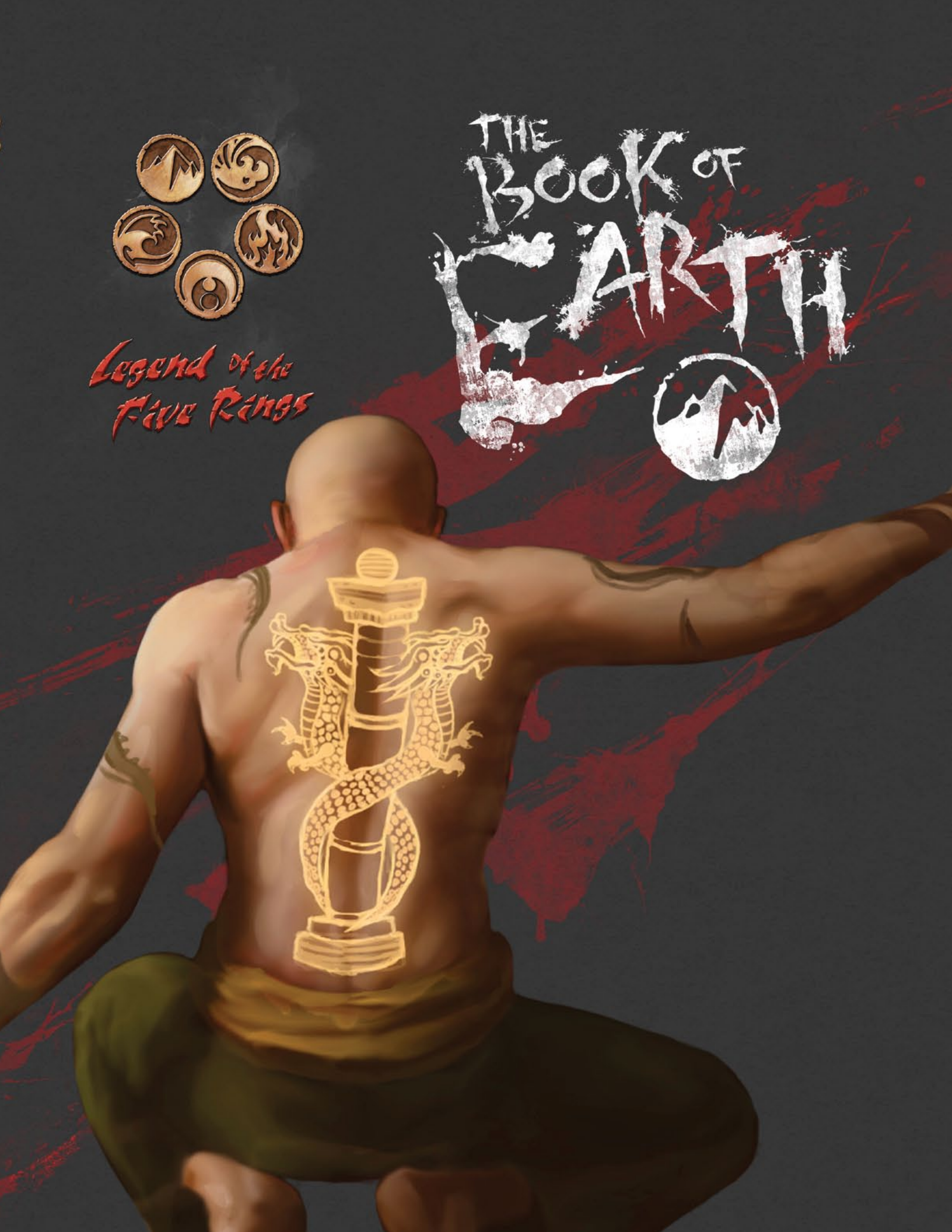
# The Book of Earth

Legend of the Five Rings



## The Book of Earth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SPECIAL THANKS:

*Here at AEG, we believe it's very important that everyone be properly recognized for the work they do. Unfortunately, with such a large number of people working on each of our RPG products, it's inevitable that someone gets left out now and again. We'd like to avoid it, but it happens, and when it does, we like to make it right.*

*Playtesting is one of the most vital aspects of our mechanical design process in L5R 4th Edition, and we greatly appreciate our playtesters. Unfortunately, one man has been inadvertently left off the list since sometime in 3rd Edition.* Daniel Slater, *thanks very much for all your work, and I'm sorry we omitted you for so long.*

Mike Knabush *is one of the authors that helped make our first PDF exclusive book, Strongholds of the Empire, such a success, but he was somehow left off the credits during the first version of the file's release. Sorry, Mike!*

*Finally, during all the hubbub around getting the Book of Air out, we somehow left off one of our writers. What's worse, this guy is one of my Story Team and our new line graphic designer to boot!* Robert Denton, *you're an all-star. Thanks, and we're sorry about that.*

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# Introduction

*Kaiu Ino waited patiently as his student approached. Behind him, incense and fire burned in the old shrine. The cave where he and the shrine waited was wide but not especially tall, which caused a problem for many members of the Crab Clan – like their founder, many of them were men and women of unusually large stature. The novice ducked his head carefully as he made his way toward his master.*

*"Master Ino," the young Kaiu said, kneeling on the uneven stone floor and placing his forehead against it.*

*"Sit up, little hammer," Ino said with a smoky voice. His throat was scarred by decades of inhaling the smoke and heat of his forge. He pulled back a cloth that was covering several items that lay before him.*

*"What do you see?" he asked, waving a hand over the items.*

*"A forging hammer, sensei," the student said quickly. "Two unfinished blades. A wide stone. Tongs. Etching tools."*

*"A 'forging hammer'?" The elder man repeated, and then sighed. "No matter, you will learn. Now," Ino lifted the hammer and slammed it quickly on the ground. The deep sound echoed in the chamber, a dull impact mixed with the higher ring of the metal striking stone. "What do you hear?"*

*"I hear ... I hear the stone and metal, master."*

*Ino slammer the hammer on the floor again... and then against the smooth stone that lay next to it. "What do you hear?"*

*The student considered for a moment, then nodded understanding. "The sound is different against the stone than it is against the floor."*

*Ino nodded and struck the stone again. This time the previous noise was joined by a grinding crack. The young student flinched visibly. "Good," Ino said, nodding his head and smiling. "You hear stone cracking and it worries you." He took his hand off the hammer, leaving it atop the stone. "Now, tell me, how deeply do you think the rock is cracked?"*

*"I couldn't say, sensei. I am sorry."*

*The older Kaiu shrugged and lifted the hammer. Beneath it, the stone was only superficially fractured. "You will learn that as well," he said. With his free hand, he touched his palm to the stone and whispered.*

*When the sensei took his hand away, the stone was mended.*

*Ino's student stared with clear surprise.*

*"You did not know I could do that, did you?" Ino said. "It is true, I have the gifts of a shugenja, and I use them to aid the clan. Like the stone itself, my pupil, I am full of depths and hidden things. Things those who only peer at the surface will never know. Those who do not understand how to listen when stone talks think it has nothing to say. They are fools."*

*His smile broadened. "But you will not be."*

Welcome to **The Book of Earth**, the second in the Elemental series, a set of five sourcebooks for the Legend of the Five Rings Role-Playing Game, 4th Edition! This series of books explores the Emerald Empire of Rokugan through the perspective of the five Elements which the Rokugani believe make up all of reality: Air, Earth, Fire, Water, and Void. Each book will add new depth to the world of Rokugan and new mechanical options for your L5R 4th Edition campaign.

# What Is This Book?

This book, like its predecessor the *Book of Air*, views the Empire through the prism of a specific Element – in this case, the Element of Earth, examining how it influences everything from fighting styles to social interaction to magic and mysticism.

The chapters in this sourcebook comprise the following:

### Chapter One: Stone and Blood

This chapter deals with the elements of war and combat that are associated with Earth and the principles and themes of Earth – defense, protection, brute power, and physical resilience. This includes a discussion of Heavy Weapons and the various martial traditions associated with them, an extensive examination of armor and the traditions and crafts associated with it, and the nature and history of castles and sieges in Rokugani warfare. There is also an examination of *sumai* wrestling, the martial art most closely associated with Earth.

### Chapter Two: Stone and Power

Rokugani magic is intimately connected to the Elements and their divergent nature. This chapter discusses those groups of shugenja in Rokugan who pay special attention to the Element of Earth, and also includes an extensive review of the use and value of the major Earth spells. There is also a detailed discussion of the Earth kami themselves, their nature and behavior, and their interactions with the other Elements. Finally, the chapter contains an extensive discussion of the struggle against the Shadowlands, an effort in which the power and purity of Earth figures heavily.

### Chapter Three: Stone and Peace

The world of court and politics is not generally known to be a place of Earth, but a few courtly and artistic traditions do draw on the Element for inspiration. This chapter discusses the Earth-based courtly methods of the Crab, the Mantis, and the Otomo, among others. It also offers detailed descriptions of three prominent castles in the Empire whose courts are Earth-dominated.

### Chapter Four: Stone Within

This chapter examines those orders of the Brotherhood of Shinsei whose teachings and methods are oriented toward the Element of Earth. This includes some lesser-known monastic orders not previously depicted in the L5R 4th Edition RPG, and concludes with a discussion of the common usages of the major Earth Kiho.

### Chapter Five: The World of Earth

This chapter deals with a host of different aspects of Earth in the lives of the Rokugani, both mundane and supernatural. Topics include the major mountain ranges of Rokugan, natural disasters associated with Earth, Earth-oriented arts and crafts such as farming and sculpture, and natural and otherworldly beings connected to this Element.

### Chapter Six: The Lair

The final chapter in this book offers a complete campaign setting, an isolated community hiding from the rest of the Empire, themed around Earth's themes of defense, endurance, and fortification. Although the Lair is built around a specific Minor Clan and location in Rokugan, it is a "semi-generic" setting and can easily be relocated to another part of the Empire or another era in Rokugan's history, allowing the GM to adapt it for use in any L5R campaign.

### Appendix: New Mechanics

The Appendix includes a variety of new mechanics based on the preceding six chapters, including many new Paths, two new Monk Orders, an array of new Earth spells and Earth Kiho, and stats for several new Earth-oriented creatures.

# Skills of Earth

Few Skills are reliant on Stamina and Willpower, as neither of these Traits represent aptitude or skill very well. However, the Earth Traits can be useful when applying Skills in a manner where talent is not as important as pure stubbornness or staying power. In certain situations, some skills may be better paired with one of these two Traits, as suggested below.

**Animal Handling (Willpower):** The typical way to train animals is a mixture of empathy and discipline. The trainer learns how to handle particularly difficult subjects by understanding their behavior and shifting their training appropriately, but he must also stick to a regimen that will instill certain behaviors in the animal. In some cases, however, empathy is less important than sheer iron will, especially when dealing with animals that are notorious for sensing fear and reacting to it.

At the GM's discretion, certain animals such as bears, or pack animals like dogs and wolves, can be trained at a lower TN if the trainer wishes to use the Willpower Trait instead of the Awareness Trait. This method of training puts much less emphasis on establishing a friendly and loyal bond between the animal and trainer and instead instills a sense of dominance over the beast. The trained animal will not be much for playtime or displays of affection, but will be unquestioningly loyal to its master, much like a dutiful samurai should be. This method does not work on all such animals, and those who have strong affection for animals (such as members of the Kitsune or Shinjo families) see it as bordering on cruelty.

**Athletics (Stamina):** While many actions governed by Athletics are tests of coordination or raw might, sometimes it is important to simply endure in the task at hand. Climbing, running, and swimming use Strength to show how well the character can ascend a wall, how fast they can run, or how quickly they can swim... but not how long they can do it. If the GM wishes to show whether a character can persist in such activities over a long period of time or against severe obstacles, he can have the character substitute Stamina for Strength. A climber might make an Athletics / Stamina roll to keep still on a rock face for a long time without losing his grip, for instance. Or, a swimmer might be attempting to tread water, or a runner might slow his pace in order to run longer.

While a character's raw Stamina may indicate how long he can effectively perform these activities (without a roll), there are some situations where the primary concern is always sheer endurance and not form. For instance, an army conducting an all-night forced march might require its soldiers to roll Athletics / Stamina not to fall out of the ranks from exhaustion.

**Craft (Stamina) or Artisan (Stamina):** Crafters and artists of all walks of life tend to have one thing in common: they are often devoted to their art in a way that mirrors obsession. Even farmers and fishermen can become lost in their work, toiling away an entire day without stopping, knowing that day's crop or catch is unusually good and as much time as possible must be spent on it. Those who craft material goods or create artwork are if anything even more likely to fall into this pattern of behavior, sometimes forgetting to sleep or eat in order to finish their work.

If a character using a Craft Skill or an Artisan Skill has been at his work for an unusual amount of time, the GM can call for that character to make a [Skill] / Stamina roll to continue without causing harm to the final result. Fatigued shipbuilders can lose their focus and create unsafe boat frames, smiths can let their hand slip and damage the metal they work with, an artist can make a bad brush-stroke and ruin a painting, and so on. The GM should keep the TN of the roll a secret, possibly allowing the character to believe nothing went wrong, though in truth he simply failed to notice the mistake. Large failures, of course, should be noticed immediately... but may not be repairable.

**Etiquette (Willpower):** In the regimented hierarchy of Rokugan's social system, dealing with protocol and endless minor social rituals can become an exhausting and frustrating task. Canny courtiers attempting to embarrass their rivals do not wait for their foe to make a mistake – they attempt to foster a situation for that mistake to happen. One of the most common ways to do this does not involve outsmarting someone but instead wearing on their patience and resolve, eventually driving them to an outburst or some other angry misstep in their behavior.

When a character is attempting to use Etiquette to avoid being manipulated in this way, the GM may allow the character to roll Etiquette / Willpower instead of Etiquette / Awareness. This represents the character exerting self-control, not necessarily conducting himself with extraordinary grace but instead merely not rising to someone else's taunts or jibes. This tactic is usually best reserved for characters with low Awareness but passable Etiquette Skill ranks. While such characters might find it hard to conduct themselves correctly in all social settings, they at least have the mental resolve not to be baited into intemperate behavior.

**Intimidation (Willpower):** In the Empire, even the brutish art of intimidation is somewhat artful and subtle, as indicated by the predominant use of the Awareness Trait. It is one thing to out-and-out state that you're going to destroy someone's reputation, but engendering **real** fear about when and how it might happen is something else. Rokugan is a place where even such low behavior is not done in blatant and coarse ways. A Scorpion merely stating, "I am going to make you suffer," is not as threatening as if he suggests he knows exactly **how** to cause the most suffering... and is easily able to do so.

The Yoritomo school of politics relies heavily on another tactic entirely – browbeating and verbal abuse that holds some of these components, but is much more direct and impolite. While only the Mantis have truly mastered this art, the GM may allow characters to use their Willpower Trait when making Intimidation checks in any situation where it seems like a better fit than Awareness. Some enemies cannot be subtly cowed, either because they are uncaring about veiled threats or are merely too stupid to understand them. In these cases, a character can attempt to be domineering and authoritative in an attempt to assert control of the situation.

**Perform (Stamina):** Much like craftsmen and artisans, performers can become engrossed in their art or engaged in such a way that physical endurance becomes a serious factor. Unlike them, however, performers can intentionally take on performances that directly tax them physically as part of their art. In some of the more dazzling Scorpion kabuki plays, an actor can find himself wearing enough layers of makeup and costume that a certain amount of stamina is needed to simply get through the show. Dancing can involve holding difficult, draining poses, and certain songs played on a string instrument might call for sustained playing that is impossible to those with limited endurance or bad constitution.

More simply, Stamina simply plays a part in how long a performer can maintain the performance. A player or GM may use Stamina in place of the usual Trait for the Perform Skill in situations like these. Depending on the task at hand, failure could indicate any number of things. An orator who has been talking too long simply finds himself unable to keep using his strained voice, a dancer's weary limbs may falter, or a drummer may finally find the strength of his arms failing. It is best to keep in mind that Rokugani society is accepting of those who know their limits and quit while they are ahead, but very unforgiving of those who attempt the difficult and fail, regardless of how high the goal was.

**Stealth (Stamina):** As any Hiruma or Daidoji scout will attest (and any Shosuro ninja will silently agree), stalking and remaining unseen is not simply a matter of light feet and quick reflexes. Stealth is a game of patience more often than not, learning to pick the right moments to move and learning how to remain perfectly still until that time. A trained scout may spend hours in their same position, observing an enemy or holding still until the time is right to continue on. Clever sensei train their silent students not just how to move, but how to follow the deceptively difficult art of stillness.

With minimal movement, joints begin to ache, annoying itches start to become maddening, and muscles try to cramp and lock in place. While there are arts to alleviate the impact of these factors, eventually it comes down to plain physical endurance. When a character is attempting to stay perfectly still for an hour or more, or is attempting to resist the effects of fatigue on his stealthy arts, the GM can have the character use Stamina for the Stealth roll instead of another Trait. Failure can indicate the character has finally allowed sleep deprivation to get the better of him, or the aches in his body were simply too great to ignore and he has moved in a way that could get him noticed.

## Earth & Advantages/ Disadvantages

Since the Elements compose all things, a strength or weakness in a certain Element can make a serious impact in someone's life. The Element of Earth is no exception to this, though the boons and curses associated with it usually manifest themselves physically. Earth not only governs someone's endurance and will, but also the wholeness of their body. Certain Advantages and Disadvantages reflect unusual levels of Earth (good or bad) in a character.

# Advantages

**Bland:** While notoriety and fame can be advantageous in a society concerned with status, sometimes being able to remain unnoticed can be useful.

Many features of the natural world are difficult to tell apart from others. After all, only the most gifted scholars in the subject can tell one field, forest, or hill from another. This Advantage indicates the character's Earth has formed in a similar fashion. You have few (if any) truly defining physical characteristics. An average-sized nose, unremarkable hair, shoulders that are neither broad nor narrow, and so on. Indeed, your looks are so average others will compare themselves to you as the baseline of what a "normal" person looks like.

**Crab Hands:** All weapons contain a high amount of Earth, though this is often tempered by other Elements depending on the weapon. Characters with this Advantage have their Earth attuned in a way that resonates well with the same Element in weapons. Because of this connection, the Earth spirits in even normal, un-awakened weapons work to assist you on some small level. Characters with this Advantage are more likely to treat weapons as if they were sentient creatures, naming them, speaking to them, or simply feeling as if they were not alone while armed.

Due to the nature of this bond, weapons and items with awakened Earth spirits will be extremely fond of the character. If the item is intelligent or animated in some way, it will function better in the character's hands. The GM may choose whether or not this grants any further mechanical bonuses, regardless, the character's affinity with the weapon will be immediately obvious to anyone with insight or training in the Elements.

**Hands of Stone:** Either through training or birth, the character's Earth has manifested in such a way that his hands are tougher and more dense than the average. Not only that, but this also makes it easier for him to disrupt the Earth in other things – Earth, after all, is the Element that gives living creatures their stability and form. While this is not exactly a magical effect, the character might unconsciously be able to perceive the weaknesses in the Earth spirits holding something (or someone) together and strike there. It is also possible his Earth simply overpowers the Earth in his target.

Those who have this Advantage tend to eschew armed combat, and not merely due to their improved aptitude for hand-to-hand fighting. When holding a weapon the character feels somehow blunted and out of touch with his own Earth, which can be unnerving.

**Large:** The most obvious display of a heightened Earth in someone is the Large Advantage. The character simply has more Earth than most, and not in a way that necessarily makes him awkward or slow. Large characters are often compared to animals or natural phenomena like bears, mountains, towering trees, and other things that show strength in the Earth element. It's important to note that this Advantage indicates you simply have more Earth than most, not stronger ties to that element.

It's worth noting that Large characters tend to favor large weapons, not only to take advantage of their stature but also for reasons similar to characters with Crab Hands – their greater Earth creates a minor bond to weapons with similarly large amounts of the Element. This harmony may also translate into being more comfortable in environments like mountains, caves, and stone structures.

**Silent:** This Advantage is similar to having a lack of Earth, but is not really the same. Rather, the character's Earth is simply "lighter" in both the physical and spiritual sense. Consequently, the character is no less robust than anyone else, but is lighter on his feet and seems to have less of a presence in the room unless they call attention to themselves.

Because of the nature this Advantage, the GM may rule the character interacts with certain magical effects in a slightly different way. Spells and effects that key off of the character's Earth (either by using it or attacking it) might be slightly lessened – though if this produces a mechanical benefit the GM should probably increase the point cost of the Advantage. Regardless, a shugenja casting a spell like Earth's Touch on the character will notice that his Earth is unusual.

**Strength of the Earth:** Perhaps the most obviously Earth-aligned Advantage, Strength of the Earth represents many of the essential qualities of the Element: toughness, resilience, and willpower. The character's ability to keep performing even when wounded badly is partially through force of will and partly due to the character's superior Earth simply overpowering the body's usual response to pain.

It's important to note that this Advantage is different than being able to take more damage. The character just has a significantly higher tolerance for pain, and likely won't even notice small injuries like scrapes or pinpricks. Arrogant samurai with this Advantage sometimes show off their gifts with tricks like putting out torches with their bare hands.

## Disadvantages

**Bad Health:** Something about this character's Earth is malformed so badly that they are more physically fragile than most. Others may believe the character has been cursed by the wrath of Jurojin, the Fortune of Longevity. Whatever the case, injuries seem to affect the character more and sickness has an easier time taking hold in his body. His Elemental Earth is simply weaker than in others, and it shows often.

This Disadvantage should not be confused for the effects of Low Pain Threshold. The character is not unusually sensitive to damage, and may actually be more stubborn about showing pain due to his fragile health. He simply has less physical tolerance for the damage itself – a wound might bleed more profusely, joints are more easily injured, bruises form readily and heal slowly, and so on. Characters with Bad Health may find themselves shunned for their weakness, or alternatively they may win respect for overcoming their deficiency.

**Disturbing Countenance:** Unlike many other physical Disadvantages, this one causes no direct handicap for the character. His body functions exactly as it should. Instead, the character's Earth has simply formed in a way that is seen as... unpleasant. The specific manner in which the character is disturbing can vary widely – unnaturally small or large facial features, a smile that is like a dead man's rictus grin, eyes that seem to hold no life or emotion, or something else that is "off." It may be noted that these things are usually small and subtle, not wildly offensive or disgusting. It is also possible that there is nothing obviously wrong with the character; some people are just unnerving or disturbing in a way that can't be described in words. In such cases the subtle misalignment of the character's Earth is perceived on a unconscious level.

While this Disadvantage certainly does not mean the character is evil or morally corrupt, many who suffer negative social reactions for so long become withdrawn, antisocial... and sometimes vengeful.

**Low Pain Threshold:** One aspect of a mortal's Earth is his ability not just to withstand damage but to cope with the results of it. Earth is the Element of endurance and absorption, and some men and women simply don't have the strength of Earth to handle pain and punishment on any level. Something about their Earth is lacking, making the lightest blows feel amplified and even tortuous. This does not mean the character is more physically fragile than others, simply that he cannot cope with the stress and misery of pain as well as others. This may be manifested either physically (the pain is intensified) or mentally (a lack of discipline and willpower). Of course, the inability to bear pain is considered a major shortcoming in the eyes of all samurai. While it is expected that a poet will be less hardy than a bushi, nonetheless all samurai should be able to face pain with courage and handle it without complaint.

This Disadvantage does not necessarily indicate others can see that the character is unable to handle pain, but it is a distinct possibility. Samurai will not be overly judgmental toward someone who is obviously suffering and can't focus properly, but those who cry out in pain or complain about it will draw censure.

**Missing Limb (Birth Defect):** In a society that revolves around what is proper and correct, being born without the correct number of fingers, toes, or even entire limbs can be seen as a sign of disfavor from the Fortunes. Stories will always follow the character about what he may have done in a past life or what blasphemy his parents committed to bring such a curse down on their child. Whatever the cause, the character's Earth is not simply malformed; it is stunted in growth, unfinished. Those born without a limb are not merely physically incomplete, but spiritually as well.

Obviously a missing limb can cause a great many problems for any samurai character, bushi or otherwise. Warriors who lack appendages will obviously have issues in combat, but physical bearing and appearance can be just as important to politicians and ambassadors. Shugenja and monks, on the other hand, can somewhat mitigate the social impact of such conditions, since many folk are used to the idea of holy men and women being ravaged by supernatural forces.

Permanent Wound: A permanent wound indicates the character's Earth has become incomplete in some way. There are many mundane ways for this to happen – after all, a mortal's Earth is strongly tied to his physical form, so a severe enough wound can cause damage directly to the balance of Elements in his body. The wound itself does not mend correctly because the character's Elemental Earth has been deformed by the damage.

GMs who wish to add more depth to their game may wish to detail the specific nature of a Permanent Wound. A broken bone that does not set correctly, for example, would cause the character to walk with a limp or constantly hold his arm awkwardly. A flesh wound which never heals properly might be disturbing to look at, or be a source of infection and illness. A large knotted scar on a sword arm can draw looks of disgust or respect depending on the audience, but a visibly "unclean" wound (one that looks malformed, discolored, or unhealed) will be seen as disgusting.

Small: A small character has his Earth stunted in a way similar to a character who was born with a missing limb, but with the deficiency spread out through the body. This is one of the few Earth-related Disadvantages that has no major social or spiritual stigma attached to it. While certain families and clans may look down on samurai of smaller stature, there is no general hostility to them.

Small samurai, especially bushi, often attempt to offset their diminished stature through increased physical strength. While a powerful Water can help overcome some of the effects of this Disadvantage, ultimately the character does not have a large enough frame to direct it properly.

## The Full Defense Stance

The Stance of Earth is one of the most limited of the five combat stances. In some ways it typifies a style of combat different from all others associated with the element of Earth. It does not display the raging qualities of the earthquake or the volcano. It does not roar with the righteous purity of perfected Jade. Rather, the Stance of Earth simply stands, immobile and impenetrable like a mountain, holding back the blows of the enemy.

The Stance's main benefit is obvious: it makes it far harder for a warrior to be hit, far more so than the Stance of Air. Moreover, the Stance becomes more powerful as the samurai's defensive training improves. At first glance, however, the Stance may seem somewhat futile unless one's only concern is not being struck; some warriors might even see it as cowardly. Losing the ability to maneuver, strike the enemy, or even draw a weapon seems to be unwise unless one lacks the ability to fight for oneself. Thus, many samurai consider the Stance of Earth to be a tool for those being protected, those who lack the ability to influence the flow of combat.

However, in the hands of a yojimbo (especially a Shiba bushi or a highly trained Daidoji) the Stance of Earth becomes something entirely different. Because they are capable of guarding their charge even while in the Stance of Earth, the Shiba are almost uniquely positioned among the Great Clan schools to make use of the stance in ways nobody else can. Even Daidoji methodologies require more mobility in order to perform their feats of defense, though if a Daidoji reaches proper mastery of the necessary skills he can also be extremely effective while in the Stance of Earth.

The yojimbo is the principle figure who will make use of this stance with regularity. Of course, a yojimbo is expected to master more skills and techniques than merely the pure defensive; without a well-rounded set of skills, the lack of mobility inherent to the Stance of Earth will negate the capacity to protect their charges to the fullest extent. Many yojimbo with advanced skills find that the Stance of Air is far more likely to be effective in most situations.

While yojimbo may be one of the principle users of the technique, it is worth noting that even if a defender is not particularly versed in guarding techniques, the Stance of Earth can still be effective in protecting allies. With careful positioning, a bushi can interpose himself between enemies and allies, blocking the foe temporarily while his comrades respond appropriately. This works especially well in any situation where the enemy must come through a narrow passage such as a gateway or tunnel; the Crab in particular have been noted for the use of this method when defending the tunnels beneath the Wall. Of course, the Stance of Earth should not be forgotten by non-bushi on the battlefield. While shugenja will rarely use it unless they are biding their time to cast a spell later, courtiers will find the Stance quite effective if they have the skills in defense to utilize it properly.

The Stance is of course not without its weaknesses. The greatest weakness is that unless one is a master of defense the Stance limits mobility to an extreme extent, and it is impossible to do anything other than the simplest of actions. One cannot move quickly, use a weapon, or cast a spell. Most samurai are not gifted enough to use it in an advanced manner, so in most cases it is a Stance of last resort, particularly at low levels of ability. The more common Stance in most combat situations will be that of Air, which allows greater flexibility while still enhancing one's defensive position.

# Earth-Based L5R Campaigns

In the previous book in this series, we discussed ways in which the flexibility and improvisational nature of Air could be harnessed for L5R role-playing. However, improvisation is not the only possible approach to building a successful RPG campaign. Many GMs prefer a campaign with a heavier emphasis on planning and preparation, a campaign built on deep and firm foundations. The L5R 4th Edition Core rulebook discusses a number of different campaign types, and several of these lend themselves to such a structural Earth-driven approach, especially Location-Based and Relationship Mapping campaigns. Open-World gaming can also benefit from extensive preparation, but because it allows the PCs to roam wherever they wish, it makes it more difficult for the GM to be fully prepared; thus, an effective Open-World campaign is usually a blend of Earth-based preparation and Air-based improvisation.

Of course, any experienced GM will always do a certain amount of preparation before running an adventure – coming up with plotlines, developing NPCs, and deciding on the basic layout of any physical locations. However, the total amount of prep varies widely between different GMs. Some prefer to lay out only a basic "sketch" of their world and develop the details on the fly – the quintessential Air approach. Others prefer to put in much more work: writing up dozens of NPCs, developing a variety of plotlines and if-then contingencies, and drawing up detailed maps. This sort of approach is very time-consuming, but it can also be very rewarding, since it gives the GM a huge "foundation" of material on which to build adventures, and also gives the players much more sense that they are inhabiting a fully-realized world.

Published supplements that present a pre-designed setting, such as a city, village, or province, are in some ways the essence of an Earth-based approach to L5R role-play: they present a major, expansive location in great detail, complete with lengthy lists of NPCs (each with a fully-realized personality and motivations) and numerous specific adventure hooks. These sorts of products can be used very effectively for Location-Based and Relationship Mapping campaigns, but because they provide a solid foundation for the GM to rely on and refer back to, they can also be very useful for running more improvisational campaigns. The various campaign settings presented in the Elemental Series (such as this book's setting, the Lair) fall into this category, as does the upcoming L5R 4th Edition box set, *The Second City*.

## Older L5R Campaign Settings

Prior to the release of L5R 4th Edition, earlier versions of the L5R role-playing game published a variety of detailed campaign settings which can be extremely useful to GMs, especially GMs who prefer an Earth-based grounding of their games in preparation and detail. Many of these products can still be found on the used-game market, and some of them are also available as PDFs from DriveThruRPG.com.

*City of Lies* – The first and in many ways the most famous of all L5R campaign settings. This boxed set portrays the Scorpion city of Ryoko Owari, the second-largest and most infamously corrupt city in Rokugan.

*The Tomb of Iuchiban* – A complete description of one of the most infamous and secret locations in Rokugan: the hidden tomb where the Bloodspeaker is imprisoned for centuries. This box set also included a detailed history of the Bloodspeaker Cult.

*Otosan Uchi* – The original Imperial Capital, which ruled over the Empire from its founding all the way until the time of the Four Winds in the twelfth century. This box set depicted the city in the Pre-Coup era, and included complete maps of the city and the Imperial Palace itself, as well as a comprehensive account of the Scorpion Clan Coup.

*Mimura: Village of Promises* – A smaller-scale approach to a prepared setting, this book presented a detailed description of a medium-sized village and its surrounding territories. Much like the campaign settings in the Elemental series of books, it was a "generic" village which could be placed almost anywhere in Rokugan.

Organized convention-based gaming, such as the Heroes of Rokugan campaign, is also very much Earth-based in the amount of detail and preparation it entails. These sorts of games tend to take an extremely detailed approach to adventure design in order to ensure that every group which plays a specific adventure has a similar experience. While this is certainly a legitimate approach for convention-based play in which the goal is to create a "shared world" for hundreds of players all around the globe, it is not necessarily the best method for GMs running their own home campaigns. The extreme detail and carefully planned outcomes of such adventures can feel constraining even to GMs who prefer an Earth-oriented approach to their campaigns. Of course, for a GM who feels uncomfortable with improvisation, the detailed designs and contingency planning of convention-based games can be a reassuring "safety net." It all depends on the particular GM's preferred style and strengths.

# Stone and Blood



*Shiba Gyukuro entered the tent. The rising sun cast his shadow across the grassy floor and onto his empty suit of armor. The yawning eye sockets of his porcelain mask, his* mengu*, drank their fill of his mortal shadow, until at last the tent flap was drawn shut, blanketing the interior in darkness.*

*His servants were swift in lighting the candles this time, prayers tumbling from their lips. Through the fog of incense smoke, the light did little more than fill the tent with a faint orange glow. They avoided his gaze, tending to the details of the ceremony. No one spoke. One misstep and the transformation would not take place. They knew this well.*

*On his knees, now, the suit looming over him, he bowed to it. The grass, still wet from the morning dew, stained his forehead, yet he pressed it there for the proper length of five heartbeats. His servants hovered around the suit of* o-yoroi*, their fingertips brushing the lacing that held the lacquered plates in place. They were timid, almost fearful.*

*That it had come to this was regrettable, but now there was no turning back. Gyukuro raised his head and met the face of his armor. He looked into its empty eyes.*

It is time*, he thought.* Awaken.

*The servants lifted his armor from its pedestal one piece at a time. First, the* kiahan*, to protect his legs. Left side first, to awaken the martial spirit. Right side next, to steady the mind. Then come the hands, then the arms, then finally the* dō *is placed over him. Slowly, deliberately, not all at once, much like the tide pulls the sand away. He inhaled the air of the tent and exhaled his thoughts. He abandoned them to the void; he felt nothing but the weight of the armor, piece by piece, as it was laced onto him. Becoming him, as he became his armor.*

*With each component, he felt the influence of his Self lessen, as though it were being boxed away inside of him. The* kote *were his arms, the* dō *was his chest, the* kabuto *his head, the mask his face. Whatever he was before did not matter now. He inhaled the air of the armor and exhaled its breath. His new face was smooth and cold as the shell of an egg.*

*"It is done," the eldest servant murmured. The youngest fell to his knees and stared, eyes wide with horror. Gyukuro extended his new arms, testing their weight before opening his hands to his third servant.*

*"My* daisho*," he said. His voice echoed, as though it were far away... or not his own.*

*The tent flap flew open. The morning sunlight was dimmed by the thousands of forms on the horizon. Banners fluttered in silhouette. Gyukuro's karo fell to his knees and bowed. "My lord!" he gasped. "The enemy approaches."*

*Gyukuro smiled. His porcelain face did nothing.*

The way of Earth is the way of endurance, protection, and defense, of stubborn resistance and iron will. Warriors who fight in the way of Earth prefer to fight defensively, relying on their armor and their physical resilience to survive enemy blows. Where the practitioners of Air or Fire strike swiftly, trying to bring down their enemy before he can return a blow, the warriors of Earth wait and endure until they have the chance to strike back with overwhelming force; not surprisingly, they tend to prefer the largest and heaviest of weapons, calling on the power of Earth to deliver slow but mighty blows.

The Crab Clan is of course the clan most associated with Earth, both in its fighting techniques and its magical practices. The Crab Clan's iconic Hida fighting school specifically teaches them to call on their Earth for both defense and offense, shrugging off enemy blows and delivering mighty strikes of their own. Crab warriors are legendary for their massive size and astonishing endurance, able to shrug off blows which would drop another samurai writhing to the ground in pain. However, the Crab are not the only clan whose martial teachings rely on Earth's power.

Among the Minor Clans, the Badger Clan is the most strongly associated with Earth, which is perhaps not surprising given that it was created from an off-shoot of the Crab. Much like their distant cousins, the Ichiro family relies on toughness, endurance, and the might of heavy weapons to prevail, although they also show a greater reliance on Strength (the way of Water) than the Crab. Both the Crab and the Badger place a great emphasis on using the largest and heaviest weapons known to the Empire, relying on the weight and power of these weapons to overcome any lack of speed or flexibility.

The Dragon Clan are most closely associated with the Element of Fire, but their fighting techniques do call on the power of Earth as well. In particular, martial groups like the Mirumoto Mountaineers rely on the enduring strength of Earth to assist their fighting abilities, rather than depending solely on the aggressive flexibility of Fire. Given that the Dragon live within rugged mountains and train constantly in that environment, it should perhaps not be surprising that Earth has become a powerful secondary theme of their martial styles.

The Daidoji of the Crane Clan are also known to incorporate the ways of Earth into their fighting style, supplementing its primary emphasis on Air and Fire. Like the Crab, the Daidoji are fond of defensive fighting, and are trained to withstand injuries which would cripple lesser men.

## Heavy Weapons in Rokugan

The preferred styles of combat involving Heavy Weapons are surprisingly versatile when such weapons are in the hands of those particularly proficient in their use, but when they are wielded by those only moderately familiar with their abilities they are quite simple and direct. It is very easy to tell the difference between a true master of these weapons and a mere journeyman, especially given how rare it is to encounter the former. The average samurai generally spends little to no time studying the putatively crude and clumsy heavy weapons, seeing them as little more than beating something with a large stick; they prefer to focus on more elegant and honorable weaponry such as spears, bow, and of course the katana. The Crab and the Badger devote considerably more time to heavy weapons, of course, but even in their ranks the training usually does not advance to the point of true mastery. If a Crab knows how to crush in the skull of an oni with his tetsubo, there is little need for additional finesse. And since the Crab seldom have the time to pursue training for its own sake, it is extraordinarily rare for even one of their samurai to have the resources, inclination, and skill to truly master the ways of heavy weapons.

In the hands of a journeyman, the heavy weapon is exactly what it looks like: either a very large and powerful stick or a very large axe. The normal attack style with these weapons is to embrace the Stance of Fire and simply swing as hard as possible, in the most brutal and savage manner, whether overhead or with side-sweeping strikes. Full arcs and wide, sweeping attacks allow maximum force at the point of contact, dealing the greatest possible damage on the target. While this leaves the wielder open to retaliation, the usual intention is to rely on armor to protect oneself from enemy strikes while relying on the sheer power of heavy weapons to bring down foes as quickly as possible.

Against most ordinary opponents and the typical creatures of the Shadowlands, this style of combat is generally quite effective, often brutally so. While enemy attacks will certainly get through, the ability of Crab warriors to endure heavy blows with surprising ease means they can risk ignoring their own defenses while using their mighty weapons to bring their opponents low as quickly as possible.

Slightly more experienced practitioners sometimes take a somewhat more measured approach, switching to the Stance of Water after their initial assault and trying

to strike more judiciously against their opponents' weak points. This approach is also popular with Crab when fighting opposing samurai, since a human foe usually is more defensively skilled and harder to beat down by sheer force than a Shadowlands beast. This approach relies on strikes from many different directions, as opposed to the straight-ahead blows used in the Fire Stance, but at the most basic level they are still the same sort of bashing attacks.

Although these approaches are simple, there is nothing wrong with them; the Crab employ them consistently because they work. Heavy weapons are designed to pound or hack through armor and thick hides, shatter defensive stances, and strike home to rupture muscle and crack bone. They do this with alarming efficiency, and a samurai who sneers at these "simplistic" fighting techniques is likely to pay a bitter price for his foolishness. There is nothing elegant or civilized about such fighting methods, to be sure, and they do not display any sort of 'Mastery' by the standards of Rokugani martial arts... but they get the job done.

Those who truly master the art of using heavy weapons tend to eschew the masakari, ono, and tetsubo in favor of the dai tsuchi and kanobo. The reason for this is simply that only the kanobo and dai tsuchi truly offer any degree of versatility in fighting methods. Both have the ability to double as hooked polearms, tripping weapons, or defensive tools as well as straightforward attack weapons. Masters of the art of heavy weapons combat almost always use the Stance of Water; the Stance of Fire is deemed to be overly inflexible and dangerous, resorted to only when an opponent's mistake offers the opportunity to win with a single decisive strike. In the hands of the master, even these huge weapons move with considerable speed, and the warrior will constantly shift his hands on the weapon's haft to adjust to specific combat circumstances. (By contrast, basic Crab training emphasizes keeping the hands in the same place so as to avoid any risk of losing one's grip.)

The preferred true weapon of the heavy weapons master is the kanobo, which falls into a flexible middle ground between the tetsubo and the staff. Most Crab and Badger warriors scoff at the very idea of "mastery" of heavy weapons, since in their view these weapons are practical devices without any of the associated sacredness of the daisho or the artistic elegance of the bow. Indeed, from a military perspective, there is some truth to the Crab attitude on this matter. Treating the heavy weapon as something to employ with finesse rather than merely as a destructive force does sometimes tend to weaken its raw effectiveness. However, those who pursue the mastery of heavy weapons are most often not samurai at all, but monks, and thus usually do not concern themselves with the opinions of the Crab. And while they may short themselves on some of the raw destructive power of heavy weapons, these masters can be quite terrifying opponents in their own right, striking with all points of their weapons and harrying opponents in ways none would ever expect.

## Groups Dedicated to Heavy Weapons

Within the Empire there are basically five groups who make regular use of heavy weaponry in melee combat: the Crab, the Badger, the Daidoji, the martial orders of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, and certain groups of ronin. Unsurprisingly, these are all groups where the fighting style of Earth shows itself with some regularity. Outside of these groups it is extremely rare to find samurai who favor heavy weapon fighting, although a few such eccentric individuals do exist.

The first and most obvious reason why heavy weapon are not seen beyond these ranks is the social and spiritual predominance of the katana as the weapon of choice for all noble and honorable samurai. The katana is the blade of one's ancestors, the soul of the warrior. A samurai who draws his sword stands with countless prior generations who have wielded the same sacred steel in his hands, cutting down all who would dare to oppose his lord. The katana is the presumptive and chosen weapon of nearly all samurai, save perhaps the extremely odd Tsuruchi and the occasional disgraced ronin who has lost his ancestral blade. Heavy weapons have no such social or spiritual significance; they are simply tools, appearing crude and clumsy compared to the grace of a sword. They cannot even approach the acceptance accorded to spears or bows, which can at least claim a share of the samurai martial tradition going back to the dawn of the Empire.

In addition, many within the Empire are unconvinced of the true capabilities of heavy weapons. This is not surprising when one realizes that most heavy weapons are simply not as effective unless their wielder exhibits prodigious physical size and strength. The ono, in particular, is almost infamous for being a weapon that is devilishly unforgiving of those who lack the muscle-power to wield it properly. In the hands of a very strong samurai it can destroy even powerful opponents with a single blow, but for warriors of more average build it can actually be less effective than a katana.

However, those who make use of these weapons have found their own reasons to employ them by preference. To the Crab, one of the first and simplest reasons is because of their war against the Shadowlands. The constant struggle with the creatures of Jigoku, especially the demonic oni, drives almost every aspect of Crab training and preference in war. Oni, ogres, and other such entities are notoriously resistant to physical harm, and one of the few reliable ways to break through this resistance is through the use of heavy weapons, especially the dai tsuchi and the tetsubo. With the proper strength behind them, both of these weapons can power through the thick hides and bony shells of Shadowlands demons, crushing and destroying foes who could shrug off any number of sword-strikes.

This Crab approach to weaponry, like most aspects of their clan, is usually looked down on by the rest of the Empire as an example of their pragmatism dominating all else. (One disgusted Crane who spent time on the Wall famously remarked, "The Crab would pluck the very stars from the Heavens if they could burn the Fallen Kami with them.") However, there is another aspect to the Crab Clan's preference for heavy weapons. Most Crab are actually deeply religious people who value their ancestors' guidance. They do not like to sully their katana with the blood of goblins and oni, or risk harm to its blade in a demon's claw. The tetsubo, however, is not only durable but also disposable, carrying no inherent spiritual or ancestral significance; it can be risked with impunity. The predominance of heavy weapon in the clan has led to the tetsubo being seen as the signature weapon of the Crab, far more so than the blades of their forefathers, and even appearing in the Hida family *mon*.

The Crab use any and all heavy weapons, although the tetsubo and dai tsuchi carry special places in their hearts. Even the Hiruma, whose fighting style emphasizes speed and stealth, are known to use the masakari at times. The Crab are also known throughout the Empire as the best source for reliable, quality heavy weapons, and indeed most tetsubo wielded in the Empire are of Crab make (though some Ichiro smiths of worthwhile note also create these weapons). While the other clans do not use these weapons often, there is still at least some call for them (primarily during periods of intense war, when demands of practicality often overweigh tradition), and this can sometimes be a source of trade for the Crab Clan.

The Badger Clan favors heavy weapons because of the clan's martial style; there is no bushi school in the entire Empire that relies so much on raw force as the Ichiro School. These samurai have developed techniques to maximize the vicious potency of their blows; this also means they must use the toughest and most reliable weapons lest they be accidentally disarmed by a shattered blade or snapped haft. Not surprisingly, they favor the largest and strongest of weapons – the tetsubo, dai tsuchi, and ono. In fact, the Ichiro use heavy weapons even more exclusively than their better-known cousins in the Crab – there are Ichiro bushi in the Empire who have carried a katana for their entire adult life without ever using it in combat, drawing it only to oil and tend the blade with the reverence it is due. They are still trained in the basic kata of kenjutsu, of course, but never use those techniques outside of sparring with *bokken* or *shinai*. This disuse of swords has given rise to a tradition in Ichiro lands based on the widespread Rokugani belief that the katana demands blood whenever it is drawn: Many Ichiro will nick their thumb to leave a droplet of their own blood on their blade whenever they unsheathe it for cleaning, thereby satisfying the honor of the blade by paying in blood that it will never shed otherwise.

The Daidoji family are not known to favor the heavy weapon as a dominant martial form – their preferred weapons are swords, spears, and bows. However, from long years of fighting alongside the Crab since the Battle of the Tidal Landbridge, the Daidoji have realized the efficacy of such weapons in some situations, and given their role as pragmatic defenders of the Crane they will not turn down any tool for that purpose. The samurai of the Daidoji Heavy Regular units are usually trained alongside the Crab for at least a year (provided the current state of Crab-Crane relations permits this). They are always equipped with the heaviest armor and wield a combination of spears and heavy weaponry, often to brutal effect. They are especially useful for blunting the charges of the Lion or the Unicorn, since their physical durability, defensive stances, and heavy weaponry make it far easier for them to repel such attacks. They have also been used as elite squadrons to withstand problematic archer units, since their heavy armor makes them more resistant to harassing arrow fire. They usually prefer either the tetsubo or the dai tsuchi as their weapons. (A few Daidoji Scouts have been known to carry the masakari, much like their Hiruma counterparts, but such men seldom join the Heavy Regulars, whose fighting style is wholly antithetical to the Scouts' approach.)

Ronin do not precisely favor the heavy weapon, but wave-men are well known for using any port in a storm. They cannot afford to be picky about what weapons they use, and generally rely on whatever is available; in addition, ronin from the Hida, Daidoji, or Ichiro families usually carry on their training with heavy weapons as best they can. Very few ronin are able to afford high-quality armor – indeed many cannot afford armor at all – and thus they cannot afford to risk their lives waiting for their opponents to give them an opening; simply crushing a foe with a single blow from a dai tsuchi has considerable appeal to a wave-man. The relatively simple fighting style of heavy weapons also has appeal to ronin, since most have neither the time nor the wealth to train intensively in swordsmanship. Even those ronin who do lack the skill and strength to wield the larger heavy weapons often carry a masakari, which is both cheap and reasonably effective. Bandits, of course, positively love these sorts of weapons, since they terrify those who lack fighting skill – such as the peasants and merchants who are their favorite prey.

It should be noted there are few ronin *otokodate* who actually train in formalized techniques for the wielding of heavy weaponry. There are relatively few ronin in the Empire who actually have the training to develop such a technique in the first place, and thus most ronin study only the basic fighting methods involved with heavy weapons. The few Hida and Ichiro ronin who have advanced training in such weapons rarely can band together long enough to form a true *otokodate* devoted to this type of combat. Furthermore, most of these clan ronin retain enough residual loyalty to their family to be unwilling to share ancestral techniques with others. (There would also be the possibility of reprisal if a clan samurai discovered this and took offense.)

The orders of the Brotherhood of Shinsei only rarely favor the heavy weapon. Typically, only the sect of Osano-Wo finds anything valuable in these weapons. Most other orders consider them to be crude tools of destruction, without elegance and without the mercy and charity expected of a proper monk. (The monastic orders' preference for staves and bare-handed combat is heavily influenced by their belief in showing mercy to their foes.) Within the order of the Fortune of Fire and Thunder, however, there are many retired Crab samurai, along with many monks who acknowledge the Crab origins of Osano-Wo himself and his preference for such weapons. They believe they honor the Fortune through the use of weapons associated with him and his Crab heritage. More generally, sohei warrior-monks in any sect are usually more willing to employ weapons than the more peaceful majority of the Brotherhood. The kanobo, tetsubo, and dai tsuchi are the most commonly seen weapons in their ranks, though the ono is not unheard of. The masakari is almost never seen.

# Types of Heavy Weapons and Their Usage

Due to their practical nature, the design of heavy weapons has not changed much over the Empire's history, and the mighty hammers and spiked clubs used by modern Crab warriors would be perfectly recognizable to their ancestors from the First and Second Centuries. Centuries. Likewise, the fighting methods devised for them remain essentially the same.

## Dai Tsuchi

*"Crude, but effective." – Kakita Noritoshi, Kakita family daimyo*

Essentially a hammer the size of a polearm, the dai tsuchi is a weapon found almost exclusively in the ranks of the Crab Clan and the Badger Clan. It is designed and used specifically to pound and crack through enemy armor (whether natural or man-made). By focusing the entire force of the blow into the relatively small impact point of a hammer-head, the weapon offers an unparalleled ability to smash through even the most impressive armor, shattering stone as easily as bone. What it lacks in raw damage capacity, it makes up for in this ability to ignore armor protection. However, unlike the tetsubo, it lacks versatility in combat; the dai tsuchi is built for a very specific form of attack, and strikes only with the head of the hammer.

## Kanabo

An unusual weapon, the kanabo is found only infrequently among the ranks of samurai. Instead, it is a weapon found far more frequently in the hands of those monks who do not eschew the use of weaponry entirely, particularly among the sohei orders who are known for their incredible martial capacities.

The kanabo is a spiked and knobbed metal staff with a round ring at the base of its stave. The weapon is quite long, often matching the length of a bo staff. It is usually wielded in a fashion similar to a tetsubo, but lacks the latter weapon's raw steel-clad bulk and thus is a sort of middle-ground between the tetsubo and a stave or polearm. It is not as brutal as most other heavy weapons, and is more easily used in a defensive manner, both qualities which appeal to the Brotherhood of Shinsei. The Crab usually scoff at its use, pointing out they cannot possibly crush the skulls of their foes with this light-weight pole – though the monks who favor it seem to have no issues.

## Masakari

*"You can feel its strength, feel it longing to be used against the demons." – Kuni Josuke*

The masakari is generally not considered the most effective of military tools and is not favored by the Hida upon the Kaiu Wall; the Hiruma, however, do find some value in it due to its smaller size. In recent centuries some Hiruma have developed a specific fighting style with the masakari, the so-called Hiruma Slayers, chopping down their inhuman foes with a relentless barrage of axe-strikes.

In truth, the masakari's classification as a "heavy weapon" is essentially a polite effort to avoid the simple reality that it is a glorified wood-cutter's axe, only slightly different from the tool used by most peasant tradesmen. The higher quality of the metal and the extra support built into the haft (to prevent it from shattering under the strain of combat) are the only differences between it and the original peasant design. For those samurai of a strict and traditionalist nature, these differences are not sufficient to make the masakari an acceptable weapon, and thus it is used much less widely than other heavy weapons. Indeed, the masakari is far more likely to be found amongst ronin than

among the ranks of most Great Clan samurai. Its relative versatility, ease of repair, and wicked edge do give it value to those willing to use it, and many ronin find it to be a decidedly more practical choice than more expensive weaponry.

### Ono

*"It can cleave an arm from an ogre in a single blow. Of course, you still have to deal with the other arm" – Hiruma Todori, Hiruma family daimyo*

The Ono is believed by some to be the most devastating weapon ever created. A massive two-handed axe with a razor-sharp edge, mounted on a haft the length of a polearm, it is generally given only to those who are specifically trained in its use. The reason for this is simple: however impressive it may appear, the ono is only effective in the hands of a warrior who is both skilled and strong enough to bring its full power to bear. The ono can deliver blows of truly fiendish lethality, but only in the hands of the mightiest of warriors, even among the Crab. Legend claims that the ono was the favored weapon of Osano-Wo himself, who used it in preference to all others.

In point of fact, however, the ono is used more often among the Ichiro than among the ranks of the Crab. The Ichiro School's emphasis on training its students to a peak of raw physical strength makes them singularly well-suited to use the ono in battle, whereas among the Crab generally only the stronger and bulkier warriors can do so.

### Tetsubo

*"A cruel weapon? Of course. If my enemy survives the strike, he must be too crippled to flee from the killing blow." – Hida Kanedo*

No weapon is more synonymous with the Crab Clan than the tetsubo. It is a massive club, the haft made from either the strongest wood or from metal, covered with steel studs throughout its length. In rare cases, the Crab may have the studs fitted with jade in order to make the weapon more potent against the creatures of the Shadowlands, though the rarity of jade makes this an unusual measure even in their ranks. The weapon is designed for shattering and breaking bones, causing the most damage possible. Although not quite as effective as the dai tsuchi at penetrating armor, it is still useful in that role, especially lighter armors which it tears through like chaff.

The tetsubo is not only considered a signature weapon of the Crab but has taken on a powerful symbolic and almost reverential nature with them as well. The tetsubo, not a katana, appears on the Hida family mon. Far more tetsubo have seen their inner spirits awaken in Crab service than any other weapons, and consequently the number of tetsubo nemuranai in the Empire actually rivals the number of katana (though few outside the Crab Clan realize this). These blessed weapons are revered within Crab ranks in the way other clans would protect their family daisho sets, but the Crab never lose their sense of practicality: their tetsubo nemuranai see constant use in the battle against the Shadowlands.

# The Protection of Earth: Armor

*"A samurai is protected by steel and conviction." – Kaiu*

As much or perhaps even more so than the katana, armor is the iconic symbol of the samurai. There is no other sight quite as stirring (or terrifying, depending on your perspective) as a samurai taking the field in full armor, his face concealed by a terrifying war-mask. This represents more than just a man who has prepared himself to go to war; it is the image of thousands of years of tradition, a direct visual symbol of the samurai's place as the warrior-nobility of the Empire. Rokugani beliefs and traditions associated with armor are ancient, dating all the way back to the dawn of the Empire.

## A Brief History of Rokugani Armor

Even before the fall of the Kami, the warring tribes who dwelt in what became Rokugan made and used many kinds of simple, primitive armor. This was most commonly made from cured leather hide, for in those days the standards of civilization had not yet taught the people that such things needed special purification. Some tribes, especially along the coasts, wore armor made from the natural defenses of animals: plates made from turtle shells, planks of wood, and even animal bones. A few tribes even had access to breastplates of hammered copper.

However, it was the Tribe of Isawa who were the most advanced in armor-craft at the time. Their understanding of the Elements allowed them access to bronze, and as a result their weapons and armor were far superior to others'. Their leaders wore flowing canvas brigandines lined with bronze plating, elaborately decorated to denote the wearer's status. Because it was a major undertaking to create such armor, only the leaders of the tribe were permitted to wear it.

It was not until the fall of the Kami that armor-crafting began to advance. The Kami brought many things with them from the Heavens, including the secret of forging iron and steel. This alone was enough to make the armies of the fledging Empire a force to be reckoned with, something none of the existing tribes could possibly compete with.

It is not known who developed the first true suit of Rokugani armor. However, the Imperial Histories attribute the honor to the Kami Akodo. According to legend, Akodo was seeking a way to protect his officers and fellow soldiers against the hordes of the Shadowlands without hindering their ability to fight, and was inspired by the sight of a salmon swimming upstream. He noticed that as the current tossed the tiny fish into the sharp rocks within the river, they did not draw blood. Thus he conceived of a sleeved tunic made of overlapping metal plates that were laced together. After each experience on the battlefield, Akodo and his kin (specifically his brothers Hida and Shiba) amended the early designs to improve the armor's performance. Thusly this "fish scale armor" gradually evolved into the lamellar-plated suits that are iconic to the samurai caste.

Ironically, it was the same desire for protection that gave birth to the kimono. Few Rokugani of the modern Empire recall that the original purpose of the kimono was not fashion, but defense. This is due to an unusual property of the preferred material, silk. Silk is valued not only for its texture, appearance, and comfort, but also for protection against arrows. It does not tear when struck with a launched arrow or thrown spear, instead wrapping around the piercing point, enveloping it in silk even as it pierces the skin. This makes the resulting wound less grievous and easier to treat, saving countless lives. At the dawn of the Empire, when the armies of Fu Leng invaded, there simply were not enough resources to provide all of the Kami's followers with armor. Armor was supplied the most important soldiers and commanders, but the Kami wanted to extend some kind of protection to their other troops as well. So they bade all of their followers who had no armor to wear silk kimono into battle. In modern times the Rokugani nobility continue to wear silk kimono, without realizing that it is a subtle reminder that even the most courtly among them are still, at their heart, warriors.

Although cast iron was sometimes used for weapons at the dawn of the Empire, for armor it was only used for the armor of top-level leaders, generals and daimyo. Because iron was prone to rust, *yoroi-sei* (armorsmiths) developed a form of laminate derived from tree sap which protected the iron plates. This led to the development of lamellar plates, which would become a signature feature of samurai armor in later centuries. These early suits of armor were very heavy, consisting of boxy shapes and multiple layers. However, because ponies were already commonly used by samurai in warfare, the weight of the final suit of armor was not considered important. Due to the difficulty and expense of early iron-working, bronze remained far more common in armor until the ease of iron-working improved significantly in the peaceful years after the First War.

In later centuries, infantry tactics became predominant and there was pressure to make armor lighter and more maneuverable. The development of the *o-yoroi*, the heaviest of modern infantry armor, was based on creating armor that allowed a samurai to be decently mobile while enjoying the same protection as a mounted warrior. As decades passed, armor-crafters compromised more and more, and many samurai eventually came to favor lighter, less-complete suits of *o-yoroi* that were simply referred to as *yoroi*. Thus the modern distinction between light and heavy armor came to be. Ironically, light armor actually evolved from heavy, not the other way around.

Contact with gaijin in the fifth century, most notably the Battle of White Stag, influenced the later development of armor. Rokugani armorsmiths recognized certain attributes of gaijin cuirasses that they decided to emulate, such as the prevalence of iron and how the cuirass completely closed up around the individual. Up until this point, Rokugani *yoroi* were completely open on the right side, which was protected by a separate metal plate known as a *waidate*. After the Battle of White Stag, *yoroi-sei* began to incorporate more iron into their suits, and the dō was redesigned as a tunic that hung off the shoulders. Some families, most notably the Kaiu, fully adopted the gaijin cuirass into their own armor designs, resulting in the so-called *Tetsu-Dou*.

During the long relative peace that followed the Battle of White Stag, designs in Rokugani armor remained relatively unchanged for centuries, with relatively few experiments or challenges to tradition. This changed somewhat with the arrival of the Unicorn in the ninth century, as armorsmiths grudgingly began to incorporate certain foreign elements brought to Rokugan by the people of the Ki-Rin.

It was in the early twelfth century that another shift in armor-making led to a drastic progression in quality and strength. This was a tumultuous period for the Empire, riven with war and other conflicts, and armor-smiths from many clans had the opportunity to test their ancestral methods and adapt them to overcome new challenges. Notably, advancements in bow-making and innovative methods of archery exploited weaknesses in lighter suits of armor. Suddenly, *o-yoroi* were in preference again, and all the clans moved toward heavier suits of armor with greater coverage. As the Clan Wars dragged on and was followed by other conflicts, demand grew for more resilient suits that did not sacrifice movement, and armorsmiths began to truly deviate from their time-tested traditions and develop new forms of armor. The duties of their intended wearers began to draw more serious consideration, resulting in suits with more specialized purposes than in prior centuries. The pressures of war mobilization also prompted armorsmiths to develop new ways of producing lighter, better suits that could be crafted in far less time.

In the most modern times, additional conflicts such as the Kali-Ma Invasion have led *yoroi-sei* to further innovation, while the intervening periods of peace have encouraged a more artful approach to the craft. The results are possibly the finest suits of armor produced in centuries. The Tsi family of the newly-appointed Oriole Clan leads the innovative trends in the craft, rivaling the Kaiu as the most prestigious smithing family in the Empire, and the legendary swordsmith Fubatsu himself has praised their works.

### What About Shields?

Some may wonder why the Rokugani do not fight with shields. They are, after all, a warrior culture, and shields are a simple and effective form of armor used by countless cultures for thousands of years. Yet the Rokugani consistently refuse to use them, even after being exposed to the concept repeatedly.

The answer to this is directly related to the Rokugani philosophy of combat and choice of weapons and fighting styles. Archery, of course, requires both hands, as does fighting with spears or polearms. Above all, the Rokugani art of Kenjutsu places a great emphasis on both power and precision, requiring full control of the katana by using both hands. An opponent's attacks are not blocked or absorbed, but instead are diverted or deflected. Almost all other Rokugani arts of melee weaponry use similar techniques, and Rokugani warfare emphasizes the offensive as the decisive method of combat (with the exception of the Crab). Consequently, the Rokugani have never seen value in encumbering themselves with shields.

## Components of Samurai Armor

Notwithstanding the great variety of designs and types developed over the centuries, all Rokugani armor is ultimately made up of six basic components. They are each classified by the part of the body they are protecting, specifically: the chest, arms, thighs, legs, head, and face, with each given equal importance and consideration. These components can be further broken down into many more depending on the type of armor in question. Some of the components (even the basic ones) can be absent from a particular samurai's suit of armor, depending on the intended function and the designer's preferences. However, at the simplest a complete suit is always made up of the following six parts, albeit in varying incarnations.

The dō, or chest armor, is the basic component that comprises the majority of the suit. It is usually broken into two or three different parts that are layered on top of one another, although simpler suits may actually only have one piece to the dō. It is commonly referred to as "chest armor" because ancient suits only offered protection to a samurai's front. However, most dō in modern times are more comprehensive in protection, and consist essentially

## Armor Terminology

*Dō* - Chest armor. Usually a tunic of laminated armor plates. Protects the chest and back, and oftentimes the legs via hanging *kusazuri*.

*Haidate* - Thigh armor. An armored apron donned at the waist and draping down to the knee.

*Hoate* - A half-mask of porcelain or shaped metal that covers the lower half of the face. Hooks into the *kabuto* which holds it in place. Often bearing a grimace or other intimidating features.

*Kabuto* - An armored great-helm, perhaps the most iconic piece of a samurai's armor. Made from tightly-riveted plates of wrought iron or bronze. Usually, these helmets are adorned with decorative crests known as *datemono*.

*Kiahan* - Padded shin coverings. Made of thick cloth, these are worn under the samurai's shin armor.

*Kogake* - Armored foot coverings. Essentially just *tabi* (socks) with small copper or iron plates sewn into the fabric.

*Kote* - Armored sleeves that protect the arms.

*Kusazuri* - Flexible plates of armor that hang from the belt of the *dō*. Usually there are three, one hanging from the back and one from either side.

*Mempo* - A full mask that covers the entire face. Made of shaped metal, or less commonly of porcelain. Often painted or sculpted to resemble a demonic face.

*Mengu* - Armor for the face. Usually either *hoate* or a *mempo*.

*Nodowa* - An armored collar worn around the neck. Usually, this is a strap of thick cloth that is tied in the back, with short versions of *kusazuri* that hang over the collarbone when worn.

*Sangu* - The collective components of armor that protect the extremities. Composed of *Kote*, *Suneate*, and *Haidate*.

*Sode* - Large, rectangular plates of lamellar armor made from copper, bronze, iron, or rarely from laminated wood. Worn on the upper arm for protecting the shoulder. Often painted or decorated. One of the most iconic parts of a samurai's armor.

*Suneate* - Armor for the shins and knee. Worn over the *Kiahan*.

*Tekko* - Armored bracer-gauntlets. Shaped to protect the hands, but without finger-protection so as to allow for drawing a bow or handling a katana. Sometimes physically attached to the *kote*.

of a tunic of corded armor plates that forms a cuirass, protecting both the front and back. On most suits, three lower-body plates called *kusazuri* hang from the belt of the dō, protecting the lower torso and legs. Different kinds of greaves, sashes, neck armors, and other supplementary components and embellishments are often added to the dō, but in essence it is a cuirass. The dō is the heart of the samurai's armor, both literally and figuratively.

The *kabuto*, or helmet, is the second basic component making up a suit of armor. The head of a samurai is very vulnerable to attack, and even a grazing blow to the skull can prove fatal in the wrong circumstances. Thus it is important for a samurai to protect his head, and it is considered foolish for any bushi to enter battle without first donning his *kabuto*. There are nearly as many variations of the samurai's great helm as there are noble families in the Empire, but most are made from bronze or iron, possess a thick visor in the front, and have a suspended guard for the back of the neck called a *shikoro*. The helmet is held in place with a thick chin-cord that includes places to hook the facial mask-armor, or *mengu*, and hold it into place. The domed shape of the helmet helps deflect the force of blows and prevent fractures and stunning. Usually, these helmets are adorned with decorative crests known as *datemono* which identify the owner's clan, family, and rank. The helmet is, perhaps, the most iconic part of the samurai's armor, and the removal of the *kabuto* in front of one's opponent is synonymous with surrender.

The next three components are collectively referred to as the *sangu*, armor meant specifically to protect the extremities. The first is the *kote*, armor that protects the samurai's arms. *Kote* are essentially armored sleeves with small plates of laminated metal sewn into the fabric. There are many kinds of *kote*, but most are made of two parts, one that covers the forearm and elbow, and another that covers the upper arm to the shoulder. They are not actually attached to the dō, but function autonomously from the rest of the armor. Often the *kote* includes the iconic *sode*, the rectangular plates of armor protecting the shoulders.

The leg armor, or *sunate*, protects a samurai's legs below the knees. These are made of several metal pieces laced together around the leg. They usually extend from the ankle up to the knee. Armor protecting the thigh, known as *haidate*, is essentially a cloth apron shaped and supported by laminated armor plates. Usually this consists of thin plates of copper or bronze, more rarely of iron. Less commonly, *haidate* can be made from chain-linked armor known as *kusari*. For lighter suits, stiff rectangular plates of cloth-covered wood are sometimes used instead.

Often overlooked, *mengu* is armor protecting the face of the warrior. In early times, *mengu* were incorporated into the helmet, sometimes even hinged or corded into the helmet's facial opening. In modern times, they are separate components that are fitted into a samurai's *kabuto*. The most common type of facial armor is the *mempo*, an armored mask that covers the entire face. *Mempo* are often painted and shaped into intimidating or unsettling grimaces to aid a samurai in battle. Some Rokugani believe that once the mask has been laid upon the samurai's face, he ceases to be who he was before the armor was donned, becoming an unhesitating spirit of war.

# Types of Armor in Use

Rokugan is a land of countless warrior traditions, and this extends to its creation of arms and armor. There are almost as many types of armor in Rokugan as there are armorcrafting traditions. The basics of the art can be applied in many ways, and a smith who knows the basics and understands his art can make armor for any function. As the craft progresses, certain conventions come and go, and specific uses for armor arise when the nature of warfare changes.

## Ashigaru Armor

*"Light, cheap, and plentiful - perfect to arm thousands of hastily trained peasants." – Hida Fubatsu, twelfth century master smith*

The armor supplied to peasant soldiers rarely consists of more than a chest-plate, simple arm- and leg-guards, and the conical helmet known as a *jingasa*. Ashigaru armor is valued chiefly for being very simple and cheap to manufacture, and is often made from wooden planks instead of lamellar plates, giving it greatly inferior stopping power against blades. It still offers decent protection from arrows if they strike the armored sections, and does have the virtue of not hindering movement. Most samurai eschew such armor due to its association with the heimin caste, but it is ideal for scouts who wish to have some basic protection without the weight and obstruction of samurai armor.

## Yoroi (Light Armor)

*Yoroi* simply means "armor," and the suit of armor known as *yoroi* is essentially an incomplete suit of *o-yoroi*, with certain pieces omitted in order to maximize maneuverability. It normally consists of the chest armor, helmet, and the arm- and leg-guards. However, it incorporates smaller shoulder guards and leaves the thighs and legs mostly unarmored. The distinction between *yoroi* and *o-yoroi* is largely a convention of modern times; a suit of *yoroi* would be considered a complete set of armor in the early centuries of the Empire.

## O-Yoroi (Heavy Armor)

*O-yoroi* (literally "great armor") is considered the pinnacle of infantry armor. It is actually an adaptation of riding armor for samurai fighting on foot. In early days of the Empire, heavy armor was reserved only for mounted warriors; it was so restrictive and cumbersome that only well-trained ponies could maneuver such men in battle. In time, better techniques and materials were developed so samurai could dismount and fight on foot without sacrificing their protection. The result was the *o-yoroi*.

*O-yoroi* is considered to be a complete suit of armor, as opposed to the partial suit known as *yoroi*. It completely covers the samurai front and back, leaving only portions of the legs, hands, and eyes exposed, in addition to some space under the armpits. It is made from lamellar plates of metal, usually iron, bronze, or copper, and held together with silk lace and canvas. Although the weight of the armor is equally distributed so as not to hinder movement to the point of impracticality, a samurai in *o-yoroi* is nonetheless restricted in his range of movement, making swordfighting difficult. As a result, most samurai wearing this armor prefer to fight with polearms or heavy weapons.

## Riding Armor

The ancestor of the *o-yoroi*, riding armor is specifically made to offer maximum protection while on horseback. Because the armor is intended for use on horseback, its weight and restrictions of movement are not considered as important as in infantry armors. Extended shoulder pads offer protection from arrows, while the tilted plates provide greater protection from infantry strikes below. As such, the chest armor is made from lighter metal plates, such as copper or bronze, while iron is prioritized for the legs and shoulder pads (or *sode*). Riding armor is often worn without a helmet due to the need for unhindered sight while mounted, although this is not a consistent choice.

## Specialty and Unconventional Armor

Although the four types of armor described above are the ones most well-known throughout Rokugan, there are a number of more specialized types in use around the Empire. Rokugan is a vast Empire and there are nearly as many different designs and types of armor as there are armorsmiths. Even two suits made by the same craftsman in the same province could appear vastly different and serve different purposes; nearly every suit of armor is as unique as the warrior wearing it.

### Bogu (Practice Armor)

*Bogu*, literally "equipment to protect," is armor made specifically for use in the dojo. Even though students are not trusted with live weaponry while sparring, the practice weapons they wield, such as wooden bokken and bamboo shinai, can still inflict some damage. Thus it is often necessary for students to wear practice armor while sparring, especially if they are inexperienced. Usually, practice armor is made of lightweight lacquered bamboo and thick padded cloth. It consists of a bamboo chest protector, a bamboo mask for the face that is lined with padded silk, shoulder protectors of flat wooden planks cushioned with cloth, and combination forearm-and-wrist guards similarly made of shaped bamboo. Over these armor pieces the student wears a thick padded kimono for additional protection.

*Bogu* is effective for practice and avoiding dojo mishaps, but impractical for actual combat. Besides being primarily made of bamboo (which has little stopping power against most weaponry), it only protects the front of the wearer, since students usually conduct their sparring while facing one another. Most apprentice armorsmiths start out by making suits of *bogu*, since doing so utilizes the fundamentals of their craft. As such, there is usually an abundance of *bogu* in most armories, and certainly bushi dojo are well-stocked with them.

- **Bonus to Armor TN:** +0
- **Reduction:** 1
- **Price:** 1 koku

### Tatami Armor

*"Protection is important, of course, but mobility is even more important. Would you prefer to survive being hit, or avoid being hit at all?" – Hiruma Etsuro, scout*

An example of an unusual type of light armor, tatami-yoroi or "foldable armor" is designed to be very portable. Inspired by the woven tatami mats that cover the floors of most Rokugani homes, tatami armor is essentially a foldable kimono made from layered burlap. Square armor plates are sewn into the armor; these provide most of the protection, although they are sometimes combined with small amounts of kusari (chainmail). Such armor is often worn in layers, and although it typically has the appearance of a kimono, other such armored garments are also possible, including kamishimo and tunics. While *tatami-yoroi* does not offer much more protection than typical ashigaru armor, it is ideal for scouts because it is extremely portable and can be donned quickly. It is also ideal for court guards, since it can be worn underneath a regular kimono without offending guests. Although it is foldable and portable, it is heavier than one might expect, and unsuitable for those who require stealth in the course of their duties.

- **Bonus to Armor TN:** +4
- **Reduction:** 1
- **Price:** 10 koku

### Tetsu-Dou (Iron Armor)

*"Highly effective in protecting the warrior beneath, but very limiting in terms of movement and reaction speed. A necessary trade-off, from time to time." – Daidoji Kikaze, family daimyo, twelfth century*

A unique form of heavy armor that is worn almost exclusively by Crab samurai, the tetsu-dou is an innovation created by Kaiu armorsmiths for the purpose of withstanding an oni's attack. At its core it is simply an altered form of *o-yoroi*. However, it is crafted entirely out of iron. Instead of the lamellar plates that comprise most Rokugani armor, the *tetsu-dou* is laminar, made from very thin plates of cast iron that are overlapped to provide layered protection. However, it is the *dō* that truly sets this armor apart: a hinged cast iron cuirass made from two individual pieces.

This armor is designed to protect the wearer from the slashing claws and piercing teeth of monstrous oni, allowing him to get close enough to inflict harm. It is not quite as effective against bashing weapons like tetsubo, but such are rare amongst oni. Due to the great expense required to make this armor, it is usually seen only in the hands of very prominent Crab, such as daimyo, generals, or warriors of truly exceptional skill. Each suit takes a full year to complete, and because they are made for specific samurai, each is fashioned to reflect the preferences and aesthetics of its wearer. For a non-Crab to own a set of tetsu-dou is a great honor; the Emperor's personal set is displayed in a place of prominence within the Imperial Palace.

- **Bonus to Armor TN:** +13
- **Reduction:** 8

- **Special Rules:** Iron armor is considered heavy armor for the purposes of mechanical effects that specify armor type, including Techniques, Advantages, etc. Wearing iron armor increases the TN of all Skill Rolls using Agility or Reflexes by +10; if the wearer has a Strength of 5 or higher, the penalty is only +5 instead.
- **Price:** 100 koku

### Unicorn Riding Armor

It should come as no surprise that the Unicorn, the masters of mounted warfare, have their own unique type of riding armor. Unlike most Rokugani, the Unicorn have no aversion to using cured animal hide and employ it freely for their armors. The type of armor known as "Unicorn Riding Armor" is an altered version of traditional Rokugani riding armor, incorporating leather gloves, leather armored plates, and other modifications beneficial for the Unicorn Clan's heavy cavalry forces. The armor also incorporates four large domed metallic disks (one for each of the four winds) protecting the chest, back, and flanks. The result is protection equivalent to normal riding armor, but more accommodating for riding and less restrictive on the wearer's movements. Unicorn riding armor is generally used by Moto bushi and some Shinjo bushi (those who embrace their clan's foreign legacy most strongly); some Utaku shiotome have also adopted its use.

- **Bonus to Armor TN:** +4, +12 while on horseback
- **Reduction:** 4
- **Special Rules:** Unicorn riding armor is considered heavy armor for the purposes of mechanical effects that specify armor type, including Techniques, Advantages, etc.
- **Price:** 75 koku

### Bagai (Barding)

Unicorn samurai form close bonds with their mounts, and in battle the protection of their horses has the same priority as their own protection. Thus, it is common practice for the Unicorn to adorn their warhorses with armor. This armor, known as *bagai*, is made of laminated metal plates set over thick padded cloth, including a metallic facemask called a *bamen* worn on the horse's snout. The armor drapes over the flanks of the horse like a tent, with the lamellar plates protecting the horse's flanks and chest.

The average Rokugani riding pony, even if trained for war, is simply not strong enough to carry the weight of Unicorn barding along with an armored rider. However, the steeds of the Unicorn, especially Utaku Warhorses, come from much stronger stock, and can wear bagai without great effort. Even so, it is not uncommon to see similar types of armor on the mounts of the other clans; however, to avoid harming the animals the riders themselves must themselves be armored lightly or not at all.

- **Bonus to Mount's Armor TN:** +7
- **Reduction:** 3
- **Special Rules:** A Rokugani pony who wears this armor is considered to have a Water Ring one Rank lower for purposes of movement.
- **Price:** 25 koku

### Ceremonial Armor

Some armor is crafted simply for appearances. Ceremonial armor is made to the same design as other types, purposefully crafted to resemble functional armor. However, it is designed to accentuate certain aspects of the wearer, such as the shoulders and chest, to give the wearer a more imposing and authoritative look. It is usually also made from materials prized for their beauty but impractical for combat. Beautiful lacquered woods, vibrant velvet and silk, burnished gold and polished silver, emeralds, sapphires, and even bands of jade can be used to construct these bedazzling armors. It is extremely prestigious for an armorsmith to have his personal stamp embedded in a suit of ceremonial armor, for this implies his style and craft are worthy to be admired even without the practical application of the armor. However, despite the quality of its crafting, most ceremonial armor offers no greater protection than the armor of an ashigaru.

- **Bonus to Armor TN:** +3
- **Reduction:** 1
- **Special Rules:** At the GM's option, a truly impressive suit of Ceremonial Armor might award a small bonus to the wearer's Intimidation Skill rolls.
- **Price:** 90 koku

## My Grandfather's... Armor?

The samurai of Rokugan venerate their ancestor's belongings, especially their weapons. In fact, a samurai's katana can easily be hundreds of years old, carefully preserved and passed down from generation to generation. Such weapons are said to contain the essence of every samurai who wielded them. So what about ancestral suits of armor?

Just like other such belongings, ancestral armor is venerated and cared for lovingly by samurai, often displayed in the family shrine or a similar place of honor. However, unlike a katana or other weapon, ancestral armor is generally not worn by the descendants of its original owner. It is quite uncommon for a samurai to wear the armor of his father, for instance, and the more generations that have passed since the original forging, the rarer this becomes.

There are many reasons for this divergence between armor and weapons. One is because in order for armor to be truly effective it must be custom-suited to its wearer. It is very difficult, expensive, and sometimes even risky to re-fit the armor of one's ancestors. In addition to this, the passage of years and the subtle work of the Elements can cause the lacing and cords binding the armor to decay, even if cared for diligently. Enough such repairs and alterations, and given a few generations the armor will no longer truly be the same.

Another factor is the spiritual significance attributed to suits of armor. Some Rokugani believe that if a samurai dies wearing his armor, his thoughts remain in the armor's helmet. Donning such armor would allow the wearer to be influenced by these thoughts, affecting his actions accordingly. Seemingly in support of this belief, the Sodan-Senzo priests of the Kitsu family will often ask for a piece of an honored ancestor's armor – most often, the helm – when attempting to contact his spirit in the afterlife. While many samurai might welcome this inherent guidance from their ancestors, the final thoughts of a warrior who died in combat can be more distraction than aid. Better to leave the armor on display in a place of honor.

Lastly, older suits of armor may simply not be adequate for protection against more recent weapons or fighting techniques. Although the Rokugani are a traditional people, even they have developed new weapons and techniques for bypassing armor over the twelve centuries of the Empire's history, and a relic from an older time may not be able to resist a blow that could claim the wearer's life. Of equal concern, it is disgraceful to allow the armor of one's honored ancestor to sustain damage after it has been preserved and cared after for so long.

There are exceptions to these rules, of course. Most notably, the famous Ancestral Armors of the Great Clans, each of which have illustrious histories and contain potent awakened spirits; these armors are passed down between generations of daimyo and are sometimes worn, even into battle. But these are exceptional cases for exceptional armors, few and far in between.

# Donning Armor

The act of donning armor is a very ceremonial undertaking, every bit as spiritual and symbolic as it is practical. Every step in the process is deliberate and somber, preserved and passed down the generations from sensei to student, and conducted with the same respect and importance as a religious ceremony. Great significance is laid on this ceremony; not only is the order in which pieces are donned important to the effectiveness of the armor itself, but it is also believed the ceremony awakens the martial spirit and prepares the mind for battle.

The precise order in which pieces are donned must always be followed exactly. A student who cannot remember the proper order in which to don his armor is not permitted to pass his gempukku, and indeed is considered unworthy to be a samurai. Deviating from the process, even to save time, is very unlucky. Honorable samurai would rather go to battle without armor than risk the disgrace of donning it incorrectly. To do otherwise is to shame your lord and draw the attention of unfriendly spirits.

Even those who place little stock in superstition understand the wisdom of following the ceremony exactly. The slow and deliberate pace ensures nothing is donned incorrectly (or uncomfortably), and maintaining the pre-established order helps keep every component of the armor in place. Deviation risks the physical integrity of the armor, so rushing through the process could cost a samurai his life. A samurai must fight to achieve victory, but if he fails to adhere to the traditions of his ancestors, he invites defeat before the sword is ever drawn.

## The Ceremony of Donning

The entire armor-donning takes about twenty-five minutes to perform from start to finish. The samurai is normally assisted by a number of servants; without them, donning the armor can take up to twice as long. Omitting certain components (e.g. light armor, which is "incomplete" compared to a true *o-yoroi*) can cut the time of the ceremony down, but as noted above, rushing through the process can be costly during the battle to come.

Before a samurai can even begin to put on his armor, he must first prepare himself to receive it. The samurai cleanses his mind and body with a ritualistic bath. During this cleansing process, the samurai meditates, contemplating the movement of the water and the upcoming conflict. While he does this the servants prepare the armor for donning, untying the knots and laying out each piece according to tradition. This is usually done in a small circular tent made specifically for this purpose, or in a designated room within a castle or barracks. It is common for servants to light candles or even incense for the ritual, as this helps keep the samurai's mind clear and aids in the spiritual transformation. Some samurai choose to have their armor pieces individually anointed by priests or shugenja, but this is an especially ancient practice that has mostly fallen out of use in modern centuries.

When the samurai has fully bathed and cleared his mind of all distractions, he dons a cotton loincloth known as the *fundoshi*. If the samurai is a woman, she instead wears a tabard-like garment known as an *ado-dai*. The samurai then enters the dressing tent where the servants, and the armor, await.

The first thing the samurai puts on is the *shitagi*. This garment is similar to a kimono but is much shorter, cutting off at the knee. It is donned with deliberate movements, first entering the left sleeve, then the right, then closing the garment in front and tying it shut with a silken cord. After this, the samurai dons *hakama*, a type of pleated pants worn over the *shitagi*. The samurai always dons the *hakama* with the left foot first, to awaken the martial spirit. The purpose of these garments is to protect the samurai from the chafing of the armor itself.

Next the samurai puts on his tabi socks, then – with assistance from the servants – wraps the loose sleeves of his garments, arms and legs both, with strips of cloth. The *hakama* are usually left to bunch at the knee, and the sleeves of the *shitagi* are allowed to do so at the elbow.

Eight minutes into the ceremony, the samurai begins to don actual armor. He begins by putting on the *kiahan* (left first, as always), tying them tightly on the innermost side of the leg to prevent discomfort. After this, he dons his zorii sandals.

By this time the armor is fully prepared and the servants are standing by it. If the samurai is a high-ranked individual such as a daimyo, he may have as many as one servant per piece of armor with two for his dō, the largest component. Regardless, the samurai first requests the *sunate*, laying them over the *kiahan* and fastening them tightly. Then comes the *haidate*, tying it to the silk cord belt and draping it over the thighs. After this, the samurai puts on elbow-length cloth gloves, followed by bracer gauntlets called *tekko*. He then dons his *kote*, lacing them beneath his arms.

The biggest piece comes next. The servants help the samurai to don his torso armor, the dō. The cords are unstrung and the armor is put on over the head, draping from the front and back like a tunic. The silk cords are then re-tied by servants while the samurai himself ties on the outermost obi, which will hold the armor together. This obi is shorter and thicker than that worn normally, and usually is dyed a color corresponding with the samurai's rank within his unit. By the time the dō is donned and fully adjusted, the ceremony has lasted sixteen minutes.

Next, the samurai ties on his *sode*, lacing them carefully to both his *kote* and his dō. Following this, he ties the *nodowa* around his neck, allowing it to drape over his collarbone. After these parts are adjusted, the samurai approaches his daisho stand and bows, showing proper

respect to the blade before lifting it from the stand and reverently equipping it.

The ceremony has lasted twenty minutes at this point, and the body is now fully protected. However, there is still the head to consider. First, the samurai dons the *hachimaki*, a soft cloth draped over the head and held in place with a martial headband. The purpose of this is both to protect the head from the hard edges of the helmet and to hold it in place. The samurai then equips his *mengu*; he either puts on a *hoate* or a *mempo*, whichever suits his preference. If required, the samurai's dō is fitted at this time with an L-shaped banner frame for his *sashimono*, a banner used for identification. This is fitted with straps near the waist and shoulders.

The transformation is now complete. The samurai is ready for battle... a process which took twenty-five minutes from start to finish.

## Social Implications of Armor

From a social standpoint, it is vital to remember that when a samurai dons his armor, he is essentially stating his intention to go to battle. Samurai armor is a very iconic and visually striking, and throughout the Empire it is culturally associated with war. It is designed not only to provide protection but also to give a samurai an imposing figure. Because of this, a samurai who spends all his time in armor is likely to attract unwanted attention, suspicion, and hostility. At the very least he will draw raised eyebrows. People usually treat an armor-clad samurai much differently, especially in times of peace, and to be always in armor is considered by polite society to be uncouth and barbaric. (This is a stigma the Crab have mostly learned to live with, even though they are afforded some tolerance given the nature of their duties.)

Barring exceptional circumstances where it cannot be helped, a samurai should never present himself to any lord while wearing armor. In fact, wearing one's armor in any social setting (in court, at the teahouse, while visiting a palace, and so forth) is a serious gaffe. At the worst, it implies the wearer does not feel safe in his current location, a serious insult to the lord of the house. Such samurai are likely to be shown silent contempt if not outright barred from the proceedings, and attending a court in armor will usually earn a few points of Infamy.

Traveling while wearing armor is often just as offensive, especially when visiting the lands of another clan. There are several negative connotations associated with this act: it implies the wearer intends to go to war, and also suggests the wearer does not feel safe in the lands he is visiting, an affront to the honor of the provinces' lords and a slight to their clan. Some clan magistrates even define the entry of their lands by armor-clad outsiders as "invasions" and will respond to them as such!

In most cases, a samurai guest who approaches a castle while wearing his armor is automatically turned away, since he has proffered insult to the castle's lord. Clan magistrates and border wardens likewise always investigate travelers wearing armor and treat them as hostile until otherwise demonstrated. Samurai clad in armor during peacetime are often regarded as cowards, disgraces to their family and name.

Exceptions to these rules do exist. For instance, the Crab are usually forgiving of armor-clad travelers, since their lands are effectively hostile even in times of "peace." Magistrates and personal yojimbo are usually permitted to wear their armor while traveling or visiting court, out of respect for their duties. Military forces with permission to travel through the lands of an ally may also be afforded this courtesy, although the waystations they must pass through should be warned well ahead of time to prevent a misunderstanding. A samurai's traveling papers will usually state whether or not the samurai should be traveling in armor, and if not, it can usually be inferred from a written statement of purpose. Even in these cases, however, clan samurai are always wary of an outsider clad in armor.

In game terms, it is wise for players to remember their characters are representing their daimyo at all times, and thus when they wear their armor in situations with social repercussions they are bringing shame on their lords as well as themselves. The GM may elect to assign points or even entire Ranks of Infamy to characters who routinely travel in armor or who are always seen wearing their armor in public.

# The Craft of Armorsmithing

The crafting of armor is a time-honored tradition, practiced by numerous families throughout the Empire. It has its roots in tradition and owes its progress to war. It is considered an artisan craft in the eyes of the samurai caste, and a proper and even beautiful art in the eyes of certain families within that caste. The balance of craftsmanship, protection, practicality, and aesthetics sought by each armorsmith is the same, whether the end result is a simple set of scout armor or a fully-fledged *o-yoroi*.

Each of the Great Clans have their own armorsmithing traditions and techniques, carefully guarded by generations of craftsmen. Most armor is commissioned by the advisors to daimyo and created by samurai from vassal families. In fact, most families with bugei traditions have at least one vassal family in charge of crafting armor for their masters' samurai.

A samurai's first suit of armor is commissioned by his or her lord some time before the samurai's gempukku, although more rarely it may be made after the ceremony is complete. Because of the nature of the armor, which must fit extremely well lest it hinder its wearer in combat, each suit of armor must be made specifically for its intended owner. It is possible for a samurai to own multiple suits of armor (including those inherited from his or her ancestors), but this is more common among wealthy lords and daimyo, since each suit costs a small fortune.

## Materials and Time

*"We Crab may sometimes want for jade, but never for steel." – Kaiu Tojikana*

The ownership of armor is considered very prestigious and a sign of great wealth. The materials and expertise it takes to make just one suit is extensive, and fine suits of armor can cost more than a mere heimin ever see in an entire lifetime. A merely adequate *o-yoroi* can cost more than forty Koku, with especially well-made suits costing three or four times that much.

Much of the cost is the materials for the armor itself. Most armor is built on a layered cloth base of burlap or hemp, but the finest suits are made with heavy-weave silk. Beneath this are a few layers of canvas, which provides padding to absorb blows. The innermost cloth layer is an especially soft burlap, silk, or in the most expensive and decorative suits, velvet.

Affixed to the cloth base are the lamellar plates which provide the majority of the armor's protection. These plates are made of hammered bronze or iron, or sometimes copper to reduce weight and expense. Usually, iron is reserved for the helmet, the chest armor, and the legs; the other pieces usually use bronze or copper. Armor-crafters will commonly alternate between iron and copper plates to save cost and reduce weight.

Also used are small metal scales, called *kozane*, which are laid in alternating sets between iron and copper. Chain

armor, called *kusari*, is often used to supplement the lamellar armor at weak spots. In cases of armor suitable for ashigaru, wooden planks are often used instead of metal to keep the cost low. These are cut thicker than metal plates, although they still provide inferior protection. Samurai-grade armors almost never use wooden pieces; many honorable samurai would rather die than accept protection from a material associated with ashigaru.

Each of the clans use a different lacquer for their metal plates, but even in the Crab lands, where the art is near-perfected, lacquering metal is a difficult affair. The lacquer used to create the laminate is made from the mixed sap of various trees, which are often poisonous and require careful handling. Sometimes the sap's natural hues are satisfactory for the final appearance of the armor plates, but many clans will introduce inks and dyes to the process to ensure their armor reflects their clan colors.

The common perception is that the armor plates of *o-yoroi* are thick and the entire suit would thus weigh the samurai down, hindering both speed and movement. However, this is not the case; most blades, even those crafted by masters, have difficulty cutting iron merely 1/10th of an inch thick. Thus thick and heavy plates are not needed; thin lamellar plates are usually more than enough to offer good protection, with thicker plates used only for the chest. A fully-armored samurai can still run, jump, and mount a horse without difficulty. Having said this, a full suit of *o-yoroi* incorporating iron plates can still weigh up to 70 pounds, and the bulky form of heavy armor often restricts the more precise movement of the arms (which is why the naginata is sometimes favored over the sword by heavily armored samurai).

As one can imagine, combining of all these elements into a single suit of armor is extremely time consuming. Even an incomplete suit of light armor for the use of scouts can take much time and attention to complete. To speed up the time, armorsmithing families will assign three, four, or even sometimes five craftsmen to create a single suit of armor. A full suit of *o-yoroi* can require as many as one thousand individual armor plates or three thousand individual armor scales. The entire process can take up to a year to complete, even with multiple artisans involved in the work.

## Care and Maintenance

Akodo's *Leadership* says a samurai must always be prepared for battle. Just as a samurai must be always training to meet this expectation, a suit of *o-yoroi* requires nearly constant maintenance to remain battle-worthy. High-ranking or wealthy samurai will keep retainers just to repair and care for their armor. A poor samurai, of course, must perform this task himself.

When armor is not in use, it is kept assembled on a display stand – preferably in a cool dark place, so the materials do not degenerate from exposure to the Elements. The laminate applied to the metallic plates helps prevent rusting, but does not eliminate the possibility, so the plates still require regular polishing and cleaning lest they lose their integrity. The cords which bind a suit of armor together are especially are at risk for rotting, and must be checked and oiled regularly lest they become brittle. Normally, this maintenance is performed once a week.

While armor affords much protection, it also sustains damage very easily. It is quite common for armor to be severely damaged in battle; plates sustain dents and cracks, arrows embed themselves into sode, lacing breaks and frays, sweat and blood seeps into armor-cords and dirties them, and sometimes plates break under crushing blows. Just as the creation of armor is tedious and time-consuming, so too is the repair. In times of war, armorsmiths always follow their clan armies into the field, working after every battle to restore suits of armor to their previous functionality.

# Clans and Families with Armor Traditions

Although every samurai in the Empire uses armor and every Great Clan maintains large numbers of armorsmiths, there are a few groups which maintain an especially strong tradition in the design and crafting of armor.

## The Crab Clan

Throughout the Empire's history, ever since their very founding, the Crab Clan has been locked in a perpetual war with the Shadowlands, battling against all manner of man-eating beasts and demonic oni. It should come as no surprise that the Crab are a clan that places a great importance on armor – in fact, the Crab focus on armor is greater than perhaps any other clan or group in the Empire. After all, there are many times when even a Hida warrior's alertness, stoicism, and strength of will are not enough to keep him from the clutches of a Shadowlands horror or the well-laid ambush of a nightmarish creature. In those all-too-frequent times, a Crab must trust his armor and the skill of the *yoroi-sei* who forged it to determine if he lives or dies.

The Crab are well-known to favor heavier suits of armor, but there are a few notable exceptions. The Hiruma scouts, for instance, usually wear minimal protection, operating under the philosophy that if they are not noticed armor will not be needed. Crab berserkers often eschew armor because it impedes their wild aggressive attacks, and more than a few berserkers have been seen to charge into the thick of battle wearing nothing more than a *hakama*. Most samurai of the Hida, however, do not fall into these categories and must rely on their armor in their frequent direct combat with their ancient inhuman enemies. Hida training is to draw the enemy close where it cannot

retreat, and this sometimes means sustaining many blows. This makes it essential that the Crab's armor be able to withstand the enemy's attack. Heavy armor, such as the *o-yoroi* and the unique *tetsu-dou*, is thus always preferred by front-line Hida warriors.

A Crab treats his armor with the same reverence and respect as his weapons, not out of superstition but so they do not fail him when the time comes. Crab are trained to conduct minor maintenance on their own equipment, so it is quite common to see a Crab bushi inspecting his armor, replacing lacings, or oiling the lacquered plates. Usually, armor is stored and displayed where it can be donned at a moment's notice. Indeed, because a Crab is expected to be ready for battle at any time, they adopt habits that shave off precious minutes from the time required to don their armor. Many Crab simply do not take it off until their time of active duty is finished. Hida bushi have been known to wear their armor for literally days at a time, stoically enduring the weight and discomfort, ignoring the stench of their sweat as it soaks into the armor's lacing.

All this being said, despite the notorious Crab practicality they will still try to observe the proper ceremony and traditions whenever possible while donning their armor. To do otherwise is to invite the disastrous anger of the Fortunes and ancestors, and a Crab warrior facing the horrors of the Shadowlands takes no such chances.

Naturally, it is the Kaiu who are the best-known Crab armorsmiths, and indeed some of the most famous smiths in the Empire. Tasked with engineering armor that can withstand the strength of an oni, the Kaiu family have spent centuries perfecting the most powerful and resilient armor possible. Metallurgists within the clan are always seeking new ores that may be useful for weapons and armor, and the family's *yoroi-sei* are always working on improvements. Indeed, when it comes to armor, the Kaiu are synonymous with innovation. The unique *tetsu-dou* armor was invented by a Kaiu vassal family, the Ishi. Many Kaiu suits of armor are created specifically for their effectiveness against oni and other Shadowlands denizens; suits of primarily scale-mail are developed to protect samurai against crushing attacks, while the claws of Jigoku's horrors are often foiled by the solid iron of the tetsu-dou. However, not all of the Crab's opponents are otherworldly... in fact, many times, they are quite human. For every suit of outlandish armor custom-built to foil the Shadowlands, there is a Kaiu-forged suit of traditional *o-yoroi*.

## The Phoenix Clan: The Shiba

For a clan so dedicated to pacifism, it may seem unexpected for the Phoenix to take an interest in armor. To the Shiba, however, armor is a reflection of the samurai's sacred duty. Its purpose is protection, after all; the protection of life, of image, and of spirit. In fact, the kami dwelling within armor are believed to have the same influence over the protective value of the armor as the physical material and skill used to make it. When a Shiba dons his armor, he effectively becomes a different person, encasing himself in the identity contained within the armor itself. There are many among the Shiba who believe some aspects of a samurai's spirit lingers in his armor even after his death. For all these reasons, the Shiba lay particularly strong importance on their armor, far more than many families.

The typical ceremony for donning a suit of *yoroi* or other light armor can take between fifteen and twenty minutes, with a suit of *o-yoroi* taking twenty to twenty-five if everything is done according to tradition. However, the ceremony the Shiba employ is far more elaborate, and involves awakening the spirit resting within the armor and aligning its identity to the wearer's own. In this way the samurai does not simply sheath himself in his armor and fight from inside it. Instead, the Shiba and his armor truly become one. These elaborations on the normal ceremony are unique to the Phoenix, and they typically increase the donning time by five to eight minutes. Yet without them, the Shiba believe a samurai has not truly awakened his martial spirit; the armor remains simply a tool and not a true extension of its wearer's warrior self.

Perhaps due to the spiritual attachments the Shiba have towards their armor, every suit they possess is totally one-of-a-kind, each just as unique as the samurai who wears it. Shiba armor is commissioned by each young samurai's lord well before he reaches gempukku, thereby giving the Koganshi vassal family adequate time to construct something that matches the up-and-coming samurai's personality. Through variations of adornments, embroidering, patterns of the lamellar scales, and sometimes even the shape of the armor itself, the result is different from all others. To those who are familiar with the conventions of Phoenix armor-forgers, the armor of a Shiba can be as self-identifying as a personal mon or banner.

Although Koganshi-crafted armor is not as strong as the armor of the Kaiu and not as resilient as the armor of the Tsi smiths, it is by far the most beautiful in the entire Empire. Every aspect of every suit is given complete consideration, ensuring the aesthetic balance of the entire piece, and the suits are always adorned with elaborate and beautiful decorations. Hand-woven silks, gold and copper trimming, and dyed lacquers are masterfully applied, even to suits of low-ranking samurai. However, such applications are not gaudy or overbearing; they are always tasteful and serve to celebrate the personality of the samurai wearing them. Light armor is the most common among the Shiba, the typical *yoroi* being more than a suitable canvas for the Koganshi artisans. However, it is the rare and radiant Koganshi *o-yoroi* that is most prized by Shiba and armor collectors alike, if only because there is more beauty there to be appreciated.

Some speculate there is another purpose to these elaborate decorations: distraction. After all, the chief duty of the Shiba is to act as yojimbo to the Isawa shugenja, and it is difficult to ignore a samurai in brightly decorated eye-catching armor. Of course the Shiba do not say whether such distractions are a practical reason behind their elaborate armor designs. However, if it is not a deliberate purpose, it is at least a happy coincidence.

All of this being said, anyone who imagines the beauty of Shiba armor is indicative of compromises in quality or protection is foolish indeed. Perhaps the most impressive aspect of these armors is their surprising durability, and their protection is every bit the equal of less-elaborate suits from other clans. A Shiba is likely to have the same amount of protection as a Doji or Mirumoto, but his armor will be far more striking on the battlefield... or in court, protecting his charge.

## The Tsi/The Oriole Clan

The Tsi are considered to be one of the greatest forging and crafting families in the history of the Empire, and thus it is no surprise they are among those families known for the quality of their armor. In fact, the Tsi are often commissioned to create suits of armor for members of the Great Clans, and their work in that field rivals their famous blades in quality. They never create these items in bulk, instead taking commissions one at a time. Thus the armor of the Oriole is known for its rarity as well as its quality.

However, Tsi armor is also known for its great practicality in design. Where the armors of other clans are sometimes ostentatious and showy, the Tsi armors are efficient and straightforward, possessing virtually no decoration except for the forging-stamp of the smith who created them. The samurai receiving such armor will often decorate it as he sees fit, and the Tsi do not take offense at this. Notwithstanding the apparent plainness of Tsi armor designs, their suits are always quite comfortable, and it is said that Tsi armor requires far less maintenance to keep functional. This keeps the demand for Tsi armor quite high.

While the Tsi must ask the Emperor himself for permission before forging a katana (a tradition they have held for centuries, long before they were granted status as the Oriole Clan), a Tsi need not petition to forge armor. In modern times the Dragon often commission armor from the Tsi for their samurai out of respect for their alliance with the Minor Clans. The Mantis, likewise, commission much armor from the Tsi, and surprisingly even the Kakita and Doji have sometimes shown an appreciation for their simple yet effective armor. Those who truly understand the craft of armorsmithing look upon their works as objects of great beauty, and no Imperial's armor collection is complete without at least one sample.

It can thus be a surprise to discover that the Tsi samurai themselves typically do not wear armor, not even that of their own manufacture. The Oriole Clan trains in Kenjutsu to better understand the crafting and function of swords, and their limited fighting style very reliant on defense with the blade. Armor is redundant to their approach, and in any case the Tsi have never engaged in warfare and have no intention of doing so in the future. If an Oriole samurai is spotted wearing armor, it is either out of simple necessity or because he is attempting to determine how his client will be using his commissioned work. A Tsi smith usually creates several prototype armors which he will test and experiment with before attempting a final piece. He will not presume to wear the final completed armor, of course; it was made for the client, and it would be disrespectful to don it.

## The Quartermaster Families

It is in the interest of every clan, great or minor, to keep its samurai well-equipped and its martial assets regulated. Among the Great Clans, this duty usually falls to one or more specialized vassal families. These so-called "quartermaster" or "forging" families (*Juhin-Kenzoku*) are usually tasked both with forging new weapons and armor (those granted to followers by daimyo) and with keeping accurate written records of who is in possession of these arms. Whenever a new suit of armor or a weapon is forged by these families, they record whose orders led to the suit being forged, what type it is, and to whom it was given. If it is named, this too is recorded. Whenever the item changes hands, official papers announcing this are sent to the vassal family to update their records. In this way, possession of armor and weapons is closely tracked, if for no other reason than to protect the clan's interests. Since the entire purpose of these vassal families is to equip their clans, the *Juhin-Kenzoku* share a close kinship with each other. All of them take their duties very seriously.

Herewith is a list of the *Juhin-Kenzoku* in each of the Great Clans that are known primarily for forging armor:

### Crab: The Kenru Family

Founded in the twelfth century by Kaiu Kenru, a legendary armorer of his time, the Kenru Family jealously guards his secrets. A suit of *o-yoroi* forged by a Kenru takes twice as long to make, but it is said to last five times the lifetime of a normal suit.

### Crab: The Ishi Family

Also a vassal family of the Kaiu, the Ishi is one of the most ancient vassal families in the Empire. According to legend their founder, Kaiu Ishi, forged a suit of armor that saved the life of Clan Champion Hida Kenzen. After the battle of White Stag, it was the Ishi family that invented the *tetsu-dou* style of armor.

### Crane: The Fujihiro Family

An ancient vassal of the Daidoji, this family is better known for their forging of polearms. However, they also train master artisans of armorcraft. Their armor is noted for its slender form-fitting shape and freedom of movement, especially the suits worn by scouts of the Daidoji.

### Dragon: The Remiki Family

Somewhat unexpectedly (at least to those not familiar with the Dragon), the most prestigious tradition of armorers in the Dragon Clan is found within a family of shugenja. Originally vassals of the Agasha, in modern times the Remiki serve the Tamori. Regardless of era, the Remiki treat the creation of armor as a form of meditation. It is said the mantras they whisper during forging awakens spirits that strengthen their armor.

### Lion: The Itagawa Family

Vassals of the Akodo, the Itagawa are not well known to the Empire at large except by those who collect *mempo*. The exquisite quality, detail, and expertise of an Itagawa mempo rivals the work of master artisans from other clans. Even so, the Itagawa avoid the limelight, humbly fulfilling the duty of protecting their clan's warriors.

### Mantis: The Chirichi Family

Among all the Great Clans, the Mantis are those who most often commission suits of armor from outsiders – mainly because their own clan is short of both the materials for making armor and the craftsmen to forge it. However, the tiny Chirichi family of the Yoritomo do manage to supply a modest but steady amount of armor for the clan. Among their accomplishments, the Chirichi have developed a kind of heavy armor that can be removed in a mere fraction of the normal amount of time, which can be very useful when a samurai has fallen overboard.

### Unicorn: The Zeshi Family

The Zeshi, vassals of the Iuchi since the tenth century, are founded by the son of an Iuchi daimyo who did not inherit the gifts of the kami, and sought to serve the clan in other ways. Since their founding the Zeshi family have supplied the Unicorn with the bulk of its modern riding armor. They are famed amongst the Unicorn for their expert leather-working skills, but due to the Rokugani taboo against working with dead flesh they are relatively unknown to the rest of the Empire.

### Phoenix: The Koganshi Family

These vassals of the Shiba are justly famous for the beauty of their armor. In fact, armor crafted by the Koganshi is prized throughout the Empire. The intricate embellishments, radiant colors, and beautiful adornments allow each of their suits to be appreciated as a work of art. Even so, Koganshi armor is fully functional; no aspect of defense is sacrificed in the name of beauty.

### Scorpion: The Ugawa Family

In the fourth century, a samurai-ko named Kaiu Ugawa was married into the Scorpion Clan as a covert punishment for the needless death of the unit entrusted to her. She believed there would be no purpose for her in the Scorpion... until she found their forges lacking. The techniques she taught the Scorpion armorsmiths earned her a vassal family under the Bayushi, who preserve her methods to this day.

### Unicorn: The Shiko Family

When a dire plague assails the Empire in the twelfth century, the Horiuchi family is all but destroyed. A woman named Horiuchi Shiko, an armorsmith who had mastered the craft of horse barding, was one of the handful of survivors. She was taken into the Ide and granted vassal family status so the techniques she developed for the Horiuchi would not be lost.

## Spider Armorsmiths

The Spider Clan starts out as an effort by the forces of Daigotsu to infiltrate the Empire, pretending to be a ronin band seeking recognition as a clan. However, the spectacular events at the conclusion of the Kali-Ma Invasion result in the Spider being granted official status as a Great Clan by the Empress Iweko. This leads to a number of subsequent events, notably including the departure of the so-called Chuda family – their *maho-tsukai* practices are not acceptable in the new, officially-accepted form of the Spider Clan.

When the Chuda depart, a craftsman and armorer among them – a man called Chuda Gyushi – forsakes his former line and swears fealty to the Daigotsu. The new Clan Champion, Daigotsu Kanpeki, gives him the chance to prove his loyalty by granting him his own vassal family, an armory... and the promise that if he betrays his lords, it will be the last thing he ever does. In this way the Spider come to possess a *Juhin-Kenzoku* in the manner of the other Great Clans they seek to imitate.

# Fortresses of Earth: Rokugani Castles

*"It is rare to find a home that is not also a fortress. Samurai are paranoid lot." – Daigotsu, Dark Lord of the Shadowlands*

Castles are among the most distinctive architectural creations in the Empire, both for their beauty and for their formidable capabilities. In a land where the majority of structures tend to be lightweight if not downright flimsy, the solidity and formidable strength of castles and palaces sets them apart. No other structure draws so heavily on the style and theme of Earth in its design or construction, and no other structure – save perhaps for the greatest of temples – draws such intense effort, attention, and devotion.

Castles are also among the few structures in Rokugan that make extensive use of stone in their construction. The Crab are of course particularly well-known for their massive stone fortifications, castles so huge they look more like mountains than anything man-made. However, almost all the clans make extensive use of stone in their castles, particularly in the foundations and walls, and the construction of castles is thus an art deeply associated with the Element of Earth. It is also, of course, an art of War, and the clans with strong military traditions also tend to be the clans who build formidable castles (with the notable exception of the semi-nomadic Unicorn, whose castles tend to be smaller and more lightly fortified). However, building castles is an art as well as a craft, and the clans with powerful artistic traditions (such as the Crane and the Phoenix) build castles which, while they may be less militarily impressive, are second to none in architectural beauty.

## Construction of Castles

Rokugani castles are usually built to stand guard over important access routes to the clan's lands, such as major roads and rivers. They are usually placed atop hills or on other high ground to make things more difficult for attackers and to maximize the range and power of defending archers. Castles built in the mountains are called yamajiro, and are considered the most desirable because of the natural defenses that surround them. Most of the castles of the Dragon Clan, for example, are *yamajiro*. More commonly, however, castles are built on either open plains (to protect trade routes or important villages) or on low hills near such strategic locations. Castles in open lands are called *hirajiro*, and are most common among the Crane, Unicorn, and Lion (though the Unicorn castles built after their return to the Empire tend to use unorthodox styles). Castles on hills are called hirayamajiro, and are most common in Crab and Scorpion lands.

Once a site has been chosen, an architect is selected to draw up plans. This sometimes can result in fierce competition between designers from a clan's various families. Typically each architect's plan will be sponsored by a prominent courtier, who backs that proposal in court and presents them to the court of the relevant daimyo. The actual manner in which the plans are presented differs between clans; a Crab architect, for example, is expected to build a small-scale representation of the proposed structure including surrounding terrain, while a Dragon must present an evaluation of the time construction will take, including the time to create new roads through the formidable Dragon mountains. A Crane architect will offer beautiful drawings of the castle's expected final form, while a Phoenix will often call on the assistance of a shugenja to portray the proposed castle with images of Air.

The approval process represents an opportunity for the architect and his family to gain much glory and prestige. The negotiations over which courtier will present each architect's plans can take several weeks and provoke major political rivalries; after all, this represents a major opportunity for courtiers to prove themselves and gain more prestigious appointments from their clan.

### *Kyuden* versus *Shiro*

*"Would that all paltry shiro could be kyuden some day." – Doji Bukita, twelfth century*

The title of a castle – *shiro* or *kyuden* – denotes more than simple size. The title *shiro* can refer to any castle or military strongholds, but the term *kyuden* denotes that a structure is capable of hosting the Imperial Winter Court, the largest and most prestigious social gathering in all of Rokugan. The traditional requirement to be called a *kyuden* was to be able to accommodate at least two hundred and fifty guests in addition to the stronghold's usual complement of residents, guards, administrators, and other personnel. This number, originally codified by the Seppun family, assumes that each of the Great Clans send thirty representatives, along with the Emperor's own entourage and any other surprise guests. After the addition of the Mantis Clan in the twelfth century, this was raised to two hundred and eighty, and then to three hundred and ten after Empress Iweko admitted the Spider Clan a few decades later. Older structures, such as Kyuden Doji, were exempted from the new requirement.

Constructing and maintaining a *kyuden* requires a massive expenditure of resources on the part of the host clan. No clan boasts as many *kyuden* as the Crane, but all of the Great Clans have at least one palace capable of hosting the Emperor's court. Among the Minor Clans of Rokugan, none truly have a castle capable of being named a *kyuden*, although the sole castle of the Sparrow Clan has been granted that title by Imperial favor.

Gift-giving is an important facet of the presentation process; even in pragmatic military clans like the Crab, the architect often presents gifts to his daimyo. The process of constructing a castle takes a great many clan resources and many months of work; thus an architect will be selected not only on the strength of his plans, but also on his perceived ability to carry those plans through to fruition. The dedication and care with which an architect selects and presents gifts is seen as an indication of ability and competence. An architect who cannot even give a gift properly can hardly be expected to oversee a project as complex as building a castle!

Once an architect and plan have been chosen, the real work of castle construction begins. Hundreds, often thousands of heimin are conscripted from nearby villages to form the work crews that build the castle and its surrounding structures. Clan magistrates are often assigned the task of finding suitable workers, though it is not uncommon for a village to volunteer the required laborers for the task. The Mantis and the Crab are known for putting their more skilled heimin (those with specialized stoneworking skills, for example) in charge of major portions of the work, but in the more civilized lands of the Empire the work is usually directly overseen by samurai craftsmen. The Scorpion maintain a curious habit of using criminals in the construction of their fortresses, and some observers have whispered the most ancient Scorpion palaces have the bones of those who built them in the mortar of their foundations.

The first task of the assembled work force is to clear the surrounding area; after all, a castle's defense against a siege is based in part on its command of the ground and maintaining a clear field of fire for its archers. Any forests are clear-cut, with the lumber then being used to help build the castle. Once that is done, the foundation stones of the keep and the surrounding walls are laid.

Rokugani keeps usually have between three and six floors, although truly large kyuden can have keeps as high as ten floors. The first floor, built on the foundation and surrounded by stone walls (and often by earth outside those walls), contains the keep's supplies and military gear, and also houses the castle's archives and records. The second floor, normally the first visible above ground, is a grand entranceway with many rooms set aside for the welcome of guests. Above these floors, the construction usually shifts from stone to wood. Though many of the functions of these upper floors change between clans, one constant is that the highest floor is always the residence and offices of the castle's lord and his family.

# Elements of Rokugani Castles

Although every clan's castle designs have their own idiosyncrasies, there are many basic elements which every castle has in common.

## Keep (*Tenshukaku*)

The center of any castle is the keep. This is a multi-storied structure, ranging from three to six floors in height, built atop a strong stone foundation. The keep is also the home of the castle's daimyo, and the highest level of the keep is always the daimyo's personal residence. Symbolically, this represents the relationship between Tengoku and Ningen-do, as well as reminding everyone of the lord's high station. Lower floors contain guard chambers, guest quarters, storage and supplies, audience halls and court chambers, shrines to fortunes and ancestors, offices, archives, and even gardens, libraries, and artist studios. Few castles outside of the Crab lands are without some kind of artistic decoration, although the degree of decoration varies widely.

A keep is always entered on the second floor, so anyone approaching must ascend a ramp to the main gate. This ramp is always covered by arrow slits and often winds through a maze of outer walls and gatehouses (see Outer Walls, below). Thus, even if the outer walls have fallen to attackers the keep itself can often hold out.

## Outer Walls (*Maru*)

A signature element of almost every major Rokugani castle is the outer walls, which form a complex system of barriers, courtyards, and gatehouses which must be passed in order to reach the central keep. These layouts of walls and gates can be hugely elaborate, and are designed both to awe and impress visitors and to impede an attacking army at every turn. Some walls, such as those at the mazelike Shiro Shiba, are specifically designed to confuse and enrage an attacking army, sending them down false paths and confronting them with lethal dead ends at every turn. On the other hand, the walls of Kyuden Doji and Kyuden Bayushi are straight and relatively simple in design, more symbolic than practical.

Naturally, all walls – even in the lands of peaceful clans – are equipped with arrow slits (*yasama*) to allow the defenders free reign to fire into attackers. Some castles also equip their outer walls and gateways with emplacements for unleashing rolling logs, boulders, or bales of brush which have been set on fire; another popular defensive weapon is barrels of sand which are heated until the sand is almost molten. (With the exception of the Crab and occasionally the Unicorn, Rokugani castles generally do not employ boiling or flaming oil against attackers.)

Construction of outer walls varies by region – in the more peaceful lands they tend to be fairly narrow and highly decorative, covered in beautiful carvings and painted in bright colors. Among the more martial clans such as the Lion and Crab, however, they tend to be much thicker and plainer in design, with heavier parapets. The purpose of these walls is to keep invading armies out, rather than to impress or trick them. It is also notable that walls in martial clans are made entirely of stone, while those in more peaceable regions are a mixture of stone and wood, and sometimes even made entirely of wood.

## Barracks

Any sizable castle includes one or more barracks to house the samurai who serve the stronghold's lord. Barracks are typically utilitarian, providing little more than a small living space for samurai who are off-duty. Only unmarried samurai live in barracks, which also serve to house ronin employed in the daimyo's service. Typically, barracks include small shrines to the ancestors and a secondary armory (over and above the large amount of gear kept in the bottom level of the main keep). Most barracks are separate from the main keep, although still part of the overall castle complex, but smaller castles will house the barracks within the bottom two floors of the

### Stone and Wood

*"Stone doesn't stop oni, but it buys you time. Never trust wood." – Kaiu Seiki*

Broadly speaking, there are two competing philosophies behind the construction of castles and other large buildings in Rokugan. One was born in the Crane Clan, the source of artistic creation in Rokugan, while the other originated with the Crab, those most experienced in war and destruction. These philosophies have driven the construction of everything from mighty castles to simple homes. In brief, the Crane prefer wood, while the Crab choose stone. (Of course, ultimately both philosophies are based on the Element of Earth.)

Wood speaks to common, day-to-day use. Wood-based construction philosophy emphasizes creation, resilience, and rebuilding. Wood is easily worked and wooden structures can be built – and rebuilt – quickly. Fortresses whose construction relies primarily on wood are designed to be as frustrating and difficult to besiege as possible, but can also be rebuilt quickly if necessary. The flip side of this, of course, is that such castles tend to be not merely captured but destroyed – usually burned to the ground.

Stone is about eternity; the construction philosophy of stone emphasizes timelessness and protection. Buildings made of stone are much slower and more difficult to construct, but are designed to last for centuries at a time. Stone castles are intended to weather any assault and never be captured, no matter how overwhelming the assault. The flip side of this is that if a stone fortress falls, it provides as much benefit to its captor as it once did to the original owner.

keep proper, and extremely large castles will often have secondary barracks within the keep in addition to the main ones elsewhere.

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

## Moats (*Mizuki*)

Not all Rokugani castles include moats, but they are common enough to be included in the standard features of the Empire's castle designs. Typically, a moat will be placed outside of the main outer wall of a castle complex and/or along an inner wall that divides the complex into sections. Some castles also add a third moat around the *tenshukaku* itself, although depending on the castle's layout this is not always possible. Moats are most often used in the castles of the Crane, Scorpion, and Lion, as well as in the castles of the Imperial families. The Unicorn and the Dragon seldom bother with moats – the Unicorn tend to refrain from building heavily-fortified castles, and the Dragon find it difficult to construct moats in their rugged mountains. The Mantis as a whole seldom bother with moats – they have the entire Sea of Amaterasu as a moat, after all – but the Tsuruchi family's castle is known do make use of them. The Crab use them when possible, but the relative lack of water near the Shadowlands means they cannot always do so; of course, the Kaiu Wall itself is defended by the River of the Last Stand.

The Rokugani usually do not use drawbridges. Instead, they build normal bridges to cross their moats, often of a highly decorative nature, but design them to be collapsed during an attack.

Moats can serve as a castle's backup water supply if they are connected to a spring or a flowing river. More often, however, they are isolated bodies of water and prone to becoming stagnant or diseased. (In the Crab lands, moats can also sometimes become infested with aquatic Shadowlands creatures, a danger which the clan must watch for vigilantly.) In some cases the moats do not actually contain water, but are merely large trenches, sometimes with decorative grasses and flowers cultivated within. In time of war, these empty moats are filled with water.

## Towers (*Yagura*)

The outer walls of castle complexes are often supplemented with towers, some of which can be quite large and even become effectively secondary keeps. The main gate into a castle complex will almost always be flanked on either side by such towers. Towers serve as defensive strongholds in the event of an attack on the castle, especially as rallying points for defending soldiers. Their height also allows archers to dominate large areas around them, and when siege engines are available they are mounted in towers for maximum effect. (This is rare outside of the Crab lands, of course.)

Towers also serve as secondary storehouses for weapons and food. The larger towers, which are usually found in the major fortresses of the Crab, Dragon, and Lion, are fully realized multi-story keeps intended to split up and disrupt any attack which might otherwise focus on the main tenshukaku. They are seldom seen in the Unicorn, Crane, Scorpion, or Phoenix lands.

## Castle Towns (Jokamichi)

Castle towns (*jokamichi*) form naturally around castles. Heimin and eta are inevitably drawn to castles, often starting from the work-crews who built them in the first place, and with time a fair-sized town usually develops outside the walls – sometimes even evolving into full-sized cities. In the Lion lands, the samurai actively discourage the development of *jokamichi* on the grounds that they weaken their castles' defenses. Regardless, such towns are seldom walled.

Castle towns usually provide the home for most of the merchants, laborers, servants, artisans, and other skilled heimin of a daimyo's fief. Some also serve as homes for farmers, but usually only in the most pastoral of locations. The village around Kyuden Suzume is almost the ultimate example of such an arrangement, since due to the notorious poverty of the Sparrow Clan its samurai must often labor in the fields alongside the peasant farmers.

## Unique Aspects of Rokugani Castle Design

Rokugani castles have a number of aspects which distinguish them from western castles. The first of these is that the walls of Rokugani castles are generally sloped rather than completely vertical. While the slope does in theory make them slightly easier to scale, the stones used to make the walls are usually too tightly-crafted to offer handholds, and the Rokugani will often coat the outer walls with plaster to give them a smooth finish. The sloped design is intended to help the castles withstand earthquakes (a problem in many regions of Rokugan), as well as making it easier for defenders to roll large logs and stones down on their attackers.

Also unlike the walls of western castles, most Rokugani castles do not have walkways or passages within or atop their walls. (There are some exceptions, notably the fortresses of the Crab lands and a few truly large fortifications such as the Kaiu Wall and the walls of the Imperial Capital.) Instead, timbers stick out of the walls and wooden planks are placed across these timbers as needed to create places for the defenders to stand; these are known as "stone-throwing shelves," or *ishi uchi tana*. These standing spaces are movable and can be installed or relocated as needed.

The smaller buildings within the walls of a castle, such as the barracks, are often crafted with a layer of plaster over wooden beams rather than more conventional Rokugani wood-and-paper construction methods. This makes these interior buildings stronger and also virtually fireproof, an important quality in a siege.

A notable feature of many Rokugani keeps, especially those whose lords fear assassins, are the special floors known as nightingale floors. These appear to be traditional polished wooden floors, but are built in such a way that they creak and groan when walked upon; in effect, they "sing," alerting everyone in the area that someone is walking on them.

## Famous Rokugani Castles

There are literally hundreds of castles in Rokugan, many of them never known to anyone outside of their own province. However, in the annals of the Empire's history there are several castles which stand out above all others, earning lasting fame and respect for their military strength or their unusual history. This sections lists a few of the more prominent such castles.

### Kyuden Hida

*"It will be a fortress that cannot fall, no matter how great the armies arrayed against it. The forces of darkness will break against it like water." – Kaiu*

Kyuden Hida is without question the largest and most impressive fortress in all of Rokugan. It is generally believed the castle was designed by Kaiu himself, but some modern Crab legends claim Osano-Wo single-handedly carved the castle out of a mountain. Indeed, those who first see the stronghold often remark that it does not look as though it was built but rather grew naturally out of the mountains around it. Regardless, ever since the first century Kyuden Hida has served as the central stronghold of the Hida family and thus of the Crab Clan. Its outer walls stand over 35 ken-an (180 feet) high, higher than any other castle in Rokugan save the sacred walls of the Imperial Capital, Otosan Uchi. The main gate is built of solid steel, and require ten men to open. Kyuden Hida's location commands a prominent mountain pass, the fastest route into the central Crab lands and the most important communications hub in the Hida provinces.

### Kyuden Hida and the Destroyer War

During the late-twelfth-century conflict known variously as the Destroyer War or the Kali-Ma Invasion, the invading hordes of Destroyers breached the Kaiu Wall and overran much of the southern Crab lands. Kyuden Hida itself held out for many months, with the Crab staging raids out of their fortress to savage the flanks and rear of the advancing gaijin horde. Eventually, the Destroyers decided they had had enough, and dispatched a huge army to assault the Crab Clan's greatest castle.

The siege lasted 26 days. The attacking forces used a monstrous catapult, created from the flesh of countless demons grafted together, to bombard the castle – not only with massive stones to weaken the defenses, but also with plague zombies which ran amok within the walls. Those infected by the plague became zombies themselves, further weakening the defenses. On the final day the Destroyers finally breached the walls. The remaining Crab in the garrison fought to the last, dying one by one.

After the Goddess Kali-Ma was slain and her forces defeated, the Crab reclaimed the ruins of Kyuden Hida and promptly began rebuilding it, determined to make it even stronger than before. The Kaiu added a whole new set of defenses and traps, including spike-tipped iron nets that could be extended from the top of the massive walls. These were intended to catch and deflect any projectiles launched over the walls, a defensive supplement born of their painful experience with the Destroyers' tactics.

All of the families of the Crab contribute to the formidable defenses of Kyuden Hida, adding to the inherent strength of its location and construction. The castle is always manned by at least three thousand veteran bushi of the Hida family. Once per year, the Kuni Witch Hunters gather at Kyuden Hida to share their knowledge and to report on their activities to the lord of the Crab. For much of the Empire's history the Hiruma also maintain a large presence in Kyuden Hida, and it served as their de facto home for many years after the fall of Shiro Hiruma in the eighth century. The Kaiu, of course, maintain a constant presence in the castle – they see it as their founder's greatest legacy and dedicate themselves to not only maintaining but improving it, year by year. The most brilliant traps and most powerful siege weapons are installed in Kyuden Hida, and inventions of brilliant madness stud its walls. Even the castle's great central courtyard is an elaborate weapon, able to transform into a whirring pit of mechanical death should the giant stone walls ever be breached.

Some claim there are tunnels connecting Kyuden Hida to the Kaiu Wall and even to the other major Crab strongholds, but this has never been verified by any member of the Crab. The tunnels beneath Kyuden Hida allowed the Crab to stage devastating flank and rear attacks against the Destroyers in the latter parts of the Destroyer War.

## Kosaten Shiro

*"If the Lion see this as a threat, let them try to take it."*
*– Daidoji Tsuyoku, family daimyo*

Although Kosaten Shiro is in no way the most famous Crane castle (that honor belongs to Kyuden Doji, followed closely by Shiro Sano Kakita), it is definitely among the most famous military fortresses of the Crane Clan, rivaled only by Shiro Daidoji. It is a perfect example of the clan's defensive approach. Primarily a wood structure (albeit set on a high stone foundation), Kosaten Shiro is not nearly as formidable as the average Crab fortress. However, it is situated on the prime potential invasion route from Lion lands, right in between Shiro Daidoji and the Lion Clan's Shiro Matsu. Due to the layout of the roads in this part of the Empire, any Lion invasion numbering more than a couple of thousand must of necessity travel via the route guarded by Kosaten Shiro.

Although the castle does not look particularly formidable from the outside, Kosaten Shiro's elaborate construction hides a bewildering array of hidden passages, camouflaged arrow slits, and even fake walls to confound and weaken attacking forces. The castle has fallen more than once, but it has always extracted a bitter price from its enemies. And when the Crane Clan's political and economic strength ultimately prevails, they always rebuild the castle quickly.

The Daidoji preference for preparation in all things is evident not only in the design of the castle but also in the lands around it. When the Lion and Crane wage war, any Lion army advancing toward Kosaten Shiro must run a gauntlet of hundreds of lethal traps placed in the lands around the fortress.

## Kyuden Ashinagabachi

Kyuden Ashinagabachi, the Castle of the Wasp, became one of the most famous Minor Clan holdings in Rokugan before it was absorbed into the Mantis Clan after the Hidden Emperor Era. As outlined in the L5R 4th Edition supplement Emerald Empire (page 103), the castle was seized from the Scorpion by the nascent Wasp Clan at the dawn of the twelfth century. The new clan's founder and lord, Tsuruchi, set out to modify the castle to fit the unique methods and needs of his new family, which focused on archery as its source of strength. Walls and towers were rebuilt and even the keep itself was modified to provide optimal sight-lines and ambush zones for archery. Tens of thousands of arrows are stocked in the basement of Wasp Castle, courtesy of a local population that includes some of the best fletchers outside of Lion lands, ensuring the castle's defenders enjoy a near-limitless supply of ammunition.

The most notable thing about Kyuden Ashinagabachi is the clear-cutting around the castle. It sits nestled in the cleft of a small mountain pass, and for miles around there is not a single tree to break the archers' sight-lines. The narrow mountain pathways that lead to the castle have been completely cleared of any kind of natural cover, and a small heimin work force makes sure this does not change. Thus, any hostile force would have to face a long, withering march through the implacable and deadly accurate fire of the castle's defenders. It is said the archery killing fields around the Castle of the Wasp are as much as five times more effective than those of other castles in the Empire.

Though Kyuden Ashinagabachi was originally a Scorpion palace, Tsuruchi's tradition of modifying the castle has continued through each successive daimyo of the family. It is not uncommon for each new leader of the Tsuruchi to make massive changes in the layout of the fortress based on the evolving needs of the Tsuruchi and the Mantis Clan. Unsurprisingly, the largest change in the castle's design came after the Wasp were absorbed into the Mantis Clan.

The primary dojo of the Tsuruchi school is nestled within the walls of Kyuden Ashinagabachi. This structure, nearly as fortified as the main keep, represents the greatest treasure of the Tsuruchi. The building is studded with arrow slits on all sides, making any hostile approach extremely dangerous for invaders. The dojo was built inside the castle after Tsuruchi seized it from Scorpion control, and in contrast to the rest of the complex it has never been modified by subsequent daimyo.

### Kosaten Shiro in Modern Times

In the year 1167, Kosaten Shiro was destroyed at the beginning of the so-called War of Silk and Steel. A Dragon attack set off hidden stores of gaijin pepper (gunpowder) which the Daidoji had hidden there. The explosions annihilated the castle's secondary keep and eastern wall and ignited a fire that consumed the rest of the castle.

Despite the extensive damage, the rebuilding of Kosaten Shiro took a mere three years. However, this time the Daidoji decided to apply new techniques, strengthening the wooden walls with stone buttresses and towers. This caused some Crane to remark that Kosaten Shiro had been rebuilt by the Kaiu, much to the chagrin of its latest architect, Daidoji Botan.

## The Palace of the Breaking Dawn

The Palace of the Breaking Dawn, also known as Shiro Akatsuki, is one of the strangest military fortress in Rokugan. The name of its original architect has been lost to history, but the castle's ringed defenses and heavy use of stonework point to a Kaiu. On the other hand, the parapets show signs of Lion influence, while the well-hidden arrow slits and burning pitch emplacements suggest a Bayushi architect and the confusing layout of the courtyard has all the hallmarks of an ambush-minded Daidoji. The real truth may well remain unknown forever; individual GMs can decide for themselves who built Shiro Akatsuki in their version of Rokugan.

The so-called Palace is located on unaligned lands deep within the Mountains of Regret, close to the Phoenix but outside their borders. For much of its history it was considered an Imperial holding, ruled by various minor lords appointed to the task by Imperial functionaries. During the Clan War the castle was abandoned and effectively left unclaimed, whereupon it was chosen as a home by the Legion of the Wolf – those ronin of Toturi's Army who chose to remain wave-men after the Second Day of Thunder. Later they were joined by other ronin otokodate who sought to uphold Toturi's heroic traditions, most notably the so-called Legion of Two Thousand. Under the rule of these ronin the castle has maintained itself independently of any support from the clans of Rokugan, a remarkable feat in any era, but especially impressive in the time of such crises as the Race for the Throne and the Destroyer War.

## Shiro Akatsuki and the Attack of Karatsu

The greatest test of the Palace of the Breaking Dawn was an event in the late twelfth century known as the Siege of the Wolves. At the time the Palace was the home base of the Legion of Two Thousand, a large ronin otokodate whose ranks included a formidable and honorable warrior named Kuronada. Unfortunately, Kuronada's father was a ronin shugenja called Karatsu, a murderous tyrant who was bitterly furious at his son for abandoning his own ways.

Karatsu gathered an army of bandits and recruited reinforcements from a gaijin invasion called the Army of Dark Fire. A combined force of Lion, Dragon, and Crab joined the ronin to resist Karatsu's week-long siege. Karatsu employed powerful Earth and Fire magic in his attack, at one point even collapsing the main gate of the Palace. However, the ronin architects who had worked on Shiro Akatsuki over the years had created a defensive structure that stalled, confused, and bewildered the invading army. The layered walls and interior gates of the castle, manned by ronin who fought as bravely as the clan samurai alongside them, created a fearsome defense that Karatsu's bandit rabble and crazed gaijin could not break despite their incredible magical forces.

On the final day of the siege, the invaders were attacked by a relief force of warrior monks. These proved to be sohei from the infamous Order of the Spider, led by the corrupted Tetsuo – one of several instances in that era in which the Spider Clan functioned as a reluctant ally to the honorable forces of the Empire. Karatsu himself had entered the walls of the Palace to personally battle his son, but it was Kuronada who emerged from their duel victorious. Karatsu's body was never recovered, but the Legion of Two Thousand and their peculiar stronghold survived the siege and emerged victorious.



Despite being a castle of ronin, Shiro Akatsuki has its own traditions that rule its inhabitants as firmly as in any Great Clan stronghold. Every wave-man, no matter their renown, is expected to bring a stone when they visit the Palace. These stones are used by the masons and carpenters who maintain the castle, giving it an odd and uneven look. Many ronin inscribe their names onto the stones they bring, and the walls of the Palace of the Breaking Dawn are covered in these inscriptions. One can trace the history of the Wolf Legion and the Legion of Two Thousand simply by reading the walls of Shiro Akatsuki.

## Sieges in Rokugan

*"To use the tools at hand; that is the mark of a siege master." – Akodo Keiichi*

As noted in previous L5R 4th Edition books discussing warfare in Rokugan, sieges in the Emerald Empire can be either brief, lasting but a few days, or long drawn-out affairs, lasting weeks or even months, draining the strength of both the besiegers and the besieged. The usual tactics to break the spirits of opposing forces find little use in a siege, which all too often becomes a terrible grind of endurance – the ultimate expression of Earth in warfare.

A siege takes place any time the defender retreats into his castle rather than continuing to fight in the open field. This may take place because the defender has already been defeated in battle, leaving him no choice but to seek security within his castle. It can also happen if the defender recognizes himself to be so badly outmatched as to make a field battle suicidal – although some samurai will welcome such a hopeless battle as a chance to express their courage and loyalty, a responsible daimyo knows he cannot throw away his clan's samurai so foolishly. Better to undertake a siege and hope for the rest of the clan to send reinforcements to turn the tide of the war.

Most castles command the strongest terrain in their territory, with killing fields stretching for hundreds of yards around them. Thus it is highly unlikely that an attacker can take a defended castle in a quick assault. Instead, the besieger will typically attempt to seal off the castle's supply lines and starve out the defenders. In the cases of an especially protracted siege, it is not uncommon for the attackers to construct a temporary shiro of their own facing the enemy keep. These structures are usually made of wood and are considerably smaller and less formidable than permanent castles, but they are still valuable as a fortified base of operations where the attackers can protect their supplies and command centers from enemy sallies. These hastily-constructed buildings are known as shiro-chi; they seldom last past the conclusion of the siege.

If starving the enemy into submission is judged to be too time-consuming, or if the attackers need quick results for political or economic reasons, or the castle's supplies seem likely to outlast the attackers' resources, the attackers must instead attempt to take the castle by storm.

Small Rokugani castles can often be seized with a single violent assault (albeit at heavy cost to the attacker), but large well-fortified castles do not yield so easily. In such situations the attackers must start by breaking through the outer walls. This is never an easy prospect, regardless of whether the outer walls are a confusing mazelike structure or a simple series of concentric turtle-shell-like defensive layers. To assault a castle built in the tortoise style (such as a Crab or Lion castle), the attackers must capture or breach a long successive series of fortified walls, each of them more heavily defended than the last. To assault a castle in the maze formation, such as many Phoenix and Crane castles, the attackers must endure repeated ambushes and vicious, canny traps that sap their numbers and willpower.

In an exceptionally strong castle, this stage of the assault can last for many days or even weeks. It is not uncommon for a besieging force to manage a partial penetration of a castle's defenses, only to be forced to break off the assault when casualties grow too high or the enemy receives reinforcements. However, if the attacker does manage to win through the outer layers of the castle, one final obstacle awaits: the castle's primary keep, the residence of the lord himself. This is often the costliest phase of the assault, as the exhausted attackers must now fight they way through narrow halls and stairways that provide natural bottlenecks for the defense. Small wonder that many attackers simply give up and burn the keep rather than go through the bloody slog of capturing it intact.

It should be noted that outside of the Crab lands siege engines are rare. The most commonly employed siege technologies are siege towers (usually constructed from the timber of nearby forests), ladders, battering rams, and climbing rope. Many samurai consider actual siege weapons such as catapults to be distasteful, and even the Lion – the foremost authorities on warfare and tactics – make only limited use of them. Of course, this lack of sophisticated siege weaponry is precisely why most sieges in Rokugan are such difficult and bloody affairs; it may be noted that Crab armies are well-known for being able to take enemy castles with much greater ease.

## Notable Sieges in the Empire

The earlier section on castles has already touched on some of the more famous sieges in Rokugan's history. The following section outlines several more, including the rise of two of the Empire's most notable siege-masters.

### The Battle for The Shell

Before the Great Carpenter Wall was built, the battle lines between the Crab Clan and the forces of the Shadowlands were somewhat more fluid, and the Crab maintained many lesser keeps and fortresses in the border zone. Among the strongest of these was the so-called Castle of the Tortoise, known by those who served there as the Shell of the Crab. Kaiu engineers used the Shell to develop and test new defensive techniques, and sometimes deliberately enticed Shadowlands forces into attacking it so they could test their latest defensive ideas. Thus, though the Shell had a relatively small garrison, it was considered to be one of the best-defended fortresses in the Empire.

Unfortunately, its defenses could not withstand corruption from within. In the late fourth century, two Taint-corrupted Kaiu engineers deactivated the castle's defenses and opened its gates, allowing a force of less than one hundred Lost warriors to capture the castle in a single night. The fall of the Shell placed the Crab Clan's forward defenses in jeopardy and confronted them with an enemy castle inside their lines. The Crab Clan Champion called together one hundred Kaiu Engineers, many of whom had previously spent time working on the defenses of the Shell, to command a siege of the fallen castle. The Crab armies surrounded the castle and entrenched themselves while the engineers reviewed all of the Shell's defenses and devised ways to counteract each one.

After two months, the engineers were ready to begin their assault. It took them three weeks to carefully tear down the Shell's defenses, minimizing the threat to their Hida brethren. Sadly, the Shell had been wholly Tainted during its time in the hands of the Lost, and once it was taken the Crab were forced to raze it to the ground. Eighty-nine of the one hundred engineers survived the siege, and they were granted the title of Siege Masters by the Clan Champion. Their experiences and discoveries have since become an integral part of the Kaiu Engineering School's curriculum.

### The Castle of the Swift Sword and Akodo Keiichi

During the era following the First Rise of Iuchiban, a samurai named Akodo Keiichi served as a minor tactician of the Lion Clan. His obscurity came to an end when Shiro sano Ken Hayai came under siege from a large force of bandits. The castle was undermanned at the time and Keiichi was the senior officer present. He watched as the bandits used conscripted peasant labor to construct a massive shiro-chi. With reinforcements weeks away, Keiichi feared the bandits would soon breach the walls of his family's ancestral seat.

Then the Fortunes smiled on the defending Lion forces. A massive rainstorm swept out of the north and the nearby river, Kama Shishi-o, flooded. A few Kitsu shugenja were trapped within the Castle of the Swift Sword, and Keiichi realized the raging waters combined with the priests' power gave him the tools to break the siege. The priests spent two days making offerings to the water spirits of the river. Finally the spirits answered the prayers, sending the river storming through the bandit stronghold. In a matter of minutes, the rushing torrent of water had destroyed the shiro-chi and killed most of the bandits, including their leader.

Keiichi's plan marked the first time shugenja had been used in siege warfare. In recognition of his service, Keiichi was appointed a sensei at the Akodo War College; his teachings on siege warfare have become a standard part of the school's teachings and in modern times are studied across Rokugan.

### The Fall of Shiro Hiruma

The fall of Shiro Hiruma during the Siege of Daylight is an oft-recounted story of loss and failure, of doomed heroism and the treachery of Jigoku. The Maw's fateful siege would cost the Hiruma family their home for over four hundred years.

For weeks before the attack, Hiruma scouts reported an army of Oni larger than any yet seen. Hiruma Tadanori, then the daimyo of the Hiruma family, dutifully forwarded the reports to the Crab Champion, but no one realized just how large the threat truly was... until it was too late.

On the ninth day of the month of the Serpent, a violent storm broke over the Hiruma lands. Some Crab historians would later claim the foul weather was summoned by the Maw or perhaps even by Fu Leng. While the storm raged day after day, Hiruma guardposts on the outskirts of their lands went silent one by one. Tadanori, sensing danger, summoned all available forces to rally in the heart of the Hiruma lands. Barely had this begun when the horde of the Maw appeared, numberless beyond counting. Overwhelmed by the Maw's vast army, far larger than any Shadowlands attack in centuries, the Hiruma fell back on their castle. The daimyo, recognizing the possibility of outright defeat, ordered the remaining Hiruma lands evacuated. "Even though the Hiruma may fall, the Crab will not," he swore, leading as many bushi as he could spare to escort the heimin refugees to the presumed safety of the Hida and Kuni lands. Tadanori did not at first wish to go with them, but the senior sensei of the family dojo, Hiruma Otokogi, insisted the ruling line must survive. Tadanori and his son were among the last to leave Shiro Hiruma... and the last to gaze upon their ancestral home for seventy years.

Shiro Hiruma was not a large castle, but it was strong and cunningly designed, and Otogoki and his men hoped to hold out until Tadanori could bring help from the Hida. Indeed, at first they threw back all the Shadowlands assaults, despite the presence of the Maw and his cunning leadership.

But where other oni relied solely on sheer power and strength, the Maw supplemented those traits with clever tactics and dark magics. On the sixteenth day of the siege, suddenly hundreds of oni, trolls, and goblins appeared within the castle walls. The Maw had used foul maho to call forth kansen of the Earth and open tunnels into the castle's foundations. The three hundred defenders, including Hiruma Otokogi, perished in less than an hour. The Shadowlands claimed the ruined shell of Shiro Hiruma and it became a place of darkness.

Although the Crab ultimately prevailed against the Maw at the Battle of the Cresting Wave, the fall of Shiro Hiruma remained a black stain on their honor and on the name of the Hiruma family. Up until the Kali-Ma Invasion in the twelfth century, it was the greatest defeat the Crab had ever suffered. For over four centuries, the Hiruma abandoned their family mon and creed, leaving their banners blank until they could reclaim their home and their honor; countless Hiruma would die in futile efforts to reclaim the Tainted castle before the clan finally succeeded in doing so after the Second Day of Thunder.

### The Razing of Shiro Sano Kakita

During the Clan War, when Hida Kisada's armies marched against the rest of the Empire, a Crab army under Kisada's younger son Sukune advanced deep into the Crane lands and assailed the seat of the Kakita family.

Unlike some Rokugani sieges, the razing of Shiro Sano Kakita was swift. It was not a castle built for defense, but rather for aesthetics. Though it had the superficial trappings required for it to be considered a castle, it was in no way as defensible as a fortress built specifically for military purposes. Its primary advantage was its location deep within the heart of the Crane lands. No enemy army had ever threatened it before.

Even so, it was surprising that the castle fell so quickly. What brought Shiro Sano Kakita low so swiftly was a unique series of events. First, the rest of the Crane lands were under attack from the army of the False Hoturi, and thus no support was available for the Kakita castle. Secondly, Sukune's forces included many Shadowlands creatures, which spread terror among the defenders and weakened their resolve. Thirdly, Sukune's army also included the small but potent cavalry force of Hida Tsuru, which outflanked the castle and razed the surrounding lands, driving hundreds of peasant refugees into the castle and further disrupting its defenses.

Although Shiro Sano Kakita was captured, the victory did not last. Dragon forces under the command of Toturi the Black threatened Sukune's northern flank, and he was forced to burn the Crane castle to the ground and retreat to Beiden Pass. It was only due to the tactical genius of Hida Sukune, arguable the greatest tactician the Crab had during the Clan War, that his army was able to escape total destruction.

## The Fall of Shiro Usagi

The siege of Shiro Usagi, the seat of the Hare Clan, is a tragic tale. At the dawn of the twelfth century, the Hare were considered the leading experts on the Bloodspeaker Cult and would have been the first line of defense against any resurgence of that group, but a chance meeting led to the clan's near-destruction.

Usagi Ozaki, the son of the Hare Daimyo, went to the Imperial capital with his sister, Usagi Tomoe, to seek a good marriage for her. By sheer chance Ozaki witnessed a Scorpion named Soshi Yukio blackmailing a samurai named Matsu Akira; the incident resulted in the death of the Soshi and the two Hare discovering a scroll written in a strange cipher. Alarmed by what had happened, they fled back to Shiro Usagi, inadvertently dooming their clan.

Although Ozaki and Tomoe did not realize it, they had stumbled across an operation of the Kolat conspiracy, of which Soshi Yukio had been a member. The Kolat did not want their cipher in anyone's hands, and they maneuvered the Scorpion Clan into attacking the Hare on the pretext of revenge for Yukio's murder. In the year 1123, the Scorpion general Bayushi Tomaru led an army of over a thousand bushi to assail Shiro Usagi. They might have taken the castle by an immediate assault, but a monk friendly to the Hare Clan sent word of the approaching army, allowing the Hare daimyo, Usagi Oda, just enough time to rally his forces.

The siege of Shiro Usagi is a rare and striking example of Scorpion siege techniques. First, they sent a diplomat to try to end the siege before anyone was killed. All he requested was the scroll Ozaki and Tamoe had taken from Yukio. Unfortunately, Oda knew nothing about the scroll, and his children refused to admit its existence.

After the Scorpion army entrenched itself around Shiro Usagi, they again sent messengers trying to get the Hare Clan to surrender the item "stolen" from Soshi Yukio and to surrender her murderer. Rebuffed again, they offered to allow twenty of the peasants who had taken shelter within the castle to leave safely if the Hare would consent to fighting three duels. In this manner, the Scorpion hoped to identify the greatest warriors among the Hare and if possible eliminate them before general fighting began. The duels were fought and two of the Hare's finest warriors were killed, though Usagi Oda himself defeated his opponent.

In a classic Scorpion move, while the peasants were arguing among themselves over who would be allowed to leave, Bayushi Tomaru attacked the rear of the castle. However, Oda had suspected such a tactic and the Scorpion were repelled.

On the second day of the siege it rained, and Tomaru launched a second assault under cover of the storm. He also sent two shinobi into the castle during the confusion of the attack. One of them poisoned the castle's well and

was then slain trying to assassinate Oda, while the second searched the castle for the scroll (but was unable to find it). Had they succeeded in slaying Usagi Oda, the battle would have been over.

With their gambits having largely failed, the Scorpion resorted to a series of direct assaults, relying on their greatly superior numbers to overwhelm the Hare and their small castle. Four more days of battle finally defeated the Usagi, whose strength was greatly weakened by their lack of clean water, and most of the clan perished when the defenses collapsed. It is known that Usagi Tomoe was captured and later married Bayushi Tomaru, who claimed to have been smitten by her beauty and innocence. It is also known that Usagi Ozaki managed to escape the castle with the Hare Clan Ancestral sword and the Kolat scroll, though reports vary as to how he accomplished this. Some tales say he fled through a secret tunnel, but Ozaki himself later told stories of leaping down from the walls of Shiro Usagi with the help of his sister's magic, getting lost in the general melee, and finally breaking through for freedom.

Finally, there are conflicting reports about the death of Usagi Oda. Many accounts speak of him fighting and losing a final duel in exchange for the Scorpion allowing the peasants and a small group of Hare retainers to go free. In other tales he was slain defending the castle, perhaps while trying to keep his daughter Tomoe from being captured.



# Sumai: The Martial Art of Earth

Historians have difficulty pinpointing the beginning of *sumai* wrestling's storied tradition in Rokugan. In most cases the origin of sumai is associated with the Crab Clan, which of all clans is the one where *sumai* wrestling is most popular, but the true story has been lost in the fragmentary histories of the Dawn of the Empire. The most popular version of *sumai's* origins is the one told in Crab *sumai* dojo, which claims the art originated in a wrestling match between the Kami Hida and a defiant mortal warrior named Osumo. According to the tale, the fierce Osumo declared his village would not swear fealty to the Kami unless Hida could force him off his feet. Hida challenged the insolent man, but much to his surprise lost the wrestling match for three successive days. Finally, on the fourth day Hida (in some versions of the tale inspired by a conversation with Shinsei or some other wiseman) suddenly switched tactics; instead of matching his great strength against Osumo's skill, he allowed Osumo to seemingly overwhelm him – the sudden shift in weight caught Osumo off-guard and he lost his balance, allowing Hida to easily throw him to the ground. Osumo and his village swore fealty to Hida, who

happily accepted the loyalty of such strong warriors. To this day, *sumai* practitioners are called *sumo* in Osumo's honor.

Like most such tales from the Dawn of the Empire, this one is problematic – the Kami Hida was not known for using subtle tactics, after all. Scorpion scholars have suggested the whole story is a later mythologizing of the early development of *sumai*. Whatever the case, the tradition of *sumai* as both a martial art and a sport does seem to have originated among the Crab. In the early centuries of the Empire it was largely unknown outside of Crab lands and considered a curiosity of the clan of Hida. This finally changed during the reign of the eighteenth Hantei.

Hantei XVIII was known for his affection toward the Crab and visited their lands on many occasions during his youth and reign. (This may be partly due to his father's close association with the Crab general Hida Tsuneo, the so-called "Stone Crab.") He seems to have become wholly besotted with the ideals and methods of *sumai*, going so far as to study the art himself. (Some tales claim he attained the rank of *yokozuna*, a grandmaster of *sumai*, but this cannot be confirmed.) When he ascended to the throne, one of his first decrees established *sumai* as an official sport at the Imperial Winter Court. It has remained one ever since.

*Sumai's* introduction to the rest of Rokugan led to a brief political surge for the Crab Clan as the other Great Clans rushed to send their students to learn the art at the feet of the Crab masters. Although this did not last – the other clans soon developed enough *sumai* knowledge to train their own wrestlers – the Crab still retain the strongest tradition in this martial art and are the only clan with an actual fighting Technique based on it.

## Sumai: Rituals and Practices

In the early centuries of the Empire, the administration of *sumai* fell to the Kuni, the priests of the Crab. (Some tales claim Osumo's village was in the lands claimed by the Kuni.) The emphasis on purification which is so central to formal sumai competition seems to have originated with the Kuni. Trained *sumo* purify their fighting arena with salt, a well-known safeguard against evil spirits. They also stamp their feet while shouting fierce kiai, sometimes for minutes at a time, before each match – again, a derivative of the common belief that loud shouting attracts the Earth kami and drives out dark spirits.

After Hantei XVIII made sumai a sport of the Imperial Court, the Brotherhood of Shinsei was assigned as the administrators and overseers of *sumai* competitions throughout Rokugan. This transition to a formal Imperial sport also introduced a major change to the rules: a circular ring, which added an element of positioning and strategy to what had previously been a contest of raw strength and skill. The change was bitterly opposed by the Crab, but the Emperor himself came out in support of the new rule.

Modern formal *sumai* is far more regimented than in the early days. So-called "stables" of specially-trained *sumo* form part of the repertoire of weapons most clans' courtiers may call on. Samurai who live in these "stables" – essentially highly specialized dojo – undergo intensive specialized training, including specific diets, to make them effective in the art of *sumai*. Though the spiritual and religious traditions of sumai are maintained by the Brotherhood of Shinsei's supervision, most samurai consider sumai tournaments as political events. The winner of the Imperial *Sumai* tournament becomes famous in all the social circles of Rokugan, and the patron lord of the sumo who wins gains no small measure of prestige.

A modern *sumai* tournament begins with all competitors engaging in purification rituals. Competitors shower the ring in salt or rice, with the former being more popular in Crab and Scorpion lands. The ring itself is surrounded at four points with pillars, each facing a cardinal direction, and each mounting charms beseeching protection from the kami. Yogo wardmasters are highly sought after at *sumai* tournaments, since it is believed their wards carry protective power beyond that of the prayers other shugenja provide.

At the start of a tournament, all of the *sumo* competing are divided into two groups, designated East and West. This is based on the tradition that the two entrances to a formal *sumai* ring always face east and west. *Sumo* enter the arena according to rank, each competitor walking a full circuit around the ring to inspect it for any traps or hidden flaws. After the ring has met with approval from the competitors, they face the attending crowd and bow as a sign of respect to the audience, then face each other and raise their hands into the air, showing they are not armed. This process is known as the *dohyo-iri*, and applies to all *sumo* except those exceptional wrestlers who attain the highest rank of *yokozuna*. Each *yokozuna* instead has his own individual ring ritual. Hida Takuma, a storied *yokozuna* from the twelfth century, was notable for believing evil could be pounded and shouted out of the ground, and his entrance ceremony was notorious for the terrifying anger the Crab would display. By contrast, tenth-century *yokozuna* Bayushi Echikei believed matches could only be fought on clear sunny days, and refused to battle on any others.

Before a match begins, the individual *sumo* spend several minutes stamping the ground and shouting fierce kiai. These actions scare away any potentially harmful spirits and attract the attention of the Earth kami to aid in the purification of the ring. Particularly superstitious *sumo* will spread salt on their bodies as extra protection against evil and mischievous spirits.

Formal *sumai* competitions last for eight days. At the conclusion of the tournament, a *sumo* from the winning stable is honored by performing the *bugaku* bow dance before the sponsoring authority – the Emperor in the case of the Imperial *Sumai* Tournament. The dance, performed with a masterwork bow (usually of Asahina make), is the true end of a *sumai* competition; it is considered highly rude to leave before the *bugaku* dance.

## *Sumai* Ranks

The *sumai* tournament structure has given rise to a set of ranks used to designate a *sumo's* record and experience. The Miya family carefully tracks the records and titles of all registered *sumo* in the Empire; pretending to a title one has not earned is highly dishonorable and considered grounds for a lethal duel.

- **Shin Deshi** – A new *sumo* who has not competed in a tournament. Most *sumai* stables award this title to their new students the moment they join.
- **Komusubi** – The lowest ranked position in tournament *sumai*. A *sumo* earns this title after competing in a single tournament.
- **Sekiwake** – For a *sumo* to gain this rank, he must complete a tournament with a majority of wins. One or more match losses do not prevent a *sumo* from attaining this rank, so long as he wins the overall tournament.
- **Ozeki** – The second highest position in *Sumai*. This title is earned only if the *sumo* wins a tournament while suffering no losses. This is sometimes called the White Star title, after the mark on the official tournament records to indicate the winner.
- **Yokozuna** – The highest rank, attained very rarely and only by *sumo* of truly legendary skill and stature. A declarations of *yokozuna* requires winning at least two consecutive Imperial Winter Court tournaments while suffering no losses.

## Tournament Organization and Structure

With the growing popularity of *sumai* following the reign of Hantei XVIII, the Miya family decreed all *sumai* tournaments must be formally recorded. The tournament judge from the Brotherhood of Shinsei submits written account of the outcome to the Miya, and thus the annals of modern *sumai* are meticulously recorded and the records of all sumo are known and remembered.

The largest and most prestigious *sumai* tournament is of course the one held at the Imperial Winter Court. It serves both as entertainment for the guests of the court and as an opportunity for the clans to display their skills and seek influence with one another. All of the *sumai* stables in Rokugan send their best competitors, those of at least *Ozeki* rank, to the Winter Court to compete. The winner of the tournament is given a personal blessing by the Emperor, as well as a special title crafted by Imperial artisans to be displayed in the *sumo's* home or school.

Second to the Imperial Tournament are those sponsored by the Great Clans. These are sometimes held during the clan winter courts, but also sometimes take place at other times during the year, such as during the festivals to celebrate a clan's founding Kami. Entry to these tournaments is open to *sumo* of all ranks, but victories are naturally considered somewhat less prestigious than in the Imperial Tournament. (Most notably, a *sumo* cannot advance to the rank of *yokozuna* except through victory at the Imperial Tournament.) During the spring and summer months, traveling sumai tournaments are held in villages throughout Rokugan, usually during the various annual festivals.

## Sumai Stables

Most *sumo* are taught their sport in special dojo known as "stables," funded by various prominent daimyo. It is these groups of samurai who travel Rokugan in the spring and summer, fighting in sumai tournaments, and from these same groups come the elite wrestlers who do battle for the Emperor in Winter Court. *Sumai* wrestlers who do not belong to a stable face extensive hostility and prejudice when attempting to compete in tournaments, and thus are unlikely to ever attain high rank.

Stables offer various benefits to those who join them. The most obvious is access to experienced teachers who can share the advanced techniques of *sumai* wrestling, but other benefits – a prominent patron in the form of the stable's daimyo, access to the abundant food needed to properly train in the art – are almost as valuable.

Most stables are sponsored and maintained by daimyo of the Great Clans and admit students solely of that clan – since *sumai* is a competitive sport, admitting rivals to one's own school would be foolish indeed. The actual work of running a stable is typically delegated

## GM's Toolbox: *Sumai* Tournaments

Although *sumai* wrestling can be represented by the conventional L5R 4th Edition rules for unarmed combat and Grappling, many players and GMs may find this unsatisfactory as a simulation of a sport. Accordingly, we present the following option:

To represent *sumai* tournament wrestling, simply have the two wrestlers perform a Contested Roll of Jiujutsu (Sumai) / Strength. If one wrestler wins the Contested Roll by 5 or more, he wins the match (either knocking his opponent down or forcing him out of the ring). If neither wrestler beats the other's roll by at least 5, the bout continues and another Contested Roll is made.

*Sumo* gain a considerable advantage from being larger and heavier than their opponents. GMs may represent this by awarding a +1k0 bonus to the roll for the larger wrestler, e.g. for a Large wrestler facing a normal or Small wrestler, or a normal wrestler facing a Small one.

GMs who want to add a little more depth to their *sumai* tournaments may also wish to incorporate the "stare-down" that takes place before each match, when each sumo seeks to intimidate the other and gain a psychological advantage. This can be represented with a Contested Roll of Intimidation / Willpower, with a wrestler who wins the roll by 5 or more gaining a +1k0 bonus to the subsequent Jiujutsu roll.

## *Sumai* and the Martial Arts

Most of Rokugan sees *sumai* as a competitive sport rather than a martial art as such. Masters of hand-to-hand combat styles such as Kaze-do do not consider sumai to be a fighting art. (The Crane, in fact, sneer at it even as a competitive sport, believing it represents nothing more than brute strength without any skill or artistic merit.)

Unsurprisingly, the exception to this rule is the clan which originated *sumai*, the Crab. The Crab *sumai* stables still remind their students that *sumai* originated as a fighting art, and teach a combat technique based on the *sumai* forms. Although not nearly as popular (or deadly) as the primary Crab martial art of *Kobo Ichi-Kai*, the Crab *sumai* wrestlers have still managed to occasionally surprise a foe who imagined their skills were useless in actual combat.

to a lesser official who is skilled in administration, though occasionally a daimyo who is also a *sumai* fan will take a personal interest in the stable under his patronage.

The Imperial stables, however, are considered the most prestigious and appointments to them are eagerly sought. They recruit the finest *sumo* from all over the Empire to fight in the name of the Imperial families and the Emperor himself.

A few ronin stables have appeared over the years, usually run by a clan ronin who is hoping to make a living for himself by teaching his *sumai* skills for a fee. Most of these ronin stables do not last long, but a few of them have managed to endure for several generations and even to produce a few *ozeki*-ranked wrestlers. (No ronin has ever been named *yokozuna*.)

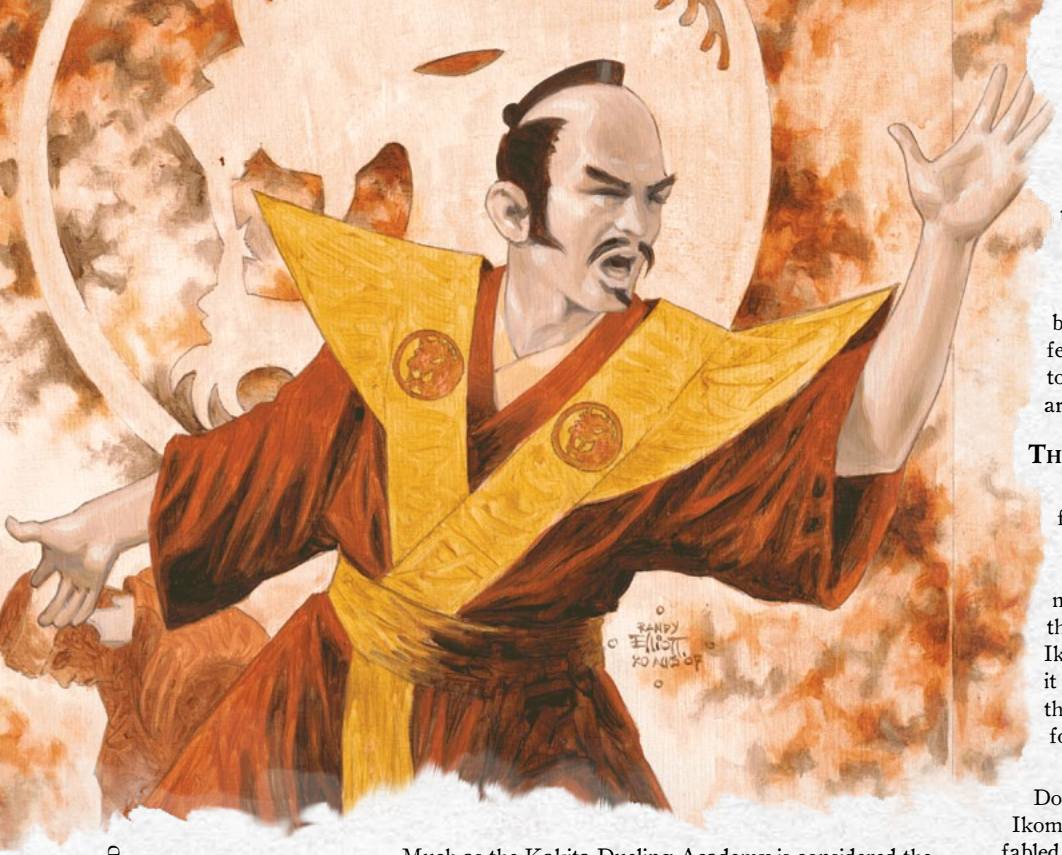
## Groups with Sumai Traditions

Not every clan and faction in Rokugan pursues the sport of sumai, but enough do for extensive traditions to have grown up over the history of the Empire.

### The Crab Clan

The Crab have a long and storied tradition of excellence in *sumai*. The social respectability of *sumai* often grants skilled Crab wrestlers access to courts where they might otherwise never be invited. Most of the skilled *sumo* from the Crab Clan are of the Hida family, who tend to begin their training in sumai at an advantage due to their large stature. However, a few Hiruma and Yasuki and even a single Kuni have attained the rank of *yokozuna*; it helps that all Crab have access to some of the best *sumai* stables in the Empire.

Any Crab bushi who trains in the Hida School learns the rudiments of wrestling. Promising students are enrolled at the Grip of Earth Dojo, which is dedicated to teaching advanced wrestling techniques and is the principle home to the Crab Clan's sumai fighting technique. Those students who show a knack for the ritual and pageantry of *sumai* as well as its physical aspects are sent to the Imperial capital, where the Crab maintain the Stone Tower Dojo.





Much as the Kakita Dueling Academy is considered the premier school of iaijutsu in the Empire, the stables of the Stone Tower Dojo are considered the best in Rokugan. More *yokozuna* have been trained at the Stone Tower than anywhere else in the Empire, though the Lion Clan's Strength of the Storyteller Dojo is a close second. The Stone Tower Dojo contains several different sumai stables, all fully manned. Its students undergo rigorous training in both the techniques of *sumai* and the rituals and traditions involved in the sport. Much of this training involves study in the ways of courtesy and the courts, unusual subject matter for Crab, and some of the wrestlers who graduate from the Stone Tower later became influential courtiers for the clan.

### The Crane Clan

The Crane as a whole almost never participate in the sport of *sumai* as other than spectators. There have been a few instances of members of the Daidoji Trading Council sponsoring specific wrestlers, and there are a few semi-legendary tales of a Daidoji family daimyo from the fifth century who tried to start his own *sumai* stable and even competed in a few events himself. The Crane discount these tales as scurrilous rumor.

### The Dragon Clan

The Dragon respect the traditions of *sumai* and there have been several Dragon yokozuna. Many of them were from the Togashi order, though these tended to only compete for a limited time before wandering off in search of further enlightenment elsewhere.

Surprisingly, in more recent centuries a number of successful *sumo* have come from the Kitsuki family. There is even a small dojo in Kitsuki lands dedicated to the study of sumai, though they pursue the sport in a peculiar way. While they study and practice the normal sumai traditions, their approach to wrestling technique takes a much more analytical approach than other stables. The Kitsuki say that if one watches the way one's opponent moves, during both his normal life and in the ceremonies leading up to the actual match, one will gain a considerable advantage over him. They watch how their opponents walk, use chopsticks, and a myriad of other subtle actions to gain clues about their balance, strength, and determination. Of course, few Dragon *sumo* have the observational abilities to truly master this approach, but those who do are formidable indeed.

### The Lion Clan

While the Matsu family of the Lion has its fair share of skilled *sumo*, they rarely reach the higher ranks, since they often have trouble mastering the serenity and focus which are needed to become a *yokozuna*. Instead, among the Lion the true *sumai* masters are from the Ikoma. For centuries, the Ikoma family has seen it as their sacred duty to train the best wrestlers in the Empire, not least as a way of honoring their founder's own fighting skills.

The stables at the Strength of the Storyteller Dojo (found within the larger complex of the Ikoma family's Dojo of Sacrifice, which trains the fabled Ikoma Bards) are respected almost as much as those of the Stone Tower Dojo. Ikoma who train there are fed the best food available while learning not only the techniques of *sumai* but also the history of its traditions. They are also forced to train in many peculiar conditions, such as when hungry, ill, drunk, in the rain, covered in mud, immediately after waking up, and so forth. The Ikoma believe if they can win in these conditions, victory in the ring will be a simple matter. Some believe the Ikoma employ these methods as a way of realizing the ancient legends and tales of their founder's exploits.

Despite all their efforts, the sensei of the Strength of the Storyteller Dojo have yet to overcome the Crab Clan's Stone Tower Dojo as the leading trainer of *sumo*. Despite this frustration the rivalry between the two sets of stables is largely a friendly one, but nonetheless when *yokozuna* from the two rival schools square off it is a momentous occasion in the *sumai* world.

### The Mantis Clan

There is little *sumai* tradition among the Yoritomo, the Kitsune, or the Tsuruchi; although the Yoritomo often enjoy wrestling, they see the trappings and rituals of the *sumai* as tiresome and unnecessary. There is only one *sumai* stable on the Isles of Silk and Spice, and no more than three Yoritomo have ever attained the rank of *yokozuna*.

However, the Moshi family has a surprisingly strong tradition in *sumai*. The Moshi place great stock in following tradition, and *sumai* is a sport based around tradition and ritual. In the modest lands of the Moshi is a single *sumai* stable of considerable repute, the House of Salt, named after the tradition of throwing salt to purify the ring and the wrestlers. Although several *yokozuna* have come from the House of Salt, the instruction there actually emphasizes the traditions of *sumai* more than it concentrates on winning. All of its students are known for their pious devotion to *sumai's* highest traditions, and many of them later go on to officiate *sumai* tournaments across the Empire.

### The Phoenix Clan

The Phoenix as a whole have no tradition of sumai; although an occasional Shiba or Asako will take up the sport, they are quite rare and must train in other clans' stables. No yokozuna is recorded as coming from Phoenix ranks, although there is a legend in the Henshin order of an Asako who became a sumai champion and then reappeared to compete every hundred years under a new name.

### The Scorpion Clan

The Scorpion Clan participates in the art of sumai mainly because other clans would look askance at them if they refused. There are a few sumai stables in the lands of the Bayushi which teach the rudiments of the sport, but it is among the Shosuro where sumai is closely studied.

Specifically, the Shosuro Butei study sumai, not to win tournaments but so they can accurately portray sumai matches in their theatrical performances (and spying missions). They study the sport's many rituals and traditions as well as the wrestling styles of the other clans. Some Shosuro actors who have studied sumai have gone on to become masters of the sport in their own right, but most simply see it as another skill to mimic.

### The Unicorn Clan

The Unicorn rarely embrace the formalized world of sumai wrestling. Among the Moto, however, there is a long tradition of another kind of formalized wrestling, bariqu wrestling.

The traditions and methods of bariqu wrestling can be traced back to the Moto family's origins as the Ujik-Hai tribe. Among that people, bariqu wrestling was the way a leader showed his strength to those who challenged him without having to kill them. Modern bariqu is primarily a sport rather than a fighting art, but has somewhat different rules than sumai. Bariqu does not use a ring, and victory is based solely on throwing one's opponent to the ground; consequently, it places a stronger emphasis on agility, as opposed to sumai's focus on strength, weight, and mass.

It is difficult for trained bariqu wrestlers to adapt to the different styles and rules of sumai, but a handful among the Moto have managed to become masters of both styles.

# Stone and Power



*Hida Bakuro swung his tetsubo once more, knocking another goblin off the parapet of the Kaiu Wall. The assault had come at dawn; so far his legion was still holding its position, but the goblins seemed endless. Shrugging to readjust the heavy armor that warded his flesh, Bakuro lifted his tetsubo and looked for another target. No amount of goblins would ever make him fear them.*

*But then a creature unlike any other appeared over the wall's edge. It looked like a giant centipede, its head large enough to swallow a fully-armored Crab soldier whole. Its legs and carapace seemed to be made of steel, claws piercing the stone of the Wall wherever it stepped. A few warriors rushed forward to strike at the creature, but their blows did not even leave a dent in its skin. The oni cut them down with ease, its massive clawed legs slicing through their armor as if it was paper, then reared back and spit out a vast gout of fuming green liquid. Men and women screamed as their armor and skin dissolved alike.*

*Hida Bakuro managed to avoid the blast. Crouching against the parapet, he swallowed hard to gather his courage. "Hida!" he bellowed, and charged the creature. His tetsubo slammed repeatedly against the monster's scales, but seemed to have no effect. The demon did not even notice, turning its massive head toward more numerous prey elsewhere atop the Wall.*

*The creature seemed as surprised as Bakuro when his weapon finally broke its skin. Bakuro paused and blinked at his weapon; it seemed unchanged, but he felt suddenly stronger, more powerful. Looking around he saw a Crab nearby in the robes of a shugenja, his elaborate face paint marking him as one of the Kuni. The priest's lips writhed with payers, his fist clenched around a scroll crackling with energy.*

*The monster lunged at Bakuro, but its claws left only small gouges on the Crab warrior's armor and skin. With a roar of triumph Bakuro pressed his advantage, his weapon lashing out sideways to crush several of the creature's legs. Angered, the demon reared back and opened its mouth wide to spit its venom once more, but Bakuro did not give it the chance – he pressed closer, slamming the iron-shop cap of his tetsubo into its midsection. The monster coiled around the injury like a wounded insect, ichor dripping from its maw instead of spraying out lethally. As it lifted its head to attack once more, Bakuro whispered a prayer to Hida and brought down his tetsubo as hard as he could. The demon's great skull cracked like an egg.*

*As he began to catch his breath, Bakuro looked around and realized no one was left alive save he and the Kuni. The battle was over, albeit at fearful cost.*

*"Thanks," he called to the shugenja. "You saved my life and this portion of the Wall. I just hope this," he looked down at the demon's blood, spattered across his torso, "won't get me into trouble."*

*"It won't," the Kuni grunted. He tucked his scrolls away briskly. "I saw to it."*

*As he turned to leave, Bakuro called, "What if next time you aren't around?"*

*The Kuni did not turn. "There will always be one of us."*

Like all the Elements (apart from Void), Earth magic is practiced by shugenja all across the Empire. However, a few families make it the main focus of their magical studies; in modern times, these include the Kuni, the Tamori, and the Kitsune. (The Isawa, of course, study Earth just as assiduously as they do the other Elements.) Some use it for defense, others as a way to commune with nature or for its purifying proprieties. This chapter discusses the different practices of each of these Earth practitioners.

# Earth Magic as Endurance

More than anything else, Earth endures, remaining in place despite the relentless onslaught of the other Elements. Fire may sweep through like a raging storm, Water may flood and spume, Air may howl with all the strength of a hurricane... but Earth will still be there afterward. Although all shugenja call on Earth for its power of endurance, one family takes things a step farther and uses this aspect of Earth as a governing philosophy.

## The Tamori Family

In contrast to more traditional and established families like the Kuni and the Isawa, the Tamori – born out of the strife of the Hidden Emperor era – have had relatively little time to explore the secrets of Earth magic, although they have already made an impact on the practice of Earth magic during their short history. The Tamori were born from the remnants left behind by the defection of the Agasha family, supplemented with a few ronin recruited from Toturi's Army, and initially they lacked direction – the Agasha had taken much of the family libraries and research records with them. Founder Tamori Shaitung was nonetheless determined to make her new family the equal of any other. The choice of focusing on Earth magic was driven by several factors, including the wish to distinguish her followers from the hated Agasha, whose legacy she saw as shameful. Shaitung had many of the qualities associated with Earth: she was willful, honorable, trustworthy, and indefatigable. She also communed at length with the kami of the Dragon Mountains, ancient spirits which were both powerful and hard to reach. Some historians posit that her eventual alliance with the underground race known as the zokujin allowed her to learn new secrets of the Earth, thus explaining the almost meteoric rise to power she and her family subsequently enjoyed. Even the Phoenix Clan's Elemental Masters had to pause when she confronted them with her full power. Similar stories of incredible prowess by later members of the family, such as the *yamabushi* Tamori Wotan, expanded the image of the Tamori as powerful (if eccentric) users of Earth magic. Within a generation the practice was enshrined as tradition.

As befits the Dragon Clan, the Tamori philosophy regarding magic is quite different from other clans. Most obviously, the Tamori embrace the ways of war in a manner unique to them. While they are never forced to do so, nonetheless most of them engage in advanced military training, including kenjutsu, jiujutsu, and the use of many other weapons. Often they go on to join the Dragon armies, and even those who do not serve on the battlefield frequently behave as bushi, carrying the katana and answering insults with duels. Of course, their magic helps them in such endeavors; Earth spells are capable of reinforcing the body, creating armor, or simply shattering the ground beneath one's opponents. Self-enhancing Earth spells are a particular favorite of the Tamori, and more than one opponent has fallen before a priest whose skin has turned into stone and who is strong enough to shatter bones with a flick of the wrist. The Tamori do not reject simple offensive prayers, however, and the manipulation of rocks and soil can have tremendous impact on the battlefield, particularly in the treacherous terrain of the Dragon lands.

Another aspect of the Tamori family's Earth-oriented ideology is self-reliance. Tamori sensei make sure this ideal is ingrained in every student: support himself and his clan on his own, never expecting any outside help. This philosophy may have arisen from the lack of resources in the family's early days, as well as the influence from several orders of the Brotherhood of Shinsei who worked closely with the Dragon Clan at that time, but in truth the Tamori also simply dislike asking others for help – even the kami, if they can avoid it. A Phoenix Clan shugenja would be puzzled to see a Tamori climb a mountain he could easily fly over with a simple spell. But to the Tamori, if one can do something without magic there is no need to bother the kami. It is only when pushed to the last of their resources that they will cast their spells. Since the prayers that invoke the kami require energy and concentration, the Tamori doctrine of self-reliance not only makes them well-rounded in their skills but also ensures they always have their mystical powers available for the most important occasions. The flip side of this is their tendency to use spells to achieve the most miraculous and inhuman effects – like walking into an open volcano or staying awake for days at end. The resilience of a Tamori under the influence of his Earth spells is legendary. The added benefit of this attitude is that many Tamori are very receptive to training in the ways of kiho, since they add to the range of self-reliant abilities they can possess.

A final principle of Tamori ideology is an emphasis on Bushido – particularly the tenets of Duty and Honesty – that is exceptional among shugenja. Disgusted by the betrayal of the Agasha, Tamori Shaitung infused her whole family with a strict sense of honor. Although the Asahina and Kitsu are more traditionalist than the Tamori, the Tamori are second to none in their loyalty to their daimyo and their clan. Coupled with the influence of the other Dragon families, this also makes them quite direct in all their social dealings – as well as in their manner of entreating the kami for spells. They prefer spells which punish the unworthy and reward the honorable, and reject what they perceive as treachery or deceit, making them

uneasy with the magic of Air. Such attitudes often put them at odds with subtler spellcasters from other clans, such as the Soshi or even the Asahina. To the Tamori, there is nothing to hide.

## Tamori Spellcasting Practices

As is common for many shugenja families, the Tamori prefer to use paper from their own homeland to create their spell scrolls. They usually choose paper which will resist exposure to the natural elements, since the Dragon Clan's territory tends to be rugged and unforgiving, and the Tamori often travel with minimal garments and equipment. The style of calligraphy they use is almost an exercise in minimalism – only the most important words are noted, and the characters are simplified if possible, leaving scrolls which look almost bare but which are easier for the Tamori to use. Due to their willingness to enter combat, many Tamori memorize their spells and avoid using the scrolls altogether. On the other hand, their prayers are often loud, even shouted, since they believe sincerity impresses the Earth kami and helps in the casting. They also tend to minimize any physical moves that accompany their spell-casting; in fact, the sensei of the Tamori shugenja school make a point of teaching their pupils to incorporate the moves of kenjutsu into their spellcasting, using it as a focus for both honor and soul. This horrifies traditional shugenja, but the Tamori find the sacred nature of the samurai's weapons acts as an excellent conduit for the kami.

Of course, one legacy of the Agasha the Tamori have not discarded is the use of potions and elixirs. The process requires careful alchemical composition, which itself requires a great knowledge of natural and artificial ingredients, as well as a knowledge of divination (to determine the correct time for all actions) and of the human body (to understand the effect of ingested elements on it). Although all Elements can be used for potions, Earth remains a favorite in this area as well. Tamori potions are usually stored in small glass or clay bottles, often covered with simple calligraphy which serves both to sanctify the object and to make it easier to remember which potion is which. The use of potions of course has many applications in combat, since drinking a flask or hurling it at an enemy almost always takes less time than casting a spell. In fact, the pragmatic Tamori sensei offer throwing lessons for their students, since they realize a precise throw may save their lives someday. Such focus on the relationship between the material and the magical allows the Tamori to easily cast any spells requiring the creation or modification of physical items, something at which the Earth kami excel.

Although famous for their warrior prowess and their spectacular spells, the Tamori never forget their roles as priests of the kami, and as Dragon samurai they are dedicated adherents to the Way of Shinsei. Since they are a relatively small family, the arrival of a Tamori shugenja in a Dragon village is much more noteworthy than the same event in a clan like the Phoenix or the Unicorn. Their connection to the Earth spirits makes them especially skilled at blessing the crops of the heimin, which is always appreciated in the harsh lands of the Dragon Clan. When that fails, the Tamori are quick to teach the peasants to rely on themselves, finding strength in exploiting whatever resources they have. The Tamori also pay particular attention to natural spirits and creatures that inhabit the area and always pay them appropriate respect, trying to emulate their natural wisdom.

The rites of the Tamori at funerals, weddings, and birth celebrations are known to be somewhat spare and simple, but always exhibit an uplifting quality, a resolute conviction which others find infectious. They also glorify the world around themselves, trying to foster a deeper connection between men and the natural environment, which they believe it is an important step towards enlightenment.

## Magical Orders Within the Tamori Family

The Dragon Clan traditionally allows its samurai to find their own path through life, so it is no surprise that many individual Tamori specialize in different areas of expertise, forming smaller orders within the family's ranks. The most famous are of course

their warrior priests, the *yamabushi*, who comprise a large proportion of the total family. The *yamabushi* train routinely alongside the bushi of the Mirumoto family, and learn to channel the Earth kami through their soul directly into their martial skills, becoming tremendous warriors. They also become supremely adept at wielding weapons crafted by the kami, allowing them to be the equal of any bushi on the battlefield. Many yamabushi focus on the art of alchemy described above, while others choose to become weaponsmiths.

Smithing has long been associated with the Dragon Clan, and the Tamori have furthered refined it through the direct application of magic. (Oddly enough, the most famous of these are the so-called Water-Hammer Smiths, who mainly use the kami of Water to support their work – but their training in the ways of Earth provides a vital foundation for their work.)

The greatest of the Tamori join the Masters of the Mountain, an elite group who emulate Agasha and Shaitung's practices by meditating deep within the Great Wall of the North mountains, drawing on the power of Earth both within and without. They are able to reinforce their bodies and command the kami with greater strength and flexibility, making them formidable indeed.

# Earth as the Element of Defense

More than anything else, the Element of Earth is associated with the defensive, with endurance and resilience, with stubborn courage and willful obstinacy. Many shugenja call on this aspect of Earth magic to protect themselves, their lords, or their companions, but several groups in the Empire place a particular emphasis on this aspect of Earth.

## The Isawa Family

The great Isawa was a man gifted in all types of magic, with tremendous knowledge of all the Elements. Today the Isawa shugenja school teaches the ways of all four Elements with equal proficiency, as well as teaching the ways of the Void to a gifted minority. Few if any individuals ever achieve the complete mastery of their illustrious ancestor; most Isawa favor one Element over the others. This is something the clan recognizes and accepts, and over the

years various branches of their School have evolved to focus on each of the Elements – including, naturally, one dedicated to the Element of Earth.

Many Isawa find the Element of Earth comes naturally to them, since their strong-willed nature lends itself well to the manipulation of such an Element. Those who choose this path tend to be resolute and often downright stubborn individuals. The second Thunder of the Phoenix Clan, Isawa Tadaka, was a famous practitioner of Earth magic who rarely if ever turned away from his goals, even when those were supremely dangerous. Isawa practitioners of Earth magic also tend to be more used to hard work than many samurai, since the Earth sensei of the Isawa shugenja school make sure their pupils exercise and build sufficient endurance to manipulate the willful Earth kami. Long walks in the mountains, extended periods of meditation under harsh circumstances, and similar methods are commonplace. When the long winter of Phoenix lands comes, students of other Elements stay warm inside their temples while the acolytes of Earth can be found outside, kneeling immobile in concentration as wind and snow howl around them.

As prime students of the Tao of Shinsei, the Isawa know nothing in the world is permanent; everything is subject to change. Even mountains are transient, a concept which can be difficult to grasp but is essential for students of Earth magic. While the solidity of the ground on which they walk might seem to be eternal, nothing resists the passage of time; even mountains can be laid low by erosion, the solid ground fractured by earthquakes. Earth shugenja of the Isawa School see themselves as natural agents of change, no more violent or disturbing than any other part of the Celestial Order. When they use their magic to rip rocks from the ground or reshape the land around them, they are simply guiding the kami toward a path they would have followed eventually on their own. This philosophical distinction reconciles the Isawa's respect for the natural order with their need to ask for the kami's help to accomplish their tasks. As a result, Isawa Earth shugenja are able to manipulate the earth kami with great ease, whether creating new structures or unleashing ferocious earthquakes on the unworthy.

A side effect of this is the ability of Isawa shugenja to affect architecture in their lands. Since the Phoenix Clan has an unusually large number of shugenja in its territory compared to other clans, they often become quite creative in finding ways to use their mystical abilities for the clan's advantage. Earth is a ubiquitous element, present in soil, brick, rock, wood, metal and indeed almost all physical things. After centuries of refinement of their abilities, the Isawa have become quite skilled at using the Earth kami to manipulate, improve, and even decorate physical structures. Isawa shugenja have been known to evoke bricks from the ground, to make wood shape and bend itself into required forms, or to make roof tiles fall into perfect place. Of course, given both the degree of magical skill required for such accomplishments and the religious role of spells in Rokugan, these techniques are usually reserved for work on temples, palaces, or other such glorious and highly honorable structures – although in times of great crisis or destruction, such as the War of Dark Fire, the Isawa are willing to apply these abilities more widely. Such applications of Earth magic have helped the Isawa build (and when needed, rebuild) fantastic palaces such as Kyuden Asako and Kyuden Isawa. Phoenix castles are well-known as works of both art and physical solidity, and without magic their construction and repair would doubtless have required vastly greater effort, if they were possible at all. The Isawa have also used their skills to draw from the memory of the Earth kami (who pay much more attention to the lay of the land than to human doings) to help rebuild destroyed buildings perfectly as they were before. Thus despite centuries of wars and natural catastrophes, many Phoenix temples retain the same designs from the earliest days of the Empire, making them appear as permanent fixtures upon the land. This stability is a great comfort to the Phoenix, among the most traditional clans in the Empire.

A very important tenet of the Phoenix viewpoint is pacifism. Despite living in an Empire of warriors, the Phoenix believe life is a sacred gift and shouldn't be wasted without reason. Earth magic is a great asset in support of this philosophy, since it allows one to strengthen the body, the mind, and even the land itself against aggression. Many Earth spells are designed to protect against physical damage, and it is quite common for Isawa Earth shugenja confronted by violent behavior to simply armor and enhance themselves with a few spells, leaving them largely immune to their foes' aggression. The Earth can also strengthen the health of an injured or ailing person, allowing for life to be prolonged until further assistance can be provided – either in the form of healing Water spells (which most Isawa shugenja learn, at least at the basic level) or medical attention, also a mandatory part of the Isawa Shugenja School syllabus. Further, the Isawa also believe in honor and strength of mind, and regularly call on the Earth kami to help them withstand fear or temptation. In the great courts of the Phoenix, rival courtiers often find their hosts to be all but impossible to tempt or manipulate, a strength which relies in significant part on the power of Earth.

When all else fails and war comes, the Phoenix use the land around them as part of their defense. The mountainous paths to the lands of the sons of Shiba are famously difficult to navigate, and Isawa shugenja frequently rearrange them to their needs. Stone walls erupting of nowhere, ground opening under the feet of enemy armies, and sudden inexplicable landslides have convinced many armies to just turn back from the Phoenix lands, allowing wars to be ended with minimum loss of life. Of course, for all their vaunted pacifism, the Phoenix do not hesitate to unleash their full power on the battlefield once they judge there is no other choice, and here too the power of Earth plays a vital role. Isawa shugenja have unleashed earthquakes strong enough to wreck entire legions, wrenched islands forth from beneath the ocean, and built armies of earthen warriors as strong as any bushi.

## Does Any of This Work?

As noted in this section, the Isawa shugenja employ a number of methods to enhance their spellcasting, most famously through their careful tending of the Isawa Mori and the paper which they create from its wood. Although these Phoenix methods are certainly interesting from a cultural standpoint, for players of the L5R RPG they raise an obvious question: Do they have any mechanical effect?

The answer is: It depends.

While it can certainly add more depth to an L5R campaign to introduce mechanical effects based on the quality of scrolls and calligraphy, the style of prayers, or similar effects, it also adds complexity to the game and introduces the possibility of disruptions to mechanical balance. Thus, GMs must decide whether any of these elements will be appropriate for their games. For consideration, we present the following options:

Spell scrolls made from the spiritually powerful wood of the Isawa Mori seem to be able to better attract the favor of the kami. If a shugenja uses such a scroll to cast a spell, it awards a +3 bonus on the Spellcasting Roll. Note that not all Phoenix scrolls are from the Isawa Mori – even within the clan, possessing these scrolls is a privilege, and outside the clan they are rare and sought-after gifts.

A shugenja who is careful to scribe his spell-scrolls with calligraphy that is favorable to the type of kami being invoked may be able to enhance the power of the spells. A suggested mechanical requirement would be a roll of Calligraphy / Intelligence at TN 30 (TN 25 for Phoenix characters, who have access to kanji unknown to the rest of the Empire) to make the kanji precise enough to coax a stronger reaction from the kami. The suggested bonus would be +3 to Spellcasting rolls with that particular scroll.

A shugenja who delivers his prayers in an appropriate tone and with suitable accompanying gestures and dance may be able to evoke a stronger response from the kami. The suggested roll would be Perform: Dance / Awareness or Perform: Song / Awareness at a TN of 30, but increasing the number of Complex Actions required to cast the spell by 1. In return, a successful shugenja gains a Free Raise on his Spellcasting roll.

## Isawa Spellcasting Practices

Rokugani shugenja often discuss whether the Isawa's magical prowess comes from their technique, from their bloodline, or from their lands. The legendary forest known as the Isawa Mori was identified as a place of spiritual power long before the Kami fell from the Heavens, and the Phoenix Clan quickly learned to harness it. By carefully harvesting a select number of trees, the Phoenix are able to create spell scrolls which seem to be particularly effective at gathering the energies necessary to entice and manipulate the kami. This scroll-making craft is overseen by the Isawa Earth shugenja, since wood is a substance closely associated with the Element of Earth. The paper made from the Isawa Mori undergoes a lengthy ritualized process, including many intense prayers, resulting in scrolls which can be a powerful help in spellcasting – albeit somewhat bland in appearance to the profane eye. The calligraphy used does draw attention, however. The ancient Tribe of Isawa was one of the first to develop a writing system, well before the Fall of the Kami, and it is widely believed their system was actually the source of the Empire's kanji. Even in modern times, Phoenix calligraphy retains a sharp and distinctive quality. The Isawa also use an impressive range of characters on their scrolls, including many kanji which have not been used by other clans in centuries and even some never seen outside the Phoenix Clan. These kanji tend to be very complex, with every brush-stroke having a precise meaning. While the art of writing is not usually the forte of Earth shugenja, they pay particular attention to the inks used on their scrolls, believing the nuance in color and shade in interaction with the paper will support the strength of their spells. When it comes to magic, the Isawa leave no possibility unexamined.

The Phoenix are also known to experiment more than other clans in finding ways to vary their prayers for maximum effect. For example, their prayers to the Earth kami tend to feature regular monotone chanting, since they believe the Earth kami respond well to calm and steady voices. Although they sometimes accompany the prayers with ritualized movement or dancing, these are always very slow and distinctly ponderous in style. In the twelfth century, a new school of thought emerges among the Isawa which argues that geometry patterns can be used to coax the kami of Earth, and it is certainly true that the dances used in Isawa prayers to the Earth always follow regular and harmonious patterns.

## Magical Orders Within the Isawa Family

As any other shugenja student will (perhaps reluctantly) admit, the Isawa often eschew specialization in one facet of an Element in favor of overwhelming efficiency in using all its aspects. As such, while Isawa Earth shugenja most often use the Element for defense, they are proficient in all of Earth's applications: resistance, manipulation of the material world, communion with nature, spiritual purity, opposition to the Taint, and so forth. The Phoenix

libraries are vast, allowing access to almost any spell created over the history of the Empire, and it is very common for Isawa shugenja to be constantly working on developing new spells of their own to add to their catalog of powers. Earth shugenja are not usually known for their creativity or imagination, but they have the patience to keep working where others might give up. Even the most uninspired acolyte may be able to produce a powerful spell after many years of unstinting work. Another forte of the Isawa Shugenja School is its lack of any weak area when it comes to the Elements. Whereas an Earth shugenja from another clan's school might labor under a weakness in the Element of Air, an Isawa has no such disadvantage. The typical Isawa Earth acolyte who passes gempukku will already know at least one spell for each of the other three Elements, making him a well-rounded priest able to serve his clan in all ways and equally proficient at coaxing the kami of all Elements. This is an advantage no other school of magic can boast.

Although nowhere near as permissive as the Dragon Clan, the Phoenix still encourage their shugenja to find many different ways to serve the clan, and as a result their school contains a number of smaller orders which pursue different avenues of magical study in the Element of Earth.

The most famous of these is, of course, the Isawa Tensai order, whose students of Earth are trained on a rock outcropping near Kyuden Isawa which features stones of many different types and colors. Those of a more militant nature – rare within the Isawa, but not totally unheard-of – usually join the Earth-oriented branch of the Elemental Guard, the so-called Avalanche Guard. Like all the Elemental Guards, the Avalanche Guard is a terrifying battlefield force on the rare occasions it is unleashed, crushing enemies when it is not re-shaping the land to confound them.

A small order of elite priests focus on ways of using Earth to affect physical architecture; the so-called Isawa Architects have created many wonders for the clan, as well as rebuilding and preserving the most ancient structures in their lands. An even smaller group drawing from the most mystically inclined of the Isawa try to contact and emulate the power of the Earth Dragon, a difficult and dangerous process at best. Still others try to reinforce the human body through medicine and magic, or to reshape the land and mountains around themselves. If it can be done with Earth magic, the Isawa have an expert on it.

As the creators of the shugenja tradition, the Isawa are also the leaders in the performance of religious rites. Earth shugenja in particular are favored for this role, since it is they who bestow blessings on the crops each year to seek a good harvest. It is a great testimony to the power of such rites that the Phoenix farmlands rarely suffer from serious crop failures. When such unfortunate events do happen, the Phoenix always take it quite seriously and dispatch Earth shugenja to investigate, to learn if some Fortune or spirit has been angered and can be propitiated to restore harmony and fertility. The consecration of new temples and shrines likewise often falls on the Earth shugenja, and any time a new religious structure must be built the Earth shugenja will be consulted to make sure it is done with all proper rituals and purifications. Indeed, the Isawa often have such prayers permanently engraved onto the foundations of structures in their lands.

## Mechanical Options: Crop Blessings

Although blessing fields and crops is one of the most basic and widespread of shugenja duties, the L5R 4th Edition RPG has not created any specific spell to represent this effect – after all, a crop-blessing is not something that produces any mechanical game effect. However, if a GM wishes to incorporate crop blessings into the game in a mechanical way, we suggest the following option:

Blessing the Land is considered to be a Rank 0 Earth spell (meaning it can be cast even by a Rank 1 shugenja who is deficient in Earth). The spell will normally affect a single field or rice paddy; each Raise on the spell will double the extent of the blessing's effect.

A crop blessing will protect the chosen fields against any natural threat to the harvest (e.g. blight or disease, bug infestations, drought, etc). However, it will not protect against crop failure stemming from the wrath of an angry spirit or Fortune – in those cases, the shugenja must determine the source of the spirit's anger and appease it in order to restore proper conditions.

## The Isawa Temple Guardians

During the First War in the Dawn of the Empire, when Isawa still ruled the tribe which bore his name, a young shugenja named Kanshiki grew worried about news of the approaching Shadowlands Horde. He was the sole keeper of a small temple to Ebisu, far in the north of the lands of the Phoenix, and could not count on the support of the tribe to defend his home. When the creatures of Fu Leng approached, Kanshiki summoned all the peasants and monks living nearby to find refuge in the temple, and called on his Earth magic to defend them. To his own surprise, Kanshiki found himself able to push back the horrors of Jigoku, protecting the temple from intrusion and striking back with the power of jade until the creatures gave up and retreated.

While the other survivors went back to their normal life, Kanshiki spent many days meditating on the event and wondering how his victory had even been possible. He eventually formulated a theory: the holy ground of temples, dedicated to the Fortunes, constituted a part of Ningen-do that basked in the direct influence of the Celestial Heavens, Tengoku – as long as the religious dedications were properly maintained. The kami would respond more strongly in such places in order to preserve them from malevolent influences that drew the wrath of Heaven. Kanshiki spent the rest of his life studying this phenomenon, eventually choosing several apprentices who became the first of the Isawa Temple Guardians.

Admission in the order is based on personal recommendation, and members always have an affinity for the Element of Earth, since its power is essential to the order's teachings. Apprentices spent long hours in prayer and meditation, learning to harmonize their energies with those of the temple in which they pursue their education, and communing deeply with the Earth kami to learn their strength. They learn to use Earth magic to purify, reinforce, and defend the sacred grounds of every temple; those who complete the training often add a simple torii arch to their school mon, representing their additional studies. Although recruitment was once limited solely to the Isawa, over the years the senior members of the order saw wisdom in opening their doors to other shugenja aligned with the Element of Earth, even if few met their exacting criteria of devotion, skill, and piety. The most frequent family to join the order (after the Isawa themselves) is the Kuni, who all too well understand the difficulty of maintaining holy grounds against the forces of darkness.

Although the popular perception of the Temple Guardians is that they spend their lives defending single locations, in fact they often travel from one temple to another, seeing that all holy places throughout the Empire are well-maintained and fully protected. This includes temples in other clan lands where the Guardians do not have any actual authority, and true to their Isawa heritage the Guardians often present themselves as the sole source of wisdom in such matters. However, they are genuinely dedicated to the proper maintenance and protection of temples, and priests from other clans usually see the visit of a Guardian as an opportunity to learn and to increase the holiness of their grounds. To a Temple Guardian, every single detail of a temple's maintenance is relevant, from architecture and gardens to construction materials, rites of consecration, inhabitants, and everything else related to it. Through careful study and meditation, any temple can be made even more pleasing to the kami and the Fortunes – as well as more resistant to the powers of the Realm of Evil. The Guardians make no distinctions as to who or what a temple is dedicated to, so long as it falls within the proper forms of Rokugani theology, and thus they generally know more about that theology than almost any other priests in the Empire.

The Temple Guardians have an extensive knowledge of Earth magic, since they rely on the kami of Earth to help strengthen and protect the shrines and temples which they tend. They embrace a number of magical theories which are considered odd or unconventional by other shugenja, such as their belief that subtle contact between the Heavens and Ningen-do happens on holy ground, and the notion that the kami can be pleased and made more responsive through a more harmonious arrangement of the landscape. They also believe temples throughout Rokugan form a network of spiritual energy, creating lines which the kami follow more easily and which could be used for great magical power if properly mapped and accessed. (This idea has found some favorable attention among the Kuni, who claim they have been able to use it to maintain their powers in the blighted and largely kami-free Kuni Wastes.) It is not uncommon for Temple Guardians to carry detailed maps of Rokugan, showing the locations of temples and with careful mystical annotations regarding their dedication, elemental affinities, and spiritual importance, as well as the purported energy lines connecting them.

## The Yogo Wardmasters

The Yogo family, estranged cousins of the Phoenix, is dominated by shugenja and would probably be more famous across the Empire if not for the curse lingering on its bloodline and the sinister reputation of the Scorpion Clan in general. Over the centuries of its reclusive existence, the family has developed an intricate knowledge of obscure branches of magic, mainly warding spells and confronting the threat of the Taint. Tasked with protecting the twelve Black Scrolls and burning with the need for revenge against the forces of Jigoku, the Yogo developed powerful defensive magic that was unique to their school. Although Yogo ward magic can be performed with all Elements, it shares many traits commonly associated with Earth: permanency, protection, and resilience. In addition, the Yogo emphasis on rooting out the Taint is closely associated with the secondary purification aspect of Earth magic.

The Scorpion Clan is often known as the Clan of Secrets, and its obsession with acquiring information is only matched by the Phoenix – although of course the Scorpion tend to treasure more shameful sorts of knowledge. While most of the clan (including the Soshi with their Air magic) work to acquire such prizes, it is the Yogo's duty to protect such secrets once they are found. The Yogo warding techniques provide something which most defensive spells lack: permanency. Through prayers and crafting techniques known only to them, the Yogo can persuade a kami to lie dormant in a piece of delicately inscribed paper, waiting to be used at a later time. Even for spells of other Elements, the kami of Earth are still involved, since they have eternal patience and are always present in the special warding papers. The Yogo carry these wards on their person to be used at a later time, or place them on a door or wall where they can protect a location. Few know more about long-term enchantments than the Yogo family, and it is believed some wards in their lands have been in place since the days of Yogo himself. Earth spirits are often used to fortify such ancient spells, since for them time flows at a much slower pace than as seen by mortals.

Another and even more secretive order among the Yogo is the Kuroiban or "Black Watch." As discussed in the L5R 4th Edition supplement The Great Clans, the Kuroiban was created as a covert organization to hunt maho throughout the Empire, and developed a mystical technique that allows them detect Taint. This special technique was devised with the help of the Kuni – sometimes without their knowledge – and allows the kami to detect the corruption of Jigoku within a human target. Developing the Black Watch technique required long and extremely careful experimentation, and the Earth kami supplied tremendous insight into the nature of unholy energies – Earth, after all, being of all Elements the most sensitive to Jigoku's influence. Of course, while the Kuroiban always wish to remain hidden and use covert methods, they recognize the possibility of direct conflict and usually make sure to have a few more conventional Earth spells ready, such as Jade Strike, to deal with the forces of the Ninth Kami.

# Earth Magic as the Element of Nature

The Element of Earth is closely associated with the forces of nature, especially plants and animals. Those shugenja whose duties and traditions closely associate them with the natural world tend to be Earth shugenja, and their affinity for plants and animals can often lead them to develop techniques quite unlike those found elsewhere in the Empire.

## The Kitsune Family

*"I trust you, of course, but my bear friend here has doubts about your intentions in our forest." – Kitsune Tokoru*

The Kitsune family was founded in hardship. The vassals of Shinjo who could not or would not follow her out of the Empire, they were displaced by the Lion and reduced to a Minor Clan in inhospitable lands. Their first days in the Kitsune Mori were painful and difficult, but eventually an alliance with the spirits of the forest allowed them to survive and, in time, flourish as a small but proud Minor Clan. Tied to the forest around them, and surviving in large part from the bounty it offered, they naturally developed an affinity for Earth magic. Since the gifts of the kitsune spirits meant an unusually high proportion of the family had magical talent, they focused their limited resources on developing their shugenja school.

In the mid-twelfth century the Kitsune become the fourth family of the Mantis Clan. While this allowed some of them to more easily attend other schools and gain access to many different types of learning, it also unlocked additional possibilities for the Kitsune shugenja, since the Moshi and Yoritomo collaborated with their new fellows and offered their own insights on Kitsune magic. As a result the Kitsune quickly became a key part of the Mantis Clan's overall capabilities, their mastery of Earth magic equaled by none others in the clan.

One of the greatest obstacles the Kitsune originally faced was their environment. Since their new lands were covered by one of the largest forests in Rokugan, the Kitsune had very little agricultural capacity. Thankfully, the spirits of the forests shared their knowledge with their new guests, and the Kitsune quickly adapted. For those who knew where to look, the forest offered an almost endless bounty of foods and other resources, including many herbs and medicinal plants unheard-of in the rest of Rokugan. The Kitsune became some of the best herbalists in the Empire, developing great knowledge in medicinal applications of natural substances. This focus on nature and the forest also led them to create and use many new spells that used the Element of Earth to directly affect plants and animals around them. Thanks to the prayers of their shugenja, the Fox could build residences from shaped trees or grow rice where no one believed it possible. Those foolish enough to trespass the clan's borders found themselves under assault from nature itself, or would simply become lost in the seemingly endless maze-like forest. Thus their unique environment became for the Kitsune a source of unique strength.

Of course, the true and ultimate source of the Kitsune family's power is the blood they share with the kitsune spirits, the fox shapeshifters who first helped them survive in the forest. Osusuki and Akomachi, the twin spirits who joined the Fox Clan, taught the members of the new family to respect the spirits of nature, especially those who came from the Realm of Animals, Chikushudo. Through this contact with the fox spirits the Kistune soon came to realize that most animals had supernatural equivalents who could be sources of help and wisdom. This of course influenced the development of their magic, and soon they were able to interact with the animal spirits as easily as other shugenja did with the Elemental kami. In support of this they devised a series of spells designed to affect all animals, whether spiritual or mundane. Although more than one Element could conceivably be used for such spells, Earth offered advantages which were undeniable: apart from birds and aquatic creatures (the latter generally dwelling far from the Kitsune territory), all animals share an innate connection with the ground they dwell on, so the kami of Earth offered a natural conduit to them. The Kitsune also considered themselves protectors of animals against the depredations of other men, and Earth magic provided many ways to protect and reinforce animals against aggression. Experienced Kitsune shugenja are capable of summoning animals to their aid, increasing the beasts' physical abilities, communicating with them, and even in some cases adopting some of their abilities and appearance.

Another aspect of Rokugani magic the Kitsune dealt with was the existence of spirit portals. The Kitsune Mori forest harbors a major passage to Chikushudo, the Realm of Animals, and many members of the family have visited that Spirit Realm. This is not a journey to take lightly, since it is easy to get lost in such realms or to fall prey to their jealous influence. Legends of mortals reverting to a feral state are a cautionary tale to all adventurous Kitsune, one they take very seriously. Earth magic can offer protection against such influences, anchoring the subject to his home in Ningen-do. It can also be used to close spirit passages, which can be very important when they occur in dangerous areas. Finally, it can also be used to ban or imprison hostile spirits; the Kitsune are usually reluctant to do this, but it can be the best solution when faced with a particularly wild or dangerous creature, such as the ghostly kitsune-tsuki. The Earth shugenja of the Kitsune family are well-equipped to face all such challenges.

## Kitsune Spellcasting Practices

Much like the Isawa, the Kitsune make use of the wood in their forests to create paper. In fact, the variety of different trees in the Kitsune Mori leads the family to create many different types and styles of paper. They make full use of these in the creation of their spell-scrolls, and many Kitsune will associate a specific type of paper with a particular spell based on the proprieties of the plant it was made from. Consequently the typical Kitsune will carry

scrolls that are quite varied in texture and appearance. Their calligraphy is elegant, characterized by long flowing strokes, and favors kanji whose shape reminds the reader of different animal species. Kitsune prayers and chants are usually performed in hushed tones, almost whispered, since silence can be the key to survival in the forest. Some words used are actually a reproduction of animal sounds adapted to the Rokugani language. Accompanying dances and gestures, when they occur, are sharp or even wild, reflecting the rugged outdoor lifestyle of most Kitsune shugenja. Here too some movements emulate animals, although in such a stylized manner they are almost impossible to recognize save to other devotees of dance.

All Kistune shugenja are privy to the technique known as Essence of Chikushudo, which allows them to use the common spells of Sense, Summon, and Commune to locate and speak with animal spirits. The prayers and energy used for this Technique are completely alien to other shugenja, and will usually completely baffle them unless they know what is being done beforehand. The ability to detect spirits is quite valuable, since many animal shapeshifters masquerade as common humans or normal animals. Tricksters like these know if a Kitsune shugenja is present, it is only a matter of time before they are discovered. This Technique can also help a shugenja find an ally in time of need, although using Summon in this way can be dangerous – there is little way to predict what kind of spirit will appear or how it will react. The Kitsune are always careful to maintain a deferential attitude in such dealings. The ability to Commune also helps in establishing a dialogue, since many of the wildest spirits do not understand the tongue of men at all, or refuse to express themselves in anything but grunts and roars. Such creatures always appreciate a shugenja able to talk to them using their own spiritual tongue. Animal spirits are always very difficult to relate to, since their mindset is intrinsically different from a human one, and the information they can give on human activities is limited. One should not expect a dog spirit to recognize the colors of a Great Clan, but on the other hand it will have a sharp memory of any smells and tracks.

Some of the Kitsune have carried their affinity with nature considerably farther than the rest of the family. Among the most impressive of these are the Kitsune Summoners, who are able not only to call the spirits of Chikushudo but also cause them to materialize in the physical world and assist the shugenja who has invoked them. These individuals have often provided key services when defending the family's territories or tracking down individuals who wronged them. A more uncommon tradition is that of the Kitsune Artisans, shugenja who focus their Earth magic into creating items of beauty. In point of fact, Earth magic allows for some delicate manipulations of plants, stone, and other such solid objects, and this can produce surprisingly impressive results in the domain of art, including sculpture, architecture, and ikebana (flower arranging). Most Kitsune artisans pursue their art out of a genuine desire to enhance the beauty of the world around them, but their lords long ago realized the glory and political favors which such could bring them at court, where the nature-based works of the Kitsune can often create a great sensation.

Many Kitsune shugenja also study the art of herbalism, using their magic to supplement the natural properties of curative herbs. It is said there is no disease or poison whose cure cannot be found in the Kitsune Mori, and over the years the members of the Kitsune family have tried their hardest to prove this true. A related practice in Kitsune rituals is the heavy use of plant-based incense, whose natural essence is believed to help to carry prayers to the spirits of the forest. Stepping into a Kitsune temple is to be welcomed by strong natural smells, making the place a link between the wilderness and human civilization.

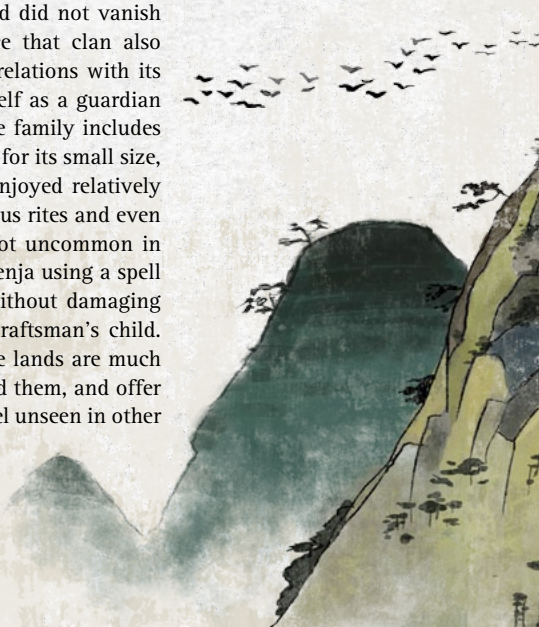
More generally, the Kitsune embrace the Virtue of Compassion in every possible way. As the sole custodians of their people for many centuries, the Kitsune have always been close to the lower castes. This bond did not vanish after they joined the Mantis Clan, since that clan also shares the tendency to maintain closer relations with its heimin and even sometimes appoints itself as a guardian of the common people. Since the Kitsune family includes a high proportion of shugenja, especially for its small size, the heimin in their lands have always enjoyed relatively favored lives, protected by regular religious rites and even the frequent direct use of magic. It is not uncommon in the history of the Fox Clan to see a shugenja using a spell to move a tree out of a farmer's way without damaging it, or using the kami to heal a simple craftsman's child. Unsurprisingly, the heimin of the Kitsune lands are much more cognizant of the spirit world around them, and offer gifts and veneration to the spirits at a level unseen in other lands.

## The Children of the Forest

At the end of the first century, the infant Fox Clan managed to survive in its strange new home by forming an alliance with the fox spirits of the Kitsune Mori – an arrangement that ultimately included intermarriage with the spirits in their human form. From time to time this spiritual heritage manifests itself in a young Kitsune who seems to communicate with animals instinctively, who is more at home in the forest than in a house or temple, and who begins to show strange physical affinities to the fox spirits: green eyes, red or white hair, and even fur.

In the early days of the clan, these strangely gifted individuals often lost their humanity to the allure of the fox spirits' wild and unfettered existence. Over the centuries, however, the Kitsune shugenja learned to recognize the symptoms of those whose connection to Chikushudo was dangerously strong. Eventually the family devised techniques of self-control and spiritual harmony that would let these individuals find a balance between their human and animal sides.





## The Iuchi and Horiuchi

*"Come now, Utaku-chan. I can help you move more swiftly than that." – Iuchi Hari*

While the primary focus of the Iuchi family is on the Element of Water, their curious nature combined with their long journeys outside the Empire have led them to study all Elements and all forms of magic. Many of their favorite spells and abilities revolve around animals, particularly the beloved steeds of the Unicorn Clan; they also favor the magic of movement and travel, since for eight centuries the Unicorn Clan was almost always on the move. Although Earth magic is certainly never associated with speed, it does have a strong connection to nature and animals, as well as certain uses for travel – such as removing obstacles or obstructing pursuit. During their many journeys through exotic foreign lands the Iuchi found Earth magic particularly useful to studying and understanding the local plants and animals. The ability to know what was edible and what was poisonous, or to soothe dangerous beasts and quickly tame horses for use, was invaluable to the roaming clan. While the Iuchi had no direct connection to Chikushudo and thus certainly never attained the proficiency of their distant Kitsune cousins, they nonetheless were quite skilled in this aspect of Earth magic.

During their journeys, the Iuchi discovered the kami often did not answer them well – or at all – in the gaijin lands. At the same time they encountered many forms of gaijin sorcery, ranging from the strange to the downright sinister, and with time they integrated these foreign techniques into their own magic. Out of this was born Meishodo, the practice of inscribing secret names of power on amulets to quickly and efficiently reproduce the effects of a normal spell, sacrificing flexibility for reliability and speed. The practice continues to be studied in modern Rokugan, mainly by the off-shoot Horiuchi family, and has been somewhat reconciled with Rokugani religious ideals. (The original Meishodo amulets appeared to trap a spirit within them, forcing it to perform the desired spell, but modern amulets instead appeal to the kami in a more positive manner.) Perhaps because of its association with physical amulets, Meishodo spellcasting functions better with the spirits of Earth than those of Water, so practitioners of the Meishodo arts tend to focus on defensive and nature-based magic rather than the arts of travel and movement favored by their more conventional shugenja brethren.

During its brief twelfth-century existence, the Horiuchi family makes extensive studies in the art of Meishodo, such that the practice is often associated with them in the public mind. The fact that they dwelt in a mountainous province of the Unicorn Clan and maintained scouts in the legendary Shinomen Forest only increased their interest in Earth magic. Sadly, this knowledge was not enough to save them from the vicious plague that spread through the Empire during the Kali-Ma Invasion, but their knowledge of Meishodo survived and was carried forward by the Iuchi, ensuring future generations of Unicorn would benefit from the Horiuchi even after the family ceased to exist.

## Earth Magic as Purity

The fourth and final aspect of the Element of Earth which is utilized by shugenja is its close association with spiritual purity through the sacred substances of jade and crystal. Many Earth spells can call on the power of jade or of crystal to strike down Tainted creatures, bind and control dangerous spirits, and otherwise uphold the purity of Ningen-do against corrupting influences.

## The Kuni Family

*"Send more demons! I shall bury them all. I will be the light that purifies the Empire. All that live in darkness should fear me, for they will not survive my crusade of fire."– Kuni Daigo, Jade Champion, twelfth century*

Kuni was one of the first shugenja in the Empire's history and became one of the greatest heroes of the Crab. Although his origins are vague (like many of the legendary figures in the Dawn of the Empire), he would became the founder of one the first shugenja families in Rokugan and along with his friends Hiruma and Kaiu helped shape the nature and attitudes of the Crab Clan. His emphasis on Earth magic is hardly surprising, given that the whole Crab Clan from the beginning seemed to embrace the virtues of Earth over all else. Dedication, resolve, endurance, and courage were all traits which Hida sought out in his followers. From Kuni's personal perspective, however, it was the ability of Earth to resist the Shadowlands Taint which made it so vitally useful. From his day forward, the Kuni family has intensively studied the ability of Earth – and by extension, the sacred substance jade – to ward off the Taint and harm the impure. In modern times, nobody in the Empire, not even the Isawa, can claim to know more about the different ways to fight corruption through Earth magic.

The first and foremost topic for all Kuni apprentices is the study of the Taint and its interaction with jade and crystal. While the Taint was at first thought to be a sixth Element of sorts, it has since been identified as the influence of Jigoku, the Realm of Evil, which spreads into the mortal world through various spirit portals – most notably the Festering Pit of Fu Leng. Jade and crystal are tied to all Elements, since they both originate in the tears of Amaterasu, but their material nature and their connection to the ground where they are found make them easier to access through the Element of Earth. Efforts have been made for centuries to produce these substances through magic or alchemy, but all have failed and the Kuni shugenja believe it is impossible to duplicate the unique holy nature of these materials. One can, however, emulate their proprieties through the use of spells, primarily spells granted by the kami of Earth. Protection and purification were the first applications of such magic, but the Kuni quickly discovered that by summoning the purity of jade and directing it at Tainted creatures they could destroy them. The Kuni became famous for being able to destroy

large numbers of Shadowlands creatures with ease, often by means of a single spell unleashing massive blasts of jade-green energy. In modern times the Kuni family's insights into the nature of jade remain unmatched in Rokugan, and they continue to study it meticulously, discovering new applications every day. More recently they have also deepened their research into crystal, finding ways to use the Earth kami to invoke the potency of that even rarer substance.

Sadly, the Shadowlands are full of dangers, and some are too great for the Kuni to destroy outright. Here too Earth magic provided them with a solution; since Earth kami could often be convinced to restrict movement, it was natural to take this farther and find ways for them to constrain Tainted creatures or even to bind the essence of hostile spirits. The Kuni were the first to develop what are now known as binding spells; in a rare instance of collaboration between clans, they sought help from the Yogo in doing so, since the Yogo knowledge of warding magic provided the first steps in developing these binding effects. Such spells allow the Kuni to detain powerful oni and other such creatures, not only protecting the Empire but also giving the Kuni new opportunities for research on their captives. Alas, in some instances this ended up giving such demons extended periods of time to tempt the Kuni into joining the forces of Jigoku; the Kuni have paid a high price over the centuries for their perilous research.

This is one of the reasons why the Kuni also extensively study how the Element of Earth can be used to reinforce the mind and the will. Faced with nameless horrors on a daily basis, surrounded by violence and death, the Kuni must shield themselves against human emotion to be able to accomplish their duties. They receive extensive training and preparation from some of the harshest sensei in Rokugan, but this is not always enough to avoid madness, panic, or corruption. The Earth kami can easily lend their strength of will if properly entreated, turning hesitation and frailty into steadfastness. The Kuni routinely use such spells on themselves when they feel their will waver – which may be part of why outsiders tend to see them as emotionless madmen, for the strength of the Earth kami can easily cut off emotions altogether. The Kuni also support their Crab brethren with such magic, helping them withstand the terrors brought on when facing their great enemy.

One key element of the struggle against the Shadowlands is understanding the true nature of such monstrous inhuman foes. The Kuni routinely risk their bodies – and sometimes their souls – by capturing, studying, and dissecting creatures of the Shadowlands, from undead to ogres and even demonic oni. More than one Kuni has gone mad from such research, and the family as a whole has acquired a deeply unsavory reputation, yet they continue nonetheless, knowing that their work ultimately strengthens the Crab. Thanks to this knowledge, Kuni shugenja understand how to direct their spells to strike with maximum efficiency, know how to treat Crab soldiers injured by Shadowlands monsters, and know what weaknesses to exploit on all manner of dangerous creatures. A side effect of this research is that they also discovered how to bind and control a number of non-Shadowlands spirit creatures – most notably the mischievous mujina, who the Kuni have often forced into service in the clan's iron mines. They also became experts at rooting out shapeshifters, skin-changers, and other such Shadowlands infiltrators; Kuni shugenja sometimes leave their lands and roam the Empire alongside the Witch-Hunters in search of such threats.

## Kuni Spellcasting Practices

Being pragmatists, the Kuni rarely pause to pay attention to the paper used for their scrolls as long as it does the job. Similarly, Kuni calligraphy tends to be very plain and straightforward, and in truth no one would ever accuse any Crab of making artistry his prime concern. However, the cipher used in Kuni spell-scrolls is one of the most intricate in the Empire, since the Kuni are famously (and justifiably) paranoid about sharing their secrets lest they be used against them. A student of the Kuni style must painstakingly memorize several ciphers, reviewing them over and over until they are so natural to him that he can read the scrolls without the slightest delay. Kuni prayers are usually spoken in low tones, which the Kuni believe emulates the voice of the Earth kami. They often exhort the spirits of Earth to act not as a favor but rather out of a duty to maintain purity in Ningen-do, something most other schools would consider rude if not downright blasphemous.

A shugenja in the act of casting a spell will often glow with the energies of the kami, especially in the eyes which frequently shine with the pure white light of Elemental power. Kuni shugenja, however, channel Earth energies so often that their eyes glow an eerie jade-green color instead. A few very rare members of other families have shown this trait as well, but usually only the Kuni have the depth of experience in Earth (and especially jade) magic required. Of course, the Kuni are also easily recognized by their notorious Kabuki-style facepaint.

The duty of being a priest to the Crab Clan is a grim one, as war, death, and horror are their daily lot. The Kuni are widely known for their attitude of stoic silence, never complaining about the lives they must lead for their

clan. They tend to keep whatever religious ceremonies they need to perform as short and straightforward as possible, something for which other Crab samurai are usually grateful. This is not to say the Kuni fall short in their duties – after all, ritual blessings and purification can be of great use to ward off dangerous spirits and Tainted kansen, so the Kuni take all such duties extremely seriously. Because of their close connection to Earth and the Crab Clan's perpetual food deficit, the Kuni make a particular priority for rituals that bless crops and purify the farmlands. After the eighth century, such duties acquire a certain poignancy, since the Kuni family's own lands are reduced to a barren lifeless wasteland after the invasion by the Maw.

A common practice among the Kuni is to carry a prayer staff which is consecrated by various purification rituals and usually has pieces of jade, prayer strips, and even shards of crystal attached to it. Such staffs are useful tools for bestowing blessings and warding off the deadly energies of Jigoku, and also serve as weapons at need.

## Mystical Orders Within the Kuni Family

Like any large and long-standing shugenja family, the Kuni have several elite orders within their ranks, although they tend to be more secretive about these than other clans. Some of the strongest in the art of binding become Oni Slayers, who dedicate their lives solely to the capture and eradication of demons from Jigoku. Such a life is not for the weak of heart, since oni are probably the most dangerous and devious creatures known to man. A few Kuni shugenja will sometimes join the ranks of their family's other major school, the Witch Hunters, their Earth magic being a perfect complement to the ascetic mystical techniques the Witch Hunters use to root out and eliminate the Taint inside Rokugan.

Among the most powerful of Kuni priests are those who study the deepest mysteries of jade and crystal, calling on the essence of these materials to create weapons against the forces of evil. In the twelfth century, the Kuni begin focusing more intensely on the power and nature of crystal, partially influenced by encounters with other races who used crystal (the Naga and the Nezumi) and partly due to a jade shortage that plagues the clan at that time. Out of this research emerges the Kuni Crystal Masters, the creators of the Sapphire Strike spell, who specialize in awakening the spiritual powers of crystal and using those powers to enhance their magic.

Since the founding of the Falcon Clan, which eventually became the Toritaka Family of the Crab Clan, a few have their members have studied with the Kuni and became known as Exorcists, shugenja whose prayers can ban the ghosts of the dead, who are all too often corrupted by the Taint or otherwise animated by nefarious intentions.

## The Original Chuda Family

During its short-lived existence, the Snake Clan was one of the strongest enemies of the Shadowlands Taint and its servants, the sinister maho-tsukai. Founded by a Phoenix Clan shugenja and drawing most of its founding members from that same clan, the Snake had a strong talent in magic and Chuda himself favored the Element of Earth. This meshed well with the clan's goal of hunting down hidden maho-tsukai cults in the Empire. Since the Chuda often operated alone and in distant corners of Rokugan, from necessity they developed techniques to improve their resistance to injury. Their spellcasting style fell somewhere between the Phoenix and the Crab, using tremendous power but targeting it mainly against creatures or people harboring the Taint. Thanks to their extensive knowledge and the dedication they showed in rooting out their enemies, the Chuda developed many new spells during their short history.

Of course this was not enough to save the Snake Clan from its ultimate doom. As described in the L5R 4th Edition supplement The Great Clans, pages 177-178, eventually the

### Kuni Prayer Staves

Shugenja from many clans often carry prayer staffs as both a physical aid and as an item to focus on when performing spells. Staves may be plain or can be adorned with ritual calligraphy, prayer strips, and other symbolic items. With long use the spirits within these staves sometimes awaken, turning them into minor nemuranai that assist and protect their wielders.

The Kuni, however, make a practice of actively seeking to awaken the spirits within their staves, which are always adorned with jade (and whenever possible with crystal as well). Their staves often become potent weapons against the forces of Jigoku, and the Kuni shugenja make a practice of crafting them not only for their own use but also for their brethren in the ranks of the Witch Hunters. The staves are traditionally bound to the Earth within their wielder, making them more potent but also making them unable to survive that wielder's death.

In game terms, a Kuni prayer staff is created using the Crafting rules and then bound to its user through an elaborate ritual requiring several hours and the services of a Rank 5 Kuni shugenja. Thereafter, the staff's power will rapidly awaken through use by its wielder. The GM has the final say on how long it takes for a Kuni prayer staff to awaken; in general it should not take less than a year, but extraordinary circumstances (such as confronting and defeating a powerful Shadowlands creature, or exposing the staff to extremely powerful Earth magic) may cause it to happen earlier.

Once awakened, a Kuni prayer staff may be used as a focus for casting Earth spells. Focusing an Earth spell through the staff requires spending a Void Point as a Free Action; in return, the caster gains a +2k1 bonus to the spellcasting roll (+3k1 if it is a Jade spell). The staff may also be used as a weapon, and is considered a Jade weapon (able to bypass normal Invulnerability, etc). Because the jade on the staff is infused with awakened Earth kami, it will not corrode when exposed to the Shadowlands Taint, and the bearer of the staff is protected against the Taint so long as he holds it. If the wielder of the staff dies, the staff immediately crumbles away as the Earth kami completely abandon it.

noble Snake fell to a fearsome Shuten Doji spirit and became the very threat to the Empire they had once hunted. Their cousins in the Phoenix Clan put an end to their evil, exterminating all living men, women, and children in the lands of the Chuda. As a further precaution, all spells and scrolls coming from the Snake were burned and the ashes buried.

In modern times, some among the Kuni and the Asako still lament the loss of the Snake Clan's secret spells and techniques, especially their talents for both strengthening the body and more easily destroying the impure. Unfortunately, the nature of the Snake technique cannot be duplicated without the knowledge of the Chuda, especially the intricate prayers to the kami of Earth they developed. Even worse, the few relics of the clan which have been found since its fall have all been deeply Tainted and spiritually corrupted by the residue of evil left behind by the Shuten Doji.

In the twelfth century, the name of the Chuda reappeared, but associated with a group of evil maho-tsukai who claim descent from the original family. (Whether this claim has any truth is a matter of considerable debate.) Thus, most people have given up hope of ever rediscovering the secrets of the original Snake Clan shugenja school.

## The Moto Death Priests

*"Who can escape the power of the Lords? Death comes to all things; it stands behind us and before us. If I must travel over the face of the Empire to teach the correct respect of them, then that is what I will do." – Moto Ming-Gwok, twelfth century*

While the Iuchi have always been the primary shugenja family of the Unicorn Clan, in the twelfth century a small number of the Moto family become spiritually influential within the clan through their worship of the Shi-Tien Yen-Wang, the ten gaijin gods of death who became integrated with the larger Rokugani pantheon as a result of events in the Four Winds era. Although few in number, these adherents are very proud of their duties and their legacy, and in later years even a few Iuchi join them in their studies of the Lords of Death. The Death Priests are stern, severe individuals whose sole preoccupation is justice, whether in life or in death. This steadfast commitment has made them fairly capable with the magic of Earth, an Element which shares their values of determination, purity, and dedication. Their ideology makes them fairly cynical individuals, if not necessarily violent, and they tend to fixate on the flawed and imperfect nature of mortals – leading them to seek positions as magistrates or as members of the Unicorn armies.

Obviously, the Moto Death Priests appreciate any spells which can aid them in apprehending the unworthy. Spells which restrict movement or weight down the foe are well-favored, since the Death Priests always want their adversaries appropriately judged and punished in this life before being sent to the afterlife for the judgment of their

### The History of the Kuni Crystal Masters

The first Crab to develop what eventually became the Crystal Master technique was a young shugenja named Kuni Utagu, destined to one day become the Jade Champion. During his youth Utagu often went into the Shadowlands to study the enemies of the Empire. At one point he spent several months living with the Crooked Tail tribe of the Nezumi, trying to learn how they were able to resist the Taint so effectively. The Crooked Tail was a highly xenophobic group, haunted by bitter experience with the entity known as the Lying Darkness. The tribe was familiar with the power of crystal; indeed, it lived near a large crystal outcropping, and as the Crooked Tail Nezumi gradually grew to trust young Utagu, he was able to learn a few of their secrets. Utagu never revealed how he did it, but he was able to adapt a few of the Nezumi practices to the traditional Rokugani form of magic. Very few shugenja can master the exotic and obscure practices which Utagu pioneered, and the Crystal Masters are a small sect at the best of times, never numbering more than a couple of dozen. However, they are always greatly welcomed on the Kaiu Wall.

Although in the normal history of the Empire the Crystal Masters do not appear until Utagu creates them in the twelfth century, there is no requirement for the GM to impose this constraint in his campaign. Given the extensive contacts between the Kuni and the Nezumi, Utagu's discoveries could have been achieved by some other visionary Kuni at almost any time in the Crab Clan's history. The GM should therefore feel free to introduce the Crystal Master to any campaign setting where he feels it would be fun or appropriate.

gods. Some specialized Earth spells allow them to punish those less honorable than they, showing the unworthy the consequence of their actions in this life before they see it in the next. They also favor spells which enhance tracking or improve movement, since criminals are also usually cowards unwilling to stand and face the wrath of a Death Priest. Of course, the prayers involved in their spells invariably include reference and supplication to the Lords of Death, something which the Rokugani would once have considered blasphemous; once those ten Gods are allowed to rule over the punishment of souls in the afterlife, this is considered acceptable, although the more traditionalist families such as the Isawa and the Asahina still find it distasteful.

## The Asako Inquisitors

*"You will answer my questions. You will answer them quickly and you will answer them completely. These are Phoenix lands, and we do not tolerate the stench of corruption here." – Asako Rinshi*

The Asako family performs a variety of roles in the Phoenix Clan. They are known primarily as scholars and historians, and most Rokugani are vaguely aware of some manner of monastic order within their ranks (the secretive Henshin), but as a family founded by Lady Asako and her husband Yogo they are also not without magical talent. Those Asako with the gift usually train in the Isawa Shugenja School, partly because they lack the resources to develop a school of their own and partly to avoid further deepening the long-standing divide between the two families. The Asako do recognize the Isawa's prowess, of course, and know that shugenja from outside their clan would offer many favors for the chance to train in the school of the Empire's most ancient and powerful shugenja family. However, the Asako do maintain a mystical organization of their own which actively recruits shugenja: the Inquisitors. The Inquisitors have a somewhat controversial reputation – albeit not nearly so much as the unsavory Kuni Witch Hunters – and thus many are surprised to learn the organization is dominated and its training overseen by one of the most peaceful and scholarly families in the Empire. However, the pacifistic ways of the Asako do not extend to the Taint, which they regard as a terrible corrupting influence which hinders man's potential and unbalances the Elements.

The Inquisitors are elite and exclusive, led by shugenja but recruiting samurai of all types who meet their requirements of dedication and purity. Those who are actually admitted to the Inquisitor temple and taught the order's secret techniques must pass even more stringent requirements, since they are expected to display a profound connection with and understanding of the Elements, something only a few samurai attain. Training is intense and focused; for shugenja recruits, it involves complex mystical techniques mixing the lore of the Asako and the magical skill of the Isawa, techniques which can be used to disrupt an enemy's spellcasting. The very existence of this ability could be considered blasphemous if it was not used almost exclusively against criminals, maho-tsukai, gaijin, and other such villains. Still, an Inquisitor armed with these techniques can easily interrupt the casting of a normal spell if he chooses to do so. Another application of the Asako's training grants the ability to infuse a common spell with the proprieties of jade or crystal, somewhat like the Kuni Crystal Masters, and like them relying on supplications to the kami of Earth.

Although the Inquisitors accept shugenja from all schools of the Phoenix Clan, Earth magic is a mandatory study for their shugenja recruits due to its strong relevance to their duties. Beyond the obvious proprieties of jade and crystal, Earth also provides ways of restraining criminals, defending allies, and tracking maho-tsukai across the land.

The Inquisitor order is marked by the stylized tattoo of an eye somewhere on their body, usually on one or both hands. The creation of these tattoos is accompanied by prayers and uses carefully prepared inks, in a manner not dissimilar to the rituals of the tattooed men of the Dragon Clan (albeit without the added element of using a Kami's blood as the medium). Asako who are shugenja sometimes use their tattoos as a mental focus point for their spells, although it does not appear that the tattoos possess any actual mystical power.

Another Earth-oriented aspect of the Inquisitors is their creation of the weapon sometimes called the Inquisitor's Strike, a wakizashi which is forged with magical assistance and with small amounts of jade powder added to the steel. This allows it to affect Tainted and immaterial creatures, despite not being actually made of jade. Some Crab samurai have been known to complain about these weapons, seeing them as a waste of resources since they cannot protect their wielders from the Taint as true jade weapons would do. Of course, the Asako reply that their business is within the Empire, not south of the Wall, and they will create the weapons they find best suited to their duties.

# Notable Uses of Earth Spells

Earth magic is employed throughout the Empire in a variety of ways, and the basic prayers to the Element have been in continuous use since Rokugan's first century. The following section discusses the most typical use and application of the better-known Earth spells.

### Armor of Earth

A staple of resistance magic, Armor of Earth is most commonly used in battle, where its ease of casting makes it quite useful. Although the protection it offers is not sufficient to save a lone shugenja beset by numerous opponents, it can be very helpful for surviving a smaller skirmish.

Some shugenja of a more ascetic bent have been known to use this spell on themselves in order to push the limits of their pain tolerance.

### Armor of the Emperor

One of the strongest personal protection spells used in battle, Armor of the Emperor is especially effective against massive blows such as those delivered by oni, making it popular with veteran Crab shugenja. The invocation of the Emperor's title in the spell is based on both its power and on the symbolic link which the Child of Heaven forms between mankind and the divine. Partly for this reason, and partly for its tremendous protective power, this spell is a favorite of the Seppun family.

### Be the Mountain

Another defensive spell, but one which enhances allies rather than the shugenja himself. This prayer can make a shugenja as efficient as any yojimbo in saving his lord's life, and most daimyo try to keep a court shugenja nearby who knows this spell. Of course, the spell's constraint on movement can be crippling in some situations, and those warriors who rely on speed – such as the Kakita and the Hiruma – eschew this spell even when it is offered. Much like Armor of Earth, this spell can also be used outside of combat to protect against pain and physical damage, and some of the more brutal bushi schools have been known to employ Be the Mountain to protect their students during martial practice.

### Bonds of Ningen-do

Spells which can affect spirits are rare and peculiar in their nature, and Bonds of Ningen-do is among the most powerful of them. One of the crowning achievements of the Kuni family, it has spread over the years to other clans, although some view its usage with unease. Many Kitsune are horrified by it and consider it an offense to their spiritual cousins; they will only consider using it against truly malevolent spirits. The Kitsu are, surprisingly, split – some consider it their duty to rein in troublesome spirits, while others think the spell is offensive against the Celestial order itself. The Kuni obviously do not pause to consider such things and freely use the spell to force mujina slaves to work in their mines. Other families usually fall somewhere in the middle, varying their opinions on the personal level.

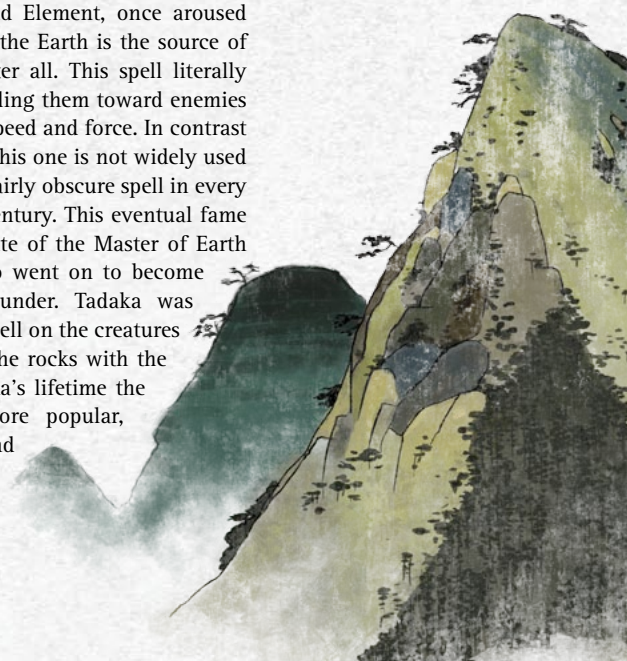
### Courage of the Seven Thunders

While many spells call on the attention (even indirectly) of the Seven Fortunes, the Sun and Moon, or even the Celestial Dragons, few depend upon ancestors, let alone ancestors as illustrious as the Seven Thunders. This makes Courage of the Seven Thunders a most unusual spell. Like many enhancement Earth spells, this prayer fortifies its targets, giving samurai the courage to face impossible odds – particularly against the creatures of the Shadowlands.

The fact that this spell is more effective on samurai of the seven original Great Clans is a source of considerable vexation to the Mantis Clan, who insist their own Great Clan status is just as legitimate as those whose lineage goes back to the Dawn of the Empire. As a result, the spell is almost unknown among their ranks. In the late twelfth century, the so-called Spider Clan is also awarded Great Clan status, but given their hostility to everything the Seven Thunders represent, it is hardly surprising they refuse to use such magic at all.

### Earth Becomes Sky

While Earth may be a placid Element, once aroused its fury can be terrible indeed; the Earth is the source of landslides and earthquakes, after all. This spell literally rips rocks from the ground, hurling them toward enemies to strike with bone-shattering speed and force. In contrast to other offensive Earth spells, this one is not widely used by the Kuni, and indeed was a fairly obscure spell in every school until the early twelfth century. This eventual fame is due to its becoming a favorite of the Master of Earth of that era, Isawa Tadaka, who went on to become the Second Phoenix Clan Thunder. Tadaka was particularly fond of using the spell on the creatures of the Shadowlands, imbuing the rocks with the proprieties of jade. After Tadaka's lifetime the spell became significantly more popular, especially among the Kuni and other enemies of the Taint.



### Earth Kami's Blessing

While many Earth spells protect their targets from injuries, this one allows its recipient to simply ignore the pain and physical disability caused by wounds, while also strengthening his endurance and force of will. The longer duration of this spell also makes it easier for warriors to survive a battle and receive real healing afterward, and shugenja in armies often cast this spell prior to action on bushi of special importance such as officers.

### Earth's Protection

Similar to Elemental Ward (discussed below), this prayer calls on the spirits of Earth to protect against other spells, but over a larger area and affecting Air, Fire, and Water simultaneously. It is also a good example of the trade-offs shugenja face when researching spells: while this one does differentiate between hostile and friendly spells ( unlike Elemental Ward), it does not protect in any way from Earth spells, leaving an opening for enemies to exploit.

### Earth's Stagnation

Earth's Stagnation is a favorite spell among magistrates thanks to its ability to slow and disable targets without harming them, allowing them to be caught alive for questioning. The Kuni have also made good use of this spell to capture Shadowlands creatures they want to interrogate (or dissect), though they usually need the assistance of a couple of strong bushi. By contrast, many of the more martial shugenja, such as the Tamori and the martial arm of the Kitsu, refuse to use this spell on the ground that it prevents a fair and honorable fight.

### Earth's Touch

A very common prayer, Earth's Touch is a popular spell with which to fortify the spirits of diplomats during trying days at court. The spell can give them the willpower to stand up to rivals' intimidation and the energy to carry through a long day's proceedings. The spell is also used when samurai are facing long periods of effort or labor, and Kuni shugenja can frequently be seen on the Wall using this spell to bolster sentries during their long watches or enhance the stamina of Kaiu engineers on repair duty.

### Earthquake

A truly terrifying manifestation of the power of Earth, this spell is feared by many and never used lightly. Indeed, clever shugenja have been known to use the fact that they know the spell at all as a political tool, threatening to use it when pressed. On the opposite side, pacifistic shugenja often refuse to learn the spell at all, and have been known to commit seppuku in protest when ordered to do so. Considering the panic and destruction caused by natural earthquakes in Rokugan, this is no surprise.

### Elemental Ward

While the pure energies of Earth can be used to ward against evil, their defensive nature can also be turned against the other Elements. This spell is quite popular among all shugenja, not just those focused on Earth, since rare indeed is the priest who wishes to be defenseless when faced by one of his peers. Important personages such as daimyo, Clan Champions, and Imperial officials will frequently have the spell cast on their person. Of course, the fact that it also wards off beneficial magic must be considered before using it, since under the wrong circumstances the consequences could easily become tragic.

### Embrace of Kenro-Ji-Jin

Certainly among the more visually impressive of Earth spells, Embrace of Kenro-Ji-Jin also has numerous practical applications. The most common is to use it as a means of travel, since when one is under the Earth no physical obstacle matters anymore. It is useful for locating hidden tunnels and caves, and no underground hideout is safe from a shugenja with this spell. It can also be used simply to hide, either defensively or for the purpose of ambush, and shugenja in the Scorpion Clan have sometimes employed this spell for assassinations. Finally, a few shugenja – particularly in the Dragon Clan – simply like to use the spell for a change of perspective, to observe their surroundings or to meditate while completely cut from the Element of Air.

### Essence of Earth

This prayer is a refinement of Earth's Kami's Blessing to have more flexibility. It can be reinforced, extended to more people, or cast from further away. This spell is a favorite of martial clans who use magic on the battlefield, and a group of Matsu, Yoritomo, or Hida bushi bolstered by this prayer can be truly terrifying opponents.

### Essence of Jade

The most potent of supernatural protective spells, Essence of Jade provides near-complete protection against the Shadowlands Taint and is the only known defense against the fearful powers of maho-tsukai. Unfortunately, only a few shugenja are powerful enough to make use of it, even among the Kuni.

### Force of Will

Among the most potent of strengthening spells, Force of Will bolsters the beneficiary's Earth so much that he can ignore intense pain and even death for a few moments. This can make a critical difference in battle and can even snatch a samurai back from death if the spell is followed quickly by a healing prayer such as Path to Inner Peace. In more mundane situations, it can allow severely injured or ill people a moment of clarity to accomplish a last feat or answer a question, or even give someone a few last moments to make a decision or convey a secret before they move on to Meido and the judgment of the next world.

### Grasp of Earth

Another spell designed to obstruct and slow an opponent, Grasp of Earth makes all but the strongest of foes almost completely immobile. It can also be used defensively, preventing an opponent from getting closer, and as such is a favorite of the more pacifistic families like the Isawa and the Asahina – they see it as an excellent way to defuse a conflict with little to no bloodshed. More militaristic or pragmatic families view the spell as a way of supplying easy targets for archery; during the era of the Three-Man Alliance, Kitsune shugenja frequently used the spell in tandem with Tsuruchi archers, with devastating effect.

### Hands of Clay

Earth is present in most solid items, and through sympathetic connection with the Earth aspect of walls and ceilings a shugenja can walk on them as effortlessly as a spider. This of course greatly enhances his ability to cross over any obstacle, making this spell prized in the Dragon lands and anywhere the Unicorn Clan goes. (It is rumored some of the more foolhardy Iuchi samurai are working on a version of this spell which would function on a horse.) The Kitsune can also use it to great effect in the forest, climbing up and down the trees, and of course it is a ninja's dream to just walk up a wall, giving the spell a special appeal in Scorpion lands.

### Jade Strike

Jade Strike is one of the oldest known spells in the Empire, developed in the early days of the First War against Fu Leng. It is known to all shugenja schools across Rokugan and is always shared freely among shugenja, even those from rival clans. The Kuni consider it to be the worst of failures not to know this spell, and indeed regard a refusal to learn it as deeply suspicious. A great many shugenja know Jade Strike despite having never had to use it in their lives, simply because it is expected they should be prepared if they ever encounter a creature of Jigoku. Indeed, when a creature of the Shadowlands appears within the Empire, the most common response is to summon the nearest shugenja in the expectation they will know this spell.

Jade Strike can also be a crude way to detect the Taint, but it misses the lowest levels of infection, and most Rokugani would consider using the spell in such a way to be highly offensive to say the least – except among the Kuni, for whom it is regarded as an acceptable greeting.

### Jurojin's Balm

Jurojin's Balm is not a fool-proof answer to poisoning, but a second chance can be just what a victim needs before it is too late, and the spell can easily be cast repeatedly by a powerful shugenja. Of course, the Scorpion Clan tends to dislike the spell, although they do not admit such in

public. (This does not stop them from using it to protect themselves, of course.) The side-effect of curing all drunkenness has been used to save face countless times, and this makes the spell particularly popular with the Mantis and the Crab. A few ruthless samurai have even used the spell as a ploy, allowing themselves to become drunk and letting their enemies underestimate them, then using the spell to stage a seemingly miraculous recovery and catch their foes off-guard.

### Major Binding

One of the three binding spells created by the Kuni family, Major Binding overcomes the limitations that constrain Minor Binding (below), allowing it to be cast on the strongest creatures and even on those mortals who have become Lost. The lengthy ritual involved does make the spell more difficult to use, and more than one Crab warrior has sacrificed his life buying time for this spell to be completed successfully. It is very difficult to cast the spell discreetly, but not wholly impossible, and clever shugenja have sometimes used elaborate artifices to stall and distract their targets while completing the ritual.

## Restoring the Blighted Lands

As noted under the discussion of Purge the Taint, the extensive use of that spell can completely remove the Taint from large areas of land, but at the price of also driving out all the Elemental kami and thus reducing the land to a bleak, lifeless waste.

On a few occasions, very powerful shugenja have managed to restore the kami to small areas of land within these blighted areas. This has usually involved magic of exceptional power, bolstered by acts of great honor and personal sacrifice. The GM may allow similar acts by PCs to produce similar results.

Some shugenja have theorized that over time, the kami might slowly return to the blighted lands, especially if outside materials are systematically brought in. Thus far, there has been no sign of renewal in the Kuni or Hiruma lands, but on the other hand there has been no concerted effort to "import" soil or water into those lands.

Another possibility would be to call on divine favor to restore the kami. Some monks and shugenja have suggested that opening a spirit portal to Yumi-do or even Tengoku might infuse the land with divine energy and thus restore the kami. Thus far, however, none have dared to attempt such a bold gambit, which could just as easily provoke the wrath of Heaven at such mortal presumption. It is ultimately left up to the GM as to whether such an act might succeed.

### Minor Binding

A favorite of the Kuni, this spell instantly captures weaker Shadowlands creatures, an invaluable power for the Kuni family's ongoing program of imprisonment, interrogation, and dissection. The duties of the Kuni would be much more difficult without this spell and they rely on it heavily; elsewhere in the Empire it is largely unknown, although the Yogo Kuroiban and the Phoenix Inquisitors have been known to employ it. One must be careful about the expiration of the spell, since a bound creature might not be easily contained by physical means once the spell ceases to function.

### Power of the Earth Dragon

If Essence of Jade offers the greatest protection against supernatural threats, this prayer – which calls directly on the power of the divine Earth Dragon itself – is the most potent of physical protective spells. Only the most powerful awakened weapons can break through the physical defense afforded by this spell. While the spell's usages in battle or to protect important personages are obvious, it has also been used by powerful and adventurous shugenja to resist otherwise-lethal environmental threats, such as swimming in an icy lake or walking on lava.

### Prison of Earth

The most powerful of binding spells, the Prison of Earth is permanent and absolute in its effects – provided one has an appropriate item at hand. The danger, of course, is that the item containing the creature may later be lost, or worse, destroyed. Several places in Rokugan contain relics housing powerful creatures imprisoned with this spell, including Shiro no Yogo in Scorpion lands, various hidden sites on the Kuni Wastes, and the secret city of Gisei Toshi in Phoenix lands. Given how many times this spell has been used since its creation in the Empire's earliest years, one must wonder what might be hidden in any simple piece of jewelry

### Purge the Taint

As with most Jade spells, this prayer was created by the Kuni and they remain not only its chief users but also the only ones to have employed it on extensive tracts of land, namely their own family territories (and in the twelfth century, the lands of the Hiruma as well). Using the spell on this scale is a bitter bargain at best, since while it frees the land from the Taint the price is physical barrenness and spiritual decline. Still, it is a better choice than any other solution found thus far in the Empire's history. The Kuni have worked for centuries on finding ways to reverse the unfortunate side-effects of this spell, but have achieved only the most minor and local successes.

### Rise, Earth

All of the Elemental kami have the ability to manifest in powerful physical forms if they are properly entreated, and thus every Element boasts a spell of this nature, able to evoke a truly potent manifestation of Elemental power. Although the most frequent application of these spells is in battle, the creature summoned forth by Rise, Earth

can also be used in other ways, such as moving large weights or destroying structures, especially since the spell lasts as long as the caster focuses on it – potentially many hours. Of course, only the most pragmatic of shugenja – such as the Kuni – would presume to use a spell of this magnitude in order to perform manual labor, no matter how dire the need.

### Sharing the Strength of Many

A simple yet very efficient spell, this prayer uses the weakest member of a group as a source of strength for all. It is one of the very few spells which can easily be cast on multiple targets. Samurai of the Crab Clan, who are usually very powerful in the ways of Earth, can form quite potent groups when this spell cast on them.

### Strength of the Crow

This spell is named after Shinsei's legendary bird companion, who is said to have acquired its black feathers after traveling with the Little Prophet into the Shadowlands during the First Day of Thunder. The spell can ward off the contamination of the Taint, although not with absolute certainty. Nonetheless this spell has saved hundreds of souls over the centuries and safeguarded immeasurable precious supplies of jade.

### Soul of Stone

Like the Courage of the Seven Thunders and Earth's Touch, Soul of Stone bolsters its targets, making them almost impossible to manipulate – at the price of losing their own social acumen. Lords who have little or no training in the ways of court will often appreciate the spell's effects, especially if they are going into the court of a major political clan like the Scorpion or Crane. Those of more refined social skill, on the other hand, view this spell with disdain. Unsurprisingly, the Crab are very fond of it, and rival courtiers often find themselves surprised at how a brutish Hida or cold-eyed Hiruma is utterly immune to their courtly tactics, his position as immovable as the mountains.

### Strike at the Roots

Although very brief in its duration, this spell is quite powerful; it drains all but a minute amount of Earth from the target, leaving the victim weak both physically and mentally. It is almost a death sentence in battle, but can also cripple a diplomat at court. Such weakened targets are also easy targets for assassins, leading to some of the more bizarre killings in the history of Rokugan – on one occasion, for example, a Crab warrior targeted with this spell died of alcohol poisoning on his third bottle of sake.

### Symbol of Earth

The Symbol spells are favorite specialties of the Yogo family, who use them to protect entrances and passageways, but the Symbol of Earth is also popular among the Kuni due to their affinity for Earth. Since the Symbol spells are essentially permanent until discharged, many important sites such as castles and palaces are protected by multiple Symbols in strategic locations, especially in the Crab lands where supernatural threats are commonplace. Indeed, the increased power of the Symbol of Earth against the Shadowlands Taint makes it virtually mandatory in the primary Crab holdings. It also acts as a deterrent against infiltration, since the shock wave and subsequent crash produce a lot of noise; however, some assassins are strong in the ways of Air, allowing them to overcome Earth Symbols, and more than one Crab lord has perished to a knife in the dark despite being protected by this spell.

### Tetsubo of Earth

Being without a weapon has been the death of more than one samurai, and Crab samurai have a particular determination to avoid such a fate. Unarmed combat can substitute for weapons, but only up to a point. Considering also the clan's near-religious veneration of the tetsubo, which can even be found on the mon of the Hida family, and it is no surprise that this spell is very common among them. The Kuni themselves frequently spar using tetsubo so as to be able to employ this spell with more effectiveness. The Tamori often make use of the spell as well, due to both their natural preference for Earth and their taste for fighting with weapons; the yamabushi in particular are quite proficient with all weapons made with the kami's help.

### The Kami's Strength

Like many other Earth spells, this prayer grants potence and resilience at the price of immobility. It allows a lone warrior to accomplish seemingly impossible feats, particularly if the caster and the target are already powerful to begin with. The Kuni are fond of casting it on veteran Hida warriors, then letting them stand against the Shadowlands Horde. The Tamori usually prefer to cast it on themselves, turning themselves into nigh-invincible fighters.

### The Kami's Will

Another Earth spell of protection, in this case spiritual and mental protection, The Kami's Will makes the target almost immune to intimidation or other attempts to change his mind – at the price of making him all but unable to function in society. It is also one of the most powerful forms of protection against other Elemental magic, and powerful shugenja will often cast it on themselves when facing one of their counterparts in a taryu-jiai duel.

### The Mountain's Feet

An odd spell which roots the beneficiary's feet into the Earth, using the natural connection between the Element present in both people and the ground below them. It is popular among warriors, particularly those who favor hand-to-hand combat. However, the spell has also been used in difficult natural conditions, such as while enduring a hurricane or climbing a steep mountain path. Legends mention a caster of the spell so powerful he withstood the strength of a tsunami, although Water shugenja laugh at this idea.

### The Wolf's Mercy

The opposite of Earth Kami's Blessing, this spell weakens the target against any and all attacks. Wicked shugenja have been known to use this spell to support assassination attempts, and as a result the spell has acquired an unsavory reputation over the centuries. Its only redeeming quality in most eyes is the extra effect it has against the forces of Jigoku – since the Crab consider any weapon against the Taint to be useful, they happily employ this spell for that purpose.

### Tomb of Jade

In many ways the most famous and iconic of Jade spells, the Tomb of Jade uses a complex infusion of Earth kami to turn a Tainted foe into purest solid jade, destroying the target if the process is completed. The spell requires great strength in the Element of Earth to execute properly, but can defeat almost any Shadowlands creature if it is properly cast, and highly experience Earth shugenja never go without this scroll. Isawa Tadaka was known for using this spell almost as often as he called on Earth Becomes Sky. The Crab have also been known to take advantage of the fact that the spell's victim remains as a statue of jade for several hours thereafter – although the jade created in this way is not permanent, for as long as it lasts it is just as potent as any other jade, and Crab warriors can take great advantage of this. Some Kuni are still researching ways to make the jade permanent, although they have had no luck despite centuries of effort.

### Wall of Earth

A simple spell with countless applications, Wall of Earth is especially popular with military commanders, who use it to create improvised fortifications or to shape and change the flow of battle. Both the Unicorn and the Lion have been known to employ the spell in this way. Other clans have found a practical use for the spell in blocking streets and containing crowds, a useful thing during times of urban unrest or peasant revolt.

### Wholeness of the World

Earth is the Element which is the most reticent to change. By calling on this quality, a shugenja can make a person almost immune to any alteration of his being. This can protect the target from other spells, from poison, from powerful nemuranai, or even from some Shadowlands powers. One interesting aspect is that it completely neutralizes some of the powers of the Asako henshin, which might further explain the frequent rivalry between that order and the Isawa.

# Secrets in the Stone: The Nature of the Earth Kami

*"The earth kami are steadfast and patient, but their anger is terrifying. To hear the mountains scream is to be forever changed." – Isawa Taeruko, Master of Earth, twelfth century*

One of the major obstacles for a student trying to become a shugenja is learning how to deal with the Elemental kami. Every spell is a prayer for these kami to lend their strength to the shugenja, and as such priests and priestesses must become intimately familiar with the Elemental spirits. Humans are made up of the five Elements, a perfect balance attained through their divine origin in the blood of the Moon and the tears of the Sun. But the kami are made of only a single Element, and as such view the world very differently from mankind.

Earth kami, in particular, can be very odd for mortals to deal with. They are not capricious or mercurial like the Air or Water kami can be, and they certainly are not as agitated as the Fire kami. Rather, they are blunt, stubborn, and direct. Conversations with them can actually be shockingly brief and to the point, especially when compared to the Rokugani tendency to use flowery language and innuendo. The Earth kami view everything as simple facts with little room for nuance. Even more than the other Elemental kami, their character is defined by their effective immortality. Change for an Earth kami is an alien concept, a distant phenomena they cannot really envision. Since they are almost always the same, they tend to see the rest of the world as such, and current phenomena as only a minor disturbance at best. Similarly, they display almost no emotion of any kind, since emotion would imply a change in mindset and perception. This also makes them extraordinarily slow to change their mind, which can make them very frustrating for shugenja to deal with.

A lot of apprentice shugenja do not even realize they have successfully communed with an Earth kami the first time they do so. After all, any dialogue with the spirits of Earth consists of long, ponderous silences interrupted only by the briefest of words. Patience is key when dealing with the Earth kami, since they see excitation as wasted energy. On the other hand, they never play games with their interlocutors, making them somehow straighter to deal with than some of their cousins from the other Elements. The vision of Earth kami is limited – human emotion is a mystery to them, only understood in the broadest of terms, and they are purely materialist in their perspectives. Objects, materials, colors, and weights draw their attention much more than movement, time, pattern, or sound. A magistrate asking the Earth kami about the actions of a suspect will get a lot of information about the criminal's sandals, and perhaps something about his clothes, but much less about what he did or who he was – indeed the spirit may not always realize if a person is male or female.

Earth shugenja who spend much time in communion with the spirits of their Element can display the same traits as the kami, growing taciturn and obsessed with seemingly useless physical details. This is particularly true in the Isawa family, whose members' characters are always strongly colored by their Element of choice; Isawa Earth shugenja are known throughout the Empire for being quiet, contemplative, and somewhat obsessive.

## Earth and Elemental Imbalances

*"Imbalance is the only true sin. The Heavens tolerate all else." – Togashi Tsuri*

The Tao of Shinsei teaches that all things in existence are made up of the five Elements in different measures. People, animals, places, and things are all formed from these five building blocks of the Rokugani cosmology. When the Elements are in their proper proportions within an object or a living being, it is said to be in balance, but when the Elements are out of proportion for some reason, several undesirable consequences can follow. Several of them are discussed below, though this section is in no way exhaustive.

### Earth Imbalances in Creatures

When a person or animal experiences a lack of Earth, this can express itself in a variety of ways. From a purely mental point of view, Earth represents an individual's strength of character, the ability to say "no." While this may seem less important to samurai who are taught to obey since their earliest youth, it is important for them to be able to reject the temptations of dishonor and ignore the sins of Fear, Desire, and Regret. Therefore a weakness in the Element of Earth can be a serious problem for a samurai, producing a weak, pliable personality. Such persons have little in the way of moral center, being constantly affected by social pressure into changing their ideas and positions. This also weakens their resistance to the three sins, and cowardly, wishful, or melancholic individuals are often said to be lacking in Earth. Needless to say, in a society of pious warriors this will trigger contempt more often than not; even courtiers and peaceful priests are expected to show mettle when standing up for their lords and maintaining their Honor.

A living being with an excess of Earth, on the other hand, becomes as mentally immovable as the mountain. Nothing or nobody can influence their thoughts and ideas, which are set more firmly than granite. Samurai too strong in the ways of Earth can appear to be foolhardy, lacking room for doubt but also being stubborn and incautious. They often believe they know about everything and are right in every situation, an attitude which invariably leads to conflict – not least because such self-confidence, if it grows too intense, can even cause a samurai to disagree with his lord. Among animals, predators which become man-eaters are often considered to be suffering an excess of Earth as well, since they become immune to fear of death at human hands.

## Specific Earth Imbalances in Creatures

*"The one weak in Earth fears what he can see, and fears even more what he cannot. Every shadow is a danger, every silence a statement of impending doom. The one too strong in Earth doesn't understand the possibility of death or failure, and throws himself into the fight without caring for his life of those of others."*
– Kuni Mataemon's The Twists of False Madness

This passage from Kuni Mataemon's famous treatise describes situations in which the Element of Earth is stronger than any other Element in the body. However, imbalances also occur in more specific situations between Earth and another Element, and in these cases more precise patterns emerge.

**Earth over Air:** The direct opposition between these Elements causes such an imbalance to result in a weakening of Air rather than a strengthening of Earth. Physically, this makes the subject slow to react, suffering the consequences of his environment rather than adapting to it. A drowsy, distracted individual exemplifies this imbalance. Mentally, this imbalance removes notions of nuance from the victim's mindset: all issues become simplistic black-or-white choices, with no room for negotiation or compromise.

**Earth over Fire:** Earth is the fuel of fire, the basis on which Fire stands and grows. With too much Earth, this basis is lost and Fire becomes weak and uncontrollable. The victim grows clumsy, unable to act with finesse and precision, often causing disturbances by moving erratically. From a mental and social point of view, this imbalance prevents the mind from focusing itself, obstructing clear decision-making. The victim becomes mentally ponderous, examining every minor issue for hours, unable to come to a quick conclusion.

**Earth over Water:** In the natural world Earth gives form to Water, delineating the courses of rivers, the shape of coasts, and the bottom of the sea. With too much Earth, the flow of Water is reduced to a trickle. Physical movement becomes slow and difficult, and quickly tires the individual. The mind does not see clearly and the senses do not extend very far from the body, leading to shorter range in both vision and hearing, while taste and scent are dulled. Individuals born blind or deaf are often said to suffer from this imbalance.

Absence of Earth in the physical body leads to the absence of resistance and endurance. While weakness in other Elements might prevent one from accomplishing certain functions, being deficient in Earth makes one more vulnerable. A samurai with weak physical Earth tires too easily and falls sick with much greater frequency. Even the simplest illness may become deadly. Afflictions such as hemophilia are often associated with a lack of Earth, as the body becomes too weak to retain its own blood and vulnerable to the slightest damage. Bones break more easily, lacking the solidity of Earth to hold them together. Animals with similar problems are usually killed quickly, by predators, illness, or accident, as the natural world reasserts balance. This may appear cruel to a gentle-hearted courtier, but the world of nature is often harsh.

Strong physical Earth in living creatures makes them heavy and slow, to the point where they can find it difficult to move at all. Obesity, rare among samurai but not wholly unknown, is sometimes politely referred to as being "plentiful of Earth" – such samurai, who prefer a life of luxury, soon lose their warrior's edge and become as slow and ponderous as the Earth itself. Some conditions of old age are also associated with excess Earth, such as joint pains, difficulty of movement, shortness of breath, and lack of flexibility. Some scholars even believe the whitening of hair and discoloring of skin in the aged to be a "mineralization" of the body, as its refusal to die slowly turns it more and more like stone.

Animals and plants with an excess of Earth can also become excessively large, bloated, or even physically distorted, causing a host of problems for themselves. Some Rokugani believe the Hida family also suffers from a similar imbalance, one they seem to have encouraged over the centuries through both marriage and training, although one would need great courage to tell them such to their faces.

## Earth Imbalances in Objects

Almost all physical objects contain Earth in at least some measure. Earth gives materiality and solidity to all things in existence, and is often present in direct proportion to the durability of the material in question. Only liquids, gases, and other non-solid phenomena lack the Element of Earth entirely.

Too much Earth in an item will make it heavy and awkward to move. As Earth overshadows Air, the object loses its subtlety and ease of use. A blade will become little more than a bludgeon, while a piece of clothing will feel heavy and rough against the skin, its color slowly fading. A lack of Earth is even more dire: it is the curse of fragility and erosion. Items break even when under regular stress, while light wind or mere sprinkles of rain chip away at them. In the absence of strong Earth, Air moves in and Fire grows wild and without limits, leading to very easy combustions.

Magical items in Rokugan are called nemuranai, objects which had their internal spirits awakened either by circumstance or through powerful magic. As such, they have a consciousness of their own which is readily

affected by Elemental imbalances. A nemuranai with too much Earth will become willful, preventing its user from handling it unless it wants him too. An enchanted blade made to fight against the Shadowlands might remain in its saya if its wielder attempted to draw it against other enemies, even though doing so risks the owner's death. An ancient and powerful magical anvil might become impossible to move, as its greatly overstrong Element of Earth makes it both incredibly heavy and thoroughly unwilling to consider the possibility of ever being in another location. Conversely, weakness of Earth will make the spirits of a nemuranai meek, easily influenced by spells or other forms of communication, as well as making the item more vulnerable to destruction, a terrible fate for such prized heirlooms.

# The Earth Kami

*"The kami of Earth are slow to rouse and slow to act. However, once they have decided to protect a place or a person, they are slow to yield, even to the most ferocious of blows." – Naka Kaeteru, On the Nature of the Elements*

It is not difficult to be convinced of the sacred and primordial nature of Earth. The ground the Rokugani walk on, the earth from which they grow their food, the metal of their blades, all of this makes the Earth omnipresent in their lives... and the wrath of the Earth correspondingly terrifying.

## Communing with Earth Kami

Getting information from the Earth kami can often be simultaneously simple and complex. They are the most direct of kami in their speech and communication, rivaled only by the Fire kami in this regard. But while the Earth kami will answer in plain-spoken and simple ways, their answers will often be limited in scope and narrowly focused on odd details. A shugenja might ask, "What happened in this place yesterday evening?" only to be answered "Red" by the Earth kami, who could then be referring to the sunset, to blood, or to a meeting of Phoenix samurai. Earth kami are very pragmatic and see the world through very biased eyes. It is hard to get more than a few words out of them, but even then one has to make sure these words are understood in the right context.

This is not to say their assistance is useless; a focused and attentive shugenja can get a lot from them. When directed the right way, the Earth kami can reveal a great deal, for they are present in every solid thing and have an intimate knowledge of all physical materials. Knowing that a blade was drawn from its saya for the first time, that it was chipped by striking against a different and stronger kind of steel, and that it then fell onto the ground before being picked up hours later by hands which were covered in red dirt can be a treasure trove of information to the right person. Precise lines of questioning will work more efficiently with the Earth kami than riddles, bribery, or flattery, in contrast to the kami of Air or Fire.

Even through they are overwhelmingly material in nature, Earth kami can sometimes detect feelings and emotions through their observation of the human body. A shiver, a weakening of the posture, or a clenching of the fists can mean a great deal about the human psyche, and these physical actions are acutely visible to the Earth spirits.

### Places of Power – Earth

Certain physical locations are strong in a particular Element and thus will have more powerful spirits of that Element. Locations that are particularly strong in Earth include:

- Caves and grottoes.
- Mountaintops.
- Forests.
- Deserts, particularly the rocky ones.
- Temples dedicated to Earth-aligned Fortunes or entities, such as Yama-no-Kami or (especially) the Earth Dragon
- Places that have a very strong historical association with Earth, such as the sanctum of the Phoenix Master of Earth.

GMs who wish to add more flavor to the use of magic in their campaigns may wish to make it slightly easier to cast Earth spells in these sorts of areas, such as by awarding a Free Raise or simply lowering the TN of the Spell Casting Roll.

## Enticing Earth Kami

Earth kami are slow to awake and generally not too communicative in nature, making it an endeavor to commune with them at all. But they are also steadfast and trustworthy, making it often well worth the effort of contacting them. They have very little in the way of wants and needs, and are generally content with their existence. However, mankind has access to a resource which is quite elusive to them: creation. Through patience and effort, men can give new form and purpose to physical objects, and this pleases the Earth kami.

Effort is actually the one key requirement to please the Earth kami. They tend to consider humans as ephemeral, untested creatures, and as such like to see them put under a bit of pressure. For a great favor, a kami might ask a shugenja that he build a small shrine of rock, by himself and using only his hands or tools he crafted himself. Earth kami believe such actions make mankind better understand the slow process of change in the world... and its cost. On some occasions Earth kami have also simply requested some of the shugenja's energy, making him feel tired or sleepy after the spell is cast. Only through strength of body and mind can the shugenja carry on his duties afterward, thus proving himself worthy to the Earth kami.

Most of these requirements are physical, since the Earth kami are rarely interested in the thoughts and moods of human beings. However, they may sometimes require a form of mental or physical purification from those who importune them, such as a meditation, a fast, or another such privation. Asceticism is quite common among Earth shugenja, since more than any others they are taught by the kami to rely primarily on themselves and the bounty of the natural world to survive. Odd vows such as silence or immobility can also be used to curry the favor of the Earth. Finally, blessings and purification rituals – particularly those related to croplands, grounds, or buildings – are always welcomed by the Earth kami.

## Earth Kami and Other Spirits

Earth kami are probably those for which communication is most difficult. They are always forlorn and quiet, and this applies to their relations with other Elemental kami and spirits as much as to their interactions with human beings. Nonetheless, kami of different Elements do interact, and patterns can be observed which reveal more about their nature.

Air and Earth are almost completely separate in existence, and because of this they tend to coexist peacefully despite being opposed. Air starts where Earth ends, and absence of Air usually means presence of Earth. In places like mountaintops and cliffs, the two Elements can exist powerfully side by side. But when they exist in imbalance, the consequences can be dire for life, as heavy oxygen-poor air is trapped by Earth through dust storms, clouding vision and choking those creatures unfortunate enough to be present.

Earth and Fire are frequently found together. Fire can very rarely exist on its own: it needs both fuel from the Earth – most often in the form of wood – and breath from the Air. But Earth also keeps Fire in check; the heat of the volcano is contained by its rocky walls, and a handful of dirt can extinguish a campfire. When in harmony, Earth and Fire provide comfortable warmth and are of great assistance to the growth of life and the creation of new objects – the sprouting of plants during the spring, the forging of metal by the smith. When Earth overshadows Fire, however, places grow cold and barren, while Fire over Earth leads to the life-crushing heat of the desert.

Earth and Water are contrasting symbols of change and permanency. Earth gives limits to Water, setting its shape and path, but Water is the most potent agent of change for Earth, sculpting it through constant erosion and wear, demonstrating that nothing is truly permanent. When balanced, the two Elements provide the essential condition for life; rivers flow according to their path, rain is absorbed to grow crops, and so forth. If Earth is too strong, water turns tepid and diseases follow, such as the infamous Water Fever during the reign of Hantei XX. Conversely, if Water overcomes Earth, the ground loses its shape amidst mudslides and avalanches, or terrible floods devastate the land.

## The Price of Purity: Fighting the Taint

*"Every day would be the death of you all, the end of everything the Empire has built... except that we are here."*
*– Hida Reiha, the Jade Widow*

There is no aspect of Rokugan's existence which is more closely aligned to the Element of Earth than the struggle against the Taint, a corruptive force which is directly resisted by Earth and especially by its purist forms, jade and crystal. Unfortunately, the struggle against the Taint is often deeply complicated by the beliefs and attitudes of the Rokugani themselves.

To an outside eye (or perhaps to a young or ignorant citizen of Rokugan), fighting the Taint and the Shadowlands Horde appears to be a glorious and noble endeavor. Endless armies of demons and corrupt sorcerers trying to undermine the Empire every day, with only a handful of proud warriors standing between them and oblivion: could any situation be more conducive to feats of heroic prowess? However, several problems prevent this view from actually being embraced by the Empire.

The first is that the Shadowlands Horde, comprised mostly of inhuman creatures and madmen, is an honorless opponent. Glory in Rokugan is won against fellow samurai – by overcoming their tactics on the battlefield, defeating them in duels, outwitting them at court or in a display of magical power. In the eyes of samurai, glory comes

from facing and defeating a noble adversary who is bound by the same rules of honor and proper civilized conduct. Against the forces of Jigoku, this is impossible. An oni will never stride forth to accept a challenge or boast of his previous noble deeds, his dojo or his sensei. In truth, there is no more glory in fighting the Shadowlands than in putting down a rabid dog. Nor is there ever truly a victory; the Horde knows neither shame nor fear and is virtually endless. How can one claim success against such an opponent? Fighting the Shadowlands is the duty of the Crab, an unpleasant duty for which they are accorded some modest respect, but for the rest of the Empire there are far more honorable and admirable goals to be pursued.

The second is the fact that the Taint is a contagion. It is very literally a spiritual infection bleeding through the Festering Pit of Fu Leng, spreading through the land and through the bodies and minds of mankind, turning them into servants of the Realm of Evil. It bears keeping in mind that outside the Crab Clan, most Rokugani have very little knowledge of how the Taint functions. As far as most samurai know, just being on the Kaiu Wall or maybe even just being in the Crab lands could be enough; standing in the mere presence of a demon or other Tainted creature might corrupt one's mind and soul. Any appearance of Tainted activity inside Rokugan's borders tends to create a frantic panic, with everyone trying to solve the problem and purify the area as quickly as possible. Mass executions of peasants who are merely suspected of exposure to the Taint is a common remedy. Thus, any samurai who seeks out and battles the forces of Jigoku (a category that of course includes every single Crab warrior) is likely to be regarded with great suspicion and hostility by the rest of the Empire.

Third and lastly, outside of the Crab few samurai are eager to risk their souls and honor to face the creatures of Jigoku. Fear is a sin and every samurai tries to keep it far from his mind, yet there is a deep unpleasantness associated with the Taint which even the bravest samurai have difficulty ignoring. Moreover, chasing fear away from one's mind becomes much more difficult when battling ten-story-tall demons or confronting sorcerers capable of calling corpses to fight for them. It is not uncommon for even veteran samurai warriors to panic and break ranks when opposed by such terrifying creatures, and no lord wishes to send his bushi into a situation which could lead to such shameful behavior. He will instead defer to those tasked with dealing with such things: the Crab, or if necessary the Jade magistrates. This caution has, over the years, sometimes extended to include the Crab Clan itself, as rumors abound on how their proximity with the Shadowlands has created dark influences on their characters. The crude, brutish Hida, cold-eyed Hiruma, and eerie Kuni are often covertly accused of drawing their strength from the Realm of Evil itself, leading them to be shunned.

Of course, the true nature of fighting the Taint can often be even worse than Rokugani rumor suggests. Without the protection of jade, the danger of being infected rises quickly if one visits the Shadowlands or is in contact with already infected men and creatures. The physical and mental consequences of Taint are both repulsive and painful, as sickness and mutations wrack the bodies of the afflicted while dark visions and madness infect their minds. Victims are wracked with painful fevers or break out in suppurating sores. Hallucinations and loss of emotional control can and often do lead to shameful behavior, followed by seppuku if the afflicted is still conscious of what is happening to him, or execution if he is not. To become Lost is the worst of fates, a samurai transformed into a vessel for the ultimate blasphemies of Jigoku, a mind entirely turned towards evil. Thus it is not surprising that even the bravest of Lion warriors will balk at fighting a Tainted creature.

Even if an infection is minor, the social consequences are dramatic. A known Tainted person can never marry without warning his prospective bride, which virtually terminates any potential matches and prevents a samurai from passing on his family's legacy. Such unfortunates are shunned by society and are usually forced to retire to a monastery and live out their lives in seclusion.

These attitudes have been enshrined in Rokugan for centuries and are unlikely to change. Outside the Crab Clan, no samurai sees a good reason to research or better understand the Taint, much as no honorable samurai sees a good reason to research poison unless one is a doctor. The acquisition of lore regarding such foul matters is both highly dishonorable and immediately suspicious, and magistrates will take no chances if they believe a samurai is a potential maho-tsukai in training. For that matter, gaining accurate information on the Taint has a bitterly high price, as the Kuni can attest with centuries of dissections and experiments to back their claims (practices that are, of course, horrifying in most samurai's eyes). Those who study the Taint deeply are prone to other dishonorable behavior such as paranoia and hostility to normal social conventions, if not outright madness which can easily be confused with the effects of the Taint itself.

So in the end, most samurai are content to close their eyes and let the Crab deal with the Taint on their own, far from the sight of more honorable and civilized Rokugani.

## Clan Attitudes Toward the Taint

Although the discussion above supplies a general outline of the social implications of the Taint in Rokugan, the various clans do have slightly different attitudes toward the power of Jigoku, as outlined hereafter.

### The Crab

*"Twenty million drown in blood if I am weak." – Hida Yakamo, early twelfth century*

One might expect the Crab to have the most clear-cut attitude towards the Taint, given that they are its first and foremost enemy. But in truth, their centuries of experience have led them to have a rather subtle and nuanced view. This is epitomized by the phenomena of the Damned, Tainted but not yet Lost warriors who continue fighting for the Crab Clan until their deaths. Some Crab even bear a grudging respect towards their eternal foe, coming to see it as the only foe worthy of their own strength. (Hida Kisada was perhaps the most unfortunate example of such attitudes). But perhaps the most distinctive aspect of Crab attitudes toward the Taint is their intense paranoia toward the threat of infection or infiltration.

### The Crane

*"We should not speak of such things." – Doji Ayano*

The Taint is ugly, dishonorable, and shows no regard for proper behavior. As such, the Crane stay miles away from any potentially Tainted situation, letting the Crab resolve it. That's their job, after all. However, over the years Jigoku has found ways to slip into the Crane lands and to attract weak-willed Crane samurai with promises of beauty and fame. Since the sons of Doji cannot afford to lose face with the rest of the Empire, they tend to keep such shameful incidents hidden, frequently causing even more damage due to their lack of knowledge. (The hideous career of Doji Nashiko, the Demon Bride of Fu Leng, is of course the worst example of this problem.) The only occasional exception to this secrecy is the Daidoji, who have relatively good relations with the Crab and thus are sometimes willing to share such information with them.

### The Dragon

*"I am a seeker of truth." – Togashi Kokujin*

The insightful Dragon can usually stay clear of the traps offered by the Taint, and unlike most of the other Great Clans they find no shame in requesting the assistance of the Crab against it. Unfortunately, their relative ignorance of the Taint means they do not always realize when such assistance would be necessary. Moreover, some of the more esoteric Dragon have sometimes become fascinated with the otherworldly nature of Jigoku's influence, trying to understand it as part of a false path to enlightenment.

Also, tattooed men sometimes travel to the Kaiu Wall out of a desire to test their purity against Rokugan's greatest foe, and a few inevitably give in to the influence of the Ninth Kami.

### The Lion

*"It is a matter of no great urgency, for my lord has assured me that nothing is wrong." – Matsu Kokanshi, magistrate's yoriki*

To the Lion, Taint is just another form of dishonor. This usually allows them to stay clear from its open manifestations, but it also means they often refuse to recognize the possibility of its presence in their ranks. The case of Ikoma Ryozo, a samurai born Tainted yet shielded from all accusations by his belonging to an honorable and respectable family, is typical of the conflicting Lion attitudes toward the problem. Only when it is too late will the Lion admit such shame – but when they do, they are among the few in Rokugan who can find the courage to continue fighting and not surrender to evil.

### The Mantis

*"Experience means nothing in the Sea of Shadows." – last letter of a Mantis ship-captain*

Aside from a few sea-based phenomena such as the Skull Tide and the sea trolls, the Mantis have very little contact with the Taint thanks to the relatively isolated nature of their island home. The idea of bowing to the Ninth Kami goes against Mantis pride, of course, yet their ambition is also a key weakness to the temptations of Jigoku. The daring Mantis often fail to recognize the true dangers posed by the Taint, and many Mantis samurai have met their end against an enemy they thought they could easily defeat.

### The Phoenix

*"I give you my name, demon. Now, answer our questions." – Isawa Tadaka, twelfth century*

The Phoenix are probably the only clan aside from the Crab that can claim in-depth knowledge of the Taint, and thus it is perhaps not surprising that outside of the Kuni family the Phoenix harbor the greatest number of maho-tsukai in their ranks. The Isawa family's endless quest for knowledge and power makes them uniquely vulnerable to the allure of Jigoku. The Taint is the price of Isawa hubris, and the clan's order of Inquisitors is a natural reaction to this problem. The Inquisitors are just as relentless in rooting out blood sorcerers as the rest of the clan is in pursuing knowledge. As a pacifistic clan, the Phoenix are known to sometimes show mercy even to the forces of Jigoku (an attitude which the Crab find bizarre) and will always pray for the souls of the Tainted to find redemption in death, even if it is too late.

### The Scorpion

*"How can they be so blind?" – Yogo Junzo*

Unburdened by shame and honor, the Scorpion are capable of being among the Taint's greatest foes... but are also among its most treasured prey. No Scorpion warrior will balk at any task, even facing the minions of the Ninth Kami, and they know the methods of infiltrators themselves, leading to the success of their own purification efforts such as the Kuroiban. But without honor to armor their souls, some of them can become easy targets for Jigoku's seduction, especially due to the underlying arrogance of a clan which believes it can outsmart and outmaneuver any foe. Those Scoprion who fall to the Taint turn their skills at treachery and deception toward concealing their evil, making them very hard to uproot. Some of the greatest of Shadowlands villains, such as Yogo Junzo and Paneki's Disgrace, have come from the ranks of the Scorpion.

### The Unicorn

*"Look at my face and you will see the future of Rokugan." – Moto Sada*

The Unicorn all but forgot about the ancient fight against Fu Leng during their eight centuries of wandering outside the Empire. After their return, they often displayed dangerous naiveté when faced with issues of the Taint, leading to catastrophes such as the Dark Moto or the later fall of Iuchi Shahai (who became the bride of the Dark Lord Daigotsu). At the same time, however, the Unicorn are less prey to the prejudices which the other clans show toward issues of the Taint, allowing them to enjoy good relations with the otherwise unpopular Crab. In the late twelfth century, this attitude also led to a cautious alliance between the Unicorn and the Spider Clan.

### The Minor Clans

*"Is anywhere safe?" – Yoshi, Tortoise Clan sailor*

While attitudes do vary depending on the Minor Clan in questions, all Minor Clans remember the fate of the Snake, corrupted from the inside, and the Boar, sacrificed to fuel the Bloodspeakers' mad quest for power. The lesson is clear: to deal with the Taint is to invite destruction, not only for oneself but for the whole clan. Minor Clan samurai thus tend to stay as far as possible from Taint-related issues. The major exception is the modern Hare clan, whose hunt for Bloodspeakers has led to the adoption of a paranoid attitude not altogether different from the Crab's.

### The Imperials

*"Let us see who dares defile the home of the Emperor." – Seppun Ogami, year 1128*

The Imperial attitudes toward the Taint may be broadly described as "like the Crane, but more so," which helps explain why the Bloodspeaker was able to sprout from their ranks. However, a few Imperial samurai do remember the deeds of those Emperors who fought in battle against the true enemies of Rokugan – men like Hantei Fujiwa and Toturi, for example. Also, many Imperials serve in the ranks of the Emerald and Jade magistrates, who are expected to take action against Tainted samurai and Shadowlands incursions whenever necessary. Thus the direct servants of the Emperor generally do not hesitate to take action against such foes where other samurai might falter.

## Fighting the Taint: Infiltrators and Unmasking Them

While the vast majority of Shadowlands creatures tend to use brute force and overwhelming power to reach their ends, a select few have the ability to remain hidden and to feign the appearance of being human – if only to cause more damage in the future. The presence of these infiltrators is one of the main reasons behind the existence of the Kuni Witch Hunters, and while the Inquisitors and the Kuroiban are focused more on the threat from maho, they too take action against such creatures whenever they can find them.

### Human Infiltrators

The Lost are the most common infiltrators of the Empire. After all, they are already human in their form and their basic personalities, with extensive knowledge of Rokugan's society. Provided they have never been discovered as Tainted before, they do not even have to infiltrate the Empire – they are already there, and need only to maintain their deception. Of course, the Taint can be a considerable obstacle to such concealment efforts. Most Tainted individuals will develop symptoms making secrecy impossible: discolored eyes or skin, foul odor, rotting of body parts, strange growths, and similar unpleasantness. However, sometimes the symptoms are subtler or easier to conceal, and a few Lost even develop supernatural powers allowing them to conceal their physical symptoms or even to become more attractive. Jigoku seem to instinctively sense who would benefit the most from such powers, and these gifts are often bestowed upon Tainted or Lost samurai in positions of influence.

Setting physical symptoms aside, during Taint infection the behavioral changes can still expose a samurai who shows no outward sign of corruption. Such people may experience violent nightmares, hear voices, talk to themselves, or fall into bizarre or repetitive behavior. But once they are truly Lost, such erratic behavior is often suppressed by the will of Jigoku. The Kuni have learned that such hidden Lost often have internalized their Taint, and any open wound will reveal blackened blood and distorted organs. Of course, the social implication of causing an open wound are a major obstacle to this method (not that this will stop a true Crab). Prodding a severely Tainted individual's skin with a bit of jade will often reveal their nature, causing pain and even sometimes a visible burn, but this method requires getting close to the suspect with a piece of jade, which is not always easy. The most reliable method is the spell Jade Strike, but as discussed earlier in this chapter, it is considered a severe breach of etiquette to unleash such magic on someone without warning or permission – especially since to the uninitiated there is little visible difference between a Jade Strike and many sorts of Fire spells. More than one over-aggressive Kuni has lost his life when his target successfully accused him of using a Fire spell.

More commonly, a magistrate or a Witch Hunter who suspects someone is one of the Lost must resort to simple observation, waiting for the Lost to reveal its true nature – either through behavior (by showing excessive cruelty, for example) or through suspicious physical activity (such as an old, frail woman who suddenly jumps onto a rooftop). Only the most steel-willed of the Lost can go for long

### Non-Samurai and the Taint

*"What became of the maho-tsukai? Oh, daikan-sama, I am sure we do not know." At that moment I became aware of just how many peasants were in the crowd. – from the journals of Seikansha*

Peasants live in constant danger from mundane threats like drought, famine, war, and the vagaries of abusive samurai. They are also deeply ignorant of supernatural matters, approaching them with a mixture of superstition and deep fear. Thus it should not be surprising that commoners usually react with panic if not outright hysteria if the Taint is so much as mentioned. Angry mobs can quickly arise if rumors of sorcery begin to spread, sometimes resulting in the murder of innocents. Just as easily, such rumors can produce panicked flight as the common folk try to escape an area perceived as Tainted and deadly. Of course, given both their total ignorance of such matters and their generally miserable lives, the peasantry are also prime targets for recruitment by the forces of Evil. It is not a coincidence that the Bloodspeaker Cult is comprised largely of commoners despite having been founded by an Imperial samurai.

Ronin are also vulnerable to the Taint. They are isolated, without the protections of clan and family, and often fueled by bitter feelings and thwarted ambition. On the other hand, some ronin are able to confront and resist the Taint more clearly and easily due to being free of the social constraints and attitudes of the Great Clans. The shugenja Seikansha, who dedicated his life to collecting and recording the activities of the Taint, is the perfect example of this.

Monks of the Brotherhood of Shinsei are in many ways the best equipped of all Rokugani to resist the powers of Evil, since their lives are dedicated to selfless compassion and meditative wisdom. However, when monks do fall to the Taint they can become some of its most powerful servants. On rare occasions, entire monastic orders have been led down False Paths and become servants of Jigoku, such as the infamous Cult of Lord Moon in the eleventh century.

without displaying their true nature, particularly if they believe themselves to be in private surroundings.

One Shadowlands power which has given many Witch Hunters trouble over the years is the one known to the Kuni as Beside the Darkness. Even rarer than Unholy Beauty (but often paired with it), this ability allows the Tainted individual to temporarily suppress his Taint altogether, albeit at the price of losing all other powers that draw on the strength of Jigoku. This makes the Taint impossible to detect – one reason why the Crab always prefer to test for Taint without warning the target beforehand. Psychological patterns of behavior may remain, however, and a clever investigator may notice a difference in physical abilities during the period when the Taint is suppressed. Also, the length and difficulty of the process makes Beside the Darkness impractical to maintain at all times, meaning the best weapon against it is simple patience. (It is also worth mentioning here that some of the most powerful Lost, the akutenshi, have the ability to shapeshift freely into any human form, making identification almost impossible and detection arduous at best.)

Another human enemy of the Crab which has made an habit of hiding itself within Rokugan's society is the Bloodspeakers Cult. While not explicitly aligned with Jigoku, the Cult still practices maho and thus is both a threat to the Empire and effectively a servant of the Realm of Evil; many of its members suffer from some degree of Taint infection. Since they are almost never Lost and have access to techniques and spells to keep their Taint levels low, it is often quite difficult to root them out. The most frequent clue (not only for Bloodspeakers but for almost all maho-tsukai) is the wounds they frequently inflict on themselves to cast their blood-empowered spells. While the cleverest of sorcerers use somebody else as a source of blood, and the most powerful can sometimes regenerate without scars, it is more common for maho use to leave scars, particularly on the forearms. Many superstitions in Rokugan mention odd behaviors from tsukai, such as a compulsive need to count grains of rice when spilled on the floor. It is unclear how much of this is true and how much is mere legend. While clearly the terrible Bloodspeaker Iuchiban did not have such obvious giveaways, he was by all accounts a man of tremendous willpower; it is quite possible that lesser maho-tsukai develop odd habits from the Taint's influence on their mind and their often unstable psyches.

Finally, another difficulty to keep in mind is that maho-tsukai can very often be simple peasants or even eta – something which samurai have difficulty reconciling with their normal mindset. Investigating such classes of people is distasteful to most samurai and they cannot really understand the peasant mindset, making the infiltrators even harder to unearth. Only the Witch Hunters, who are notorious for "slumming" among the lower castes and sharing many of their superstitions, manage to avert the worst aspects of this problem.

## Non-Human Infiltrators

Sadly, Tainted humans are not the only infiltrators or even the most dangerous ones which may be found in the Empire. Pennaggolan, bog hags, yamauba, pekkle no oni and many other such creatures perpetually slip into Rokugan and undermine the Empire's strength. They are all very different creatures with widely varied abilities, but they do share some commonalities which the Crab have learned to watch for.

Many of these creatures do not maintain a human appearance at all times. Pennaggolan, for example, must go forth from their human bodies to feed each night, and after gorging themselves on blood they must use vinegar to squeeze themselves back into their body; thus if a Witch Hunter encounters signs of vampiric activity, he will often

begin looking around for the nearest vinegar salesman. Bog hags need human skins to disguise themselves, and must periodically acquire new skins when the old ones become rotted or torn. Once again, patience here is key, since the creature is likely to eventually reveal itself at some point.

Some creatures have specific physical aspects which can clue in the well-informed investigator to their nature. Yamauba always looks like the mother of whoever speaks with it, which can be a clue in itself if the investigator knows his mother is far away. The dokufu's human form is usually incredibly aged, since it matches the creature's actual age. In addition, many of these creatures occasionally display incomprehensible behaviors due to their inhuman nature and the effects of the Taint.

Although nearly all of these creatures are Tainted, they tend to be clever about avoiding mistakes that might expose the touch of Jigoku. Moreover, a few of them cannot be detected in the normal manner. A pennaggolan, for example, can only be detected and affected by jade when in its natural form, which is only revealed when it leaves its human body to feed.

By far the most dangerous infiltrator, and the most difficult to expose, is the pekkle no oni. Not only can they take on human form with flawless accuracy, but the Taint of the pekkle no oni is virtually undetectable – the only clue is the creature's tarry black blood. Naturally these malignant demons are always careful to avoid situations where they might be cut. Thankfully, pekkle are extremely rare, but ruthless Witch Hunters will nonetheless not hesitate to cut someone's skin to check for traces of foul blood (with sometimes disastrous political consequences).

## Crab Paranoia

*"When you wake a sleeping Crab, use a stick." – Kuni Mataemon*

Between the lack of respect from the rest of the Empire, the daily dangers of their normal duties, the constant possibility of infiltrators, and the ever-present threat of infection by the Taint, it is no surprise the Crab have developed a collective sense of paranoia over the years. This behavior is very hard for the other clans to understand (save perhaps for the Scorpion, who know treachery all too well). A Crab's trust is never easily given to an outsider, and even in their own company they often watch each for signs of danger. All too often, men have fallen because someone hid a Taint infection until it was too late, or because scouts were caught and replaced with bog hags, or because a single man left his post for selfish reasons. While the Crab sense of paranoia is, in fact, largely justified, the Crab are human beings and the pressure of constant vigilance and mistrust can drive them to extreme and destructive measures.

The first target of the Crab's wariness is themselves, a fact which can be surprising to outsiders. To the Crab, however, it makes perfect sense: they fully acknowledge that their daily contact with the forces of Jigoku puts them in more danger of subversion than any other group. Their constant battles with the forces of the Taint mean any of them could be infected – or could simply be a traitor, although this is far more rare. If they suspect someone of being Tainted, a common practice is to "accidentally" bump into the subject while holding a piece of jade. This will of course draw a reaction of pain and burning from any Tainted person or creature, and if not the Crab will just briefly apologize and walk away. Crab samurai are of course aware of this practice and of what is being done to them – but freely acknowledge they would do the same if the roles were reversed. In a Crab military unit the samurai are almost never alone and bunk in groups, ensuring they are constantly under each other's eyes. In the Shadowlands itself, any samurai who goes out of sight for any amount of time will tend to be considered a shapeshifter until proven otherwise, and the Crab have standard drills for responding to the potential presence of such creatures. Similarly, any time a Crab expedition returns from the Shadowlands, everyone is thoroughly tested by Kuni shugenja for signs of Taint, and the slightest doubt is enough to warrant extended quarantine until a final verdict can be made.

Needless to say, all these rules also apply to outside visitors to Crab lands, which can often lead to awkward situations and political incidents. Any visitor to the Crab should beware of showing odd or eccentric behavior that might be interpreted as Jigoku's influence. The Crab consider a lost life a small price to pay to avoid the possibility of infiltration, and won't hesitate to kill off a suspect if they think it necessary, laws and politics be damned.

All of this Crab behavior of course becomes significantly more problematic outside of the Crab lands, and when Crab visit other clans the lack of control and familiarity often drives them to the edge of self-control. After all, they know better than to believe Jigoku's influence stops at the Kaiu Wall. It is sadly true that many Crab who spend too much time on the Wall tend to see bog hags and demons everywhere, even when no danger is present. Such broken minds are a constant reminder to the other sons and daughters of Hida of how far one can fall... and of what it takes to survive.

One family above all others takes the clan's paranoia to the highest level: the Kuni. As shugenja, they are even more vulnerable to the temptation of the Taint, since it is all too easy for spells cast in the vicinity of the Shadowlands to attract malignant kansen rather than the pure Elemental kami. Moreover, their extensive investigations into their enemies – investigations which require frequent trips into the Shadowlands – constantly expose them to the threat of the Taint. It is no surprise many Kuni fall prey to corruption – in fact, some believe the Kuni family has had more maho-tsukai appear in its ranks than all other families put together, adding to their already infamous reputation. But the core of the Kuni remain dedicated to their duty of studying and combating the influence of the Shadowlands.

Following the destruction of their lands in the Maw's attack in the eighth century, the Kuni live in a decentralized system, with sensei and pupils or families dwelling in independent houses spread throughout the Kuni Wastes. This isolation adds further risk that corruption might go

undetected, so the Kuni make sure no one is left alone for too long; visits from other shugenja or from Witch Hunters occur with regularity, and are treated as courtesy visits even if everyone knows what their purpose really is. At larger gatherings of the family, security is even more obsessive – wards are inscribed all over the place, and it is not uncommon for the Kuni to cast Jade Strike at one another, something which would draw horrified reactions anywhere else in the Empire. Thus while the Crab as a whole never take purity for granted, the Kuni don't even believe it is there until it can be proved with certainty.

## The Imperial Histories: The Taint After the Destroyer War

After the invasion of Kali-Ma and the Destroyers in the late twelfth century, the Empire is in dire condition, including the appearance of a second Festering Pit in the Scorpion lands. The Dark Lord Daigotsu claims the position of master of Jigoku after the death of Fu Leng, and offers a bargain to Empress Iweko I: if Iweko will recognize the Spider as a Great Clan, Daigotsu will withhold the infectious spread of the Taint, such that only those who wish to accept it will become Tainted. Iweko accepted the offer. She did not explain her reasons to the rest of the Empire, but they may have included both the desire to protect her ravaged people from further spread of the Taint and the hope of using the Spider as a weapon against the Empire's enemies. Regardless of her reasons, the nature of the Taint suddenly changed, and this had far-ranging implications for Rokugan.

For the Crab, although the status of the Spider was a hard fact to accept, it relieved them of one of their most basic hindrance: the reliance on jade. The precious substance was getting scarce in Rokugan, but suddenly it wasn't needed to venture into the Shadowlands anymore. Added to the new stocks to be discovered in the Colonies, the price of jade dropped, freeing a lot of the Crab's resources which were quickly refocused by the Yasuki. The Crab then rethought some of their strategies: it was now possible to send large parties in the Shadowlands, and for extended periods of time. The dangers were still present, but at least one's soul was safe. The elite unit known as the Damned slowly ceased to exist, as any Tainted Crab was now a traitor and would usually be executed on the spot. It is worth noting, however, that the Crab still used jade: as a powder to kill some of the strongest oni, for one, but also in stockpiles in case Daigotsu ever betrayed his agreement with the Empress. No one could ever accuse the Crab of being careless.

Not that Jigoku gave up on converting souls – in fact, a surge in the cleverest tricksters and demons came from the Pit after the arrangement, ready to tempt Rokugan. Where once it relied on simple contamination, the Realm of Evil now became more insidious, promising power and influence to bitter mortals in exchange for their souls. Maho, being a direct summon to Jigoku's power, still Tainted its users (a fact many kansen conveniently forgot to mention) and was still a powerful tool. And with the presence of the Spider Clan, it was easy to point out how powerful one could become with the help of Jigoku.

### GM Options: The Modern Taint

In the official "canon" L5R timeline, the deal which Daigotsu makes with Empress Iweko is a legitimate one – the Taint does indeed stop behaving like an infection, thereafter spreading only to those who willingly accept its power. However, there is no requirement for all GMs to use the "new Taint" in their own games. If your vision of Rokugan is one where the traditional form of the Taint holds sway, you can certainly ignore the outcome of the Destroyer War – or include it in a different form which better fits your preferences. For example, consider the following options:

Perhaps Daigotsu keeps the Taint under control for a time in order to lull the Empire into a false sense of complacency. Then, when the precautions against the Taint have grown lax, the Dark Lord restores it to its full power. After all, it is highly unlikely that a Dark Fortune in the service of the Realm of Evil can be trusted to keep his word!

More subtly, perhaps Daigotsu suppresses the symptoms and effects of the Taint but does not actually impinge its spread. This allows the Taint to infect the Empire far and wide while the Rokugani remain blissfully convinced that it is no longer infectious. Then, when the time is ripe, the Dark Lord can suddenly restore the full power of the Taint – instantly converting large portions of the Empire into Lost.

At the simplest level, perhaps the Empress rejects Daigotsu's demands, as many of her samurai believed she should have done. In this case, not only does the Taint remain fully infectious but the Spider Clan remains an enemy of Rokugan, rather than being incorporated and recognized as a clan. Needless to say, this will change to storyline of the subsequent Age of Exploration considerably.

The legal implications of Iweko's agreement were complex, and remained somewhat unclear a generation later. Tainted samurai, even Lost ones, were allowed to live but only if they surrendered to the authorities and accepted exile to the Colonies. (In response, the Jade Champion modified the laws on the Taint to give his Jade Magistrates more leeway to execute Tainted samurai before they could surrender.) Those who did travel to the Colonies found their ultimate fate was left up to the Spider Clan, which could choose to execute them or enroll them in its ranks as it saw fit. Also, since the Spider now worshipped the Dark Lord Daigotsu as the Fortune of Jigoku, many of them continued to willingly accept and use the Taint on their own. Naturally, all of this made for constant tension between the Spider and the other clans, as well as leading to much higher levels of contact between the Lost and normal Rokugani... which horrified most, but made a few curious. The complete repercussions of the bargain will doubtless take many years to fully realize.

# Stone and Peace

*Kakita Seiki felt the faintest twist of displeasure almost reach the edges of his face. He schooled himself to stillness by an act of will. This entire affair had been a test of not just his patience but of every fiber of his honorable bearing. For the last two weeks he had been tasked with the duty of making contact with the man who was now at last seated before him, looking at him with impassive, distant eyes and a faintly bemused smile on his face. The meeting was of vital importance; it would allow the Crane to at last finalize several different marriage arrangements, all of which needed to be conducted within the next month in order to ensure there would be no delay in the proceedings – and no disruption of the treaties and alliances connected to those marriages. Any such delay would be a major loss of face, not only for the governor Seiki served but also for the esteemed nakodo who had spent so many months arranging the matches. And that in turn would mean a loss of face for the Crane Clan itself, perhaps even a breakdown in the treaty negotiations.*

*Every day it had been the same thing: refusal. Oh, there had been different excuses each time Seiki had visited, but it had always amounted to the same result. Each time Seiki was met at the entrance by the same exact functionary. Each time he was asked to remain there while the functionary entered and inquired about the whereabouts of his master. The house was huge, of course, as befit its owner's station; Seiki knew there were many attendant sub-buildings that might need to be visited, but still, it hardly took hours to do so. However, courtesy demanded he endure the wait outside of this Otomo's home, day in and day out.*

*Finally today he was told the master was present in the home and he would be granted an audience, after a wait of only an hour. He had been brought into a nondescript, easily-forgettable room, a room of just exactly the quality and decoration appropriate to a samurai of his standing – and not a single bit more. Here he had waited again, waited for what he was certain was another three hours. And when he was finally led from there to the audience chamber, he ended up on his knees, prostrate and waiting, for almost thirty minutes more.*

*Seiki prided himself on his diplomatic skills, but now even his carefully-schooled features were beginning to show the strain, his fingers and extremities twitching so very slightly with weariness and frustration both physical and mental. This whole affair was more like torture than any negotiation he had ever conducted before.*

*He felt more than heard the very faintest of coughs slip out past his dry throat, and tightened his chest immediately lest more sound escape. Pray Doji's name the Otomo was not offended, not after he had finally won his audience!*

*Across from him, the Imperial bureaucrat's face was partially concealed by the fan that he was using to languidly move the air about his face, and thus Seiki could not see the thin viperish smile that creased Otomo Hisashi's mouth. Only now was he certain that this arrogant, demanding, expectant little child of a Crane was finally ready to listen properly. He would have his precious weddings acknowledged, of course, the paperwork stamped with the approval of the Son of Heaven's servants. There was still plenty of time for that. But the tone with which he had approached Hisashi had been anything but properly*

*servile and submissive. A proper supplicant would be hoping merely to avoid being sent away to some kami-forsaken corner of the Empire, forgotten forever. Clearly this Kakita Seiki did not recognize who it was that he was dealing with, nor did he comprehend the importance of Imperial favor for his clan's ventures to proceed.*

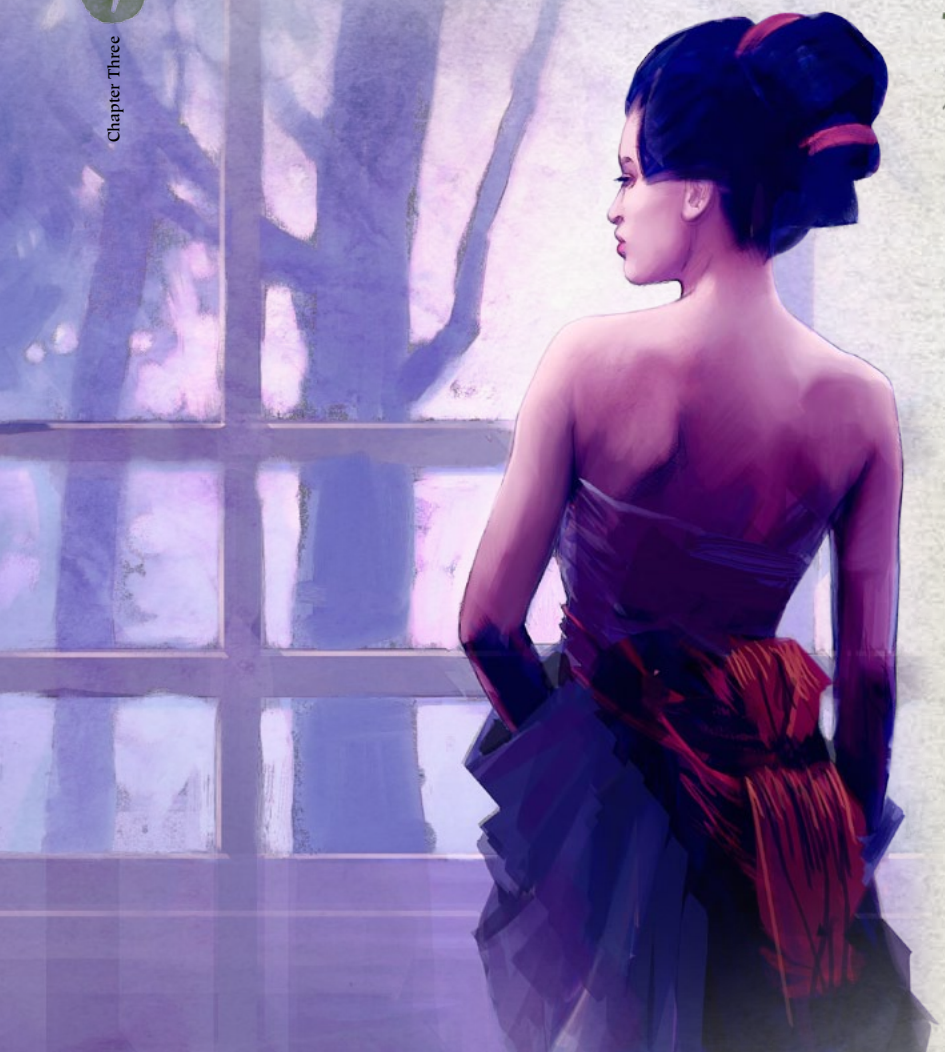
*He finally returned the Crane's bow, listening with a cruel pleasure to the faint groan of relief as the Kakita straightened up from his lengthy prostration. Hisashi snapped his fan closed and smiled what looked like a perfectly normal – if somewhat unctuous – smile. "Kakita Seiki-san, yes? I recall meeting your mother the last time that she was visiting the Capital. An august woman, and a fine asset to Lady Doji's descendents. Was she not skilled in the arts of painting? I hope she will be showing her work again in the coming spring season." His tone held absolutely sincere concern, as though this were the most important thing to speak about.*

*Seiki blinked, and for a split second almost forgot the rules of etiquette. There were forms, expectations. The gift he was keeping carefully prepared in his inro still had to be presented, the ritual refusals gone through. He could not even begin to discuss his business until they had held a proper conversation for an appropriate length of time, so as not to treat the matter as a mere mercantile transaction. He could almost feel the weight of the time he must remain in this Otomo's presence bearing down upon him, and he swallowed thickly before replying. "Of course, Otomo-sama. I believe my august mother has been hard at work, roaming the countryside of my family's holdings for the perfect inspiration, by our lord's leave." He could not keep a faint plaintive note from entering his voice. He wanted this whole meeting to simply end.*

*Otomo Hisashi continued to smile, though only on the inside. The little children of the clans forgot too easily; Kakita Seiki was no different. It was his purpose in life to remind them of their proper place. Perhaps in time this Crane might even become a usable pawn, but for now his lord would be reminded to handle these matters in a more timely fashion, and not send fools into the midst of serpents.*

*It was, he reflected, a reminder that almost every samurai in the Empire could stand to be given now and again.*





# Courtly Philosophy of Earth

At first glance, the Element of Earth seems the least suited to the way of the courtier. There is certainly no question that the number of courtier schools whose philosophy is centered around the ways of Earth is far fewer than for any other Element save the eternal and enigmatic Void. Were one to speak with the sensei of courtier schools oriented toward Air and Water, many of them would denigrate the very idea of a courtly philosophy centered upon Earth. Nevertheless, there are a select few courtly groups which follow the teachings of Earth above all others.

Understanding how the Earth differs from other philosophical paths requires the student first to give up on the preconceived notions of what the Earth represents. Most of those who consider the Way of Earth think in terms of its martial applications, but only one martial or magical aspect of the Earth is truly applicable to courtly teachings: endurance. The other aspects of Earth – the strength of stone, the enforcement of elemental and spiritual purity, the rage of the volcano or the cracking thunder of an earthquake, the wrath and ferocity born from deep within the world's heart – these things have nothing to do with the courtier who follows Earth's teachings.

Rather, courtiers rely most strongly on the fact that Earth is the Element of stability. The Earth looks upon the Air and knows that it hears many secrets, flitting from

tale to tale, but when Air encounters a threat it lacks the anchorage to give it shelter from the storm's fury. Likewise, while Fire burns hot, it also burns fast, and its resources are lost in the midst of its fierce and tempestuous ardor, plotting itself into oblivion. Water is an element that sees through all illusion, opens the gateways and cracks the greatest of obstacles, but it becomes stagnant and laconic when it has reached its goal. It cannot perceive the action that is possible through inaction. None of these other Elements contain the notion of patience, of endurance and stability, of resolution and internal integrity, which is where the courtiers of Earth find their true strength.

Perhaps the easiest way to understand this is to look at the principle courtly tools of the Earth: the raw Willpower to sustain oneself against the inquiries and manipulations of other schools, and the power of Intimidation to impose one's views on the court. Almost all courtly schools of thought within the Earth (other than a few obscure ones from the Minor Clans) demonstrate a certain propensity towards Intimidation, which is perhaps why they are so often misunderstood as brutish and unthinking bludgeons stumbling through the delicate world of the courtiers. Intimidation often is considered a skill unworthy of a refined and elegant samurai, a demonstration of braggadocio beyond the proper glory one garners in the name of one's lord. However, an intrinsic misunderstanding lurks within this view of Intimidation. For while it is certainly not the most honorable of methods, underneath a campaign of Intimidation lies the true secret of the Earth's success: its stability.

The best and most masterful practitioners of the art of stability as a weapon are the Otomo seiyaku. None would ever dare openly say this, of course, and most would not even consider it too deeply, since regarding the lofty heights of Heaven from below invites disaster; nonetheless, the Otomo school of thought relies upon stability, stagnation, and intimidation to operate successfully. The Otomo (and to a lesser extent the other masters of courtly intimidation, the Yoritomo, Hida, and Yasuki) are deeply and firmly aware of their exact place within the Celestial Wheel and the social order of Rokugan. They have no illusions as to who and what they are and what they represent at literally all times. They take the teachings of Sun Tao to heart, teachings which relate that to know oneself is the first step in preparing for war. One cannot fully succeed without knowing also the opposition, but if one lacks the knowledge of self that is the foundation of all effort, one can never hope to achieve true mastery in the courts.

Each of these schools relies on an intrinsic and firmly entrenched self-identity, one that is not merely years in the making but bears the weight of a thousand years of Imperial decrees and generations upon generations of reinforcement. The Yoritomo thrive on their self-styling as underdogs, the champions of the common people and the other Minor Clans, their mastery of all matters naval, and their role at the very fringe of society. The Crab are without question the last line of defense of the Empire, the stalwart wall that has withstood centuries of onslaught so that all may be protected and kept pure. The Otomo for their part are the voice of the Emperor, the agents of the Son of Heaven, and to question them is close to blasphemy. This level of self-awareness transcends all but the most deeply meditative practitioners of other courtier schools, and becomes a powerful weapon within the Courts.

Intimidation displays this self-awareness in its most raw form. Whether it is the artful and manipulative control that the Otomo exert by calling on their pre-eminent standing at the side of the Imperial Throne, or the sometimes crude way in which a Crab looms over a rival with all the advantages of height and muscle-mass to reinforce his clan's sacred duties, the basic nature of this approach is the same: these schools rely on absolute self-awareness to invoke authority over others through sheer force of will. Where they are most successful, their victories are barely noticed by those around them – other than the occasional sniff at the bald-faced nature of their behavior. Practitioners of the Way of Earth in court are often left to their own devices, performing their specific (and needed) functions which define their divinely-appointed role in the Empire. (Or, in the case of the Mantis, the role carved out over countless generations of toil and sweat until their claim was incontrovertible.)

This exertion of will comes at a steep price. Those who are courtiers of Earth often become pigeon-holed into the roles they perform, and when they seek to diverge from these expectations in any serious way they usually find themselves markedly less effective. Within their roles they are often able to act almost above question, but beyond those limitations they tend to be treated as curiosities at best, and annoying pests far more often. Even the Otomo, who are largely immune to this due to their powerful Imperial patronage and pervasive presence throughout the courts of the Empire, are in fact very limited in their functionality. Hundreds of years of tradition and Imperial edicts ensure the foundation of the Otomo family's power is very broad in its reach, but when the family moves in fields where it lacks open authority from the throne it finds itself relegated to politely tolerated guests, rarely actually listened to and often summarily ignored. This can be a source of frustration for younger members of any of these families, particularly for the most ambitious among their number; however, the path of Earth is not one ever meant for the passionate or ambitious. Many ambitious courtiers from these schools have tried to build up their own base of power, only to ultimately find themselves cut off at the heels and ultimately destroyed – or worse, simply ignored and reduced to irrelevance.

Along with the central tenet of self-awareness, the courtly schools of Earth generally require one other emotional trait for success. It is the ability

to be aware of others' motivations, desires, and wants; valuable as these things can be for manipulating those audacious enough to walk into the Earth's territories, they are of little help when maintaining one's own rightful authority. Likewise, perception can detect when things are not as they seem, and a clever wit can devise stratagems, but no matter how clear one's thoughts and senses these are not the most powerful tools for the courtiers of Earth. Rather, a devotee of the Earth must possess above all a stubborn, tenacious, and indomitable will.

Without a strong will, it is extremely difficult to assert the dominance, priority, and more importantly the nature of one's already pre-existing authority. Schools of Earth strive to infuse self-awareness into their students, awareness of one's standing and one's role, from early youth. In theory, of course, any courtier (regardless of family or clan) should be taught at least some level of self-awareness, but the schools of Earth emphasize this training in order to build the absolute sureness and indomitable will that become the basis for all of their techniques. This is the utter certainty present in the eyes of a Crab courtier who sits across the table from a team of Crane diplomats and patiently wears them down to acquire concessions his brethren desperately need. Such stability requires the firmest will in order to be maintained.

Any courtier will face an incredible number of attacks from his rivals in the courts. Schools of the Earth may face fewer by virtue of their more limited roles, but they do not actively seek to avoid scrutiny or criticism. Rather, they are taught to outlast those who attempt to whittle or chisel away at their family and clan's divinely established position. No such mere political attack can last forever, after all, and hundreds of years of consistent reinforcement enables the courtier of Earth to know there is no ultimate risk in the trivial rhetorical arrows of rival courtiers so long as one has the will to endure them. The handfuls of Minor Clan courtiers particularly excel at the use of this stubbornness. Their very existence is the result of the whim of Imperial authority, and they have spent generations upon generations serving in the very limited but very consistent roles they have been relegated to perform, relying on Imperial proclamation to protect their place. The longer they last, the more patient these small clans become, lurking quietly on the fringe of the courts. They do not seek more than they are allotted, and wait for the moments they are needed. By doing so, they avoid hostile notice and continue with their quiet existence.

Overall, the philosophy of Earth is seen most of all in inaction. This fundamental aspect of the way of Earth is a basic lesson that to some extent all courtier schools must learn, but those who truly excel in its teachings are inevitably not the most glorious or well-known individuals within the courts. However, they are usually respected for the part they play, and those who seek to oppose them are not terribly numerous. Their very nature, the bearing they carry with them, is usually enough for most to leave them unmolested unless there is a pressing need to meddle in their affairs. When it is working at its best, the courtly practice of Earth does not need to do anything at all, and with the smallest of effort outlasts any opposition while at the same time acquiring that which is already promised to it. Indeed, the greatest masters of these schools are so firm and unshakeable in their internal resolve that they display the way of "acting without acting," their very presence carrying more than enough weight, seeing no need for words which would ultimately be wasted.

It should be noted that the way of Earth, while stolidly patient, is not lazy in the slightest; rather, the courtier of Earth works steadily to establish a niche in the court where he can reliably and persistently perform his duties while being left alone to do what must be done. It is quite rare for these courtiers to be flashy, glory-driven persons or even to be well remembered after they are gone... but without their quiet efforts, the Empire might have collapsed long ago, never realizing its danger until it was too late. True courtiers of the Earth would have it no other way.

## The Crab Clan

It is a sad and somewhat ironic truth that the Crab are perhaps one of the clans best positioned to capitalize on specific functions of their role within the courts, but at the same time one of the clans least capable of realizing this potential. One of the principle reasons behind this is readily apparent when one notes who is assigned the task of serving as courtiers within the clan. The vast majority of these individuals are either Yasuki or soldiers forced into retirement, supplemented by a smattering of Kuni and Kaiu.

Furthermore, while the Yasuki are most frequently the agents of the clan, they are viewed within the courts as the "exception to the rule" when interacting with the Crab as a body. While their courtly school does orient toward Earth, they do not rely on the standing and repute of the Crab but rather employ their own peculiar methods, and as such tend to represent a rather anomalous arm of the clan. The 'average' Crab Clan diplomat who is not a representative of the Yasuki family is generally a diplomat in name only; their retirement to the court is invariably due to the infirmities of age, debilitating injury, or some grotesque failure on the field of battle that was insufficient to demand the greater punishments of exile or seppuku. The majority of these individuals have little to no desire to actually be in the courts, and would prefer to die a death befitting their training on the fields of battle. The few within the clan with a marked propensity towards the courts are generally shunted off to train with the Yasuki family, and for the Hida this is often considered to be a somewhat shameful, making them a lesser member of the family.

There are, however, rare exceptions to this rule. Some individuals, recognizing their time in the field is done, take to the work of the court with the same relish and zeal they applied to the crushing of an oni's skull or the banishment of some hellish spirit. They lose none of the jaded embitterment that grows from years of battling the Shadowlands, but they temper their martial rage with patience and take on a calming, stone-hard presence

within the courts. The most effective of traditional Hida, Hiruma, and Kuni diplomats almost never speak, knowing that rhetoric and oration are not their strongpoints. Instead they master the art of being seen, so their representation of the Crab is always known. They respond when spoken to, of course, and comport themselves with enough honor to avoid comment or scandal. So long as there are no wars underway with other clans, these representatives can actually become somewhat popular as the more savvy courtiers among their normal rivals come to speak with these quiet 'civilized' Crab and may even aid them in performing their duties.

Outside of the Yasuki, it is usually through veterans such as these that the Crab make their presence felt within the courts. Despite rumors to the contrary, most champions of the clan have always kept at least one cunning and canny diplomat who is not Yasuki available for use. This person, generally a Kuni or a retired Hida general with a particularly patient attitude toward the foolishness of the Crab Clan's rivals, who makes himself familiar with the few among the clan's retiring soldiers who are both moderately capable of the courtly arts and possess the disposition to serve within the courts for an extended period of time. These individuals are then deployed to the most important and reputable courts, where their standing and status as semi-retired Crab of high rank is generally enough to let them effectively represent the clan in such major locations. One or two are always placed within the Emperor's own court, where they offer a constant visible reminder of the price the Crab pay for the rest of the Empire. Naturally, the more infamous and hot-headed Crab are never sent to major courts unless absolutely no alternatives are available – or if a particularly brutish and uncivilized Clan Champion is active. (For example, Hida Kisada was infamous for his contempt toward the Hantei Emperor, and sent the most sinister and menacing of Crab to represent the clan in the Imperial court.) Normally, however, the more thuggish Crab are assigned duty as sensei or, if necessary, to the most minor and inconsequential of courtly postings, places where an insult will cause the least amount of political damage.

The chief courtly advisers of the Yasuki are generally tasked more with the specific (and often quite tricky) task of 'resource management,' working to maintain the clan's supplies and food. This can entail assignments to almost any court in the Empire, from the Imperial City down to the most minor regional castles.

Over the centuries this methodology has usually managed to avoid giving potential offense while maintaining the Crab in the courts. However, it has also meant that the Crab have never truly capitalized upon the potential political gains their role in the Empire offers. Most Clan Champions are content with making sure their clan's war effort against the Shadowlands is sufficiently funded, and whenever possible leave the other affairs of court to those who care about such things.

# The Mantis Clan

The Crab Clan's closest cousins suffer a nearly opposite set of circumstances within the courts. Everything they possess is the result of the effort, toil, sweat, and blood of their people rather than being the long-standing and ancient traditions dating back to the time of the Kami. The Mantis forged and crafted their own world, their own political power-base, and their homes and resources from places where the rest of the Empire did not care to tread. Their greatest assets, found in and through their naval power, have been built out of things considered unworthy of the attention of the mainland clans – things like commerce and gaijin goods – and with only minimal support from the rest of Rokugan. Their position was maintained through a mixture of relentless determination, tacit approval from those who benefited from their activities, and the sheer difficulty for any other clan to threaten them.

Even after the Mantis became a Great Clan in their own right, this tradition of forging one's own destiny remained a hallmark of the clan. It is both the reason they rose to such prominence in the aftermath of the second Day of Thunder, and the reason they are sneered at and (as much as possible) ignored by the other clans. To many they appear as overstuffed upstarts, wielding power that is not worth proper consideration, obsessed with things that have no value to proper samurai, and bragging of conquests none have ever witnessed. In short, the more traditional clans and factions regard them as the spoiled brats of the Empire. This is infuriating to the Mantis, of course, who are convinced (with some justification) everything they possess has been earned... and that they have also earned the recognition of their peers.

The Mantis are of all factions the most pro-active in implementing Earth-centric tactics within the courts. They rely openly on Intimidation tactics that demonstrate the more aggressive and psychologically destructive personality traits of the Earth. Within these methods is a core element of burning ambition that sears through everything the Mantis do, especially in the Yoritomo family (though a strong undercurrent of the same attitude may also be found in the fledgling family of the Tsuruchi). These families have earned their status not because they are descended from some great founding ancestor but through the toils and trials they have faced. In the case of the Tsuruchi, they have built their repute on the hundreds of dead nay-sayers who ran afoul of their bounty hunters. In the case of the Yoritomo, they built on the foundation of the beautiful, deadly, but incredibly valuable lands they claimed – entirely without Imperial decree – off of the coast of Rokugan. Even the Moshi and Kitsune families carry deep and prickly pride in what they represent, lines of samurai who served forgotten causes of little to no interest to the rest of the Empire, actively detracted by many clans at different times.

This attitude has a tendency to give Mantis Clan diplomats a prickly reputation. Even on the best of days they demonstrate an almost disturbing sense of entitlement, fueled in part by the fact that their clan's diplomatic efforts – like the rest of their efforts – follow a much more merit-based system than the rest of the Empire, a system in which only the truly fit and skilled are promoted to key positions within the hierarchy. The Yoritomo and Tsuruchi especially detest the notion of nepotism in any fashion or form, and while they might tolerate it among their more traditionalist cousins in the Moshi or Kitsune families, the clan as a whole has surprisingly little tolerance for any entitlement that comes solely from one's ancestry. Instead, the sense of entitlement they possess is based on the deeds their families and clan have accomplished, successes which they believe prove the worthiness of the Mantis Clan as a whole and its place in the Imperial courts.

The typical Mantis Clan diplomat is generally on the young side, and the clan is far more likely than most others in the Empire to send uninitiated diplomats to major courts as aides to their seasoned diplomatic core. Of course, this is partially a pragmatic necessity: the vast bulk of the clan is comprised of the Yoritomo family, and even they are a small family compared to most other Great Clan

families. The Moshi (and in the most modern times, the Kitsune) generally are not large enough outside of the shugenja within their families to field a meaningful number of courtiers. The Tsuruchi are almost equally problematic due to their philosophical tendency to shy away from all matters of 'true samurai' in combination with having low numbers within their family. While diplomatic envoys from each of these families do exist, the vast bulk of Mantis Clan courtier must inevitably come from the Yoritomo. Even within the Yoritomo, the family's primary focus is martial, so the numbers of courtiers are limited in many cases the only available envoys are far less seasoned than would be the case in other clan's families, particularly in the secondary courts. Of course, the Mantis Clan also favors the upholding of personal ambition so long as it does not negatively impact the clan; if a younger courtier demonstrates successful boldness in the courts of the Empire, he is likely to be promoted frequently so long as his star continues to rise. In this way relatively young and inexperienced individuals have often found themselves in positions of lofty importance.

The majority of Mantis diplomats are full of bluster and bravado. Sometimes this is seen in the sort of outright bombastic behavior that might be expected given their ties to the fortune Osano-Wo, and sometimes it is seen in the cold, methodical, and calculating confidence of one who feels unassailable. Ironically, this confidence matches well the tenet of Sincerity, since it is rare to find a Mantis who does not mean exactly what he says and is willing to stake his life on his proclamations. To some clans this bold and even occasionally brash sincerity can be seen as endearing. To the majority of traditionalist families, however, it is ranklesome, beyond even the distasteful behavior one expects to encounter from a Crab.

So far as most of the Empire is concerned, the Mantis are at best a source of resources, and a nettlesome one at that. The Mantis, characteristically, have learned to wield this assumption about their economic strength with all of the finesse of a masakari being applied to an opponent's forehead. They withhold financial power and access to transportation until concessions are given to their demands, and generally take on the political habits of a schoolyard bully. At least some of the Mantis would probably prefer not to have to resort to such tactics. However, they believe the Empire has left them little choice but to use whatever sources of strength they have, and they are an impatient people who have waited centuries for the world around them to see their worth.

## The Otomo Family

In regard to the philosophy of Earth in the courts, the Crab may be said to represent the mountain standing against a never-ending horde of opposition (both in life and in the courts), the Yoritomo are as defiant as an avalanche cascading down on the unprepared, and the Minor Clans demonstrate uniquely stoic attitudes of their own. Still, most do not view the way of Earth as a sign of potency within the courts. It is seen as a necessary Element, to be sure, for without strong will a courtier will easily fall to the temptations of the less honorable. However, nobody within the broader Empire would ever deign to consider the Element of Earth to be a weapon of first choice. It is fitting, in their eyes, that it is used primarily by the brutish Crab, the desperate Minor Clans, and the over-eager Mantis. It is a tool of last resort, a bludgeon used where the finesse of the blade is far preferred. To the minds of the most seasoned of diplomats, wielding the force of Earth as a weapon within the courts is the sign of a weak and impotent creature who is either too stupid, too desperate, or too poorly matched to truly aspire to the highest positions.

However, none of the above applies to the Otomo family.

The Otomo are always a force to be reckoned with in the courts; any courtier who says otherwise is either supremely arrogant or a fool, usually both. Even the most powerful of Imperial Chancellors and Imperial Advisors, even master politicians with extensive grievances against the Otomo, will grudgingly acknowledge that one cannot walk the halls of the Imperial Courts without the leave and assistance of the Otomo family. It is literally impossible to operate in the capitol of the Empire without their presence, their word, and their permission, and over the centuries

their power has become effectively unassailable. They are the grand exception to the rule that the Element of Earth is not a political force worthy of consideration, and they are this way because of something so inherent to the Empire's mindset that it is simply unquestionable: the mandate of Heaven.

Where numerous clans might claim to hold authority because of their linkage to a divine progenitor, the Otomo have a different sort of divine mandate. They were directly granted the power to manage the courts of the Empire by Empress Hantei Yugozuhime, a role reasserted by every Emperor since. Because the Emperor is the Voice of Heaven and has the divine authority of Tengoku behind him, to question the right and presence of the Otomo family at the Emperor's side is tantamount to blasphemy – as the Otomo are quick to remind anyone who might think to chisel away at their power-base. This political reality is upheld not only throughout the Hantei dynasty but also during the subsequent Toturi and Iweko dynasties, both of whom reaffirm the Otomo family's role and power as part of their own legitimization. Thus through three separate Imperial lines, through three different sets of divine and human mandates, the Otomo family remains a dominant power in the Imperial courts. The Imperial Court is all but synonymous with the Otomo name, and their courtiers always comprise a significant portion of its population.

In many ways the Otomo presence within the courts can almost be considered a hindrance more than a blessing; however, due to their place as the hand-picked agents of the Emperor, this works in ways that are effective for them. To the Otomo, not only is stability a weapon, but also stagnation. However much the Doji family may believe they maintain the customs and cultural perspectives that rule the courts, the Otomo are far more adamant on the subject, pointing out these social rules were first created with the permission of the Shining Prince himself. In fact, the Otomo are almost single-handedly responsible for helping to ensure Imperial protocol, policy, and the functional operation of the Imperial courts do not change in any significant fashion for over a thousand years – the sole change in the bureaucracy being the creation of the office of Imperial Treasurer under Empress Iweko I. Since the removal of the gaijin from the Empire after the battle of White Stag, the Otomo have tirelessly maintained an environment of closeted nepotism, rigid hierarchical political structures, dizzying bureaucratic protocols, and infuriatingly tiresome redundancies of positions of authority – all to maintain their own hold on power. The end result of their constant efforts is that, despite their almost infinitesimal size in comparison to the individual Great Clan samurai families, they dominate all positions within the Imperial bureaucracy and are ubiquitous in the Imperial Court, and routinely hold positions far above those a person of their standing would normally possess. One cannot walk in the halls of the Imperial Capitol without some Otomo being aware of it, and if the family has any opinion on one's activities it can be safely assumed there will soon be an Otomo "adviser" on hand to make sure everything is done in a fashion that befits the "needs of the throne." Similarly, there is no significant court elsewhere in the Empire where there are no Otomo representatives, representatives who are always accorded the utmost respect and deference. Political marriages are likewise used to make sure the Otomo family's influence is felt everywhere in Rokugan. One simply cannot walk through the Empire without being under their gaze.

Stagnation, nepotism, rigidity, tradition, and inertia are the tools of the Otomo. Some believe the domineering Technique known as *Obiesaseru*, which allows the Imperial scions to speak with the very authority of the Son of Heaven and command any honorable soul in the Empire to obedience, is the family's greatest asset – but in reality, it is merely a potent byproduct of their constant, tireless, relentless protection and promotion of their family's power. Defying the Otomo is, generally, an exercise in the utmost futility, as one finds oneself pitted against an overwhelming mass of political obstructions that bog down one's advances like an army trying to advance through a swampy mire. It is an exhausting, infuriating, and almost entirely unsatisfying struggle. Generally speaking, if the Otomo oppose something, it can succeed only if they do not care enough to ultimately stop it or if their opponent is willing to expend massive effort and resources, such that it becomes a Pyrrhic victory at best.

Some believe the Otomo are driven by arrogance, political corruption, and ambition. The truth, however, is far different. To the Otomo, ambition is a waste of effort, a sign that a person is unfit for anything but the most menial of tasks. Appearing ambitious to outsiders is fine, of course, but actually being ambitious demonstrates an almost childish impatience and a clear misunderstanding of the family's purpose. In fact the Otomo have no reason to be ambitious; they have been given a personal place as the attendants of the Son of Heaven. Since the days of Hantei Yugozuhime the Otomo have been entrusted with the duty of personally ensuring the Empire is ruled solely and entirely by the Son of Heaven, and no others must ever garner enough power to threaten the Imperial Throne's control. Thus there is nothing for the Otomo to seek that they do not already have. They protect the Imperial government's arcane and overly complicated structure not to maintain their own position but from divine mandate for the defense of Imperial authority. They wield their capacities as advisers to the courts of the Empire in order to weaken the Great Clans' relative positions and prevent alliances that might threaten Imperial power. Everything that they do is intended to protect Imperial power, not for themselves but for the Emperor himself. After over a thousand years, their opponents have largely given up on chiseling away at their system and consented, however grudgingly, to operate within it; the Otomo will have it no other way.

## The Minor Clans

The Minor Clans are not considered a significant force within the Empire's courts, and with good reason. They lack the resources and alliances to function as such, and rarely demonstrate more than brief leaps in standing for short periods of time – usually only when one particularly famous and outstanding samurai from their ranks is named to a unique position such as Imperial Advisor. Although it is not completely unheard-of for a samurai of the Minor Clans to hold such a posting, it is quite unusual for them to rise to such heights within the courts. More typically, the Minor Clans are the disaffected and ignored factions within the courts, granted occasional table scraps when their need is dire but otherwise ignored and left to their own devices. While certainly many within the Minor Clans find this attitude troublesome and even infuriating, they know there is nothing to be gained in saying so, and instead they embrace the way of Earth, endure, and carry on with their business.

Among the Minor Clans, the Ichiro and the Toku families most typify an Earth-based attitude towards the courts. Both of these families share in common with the Otomo a recognition of their own divinely mandated roles in the Empire. The Ichiro are tasked for centuries to guard a border nobody cares about, standing alone in an uncontested land considered largely worthless by the rest of the Empire, holding back presumed threats that never came. Even after their near-destruction in the early twelfth century and again in the War of Dark Fire later on, the Ichiro remained on their lonely towers, maintaining vigil against foes who might never return, solely because it was their task to do so. The Toku, likewise, bear a responsibility placed on them by Emperor Toturi I in honor of one of his most loyal servants. They are tasked as the magistrates of unaligned and Minor Clan lands and as logistical aides to the Imperial Legions, and they undertake these minor duties with absolute seriousness, to the point of sometimes drawing ridicule from the Great Clans.

Unlike the Otomo, however, these clans have little to no need to protect their appointed roles, since no one else is interested in taking those roles way. Instead, the Minor Clans display the stability of the Earth, enduring the mockery and contempt of the Great Clans as a mountain endures the winds. They send only the most seasoned and well-prepared representatives to the few courts they attend, and they are usually there not to actively seek goals but simply to represent their clans and to learn by watching. They step forward and speak up only when absolutely necessary, usually because of something that directly affects their clans, and for the most part they are an entirely passive force within the courts of the Empire.

This is as much a survival tactic as it is anything else. The Minor Clans survive in part because they perform tasks nobody else wants, but also because they walk a dangerous tight-rope, struggling to maintain their position while avoiding the hostile attention of their betters. Occasionally, ambitious or greedy Great Clan leaders threaten the holdings of these clans – the Lion in particular are known for frequently seeking justification to make war on the Minor Clans who border their lands. Minor Clan functionaries must perpetually guard against such threats while also not letting themselves become so unnoticed as to be completely forgotten. When the former occurs, the Minor Clans can suffer heavily at the hands of their stronger neighbors, but when the latter happens their people may suffer or even starve without the assistance of the Empire.

Of course, much of the time this figurative tightrope is not necessarily all that difficult to walk. Aside from those rare few who take some sort of perverse offense at the existence of Minor Clans despite their establishment by the order of the Son of Heaven, most of the Empire is largely willing to leave them alone to do what they are meant to do. Thus, the most important trait for Minor Clan diplomats is the patience and willpower to endure both the sleights of their enemies and the indifference of the courts. Through these traits they are able to weather most storms and avoid foolish mistakes or unnecessary outbursts that could cost their brethren dearly.

## Ronin and Monastic Orders

Both ronin and monks who attend the courts must display much of the strength of Earth, and only in rare cases do they exhibit behavior or philosophies more appropriate to the other Elements. The reasons for this are different, but the result is almost always the same. Both monks and those few ronin who find a place within the courts are almost invariably shunted to the side and relegated to the role of curiosities and amusements rather than serious participants in the political process. The monastic orders do possess considerably greater clout than the typical wave-man, but outside of the Phoenix and Dragon lands there is a general attitude that they should not meddle in anything not purely theological. If the matter does not pertain to the Tao or worship of the

Fortunes, most lords will merely nod their heads politely to the words of a monk and turn back to the business at hand. This is simply an unavoidable side-effect of the role of the Brotherhood of Shinsei within the Celestial Order. Ambition is an inherent concern (and vice) for samurai, tied to the Sin of Desire. Power, politicking, favor trading, deal-making and the like demonstrate an over-fascination with the things of this world. To the members of the Brotherhood, not only the pious lifelong monks but also those samurai who have devoutly retired from their worldly life, this sort of politicking is not only undesirable but a threat to their personal pursuit of enlightenment.

Normally, this is not an issue in relations between the monastic orders and the courts, since monks do not usually involve themselves in anything that does not directly involve the Brotherhood or the Empire's religion. So long as they stay within those bounds, the rest of the Empire is happy to comply with any reasonable requests from them and heed their religious counsel. This is normally an amiable, stable, and quiet relationship, epitomizing the most peaceful aspects of Earth. Only during times of severe war or extreme natural disasters does the nature of this relationship change, as widespread suffering causes the Brotherhood to become more directly involved with the affairs of the Empire as a whole. Even then, however, the Brotherhood seeks as much as possible to take a patient and serene approach in all dealings with samurai. If they must suffer some level of hardship due to difficult times, this is merely a trial to be endured with the stolid strength of Earth, perhaps even a source of learning and enlightenment. Thus monks almost always maintain good relations with the Empire's courts.

Ronin, on the other hand, almost universally avoid the courts like the plague. The few who engage in any level of politics (and who were not originally from a courtier school) generally take an extremely cautious and deferential approach, epitomized by the Masters of Games from Nanashi Mura. Their methods are very much in keeping with those of the more conventional Crab – namely, patience, silence, and stolid resilience in the face of hostility or mockery. A few ronin take the opposite tack and try to emulate the Yoritomo family, attempting to bludgeon, bully, and cajole whatever concessions they can acquire – needless to say, this usually results in the impertinent ronin meeting his end on a duelist's blade, although a few exceptional individuals like the famous poet Rezan have made a success of themselves through this method. More sensible wave-men rely on their willpower and endurance to try to navigate the dangerous waters of court, waters ruled by far bigger fish than they. For the most part they merely looking to survive and leave a positive enough impression to perhaps gain a patron or useful position in the future.

## Courtly Organizations of Earth

Although the way of Earth does not lend itself to political affairs nearly so readily as the way of Air, there are nonetheless several political organizations whose teachings rely on the ways of Earth to promote their clans' cause in the courts.

### The Otomo Bureaucracy

*"Help your earthly suffering? Why would I care about worldly concerns? My concern is the state of the heavens, and the Imperial Court as their representatives!" – Otomo Seimi, twelfth century*

The bureaucracy of the Imperial Court is under the near-total control of the Otomo family. While samurai from other clans do gain appointments, even mid- and high-ranking ones, the vast bulk of the Imperial functionaries throughout the capitol are of the Otomo family. Many of these are normal, run-of-the-mill courtiers within the family, whose function is to sow disinformation, discord, and confusion amongst the clans and avoid power accumulating in the wrong hands, there is a subset of the family that takes a far more indirect approach to their duties. These members of the family train in the art of manipulating and controlling the flow of information and resources through the Imperial capital, and are inevitably appointed to significant positions within the fearsome bureaucracy of that city. They do not boast of their positions or their techniques, and as a result even the

### Rezan, the Ronin Poet

Perhaps the most famous ronin courtier in the history of the Empire is the wave-man named Rezan, a man often credited with being the Empire's greatest poet. However, there are so many stories associated with Rezan that it is difficult to be certain whether he even existed.

The most popular tale of Rezan claims he earned his fame by entering an annual Crane poetry competition, a contest in which the topic of the poems was chosen by the Emperor himself. Rezan had publicly criticized Imperial policies and was under a death sentence; however, his victory in the competition led the Emperor to spare his life and he was recognized as the Empire's greatest living poet.

A less generous version of Rezan's life claims he was actually a terrible poet. During a visit to the Doji courts he found himself in a public conflict with a prominent Crane. The two had argued over who was the most beautiful woman at the court, and the Crane demanded Rezan accept a challenge of poetry, each writing about their chosen woman. The Doji's choice was a young Crane maiden, but Rezan chose – either through accident or cunning – a woman who was revealed to be the Emperor's daughter in disguise. The Doji realized he could not win without shaming the Emperor's family, so he instead lost intentionally and publicly declared Rezan was the greatest poet in the Empire. Thanks to his glorious victory, Rezan was supposedly able to marry the daughter of the Emperor and join the Miya family, becoming Miya Rezan. However, he died in a duel just three years later, and the tale claims his wife died from grief soon after.

Very little (if any) of Rezan's actual poetry is known to the public, but a great many poems are credited to him. It has become customary in the years since his death for poets who wish to publish anonymously to claim they have "discovered" a previously unknown work by Rezan – thus his repute has climbed steadily with each passing century. Moreover, it has also become common to attribute many key innovations in poetry to Rezan – for example, he has been credited with the haiku poetry form, even though it was in use for hundreds of years before he was born.

most skilled Crane and Scorpion diplomats are often quite unaware of the distinction between a traditional Otomo seiyaku courtier and an Otomo Bureaucrat.

The methods of the Imperial bureaucracy began in the time of Hantei Genji, the shining prince, under whose reign the government of Rokugan first developed into its recognizable form. At the time, the new bureaucracy existed predominantly to organize and streamline the functions of the newly created Imperial court, and the Otomo were merely a part of the larger structure. That changed in the time of the Gozoku Alliance, when the Imperial government was extensively restructured and expanded under the control of the newly created Nasu family (see the L5R RPG 4th Edition supplement Imperial Histories, Chapter Two, for details). After the overthrow of the Gozoku by Empress Yugozohime, she disbanded the Nasu and appointed the Otomo to take over and run the bureaucracy they had developed. Although the majority of the family now embraced their new role of sowing discord between the Great Clans (and thus ensuring there would not be another Gozoku), a minority focused on their duty as bureaucrats, expanding and reconstructing the Imperial government to make it an impenetrable barrier to those opposing the Otomo.

The Otomo Bureaucrats work seamlessly alongside their seiyaku brethren, their technique bolstering and assisting the broader family to mitigate Great Clan power and activity. Their sensei teach the Bureaucrats to look for any sort of troubling political process within the courts, anything undesirable to the Otomo family's broader goals, and obstruct it in every way possible. This buys time for the rest of the family to pool resources, consider options, and respond in a fashion deemed appropriate. When not outright assisting the family's efforts, the Bureaucrat functionaries follow a general policy of randomly obstructing and slowing down anything pursued by the Great Clans. Their actions tend to strike outsiders as petty and without meaning, but in fact their interventions make it consistently difficult for even experienced rival courtiers to recognize when they are being actively opposed and when they are merely being tied up in the tiresome complexities of the Imperial bureaucracy. In the Bureaucrats' view, this sort of confusion is not only desirable but necessary; if their opponents realize they are being actively opposed, they are far more likely to take active countermeasures, which the Otomo naturally consider undesirable.

## Crab Clan: The Yasuki Extortionists

*"What is this pittance? Come back when you are serious." – Yasuki Tsujiken*

Among those who are most familiar with the methods of the Yasuki family, they are not normally consider to follow a philosophy of Earth, but rather one of Water – perception and flexibility combined with underlying subtle strength. They are the in fact the principle exception to the overall Earth-dominated philosophy of the Crab Clan, something which is not that surprising given that they originated among another clan, the Crane. The Crab as a whole are almost monomaniacal in their dedication to Earth as the Element expressing their approach to war, combat training, courtly policy, and magical practices; they are not known for perceiving deeply into things. (For that matter, the Yasuki were also a poor fit within the Air-dominated Crane Clan.) The Yasuki are a school of the waves; even their mon expresses more kinship to the water than it does to their Crane or Crab heritage, almost as if the Carp are caught within the pincers or the beak of their masters.

However, the organization within the Yasuki which are sometimes called the Extortionists are very much an exception to this rule, and a unique expression of kinship with Crab Clan philosophy which has developed over the centuries. The Extortionist tradition originated not long after the first Crab-Clan War, when the family's leadership began experimenting with trying to embrace the intimidating, Earth-driven political philosophies of their new Crab masters within the courts. The early results were a nearly unmitigated failure, one that cost the lives and honor of several talented Yasuki samurai. The family's leadership was ready to scrap the project entirely when a man named Yasuki Mitsunari stepped forward with a new proposal.

Mitsunari requested permission to make a new attempt at adopting Earth-oriented tactics, but this time with a far more specific focus: money and commerce. To minimize risk to the family and the clan, he proposed the new method be initially tested on ronin and minor clan samurai, who could be offended with little risk. While skeptical, Mitsunari's superiors permitted him to undertake the exercise. His insights proved to be considerable. A merchant in training, he had observed at first-hand the methods of strong-arming used by heimin moneylenders and adopted these to use against samurai, while avoiding politically formidable figures who had status or allies behind them. The returns from his efforts were considerable, not only in monetary benefit but also political gains.

While the Yasuki leadership was impressed with his successes, it was clear that Mitsunari's method could never become the main technique of the family; the potential for offending the wrong person was simply too

great, and too many samurai were immune to financial appeals. However, the Yasuki were loathe to let a perfectly obvious and useful tool go to waste, and so gave orders for Mitsunari to refine his techniques and teach them to those students he found suitable. Over time, his disciples eventually became known as the Extortionists.

The Extortionists have never been common; the vast majority of the Yasuki prefer to make their profits through conventional trade rather than loans and interest payments. Recruits for the Extortionists are drawn from those in the family with considerable experience and a demonstrated talent for intimidation, along with the patience to distinguish real opportunities from those which only seem appealing. Extortionists are thus almost always veterans of the Yasuki courts, but with a skill set that is not often found in the family's ranks. During the brief period in the twelfth century when the family became split between the Crab and the Crane, the Extortionists remained entirely within the ranks of the Crab, knowing their methods would never be accepted by the overly honor-bound and traditionalist Crane.

Most Extortionists are not assigned to courts as such, but instead dispatched to those cities and castles where it is believed their unique skills will be useful; often the family conducts prior research to see whether a particular assignment will be an appropriate location for an Extortionist. At the end of the twelfth century, the Empire's settlement of the distant former Ivory Kingdoms creates new opportunities for the Extortionists, since everyone in the new Colonies needs money and the distance from Imperial authority makes intimidation and blackmail much more effective.

## Crab Clan: The Severed Hand

The group calling itself the "Severed Hand" has been around since the time of the first Yasuki War, although it has never been a large organization, having no more than a hundred members at its peak (shortly after the fall of the Hiruma lands to the Shadowlands). It is comprised entirely of Crab warriors who have been maimed or crippled in some fashion which makes them incapable of serving in on the front lines any longer, and who lack the skills or teaching capacities to serve as military advisers or as sensei. Whether or not they possess any real skill in the courts, these men and women are assigned to serve the Crab by maintaining a presence in the far-flung courts of the Empire. They are usually selected for this solely because they possess enough patience (or more rarely, charm) to tolerate the shallowness and idiocy (as the Crab see it) of the courts. Their capacity to tolerate the repeated misunderstandings of a Crab's duty makes them at least useful to the clan in some fashion. Those who take this duty seriously – which, given the nature of the Crab, is almost all of them – do their best to carry out their new role, and the Severed Hand emerged out of their efforts to share knowledge and resources with each other. Since its members have no formal courtly education, most of them develop their skills through personal experience, sometimes of a costly sort. They believed such experience should be shared as much as possible, since only through mutual cooperation can the Crab hope to protect the clan's interests in court. They correspond with each other whenever possible, sharing news and assessments of the situation in the courts.

The actual name of the Severed Hand is not generally known, although the Crab do not treat it as a secret, and those few who have heard of it do not usually mention it in Crab hearing. After all, it is both unwise and almost grotesquely impolite to remind a Crab warrior that he is no longer capable of serving his clan on the battlefield.

The Severed Hand has no formalized dojo; acceptance into its ranks is at the discretion of the existing members, who generally have little to no centralized leadership. The Hand is simply a community of like-minded brethren who do their best to aid each other in their duties, sharing their understanding of how to survive in the courts, and their Technique is spread through personal instruction. The "typical" member – if such can be said to exist – is a grizzled old veteran often glimpsed at the edge of the court, dismissed and ignored until he speaks. Usually only the wisest of courtiers are aware of them, and such persons give these Crab diplomats the respect they have earned through their prior service.

## Mantis Clan: The Yoritomo Sculptors

Outside of the Kitsune (who are an independent Minor Clan for almost their entire history), artistic inclination is rare among the Mantis. Sculpture is the exception to this tendency. Mantis sailors' penchant for wood-carving on long voyages slowly developed over time into a full-blown artistic tradition within the clan. Ever mindful of any resource they could exploit, the leaders of the Mantis saw in the practice a potential commodity, one with both commercial and political value. Over the years they began to nurture this potential through both private tutelage and political favors, often drawing on commercial ties with the Crane or the Phoenix to acquire the services of their artistic sensei. Eventually, Mantis sculpture advanced to the point of being able to maintain its own dojo and traditions without the need for outside assistance.

The talents of trained Mantis artisans are generally quite focused, centered entirely on the artform of sculpture – one which the rest of the Empire regards as a secondary artistic pursuit. As a result, there are distinct limits to their overall value. Still, netsuke are much sought-after for gifts, and temples often have need of statues, so the Mantis artistic training does earn them both political favor and a steady inflow of koku. While they are certainly not the most lucrative of the Mantis' activities, they are a consistent source of financial gain and political favor, with the added advantage of being a perfectly valid, civilized, and honorable practice for a samurai – in contrast to the rather mercantile and piratical activities which are the more typical Mantis practice.

The Technique of the Yoritomo Sculptors has actually been in existence far longer than the Yoritomo family name, and for most of its history the group is known simply as the Mantis Sculptors. Earlier training was often somewhat informal, with sensei and students practicing on ship-board in between their other duties, but with the Mantis' rise to prominence as a Great Clan the Yoritomo decided to bring such loose traditions into a more formal dojo-style environment as part of the general effort to impress the other clans with the Mantis' power and legitimacy. The more recent admission of the Kitsune to the Mantis Clan has provided a further source of artistic knowledge to enhance the Sculptors' training and expertise.

The other clans offer only begrudging respect to the Mantis Sculptors. The Kakita, in particular, show little to no deference toward their work and search for opportunities to disparage it. In point of fact, at least some of this attitude has derived from jealousy. While the Mantis are not widely known for their skilled artisans, the fact remains that their sculpture enjoys the blessing of a singular and dedicated focus, supported by multiple sources of training and inquiry. The truly gifted Mantis sculptors can give even the famed artisans of the Kakita and Shiba a challenge, at least within their chosen field.

## Mantis Clan: The Yoritomo Emissaries

The Yoritomo are not a people known for their patience. If anything, a hallmark of their history, their rise to power, their combat style, and their courtly methods is their impatience, their boldness, and their almost reckless drive toward success. The Emissaries are the solitary exception to this general habit, at least as far as organized traditions go. They are well-trained functionaries schooled in the arts of handling hostile negotiations with calm patience, displaying much greater subtlety than their fellow Yoritomo courtiers.

The Emissaries have a lengthy history within the Mantis Clan; their school of thought has existed ever since the era of White Stag. The level of hostility found in the negotiations with or relating to the gaijin – and the near-disaster for Mantis affairs which resulted from the final break with the gaijin – suggested that conventional Mantis methods of diplomacy were not always optimal in tense or dangerous situations. A calming, settled, and patient influence could provide an important counterpoint to the aggressive negotiations which the clan traditionally favored, especially in situations where it was important for everyone to remain safe. The Emissaries are nonetheless a small group, rarely seen outside of the Mantis Isles, their influence seldom felt in the Empire's courts. Until the time of the Clan War, Mantis interests on the mainland were spotty at best and usually conducted along the coastline.

It was only after the Mantis gained Great Clan status that the rest of the Empire began to notice a distinction between the majority of brash, thunderous Mantis diplomats and the minority of patient, enduring ones. (Interestingly, when they have made an impact their most prominent practitioners have been women, such as the famous Yoritomo Yoyonagi and her apprentice, Yoritomo Yashinko.)

The Emissaries tend to be used primarily in situations where hostilities are considered highly undesirable and thus the conventional Mantis methods would have the potential to be counterproductive. They are too few and thus too valuable to simply throw into harm's way, but at the same time their gifts are best used when there is at least some modicum of risk. Rare is the Emissary who does not have the service of at least one yojimbo, usually one capable of dueling better than the average Mantis samurai.

### Brotherhood of Shinsei: The Defenders of the Brotherhood

The Brotherhood of Shinsei generally holds itself apart from the Empire's politics, but on some occasions they do send emissaries to the courts to make sure their own concerns are properly expressed. This is most likely to happen during periods of war, strife, or natural disaster, when the Brotherhood's concerns for the common people is most likely to be ignored or forgotten by the samurai caste. The Brotherhood must also make sure its own holdings are properly protected during difficult times, since samurai often neglect the protection of shrines and temples when their attention is focused on warfare, sieges, and conquest. Over the centuries, those of the Brotherhood with an aptitude for patient diplomacy have devised a Technique which is now taught within several monastic orders. The Defenders of the Brotherhood are most commonly found among the more peaceful and contemplative sects, such as the Temple of Kaimetsu-Uo, but even the sohei of Osano-Wo have occasionally trained their monks in its simple but effective methods.

Like many social efforts built around the Element of Earth, the Technique of the Defenders is focused on patience and resilience, enduring the vagaries of the court and avoiding giving offense until the time comes to speak. The Brotherhood cannot threaten economic or military reprisals against those who offend it – indeed most of the sects act on their own, with little to no sense of unity – but the moral judgment and theological authority of an enlightened monk can be powerful forces in their own right. By calling on these assets, the Defenders can ensure the voice of the Brotherhood is heard at court and its modest interests are protected from harm.

The Defenders do not wear a mon or other symbol, and they are outwardly impossible to distinguish from any other member of the Brotherhood who might be attending the courts. Like most such monks, they usually blend into the court at large, their presence barely visible. Only when they are truly needed do they emerge from the wings to plead the case of the Brotherhood and to speak for its principles and beliefs.

## Courts of the Earth

Rokugan's most well-known courts are oriented toward the methods and traditions of other Elements, most notably Air. However, a few courts and strongholds do seem to have a certain affinity for the ways of Earth. This section presents detailed descriptions of three such courts.

### Kyuden Gotei

Few visitors to the Islands of Spice and Silk can say that they have ever seen a city quite like Kyuden Gotei. By the standards of the Empire at large, it is unique both in the way it is organized and (above all) in its opulence. While no other mainland settlement would ever dare to rival the grandeur of the Imperial City, Kyuden Gotei has never held itself back on such an account, and in some ways it easily outstrips the glory of the capitol. The Mantis only get away with this because of their relative isolation and the Empire's dismissal of their gaudy style; on the mainland only a madman would attempt to build a city so garish and ostentatious, and with so much foreign influence. The sheer in-your-face garishness of Kyuden Gotei is so distracting and shocking to most visitors that they do not even realize its opulence vastly exceeds even the finest cities on the mainland. It also helps that it is difficult to clearly tell whether the castle itself is in fact larger than the Imperial Palace, at least not without extensive investigations that have never occurred.

Kyuden Gotei stands as a physical testament to the wealth of the Mantis. Although the Mantis are the smallest of the Great Clans (by a large margin compared to any other clan save perhaps the Phoenix in their more beleaguered times), they are disproportionately wealthy to a degree that would put several Great Clans to shame, and have been

for many centuries. Only the Crane and the Unicorn can consistently rival the sheer financial wealth that is at the beck and call of the Mantis Clan. While other clans have seen their circumstances improve for brief periods, the Mantis Clan's near total domination of the Empire's sea trade for the better portion of twelve hundred years has permitted the clan to collect wealth that practically defies imagination. To be sure, this apparent power is mitigated by the fact that the rest of the Empire sees ostentation and open use of commerce as embarrassing and even occasionally dishonorable behaviors. However, in Kyuden Gotei no such limitations are recognized and the sensibilities of guests are seldom considered. This is a city of the Mantis, not a mainland port where "outdated" samurai views of how the world should work still prevail. Here, wealth is not merely displayed, it is paraded openly and gloated over.

The castle of Kyuden Gotei itself looms above a sprawling metropolis, third in size within the Empire behind the Imperial City and Ryoko Owari; indeed, the city takes up the lion's share of the largest island in the Islands of Spice and Silk. The castle began as a single building constructed by the clan's founder Kaimetsu-Uo, and has since grown into a titanic and sprawling complex. Decked in jewels, gold, brilliant colors, bright lanterns, and the finest of artwork (both Rokugani and foreign), Kyuden Gotei is a gaudy bauble of a castle, and is known to be clearly visible from miles away as one approaches the island. Its rooms are apportioned in the most lavish manner, and even the most politically weak and insignificant of visitors, the lowest of scum who stands opposed to the interests of the Mantis, are housed in a comfort that would shame the wealthiest city governors on the mainland. Guests with any sort of real wealth, prominence, or use to the clan are generally cared for to a point of luxury that makes many visitors downright uncomfortable.

Part of this behavior is simply habit, the side effect of a thousand of years of development on remote islands while gathering massive financial resources. But much of it is quite intentional by the Mantis Clan, especially after they attain Great Clan status. The clan knew if it was to thrive in its new position it would have to accumulate political favors and influence. Playing off of the simple reality of human greed, the Mantis deliberately display the full glory of what gold is capable of achieving. Moreover, they know this display puts samurai from the most traditional of clans on edge, making it difficult for them to react as they would in their own lands. Mantis Clan courtiers often rely on this 'home-field advantage' in their negotiations, and prefer to hold all the most important discussions for their clan in their own holdings so as to ensure they have this resource behind them.

The surrounding city is a sprawling, massive metropolis, and hints of gaijin influence are seen throughout its streets – albeit restrained enough to avoid being labeled blasphemous by guests from the Empire. Due to the semi-tropical climate, the inhabitants – both samurai and commoners – tend to dress more lightly on the Islands, to the point of bordering on outright scandal by conventional Rokugani standards. Of course, they can always plead the practical realities of their homeland to any who might try to make a political issue of their dress. In fact, the Mantis often politely suggest their guests should dress similarly lest they suffer from heat prostration. For those too conventional in attitude to embrace such clothing, the Mantis often offer regular kimono crafted from the most light-weight fabrics, allowing their guests to maintain both propriety and health – and thereby indebting themselves to their hosts.

Kyuden Gotei is probably the most exotic place within historical Rokugan (excluding, that is, the foreign lands which are settled during the reign of Empress Iweko I). It is welcoming to guests, presenting an atmosphere of warmth and invitation, but its hospitality is confusing, dizzying, and often overwhelming to those from the mainland Empire who are unprepared for it. Courtiers assigned to the city are usually seasoned diplomats with friends among the Mantis, their station just low enough that they can be permanently assigned to the Islands and thus be able to acclimate to their strangeness.

### The Yoritomo Elite Guard Barracks

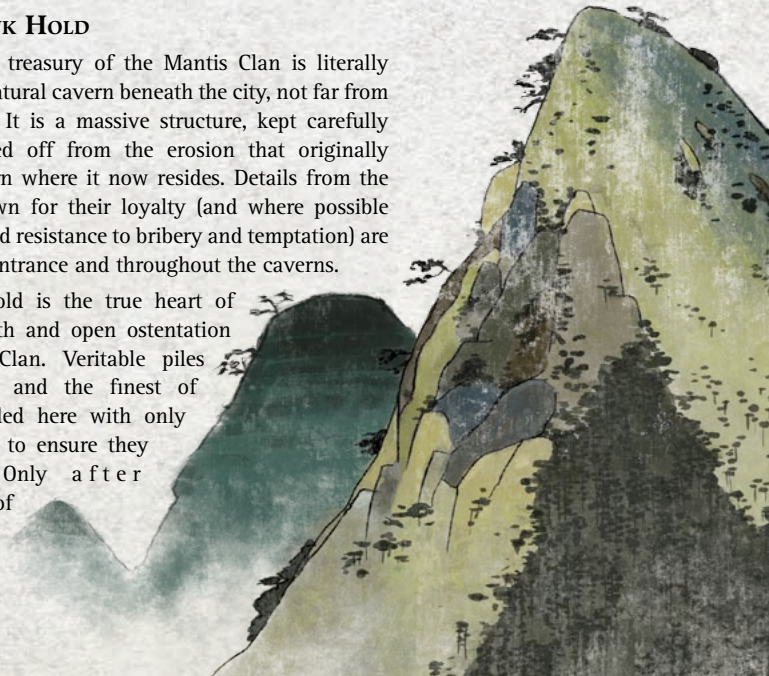
The official barracks of the Mantis Clan's elite military unit is housed in an unusual location by the standards of the Great Clans: for generations it has been stationed directly adjacent to the main palace in its open courtyard. The barracks can easily house several hundred troops, and the location offers easy access to both the city outside and to the castle itself. While the Elite Guard is specifically tasked with only the most honorable, pivotal, and dangerous assignments, the Mantis Clan's leadership has always appreciated having access to this unit at a moment's notice. Such access has rarely actually been needed, but when such occasions have arisen – most notably during the civil war between Yoritomo Kumiko and Yoritomo Kitao – the Elite Guard's convenient location has been critical.

The actual facilities are likewise arranged for swift deployment, a hallmark of the Mantis military. Weapons and armor are kept ready to hand at all times. It may be noted that Mantis weaponry and protection, like that of their Crab cousins, is functional, efficient, and lacks any shred of beauty or aesthetic design. Likewise the barracks themselves are built for functionality, making them a blunt contrast to the gaudy splendor of the palace itself.

### Heaven's Bank Hold

The legendary treasury of the Mantis Clan is literally carved out of a natural cavern beneath the city, not far from the palace itself. It is a massive structure, kept carefully secure and sealed off from the erosion that originally created the cavern where it now resides. Details from the Elite Guard known for their loyalty (and where possible their demonstrated resistance to bribery and temptation) are stationed at the entrance and throughout the caverns.

Within the Hold is the true heart of the glaring wealth and open ostentation of the Mantis Clan. Veritable piles of gold, jewels, and the finest of valuables are piled here with only a minimal effort to ensure they are well sorted. Only after the founding of



the Iweko Dynasty, with the rise of the Imperial Treasury and the appointment of the skilled merchant Yoritomo Utaemaro as its head, did this vast stockpile of wealth become well-organized. Regardless of era, though, a literal Emperor's ransom can be found within the cavern, along with numerous unique items of historical and mystical significance, such as Kaimetsu-Uo's Ono, Gusai's infamous dagger, and crystal weapons imported from the Burning Sands.

The Hold is also fascinating for those among the Mantis who study the ways of the gaijin. Within its depths can be found countless examples of art and artifice from the Ivory Kingdoms, the distant lands of the Thrane and the Merenae, and even several articles imported from the Burning Sands via contacts within the Unicorn. These items are carefully stored and guarded here, serving not only as treasures of the clan but also as pieces of history and esoteric wisdom, studied by the scholars and emissaries of the Mantis to prepare for future interactions with these cultures.

### The Gotai Province Harbor

The marketplaces of the city are found by the docks, where the bustle of Rokugan's busiest port endures throughout the day. It is generally agreed that Kyuden Gotei's sprawling bay is the single most active harbor in the entirety of the Empire, and its massive docks are designed to accommodate hundreds of vessels at a time – including ships of sizes significantly greater than those officially permitted by Imperial Law. To those who are intimately familiar with either the ways of the gaijin or of Rokugani sailing, the nature of the harbor is clear: it is designed to handle traffic with vessels that are not of Rokugani origin. This unadmitted change in design began during the White Stag era, when the Mantis hoped to usher in an age of booming foreign trade, and has been quietly maintained ever since.

The harbor exhibits a near-constant buzz of activity. Haggling can be heard from peasants and samurai alike, all under the watchful eyes of Mantis tax collectors, harbormasters, and soldiers. Despite the massive amount of activity, the area is in fact one of the most peaceful in the entire city. The wealth of the Mantis is constantly pouring into the city through this port, so the clan will not permit it to fall into confusion, disarray, or chaos. Doing so damages the bottom line, and since the clan's wealth is its greatest weapon they will never willingly damage it. Almost anything can be found in the markets attached to this port, but especially prominent within these walkways are vast supplies of exotic spices, strange foods, and even the occasional gaijin curiosity. No weapons of gaijin make, however, are ever found on the docks – the Mantis know better than to let such imports be seen in public, given the Imperial decrees associated with them.

### The Sea Eel's Smile

It may not sound like the most auspicious of locations, but this restaurant is widely known by the locals as home to the finest sushi in all of Kyuden Gotei. For it to hold such a reputation in a city so close to the bounty of the sea is a testimony to the gifts of the family which runs it and their contacts in the local fishing communities. The same family of heimin has run this establishment for the better portion of eight centuries, passing down secrets of sushi preparation which they guard as zealously as any dojo protects its martial techniques.

The Sea Eel's Smile is well known for its specialty works with its namesake eel, as well as with a variety of fish, including the deeply-prized fugu: pufferfish. Fugu is beloved by connoisseurs of fine sushi all across the Empire, but it is extremely difficult to prepare safely – the poisonous glands in the fish contaminate the flesh with lethal effect if the sushi is not prepared properly. While those skilled in its preparation can be found in many places, it is the pride of this establishment to believe and boast that its chefs have mastered the art of its preparation in ways none can rival. Certainly no other restaurant has tried to challenge their claim, and this helps explain the almost kingly prices they command for the delicacy.

## Face of the East Castle

The Crab lands are considered by most to be anything but hospitable for diplomatic negotiations. Kyuden Hida may be a nearly impenetrable military fortress, but it is certainly not a pleasant location for visiting dignitaries, nor is it entirely safe for all its formidable nature. The castle may have no obvious flaws, but infiltration attacks still take place and these can endanger guests of the Crab. The same can be said of any of the principle fortresses of the Kaiu Kabe, often to an even greater extent. The Black Crane Palace, safely ensconced on the shore of Earthquake Fish Bay, is a much more civilized and amenable location – but the reputation of the Yasuki family, in combination with the fierce hostility the location evokes in Crane visitors, makes it impossible for this castle to serve as a universal diplomatic location. As a result, over the course of centuries the fortress of Shiro Kaotsuki no Higashi, the Face of the East, has become the clan's other primary choice for receiving political envoys.

The castle stands between the Twilight Mountains and the Shinomen Mori's southern edges. While this location does have some distant proximity to the Shadowlands, the castle is guarded by leagues of distance and the finest soldiers that the Crab can spare from their endless war against the hordes of Jigoku. It is a rare period in history when the castle has even been threatened for any length of time, much less actually suffered damage. In addition, with no significant threats towards the north (save potentially the Unicorn lands, though even they are quite distant), none to the east due to the Shinomen Mori, and a buffer zone of Minor Clan holdings to the west, even in times of war this is perhaps one of the only truly peaceful locations in the

entirety of the Crab Clan's lands. Thus, visiting dignitaries are generally able to conduct their business with the Crab without undue danger or incident.

By the standards of most other courts in the Empire, Shiro Kaotsuki no Higashi is a spartan place. Even Shiro Mirumoto offers greater comforts for its guests and a wider range of entertainment to please them. By the standards of Crab lands, however, this castle is almost palatial in its offerings; the Crab rely on the Yasuki to provide these fripperies, since the rest of the clan simply does not have much tolerance for finery or distractions. In addition to making sure the basic needs of courtesy are fulfilled, the Yasuki also take great pains to ensure any guest is never far from the realization of what the Crab do for the sake of the Empire. The lands around Face of the East are kept bleakly militaristic not only because of general Crab tendencies but also to show visitors what it is to live in the clan's lands. Yasuki diplomats apologize profusely at every turn for the castle's limited accommodations, while reminding guests that the majority of this year's rice harvest must go to the troops who stand on the Wall. They offer the finest of artistic works from their people, always themed to remind those present of what the Crab do and what price they pay. Entertainment is provided, but always with the spoken and unspoken understanding that such things are denied to the Crab warriors who do not have time for such pleasures. The cumulative effect can be staggering to guests, especially those not well-trained in resisting manipulation. For the strong-willed and cold-hearted, the Yasuki can always offer material goods.

The principle negotiations that occur in this castle and its surrounding town are financial and mercantile in nature. Most envoys in Crab lands are specifically trade representatives from the other Great Clans, sent for the purpose of setting prices and deciding necessary goods that will be traded with the clan. The Yasuki use the negotiations here to make as many different deals as possible, maximizing the Crab Clan's access to the goods it needs. Although the surrounding city is of only moderate size, the Yasuki make sure it has access to any normal goods and quite a few exotic items as well. This ensures they always have what they require to meet others' desires and thus assist their negotiations.

The only periods in which this castle was not used as a center of negotiations were in the war-torn twelfth century, particularly in the Four Winds era and during the later Kali-Ma Invasion. During these periods the scale of conflict in the Empire was so great, including major Shadowlands incursions, that even the Face of the East was not necessarily safe for visiting dignitaries. During these times the Crab made do with other less-suitable locations, such as Watchtower of the East Castle.

### Golden Carp Marketplace

Off to the side of the main marketplaces in the modest city attached to Shiro Kaotsuki no Higashi is a place known to those in the know as the Golden Carp. The Yasuki do not officially acknowledge that this market exists, for it trades in goods and services which must be kept out of the sight of magistrates. More illicit and questionable deals are brokered in these shadowed streets than in any other place within the Crab lands. Most locals are aware of the existence of the Golden Carp but avoid speaking of it aloud in order to maintain appearances. Virtually anything – short of items of an outright blasphemous nature – can be bought or sold in the Golden Carp market.

One of the more noteworthy elements of the Golden Carp is that it is an entry point for a great deal of gaijin trade into the mainland of the Empire. When the Unicorn Clan wishes to move foreign merchandise that might draw too much direct disapproval from the rest of Rokugan, it generally does so through the more flexible Crab markets rather than risk owing favors to the Scorpion (the other clan that deals with illicit goods on a large scale). The Golden Carp is the main intermediate destination of these goods prior to their being shipped on into the broader Empire. Since the Yasuki know how valuable this trade is for them, they make a point of treating their Unicorn trading partners fairly (as opposed to the far more ruthless and rapacious methods they use in their dealings with other clans).

### The Shell of Stone Distillery

While the Shell of Stone would never claim to be one of the best distillaries in the Empire (and would certainly not claim to rival the famous Friendly Traveler Village Sake from the southern Crab lands), it has nonetheless established a long-standing reputation for a good-quality product. It specializes in the brewing of shochu, and notably strong shochu at that.

The Shell of Stone's special product is Mugijōchū, an extremely potent barley shochu with a very strong and sharp flavor. It is some of the most powerful alcohol permitted in the Empire, and while it is generally frowned-upon in higher echelons of society, but for those with a taste for potent drinks it is considered one of the best. The Shell also occasionally experiments with the distillation of other substances such as potatoes and buckwheat, though none of these concoctions have gained any popularity so far. Mugijōchū remains the distillery's prize product, and a major source of profit for the Yasuki.

### House of a Thousand Truths

This inn is seemingly quite unremarkable, and in fact of sufficiently low quality that most samurai, even Minor Clan samurai, never look at it twice. However, its condition never declines enough that it might be torn down or destroyed. Only ronin ever frequent the establishment, along with the occasional Crab magistrate going to collect a bribe. In reality, The House of a Thousand Truths is a front for the Yasuki-operated smuggling ring known as the Scales of the Carp. Comprised of ronin merchants and smugglers, the Scales of the Crab is a cutthroat group which respects only the orders of its Yasuki patrons. Illegal goods, including those fenced through the Golden Carp marketplace, are controlled and distributed from here, at a hefty profit for the smugglers' Yasuki masters.

### The Dens

Outside of the city, known only to those of the Crab who pay attention, is a set of caves used by occasional transient nezumi populations. Nezumi wanderers and scroungers sometimes enter the city from here. The Crab maintain an understanding with the creatures so long as they keep their activity clandestine and cause no significant trouble within the city. This allows occasional but sometimes valuable trade with the nezumi. The only period when this does not occur is in the early twelfth century when the ancient Naga race awakens – Face of the East Castle is their most frequent point of contact with the Crab Clan, and the nezumi make sure to stay well away when the snake-men are about.

## Shiro Mirumoto

While in modern times the lands of the Kitsuki family and the Dragonfly Clan are the principle entry points to the Dragon Clan's provinces, it is Shiro Mirumoto that always serves as the predominant Dragon court. Shiro Kitsuki does not even exist until the family is founded in the ninth century, and the Kitsuki are too eccentric in their views to be comfortable hosts for the majority of samurai from other clans. The Dragonfly, of course, are a Minor Clan and one whose very existence is a source of trouble with the neighboring Lion. The Agasha (and later Tamori) lands are both too distant and too volatile with earthquakes and volcanoes for regular diplomatic traffic. And of course the High House of Light, technically the seat of power for the clan through most of its history, is so remote and inaccessible as to make a court there very difficult, to say the least. Shiro Mirumoto has always been just accessible enough and large enough to manage the main courts of the Dragon.

Shiro Mirumoto has been described with the same word by almost everyone who visits the lands of the Dragon: "Functional." It is a seat of stability, a calm and peaceful place. The accommodations are pleasant but not luxurious. Guests in the castle are offered a wide assortment of contemplative and erudite diversions to occupy their time. For those who are more accustomed to things like fine

geisha houses, opulent theaters, grand displays of the arts, and splendid festivals, the castle's style can be somewhat off-putting. Priests, scholars, historians, and other such meditative souls find Shiro Mirumoto to be not only peaceful but even pleasant and enlightening. The castle exudes an air of quiet contemplation, offering all that is expected of the samurai life – and nothing more.

Although any practical need can be found in the castle or the surrounding city, the arts are not represented in any substantial way beyond what is expected and required. The military might of the Dragon is certainly visible here, albeit in a restrained way – there are plenty of dojo, but relatively few barracks and fortifications, since the mountains themselves are a more powerful defense than any walls and the soldiers of the clan are better stationed in the more open lands to the south. The castle does boast several libraries, although the selection is not as impressive as can be found in the castles of the Agasha and Tamori castles (or the Isawa and Ikoma, for that matter). Shiro Mirumoto does all things in moderation: nothing is lacking, but at the same time nothing is ever as fine or as impressive as one can find in other courts.

To the Dragon, this is all as it should be. Shiro Mirumoto represents both the methodical and precise attitude of the family and the thorough and meditative nature of the Dragon as a whole. It is a place of calm stability, of patience and contemplation; it is not mired in the obsession over perfection found in the Kakita, or the obsession with politics in the Bayushi. It is not a place of opulent palaces or ostentation. It lacks the subtleties and nuances of courts that are centered on Air or Water. While many of the actual schools within the Dragon Clan do not center on the elemental nature of Earth, their principle court certainly does.

Guests who attend the court of Shiro Mirumoto rarely speak ill of their time there. The Dragon are impeccable hosts and go out of their way to make sure their guests never experience any sort of unpleasantness. Overall, the goal of the clan is to carefully avoid producing any sort of offense or inter-clan incident; generally, their goal is fulfilled.

### The Great Study

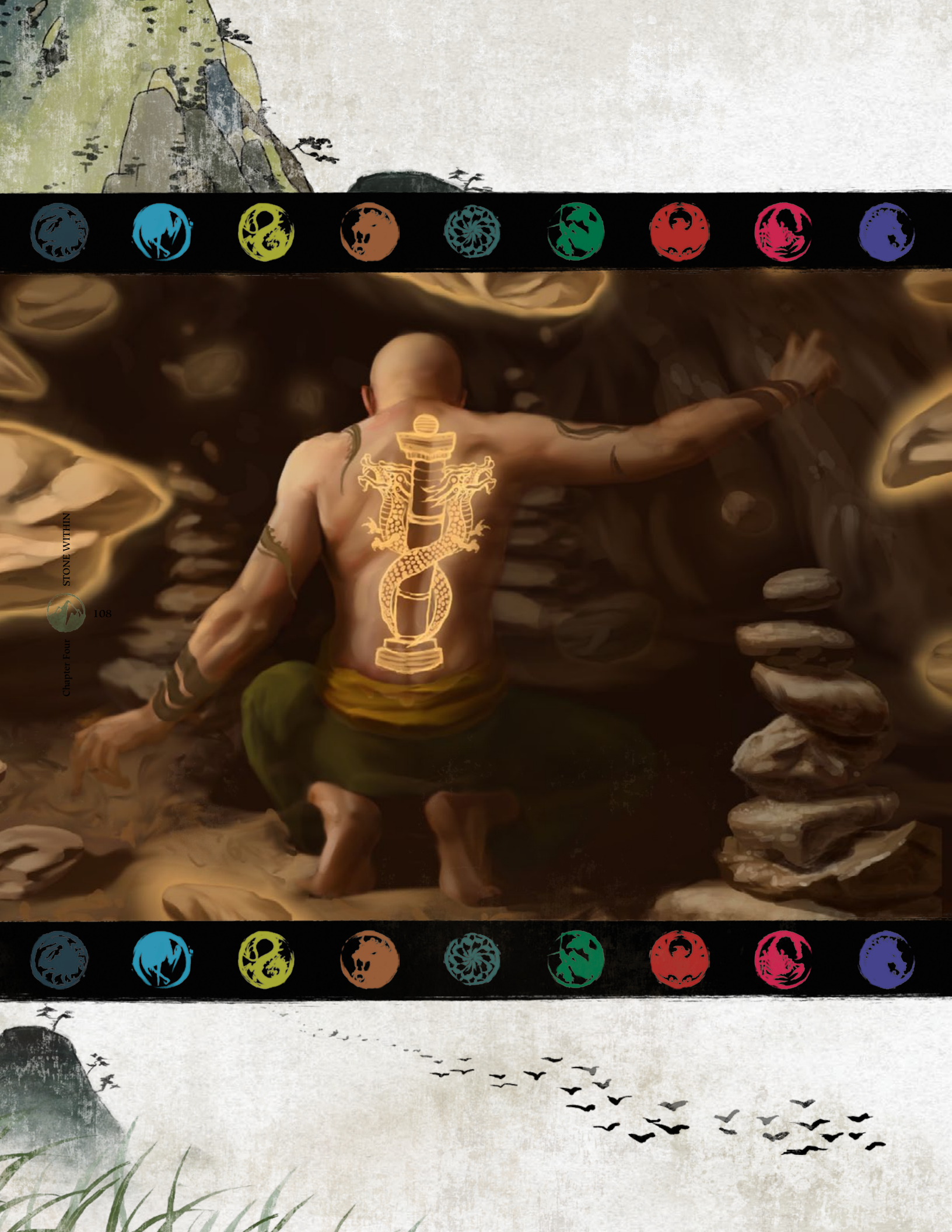
Located deep beneath Shiro Mirumoto, this structure is the creation of Mirumoto Daisuke, a paranoid family daimyo from the third century. Originally the massive hidden chamber was stocked with a huge supply of foodstuffs, presumably in case of an attack on the castle (even though no such attack had ever taken place or even been threatened). Ultimately, after Daisuke's death the hidden storage chamber was emptied out and largely ignored over later centuries. Every daimyo knew it was there, and the military functionality of it was never questioned, though Daisuke's paranoia was politely not discussed. However, in the wake of the Dragon-Phoenix war in the Four Winds era, the family discovered a new use for the location.

The Mirumoto had become deeply concerned about the hundreds of ancient nemuranai scattered across the Empire, whose potential misuse could cause untold problems. Under the orders of Mirumoto Uso, the family daimyo of that era, all Dragon nemuranai were brought to the underground chamber at Shiro Mirumoto, which was renamed the Great Study. There they were studied, catalogued, and kept under careful guard. Soon the Dragon began to retrieve items from elsewhere in the Empire, quietly bringing them back to the Great Study; these included such legendary artifacts as the Armor of Sun Tao, the Jade Goblet of Otosan Uchi, and many others. While attempts to catalogue the treasures of other clans were largely rebuffed, a few notable individuals did donate their personal possessions to the Study – most infamously, the Lion samurai Akodo Ginawa, who relinquished the fearsome bloodsword Revenge to the Mirumoto family's care.

### Iron Mountain Dojo

Situated on a mountainside less than a mile from the walls of Shiro Mirumoto, this Dojo sits on the original planned location for the castle. The rugged and jagged terrain ultimately proved unsuitable for a proper castle, but was deemed more than sufficient for a martial dojo, and it soon became one of the preeminent dojo of the clan. The Iron Mountain Dojo is a modest structure, just as functional in nature as the castle in the valley below, and despite its relatively short distance away it can only be reached via a long and arduous climb. This is considered to be part of the training for the dojo's students.

The jagged and rocky terrain around the dojo is not particularly kind to the unwary; however, this allows it to offer a uniquely rigorous type of training that meshes well with the meditative style of the swordmasters of the Mirumoto. The dojo is the home for the Mirumoto Mountaineers, a small order of warriors who specialize in fighting within the jagged landscape of the Dragon Mountains. Guests at the dojo are infrequent, even when the Dragon host a Winter Court, since the inhospitable landscape makes it quite forbidding to outsiders.



# Stone Within



*Taka knelt in a meditative pose and stared at the huge stone slab that sat before him. It was worn smooth on the surface facing him, but other than that it was roughly-hewn, a vaguely square-shaped block raised on a pedestal in the courtyard. It was unusual as shrines go, but this was the temple's shrine to Kisada, the Fortune of Persistence. It had endured much, and it remained. The lesson was obvious.*

*What was not obvious, Taka reflected sourly, was what he was doing here.*

*The initiate had been in the courtyard for more than ten hours at this point. He had arrived mid-morning, and now the Sun had fallen behind the mountains, casting long shadows over the temple compound. He had been instructed to ask the rock to break. Those were the exact words his master had used. "Ask the rock to break," Mokku had said with that almost-smile he saved for the times he knew something no one else knew.*

*At first Taka had thought his master was telling a joke. Asking a rock to break? But Mokku did not follow up with any further joke or any admission that he was teasing. Instead, the senior monk had simply waited for his young student to leave and go about the task he had been given.*

*And so, many hours later, Taka still knelt before the rock, dissecting the situation in his mind. At first he had approached the problem with the most obvious answer. He had knelt, prayed to the Fortune of Persistence in devotion, and then spoke aloud a request for the rock to break itself. Taka was something of a blunt thinker, which was why he fit in so well with the Order of the Nameless Gift, so it stood to reason this was merely a test to reinforce his point of view.*

*After the rock did not in fact split – or even crack a little bit – the young monk began trying to find more metaphorical ways to interpret his master's request. Perhaps asking meant talking in a language the rock understood. Or interacting with it in a way the rock recognized. So he examined the large stone for awhile, looking for a weakness in its surface. There was none. He splashed it with a bucket of water – after all, there were countless metaphors about how the sea could wear away stone – but that did not accomplish anything save make him look a little odd to the other monks passing by.*

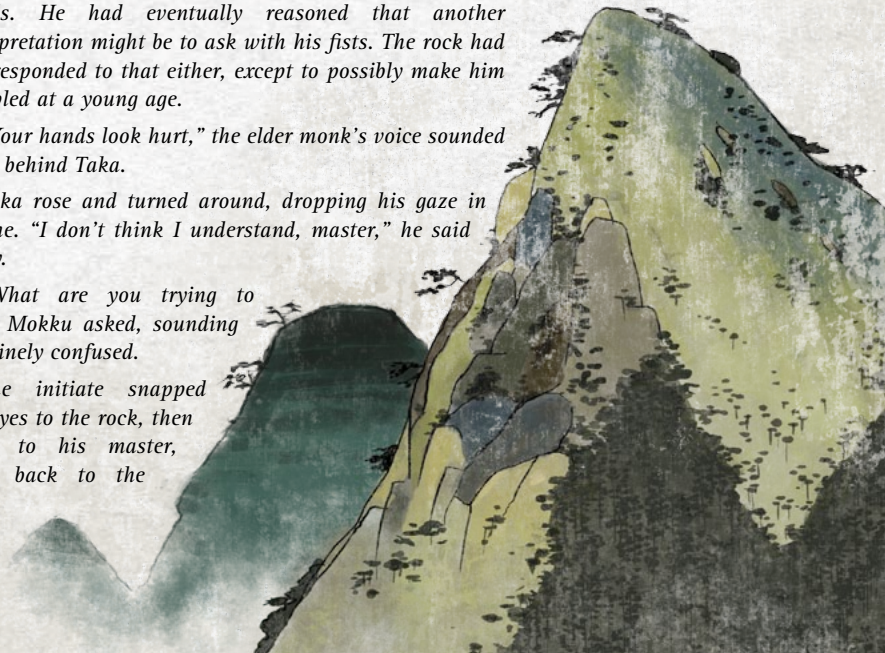
*Now, Taka looked down at his aching and bleeding hands. He had eventually reasoned that another interpretation might be to ask with his fists. The rock had not responded to that either, except to possibly make him crippled at a young age.*

*"Your hands look hurt," the elder monk's voice sounded from behind Taka.*

*Taka rose and turned around, dropping his gaze in shame. "I don't think I understand, master," he said sadly.*

*"What are you trying to do?" Mokku asked, sounding genuinely confused.*

*The initiate snapped his eyes to the rock, then back to his master, then back to the*



*rock again. Surely now Mokku was toying with him. "I am doing what you required. I'm trying to get the rock to break. I'm asking it to break, and it won't."*

*Mokku raised an eyebrow. "That's ridiculous," he said. "How would you possibly be able to do that? Look at that thing, it's easily heavier than twenty Crab warriors and just about as dense."*

*"But... master," Taka said, pleading. "You asked me to!"*

*"Well of course I did, initiate, do you think I had forgotten?"*

*Taka cleared his throat and looked down again. "Ah... no, master. My apologies."*

*"It's a huge rock, Taka, it won't break if you ask it," Mokku said, gesturing at the stone. "You could have just said, 'No, Master, I can't do that. It's a huge rock and it won't break if I ask it.'"*

*A moment of silence passed as Taka's mouth twisted, trying to find words.*

*"Now go clean up your hands, you might get an infection," the older monk said, turning to go. "Sometimes you just have to accept that the rock won't break."*

# Monastic Orders: The Ways of Earth

While monks do not directly channel the power of the Elements in the manner a shugenja does, many monastic orders are drawn to a particular Element or find that their philosophy aligns naturally with one. In the case of the Element of Earth, this association, either purposefully or coincidentally, causes monks to become masters of patience and endurance. While different Orders that find themselves aligned with Earth can have different goals, how they attain them and the attitudes they take along they way tend to be similar. The calm, unflappable monks found in so many peasant tales are usually from Earth orders.

## Shrine of the Seven Thunders

Monks trained by the Shrine of the Seven Thunders are common throughout the Empire, unsurprising given that the figures they revere and study play such a powerful role in Rokugan's history. When Shinsei led the Seven Thunders to success at the first Day of Thunder, many monks saw the Thunders as quasi-divine beings. Though the Thunders were mortal, they were viewed not just as individuals but as expressions of harmony and purpose. The monks certainly knew the Thunders were mortal men and women, not perfect or flawless by any stretch of the imagination. However, the Thunders also seemed to represent primal forces of the universe made manifest in intelligent beings. This idea quickly grew into the concept that the Thunders were powerful enough to defy the Dark Kami not because they were strong or skilled but because they moved in harmony with creation itself. In short, they were able to defeat the champion of Jigoku because those in harmony with creation could change the world.

The teachings of the first Shrine of the Seven Thunders spread like wildfire. After all, the Thunders were known throughout the young Empire and many wished to know the secret of how these men and women had triumphed. Unfortunately for the monks of the order, many visitors sought to study the Seven Thunders for selfish reasons. They reasoned that if such mortals could slay a god, surely learning their ways could not fail to bring great power. Of neccessity the early monks quickly learned how to weed out such misguided adherents, either rejecting them from the Order or trying to enlighten them instead. With time, many of the Shrine's monks came to believe such misguided men and women had come to them so they could be taught the error of their ways.

This attitude met with mixed success. Some initiates were able to be taught the error of their ways, but others felt tricked and deceived by the monks. After all, had not these seekers of enlightenment spoken about the power of the Seven Thunders? Now they wanted to keep such secrets to themselves. Eventually, the monks found they had made some powerful enemies among those they had rebuffed, and the Order was almost snuffed out when an unlikely alliance of Lion and Scorpion politicians brought a petition to the Imperial Court, claiming the Shrine of the Seven Thunders was teaching heresies.

Fortunately, the then-current Emperor, Hantei IV (Hantei Bosai), was well-disposed toward the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Though the representatives of the two clans made a strong case against the members of the Order, the Emperor did not rule immediatey, instead calling on his advisors in the Seppun to investigate these claims and return to him. And while it was no secret the Seppun family were also friendly with the various sects of the Brotherhood, not even the Scorpion dared to question their integrity.

After the Seppun returned and offered their suggestions, Hantei IV's final decree was that the monks of the Shrine of Seven Thunders were to be regarded as teachers, historians, and scholars. In that, they were free to share their information or keep it secret as they pleased – save at the direct decree of the Emperor or his agents. The Lion and Scorpion could not argue against such a precedent, understanding their own texts and secrets could likewise become a matter of public inquiry if they were to do so.

Since that time, the monks of the Shrine of the Seven Thunders have been free to study and meditate as they see fit, and the Order has spread across the Empire, constructing many lesser shrines and temples throughout the land. The monks of this Order place great value on quiet, contemplative harmony with the universe. They teach that true strength does not come from a great mind, powerful weapons, or even from energies of the kami. Instead, stillness and acceptance lead to a clear mind that allows one to hear the voice of the Heavens and operate in harmony with the universe, thereby doing truly great deeds.

To the members of the Order, the Seven Thunders themselves are less individuals and more like ideals. The monks view each Thunder (and their later reincarnations at the Second Day of Thunder) as a certain mix of the Elements and of the strengths and weaknesses of mortal men. The monks are free to make focused studies on the different Elements as they choose, but the Shrine's teachings promote the idea of balance in all things, and its emphasis on meditative introspection, stillness, and calm minds makes it very much an order dominated by the ideals of Earth, even for those who devote themselves to the mysteries of Fire, Air, or Water.

Above all else, the monks of the Shrine of Seven Thunders are scholars, and their studies are never-ending. They follow Shinsei's dictum that true learning never ends, and the title "Master" in their temples means very little – such positions are more for the sake of organization and administration than anything else. Once initiates have proven themselves, they are given as much respect as a monk who has spent decades among the order.

## The Temples of Kaimetsu-uo

The monks of the Temples of Kaimetsu-uo hold an odd place in Rokugan, and have since their inception. The order is named for the founder of the Mantis Clan, a grandson of Hida known for his bravery and bold nature. When Kaimetsu-uo learned his half-peasant brother had been named heir to the Crab Clan, he took his mother and left the clan. Although he would have been well within his rights to demand to stay in Crab lands, instead the son of Osano-Wo accepted his destiny, believing his place was no longer in his father's lands. To many, especially his descendents in the Mantis Clan, this paints the picture of a heroic man grasping for his own fate with both hands. To a small sect of monks that heard his tale a generation later, it was instead the actions of an elevated soul who sought his proper place in the Celestial Order. This group of Fortunist monks, who dwelt near Otosan Uchi, studied the young man's tale and were profoundly moved by it.

### The Symbolism of the Seven Thunders

The Order of the Seven Thunders claims these great mortal heroes are actually expressions of certain powerful ideals, ideals the Order uses to intuit the correct path of all creation as driven by mortal will. Each Thunder represents not a reincarnation of previous Thunders, but something of a shared place in the universe that creates a similar connection between mortal spirits.

The Crab Thunder represents the avatar of Protection, which denies corrupting influence not only through endurance, but through expulsion.

The Crane Thunder represents the avatar of Honor, which creates an identity and discipline to hold on to in times of strife.

The Dragon Thunder represents the avatar of Knowledge, which gathers secrets bravely, and guards against those who might misuse them.

The Lion Thunder represents the avatar of Purity, which maintains its ideals against all odds, even in the face of death.

The Phoenix Thunder represents the avatar of Rebirth, which renews the purpose and vigor of the worthy, forever rewarding noble sacrifice.

The Scorpion Thunder represents the avatar of Destruction, which clears away all that must be removed for defying Heaven.

The Unicorn Thunder represents the avatar of Mercy, extending the hand of compassion and grace, marking the difference between a samurai and a butcher.

Eventually these monks petitioned the Emperor to grant Kaimetsu-uo the status of a Fortune, the Fortune of Serenity. Hantei Genji was aware that Kaimetsu-uo's father, Hida Osano-Wo, was already the Fortune of Fire and Thunder, and he was moved by the tale of Kaimetsu-uo. However, the Shining Prince was also wary of the idea of Celestial Dynasties that were not of the Emperor's line. As gently as he could, he denied the petition, citing as his reason that while it was well meaning it created an unintentional insult to Hotei, the Fortune of Contentment. Taking Kaimetsu-uo's example to heart, the monks accepted the Emperor's judgement gladly and set about making their own way. They officially named their order after Kaimetsu-uo's memory and began to study how his actions could be emulated. In short, they believed he was an enlightened soul and his example should be followed (or at least studied) by all those who sought enlightenment.

The monks claimed Kaimetsu-uo's greatest acts were due to his need to seek peace and harmony, rather than conflict.

First, before he would go on to found the Mantis Clan, he had to let go of the resentment he felt toward his father and brother.

Second, when Osano-wo was killed, Kaimetsu-uo could have stormed the Phoenix castle that harbored his father's murderer. Instead, he pled to the spirit of his father and to the Fortunes, and was rewarded with fire and thunder from the Heavens. In this, he avoided needless conflict by showing the Phoenix a Celestial sign they could understand and respect.

Finally, the monks believed even his choice of a birthplace for his new clan – the remote Islands of Spice and Silk – signified his need to remain apart from the political and military conflicts of the Empire.

From all of this the monks derived their new Order's teachings. Peace, understanding, and a patience born from the idea that fate and the Heavens should not be fought but embraced eagerly. The single Temple of Kaimetsu-uo eventually became many temples, most of them dotting the coasts of the Empire. The Order's teachings were similar to those of the worshippers of Hotei, but also showed resemblance to venerations of Ebisu and Fukurokujin. These gentle ideas gained great popularity, especially among the lower castes, and the monks of the Temples were in the forefront of the Brotherhood's ongoing friendly relations with the peasants and other lower castes.

It was not long before the Order gained the attention of both the Crab and the Mantis. Though the Crab held very little claim to Kaimetsu-uo's memory, he was nonetheless the grandson of Hida, and the Crab wanted to ensure these monks were not sullying his memory. The Mantis had similar concerns, but seemed less worried and more supportive of the idea that their founder might be revered by those beyond their own ranks.

But when both clans sent emissaries to the Temples of Kaimetsu-uo, they were shocked. The Crab had expected to find historians who revered the son of a Fortune, thus indirectly giving prayer to Osano-Wo. The Mantis had imagined the monks to be praying to Kaimetsu-uo's memory as an explorer and bold adventurer. Instead they found quiet, contemplative monks who invited their guests to sit in silence and pray to the Fortunes for guidance to their fate.

The first ambassador from the Crab had little interest in the whole affair once his confusion died down. He prepared a report for his Champion and returned to the Crab Clan's lands, offering no particular cause for worry or ongoing attention. The Mantis emissary, however, was intrigued despite himself. Though the monks had a very different interpretation of Kaimetsu-uo's virtues and strengths, they did teach the view that fate was not simply a design enforced on mortal souls; instead, fate could also be found in the spaces between the things denied to oneself. If a man was told he could not do a thing, it was his choice to either do nothing and bemoan his fate, or – as Kaimetsu-uo did – simply move on to a new task that had not been denied him. To the Mantis this was certainly a sympathetic viewpoint, but he eventually found he could not bear the tedium of the Temples' teachings. While he agreed they had a good mindset, in his view the monks spent too much time contemplating what had come and what might yet come, waiting with the infinite patience of the Earth for the correct moment to choose their actions.

Since that time, the Order of Kaimetsu-uo has flourished, though it has never reached the size of the more prominent sects of the Brotherhood. It enjoys friendly relations with nearly every clan, though the Scorpion are unsurprisingly hesitant to deal with them. After all, monks with the peaceful patience of Earth are frustratingly difficult to manipulate or provoke. Indeed, the Brotherhood often sends monks of this Order to serve as mediators in conflicts that have caught its attention. When words fail, the brothers of Kaimetsu-uo are capable

combatants, but they try to avoid harming others, instead preferring for opponents to wear themselves down while the monk acts as an agent of the Fortunes and Heaven, denying them their incorrect course of action.

## The Order of the Nameless Gift

*"Mankind is both flawed and perfect, weak and strong. Born of divine substance, yet subject to the basest passions. An enigma, yet at the same time as simple as can be. No subject could be more important." – Abbot Mako*

Early in the fourth century, a sect of the Shrine of the Seven Thunders broke away over philosophical differences regarding the nature of humanity and the universe. It is not clear exactly when the sect began operating autonomously, but it is known the abbot of one particular shrine engaged in a years-long campaign of letters with his superior before finally declaring his temple's official withdrawal from the Order. So great was the dissonance between the abbot and the rest of the Order, however, that by the time the letter was sent the temple was already effectively on its own.

The abbot, a man named Mako, reasoned that the Seven Thunders were not merely expressions of fate and balance in the Celestial Order made flesh. He believed such a view robbed the Thunders of their true significance as examples of Shinsei's teaching: that mortal will could shake the foundations of creation. The counterargument was that such a thing had been accounted for in the Order's views, stating it was mortal will that lent drove the Thunders to their great deeds, but their special nature was also required. The argument was effectively at an impasse. Which was more significant, the Thunders' mortal will or their harmony with the universe? While there was agreement that both were necessary, the masters of the Shrine of Seven Thunders were uncomfortable with the idea that the gifts inherent to humanity could be unlocked by those unwilling or unable to attain a state of spiritual harmony.

When Mako's sect broke away, there were little resentment and no violence. After all, both orders believed mortal man's freedom to choose and direct his own path was exceptionally important. The new order reaffirmed its determination to meditate on the very nature of humanity and what the spark of the mortal soul meant when compared to the rest of the universe. However, Mako's monks were much more worldly than their counterparts in the Shrine of the Seven Thunders, believing that while the soul and spirit were important, humans were basically physical creatures. They acknowledged humans were formed from the stuff of Sun and Moon, but believed there was something unique and powerful within every man or woman that was not merely the touch of divine origin. What it might be, though, was hard to identify.

And thus the Order of the Nameless Gift was born.

The Order is first and foremost a group of scholars and introspective thinkers, examining topics from the inside out and learning whatever they can. However, unlike many philosophers and other seekers of wisdom, they believe the truth is often obvious and simple. The world's mysteries, much like humanity itself, are often expressed physically and not in riddles or hidden invisible truths. Monks of this Order, in surprising contrast to those of most other branches of the Brotherhood, prefer to speak plainly and find the surface of an answer as useful as its hidden side.

Other Orders, especially those not very familiar with the monks of the Nameless Gift, often dismiss their attitude as childish and naive. After all, many of Shinsei's teachings warn against seeing things too simply, and the world contains many layers that bear investigation and understanding. A true master of the Nameless Gift responds to such criticisms by splitting an onion and pointing out that sometimes each layer of reality is simply more of the same. He would also point out that Shinsei warned against seeing complexity when there was none.

Since the sect that founded the Order of the Nameless Gift was located on the southern edge of the Phoenix lands, the Asako family took a great interest in them – not least because their beliefs were uneasily close to the secret teachings the Henshin order. By the fourth century the Asako knew there were a great many False Paths that could lead to corruption and ruination. The Phoenix made cordial approaches to the Order and quickly estblished a friendly dialogue. The Asako appreciated the enlightened simplicity of the monks and soon became confident the men and women of the Order were not seeking anything other than true understanding for its own sake.

Because the monks of the Nameless Gift are a physically-oriented sect, they train extensively in hand-to-hand combat, much like the sohei orders. They are far less militant than the monks of Osano-Wo, but when finally stirred to violence they are exceptional combatants. Due to their beliefs, their physical training is heavily Earth-oriented, with a great deal of endurance testing and sustained exposure to the elements. The monks accept physical sensations both good and bad, though they certainly do not enjoy pain and try to avoid truly injuring themselves. Nonetheless, they are far more open to experiencing all the physical world has to offer than their cousins in the Order of Seven Thunders, and if they do not seek pain they certainly do not shy away from enduring it.

Monks from the Order of the Nameless Gift are frustratingly difficult to seriously wound or to bring down quickly. They can shrug off painful blows that would leave others doubled over in pain, and some of them have been known to continue to fight when the most hardened bushi would have succumbed to their wounds. Some members of the Order even seem to draw strength from their pain, using the intense physical sensation to focus their minds and draw upon the namesake of their Order. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Order tends to attract retired samurai from the more physically-oriented clans, such as the Crab, the Mantis, and the Lion.

In modern times the Order of the Nameless Gift remains relatively small, although its teachings are easier to grasp than typical monk philosophies. Many Rokugani find the Nameless Gift monks somewhat offputting, if only because they are more accustomed to hearing metaphors and high-minded philosophical rhetoric from members of the Brotherhood. For their part, the members of the Order simply accept this as part of the world, and endure.

## The Temple of Persistence

*"One does not pray to the Fortune of Persistence, unless one wishes him not to answer." – Hida Kosho*

Although the Emperor Hantei XVI was infamous for elevating peasants, criminals, and enemies to the Heavens as Fortunes of various disgusting or undesirable things (torture, dung, beetles, and so forth), probably no Imperial elevation of a Fortune was more controversial than Toturi I's decision to proclaim Hida Kisada as the Fortune of Persistence. In his life as a mortal man, Kisada broke the Crab Clan's oaths to the Empire by not only brokering an alliance with the forces of the Shadowlands but then by marching to the Imperial City, attempting to take the Throne for himself. Had the Empire not been embroiled in the bloody chaos of the Clan War, he would most likely have ended his life executed for treason. Instead, his son Hida Yakamo brought him safely back to the Crab lands after he was severely wounded by the possessed Hantei Emperor.

During the final months of the Clan War, Kisada lay suffering on what many thought would be his deathbed, for he had been run through by the ancestral sword of the Hantei Dynasty. But despite his crippling injury and constant pain, he helped coordinate the re-organization of the battered Crab forces and even traveled back to Otosan Uchi to join with the generals of the other clans to end the threat of the Dark Kami. His role in the great battle on the Day of Thunder earned the respect of several key leaders, many of whom later defended him in the courts. He was a dying man, they said, and despite his earlier crimes he had acted with valor and honor. It would be enough to allow him to simply pass on.

However, the man known as the Great Bear seemingly refused to die. Stabbed through with a blade reputed to slay all it struck, he nonetheless persisted for nearly two more years, passing the mantle of Clan Champion to his son but serving as an experienced and trusted advisor as he and Yakamo rebuilt the Crab. It is said Kisada never truly died; rather, eventually Emma-O himself came to the man and demanded he stop defying the Celestial Order and die as a mortal should. Faced with such an order, Kisada passed on to the next realm. A great and somber funeral was held in Crab lands, and all the Crab mourned his departure.

What happened next threatened to end the new Toturi Dynasty just as it began.

Emperor Toturi I looked across the Empire and saw that despite the scars of the Clan War, distrust still fragmented the clans. None were more reviled than the Crab, who many thought should be crushed outright for their earlier crimes. The Emperor conferred with the Seppun, and then decided to take a chance: after the customary period of consideration, he announced that Hida Kisada had been elevated to the Celestial Heavens as the Fortune of Persistence. Toturi stated the man's relentless will and tenacity was legendary and should serve as a beacon and guidepoint for all others. Beyond being merely a hero, he embodied the refusal to surrender against even the worst circumstances.

It was a bold political move, effectively exonerating Kisada and turning the history of his march against the Emperor into a tale of valor. While this deflected criticism and political pressure against the Crab, allowing them to turn their attention fully to the defense of the Kaiu Wall, it also caused a great deal of unrest, particularly among those clans who had suffered heavily at the hands of the Crab during the Clan War. With the support of the Seppun fully behind the Emperor, however, ultimately no one dared openly question the Emperor's will. Still, it is likely the chaos and conflict of the Hidden Emperor era was made significantly worse by this resentment of Toturi's actions.

Almost immediately, a sect of the Temple of Osano-Wo became the new Fortune's first adherents. After all, Kisada was descended from the Fortune of Fire and Thunder, and the concepts of endurance and perseverance spoke to the hearts of many sohei. For them, the tale of Kisada and the new Celestial role of the Fortune of Persistence told volumes about the potential of man. The Shadowlands warred against his clan, but Kisada endured. The Shadowlands betrayed him, but Kisada endured. The Empire wished for his head, but Kisada endured. He could at any time have requested seppuku, he could have found an easier way to walk away from his past, but Kisada endured.

The Temple of Persistence does not paint Kisada as a virtuous man, but instead simply points out how a persistent person can change the course of an Empire. To the monks of this sect, persistence is not simply weathering a storm but fighting it back as well. Simple endurance is for cowards or weaklings, they say – truly enlightened souls understand how to move toward their goals in the face of impossible adversity. Though Kisada's actions were villainous, he pressed on and struck aside whatever stood in his way – the Crane, the Lion, and eventually the Shadowlands he had once allied with. The ultimate lesson of persistence, according to the monks of the Temple of Persistence, is that Kisada finally learned and changed precisely because he pursued his path so relentlessly. Other monks teach inaction, contemplation, and introspection, but the sohei of the Temple of Persistence feel these are unworthy tools for true learning. Instead, striking out on a path – any path – and pressing on to learn through experience, folly, and adaptation is the only way to enlightenment, to understanding that is truly worthwhile.

The monks of this Order venerate and pray to their patron Fortune, but in contrast to other Fortunist monks they have no expectation of actually communing with him. Prayer and meditation, according to the Temple, are simply exercises to keep one on the path, not tools to seek guidance or assistance. In fact, the monks find the idea of truly requesting aid from the Fortune of Persistence somewhat blasphemous. Instead, the act of prayer is one almost of confession, as the monk outlines how he still requires the Fortune's lessons and example in order to continue.

Naturally, the temples of this Order are more common in Crab lands than in any other part of the Empire, but minor shrines and smaller temples are found scattered all over Rokugan. The teachings of the Temple of Persistence have actually become quite popular with the peasantry, who find the concept of pressing through adversity very useful to their everyday lives... and by pursuing them, hope to cleanse their kharma and be reborn to a higher station.

The monks of the Temple of Persistence are similar to the sohei of Osano-Wo when it comes to combat, and indeed to conflict in general. However, their convictions tend to make them more bull-headed and likely to disregard self-preservation in all but the worst circumstances. However, the monks do not throw their lives away uselessly – after all, the point is to learn from one's missteps and continue, not die stupidly along the way.

# Earth and the Power of the Kami

There are many Kiho which call on the power of Earth. The following sections discuss the more prominent usages of the well-known Kiho of Earth.

## Internal Kiho

Due to the nature of Earth as well as the basic functioning of Kiho, the majority of Earth Kiho are Internal. This is because it is much easier to manipulate one's own Earth than to do anything else with the Element. The power of Earth is subtle, and the balance of Earth in a physical body is extremely rigid and uncompromising in the face of outside influence. Thus, most Earth Kiho focus on taking advantage of this fact for the user's benefit rather than attempting to overcome or control an enemy's Earth.

### Cleansing Spirit

*"Rest easy, my friend. Let the spirits ease your pain."*

One of the most basic lessons of Earth is purity. This Kiho strengthens the monk's Earth to make it more resistant to physical corruption and sickness. Its use is subtle, since it does not reinforce the monk's strength or endurance. Monks learn this Kiho by focusing on the correct nature of the different parts of their body – the flesh, blood, muscle, bone, organs, and so on. Resisting damage itself is much more difficult, but understanding the makeup of a bone and thus maintaining it in its purest and truest form is a simpler lesson.

This Kiho is not very common among monks, since most Brotherhood Orders have no need to fear poison or disease. The Kiho is often partially taught to apprentice monks as a preliminary lesson, but mastering it is far more unusual. Those who do make use of Cleansing Spirit frequently are often those who work extensively with the sick, as well as those who become involved in the sometimes-deadly politics of the Empire.

### Earthen Fist

*"Strike the center, and the structure crumbles."*

This is one of the most basic Earth Kiho learned by members of the Brotherhood, and it creates a subtle shift in the monks' Earth that helps them develop the foundations for other Kiho. Focusing on their own Elemental Earth, the monks align it in such a way that they are able to absorb the energy from enemy attacks and use it against those enemies almost immediately. Effectively, the attack heightens the monks' Earth, allowing them to more easily disrupt attackers with forceful strikes rather than elegant or complex ones, and thus knocking foes' weapons out of their hands.

Despite its obvious combat applications, this Kiho is more popular among non-combative sects of the Brotherhood. While some sohei learn this as a way to assist in defeating armed opponents, most monks who take the time to learn this Kiho prefer to use it as a way to end violence without bloodshed. Outside of the Brotherhood, after all, there are very few competent unarmed combatants, and most samurai find themselves at a loss if their weapon is removed.

### Earth Needs No Eyes

By focusing on the bonds between the Elemental Earth in all things, a monk can gain an awareness typically achieved only by those who can touch and understand the Void. Focusing almost exclusively on the sensations of his own Earth, the monk gains a nearly supernatural awareness of the Earth in all other things, allowing him to feel both the Earth under his own feet and the movement of someone else through their Earth.

Due to the awareness the Kiho brings and the meditative focus needed to learn it, Earth Needs No Eyes is widespread throughout the Brotherhood. Scouts and would-be assassins who are tasked to stalk a monk have learned the hard way to simply expect that their prey might know of their presence, no matter how silent they might be, and act accordingly. This Kiho has obvious applications for bodyguards as well, and on those rare occasions when prominent monks enter the world of politics they are usually escorted by a few members of the Brotherhood trained in its use. Samurai who know of the Kiho have sometimes tried to learn its secrets so as to train yojimbo to utilize it, but needless to say no bushi has the time and spiritual focus to attain such things.

### Grasp the Earth Dragon

*"You think me to be aged and weak? The dragons have lived a thousand years, yet I would not call one old."*

This Kiho alters the monk's Earth in an extremely unusual way. Where most such techniques teach monks to embrace their Earth and enhance it in some way, Grasp the Earth Dragon teaches them how to dissociate themselves from it. When a person's body is injured, the disfigurement of their Earth causes a distraction in the form of pain. By learning this Kiho, a monk is able to dull or even fully ignore that pain. Coincidentally, this Kiho is integral in lessons about the Void, since it aids in teaching how the Elements are at once bound together but separate in all things.

Naturally, martial sohei orders find this Kiho immensely useful, and often learn and use it as part of a broader regimen to increase bodily endurance. It should be noted this Kiho can be dangerous, since not all monks learn how to assess their body's true condition while they are within the embrace of Grasp the Earth Dragon. In fact, a few orders simply refuse to teach their monks this Kiho, since it has led to the unintended death of their initiates in the past.

### Root the Mountain

*"The strength of the will is the strength of the mountain, seek it not in words, but in deeds."*

One of the most powerful and simple of Earth Kiho, Root the Mountain aligns the monk's Earth with the ground itself. The Earth of the ground and the Earth of the monk become connected, almost as if the monk was a spike of stone jutting from the ground. Naturally, this connection makes the monk

extremely difficult to move, whether forcefully or voluntarily.

Monks who learn this Kiho tend to be from the most peaceful and passive sects of the Brotherhood. A master using this Kiho can stand as an impassable barrier between himself and those he is protecting. In fact, use of this Kiho has often turned away a group of attackers simply because they become surprised and intimidated by the strength the monk must have to be so immoveable. Others watch the monk remain standing through blows that would knock a regular man off his feet and conclude he must be a supernatural creature or even a minor Fortune.

## Martial Kiho

The few known Martial Earth Kiho do not focus on striking out at another physically, but instead on using the essence of Earth to attack something. These Kiho typically use the monk's Earth to assist him in a more direct way than Internal Earth Kiho, or else draw out the victim's Earth to his detriment in some way.

### Rest, My Brother

Since almost the very beginning of the Empire, the monks of the Brotherhood of Shinsei have believed it was part of their duty and role to understand and combat the Shadowlands whenever they could. This Kiho was developed after many earlier failed attempts to use a Monk's Earth to strike the corrupted spirit of a Tainted enemy. After many centuries, a sohei finally realized learned the solution was enticing the target's own Earth to turn against him, which proved to be much easier.

This Kiho is practically universal among all Earth-aligned sects of the Brotherhood, and fairly common outside of them. Rare is the order that does not fight the Taint and those corrupted by it whenever possible.

### Way of Earth

A simple but effective martial Kiho, Way of Earth forces the monk's Elemental Earth to strengthen his body, an especially useful trick for monks who specialize in wrestling or grappling their foes. The monk's Earth makes his bones, joints, and even skin significantly harder, so every elbow strike, grip, or slam against the body hurts just a little more.

Popular among many orders within the Brotherhood, this Kiho is obviously most often learned by monks who focus on close quarters fighting and grappling. It is especially well-liked among the Temples of Persistence, as it aligns perfectly with their philosophies on tenacity and pressing through adversity to ultimate victory.

## Kharmic Kiho

Earth Kharmic Kiho depend on the bonds between the common Elemental Earth in all things, attempting to create a harmony that can be used or exploited. Thus while Kharmic Kiho of this Element usually cause no harm directly, they can instead make a victim's Earth overpower his other Elements, or change the Earth's alignment with other Elements in some other way that disrupts the target.

### Speed of the Mountains

This Kiho is a classic example of using Earth Kharmic Kiho to indirectly assail foes, turning their Earth against them without actually attacking with the Element. It is of course not an easy process to encourage an unwilling target's Earth in this manner. If it is managed, though, the victim's Earth overpowers his Water, making it more difficult for him to move with any kind of speed.

Many Brotherhood Orders that teach this kiho avoid letting initiates learn it, in the belief that attacking another's Elemental balance in such a direct way can undermine proper training. Only when a monk gains the experience to realize how harmful this can be is he allowed to master the Speed of the Mountains.

## Mystical Kiho

Mystical Kiho are exceedingly rare to learn or even witness, and Earth Mystical Kiho are probably the most unusual of them. The Element does not lend itself well to displays of supernatural power or flourishes of raw Elemental control. These Kiho do not often manipulate the Earth itself, but instead attempt to align the monk more strongly with external spirits of Earth. Turning oneself into stone, passing through rock, or other such feats of harmony with the physical Earth are usually how these Kiho function.

### Embrace the Stone

By calling on the common bond of Earth in all physical objects, the monk learns to entice the spirits of Earth to aid him. This Kiho actually shifts the Elemental Earth in the area, with the result that objects in the vicinity share small amounts of their share of Earth with the monk. The monk's very flesh and muscle gain the resilience found in stone.

This Kiho is both difficult to learn and hard to teach. It involves an amount of harmony with the Earth kami that is usually only found among shugenja. However, patience and practice allow the monks to use their Earth as a beacon to the spirits, even if the monk cannot necessarily speak with them directly.

# The Keeper of Earth

In the year 1166 a monk named Rosoku, the direct descendent of Shinsei, issued six challenges to the Empire. The story of these challenges is chronicled in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire* (page 75). Rosoku issued one challenge for each Element, declaring the winner of each challenge would uncover a tome containing the wisdom of that Element; the eventual victors of these challenges became the Empire's first Elemental Keepers. The victor of the Earth challenge, and the first Keeper of Earth, was Kaiu Sugimoto.

Sugimoto was a man who had known much tragedy in his life. He spent his days in humble service to the Kaiu family, witnessing firsthand the hardships of the Crab. He revered Emperor Toturi I, and was deeply shocked by the Emperor's death. Not long after, his wife died during a Shadowlands attack on the Wall, defending the Empire from unspeakable horrors. Later, while he was serving in the Crab Embassy in Otosan Uchi, Sugimoto also lost his only son during Daigotsu's assault on the city. He saw the boy devoured by an oni, and suffered a crippling wound to his own right arm. Thus in less than two years Sugimoto was robbed of his family, his pride, and his purpose. Nonetheless, he stoically carried on, like a stone cleaved from a great mountain. Unable to fight any longer, he worked as an armorsmith for his younger cousin, a man named Kaiu Tasuku.

When Rosoku issued his challenges to the Empire, the challenge of Earth struck Tasuku as especially befitting to a Kuni: *"The smith who crafts a helmet strong enough to shatter a thousand blades shall keep the Book of Earth."* Tasaku, a famed armorsmith himself, believed he could achieve this challenge and win the Book of Earth.

At the same time as these events, the Badger Clan was engaged in a conflict with a tribe of Yobanjin known as the Mountain Wind. The Badger, who had not yet recovered from their heavy losses in the Clan War era, requested the aid of the Crab to purge their lands of these gaijin intruders. Tasuku answered gladly, for he knew of a rare kind of iron ore found only in the Ichiro lands; he hoped to earn some of this hardy mineral as a reward from the Badger, and then use it to craft the legendary helmet needed to meet Rosoku's challenge.

Kaiu Sugimoto did not care for his cousin's plan, but as a loyal and dutiful samurai, he accompanied him and served without question. However, upon arrival in the Badger lands he discovered the Yobanjin were innocent of any trespass against the Badger; in fact, the two sides were being manipulated into conflict by a mysterious malevolent force (possibly the Badger Clan's notorious enemy, the Hideo no Oni). During a meeting of the Badger generals, Sugimoto presented the Yobanjin's testimony and argued against further conflict. When his cousin (blinded by his own ambitions) cast this testimony aside, Sugimoto smashed his own helmet on the war table, stunning the Badger and shaming Tasuku with his stoicism. The Crab and Badger abandoned their plans to fight the Yobanjin and instead joined forces to seek out the Hideo no Oni.

What they did not know was that the Mountain Wind Yobanjin had allies within the Crane Clan, allies who were ready to exact retribution if they were attacked. When Sugimoto threw his helmet on the war table, he stopped a thousand blades before they could ever be drawn. His stoic, willful, and unyielding nature had ended a war before it began.

Shortly afterward, he discovered the Book of Earth.

Kaiu Sugimoto did not believe himself worthy of the position of Keeper. He was no enlightened man. He had never read the Tao, never devoted himself to esoteric practices, and in fact did not even have the ability to conduct simple meditation. He offered the book to his champion, Hida Kuon, but Kuon refused, claiming the position was not Sugimoto's to give away and commanding him to accept his new duties. Left with no choice, Sugimoto dutifully sought out Rosoku to learn what was required of him.

It was from Rosoku's lips that Kaiu Sugimoto learned the truth of the Elemental challenges. They were not intended to find the enlightened, nor to bestow any mystical powers or Elemental oneness. Rather, the challenges stood as a way to reveal six individuals who best embodied the Elemental principles as mortals understood them. Sugimoto was patient, strong-willed, disciplined, and stoic, and in his heart he championed principles of balance and purity. When Rosoku showed him how he had possessed these traits all along, Sugimoto realized he truly did deserve his new position.

## Passages from the Book of Earth

"The earth is eternal. Even as a hundred thousand beings trample upon its back, the land does as it always has. No matter how the wind howls, the mountain does not move."

"One can only come to understand oneself within by experiencing the world without. The foot feels itself only when it is touching the ground."

"That which has happened is gone. Indeed, it never existed. Whoever you were in the past only matters if that is who you are now. Nor has the future ever come to pass; it has always remained beyond the horizon. Who you will be you cannot know. Focus instead on who you are now. It is the only thing that is real."

"You can only lose that to which you are clinging."

"Do not depend upon partial feelings. Feel the ground beneath you? It has always been there. Many trample on its back, yet none dispute its strength. The earth holds no doubts and fears no force. Strike as the earth, and you cannot fail."

However, Kaiu Sugimoto never truly considered himself to be "enlightened" in the same sense as Shinsei or even his fellow Keepers. He had not awakened to limitless potential nor discovered an ultimate insight into the way of the world. He had not become infinitely wise. He simply understood and accepted himself for who he was; he had seen his true self and chosen to embrace it, while letting go of those things in his past that had caused him so much pain. Rosoku called this mental state "*Satori*," but to Sugimoto, it was not even worthy of a label.

# The Book of Earth

The Book of Earth did not bestow Kaiu Sugimoto with divine insight, nor did it grant him any supernatural abilities. The six books were in fact mundane; they contained no magical powers, only wisdom. The Book of Earth mostly offered a guideline for living one's life simply and with certainty, learning to recognize and accept things precisely as they were. All Keepers were encouraged to add their own insights to the Books, but of all of them Sugimoto made the least changes, adding only a few amendments. However, those minor changes affected the meaning of the tome the most deeply of all six.

The current Book of Earth teaches a careful balance of attitudes. Soil that is too soft can support nothing, yet nothing can grow upon ground that is too hard. One must hold oneself to virtuous standards and be unyielding, yet one must live concerned with the present, not grasping for that which has already passed or may yet come. Thus to "be as Earth" is not merely to be stoic and strong-willed. It is also to know oneself and see the true nature of one's surroundings. The book presents this simple but challenging philosophy in plain language and common metaphors, avoiding lofty images or complex allegories. Indeed, much of the insightful charm of the book comes from its simple analogies, where it relates day-to-day mundane activities in order to illustrate deeper meanings. The tome is written to convey a sense of certainty, and those who read it often feel a renewed sense of purpose and courage.

In mechanical terms, the owner of the Book of Earth gains a +1k1 bonus to all Earth rolls, Stamina rolls, and Willpower rolls, including Skill rolls that use the Willpower and Stamina Traits. This bonus increases to +2k1 on Contested Rolls using Willpower or Stamina. However, these bonuses are lost if the Book of Earth is not consulted and meditated upon at least once every two days.

The Keeper of Earth receives the above bonus at all times, regardless of how often he/she consults the text. In addition, the Keeper receives beneficial effects from the respect and admiration of the Earth kami, although the specific nature of these manifestations are left to the GM. An obvious possibility would be the ability to Commune with the Earth kami, as per the spell.

# The World of Earth



*Akodo Kakihara moved through the mountain path, following the sound he had heard for the past hour. He might be on his musha shugyo, the warrior's pilgrimage that temporarily released him from obligations to his clan, he couldn't bring himself to ignore the sounds of violence in Lion lands.*

*The sound echoed through the mountains ahead of him, as though a great force was striking against the rocks, and as he came closer and closer he began to wonder if he was involving himself in something that might be the end of his life.*

*Such thoughts were unworthy of a samurai, Kakihara told himself firmly. Pushing them aside, he finally crested an outcropping and got a clear view of the noise's source.*

*What he saw perplexed him.*

*Amid the dry brush and stone of the mountainside, a tattooed monk was striking at the very mountain. Each time he stepped back, took a deep breath, then moved forward and slammed his hand into the stone. Over and over. The noise from the monk's strikes was not the simple slap of meat and bone against rock, but rather sounded like distant thunder, shaking the very earth beneath their feet. Each blow shattered stone into gravel.*

*Kakihara had heard of the strange ise zumi monks of the Dragon Clan, of course, but he had never met one. He had thought the stories of these men and women jumping from waterfalls, balancing on the tops of homes for months, and breathing fire were ridiculous fabrications. But as he watched this monk repeatedly smash the very mountain he was standing on, the Akodo began to realize they might very well be true.*

*For a few moments, shock and curiosity rooted Kakihara to the spot, and he simply stared at the monk. Finally he realized he should either say something or leave the monk to his ... whatever it was. After a few further moments of consideration, the Lion took a breath, straightened himself, and walked toward the monk.*

*"Stay back, please," the Dragon said, just as he struck the stone again. The thunderous noise rang out once more, and several chips of stone flew by Kakihara's face. "I am here under the permission of the Ikoma family, and I would not wish to repay their hospitality by accidentally maiming one of their clansmen."*

*At first the Akodo took this as a threat, but then he felt a warmth on his cheek. When he pressed his fingers to the sensation they came away red with blood, and Kakihara realized not all of the stone had sped by him harmlessly. He took a step back and nodded thanks. "Might I ask what you are doing here?"*

*The monk resumed his starting stance yet again, looked at the Lion for a moment, and then said, "You may." He stepped forward, striking the mountain once again with a vicious downward heel kick.*

*Courtesy is a part of Bushido, Kakihara reminded himself. Carefully keeping the frustration out of his voice, he asked, "So, what is it you are doing here?"*

*"I am breaking the stone, obviously," the Dragon replied, repeating the process again. A larger shard of rock arced into the air and landed where the Lion had been standing moments before. "The mountains interest me."*

*"There are mountains in the Dragon lands," Kakihara said, motioning vaguely to the north.*

*The monk gave the Lion a look that seemed almost bemused. "Yes, but they are not this mountain," he said, as if he was explaining something obvious. After a pause, he stopped his strikes and bowed. "My apologies, Lion. I am being rude. I am Hizumi, of the Togashi order."*

*Rude and confusing, yes, Kakihara thought to himself. His face showed nothing as he returned the Dragon's bow. "I am Akodo Kakihara of the Lion Clan."*

*"You probably wish to know the purpose of this exercise, not to hear a lesson on geography and mapping," Hizumi offered.*

*Kakihara smiled thinly, "Yes, by all means." He was proud that he kept sarcasm out of his voice.*

*"The stone," Hizumi said, waving at the rock all around, "is different than the stone in the Dragon Mountains, as I said. It is different than the stone on the other side of this range, in the Scorpion lands. It is different than the stone the Crab take from the ground to the southwest, and it is different than the stone in the mountains where our friends in the Phoenix make their home. How can I say I can break stone if I have not broken all of this stone?"*

*The Lion frowned in thought. Something about the monk's words reminded him of his studies at the dojo. Then it struck him. "Akodo's teachings tell us that not all battles on a plain are on the same plain. Not all wars in the hills are in the same hills."*

*"Precisely," the Dragon agreed. "A stone is not all stone. Not all steel is the same, any smith will agree. So when a man says he has the strength of the mountains, or that he is stronger than steel, does he truly know?"*

*Kakihara nodded despite himself. "I think I understand. So, do you plan to visit every peak in the Empire to test yourself?"*

*"Of course not," Hizumi snorted. "That would take forever. My hands already hurt from just today."*

*The Lion blinked, then suddenly threw back his head in a loud laugh. "I think I might like to journey with you for awhile, Togashi-san. The earth, perhaps, could teach me much as well."*



# Earth in the Natural World

*"Even a strong man cannot stand when the earth betrays him." - Mirumoto Kei*

The Element of Earth is characterized by its stability and its resilience. Whereas Air is dynamic and eternally in motion, Earth is stationary, stubborn, and resistant to change. Mountains, boulders, castles, forests – all these things epitomize Earth in its aspect of stability. Yet when that stability is disturbed, Earth reacts with a fury unmatched by any other Element save perhaps Fire. Earthquakes, the most devastating of all physical phenomena, are created by the wrath of Earth.

However, there is another side to Earth: it is also the Element of life and physical existence, and its resilience reflects the ability of life to persevere in the face of all manner of opposition. Animals and plants are deeply associated with the Element of Earth, and forests – cradles of life and home to countless animal spirits – are among the places strongest in the Element. Air and Water may batter at the land, Fire way sweep across it, yet the Earth remains and life soon springs back from it as vigorous as ever.

It should not be surprising that Earth is essential to the most basic aspects of life in Rokugan. Peasants, carpenters, masons, and other such essential craftsmen – craftsmen without whom the Empire could not possibly function – are all deeply associated with the Earth. Of all Elements, it is the closest to the daily lives of the Rokugani and thus, quite possibly, the one which ordinary Rokugani understand the best.

# The Mountains of Rokugan

When the first men appeared in Rokugan, many centuries before the Fall of the Kami, they found a wondrous land with widely varied natural geography. These men first settled along the coasts and rives in the more temperate regions. The vast mountains to the north, east, and south were viewed with a combination of awe and terror, both for their natural majesty and for the dangers and mysteries they held. Thus the mountains of Rokugan soon became places of great spiritual significance.

As the population grew and began to expand inland, these mountain ranges eventually came to define the borders of what would become the borders of the Emerald Empire. The Great Wall of the North (Kyodai na Kabe sano Kita) marked the divide between Rokugan and the vast steppe beyond; the Spine of the World Mountains (Seikitsu sano Yama no Oi) split the land in half and would come in time to mark the borders of several clan territories; and the Twilight Mountains (Yugure Yama) initially marked the border with the lands of the Nezumi Empire and would later become the natural barrier between Rokugan and the Shadowlands.

The mountains of Rokugan also came to play a significant role in the culture and lifestyle of the Empire. They provide a wealth of natural resources utilized in nearly every aspect of Rokugani life, and their simple presence deeply affects the lives of those who choose to live in or near them. Few other aspects of nature have done more to affect the Rokugani way of life.

## The Great Wall of the North (Kyodai na Kabe sano Kita)

In modern times the Great Wall of the North defines the northern border of the Empire and wards Rokugan against the barbarian Yobanjin tribes who inhabit the steppes beyond. The mountains begin with gently rolling foothills, gradually increasing in altitude until they ascend into a series of jagged peaks that form the central part of the mountain range. These peaks are so tall that they remain covered in ice and snow year round.

The Great Wall of the North is tectonically active, with several active volcanoes and frequent earthquakes; this violent activity leads to a higher incidence of landslides. As a result, passage through the Great Wall is difficult; few make the journey and survive to tell the tale. There are only two known passes through this mountain range: one is guarded by the Badger Clan, while the other is Sorrow's Path, the route an exile must take when he is forced to leave Rokugan. Unsurprisingly, few are inclined to use either of these routes.

Despite the high altitudes, volcanic activity, and propensity for landslides, this mountain range is home to a wide array of flora and fauna. Melted snow from the tallest peaks creates rivers and streams that lattice the middle and lower elevations; the water combines with the rich volcanic soil to create a nourishing environment for a wide variety of trees, ferns, and shrubs. The lower slopes and foothills are covered with a thick canopy of forest, mostly conifers intermingled with oak, maple, and elm trees, the ground below carpeted with mosses and ferns. The animal life is equally diverse, ranging from small creatures such as rabbits, fox, and quail to bears, deer, and boar.

It is in the middle and lower elevations of the Great Wall that the Dragon Clan makes its home, and the Phoenix inhabit some of these slopes as well. Though the environment is not nearly as hospitable to civilization as on the plains below, the Dragon have adapted remarkably, integrating life in the mountains into their culture. The Phoenix keep most of their population in the lowlands, but have built many great shrines and temples within the mountains, most famously the Shrine of the Ki-Rin and the great Shrine to Jurojin.

The Unicorn territories also include a portion of the Great Wall of the North, but they regard the mountains as a barrier rather than a place to live. Most of their population lives well to the south of the great peaks.

## The Spine of the World Mountains (Seikitsu sano Yama no Oi)

The Spine of the World Mountains, also known as the Seikitsu Mountains, are the other major mountain chain of note in Rokugan. They cut a diagonal path through the Emerald Empire, from the northeastern Unicorn territories to the southeastern Crane lands, with only a few passes bridging the barrier. The peaks are covered with a thin, rocky soil that heightens the risk of landslides; the unstable nature of the Seikitsu Mountains make them a challenge for even the most accomplished mountaineer.

Because the Seikitsu Mountains bisect the Emerald Empire, passage through the range – whether for trade or for military purposes – is hugely important. Though there are a number of small passes through these mountains, they are neither large enough nor stable enough to allow passage to large military forces or trade caravans.

At the Dawn of the Empire there were three passes large enough to allow large groups of people to pass through the mountain chain: the Iuchi Pass in the north, the Seikitsu Pass in the center, and Beiden Pass in the south.

However, the Seikitsu Pass was collapsed by Akodo One-Eye at the end of the first century during a battle against an army of tsuno. Thus for most of the Empire's history, the Iuchi Pass and Beiden Pass were the only ways to move large armies or sizable amounts of trade goods through the Seikitsu Mountains, and since the Iuchi Pass was considerably smaller, most attention focused on the Beiden Pass. It became the site of many battles between the Lion and Scorpion Clans, who controlled the lands on the two respective sides of the pass. This finally changed in the year 1150, at the conclusion of the War of the Spirits, when Beiden Pass was deliberately collapsed upon the armies of the Steel Chrysanthemum. Soon after, the Lord Sun struck a blow against the northern end of the mountain chain and reopened the Seikitsu Pass, which remains open in modern times.

Because the Seikitsu Mountains traverse such a large part of the Empire, the native wildlife varies widely. The northwest portion of the range is almost barren of life; the landscape is dotted with scraggly trees and scrub brush that clings determinedly to the thin soil. Between the landslides and the limited amount of natural flora, few animals live in this region of the mountains. Farther south, where the climate becomes warmer and rainfall is more common, hearty conifer trees become abundant, accompanied by animals such as elk, deer, wolves, and cougars. The southernmost portion of the Seikitsu range hosts the widest variety of plants and animals, with the foothills and lower elevations covered with mixed forests that teem with wildlife.

The Unicorn, Lion, and Scorpion territories are adjacent to the Seikitsu Mountains. Both the Scorpion and Lion make considerable use of the mountain range for stone, metals, and other such mineral resources. The Unicorn, however, prefer a more mobile lifestyle and generally avoid the mountains in favor of their beloved grassy plains.

## The Twilight Mountains (Yugure Yama)

The Twilight Mountains lie along the southwest border of Rokugan, close to the border between the Emerald Empire and the Shadowlands. In contrast to the high peaks of the other two ranges, the Twilight Mountains range is composed of a series of low-elevation peaks, grouped closely together and crisscrossed by deep valleys and ravines. The tallest peaks are usually covered with snow during the winter months, but always melt off in the warmer months; consequently, landslides are a threat during springtime.

Few plants are able to grow on the higher elevations, due to the thin soil, but the ravines are usually densely forested, as the soil runoff and melted snow combine to create a rich loam for plants to thrive. These shadowy forests are populated with a variety of animals, and occasionally suffer infestations of darker creatures from the Shadowlands.

The safest way to move through the Twilight Mountains is by traversing the Carpenter Pass, sometimes called "Little Beiden," which is integral to the Crab Clan's ongoing war efforts against the Shadowlands. Troops and supplies move through this pass frequently as the Crab clan reposition their armies. Because of this strategic importance, the pass and the road leading through it are meticulously maintained. Travel through the rest of the mountain range is more difficult; though there are many smaller passes, they are not as well-traveled or maintained.

## Other Mountain Regions of Note

Though not part of one of the three major mountain chains, there are two other notable mountainous regions in Rokugan: Lookout Mountain and the Mountains of Regret.

Lookout Mountain is located in the central Lion territories. It is a single mountain that rises sharply out of the otherwise flat plains that surround it. Powerful Earth kami reside within the mountain, and the Kitsu maintain a shrine there in order to commune with them. It is said the one can see the entirety of the Lion lands from atop the mountain's summit.

The Mountains of Regret are a small mountain chain located in the southern Phoenix lands, dividing them from the Imperial territories in and around Otosan Uchi. These mountains are so-named because of the sheer number of people who have lost their lives to earthquakes and landslides in the perilous Treacherous Pass, the main route through them. It is said that the snows of the Mountains of Regret turn blood red in the light of the setting sun. Rumor has often credited these mountains with housing ogres and goblins, though such tales are firmly denied by the Phoenix.

# Wrath of the Earth: Earthquakes, Landslides, and Volcanic Activity

Though Rokugan has only experienced three major earthquakes in its recorded history, minor tremors are much more frequent. These tremors occur throughout the land, though they are certain regions which are more prone to them – including Otosan Uchi, the capital of the Empire for most of its history.

There are many legends concerning the cause of earthquakes. Most samurai believe earthquakes are caused by the displeasure of the Fortunes or the anger of the earth kami, and when such a disaster strikes it is common to bring in shugenja and try to learn what misdeed has attracted the wrath of these supernatural forces. Peasants sometimes invent their own myths to explain the recurrence of earthquakes, such as a tale in many coastal villages claiming that earthquakes are caused by a huge catfish that lives in the Sea of

Amaterasu: as it searches for food, it collides with the coast, causing the earth to shake.

Landslides are a far more common threat than earthquakes, especially in hilly and mountainous territory. Landslides become a serious threat anytime there is heavy rainfall, as well as during the spring when snowmelt comes down from mountain peaks. Since most Rokugani houses are made with a mixture of wood and paper, landslides can sweep them away easily, and most Rokugani who live in landslide-prone territory pray rigorously to the earth kami to spare them from being buried under tons of dirt and rock.

In addition to the direct risk they pose to those living in the area, landslides can also wreak havoc on trade by closing key mountain passes. Keeping passes clear is laborious work, often requiring the efforts of hundreds or even thousands of peasant laborers, but necessary to ensure commerce continues.

The wrath of the Earth is not limited simply to earthquakes and landslides. Rokugan is also home to a number of active volcanoes, and the anger of the Earth can sometimes unleash new ones with little or no warning. Three notable areas of recurrent volcanic activity are the Great Fall, Sleeping Thunder Mountain in the Dragon lands, and Earthquake Fish Bay.

The Great Fall is a series of volcanoes in the Dragon lands that are quite active. Due to the frequent tremors and occasional eruptions, the Dragon Clan uses the place as a training ground for their young samurai, a place to teach vigilance and learn to move and fight in harmony with the Earth.

Sleeping Thunder Mountain is located south of the Shrine of the Ki-Rin in a spur of the Great Wall of the North. In contrast to the Great Fall, this volcano has not erupted within the memory of Rokugani historians, though tremors can sometimes be felt from it and the occasional pillar of smoke rises from the peak.

Earthquake Fish Bay, located in the southern Crab lands, has near-constant volcanic activity in the land beneath its waters. As a result, the bay is unusually warm and remains so throughout the year, even in the dead of winter. The bay is also prone to occasional fierce earthquakes with an unusual side-effect; at least three times in recorded history, large numbers of fish have appeared on the beaches, followed shortly thereafter by a fierce earth-tremor. The Kuni theorize that the fish sense the impending wrath of the Earth and attempt to escape before it can strike.

## Earth and Life: The Forests of Rokugan

The great forests of Rokugan are viewed with a combination of reverence and fear. They represent nature untouched by man and are seen as the places where the kami – especially the Earth kami – are the most powerful. There is a perceptible aura of power in these places, and whether that power is of benevolent or malevolent nature depends on the nature and attitude of the spirits which dwell there. Not even the most jaded samurai can walk into the primeval forests of Rokugan and not be awed.

Though Rokugan is dotted with countless woodlands, it boasts three major forests: the Shinomen Mori to the west, the Isawa Mori lies to the north, and the Kitsune Mori beneath the eaves of the Seikitsu Mountains.

### The Shinomen Mori

*"Never assume you know the Shinomen's secrets." – Akasha*

There are few places in Rokugan more mysterious – and more dreaded – than the Shinomen Forest. Located in unaligned lands west of the Scorpion territories, it is a truly vast place, far greater in extent than the lands of most Great Clans. The ancient trees grow closely together, their leaves and branches intertwining to create a thick canopy that leaves much of the forest floor in shadow. Combined with the constant rumors of ghosts, spirits, and monsters – not to mention the re-emergence of the Naga race in modern times – it is hardly surprising that most of the Shinomen Mori remains unexplored.

Those brave enough to penetrate the outer edges of the Shinomen Mori report a wide variety of plant life within the forest. The northern portions are composed primarily

of fir, spruce, and hemlock trees. Farther to the south, more deciduous trees can be seen intermingled with the conifers: maple, oak, and elm trees are plentiful, along with many wild fruit trees. In the southern portion of the forest, wild cherry trees are plentiful, giving their name to the Lake of Cherry Blossom Snow.

A vast multitude of natural animal life is found within the forest – indeed, almost every bird and beast that can be found within the Empire has been seen in the Shinomen, along with many from foreign lands. However, rumor (and occasional expeditions from the Crab) report that the forest is also home to far darker creatures, particularly in its southern regions where several areas of Tainted corruption have been identified. Hostile spirit creatures, gaki, ghosts, and many creatures of the Shadowlands have been encountered. Most important of all, the forest contains within its borders the last remnants of the Naga, the ancient race of serpent-people, sleeping in the ruins of their cities. Though the Naga are peaceful by nature, they have a monstrous appearance, and on those occasions when they are awake, they contribute to the frightful reputation of the Shinomen Forest.

Due to the Shinomen's dangerous reputation, hunters seldom dare its depths, and it is rare for lumber to be taken from it either. Only a few small human settlements skirt the forest's edges, and the folk who dwell in them are careful to make constant offerings to appease the spirits of the Shinomen and avoid drawing their malevolent attention.

## The Isawa Mori

The Isawa Mori lies in the heart of the Phoenix territories and is second in size only to the Shinomen Mori. However, the Isawa forest is regarded with reverence rather than fear. The Phoenix consider it a sacred resource and carefully harvest its blessed wood to create their spell-scrolls (see Chapter Two for a further discussion of Isawa scrolls).

The Isawa Mori is composed primarily of coniferous trees and thus remains cloaked in green shadows all year round. The most abundant types include fir, cypress, and pine, but other species are present and even sequoia trees can be found deep within the forest. The place boasts a wide variety of wildlife, albeit not as comprehensive as the Shinomen, and is especially well-populated with birds. Predators are less common due to the presence of nearby samurai, but wolves and bears do exist in some numbers.

The Isawa Mori is justly famous for the vast number of spirits that dwell within its bounds. Otherworldly encounters are a frequent occurrence, heightening the forest's reputation as a deeply spiritual place. The Isawa have traced this phenomena to the Heart of Nature, a naturally occurring spirit portal which appears, seemingly at random, in different locations within the forest. The Heart opens into three Spirit Realms: Chikushudo (the Realm of Animals), Yume-do (the Realms of Dreams), and Sakkaku (the Realm of Mischief). The Phoenix have tried to study the Heart of Nature more closely for many generations, but its seemingly random movements make this difficult.

Though the Isawa Mori as a whole is viewed with reverence, there is one part of the forest which is feared: the so-called Mori Kuroi or "Black Forest," an area said to be haunted by malevolent spirits and oni. The shadows are thicker in this part of the forest, no birdsong can be heard, and a pall of dread hangs heavy in the air. Rumor claims not even the Elemental Masters themselves go willingly into the Mori Kuroi.

## The Kitsune Mori

The Kitsune Mori is the smallest of the great forests, dwarfed in size by the massive Shinomen Mori that lies to the west. It is located in south-central Rokugan, where the temperate climate creates an ideal environment for an abundance of plants. The forest itself is composed of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees which grow in loose groupings, allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor. As a result, the ground in the Kitsune Mori is carpeted with a wide variety of plants, many of which are edible or have medicinal properties.

The forests is home to a great variety of animal life, especially smaller animals such as quail, rabbits, deer, and of course several varieties of foxes. Larger animals such as wolves, bears,

and boar do exist, but are rarer here than elsewhere. Of course, the reputation of the Kitsune Mori is based most strongly on the numerous animal spirits that dwell there, particularly kitsune and tanuki spirits. There are supposedly multiple spirit portals to the realms of Chikushudo and Sakkaku within the forest.

For a thousand years the Fox Clan (later the Kitsune family of the Mantis Clan) makes its home within the Kitsune Mori, living close to nature and communing with the spirits that dwell within the forest; it has few mysteries left to reveal to them. But the Kitsune Mori is still a source of trepidation for the rest of Rokugan. The innocent pranks of kitsune and tanuki spirits can cause immense trouble – and sometimes, real danger – for the unwary traveler, not to mention the risk of passing through a spirit portal and being lost to Ningen-do forever. Thus, though the Kitsune Mori is not openly feared in the manner of the Shinomen, few non-Kitsune Rokugani will enter it unless they have a good reason to do so.

# Earth in the World of Men

The Emerald Empire is rich in natural resources which are utilized in all aspects of the Rokugani culture. The fields provide the crops necessary for food and trade goods. The earth provides stone and lumber necessary to build homes and castles, and the iron and copper necessary to defend those castles.

Most of Rokugan's natural resources are acquired from the land and worked into a functional form by the heimin class. Farmers are of course the most revered of the heimin, for without their efforts the populace would starve. Miners and steelworkers wrench metals from the earth and craft them into the weapons and tools necessary for daily life. Masons, carpenters, and sculptors produce the structures necessary for life and decorate them with beautiful works of art. Potters turn the earth into vessels for food, drink, and storage.

It should be noted that some members of the samurai caste do practice some of these crafting skills, particularly smithing, sculpting, and pottery. However, they do this more out of personal interest or artistic intent rather than practical necessity. The samurai's first duty is to Emperor and clan, and crafting comes a distinct second. The heimin craftsman, by contrast, produces these works specifically to fulfill his role in the celestial order.

## Farming

*"No samurai can stand without the support of those who work the fields. Bushido can give life to a man for only so long before hunger claims his body." – Takuan, Monk*

The Rokugani diet consists primarily of grains and vegetables. Everyone, from the Emperor to the lowest eta, needs to eat; this is why farming is considered the most important and respectable heimin trade. Vast tracts of land in the Empire are devoted to various types of farming, with tens of thousands of heimin laboring on them to produce enough food to sustain Rokugan's immense populace.

The temperate climate and soil of Rokugan is highly conducive to growing rice, which is the primary staple of the Rokugani diet. It is consumed with almost every meal, either as a whole grain or a flour, and is cooked in a variety of ways. Broken rice grains are also used for animal feed and even for compost. The importance of rice can be seen in many aspects of Rokugani culture. Shrines to Inari, the Fortune of Rice, can be found in every province and indeed almost every village. Even the Empire's monetary system is dependent on rice; the worth of the koku is officially derived from the amount of rice a man needs to eat in one year.

Secondary grains include wheat, buckwheat, barley, millet, and oats; these are grown primarily in lands where there is insufficient water to maintain rice paddies, such as the vast plains of the Lion and Unicorn lands. Wheat is ground into flour and made into breads and noodles; bread is eaten by all Rokugani, but noodles are consumed exclusively by the samurai class. Barley, millet, and oats are considered to be less refined; as such, they are consumed primarily by the lower classes, or used as animal feed.

Beans, especially soybeans, are also widespread crops. Soybeans are a major crop and utilized for their oil in addition to being the chief ingredient in a great number of traditional dishes, enjoyed by samurai and heimin alike. Soybean curd, or tofu, is a major source of protein all across Rokugan.

Mulberry bushes are also an important crop for Rokugani culture. Mulberry leaves are the only known food source of the silkworm, which is integral to the creation of silk and thus the manufacture of clothing.

Most farming takes place in central Rokugan, with its temperate climate and relatively flat lands. These regions are controlled by the Crane, Lion, and Scorpion Clans, who boast the highest agricultural output in the Empire. The Lion are usually forced to use all of their production to feed their vast armies, but the Scorpion and especially the Crane usually enjoy surpluses which they employ for trade and diplomacy. The Unicorn Clan also has a large amount of arable farmland, but chooses to utilize much of its territory as pasture for its vast herds of horses. The great demand for their horses, as well as their other sources of wealth, allow them to easily make up any shortfalls in food – and in fact, the lands they do cultivate often produce a surplus on their own.

## Rice Farming

*"Have you eaten rice today?" – Traditional Rokugani greeting*

Rice is not merely the most important crop in Rokugan, it is probably the single most important thing in the Empire. It is more important than honor, glory, duty, the Emperor, or even the Celestial Order... for without rice, none of those things can survive. Rice is the vital, primary food source for the overwhelming majority of the population, including every member of the samurai caste (save perhaps for some members of the Fox Clan). It is rice which underpins the economy and to some extent even drives technological innovation. It is no wonder that Inari is the Fortune venerated more widely and consistently by more people in Rokugan than any other... though of course the vast majority of those worshippers are peasants.

It is something of a miracle that Rokugan can grow rice at all, since the farming of rice takes considerably more know-how and technological capability than most other crops, and much of Rokugan is not naturally suited toward cultivating it. The first people to begin farming rice lived in swampy areas with lots of rainfall, for rice does not grow well without enormous amounts of water. Later, however, farmers in other parts of Rokugan developed extensive irrigation systems in order to grow rice in their own less-suitable lands. The Imperial Histories credit the Kami with spreading knowledge of irrigation and other such advanced farming techniques to all of Rokugan.

In lands which are not naturally wet enough, rice is grown in paddies, fields specially designed to be below the natural level of the ground (thus attracting water runoff from higher elevations). Often they are built in lowlands or valleys where they can draw water runoff from hills or mountains above them. If no source of runoff is available, the farmers will create it by diverting water from rivers and streams, or catching rainfall in barrels and then sluicing it into the paddies. Each individual paddy is much smaller than the large fields used for growing grains, and is bounded by raised earthen walkways that serve both to hold the water within the paddies and to allow the farmers to travel between the paddies without disturbing the rice.

Before farmers plant rice, they perform intricate ceremonies in which they entreat Inari, asking for a bountiful harvest in the year ahead. During these ceremonies rice from the previous harvest is cast into each of the paddies as a way of blessing them and telling the land what it is being asked to produce. Rice wine (sake) and bowls of rice are also left throughout the paddies as offerings to Inari. Finally, a little water is allowed through the irrigation systems and the paddies become muddy, although at this point they are not yet filled with standing water.

Once the fields are muddy, the farmers plant the rice. Some farmers plant rice in orderly rows, while others plant it in a haphazard manner; there are many individual and regional traditions regarding the way in which to place the rice. Once the rice is planted, more water is slowly introduced to the paddies until there is a few inches of standing water above the mud. The standing water provides a constant source of liquid for the growing rice seedlings, as well as discouraging weeds. However, it does present its own share of difficulties. Water-loving insects like mosquitoes are very common near rice paddies and those insects in turn draw birds which eat them... and if given the chance, eat the rice as well. Scarecrows crafted from straw are common in rice paddies, and often the village children will stand vigil over the paddies (especially near harvest) to drive away hungry birds.

Through the growing cycle, water is continually added to the paddies, since the standing water evaporates or soaks into the ground over time. As harvest approaches, the water level is finally allowed to drop and the mud surrounding the standing plants dries out. Then the farmers gather and use an assortment of tools (primarily kama) to harvest the rice plants at their roots. Harvest is an intensely busy time, with entire communities banding together to harvest each paddy in turn. Once the work is done, there are usually large celebrations in which some of the new rice is eaten and much sake is drunk. Some of the rice is set aside to seed the fields next year, and the rice stalks are dried and used for a variety of purposes, such as animal feed, weaving (tatami mats and sandals), and so forth.

# Mining

Although mining is not a common occupation in Rokugan, the Empire is highly dependent on its output. Farmers and craftsmen both require tools in order to perform their duties, and of course samurai require metal for their implements of war. Because metal is necessary for all aspects of Rokugani life, its trade is highly lucrative, and clans which are short of arable land can nonetheless survive on their trade in metals. Every clan guards its mines and mineral resources closely.

Iron is the most commonly mined ore, since it is necessary for both tools and weapons. The Great Wall of the North has numerous iron deposits which the Unicorn, the Phoenix, and especially the Dragon mine heavily. The Crab Clan has access to major iron deposits in the Twilight Mountains, some of the largest iron deposits in the Empire. The Crab are notably skilled at the refining of iron into steel, and the so-called Kaiu steel is a highly prized product all across the Empire.

Copper is another important ore, used for currency, jewelry, decorations and tools. The vast majority of the Empire's known copper mines are found in the Spine of the World Mountains, especially in the Lion territories. This affords the Lion a significant trade product, one particularly valuable given how often they are in need of additional food.

All of the clans also mine for valuable minerals such as gold, silver, jade, and gemstones. Jade is of course the most sought-after mineral, prized both for its beauty and for its spiritual properties. The Crab Clan boasts some of the largest jade mines in the Empire, but their ruthless use of the substance has also led to their suffering periodic jade shortages until new veins of the sacred stone can be found. Several other clans have access to jade mines in the Spine of the World Mountains, most notably the Scorpion and the Crane, and the Phoenix have been known to extract small quantities of jade from the Great Wall of the North.

Precious metals such as gold are utilized for coinage as well as for jewelry and other such decorations. (Gold-plated statues are common centerpieces for temples, for example.) The Great Wall of the North is a notable source of these metals, and both the Dragon and the Phoenix maintain a significant trade in these substances. Gemstones are found in the Great Wall as well, especially in the western regions where the Unicorn (and before them the Lion) maintain many diamond mines. The Mantis Isles are also rich in a variety of gemstones, which the Mantis mine and trade for items not easily obtained on the islands, such as grain and iron.

## Mining Techniques

Rokugani mining techniques are quite primitive by our own standards, but in some case are supplemented by magic. In the earliest years of Rokugani civilization, mining consisted of little more than finding a place where the desired ore broke free of the ground (or seemed to be prevalent in the surrounding rocks) and then digging it out using picks, shovels, hammers, and chisels. Some Rokugani also panned ore from rivers and streams using woven bamboo baskets.

Over time, technology advanced and the Rokugani began to dig deep trenches and light pitch fires within them. This would soften to ore within the ground and mix it with the pitch. They would then dig that combination out of the pits and burn the pitch away to separate the ore.

Eventually, miners began to be able to recognize the indicators that specific types of ore lay deeper within the ground, and dug deeper tunnels and shafts to reach it. These mining shafts presented a host of difficulties of their own, primarily ventilation and drainage issues. They were also by necessity small, and required small men, juveniles, and sometimes women to work within them. By the time of the Clan Wars, Rokugani miners had learned to shore up the shafts with timber and could thus begin to use full-sized adult men in the mines, though collapses were still common.

In modern mines, seepage is solved either by digging drainage tunnels which are lower than the rest of the mine or by funneling the water to specific locations, then bringing it out of the mine using a bucket-and-pulley system.

Ventilation was and remains a problem. In some cases it is solved by cutting extra shafts down into the mine, but this is often very labor intensive and can sometimes weaken the structure of the mine itself, causing a collapse. Another common method is building wooden "wind boxes" (essentially primitive air ducts) into the ceiling of the mine and pumping air with large bellows. Neither option is particularly good, unfortunately, and miners commonly develop respiratory problems. In the Dragon and Phoenix Clans, some techniques have been developed for entreating the Air kami to travel more freely through the mine-shafts, reducing the ventilation problems.

Light in mines is usually provided by candles, fish-oil lamps, or torches crafted from bamboo. Unfortunately, the heat and smoke from these light sources only adds to the ventilation problems. Here too, shugenja can sometimes assist with the problems, although Fire kami are notoriously excitable and difficult to keep under control.

The ore itself is usually carried out of mines in woven baskets carried on the miners' backs. Once out of the mine, ore is crushed by hand, using hammers, picks, and shovels, then heated to separate the ore from the stone, then finally cooled into ingots and sent on to its final destination.

## Masonry

Though Rokugani stone masons do not receive the same level of respect as farmers, their role is still an important one. Though most ordinary Rokugani houses are constructed of wood and paper, major structures like bridges, castles, and temples require stone as part of their structure. Nearly all castles have a stone foundation, for example, and the larger and more formidable castles are built almost entirely of stone. (This is especially common in the Dragon and Crab lands.) Masons are responsible not only for shaping and assembling stone structures but also for obtaining the stone in the first place, mining it, shaping it into suitable blocks, and transporting it to the construction site.

The amount of stone used in a structure is dependent in part on the materials that are available and the natural conditions of the building site. For the Crab or the Dragon, the ready availability of stone from nearby mountains make it much easier to use as a building material, especially given its resistance to attack. The Dragon go so far as to actually build some of their castles directly into the mountains, blending masonry with natural stone, a significant challenge for their masons.

Castles and temples built in other lands are generally located well away from the mountains and quarries where stone can be found, which helps explain their greater reliance on wooden construction. Transporting large blocks of stone across long distances is a major project and can often require months of time and the labor of hundreds of heimin.

## Carpentry

Carpentry is a vitally necessary craft for the Rokugani, used in the construction of buildings, manufacture of furniture, and many other things besides. There are almost no samurai carpenters, since this is seen almost entirely as a heimin craft, but on rare occasions a samurai will seek to elevate carpentry into a higher art form, producing beautiful and intricate wooden works of art.

Among the heimin, carpentry is a skill passed down through the generations, each carpenter training his son in the ways of the craft. The typical apprenticeship lasts for seven years, after which the carpenter is deemed worthy of working without the supervision of his teacher. Talented carpenters are a valuable commodity, especially in a land like Rokugan where fires, earthquakes, and tsunami regularly destroy large numbers of buildings. Most daimyo try to keep several trained heimin carpenters in their lands.

In Rokugan, carpenters are divided into three general categories. The most respected class of carpenters is the miyadaiku, who are responsible for building temples and shrines. Their painstaking work is intended to please both man and the Heavens, and the buildings they create are designed to last for centuries. Only carpenters who are recognized as of the miyadaiku level of skill and experience (and their apprentices) are permitted to work on such projects.

The second class of carpenters is the sukiya-daiku, who are responsible for building residential dwellings and commercial structures such as inns and teahouses. The best of these carpenters sometimes refine their skills enough to become miyadaiku, but more commonly the two groups remain separate and each focus on their own class of projects.

The third type of carpenters are the sashimono-shi, who are responsible for making furniture and other such practical items for use in businesses and residences. Most of these carpenters create simple work for the use of their fellow heimin, but the most skilled are permitted to make furniture and other wooden items for samurai.

One of the traits of a good carpenter, regardless of type, is the ability to choose the most appropriate wood for the task at hand. Rokugan is home to hundreds of different tree species, and their different types of wood are used for a great variety of purposes. Oak, for example, is the most popular wood used for building large structures, such as castles, ships, and monasteries. It is particularly valued for its strength and durability. However, oak is notoriously difficult to work with, since its hardness quickly wears out tools. Pine is a very widespread and easily-obtained wood that is frequently used in building construction; its wood is softer than oak, easier to work with, and thus is commonly used in ordinary residences and businesses, as well as for furniture for the heimin.

The beech tree can be found in northern and central Rokugan. This is the wood of choice used by the higher levels of sashimono-shi, since it can be used to produce beautiful furniture. Because beech wood is harder to obtain than pine and is regarded as more beautiful as well, it is preferred for the furnishings of well-off heimin and lower-ranking samurai.

Walnut wood, found in northern Rokugan, is prized because it is both easy to work with and very beautiful, making it a superior choice for furnishings and other crafts. Due to its expense it is usually restricted to the belongings of higher-ranking samurai.

### Carpentry Tools and Methods

Rokugani carpentry tools are crafted mainly from steel rather than iron, and thus last a very long time if properly maintained. In some cases, the same tool may be passed down through generations of carpenters, replacing the non-metal components along the way, and there are even rumors of a few carpentry tools which have awakened and become nemuranai.

Rokugani saws are pull saws, meaning they cut when the saw is pulled across the wood rather than when it is pushed into the wood. This reduces stress on the blade and allows Rokugani saw blades to be fairly thin.

Most Rokugani carpentry tools – hammers, axes, and chisels – are not greatly different from their Western counterparts, but Rokugani planes are somewhat different in that they, like the saws, operate by pulling them across the wood rather than pushing them. They are most often crafted by attaching a blade to a convex box that is pulled across the surface of the wood. There are also larger planes called yarigana which are shaped like a spear with a leaf shaped head; these are used to smooth the large circular columns which are a major feature of Rokugani castles, shrines, and temples.

Rokugani construction does not use nails. Rather, it uses intricate joint technology, such as dovetailing to join pieces of wood together. This is sometimes supplemented with wooden pins.

## Sculpture

Sculpture is both a craft and an art form, one found primarily in Rokugani temples, although sculptures are occasionally used in other settings such as gardens. Sculpture is performed in a variety of mediums, including clay, stone, and wood. In contrast to most of the other Earth-based crafts, sculpture is seen as a higher form of art and is practiced as often by samurai as it is by commoners.

Clay was one of the first mediums of sculpture used by the Rokugani, with some clay statues in Kyuden Isawa pre-dating the Empire itself, and it is still used in the present day. Clay is popular because it is inexpensive to obtain and easily worked into the desired shape; the primary drawback of clay is that it requires a kiln to harden and set it, limiting the size of a clay sculpture to the size of the kiln. Clay sculpture is used for a number of purposes. For example, it is used to create haniwa, miniature figurines that depict the Kami or the Fortunes; these are typically carried by the Rokugani to attract the favor of that divine being. Clay is also used to create likenesses of honored ancestors to be placed within family shrines. Because clay is the most lightweight of the sculpture types, it is also used to create the small guardian statues that adorn the roofs of many Rokugani buildings.

Stone is easily obtained and well able to withstand the elements; as a result, it is the preferred medium for statues that are placed in gardens, city squares, and other outdoor areas. Stone carving requires effective tools and a high level of skill, since it is the most difficult and unforgiving medium the Rokugani use.

By contrast, wood is relatively easy to use and is the most widespread and popular medium used in Rokugani sculpture. Wood is used for everything from simple carvings to vast temple statues, and is the most commonly used medium for the huge statues of the Fortunes, the Kami, and the Elemental Dragons that can be found in most shrines and monasteries. (These statues are often plated over with gold and decorated with precious stones.) Wood is also used for many lesser forms of carving art, such as Noh and Kabuki masks.

## Pottery

A pre-curser of clay sculpture, pottery is the craft of combining Fire and Earth to produce useful items, primarily various types of earthenware vessels. It was one of the original mortal skills practiced in the time before the Kami fell to earth. Ancient Rokugani pottery was simple and crude, usually nothing more than hand-shaped vessels hardened in open fires. However, as the Empire grew and the Kami shared their wisdom with the mortal world, the Rokugani gained far greater mastery of the skill. The invention of the potter's wheel and the kiln allowed for much finer pieces to be produced, and techniques for creating stoneware and porcelain were developed and perfected, along with numerous techniques for decorating pottery. "Modern" pottery,

designed to be both functional and aesthetically pleasing, was fully developed by the end of the fourth century and has remained largely unchanged since then.

Pottery is used primarily for food service and storage, and is produced primarily by heimin (although a few samurai artisans work with the more refined forms of pottery, especially porcelain pieces). There are three types of pottery: earthenware, stoneware, and porcelain.

Earthenware is the most common type of pottery; the clay needed to make it can be easily found in most areas of Rokugan, and it hardens at lower temperatures. Earthenware is often left unadorned or decorated only with very simple designs. This type of pottery is used widely throughout the Empire, primarily by the heimin caste although better-quality pieces are found in most samurai households.

So-called stoneware requires a heavier type of clay found near the major mountain ranges. Because the clay is extremely dense, it also requires higher temperatures to set properly. However, the resulting pottery is much stronger and more durable. Stoneware vessels are usually used for food storage and transport.

Porcelain is a much more delicate form of pottery, used primarily for plates, bowls, cups, teapots, and other such items used primarily by the samurai caste. It is also the vessel of choice for interring the cremated remains of the dead. The clay needed to produce porcelain can only be found in the coastal regions of Rokugan, both on the mainland and on the Mantis Isles. The brittle nature of the clay and the high temperatures needed for it to harden properly make porcelain by far the most difficult of the three types to produce. Porcelain in often intricately decorated using a variety of painting and glazing techniques, and samurai who dabble in poetry usually focus on this aspect of the craft.

## Creatures and Otherworldly Beings of Earth

Each of the Five Elements has a variety of beings associated with it, both mundane and supernatural. In the case of Earth, nearly all mundane creatures (save birds and aquatic animals) are strongly associated with Earth – to list them all would be superfluous. At the supernatural level, the premier being is the Elemental Dragon of Earth, followed by several Fortunes and then the lesser spirit creatures (such as the Ryu associated with Earth). The most significant of these entities are discussed here.

# Denizens of the Heavens

### The Dragon of Earth

The Earth Dragon is known for being very detached from the doings of mortals and almost never intervening in mortal affairs. However, on the rare occasions when he does act, he does so with great force.

### Inari, Fortune of Rice

Inari is one of the most venerated lesser Fortunes because of the importance of rice within Rokugani society. Inari is known as a caring and compassionate Fortune who takes an active interest in the humans who worship him. His favor means a bountiful harvest, while his displeasure heralds famine. As a result, shrines to Inari can be found throughout Rokugan.

### Kenro-ji-jin, Fortune of Soil

Kenro-ji-jin is revered primarily by farmers, who understand that nutritious soil is the foundation for a good harvest, as well as others who rely upon the earth to make their living (such as masons and potters). Most farmers maintain a small shrine to him near their gardens, rice paddies, or fields.

### Kuroshin, Fortune of Agriculture

Much like Kenro-ji-jin, Kuroshin is revered primarily by farmers. Like Inari, he is normally a benevolent fortune who rewards those who endeavor to learn the ways of the land. Those who abuse his bounty attract his displeasure, which typically results in barren fields and herds struck by illness.

### Toyouke-Omikami, Fortune of Grain

This Fortune is not as widely revered as Inari, since grain has a lesser importance to rice in Rokugani society. She is revered primarily in the Unicorn lands, where grain is valued highly as fodder for horses. Toyouke-Omikami is normally content with her lesser role, and grants favor to those who show her the appropriate reverence.

### Tsi Xing Guo, Fortune of Steel

This Fortune is revered primarily by those who shape metal into weapons, armor, and tools. However, he is a somewhat indifferent Fortune, focusing primarily upon honing his own craft. Those who do manage to draw his interest are able to fashion truly superior crafts.

### Ryu of the Earth

The Ryu are the dragon spirits of Tengoku, described in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*. The Ryu of the Earth Dragon are very much like their master: aloof and distant from the affairs of mortal men. When they do manifest in the mortal world, they can be found most often coiled atop the highest mountains of Rokugan, watching the events of the land and listening to the rumblings of the earth and the whispers of the nature spirits. They are calm and patient, content to rest unmoving atop the mountains until it is time to act. Their patience does not mean they are lazy; when necessary, they strike with the ferocity of an earthquake. They appear to be serpentine dragons composed of stone and rock, usually only about 6 to 8 feet in length; their scales shimmer with precious stones and ores. Like all Ryu, they can fly, but have no wings – rather, they appear to swim through air as if it were water. They can also move through the solid earth in the same manner.

# Supernatural Beings Associated with Earth

### Kodama

The kodama are spirits who inhabit the oldest trees in Rokugan. They prefer to live in oak or ash trees, but any tree that matures past the age of thirty can attract one. Once a kodama binds itself to a tree, its life becomes tied to it; if the tree dies, the kodama will die as well. Thus the kodama will strengthen the tree it links to, protecting it from pestilence and insects. The huge, ancient trees found deep within the Shinomen Mori, Kitsune Mori, and Isawa Mori forests often have kodama linked to them. When such trees are chopped down or otherwise deliberately destroyed, the dying kodama will curse the persons responsible to great misfortune; it is said this can be averted, however, by first planting a seed from that tree in a different location, which will cause the kodama to transfer its link to the new tree.

### Myobu

The myobu are an unusual form of kitsune spirit who directly serve Inari, the Fortune of Rice. They frequently take human form, appearing as either a beautiful woman or an elderly peasant, while their fox form is uniformly that of a silver fox with up to eight tails. The number of tails is dependent on the myobu's age and its standing with Inari. Myobu are normally benign spirits, and appear to peasants and samurai alike, offering omens and instructions on how to maximize the harvest and avoid famine. If a particular person has displeased the Fortune, however, the myobu appear in a more angry manner, offering dire warnings or bestowing curses. (Devout prayer will encourage them to offer advice on how to regain Inari's favor.) Though the myobu themselves claim no differentiation from their kitsune brethren, the Rokugani still sense a difference, and it is not uncommon to see small carved representations of myobu in any shrine dedicated to the Fortune of Rice.

## The Tale of the Monk and the Foxes

This tale is told widely among the monks of Inari, as well as among the peasants of Rokugan. Supposedly, one stormy night a kitsune spirit and his gravid mate sought shelter. They were chased away by all they met, for the farmers saw foxes as dangerous pests. The two spirits despaired of finding any sort of shelter from the storm. Finally, however, an elderly monk of Inari invited the pair into his humble cottage to share his fire and his rice. The two foxes were so grateful for his kindness that they pledged their service and that of their children to the Fortune Inari.

Supposedly, the myobu are the descendants of that original pair of kitsune, and serve as the messengers of Inari. They maintain their kitsune powers, but their demeanor is more serious than that of their brethren, and they tend to avoid the pranks and mischief which ordinary kitsune indulge so often. Instead, they focus on showing humans how to offer proper reverence to their patron Fortune.

### Yobuko

The yobuko are spirits who inhabit mountains and mountain passes. They typically take the form of a small boy with a wide face, wearing peasant clothing and a broad-brimmed straw hat. However, the yobuko only have one leg, hopping from place to place, and the sound of their movements is vaguely like small pebbles tumbling down a hill. They do not know the Rokugani language, but will repeat the words they hear; it is said that when mortals hear the echoes of their voices in the mountains, it is the yobuko calling back to them. Although the yobuko view humans in their territory as guests, they are basically solitary creatures, and if mortals stay in their territory for very long they will become angry. When this happens, visitors begin to hear the rumbles of an approaching avalanche rather than the echoes of their own voices, a warning that they have overstayed their welcome and it is time to leave.

### Jinmenju

The entity known as the jinmenju appears to be a tree, superficially similar to a peach tree; it blooms blood-red flowers in the spring, followed by fruit in the summer. However, the fruit it bears takes the shape of human faces, complete with functioning eyes, nose, and mouth. The eyes are red in color, the mouth is filled with razor-sharp teeth, and the faces utter bone-chilling laughter or hideous screams whenever someone approaches. They seem to retain their life even when separated from the tree, falling silent only after the tree itself is dead. Groves of these sinister trees can be found in the Shadowlands, and there are also a few in the darker parts of the Shinomen Forest and the Mori Kuroi, as well as other locations marked by supernatural rumor or Tainted activity (such as the Forest of Dreamers). Rumor claims the jinmenju are actually peach trees that have grown in blood-soaked or Tainted ground.

### Zokujin

The so-called "copper goblins" are one of the five Ancient Races who predated humanity; their history and nature are described in the L5R 4th Edition supplement Enemies of the Empire, pages 193-195. They are deeply connected to the Element of Earth; in fact, they feed on stones and metals, and can walk through solid earth as easily as through air. The Lion Clan has sometimes actually enslaved the zokujin to labor in its mines.

### Greater Terror of Earth

The Jimen no Oni is the more powerful of the two Earth Elemental Terrors, created by the Dark Oracles early in the twelfth century. It appears as a giant humanoid made of blood-clotted dirt and rock; in pace of eyes it typically has rubies that shine with unholy fire. Those that have survived encountering it say its cry sounds like the rumble of a great boulder crashing down a hill. The Jimen no Oni is the least cunning of the Elemental Terrors, but what it lacks in intelligence it makes up for in brute force. In battle it simply singles out the strongest-looking foe and beats it into a pulp, then proceeds to the next strongest-looking opponent. It is, in truth, a dark perversion of the Earth principle of persistent endurance, throwing its overwhelming force against an obstacle relentlessly and unceasingly until it is defeated.

### Lesser Elemental Terrors of Earth

The Toichi no Kansen is the largest of the Lesser Elemental Terrors; it takes the form of a large pile of dirt and stone with stony appendages. Like its greater cousin, the Toichi no Kansen is not known for its intelligence, but possesses great patience and relentless determination when hunting down its foes. It always attacks the strongest-looking foe, not ceasing until the prey is dead. It also uses an ability to drag its victims beneath the ground, dooming them to suffocation. According to the Kuni who have investigated it, the Toichi no Kansen is not a true demonic spirit in the manner of most of the other Elemental Terrors, but is merely an extremely powerful kansen infused into a mass of Tainted earth; however, when it has gained enough favor in the eyes of the Dark Oracle, it may be granted to power to become a Greater Terror of Earth.

## Legendary Races of Earth

Rokugani legends and folktales are full of stories about non-human races, sometimes ancient and extinct, at other times believed to inhabit remote and unexplored corners of the world. Some of these tales have their basis in reality – for example, the legends of an ancient race of snake-men turned out to be based on the ancient Naga race, which had been asleep since before mankind dwelt in Rokugan. Tales of "copper goblins" living beneath the earth turned out to be the zokujin race, rumors of bipedal bird-men were the kenku, and so forth.

However, Rokugani folklore also tells many tales of strange and mysterious races whose existence has never been confirmed by a samurai's eyes. Do these creatures actually exist? Perhaps they do, perhaps they do not – it is left to the choice of the GM as to whether these races are "real" within his version of Rokugan.

## The Daidarabochi

The Great Wall of the North is riddled with numerous springs, lakes, and rivers, and it is said among the peasants of the Dragon lands that these springs were created by the daidarabochi, a race of angry giants who live high in the mountains. These giants are so large that their very footsteps can create holes large enough for a spring, and when they become angry, the rocks they throw create holes large enough for lakes. The plumes of smoke from active volcanoes are attributed to daidarabochi cooking fires. These tales are partly intended to scare children into staying near their homes: "Do not stray too far, or the daidarabochi will get you," is a common refrain in Dragon peasant households – and even, sometimes, in samurai households.

If the daidarabochi exist, they are a race of giants who live in the upper elevations of the Great Wall of the North. They have a particularly thick skin that renders them resistant to the cold of higher elevations, and they subsist primarily on mountain animals that stray into their territory; however, they are not above eating the occasional human victim who stumbles across their homes. A crude race, the daidarabochi lack the refinement of Rokugani culture and focus mainly on survival in the barren icy mountains. They eat mostly meat, consuming it raw because they have not mastered fire. They fight using whatever implements are nearby, typically their fists or boulders, or uprooted trees on those rare occasions when they venture into lower elevations.

## The Hibagon

Many Rokugani who live near deep forests, especially the Shinomen Mori, tell tales of encountering a strange fur-covered creature which stands on its hind legs like a man, but has a snubbed face and wide-set eyes similar to a monkey. Supposedly its entire body is covered with brown or black hair except for its hands and feet. They call these creatures the hibagon, a race of secretive ape-men.

If they do exist, the Hibagon dwell in the heart of the deepest forests, especially the Shinomen Forest, where the trees grow closest together and mankind is least likely to visit. They live among the branches of the trees, constructing crude woven shelters from sticks and leaves. Their behavior is very similar to that of a primitive human being, complete with a mastery of simple wooden tools and a basic spoken language, though they lack any skills for working stone or metal. Though they are fierce in appearance, the hibagon avoid eating meat, surviving on a diet of fruit, nuts, leaves, and bark.

Hibagon are shy creatures, preferring to avoid other intelligent races and generally fleeing from encounters; they also flee from animal predators and fear fire. Strangely, however, they have a natural hatred of Tainted creatures, and will react fiercely to anything that is clearly Tainted, trying to drive it away with barrages of rocks and sticks. (Of course, they will flee from a Tainted foe who clearly outmatches them.)

## GM's Option: The True Elemental Terrors

The Elemental Terrors were created by the Dark Oracles in the early twelfth century, and personify nature that has been corrupted by the Taint. Most Rokugani encounter only the Greater and Lesser Terrors, which roam across the Shadowlands and sometimes enter the Empire to spread havoc and destruction. However, there are rumors of still greater entities associated with the Terrors: the so-called True Terrors, five unique beings who spawn the Greater and Lesser Terrors. According to this tale, it was actually only the five True Terrors which were directly created by the Dark Oracles and which dwell within the infamous extinct volcano near the Festering Pit; all the other Terrors were spawned from these original five.

If this is true, the True Terrors are unique beings of monstrous power, roughly equivalent to Oni Lords. No Rokugani has ever encountered a True Terror; thus, it is left to the GM's decision as to whether or not they actually exist in his version of Rokugan.

## Mundane Creatures of Earth

### Cougars

Cougars (sometimes called "mountain lions") are slender and agile predatory cats which live in the mountainous regions of Rokugan. They can grow as long as eight feet from nose to tail, and their fur ranges in color from tan to red to silvery gray depending on their habitat. They have powerful legs which they use for climbing or leaping after prey. Cougars are carnivores, willing to eat anything they can catch – including men, as well as large herbivores such as deer or wild horses. They typically catch their prey by stalking and ambushing it; once their target is dead, they will drag it off and hide it in the upper branches of trees, where it can be consumed over a period of days. Cougars are solitary by nature, except when the females are raising their young.

### Panda

The panda is a rare variety of bear with distinctive black-and-white patches in its thick fur coat. An adult panda is typically 4 to 6 feet in height, with a wide body and short limbs. They live primarily in mountainous regions, close to the bamboo forests which are their favorite food. Because bamboo is a poor source of nutrition, pandas often behave in a very lethargic manner, and rarely show aggressive tendencies. They tend to live a solitary existence and seldom attack other creatures unless provoked. The panda's exotic appearance makes it appealing to Rokugani nobles with a taste for the unusual, and consequently the creatures are sometimes captured and put in display in the gardens of wealthy samurai.

### Komodo Dragons

These large lizards, growing up to ten feet in length, can occasionally be found in the Mantis Isles as well as in other tropical islands which the Mantis have visited with their ships. Their bodies are covered with black and tan scales, and their mouths are edged with short serrated teeth. Their saliva is blood-red, which only increases their fearsome appearance. Komodo dragons are aggressive carnivores, willing to eat both carrion and live prey. They hunt by ambush, hiding themselves in tall grass or brush and charging out to bite their prey, employing short bursts of speed. Their bite is septic and will usually kill the victim. Because of their fearsome appearance and nature, komodo dragons have sometimes been mistaken for Shadowlands creatures.

## Earth Awakened: Nemuranai of the Earth

Rokugan contains innumerable nemuranai, legendary items whose kami have awakened. Some of these were awakened by the visionary artisans who created them, while others were brought to awareness by the famous samurai who wielded them. This section discusses the most famous (and infamous) nemuranai which are most strongly associated with the Element of Earth – primarily various legendary armors.

## Agasha Kitsuki's Armor

To outsiders, many of the Dragon Clan's traditions can be confusing or even borderline blasphemous. The clan is known for blurring the lines of Rokugan's social customs – trained bushi learn the secrets of the shugenja's art, priests are often well-respected personal combatants, and the Togashi seem to do whatever pleases them, academically or physically. A less prominent but still well-known aspect of this is the Kitsuki family: well-trained investigators who reject conventional Rokugani standards of evidence, but who are also skilled diplomats and often remarkable duelists. The Kitsuki are far more willing to engage in combat that other courtiers or politicians, and many believe this stems from grim necessity – the family's habit of uncovering painful truths leads to all-too-

frequent lethal challenges. What few histories record is that Agasha Kitsuki himself, the founder of the family, had a great interest in the martial arts, and his students still follow in their mentor's footsteps.

Kitsuki believed one of the most essential arts of investigation was the ability to make a person reveal their true self. As he gained notoriety in the Dragon Clan, he was invited to speak with several classes at the Mirumoto school; the former Agasha's teachings meshed well with the somewhat formless fighting style of the Mirumoto, and it was not long before Kitsuki was splitting his time between his own duties and the Mirumoto dojo. Eventually, however, he realized he was distracting himself too much from the task of managing his own school and his fledgling family, and he politely parted ways with the Mirumoto teachers. In gratitude for his work, the Mirumoto ordered an exceptional suit of armor made for Kitsuki, both for his personal protection and as an heirloom for his family. The suit was designed to work with Kitsuki's preferred method of fighting, so it was light and afforded a great deal of flexibility. It fit well over a standard court kimono, and Kitsuki took to wearing it often in that manner; while many bristled at this violation of social convention, few noted that the armor was a marvel of both protection and fashion, almost an ornate manner of dressing rather than a mere set of lacquered plates.

Kitsuki owed his life to the armor more than once, as his curiosity often led him ahead of his caution. This led him to order several adjustments to the armor, and it eventually became less of a full suit of armor and more a set of different pieces that covered only the vital areas where assassins would usually attempt to strike – kidneys, hamstrings, the throat, and so forth. Of course, this left more obvious areas such as the stomach, upper arms, and legs unprotected, but Kitsuki's skills meant he had little problem defending himself from direct frontal attacks.

As Agasha Kitsuki's armor has passed down from generation to generation, later daimyo have made further adjustments and improvements on it; the armor has, in effect, become a sort of physical journal of the family's history. Each change to the armor has its own story and reason, and a keen investigator can examine the armor and determine them. For example, daimyo Kitsuki Daisuke added several breakaway sections to the armor in places where an unarmed attacker might attempt to grab the wearer. These pieces cleanly fall away from the wearer, leaving the assailant holding nothing but a chunk of armor.

After the advancement of daimyo Kitsuki Iweko to the Imperial Throne in the late twelfth century, the Kitsuki armor goes from an important family heirloom to a sacred one; the founder of a Celestially-appointed dynasty wore the armor for many years prior to her ascension, and the spirits within it thus became even more powerful. While the armor stayed within the Kitsuki family, they pledged Iweko and her heirs would always have a rightful claim to wear the armor if they so chose.

## Animals of the Ivory Kingdoms

The Mantis Clan makes contact with the gaijin realm known as the Ivory Kingdoms in the eighth century, and the Empire more generally comes into large-scale contact with that land in the late twelfth century after the Kali-Ma Invasion. The subsequent transformation of the ruined Ivory Kingdoms into the Colonies of Rokugan, results in a great deal more contact between the Rokugani and these foreign animals.

Although there is considerable overlap between the animals which inhabit the Empire and those dwelling in the Colonies, there are also a number of unique natural creatures in the former Ivory Kingdoms. Many of these are described in the L5R 4th Edition box set, *The Second City*, but a couple more are presented here.

**Mongoose** – The mongoose is a small mammal that inhabits the jungle forests of the Ivory Kingdoms, although it has also occasionally appeared on the Mantis Isles. They have brown, silver, or black fur covering their slender bodies, and a long snout with a mouth full of needle-sharp teeth. They have five toes, each tipped with a long claw. The mongoose primarily eats insects, birds, and frogs, but is also know to hunt snakes – including extremely large and dangerous snakes. It is extremely fast and agile, utilizing its superior speed to kill its prey with several quick bites. The Ivinda, the native people of the Ivory Kingdoms, revere the mongoose for its skill at killing snakes, and refuse to ever hunt them. Samurai do not share these attitudes, but pay little attention to the mongoose; heimin in the Colonies have begun to develop an affectionate attitude similar to that of the Ivinda people.

**Rhinoceros** – The rhinoceros is a large mammal that lives primarily in the open plains of the northern Colonies. It can weigh up to a ton and has a thick gray hide, similar to that of an elephant. Both male and female rhinos have a horn at the end of their long noses. The rhinoceros is an herbivore, subsisting primarily on grass and leaves, and is generally a solitary creature, though females can be accompanied by a single calf. The rhinoceros is notoriously ill-tempered and extremely aggressive; its eyesight is poor, but its hearing is acute, allowing it to locate targets easily. Despite their large size, rhinos are extremely fast and able to make sharp turns, much to the surprise of their enemies. Because of their tough hides and aggressive nature, rhinos have become a popular hunting choice for samurai in the Colonies, albeit not as much so as tigers. More recently, folktales have begun to credit powdered rhino horn with a variety of medicinal qualities.

Mechanically, Agasha Kitsuki's Armor confers the standard Light Armor bonuses, but with several additional effects. The wearer does not suffer any Armor TN penalty from being attacked while unaware, and any such attack that does successfully strike the wearer suffers a –1k1 penalty to its damage roll. The spirits within the armor also guide the wearer with the wisdom of some of the most brilliant minds to ever live in the Empire; when the wearer makes any Contested Social Roll, those opposing him cannot make Raises, and their dice cannot explode unless they have a higher Honor Rank than the wearer. Finally, any Investigation Skill Rolls made while wearing the armor gain a bonus to their total equal to the wearer's combined Intelligence and Honor Rank.

## Ancestral Armor of the Ki-Rin

When Shinjo encountered the nomadic Ujik-hai tribe in the Burning Sands, the meeting was not entirely peaceful – the barbarians attempted to betray and ambush the Kami and her followers. When the Ki-Rin Clan defeated the Ujik-hai soundly, many members of the tribe knelt before Shinjo and swore fealty. Some believed they should follow the strongest leader they could find, while others were disgusted at their former leader's betrayal and were moved by Shinjo's mercy when she allowed them to flee from their failed attack. By the time the clan moved on, taking many of the Ujik-hai with them, the two groups had forged a strong friendship. The nomads who decided to stay in the steppes gifted a suit of their armor to Shinjo, who they referred to as the Ki-Rin Khan. While the armor was a moving gesture, the Kami never wore it herself, but instead bestowed it on her most favored followers to wear as symbols of their authority.

When Shinjo was finally lost to the clan many years later, her son and heir was wearing the armor; since that time, the Armor of the Ki-Rin Khan has always been worn by the recognized heir to the leadership of the Unicorn Clan. If the current Champion's heir is too young to lead, the Armor is instead bestowed on a designated regent who will lead the clan should something happen to the Champion. Thus, being gifted with the Armor of the Ki-Rin means the Clan Champion has unwavering faith in one's word and loyalty, and such a person always carries great weight within the clan's councils.

Only twice in the history of the Unicorn has the bearer of the Armor been stripped of it by the Champion. In both cases, the shame was so horrible that the disgraced party fled alone to take his own life in complete shame and sorrow.

The Ancestral Armor of the Ki-Rin Khan is mechanically Light Armor, but is of obvious gaijin design, made in the style of the ancient Ujik-hai tribes of the northern steppes. It is colored in the purple, white, and silver hues of the Unicorn Clan and trimmed with furs and leathers that are ancient but well-cared-for. The armor's awakened spirits enhance the wearer's coordination and focus in mounted combat. The wearer may take the Full Attack Stance while mounted, regardless of Horsemanship Skill Ranks, and does not suffer any Armor TN penalties when in the Full Attack Stance while mounted.

## Armor of Earth

The Armor of Earth is one of the five Elemental Nemuranai crafted by Asako Shingon and Iuchi Yogosha, making it an artifact of both legend and power. The armor's exact history after it was crafted is somewhat unclear, but it is known to have passed through the hands of several owners during the Clan War. After that great conflict ended, several Ikoma historians dedicated themselves to making an accurate account of the five Elemental artifacts; the scholars pored over reports of conflicts shared by all of the clans, assisted in their research by the Asako family in those situations where they needed to consult families not friendly to the Lion.

In all cases where the historians are reasonably sure the true Armor of Earth was involved, the bearer of the Armor was slain in combat against overwhelming or otherwise hopeless odds. For example, during a bandit raid against a southern Phoenix territory, the Armor was worn by a Shiba bushi who threw himself selflessly into a horde of enemies so that several messengers could escape to reach Shiro Shiba. On another occasion a Crane shugenja wearing the Armor gave his life holding back a large group of bandits while other Asahina-trained priests fortified a nearby village with protective magic. All of these instances bear a similar theme, and in all cases the Armor itself was unaccounted for after the conflict.

The Phoenix and Ikoma theorize that the Oracle of Thunder assisted in the creation of this artifact to some degree. They believe that because the Empire was in an era when great heroes would need the power of Earth to do what was needed, Thunder gave the Armor a portion of its power as well.

Once the Clan War ended, the Armor of Earth was not seen again for several years. During the Empire's War Against the Shadow, however, Togashi Mitsu and Togashi Hoshi were led to the Armor by a vision from the Oracle of Earth. In keeping with the Oracle's command, they sought out the Armor and have it to a Unicorn woman they did not know: none other than Otaku Xieng Chi, the daimyo of her family at the time. The Armor was thus present when Xieng Chi and several other samurai rescued the kidnapped Emperor Toturi in the year 1132. Knowing the Armor's reputation, Xieng Chi fully expected to die in the liberation of the Emperor, but she survived and passed the Armor to the Emperor to use as protection. Toturi I, gripped by the madness of the Lying Darkness, discarded the artifact in the Imperial Palace. The Armor of Earth was not seen again until many years later, when Toturi's heirs battled each other for supremacy.

The Armor of Earth is Heavy Armor, but the TN penalty it imposes is reduced by the wearer's Earth Ring. The primary ability of the Armor is to infuse the bearer with the immovable strength of Earth, making him an impassable barrier to enemies. The wearer may spend a Void Point to activate the armor for ten Rounds; during that time, any effect that would move the wearer in any way automatically fails unless the wearer chooses to allows it. Also, while this effect is active, any damage rolls against the wearer (for any reason) keep one less die.

During the Clan War, the Armor also holds the blessing of the Oracle of Thunder, which causes heroic souls to sacrifice themselves against the chaos and darkness that threatens to tear the entire Empire apart. When the wearer is at the Crippled (or lower) Wound Rank, and engaged in a battle to defend someone or something relying on his protection, the Armor permanently lowers his Willpower and Stamina by 1... but in return, his Wounds are completely healed. This effect will continue to happen each time the wearer drops to Crippled or lower, until it reduces one of the wearer's Earth Traits to 0 – at which time the wearer dies normally. Moreover, if during the battle the wearer was healed by the Armor of a number of Wounds which would normally have killed him, he will perish once the battle is over.

## Armor of the Five

The position of the Voice of the Elemental Masters is one of many odd wrinkles in the political landscape of the Phoenix Clan. Though the samurai named as Voice does not hold political authority of his own, he is often sent out into the clan and even the greater Empire to speak on behalf of the Elemental Council. Though the Voice is typically a Shiba, and thus a vassal of the Phoenix Champion, he can speak against his Champion's wishes if that is the will of the Council. In addition to these duties, the Voice is often in the company of the Elemental Masters and is expected to protect them with his life if necessary. As both a representative of the Masters and a possible defender of their persons, the Voice was provided with a special suit of armor crafted specifically for the position. The finest smith in the clan was called to work with the students of the Elemental Masters, and spent a year finding ways to blend Phoenix magic with the armorsmith's art.

When it was completed, the dark-hued suit of red, gold, and black was an astounding work even to the Phoenix. The blessings of the Master of Water allowed it to change shape to more effectively fit its wearer. The Master of Air ensured the armor was light and comfortable. Magic from the Master of Fire kept the effects of cold and supernatural heat at bay, and the Master of Earth reinforced the armor to make its protection even more remarkable than it appeared. Finally, the Master of Void imbued the armor with a connection to the Masters' council chamber in Kyuden Isawa, so that the Voice and the Council could communicate at long distances.

The armor has been passed down for centuries from Voice to Voice, and all Phoenix recognize the suit on sight. All those who live in Phoenix lands, whether samurai or peasant, know what the armor of the Voice of the Masters looks like so they can recognize him and obey his word. There have been instances of bandits and other lawbreakers attempting to duplicate the appearance of the armor; such crimes have never succeeded, and are always met with swift and harsh justice. The longest this ploy has ever lasted before exposure was two weeks.

Since the armor is a symbol of the Voice's station, the Voice wears it at almost all times; only in situations where it would be inappropriate (such as the Emperor's Winter Court) does the Voice go without it. Most of the

other daimyo in the Empire are familiar with the Voice's position and with the armor, and thus are much less likely to consider it an insult when worn in their presence.

The Armor of the Five is mechanically considered Light Armor, but awards an Armor TN bonus of +10 and a Reduction of 5. Moreover, if the wearer is targeted by a spell, he may spend a Void Point to either cause the Spellcasting Roll to either fail or to automatically succeed. (This effect does not work against spells cast by members of the Phoenix Elemental Council, since the Five Masters are taught how to bypass the armor's magical protections.) Finally, the wearer can mentally communicate with any shugenja who is in the Elemental Council's chamber.

## Armor of the Golden Samurai

There is a peculiar relic that has become an heirloom of the Matsu family. It is a set of gold-lacquered armor that has no name and no obvious marks indicating its history or maker. The Matsu have dubbed it the Armor of the Golden Samurai, and only a few historians know its actual story.

In the second century, when the Great Clans were still settling into the vast lands the Hantei Emperor had granted them, ronin were far more common and were much less likely to be bandits or dishonored samurai. One of these men was a smith named Kukinjin, known primarily for his exceptional armor and metalworking. When Kukinjin announced he would retire, he was predictably inundated with requests from high-ranking samurai beseeching he craft a final set of his armor for them.

One such man was an unusually haughty and rude daimyo, Harui, who had sworn fealty to Shiba. Shiba Harui's request was politely declined, but in response he went to Kukinjin's village personally to demand the smith comply with his request. It was the Phoenix's good luck (and the misfortune of the armorsmith) that he arrived just as a set of gold-colored armor was being finished for someone else. Unwilling to argue further with a mere ronin, Harui cut the old man down where he stood and claimed the suit of armor for himself.

This brutal act was witnessed by a Matsu samurai-ko named Toriko. While she did not know Kukinjin or his reputation, she was appalled that a fellow samurai could do such a thing. She confronted Harui and demanded his reasons for murdering the smith; the Shiba responded by drawing his sword once again. Toriko promptly struck him down.

The Matsu samurai-ko subsequently learned all of the crimes Shiba Harui had committed, but also discovered that the armor was meant for Harui's superior, a daimyo named Shiba Morihime. Toriko took it upon herself to travel to the Phoenix lands and deliver both the armor and the story of Harui's actions to his master. Morihime felt the entire affair had sullied both the gift of the armor and the name of Shiba; she declared the armor, the last work of one of the greatest smiths of the age, would be Matsu Toriko's. Thus did Toriko return to the Lion with an unexpected honor and prize. She wore the armor proudly in battle for many years, and by the end of her life the combination of Kukinjin's spirit and her dedication to Bushido awakened it into a nemuranai. When Toriko wore the armor it shone as if it was directly in the sunlight (even when indoors) and all but blinded her foes, especially those of questionable morals. When Toriko finally fell in battle, the armor passed to her daughter and thus became an heirloom of the Lion Clan. However, the armor's magical power did not always manifest reliably, and for some samurai it would not work at all.

Due to the armor's somewhat unreliable nature, the Matsu family often simply left it in a place of honor on their estate. At the end of the Clan War, the armor was used by Matsu Ketsui, daimyo of the Matsu family after the death of Matsu Tsuko, and she was able to fully awaken its power once more. Ketsui became a beacon for the samurai of the Empire and a blinding scourge to Tainted beasts and Lost samurai during the Second Day of Thunder.

The Armor of the Golden Samurai is a suit of gold-plated Heavy Armor, its sheen undimmed by age. When the armor is worn by a samurai with an Honor Rank of at least 4.0, he may attempt to activate its power by rolling his Honor at a TN of 25. With a success, the armor radiates a blinding aura that produces a Fear effect to all enemies within fifty feet. (Those beyond fifty feet can still see the light, but are far enough away not to be overawed by it.) The Fear is equal in strength to the wearer's Honor Rank; however, this is lowered by the target's own Honor Rank, if any.

## Armor of the Shadow Warrior

The Crab Clan has many relics and sacred arms and armor, and in contrast to other clans – who often hesitate to use their sacred nemuranai against the forces of the Shadowlands, lest they be Tainted or destroyed – the Crab never hesitate to use their treasures to the utmost. In the Crab view, it would be folly to deny their soldiers any edge in their eternal war against Jigoku's forces. In the case of the clan's ancestral armor, however, the clan came to a compromise – the "official" armor of the Clan Champion was made as an art piece and placed on display in Kyuden Hida, while Hida wore a more practical suit of armor into battle and passed it on to his descendents.

This armor, called Ketsuen, was not actually the first suit Hida wore, but it was arguably the most perfect one his vassal Kaiu ever crafted. It was unfathomably heavy and thick even by the standards of the day. Of course, Hida's descendents have always been notoriously large (in height, muscle, or both), so as the armor passed from generation to generation little has had to be done to refit or lighten it to accommodate its later bearers. Hida favored Ketsuen due to its tremendous resilience, and over time it took on his distaste for magical tricks and corrupt power. It was not long before Hida's indomitable spirit imparted a great resistance to magic – both pure and corrupt – into the armor, along with his limitless endurance and willpower. When Hida faced his dark brother Fu Leng in single combat, the mighty Crab Kami struck with such force that the Fallen Kami's blood sprayed upon Ketsuen, forever staining it a dark near-black; this only worsened over time from the sweat and grime of war. This dire appearance gave the nemuranai its later name, the Armor of the Shadow Warrior, since its dark tones made the wearer seem to fade away in the haze and smoke of war.

The Crab Champion wearing this armor at the vanguard of his soldiers became a fearsome legend in the Shadowlands. Goblin tribes would repeat terrible stories of such events, often attempting to claim they had seen the Armor of the Shadow Warrior and lived. Ketsuen passed along through many generations of Hida daimyo; in some cases it was lost in battle (along with its wearer), but it was always eventually recovered, and its powerful awakened spirits protected it from the Taint.

Ketsuen is a huge, massively heavy set of Heavy Armor, covering the wearer completely except for the eyes. It awards a bonus to the wearer's Armor TN of +20, with a Reduction of 10. Only a bushi of the Crab Clan may wear the armor; for anyone else, it is simply too bulky and heavy, but for a Crab the awakened kami buoy the armor up and make it possible to wear it. Anyone wearing the Armor may ignore all the normal TN penalties associated with Heavy Armor; furthermore, if the wearer is Large, they gain a +0k1 to all their melee damage rolls as they are able to use the massive weight of the armor to their advantage. Finally, any Spellcasting Roll for a spell which targets or affects the wearer (whether hostile or favorable) has its TN increased by the total of the wearer's Earth + Honor. Maho spells which target the wearer suffer double this penalty.

### The Armor of the Shadow Warrior in Modern Times

During the Clan War, the Armor of the Shadow Warrior was greatly damaged when Clan Champion Hida Kisada wore it in battle against the last Hantei Emperor, who had been possessed by the Fallen Kami. Fu Leng ran Kisada through with the Ancestral Sword of the Hantei, relishing the chance to mangle the armor that had been stained by his wounds a thousand years prior. However, the armor was saved when Hida Yakamo dragged his father's wounded away.

Yakamo would eventually take the armor for himself, but a few years later he died in the Shadowlands. Although his body and soul were rescued by the Naga, the Armor was finally claimed by the denizens of that dark realm and the Crab could not find it; some of them blamed the damage Fu Leng had done to it, but none were certain why they could not find it. Whatever the reason, the Armor remained in the Shadowlands and became Tainted.

Two decades later, the forces of the Shadowlands sent the Armor to the Mantis Clan as part of an elaborate scheme to goad the clan into war with the Scorpion. Yoritomo Aramasu, the Champion of the Mantis, recognized the true identity of the Armor and ordered his shugenja to attempt to cleanse it, something they were eventually able to do by evoking the power of the Armor's inherent Earth spirits. Aramasu waited for an opportunity to present the relic to the Crab when doing so would garner the greatest advantage for the Mantis, but no such chance arose before his death. Several years later, Clan Champion Yoritomo Naizen finally gifted the Armor to the Crab during the events of the Race for the Throne.

## Chousen, the Ancestral Armor of the Gusai Family

The Gusai family and name is something of a contradiction for the Mantis; it is at once a source of some of their greatest pride and their greatest shame, all of which is embodied by the man Gusai himself. Many people know the tale of Gusai's confrontation with the Emperor, where he used a hidden knife to show Son of Heaven to show the power of steel. His boldness earned him a family name for the Mantis... as well as an execution order.

The Gusai family only existed for three generations, but they passed down Gusai's armor and weapons as heirlooms. When Gusai Rioshida took the Emperor's son hostage, the Mantis turned on him in an act of self-preservation; this allowed the clan to continue to exist, but the Gusai family name was stripped away. This left the Mantis at something of a loss when it came to the matter of Gusai's heirloom armor. The armor had passed from Champion to Champion, and to destroy or discard it was not appropriate since it was a symbol of the clan rather than merely of a single man. The Clan Champion who inherited the Mantis Clan from Rioshida, a practical man named Yohihotsu, decided it was best for everyone if the armor was placed on display in the Mantis palace and left there for the time being. It is said a piece of Gusai's spirit lingered on the armor, and approved of the decision – it was in the best interests of the Mantis, after all, yet showed some modest defiance in the face of the more cowardly but politically expedient choice of destroying it.

After two generations, the armor was worn again by a man named Munemori, who used it in battle against enemies of the Crane Clan. The Crane were in a small skirmish with the Scorpion at the time, and as often happened they hired the Mantis to assist them. Many of Munemori's friends and advisors noticed a subtle change in the man when he wore the armor into combat. He was faster and more ruthless than they recalled, and he was especially fond of singling out high-ranking Scorpion officers for personal combat. Though several of these Scorpion attempted to lure him into uneven fights, Munemori was not above such tricks himself, and bested each man and woman he faced. Munemori died under mysterious circumstances several years later, but the armor wouldf be worn by many later Mantis Clan Champions.

In modern times, the armor was thought lost when Yoritomo wore it during the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, deep in the Shadowlands. It resurfaced years later when a band of ronin presented it to the Mantis, claiming they had recognized Yoritomo's body, recovered the armor, and burned the corpse; they had spent years gathering the funds to travel across the Empire to the Islands of Silk and Spice, and immediately offered their lives for touching Yoritomo's body even for this purpose. Clan Champion Yoritomo Aramasu was impressed by the dedication expressed in these men's story, but was disappointed that they were obviously Scorpion spies sent to infiltrate the clan. He accepted their offer of seppuku and volunteered to stand as second for each of them in turn. Afterward, Aramasu commented on his good fortune that his enemies had begin simply arriving at his doorstep with gifts and polite offers to die at his command.

Chousen is mechanically a suit of Light Armor that imposes no penalty to Athletics rolls. It is extremely light and flexible, and is crafted to hold an array of small weapons in convenient loops and pockets. Any Small or Medium weapon the character is carrying may be switched out as a Free Action. Also, the wearer may choose to use his Strength or Agility in place of his Reflexes when rolling Initiative. Finally, the whisper of Gusai's spirit urges the wearer to take on noteworthy opponents. When attacking opponents with a Status or Glory of 4.0 or higher, the wearer gains a +1k1 bonus to all melee attack and melee damage rolls, and his Water Ring is considered 2 Ranks higher for movement purposes.

## Destiny's Anvil, the Armor of Goju Kyoden

This muted black armor was worn by the first being to hold the sinister title of Obsidian Champion; it has an otherworldly quality that is easy to detect but difficult to define. The armor appears almost chitinous and organic when viewed askance, but when regarded directly it appears to be of stone. Like many nemuranai, the armor itself was originally merely a suit of armor of good quality with an unusual design, but its bearer awakened spirits within it. Unlike other such items, though, this armor is fueled by dark kansen, as well as a small fraction of the Nothing. Because of this, it is at once ominous but easy to forget, remarkable and unremarkable at the same time.

Goju Kyoden was a loyal servant of Daigotsu and became a model for the Lost the Dark Lord rallied to his banner. The Dark Lord's personal bodyguard was ruthless but utterly devoted to his master, serving with the same dedication as a samurai despite being a creature of the Taint. When Daigotsu sought to release Fu Leng's soul from Meido during his attack on Otosan Uchi, Kyoden stood guard over the ritual and did not hesitate to face the Champion of the Lion Clan in single combat. Kyoden was slain by Matsu Nimuro, but he bought his master the time needed to complete the task.

While service beyond death is not uncommon among those who bear the Taint of Jigoku, Kyoden was also touched by the Nothing, and this meant he was not so easily within the reach of necromancy. When Daigotsu approached the Shadow Dragon to bargain for Kyoden's return, the Dark Lord ultimately had to offer a small bit of his own soul. Furthermore, the Shadow Dragon required a physical object to call Kyoden from the formlessness of the Nothing; for this purpose, Daigotsu used Kyoden's obsidian-inlaid armor. In this way Kyoden returned to life as a whole being, not an undead mockery or shambling zombie.

After Kyoden eventually sacrificed himself to return Daigotsu to life from the piece the Shadow Dragon had claimed, the Dark Lord gave the armor a name; he called it Destiny's Anvil, in tribute to the unmoving man who had worn it and had defeated fate to forge Daigotsu's future. Infused with the remarkable will of the first Obsidian Champion and constantly exposed to the supernatural forces of the Shadowlands Taint and the Lying Darkness, Kyoden's armor soon became a powerful dark nemuranai, unlike any other seen before. Unlike most Tainted magical items, it has no active interest in corrupting, cursing, or otherwise harming the wearer (though extended use of the armor will eventually corrupt them, of course). Instead, it acts as a conduit between the power of Jigoku and the wearer. Regardless of the wearer's Taint Rank (if any), he may always add +1k1 to any physical skill roll; however, if his Taint Rank is below 10, he gains 1 point of Shadowlands Taint each time he does this. Additionally, the wearer always adds a bonus equal to his Taint Rank to the total of all physical rolls, even if he is not Lost.

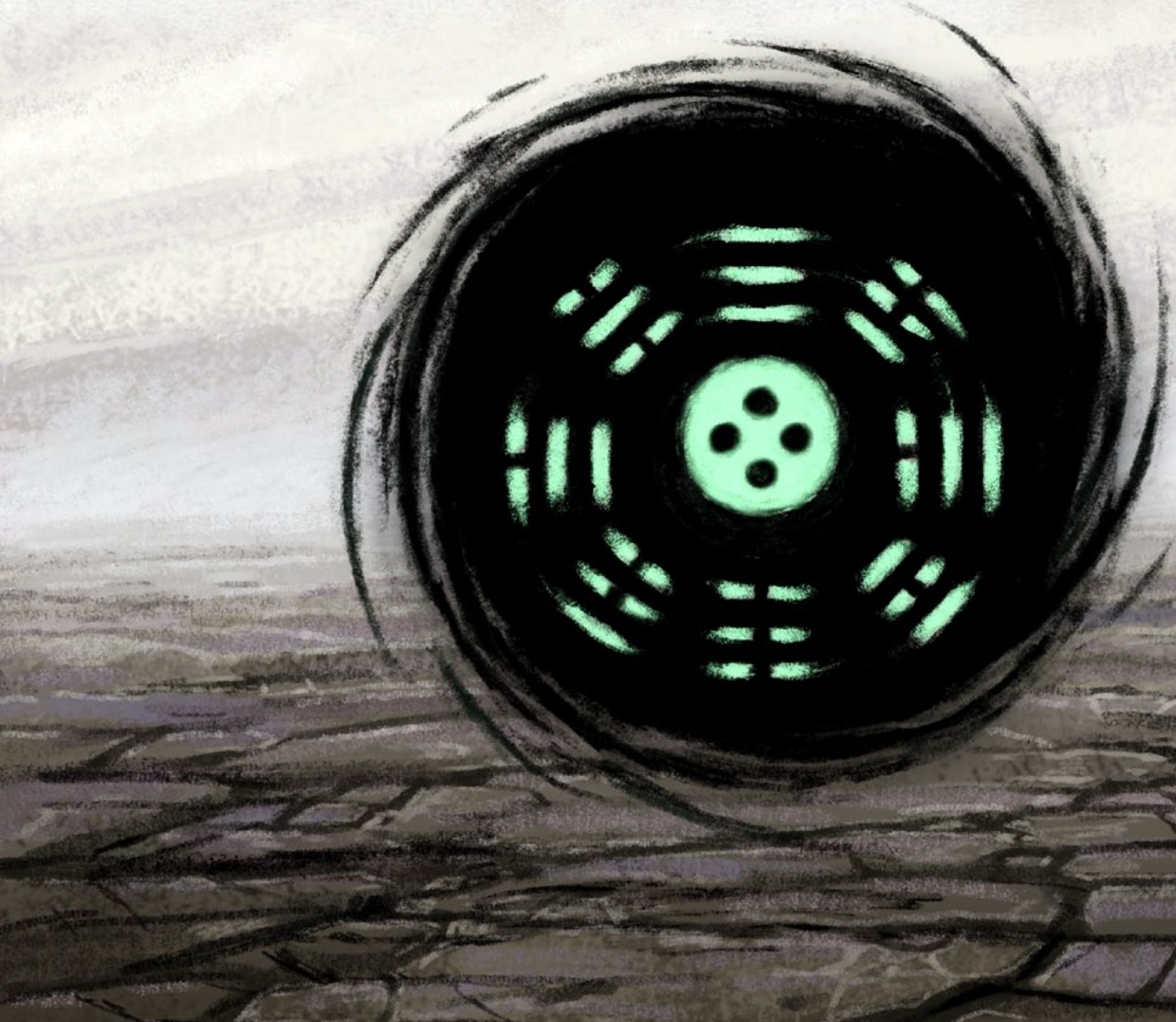
Because of Kyoden's Armor's exposure to the Lying Darkness, the Taint of the wearer is harder to spot than normal, and he is resistant to non-crystal magic. The wearer is considered to have two Ranks of Magic Resistance against any spell that is not Crystal, and any rolls made to determine if the wearer has the Taint suffer a +10 TN penalty.

## Ikoma's Anvil

The family founded by Ikoma has always held an unusual position in the Lion Clan. The Ikoma are known as storytellers and historians, but also as warriors, advisors, diplomats, brawlers, generals, and war heralds. A Lion who introduces himself as an Akodo is likely a soldier or an officer, a Matsu will probably be a fierce warrior, a Kitsu a quiet seeker of mysteries... but each Ikoma seems to be different than the last.

Early in the family's history, it was clear that despite their many emerging roles in the Lion Clan, they were never destined to lead it. They were content to stand beside or behind – but never in front of – their Matsu and Akodo cousins. To this end, they fostered relations with other clans in order to further the goals of the Lion where the other families might fail. For a time, the Ikoma and Hida families were very close due to these overtures. The Crab had always respected the Lion Clan's might, but felt the typical Lion was too rigid and harsh. The Ikoma representatives, however, fit right in beside the Hida. They would drink, brawl, and tell glorious stories of Lion warriors who rivaled the heroes of the Crab, and did it all while celebrating their common spirit rather than attempting to outdo the other clan.

The Hida family gave Ikoma Komori, Ikoma's son and heir, a gift to commemorate the growing bond between the



two families: a set of the Crab Clan's famed war drums, for which the clan was already becoming famous. The drums were named Ikoma's Anvil, though in private the Crab joked they should have been called Ikoma's Face – after all, the man was known for his rough and beaten-in visage. Their proper name was a reference to the fact that among the Lion, it was the Ikoma who used their words and other skills to craft war for their kin.

While the practice of war-drumming never gained widespread popularity among the Lion, Ikoma's Anvil was part of the Lion Champion's command group from that era forward. The drums were designed to take advantage of the different tones that could be created by striking different parts of the head, allowing quite complex tunes and rhythms to be created – very useful for conveying orders on the battlefield. The sheer size of the drums mean they easily ring out over the din of even the most large-scale engagements. The armies of the Lion find the sound of the drums at once soothing and stirring, as if being called to battle and assured of victory at the same time. Enemies, on the other hand, have reported the drums as sounding chaotic, distracting, and intimidating. The Lion reply that the war songs of their ancestors can only be appreciated by those of their own clan. There are always at least three Ikoma trained on how to play the family's rousing war-songs on the drums, and it is considered a great honor to be allowed to play them even in practice, much less in combat.

Over the years, the great bronze-bound drums have become stained with the blood of countless samurai -- Ikoma and others – who have died either while steadfastly playing or while fighting to keep them out of enemy hands. The Lion believe the spirits of these samurai watch over the drums and enhance their potency. The drums are huge, impossible for a single man to move, and are usually carried by two samurai while the third one plays.

When played during a battle, the drums allow any Lion within hearing to add half his Honor Rank (rounded up) to the total of his rolls on the Mass Battle Table. Additionally, they gain a +1k0 bonus to resist any Fear effects. Finally, a Lion commander whose army is using the Anvil adds his Honor Rank to the total of any Battle Skill Rolls he makes to determine whether his side is winning the battle.

## Indomitable, Mutsuhito's Armor

Little is recorded in the Imperial histories about the man who served as Fu Leng's first general. It is known he was from one of the tribes that pre-dated the Fall of the Kami, the so-called Tribe of Noriaki, and fled the nascent Empire after his tribe's failed attack on the Seppun. He had a personal history with Matsu, the Lion Thunder who eventually slew him on the Day of Thunder before facing Fu Leng. It is hinted, but not confirmed in the official histories, that Mutsuhito and the men who fled with him into the Shadowlands were Fu Leng's first human followers. Though they were twisted by the touch of the Shadowlands and the Festering Pit, it is rumored among the Crab that they swore fealty to the Fallen Kami of their own free will.

These rumors had a basis in truth. Though Fu Leng wished to destroy the Empire his brothers and sisters had built, he also wished to raise his own dark kingdom in its place. His attempt at creating replacements for men had produced only the goblins, weak and twisted creatures, while the ogres and trolls were too brutish to serve as anything but a simple army. Men who embraced the Taint, however, could be far more. Fu Leng blessed Mutsuhito and his men not only with the corrupting power of Jigoku but also with titles and honors, making them the first of the Lost. The tattered remains of the Noriaki tribe became Fu Leng's personal guard, enforcing the dark god's will within his own ranks.

In the time between his oath to the Dark Kami and his death at Lady Matsu's hands, Mutsuhito proved himself worthy of Fu Leng's favor time and time again. His bloodlust was tempered only by his slavish devotion to his master; in time, even the oni of Jigoku came to fear the mortal man who served Fu Leng's will. To mark the man's station, Fu Leng created a suit of armor from the corrupted metals of the Shadowlands and the solidified energy of Jigoku. He called this armor Indomitable, and made it so that the man who wore it grew more powerful as he faced stronger enemies.

When Musuhito finally died, his body was left to rot in Fu Leng's keep deep in the Shadowlands. The fallen warrior rose from the dead as a *hyahukei*, a self-willed undead, and sought for years afterward to reunite the demons and feral creatures of the Shadowlands under Fu Leng's banner. However, while his power was still great – greater, perhaps, than when he was a living man – he lacked the willpower to bind together the disparate creatures of Jigoku on his own. Without the Dark Kami's direct backing, he was simply another nightmare in a realm of nightmares. Eventually, Musuhito threw himself into the Festering Pit, a final act of devotion to Fu Leng; however, he left his armor behind.

Indomitable remained lost in the Shadowlands for generations until a corrupted shugenja stumbled upon it. The shugenja used the armor for a time, until its power overcame him and the Taint literally ripped his muscles and bones apart. Later, a lone Crab scout who had become

corrupted by the Taint found the armor; he spent three decades hunting and murdering his former kinsmen until he was finally hunted down and killed himself. Not knowing the significance of the armor, the Crab simply beheaded and burned the body and left.

Indomitable has survived, been found and used and lost again, for centuries more since then – each time destroying its wearer in some way, either direct or indirect. In the twelfth century it was taken by one of the gaijin demons who led the Destroyers during the Kali-Ma Invasion. That general died in the Empire, allowing Indomitable to finally enter Rokugan and spread its siren song without the bothersome Crab containing its influence.

Physically, Indomitable is a suit of black heavy armor, notable only for its antique design, that looks as if it is well-used but also well-tended. It is slightly warm to the touch, almost like human skin. It is remarkably close-fitting and can be comfortably worn even by those who are not accustomed to wearing armor, such as courtiers and shugenja. The black cloth and silk that holds the armor together is encrusted with bloodstains that cannot be removed, though those who get too close to the armor usually do not care. Indomitable is sentient, although it does not communicate in words, and its spirit calls out to those who are Tainted or who seem susceptible to the lure of the Taint, encouraging them to wear it. It can use emotions and even mental images to promise all manner of power to its wearer, usually finding the way to appeal most to its victim.

Mechanically, Indomitable is considered Heavy Armor, but does not impose any TN penalties on physical rolls. The moment it is donned, the wearer gains a full rank of Shadowlands Taint. However, his Raises are no longer limited by his Void Ring, and he gains a number of Free Raises per day equal to his Taint Rank. If the wearer is a shugenja, he also gains universal spell slots (similar to those granted by the Void Ring) equal to his Taint Rank. Any time the wearer calls on either of these benefits, he immediately gains one Point of Shadowlands Taint.

Shadowlands creatures treat the wearer as if he has Fear 5, and this affects creatures normally immune to Fear (such as undead). For his part, the wearer is immune to the Fear effects of all Shadowlands creatures.

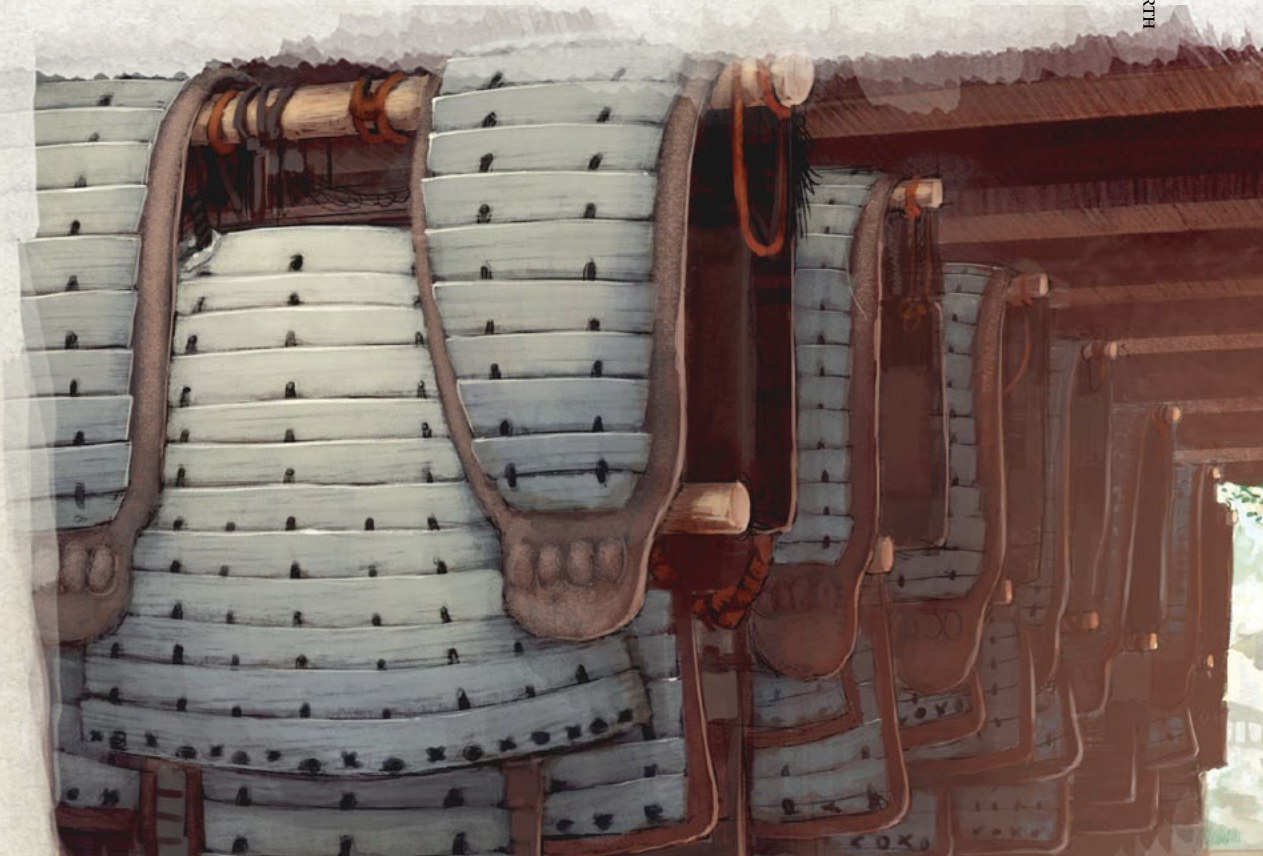
## Kaiu's Smithing Tools

While the Great Clans may argue among themselves about who has the strongest or best-trained army in the Empire, few are willing to challenge the claim of the Crab in the realm of arms and armaments. The tradition of Kaiu smithing and the secrets of their steel are the most respected in all of Rokugan. Even the elegant Doji and Kakita families know that while Crane swords have their strengths, a Kaiu blade can cut nearly anything that can be cut, and withstand stress no other blade could possibly endure.

This reputation is owed largely to the teachings of Hida's ancient vassal, Kaiu himself. While many associate the Crab with the Hida's focus on battle or the Kuni's obsession with combating the Shadowlands, Kaiu's fixation on smithing lives on through his descendents and is a quiet but equally important facet of the Crab Clan's identity. What Kaiu did not manage learn in his lifetime, his family has discovered and perfected in the centuries since. Thus while most family daimyo inherit a katana and a suit of armor from their predecessors, the Kaiu daimyo also possesses the forging tools of the first Kaiu.

These tools were initially used frequently by Kaiu's immediate descendents, but as their dedication and spirit awakened the kami within them, it became apparent they were more than mere tools. Over time, they were used less and less often, for their power was worthy only of the most important tasks. (For example, Clan Champion Hida Ichido commissioned a set of armor for Emperor Hantei Fujiwa when he personally led an army against the Shadowlands.) In modern times, Kaiu's tools are used by a smith perhaps two or three times in a generation. Typically, they are only employed by the Kaiu daimyo, but the Crab are practical and realize the most skilled smith in the family may not always be its leader. These items have





never been allowed into the hands of an outsider, but this is not due to any taboo but simply because the Kaiu have never found someone worthy to do so. Over the centuries a few smiths from outside the Crab have felt their skill gave them the standing to make such a request, but so far the Kaiu have always politely refused such requests; they feel anyone who would use Kaiu's tools must have a deep understanding of Crab philosophies on artifice in order to avoid blemishing Kaiu's memory. A partial exception to this rule is found in those non-Crab who have trained at the Kaiu academy, and in the Empire's history two of these have been judged worthy to touch the tools.

Anyone who uses Kaiu's heirlooms undergoes a strict two-day ritual of meditation, fasting, and mental preparation. The smith is expected to make many prayers to the spirit of Kaiu throughout the entire crafting process, constantly seeking the ancient smith's guidance on whatever he is making. While the Kaiu family is not very superstitious as a rule, in these situations any small detail or incident that could be construed as a sign of Kaiu's disapproval is taken extremely seriously. Failure to complete a perfect item is not taken as such a sign, since the family realizes that even the best crafters must occasionally fail, but failure due to incompetence leads to severe punishment. Imperfect items, many of which samurai would barter whole provinces to own, are usually destroyed and the process begun anew until a suitable result is obtained.

Using Kaiu's smithing tools during any appropriate Craft or Artisan Skill Roll confers three Free Raises on the roll; if the smith is of Kaiu's bloodline, he gains five Free Raises instead. While crafting the item, the smith only requires half of the food and rest usually necessary, as Kaiu's fortitude and zeal drives him on. (This will also reduce appropriately the total time needed to craft the item.)

## Kote of the Daidoji Daimyo

The Daidoji family has always been tied closely to the fate of the Doji; while many clans have families that are friendly with one another, the Daidoji and Doji often see themselves as a single entity. Where two Lion families might compete with each other for glory or fortune, these two Crane families only ever come to conflict in arguments about the Crane Clan's overall well-being. In essence, the families are brothers to each other. (This, of course, was part of why the Crane Civil War during the Hidden Emperor era was so deeply shocking to the clan.) Like any such relationship, each sibling has its own unique strengths and weaknesses, and the Daidoji realize their role in the clan is a much more martial one than the Doji or even the famed Kakita swordsmen. Where the Doji are the Crane Clan's voice and mind, the Daidoji see themselves as the clan's armor and guard. This arrangement is represented well by the hand-guards that have passed down from one Daidoji leader to the next – armor pieces that were originally requested by the Doji family as a gift to the Daidoji damiyo.

The kote are cleverly constructed. One gauntlet is lighter than the other, and parts of the armor can be reassembled so the lighter and heavier pieces can be switched between arms. This helps favor the Daidoji's fighting style – one that often employs polearms and other such two-handed weapons, as well as bows. Like many armor sets for archers and spearmen, who are expected to present a profile and a leading side to their opponent, the heavier kote is held closer to the fore, the lighter toward the rear. This allows for more protection in the front and easier flexibility for the off-hand, and since the pieces can go on either hand, left-handed combatants can use them as effectively as right-handed.

Though these armor pieces are well-crafted, they are not ostentatious and are clearly designed to be used in battle, not as decorations – a fitting choice given Daidoji philosophy. They are traditionally only worn when the Daidoji lord is in direct martial service to the clan – though to be sure, this can be quite often for the daimyo of the Daioji family. They bear the mark of the Daidoji family on the plate that covers the hand, while the Doji mon is imprinted on the strap that goes over the palms. This symbolizes the nature of the Daidoji as the protectors of the Doji quite well. The tradition of only wearing them in military service has led the Daidoji lords to adopt the saying that it is time to "put on the hands" when military action becomes inevitable.

The kote are only worn by the Daidoji damiyo, and they are usually presented to a new daimyo in a private ceremony by the Crane Clan Champion. However, since the Daidoji leader's life is often given in service to the Crane, there have been at least four times in the clan's history that the kote have been passed to a new lord on the field of battle, going from a dying daimyo to his heir or chosen regent.

Wearing the Daidoji Kote fills the bearer with the resolve of all those Daidoji who have come before and given everything to protect the Crane. The purpose and significance of this sharpens the wearer's resolve to a razor edge, making him a nearly insurmountable obstacle to his enemies. The wearer may take the Guard action as a Free Action as well as a Simple Action, and any Armor TN bonuses granted to others by the Guard action are increased by 5. Also, any attempts to sway to wearer from his duty, magically or otherwise, automatically fail.

## Machimasu, The Ancestral Armor of the Mirumoto Family

The history of the Mirumoto family's ancestral armor is largely unknown outside the ruling line of that family and a few exceptionally well-informed historians. In this and many other ways, it reflects the nature of its original owner, Mirumoto himself. Little is known about him before he met Togashi, other than a general repute that he was a rude and crude man who was eager to demonstrate his immense talent with the sword whenever he could. However, in addition to perhaps being something of a brute or a bully, Mirumoto also possessed a keen intellect that constantly yearned to learn new things. Thus it is no

surprise that he was drawn to the Kami, and especially to the enigmatic and mysterious Togashi, when they came to the earth

It is said that the Mirumoto family's tradition of training bushi and shugenja side-by-side may be traced back to those earliest days, when Mirumoto and Agasha spoke of their new lord's nature and of many concepts the swordsman had never even considered: the spirits, the Fortunes, magic, enlightenment, and the mysteries of the Celestial Order. Mirumoto's friendship with Agasha and his reverence for Togashi led him to change his attitude towards others; while he remained a practical and straightforward thinker, he now contemplated philosophies and topics other swordsmen could not even imagine. Eventually, his friendship with Agasha led to her gifting him with a fine suit of armor... only months before he would be called to face Fu Leng.

When she presented the gift, Agasha said the name of the armor was Machimasu: literally, "I Wait." She explained Mirumoto had always been a Dragon and had always been the man he was today. That man simply waited for the man Mirumoto used to be to find him. In his own way Togashi had also waited for Mirumoto, and likewise Agasha had waited for a friend who would understand her well. "Wait for the person we were to find us, just as we wait to find the person we will become. But we are not always aware of it," she said.

Mirumoto wore the armor when he died on the first Day of Thunder. It was thought lost for hundreds of years, but was finally recovered by a Hiruma scouting party that had become lost in the Shadowlands. (Many Crab see this as fate rather than accept the ludicrous idea that a group of Hiruma could all lose their way.) The Kaiu considered the armor an interesting curiosity because it was not Tainted despite lying in the Shadowlands for decades at least. Eventually, a historian in the family recognized the mon of the armor and felt honor-bound to contact the Dragon about it. When a small group of Mirumoto and Agasha nobles arrived to collect the armor, the Kuni daimyo asked how such a thing could remain uncorrupted for so long. The only answer the Mirumoto gave was simply: "It waited."

Since that time, Machimasu has remained in the hands of the Mirumoto, though it is not always used by their daimyo. Because the Mirumoto function for most of the Empire's history as the de facto rulers of the Dragon Clan, the family daimyo must often spend his time in court, leaving generalship to other samurai who wear the armor in his stead.

Machimasu is a dull green set of armor whose plates are worked to resemble dragon scales. The armor is made flexible to harmonize with the fast, agile style of Mirumoto's techniques. Mechanically, it is considered Heavy Armor, but if the wearer has Ranks in a Dragon Clan Bushi School he may ignore the normal TN penalties for Agility and Reflexes rolls. The armor's awakened spirits allow the wearer to adapt to incoming attacks with blinding speed, letting him change Stances as a Free Action immediately before an attack he makes or an attack that is directed against him.

## Ouno's Heart

Isawa's brother Ouno is not well remembered in the histories of the Empire or even the Phoenix, since most of his life was lived before the Fall of the Kami. Unlike his brother, Ouno was a quiet, contemplative man who often did not speak for days at a time; he spent his time studying the Elements and protecting his people. He was known for suddenly appearing to members of the Tribe of Isawa who were in danger, defeating attacking barbarians or rampaging animals in a sudden display of magical power, only to walk away wordlessly afterward. To Ouno, protection of the Tribe was always the first concern, and he spent many hours learning new ways to safeguard his people. Though he was most gifted in Earth magic, he studied Water a great deal to gain insight into the future and events going on elsewhere, allowing him to prepare against them. He was also a skilled armorsmith, and shortly after Shiba pledged to protect Isawa's Tribe, Ouno knew his people would be part of the Empire's war soon.

He spent a month in almost absolute seclusion, praying to the Bishamon and the spirits for guidance and assistance. From their blessings and power he found the skill to forge a great suit of armor that bore the imagery and colors of his brother's new clan. By the time Ouno emerged from seclusion, the Tribe of Isawa (now the Isawa family of the Empire) was ready to march against the enemies of Rokugan. While Shinsei finished gathering the Seven Thunders to confront Fu Leng, Ouno led the bulk of his kin against the followers of Fu Leng who had made it past Crab and Scorpion territory.

The spirits Ouno had bound into his armor were enhanced by his devotion to eradicating Fu Leng's blasphemy. Though he never displayed the sheer power of his brother Isawa or the battle acumen of Asako's lost love Yogo, Osuno nonetheless moved through the battlefields like a slow-rolling boulder, unstoppable as he crushed everything in his way with indifferent power. While the First War did not end immediately upon Fu Leng's death, shugenja of any reasonable power across the Empire felt the shift when the Dark Kami was sealed away, and Osuno also felt the death of his brother in that moment.

It was only then that he ceased to fight coldly and instead unleashed rage. It is said that several of the larger hills and valleys in central Rokugan are the creation of the grieving Ouno, who hunted down the fleeing and tattered armies of the Shadowlands for months after Fu Leng's defeat.

After the war, Ouno returned to his quiet ways, patiently rebuilding what the Phoenix had lost in the war and assisting his kin in integrating with Shiba's vassals and with the other clans. While he was not gifted with words or leadership, he was an unflagging bastion of support and strength to the other members of the Isawa, and he was named the first Master of Earth a few years before he died. In all this time Ouno never faltered, and after the war he was rarely seen without his armor. It is said the suit had physically fused with him, that the man was so in tune with the Earth spirits that he had grown a mineral hide that had intertwined with the armor.

In the year 57 Ouno retired from his position and went to meditate in an underground shrine that was his private sanctuary. When his apprentices came to check on him the next morning, all they found was a stone statue facing Ouno's private shrine to Bishamon. The statue's features were not well detailed, but it matched the build of the former Master, and many concluded he had finally joined with the Element he had spent his life mastering. The armor he left behind was not part of the statue – which the apprentices interpreted as their master's wish that it be handed down to others in the clan.

Ouno's Heart is traditionally worn by either the Master of Earth or, more often, the commander of the Phoenix Clan's Avalanche Guard. It is a suit of Heavy Armor whose Elemental purity makes the wearer all but incorruptible in spirit or body. The wearer gains +3k3 to any rolls to resist sickness, poison, or supernatural corruption of any sort (including both the Shadowlands Taint and the touch of the Lying Darkness). Additionally, if the wearer is a shugenja, he gains Free Raises equal to his Shugenja School Rank when casting any spells that combat corruption, poison, or sickness, either through direct damage or by purging those evils.

## Sasageru, Ancestral Armor of the Crane Clan

The Ancestral Armor of the Crane Clan is unique in Rokugan in that it was not forged by hands mortal or divine, but was instead simply a physical manifestation of the Crane Clan's honor and nobility. In the years after the First War, the Crane Kami, Lady Doji, watched her kin pass on to death one at a time. When she learned Togashi was gone, she believed her own time was at an end as well, and reflected that she had no great texts of wisdom or revered weapons to pass to her descendents. Instead, she invited her great grandson, Doji Sasageru, to sit with her at the shore near her estate and spoke to him of what honor was and what duty meant. It is said they spoke all day, and as evening came she blew a sweet breath into her palm and waved it over Sasageru, whispering that his honor and spirit would become the heirloom of the Crane Clan. The last rays of Lady Sun glowed their brightest in the dusk, and the man found himself standing in an exquisite set of pale blue and white armor. Doji smiled to him then, and the waves of Amaterasu's Sea rushed up to embrace her mortal end.

The new suit or armor was much like the Crane Clan itself – beautiful in form, elegant in function, and peerless in execution. No weapon seemed to even scratch its surface, though the wearer would occasionally be wounded by canny opponents who could find ways to slip a blade or arrow between the pieces rather than through them. It showed only the slightest signs of wear or blemish, and then only after unusually long or intense campaigns. The armor took its name, Sasageru, from its first bearer, and it was literally a creation of that man's soul and honor. The armor has passed down from one Crane Champion or Regent to the next, even in those rare times the clan has not been led by a member of the Doji family, and each person to don the armor can hear the faint words of Doji's grandson in times of conflict. Sasageru's voice urges the wearer always to acts of honor and virtue.

The armor is not worn often, typically only when the Clan Champion leads the Crane armies in war, or to special functions such as formal military meetings with Imperial guests. When a Crane Champion serves as Emerald Champion, Imperial Advisor, or any similar appointment that has its own honorable trappings, Sasageru remains with the Crane Clan and is used by the Champion's appointed general in his absence.

The Ancestral Armor of the Crane Clan responds to the Honor of the wearer, with purer and more dutiful souls finding it lighter and more comfortable. The armor functions mechanically as Light Armor, but its Armor TN bonus is increased by the wearer's Honor Rank and its Reduction is increased by half of that amount (rounded up). Additionally, the wearer may spend a Void Point to substitute his Honor Rank for his Willpower, Awareness, Reflexes, Agility, or Stamina when making a Trait or Skill roll.

## Shosuro's Blackened Armor

When Shosuro returned from the Shadowlands after the Day of Thunder, she gave the Black Scrolls and the Obsidian Hand to her master, Bayushi. What many did not know was that she had also returned with a fragment of the Lying Darkness that had helped her survive the trip. The Darkness had bargained with her in order to gain entry to the Empire and a foothold on the Thunder's identity and soul. When Shosuro faked her death and took up the name Soshi, she managed to nonetheless maintain her grip on her identity for a time, helped by her armor – which had become like a second skin during the long war against Fu Leng.

Shosuro had spent many years stalking and assassinating key targets for her lord or simply gathering information. Though she was not a legendary warrior, she was competent with a blade and relied on surprise, speed, and agility to carry her through a fight. Her armor was only minimal, but she made constant modifications to it as the First War went on. By the end it was a chestpiece, arm-guards, shin-guards that had become darkened by soot, sweat, and blood. (Shosuro remarked that the coloring helped her since it blended into darkness more easily than actual black, and many of the early Scorpion followed her lead in this.) The war taught Shosuro the value of wearing her armor at all times; she became used to sleeping in it and sometimes never removed it for weeks at a time. Near the end of the war she was heard to remark that she actually felt odd without it.

When Shosuro became Soshi, the Scorpion Thunder took to wearing the armor underneath the billowing robes and wide hats that her new identity favored. As the Darkness took its toll on her soul and mind, Shosuro began to suspect the bargain she struck was a poisoned one. She began to shed Soshi's clothes and stare at herself in her armor each evening, trying to keep what hold on her identity she could. When it was no longer enough, she gave up the armor and fled to the Dragon mountains, where she would hide in Togashi's crystal prison for a thousand years.

When Soshi and Bayushi vanished, the Scorpion Clan was thrown into disarray. Several leaders were puzzled to find Shosuro's lost armor in Soshi's chambers, but simply believed it was yet another of their master's secrets. Since the armor was Shosuro's, it was given to the daimyo of the family that had taken her name, and it has served as a sort of unofficial ancestral armor ever since.

Mechanically, Shosuro's Blackened Armor is Ashigaru Armor but gives a +7 bonus to the wearer's Armor TN. Because of Shosuro's association with the Nothing, the essence of that ancient force seeped into the armor; the wearer gains two Free Raises on all Stealth Rolls, and once per day he may call on the armor's power to allow a Stealth roll in a situation where it would usually be impossible (such as standing in plain sight or walking through a crowded area). The armor simply suppresses the wearer's presence in everyone else's perceptions; this effect lasts until the wearer does something that would bring obvious attention (such as attacking or speaking loudly).

## Sting, Tsuruchi's Kabuto

The founder of the Wasp Clan left behind several heirlooms, most notably his bow. Those closest to Tsuruchi knew his helm was also one of his most prized possessions, and when the man retired it was kept in a place of honor by his family.

Tsuruchi was perhaps the finest mortal archer the Empire had ever seen, a fact he attributed not to a steady hand or sharp coordination, but his clear gaze. Tsuruchi's eyes were not only able to find a target at a distance far beyond what most could see, but could also see through the surface pretensions of those he met with little more than a glance. This technique is taught among the Kitsuki – they call it Ichi Miru or "first look" – but Tsuruchi was born with an instinctive understanding of it. Over time the spirits in his helm awakened and were infused with Tsuruchi's unwavering gaze. When he retired, the helm passed to his son Tsuruchi Ichiro, who was amazed at how powerful the nemuranai was for something so new. With time, the helm became the unofficial symbol of the family's leadership.

Sting is a large iron kabuto that has no attached mengu. It gives the wearer a +5 bonus to his Armor TN. Anyone wearing the helm is considered to have a Perception two Ranks higher for the purpose of Trait and Skill rolls, and when making an attack with a bow, he gains a Free Raise which may only be used for the Called Shot Maneuver.

## The Shield of Moto Gaheris

The return of the desert Moto to the Empire during the Hidden Emperor Era was an event of great significance and change for the Unicorn Clan. Though they rejoiced when Shinjo emerged from the Burning Sands with the nomadic descendents of the Ujik-hai, the returned Kami immediately began to exterminate members of her own bloodline, revealing her family had become infested by the Kolat. After this purging, Shinjo declared the Moto family would rule the Unicorn, and appointed Moto Gaheris as the leader of the clan. In the span of a few weeks, the ruling family of the Unicorn had been cast down and greatly reduced in number, a barbarian outsider had taken over its rule, and the entire character of the clan was changed. Even those who were used to the Unicorn Clan's "barbarian" ways were shocked at the further transformation wrought by the desert Moto. Gaheris instituted sweeping changes to the clan's military structures and he unapologetically indulged in his gaijin customs, making little to no concession to Rokugani traditions and customs.

The Unicorn had brought shields back with them from the Burning Sands, but seldom used them, treating them more as a curiosity than a common tool of warfare. Gaheris, however, used a shield himself and encouraged its widespread use. Although shields did not become a standard feature of Unicorn warfare, they were far more common after Gaheris' arrival than before. The innovation was of course mocked and derided by the other clans. To no one's surprise, Gaheris did not seem to care much. His own shield eventually became an heirloom for the ruling line of the Moto, passed down much in the same manner as a sword or armor. His son, also named Gaheris, carried the shield during the War of Spirits.

The Shield of Moto Gaheris is made of wood, reinforced with a rim and bands of steel, and decorated with various stones and jewels. It has the marks and wear associated with constant use in warfare, but is as solid as it was when it was crafted – perhaps even more so, as the unyielding spirit of the Moto Khan awoke the kami of the shield and gave it great power. The shield is traditionally carried in a wielder's off-hand, and grants a +5 bonus to Armor TN, albeit at the price of making it impossible to use two-handed weapons. (Also, due to the shield's tendency to obstruct the wielder's movements, it also inflicts a +3 TN penalty on any attacks the wielder makes with Medium or Large weapons.) The shield reinforces the user's spirit with the iron will and strength of the Khan, granting him a +3k3 bonus to resisting Fear and recovering from the Dazed and Stunned conditions.

## The Toturi Armor

Like Toturi himself, the Toturi Dynasty's history was a time of both greatness and tragedy. When Hantei XXXIX stripped Akodo Toturi of his name, honor, and status, he ordered the former Lion Champion be given an old practice blade and armor to carry into his new life as a wave-man. The armor had been used as a striking target for kenjutsu practice and was in nearly useless condition. However, Toturi had accepted his fate, donned the armor as if it were an exquisite gift, and left.

Living as a ronin and assembling an army at the command of Togashi Yokuni, the man now called Toturi the Black repaired his armor as best he could and wore it proudly. When he was appointed as Yokuni's general, the Mirumoto offered him a superior set, but Toturi declined, believing the armor was a fitting reminder of what had happened when he let his pride and passions get the better of him. The mottled brown and dark red of the chipped armor plates would eventually become symbols of the ronin army that took his name. As his fortunes improved, Toturi was able to enhance the repairs he had made, and he began embossing the armor with the mon of the clans and families who joined him in his struggle to unite the warring Empire against the true threat of the Shadowlands. Thus the increasingly improved armor became a physical metaphor for Toturi's Army and for Toturi himself.

When Toturi accepted the Throne after the Day of Thunder, the most talented smiths and artisans in the Empire offered him their services to create armor which would be a worthy heirloom for his dynasty. Toturi graciously declined, seeing his existing armor as an appropriate gift for his heir. Years later, Toturi was slain by the onisu Fushin while he was traveling to Ryoko Owari to meet with his bastard son, Kaneka. The armor was with his entourage, a fact that many later pointed out to bolster Kaneka's claim that the Emperor was planning to appoint him as his heir. The armor was recovered by the Scorpion, who had come just too late to save their Emperor, and was set aside in the Imperial City until the matter of Toturi's succession had been settled between the Four Winds. Thus the armor again became a symbol for Toturi's legacy, as it stood aloft and untouched amid the politics and warfare that surrounded the struggle for the Throne. None of his four children dared to try and lay claim on the heirloom until their position as Emperor was clear.

The Toturi Armor is mechanically Heavy Armor that radiates the aura of calm authority Toturi possessed through his life. The wearer is completely immune to any Fear effect whose Rank is equal to or less than his Honor Rank. The armor also grants the wearer the Tactician Advantage, or doubles the benefit for characters who already possess the Advantage. Once per skirmish, the wearer may take a Simple Action and spend a Void Point to rally his companions in the fight; this allows every friendly character within 100 feet to ignore the effects of Fear, Fatigued, and Wounds on their next Turn. (The GM may choose to extend this benefit to other effects and Conditions such as Dazed.)

## Tsunetomo's Dai Tsuchi

Few official histories record the life and death of the ronin Tsunetomo, a man who embodied a great deal of what the Empire finds disgusting about ronin. The large warrior was born to ronin parents and quickly learned to accept the scorn and outright hatred of clan samurai. When he came of age, his father taught him what he knew of combat and war, but also of philosophy. Moreover, his mother was something of a scholar, and his parents together imparted a great deal of education in their son before their eventual deaths to a plague in the year 337.

The young orphan was sixteen years old. He spent only a short time mourning for his parents in the village where they died, for their teachings had shown him that the flesh was transient and death was to be expected. It seemed likely to him that their honorable and kind souls had gone to a place where they would be treated with respect. Tsunetomo, though, had to contend with the Realm of Mortals and an Empire that despised him and his kind.

Tsunetomo continued to learn as he grew older. He learned to apply the lessons from the Tao and the generals of the First War in many ways, both in and out of combat. Because he was such a large man, Tsunetomo favored the dai tsuchi in combat. He was often mistaken for a wandering Crab bushi, and did little to disabuse people of this notion. The great hammer became something of a metaphor for the man himself – despite his intelligence and education, he was by nature blunt, relentless, and without much nuance or guile. His very intelligence caused him to spend little effort attempting to parley or

## Toturi's Armor After the Dynasty

When Toturi III died in the Shadowlands, he had left his father's armor in the Imperial City, and once again neither his older brother Kaneka nor his younger brother Sezaru was willing to lay claim to it – or to the throne. When they both died and the Toturi Dynasty came to an end, the armor was left once again to rest on the wall of the Imperial palace, awaiting its fate.

After the ascension of Empress Iweko I, there was some speculation as to what would become of the fallen dynasty's heirloom armor. After all, the new Empress was appointed by the Heavens, which had grown affronted by the mortal meddling that was embodied in the Toturi line. Iweko ordered the armor preserved and set in a place of honor in the Imperial Palace, for she held a deep respect for Toturi's memory. She has, however, been somewhat enigmatic about what will eventually become of the armor. Iweko herself has never specifically said if it will simply be a historical relic or if another will wear it. When asked directly by the Imperial Chancellor, Satsu merely stated, "She has set it aside for when fate must be confronted."

reason with his enemies. Instead, he sized them up quickly and dispatched them equally quickly if he saw fit. He had little respect for clan samurai, and brazenly killed those who challenged him.

With time, Tsunetomo's might and attitude earned him a following, and he became a bandit lord without really even trying. However, Tsunetomo's men never raided villages or caravans, they simply set themselves up as the only legitimate power in a region that had once belonged to the Ki-Rin Clan and now was claimed by the Lion. The area was seldom patrolled by the Lion bushi, and indeed was practically forgotten except for its small harvest each year. Under Tsunetomo's rule, the peasants flourished and sent only a pittance of their production to the Lion... who took many years to finally realize what had happened. In truth, in those early centuries the Great Clans were still relatively small, and it easy for a bandit or ronin to claim a bit of land by force and style himself a daimyo if he did not draw too much attention.

When the Lion Clan finally came to destroy Tsunetomo and his ronin, they were expecting an unorganized bandit gang or perhaps a tribe of gaijin who had invaded from the mountains. Instead, they encountered a small ronin army which crushed their first force, then defeated the second in a victory that the Scorpion and Crane were all too eager to discuss in the courts of Rokugan.

Tsunetomo knew it could not last; precisely because he was a much more intelligent and canny general than the Lion had expected, he knew he could not ultimately prevail against the organized army of a Great Clan. Defeat was only a matter of time. Deciding his glory was of greater worth than his life, he led a fourth of his men in a suicidal fight against the next Lion army, led by an Akodo general, while the rest of his followers trickled away from the village. Tsunetomo's only command to the survivors was to ensure the peasants did not suffer from the Lion's negligence again.

The ronin's hammer was taken as a trophy by the Akodo, and has passed as a gift from then to other samurai several times through the Empire's history. Tsunetomo's men kept their word for the most part, and their descendants formed a ronin otokodate that watched over the region for many generations. Sadly, in the twelfth century many of them were lured into the Spider Clan and ended up swearing fealty to the Daigotsu name (although some ultimately saw this as a betrayal of their oaths and refused).

Tsunetomo's Hammer is an unusually light and precise weapon for its size and weight. It grants a Free Raise when making the Called Shot Maneuver. Moreover, when rolling for damage the wielder can spend a Void Point to ignore the opponent's Reduction against that hit.



# GM's Toolbox: Mechanical Themes of Earth

GMs and players alike will sometimes have opportunities to introduce new game mechanics into an L5R campaign. Commonly, this is done through lesser actions such as shugenja developing new spells, items awakening and becoming nemuranai, or bushi perfecting new kata. However, it is also possible (though extremely rare) for characters to invent new Techniques, creating new Alternate Paths or even founding a whole new Basic School. Allowing PCs to accomplish such things should not be considered lightly, of course, since existing Schools and Techniques are the result of hundreds of years of study and perfection.

In any case, it is important to be able to approach these situations with both game balance and game flavor in mind. To help players and GMs deal with these concepts, here are some guidelines for new Earth-based mechanics.

## Earth Spells

Earth spells tend to provide protective and bolstering power, overlapping with Water and Fire in some regards. Many of them focus on increasing characters' durability and resilience. They can also focus on spiritual and physical purity. When they create direct physical effects, they tend to be overt and blunt, eschewing the subtlety of Air in favor of summoning forth massive stone walls or hurling rocks across a battlefield.

The most basic Earth effects increase resilience and stamina, since they draw on the obvious strengths of the Element. The Traits of the Earth Ring are about coping with physical and mental stress, a topic addressed by many existing Earth spells such as Earth's Touch and Be the Mountain. When creating new spells like this, it is important to keep in mind that Strength is not an Earth Trait, so avoid effects cope with obstacles through brute force. Instead, spells of this nature should emphasize either mitigating or turning aside the physical or mental attacks of others.

Protective magic may sound similar to what was just described, but has less to do with increasing endurance and is more focused on negating threats entirely. Elemental Ward, for example, draws upon Earth's theme of protection by using it as a "grounding" agent for hostile magic. Magic such as this should usually focus on a specific avenue of attack and be extremely efficient at stopping it. Since this type of spell focuses on negating something specific, they can be a little more impressive for their Mastery Level. Courage of the Seven Thunders, for example, allows for a whopping five extra dice to be rolled when it triggers (with a Rank 1 spell)... but only helps with Fear effects.

Finally, the third hallmark of Earth spells is the rejection of impurities. This is where Earth and Water have some common ground, since Water is seen as the default

"healing" Element. However, where Water can reverse damage done, Earth can stop the effects of unnatural bodily states. As an example, a wound from a sword is not the default state of a body, but everything that is intact is still functioning properly. Poison, however, introduces impurities to the entire bodily system and causes damage in that way. This category of spell also combats the Shadowlands Taint and the Lying Darkness, and spells that do so can be higher in potency for their Mastery Rank due to their specialized nature.

Earth can also include other effects such as direct-damaging and disabling spells, but these should always depict effects that are in theme with manipulating the Earth or affecting a target's Earth Ring or Earth Traits. In-game examples include Earth Becomes Sky, Earthquake, and Wolf's Mercy. These spells should generally be less powerful than Fire spells of similar Mastery Rank unless they are striking specialized targets.

## Earth Nemuranai

Items imbued with the power of Earth are often difficult or impossible to destroy, have powers based on weight or density, help the wearer remain pure in some way, or enhance Earth-based Traits or Skills. Armor is probably the most common form of Earth nemuranai, and often awards higher Armor TN bonuses or lower penalties as the Earth spirits infuse the armor with unusual strength or lessen its burden on its wearer.

Common minor nemuranai tend to be armor or protective items such as a mempo or a charm. Nemuranai armor is usually well-made (or if not, at least lovingly cared-for) and usually awakens due to glory in combat, or simply due to being used by many generations of warriors. Protective charms may start out as simple items like a fan or a coin that survives dangerous situations over and over along with its owner. After some time, this item may become "lucky" as the Earth spirits within it become more actively protective of its owner. Such minor items might grant small bonuses for things such as resisting fatigue or avoiding damage.

Items that aid a character's rolls (such as Stamina, Willpower, or Skills based on those traits) will often be in the form of something easily associated with the benefit. For example, a pair of kote could assist the wearer when making Stamina rolls.

Earth spirits can occasionally awaken in weapons, but this is usually restricted to weapons that deal damage through mass, weight, or sheer durability. When this happens, the kami tend to make the weapon heavier and thus more potent. For example, an awakened tetsubo will have greater impact and thus might do more damage or ignore Reduction.

## Earth Kata

Kata whose Mastery is based on the Earth ring will typically be developed by students of schools that have a Stamina bonus or that specialize in endurance and raw durability. If a bushi character develops a new Earth kata, the player should keep in mind that the combat principles of Earth do not focus on subtlety, feints, or precision. Instead, these Kata should do things like aid a bushi's Armor TN (by making better defensive maneuvers, or using armor more effectively), retributing against enemy attacks, or sacrificing offensive power for a more effective defense.

Earth Kata that deal with weapons will almost always center around Heavy Weapons.

## Earth Schools and Techniques

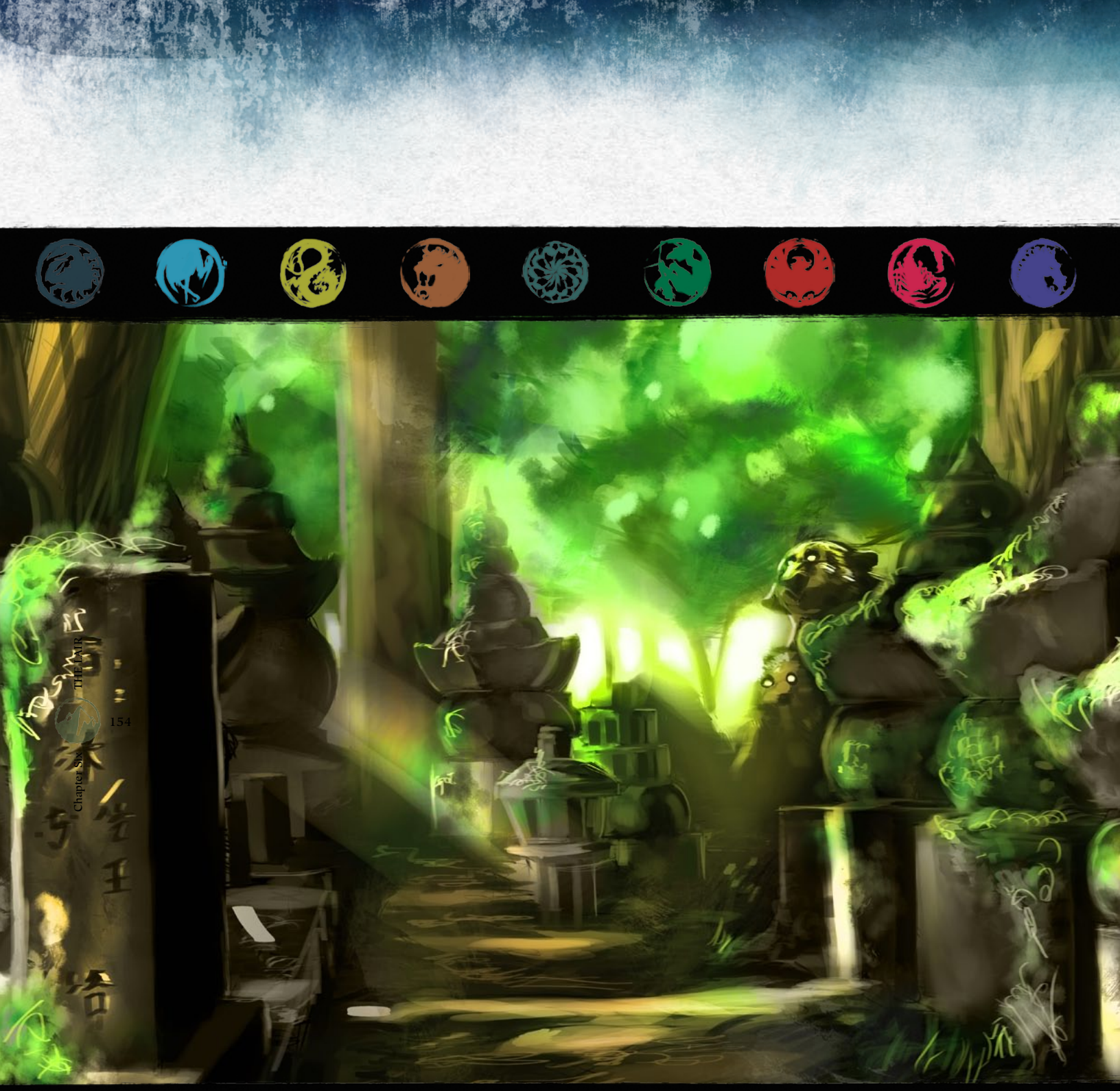
Schools and Techniques that can be considered Earth-oriented are generally those that grant Stamina or Willpower Trait bonuses as part of their starting package, Alternate Paths for such Schools, and Shugenja schools with the Earth affinity. More broadly, this category may include any Schools that are focused on defensive techniques, although this produces some overlap with Air-oriented and Water-oriented Schools.

For bushi schools, Earth-oriented Techniques should focus on at least one of the following: skills that involve Stamina or Willpower, attacks that favor raw damage over precision, attacks that are effective against opponents who have attacked you ineffectively, defending yourself or others through power and endurance, and resisting incoming attacks and damage. These Techniques should reward characters for making slower but more effective strikes, or for wading into the thick of battle, and should not work well with light weapons or light armor.

Few courtier schools are considered Earth schools, but those that do focus on navigating Rokugan's social circles through sheer determination and tenacity rather than clever words and charm. When considering new mechanics for Earth-based courtier schools, it should be understood that the Empire has little use for brutes and thugs, so even a "bullying" mechanic should show some restraint – though there always times and places for a simple blunt reminder that Rokugan is an Empire of warriors. Earth-based court mechanics can also focus on the resilient aspect of Earth by making the courtier difficult to manipulate or dissuade.

Shugenja schools typically focus on one of the types of Earth magic mentioned above (fortification, protection, or purity), though as noted in Chapter Three, nature and animals are also a domain of Earth. Typically, Earth shugenja Techniques should either make the chosen method of magic more powerful or versatile, or allow the shugenja to expend spell slots to perform a spell-like ability related to that aspect of Earth magic.

Monk schools can vary wildly depending on the flavor and backstory of the particular Order, and are thus the hardest to classify by Element. In general, the best approach with monastic Schools is to examine the specific Order's history and decide if it is slanted more toward combat, diplomacy, or mysticism. Then, apply one of the above concepts (Earth-based Bushi, Courtier, or Shugenja) to the Technique.



# THE LAIR

*Matsu Goji kept running, the bandits behind him gaining ground. He knew his behavior was not the most honorable, but this had been the case for a long time now. Besides, there was only so much one could do against seven ronin. He could probably kill one, maybe two, but then they would cut him to pieces, his death as meaningless as theirs.*

*So he ran, lurching up the narrow mountain path, praying they would get tired before him. Would the Fortunes hear the prayers of a coward?*

*Goji's breath burned in his throat and his legs were heavy as leaden weights. Despair threatened to engulf him... but then he turned a corner on the trail and stopped dead. Three men stood before him, heavily armored and holding strange polearms, their stances resolute and stern. Goji could not recognize their colors, dark blue and green, and his darting eyes could see no mon on their chest-plates or sleeves. The metal mempo covering their faces made them monstrous and strange in the dim sunlight filtering through the trees.*

*"Step aside," one of them said. Matsu Goji gulped and lurched out of the way as the trio stepped forward, polearms swinging, to meet with the pursuing ronin.*

*The clash and ring of combat echoed through the dense trees that covered the mountainside. Three against seven – Goji did not like those odds. Yet the three strangers stood their ground, even pushing the ronin back down the trail, using the superior reach of their polearms to strike at them. They had taken wounds – Goji could see blood staining their armor – but did not seem to even consider backing down, let alone fleeing.*

*Goji clenched his fists, feeling something arise within him, something he had not felt in months.*

*Courage, and fury.*

*The young Lion unsheathed his katana and charged, slashing one of the ronin from shoulder to hip. Distracted by his sudden reappearance in the fight, the other ronin fell into confusion, and the three strange samurai lunged forward with their spears, finishing off their foes in moments.*

*Goji sank down on a large rock outcropping. His heart was racing and his blade dripped with the blood of the man he had killed. The strangers turned toward him, and it occurred to him that they might be a greater threat than the bandits. But Goji was finally tired of running. Let them try to kill him if they wished. "Who are you?" he called.*

*The lead man removed his mempo, revealing a scruffy chin and a resolute gaze. His eyes met Goji's squarely. "I am Heichi Kotsuro, and these are my brothers, Kotsune and Kotetsu. Yourself? What were you doing in these mountains?"*

*"Matsu Goji of the Lion Clan," he answered. With a start he realized his blade was still wet with blood, and cleansed it with a sharp flicking motion. "Heichi, you said? I am not familiar with this name. Are you a vassal family charged with protecting these mountains?"*

*"These mountains are indeed under our protection," Kotsuro nodded. "However, we are not in the service of any Great Clan. The Heichi are the Boar Clan."*

*"The..." Goji stood up, suddenly worried. "The Boar Clan... died years ago," he said, trying to remember history lessons from the dojo. His hand tightened on his sword-hilt. Were these madmen?*

*"Not here," Kotsuro shook his head. "Not here. And now, I ask you to come with us."*

*Goji tightened his grip on the sword still further. "Why?"*

*"Because no one can know of the Lair and leave. Either you die here, by your hand or ours, or you follow us and do not look back. Your choice."*

*Goji thought about it for a moment. His eyes strayed to the bodies of the ronin bandits, their dishonorable blood soaking into the ground.*

*Then he sheathed his sword and stepped forward.*

# The Story of the Boar Clan

The story of the Boar Clan is an odd and mysterious one, often forgotten in modern Rokugan. The original members of the Boar Clan were part of an expedition from the Crab Clan sent in the late fourth century to establish iron mines and villages in the northeastern part of the Twilight Mountain. They disappeared without a trace, cut off by landslides and earthquakes; since the treacherous mountains were known to be the home of many strange creatures and dangerous spirits, and the Crab had few resources to spare for a rescue mission, so they simply assumed the expedition had perished.

More than sixty years later, a contingent of samurai came out of the mountains and traveled to the Imperial City, offering gifts of jade and iron to the Emperor. The Hantei asked if the ore was payment for their lands, a subtle test of these samurai – for after all, in truth all lands in Rokugan belong to the Empire. The leader of the group, a man calling himself Hida Heichi, cleverly answered it was simply payment of the Imperial taxes due for all these years. Pleased and impressed by this answer, the Emperor proclaimed him the first samurai of the Heichi family and the founder of the Boar Clan.

Sadly, despite establishing a reputation as strong, tenacious warriors and experts in mining, the Boar Clan survived for less than two centuries. At the dawn of the sixth century, a Bloodspeaker cultist named Agasha Ryuden infiltrated the main castle of the Boar Clan, Shiro Heichi. Ryuden knew that beneath the Boar lands lay the blood of the First Oni, slain in the First War, which had turned into a powerful ore. Using powerful maho, Ryuden sacrificed most of the Boar Clan and used the blood of the First Oni to create the Anvil of Despair, a powerful artifact which would go on to blight the history of the Empire with the creation of many terrifying cursed nemuranai. When Imperial authorities arrived in Shiro Heichi to investigate the clan's failure to pay its taxes, it seemed as though the Boar Clan had simply vanished, leaving behind only a scattering of strange humanoid statuettes. The Emperor eventually declared the Minor Clan disbanded, ending the Boar's proud legacy.

Unbeknownst to most, what happened was actually more complex than merely the attack of a Bloodspeaker. During their initial trip into the Twilight Mountains, the samurai of the Crab were held captive by the Shakoki Dogu, a powerful Earth spirit which had awoken to guard the First Oni's blood. Lacking companionship, the Shakoki Dogu held the samurai in between the Spirit Realms to help him in his vigil. Hida Heichi finally convinced him to let them go and swore to always protect the mountains. When Ryuden almost destroyed the Boar Clan by himself, the Shakoki Dogu was terrified, and turned the last Heichi samurai into spirits, removing them from Ningen-do forever. In later years, visitors to the Twilight Mountains report feeling an eerie presence and occasionally finding little statuettes of roughly hewn humanoid figures – the eyes of the Shakoki Dogu upon the world.

# The History of the Lair

After the creation of the Boar Clan by the Emperor, its Clan Champion sent several expeditions through the Twilight Mountains to spot potential mining sites which could be exploited by the new Minor Clan. Of course, most such sites were already occupied by the Crab or the Crane, and the Boar had to make do with the most remote, difficult, and dangerous places. (Not that this troubled them overmuch, given their history.) One of these expeditions went farther than any other. Led by a samurai named Heichi Jomei, it made it across some of the most difficult passes in the mountain range, eventually reaching a remote corner of the range which had never been

explored before by any Rokugani. It was a small plateau completely surrounded by mountains, shielded from outside view and sheltered from the worst of the weather, accessible only through a single narrow path. The plateau was well-watered by streams from the mountains, offering the prospect of planting crops. Making camp immediately, Jomei sent his best scouts into the surrounding mountains, and they found several iron veins and even some copper and jade. The area seemed perfect for a settlement despite its remoteness, and construction started almost immediately, while Jomei sent for reinforcements.

Of course, turning the place into a habitable settlement was a great deal of work. Moreover, the mountains were inhabited by many natural predators, such as wolves and bears, who did not appreciate the sudden intrusion of men into their hunting range. The first winter season proved to be extremely harsh, with heavy snows and bitter winds. An avalanche buried one of their supply caravans, resulting in hunger and even starvation. But the settlement survived, displaying the tenacity for which the Boar had already became famous. The first harvest of rice allowed the new village to begin growing and prospering, and the flow of trade in iron ore allowed Heichi Jomei to turn his temporary fort into a real castle.

The forlorn settlement, largely unknown outside of the Boar Clan, came to be known simply as the Lair, a simple name based on its remote location and highly defensible nature. It expanded its mining operations, opening three major mines that came to be known as the Three Brothers, while the villagers cultivated every inch of the mountains they could, constructing terraced rice paddies up and down the slopes, trying to make the place as self-sufficient as possible. Many Boar samurai were sent to the Lair to guard it against predators and deter any possible attack from the Great Clans. No real threat arose, but Jomei and his troops maintained vigilance.

When news and trade caravans stopped coming in from Shiro Heichi, life in the Lair initially carried on as it had always been. Jomei at first assumed the latest messengers and shipments had been delayed by bad weather, a frequent problem in the rugged mountains. However, after a few weeks Jomei became concerned and sent several of his best men to contact the rest of the clan. None of them returned. Soon after, the Lair came under attack from a force of Bloodspeakers, dispatched by Agasha Ryuden to dispose of this lingering remnant of the Boar Clan. Thanks to Jomei's thorough preparations and a small stockpile of jade, the attack was pushed back, albeit at great coast to the Lair's population.

Disturbed by the violent attack by maho-tsukai, Jomei again sent out scouts, this time dispatching one his best hunters, Heichi Juneiko, to Shiro Heichi. After many days she finally returned with terrible news: the Boar Clan had disappeared from the face of Rokugan. Jomei quickly gathered what remained of his men, telling them what had happened and announcing his decision. The Lair would remain as the last stronghold of the Boar Clan, to preserve its heritage and maintain eternal vigil on the mountains. However, they could not risk letting their enemies know they still existed. Therefore, Jomei completely forbade anyone from leaving the Lair without his permission. Its existence was henceforth to be a secret to the outside world.

A handful of samurai from other clans were present when Jomei made his announcement, and he informed them this rule would apply to them as well; they would never be allowed to leave the Lair, lest they reveal it to its enemies. Some of them attacked the Boar warriors, while others attempted to escape or else committed seppuku. Jomei was saddened to see their deaths but felt he had no choice.

## Another Time, Another Place...

The Elements series of books each feature a campaign setting which is designed to be used 'as is,' dropping it into the time and place of the GM's choice. The setting offered in this book is tied to a specific Minor Clan and a specific history, which makes it somewhat more difficult to fit into other campaign eras and setting. However, clever GMs can find many ways around this:

Perhaps the initial expedition which established the Lair was more far-ranging and could have ended up anywhere in Rokugan where there are mountains. (Or even outside of Rokugan, for GMs running a campaign set in the Colonies during the era after the Destroyer War.) What constitutes unaligned territory has varied over time, so the Lair could be in the territory of a different Great Clan, in a remote location that has not been detected yet.

The setting as written assumes the Boar Clan has already been destroyed, but it can also be used during the two centuries the Boar were in existence. The restrictions on entering and leaving the Lair would probably be laxer, although the Boar might still want to maintain secrecy for spiritual or economic reasons.

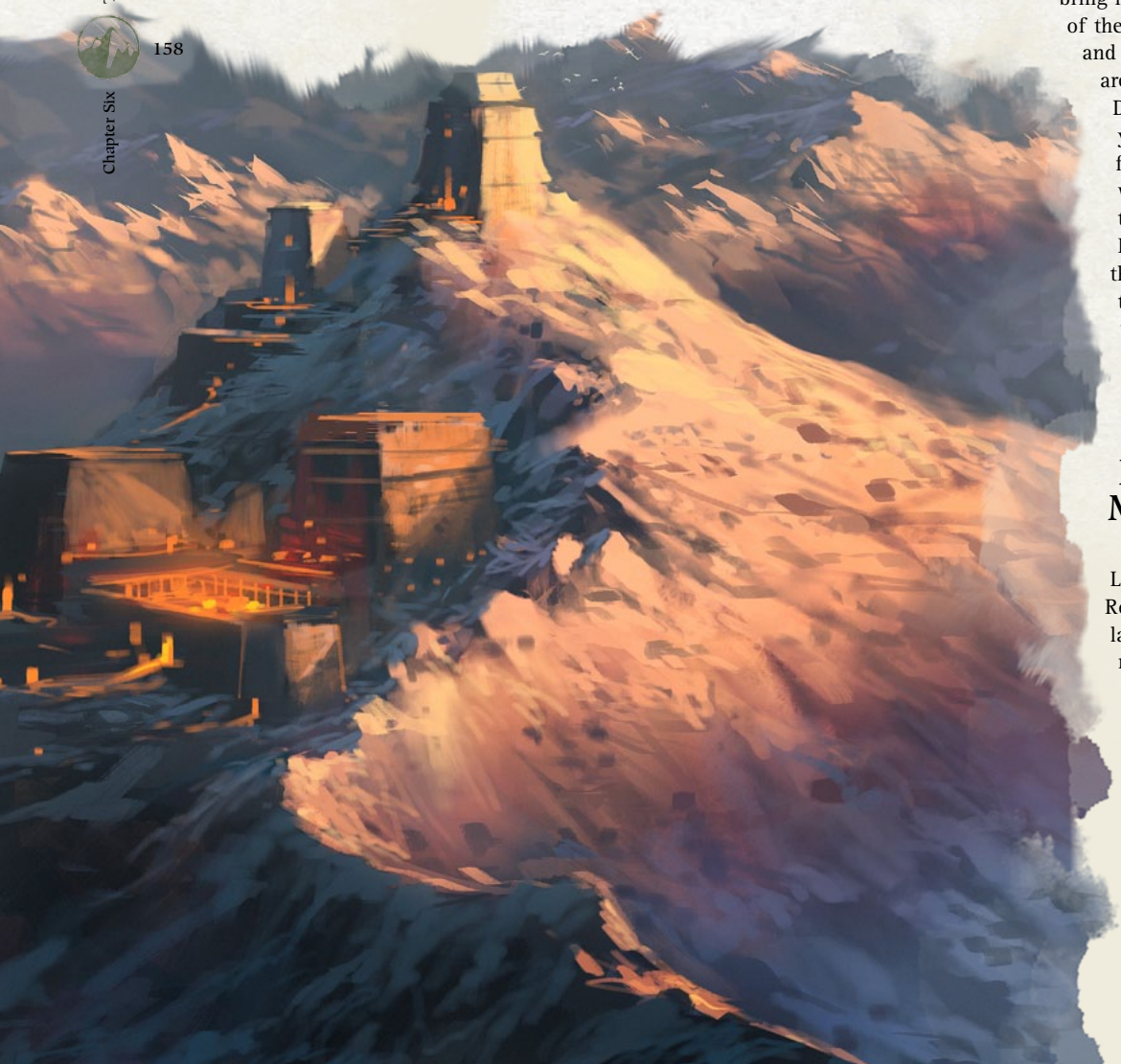
If the setting is used in an era before the creation of the Boar Clan, it might have been built by another Minor Clan, either an existing one like the Mantis or an original one that was later forgotten by history. It might even have been founded by a ronin band of honorable intentions. Another interesting option would be if the Lair would be the remnant of a pre-Kami tribe, possibly considering itself loyal to Rokugan and the Emperor but not part of any clan except itself.

## The Lair in Isolation

The Lair has changed only slightly in the years since Jomei cut it off from the Empire. Jomei refused the title of Champion of the Boar Clan, both because he did not feel worthy of the title and because claiming such a position would risk exposure to the clan's enemies. When he passed away, his son took the name of Jomei, and this soon became a tradition, so that a Heichi Jomei has always been in charge of the Lair. The place survived in almost complete isolation, cut from the rest of the Empire and almost from time itself. They used the resources of their mines to make weapons, armor, and tools. The peasants continued to grow their crops in the mountains, and the samurai supplemented the food supply by hunting birds – and in the direst of times, other game as well. The mountain streams did sometimes provide fish, and the mountains had enough trees to supply their minimum needs for lumber, charcoal, and paper. The Lair was never prosperous again, but it survived, its population more or less stable. Most of the samurai were initially forced to marry peasant women, since there simply were not enough samurai women in the Lair, and this was simply politely ignored by all concerned after the marriages were concluded. Aged samurai shaved their heads and built a small monastery, preserving and teaching the ways of the Tao and the Fortunes.

However, despite its isolation, the Lair was not completely cut off from the Empire. Over the course of many years, small groups of samurai, wandering monks and ronin, Imperial cartographers, and other such folk occasionally stumbled upon the Lair. Peasant fugitives and bandits sometimes found their way there as well, particularly in times of great tumult in the rest of Rokugan. The Jomei required all such visitors to remain with them lest they expose the hidden stronghold to its foes. In fact, these visitors encouraged the Jomei even more in their determination to remain hidden, since they revealed that the Boar Clan had been officially disbanded by the Emperor, raising the threat that the Lair might be considered in violation of Imperial law. Some of these visitors were ultimately killed, while others grudgingly accepted their fate and became residents of the Lair. The Jomei even offered to let samurai visitors marry into the Heichi family and take its name, although only a few of these inadvertent guests accepted this.

Of course, one problem which immediately presented itself was the issue of taxes. Given the history of his clan, Jomei could ill afford not to safeguard part of the clan's production for taxes, yet contacting the outside world could mean revealing his people and risking their destruction. The first Jomei oversaw the construction of a special room in the castle where part of the production from the mines could be stored away safely until such time as they could bring it back to the Emperor. The residents of the Lair consider this tradition sacred, and only the most trusted of samurai are assigned to guard the room. Despite the Lair's small size, over the years the taxes have added up to a formidable amount, and the samurai worry that it has become enough to threaten loyalty or attract bandits. Each of the Jomei has struggled with the idea of sending these taxes back to Rokugan, wondering if it is now the right time to reveal themselves to the Empire, but so far they have continued to follow the path of caution.



### Dangers of the Mountains

In the many years since the Lair cut itself off from the rest of Rokugan, natural predators have been largely hunted out of the surrounding mountains. However, the Lair does periodically face threats of a less mundane nature.

Bandits represent one of the greatest dangers. Groups of ronin and criminals often use the Twilight Mountains as a refuge from the forces of the Crab and the Crane, and there is a constant

threat that they may stumble across the Lair. Gangs have learned of the Lair's existence several times, preying on its fringes or even trying to organize large-scale attacks on the village or the mines. On at least one occasion, a gang learned of the stored taxes from a captured villager, and the gang's leader assembled a very large and formidable force with the goal of storming the castle. This resulted in a small-scale war within the mountains, lasting several days and costing over a hundred dead on each side. Due to this and other such incidents, the Boar tend to view ronin with great suspicion, and are far more likely to simply kill them than to accept them as guests in the Lair.

The Twilight Mountains are also prone to being infiltrated by creatures of the Shadowlands. Goblins and ogres are the most common, but more exotic creatures sometimes manage to slip past the Crab border as well. An extensive network of tunnels and caves can be found throughout the region, and some samurai believe the tunnels connect the area to the Shadowlands, explaining the seemingly constant trickle of monsters that plague the mountains despite the best efforts of the Crab. Inevitably, some of these creatures menace the Lair, and the Boar are very glad for the small jade vein in their mountains. Some among them have suggested the creatures are actually attracted to the Lair due to some ancient evil hidden beneath the mountains, though Heichi Jomei and his successors have always rejected this idea.

## The Old and the New

Perhaps the most peculiar feature of the Lair is how its lack of interaction with the outside has kept the inhabitants in the dark about the rest of the Empire. To an outside eye the place looks like it is still in the fifth century. News does still trickle into the Lair through the occasional visitor stumbling onto the place, and on a few occasions the Jomei has organized spying expeditions to visit the exterior, but it can be years or even decades between such occasions, and in any case the Lair is always very slow to adapt. For example, the return of the Unicorn took the Boar by surprise many years after it had happened, and their first encounters with the sons of Shinjo were often fraught with difficulties. Likewise, the Boar maintain traditional tombs despite occasional warnings about the Imperial edict ordering cremation (a response to the first rise of Iuchiban). Tombs dot the mountains around the Lair, creating a subtle vulnerability to the Bloodspeakers if they should return.

On the other hand, what little knowledge the Boar possessed has been treasured over the ages, and they know the events of the fourth and fifth centuries as if they happened yesterday. A student of Rokugan's history or genealogy would be delighted to find the Lair, which has kept many ancient traditions, language forms, and historical records intact. And of course the secret Techniques of the Heichi Bushi School are still taught here; they are considered the most important of legacies, and the Jomei are careful to make sure they are always passed on to the next generation.

Of course, samurai are still human, and their lack of perfection can sometimes disrupt the Lair's usually harmonious existence. In times of quietness or when many guests are present, the stir of freedom can agitate the people of the Lair, and debates arise as to whether the policy of isolation is still appropriate. The first and most famous instance of this took place two generations after the first Heichi Jomei died. Jurei, the son of the current Jomei, began arguing it was time for the Boar to return to Rokugan, since the Bloodspeakers had not manifested themselves in many years. Surely a new Emperor would be amenable to the cause of the lost Minor Clan and reinstate them once their taxes were remitted. Jurei had actually left the Lair once on a mission to obtain rare medicines, and had returned fascinated by the larger world of Rokugan. The debate raged across the clan, for many still feared the servants of Iuchiban could return, or doubted their clan's fate in a world that had forgotten them. Jurei worked hard to convince his father and the rest of the clan to change their mind, but while some did agree with him (particularly among the younger generation), his father refused to budge from his position, determined to protect the Boar even if it meant keeping them trapped in a smaller world. Soon after, a violent incident took place when one of the youngest samurai in the Lair tried to escape, drawing his katana when confronted by sentries. They reluctantly killed him, and the event drove Jurei and his followers into a rage; battle erupted within the Boar Clan, samurai against samurai, while the peasants watched and wondered if their lords had gone mad. Eventually, Jomei ended the civil conflict by killing his son in personal combat, an act that left him heartbroken. He retired to the Lair's small monastery and named his closest lieutenant the new Jomei, leaving to him the task of rebuilding the Lair's forces.

## A Glimpse of the Outside

On a few rare occasions, the Jomei will allow a few samurai to leave the Lair and travel into Rokugan. The reasons for this vary widely, and can include seeking important resources (medicine, seeds for plants not growing in the Lair) or trying to learn if the Bloodspeaker Cult is still a threat. Sometimes, the Boar will try to recruit individual samurai or skilled peasants, especially if the Lair lacks some essential skill. (On one occasion, a plague ran through the valley and killed all the monks at the monastery; an expedition was organized to find and recruit new monks to serve the Lair's spiritual needs.) Guests of course are never allowed to leave the Lair, since it is believed this would risk the place's secrecy and thus its survival.

Sending anyone outside the Lair is always seen as a great risk for the Boar Clan, and only the most trustworthy of samurai are tasked with such missions. Such men and women must be great warriors, peerless hunters, and also possess keen minds and intellects. Guile is also needed, since Boar scouts are expected to dissimulate on their identity and perhaps invent a cover story to explain their

strange accents and mannerisms. Of course, any mon or other identifying symbols are removed before the samurai leave the Lair, and armor is repainted to a bland brown. The mai chong, the traditional weapon on the Boar Clan, is likewise never brought outside the Lair, since they are too distinctive and recognizable.

However, some in the Lair share stories claiming that on a few occasions large numbers of samurai have left the Lair, due to times of great danger in the Empire as a whole. One legend claims that when a village in the foothills of the Twilight Mountains was at risk of being destroyed by some great evil, the whole force of the Lair emerged and fought as a bannerless army. Another tale claims the samurai of the Lair fought in the great battle against Iuchiban at Sleeping River. Such tales are firmly denied by Jomei past and present, but this might just be to maintain the appearance of absolute fidelity to their rules. What is true, however, is that samurai are sent out from the Lair whenever the Jomei catch so much as a hint of the Boar Clan operating in the rest of Rokugan. (During the Clan War era, for example, the ronin shugenja Heichi Chokei claimed to be heir of the Boar Clan, and this attracted the attention of the Lair.)

It is a sad truth that those sent out from the Lair do not always come back, given the dangers of the larger Empire. In fact, some of them choose to remain within the larger Empire rather than return to the strange insular life of the Lair. The Boar prefer to ignore the possibility that some of their people have abandoned them, and point at the Lair's survival as proof of their samurai's integrity.

## The Price of Isolation

The Lair has been cut off from the rest of the Empire since the start of the sixth century. Though the Boar were never a clan known for their adherence to social niceties or for following the latest courtly fashions, this long isolation has nonetheless cost them much. Technological advancements, martial techniques, new battle tactics, the lessons of the great battles against Iuchiban and the Shadowlands, new spells, new means of detecting the Taint; all of these and more have been denied to the Boar. The following sections outline the key things which time has cost the Heichi family.

### Burial

After the Battle of Stolen Graves and the emergence of the Bloodspeaker Cult under Iuchiban, Hantei XI forbade the burial of the dead in Rokugan; henceforth all corpses were to be cremated. The Bloodspeakers had nearly annihilated the armies of Rokugan with the reanimated corpses of their ancestors, and the only way to prevent a recurrence of this atrocity was to destroy the corpses. Elaborate cremation rituals were developed by the Brotherhood of Shinsei and the Phoenix Clan, and these rituals were put into use across the whole of Rokugan. Eta were given the task of unearthing the bodies of the dead in cemeteries throughout the Emerald Empire, from the crypts of Crane lords to the humble graves of peasants. The Lion Clan wrestled greatly with the Emperor's order, their love for their ancestors warring with their devotion

to Bushido, but in the end the clan relented when their Champion cremated the body of his father in a public ritual.

Isolated as they were, the Boar did not learn of this order until almost two centuries later. Moreover, never learned of this order. Though guest samurai have told them, on occasion, about the Emperor's decree, such tales are not given much credence. An honorable burial is the final reward of a samurai, and the Boar cannot believe the Son of Heaven would deny this to his subjects. Even the heimin of the Lair are awarded their own graves. This practice, unfortunately, could well threaten to destroy the Lair if the Bloodspeaker Cult should manage to take advantage of it. (See "The Nine Days of Blood" for a discussion of how this might play out.)

## Clothing

When the Boar Clan was founded, the samurai class did not regularly wear kimono, kataginu, or hakama. A style of dress known as hitatare was the norm. The hitatare consisted of a top shirt and a bottom set of pants, both of which were wide and flowing, tied with elaborate bows around a samurai's body. Bushi on active duty and patrol typically wore yoroi hitatare, a cut-down version of the standard garment meant to be worn under armor. The two halves of the hitatare were joined by an obi, where the samurai kept swords, fans, and other necessities. Typically, the top half of a hitatare was tied closed by a large series of bows on the chest.

After the reign of Hantei XVI, the hitatare began falling out of favor as kimono became more standardized. There are many reasons for this, from the kimono's greater ease of production to the desire of most Rokugani for a new beginning following the unfortunate reign of the Steel Chrysanthemum. The diligent silk production of the Crane and the prodigious amounts of the new fashion they gave away as gifts doubtless also contributed to the downfall of the hitatare.

But in the Lair, there was never an influx of kimono and the other fashion styles that followed it. The hitatare's durability and ease of creation meant the Boar saw no need to replace it, especially given their limited supplies of clothing. In later eras, guest samurai often become objects of fun to the Boar due to their unfamiliarity with the hitatare, and they assign their children to teach the newcomers how to dress. Some Crane guests have attempted to enlighten the Boar as to the new styles of dress, but their efforts have had little effect.

## Celebrations

The arrival of gaijin in Rokugan during the era of Empress Hantei Yugozohime was a transformative period for the Empire. With the ships of the Merenae and Thrane came new technology, including the strange and terrible gaijin pepper. Though the use of this technology was forbidden, within a century celebratory fireworks had entered Rokugani traditions. Although these fireworks, called hanabi, were officially declared to be herbal/alchemical creations with no relation to the gaijin, in truth they were simply a refinement of gaijin pepper. They quickly became a widespread and popular element of festivals and feasts. By the twelfth century, fireworks are a staple of every village's festivals and harvest celebrations.

Any village, that is, except in the Lair. Fireworks require many hard-to-find components in order to create them, and it takes monks many weeks to construct the hanabi used in just one night of celebrations. Such luxury is beyond the meager resources of the Boar. On occasion, guests will bring a few hanabi with them, but this is a rare treat indeed. The gift of a night's celebrations is not easily forgotten by the Boar, and a guest able to bring such a rarity will be well regarded. It can often be multiple generations between such occasions.

## Law Enforcement

In the early days of the Lair it was a bustling hive of activity. Heimin were being called in to work in the mines of the Heichi, the Crab were heavily involved, and there were plans to construct major roads through the Twilight Mountains to support the new population there. Thus, Boar Clan Champion Heichi Batsuda requested an Emerald Magistrate be assgined an official clan magistrate would be needed at of Heichi sano Negura. The assigned magistrate was a young man named Doji Yoshi, who brought an unbridled enthusiasm to his position; during his tenure the Travelers' Path and the lands of the Boar knew peace. Unfortunately, Yoshi was killed by a bandit shortly before the Lair broke off contact with the outside world.

Since then, the Boar have largely gone without magistrates. The heimin and eta largely police their own, with only occasional samurai involvement, and justice among the samurai is usually administered by the Jomei, sitting in judgment. Occasionally, an actual mystery arises, and in those cases Heichi Jomei will assign a samurai the duty of solving the problem. After the case is solved, the samurai is simply assigned another duty.

## Money

In the rest of Rokugan, each clan is permitted to mint new coinage every year based on the size of the harvest. The amount of koku that can be minted is determined by the Imperial government – through most of the Empire's history, this is handled by the Office of the Emerald Champion, though in the late twelfth century the new position of Imperial Treasurer is created to take control of this aspect of Imperial governance.

Within the Lair, however, there is no way for the Boar to receive permission from the Emperor to mint new coins. Only a modest amount of coinage was in circulation in the valley when the first Jomei chose to cut off the Lair from the Empire, and over the centuries this proved inadaquate to keeping the local economy running, despite the occasional additions of small amounts of coinage from guests of the Boar. The Jomei have quietly coined additional zeni (the lowest-denomination coin in the Rokugani economy) to facilitate proper commerce within the Lair. They regret this

technical violation of Imperial law, and hope that by restricting the new coins to the lowest denomination the scale and seriousness of their unavoidable disobedience will be minimized.

Guests of the Boar find it relatively easy to spot the local coinage, which has a distinctive size and engraving.

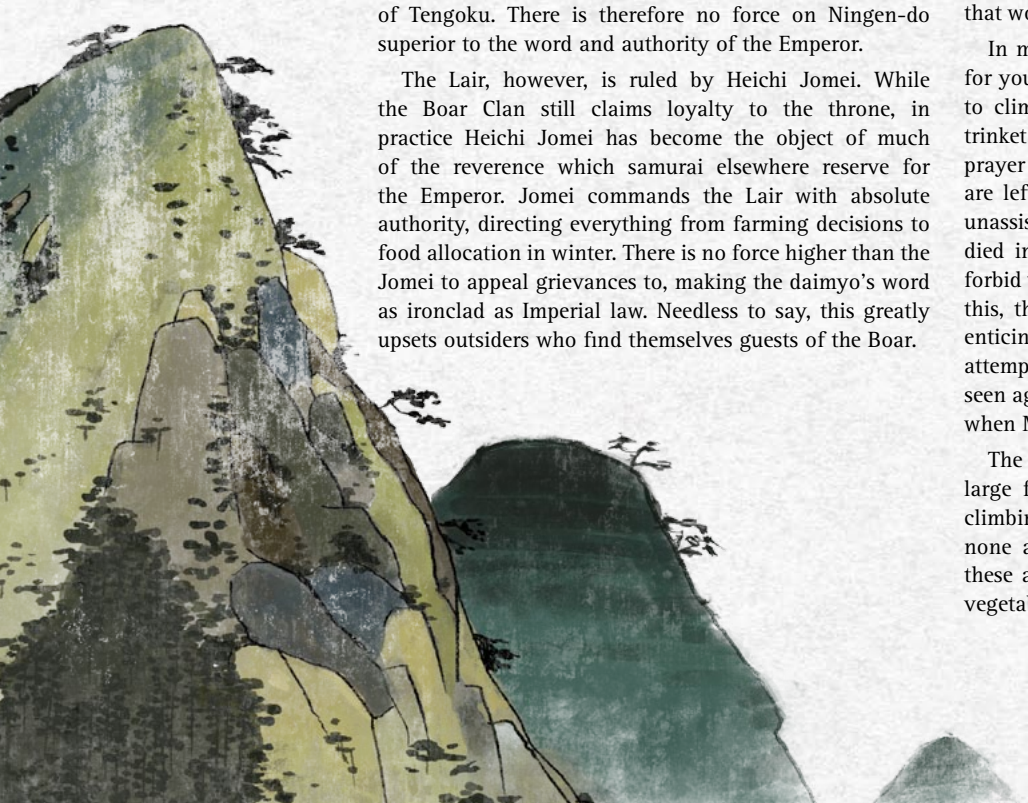
## The Jomei and The Emperor

"Otosan Uchi is a long way from here," is a popular saying in the Lair. Guest samurai are often confused and unsettled by the Boar's devotion to their leader, the daimyo known as Heichi Jomei or simply as the Jomei. As the Lair has grown more and more distant from Rokugan as a whole, the power of the Jomei has increased into almost absolute control of the Lair.

In Rokugan, society is structured as a mirror of the Celestial Order. At the top of that order is the Emperor, supreme and divine ruler of Rokugan. The family of the Emperor bears the Mandate of Heaven and the blessings of Tengoku. There is therefore no force on Ningen-do superior to the word and authority of the Emperor.

The Lair, however, is ruled by Heichi Jomei. While the Boar Clan still claims loyalty to the throne, in practice Heichi Jomei has become the object of much of the reverence which samurai elsewhere reserve for the Emperor. Jomei commands the Lair with absolute authority, directing everything from farming decisions to food allocation in winter. There is no force higher than the Jomei to appeal grievances to, making the daimyo's word as ironclad as Imperial law. Needless to say, this greatly upsets outsiders who find themselves guests of the Boar.





# The Lair: Physical Description

The Lair sits on a wide plateau between mountains in the Twilight Mountains range. Despite its small size, the Lair manages to be largely self-sufficient, relying on crops grown on the plateau and fish harvested from the mountain stream, particularly the large steam known as the River of Three Horses. Weapons and armor are made from ores mined from the three great mines in the Lair, ensuring that the samurai of the Boar are as well-armed and well-equipped. A single narrow road runs out of the Lair, connecting it to the outside world.

To the east and west of the Lair lie the mountains Kitai (Hope) and Kaikon (Regret). The twin peaks are among the highest in the Twilight Mountains, seeming to scrape Tengoku itself with their white, snow-capped tops. These, perhaps more than the edicts of Heichi Jomei, serve to isolate and cut off the Lair from the outside world. The mountains were named by the Crab at the dawn of the Empire. The zealous Miya Akate, a mapmaker in service to the first Miya, led a team of Hiruma explorers through the Twilight Mountains. Akate's maps of Crab lands would form the foundation of the Imperial maps of southern Rokugan, and he had enjoyed much success in the courts for his efforts. The explorers endured a difficult climb through the mountains, but when they reached the peak of what they thought to be the tallest mountain, they saw another peak that equaled it in height. The Crab planted their standard at the top of the mountain and called it Hope, for the end of their journey was close at hand. Miya Akate led them across to the next mountain, leaving behind only a single man who had been injured in a rock slide. The last anyone saw of Miya Akate and his accompanying scouts, they were ascending the mountain that would bear the name Regret for all the centuries after.

In modern times, the mountains represent a challenge for young Boar samurai. It is considered a mark of honor to climb to the top of Hope and leave behind a small trinket of one's presence. These tokens can be anything – prayer beads, statues of ancestors, sometimes even swords are left at the mountain's peak. Climbing the mountain unassisted is a tremendous feat, and many have failed and died in such attempts, and the sensei of the Boar dojo forbid their students to attempt such a reckless act. Despite this, the challenge the mountain represents is often too enticing for a young samurai to refuse. Some few have attempted climbing Regret, but those that try are never seen again; the mountain remains as deadly now as it was when Miya Akate ascended its ominous flanks.

The arable land on the plateau is covered by several large farms, supplemented by an array of rice paddies climbing the lower foothills of the mountains (though none are maintained on the slopes of Regret). Most of these are dedicated to the production of rice, grain, and vegetables, although the Lair also raises flocks of poultry

and has a few fruit trees. The farms employ most of the Lair's commoner population, and are overseen very closely by Heichi Jomei and the samurai of the Boar.

The primary source of lumber for the Lair is the small forest called the Eiko no Mori, which is located alongside the road which descends from the plateau. Very little of the forest lies on the plateau on which the Lair sits, those lands having been cleared for farming, but trees do grow abundently on the slopes of Hope and Regret below the snowline. The trees in and around the Lair are mostly evergreens, primarily pines, the climate being too chilly to support deciduous trees.

## The River of Three Horses

The River of Three Horses is named for the scouting party that first discovered it. It is actually not so much a river as a large freshwater stream that runs near and through the Lair. It is the primary source of water and fish for the people of the Lair, and as such it is heavily patrolled by Boar samurai. This is especially neccessary because, unfortunately, the river attracts the attention of a tribe of Mountain Goblins that live north of the Lair. These creatures are the most frequent opponents of the Boar, as both man and monster have need of the river's water.

The river has also somteimes been the target of more powerful Shadowlands creatures seeking to poison or Taint the Lair's inhabitants. Thus far the Boar have managed to avert such a result, and their vigilence hopefully ensures they will continue to do so.

## The Boar's Tusks

The edge of the Lair, and the end of the Boar Clan's territory, is a cliffside called the Boar's Tusks. The Tusks are so named for two prominent jutting stones that protrude from the cliff edge. These craggy edifices are three times the height of a man, and no living thing clings to their gray stone.

The cliff descends into a deep forested gorge between the mountains, hundreds of yards deep. No samurai has explored the dark crevices at the bottom, and many believe the light of the sun has never reached that far.

## Travelers' Road (The Path to Jigoku)

There are many small roads and narrow passes that cross the Twilight Mountains, but only one leads to the Lair. This narrow road, which traverses the side of the Boar's Tusks as it ascends to the plateau, is known to the Boar as Travelers' Road and is heavily patrolled by the best-trained and best-equipped Boar samurai. When patrolling the lower reaches of the path, these samurai cover the mon on their clothing and armor, appearing as nothing more than wandering ronin. They are tasked with intecepting anyone who might threaten the Lair. Typically they escort the visitors into the Lair, where they are offered a choice between death or becoming permanent "guests" residing there. (Those who refuse to accept escort into the Lair are killed outright lest they betray its location.)

To those from outside the Lair, this ancient road is much more ominous. Over the centuries, many heimin and samurai have traveled the road never to return. Crab villages near the road refer to it as the Path to Jigoku, and priests have sometimes performed rituals to try to purge the road of the supposed evil spirits that inhabit it. Crab heimin are convinced the road is cursed and have allowed it to fall into ill repair over the centuries. "Only the dead walk the Path to Jigoku," is a popular saying in the region, and some peasant tell a cautionary tale of a boy who walked the path and was eaten by an oni.

This superstition has occasionally drawn interest from Imperial Magistrates, and their failures to return from exploring the path only further enhances its dire repute. In the twelfth century, a Jade Magistrate named Isawa Konetsu swears to cleanse the path of whatever evil spirits corrupt it. Konetsu travels the path for several days before being stopped by a group of what he believes to be ronin. Konetsu easily obliterated the ronin with his formidable magical power, only to travel on and come across the Lair. Potent as he was, he could not defeat the entire strength of the Boar; he surrendered to Heichi Jomei and disappeared from Rokugan.

## Eiko no Mori

The elevation of the Lair and prevents deciduous trees from growing on its plateau, and in any case most of the trees there were cut down centuries ago to make room for more farms. However, there is a fairly healthy evergreen forest that grows on the lower slopes of the Twilight Mountains and also clings to the sides of the peaks Hope and Regret. Eiko no Mori is mostly pine and fir trees, and is usually thick with small game. It was first explored by a ronin scout named Eiko, and Miya Akate named it after her in reward for her dedication. It has borne her name for over a thousand years.

### The Grove of Games

There is a legend among the Boar of a grove deep within the Eiko no Mori where a go board always awaits, its immaculate pieces ready at all times for a new game. No one knows where the board and pieces came from, but supposedly they are always set up ready for new players. Allegedly, if players are forced to abandon a game and then later return to the grove, they will find the pieces of their incomplete game perpetually ready. One tale attached to this legend claims that a ronin who lived in the Lair played a single game of go against a Kaiu grandmaster for fifteen years.

It is up to the GM as to whether the Grove of Games actually exists and if so, why and how it behaves as it does.

The Crab consider the forest unimportant, located as it is within the largely inhospitable Twilight Mountains, and do not bother to police even the lower regions that are well outside of the Lair's territory. However, this isolation makes the forest a popular lair for bandits and it often becomes practically infested with them. Bandit organizations as diverse as the Forest Killers and the Serpents of Sanada have called the forest home at various times.

## Priests' Point

The Twilight Mountains have always been a place of interest to Rokugan's Earth shugenja. The mountains have a distinct nature that is quite different from the other two major mountain ranges in Rokugan; they are lower and less formidable than the Spine of the World or the Great Wall of the North, yet they have a more sinister and foreboding nature than either of the other great mountain ranges. On those occasions when Earth shugenja become involuntary guests of the Boar Clan, many use their enforced isolation as an opportunity to study the Twilight Mountains in depth.

At the edge of the Lair, near the Eiko no Mori, is a small shrine dedicated to the Earth kami. Built in the center of a great ring of trees, the shrine forms part of a larger complex called Priests' Point. Over the centuries, many shugenja have visited here, spending countless hours in communion with the Earth kami of the Twilight Mountains.

The site was originally chosen due to its affinity to the Earth kami. Communicating with the spirits of Earth is easier here than anywhere else in the Lair, perhaps easier than anywhere in the entire mountain range. The shrine contains a small library recording the studies and observations of the shugenja who have come here over the centuries, passing their discoveries on to the future.

Amidst all the esoteric spiritual knowledge stored at Priests' Point may be found the only known writings on the spirit known as the Shakoki Dogu. A few shugenja here have actually learned to commune with this rarest Earth spirits of all, though invoking a Shakoki Dogu has a high cost for the shugenja involved. There is also research into Jade spells and the purification of the Taint. In truth, Priests' Point is one of the great hidden treasures of the Boar Clan, but one the clan itself is sadly unable to use.

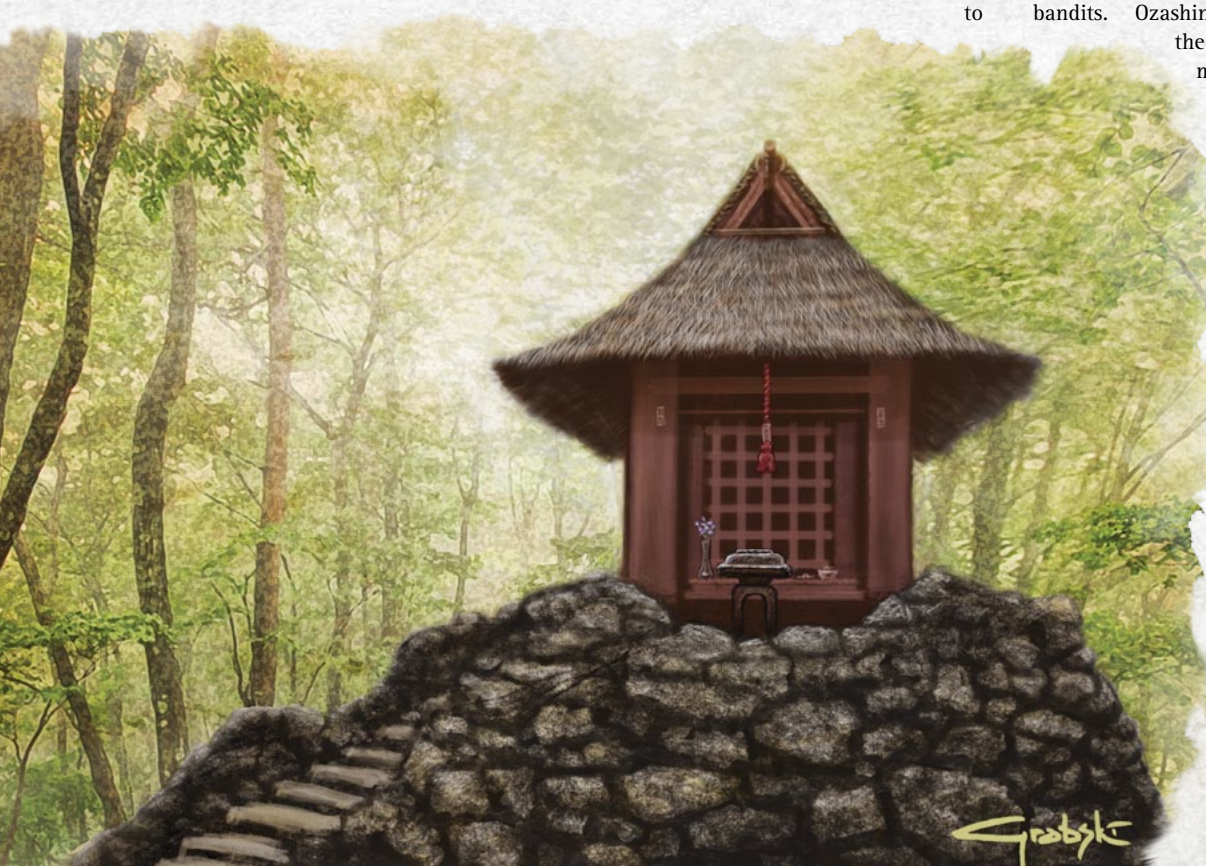
## The Three Brothers' Mines

The original scouting party that discovered the Lair included three brothers. The eldest, Heichi Goshoryu, was a trailblazer and led the party through the Twilight Mountains. His younger brother, Heichi Dammaku, mapped the lands they explored with skills he'd learned among the Miya. The youngest of the three, Heichi Ozashin, was the most cautious and wary; his skills saved them from attack by Shadowlands creatures a dozen times. Together, the three discovered the economic resources of the Lair, the iron, copper, and jade mines that now bear their names and are collectively known as the Three Brothers.

The largest mine, rich in iron, was named after Goshoryu. It has been extensively explored in the centuries since its discovery, its material bounty of immeasurable worth. In modern times the mine almost resembles a honeycomb, as innumerable new tunnels and entrances have been created (or discovered) with the passage of time. Thus far the mine's veins of ore have never run dry, though the mine has grown and burrowed steadily deeper into the mountain.

Ozashin's name passed to the valley's small jade mine. Carefully guarded at all times, this mine is the Lair's primary defense against the occasional attacks of Shadowlands creatures, as well as a potential lure to bandits. Ozashin himself was the first master of the mine, and ordered the heimin miners to create a new tunnel connecting the mine to Heichi sano Nagura, the castle being constructed by Heichi Jomei. Ozashin's Relief, as the tunnel came to be named, provides an emergency escape route should the castle ever come under concerted siege.

The third mine is named after Goshoryu, and is the richest mine in the Lair, with extensive deposits of both iron and copper, as well as occasional small veins of gold. This mine was the principle resource of the Lair in its early days, and the Boar Clan exploited its resources with vigor. Many heimin were brought in from the main lands of the Boar to work the



mine, so great was its bounty, and at one time the Boar even considered trading favors with the Crab to have the Kuni bring in some enslaved mujina to work the mine. Fortunately, this plan never came to fruition, since it is unlikely the mujina could have been kept under control after the Lair became isolated from the rest of the Empire.

## Shrine to Shinsei

The lone temple in the stronghold of the Boar, this shrine is a small building yet quite serviceable; an ancient stone statue of Shinsei sits at its center. Though it is lovingly maintained, sheer age has worn away many of the details. The monks of the Lonely Monastery serve as caretakers for the shrine. Although the shrine is theoretically dedicated to the Shintaoist sect, the occasional injections of outsiders into the Lair means that not all the monks here are of that sect, and those who tend the shrine can often be heard debating each other as to the relative merits of the Taoist and Fortunist sects.

The shrine is located at the edge of the Boar's Flanks, making it readily accesible to all within the castle and town; a path leads from it up the mountainside to the Lonely Monastery. The caretaker monks, when not debating amongst themselves, do their best to offer religious lessons and teachings to any who have need of them. The samurai of the Boar are not especially dedicated to the quest for enlightenment, but they are certainly pious, and the heimin of the valley often have need of spiritual counsel.

The most famous monk of the shrine was known as Tomei. Brought to the village by the Boar after a plague ravaged them, Tomei's healing arts brought great succor to the Lair's people and did more to spread the word of Shinsei amongst the Boar than any other. Tomei was often brought in to consult with the reigning Jomei on spiritual matters, and was a friend to all the Lair's inhabitants. When he died, a small statue in his honor was placed in the shrine, in the very shadow of the statue to Shinsei.

## The Lonely Monastery

Built into the side of the mountain Regret, the Lonely Monastery is an oddity even by the standards of the Lair. It was constructed as a place for aged samurai to retire, and later became home to those monks who were guests of the Boar. Its use has further evolved over the centuries; it has become a home for artistry, since in the hard-working world of the Lair only old monks have time to pursue such things. Some of the monks also find this a way to seek the enlightenment they could not consider during their busy lives as samurai.

The monastery is constructed of wood, fitted together seamlessly in the highest expression of the carpenter's craft; the abbot of the monastery always learns this technique and passes it along to his successor. Aside from such woodworking, sculpture is the most common form of art in the monastery, which is perhaps not surprising given the resources the monks have to work with. It is said there are a thousand Fortunes, and a significant fraction of those are represented in this monastery by statues of stone or wood. Many of these statues are displayed on the path that leads up to the Monastery from the Shrine of Shinsei.

Not all statues are so proudly displayed, nor their artisans highly regarded. Deep within the Monastery is a statue that tests the soul of all who look on it. It depicts a stylized man recoiling in abject horror, tears streaming down his face; an inscription on the base says only, "A Fortune." It is known to crush the spirits of any who look on it, making them feel as if there is no escape from the trap of kharmic rebirth, destroying the entire concept of enlightenment and the Celestial Wheel. Some monks say if the unprepared view it, they will forever be denied enlightenment... yet they have never dared to destroy it. None remember who sculpted it, or why.

## Shrines of the Dead

The Imperial edict to burn corpses never really reached the isolated Lair. Consequently, ancient burial rites long lost to Rokugan itself live on in the Lair, centuries after the Battle of Stolen Graves. The Shrines of the Dead are several plots of land in the hills and forests around the plateau, each dedicated to the dead of the Lair. In death, as in life, peasants and samurai are separated into distinct burial

### The Boar and Shugenja

One of the most notable aspects of the Lair is that the Heichi lack any shugenja and have no real capacity to recognize or understand when one of their number has gained the favor of the kami. There is no distinction between one who speaks with the kami and one who speaks from madness. Such unfortunates, whether or not they are truly mad, are placed in the care of the monks in the Lonely Monastery. There are many reasons for this: the isolation of the Lair, the small size of the original Boar Clan, and the near complete lack of shugenja amongst their parent bloodline in the Hida.

Despite this failing, the Boar do recognize priests of the kami when they join them as guests. These involuntary additions to the Lair's population are a great boon to the Heichi, and occasionally present an opportunity for those among the Boar with spiritual gifts to receive something approximating formal shugenja training. Such outsider priests can tell the difference between simple madness and one to whom the kami are speaking.

The Boar's lack of identification and proper training for shugenja has proven dangerous more than once. On one occasion, for example, a heimin claiming to be guided by a spirit unleashed a torrent of excitable fire kami throughout the Lair, causing great damage before the Boar samurai could put him down.

## The Jade Statue of Emma-O

GMs who wish to enhance the supernatural themes of the Lair may opt to declare that the jade statue of Emma-O is actually imbued with a fraction of the Fortune's essence. When maho spells are cast in the vicinity, or the hungry dead appear to bedevil the people of the Lair, the statue comes to life. It is motivated by the will of Emma-O, seeking to secure the boundaries between life and death. The GM may use this as a plot-hook to warn the PCs of the presence of Bloodspeakers or undead in the valley, or as a deus ex machina to save them from an unwinnable fight with such opponents.

Shugenja who study the statue may potentially discover its true nature, but only if they are already intimately familiar with death themselves. Those in the past who have understood the importance and power of the jade statue have never told another for fear that such knowledge could lead to the statue's destruction.

shrines, and different samurai bloodlines maintain their own shrines. Due to space limitations, peasant bodies are often buried amongst one another by the eta gravekeepers.

Every shrine has a statue to Emma-O, the Fortune of Death, calling on the Fortune to protect the dead. The largest shrine, where the ruling line of Jomei and their closest retainers are buried, is protected by an exceptionally fine statue made from solid jade. This statue was a gift the Lair received from the Kaiu daimyo, shortly before the valley cut itself off from the Emerald Empire. It stands as tall as a man, and shines with a soft green light when struck by the sun. Some believe it is actually infused with the power of the Fortune of Death.

## The Boar's Flanks

The castle town around Heichi sano Negura is of only moderate size, hardly surprising given the limited space and resources of the Lair. The population has never risen above a thousand, and is often as few as three or four hundred. Most of the inhabitants are farmers, although there are some craftsmen and artisans, notably blacksmiths, stone masons, weavers, and carpenters. The town is arrayed in a fan pattern around the eastern portion of the castle proper, leading to the name of the Boar's Flanks, though no one is certain who first coined it. The oldest records in Heichi sano Negura give a different name for the village, but with the passage of centuries even the samurai have come to know it by its common name.

Due to the limited supply of wood in the area, many buildings in the Boar's Flanks are made partly or wholly of stone, a most unusual feature for peasant residences. (When the Lair was founded, these buildings were wooden, but the need for repairs and new construction over the centuries has led to a gradual conversion to stone construction.) Whereas stonemasons are one of the less common trades in most of Rokugan, within the Lair nearly every heimin knows the art of stoneworking, and even some of the eta.

Another major difference from standard Rokugani villages is that the eta do not live totally separate from their heimin superiors. Due to the constraints of space, the eta live in their own neighborhood within the town rather than in a seperate settlement as would be the norm. This closeness has also led over the centuries to a moderate relaxing of the social division between heimin and eta, though it is has certainly not disappeared entirely.

Due to the threat of bandits or Shadowlands creatures, the village is surrounded by an earthen palisade wall, occasionally buttressed by low stone emplacements. There are three gates out of the town; the largest gives access to the farms that fill most of the plateau (and leads eventually to the Traveler's Road), the second opens to the road to the Three Brothers Mines, and the third leads to the Lonely Monastery.

## The Seven Dragons Inn

In the late fifth century, an unusual type of tea leaf was discovered growing in the Twilight Mountains near the Lair. These tea leaves were soon cultivated by a merchant family named led by a man named Yokei, who founded the Seven Dragons Inn. During the years when the Lair was still open to the rest of the Empire, the Inn became moderately famed for the peculiar semi-bitter flavor of its tea.

When Heichi Jomei ordered the Lair sealed, however, the Inn had to adapt to its new circumstances. It became the social epicenter for most of the Lair's population, a place where gossip and rumor are served as quickly as tea and sake. In the late seventh century, a Hida guest of the Boar showed the family how to brew shochu; the Crab's gift became one of the most popular drinks in the castle town, causing an expansion of the teahouse to accommodate its more numerous clientele.

The same family has continued to run the Seven Dragons Teahouse over the centuries. This has more meaning than one might think... for Yokei was a member of the Kolat conspiracy. Thus, while the rest of Rokugan has long since forgotten the Lair ever existed, the Kolat still know about it.

## Heichi Dojo

The only surviving dojo of the Heichi Bushi School are located within the Lair. The main building is in the village, just outside the gates of Heichi sano Negura itself. It is known simply as Heichi Dojo, and it is where nearly all the samurai of the Lair do their training. (A chosen few train in the Jomei's personal dojo inside the keep.) The building is ancient, but unlike many structures in the valley it is still made of wood – the Boar carefully ration their lumber to make sure their dojo is still properly maintained. It is spacious enough to accommodate a hundred students at a time, though it has never actually been host to that many.

There are usually three sensei in the Heichi Dojo, with a new one chosen whenever his predecessor retires or dies. To be called on to teach at the school of the Boar is the greatest honor a samurai of the Lair can receive. Despite the passage of centuries, the Boar continue to pass on their ancient techniques, including the methods of fighting with their signature Mai Chong three-pointed spear. The Heichi School, extinct everywhere else in Rokugan, lives and thrives here.

It is a notable feature of the Heichi Dojo that guest samurai are free to use its facilities, since they will never be allowed to leave the Lair and thus cannot betray the secret techniques of the Boar. It is also not uncommon for skilled guests to be invited to show their techniques to the students at the dojo.

## The Lair of the Boar
## Heichi sano Negura

The Lair of the Boar, or Heichi sano Negura, is the Heichi family's seat of power within the Lair and the home of the Jomei and his family. The castle is built along early Crab guidelines, and its walls are lower than those of Crab castles built after the Battle of the Cresting Wave. It stands five stories tall, not an especially great height by Rokugani standards but towering over all of the other structures in the Lair. The castle's foundation has been built into the mountainside for additional support, elevating it further above the village giving it a commanding presence over all of the plateau.

The exterior wall is surrounded by a moat, created with water diverted from the Three Horses River. The moat is home to many fish, and villagers often harvest them for food.

Although Heichi sano Negura is impressive for such a small castle, it has critical flaws that easily stand out to modern architects. The castle is surrounded to the south and west by mountains, cutting off routes of escape. Since it is located between the mountains and the village, any long siege will result in massive destruction to the heimin population. Any siege will be highly costly to the defenders almost as much as the attackers.

### Interior of the Keep

The first level of the Lair of the Boar contains a grand entrance and visiting area. This area extends into the second level, with arched walkways surrounding it on the upper floor, and its walls are lined with precious treasures of the clan. At the head of the room is a stone throne appropriate for the lord of the Boar, with the daisho set of the first Jomei on display next to it. The walls are lined with the finest statues created by the artisans of the Lonely Monastery. Moreover, the walls and pillars are clad in thin sheets of copper to display the wealth created by the Boar over the centuries. The copper sheets are etched with the total taxes paid by the Boar every year, including all the taxes which have not been sent to the Empire. The total grows higher every year, indicating the amount of wealth stored in the Vault.

The first floor also contains a large kitchen and an equally large food storage area. The kitchen here prepares food for the castle's inhabitants – that is, the Jomei, his family, and his personal guards and vassals. The diet usually consist of freshwater fish, rice, vegetables, and occasionally poultry, all harvested from the lands of the Boar.

The second floor contains a barracks for the castle guards, those samurai charged with the personal defense of their lord, as well as a small armory for their use. The armory contains a mixture of Mai Chong, other heavy weapons, and smaller weapons for close-in fighting (which is common when a keep has been breached). This level is also where the Lair's modest guest quarters are located. 'Guests' of the Boar stay here if they choose to live by accepting the Lair's hospitality. Consequently, this is one of the most heavily patrolled areas of the castle. The castle's dojo also lies on the second floor; though the main dojo of the Lair is located outside the keep, training in the lord's personal dojo is considered more prestigious. All samurai from the family of Heichi Jomei have learned their techniques in this dojo, and the most experienced sensei in the Lair is selected to teach here.

The third floor contains the quarters of the Jomei's closest advisors and retainers. 'Guests' of particularly exceptional nature, especially shugenja, are also permitted to stay on this level; due to the rarity of priests becoming guests of the Boar, they are permitted slightly more leeway than other samurai (though in truth, shugenja often prefer to stay in the Lonely Monastery). The third floor also has a small display room for paintings, sculptures, and other artistic works. This room was created for the first Jomei's wife, and also acts as an ancestral shrine to her memory.

The fourth floor was originally intended for political and diplomatic functions, with several small audience chambers to accommodate meetings with high-ranking courtiers and diplomats. This floor sees the most care by the castle servants but the least actual use by the Boar. In fact, since the first Jomei sealed the Lair off from the outside world, this floor has essentially become a sort of museum, a lovingly-maintained remainder of the world the Boar have left behind.

The fifth and highest floor is, as in any Rokugani castle, the personal residence of the Boar daimyo. The Jomei and his family live here. Though most dwellings in the Lair are spartan and rather quaint by modern Rokugani standards, the Jomei's residence is something of an exception. Fine silken tapestries, ancient relics, and similar decorations make this a very impressive place. Indeed, the residence stands in stark contrast to how the rest of the inhabitants of the Lair live, a fact which has created discomfort in the minds of more than one Jomei. The most private of meeting rooms is on this floor, used only rarely in times of need or great political consequence.

The foundations of the castle, beneath the first floor, house several large storage chambers with food and other vital supplies, as well as a sub-basement with a secondary armory for the castle. There is also an underground passage that leads to the underground storeroom where the clan's unpaid taxes are stored – the so-called Vault. This tunnel is always guarded, both by bushi of the Boar and by a variety of traps.

The Vault is located beneath the mountain called Hope and was created by tunneling into and laboriously draining a natural aquifer within the mountain. The storeroom is huge, over 300 feet tall, and its floor-space has been expanded with additional work over the centuries. It is filled with the accumulated wealth of the Lair. This consists mainly of metal ingots and various finished goods (especially sculptures), along with small amounts of jade and a few gems that have been extraced from the mines over the centuries. The Boar long ago realized the futlity of storing rice or other foodstuffs for so long, and of course they have no capacity to coin new gold koku. The legends of this room sometimes attract the attention of bandits, who of course never realize that very little of the Lair's great wealth is in transportable form.

## The Lair and the Seasons

The Lair is in many ways an archetypal mountain village. Though it is faced with unique concerns due to existing in the Twilight Mountains, it can still be used as an example of mountain villages throughout Rokugan. Due to the difficulty of mountain roads, many such communities exist largely cut off from the Empire as a whole, though none match the complete isolation of the Lair.

Winter in the Lair is the hardest time of year, as it is in most of Rokugan. However, due to the high elevation of the Lair, the winter months are even harder for the Boar than for most villages in the Empire; only the Dragon lands see equivelent misery during the winter months. The Twilight Mountains are blanketed by snow in the winter, and due to the Lair's elevation this snow can reach several feet in depth. It is not uncommon for unwary inhabitants to be caught in a sudden snow storm and their bodies not discovered until the spring thaw. Some of the Shadowlands creatures that plague the Lair, such as mountain goblins, are at their most dangerous in the winter. They have been known to trigger avalanches, trying to disrupt the defenses of the Lair so they can steal food and other resources. There are also rumors of encountering the legendary Yuki no Onna (snow maidens) in the mountainous forests near the Lair.

Spring is by far the busiest time of the year for the Lair, starting with the first spring thaws. Due to the amount of snow that falls on the mountains around the Lair, it is fairly common for the valley to experience flooding at the start of the spring, especially along the banks of the Three Horses' River. Flooding affects even the keep of the Lair, since water can seep in through the mountain tunnels and sometimes ruin the castle's food stocks. Heavy fogs are also common at this time of year, sometimes dense enough that samurai cannot see their hands in front of their faces. As the weather warms, the heimin and eta go to work planting new crops, sometimes aided by the samurai if there is a labor shortage. The planting season lasts for only three weeks, but any disruption can prove disastrous for the harvest in the fall.

With summer heat comes a reduction in work for the commoners, but increased labor for the samurai. Travel through the Twilight Mountains is easiest in the summer, so the greatest threat of wanderers finding the Lair comes in this season. This also means an increase in bandit activity, and summer is the most frequent time for the Boar to be troubled by those seeking to steal their putative riches. The relative ease of travel also seems to excite the forces of Fu Leng, leading to greater troubles with mountain goblins, ogres, and occasionally worse. Summer is the season of war throughout Rokugan, and sadly the Lair is no exception to this rule.

Fall is perhaps the most relaxed time of year overall, though it begins with the intense labor of the harvest. While this period does see occasional attacks by hostile forces, it is generally the most peaceful time in the Lair. Once the two weeks of the harvest are passed, the people of the Lair relax and celebrate by holding a massive festival to Inari, the Fortune of Rice. The monks of the Lonely Monastery descend into the Lair and lead the inhabitants – samurai, heimin, and eta alike – in a three-day celebration of life, duty, and the future. The festival begins and ends with massive feasts, though the food is carefully managed by the Jomei to ensure that stocks will last through the winter.

## Threats: The Lying Darkness and the Lair

The Lying Darkness, the primal force also known as the Shadow and the Nothing, has for the most part ignored the tiny remnant of the Boar Clan living within the Lair. However, even small groups can be useful if converted, and the paranoid isolation of the Boar made them somewhat more vulnerable to the Shadow's machinations than would otherwise be the case. Thus, the Darkness has occasionally made small infiltrations of the Lair's population.

The strongest of these incursions, in the late eighth century, actually came close to destroying the last of the

Boar. On that occasion a leading sensei of the Boar school, Heichi Kommei, disappeared. He had served as a yojimbo to the Jomei's family for decades, creating a bond between him and the ruling family. His sudden disappearance caught the Boar by surprise, and the Jomei appointed several samurai to seek out the missing master. Four weeks later, they discovered Heichi Kommei wandering the side of the mountain Regret, just a few miles from the Lair. The old sensei's clothes were disheveled and he was suffering from dehydration and lack of sleep; when the samurai found him, he seemed to be unable to recognize their faces or mon, and briefly attacked them before they managed to subdue him. The greatest healers in the Lair were ordered to nurse Kommei back to health, and within a week the sensei seemed to have recovered, returning to his teachin duties at the Heichi Dojo. He claimed to remember nothing about his disappearance. But in truth, he had been kidnapped by the Nothing and utterly corrupted; the old teacher was gone, replaced by Goju Kommei, a shadowy copy.

Soon after Kommei's return, strange occurrences began to plague the Lair. Young students would disappear from Heichi Dojo, only to be found wandering the slopes of Regret days later. Students of Kommei began to vanish, a few weeks or months after their gempukku. A strange pall settled around the Lair, and suspicious mounted, but Heichi Jomei refused to believe his beloved former guard could be responsible. The two had frequent meetings to discuss the strange incidents, and the sensei reassured the Boar's leader that the problems were not so serious as they appeared and the missing students and samurai would soon be found.

The truth was uncovered by a pair of Crab samurai who came to the valley as unwilling guests. Kuni Aoki and his companion Hiruma Otoru became involved in the searches for the missing Boar samurai. The pair stumbled across a group of strange faceless warriors within the Eiko no Mori of faceless who attacked them with powers they had never seen before. The Crab managed to survive and escape, and Aoki was able to indentify Heichi Kommei as the leader of the shadowy coven based on his voice and mannerisms. Even then, the Jomei refused to believe the outsiders over the word of his trusted friend and confidant; it was not until a pack of strange assassins attempted (but failed) to kill Aoki and Otoru that the Jomei finally, reluctantly, ordered his old friend's arrest. When Boar samurai arrived at the dojo to take the old warrior into custody, they found he had simply vanished... nor was there any sign he had even been living in his house.

Heichi Kommei was never found again. During the years he had been teaching, nearly a third of the samurai under his care disappeared, never to be seen again, and no one is certain where they went or what happened to them. Kuni Aoki and Hiruma Otoru spent their remaining years searching fruitlessly for Kommei and his victims, convinced that he was some kind of strange new Shadowlands infiltrator. The loss of such a significant number of young bushi was a heavy blow to the Boar, and would weigh on them for many years after the strange incident.

## Threats: The Kolat and the Lair

The Kolat conspiracy finds the Lair a place of interest, not least since they have always been curious as to what caused the rest of the Boar Clan to disappear; a force powerful enough to annihilate a Minor Clan is one well worth investigating in detail. The Kolat maintains occasional contacts with the family that runs the Seven Dragons Inn and sometimes Kolat agents have become 'guests' of the Boar in order to gain more intelligence on the isolated community.

Some among the Kolat see the isolated Lair as a sort of trial run for a true Reign of Man. After all, Heichi Jomei rules without the mandate of Heaven, and in many places within the Lair the Celestial Order seems to run thin. Heimin live alongside eta, samurai occasionally work the fields; the necessity of survival is felt more keenly in the home of the Boar than almost anywhere else in Rokugan.

Thus far the conspiracy has never felt the need to intervene directly in the Lair's activities, and after the Kolat are crippled and nearly destroyed in the late twelfth century they largely ignore the valley in order to focus on rebuilding their own strength.

## Threats: The Shadowlands Taint in the Lair

Despite their isolation, the Boar are not immune to the spread of the Shadowlands Taint. As previously noted, their home in the Twilight Mountains means they do sometimes encounter monsters from the Shadowlands, and the maho-tsukai of the Bloodspeaker Cult have assailed their home more than once. In addition, outside visitors have sometimes carried the Taint into the valley when staying as 'guests.'

Within the Lair, there are no Inquisitors or Witch-Hunters to monitor members of the clan for the presence of the Taint. The Boar, however, are naturally distrustful of outsiders and have thus adopted a practice of testing visitors for the Taint by touching them with pieces of raw jade. Guests seldom undergo this procedure willingly, finding it highly insulting to even be suggested as harboring the Taint – especially by samurai of an extinct Minor Clan. Many visitors must be forcibly subdued before the ritual can take place.

For a Tainted samurai in Rokugan, there are two options: a solitary life drinking Jade Petal Tea under the watchful eyes of the Kuni and the Brotherhood of Shinsei, or seppuku to cleanse the stain on one's bloodline. But because the Lair is cut off from Rokugan as a whole, the first option is not a viable one for Boar samurai found to be Tainted. There are no special monasteries to watch over such unfortunates, no Kuni to grow Jade Petal Tea and carefully record which samurai bear the mark of Fu Leng. Thus, if a Boar samurai is proven to be Tainted, he must commit seppuku. Within the Lair, the Taint is effectively a death sentence.

This policy dates from the time of the third Jomei, and was made in response to an incident involving a ronin named Ikaro. Ikaro had joined the Lair willingly, fleeing a dark past, but few in the Lair were curious about the ronin's history or what he had been running from. It was only during a particularly brutal winter, when food stores began disappearing, that the ronin's Taint was discovered. Some stories say the ronin tripped into a pile of jade from the mines, others claim a wandering Kuni discovered his true nature. However it happened, when Ikaro's Taint was exposed he slew dozens of Boar samurai who sought to arrest him. The touch of Jigoku empowered Ikaro and he fought against the Boar with dark and superhuman powers, growing even stronger and more inhuman as the battle went on. When the cursed samurai finally fell, at immense cost in lives, the Jomei ordered that henceforth all Tainted samurai in the Lair would immediately cleanse their shame with seppuku or face execution.

Often, when a Boar samurai learns he is Tainted, he refuses to believe it. After all, to be Tainted is a mark of great misfortune, and most Boar samurai consider the Taint to result from a spiritual and moral failing; thus, many samurai refuse to accept that such a thing could be true. Although the majority do commit seppuku as their lord demands, more than a few have hidden their symptoms from their family and clan. Resources are always thin in the Lair, samurai are always needed, and thus a Tainted samurai who continues to fulfill his duties can sometimes conceal to touch of Jigoku for a considerable time before eventual exposure.

### The Blood Cave

GMs who wish to expand the Bloodspeaker interest in – and threat to – the Lair may wish to introduce the idea of the Blood Cave. This is a hidden cave in the side of the mountain Hope, just above the treeline of the Eiko no Mori. It lies far from the normal Boar patrol routes, and farther still from any well-traveled paths through the Lair. It does not appear on any Boar maps of the area.

Anyone who sleeps within the cave is visited in dreams by the Oracle of Blood, the manifestation of Iuchiban's will. The Oracle imparts dark knowledge to Bloodspeakers who consult it, as well as conveying Iuchiban's personal goals and desires. This is the reason why the Bloodspeakers remain so interested in the Lair and so well-organized in their operations against the Boar.

Because the Bloodspeakers have visited this cave so many times over the centuries, a considerable amount of secret maho knowledge is also stored here, and the place is guarded by a variety of traps and magical wards. However, the Blood Cave has not always solely been a lair of maho-tsukai. Its dark nature draws all those of corrupt soul or destructive nature. Over the centuries it has been a lair to bandits, wandering ronin, packs of bakemono, and even an oni. Cult members who escape from the periodic Boar purges have also taken refuge in the cave, seeking the guidance of the Oracle to rebuild their organizations.

## Threats: The Bloodspeaker Cult and the Lair

A recurring problem which has plagued the Lair over the years is the Bloodspeaker Cult, the organization responsible for the original destruction of the rest of the Boar Clan. More than one Bloodspeaker over the centuries has become obsessed with completing Agasha Ryuden's dark legacy by sacrificing or destroying the last surviving members of the Boar Clan. The Cult's perverse interest in the Boar seems to be built in part on a questionable interpretation of the power Ryuden found within the Twilight Mountains. The mountains were of course the site of the ancient battle between the Kami Shiba and the First Oni; the First Oni was slain and its spirit banished back to Jigoku, but its blood seeped into the stone and earth of the mountains, forever changing them. It was from this transmuted stone that Agasha Ryuden created the Anvil of Despair.

In later centuries, many Bloodspeakers come to believe the same power which Ryuden accessed may also be found in the bloodlines of those who live within the Twilight Mountains. These Bloodspeakers theorize that anyone who consumes food grown or raised in the mountains is essentially consuming a small portion of the First Oni's essence, and thus their blood could be used for extremely powerful maho rituals. Whether there is any truth to this theory is highly debatable; certainly the Kuni do not believe the essence of an ancient oni cannot be ingested through mere rice or water, or they would refuse to allow any settlements within the Twilight Mountains at all.

Regardless of their motives, the Bloodspeakers are definitely a different kind of threat than mere bandits or Shadowlands monsters; they have no interest in riches, and rather than mere random destruction they seek to convert key members of the population to their dark cause (or subvert them with maho) in order to empower their rituals. They are an insidious enemy, often preferentially infiltrating the peasants and eta who are so crucial to the Lair's continuous survival. Several times the Boar have rooted out such infiltrations, only to see new ones crop up decades or generations later. Indeed, members of the cult who operate against the Lair are particularly skilled at hiding their allegiance, since the population is so small and most people know each other well.

# Running Campaigns in the Lair

Like all of the settings presented in the Elemental series of books, the Lair is intended as a 'campaign-in-can,' a pre-made campaign setting which the GM can use for the L5R 4th Edition RPG. In the case of the Lair, this is particularly true because it is essentially a self-contained world, complete with enemies. The following section outlines a major campaign set within the Lair, followed by several smaller adventure seeds.

However, before the GM can begin running games within the Lair, he must tackle an important question: how do the PCs get there? After all, the Lair is isolated from the rest of the Empire and has been such for centuries.

One possible idea is to simply run an "all-Boar" campaign, where all of the PCs are lifelong residents of the Lair. This can certainly be an interesting change of pace from a typical L5R game, but may be frustrating to players who want more variety in their character options.

Alternatively, the GM can have the players create a "normal" groups of characters and then at some point send them on a trip through the Twilight Mountains, whereupon they encounter the Boar and are forced to become lifelong 'guests' of the Lair. The main problem with this option is that not all samurai are willing to accept imprisonment – some will die rather than submit, which can put a serious dent in the campaign. The GM can work around this by talking things over with the players beforehand; alternatively, the GM can "cheat" and start the campaign after the PCs have already been captured and agreed to become honorable guests of the Boar, bypassing any problems with stubborn PCs.

Either way, a campaign with PC 'guests' can run into another problem: what happens when the PCs go up in Insight Rank and there is no Sensei available to teach them the next Rank of their School? This can be a particular problem for shugenja, of course, but bushi and courtiers can also become a bit frustrated when they realize their only option for more Techniques is to enroll at the Heichi Dojo. However, the GM can present a solution to this by having the existing 'guests' of the Lair include one or more high-Insight samurai from the PCs' clans, samurai who can share their Techniques with their less experienced brethren.

## A Campaign Concept: The Nine Days of Blood

The Nine Days of Blood is a small campaign set within the Lair, representing a time of great danger for the remnant of the Boar Clan. What begins as a siege by an army of bandits soon becomes a catastrophe of apocalyptic proportions when a concealed Bloodspeaker takes advantage of the chaos to unleash the hordes of the dead against the Lair.

When running the Nine Days of Blood as a campaign, the most important feeling to evoke is one of seemingly inexorable doom. The Boar army is defeated by a seemingly inexorable tide of bandits, a foe larger and more organized than any force the Boar have yet encountered. The PCs may be able to mitigate the worst effects of the attack, to carry out individual acts of heroism and salvation, but the engagement should still end in an overall defeat. (The Mass Battle rules, whereby the PCs can engage in crucial Heroic Opportunities and Duels even as the battle goes against their side, feed into this nicely.) Which brings up another point: an atmosphere of doom and despair can actually be made more effective by small flickers of hope. Individual PC victories, even though they do not change the course of the battle, nonetheless give the players a sense of purpose and accomplishment... which can then be turned against them when they see the overwhelming odds and recognize the apparent futility of resistance. Once the Bloodspeakers attack, the sense of doom should evolve into total panic and chaos. The PCs will be fighting just to stay alive, with no real idea of what is happening in the larger engagement. The goal should be to take the PCs to the very edge of duty and honor, presenting them with what appears to be a no-win scenario.They must endure against all odds, much like the Element of Earth itself. GMs should not be afraid to let the PCs be heroes!

## Part One: Ougon's Army

The action begins when a small force of bandits raids the Lair's valley during a long winter's night. While most of the bandits loot the village, one of their number – a man named Ougon – interrogates some of the commoners and hears about the Vault: centuries of Imperial taxes, riches beyond any man's wildest imaginings. Eventually the Boar rally their troops and overwhelm the bandits, but Ougon escapes, carrying with him the story of the Vault. With the threat defeated, the Boar resume their normal life, other than perhaps beefing up their patrols to prevent a recurrence.

The GM may opt to run the bandit raid as an in-game event, with the PCs joining the Boar in fighting off the bandit attack (and perhaps discovering the aftermath of Ougon's questioning of the peasants). Alternatively, the GM can have the PCs arrive in the Lair after the initial attack; indeed, perhaps it is the greater vigilence of the Boar afterward that causes them to discover the PCs in the Twilight Mountains.

While the Boar quickly put the event behind them – just one more challenge in their difficult life within the mountains – the bandit Ougon does not. He travels through the nearby provinces, recruiting a small army of ronin and bandits. "Centuries of taxes! Jade, gold, copper, all of it! There in the mountains, there for any of us to have and take!" The lure of riches gathers desperate men from miles around, and soon Ougon is ready to return to the Lair once more.

On the thirteenth day of the Month of the Monkey (September), a bandit army nearly a thousand strong makes it way into the Twilight Mountains, led by Ougon. Outlying Boar patrols are overwhelmed and slaughtered. If any PCs are participating in the patrols, the GM can confront them with a battle for survival, followed by a desperate hours-long flight back to the valley to warn the Lair of the impending threat – with the bandit army on their heels. If none of the PCs are patrolling, a single Boar manages to make it back in the late afternoon of the fourteenth day of the Monkey. The bandit army is only a few hours behind him. By dawn, Ougon's force is in position to assail the Boar's Flanks.

GMs who wish to add more spice to the arrival of Ougon's army – especially for PCs who were not out on patrol – can elect to have the Jomei's impetuous son, Heichi Utsuru, lead a force out on the evening of the fourteenth to investigate the surviving scout's improbable tale of a vast bandit army. PCs can volunteer to accompany this mission and participate in a series of late-night battles and skirmishes with the bandits, trying to learn their strength and make it back alive. There is no moon that night, so the action will be in deep darkness, lit only by the stars, and the action will range through the Eiko no Mura and across the farms and rice paddies.

## Part Two: The Siege of the Boar's Flanks

As light breaks on the morning of the fifteenth day of the Monkey, the true size of the bandit army becomes apparent to the defenders. Thankfully, the bandits have no real siege equipment, and the earthen palisade of the Boar's Flanks is a formidable obstacle. Ougon attempts a couple of direct assaults, hoping to overwhelm the sparse defenders, but is thrown back. He then spends the rest of the day constructing improvised battering rams from the trees of the Eiko no Mori.

The GM may represent the failed bandit assaults with the Mass Battle Table, or simply by running the PCs through a few skirmish combats. During the night, the Boar might try to send out raiding teams to harass and disrupt the bandits, and this can give the PCs the opportunity for some heroic action despite the long odds.

Alternatively, if the PCs are high in the councils of the Boar, the GM can have them get involved in a debate between the Jomei's senior advisors over whether to maintain their defensive position or counterattack. The more aggressive Boar, led by Utsuru, advocate counterattacking, arguing that the longer they wait the more likely the bandits will figure out a way to defeat the palisade. (Any Lion NPCs currently in the valley as 'guests' will most likely also take this stance, further arguing that mere "bandit scum" cannot stand up to a determined counterattack by trained samurai.) Conversely, the more cautious advisors (including any Crab NPCs) will favor the defense, arguing that the longer the bandits try their siege, the more their ranks will be thinned by arrows, hunger, and disease. The PCs can support one position or the other, and the GM can allow their counsel to determine the Jomei's course of action. If the PCs do not participate in the debate, the Jomei opts to stay on the defensive.

Assuming the Boar stay put (or attack but are defeated), Ougon's bandits spend another day building their rams, then finally assault the Boar's Flanks in full force on the seventeenth day of the Monkey. This can again be run as a Mass Battle situation, but now the bandits have battering rams and are able to smash through the palisade gates, erupting into the Boar's Flanks. Chaotic street fighting ensues throughout the village, offering the GM many opportunities for dramatic action: PCs staging ambushes against the bandits, trying to save villagers with whom they have formed emotional bonds, and so forth. If the Boar ultimately win the Mass Battle, the bandits are eventually contained (at high cost) and driven out, and improvised barriers are used to close off the gates. If the Boar lose, the bandits overrun much of the village before the Boar manage to close off the streets with barricades, clinging to about one-third of the town. Alternatively, if the Boar lose really badly the GM can have them fall back to the keep itself and abandon the town, although this will make the next day's action less dramatically interesting.

During the night, the bandits prepare for what they expect to be the final assault the next morning, psyching themselves up with looted sake and wild eruptions of shouting, singing, and dance. Meanwhile, the Boar – now increasingly desperate – decide to arm their peasants with whatever tools and improvised gear is available, often nothing more than rocks or wooden sticks. The GM can use this night to great dramatic effect, since the battle appears doomed and many samurai will be making their final peace with their ancestors in anticipation of certain death. Due to the large numbers of casualties,

### Foreshadowing and Omens

GMs who wish to engage in foreshadowing may wish to drop clues to the existence of a Bloodspeaker within the population of the Boar's Flanks – perhaps the PCs are investigating one or more strange disappearances, or perhaps they have caught subtle clues to the renewed presence of the Bloodspeakers. The GM could even "set up" things more explicitly by having the PCs discover the sinister Blood Cave and realize, from evidence there, that someone has been using the cave recently and therefore must still be in the Lair.

GM's who like to play with the more supernatural aspects of foreshadowing – an excellent idea in a culture as suffused with spiritual meaning and superstition as Rokugan – can opt to present various omens of doom prior to Ougon's attack. A few possible ideas:

- An iron statue of Hida Heichi in the Shrine to Shinsei cracks.
- An old monk at the Lonely Monastery begins speaking wildly about visions of fire and blood, the destruction of Heichi sano Negura.
- If any shugenja are in the Lair at this time, they encounter numerous dire omens from the spirits.
- The ghost of the first Heichi Jomei appears to his descendant, warning him the future of the Boar rests with his actions.

### The Boar Counterattack

If the PCs are influential enough to convince the Jomei to mount a counterattack, the GM can run the combat on the Mass Battle Table. This is a long-odds attack, since the Boar are outnumbered nearly 10-1, and the GM should give Ougon extensive bonuses to his Battle Skill rolls to determine which side is winning during each round of Mass Battle. It is entirely possible that the counterattack will fail and the Boar will be driven back inside the palisade, in which case the rest of the Nine Days of Blood play out more-or-less as outlined below.

However, if against the odds the Boar prevail (winning three consecutive rounds of Mass Battle), Ougon's army is broken and driven in defeat down into the Twilight Mountains. In this case, the Bloodspeaker is unlikely to take action – the situation is not favorable enough. Thus the courage of the Boar averts an even worse crisis.

the eta are overwhelmed and unburied corpses lie everywhere... something worth emphasizing to the players as foreshadowing of the Bloodspeaker's imminent action.

In the pre-dawn gloom of the eighteenth day of the Monkey, storm clouds gather above the Lair of the Boar. The diminished ranks of the samurai and the poorly-armed peasants prepare for a final battle, while the wounded and those too young or old to fight are moved within the walls of Heichi sano Negura. Ougon gathers his men for the final attack... but his plans are forestalled.

## Part Three: The Bloodspeaker Strikes!

The storm breaks shortly before dawn, with torrential downpours of rain and thunderous lightining strikes, disrupting the preparations of both armies. Amidst the chaos, however, a terrible moaning echoes throughout the valley. The dead begin to stir.

The peasants will naturally break and run at the first sight of a walking corpse. The bandits fare little better, losing all order as their own casualties rise from the ground and attack them. Sadly, many of the Boar will likely break as well, their morale – worn down by days of desperate fighting – unable to withstand the terror of the walking dead. Most of them will try to retreat into Heichi sano Negura, hoping to hold it against bandits and zombies alike. Ougon will rally a small group of his followers for the same goal, leaving the majority of his former comrades to perish at the hands of the undead.

The PCs will most likely be caught in the middle of this chaos, trying to stay alive. Their obvious course of action may be to join the retreat into the keep, but the more bold and aggressive PCs may choose to go on the offensive and seek out the maho-tsukai responsible for this madness. This can lead to a dramatic showdown in which the PCs confront – and hopefully, defeat – the Bloodspeaker and save the Lair single-handedly.

If the PCs join the retreat to Heichi sano Negura, the keep should manage to repel both Ougon's last-ditch attack and a subsequent undead assault. These actions can again be run on the Mass Battle Table if the GM wishes. After the undead are driven back, an unnatural calm descends while the Boar peer through the rain at the ruins of their village, listening to the distant inhuman moans of the zombies. With the majority of both the surviving samurai and the commoners inside, the place is intensely crowded and the supply situation is desperate.

That night, an interesting scene takes place. Ougon, recognizing the hopelessness of his position, slips up to the keep's gates with his remaining men and asks for a truce. He meets with the Jomei, proposing to join forces

against the undead threat. The Jomei, shaken and distraught over the slaughter, turns to those around him for advice, offering the PCs another chance to decide the course of events.

Aggressive PCs may propose to go out into the storm-wracked, night-shrouded village and seek out the maho-tsukai responsible for the undead. The Jomei will not risk his own men on this sort of forlorn hope but will certainly allow the PCs to undertake it if they seem competent. Ougon, if he has joined forces with the Boar, may also be willing to join such a mission. The Bloodspeaker is currently roaming through the village, using his power to make undead from all the Boar samurai and bandits who fell in the most recent fighting; thus, if the PCs are brave, stealthy, and aggressive, they may well be able to track him down and put an end to his threat. If not, the action will proceed to the last day of battle.

## Part Four: Climax

One the nineteenth day of the Monkey, the storm breaks and weak sunlight filters through the clouds to reveal the assembled army of undead – well over a thousand strong – with which the Bloodspeaker intends to overwhelm and conquer Heichi sano Negura. Many of them carry ladders to scale the keep's walls, or the battering rams previously constructed by Ougon's bandits. The maho-tsukai deliberately puts reanimated samurai in the front ranks for maximum psychological impact on the defenses – the GM can up the ante here by including various NPCs with whom the players have formed emotional bonds, as well as any PCs who have fallen in the previous days' fighting. As a further option, the GM may choose to have the Jomei's son Heichi Utsuro be among the reanimated dead, a further blow to the spirit of the defending commander.

The final battle should be a desperate affair indeed, with heavy modifiers on the Mass Battle Table to reflect this. PCs who come up with clever ideas or tactics to use against the undead should be able to create counter-modifiers, but the fight is still very much waged against the odds. Examples of good tactics could include moving troops outside of the castle to conduct flank attacks (maybe that rumor of a tunnel connecting the keep to the mines is true), pouring flammable oil into the moat, or creating chokepoints where only one or two zombies can attack at a time.

Ultimately, the outcome of the battle depends on locating and killing the Bloodspeaker. If (against all odds) the defenders actually win three consecutive Mass Battle rounds, the GM can represent this by having the frustrated Bloodspeaker come to the front and thereby create an opening for the defenders (and especially the PCs) to kill him. Conversely, if the defenders lose three consecutive Mass Battle rounds, the undead overwhelm the keep's walls and break into the interior, and the Bloodspeaker comes forward to preside over his triumph – creating the opportunity for a last-ditch, forlorn hope attack on him.

If the Bloodspeaker is ultimately brought down, his undead forces lose their direction and soon

## Who is the Bloodspeaker?

The *maho-tsukai* who transforms Ougon's attack into a desperate struggle against the undead is a Bloodspeaker infiltrator who has been hiding in the Boar's Flanks for months or possibly even years. Exactly who he is, however, is up to the GM. He may be a peasant who was recruited by the cult years ago, but it will probably be more interesting to make him (or her) a samurai 'guest' who arrived in the Lair at some point and has been biding his time, waiting for the chance to unleash his power for maximum effect.

Any of the sample NPC 'guests' included later in this chapter can make interesting Bloodspeaker villains if the GM wishes. Alternatively, the GM may opt to present the character of Kitsu Yosaku, a corrupt Lion shugenja:

Kitsu Yosaku grew up surrounded by the glories of his ancestors and learned the ways of his family and his clan. However, a dark worm of selfishness and deceit lurked beneath his mild exterior. His dark nature grew more twisted when it became apparent that he lacked the ability to commune with the ancestors, a great embarrassment to his parents, both of whom were Sodan-Senzo. When he finally passed his gempukku, he was given a minor assignment in the Lion armies and largely ignored.

Seething with suppressed anger and searching for the power which had been denied him, Yosaku was ripe for recruitment by the Bloodspeaker Cult, and proved an enthusiastic convert. He had a gift for maho and soon became well known within the cult for his avid research efforts, discovering many new spells and rituals. Eventually, his thirst for knowledge and power drove him into the Twilight Mountains, seeking out the same potency which Agasha Ryuden used to create the Anvil of Despair. And thus he came, by chance, to the Lair of the Boar.

Yosaku normally comes across as quiet and studious, a man who does not act when others will act for him. He tries to avoid notice and tends to speak slowly except when the topic of magical power comes up, which makes him energetic and quick-spoken. PCs who pay close attention to him may notice a certain subdued intensity, and tightly controlled resentment that simmers whenever the topics of family or ancestors come up.

### Kitsu Yosaku, Bloodspeaker

Air: 3 Earth: 3 Fire: 2 Water: 4 Void: 4

Intelligence: 4 Perception: 5

*Honor: 1.6 Status: 1.5 Glory: 2.4 Taint: 0.7*

*School/Rank: Kitsu Shugenja 2 / Bloodspeaker Technique (Insight Rank 4)*

*Skills: Battle 2, Calligraphy (Cipher) 4, Etiquette 4, Lore: History 3, Lore: Theology 2, Lore: Shadowlands 3, Lore: Bloodspeakers 7, Lore: Maho 7, Sincerity (Deceit) 5, Defense 2, Stealth 5, Spellcraft 5*

*Advantages: Apparent Honor (3 ranks), Bland, Forbidden Knowledge (Maho),*

*Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Bloodspeaker)*

*Spells: As appropriate for Rank 2 Kitsu.*

*Maho Spells: Blood and Darkness, Bleeding, Written in Blood, Summon Undead Champion, Curse of Weakness, Pain, Essence of Undeath*

begin collapsing to the ground, bereft of the kansen which empowered them. Ougon (if he lived) and his few remaining bandits choose to ask forgiveness and swear fealty to the Boar; the Jomei will seek the advice of his followers, including the PCs, as to whether to accept such an offer. Regardless, the task of rebuilding the Lair from this near-catastrophe will be a long and difficult one, presenting many opportunities for further adventures and challenges.

If the Bloodspeaker cannot be defeated, the doom of the Lair is at hand. The Jomei will try to evacuate as many of the commoners as possible, along with some samurai to protect them, but he himself will remain – along with most of his vassals – and fight to the death for the lands where they have dwelt for so long. It is up to the PCs whether to join this doomed stand or become part of the retreat (Ougon will choose retreat once it seems there is no hope left). Of course, even if the PCs do choose retreat, their survival is by no means assured – they must lead a group of terrified commoners with no supplies through the Twilight Mountains, with autumn coming on and no chance of outside help. Getting these people down to the safety of the Crab or Crane lands can be another campaign it itself.



# Sagas of the Boar

The following section contains an array of simpler adventure and campaign ideas for L5R games taking place in the Lair. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, of course, but merely a starting point for GMs seeking inspiration. The Lair is an archetype of the Location-based campaign, tying all the action to a single extensively detailed locale, and thus is intended to present a wide variety of challenges; however, it should be noted that it is not the ideal setting for courtier characters.

## The Hunger of the Damned

**Challenge**: After the death of an honorable and respected priest, bodies begin disappearing from the Shrine of the Dead. Bones of the honorably dead are found scattered throughout the Lair, the remains showing signs of having been eaten.

**Focus**: A strange creature is seen inside the shrine by an eta gravekeeper, but no one of higher station corroborates the man's story. Compounding the issue is that he is found to be Tainted despite the lack of Shadowlands attacks. The eta is ordered executed, presumably ending the problem.

**Strike**: The bones of the dead continue to be found outside the Shrine of the Dead, sometimes even in front of the houses of their families. Was the late priest actually a Bloodspeaker, or has some Shadowlands creature taken up residence inside the Shrine?

## Allure of Power

**Challenge**: Isawa Hoshi, a powerful but naïve Phoenix Earth shugenja, has become a 'guest' in the Lair. He helps the Boar after a major mining accident by creating stone servitors to work the Three Brothers' Mines.

**Focus**: A week later, the stone servants go berserk, expelling all mortals from the iron mine and slaying anyone who approaches.

**Strike**: Hoshi's sister and yojimbo, Isawa Wairiko, is actually a secret Bloodspeaker. She is Tainting her brother's creations and taking control of them, planning to use them to tunnel out of the Lair and escape the Boar's control.

## Heart of Steel

**Challenge**: The Goshoryu Mine, the mineral lifeblood of the Lair, begins to fill up with a strange stoney substance, unlike anything seen before. The heimin and samurai are forced to evacuate, but the Boar cannot afford to abandon the mine.

**Focus**: A team of samurai is ordered into the mine to investigate what the substance is and how it can be stopped or destroyed.

**Strike**: Something has upset the Earth kami, causing them to try to seal off the mine with the new substance. However, without a shugenja to Commune with them, they cannot explain what has drawn their ire. Since the Boar have no shugenja, it may not be possible to appease the kami before the mine is sealed away, perhaps forever.

## A Warrior Without a War

**Challenge**: The Boar often send out disguised samurai to investigate the Empire or to recover resources for the Lair. The greatest forager of his generation is a man named Heichi Rabo, who has spent seven years away from the Lair, living as a ronin in the Crab lands. When he finally returns to the Lair, he discovers his wife and son have died of illness, and he has become too accustomed to modern Rokugani life to fit in with the ancient ways of the Boar.

**Focus**: After being refused permission to leave on a new foraging expedition, Rabo flees the Lair without authorization.

**Strike**: Heichi Jomei sends a force of samurai to recapture Rabo, but retrieving such a skilled and determined scout will be no easy task. The continued security of the Lair may hang in the balance.

## The Lost Tao

**Challenge**: A recent arrival to the Lair, a Phoenix scholar, visits the Shrine of Shinsei and realizes the ancient copy of the Tao of Shinsei which rests there is more complete than modern copies in the Empire.

**Focus**: The Phoenix desperately pleads to be allowed to take the Tao back outside and share its wisdom with the rest of the Empire. However, none of the monks in the

Shrine can corroborate his claim that the modern Empire no longer has complete copies of the Tao.

**Strike**: The Phoenix is telling the truth. If he is not given permission to carry out his task, he will try to convince other pious samurai to do it for hi, or even become desperate enough to steal the Tao and try to escape the Lair.

## Twin Passions

**Challenge**: A pair of twin brothers are known throughout the Lair for their adventurous spirit and frequent rivalries. Now they have both fallen in love with Heichi Eriko, the daughter of the current Jomei.

**Focus**: While the brothers are out on one of their explorations of the Eiko no Mori, Heichi Eriko is kidnapped by bandits. The Jomei is beside himself and orders every possible samurai to rescue her, pledging her hand to whoever can bring her back alive and safe.

**Strike**: If the bandit camp is located, their leader claims one of the twin brothers hired them to kidnap Eriko. Eriko herself claims she is in love with the brother and cooperated with the kidnapping in order to escape the Lair with him. Do the PCs tell the truth or allow love to triumph?

## The Fortress of Evil

**Challenge**: The Three Horses' River begins drying up, causing untold suffering. Jomei orders Boar samurai to investigate what could be happening with the river.

**Focus**: The samurai discover that mountain goblins have created a dam that is blocking the river's flow, and are acting more organized than ever. In fact, they have even built a crude fortress overlooking the river.

**Strike**: An oni has come into the area, taken control of the mountain goblins, and is using them to try to conquer the Lair.

## The Nature of Evidence

**Challenge**: A string of disappearances among the eta is causing a stir in the village. The Boar ignore the problem at first... until one of their 'guests' disappears as well.

**Focus**: The only witnesses are eta, and no heimin or samurai can corroborate any of their testimony. The eta claim a samurai is behind the disappearances, a claim dismissed by the Boar. But the disappearances continue and soon begin claiming more samurai lives. Many samurai begin blaming the eta themselves for the crimes.

**Strike**: The criminal is a samurai who has gone mad, but who is still cunning enough to only commit his crimes where eta can see them. The PCs must find the truth before the Boar wind up executing all the eta in the Lair.

## The Outside World

**Challenge**: A plague has struck the Lair and many samurai are ill, including Heichi Jomei. The monks of the Lonely Monastery have documents suggesting a curative may be found in the Kuni lands. They recruit a small group of samurai to secretly leave the Lair to seek out the cure.

**Focus**: The samurai leave without the Jomei's permission, and must dodge Boar patrols until they get beyond the reach of the Lair. For 'guest' samurai, this may represent their only opportunity to escape... but they have also been given a duty by the monks to save the people of the Boar.

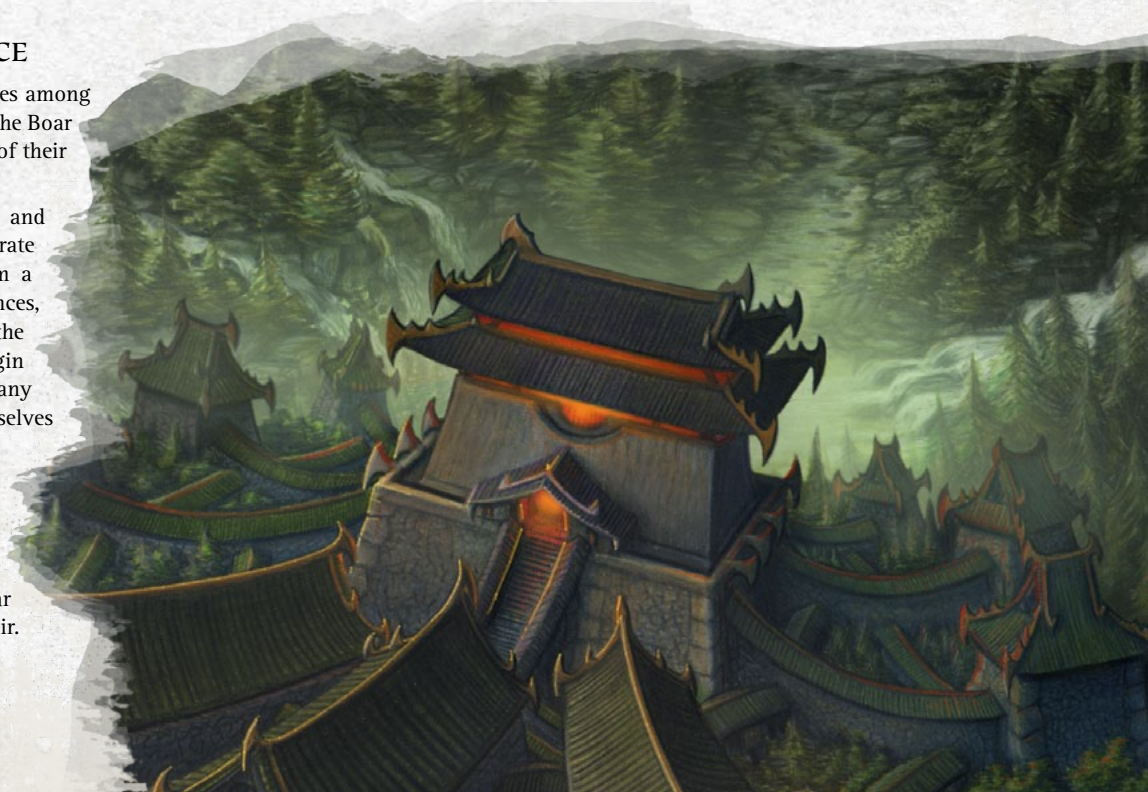
**Strike**: When they reach the Kuni lands, they discover the plague in Boar lands has also afflicted the lands of the Crab. The Kuni are zealously guarding the remedy, and are unlikely to hand it over to a group of strange samurai.

## The Worth of Brotherhood

**Challenge**: A newly arrived 'guest,' Togashi Ryuuken, gets into a heated theological dispute with the monks of the Lonely Monastery. He claims their philosophies are harming the souls of those who live within the Lair.

**Focus**: The conflict escalates from mere words into violence. Soon all the monks have taken one side or the other, and they are gathering followers from among the heimin. Civil war threatens the Lair even as the autumn harvest approaches.

**Strike**: Heichi Jomei orders samurai to put down the insurrection before the Lair's short harvest time is lost. The samurai must either reconcile the monks' substantial religious differences or defeat them (and their followers) in combat.



## Discovery and Redemption

**Challenge**: Boar patrols encounter an Imperial caravan heading towards the Lair. It proves to contain none other than the Emerald Champion, passing through the Twilight Mountains during an inspection tour of the Crab lands.

**Focus**: Although the Boar have the prospect of rejoining the Empire, the current Heichi Jomei is concerned that this may affect his control of the clan. The Jomei have become accustomed to ruling their own small Empire and the latest to bear the name is in no hurry to cede that authority. The Jomei knows that in a larger Rokugan he will just be the daimyo of a minor clan.

**Strike**: The Jomei orders his most loyal samurai to carry out an assassination of the entire caravan. Will the Boar follow his demand, or will they refuse and rejoin the Emerald Empire?

# Notable Personages in the Lair



The Lair is a setting ideal for storylines about imprisonment, siege, or survival, but it can also be the focus for a much wider range of scenarios (as shown by the Adventure Seeds above). The greater the variety of NPCs dwelling in the Lair, the more options for adventures and challenges to the PCs. The following section offers an assortment of NPCs who can be inserted into any game set within the Lair. Obviously, almost all the non-Boar samurai depicted here are 'guests' – that is to say, prisoners of the Boar Clan, force to live within the Lair lest they give it away to its enemies. The number of 'guests' varies greatly over time, and it can sometimes be decades between their visits, so the GM should feel free to use as many or as few of these NPCs as desired. Obviously, some of them will not be appropriate to certain eras of play, e.g. Unicorn prior to the ninth century, Spider before the twelfth century, and so forth.

## The Boar Clan

Samurai of the Boar Clan always form the overwhelming the majority of those in the Lair. The Heichi are a very strong-willed people, used to hardship and experts in mountain life. Much like the Crab Clan from which they issued, the Boar are brusque samurai with only modest concern for etiquette. They are proud of their independence, and consider asking others for help as a proof of failure – however, any fellow Boar will supply help without being asked. They also tend to come across as bullies, prone to verbal threats, which is both a game and a test of mettle for them. Visiting samurai may be shocked to find young Boar children threatening to break one another's knees as casually as other children might tease or joke.

Almost all samurai in the Lair are soldiers trained in the traditional Boar style; the clan never had much use for diplomats, and none whatsoever since the Lair isolated itself. However, a talented few do focus on other aspects of their duties, such as smithing, hunting, scouting, or mining, engineering. Although most of them do eventually retire to join the Lonely Monastery, they remain very active in the daily life of the Lair and do not generally withdraw into contemplation in the manner of monks in the larger Empire. No one in the Lair is allowed to be useless.

### Heichi Jomei, "the Jomei," Lord of the Lair

The current Jomei is by Rokugani standards an aging man, approaching forty-five years, but still leads the Lair with an iron fist. The importance of his role was emphasized to him from the day of his birth, and as a child he was subject to an extremely intensive training and education; it was expected that the lord of the Lair would know all the techniques of the Heichi Bushi School by the time he took power. The training turned this particular Jomei into a harsh, stern, resolute man with no room in his soul for compassion, weakness, or moderation. He is not a particularly violent or harsh man, but he never lets his personal feelings affect his judgments, and presents his vassals with the face of a just but wholly merciless leader. His men are both loyal to him and frightened of him, and treat him with an almost superstitious awe.

This Jomei is a formidable warrior, able to fight several men at a time thanks to his mastery of the mai chong, the odd three-prong spear which is the trademark of his Clan. At

nearly six feet tall, and with a muscular frame ensconced in the best heavy armor the Boar Clan can produce, he is an impressive figure. Individuals who stumble onto the Lair and are captured are always immediately brought to the Jomei, and although he treats them with the respect deserved by samurai he also makes it clear what should happen to them if they try to escape. He is perfectly willing to accept the seppuku of samurai who will not agree to remain as 'guests.'

Despite his strength, the Jomei is beginning to feel the weight of age and the stress of his responsibilities. He has begun considering retirement, but worries that his eldest son Utsuro is too impetuous and undisciplined to rule the Lair. On the other hand, passing over Utsuro for one of his younger siblings will create tensions within the ruling house of the Boar. It is a question which he must carefully examine if the clan is to be kept safe, so it may be some time yet before he can shave his head and join the monastery.

### Heichi Jomei, "the Jomei," Lord of the Lair

Air: 4 Earth: 4 Fire: 3 Water: 4 Void: 3
Stamina: 5

*Honor: 4.2* *Status: 5.0 (within the Lair only)* *Glory: 9.5 (within the Lair only)*

*School/Rank: Heichi Bushi 5*

*Skills: Athletics 5, Battle 4, Defense 5, Etiquette 1, Hunting (Survival, Tracking) 5, Intimidation 5, Investigation 5, Jiujutsu 5, Kenjutsu 5, Spears (Mai Chong) 7, Stealth 3*

*Advantages: Large, Leadership, Social Position (ruler of the Lair)*

*Disadvantages: Contrary, Driven (protect the Lair)*

## The Crab Clan

As the "parent" of the Boar Clan, the Crab most readily understand the plight of the Boar when they stumble across the Lair, and they are usually more amenable to staying here and taking part in the Lair's life and activities. Over the centuries many of them have even married into the Boar, strengthening the Lair's bloodlines and prowess. Although some miss their former life and duties among the Crab, they often find a similar purpose and meaning within the Lair, especially since there are plenty of Shadowlands creatures around. Indeed, the knowledge of the Crab has been crucial in keeping the Taint and the Bloodspeakers at bay. Of course, many Crab samurai have strongly suggested the Boar should stop hiding and rejoin the ranks of the Crab Clan, particularly in the twelfth century after the Falcon Clan did the same. The Jomei always politely refuses, since he still remembers the story of the first Heichi and how the Crab abandoned them.

### Hida Onako, Furious Berserker

Onako's story seems quite simple. A warrior and berserker of the Crab Clan, she arrived in the Lair while tracking a particularly vicious ogre which had killed the rest of her squad. She eventually killed it in a difficult battle, suffering grievous wounds; the Boar found her unconscious, lying on top of the broken corpse of the ogre, and took her in both to heal her and to save her from the Taint. It took her months to fully recover. Once she recovered, Onako proved to be a formidable warrior with incredible reserves of strength. She readily accepted the offer from the Jomei to serve alongside the rest of the Boar Clan as a soldier of the Lair, and she has already fought many times to defend it from bandits and roving Shadowlands monsters.

And yet, Oneko has few friends within the place she now calls home. Although she can be pleasant enough when she wants too, her battle rages terrify everyone who knows her. In the grip of battle, Onako screams to the top of her lungs with each shattering blow of her tetsubo. She often laughs hysterically in the midst of a fight, regardless of the situation, and plunges into the most dangerous situations as if she actually wants to die. Outside of such violent situations, she spends most of her time training and drinking, and something in the way she graphically describes her deeds in battle makes others feel ill-at-ease. Little is known about her or her family, or how her squadmates actually died. Thus, she ends up alone more often than not.

### Hida Onako, Furious Berserker

Air: 3 Earth: 4 Fire: 2 Water: 3 Void: 2
Agiligy: 3 Strength: 4

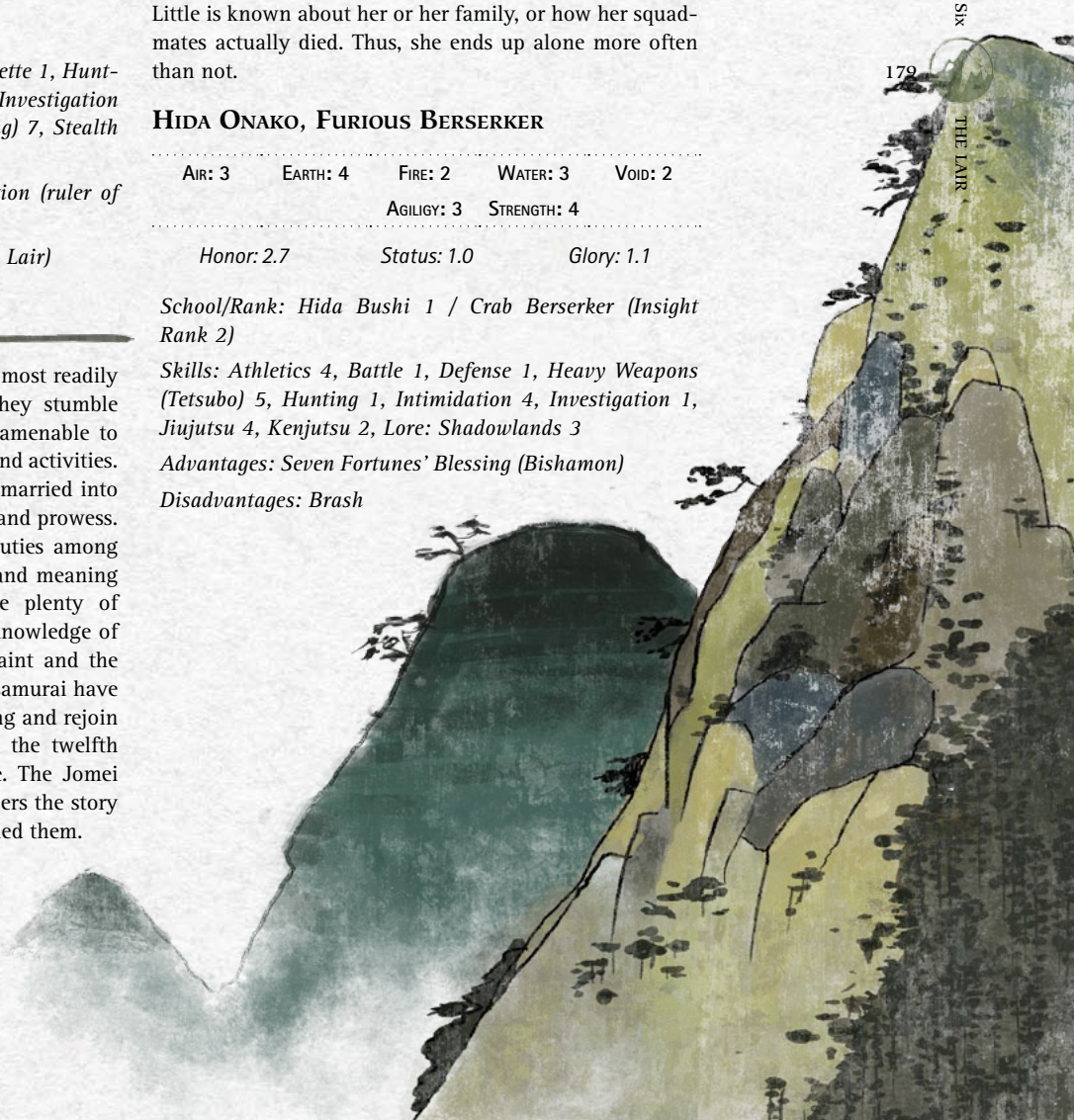
*Honor: 2.7* *Status: 1.0* *Glory: 1.1*

*School/Rank: Hida Bushi 1 / Crab Berserker (Insight Rank 2)*

*Skills: Athletics 4, Battle 1, Defense 1, Heavy Weapons (Tetsubo) 5, Hunting 1, Intimidation 4, Investigation 1, Jiujutsu 4, Kenjutsu 2, Lore: Shadowlands 3*

*Advantages: Seven Fortunes' Blessing (Bishamon)*

*Disadvantages: Brash*



# The Crane Clan

Few members of the Crane Clan ever find the Lair, since it is quite out of the way of civilized roads, but scouts or lone travelers do occasionally pass through the area. Those who are captured often have difficulty adapting to the place: the stark difference of culture is too obvious. The Lair has very little room for arts of any kind, and survives in harsh conditions which don't permit lavish meals or idleness. Still, a Crane who shows his mettle can make a place for himself in the Lair, and those who do come to the remote place are more often warriors than poets, given the physical requirements needed to reach it. For that matter, some forms of art – like poetry or storytelling – require few resources beyond a creative mind, and even the uncouth Boar will enjoy distractions from time to time. Few Crane have ever married into the Boar, since they find the place too unpleasant and its inhabitants too different from the civilized folk of their homeland. However, their diplomatic skill ensures they never offend their hosts either.

## Daidoji Tsuka, Hesitant Iron Crane

As a promising young bushi, Daidoji Tsuka was beginning to build a reputation in the Crane Clan in the years before she found the Lair. A graduate of the Daidoji Iron Crane School, she served a tour of duty in the Daidoji army where she showed great skill and dedication, along with enough understanding of tactics that she was promoted to nikutai. After a battle in which she successfully led her squadron after her gunso died, Tsuka was invited to Shiro Daidoji to be commended for her skill and bravery. Even there she made a favorable impression, since she had more grace and knowledge of etiquette that was common in the ranks of the Daidoji. Tsuka fully expected to be deployed back with the rest of her unit after the winter, but instead she was selected by an Imperial courtier named Otomo Gaishi to serve as his yojimbo – a prestigious honor.

Sadly, this new duty did not prove to be the easiest. Gaishi had asked for Tsuka partly out of crude desire and partly to share in some of the young Crane's reflected glory; in truth, the Imperial already so many yojimbo he could not remember their names. His attempts at flirting with Tsuka were met with polite but clear rejection, whereupon Gaishi took to openly mocking Tsuka for her stiff demeanor, as well as occasionally sending her on fool's errands to amuse himself or his friends. Tsuka endured it all stoically, maintaining her honor and obeying Gaishi to the best of her abilities. It was on one of these petty tasks assigned by Gaishi – he wanted snow from the mountain top to chill his sake – that Tsuka found the Lair and was brought in by the Boar samurai.

Although she did not resist her captivity, Tsuka refused the Jomei's offer to assist in the Lair's military defense. In her mind, she is still Otomo Gaishi's yojimbo, and while she cannot fulfill her duties while living in the Lair, her honor will not permit her to take up another task. Of course, she knows her service was useless to the Imperial Lord, who is unlikely to have sent anybody to search for her after her disappearance. The Boar, meanwhile, are dutiful samurai facing real and tangible dangers. Tsuka has yet to find a way to reconcile her sense of honor with her current situation, and thus has limited her interaction with the Boar samurai so as to avoid becoming too familiar with them. The only exceptions are in matters of etiquette – after all, she remains a daughter of Doji first and foremost, so she kindly corrects the Boar on proper forms of speech and address whenever necessary – which is to say, most of the time.

### Daidoji Tsuda, Hesitant Iron Crane

Air: 3 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 2 Void: 2
Perception: 3

*Honor: 6.7* *Status: 1.5* *Glory: 2.1*

*School/Rank: Daidoji Iron Crane 2*

*Skills: Athletics 2, Battle 3, Defense 4, Etiquette 3, Hunting 1, Iaijutsu 3, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 4, Sincerity 2, Spears (Yari) 5*

*Advantages: Irreproachable*

*Disadvantages: Obligation (Otomo Gaishi)*

*Kata: Striking as Earth*

## The Dragon Clan

While it is hard to make generalizations for such an individualistic clan, usually the members of the Dragon Clan tend to appreciate the Lair. They are themselves used to mountain hardships and scarcity of resources, so living in such a way is rarely a problem for them. The tendency of the tattooed men to wander the Empire makes them some of the more common visitors who find the place, and they usually adapt readily to their new conditions. They frequently help with the Lonely Monastery's affairs, since the Dragon believe spiritual needs are as important as physical ones.

One situation which can cause trouble is visits from members of the Agasha family, since the Lair associates that family with Agasha Ryuden, the man responsible for the downfall of the rest of the Boar Clan. Agasha visitors are always closely monitored and frequently forbidden to cast spells of any kind. In modern times this same prejudice is expressed toward Phoenix Agasha samurai, whose change of fealty is viewed as yet another reason for mistrust. Conversely, if a Tamori ever visits the lair, he or she will likely find it a congenial place.

### Mirumoto Rokai, Curious Bushi

Mirumoto Rokai is, as befits the Dragon, a rather strange man. Even as a youth, he was always quiet and contemplative, preferring to listen to others rather than speak his own mind. The only place where he showed passion was the dojo, where it soon became clear that he had a natural talent for kenjutsu. It seemed Rokai's ancestors were watching him and guiding his hand. After a few years of exemplary service and a pair of skillful duels, Rokai was admitted into the elite ranks of the Swordsmasters, one of the youngest to receive such an honor.

Yet despite his great success, the young man seemed to lack something. While he readily understood the training of his teachers, his soul found it insufficient, and he began to question his purpose in life. In other clans such questioning might have been out of place, but in the Dragon the teachers lent an ear to Rokai's plight, particularly as he often skillfully quoted the Tao to support his points. The sensei agreed to free Rokai of his obligations, and he shaved his head as a sign of dedication before going on a quest to find his true purpose.

After many dangerous months of wandering the Empire, Rokai eventually stumbled across the Lair and calmly accepted the condition of staying there forever as a 'guest.' Since then he has spent his days observing and understanding the Boar's small society, finding it a microcosm of the larger world and an infinite source of insight. He has refused to join the ranks of the Lair's defenders so as to avoid losing his unique point of view, but has agreed to teach them the basics of kenjutsu. When not observing the daily coming and goings of the Lair's inhabitants, Rokai can often be found in the Lonely Monastery, debating the mysteries of the Tao with the local monks. Although he is physically trapped in a small place, Rokai believes he is closer to finding the larger truths of the world than ever before, and silently hopes his ancestors approve of his actions.

### Mirumoto Rokai, Curious Bushi

Air: 3 Earth: 3 Fire: 4 Water: 2 Void: 4
Reflexes: 4 Perception: 3

*Honor: 4.8* *Status: 3.0* *Glory: 4.1*

*School/Rank: Mirumoto Bushi 3 / Swordmaster 1*

*Skills: Artisan: Poetry 3, Athletics 3, Defense 5, Etiquette 2, Iaijutsu 5, Jiujutsu 2, Investigation 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 6, Lore: Shugenja 3, Lore: Theology 6, Meditation 5*

*Advantages: Touch of the Spirit Realms (Yomi - kenjutsu)*

*Disadvantages: Fascination (The Lair)*

*Kata: Balance the Elements Style, Strength of the Dragon, Striking as Fire*

## The Lion Clan

The followers of Akodo find themselves divided if they come to the Lair.

One the one hand, being a 'guest' prevents them from serving their lords, and this is unacceptable. Many Lion will attempt to escape from the place, challenge the Jomei to a duel, commit seppuku, or simply fight to the death against any attempt at restraining them. Thus they can be some of the most difficult guests for the Boar to manage, and over the years more of them have been killed than from any other clan.

On the other hand, some Lion respect the Boar samurai's dedication to their duty and their ancestors. The spartan conditions and martial atmosphere of the Lair can be pleasant to the Lion, even if the Boar do not show as much dedication to honor as might be proper. Still, if Lion are convinced to stay they often become great assets to the Lair, and their tactical acumen is always helpful when the stronghold is attacked.

## Matsu Goji, Redeemed Lion

Like any young Matsu in the dojo, Goji was eager from early youth to prove himself as a warrior of the Lion. He trained hard, listened carefully to the lessons of his sensei, and prayed to his ancestors for guidance. The day of his gemppuku was the proudest of his life: receiving his blades and his armor, taking the name of his revered grandfather, Goji was ready to fight the enemies of the Lion.

And then war came.

War was nothing like Goji had pictured. It was dirty, terrifying, and chaotic. Goji found himself becoming more and more nervous each time he neared the front lines. In a major battle, he became separated from his unit and was wounded, which frightened him beyond anything he had ever imagined. In a moment of panic, he ran, and in the chaos of the battle nobody paid attention to his dishonorable act. Only later, when he calmed down, did Goji realize what he had done – abandoning his family, betraying his duty to his clan, shaming himself and his ancestors. He could not think of anything to do but to keep running, clinging to his mon and armor as the last remnants of his heritage, although he soon realized he was for all practical purposes a ronin.

When Goji came under attack from bandits, he ran again, and stumbled into a patrol from the Lair. The Boar soldiers quickly killed the more numerous bandits, showing no fear or hesitation. Goji was willing to join them, initially seeing the Lair as a place to hide from his own shameful past. However, Goji has come to love and respect the people of the Boar. He has started training with them and fighting alongside them, and has finally overcome his fear of battle. Now a marriage is being arranged to make him a full member of the Boar Clan. Still, Goji cannot help but fear his past might come back to haunt him, and he worries he may someday betray another clan and another family.

### Matsu Goji, Redeemed Lion

Air: 2 Earth: 2 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 3

Reflexes: 3 Stamina: 3 Strength: 4

*Honor: 4.8* *Status: 1.0* *Glory: 1.1*

*School/Rank: Matsu Berserker 1/Heichi bushi 1*

*Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 2, Defense 3, Hunting 3, Intimidation 2, Jiujutsu 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 4, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: History 3, Spears (Mai Chong) 3*

*Advantages: Multiple Schools*

*Disadvantages: Dark Secret (fled from battle)*

*Kata: Striking as Fire*

# The Mantis Clan

The samurai of the Mantis can easily understand the plight of a Minor Clan aspiring to greatness... or even just to survival, as in the case of the Boar. They themselves survived in a remote hostile environment to become a force to be reckoned with, growing stronger with each generation. Thus, Mantis 'guests' of the Lair often admire the Boar's resolve and their skill as warriors. On the other hand, the environment is very different from the Isles of Silk and Spice: a barren land and chilly climate, far from the sea, and lacking wealth and refinement. Thus Mantis who stay for a long time tend to become bored and frustrated. And of course the Lair holds troves of iron, copper, and jade, enough to trigger the greed of the more ruthless and piratical among the Mantis.

In modern times, the Mantis as a Great Clan have a much stronger position and view themselves as the protectors of the Minor Clans. Mantis 'guests' could well propose the idea of their clan absorbing what is left of the Boar, much as was done with the Fox before. The Tsuruchi family will find the rough environment of the Lair congenial, and will appreciate the Boar's simple honesty, making them more harmonious 'guests' than samurai from the Yoritomo family. The Moshi are also somewhat accustomed to mountain life and remote seclusion, albeit they are of a more peaceful and scholarly nature. Finally, the Kitsune are adepts of survival, and their skills could be of tremendous help in the Lair, not to mention their close association with the Element of Earth, which symbolizes the Lair's physical and spiritual struggle very well.

## Yoritomo Ichiro, Ambitious Warrior

When Ichiro found the Lair, he was chasing bandits who had been stealing from trade caravans on the mountain roads. He killed two of them single-handedly before the Boar arrived. Of course, his plan was to steal back the caravan contents and bring the wealth to the Mantis Clan (minus a small personal deduction of course), but his plan was thoroughly interrupted by the forced invitation to live among the Boar. On the surface, Ichiro reluctantly agreed to his new situation, and he soon joined the patrols of the Boar, even fighting off more bandits on later occasions. However, while he personally sympathized with the lost Minor Clan, he just could not bear to be trapped in a small, hopeless place when he could be out winning riches and glory for the Mantis. He also soon came to realize how much mineral wealth found within the Lair. As a result, Ichiro has developed a plan to seize control of Lair by becoming the next Jomei.

Of course, the Heichi are not going to designate a newcomer as their heir that easily, so Ichiro bides his time and builds up his alliances and connections within the Lair. He is a charismatic and likable man, and has already begun to rise through the ranks of the valley's defenders. He intends to arrange a marriage into the ruling line of the Boar Clan and then be in position to be named heir when the current Jomei passes away – if necessary, eliminating a few inconvenient obstacles through "accidents" along the way. As a back-up plan, he makes sure to maintain friendships with all the other 'guests,' and hopes to liberate some of them from the valley on condition that they carry a letter back to the Mantis... a letter which will reveal the location of the Lair and its defensive features.

Ichiro hopes to achieve his goals with a minimum of bloodshed, especially since the Boar are great warriors and could find a useful place within the Mantis Clan. Still, he knows many of them will not accept absorption without a fight, he accepts that many deaths may be necessary to proceed with his plans.

### Yoritomo Ichiko, Ambitious Warrior

Air: 3 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 2
Reflexes: 4

*Honor: 3.1* *Status: 1.5* *Glory: 2.2*

*School/Rank: Yoritomo Bushi 3*

*Skills: Athletics 5, Battle 2, Chain Weapons 3, Commerce 3, Courtier 2, Defense 4, Etiquette 1, Investigation 3, Jiujutsu (Improvised Weapons) 3, Kenjustu 4, Knives (Kama) 5, Sailing 4, Sincerity (Deceit) 3, Stealth 3*

*Advantages: Leadership*

*Disadvantages: Insensitive*

*Kata: Striking as Fire, Son of Storms*

## The Phoenix Clan

For a clan like the Phoenix, which treasures knowledge and wisdom, a remote and secret place like the Lair presents many opportunities. The Boar are a window to the past, and privy to esoteric knowledge such as the Shakoki Dogu's real nature, the creation of the Anvil of Despair, and the activities of the early Bloodspeaker Cult. And despite their distance from the rest of Rokugan, the Boar have actually clung to religion even more than before, something the Phoenix find admirable. Since the Phoenix are also believers in peace, they usually accommodate themselves well to a life as a 'guest.'

For the people of the Lair themselves, the arrival of a Phoenix Clan samurai is usually appreciated, since such men and women bring religious knowledge and peaceful attitudes to a place which can use both. Shugenja are especially prized, of course, since almost none are ever born to the Lair and their talents can make life much more bearable. Of course, shugenja are also more susceptible to the seductive power of blood magic, and the Boar have learned to watch Phoenix guests for any signs of maho. In modern times, after the Agasha join the Phoenix Clan, new suspicions arise due to the Heichi family's memories of Agasha Ryuden, the man responsible for their clan's downfall.

### Isawa Rohitsu, Disappointed Scholar

When Isawa Rohitsu and his yojimbo Shiba Hojotsu found the Lair, Rohitsu was at first delighted. He had been scouring the area for some kind of powerful Earth spirit, the kind of thing he relished discovering as a scholar of the Fortunes. Instead, he found the remnants of a lost Minor Clan. Rohitsu carefully documented the place and its inhabitants, hoping to renegotiate his status as a 'guest' by the end of his studies, which took months to complete.

However, the Boar refused to make an exception. Their firmness came as a genuine surprise to Rohitsu, who had assumed he could persuade them to be reasonable. Since then, he has halted the magical and religious support he previously offered to the Lair – a real loss for them, since he is a shugenja of considerable talent. Rohitsu has stopped well short of any kind of violence or sabotage, but he constantly states his disapproval at his current situation and frequently requests a review of his status. There is nothing left for him to study here, and he believes his knowledge is useless if not shared.

Rohitsu has the support of his dedicated yojimbo Hojotsu, an honorable and skilled warrior who agrees it is past time for them to leave. The pair are quite the thorn in the Lair's daily life, particularly since they remain polite and respectful in their repeated demands for freedom, creating constant tension but never justifying violent action by the Boar. They are both powerful individuals and could potentially carry out a successful escape, especially if they persuaded the other 'guests' in the Lair to go along. Thus far, however, Rohitsu has avoided such a crude and ill-mannered solution to his problem. Thus both sides are engaged in an exercise of patience to see which will break first.

#### Isawa Rohitsu, Disappointed Scholar

| Air: 3 | Earth: 4 | Fire: 2 | Water: 4 | Void: 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Intelligence: 3 | | |
| *Honor: 4.6* | | *Status: 2.0* | | *Glory: 2.4* |

*School/Rank: Isawa shugenja (Earth) 3*

*Skills: Calligraphy (Cipher) 3, Defense 1, Etiquette 2, Investigation 2, Lore: History 3, Lore: Theology (Fortunism) 6, Lore: Earth 4, Medicine 4, Meditation 3, Spellcraft 3*

*Advantages: Ally (Shiba Hojotsu)*

*Disadvantages: Unlucky (1 rank)*

*Spells: Sense, Commune, Summon, By the Light of the Moon, Call Upon the Wind, Summon Fog, Armor of Earth, Earth Becomes Sky, Earth's Protection, Hands of Clay, Wall of Earth, Inari's Blessing, Path to Inner Peace, Reflections of Pan Ku, Regrow the Wound, Extinguish. (Many of these spells have been memorized by Rohitsu and thus can be cast without scrolls – the exact details are left to the GM to decide as appropriate.)*

## The Scorpion Clan

For the Clan of Secrets, the discovery of a place like the Lair represents a great opportunity. Carefully handled, the Boar could become a resource or even an ally of the Scorpion Clan, or be used as a trading asset in a negotiation with another clan like the Crab or the Mantis. However, thus far all the Scorpion samurai who have learned of the Lair's existence have been captured and held as 'guests.' The Boar know well enough about the true nature of the Scorpion, and always put the sons and daughters of Bayushi under extra scrutiny. For a Scorpion

to be held against his will is infuriating enough, but to be held by a mere Minor Clan – one whose existence is not even acknowledged by the Empire! – is even more frustrating; thus, most Scorpion samurai try to escape any way they can, including sabotaging the Boar in hope of creating distractions or opportunities. Most Scorpion tread carefully in their activities to avoid being caught and executed, but the frustration of captivity can sometimes eventually drive them to unwise actions.

## Bayushi Nanjiro, Disgruntled Courtier

When Bayushi Nanjiro was discovered by the samurai of the Lair, he was the prisoner of a group of bandits who intended to ransom him back to his clan. Or rather, this is what Nanjiro told the Boar – in truth, he was in the process of convincing the one of bandits to betray his fellows to the Scorpion Clan. The Boar summarily executed the bandits, and Nanjiro had to work hard to overcome their suspicions and not to be killed alongside the criminals. Now he finds himself a permanent unwilling guest of the Lair.

Nanjiro hates the whole place, and constantly demands to be released, warning the Boar of the dire consequences of crossing a Scorpion. They have ignored both his pleas and his threats, so Nanjiro has been working to make his words true. While there is no court here for him to exert his true talents, Nanjiro is nonetheless a natural manipulator of men and women, and his influence has grown steadily. He has blackmailed, persuaded, seduced, and threatened many into becoming his allies, establishing a support network for an eventual bid to escape. Nanjiro does not care whether the Boar Clan survives or dies – all he wants is to return home to his proper life instead of slowly withering away in a mountain holdout forsaken by the Fortunes. He does not particularly enjoy the depths of dishonor he is resorting to in order to prepare his escape, but true to his Scorpion education he lets nothing bar him from his goal. When he is ready, Nanjiro will turn the Lair into a chaos of betrayal and backstabbing while he escapes with a few chosen men and women. He just needs a suitable distraction to set his plans in motions.

Nanjiro is a thin, lanky man whose long hair has turned prematurely gray. The cold of the mountain air has not been kind to him and he appears thin and sickly, often coughing. He wears a simple veil of black cloth over his face to conceal both his ailments and his mouth, and his sinister demeanor coupled with his weak appearance has led children of the Lair to nickname him the Scorpion Ghost – something which actually suits him well enough.

### Bayushi Nanjiro, Disgruntled Courtier

| Air: 3 | Earth: 2 | Fire: 3 | Water: 2 | Void: 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Awareness: 4 | | Intelligence: 4 | | |
| *Honor: 2.2* | | *Status: 2.0* | | *Glory: 1.5* |

*School/Rank: Bayushi Courtier 2*

*Skills: Acting 3, Calligraphy 2, Courtier (Gossip) 5, Craft: Poison 3, Defense 1, Etiquette 5, Games: go 4, Investigation 4, Knives 2, Sincerity (Deceit) 5, Temptation 4*

*Advantages: Dark Paragon (Control)*

*Disadvantages: Jurojin's Curse*

# The Unicorn Clan

The first members of the Unicorn Clan to ever find the Lair had a very difficult time, since the Boar knew nothing of their return to the Empire and assumed them to be gaijin interlopers. Even after word filtered into the Lair that the long-lost Ki-Rin Clan had returned, the Boar still found the Unicorn's foreign looks, odd equipment, and peculiar names to be deeply sinister. In modern times the Boar at least tolerate the Unicorn, but remain almost as wary toward them as they are toward the Scorpion. The sons and daughters of Shinjo, of course, are usually delighted to discover an unknown place, but quickly grow angry when they learn they can never leave, a bitter punishment for a people so possessed of wanderlust. On the other hand, the Unicorn adapt readily to new ways, and their compassion for the common people can sometimes convince them to help the impoverished folk of the Lair.

## Shinjo Byungchul, Concerned Father

Shinjo Byungchul was hunting through the Twilight Mountains with his young son, hoping to take both of their minds off the death of Byungchul's wife, when they encountered the Boar scouts who politely escorted them to the Lair. When he saw the place, a triumph of survival amid such a difficult environment, Byungchul knew he had to help them and offered to do so even before they asked him. A peerless hunter, Byungchul helped the Boar discovered new ways to survive off the bounty of the nearby forests, making him immensely popular. His skill

as a warrior is great as well, and he has helped the Boar get rid of some of the more dangerous Shadowlands creatures and bandit gangs in the area. Having traveled a great deal in his younger days, Byungchul finds the Lair a nice place to settle down, and protects the inhabitants of the village and castle the same way he once protected his clan.

The only problem that chafes Byungchul is his son. Although the boy has been quick to adapt to the new environment, he is nearing the age where he should be sent to a dojo. Byungchul refuses to re-marry into the Boar Clan out of respect for the memory of his dead spouse, and wishes for his son to receive the same education as he did, riding a horse through the plains and learning the ways of the Shinjo. But young Byungsang is already behaving more and more like a Boar samurai, growing up alongside the Heichi children. Although Byungchul knows the path of the Boar is honorable, it breaks his heart to see his son abandoning his heritage, and he wonders if he can persuade the Jomei to let his son be smuggled out of the Lair and back to the Unicorn Clan... even if Byungchul himself has to stay behind.

### Shinjo Byungchul, Concerned Father

| Air: 3 | Earth: 3 | Fire: 2 | Water: 3 | Void: 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agility: 4 | | | | |
| *Honor: 5.1* | *Status: 1.5* | *Glory: 3.5* | | |

*School/Rank: Shinjo Bushi 3*

*Skills: Animal Handling 3, Athletics 4, Battle 2, Defense 3, Horsemanship 5, Hunting (Survival) 5, Investigation 3, Jiujutsu 1, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 5, Perform: Flute 1, Stealth 3*

*Advantages: Paragon (Compassion)*

*Disadvantages: Dependant (Son), Gaijin Name*

*Kata: Strength of the Unicorn, Striking as Air*

## The Minor Clans

Needless to say, Minor Clan samurai are in unique positions to appreciate the Boar's difficult situation. To a varying extent, all Minor Clans face difficult conditions and lack of resources, and know how important it is to safeguard one's heritage. (A Sparrow samurai might even consider the Lair a genuine improvement over his daily routine, given how poor his own clan is.) However, due to the Lair's remote location, only a handful of other Minor Clan samurai have ever wound up as 'guests' of the Boar.

One particular note that should be made is that the Boar do not know about the Five Nights of Shame and are thus unaware that the original Snake Clan was exterminated. Thus, if a member of the corrupt Chuda family ever found his way to the Lair, he would not be subject to the automatic suspicion bestowed on the Agasha or the Phoenix.

## Ichiro Ryoku, Star-Crossed Bushi

When he left the mountains of the Badger Clan on a musha shugyo, Ichiro Ryoku was already one of the most famous members of his family and was fully expected to come back a legend. A naturally gifted warrior and athlete, Ryoku was as strong as any of his fellow Badger samurai, but was also gifted with an optimism and talent none could match. He promised his family and lord he would win favor and honor for the Badger and return with allies who would strengthen their northern fortresses and respect their eternal mission.

When Ryoku stumbled across the Lair, the samurai of the Boar were under attack from a large group of bandits. Seeing honorable samurai fighting against overwhelming odds, Ryoku charged in to the fight, and with his help the Boar quickly dispatched their foes. When he discovered he would not be allowed to leave, Ryoku prostrated himself before Heichi Jomei and asked only for a stipend to be sent to Shiro Ichiro to compensate for the loss of his service to his lord and clan. Impressed by his sincerity, the Jomei agreed to do so, sending of one his men every few years to anonymously deliver ingots of steel to the Badger.

Ryoku has adapted easily to living with the Boar, not surprising given that both their clan and his are descended from the Crab. He is one of the most well-liked warriors in the valley, and could be mistaken for a Boar himself if not for his mon and his gray kimono and armor. Ryoku has even started a romance with a fellow warrior – Heichi Rikuko, a skilled and formidable woman who is the only samurai ever able to best him at wrestling. There is talk of a wedding, but Ryoku is reluctant to let go of the Ichiro surname, his last tie to his family and clan. He is beginning to wonder if he could convince the Jomei to let Rikuko leave the mountains and join the Badger instead. It may be a foolhardy plan, but Ryoku wants desperately to find a way to serve both of the clans he loves.

### Ichiro Ryoku, Star-Crossed Bushi

| Air: 3 | Earth: 3 | Fire: 3 | Water: 3 | Void: 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Reflexes: 4 | | Agility: 5 | Strength: 4 | |
| *Honor: 4.4* | *Status: 1.0* | *Glory: 4.8* | | |

*School/Rank: Ichiro Bushi 3*

*Skills: Athletics (climbing) 5, Battle 3, Commerce 1, Craft: Armorsmithing 3, Defense 3, Heavy Weapons 3, Hunting 4, Iaijutsu 3, Investigation 2, Jiujutsu 3, Kenjutsu (Katana, No-dachi) 5, Sincerity 2, Spears 3*

*Advantages: Crab Hands*

*Disadvantages: True Love (Heichi Rikuko)*

*Kata: Striking as Air, Striking as Earth, Striking as Fire*

# The Imperial Families

Rarely if ever do members of the Imperial Families find the Lair. They are few in number and rarely venture off the main roads of the Empire, so it is highly unlikely for them to find the remote castle of the Heichi. The main exception to this is the Miya Heralds, particularly those who serve in remote locations or as Imperial Cartographers. Of course, Heralds generally object to being kept prisoner in a single location, but the Miya family does see it as their duty to help the weak and downtrodden, and their knowledge of the Empire can be a tremendous blessing to the Boar.

No Otomo has ever willingly stayed in the Lair, preferring seppuku to enduring imprisonment in a remote and unpleasant location. A few Seppun have chosen to stay, and are afforded the highest of respect if they choose to fight alongside the Heichi.

## Miya Kaishako, Herald in Distress

Miya Kaishako was in many ways an archetypal Miya Herald, eagerly embracing her duties from an early age. She dreamed of traveling the Empire, bringing the word of the Emperor to all. She was a clever and somewhat restless girl, and her sensei made sure to keep her busy at all times. As soon as she passed her gempukku, Kaishako was initially sent across the Empire on remote missions and obscure assignments, as usual for a new Herald. She never complained, always fulfilling her tasks and learning any skills necessary for their completion. She sought always to make Rokugan a better place for all.

Kaishako was injured while traveling through the Twilight Mountains, and became lost in the remote mountain pathways. The Boar took her in and nursed her back to health, happy to do all they could for one of the direct servants of the Emperor. When Kaishako learned she was required to stay in the valley, she seemed deeply shaken; although the Boar attributed this to her inability to travel, in fact it was because she was carrying very important and terrible news. (It is up to the GM exactly what this news might be, depending on the era in which his campaign is set.) So while she waits for now, Kaishako is quietly but urgently seeking a way out of the Lair.

Kaishako is a small athletic woman and has never let her status as an Imperial spoil her. She keeps her lair long, tied back in a simple ponytail, and usually sports an infectious smile which does much to disarm any potential conflicts. Her inner worry is beginning to show, however; she is losing sleep and her hosts are beginning to think she might be ill, raising questions which only make her position harder to maintain.

### Miya Kaishako, Herald in Distress

| Air: 3 | Earth: 2 | Fire: 3 | Water: 2 | Void: 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Perception: 3 | |

*Honor: 6.7* *Status: 3.0* *Glory: 2.4*

*School/Rank: Miya Herald 2*

*Skills: Athletics 3, Calligraphy 2, Courtier (Rhetoric) 3, Defense 3, Etiquette (Courtesy) 4, Horsemanship 4, Investigation 3, Kenjutsu 2, Lore: Heraldry 5, Sincerity 4*

*Advantages: Clear Thinker*

*Disadvantages: Dark Secret (terrible news)*

# The Spider Clan

The Spider Clan respects only strength and sees the Minor Clans as weaklings to be infiltrated and controlled. Any Spider who discovered the Boar would see them no differently. Moreover, the Spider Clan includes in its ranks the powerful immortal sorcerer Asahina Yajinden, who makes use of the Anvil of Despair – the very artifact that was created from the sacrifice of the rest of the Boar Clan. It is likely that Yajinden would be very interested in the surviving remnants of the Boar...

Fortunately, due to the Spider Clan's brief existence only the tiniest handful of its members have ever found the Lair, and none (thus far) have left the place alive.

## Okuso, Sohei Teacher

Okuso walked into the Lair alone one day, apparently neither fearing the consequences nor thinking of turning back. As a wandering warrior monk of the Order of the Spider, he was acutely aware of the fleeting nature of life and had no time for the sin of Fear. The Boar saw him simply as a

monk and welcomed him easily enough, since monks typically were welcome additions to the isolated society of the Lair. Okuso seemed a double blessing for them, since he not had interesting insights into the Tao but also possessed great skill at arms, making him a useful addition to the valley's defenses. Although Okuso spends much of his time debating with the other monks of the Lonely Monastery, he also trains regularly with the young warriors of the Boar, imparting his wisdom and experience.

Of course, the Boar have never heard of the Spider Clan and have not yet noticed anything sinister about this formidable sohei. In truth, Okuso actually feels some respect for the people of the Lair, since they show great strength of body and character, and do not bow easily to any outside force. He is also fascinated by the stories of the Shakoki Dogu and the presence of so many Shadowlands creatures in the vicinity, and believes there might be a source of spiritual power nearby. Okuso therefore is (for the moment) a willing resident of the Lair... but that does not make his true intentions any less sinister. He is slowly inserting the Spider Clan's philosophy in the Boar Clan, using his double position as a monk and a sensei to teach them about strength, power, and victory at any cost rather than honor and Bushido. Okuso dreams of the Boar eventually becoming willing servants of the Spider, a force of elite warriors tempered by the brutality of mountain life. The mere thought makes Okuso shiver with excitement.

### Okuso, Sohei Teacher

| Air: 4 | Earth: 3 | Fire: 3 | Water: 2 | Void: 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Strength: 3 | |

*Honor: 1.7* *Status: 1.0* *Glory: 2.8*

*School/Rank: Order of the Spider Monk 3*

*Skills: Athletics (climbing) 5, Defense 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation (Interrogation) 3, Jiujutsu 6, Lore: Theology 5, Medicine 2, Meditation 3, Polearms 4*

*Advantages: Perceived Honor (2 ranks)*

*Disadvantages: Consumed (Insight – Lore: Theology)*

*Kiho: Earthen Fist, Song of the World, The Great Silence*

## Ronin

Since the Lair has been plagued by bandits for generations, its inhabitants are generally not fond of ronin, who often see the place as a perfect target for their predations. The Boar are merciless towards all criminals, with execution as the only punishment, and any wave-man in the area is automatically suspected of being a bandit. On those rare occasions when a ronin manages to enter the Lair as a 'guest,' he or she faces constant observation, suspicion, insult, and the looming threat of

duels. Of course, most ronin are accustomed to hardship and tend to be tough warriors with no outside allegiances, so those who manage to overcome the Lair's prejudices can often become excellent additions to its society.

## Osho, Unrepentant Killer

Osho has had to prove himself repeatedly in order to survive in the Lair. He was discovered just after having killed one of the bandits who plagued the area, but nonetheless had to explain he was no bandit himself, just an honorable wave man searching for employment in the Crab lands. The Boar kept a close eye on him, but Osho showed himself to be a competent warrior and has never committed any act which would suggest an intention to betray or sabotage the Lair. He keeps mostly to himself, and his only apparent passions seems to be kenjutsu, which he practices obsessively despite his lack of formal schooling. Some among the Boar have begun talking of allowing him to swear fealty to the Heichi Family, but Osho refuses any comment on the matter.

In truth, Osho killed that bandit because he was paid to do so; he has been a hired killer for most of his adult life. He was born the illegitimate son of a geisha and a clan samurai who left him a blade and some money to avoid causing too much scandal. Osho has never held any illusions about the value of life or honor. As a hired sword he was brutal and efficient, accepting any contract as long as the pay was good. It is not that he enjoyed killing – rather, he was simply good at it, and felt no particular concern on what happened to his victims.

This is why he has not betrayed the Boar – to him, this is just another contract, and he sees no reason to beak it. The conditions of the Lair are tolerable compared to a ronin's life, he has food in his bowl every day and a roof over his head every night, so he accepts his fate and dutifully slaughters the enemies of the Boar Clan. However, if a better offer was to present itself, Osho would not hesitate to abandon the Heichi.

### Osho, Unrepentant Killer

| Air: 3 | Earth: 3 | Fire: 3 | Water: 3 | Void: 2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Stamina: 4 | Agility: 4 | | |

*Honor: 3.4* *Status: 0.0* *Glory: 0.2*

*School/Rank: None (Insight Rank 3)*

*Skills: Athletics 4, Commerce 2, Defense 4, Games: Go 2, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 3, Intimidation 2, Investigation 3, Jiujutsu 2, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Lore: Underworld 3, Medicine 1, Sincerity (Deceit) 2, Stealth 1*

*Advantages: Dark Paragon (Strength)*

*Disadvantages: Insensitive, Social Disadvantage (ronin)*

*Kata: Striking as Air, Striking as Fire*

# New Mechanics

## Chapter One: Stone and Blood

## The Crab Clan

### The Hiruma Slayers

While most samurai despise the masakari as little more than a peasant axe, the Hiruma found value in its combination of relatively small size and the ability to deliver powerful cutting blows against Shadowlands beasts. The Slayers specialize in hunting down dangerous Shadowlands creatures, often operating deep within Fu Leng's realm with little to no support. During wars with other clans, however, the Slayers' skills can also come in handy for raiding behind enemy lines.

#### New Alternate Path: Hiruma Slayers [Bushi]

- **Rank**: 4
- **Replaces**: Hiruma Bushi 4 or Hiruma Scout 4
- **Requires**: Heavy Weapons (Masakari) 5

#### Technique: Deny the Horde

The Slayer technique utilizes the masakari to deliver a terrifying barrage of precise and lethal blows on the foe, using it equally well in either hand. You suffer no penalties for using a masakari in your off-hand (although you still suffer normal penalties for wielding two weapons). You may attack as a Simple Action with a masakari. When using a masakari in the Full Attack Stance against any foe, or in the Attack Stance against a Shadowlands creature or a foe you know to be Tainted, you gain an additional +3k0 bonus to your damage rolls.

### Crab Sumai Wrestlers

The Crab have a long and storied tradition of excellence in *sumai*, whose social respectability can grant skilled Crab wrestlers access to courts where they might otherwise never be invited. Promising students are taught at the Grip of Earth Dojo, the principle home to the Crab Clan's sumai fighting technique. When another samurai encounters a Crab bushi utilizing *sumai* techniques, it is almost always a graduate of the Grip of Earth Dojo. Those students who show a knack for the ritual and pageantry of *sumai* as well as its more physical aspects are sent to Stone Tower Dojo in the Imperial Capital.

#### New Alternate Path: Crab Sumai Wrestler [Bushi]

- **Rank**: 2
- **Replaces:** Hida Bushi 2 or Yasuki Courtier 2
- **Requires:** Jiujutsu (Sumai) 4
- **Special:** Enrolling in this Path automatically allows your character to get rid of the Small Disadvantage at no point cost. If you are not Small, you automatically gain Large at no point cost. If you are already Large, you are refunded the point cost of the Advantage.

#### Technique: The Way of Sumai

While most Rokugani treat Sumai wrestling as a sport, the Crab have never forgotten that it originated as a combat art. When rolling to control a Grapple, you gain a +1k0 bonus (+2k0 if you are Large). If you choose to inflict damage in a Grapple (e.g. the "hit" option), you gain a +1k1 bonus to the Damage Roll.

### The Slayers and Crab Berserkers

Some GMs may be concerned over the potential of combining the Slayer Path (Rank 4) with the Crab Berserker Path (Rank 2), resulting in a murderous juggernaut of Hiruma death-dealing power. This is not necessarily out of place for the setting – in the history of Rokugan, the Hiruma "dead eyes" berserkers are notorious as being the deadliest and most potent berserkers in the Crab Clan. However, GMs who wish to try to maintain closer "balance" between the power-levels of different characters in their group may feel that the combination is simply too powerful. In this case, the GM should feel free to prohibit a character from taking both Paths – after all, if a samurai is already notorious as a berserker, the more self-controlled and ruthlessly efficient Slayers may not be interested in teaching him.

## Kaiu Siegemaster

*"We sometimes play a game amongst each other. One Kaiu devises the strongest fortification possible, and the others must figure out its weakness." – Kaiu Watsuki*

The Kaiu are acknowledged throughout the Empire as the foremost practitioners of siege warfare, especially on the defensive. Within their ranks, the elite order known as the Siege Masters holds a position of particular fame ever since they emerged in the fourth century. Siege Masters are known for rendering castles nigh-impregnable and for constructing defenses that break the spirit of opposing armies, even Shadowlands forces.

### New Alternate Path: Kaiu Siegemaster [Bushi]

- **Rank:** 5
- **Replaces:** Kaiu Engineer 5
- **Requirements:** Battle (Mass Battle) 5, Engineering (Siege) 5

#### Technique: The Hammer of Kaiu

During a siege, you may add or subtract your entire School Rank to the total of your rolls on the Mass Battle Table (this replaces the Kaiu Engineering Rank 4 ability to add or subtract half your School Rank). If you are on the defending side in a siege, you gain a +2k0 bonus to any Engineering (Siege) rolls you make to operate siege weaponry, and the Reduction of any structures on your side of the siege is increased by 50%.

# The Crane Clan

## The Daidoji Heavy Regulars

The samurai of the Daidoji Heavy Regular units usually train alongside the Crab for at least a year; they are always equipped with the heaviest armor and wield a combination of spears and heavy weaponry. On the battlefield they are usually employed to blunt or break enemy charges, especially when fighting the Lion or the Unicorn. They are also sometimes used as blocking forces to resist enemy arrow barrages, since their heavy armor makes them more resistant to archery fire. They usually prefer either the tetsubo or the dai tsuchi as their primary armament.

### New Alternate Path: Daidoji Heavy Regulars [Bushi]

- **Rank:** 4
- **Replaces:** Daidoji Iron Warrior 4
- **Requires:** Heavy Weapons 5

#### Technique: Way of the Iron Crane

The Heavy Regulars use their experience serving alongside the Crab on the Kaiu Wall to inform their own training in heavy weapons, enhancing their defensive position against enemy attacks and striking back hard against charging foes. When wielding a heavy weapon in the Attack stance, you may add +1k1 to your attack rolls against any opponent who is in the Attack or Full Attack Stances. When wielding a heavy weapon in the Defense or Full Defense stances, you may add your Heavy Weapons Skill Rank to your Armor TN.

# The Lion Clan

## Akodo Siege Strategist

Founded by Akodo Keiichi, the Akodo Siege Strategists are trained in the art of defeating enemy castles as quickly and efficiently as possible. While they do not possess the sheer flexibility or depth of knowledge of the Kaiu Engineers, the Siege Strategists are nonetheless quite capable in their specific role. The Lion Clan's rapid capture of many enemy castles over the centuries, such as Shiro no Yogin and Kenson Gakka, is largely due to the skillful tactics of the Siege Strategists.

### New Alternate Path: Akodo Siege Strategist [Bushi]

- **Rank**: 4 or 5
- **Replaces**: Akodo Bushi 4 or Akodo Tactical Master 2
- **Requires**: Battle (Mass Battle) 6, Engineering (Siege) 4

#### Technique: Broken by Tactics

The Akodo family's mastery of warfare does extend to sieges, and while their expertise in that domain is not so great as the Kaiu, they have attacked enough castles over the centuries to make it a specific topic of study at the Akodo War College. When you are on the attacking side in a siege, your expertise makes it easier for your side to overcome the castle's defenses. When rolling on the Mass Battle Table under those circumstances, you always receive a Heroic Opportunity, regardless of the normal result. Any structures on the opposing side suffer a 50% penalty to their Reduction, due to your superior understanding of their weaknesses (this penalty is applied after any defending bonuses to their Reduction).

# The Phoenix Clan

## The Shiba Armorsmiths

The love the Shiba have for scholarly pursuits and the arts is an oddity among bushi families in Rokugan, so much so that many other bushi families look upon them with a mixture of confusion and distaste. Many Shiba pursue some manner of artistic endeavor, although they usually prefer those of a scholarly nature, such as poetry or writing. Some, however, embrace both sides of their family's nature and take up the path of the armorsmith, crafting the famous armor of the Phoenix Clan. These are both beautiful artistic creations and instruments of defense for what the Shiba regard as the tragic inevitability of war.

### New Alternate Path: Shiba Armorsmith [Bushi/Artisan]

- **Rank**: 2
- **Replaces**: Shiba Bushi 2
- **Requires**: Craft: Armorsmithing 3, Defense 3

#### Technique: Brilliant Steel

A Shiba armorsmith is adept at the creation of beautiful armor, and consequently is also adept at using armor effectively on the battlefield. You gain a +1k0 bonus when making Craft rolls to create armor. When you are wearing armor and spend a Void Point to increase your Armor TN by 10, you may increase your Armor TN by an additional amount equal to twice your Earth Ring.

# The Unicorn Clan

## Unicorn Bariqu Wrestler

Bariqu wrestling is distinct from the more widespread sumai wrestling, and is largely unknown outside of the Unicorn Clan. Within the Unicorn, its traditions date back to the time of the Ujik-Hai, the gaijin nomads who joined the clan and became the Moto family. Bariqu is focused on throwing the opponent, rather than driving him out of a ring, and makes heavy use of joint-locks and paralyzing holds.

### New Alternate Path: Unicorn Bariqu Wrestler [Bushi]

- **Rank**: 2
- **Replaces**: Any Moto bushi school 2, Shinjo Bushi 2
- **Requirements**: Jiujutsu (Bariqu) 3

#### Technique: Way of the Ujik-Hai

A bariqu wrestler relies on his use of unconventional locks, holds, and maneuvers to defeat his foes, rather than just on raw strength. If your opponent in a Grapple does not have the Bariqu Emphasis of Jiujutsu, you gain a bonus of +1k1 when rolling to control the Grapple. If you have a higher Agility Rank than your opponent in a Grapple, you gain a +2k0 bonus when rolling to control the Grapple. These bonuses stack with each other.

## GM's Toolbox: Siege Specialists and Mass Battle

The L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire* includes some optional rules and suggestions for adapting the Mass Battle rules to siege warfare. One of these options awards a bonus to generals in command of Crab forces when they roll their Battle Skill to determine who is winning a Mass Battle Round. If any Kaiu Engineers are present on their side, these generals are allowed to add unkept dice to their Battle roll equal to half the Engineering Skill Rank of the senior Engineer.

Kaiu Siegemasters are, of course, even more potent additions to a general's staff than normal Kaiu Engineers. If the GM is using this optional rule, the bonus from a Kaiu Siegemaster is equal to his entire Engineering Skill Rank (rather than half his Skill Rank) in unkept dice.

GMs who wish to add further detail to siege warfare may choose to allow Akodo Siege Strategists to apply similar bonuses to the Battle rolls of Lion generals, but only when they are besieging enemy castles, not when they are defending their own castles.

## GM's Toolbox: Grappling Options

The L5R 4th Edition core rules present a fairly simple, basic set of rules for Grappling in combat. Although these rules work well enough, they do tend to limit the options of the participants in a Grapple, and their simplicity means they do contain a few "holes" which can be exploited by the unscrupulous. GMs who are willing to add a bit more complexity to their games may wish to explore the following options for increasing the options in Grappling combat.

**Superior Size/Strength:** Wrestling is a form of combat in which greater mass and/or greater muscle power grants considerable advantage. The GM may opt to represent the advantage of superior strength (a higher Strength Rank) or size (Large character versus normal or Small character, or normal character versus Small character) is in the following ways:

A stronger grappler may perform a Break as a Free Action instead of a Simple Action.

A larger grappler may perform a Throw as a Simple Action.

Alternatively (or in addition), a larger grappler may gain a bonus of +1k1 on his rolls to control the Grapple.

**Stronger/Longer Throws:** In the standard rules, a Grappler who elects to Throw his opponent simply leaves the opponent Prone. However, throws can be very painful to the recipient! The GM may elect to allow a Thrown target to suffer normal unarmed damage. If this is felt to be too powerful (after all, why bother with a mere Hit when you can do the same damage and also leave your opponent Prone?) the GM may impose a penalty to the damage, perhaps -1k0.

A strong character can also potentially throw an opponent farther than five feet. A GM who wishes for a more cinematic approach may allow a Grappler to Throw his opponent a maximum number of feet equal to his Strength x5.

**Stronger Hits:** A skilled wrestler can inflict broken bones, joint dislocations, and similar unpleasantness on his enemies. The GM may opt to allow a Grappler with higher Ranks in the Jiujutsu Skill to inflict additional damage on his less-skilled opponent with the Hit option. For example, perhaps each Rank of superiority in Jiujutsu adds +1k0 to the damage roll.

**Grappling an Armed Foe:** L5R does not have any kind of "attack of opportunity" rule, so characters are free to initiate Grapples with enemies who are holding swords or other deadly weapons. In reality, this would be an extremely hazardous option, since only the most skilled of wrestlers could manage to slip past the enemy's weapon unscathed. To represent this, the GM may rule that if a character initiates a Grapple with an opponent holding a melee weapon, the would-be Grappler must compare his Jiujutsu Skill Rank to the enemy's appropriate Weapon Skill Rank.

If the Jiujutsu Rank is higher, the character may attempt a Grapple without penalty.

If the Weapon Skill Rank is higher, the would-be Grappler automatically suffers a hit (with no Raises) from the weapon as the "price" of attempting his Grapple.

GMs who wish to add more depth to this may choose to require a Contested Roll between the Grappler's Jiujutsu / Agility and the defender's [Weapon Skill] / Reflexes to determine whether the defender gets to inflict damage. Note, however, that this adds another die-roll to the resolution of combat and will thus slow down the action.

## New Kata

### The Power of the Mountain

- **Ring Mastery**: Earth 3
- **Schools**: Hida Bushi, Hiruma Bushi, Matsu Berserker, Ichiro Bushi
- **Effect**: When this Kata is activated, you reduce your Armor TN by an amount up to your Earth Ring; this lasts until you deactivate the Kata. All damage rolls you make while this Kata is in effect have their totals increased by the same amount.

### The Strength of the Mountain

- **Ring Mastery**: Earth 3
- **Schools**: Hida Bushi, Hiruma Scout, Shiba Bushi, Daidoji Iron Warrior
- **Effect**: When this Kata is activated, you reduce your Initiative Score by an amount up to your Earth Ring. (This cannot reduce your Initiative below 0.) This Initiative penalty lasts until you deactivate the Kata. While this Kata is in effect, your Armor TN is increased by the same amount.

### Lee of the Stone

- **Ring Mastery**: Earth 4
- **Schools**: Hida Bushi, Hida Pragmatist, Shiba Bushi, Daidoji Iron Warrior
- **Effect**: While you are in the Defense or Full Defense Stances, your Armor TN is increased by an additional amount equal to your Earth Ring

### Strike as the Avalanche

- **Ring Mastery**: Earth 3
- **Schools**: Hida Bushi, Hiruma Bushi, Ichiro Bushi, Moto Bushi, Moto Vindicator
- **Effect**: When using the Heavy Weapons Skill, your Strength is considered one Rank higher for the purposes of determining damage.

### Weathered and Unbroken

- **Ring Mastery**: Earth 5
- **Schools**: Hida Bushi, Hiruma Bushi, Hiruma Scout, Ichiro Bushi
- **Effect**: Your Water is considered two Ranks lower (to a minimum of 1) for the purpose of movement. All attack rolls made with the Heavy Weapons Skill gain the benefit of one Free Raise which may only be used for the Knockdown Maneuver.

# Chapter Two: Stone and Power

## The Crab Clan

### The Kuni Crystal Masters

In the twelfth century, the Kuni begin focusing more intensely on the power and nature of crystal, partially influenced by the struggle against the Lying Darkness and partly by their interactions with other races who used crystal, such as the Naga and even the Nezumi. The Crystal Masters emerged from this research. They are the creators of the Sapphire Strike spell, and specialize in awakening the spiritual powers of crystal and using those powers to enhance their other magic.

#### New Alternate Path: Kuni Crystal Master [Shugenja]

- **Rank:** 4
- **Replaces:** Kuni Shugenja 4
- **Requirements:** Earth 5, Spellcraft 5, Lore: Elements (Crystal) 5
- **Special:** Must possess a piece of pure crystal. Player must have approval from GM to become a Crystal Master.

#### Technique: Strike of Purity

The Crystal Masters learn how to awaken the spiritual power of crystal and use it to strengthen their spells. When you learn this technique, one piece of crystal which you possess becomes awakened and is then used to empower your spells with the essence of crystal. (If this piece of crystal is lost or destroyed, you cannot use this Technique until you acquire another one – it is the GM's discretion how much time and effort this will require.)

When casting a Fire or Earth spell that inflicts damage (e.g. Jade Strike, Fury of Osano-Wo, etc) you may spend a Void Point to channel the spell through your awakened crystal and infuse the spell with the essence of crystal. This adds one additional Complex Action to the casting time of the spell. The spell does an additional +1k1 damage and is now considered to be Crystal for the purpose of what foes can be damaged by it, whether it can penetrate Invulnerability or Creature Reduction, and so forth.

## The Dragon Clan

### The Tamori Weaponsmiths

The Tamori are an intensely pragmatic family, far more so than most shugenja families, and have a number of ideas that more conservative groups view as almost heretical. In particular their embracing of martial traditions, taking the field not merely in support of the bushi but as actual weapon-wielding combatants, has earned them the ire of many other families. Similarly, their desire to craft their own weapons, which they consider necessary to ensure proper quality, is something many others find distasteful.

The Tamori shugenja who take up the art of practical weaponsmithing (as opposed to the more artistic smiths who work in Water Hammer City) seek to marry the design of the blade with the power of Earth, attuning their weapons to their magic.

### New Alternate Path: Tamori Weaponsmith [Artisan/Shugenja]

- **Rank**: 2
- **Replaces**: Tamori Shugenja 2
- **Requires**: Craft: Weaponsmithing 3, the ability to cast at least one spell that creates a weapon (such as Tetsubo of Earth or Katana of Fire)

#### Technique: Soul of the Stone

A Tamori smith can mingle his spirit with that of stone and steel, creating blades that borrow the very soul of the mountains. When you make a successful Craft Skill Roll to finish creating a Samurai weapon, you may expend all your Void Points to instill within the weapon a number of Free Raises equal to your Earth Ring. These Free Raises may be used on any roll made using the blade. Free Raises which are expended refresh after thirty days.

A Tamori weaponsmith may never have more of these weapons in existence at one time than his Earth Rank.

## The Mantis Clan
## The Fox Clan

### The Children of Chikushudo

Perhaps no family in the Empire is so keenly attuned to the ways of the Realm of Animals as the Kitsune family. Throughout their long history, first as the Fox Clan and later as a family of the Mantis Clan, certain individuals within their ranks appear who are able to slip free of the normal confines of Earth magic and accomplish amazing feats through their pacts with the animal spirits of Chikushudo.

### New Alternate Path: Child of Chikushudo [Shugenja]

- **Rank**: 3
- **Replaces**: Kitsune Shugenja 3
- **Requires**: Hunting 3, Lore: Spirit Realms (Chikushudo) 2

#### Technique: Born of the Earth

A master of earth's intricacies can project his mind into the soil and be born again in the form of an animal. If you are sitting upon the bare earth, you may sacrifice two Earth spell slots and make a Meditation Skill Roll (TN 15). After ten minutes of meditation, you fall into a deep trance and a natural animal erupts forth from the ground before your body. Your mind inhabits and control this animal form until you choose to end the effect, your real body is harmed or disturbed, or the animal form is killed – in any of those circumstances, the animal form crumbles into dirt and your consciousness returns to your real body.

You must choose any one natural animal, either from the Book of the Void in the L5R RPG core rulebook or Chapter One of the sourcebook *Enemies of the Empire*, as the form you adopt. If the animal form has higher physical or mental Trait Ranks than you, you use the animal form's Traits – otherwise, you use your own. You gain any and all abilities of the creature, but cannot speak (and thus cannot cast spells) while in the animal's body.

## The Phoenix Clan

### The Isawa Temple Guardians

Countless temples and holy sites throughout the Emerald Empire have benefited from the protection of the Isawa Temple Guardians over the centuries. Indeed, as a group they are welcome in the lands of virtually every clan and family in Rokugan. Although their expertise is only rarely needed, when it does come into play the results tend to be memorable. There are many tales of a single Temple Guardian turning the tide during an unexpected attack

### New Alternate Path: Isawa Temple Guardians [Shugenja]

- **Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Isawa Shugenja 3, Agasha Shugenja 3
- **Requires:** Earth 4, Lore: Theology 3

#### Technique: Never This Sacred Ground Shall Fall

The Temple Guardians of the Isawa family are well known for the power they bring to bear against all who threaten the holy places of the Empire. When defending a sacred location such as a shrine, temple, or monastery, you gain a Free Raise on all Earth spells. In addition, when defending a sacred location you may spend one Void Point (as a Free Action) when casting any Earth spell that inflicts damage in order to grant it the Jade keyword.

## The Unicorn Clan

### The Iuchi Couriers (The Lords of the Plains)

Although they choose to refer to themselves by the humble appellation of the Iuchi Couriers, the shugenja who belong to this group are jokingly referred to by others within their clan as the Lords of the Plains due to their incredible ability to move at speeds no others can match. Shugenja trained by this group possess the ability to sooth the spirits of the Earth as they ride, creating a path of least resistance for their steed's benefit. This allows their horses to ride for much longer at a time, and with virtually no risk whatsoever of any missteps, even during the longest journeys.

### New Alternate Path: Iuchi Couriers / Lords of the Plains [Shugenja]

- **Rank:** 2
- **Replaces:** Iuchi Shugenja 2
- **Requirements:** Horsemanship 3, Way of the Land Advantage

#### Technique: Beyond the Wind

**You can shape the Earth as you ride, lending speed and endurance to your steed. With a five minute ritual and a successful Meditation Skill Roll (TN 15), you may bless your horse or the horse of another rider. For a number of hours equal to your Earth Ring, the horse will never suffer movement penalties based on terrain, nor will it suffer the effects of fatigue.**

**The maximum number of horses which may benefit from this Technique at the same time is equal to your Earth Ring.**

## New Earth Spells

### Drawing on the Mountain

- **Ring/Mastery:** Earth 5 (Battle, Defense)
- **Range:** 300'
- **Area of Effect:** One target structure (up to a small castle)
- **Duration:** 1 day
- **Raises:** Range (+150' per Raise), Area of Effect (one additional structure for 3 Raises), Duration (+1 day per 3 Raises)

This spell invokes the strength of Earth to strengthen a physical structure against harm. The wood and stone of the target structure – which may be as large as a castle – are infused with the strength of the mountains themselves, allowing it to withstand floods, earthquakes, and the assaults of siege engines.

When using the Siege rules from the L5R 4th edition supplement *The Great Clans*, for the duration of this spell the Wounds and Reduction of the target structure are doubled. When the spell expires, the extra Wounds are lost – if this reduces the structure to zero Wounds, it immediately collapses into ruin.

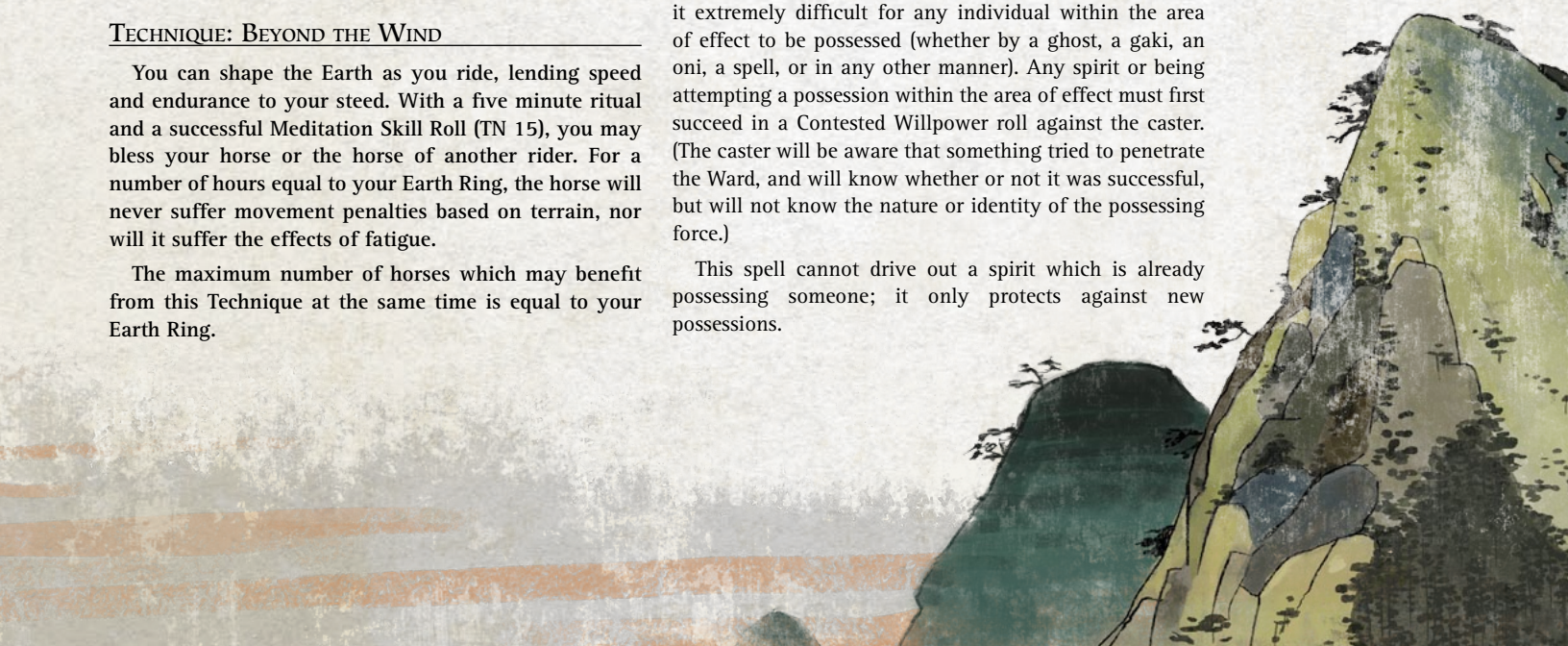
### Earth Dragon's Ward

- **Ring/Mastery:** Earth 4 (Wards, Jade)
- **Range:** Touch
- **Area of Effect:** 20' radius
- **Duration:** 10 minutes
- **Raises:** Duration (+5 minutes per Raise), Special (+1k1 to the caster's Willpower roll per two Raises)

This spell calls on the power of the Dragon of Earth to protect an area against dangerous spirits. It was originally pioneered by the Isawa but was soon embraced by other shugenja families, especially the Yogo and the Kuni. The spell requires a warding symbol be inscribed on a solid surface (the ground, a wall, etc) prior to casting; this takes five minutes. Once successfully cast, the spell wards the area against possessing spirits and effects, making it extremely difficult for any individual within the area of effect to be possessed (whether by a ghost, a gaki, an oni, a spell, or in any other manner). Any spirit or being attempting a possession within the area of effect must first succeed in a Contested Willpower roll against the caster. (The caster will be aware that something tried to penetrate the Ward, and will know whether or not it was successful, but will not know the nature or identity of the possessing force.)

This spell cannot drive out a spirit which is already possessing someone; it only protects against new possessions.





## Grounding Energy

- **Ring/Mastery**: Earth 5 (Defense, Wards)
- **Range**: Centered on Caster
- **Area of Effect**: Caster and all allies within a 20' radius
- **Duration**: 3 Rounds
- **Raises**: Duration (+1 Round per two Raises)

This spell, originally devised by the Yogo, calls on the spirits of Earth to fortify the caster and his companions, allowing them to resist the power of accursed maho spells. Any maho spell that targets the caster or any of the caster's allies within the area of effect has its Spell Casting TN increased by an amount equal to 10x the target's Earth.

## Groves of Stone

- **Ring/Mastery**: Earth 3 (Craft, Defense)
- **Range**: Centered on caster
- **Area of Effect**: Circular barrier 15' in radius
- **Duration**: 10 Rounds
- **Raises**: Area of Effect (+5' radius per two Raises), Duration (+2 Rounds per Raise), Special (+5 TN to climb rocks per Raise)

This spell is a specialized variation of the more common prayer known as Wall of Earth. It entreats the Earth spirits to draw an array of huge stones up from the ground, erupting in an instant through most intervening physical obstacles (such as the floor of a house) to create a circular barrier around the caster. The stones are too strong to break through with anything short of a siege engine (against a siege engine they are considered to have 500 Wounds and Reduction 15), but can be clambered over with a Complex Action and a roll of Athletics / Strength against the caster's Earth x5.

When the spell expires, the stones crumble away to loose earth and dust.

## Jurojin's Curse

- **Ring/Mastery**: Earth 2
- **Range**: 30'
- **Area of Effect**: One target creature
- **Duration**: 1 day
- **Raises**: Range (+10' per Raise), Area of Effect (+1 creature per two Raises), Duration (+1 day per two Raises)

This spell calls on the Earth kami to remove all protection of Jurojin, the Fortune of Health and Longevity, from the target. For the duration of the spell, the target's Earth is considered to be 3 Ranks lower (to a minimum of 1) for the purpose of healing injuries and resisting disease or poison.

## Maw of the Earth

- **Ring/Mastery**: Earth 4 (Battle)
- **Range**: 40'
- **Area of Effect**: Approximately 10' in radius
- **Duration**: Permanent
- **Raises**: Range (+20' per Raise), Special/Damage (extra ten feet of depth and 1k1 of damage per two Raises)

This prayer causes the Earth spirits in the ground to wrench open a large pit roughly 20 feet deep, swallowing up anyone in the vicinity. Anyone at or within 10' of the pit must roll their Reflexes against the caster's Earth or fall into the pit, suffering 3k2 damage. They are also trapped in the pit until they are rescued or can climb out. (Climbing out of the pit is a Complex Action and requires an Athletics / Strength roll at a TN equal to the pit's depth in feet.)

## Murmur of Earth

- **Ring/Mastery**: Earth 3
- **Range**: Touch
- **Area of Effect**: 100 foot radius around caster
- **Duration**: 1 round
- **Raises**: Area of Effect (+50' radius per Raise), Special (+5 to TN per two Raises)

This spell excites and angers the Earth spirits in the ground around the caster, causing them to briefly shake the ground in the manner of an earthquake; however, the spirits refrain from shaking the ground immediately beneath the caster himself. Although this spell does not produce a true earthquake, the brief tremor can still cause damage and alarm. Any persons within the area of effect must roll Agility at TN 20 or be knocked Prone, suffering 1k1 damage and being Dazed for one Round. Furnishing and other such items will be knocked over by the tremor, which may have a variety of effects as the GM chooses (e.g. a table with a lantern falling over might start a fire).

When using the Siege rules from the L5R 4th edition supplement *The Great Clans*, Murmur of Earth will cause 4k2 damage to all structures within its area of effect, ignoring their Reduction.

## Rites of Preservation

- **Ring/Mastery**: Earth 2 (Imperial)
- **Range**: 10'
- **Area of Effect**: One human corpse
- **Duration**: 1 day
- **Raises**: Duration (+1 day per three Raises)

This spell is used to preserve the bodies of the dead until they can be properly disposed of (typically by cremation). It was originally developed to allow Imperial and other high-ranking nobles' bodies to be preserved in dignity until their funerals, since the funeral rites of such major lords are not only lengthy but also tend to draw guests from great distances. The Crab have also found it useful for protecting their dead against the Taint, although the spell is difficult to use on the battlefield.

Rites of Preservation is a ritual spell that requires one hour to cast. When a corpse is blessed with this prayer, the Earth kami are entreated to protect the body against putrefaction and other unclean influences, allowing it to remain pristine and untouched until cremation. This blessing is one of the more important religious duties of shugenja, and despite its association with dead flesh is considered an honorable task.

A body which is blessed by the Rites of Preservation will not putrefy for the duration of the spell. Moreover, because the blessing repels the attentions of the kansen, the corpse is immune to being animated by maho or the Taint until the spell expires.

## Sapphire Strike

- **Ring/Mastery**: Earth 4 (Jade, Crystal, Thunder)
- **Range**: 50'
- **Area of Effect**: One target creature
- **Duration**: Instantaneous
- **Raises**: Range (+20' per Raise), Targets (+1 target per Raise), Damage (+1k1 per Raise)

During the War Against the Darkness, the Kuni family of the Crab came to realize that the forces of the Lying Darkness were uniquely vulnerable to the power of crystal. The Kuni threw themselves into researching the ways of crystal and learning how to call on its power through the medium of the Earth kami. This prayer was the result.

A Sapphire Strike appears much like the far more well-known Jade Strike, but the blast of elemental energy which is unleashed shows a distinctive blue-green tinge, quite different from the bright green color of a Jade Strike, as the Earth kami call on the essence of Lady Sun's tears. The Sapphire Strike has a DR of 4k4, but only against targets who are specifically vulnerable to Jade or Crystal. It is considered to be both Jade and Crystal for the purpose of game effects such as whether it penetrates Invulnerability or Reduction.

## Shelter of the Earth

**Ring/Mastery**: Earth 3 (Craft, Illusion)

**Range**: Touch

**Area of Effect**: One target creature (may be the caster)

**Duration**: 30 minutes

**Raises**: Duration (+10 minutes per Raise)

This spell entreats the Earth kami to hide and conceal the targeted creature. Earth flows up to cover the target with a realistic-looking facsimile of some natural object, such as a tree or a boulder; this shell collapses back into loose earth when the spell expires. The target can hear and breathe normally, but has no other interaction with the world outside of the concealing shell of Earth; if he speaks, moves, or is actually hit by an attack, the spell immediately ends and the concealing shell collapses as above. From outside, however, the false object will seem perfectly normal and will resist physical blows with the same strength it would have if it were real.

When creating the false shell, the Earth kami will try to choose an object that is appropriate for the area (such as a boulder on a mountainside), but they do lack imagination and in any case cannot create the false form of a man-made object – thus, the utility of this spell within a town or a castle is somewhat limited.

## Soldiers of Clay

- **Ring/Mastery**: Earth 6 (Craft, Battle, Jade)
- **Range**: 100'
- **Area of Effect**: N/a
- **Duration**: 1 hour
- **Raises**: Duration (+1/2 hour per Raise), Special (+2 soldiers per Raise)

Most famously used by Isawa Tadaka and Isawa Sezaru in the early twelfth century, this powerful variation of Rise, Earth is found solely in the Phoenix libraries. Thus far the Phoenix have not shared it with any other clan, although they seriously considered doing so during the Kali-Ma Invasion. Depending on specific campaign settings, the GM could also have this spell introduced to the wider Empire in an earlier era.

The spell creates ten human-sized warriors, forming them from earth and stone and animating them with the power of the Earth kami which infuse them. The warriors will move, fight, and otherwise act as the caster commands, obediently and fearlessly. They have Traits and Rings equal to the caster's Earth, attack (with swords made of stone) as though they have Kenjutsu of 4, and have Reduction equal to twice the caster's Earth. Their swords are considered to have the Jade property. When destroyed (or when the spell's duration ends) they collapse into piles of loose earth.

## Stone's Endurance

- **Ring/Mastery**: Earth 1 (Travel)
- **Range**: Self or Touch
- **Area of Effect**: One target creature (may be the caster)
- **Duration**: 6 hours
- **Raises**: Duration (+1 hour per Raise)

This spell calls on the strength of stone to enhance the target creature's physical endurance and toughness. This spell was originally devised by the Unicorn to allow their horses to ride for long periods of time without tiring, but after the Unicorn returned to the Empire other clans also saw value in the spell – particularly the Crab, who found it quite useful for situations where their soldiers had to remain on duty for long periods of time. For the duration of the spell, the target is immune to being Fatigued due to a lack of rest, and is considered to have a Stamina that is one Rank higher for the purpose of any rolls or effects which specifically key on Stamina (such as resisting poisons, determining how long one can avoid drowning, etc).

The spell may be cast multiple times on the same target, but the Earth spirits cannot sustain the effort beyond a total of 24 consecutive hours. Once the spell expires, the target is automatically considered Fatigued until he rests for at least half as long as he was under the spell's effects.

## Strike as Stone

- **Ring/Mastery**: Earth 3 (Battle)
- **Range**: Self or Touch
- **Area of Effect**: One target person (may be the caster)
- **Duration**: 5 minutes
- **Raises**: Duration (+1 minute per Raise)

This spell calls on the spirits of Earth to strengthen the target's hands and forearms, making them as hard as stone. The target's hands cannot be physically harmed for the duration of the spell (allowing him to perform a variety of feats, such as prying open a lock with his fingers), and his unarmed Damage Rating is increased by +2k0.

## Taming the Beast

- **Ring/Mastery**: Earth 2
- **Range**: 50'
- **Area of Effect**: One target natural creature
- **Duration**: 1 hour
- **Raises**: Area of Effect (one additional creature per 2 Raises), Duration (1/2 hour per Raise)

This spell is a secret of the Kitsune family and thus far has never been taught outside of their ranks. It calls on the power of Earth to soothe a wild animal's temperamental spirit, causing it to become temporarily tame. After completing the prayer, the shugenja makes a Contested Earth roll against the target creature (as a Free Action); with a success, the creature ceases all hostile activity for the duration of the spell, and the caster may persuade the creature to obey simple commands by means of the Animal Handling skill (TNs determined by the GM based on the complexity of the command). When the spell's duration expires, the animal returns to its normal behavior – however, in some cases, repeated castings of this spell on the same animal have resulted in its being effectively permanently tamed (GM's discretion).

This spell only works on natural creatures (such as snakes or bears) – it has no effect on spirits, supernatural creatures, or Tainted creatures.

## The Earth Flows

- **Ring/Mastery**: Earth 4 (Battle)
- **Range**: Centered on Caster
- **Area of Effect**: 1 square mile
- **Duration**: 1 hour (or two Mass Battle Rounds)
- **Raises**: Duration (+1/2 hour or one Mass Battle Round per two Raises)

This spell was originally developed by the Kitsu family of the Lion, but quickly spread to other families due to its value to any army on the field of battle. It calls on the

Earth kami to re-arrange the landscape of a battlefield in a manner favorable to his side of the battle. For example, a hillside might shift to allow the caster's side to charge downhill, or a cliff that shields the enemy flank might change into a gentle slope.

The spell awards a +3k2 bonus to any roll made by the commander of the caster's side to determine who is winning a Mass Battle, and a +1k1 bonus to any Mass Battle Table rolls made by individual samurai on the caster's side.

Because this spell invokes the Earth kami on such a large scale, casting it on both sides of the same battle can lead to a violent spiritual backlash – typically triggering a massive earthquake (equivalent to the Rank 5 spell Earthquake).

## Time's Deadly Hand

- **Ring/Mastery:** Earth 3
- **Range:** Touch
- **Area of Effect:** One physical object
- **Duration:** Permanent
- **Raises:** Range (change from Touch to 50' with three Raises)

This spell causes the Earth kami within a physical object to abandon that object, weakening its physical strength. Wood warps and flakes, stone and metal turn weak and brittle, cloth becomes thin and fragile, and so forth. The spell's effects are permanent.

Mechanically, any weapon which is affected by this spell will lose 2k1 from its DR, and any armor will lose 5 from its Armor TN bonus and 3 from its Reduction. A variety of other non-mechanical effects can also take place, subject to the GM's adjudication – for example, a kimono affected by this spell will rip if it is subject to the slightest tension or stress, and a scroll will tear and crumble the moment it is unrolled. Weakened stones or beams could be used to sabotage a bridge, to facilitate breaking into a besieged castle, and so forth.

In general, this spell will not affect awakened items (e.g. nemuranai), since their empowered spirits resist the shugenja's entreaty.

## Whispers of the Land

- **Ring/Mastery:** Earth 2
- **Range:** Centered on Caster
- **Area of Effect:** 50' radius
- **Duration:** 10 minutes
- **Raises:** Area of Effect (+50' radius per Raise), Duration (+5 minutes per Raise), Special (+1 day of tracks per two Raises)

This spell was originally developed by the Kitsune family of the Fox Clan, who used it to help track intruders in the lands of their modest clan. It has since spread to other families who find its properties useful, such as the Yogo and the Kuni. The spell causes the Earth spirits to reveal the tracks of any person who has walked upon them within the last three days. The surface – whether it be stone, earth, or wood – literally pushes up in the shape of the tracks, creating a clear and easily-followed path.

(Note that, unlike revelatory Air spells such as By the Light of the Moon, this spell does not merely reveal actively concealed tracks but also normal unconcealed tracks that are too faint or old to normally be seen. For example, By the Light of the Moon would not reveal the barefoot tracks of a servant who walked across the floor of a dojo, but Whispers of the Land will do so.)

## Wooden Prison

- **Ring/Mastery:** Earth 3 (Defense)
- **Range:** 50'
- **Area of Effect:** One target creature
- **Duration:** 5 Rounds
- **Raises:** Range (+10' per Raise), Duration (+1 Round per Raise), Special (+1k0 to the plants' Strength per Raise)

This spell entreats the Earth kami inhabiting living plants and trees, causing them to make the plants rapidly grow and twine themselves around a designated target. Within seconds the target finds himself ensnared in a dense tangle of vines, creepers, and branches. The target is automatically Entangled at the moment the spell is cast; on his subsequent Turns, the target may attempt to escape as a Simple Action by making a Contested Strength roll against the plants' Strength of 4. (Alternatively, the target can be cut free by allies – it takes two Turns' worth of effort to slash away enough of the plants to free the target.) If the target escapes, or the spell expires, the plants drop away and shrivel up as the Earth kami cease to stimulate them.

This spell can only function in an area where living plants are present, e.g. it will not function inside a building, in a desert, on a barren mountainside, or other such environments. It cannot target a flying creature.

# Chapter Three: Stone and Peace

## The Crab Clan

### Yasuki Extortionist

Some among the Yasuki, mainly in the Crab but also sometimes in the Crane, eschew their family's more conventional mercantile pursuits in favor of the practice of moneylending. Although this is considered an especially disreputable activity for a samurai, it can also be hugely profitable – there are always both commoners and samurai who need additional funds, and the concept of paying interest is so strange to them that they usually do not realize how badly the Yasuki are taking advantage of them.

**New Alternate Path: Yasuki Extortionist [Courtier]**

- **Rank:** 4
- **Replaces:** Yasuki Courtier 4
- **Requirements:** Willpower 4, Commerce 4, Intimidation 5

#### Technique: Do Me a Favor

The Extortionists specialize in rooting out the financial weaknesses of potential customers and then pressuring them into calling on Yasuki assistance. If you have supplied something your target needs, whether money or material goods (this could be achieved through role-play and/or by using the Yasuki Rank 1 and Rank 3 Techniques), you may make a Contested Social Roll of your Intimidation (Control) / Willpower against their Etiquette (Courtesy) / Willpower. With a success, they find the arrangement has left them deeply in debt to you. You may either inflict an Obligation on that person (if the GM judges they have the ability to pay you back) or a Blackmail on them (if the GM judges they cannot pay you back). The default point value of the Disadvantage in either case is 3, but the GM may modify this if circumstances make it appropriate.

### The Severed Hand

The Severed Hand is the term adopted by those Crab warriors who are forced into the courts due to injuries or other physical problems that render them incapable of further military service. Such men and women, usually grizzled veterans, tend to view the courts as a mixture of deadly traps, pointless and puerile ritual, and stultifying boredom; nonetheless, they do their best to represent their clan. Over centuries of trial and error they have developed a Technique to aid them in their duties, and share it with their fellows through personal instruction.

**New Alternate Path: The Severed Hand [Courtier]**

- **Rank:** 4
- **Replaces:** Any Crab bushi 4
- **Special:** Your character must be reassigned to the courts due to a physical inability to continue serving the clan in war, e.g. a debilitating injury (GM's discretion, but obvious examples include Missing Limb and Lame).

#### Strength of Bamboo

The former warriors of the Severed Hand have learned to rely on the indomitable strength of Earth to resist the tricks, temptations, and blandishments of enemy courtiers. When rolling to resist an opponent's Social Skill or Courtier Technique, you may use Willpower as your Trait instead of the Trait normally used.

In cases where this Technique clashes with another (such as the Bayushi Rank 4 Technique), the GM has discretion as to which Technique trumps the other.

## The Mantis Clan

### The Yoritomo Sculptors

Although the Mantis are not known for their artistic traditions, their sailors' penchant for wood-carving on long voyages has developed over time into a modest school within the clan. The clan drew on commercial ties with the Crane or the Phoenix to gain the services of their artistic sensei and develop its casual skills into a true Technique. In modern times, the Mantis use this group as a source of both political favor and personal leverage.

**New Alternate Path: Yoritomo Sculptors [Artisan]**

- **Rank:** 2
- **Replaces:** Any Mantis Bushi or Courtier 2
- **Requires:** Artisan: Sculpture or Craft: Sculpture 4

#### Technique: Watanabe's Legacy

The Yoritomo Sculptors hone their wood-carving skills on ship-board before graduating to actual training in their organization's tiny school. You gain a +1k1 bonus when using the Skills of Artisan: Sculpture and Craft: Sculpture, and you may ignore any circumstantial or environmental penalties (distractions, weather, noise, etc) to your rolls with those two Skills.

### The Yoritomo Emissaries

The Yoritomo as a whole are not known for their patience, but they have found that it is occasionally a useful virtue in the courts. Beginning with the era of White Stag, the Emissaries emerged as the exception to the Mantis Clan's general diplomatic habits. They are well-trained court functionaries, schooled to handle hostile negotiations with calm patience, displaying much greater subtlety than "normal" Yoritomo courtiers.

### New Alternate Path: Yoritomo Emissaries [Courtier]

- **Rank**: 4
- **Replaces**: Yoritomo Courtier 4
- **Requires**: Etiquette (Courtesy) 4

#### Technique: Intrepid Negotiator

Where the standard Yoritomo training focuses on browbeating foes, the Emissary learns to leaven this aggression with the calm patience of the Earth, outlasting opponents' anger and thus finding peaceful solutions to potentially violent confrontations. When making an Etiquette or Sincerity roll, you may spend a Void Point to add your Willpower in unkept dice to the roll. If the roll is specifically using Etiquette (Courtesy), you add your Willpower in kept dice instead.

# The Imperial Families

## The Otomo Bureaucrats

The methods of the Imperial bureaucracy began in the time of Hantei Genji, but came to full flower in the years after the Reign of the Gozoku, when the Otomo family was tasked with obstructing and dividing the Great Clans,

### The Yasuki Extortionists in the Crane Clan

The Extortionists are closely associated with the Yasuki family's history within the Crab Clan, but the practice of moneylending was already being developed in the generations before the Yasuki left the Crane Clan for the Crab – indeed, it was one of the reasons for the break. Moreover, a segment within the Daidoji have also pursued moneylending in order to compete with their Yasuki rivals. In the twelfth century, the temporary merging of the Yasuki back into the Crane during the Four Winds era also spreads the ways of the moneylenders.

GMs who wish to explore this aspect of the Crane-Crab rivalry may opt to allow the Yasuki Extortionist Path for Crane PCs as well, replacing the Doji Courtier Rank 4 Technique (if greater flexibility is desired, it could also potentially replace the Doji Magistrate Rank 4 Technique).

ensuring they would never again be able to subordinate the Emperor. Otomo bureaucrats specialize in delay, obfuscation, and subtle but persistent obstruction, using such indirect and seemingly passive methods to block and foil the goals of the Great Clans.

### New Alternate Path: Otomo Bureaucrat [Courtier]

- **Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Otomo Courtier 3
- **Requires:** Etiquette (Bureaucracy) 5

#### Technique: Imperial Scrutiny

Where a normal Otomo relies on the awesome power of Imperial authority to overawe his rivals, a Bureaucrat relies on the intricate and obscure complexities of the Imperial government to stymie and obstruct his opponents. Any time another samurai is trying to accomplish something in the courts (building an alliance, negotiating a treaty, making a trade deal, requesting favor from the Throne, etc), you may employ the intricacies of the Imperial bureaucracy to delay him. This may take up to several hours to carry out, and is represented mechanically by a Contested Roll of Etiquette (Bureaucracy) / Willpower; if you spend a Void Point on this roll, you gain +2k2 instead of the usual +1k1. If you win the Contested Roll, the samurai cannot make any progress toward his goal for the next two weeks, no matter what he does.

This Technique cannot be used on the same target again until after the two weeks' delay has expired.

# Brotherhood of Shinsei

## Defender of the Brotherhood

Although the Brotherhood of Shinsei generally holds itself apart from the Empire's politics, on some occasions they do send emissaries to the courts to make sure their own concerns – the protection of the common people and of the Brotherhood's shrines and temples – are properly expressed. Over the centuries, those of the Brotherhood with an aptitude for patient diplomacy have devised a Technique which is now taught within several monastic orders. The Defenders of the Brotherhood are most commonly found among the more peaceful and contemplative sects, such as the Temple of Kaimetsu-Uo, but even the sohei of Osano-Wo have occasionally trained their monks in its simple but effective methods.

### New Alternate Path: Defender of the Brotherhood [Monk/Courtier]

- **Rank:** 2
- **Replaces:** Any Brotherhood Monk 2 (may not be a Four Temples monk)
- **Requirements:** Willpower 3, Courtier 3, Etiquette 4

#### Technique: Harmony in Chaos

**The power of Earth grants infinite patience and endurance, strengthening the inherent tranquillity of monastic reserve and thus allowing a Defender to deliver telling remarks within the courts. Any time you spend a Void Point on an Etiquette or Courtier Social Skill roll, you gain a bonus of +Xk1 to the roll (where X is your Willpower) instead of the normal +1k1.**

# Chapter Four: Stone Within

## New School: The Order of the Nameless Gift

An offshoot of the Shrine of the Seven Thunders, this Order believes the fate-altering power of the Seven Thunders resides in all mortal souls. Its teachings are not for the faint of spirit or body, since the monks of the Nameless Gift delve into their secrets through physical rigor and endless trials of endurance. Training in the Order involves a great deal of focus on the physical world and seeing the vastness of the universe reflected in the mundane.

Monks of the Order of the Nameless Gift have a direct and uncomplicated approach to all things mental, physical, and spiritual. Instead of attempting to view the world in a subtle or complex manner, they embrace what is obvious and contend with that instead. This has led many to believe the Order is somewhat simple-minded, and its members do not bother to argue the point. The serenity and enlightenment they gain by keeping their perceptions and expectations simple gives them insight, endurance, and expertise at the most unusual times.

### New School: Order of the Nameless Gift [Monk]

- Devotion: Shintao
- Benefit: +1 Stamina
- Honor: 4.5
- Skills: Athletics, Defense, Jiujutsu, Lore (pick one), Meditation, any two Skills.

#### Technique: Shinsei's Gift

A monk taught by the Order of the Nameless Gift can be an endless well of endurance, patience, and insight. Because they are much more worldly than many other monks in the Brotherhood, their training and experience add to a typical monk's canny mind and strength in combat. You gain a number of Void Points per day equal to your Earth Ring, but these Void Points may only be spent to reduce damage or to raise your Armor TN. These Void Points may not be spent simultaneously with other Void Points or in any other fashion.

## New School: The Temple of Persistence

Devoted to the ideal of unyielding defiance and endurance, the monks of the Temple of Persistence believe the ultimate test is to persevere in the face of adversity, rather than merely accepting it. While they are largely a martial order, they accept any initiates who show an unflagging spirit and willingness to persist in their goals despite overwhelming odds. Training in the Temple tests both body and mind, as the monk is constantly given tasks aimed at finding his limits physically, mentally, and even emotionally.

The Temple is something of a home for monks who are viewed as overly stubborn by the rest of the Brotherhood. Monks of Persistence are not necessarily hot-headed or brash, but they very rarely accept defeat and are extremely difficult to deflect or deter from what they set out to do. While the membership of the Order is small, its monks are often called upon to represent the Brotherhood in situations where tenacity is more important than traditional diplomacy or martial prowess.

### New Basic School: Temple of Persistence [Monk]

- Devotion: Fortunist
- Benefit: +1 Stamina
- Honor: 3.5
- Skills: Athletics, Defense, Jiujutsu (Martial Arts), Lore: Theology, Meditation, any one Bugei skill, any one skill.

#### Technique: Unyielding Spirit

Members of the Order of Persistence are known to be stubborn in both body and soul. They do not simply endure the wrathful assaults of others, but learn to push forward actively toward their goal. You may spend a Void Point as a Free Action to ignore all penalties to an immediately subsequent die roll. If you use this Technique when making either a Contested Roll you did not initiate or an Attack Roll, you may also add +Xk0 to the roll, where X is your Earth Ring.

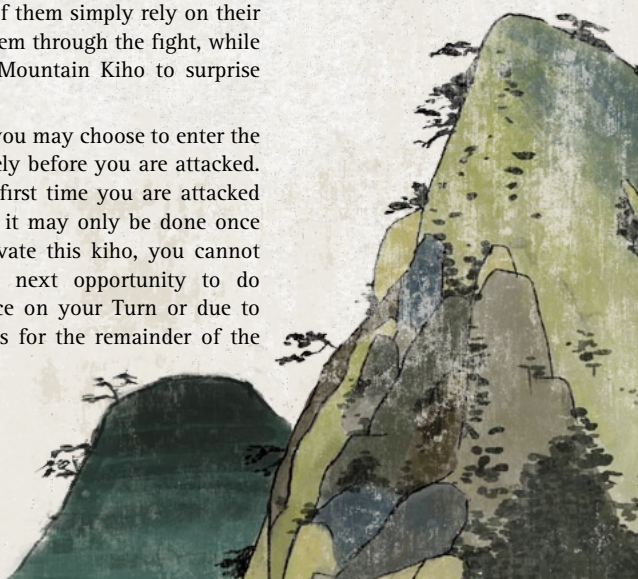
# New Earth Kiho

## Shadowed Mountain

- Ring/Mastery: Earth 6
- Type: Internal

Many sohei orders are considered reckless and wild by outsiders, and to some extent this is true. The Temple of Osano-Wo and the fierce warrior monks of the Spider Clan are brutal fighters who focus far more on offense than on protecting themselves. Many of them simply rely on their physical endurance to carry them through the fight, while others master the Shadowed Mountain Kiho to surprise and confuse their enemies.

When this Kiho is activate, you may choose to enter the Full Defense Stance immediately before you are attacked. This does not have to be the first time you are attacked after activating this Kiho, but it may only be done once per activation. After you activate this kiho, you cannot change Stances during your next opportunity to do so (during your normal chance on your Turn or due to another effect). This Kiho lasts for the remainder of the day or until used.



## Depths of the World

- Ring/Mastery: Earth 4
- Type: Internal

Earth and Water are similar in that they have seemingly endless depths to their power and influence. However, where Water is relentless in its strength and power, the Earth knows no bounds in its purity and focus. This basic Earth Kiho is taught to monks of all aspects of the Brotherhood, as it helps them re-focus and center their chi in stressful or dangerous situations.

When this Kiho is activated, you may immediately roll to recover from a non-permanent Condition or other effect that allows rolls for recovery, such as Dazed. This Kiho can only be activated as a Complex Action, but may be activated (spending the Void point) even when you are not allowed to perform actions, such as when you are Stunned.

## Harmony in Earth

- Ring/Mastery: Earth 6
- Type: Internal

More of a meditative art than many Kiho, Harmony in Earth is often used as a lesson in how to understand purity and harmony in the Realm of Mortals and the Celestial Order. This Kiho is a favorite of orders and sects that delve into the mysteries of the supernatural and mystical lore, though it is also known among several orders that face such threats in battle. By aligning his Earth with the natural world, the Monk gains the ability to perceive with an additional sense.

When this Kiho is activated, you must remain perfectly still for a number of Turns equal to ten minus your Earth Ring. Once this is accomplished, you are immediately able to detect any spiritual and physical impurities within a range of fifty feet times your Earth for one Round. ("Impurity" in this sense is not confined to things such as the Taint, but encompasses anything that the GM judges to be out of place either physically or spiritually.) You learn the direction of the impurity, its general nature (Shadowlands Taint, poison, disease, things not native to Ningen-do), and its relative strength compared to others in the area. The GM may choose to allow you to make an appropriate Lore Skill roll for the subject in question to learn one more piece of useful information of his choice. You will only sense a total number of impurities equal to your Void, detecting the strongest ones first.

This Kiho is not precise in pinpointing the location of the impurity. You will know a general direction but not a specific location.

Intelligent beings who could be detected by this Kiho (such as the Lost) can attempt to defeat the Kiho's power by making a Contested Earth Roll against you. (The GM may substitute a different type of Contested Roll if the specific circumstance seems in his judgment to require it.)

## The Rolling Avalanche

- Ring/Mastery: Earth 5
- Type: Martial (Atemi)

The principles and strengths of Earth usually deal with the Element when it is at rest, but the fury of moving Earth can be a terrible thing. Sohei who focus on a study of Earth find this Kiho extremely useful, as it channels the usually benign Element into devastating power.

This Kiho is delivered via an atemi attack that deals normal unarmed damage. However, if the strike is successful, your damage roll is increased by +Xk0, where X is your Earth Ring.

## Earth Palm

- Ring/Mastery: Earth 6
- Type: Martial (Atemi)

While the Elements of Fire and Water are highly important for the success of a warrior (or an army) in battle, without a proper harmony with Earth, both of them crumble. This rare Kiho assaults the victim's very Earth, disrupting its harmony with the other Elements, and it is not widely taught amongst the Brotherhood. Those who master it are greatly feared in combat, as they can reduce the most stalwart combatant to a helpless, stumbling wreck in just a few strikes.

This Kiho is activated with an atemi strike. If the strike is successful, you must declare whether you are attacking your target's Fire or Water. If you attack the target's Water, he suffers a -4k0 penalty to all damage rolls. If you attack the target's Fire, he is forced thereafter to make two Raises with no benefit on every attack roll. (However, these Raises do not count against the maximum number of Raises the target can make for the roll.)

These effects may be combined through multiple applications of the Kiho, and both last a number of Rounds equal to your Earth Ring, ending on the Reactions stage of the final Round. Each re-application of the Kiho resets the duration for the chosen effect. However, you cannot use this Kiho more than once per Turn.

## Bishamon's Grasp

- Ring/Mastery: Earth 7
- Type: Kharmic

Rokugani history is full of tales about quiet and unassuming monks fending off multiple attackers, all the while never striking them down. The monk instead waits for his many opponents to wear themselves out in the futility of their fury. Patient members of the Brotherhood tend to prefer this style of combat, though it often earns them the undying ire of their humiliated foes. This Kiho is common among monks who understand the need to defend oneself but prefer not to beat someone senseless.

This Kiho can only be activated when you are in the Defense or Full Defense Stance. While the Kiho is active, on your Turn you may make Grappling attack rolls as

Free Actions against opponents who have attacked you since your last Turn. (You may make one such Free Action attack against each qualifying opponent, and this ability overturns the normal rulebook constraint on attacking while in these Stances.) Opponents in a Grapple which you control while using this Kiho may be Thrown as a Free Action rather than a Complex Action; however, if the GM allows Throws in Grapples to cause damage, the damage roll suffers a -1k1 penalty. While this Kiho is active, you may remain in the Defense or Full Defense Stances while maintaining a Grapple.

### Rising Mountain

- Ring/Mastery: Earth 6
- Type: Kharmic

One of the greatest lessons of Earth is not its endurance, but its resilience. As a man chips away at a stone, he finds harder and harder stone beneath. The strength of one who would break a mountain stone by stone will fail long before the strongest layers are even seen. So, too, does a master of this Kiho become more and more difficult to harm as an attacker tries harder and harder to do so.

Once activated, this Kiho lasts a number of Rounds equal to your Insight Rank +1. While this Kiho is active, every time an attacker makes a Raise when attacking or otherwise taking an offensive combat action against you (not including spells), you gain Reduction equal to twice the number of Raises made. (This effect does not trigger from Free Raises.) The Reduction is gained the moment the Raises are declared; the enemy attack does not have to be successful. These increases in Reduction are cumulative, but the total Reduction gained cannot exceed your Earth x 5. The Reduction lasts until the Kiho is deactivated or the skirmish ends, whichever comes first.

### Wholeness In All

- Ring/Mastery: Earth 6
- Type: Kharmic

An extremely rare Kiho only taught among some of the older Orders, this remarkable ability destroys toxin, disease, and other impurities in the body of the Monk. The focus and calm required to master this Kiho is rare, and the Brotherhood knows it could lead to reckless behavior in the wrong hands.

This Kiho can only be activated after two hours of uninterrupted meditation. After the time has passed, you may activate the Kiho as a Complex Action (it can only activate in this manner). You must call a Raise on the activation roll for every mundane poison, disease, or similar non-supernatural effect affecting you. If the roll is successful, your body is purged of a number of such impurities equal to the number of Void Points you have at the time (not counting the Void Point spent to activate the Kiho). All of these remaining Void Points are then spent as part of the Kiho's effect.

This Kiho does not work on most supernatural afflictions, such as the Shadowlands Taint or magical plagues, but the GM has discretion on whether unusual or semi-magical conditions may be cleansed by it.

## New Tattoo: Bear

The bear is a primal being of nature, a force to be reckoned with even at its weakest moments. Those who possess this tattoo can summon that same incredible strength and endurance, although not simultaneously. While this tattoo is active, you may choose to increase your Stamina by an amount equal to your School Rank. Alternatively, you may instead choose to increase your Strength by an amount equal to half your School Rank, rounding up.

# Chapter Five: The World of Earth

## New Supernatural Creatures

### Kodama

Kodama are spirits who inhabit the oldest trees in Rokugan, especially oak or ash trees. Once bound to a tree, their life is tied to it and they will die if the tree perishes. Kodama strengthen their chosen trees, protecting them from pestilence and insects. They pay little attention to human affairs and usually only interact with human who have an unusually strong connection to Earth.

Legend claims that cutting down a kodama's tree will evoke a powerful curse from the dying spirit, unless a seed from the tree is taken and planted elsewhere – in which case the kodama will transfer itself to the new tree.

| Air: 2 | Earth: 3 | Fire: 1 | Water: 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Agility: 2 | |

*Initiative: 2k2* — *Attack: Fist 3k2 (Complex)*

*Damage: Fist 3k2* — *Armor TN: 15*

*Reduction: 3* — *Wounds: 15: +10; 30: Dead*

*Special Abilities:*

- **Kodama's Curse**. A kodama whose tree is destroyed can issue a dying curse against the person responsible. The accursed person receives three Ranks in the Unlucky Disadvantage, lasting a number of months equal to the age (in years) of the tree. The curse can theoretically be lifted by other kodama if the victim finds a way of appeasing them, although there are no known instances of this.
- **Magic Resistance** (two Ranks).
- **Taking Cover**. A kodama can physically hide within its tree as a Simple Action. Once hidden, it cannot be detected or harmed, although killing the tree will of course destroy it. It can emerge from the tree as a Free Action.
- **Spirit**.

### Myobu

Myobu are an unusual form of kitsune spirit who directly serve Inari, the Fortune of Rice. They frequently take human form, appearing as either a beautiful woman or an elderly peasant, while their fox form is uniformly that of a silver fox with up to eight tails, the number of tails depending on the myobu's age and its standing with Inari. Myobu are normally benign spirits, and appear to peasants and samurai alike, offering omens and instructions on how to maximize the harvest and avoid famine. If a particular person has displeased the Fortune, however, the myobu may appear in a wrathful form, offering dire warnings or bestowing curses.

| Air: 2 | Earth: 3 | Fire: 2 | Water: 1 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Awareness: 5 | | | Perception: 4 |

*Initiative: 5k3* — *Attack: Bite 4k2 (Complex)*

*Damage: 2k1* — *Armor TN: 20*

*Wounds: 15: +5; 30: +10; 45: Dead.*

*Special Abilities:*

- **Curse**. A myobu can bestow curses on those who have angered Inari. The exact nature of the curse is chosen by the GM, but will typically be connected to the rice crop in some way.
- **Shapeshifting**. A Myobu may take human form as a Simple Action, and return to its true fox form as a Free Action.
- **Spirit**.
- **Swift 3**.

### Yobuko

Yobuko are spirits who inhabit mountains and mountain passes, typically taking the form of a small boy with a wide face, wearing peasant clothing and a broad-brimmed straw hat. A yobuko has one leg and hops from place to place, the sound of its movement resembling pebbles tumbling down a hill. Yobuko do not know the Rokugani language, but will repeat the words they hear. They view humans in their territory as guests, but become irritated if the mortal overstay their welcome.

| Air: 1 | Earth: 3 | Fire: 2 | Water: 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reflexes: 2 | Stamina: 4 | | Strength: 4 |

*Initiative: 3k2* — *Attack: Fist 4k2 (Complex)*

*Damage: Fist 4k1* — *Armor TN: 15*

*Reduction: 3 (bypassed by crystal)* — *Wounds: 15: +10; 30: Dead*

*Skills: Acting (Mimicry) 3, Athletics (Climbing) 2, Stealth 2*

*Special Abilities:*

- **Earthquake**. A wrathful yobuko may trigger landslides, avalanches, and earthquakes to drive intrusive mortals out of its territory. This requires a

Complex Action and produces a mechanical effect identical to the spell Earthquake (L5R 4th Edition rulebook, page 179).

- **Spirit.**

# New Shadowlands Creatures

## Jinmenju

The entity known as the jinmenju appears to be a tree, superficially similar to a peach tree, which blooms blood-red flowers in the spring, followed by fruit in the summer. However, the fruit takes the shape of human faces, complete with functioning eyes, nose, and mouth. The eyes are red in color, the mouths are filled with razor-sharp teeth, and the faces utter bone-chilling laughter or hideous screams whenever someone approaches. They seem to retain their life even when separated from the tree, falling silent only after the tree itself is dead. Groves of these sinister trees can be found in the Shadowlands, and there are also a few in the darker parts of the Shinomen Forest and the Mori Kuroi, as well as other locations marked by supernatural rumor or Tainted activity (such as the Forest of Dreamers).

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Air: 0 | Earth: 5 | Fire: 1 | Water: 2 |
| Awareness: 4 | | Agility: 2 | Strength: 4 |

*Initiative: 1k1* — *Attack: Bite 4k2 (Simple)*

*Damage: Bite 4k2, plus poison* — *Armor TN: 5*

*Reduction: 15 (10 to jade, 5 to crystal or obsidian)* — *Wounds: 40: +5; 80: +10; 120: Dead*

*Shadowlands Taint Rank: 3.0*

*Special Abilities:*

- **Poison.** Those bitten by the jumenju's sinister fruit-faces suffer the immediate loss of 1 Rank of Stamina. (Thus, multiple bites can quickly become lethal.) The lost Stamina returns at the rate of 1 Rank every 24 hours, unless healed earlier with magic.
- **Screaming Fruit.** The horrible shrieks of the jumenju's fruit-heads inflict a Fear 2 effect on all who hear them. They may also attract other dangerous creatures within hearing, at the GM's discretion.

## Elemental Terrors of Earth

The Greater and Lesser Terrors of Earth can be found anywhere in Rokugan or the Shadowlands. They typically travel in pairs, with the Lesser Terror scouting ahead while the Greater Terror remains hidden. They can be summoned by maho-tsukai, but because the Terrors of Earth obey only the Dark Oracle of Earth, anyone who summons them cannot actually control them.

### Greater Elemental Terror of Earth (Jimen no Oni)

The more powerful of the two Earth Elemental appears as a giant humanoid made of blood-clotted dirt and rock; in pace of eyes it typically has rubies that shine with unholy fire, and its cry sounds like the rumble of a great boulder crashing down a hill. The Jimen no Oni is the least cunning of the Elemental Terrors, but what it lacks in intelligence it makes up for in brute force, crushing its foes one by one.

| Air: 2 | Earth: 8 | Fire: 2 | Water: 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reflexes: 4 | | Agility: 4 | Strength: 6 |

*Initiative: 6k4*
*Attack: Smashing Fist 8k4 (Simple)*
*Damage: Fist 7k3*
*Armor TN: 30*
*Reduction: 8 (halved against crystal or obsidian)*
*Wounds: 30: +5; 60: +10; 90: +15; 120: Dead*
*Shadowlands Taint Rank: 6.0*
*Skills: Defense 4, Hunting 4, Intimidation 4*
*Special Abilities:*

- **Earth Movement:** A Jimen no Oni can move through solid earth and stone at its normal movement speed.
- **Fear 4.**
- **Huge.**
- **Invulnerability.**
- **Magic Resistance:** A Jimen no Oni has three Ranks of Magic Resistance against Earth spells (only).
- **Trembling Earth:** Jimen no Oni's footsteps cause the earth to shake. Anyone within 50' of a Jimen no Oni suffers a penalty of –1k0 to all Skill Rolls and Spell Casting Rolls due to the distraction caused by the shaking ground.

### Lesser Terror of Earth (Toichi no Kansen)

The Toichi no Kansen is the largest of the Lesser Elemental Terrors; it takes the form of a large pile of dirt and stone with stony appendages. Like its greater cousin, the Toichi no Kansen is not known for its intelligence, but possesses great patience and relentless determination when hunting down its foes. It also has a nasty tendency to bury its victims beneath the ground, dooming them to suffocation.

| Air: 1 | Earth: 5 | Fire: 2 | Water: 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reflexes: 3 | | Agility: 3 | Strength: 4 |

*Initiative: 5k2*
*Attack: Fist 6k3 (Simple)*
*Damage: Fist 4k2*
*Armor TN: 25*
*Reduction: 4 ( none against crystal or obsidian)*
*Wounds: 20: +5; 40: +10; 60: +15; 80: Dead*
*Shadowlands Taint Rank: 5.0*
*Skills: Defense 2, Hunting 2, Intimidation 2*
*Special Abilities:*

- **Bury:** After successfully initiating a grapple, a Toichi no Kansen may drag its victim underground, moving at half its movement speed. If the victim is dragged underground, they must dig themselves out or face suffocation.
- **Fear 3**
- **Earth Movement:** A Toichi no Kansen can move through solid earth and stone at the same speed as its normal movement.
- **Huge.**
- **Magic Resistance:** A Toichi no Kansen has one Rank of Magic Resistance against Earth magic.

# Legendary Creatures of Earth

## Daidarabochi

Legends among the peasants of the Dragon lands claim the mountains of the north are home to the daidarabochi, a race of angry giants. They are so large their very footsteps can create holes large enough for a spring, and when they become angry, the rocks they throw create holes large enough for lakes. The daidarabochi have a particularly thick skin that renders them resistant to the cold of higher elevations, and they subsist primarily on mountain animals that stray into their territory; however, they are not above eating the occasional human victim who stumbles across their homes. They fight using whatever implements are nearby, typically their fists or boulders, or uprooted trees on those rare occasions when they venture into lower elevations.

| Air: 2 | Earth: 4 | Fire: 2 | Water: 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reflexes: 3 | Stamina: 7 | Agility: 3 | Strength: 6 |

*Initiative: 4k3*
*Attack: Club 8k3 (Simple)*
*Damage: Club 8k2*
*Armor TN: 20*
*Reduction: 10*
*Wounds: 30: +5; 60: +10; 90: Dead*
*Special Abilities:*

- **Fear 2.**
- **Huge.**

## Hibagon

Rokugani who live near deep forests tell tales of encountering a strange fur-covered creature which stands on its hind legs like a man, but has a snubbed face and wide-set eyes similar to a monkey. Its entire body is covered with brown or black hair except for its hands and feet. These are the hibagon, a race of secretive ape-men. They live among the branches of the trees, constructing crude woven shelters from sticks and leaves. They have a mastery of simple wooden tools and a basic spoken language, but lack any skills for working stone or metal. Though they are fierce in appearance, the hibagon avoid eating meat, surviving on a diet of fruit, nuts, leaves, and bark. They have a natural hatred of Tainted creatures, and will react fiercely to anything that is clearly Tainted, trying to drive it away with barrages of rocks and sticks.

| Air: 2 | Earth: 3 | Fire: 2 | Water: 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reflexes: 4 | | Agility: 3 | Strength: 3 |

*Initiative: 4k4*

*Attack: Club 5k3 (Complex) or Thrown Rock 7k4 (Simple)*

*Damage: Club 5k2 or Rock 3k1*

*Armor TN: 25*

*Wounds: 16: +5; 32: +10; 48: Dead*

*Skills: Athletics (Climbing) 3, Craft (Shelter) 3, Hunting 3, Jiujutsu 2, Staves 2, Stealth 3*

# New Mundane Animals

## Cougar

Cougars (sometimes called "mountain lions") are slender and agile predatory cats which live in the mountainous regions of Rokugan. They are carnivores, willing to eat anything they can catch – including men, as well as large herbivores such as deer or wild horses. They typically catch their prey by stalking and ambushing it, then hiding the corpse in a tree for later consumption. Cougars are solitary by nature, except when the females are raising their young.

| Air: 2 | Earth: 3 | Fire: 1 | Water: 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reflexes: 3 | | Agility: 3 | Strength: 4 |

*Initiative: 4k3*

*Attack: Claw 5k3 (Simple) or Bite 6k3 (Complex)*

*Damage: Claw 4k2 or Bite 4k4*

*Armor TN: 20*

*Reduction: 3*

*Wounds: 12: +5; 24: +10; 36: +15; 48: Dead*

*Special Abilities:*

- **Fear 1.**

## Komodo Dragon

These large predatory lizards can occasionally be found in the Mantis Isles as well as in other tropical islands which the Mantis have visited with their ships. Their bodies are covered with black and tan scales, and their mouths are edged with short serrated teeth. Their blood-red saliva is toxically septic, causing lethal infections in those they bite. Although they appear slow, they can put on bursts of speed, and thus prefer to attack from ambush. Due to their fearsome appearance and nature, komodo dragons have sometimes been mistaken for Shadowlands creatures..

| Air: 1 | Earth: 2 | Fire: 1 | Water: 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reflexes: 3 | Stamina: 3 | Agility: 4 | Perception: 4 |

*Initiative: 4k3*

*Attack: Bite 5k4 (Complex)*

*Damage: Bite 3k2*

*Armor TN: 20*

*Reduction: 4*

*Wounds: 24; +10; 48: Dead*

*Shadowlands Taint Rank: 6.0*

*Skills: Hunting 2, Stealth 2*

*Special Abilities:*

- **Fear 2.**
- **Poison Bite:** A komodo dragon's bite is septic. Anyone bitten must immediately make a Stamina Roll at TN 20 or become infected, losing 1 Rank of Stamina every six hours thereafter. This continues until 24 hours have elapsed, the victim dies, or the infection is magically cured.
- **Swift 2.**
- **Vibration Sense:** A komodo dragon can sense prey up to a half-mile away through the vibrations their footsteps make in the ground.

## Mongoose

A small mammal that inhabits the jungle forests of the Ivory Kingdoms, although it has also occasionally appeared on the Mantis Isles. A mongoose has brown, silver, or black fur covering its slender body, and a long snout with a mouth full of needle-sharp teeth. It eats insects, birds, and frogs, but is also know to hunt snakes – including extremely large and dangerous snakes. The Ivinda, the native people of the Ivory Kingdoms, revere the mongoose for its skill at killing snakes, and refuse to ever hunt it.

| Air: 1 | Earth: 1 | Fire: 1 | Water: 1 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reflexes: 4 | Stamina: 2 | Agility: 4 | Perception: 3 |

*Initiative: 4k4*
*Attack: 6k4 (Simple)*
*Damage: Bite 2k2*
*Armor TN: 25*
*Wounds: 8: +10; 16: Dead*

*Skills: Defense 4, Hunting 3, Stealth 3*

*Special Abilities:*

- **Swift 3.**

## Panda

A rare variety of bear with distinctive black-and-white patches in its thick fur coat. Pandas live primarily in mountainous regions, close to the bamboo forests which are their favorite food. They tend to be solitary creatures and seldom attack others unless provoked. The panda's exotic appearance makes it appealing to Rokugani nobles with a taste for the unusual, and consequently the creatures are sometimes captured and put in display in the gardens of wealthy samurai.

| Air: 1 | Earth: 6 | Fire: 1 | Water: 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reflexes: 2 | | Agility: 2 | Strength: 6 |

*Initiative: 3k2*
*Attack: Claw 3k2 (Simple)*
*Damage: Claw 6k1*
*Armor TN: 15*
*Reduction: 9*
*Wounds: 30: +5; 60: +10; 90: Dead*

*Skills: Athletics (Climbing) 2*

*Special Abilities:*

- **Huge.**

## Rhinoceros

A large horned quadruped that lives primarily in the open plains of the northern Ivory Kingdoms (and the Rokugani Colonies later carved out of those kingdoms). It can weigh up to a ton and has a thick gray hide, similar to that of an elephant. The rhinoceros is an herbivore, subsisting primarily on grass and leaves, but is notoriously ill-tempered and extremely aggressive; its eyesight is poor, but its hearing is acute, allowing it to locate targets easily. Rhinos are extremely fast and able to make sharp turns, much to the surprise of their enemies.

| Air: 1 | Earth: 5 | Fire: 1 | Water: 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reflexes: 3 | | Agility: 3 | Strength: 6 |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Initiative: 4k3* | *Attack: Gore 6k3 (Simple)* |
| *Damage: Gore 7k2* | *Armor TN: 25* |
| *Reduction: 6* | *Wounds: 30: +5; 60: +10; 90: +15; 120: Dead* |

*Skills: Defense 3, Intimidation 2*

*Special Abilities:*

- **Fear 2** (when in Full Attack).
- **Furious Charge:** When a rhinoceros is in Full Attack stance, it may make the Knockdown maneuver, and gains a Free Raise when doing so.
- **Huge.**
- **Swift 2.**
- **Trample:** A rhinoceros facing a Prone opponent can execute a trample attack as a Simple Action, rolling 8k4 to attack and 10k4 damage.

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*"The essence of Earth is the way of stability and resilience. It is oneness with one's inner strength, with the power of the stones themselves."*

- Tao of Shinsei

Earth is the strongest and most resistant of the Elements, the inner strength that turns back illness and corruption, the bodily vigor that lets a warrior continue on in the face of pain and injury. It is the power of the earthquake and the eternal stillness of the land itself. The essence of Earth strengthens a samurai's resolve, imbues his armor, lends weight to his blows. It is the searing purity of jade and the unbending will of the Seven Thunders. It is the least mobile of the Elements, but perhaps also the most powerful.

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ISBN: 978-1-59472-066-6
53999
9 781594 720666
US MSRP $39.99
Printed in the United States AEG 3310