

New Opportunities:

☼☼: If you succeed, reduce the TN of each participant's next check by 2.

☼+: Each participant removes 2 fatigue, plus 1 fatigue per ☼ spent this way.

☼☼: If you succeed, you gain 1 glory per participant of higher status than yourself.

Treaty Signing**Rank 2**

Entering into treaties and other formal agreements between clans and families has become something of a ritual over the centuries. The particulars vary from clan to clan (Unicorn treaties are often accompanied by the exchange of horses, while the Dragon generally ask for an hour of meditative contemplation beforehand), but generally such agreements involve both parties signing a document that contains the terms of the agreement and making pledges to uphold the agreement in front of an audience. The audience ensures the agreement is widely publicized, making it that much harder for either side to back down without losing face. However, inventing a document that both sides are willing to agree to is a true creative challenge. Such treaties become legendary amongst Rokugani diplomats.

Activation: Once per game session as a downtime activity (see page 248 of the core rulebook), you may make a **TN 2 Composition (Fire) check** to write an agreement. If you succeed, you may make a **TN 3 Government (Air) check** targeting yourself and a number of other characters, who are also participants. Up to three other participants may assist, providing the usual benefits (see **Assistance** on page 26 of the core rulebook).

Effects: If you succeed, each participant is assured that there are no mistakes or objectionable loopholes to the agreement, and that the agreement is acceptable to all parties involved. Each participant stakes 10 honor on upholding the agreement. Anyone who later breaks the agreement loses the honor they staked, unless another participant broke the agreement first.

New Opportunities (Both Checks):

☼+: If you succeed, all participants stake 1 additional honor, plus 1 additional honor per ☼ spent this way.

☼☼☼: If you succeed, you need only stake half the honor that the other participants stake.

The Ties that Bind**Rank 4**

A ritualist who is properly trained can reach out with their minds to gain some sense of the threads of fate that link different people together.

Activation: As a downtime activity, you may make a **TN 3 Sentiment (Void) check** targeting one character.

Effects: If you succeed, you learn of a character who would be a particularly fortuitous match for your target (in potentially any sort of relationship, such as marriage, friendship, or a formal alliance). This does not provide the exact identity of said character, but should provide valuable clues about this person (where they live, what their social status is, what clan or family they belong to, etc). If you already have met this character, the clues should be enough to identify them.

If you are using the **Bond** rules found on page 136, after performing this ritual the target and identified character may decrease the cost of forming a Bond to 1 XP.

New Opportunities

Void ☯ ☯+: You learn of one likely future consequence of a relationship between your target and the identified character per ☯ ☯ spent in this way. These consequences may affect the target, their family and clan, or you and your clan.

Void ☯ ☯ ☯ ☯: You may learn of another character who would be a particularly inauspicious match for your target, and one likely future consequence of their relationship.

AIR SHŪJI

The following shūji focus on subtle analysis and misdirection, if not lying outright

Assess Strengths**Rank 1**

A skilled courtier can deduce a lot about their opponent over the course of playing a game. Evaluating an opponent's strategy, moves, and demeanor can let them evaluate the opponent's character in turn.

Activation: As a Scheme action, you may make a **Games (Air) check** targeting one opponent in a game that you are playing. The TN of this check is equal to the target's vigilance.

Effects: If you succeed, you learn your target's ranks in Games, Tactics, or any one Martial Arts skill. Choose one additional skill to learn for each bonus success on the check.

New Opportunities

Air ☯ ☯: You learn all your target's Mental advantages and disadvantages

Hidden in Smoke**Rank 4**

The stratagem used in games such as Go has been debated and studied for centuries in Rokugan, and masters of such games know how to distract opponents with their words and movements to hide their true intent in a variety of social settings.

Activation: Once per scene as a Scheme action, you may make a **Social (Air) check** targeting one other character. The TN of this check is equal to the target's vigilance.

Effects: If you succeed, you hide your true goal or objective from your opponent. Any action or ability that would reveal your true intentions or objective to the target instead reveals a false, narratively appropriate goal, subject to the GM's approval. This effect persists until the end of the scene.

If you succeed, during an intrigue scene, you gain 1 momentum point toward a relevant goal.

New Opportunities:

Air ☯ ☯+: Choose one additional target with vigilance lower than the original target per ☯ ☯ spent this way.

Air ☯ ☯+: If you succeed, you gain 1 additional momentum point per ☯ ☯ spent this way.

EARTH SHŪJI

The following shūji rely on strength of conviction and stubborn dedication.

Unyielding Terms**Rank 2**

Setting the terms of a duel is usually a compromise between both participants. With the right knowledge, however, the weight of tradition can overcome any objections.

Activation: Once per scene as a Scheme action, you may make a **TN 4 Culture (Earth) check** when you are determining the method of battle and stakes for victory in a duel (as a participant or adjudicator).

Effects: You select either the method of battle, or the stakes for victory.

FIRE SHŪJI

The following shūji allow a courtier to dominate a conversation and opponent through fierce rhetoric and intensity.

All Shall Fear Me

Rank 3

If a courtier can pull it off, dominating a gathering through the sheer force of their personality is a good way to ensure everyone will treat them with trepidation and respect. Of course, just being noticed is only half the battle; the courtier must also appear fearsome and even a bit dangerous, but not overdo their act. If they come off as a Kabuki villain, all they'll get from their audience is a few muffled giggles.

Activation: As a Scheme action, you may make a **TN 4 Command or Performance (Fire) check** targeting any number of characters in the scene.

Effects: If you succeed, each target receives 2 strife when they choose you as a target for a Social skill check. This effect persists until the end of the scene.

If you fail, you receive 4 strife.

New Opportunities

Fire ☼☼+: If you succeed, all characters targeted by you suffer 1 additional strife per ☼☼ spent this way whenever they target you with a Social skill check.

Crackling Laughter

Rank 3

Humor, when used with proficiency, can be a powerful weapon when trying to advance one's status, particularly when trying to make a fool of someone else.

Activation: Once per game session, as a Scheme action, you may make a **TN 3 Performance (Fire) check** targeting a number of characters up to your Fire Ring.

Effects: If you succeed, each target receives 2 strife, and must make a **TN 5 Meditation (Air 6, Water 3) check** or receive additional strife equal to the shortfall.

If you fail, you receive 3 strife.

New Opportunities:

Fire ☼☼: For each character who suffers Compromised condition, gain 1 glory.

Offend the Sensibilities

Rank 2

Art can soothe the spirit and calm the mind, or it can leave one seeing red. A clever artisan can craft a piece so that it will offend the sensibilities of a particular person, while leaving most observers a bit perplexed but unbothered.

Activation: When you make an Artisan (Fire) check to craft an item, you can spend ☼ in the following way:

Fire ☼☼: Choose one individual known to you. When that individual first sees the item you created, they receive 2 strife. If this causes them to suffer the Compromised condition, the target also suffers the Dazed, Enraged, or Silenced condition (your choice). Anyone else seeing the item knows it could be very offensive.

Spiteful Loss

Rank 1

A bad sport can ruin the fun for everyone in a game, embarrassing themselves in other's eyes while leaving the other participants and audience stressed and frustrated. Of course, sometimes that's exactly the point.

Activation: When you make a Games (Fire) check while playing a game, you may spend opportunity in the following way:

Fire ☼: If you fail, forfeit 1 glory. Then each participant receives strife equal to 1 plus the shortfall of the check on all participants in the game.

WATER SHŪJI

The following shūji enable a courtier to effortlessly navigate the roiling waters of court politics.

Beware The Smallest Mouse

Rank 1

Often, minor functionaries at court find themselves able to successfully complete their tasks because they are so unimportant that nobody bothers to impede them (or even notices their existence). Some courtiers quickly learn to play up this appearance when need be.

Activation: When you make a Social skill (Water) check targeting one or more characters, you may spend ☼ in the following way:

Water ☼☼+: While interacting with you, the target treats their vigilance as 1 lower per ☼☼ spent this way and decreases the TN of their social checks targeting you by 1. This effect persists until the end of the scene.



VOID SHŪJI

The following shūji may only be used by a courtier with an almost supernatural ability to anticipate the future.

Foreseen Need

Rank 4

Artisans with an open mind and an eye to the future are always working on things they may need one day. A little preparation and anticipation can pay off greatly at the right moment.

Fun and Games

Rank 1

Games can be fun to play or observe. They can be even more fun when one of the participants is a good sport who knows how to lose and win with grace, and how to entertain their fellow participants and the audience in the process.

Activation: When you make a Games (Water) check, you may spend ☼ in the following ways:

Water ☼+: Choose one participant in the game or an observer. Remove 1 strife per opportunity spent from that participant.

Water ☼ ☼ ☼: Remove 1 strife from each participant and observer instead.

Activation: As a Support action, you may make a **TN 1 Artisan (Void)** check.

Effects: If you succeed, you recall that you had foreseen the need for an item with a rarity equal to 1 plus your bonus successes on the check. Spend one Void point to instantly reveal one item you could have crafted, as long as it is reasonable (e.g., you could be carrying it on your person or have it in your quarters, you had access to the resources to craft it over the past month).

New Opportunities

Void ☼: Double the rarity of the target item, but the item must be of a perishable nature or one with only sentimental value.

CHAPTER

3

Games of Discourse

"Isn't it a pity," mumbled Kakita Ryoku to her pillow, "when a young lady takes her lover's leave, but insists on properly padding her robes and perfecting her makeup first?"

Ide Qutlugh's hands froze on her obi's knot as she knelt before the mirror. "But at Kyūden Doji," she whispered, "protocol is everything. Surely even... now...I must not be seen in dishabille?"

"Then again," Ryoku said, curling her body against Qutlugh's leg, "it's quite understandable that youths, new to such experiences, might confuse propriety and courtesy in this way."

Qutlugh frowned. "I don't catch your meaning," she said after a moment. Ryoku sounds like a passage from that salacious book she wrote, she thought.

"On your walk back to your chambers, have a look around," said Ryoku. She rested her cheek on Qutlugh's knee, looking up into her eyes for the first time that morning. "This may not be Kyūden Shika, but you'll be far from the only one returning from a furtive tryst. Some of them hurry along, their faces

stolid masks, hats tied on too tightly, makeup strict as a geisha's. How funny! Whom do they suppose they're fooling?" Ryoku made a mock-serious face, and Qutlugh giggled. "Others stroll with confident languor, jackets loosely and lazily tied, hats carelessly askew. 'We all know why we're here,' they say, without speaking a word. 'Why regret it?'"

"I see now. It sets others' hearts at ease, and shows care for the circumstances." Qutlugh grinned. "Not proper. But courteous."

"And," Ryoku said, "it affords you more time to spend cuddling."

Twelve minutes later, Qutlugh slipped outside. She winked at the guard, whose mouth twitched into a faint smile. On her slow walk back, she bowed low to the Shinseist shrine's head priest, who flushed and stammered a greeting as he returned the gesture before hurrying away. Before heading inside, she stopped by the fishpond to watch the sun rise behind the parapet, feeling very courteous indeed.



Running The "Winter Court" Game

This book contains a tool kit for running *Legend of the Five Rings* games focused on political conflict and high-powered intrigue. The *Legend of the Five Rings* core rulebook describes this style as the "Winter Court" game. A Winter Court adventure may feature daring battles, mysterious exploration, and tense investigation, but these activities can easily be tied up in politics. In political play, each character's personal success and failure is bound to the fate of a faction, such as their family, clan, or religious order. While the dramatic stakes and complex, unpredictable interactions of player and NPC decisions may seem intimidating to GMs unused to improvisation, a political game can be extremely rewarding and is one of the most iconic *Legend of the Five Rings* experiences.

The first section of this chapter offers tools, advice, and structure for political and intrigue-heavy games, with particular attention to in-character romance, engaging characters dedicated to subterfuge (such as shinobi), and spending ♫ in thematically relevant ways. This is followed by a discussion of Courtesy, one of Rokugan's Seven Tenets of Bushidō, and of how it fits into Rokugani society. The chapter also includes new titles from the regions and courts described in earlier chapters and rules for expanded relationships in bonds.

POLITICS, INTRIGUE, AND PLAYER SAFETY

On page 122, this book discusses how to employ a set of signals or similar system that players may use to express their discomfort with content in the game. Such a system is particularly important for politically, socially, and especially romantically focused games. In addition to the fact that content in the fiction may be upsetting or distasteful, the analog gaming community and the excuse of "in-game content" have often been the delivery vector for harassment many players have experienced. Accordingly, it is wise to take safety and consent as seriously within the context of your hobby, as you would at a workplace or in public with strangers.

RUNNING POLITICAL AND INTRIGUE-HEAVY GAMES

Politics and intrigue, like combat and warfare, can go in many different directions. At its core, a political game casts the players as influential individuals whose

actions change the balance of power among a number of factions struggling for influence and control. Political power may be taken and bartered through military or intellectual pursuits, but political maneuvering (the use of secrets, lies, favors, and social pressure) is perhaps most closely associated with intrigue.

In this type of game, the GM and the players must work together and share information more proactively; it may seem counterintuitive, but intrigue play that relies heavily on secrets and misinformation actually requires the players at the table to be more honest with one another than usual.

KNOWING YOUR PLAYERS

Politics and intrigue can refer to many play styles. Fantasy novels and television have made factional politics—high powered, high stakes, and cutthroat—extremely popular. However, other players may be more familiar with spy dramas, which often focus on smaller-scale incidents, or with delicate social maneuvering in the style of *The Tale of Genji* or *The Pillow Book*, which are more about interpersonal relationships than grand political drama. Before launching into a political game, it is a good idea to hold a "session zero" in which players and the GM get together and discuss their touchstones for political fiction. This is also a good time to establish expectations: what kind of politics does everyone want?

Another useful question to ask is, "What is an exciting moment you can see your character participating in?" The answers you get help you calibrate the kind of content and conflicts you introduce to the game, as well as to guide character creation so players' choices represent their intent. As you begin to create antagonists and scenes for them, make sure that the duelist has the opportunity to show off their skill in high-stakes fencing matches, and the shinobi raised by a secretive mentor (who seems suspiciously like a tengu) in the forest has verdant hunting grounds in which to shadow loose-lipped lords.

PLAYER SKILLS VERSUS CHARACTER SKILLS

Keep in mind that players out of character do not have their characters' skills, and that no one should expect this of the players. This concept seems obvious in the case of physical matters: it's perfectly normal for a player with limited physical ability to play as an expert fencer with bulging muscles. When that character swings a sword at a foe, we don't expect the player to be able to do the same out of character. But we should also remember that a character's intellectual and social

SAFETY SIGNALS

Signals are a predetermined way for players to let the group know they're not comfortable with what's going on in a game. What form this takes is up to your group. The simplest kind of safety signal involves an object players can lift or touch, a hand symbol they can make, or a code word they can say to express discomfort. The GM should make it clear that neither the person using the safety mechanism nor the person whose content is to be modified is to suffer censure for their action, and that the mechanism is there so the table can more safely explore sensitive or difficult topics like intimacy and violence with the knowledge that they have a way to watch out for one another's well-being.

While a simple system is sometimes best, you can also add some diversity to the symbols. You might have "red" (stop immediately), "yellow," (this is fine but let's not go further/speed up) and "green" (this is great/amp it up) symbols. Another option is to have different indicators for "let's stop and discuss now," "fast forward past this," and "let's replay that differently." It is also good practice to thank the person using the safety mechanism and the person whose content is to be edited for their honesty and good sportsmanship.

Going against the apparent flow of a story to use a safety mechanism can be intimidating. The less the uncomfortable person is required to explain their discomfort, the better the system works. Explaining what they're uncomfortable with or (worse yet) any traumatic experiences that led to their discomfort may worsen the situation.

If there is any confusion about the matter (for instance, if other members of the group are unsure exactly what content they should avoid), the GM (or another intermediary the player feels comfortable talking to) should offer the player a chance to privately explain so that the intermediary can outline the boundaries for the benefit of the group.

You may be nervous that an abusive player

may intentionally misuse a safety mechanism to seize an unfair advantage for their character or to aggravate a player they do not like. This is a place where it is important to understand the difference between a safety mechanism such as this one and a traditional RPG game mechanic.

While game mechanics should generally not be used to make the game less fun for other players, they do have a gameplay element that can at times be adversarial between players, and that is okay as long as both players are okay with it. By contrast, the entire purpose of safety signals is to help everyone feel comfortable so they can have fun—and any player who uses it in bad faith should be reminded of that fact. If they persist in doing so after being asked to stop, that player might not be the best fit for your gaming group.

LINES AND VEILS

During your session zero (see **Knowing Your Players**, on page 121), remind the table that their out-of-character comfort and safety are more important than the quality or continuation of the game. Offer players an opportunity to set lines and veils.

Lines are boundaries that state what content should never enter the game: for example, "no torture" or "no spider-based monsters."

Veils are boundaries that state that certain types of content may exist in the fiction but should never be described in detail: for example, "no descriptions of the specifics of torture" or "spider monsters can exist but shouldn't be the primary enemy in a session." Remind players that if they feel uncomfortable and need to step away from the table or the game—either temporarily or permanently—the other players will respect them. Also, be sure to introduce the safety mechanics and confirm that all players understand and respect them.

capabilities may exceed their player's—and this is okay! In some political roleplaying games, it is customary for politics and socialization to be resolved through the players acting out all their characters' words and actions in social contexts. This approach can be fun, but it means that the resolution of conflict in the fiction ends up relying on the players' social and intellectual skills, not the characters'. This means that, for example, players who are less socially inclined, shy, or new to

your social context, and who therefore have difficulty with demanding social situations, are not empowered to interact with the narrative.

In *L5R*, it is okay for a shy or less self-assured player to field a political mastermind or a seductive charmer, just as it is okay for someone who lacks fencing skill to play a masterful duelist. A player who challenges themselves with a character who is different from them should not be penalized for that choice.

So, when you approach a climactic point in a social or political confrontation, always offer the option to use the dice to resolve it. If the players involved would prefer to continue speaking and acting in character, that's their prerogative, but they must have the option to rely on the game's mechanics instead. As a corollary, if you are an experienced roleplayer and you know your partner would prefer to continue without resorting to the mechanics, it's doubly important that you make the gesture of asking the other player if they want to roll, even if you know the answer is no. Doing so is an act of courtesy toward any players present but not involved in the conflict who might be less confident in their acting skills. It shows that the more confident players at the table will not judge or think less of a player who does want to go to the dice.

PLAYER KNOWLEDGE OF ROKUGANI CULTURE

Similarly, L5R does not expect individuals out of character to understand Japanese or Rokugani manners. Making reference to the fine points of etiquette—the height at which someone bows to someone else, the signs that a belt has been tied in haste, a sword held in an inopportune position to denote ease and lack of threat—can add fun and evocative detail to a scene.

That said, all too often in gaming, these details are misused. If you know details about Rokugani culture, language, or etiquette (or about the real-world ideas from history, myth, literature, and film that inspired Rokugan, such as those from Japan), it's okay to show off a little—but only a little. Do not assume other players have the same context you do. Strike a balance between overloading them with information, and leaving them mystified as to what you are doing and why.

Furthermore, be respectful of any real-world source concepts that inspired these details, and to the real people to whom those concepts might have different meanings. Ultimately, remember that the goal is to have fun, and while some amount of immersion in details of the setting can help that, it shouldn't take over completely.

PREPARATION WITHOUT PLANNING

A political game is more difficult to moderate than an action- or investigation-focused one. The challenges the GM presents to the players must be more multifaceted than a monster or villain to be struck down, or a specific hidden truth to be uncovered. Political play works best when the players are presented with

a diverse web of potential allies and enemies and are given a diverse set of approaches to achieving their goals.

The traditional approach of contriving a series of scenes is unreliable at the best of times, and this is even more true in the dynamic social circumstances of a court game. While you must be ready to improvise in a highly social game, you can still do some advance preparation of a most enjoyable kind: inventing non-player characters and the factions they represent.

QUICK PREPARATION FOR THE FIRST SESSION

For your first session, keep to two or three major influential NPCs and corresponding factions, with perhaps a handful of background characters whom you can later promote if your players latch on to them. For each faction, write some general notes about the following:

- ✧ What important resource they have that other factions might want: soldiers, rice, social cachet, secrets
- ✧ What they desperately need and cannot get without someone else's help outside the faction
- ✧ Who their representative is
- ✧ What the representative is good at and uses to get their way
- ✧ What the representative desperately needs, independently from the faction
- ✧ A general conception of how their behavior and speech differ from those of other people at court, so that you feel comfortable speaking in character as this representative

Your starting factions should be locked in some form of adversity with one another. The nature of the adversity is up to you, but it should be positioned such that if the player characters do not involve themselves somehow, the circumstances clearly and gradually grow worse and more intense in a way that is bad for the court in general. Setting up a situation rife with conflict this way allows you to hook the players organically, since “everyone has orders from the Emperor” is a less reliable motivator at Winter Court.

LET THE PLAYERS CREATE DETAILS

Once you have enough details in play that the factions can make each other's lives miserable if ignored, resist the urge to add too many specific details to the factions and their representatives—or, if you do, do not

tie yourself to the details ahead of time. You do not yet know which ones the players will be interested in and investigate deeply. If you leave things flexible, you have the opportunity to add details that suit the players' actions and interests as the story develops.

For example, you might not know until you see the players' reaction to an NPC whether you want that NPC to be a support or an antagonist to the heroes. If the PCs are struggling to succeed and stay afloat, give the NPC heroic qualities and have them offer help for a price. If the PCs are lacking for antagonism, turn the NPC against them.

FAILURE AND MOMENTUM

As with most situations in *Legend of the Five Rings*, political games reward thinking about both success and failure as interesting. "Nothing happens" failure can break the momentum of the story. In politics, after all, nothing stays still for long; the different players are constantly dancing and moving around one another, and any individual's failure is an opportunity for their enemies or allies. If a courtier makes a check to convince a representative of an enemy clan to help them against a common foe, then fails the check, "the other representative is not convinced" is not an especially interesting outcome.

Instead, think of failures as other ways to move the situation forward. If Ikoma Tarō fails to convince Doji Yoshiko to join forces with him, have her capitalize on his failure. Have her threaten to reveal his vulnerability to mutual political enemies unless he concedes to some goal of hers, or have her attempt to draw other people into the conversation to support her position.

You can even have the active character "fail forward": their action fails, but comes with a new opportunity for accomplishing the goal in some other manner. Perhaps Doji Yoshiko is unconvinced, so she demands that Tarō shoulder the responsibility for the plan by staking a great deal of his personal reputation (glory) on a successful outcome. Perhaps she is in debt to a shinobi who has blackmail material on her, and though she cannot join Tarō's cause, she tells him that should he eliminate the enemy agent, she would be very glad to lend him aid.

Dynamic failures of these kinds help keep the game moving forward in surprising and satisfying directions. A GM who relies on dynamic failures needs to prepare less in advance: each player's successes and failures in the moment writes the plot for the GM, and the GM and the other players need merely follow along.

ROMANCE AND INTIMACY

Presenting romance in a game requires a balance between too much subtlety (in which case no one notices) and too much clarity (in which case the romance seems awkward, dull, and possibly even intimidating). The process of introducing opportunities for romance to your players mirrors that of introducing a plot hook: give the players the chance to make interesting choices and see where their decisions take them.

Adding romance to a game works differently for different players. Surprise and spontaneity are integral to some players' understanding of romance because they allow the romance to generate a sense of wonder. However, others feel more comfortable with a predictable path for romance, perhaps even discussing the general arc in advance to alleviate possible tension. Ask your players what they are most comfortable with, and then let them take the lead on advancing their characters' romantic stories. If a player wants an NPC to take a more active role in courting their character (rather than their character seeking the romance initially) you should still offer the player a chance to decide (and adjust) the tenor and form their suitor's courtship takes.

The potential for romance begins with character design. If you know your players particularly well, you may have prior experience to draw on in terms of creating characters you know they'll want to get involved with; however, if you don't have much history with the players, creating romanceable NPCs is a more scatter-shot process. The "sandbox" approach, in which you present a number of possible options and then further develop those to which players latch on, is likely to be more reliable. In order for a player to develop an emotional connection with an NPC, you need to create a sense of their humanity—that there is more of an inner life to them than just the words that come out of the GM's mouth. Three components contribute to this sensation:

- ❁ **Confidence.** It is a general principle that confidence is attractive, but the most attractive form of confidence to a modern player is a little different from Rokugan's samurai standard. The culture of battle, honor, and glory in Rokugan means that most "brave" or "confident" samurai take these concepts to the point of foolhardiness. They want to be the most celebrated poet in the province, or the first into the breach with no regard for their own safety, because they know that such audacity gets

them recognized by samurai of higher station who can offer them things they and their family need to survive downturns in their fortune and advance to higher station still. However, this kind of confidence isn't as useful for romantic situations. A quieter, more steady confidence is a better choice. Think about ways your character can show confidence and vulnerability at the same time: by showing honesty about feelings of uncertainty or sadness, for example.

- ✳ **Competence or Interest.** Simply put, the NPC should have something going on in their life that continues to be important to them even if they become romantically involved with a PC. The NPC should be very skilled in at least one area, or extremely passionate about something (even if they aren't especially skilled). This quality isn't really important for the purposes of impressing the PC or their player. It's more important to give the NPC a sense of independent life and passion—the idea that they're a real person with a history and a life of their

own. Showing what the NPC is good at is a strong opportunity to show what they care about. Their competence need not be in a traditional realm such as combat or artistic expression, though those are definite possibilities. A character who is good with children or animals, who is a good listener or offers wise advice in times of trouble, or even who shows unusual diligence in the practice of an art at which they will never be the best are all viable options.

- ✳ **Vulnerability.** Most NPCs should have vulnerabilities—things they need, goals they cannot achieve on their own—to allow the PCs to interact with them meaningfully. This quality motivates the NPCs to seek PC contact and ensures that the PCs remain the focus of the adventure. Believable vulnerability, in the form of realistic weaknesses, anxieties, and troubles, gives a character realism and humanity, which are crucial to the formation of an emotional connection.



Engaging Shinobi PCs

Shinobi PCs add a new set of rewards and challenges to your game. Because shinobi do not follow the standard rules of samurai society, they add a great deal of flexibility in terms of the challenges you throw at your players. However, you may also struggle to create scenes in which both shinobi and samurai play together. Cutting back and forth between “shinobi scenes” and “samurai scenes” can generate a sense of disconnection between your players.

The best way to counteract this tendency is to make sure that your players are collaborating with you on getting shinobi and samurai into the same scenes, rather than waiting for you to provide opportunities to do so. Ask the samurai why they need the shinobi, what the shinobi can do that is valuable and essential to their plans. Also ask them why they respect the shinobi and their work—they probably have a handle on disrespect, so get them thinking about reasons why they can value one another both technically and emotionally. Conversely, give the shinobi opportunities to show their humanity and virtue. What do they care about on a personal level? What larger goals beyond payment and the job do they have, and how do these goals intersect with the greater good?

In terms of the shinobi’s mission, assassination is all well and good in short games, but longer campaigns can generate more material from missions involving espionage, sabotage, and secret communications. These types of missions require samurai and shinobi to work in concert. The samurai use their ability to move around in the light to give the shinobi access and opportunity. The shinobi then move in the shadows to pass that opportunity back to the samurai. The best missions require intense action in both the light and the shadows. Make the samurai and shinobi need each other.

GIVING ACCESS AND COVER

In order to relate meaningfully to the narrative, shinobi need access to samurai spaces. There are two common ways to obtain access: through disguise and through stealth.

Disguise-based infiltration was the first resort of historical Japanese spies. Alternate identities and believable cover stories make hiding in plain sight a much more reliable way to gather information than wearing dark clothing and concealing oneself in rafters and shadows. You should be generous with your response when a shinobi PC attempts to hide themself

among servants, to craft a believable cover identity as a courtier or bushi, or to make excuses for themself to the guards and staff with whom they regularly interact. Particularly compelling drama and romance can come from positive, friendly relationships between a shinobi’s cover identity and the people around them. A guard who genuinely likes the shinobi’s false identity and is likely to cover for them or vouch for them allows the shinobi player to make satisfying hard choices when it comes time to execute their mission.

Similarly, when the shinobi decides to go dark, you should afford them ample opportunity to hide, use acrobatics, and gain access to important areas as only they can. Trees, tall grass, bushes, secret passages, shadowy hallways, rooftops, and easily distractible guards allow shinobi to keep moving quickly and keep up with their samurai counterparts.

If the shinobi fails rolls or makes mistakes, do not go straight to revealing their identity. Instead, take the opportunity to increase the tension by ratcheting up NPCs’ suspicion slowly and suspensefully. Such a failure creates opportunities for other shinobi or, better yet, samurai to move in and cover for their colleague’s error, forcing them to collaborate and, once again, need one another.

MEET THE PLAN, KILL THE PLAN

Gamers tend to be intelligent folk who play intelligent characters who hatch cunning plans. This tendency goes double for rogues, thieves, and spies, who cannot charge heedlessly into danger like Lion Clan bushi.

What’s more, many gamers have struggled in the past with GMs who have an adversarial attitude. These GMs turn games into a sort of contest in which player and GM try to outwit one another, with the GM gleefully capitalizing on the players’ out-of-character failures to think of things or to anticipate threats. This sort of GMing has its place for those groups that enjoy it, but when trying to tell a collaborative story, it can risk bogging down play. Some players who have dealt with such a GM in the past can often spend hours of out-of-game time preparing every angle before attempting a challenge—a process that draws spotlight time away from the other PCs and slows the story to a crawl.

If you have a shinobi player character in your story, you need to be prepared ahead of time to engage with their player’s likely desire to enact cunning plans and prepare for their foes in a way that is good for the group. First, tell the shinobi’s player that you’re not out to get them—you’re telling a story together, and you know they can’t prepare for everything. Then, give the shinobi’s player a limited amount of time to plan their approach.



For example, say you're going to leave the table for five to fifteen minutes, after which you will return to hear the outline of the shinobi's plan—and only the outline, not the details. If possible, physically move to another room. This gesture prevents the shinobi's player from bombarding you with questions and encourages them to plan efficiently. Make it clear that they shouldn't take the short time frame you have given them as a challenge to see how complicated a plan they can cram into a ten-minute planning window, but instead as encouragement toward a relatively straightforward plan, perhaps something that can be explained in twenty seconds or less. The end result of the "planning break" should be a quick summary of the shinobi's approach to the problem, like "I'm going to

impersonate the daimyō's relative to get past the guards, then leap out the window into the river when I've got the documents" or "We're going to sneak over the wall under cover of night and start some fires, then find the target in the confusion."

PUTTING IDEAS INTO ACTION

Next comes the actual mission. Here, you can take inspiration from films or television shows that center around heists or capers. A common narrative structure for heist media is to show the audience the action, then deal with the rogue's planning or preparation using frequent flashbacks. Encourage the shinobi's

NPC SHINOBI

While samurai are likely to go into every game expecting to struggle against antagonistic samurai, the same is not necessarily true of shinobi. Do they know there are others beyond those who have trained and worked with them? The revelation that antagonistic shinobi are in play is an intense and exciting one; best of all, because they are stealthy, the GM need not decide in advance whether shinobi are in play. Just as the shinobi PCs can decide retroactively that something “was the plan all along,” the GM can decide late in the game that a certain NPC was in fact a shinobi all along. While an epic confrontation between rival shinobi is an attractive climax, enemy shinobi are also excellent ways to tempt PC shinobi into increasingly entangled plots and loyalties: they have no compunction about offering to work with PCs in exchange for sinister deals, or for favors that seem innocuous now but set up future tragedy.

player to describe the action in the present, focusing on what scenes seem cool or exciting to play out rather than what the “right answer” to a problem is. That way, you as the GM can improvise interesting solutions to a problem instead of following a script that ceases to be useful when failed dice rolls or excitable players knock the action off track.

If there’s a question of whether the shinobi brought the right tool for the job, don’t make them stick to a list of items they prepared ahead of time; let them continue to add to their equipment freely *in medias res*, assuming retroactively that they bought it, until such time as their character runs out of carrying space. If they encounter a problem that would have required prior time and preparation to overcome, have them narrate a flashback in which they bribed a greedy guard, released rats onto the premises, or something similar, and have them make a check at that point to see how well their preparation succeeded. Record any  from those checks instead of trying to give it to the PC retroactively; the strife should be gained when the effect of the flashback enters the story at the current time, accompanied by a suitable narrative flourish (for instance, the guard leaves them a note demanding more money for continued silence, or some of the rats end up startling them in the hall).

New Titles

Great deeds are often awarded with prestigious titles in the Courts of Rokugan, although some titles tend to become more infamous than famous over time. These new titles follow the rules described on page 305 of the core rulebook.

CASTELLAN

While a daimyō presides over one or more castles, daily management of a fortification invariably falls to one of their subordinates. A castellan is generally one of their daimyō’s most trusted agents, for they see to the safety and readiness of the daimyō’s primary holding. To serve in this role, a character must not just be trustworthy and loyal, but also learned in topics from logistics and wartime defenses, to the cultural expectations of entertaining guests from the highest echelons of society.

Assigned By: A daimyō after putting the character in charge of the day-to-day management of a castle. A castle can have a single castellan.

Status Award: +5 (to a maximum of 30)

Glory Award: +10 (to a maximum of 60)

XP to Completion: 20

Every Stone Has its Place (Title Ability): When undertaking a downtime activity to prepare your castle for an important event (a wedding, a battle, or a Winter Court, for example), you may change all rolled blank results to  results.

CASTELLAN

ADVANCE		TYPE
TITLE	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Culture	Skill
	Design	Skill
	Government	Skill
	◆ Rallying Cry 	Technique
	◆ Slippery Maneuvers 	Technique
	◆ Touchstone of Courage 	Technique

COVERT AGENT

There are countless ways in which a samurai might become an asset of someone other than their sworn lord. Sometimes, even samurai who believed their loyalty to Bushidō unshakable discover that they cannot serve both their lord and their conscience. Sometimes, covert agents are embedded in enemy courts and swear false loyalty in service of their true lord. And,

of course, some samurai are not so high-minded in their treachery. Blackmail, bribery, revenge, jealousy, fear, and even hope for a better world can all sway human hearts from the hard path of Bushidō. However should a character become a covert agent, they now serve a secret purpose, and must quickly develop new skills to stay one step ahead—or face disgrace and a brutal demise.

Assigned By: Any individual who gives the character a task that requires them to act against the interests of their sworn lord (or falsely enter the service of another lord).

Honor Award: -10 (to a minimum of 25)

XP to Completion: 20

Immediate Effects: Gain the Dark Secret disadvantage.

Practiced Prevaricator (Title Ability): When you make a check to deceive or hide from someone, you may negate up to 2 ☹ symbols.

COVERT AGENT

	ADVANCE	TYPE
TITLE	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Meditation	Skill
	☯ Artful Alibi ☙	Technique
	☯ Cadence ☙	Technique
	☯ Cunning Distraction ☙	Technique
	☯ To Float or Sink ☙	Technique
	☯ What's Yours is Mine ☙	Technique

DREADED ENFORCER

In the noblest and most honorable of courts, there are still those whose hearts bear the stains of wicked deeds. Even a daimyō who would never give voice to an order to have a lesser lord killed, or a political rival's relative captured to ensure their compliance, might tolerate a subordinate who takes such actions of their own volition (provided it remained deniable). Within the Scorpion Clan, such individuals act relatively openly. Within the traditionalist Crane or Lion Clan, such an individual might be a magistrate whose investigations are always perfectly legal—and brutal to the full extent of the law. The role of such individuals varies greatly by clan, region, and individual lord, but the fundamental truth remains the same: these agents wield fear against those who oppose their sworn master.

Assigned By: A lord after they assign the character to assassinate or otherwise remove someone of Status 60 or higher—and the character succeeds!

Honor Award: -10 (to a minimum of 5)

Glory Award: -20 (to a minimum of 15)

XP to Completion: 40

Immediate Effects: Gain the Whispers of Cruelty disadvantage.

Merciless Eyes (Title Ability): When making a check to plan an assassination or attack with lethal intent, you may negate up to 2 ☹ symbols.

DREAD ENFORCER

	ADVANCE	TYPE
TITLE	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Medicine	Skill
	Skulduggery	Skill
	☯ Deceitful Strike ☙	Technique
	☯ Like a Ghost ☙	Technique
	☯ Silent Elimination ☙	Technique
	☯ The Stillness of Death ☙	Technique

ESTEEMED NEGOTIATOR

When the Great Clans of Rokugan stand at the precipice of conflict, they often call upon renowned mediators. The Deer Clan is well-known for its counselors, but they are hardly the only group that serves this role in the Emerald Empire. Daimyō in need of impartial mediators often turn to the Brotherhood of Shinsei, the Togashi Order, and other organizations known for their great wisdom or unconventional perspective, such as the Asako, Ide, Asahina, and Yogo families. To be called upon as an outside mediator is a great honor, and those who become renowned at defusing mounting conflicts are ever in demand in the Emerald Empire.

Assigned By: A daimyō or other individual of status 50 or higher who requests the character specifically as a mediator for a political problem (and the character's lord assents to this assignment).

Glory Award: +10 (to a minimum of 65)

XP to Completion: 34

Calming Words (Title Ability): Once per scene, as a Scheme and Support action, you may reduce the strife of all characters in the scene by your ranks in Sentiment.

ESTEEMED NEGOTIATOR

	ADVANCE	TYPE
TITLE	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Culture	Skill
	Government	Skill
	Sentiment	Skill
	☯ Rank 1–3 Earth Shūji ☙	Tech. Grp.
	☯ The Ties that Bind ☙	Technique
	☯ Treaty Signing ☙	Technique

SHILDBEARER SHIELD

When a character is inducted into the ranks of the Shieldbearers, the GM can see that they are gifted with a small bronze shield. These have the following profile (Range 0, Damage 2, Deadliness 2, Cumbersome, Durable, Wargear). When a character has a readied small bronze shield, treat their physical resistance as 5. As a Movement and Support action, if a character has a shield readied, they may increase the TN of Attack action checks made targeting them by 1. This persists until the start of their next turn.

KENSHINZEN

The most legendary of living duelists in all of Rokugan, the kenshinzen are an order within the Kakita Duelist tradition who have achieved a rank of mastery over iaidō that few can even conceive, drawing their swords with a fluid speed the swiftest eye can hardly track. These artists of the sword are highly sought-after as yōjimbō, advisors, and generals, and any duelist who faces a kenshinzen lightly is sure to taste defeat.

Assigned By: Two existing kenshinzen, after witnessing the character defeating a kenshinzen in a duel. The character must also have an honor attribute of 65 or higher.

Glory Award: +20 (to a maximum of 75)

XP to Completion: 24

A Single Moment (Title Ability): When you perform an Attack action that uses a sheathed Razor-Edged weapon, you may spend ♣ as follows:

Void ♣♣: Your target cannot defend against the damage from this Attack action unless they spend a Void point.

Any ♣: After you perform this action, you may sheathe the weapon you used.

KENSHINZEN

	ADVANCE	TYPE
TITLE	Martial Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Culture	Skill
	Sentiment	Skill
	♣ Rank 1–5 Close Combat Kata	Tech. Grp.
	♣ Rank 1–5 Void Shūji	Tech. Grp.
	♣ Tea Ceremony	Technique

KYUDEN ASAKO SHILDBEARER

Training in venerable weapons that others might view as archaic, the Shieldbearers of Kyūden Asako are skilled martial artists who maintain a tradition older than the Emerald Empire itself. The Shieldbearers’ unorthodox fighting style makes them difficult for many samurai to engage individually or as a unit, and their ancient tradition has proven its worth each time it has been tested by attacks upon their home.

Occasionally, Shieldbearers are assigned to other lords in the Phoenix Clan and even beyond, for their unique tactics and keen understanding of defensive fighting make them excellent yōjimbō and unusual but effective unit leaders.

Assigned By: The commander of the Kyūden Asako Shieldbearers when the character joins their ranks.

Glory Award: +5 (to a maximum of 55)

XP to Completion: 40

Time-Tested Defense (Title Ability): After an Attack action check targeting you fails, the attacker suffers strife equal to their shortfall.

KYUDEN ASAKO SHILDBEARER

	ADVANCE	TYPE
TITLE	Scholar Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Martial Arts [Melee]	Skill
	Martial Arts [Ranged]	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Tactics	Skill
	♣ Rank 1–3 Kata	Tech. Grp.
	♣ Cleansing Rite	Technique

MASTER ARTISAN

Once in a generation perhaps, a human’s art touches the divine, stirring the world itself with its clarity of purpose. There are numerous fables of Kakita artisans whose final masterworks changed the course of history, and every artist’s tradition claims some number whose works reached these heights, establishing their creators as masters among masters. The Sevenfold Palace is one location that produces some number of Master Artisans, but there are other schools and facilities in Rokugan whose students often lay claim to this title. To take on



the title of Master Artisan is to begin this elusive pursuit—to reach the realization that mastery of an art is not the end of their journey, but the beginning.

Assigned By: Someone of status 75 or higher after the character performs a great artistic feat for them.

Glory Award: +30 (to a maximum of 80)

XP to Completion: 60

Inspired Creations (Title Ability): When crafting an item, you may spend ☼ as follows:

☼ ☼ ☼: The item you create is a singular masterwork. You must give it a name befitting its status. Once per game session when making a check that uses the item, a character may add 1 ■ set to any result of their choice.

MASTER ARTISAN

	ADVANCE	TYPE
TITLE	Artisan Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Courtesy	Skill
	Culture	Skill
	Medicine	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	☼ All Arts Are One	☑ Technique
	☼ Formal Tea Ceremony	☼ Technique

WINTER COURT CHAMPION

Each year at the Winter Court, samurai take the opportunity to prove themselves, participating in numerous challenges, games, and tests. While these events are in many ways backdrop for the bargains and machinations on the grand stage of politics, they are hardly unimportant. Becoming a Winter Court Champion offers a character more than just the accolades of the court for the remainder of the proceedings. It also gives them unparalleled access to the authorities of Rokugan, including the Imperial Court, which is usually sealed away in Otosan Uchi behind high walls of stone and higher walls of bureaucracy. Thus, winning a contest at a Winter Court can be a unique opportunity to advance their clan's agenda—and one's own agenda within the clan!

Assigned By: The Emperor or one of their chosen agents after a character wins one of the major contests at a Winter Court.

Glory Award: +20 (to a maximum of 75)

XP to Completion: 16

Accustomed to Attention (Title Ability): When making a check to boast or get people's attention, you may negate up to 2 ☹ symbols.

WINTER COURT CHAMPION

	ADVANCE	TYPE
TITLE	Artisan Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Social Skills	Skl. Grp.
	☼ Artisan's Appraisal	☑ Technique
	☼ Formal Tea Ceremony	☼ Technique
	☼ Fun and Games	☑ Technique
	☼ Offend the Sensibilities	☑ Technique
	☼ Spiteful Loss	☑ Technique

SEVEN FOLD PALACE ACOLYTE

The Seven Fold Palace serves as a proving ground for skilled artisans of the blade, of armor, and of other arts as well. Apprentices and journeyman artists toil ceaselessly amidst the pristine grounds, each someday hoping to achieve the vaunted rank of Master Artisan. The life of an aspirant is not easy, filled with long hours and harsh judgment for failed works, but the opportunity to learn is also unparalleled in Rokugan. Few succeed in the quest to become a Master Artisan, and yet there is never any shortage of new students willing to hurl themselves into this crucible of learning.

Assigned By: One of the masters of the Seven Fold Palace after the character begins studying there.

Glory Award: +5 (to a maximum of 35)

XP to Completion: 36

First, Forge Yourself (Title Ability): When you make a check to craft an item, you may suffer a number of fatigue up to your ranks in Fitness. If you do, change that many results containing ☹ to ☼ results.

SEVEN FOLD PALACE ACOLYTE

	ADVANCE	TYPE
TITLE	Trade Skills	Skl. Grp.
	Aesthetics	Skill
	Design	Skill
	Fitness	Skill
	Meditation	Skill
	Smithing	Skill
	☼ Artisan's Appraisal	☑ Technique

Spending Opportunity in "Winter Court" Games

The following tables give players and GMs additional options for ✨ expenditures. GMs running Winter Court games or other intrigue-oriented games may use these tables to allow players additional means of spending ✨ in their games, or as inspiration for new options of their devising. The tables may also be useful in any type of

game for intrigue scenes (see page 254 of the core rulebook) such as arguments, romantic circumstances, and investigative challenges. Options are included for negotiation, romance, and espionage.

If an effect calls for a player to do something but the character is an NPC, the GM does so instead.

❄ IN NEGOTIATIONS

Table 3—1: Spending Opportunity in Negotiations details a selection of ways to spend ✨ on checks while

TABLE 3—1: SPENDING OPPORTUNITY IN NEGOTIATIONS

COST	OPPORTUNITY
Air ✨ ✨+	Your careful verbal trap ensnares someone in a position in which they must either give up ground or give you a boon. They must offer you a minor concession unrelated to your current social objective unless they give up 1 momentum point per ✨ ✨ spent this way.
Earth ✨ ✨ ✨	Your uncompromising dedication to your bottom line stalls the conversation. Choose a character in the scene: that character cannot gain momentum points toward any social objective until the end of your next turn.
Fire ✨ ✨	You set someone else on the defense with fast-paced questions and demands. Choose a demand or statement another character in the scene has made. Their player (or the GM, for NPCs) must tell you any hidden motivations behind that demand or statement.
Water ✨ ✨	You break the tension with a well-timed joke or clever comment. You may ask one personal question of a character in the scene with a different social objective. The question must be unrelated to the subject of the negotiations. If the character answers honestly, they gain 1 momentum point toward their current objective and may ask you a personal question in turn. If they do, you gain 1 momentum point toward your current objective.
Void ✨ ✨ ✨	You briefly shake someone's conviction with a deep insight into their character or circumstances, causing them to speak without certainty. Until the end of your next turn, any momentum points they score are added to your current social objective instead of to their own.

TABLE 3—2: SPENDING OPPORTUNITY IN ROMANCE

COST	OPPORTUNITY
Air ✨ ✨	The conversation turns to mutual friends or acquaintances. Name a character you and your intended both know. They must tell you what they think of that character, revealing one of that person's advantages or disadvantages.
Earth ✨ ✨	An offhand comment reveals that you and your intended share some common ground: an odd hobby, a favorite actor, or a core belief. Make three suggestions to your intended's player; they must tell you which one it is. You and your intended may each remove 2 strife.
Fire ✨ ✨	A detail of your appearance catches your intended's interest. Their player must tell you which of your physical attributes they find most captivating. You and your intended each receive 1 strife, and you each reduce the TN of your next Social skill check by 1.
Water ✨ ✨	Your interaction is pleasant enough that your intended, not you, suggests another meeting within the next day or two. They offer you several options for the next time you and they spend personal time together; choose whichever you like the best, and don't be late.
Void ✨ ✨ ✨	Due to circumstances beyond your control—a gust of wind or an earth tremor, perhaps—you and your intended find yourselves unexpectedly aware of one another! Your intended decides what kind of contact it was, from a fateful meeting of the eyes to a brush of your hands against one another as you both reach for a dropped scroll. They also decide how they react, although they will not blame you for anything untoward (after all, it wasn't your fault).



negotiating a major treaty or agreement in which each side has a main objective and possibly secondary objectives. One option is presented for checks of each ring, although at the GM’s discretion, an option may be applied to checks using other rings or used as the basis for a new idea for spending ✨.

checks using other rings or used as the basis for a new idea for spending ✨.

❁ IN ROMANCE

Table 3—2: Spending Opportunity in Romance details a selection of ways to spend ✨ on checks when alone with a possible partner (the “intended”) in a quiet moment or on a romantic rendezvous. One option is presented for checks of each ring, although at the GM’s discretion, an option may be applied to

❁ IN ESPIONAGE

Table 3—3: Spending Opportunity in Espionage details a selection of ways to spend ✨ on checks when attempting to gather information while keeping one’s presence or true identity concealed. One option is presented for checks of each ring, although at the GM’s discretion, an option may be applied to checks using other rings or used as the basis for a new idea for spending ✨.

TABLE 3—3: SPENDING OPPORTUNITY IN ESPIONAGE

COST	OPPORTUNITY
Air ✨+	Your subtlety allows you to step out of sight of people, whether by hiding in a crowd or within convenient terrain. Designate a number of Minion NPCs equal to ✨ spent this way or a single Adversary NPC with vigilance lower than or equal to ✨ spent this way. Those characters lose sight of you (and do not notice your absence unless actively looking for you).
Earth ✨+	You locate an excellent hiding place, either a place where no one questions your cover identity or a concealed location no one checks. While hiding in this location, you reduce the TN of your checks to avoid notice by ✨ spent this way.
Fire ✨ ✨ ✨	A stray motion of yours catches the attention of a person or creature—but unexpectedly, they are sympathetic or helpful to you when they notice you. Who are they, and how do they offer to help? Do they think you are someone you’re not?
Water ✨	You observe a clue or hint that indicates to you that information about your target or goal might also be found elsewhere. The GM reveals another viable avenue for espionage on the same subject, unrelated to your current operation.
Void ✨	Your understanding of stealth clues you in on the possibility that you are not the first spy to pass this way. The GM reveals whether another spy has traversed your location and, if so, what trace they unwittingly left behind.

Tenets of Bushidō: Courtesy

Courtesy is the set of behavioral norms and tools guiding Rokugani social interactions. Courteous behavior, sometimes derided as the least of the tenets, is more accurately the last: a courteous samurai's conduct expresses their adherence to the other six tenets. The samurai who removes their amigasa when they meet a friend walking hatless in the rain demonstrates Compassion for their discomfort. The samurai who states their name, favored weapon, and training lineage before a duel represents with Sincerity the threat they pose. The samurai who covers up for their lord's indiscretions does so out of Duty and Loyalty. The samurai who keeps their word affirms the integrity of their Honor.

Samurai put stock in Courtesy because it signifies their noble virtues, which in turn they see as more important because they govern power. Samurai hold incomparable martial, economic, and social privilege over the other Rokugani castes. Their status—which places deadly power at their command—writes their good or bad behavior large.

DEFINING COURTESY

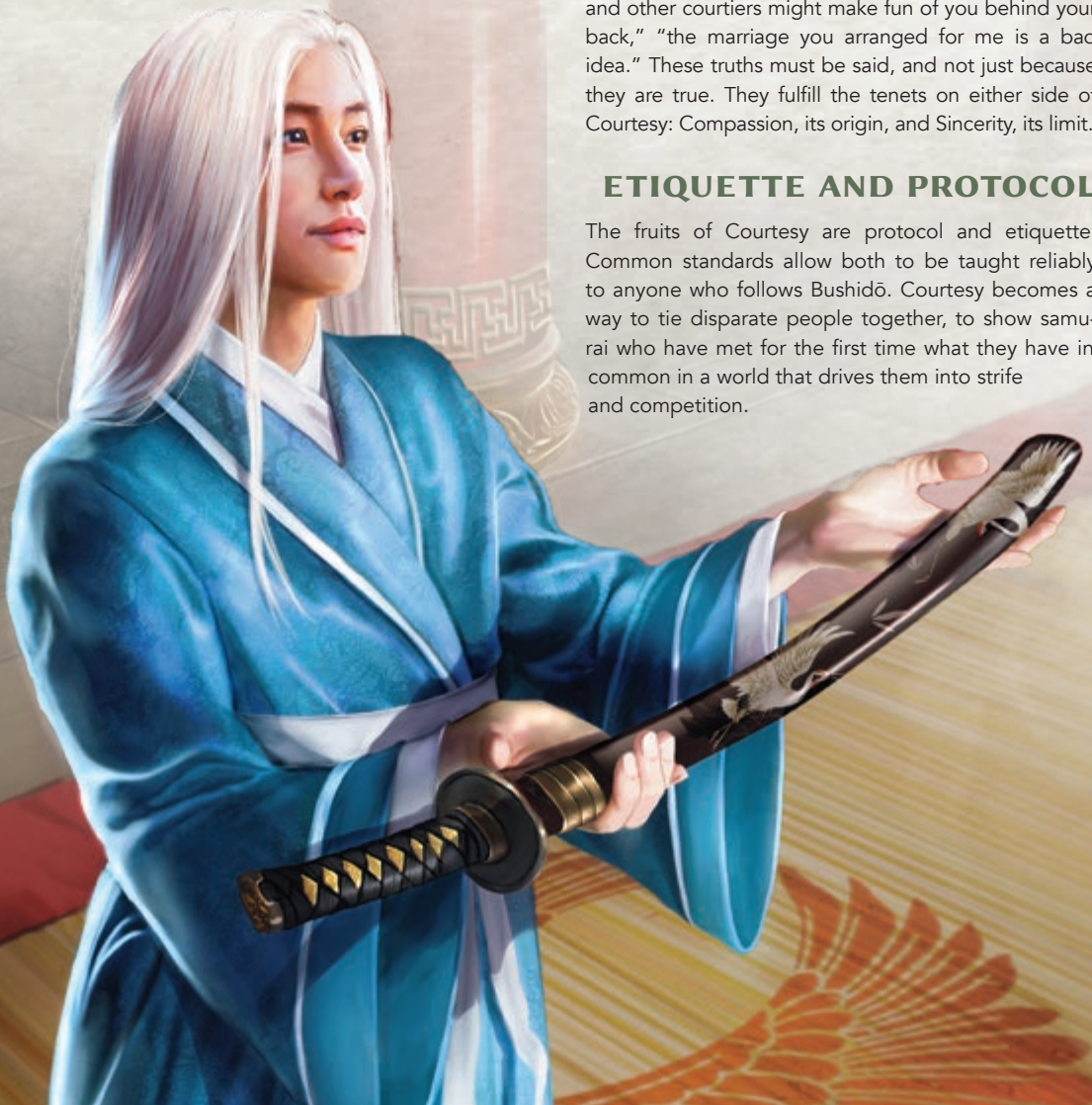
In Rokugani philosophy, Courtesy is derived from Compassion, for Courtesy expresses commitment to others' safety, health, comfort, and happiness. A courteous samurai's behavior says, "I have the power to injure you, but I choose not to. I have social status enough to ignore or be disrespectful to you, but I choose to acknowledge you. I have more wealth than I need, but I choose to share it with you."

On the other hand, Courtesy balances Sincerity. A commitment to truth in one's words and actions is valuable, but it cannot go unchecked. Everyone knows someone who cares more about truth than other people's feelings. Courtesy reminds us that there are many ways to express a truth, and it encourages us to choose the polite way out of care for others. Courtesy also reminds us there is a time and place to speak truth, and a time and place for quiet or consideration.

Sincerity must balance Courtesy in turn. Polite samurai sometimes find etiquette's bounds holding them back from speaking an uncomfortable but necessary truth, such as "you drink too much," "you spoke unfairly to your servant just now," "that hairstyle doesn't work, and other courtiers might make fun of you behind your back," "the marriage you arranged for me is a bad idea." These truths must be said, and not just because they are true. They fulfill the tenets on either side of Courtesy: Compassion, its origin, and Sincerity, its limit.

ETIQUETTE AND PROTOCOL

The fruits of Courtesy are protocol and etiquette. Common standards allow both to be taught reliably to anyone who follows Bushidō. Courtesy becomes a way to tie disparate people together, to show samurai who have met for the first time what they have in common in a world that drives them into strife and competition.



Nevertheless, when the *expression* of virtue eclipses virtue itself, it is possible for Courtesy to be turned toward selfishness and disharmony. Unmoored from Compassion and Sincerity, some Rokugani use Courtesy as defined by etiquette against others. The negative stereotype of the Doji courtier sees the science of protocol, originally a tool to lower barriers and unite strangers, doing the opposite. Subtleties of protocol, inaccessible except to individuals privileged enough to be in the places where policy and fashion are defined, become weapons to use against those to whom they have not spread. These individuals maintain Courtesy's outward form, but invert its purpose. They censure others' unintentional discourtesy, categorizing it as a personal failing.

Most samurai, though, operate somewhere between Courtesy's ideals and its perversions. Their expression of Courtesy becomes an expression of their moral fiber and their understanding of virtue and ethics. They struggle to adhere to Courtesy even as they suffer the temptation to use it as a weapon against those who are vulnerable.

BREACHES OF ETIQUETTE

An old Crane saying, rarely shared outside the clan, describes etiquette and discourtesy as the edge and point of the same curved sword. While it is generally more appropriate to employ politeness, targeted disregard of Courtesy can be even more effective, as they are unexpected and thus often deeply memorable.

GOSSIP AND RUMOR

A courtier who wants to rise in their peers' estimation must ensure that they are noticed and talked about, and a calculated public breach of etiquette can be a powerful statement. Suppose, for example, that one appears at a social function with their belt hastily tied, garments askew, and face flushed. Others may take this to mean the person does not understand how to dress for high society. However, if they have previously appeared in this company dressed perfectly, people may begin to wonder, "why the change?" A likely conclusion for them to draw is that the person arrived fresh from a clandestine assignation. They may well develop a reputation for being passionate, dangerous, and sexy—a good way to get the attention of similar individuals.

EMOTIONAL OUTBURSTS

An emotional outburst about a topic that resonates with others around oneself is a risky but effective way to sacrifice some amount of reputation to achieve a goal. For example, suppose a courtier's lands are being attacked by bandits, and they must enlist the aid

of a neighboring lord. The lord doesn't wish to invest money or lives in the conflict, so the courtier allows themselves to silently cry in the midst of the lord's court. When asked what is the matter, they explain that they were simply overwhelmed with concern for their people's lives. Now, the lord's refusal to help looks heartless, and while the courtier may be censured by their peers, the results may be worth it.

TRIFLING BREACHES AND SMALL SACRIFICES

In the *Legend of the Five Rings* core rulebook, there are guidelines for gaining honor for virtuous deeds, as well as guidelines for forfeiting honor in order to act disgracefully. However, minor acts can affect one's honor as well. A samurai ideally adheres to Bushidō in all aspects of their life, and many small positive or negative demonstrations eventually add up.

What follows are optional additions to **TABLE 7-1: HONOR AND GLORY FORFEITS/AWARDS** on page 300 of the core rulebook and to the examples related to Courtesy on pages 302 of the core rulebook.

TRIFLING BREACHES

When a character wishes to commit a breach of Courtesy that is judged to be less serious than a minor breach, they must first forfeit 1 honor.

Examples of trifling breaches of Courtesy:

- ✱ Cursing or using disrespectful language in the presence of someone of higher status.
- ✱ Publicly and explicitly discussing your finances or mercantile pursuits.
- ✱ Forgetting the specifics of a minor societal ritual in the presence of someone of higher status (turning your teacup the wrong direction or using an improper form of address).

SMALL SACRIFICES

When a character makes a sacrifice in the name of Courtesy, but it is judged to be less significant than a minor sacrifice, they are awarded 1 honor.

Examples of small sacrifices of Courtesy:

- ✱ Paying an honest compliment to an enemy during battle.
- ✱ Letting a serious insult (one that requires you to forfeit 1 or more glory to ignore) to your person pass.

UNMASKING FOR EFFECT

At the GM's discretion, a character who unmasks in such a manner can ignore one of their disadvantages while making their next check afterward, or perhaps even treat the TN of their next check as lower to account for the sympathy they have bought with their forfeit glory.

Bonds

The relationships between people are a vital part of stories that revolve around character drama, and *Legend of the Five Rings* relies heavily on related motifs. By default, relationships are reflected purely through roleplaying, and the Game of Twenty Questions introduces several relationships as well.

GMs who want to further enable mechanical incentives for this sort of character-oriented drama can do so by including these rules for bonds in their campaigns. Bonds can be recorded in the **Relationships** section of the character sheet, alongside a character's less mechanically detailed relationships. Bonds are especially good for intrigue-oriented campaigns in which who a character knows can be as important as their skills and abilities, or for giving players a specific means to shape their characters' personal stories that touch upon other people in the world.

Bonds are a new way to spend experience points, reflecting the deepening of the connection between two people as they invest energy and emotion in one another. This is commonly done by spending time together, but it can also happen via letter writing, or even during times of separation, as long as the two are deeply connected. Bonds can take many forms. Friends can obviously have bonds, and so can lovers, family, and colleagues. However, rivals and even enemies can also have bonds that define their relationships; many samurai stories are driven by a character's desire to vanquish a specific foe, or to surpass a fellow warrior whose strength inspires them to obsession.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD BOND?

Notably, bonds are more than just close relationships: they are close relationships that are important to the story the GM and players want to tell, and they are by their nature dynamic. A bond is a relationship that can change and grow. A character might have a very close relationship with someone, but if that relationship is not going to be focal to the character's narrative arc in some way or if the player doesn't think it could really develop significantly, it shouldn't be represented mechanically with a bond.

Importantly, bonds do not vanish if the person with whom a character shares a bond leaves or even perishes. The relationship will always be a part of the character who was in it, and the lessons they learned and strength they gained from that connection are permanent. A character can even continue to advance a relationship with a dead person, provided they can still learn more about them, or come to better understand

the time the two once spent together. In Rokugan, reincarnation or spiritual echoes might even lead the two characters to cross paths again, in this life or the next.

Bonds between PCs function mechanically, but they are not generally as useful as bonds between PCs and NPCs. This is because bonds are meant to help the GM and players get more out of the PCs' relationships with the characters who appear less frequently in the story (whereas most of the time, all of the PCs are present in the story, and the players can simply roleplay their relationship at the table). The GM should feel free to set the roleplaying threshold for forming a bond between PCs higher than it is between PCs and NPCs.

Bonds generally exist between two characters, but they can exist between more than two characters at the GM's discretion (rather than having many individual bonds, for example, a close fellowship of companions or a family might have a single bond shared by all members of the group).

FORGING AND ADVANCING A BOND

If the GM has chosen to include bonds in the campaign, a player may request to have their character forge or advance a bond with someone else by spending experience. The GM decides if the bond makes sense, and if they agree, the player may spend experience to form a bond or to advance an existing bond. If two or more PCs are forging or advancing a bond, each PC must individually spend the full amount of XP for the bond at the same time (as they all gain its benefits). Experience spent on bonds does not contribute toward a character's current school curriculum rank or to a title.

CALLING UPON A BOND

A character can call upon a bond to use the unlocked bond abilities. A character can call upon a bond a number of times per session equal to the bond's rank.

TYPES OF BONDS

Different bonds are expressed in different ways, and the connections a character forges vary greatly depending on who shares them.

FAMILY

Family obligation is tremendously important in Rokugan: a samurai is expected to respect their parents and elder family members while offering support and guidance to younger family members. Formal adoption, even in adulthood, is a common practice in many parts of Rokugan, both to secure lines of succession

FREE XP?

This process gives PCs an opportunity to gain a bond at rank 1 with an NPC. As it is assigned outside the normal process, this bond does not cost any XP, nor does it contribute to XP the PC has spent for any purpose. It can be advanced as normal by spending XP.

that might have gaps, and as part of treaties and other agreements. Marriage is another way characters can form the bonds of family. The following are suggested narrative effects for a character with a Family bond:

- ✱ Family generally watch out for your reputation and help with modest favors that promote your well-being (providing you with hospitality, giving you a good character reference, assisting in your training), even if you did not ask for these things. They expect the same from you, and they expect you to uphold the family name.
- ✱ Allies of your close family members are likely to know all about your most notable successes (but they have suspiciously never heard of your less auspicious endeavors), and they are favorably disposed toward you. Enemies of your family view you as an enemy.
- ✱ If your bond rank is 3 or higher, a family member can be expected to also watch out for your personal happiness. They are willing to take more notable risks on your behalf (such as staking significant amounts of honor or glory on your choices, lending you heirlooms, or trusting you to handle important tasks in their name), and they might ask the same from you.

“Strong Roots Grow Deep” (Bond Ability): Once per scene, you may call upon your bond to treat your composure as increased by your bond rank until the end of the scene.

COMRADE

Just as bands of warriors often form friendships on the battlefield, so too do courtiers, priest, and monks find close friends as they go about their daily work. Members of the same army might be comrades, as might members of two different clans who serve in the same court and pursue the same end, such as their sworn lord’s justice, or the preservation of a region. The following are suggested narrative effects for a character with a Comrade bond:

- ✱ A comrade generally watches out for your interests and be willing to do modest favors for you (helping you with a task for a few days, getting you home

without embarrassing yourself after a night of revelry, lying about your whereabouts to your enemies), and they might ask the same from you.

- ✱ Allies of a comrade treat you as an ally, and they are favorably disposed toward you unless you give them reason not to be. They might even do you significant favors, especially if the two of you are working together in a deceased comrade’s memory. Enemies of your comrades tend to steer clear of you, or view you as an enemy.
- ✱ If your bond rank is 3 or higher, a comrade can be expected undertake major tasks in your name (such as staking significant amounts of honor or glory on your choices, risking their life on your behalf, or adopting your dependents should you perish), and they might ask the same from you.

“Just Like Old Times” (Bond Ability): When you perform a check using a skill for which the bonded character has 1 or more skill ranks (or if they are an NPC, for which they have 1 or more ranks in the relevant skill group), you may call upon your bond to negate a number of ☹ results up to your bond rank.

LOVER

Samurai are expected to place romantic love below their obligations to family and clan—but the human heart is not so easily confined. Many samurai who fall in love keep their relationship secret, while others are more overt. The following are suggested narrative effects for a character with a Lover bond:

- ✱ A lover seeks to spend time with you, writes letters to you, and is willing to assist you in ways that do not require publicly acknowledging your bond (giving you information key to pursuing a desired goal, encouraging you to pursue your personal interests, helping you to deal with emotions you usually must keep to yourself), and they expect you to do the same.



EVOLVING BONDS

Bonds can change over time. If the nature of two characters' relationship changes, such as if a pair of rivals work together for so long that they come to consider each other comrades or if a family member's shocking betrayal turns them into a nemesis, the GM and player can work together to change the nature of the bond. The ranks in the bond remain, but its type changes to the new type.

- ⊗ Generally, your lover's allies do not acknowledge your relationship. Some might be favorably disposed to you covertly if you make their ally happy (and unfavorably disposed if you make them unhappy), while others might be jealous of the attention you receive. Your lover's enemies might target you to attempt to gain leverage over your lover.
- ⊗ If your bond rank is 3 or higher, a lover is more overt about your relationship, allowing them to assist you more publicly (such as giving you letters of introduction to officials above your status, allowing you to use their name to pursue your goals, and even helping you directly), and they expect the same from you.

"With You, the Storm Subsides" (Bond Ability): At the end of a scene involving your lover or reminders of them, you may call upon your bond to remove additional strife equal to your bond rank.

RIVAL

Not all deep and interesting relationships are completely amicable or totally hostile: such is the case with rivalry. A courtier might find the duplicitous methods of a fellow member of a court repugnant, but agree that both serve their lord well. Rivals are characters who might often come into conflict, but do not hate and may even respect each other. The following are suggested narrative effects for a character with a Rival bond:

- ⊗ A rival generally seeks to oppose you when the opportunity presents itself and is unfavorably disposed toward you. However, their enmity toward you lends gravity to your position, and it makes those outside of your conflict more convinced of your importance.
- ⊗ Allies of your rival treat you with grudging respect and suspicion. Your rival's enemies might seek your aid in when they face your rival, or might offer you aid in doing so (such as advice for defeating your rival, quiet political backing, or medical attention after fighting the rival).
- ⊗ If your bond rank is 3 or higher, your rival views themselves as your true foe, and they look dimly upon anyone else who acts against you. They can be relied upon to attempt to keep other people from harming you (so that they can defeat you on their own terms someday).

"I Will Surpass You!" (Bond Ability): While making a check, you may call upon your bond. Receive strife equal to your bond rank; you may reroll up to that many dice.

NEMESIS

Samurai are supposed to be above personal grudges, serving only their lord's will—a demand few can meet. A nemesis epitomizes the failure of this ideal more than an enemy or a threat; they are a personal foe, whose ends must be thwarted at every turn. The following are suggested narrative effects for a character with a Nemesis bond:

- ⊗ A nemesis tries to undermine your actions, sabotage your works, and destroy you at every turn. If your nemesis is the cunning sort, they might be willing to bide their time, patiently sowing the seeds of your destruction in the weeks, months, or years to come. If your nemesis is more direct, they might oppose you with brute force whenever the opportunity presents itself. Not all nemesis bonds must result in death; forcing a hated political enemy to retire to monastic life, or disproving an intellectual opponent's unifying theory of the cosmos might be enough for some. However, in many cases, the bond can only be resolved by death.
- ⊗ Allies of your nemesis treat you as an enemy. Enemies of your nemesis are likely to assist you as best they can (such as by saving your life after you are grievously wounded in battle with your nemesis, by explaining your nemesis's dark secrets and hidden vulnerabilities to you, and by lying about your whereabouts to your nemesis), or they may try to use your mutual foe to persuade you to assist them in their causes.
- ⊗ If your bond rank is 3 or higher, allies of your nemesis steer clear of you or spare you even if given the chance to vanquish you, as your nemesis has laid claim to your destruction. Additionally, your nemesis feels a greater need to not just beat you, but completely crush you, whether this takes the form of mocking hints left behind after they act against you, grandiose speeches while you are at their mercy that give you a chance to catch your breath, or eliminating others who threatens you.

"They Were Responsible!" (Bond Ability): You may call upon your bond to determine if your nemesis was involved in a new situation you encounter, a new challenge you face, or new problem that presents itself. You ask the GM, and they should provide you with a clear answer, along with the clue or signature style you can use to determine their involvement. If the GM confirms that your nemesis was behind it, reduce the TN of your next check to address the problem by your bond rank.

TABLE 3—4: BONDS

BOND RANK	XP COST	ABILITY UNLOCKED
Rank 1	3 XP	Bond Ability (Varies by Bond) In addition to any narrative benefits of your bond, you call upon your relationship with one bonded character in a manner based on the type of bond (see the bond ability for the relevant bond type on page 136).
Rank 2	4 XP	"Like you always say...": You count as having one bonded character's assistance on a check in which the bonded character is skilled.
Rank 3	6 XP	"A familiar presence draws near...": If the bonded character is an NPC, you may play that character instead of your own character for the next scene (or in an establishing flashback or other appropriate scene, if that character is unavailable or deceased). Remember to adhere to that character's <i>giri</i> and <i>ninjō</i> while playing them. Major decisions on the part of that character must be approved by the GM. If the bonded character is a PC, you and that PC's player may immediately play out an establishing flashback scene that occurred between your characters in the past.
Rank 4	8 XP	"You taught me this!": Use one bonded character's ring or skill ranks (or skill group ranks, if they are an NPC) for a check instead of your own.
Rank 5	10 XP	"We are bound by this fate we have made!": Transfer one of your Void points to the bonded character or gain 1 Void point after they spend a Void point.

Assembling a Court in Seven Steps

Stories that center around social intrigue often have a rotating cast of recurring characters. These characters can serve as obstacles, adversaries, or allies depending on the circumstance—and indeed, any given character is likely to appear in each of these roles at different times. A court-oriented campaign needs a solid group of NPCs with a variety of goals, desires, obligations, and interests. Given the subject of this book, the focus is on courts, but the ideas in this section could really apply to any campaign that focuses on social interactions in a single location, whether the inhabitants are courtiers in *Otosan Uchi*, monks in a monastery far from the politics of court, or peasants in a quiet village in the countryside.

Making up a large group of NPCs all at once can look like quite a daunting task, especially for a GM who is new to a setting. Ideally, each of the NPCs should be interesting enough that the players want to engage with them, but also distinct enough to understand and remember between game sessions. However, it's important to keep in mind that just as the GM isn't

solely responsible for fun during each game session, the GM can ask the players to help furnish elements of the setting. This has the added advantage of organically causing the players to know something about the NPCs they are interacting with, which helps them get over that age-old roleplaying hurdle of remembering the NPCs' names and backgrounds.

This section provides one possible framework for putting together a court. Some GMs likely won't need it, and others might find specific parts more helpful than others. As with all GM tools, individuals should pick the parts that work best for their group and not worry about any elements that won't be helpful.

Through this process, the GM first draws up some rough plans (Steps 1–3), then the GM calls upon the players to fill in key details that shape the dynamics between the various people at court (Steps 4–6), and finally the GM puts the finishing touches on the court (Step 7). Each step is labeled as "GM" or "GM and Players." GM steps can be done by the GM alone, while "Players and GM" steps involve everyone. Assembling a court can almost be a game unto itself, and one good option for a prologue or "session zero" of a court-oriented campaign, is for the GM to come to the table having done Steps 1–3, so that the GM and players can do Steps 4–6 together. Then, the GM can do Step 7 as part of their prep for the first session.

STEP 1: SKETCH OUT THE MOVERS (GM)

The first step to assembling a court is to sketch out the movers. Movers are the NPCs who, simply put, tend to move the story forward, and engage the PCs to do so as well. The movers don't need to be the highest status characters at court. Rather, they are the characters whose goals and desires most likely intersect with those of the PCs in ways that create friction, inspiring the PCs to take action to aid or oppose them. The GM should consider the general arc and themes they want for the campaign, and create movers who will enable those aspects of the campaign.

At this point, the GM should aim to create a picture of these people only in broad strokes. A role at court and *ninjō* (a desire, just as a PC would have) are enough for Step 1—even a name isn't needed at this stage. Some example movers at this stage could include:

- ✱ A daimyō who covets the territory of a neighbor
- ✱ A dispossessed heir seeking revenge against the ones who ruined their fortunes
- ✱ A skilled yōjimbō who longs to fight again and feels wasted at court
- ✱ A disfavored courtier who wants to return to their lord's good graces at any cost
- ✱ A low-ranking guard who desires to prove themselves worthy of the love of a noble
- ✱ A visiting scholar who wishes to uncover some mystery others would prefer forgotten
- ✱ A magistrate seeking revenge for their slain comrade

The number of movers can vary based on how complex the court the GM wishes to set up—more movers will make a more complex situation, whereas having fewer movers will make it easier for the PCs to understand the dynamic of the court.

Generally speaking, having three to four movers is a good target point for Step 1, with the assumption that one or two of them will ultimately end up being less focal to the story—either because the next few steps render them less relevant, or because the PCs take less interest in them as the story progresses. Staying flexible is very helpful to this process, as is embracing that some movers might end up being smaller parts of the story, while others might be thrust into the spotlight.

STEP 2: SEED THE CONFLICTS (GM)

Next, the GM should look to set up fundamental friction among the movers. This is the friction that results from deeply conflicted goals and desires, rather than frustrations that stem from mismatches in personality or preferences. It might not have started yet when the story begins—or it might have been building for years—but the friction should not yet have boiled over, as that will be a key part of the story later. Assign each mover a *giri* (in the same manner as a PC), but instead of simply allowing them to clash with the mover's own *ninjō*, make sure that each *giri* conflicts directly with the *ninjō* of at least one other mover. Some *giri* that can help set the stage in this regard include:

- ✱ Keep the peace in a given region
- ✱ Make sure that a particular individual is kept safe at all costs
- ✱ Keep a certain faction from gaining too much glory
- ✱ Prevent anyone from gaining undue influence over the presiding lord
- ✱ Uphold the social order and propriety at all costs
- ✱ Make sure that nobody snoops into the ruling lord's private affairs
- ✱ Keep public scandal at court to a minimum at any cost

Once each mover has a general position at court, *ninjō*, and *giri*, some ideas probably start to naturally surface about who these people are, and how they will interact in the story. The GM should record these ideas to look back at later, but avoid getting too attached to any specifics just yet! Drawing the players into the dynamics of the NPCs in later steps is a key part of getting them invested in not just their characters' interactions at court, but the ebb and flow of the court itself. Leaving most details intentionally undefined in this step facilitates the players' engagement with the process and eventual court that is assembled.

STEP 3: CREATE SECONDARIES (GM)

Secondaries are NPCs who exist at court, and have desires and duties, but are less likely to directly drive the plot forward, or spur the PCs to action, at least at

the outset. Simply put, they are secondary to the movers and the PCs in terms of their impact. Of course, as this process and the story unfolds, they might become movers themselves, especially if the players take a special interest in a particular secondary. But for now, they have a more passive role.

Secondaries are created much in the same way as movers (a role at court, a ninjō, and a giri), but their ninjō and giri should be somewhat less pressing and less likely to conflict with the others. It's good to have three to five secondaries at this stage.

STEP 4: ASSIGN TRAITS (PLAYERS AND GM)

At this step, it's time to bring in the players. The GM should provide a list of the NPCs they have sketched out so far for court, revealing each one's role (a daimyō, a servant, etc) and giri. The GM shouldn't reveal each character's ninjō, or whether that NPC is a mover or a secondary. This lets the GM obscure many details of the plot that the players should discover for themselves later. Roles and giri should be recorded on the Court Sheet (which can be found on www.FantasyFlightGames.com/legend-of-the-five-rings-roleplaying), or on note cards. Note cards can speed up the process by letting players record choices simultaneously. If the GM wants to use note cards, they should transcribe each NPC's "role" and "giri" onto a card, then add spaces for writing labeled "advantages," "disadvantages," "bonds," "name," and "notes."

Then, the GM should place the sheet on the table, in view of all players. Starting with the player at the GM's right and proceeding counterclockwise, each player should pick one NPC and then assign the NPC an advantage or disadvantage, writing it in the relevant section for that NPC. The GM can also participate as a player at this stage, or they can focus on helping the players with their choices.

Advantages and disadvantages may be taken from the relevant section of this book or the core rulebook, or, with the GM's permission, players can assign the NPCs newly invented advantages and disadvantages (see page 310 of the core rulebook for more on NPC disadvantages). After each player records an advantage or disadvantage, they should also record on their character sheet how their PC has some personal connection to this advantage or disadvantage, and give a brief explanation to the GM of how this is the case. The GM is the final arbiter over whether their reasoning—and the advantage or disadvantage—make sense.

Perhaps the PC fought at the battle where the daimyō famously lost an eye, or perhaps a PC has often

run into a guard at a local tavern where both often carouse to avoid facing their respective miseries. Sometimes, a suggestion might fit better as a note or detail than a full advantage or disadvantage in its own right—in which case, the GM can suggest shifting it and selecting another one. Everyone should feel free to take some time to float story ideas as play proceeds—it might inform later decisions, or help to draw out creative ideas about past incidents or future turns in the story!

Then, repeat the process until all NPCs have 1 advantage and 1 disadvantage. Each NPC cannot be given more than 1 advantage or more than 1 disadvantage at this time. Once a given NPC has 1 advantage and 1 disadvantage, it cannot be selected again (if it is on a note card, you can flip it to show it is unavailable). Players are advised to avoid choosing a card they chose in a previous round if possible.

STEP 5: ASSIGN BONDS (PLAYERS AND GM)

Next, starting from the player's at the GM's left and proceeding clockwise, each player chooses two NPCs and a bond from the list on page 136 that those two NPCs share. Record this bond on each character's card as a rank 1 bond.

Alternately, the player may assign the NPC's bond to their own PC, or offer the bond to another player's PC (though that player gets to choose the type of bond between the NPC and their PC, and is under no obligation to accept the offer if they are not interested in the concept).

Repeat this process until each NPC has been assigned at least one bond, and each player who wants their character to have a bond with an NPC has been assigned one. This is also a good time to discuss how these bonds were formed, and to fill in the NPCs' personal details, which segues nicely into Step 6.

STEP 6: ASSIGN PERSONAL DETAILS (PLAYERS AND GM)

Up to this point, the NPCs haven't needed personal names, genders, family members, personality quirks, or other individual details. They might have arisen organically during Step 4 or Step 5, but if any of these details haven't, consider offering the players the chance to weigh in on them here, especially for PCs who have a bond with one of the NPCs, or if one of the NPCs logically be a given PC's sworn lord. Players are far less likely to forget the name of an NPC if they came up with it!

EDITS!

Writing in pencil is recommended for this step, as there may be alterations during the process. The GM is the final arbiter of all choices, though the GM should endeavor to offer the players as much room to be creative as possible. Similarly, if any player has a suggested alteration, others at the table should hear them out and give their reasoning due consideration.

Overall, GMs and players should strive to be flexible at this stage.

STEP 7: RETOUCH AND FINALIZE (GM)

After Step 6 has been completed, all that remains is assembling profiles and ironing out the final details. During this step, the GM should add 1 advantage or disadvantage the PCs don't know about to each NPC. This ensures that there are still depths to the NPC for the PCs to discover.

Then, the GM should reflect on the characters who have come out of this process. What are the points of friction within this court? Which characters' histories overlap, and how? Whose duties are in sufficient alignment that they may have made alliances—and whose secret desires threaten to disrupt those pacts and throw the court into turmoil? The GM should fill in any information missing from the court sheet (see page 144), adding each mover's current goals and determining which other NPCs or PCs are likely to be seen as an obstacle to those goals.

Finally, the GM should choose an NPC profile for each NPC (or create an NPC profile from whole cloth, if they prefer). Movers should generally be Adversaries while Secondaries may be Adversaries or Minions as needed. If the NPC is based on an existing NPC, such as one of the ones from the core rulebook or this volume, the GM should replace their advantages and disadvantages with the ones chosen during this process and swap their Rings as needed to fit their personality and approach to life. If based on an existing profile,

movers should also generally have a conflict rank equal to the starting party rank in the NPC's sphere of expertise (☁ or ☹); the GM can use templates to adjust profiles up to make them a better match for the PCs (see page 311 of the core rulebook). If the NPC grows more skillful during the course of the story, the GM can of course use further templates to adjust their profile or reflect new techniques and tendencies they have developed. Movers should generally remain a challenge for the PCs, though eventually equaling or surpassing early obstacles is a part of many good stories.

Developing NPC Motivations through Needs

After assembling a court, a GM might want to dig more deeply into the motives of the NPCs, beyond their narrative roles established in the prior process. Sometimes, this isn't necessary, but other times, it can pay dividends to dive deeper into the nuances of these characters. As storytellers, GMs can take inspiration from Abraham Maslow's so-called "hierarchy of needs" (even while acknowledging its limitations as a psychological model) to look at what human beings want and need. Then they can use those to inform an NPC's desires, from the most basic such as food and safety to the loftiest like respect or self-actualization. For the purposes of *L5R*, these needs and aspirations have been translated to take into account Rokugan's fictional culture.

FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS

Fundamentally, a being has physiological needs that must be met: they need food and water, as well as shelter, warmth, and a place to sleep. Jeopardize any of these, and the GM puts the character (and anyone dependent on them, such as a parent's children or a

IN AND OUT OF CHARACTER KNOWLEDGE

Players should consider an NPC's previously assigned advantages and disadvantages when adding new ones. However, keep in mind that their PC only knows the ones they personally added to the card (or that are immediately obvious upon seeing the person, such as exceptional height or a lost arm). Their PCs can discover the others during game sessions (such as by asking fellow PCs or snooping around court), but they aren't aware of them at the start of the game.

daimyō's vassals) in a very desperate spot from the beginning. If the PCs or their lord are in such a situation, it could create a scenario that feels like a survival or shipwreck story. If an antagonist's physiological needs are in danger, their goals are likely short-term in nature, and they might be willing to use means they otherwise would not stoop to.

SECURITY AND SAFETY

Above those fundamental considerations is safety, which is one's security in matters of health, finances, and immediate surroundings. Does the character have any health challenges, or problems with money or the productivity of their lands? Are assassins threatening to take the character's life when their back is turned? (And if so, consider why?) Is an army marching on the castle gates? Remember that in Rokugan, the supernatural is a tangible force, so a character's safety can be threatened by curses, vengeful spirits, or even offended gods and ancestors. This level of needs is the source of some of the most common types of stories in Rokugan: the lord has a problem, and the samurai who serve that lord have to fix it (or at least keep it from spiraling out of control), or a village is threatened by an external force and the samurai must find a solution before disaster strikes.

SOCIAL BELONGING

Above the need for safety is social belonging, which is complicated in Rokugan, but ultimately, almost nobody wants to be an outcast in society, which could ultimately result in exile (thus threatening the prior two types of needs discussed). From the highest echelons to the most oppressed rungs of society, there are

communities that support one another, and losing the support of one's community can quickly jeopardize the previous tiers of needs. The feeling of social belonging comes from familiar and intimate relationships, as well as membership in larger social organizations. Does the character have problems with their siblings, heirs, or extended family? Beyond their spouse, does the character seek companionship with one or more lovers? On a personal level, how welcome is the character among their superiors in the family, clan, or village? How much are they liked by their subordinates (if they have any)—and do they care? Despite their importance, these needs are considered less noble in Rokugan. Samurai are expected to accept their circumstances stoically, and relegate their needs for companionship or camaraderie to a lower position of importance, even if these things are vitally important to human beings. Much of samurai drama revolves around the competing interests of the need for social belonging and what is considered noble or proper in Rokugani society.

DUTY AND DESIRE

From here we deviate from Maslow's hierarchy to account for the particulars of Rokugani society. Instead of esteem, characters in Rokugan are likely to strive for glory, or fame and reputation. These types of needs lend themselves to social intrigues in court, as the goals are as much about changing perception as they are about changing reality. Is the character carrying out their duties effectively, or do they appear to be negligent in one or more areas? Are the character's efforts adequately acknowledged, or are others reaping the renown of their actions and sacrifices? Think also about how the PCs might view their status in the eyes of a given character. Are they likely to seek their support and affirmation, or are they likely to disregard their needs? This has an enormous impact on the way they interact with the character. How might their interest in the character's opinions of them change as more is revealed about this particular NPC? Of course, it's impossible to predict exactly how PCs will act, but thinking about some of the ways they might interact with the character in advance can help you to better understand the character, even if the PCs ultimately do not do what you thought they would (and they generally don't).

ENLIGHTENMENT AND DESTINY

Finally, instead of self-actualization, in Rokugani culture humans are supposed to be concerned with fulfilling their destiny or achieving Enlightenment. To do this, characters are trying to find their place in the Celestial

Order, or to become released from it. Usually, a character's destiny isn't clear even to them, but thanks to the various mystical forces at play in Rokugan, a character may have some inkling as to their true purpose in the Realm of Mortals. For many others, the Tao of Shinsei provides them with the guideposts needed to realize the true nature of the universe and to become one with it. These ascetic directives give characters a whole new path to follow, with some of the strangest and most paradoxical desires of all. "Those desperately searching for that which they need may find it only after they have given up their search," says the Tao of Shinsei.

Goals revolving around destiny lend themselves to epic games, while goals having to do with Enlightenment can inspire heavily thematic campaigns that ask questions about the human condition. Of course, the PCs might not agree with a character's assessment about their own destiny or path to Enlightenment, especially if either involves means that the PCs find reprehensible (or interferes with their own schemes). Whether an NPC has truly discovered a mystical secret or is simply mistaken, is up to you (and is sometimes best left ambiguous, even to the PCs).

- ❖ **Current Opposition:** The person the NPC views as the biggest obstacle to their current goal. This assessment may or may not be correct, and it may change frequently.
- ❖ **Prior Offenses by the PCs:** The ways in which one or more of the PCs have previously given offense to this NPC, along with the details of the offense. While an NPC can pursue an individual PC for an offense at any time, if all four offenses are ever filled by any PCs' actions, the NPC begins to see the last PC or PCs to offend them as their current opposition, and begins to take action to remove them from the court as best they can until the offenses are redressed. Recompense could come through a formal apology, lavish gift, or duel. The GM is the final arbiter of how these are assigned and how they manifest, but causing an NPC to become compromised, chasing them from an Intrigue, or humiliating them in public should certainly all be recorded as offenses, and revenge can vary from political obstruction to a knife in the dark.

The Court Sheet

The Court Sheet is a resource for keeping track of the various powers at play in a court, meant to offer one way of structuring the often complex natures of their relationships. To use this sheet, fill in the vital information in the relevant field. Remember, the Court Sheet can be found at www.FantasyFlightGames.com/legend-of-the-five-rings-roleplaying.

- ❖ **Name:** The NPC's name
- ❖ **Role:** The NPC's role at court.
- ❖ **Mover/Secondary Box:** Whether the NPC is currently a mover (see **Assembling a Court**) or secondary at present. Remember, this can change!
- ❖ **Ninjō:** The NPC's greatest personal desire
- ❖ **Giri:** The NPC's most driving sworn duty
- ❖ **Advantages:** The NPC's advantages
- ❖ **Disadvantages:** The NPC's disadvantages
- ❖ **Bonds:** The NPC's bonds and their ranks
- ❖ **Current Heir (if any):** The current heir to the NPC's position (if their position warrants one)
- ❖ **Current Goal:** The NPC's current goal they are pursuing. This might change quite frequently, based on interference by the PCs.

COURT SHEET

NPC NAME	ROLE	MOVER	SECONDARY
Ninjō	Giri	☐	☐
Advantages	Disadvantages		
Bonds			
Current Heir			
Current Goal			
Current Opposition			
Prior Offense by the PC			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

NPC NAME	ROLE	MOVER	SECONDARY
Ninjō	Giri	☐	☐
Advantages	Disadvantages		
Bonds			
Current Heir			
Current Goal			
Current Opposition			
Prior Offense by the PC			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

NPC NAME	ROLE	MOVER	SECONDARY
Ninjō	Giri	☐	☐
Advantages	Disadvantages		
Bonds			
Current Heir			
Current Goal			
Current Opposition			
Prior Offense by the PC			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

NPC NAME	ROLE	MOVER	SECONDARY
Ninjō	Giri	☐	☐
Advantages	Disadvantages		
Bonds			
Current Heir			
Current Goal			
Current Opposition			
Prior Offense by the PC			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

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