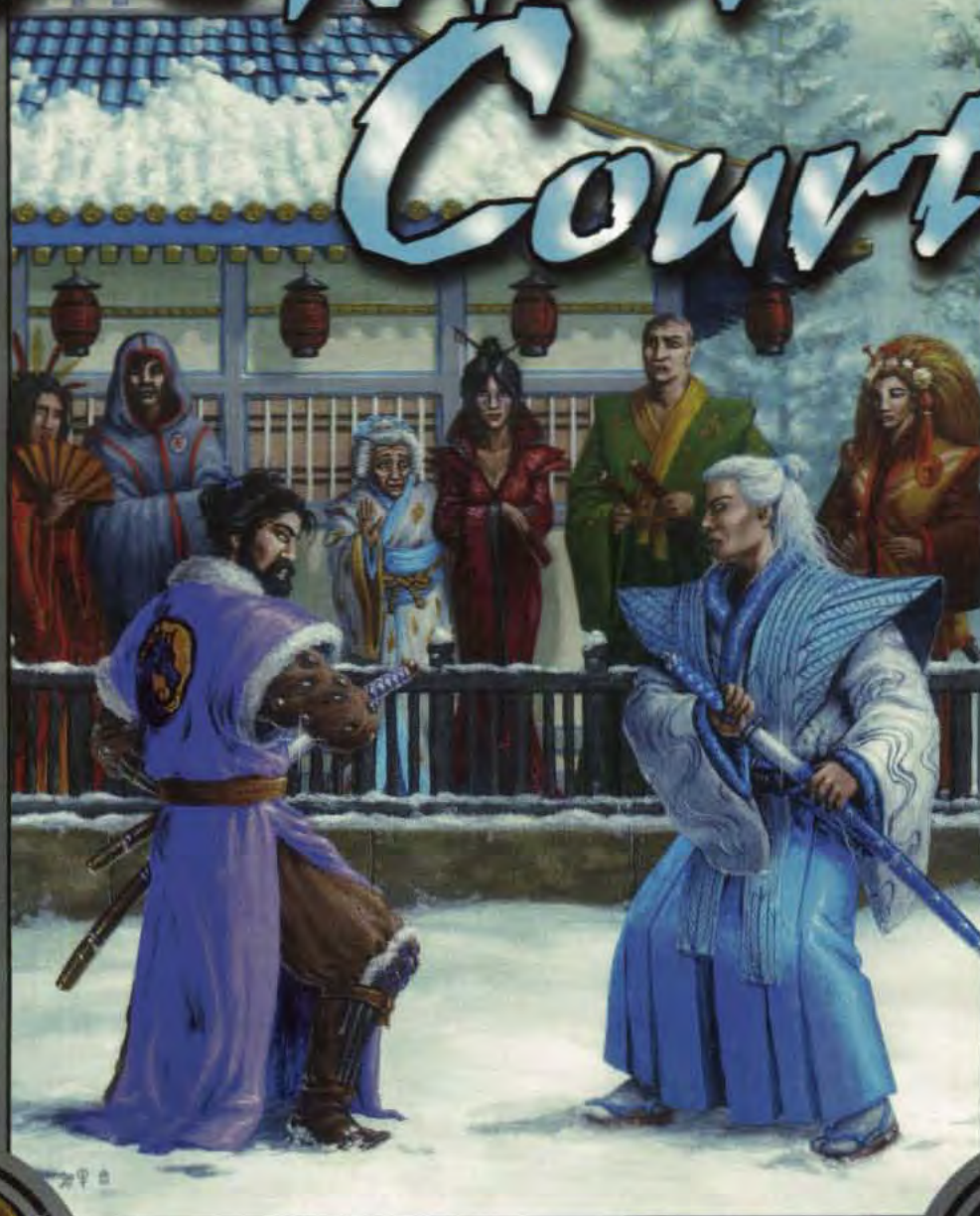




Legend of the Five Rings™

Winter Court™



*Kyuden Seppun, the Twenty-first year
of the reign of Hantei XXXVIII*



Winter Court™

The winter winds bring storms to the lands of Rokugan, covering the Emerald Empire with sleet and ice. A thick blanket of snow prevents travel, and the armies of the land rest their weapons until the gentle rains of spring thaw the Empire.

But winter is not filled with peace and harmony. In the court of the Emperor, the most powerful courtiers, diplomats, bushi and shugenja have gathered, hoping to seize the Emperor's favor for the coming year. Each move is delicately planned, each machination is carefully designed, and the winter snow covers treachery and deceit.

Learn the inner workings of the Empire – from the secrets of the court and its members to the history of the Imperial Hantei and their house. Discover the plans and schemes of the Seven Clans and the schools of the Seppun and Otomo families. Look into the secret past of two of Rokugan's most famous samurai: Bayushi Kachiko and Doji Hoturi.

Winter Court is filled with the history and culture of a thousand years. Etiquette, intrigue and glory await you, as well as a danger as real as any threat of the Shadowlands, and far more subtle. Each year the Emerald Empire changes, as power struggles and preparations for the spring cause upheavals within the Seven Clans. Rokugan's future may depend on the actions of those fortunate enough to gain an invitation to the Emperor's Court. Are you brave enough to change the Empire?



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Legend of the Five Rings

The Winter Court: Kyuden Seppun



*"The destiny of an Empire cannot be ruled by a lesser man than this,
Nor can mighty souls be concerned with mortal matters.
His is the realm of the Sun and Moon, the Celestial Heavens,
Ours, to live below him, and be content."*

- The Lady Seppun



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THANKS TO...

Jim 'Shojo' Pinto, our everlasting energizer-bunny, stayed up half the night writing down ideas, telling me about his campaign, and being an inspiration.

Kevin helped Chapter 4 become *mean*.

Jennifer and Chris helped give the Seppun their cool factor, and were polite enough to look at the horsey-machine (though not quite brave enough to ride it).

Scott took the Miya away from me, and once again proved he's the man.

Cris again showed us that she is an Artistic Goddess. When you see her at Gen-Con, be sure to tell her so. (In those words.)

Rob puts up with me on a daily basis.

Marcelo is just cool, and won't expect to be here. Sorry about the Prince concert, my friend.

Kenny, Kyle & Roby, the 'Anathema Revenge Squad,' for laughing at my ideas until I come up with better ones.

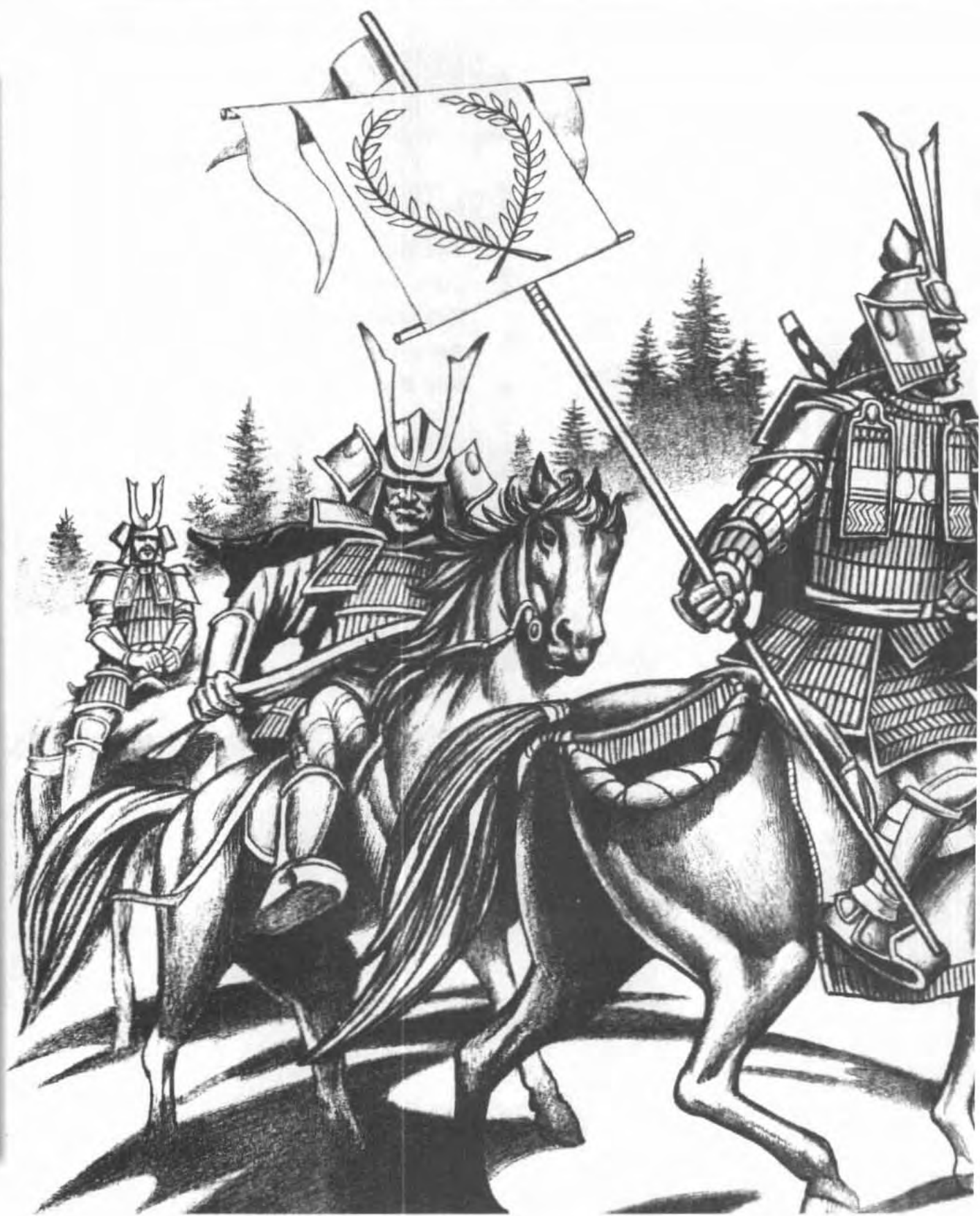
Sonya, Steve & Marshall, for reminding me I have a place to come home to.

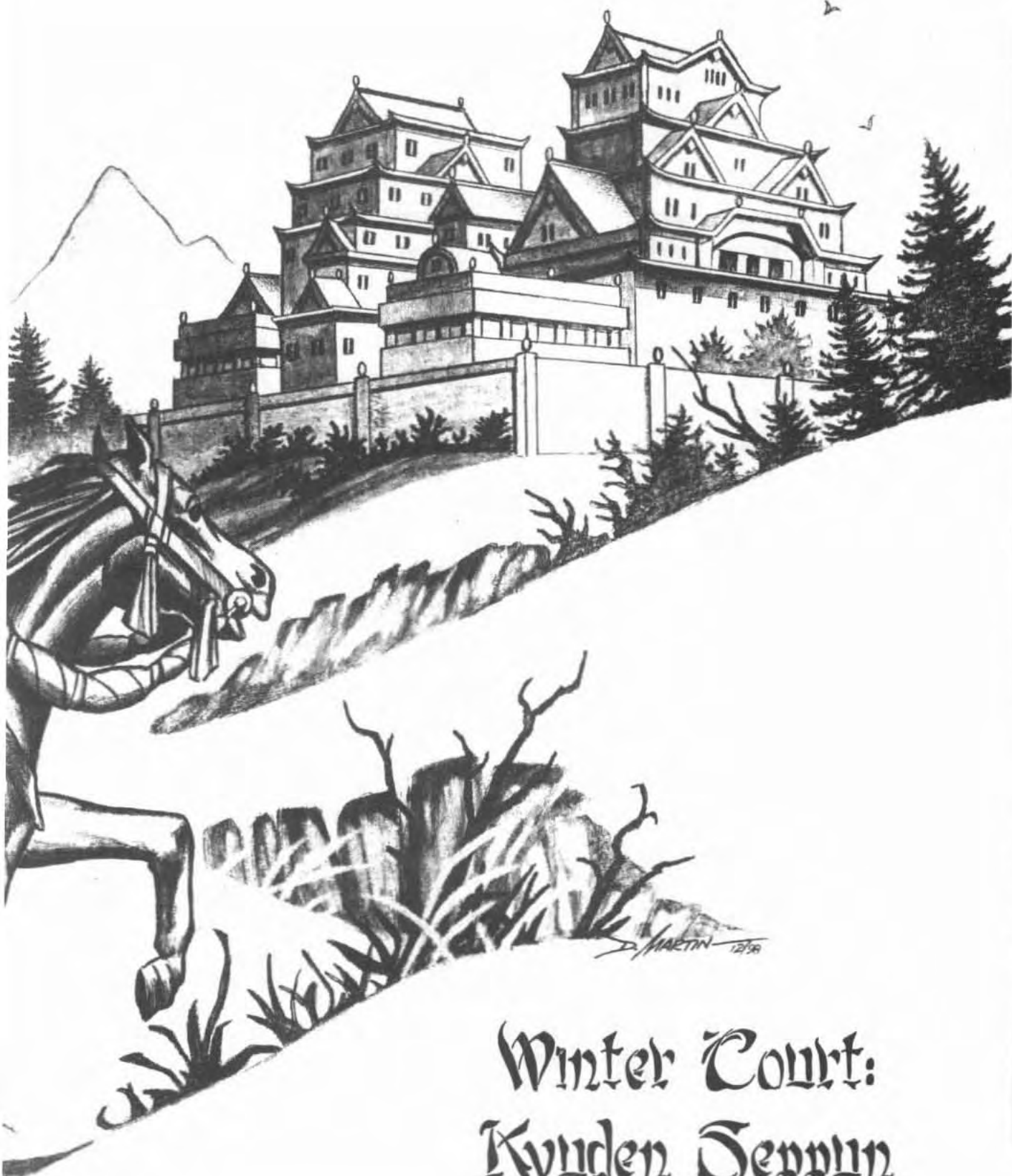
Also, I want to thank Ray Lau, for not teasing me... much.

- Ree

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Winter Court: Kyuden Seppun

Greetings, honored visitor, to the most revered and magnificent province in all the Empire: the Imperial Province of Ootosan Uchi.

For nearly seventy years, the Golden City of the Emperor has been my home, and it is my honor as the Emperor Hantei the Thirty-Eighth's Official Court Advisor to invite you to the grand celebrations which are to be held throughout the cold winter months. Time passes so quickly in our wondrous realm, and the seasons change as events unfold. Let us spend time in the company of others, that we may share in the culture and history of each year, as we celebrate beneath the loving wisdom of the Sun Mother, and the noble lineage of her honorable Youngest Son.

The Emperor has spent many months traveling through his lands, meeting the daimyos and esteemed Champions of each of his loyal houses, and has decided, in his great wisdom and magnificence, to winter within the glorious palace of his noble family: Kyuden Seppun. Located in the Mountains of Regret, just north of the Capital City, the ancestral home of the Seppun has opened its gates to the Court of the Shining Prince, and to you.

The Floating Court of the Heavens, the wonders of the Jade Tear, the Emperor's personal troupe of Kakita Artisans, and the excitements of the Winter's Tournament await you. His Excellence anticipates your arrival personally, and I, his Mistress of Ceremonies, have prepared the palace for your stay.

Let the games of winter begin!



Kakita Ryoku

A Dangerous Game

Part One

The story you are about to hear is ten years past, laced with hearsay and romantic supposition. Certainly, the affair between Hoturi-sama and Kachiko-sama was not well-known, nor has it ever been published in any way. Only now, as war burns across our land once more, can I tell the tale, and only to you, my most trusted friend. I beg you, do not judge these lovers with the eye of honor, lest you forget that every man must fall. Instead, look upon their tale as a simple game, one commanded by, and at the last, destroyed with that most dangerous enemy... our own destiny.

— Doji Shizue

KACHIKO

The winter wind whistled outside, sneaking icy pieces of snow within the cracked window. Glass, a rarity in Rokugan, filled only the windows of the very wealthy – and the Palace of the Emperor was the one place where it was used with indiscriminate taste.

Shosuro Kachiko rested one hand on her smooth cheek, watching the snow drift down outside. Her father, Shosuro Koshurin, gave final instructions to his young guardsman before commanding that the doors to the private chambers of the Shosuro daimyo be closed for the evening.

Silence. The scuttling of her brother in the corner. The weight of her father's eyes. "Kachichan," his gruff voice demanded. "Come here, girl."

Anger arched her spine, but she stood and stepped delicately to her father's side. At seventeen, the daughter of the Shosuro was small, but beautiful. Her thickly lashed eyes rested, dark and heavy, beneath delicately arched brows. Each step accentuated the thin kimono draped over her perfect hips, sliding with the ease of silk along a marble statue. Her mask, delicate lace chosen to reveal and flatter her perfect features, clung to her face with courtier's magic.

"Hai, *Oto-sama*." She murmured the proper fatherly title, her voice a maiden's whisper as she gracefully lowered herself to kneel on the pillow before the Shosuro lord.

For another long moment, her father gazed down at her, his eyes a strange dichotomy of black and blue. As his eyes lifted to his son, Kachiko felt the tension grow. "Hametsu-san," Koshurin called, "Tell me about your sister."

"Father?" Hametsu stumbled suddenly forward, surprised.

Her brother's ineptitude.

"Kachichan." His mismatched eyes returned to rest upon her lowered face. "Tell me what you know of her."

"She... she is headstrong, *Oto-san*. Willful. She does not know a woman's proper place." Her fists tightened imperceptibly against her kimono as Hametsu continued. "For years, she has spoken of duty to the Shosuro, yet when you chose to send her to the Bayushi school, she refused you."

And the old scars of bruises long healed still brushed Kachiko's sleeve.

"...she is... not unattractive. Many of the men in the Imperial Court whisper about her exploits behind midnight doors..." Her father's face grimaced, and he nodded.

Liars.

Hametsu continued. "She is clever, for a woman. Perhaps she inherited some small intelligence from you, *Oto-sama*, for I have seen her turn men against each other. We have all heard of her exploits at Bayushi palace."

The Yogo had been a fool. He had tried to use force to take what she would not give.

His head still hung in Traitor's Grove.

"But, father," Hametsu continued lamely, his voice unsure and halting, "she is... a Shosuro. One of us. I'm sure after her marriage to the Crab...ah, a few years at the Wall will end her arrogance and make her... more useful."

"Yes. The Hiruma." Her father's voice was thoughtful, touched by bitterness.

"Perhaps as a dutiful wife, she will..."

"Enough." Koshurin raised a hand. "Enough, Hametsu. She will never be a dutiful wife. She is not even worthy of the dogs upon the Kaiu Wall."

Kachiko's eyes flashed upward, filled with hate and anger, but before she could open her mouth, she saw her father's fist clench. Shaking with fury, she tightened her hands and looked swiftly away.

"*Oto-sama*?" The boy was still confused.

"You wish her dead, do you not, Hametsu?" Koshurin whispered, reaching out with his fan to lift his daughter's chin. Staring into Kachiko's black eyes, Koshurin nodded, speaking again before his gape-jawed son could manage a whisper. "Yet she still lives. And you, boy, you survive only by my will."

"But... what...?"

So that was how the assassin had been destroyed. Kachiko's lips twisted slightly in frustration, her fingernails biting into her palms.

Koshurin suddenly barked, "Out of my sight, Hametsu!" The young man, startled and appalled, leapt back from his father's



command, bowing sloppily. Fear shone in his brown eyes as he dove for the doorway.

Koshurin stood, pacing to the snowy window and looking down. Beneath the window, servants struggled to assist the last of the Doji courtiers as they stepped from their palanquins onto the ice-covered ground. "My only daughter, and my greatest failure. See how they scurry, there, below us? Cranes. As pathetic as mewling kittens, yet they are given the Emperor's greatest blessings while we are condemned to bear the hatred of an Empire. Every family in Rokugan seeks to destroy us, though we serve a purpose they cannot even conceive.

"Even you, Kachichan. You turned against our family and sent a mercenary to kill your own brother," Koshurin snarled, his blue eye gleaming in the candlelight. *"Your brother is the Shosuro*

heir!" The Shosuro daimyo's cane rapped the floor with a heavy cadence. "I should have you killed for your interference. I should send you to the Crab and let them bury you beneath their Wall!" His voice hissed though the chamber like a striking snake, burying its fangs in her soul. "You should be sent to the Darkness... you are of no use to us."

When she did not wilt beneath his venom, he raised his aged hand to his forehead. "But I cannot. There are other plans in store for you, if you survive the winter. If you can whisper your way out of your chains, girl, you could still prove useful to our clan. Do you hear me?" He turned, and his mismatched eyes shone with the fire of anger. Bitter resentment warred with his famous restraint as he stepped to her side, crouching down to snarl soft, sharp words into her delicate, perfect ear.

"Do you hear me, Kachichan? I'm giving you a chance. One chance only. And if you fail, your pretty belly will be cut open for the crows." Her father's breath was warm in her ear, and her shoulders shook from the effort of restraint. "Hametsu tried to kill you..."

And failed.

"...and you dared to return his treachery in kind. For that, you deserve to die." Her father stood before her again, his cane silent upon the floor. "Shoju-sama, daimyo of the Scorpion Clan, has asked the unthinkable. He wishes you to be his wife." He paused to let the information sink in, watching her face. A faint glimmer of surprise rippled delicately across her features, and he nodded, satisfied.

Inwardly, she smiled. She had known three days before.

"Your wedding to Bayushi Shoju, and the breach of your engagement to Hiruma Maruku,

will be formally announced at the Emperor's court tomorrow. Should you survive the dishonor, you are welcome to marry our daimyo." His voice was filled with scorn and mocking laughter. "Good night, daughter of the clan."

As Koshurin's maid slid the rice-paper door closed behind him, his laughter filled the hallway. Only then did Kachiko notice the thin trickle of blood that stained her kimono, escaping beneath her fingernails from the palms of her clenched hands.

HOTURI

The sky was the color of a dove's wing outside the palace of the Emerald Champion as two young men sparred. Weapons glistening as they wove spirals about their opponent, each strike, thrust and feint was matched equally, and no move could gain the

advantage. At last, with a shout, an aged samurai called the youths to order, watching with veiled pride as they bowed to one another, turned, and sank to their knees before their sensei.

Silently, Toshimoko sighed. His grey hair hung in a thin braid below his collar despite the wispy tendrils blowing in the chill breeze. His students – both sons of Doji Satsume – rested lightly, their breath turning to white mist as they struggled to calm themselves and reflect on the lessons of the combat. The bitter wind which cooled his students' ambition savaged his bones and turned his feet to ice. Stomping slightly, he stood from his stool and looked up at the wintering sky, watching the faint white clouds swallowed by the overwhelming grey.

Blue robes fluttered beneath the banners, and the mon of the Emperor surmounted all. "Hoturi-san," Toshimoko barked, and one of the two men bowed low.

With a loud, "*Hai*, sensei," the student lifted his head from contemplation of his studies.

"You did not do as badly as before. Both your swordsmanship and your chi have improved, though only slightly." Toshimoko's thick black brows knotted, his hands folded behind his back. High praise from their sensei.

"*Domo*, Toshimoko-sama. *Domo*." The young man bowed again, pressing his palms to the ground. As Toshimoko opened his mouth to continue, but was interrupted by a rough voice from the courtyard.

"No, Toshimoko-san," Satsume growled as he stalked toward them. "Do not praise him. His footwork is that of a child, and his sword arm is as weak as a woman's. He has little talent for the blade, for all that he whiles his time away at your Academy." Hoturi looked down as his father approached, moving back to sit in line with his brother.

The sensei bowed, murmuring words of greeting as he silently cursed. The boy had done well, and it was apparent. Only Satsume's stubbornness kept him from seeing the improvements.

"Kuwanan!" Satsume gestured. "Your wrists are still too firm. I do not know what foolishness the Lion teach you, but you are in the Crane lands today, son. You must learn to loosen your grip, so that the sword will move more freely." The younger man bowed and nodded, eager for the lesson. "Do not watch your brother for guidance. Your talent has already

surpassed him, and you will only betray your technique." As Kuwanan murmured thanks, Satsume turned to Toshimoko, the thin scar in his left cheek catching a faint ray of light from the castle.

"Toshimoko-san, I wish to speak with you. Alone."

"*Hai*, sama!" Quickly, the sensei gestured to the young men to continue. With a single bow, they rose to their stances, and began the *kata* again as the two lords stepped toward the castle's outer walls.

Satsume was not a tall man, Toshimoko remarked to himself again. It was easy to forget that the Crane Champion stood barely to his shoulder, for the man's swagger and hard eyes could intimidate the coolest Dragon. In a word, Satsume was commanding. His sons, less so. Although both Kuwanan and Hoturi had inherited their father's clear mind and ability with the



sword, only the younger son had his father's spirit. Where Kuwanan was small and thickly muscled, Hoturi was thin and willowy. Kuwanan's eyes were dark where Hoturi's shone a bright grey, and although both inherited their father's deep voice and rich laughter, only Kuwanan had the ability to make his father proud.

"Toshimoko-san," Satsume began, "The Emperor has called the Crane to go to his Winter's Court. He has told me that my duty is in the court of the Asako, who are preparing for war. Yet, I must send a daimyo to attend the Emperor's wishes."

"Yes, Master. There are many young lords who are prepared to serve. Your son..."

"*Lie*." No.

The rebuff was so sudden, so abrupt, that Toshimoko paused before he began again. "Hoturi is the Lord of the Doji in your absence. Surely he is capable..."

"*Lie*. I will not have my idiot son cavorting with samurai-ko for three months and shaming our clan. His appetites are well-known in the Emperor's court."

"And mine are not?" Toshimoko's eyes glinted with amusement. "There are many pleasures of the Imperial Court to hold a man's attention, Satsume-sama. Do you feel I have served the Crane any less well for them? Very well, then, I choose Asahina Dorai."

Satsume stared at his councilor with a wry grimace. "Dorai is fourteen years old, and already a fool."

"Better a fool than a man who will enjoy himself... and bring the clan honor."

"Toshimoko-san, why have I not ordered you to the monastery?" Satsume growled good-naturedly.

"Because they would not have me, even if you did."

"You would probably turn even the Shrine of Uikku into a geisha house." The Champion of the Crane ran a thick-fingered hand through his thinning white hair. "He can be trusted?"

"I will go with him, and bear his honor personally." Satsume snorted, but Toshimoko feigned innocence. "You have my word."

Suddenly cornered, Satsume's eyes darkened. To refuse now would be to insult the word of his most trusted sensei... and friend. Annoyed at being trapped, he nodded briskly, turning on his heel and marching back to the boys. His irritation showed in his walk as he approached them, barking orders about their footwork, their breathing, and their distance. After a moment, Satsume grabbed the boken from his younger son.

"No, Kuwanan! Never take your eyes from your enemy. If you do, you will be no more than meat on a Scorpion's sword. Here, let me show you the proper way to kill." Satsume lowered the boken into a fighting stance, facing Hoturi with a bitter grimace as his pale scar twisted his mouth into an obscene half-grin.

Kuwanan fell to his knees a distance away as Toshimoko watched worriedly. Without a thought, Hoturi dropped into a *shite* stance, ready to defend against this new opponent.

A flurry of blows struck like lightning on Hoturi's rapidly raised defense. Hoturi fell back, outmatched and winded, as the

more experienced samurai drove him to retreat. "Fight, boy," Satsume yelled, his boken ringing with the ferocity of the battle. "Fight, and prove to me that you are a true son of your mother's blood!"

With each desperate block, the young lord of the Doji found himself outmaneuvered, his father's speed and efficiency cutting off every attempt to retaliate. At last, Satsume shoved his boot between his son's legs, pushing against his wooden sword and shoving the young man to the ground. As he pulled away, Satsume drew the sword forward, a firm, final blow to his son's shocked face. A trickle of blood trailed from Hoturi's split cheek, marring the perfection of his pale skin. Kuwanan leapt to his feet beside their sensei, concern for his brother covering his blunt features.

With an oath, Satsume threw the bloodied boken to the ground, panting only slightly as he glared down at his eldest son. Before Hoturi could regain his feet, Satsume turned away bitterly. "Take him to the Emperor's court and let him waste his life with indulgence. He is useless and weak, and not even the Sun herself will save us from our enemies when I am gone. May the Fortunes take pity on our clan."

"Satsume..." Toshimoko began, but the Crane Lord's obsidian stare killed his words before they were born.

"He will *never* prove himself worthy. Not to me."



The Winter Court

Welcome to the winter court of Kyuden Seppun! This is the first in our series of supplements detailing each year's events, as well as providing information about Rokugan's civilization, customs, and the Grand Imperial House of the Hantei. It is designed to give Game Masters a vision of what is occurring within the Empire within the L5R RPG, and what events are likely to occur within the next year. While we will be giving material on the storyline as it evolves throughout the RPG, we do not intend for this book to be the final word on what can and will occur in your Emerald Empire. Certainly, if your Game Master prefers that some events do not happen, or that the Clans interact differently than we describe, you should always defer to the opinions of your GM for the purposes of their campaign.

When the snow and temperature fall in Rokugan, all activity comes to a halt. The marketplaces close, the farmers huddle in their homes and the riverboats stay tied up until the spring comes to thaw the waters. When winter arrives, Rokugan is truly at peace.

Winter also indicates the beginning of Rokugan's social season. The marketplaces may be closed, but the courts of the noble families open wide with warm arms of hospitality. At its heart, the winter court is a strange, contradictory environment. It is a time for nobility to be loud and colorful as they perform public duties, give awards of Glory and introduce new members of their family who have just been awarded their *gempukku* ceremony. It is also an opportunity for poets to read new haiku, for actors to perform new plays and for bushi to display their martial skills. On the other hand, it is also a time for the nobility to meet with distant relatives, allies and enemies and further their shrewd political machinations, and for lovers to practice the subtle art of Rokugani romance.

In short, a winter court is a great setting for adventure. Sure, it's not wandering through the Shadowlands in search of Oni, but it can be a great source of intrigue and danger, where samurai wage an entirely different kind of battle, using different skills and talents to win Glory and the favor of Rokugan's elite.

The *Winter Court* sourcebook will be a continuing series, one per year, providing background material, information and ideas about how to run adventures in a court setting that are appropriate for all characters, campaigns, and levels of game play. As the Court of the Emperor changes from year to year, so the *Winter Court* series will chronicle these changes in the Empire, and the people responsible for Rokugan's web-like intrigue. The Court can prove to be as deadly a place as the Shadowlands – though the threats are far subtler. Inside, you will find excerpts from the journal of Kakita Ryoku, the Emperor's Oba-san (Aunt) and trusted advisor, describing events and important people within the Imperial Court. We hope that these will help you create a fully detailed environment for roleplaying. The book is divided into sections, detailing each aspect of the court, from the moment your characters arrive to when it's time to go home.

The first chapter, Morning, gives you history, background and the perspective of the Empire from the relatively 'safe' confines of the Imperial court, introducing the Families of the Hantei: the Seppun, Otomo, and Miya. There are views of Rokugan, including a history of the Emperor's own family, and some unorthodox insights and revelations about the Seven Great Clans and their junior partners, the Minor Clans.

The second chapter, Afternoon, explains everything you'll need to know to survive Rokugan's most subtle battlefield. You'll learn etiquette and courtesy, and we'll give you the grand tour of Lady Kakita Ryoku's famous Winter Court. This chapter also details all the events that occur while Lady Sun is in the sky. You'll ride with samurai on a hunt, display your skill in a tournament, read poetry, watch plays and eat fine food.

The title of the third chapter is Night; in it you will find portions of the dangerous world of Rokugani romance – both courtly and otherwise. Marriage, from the contractual agreement to the actual ceremony, is covered in depth. You'll also find information on the retirement ceremony, the only formal ceremony to take place out of sight of Lady Sun. You'll hear the stories of the recent past – a recap of the events occurring in the Rokugan in the past year – and a hint of things to come. Also, we've included insights into changes occurring in the Empire – to provinces, clans, and individual characters in the RPG. As the world grows and evolves, the *Winter Court* series will track its changes, so that your GM can integrate as many of these subplots as they desire.

Lastly, in the Epilogue, you will find maps of Kyuden Seppun, the location of this year's Winter Court. There are new character options, the Otomo *Seiyaku* and the Imperial Guard, plus all the rules you'll need to make your own unique Imperial characters, including skills, advantages and disadvantages, and a few ancestors of the Imperial Line. Also, you gain some unique insights into many of the people of the court, both old and new, and discover their games of intrigue and power.

Otosan Uchi, the Empire's capitol, is too massive to be covered in this supplement, but you can expect more information in the forthcoming campaign setting for the Imperial City. While this book is not the final word on the Hantei and their family, we intend to present a detailed version of the Emperor and his court which can be integrated into any existing campaign. Remember that your Game Master may decide to create a different version of the Emperor's Court for their Emerald Empire, and you may be surprised by what you find there.

There are those who see the House of Hantei as no more than distant rulers, watching over a land truly governed by the feuds of seven ancient and powerful clans. However, the Hantei hold the ultimate power: the lineage of the Sun's most favored Child, and the strength of her granted wisdom and guidance. In Rokugan, the Divine Right of the Imperial line is more than a tradition: it is a proven fact. With respect and awesome political power, the Emperor's line holds the Emerald Empire beneath a firm fist, keeping peace in the land and encouraging growth and prosperity. Their image as passive is well-earned, for rarely does a member of the Emperor's personal entourage venture into the conflicts of the Seven Clans. However, when necessary, the Hantei, Seppun, Miya and Otomo are prepared to take active roles in the events which define their land. After all, at its deepest heart, Rokugan is the Empire of the Children of the Sun.

So get your best kimono on, bring something to perform and don't forget your invitation. We're on our way to Lady Ryoko's, and you're going to need every ounce of your skill, cunning and wits if you're going to win the attentions (and favors) of the courtiers. In the Court of the Shining Prince, no one is ever alone for long.



Chapter One: The Dawn

My friend,

I'm so glad to see you've arrived in the Emperor's court! Of course, the festivities will begin early in the day, as soon as the servants have brought in the morning's food. With each dawn, the Emperor's court is filled with beauty and harmony - the finest fruits of our Empire.

Of course, the most important thing about the Winter Court is the Emperor! You say you've never been in the presence of the Shining Prince before? Oh, my, I hope you've practiced your finest greetings. Not that he will speak to us, of course, not in public. Nevertheless, it is important that you know what to do if he were to do so. The history of the Imperial House of Rokugan is glorious, and you will need to know it if you are to spend the winter with his courtiers. The Otomo, the Seppun, and the Hantei themselves... there are so many stories to tell, so many whispers to hear.

Oh, and while you're here, you may wish to brush up on your knowledge of noble culture and behavior. Etiquette is critical for a bold young samurai such as yourself, and the Seppun prefer their guests to have a certain degree of culture.

I'm so happy to see that you have come. The Winter Court is filled with guests and prepared for the festivities to begin! The Emperor himself has insisted that the stories of the Hantei be told, to remind the people of their glorious history, and the noble maidens of the Scorpion and Crane await us just inside the doors.

But remember, young one, to walk carefully. The ground may be covered with flowers, but serpents can hide beneath beauty.

Kakita Ryoku



A Dangerous Game

Part Two

The Kuni had been a fool.

Everyone in the Winter Court was whispering about it – the life of the daimyo of the Shosuro, saved by the first son of the Crane daimyo. Really, it was too much to ask, that such a thing could occur. And to see it happen, in front of the entire assemblage of courtiers, well, that had been a singular event.

He had deserved his death. Any man foolish enough to stand between a Scorpion and their destiny can only receive a bitter end. It should be a lesson to those who would try.

In the wings of the Imperial Palace at Otosan Uchi, the courtiers were buzzing like the bees of spring, desperately searching for some reason, some blackmail or skillful political pressure that had been applied to the Crane. Why on earth would he have done such a thing?

Kachiko blessed the easy outrage of the Crab. Without a single push, he had risen to his feet, screaming about her dishonor, and shouting the most outlandish stories. Under such circumstance, how could the 'noble' Crane refuse her?

The Crab are outraged. There may be war.

"Let war come," Kachiko smiled to herself. "And I, as the Lady of the Scorpion Clan, I will be ready for it."

"Meet me in the garden," she had whispered.

Easy enough, for the daimyo of the Doji family. He could go anywhere, see anyone he wished within the palace of the Emperor – his Uncle. A cheerful smile touched Hoturi's face as he strode toward his chambers.

It had been a simple thing, the duel. Once Hoturi had been told that the Shosuro maiden was breaching her engagement, the rest fell into place. One stroke, one dead Crab, and the Scorpion now owed the Crane the life of their daughter. Hoturi had known the night before, and had been careful to find the ideal location – not too close, and not too far away. Before the court, Kakita Yoshi had been quietly sent to speak to the Hiruma boy, raising his anger with talk of the Scorpion maiden's unfaithfulness, and to spread rumors of a baby already in her womb. An accusation, a duel, had been inevitable.

When it came, Hoturi was there to collect the spoils.

The politicians will argue about it for days. He paused near a sliding paper door, to look in at the giggling maids inside, rolling the blankets for the day.

"I will have her."

The maids looked up, shocked, and Hoturi realized he had spoken aloud. As the giggling girls touched their foreheads to the floor, he smiled again, bowed slightly, and continued on.

Let them say that the Scorpions are masters of manipulation. I have used their compassion as easily as if they were no more than the youngest maiden of the Isawa. I saw the Lady's eyes, and I already know her heart. Hoturi paused to allow the guards at the door to slide back the thin paper frame. *I know how a woman's mind works...*

In the garden, three Scorpions – all maidens – looked up from their whispers. As he approached, the daughter of the Shosuro daimyo bowed slightly, and her maids did the same, hiding quick, blushing smiles behind their lace masks.

...and I will have her.

"My Lady," He bowed with practiced ease, and a faint smile touched her features. With the maids a discreet distance behind, they walked toward the water's edge.

"Your arm, my Lord Hoturi," she murmured, "Is it well?" *He is beautiful, but there is no more intelligence to him than a used rag, she thought. He is worse than my brother, who inherits his position through birth, and wastes the strength of the clan on uselessness.*

"Of course, Shosuro-san." His hand ached to touch the silk of her kimono, but he moved away. *She will fall into my grasp like a stone. These women are all the same.* His mind wandered ahead to the attractions of the evening, but he continued their polite conversation. *She is a magnificent creature, but beneath the polite conversation, she is nothing but a wife to some poor man – a harriidan, a remorseless schemer with no idea of true ambition or power. At the end of things, she will have been meaningless.*

As the hour passed, the maids watched the expressions of the two. Though little seemed to pass between them, it was a masterpiece of move and countermove, their eyes shifting like animals in cages of glass. Between them, something stirred. Some strange destiny, a thousand years in the making, twisted their lives to this point and the stars stood, breathless, to watch the game unfold.

"I am sorry that the Crab caused you such pain, Shosuro-san," Hoturi spoke quietly, unwilling to disturb her beauty.

She sighed carefully, raising her fan with her dyed cotton glove. "My lord, you should not have concerned yourself."

"While others lament what they should have done, the wise man prepares for what he should do next," Hoturi stepped to her side, pushing one of the branches of the pine trees aside so the snow would not fall upon her sleeve.

Kachiko smiled. "Shinsei's Tao, Doji-sama?" She should not have been surprised, of course, she thought. All noblemen are taught to quote a few verses, here and there. Her brother had been carefully schooled in the Tao, quoting his recitations for hours on end with no sign of comprehension. Of course, the son of the Crane would know his share.

"My sister, Shizue, reads it to me when I practice *kata* at the Academy."

Kachiko looked up, surprised. "Your sister? I had thought such tasks were 'beyond' the minds of noblewomen."

Hoturi laughed. "My sister is unusual. Besides, why should women be refused anything?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Those who say that woman are not 'suited' to learning are unaware of their abilities. I have met many Isawa and Shiba maidens," Hoturi's lips curled in a faint grin at the thought, "who are well-versed in such things, and that does not make them any less desirable as wives."

Kachiko paused. Once, she had approached the sacred book, but Hametsu's tutor had blackened her hand for it. Suddenly, this arrogant Crane had caught her interest.

"At the house of my father, such things would not be tolerated, of course," Hoturi continued, "But I see no reason that she cannot aid me in my studies..."

"And of course, she is only reading the book for you, not for her own benefit." She smiled, and was surprised at the touch of true amusement in her motion.

"Of course."

Two courtiers passed in the snow, whispering behind raised fans. One man, too fat for his elaborate kimono, seemed too calm, too sure of himself. The other had a face the red of the sunset, blustering and waving his arm in an exaggerated motion.

Kachiko raised her chin, amused at their ineptitude, and caught the same smile reflected in Hoturi's eyes. *He knows the game.*

"Those two men," Hoturi began, turning away. "One is the Unicorn ambassador, Ide Itagi. He has every intent of bringing home a rich wife so that his house will prosper."

"Too bad Itagi is a self-absorbed, *gaijin*-smelling boor." She smiled delightedly, again amused that he would share these thoughts with her.

Hoturi chuckled, surprised that she knew so much. *Perhaps she is not the weak-willed haridan I had thought.* "The other," he pointed at the calm-looking courtier, "is Akodo Matsigoshi, a man with thirteen daughters, each uglier than the next. He plans to arrange the marriage with Itagi without allowing the groom to see the bride before their wedding day."

"Perfectly suited," Kachiko turned away, "Save for the fact that Matsigoshi's eldest daughter has planned to run away with a Matsu samurai this spring, despite her father's wishes."

At this, Hoturi raised an interested eyebrow. "Ladies' talk, Shosuro-san?"

She looked up into his eyes, a touch of frank anger kindled in her gaze. "Do you believe that women have no skill in such matters?" His comment reminded Kachiko of her father's disparaging remarks about the ladies of the court.

Amused, the Crane tilted his head to the side, appraising her beauty and poise. "No madam. I only imply that politics are not usually the province of women."

"You underestimate us," she snapped irritably, a touch of emotion sneaking beneath her mask.

"No, lady, I overestimate myself." She raised her eyes at his disparaging comment, and then laughed.

"Do you enjoy *go*, Shosuro-san?" Hoturi smiled.

"Of course, Doji-sama." Her eyes lowered. "I have learned much of it from watching my brother." It was not the answer Hoturi had expected. A woman, skilled in the game of battle and strategy? Unusual.

"Do you play often, my Lord?" She moved toward a large stone board hidden beneath a lowered branch near a frozen stream.

"No." A pause. "I once did, but that was long ago." Images of his mother laughing on the beaches of Doji castle flooded his mind, and he turned his face to the sun.

Melodramatic fool. Kachiko forced a seductive curve to her lips as her hand brushed icicles from a nearby pine bough. "Do you think I would be challenge enough for you, Doji-sama?" A step closer, and the snow hushed around her feet.

Hoturi looked into her eyes, surprised by the intelligence there. "Yes, my lady Shosuro-san," he smiled charmingly, and Kachiko felt her own smile turn genuine.

She was amazed at the tone in his voice, as if he truly understood the game she offered. Looking up at the tall, pale-haired Crane lord, she recognized not only a skilled opponent, but one who understood the game as well as she, and knew the price of failure... and the sweet taste of victory.

"So, Shosuro-san, shall we play?" Hoturi reached into the cups on the table, and brushed a faint drift of snow from the marble board. Hidden beneath the limb of the pine, only the faint whispers of Kachiko's maids penetrated the gentle stillness.

White and black. Two stones lay in his hand, cupped in his palm. Kachiko reached for them, her gloved fingertips brushing against their cold surface without picking up either. Their eyes met for a moment, and she murmured, "Of course, I shall be white." White, the color of the board's owner, the master of the territory on which the game would be played.

"Are you so sure, Shosuro-san?" His hand closed, nearly trapping her fingers. "I think, perhaps, that your color is black. After all, your skills at the game are not so great as my own." His voice held a challenge that could not be denied.

"Do you believe that to be so?" She whispered, moving closer to him.

Her perfume was intoxicating – but no more so than hundreds of others. Her beauty dazzled him, but he had seen beauty before, in all its forms and colors. It was the intelligence in her eyes that

caught his imagination, more than her seductive movements and soft skin. "It may be, Shosuro-san," he murmured, tasting the scent of her hair.

His gaze held lust, and lust was an emotion that Kachiko knew well. Men of all clans, all families and all social strata had looked at her that way, from the day of her *gempukku* at fourteen. Her nurse had taught her to foster such feelings, to control men by their needs and desires, but Kachiko paused. More than mere lust, she saw another sentiment warring in the Crane's eyes. Respect.

And respect was something Kachiko was unprepared to accept or control.

"We shall see," she whispered, her body inches from his. Stepping away, she bowed slightly and turned, moving past the snow-covered branch.

As she walked with her maids back toward the awning of the Imperial Palace, Hoturi's hand closed again around the two stones. "Yes, Kachiko," he murmured thoughtfully. "We shall soon see."



Hantei and Shinsei

Let me tell you my friends and my cousins, of the time of Myth, when the Sun walked close to the earth, and the kami of the Heavens lived among us. You say the time of the Undying Ones is not real, and the legends are false? Tell that to the stars and to your ancestors, my little one, and see if they care to reply...

The day was grey and the pregnant sun hung in the sky with tears in her eyes. The ground, misty and covered with salty dew, showed the tracks of an armored man. Seated on a cleft of rock which jutted from the new-formed earth, the youngest child of the Sun and Moon looked out at the people of the land and sighed unhappily. Around the hillside, smoke from the campfires shrouded the feet of the mountains in gloom.

"It is time to decide, brother." Hida's voice was the rumble of a barely-contained avalanche. "The mortals are gathered below, to see our battle. One of us must be chosen to rule them." Hantei looked into his brother's eyes, and heard the music of the Sun.

He wishes it to be an easy victory, but it will never be so. Hida is destined to fight for eternity, and eternity does not give up her secrets so easily...

"One moment," murmured Hantei. "I will be there."

It seemed a thousand years ago, now, though it could have been but moments. The Celestial Heavens surrounded him with wealth and plenty, and their beauty was so great that even the memory of it made this barren land seem pale and half-real. The voices of the Dragons still rang in his ears, and the feel of a golden wind across his brow still carried his mother's touch. But now it was gone, all of it, lost to him forever.

He hated this world, this cold, dirty, arrogant piece of mud and clay. It was no more than a wax ball, hung by his mother in a crystal sky beneath the Shining Lands. It had been a toy to amuse him as he grew to manhood, hidden from his father's eyes. Once he had been sheltered by the eternal Dragons, taught their wisdom and their strength. He remembered the feel of the Ki-Rin as she carried him across the Bridge of Stars, and his hand still ached for the feel of his Blade of Clouds.

"Time to come and fight, Brother Hantei!" Shinjo's voice rang out, calling him back to their circle. "The wind carries the beginning of a new age!"

He smiled. "Yes, sister, it does. Fight on, and I will come to you, soon enough." In the wind, the voice of his mother whispered in his ear.

So brave, your sister, so brave and yet cursed by your father's wrath. She will be the last of you to truly die...

He remembered the brilliant dawns, each vibrant touch of light across the immortal sky, every racing deer and doe that caught a spark of life. When the Moon tore his savage course across the Heavens, Hantei had hidden, his spirit held within a golden orb which his mother had given to him. Through the long nights, he had often dreamed that he heard his sister's voice... calling him to join them in their dark prison, trapped in a place where there was no wind, no sun, no Celestial Light.

He shuddered, and the earth at his feet heaved in protest.

His thoughts stilled. The combat was done and his sister knelt, conquered. The wind calmed.

"Face me, youngest son..." It was little more than a whisper, a brush of sound. Glancing behind him, Hantei saw Bayushi, his face covered with a scrap of his silk robe. "Join the contest at my side."

"Soon, my brother, soon," murmured Hantei, and before Bayushi began to speak again, Shiba stepped forward. Within moments, their blades were twined in combat, and Hantei was alone with his thoughts once more.

The twins are much alike, in temperament and in deed. They will struggle between themselves and reach the same conclusion: betrayal.

He remembered approaching his Father for the first time, once his hands had become those of a man. Onnotangu woke, his great star-filled eyes filled with clouds of sleep.

"Stand up, Father," Hantei had said, raising Cloud-Bearer, the sword which the wind-spirits had made for him. "I have come to avenge my brothers and sisters."

The battle had been fierce, filled with hatred and blood. Hantei's life had not been spared: his Father made one cut, two, three - all deadly blows to mortal men. But Hantei had been raised up each time by his Mother's voice. Covered in blood, his sword had spun webs in the air, matched each time by his Father's black katana. Parry, and the firmament shifted. Cut, and a swinging slash, the ringing of steel against steel as the blades flew past one another. Beneath them, the Heavens lifted from the earth and the stars were ripped to shreds by their anger.

He could hear the voices of the children within his Father's belly, their screams of fury filling his soul. With a final, rending blow, Hantei's blade tore open his Father's body, spilling the Children of the Sky. Onnotangu's roaring howl of hatred and pain shattered the last veils between heaven and earth, forever parting

the magnificent land of the Gods from the ugly ball of clay and rock so far below.

A soft noise behind him startled him out of his reverie. Running one hand over the scars on his face, Hantei raised his eyes and beheld the eldest daughter of the Sun.

"They are finished, dear one," whispered Doji. "It is time for our dance."

Doji, the most beautiful of the *kami*, the favored child of the Heavens, held out her soft hand and smiled gently to her best-loved brother. Hantei's hand trembled on the hilt of his sword, and her scent filled his mind with peace. "Yes, sweet Doji," he murmured.

She is not for you, Hantei. The stars have claimed her for another. Soon she will not even remember the Heavens you speak of. This world is her home now, and nothing can change that fate. Do not reach for what you cannot have.

After a moment, he turned his eyes away, and he saw Doji's face fall. Behind her, Akodo stood, tall and proud, awaiting an eternal rival in a war he longed to fight.

"Your dance is with another."

In another life, another world, she would have been his.

Hantei saw her face, falling from the heavens like the petal of some magnificent flower, spilled out across the universe as his Father fell to his knees. She had reached for his hand and he for hers, the first moment she had slipped from the Heavens, falling through a countless eternity of stars. He watched as they had all passed by, twisting in the Celestial Wind, staring up at their unknown brother.

Their faces were cold, blank, frightened. They had never seen the heavens, never experienced the joy of its beauty. Could they have known the agony he had endured, the torment of countless years of hiding, waiting, training each moment for the day to come when he would face Onnotangu? Would they ever understand the pride he had known, the solitary love of the Mother upon the son she had chosen to save?

Would they ever understand what he had lost when he fell?

He turned his face, and looked away.

Togashi stood upon the hill, watching his brother. Though young, Hantei's face bore the scars of massive combat, his thick black hair pushed behind his ears.



"I see you looking at me, Togashi, my brother."

The Dragon smiled.

"Will you not ask me to come to the contests?" Hantei's face was a mask. "To challenge for supremacy over a land I despise? Or is there another purpose: to decide who will rule over the others, who will declare themselves to be the most favored child?"

Togashi's face slowly lost its brightness, and his eyes turned grey with thought.

"Oh, yes. I know." Hantei turned at last to see his silent brother. "Though I have fought and died for you, though I sacrificed my place in the heavens for your care, you ignore my deeds and declare yourselves to be my equals."

Togashi's voice was forever hoarse from being crushed in the fist of Onnotangu. "You see me looking at you, Hantei, but you do not see."

For a long moment, the brothers stared at one another. Least alike in temperament and grace, their eyes held the same dark hue. After a long silence, they both smiled.

He will never be parted from his people. Of all my children, he is his father's favored, and a darkness will rest in his heart until he is slain by one of his own.

Hantei knew that, of all his siblings, Togashi alone had heard the echoes of their mother's voice. A darkness clouded the land, and threads of thunder argued in the sky.

"Perhaps I look the other direction, my brother, and perhaps I do not know the things that you do. But if you choose to look away, then know that I see one thing that you cannot. I see where you have turned your back." After a moment of surprise, the smile rekindled upon Togashi's face. "Shall we fight, then, brother?" Hantei said, reaching for his sword.

"No, Hantei-sama," whispered a defeated Togashi, bowing. "There is no purpose. I already know who will win."

At last, Akodo alone stood on the hillside, crowing his victory. "Come to me, Hantei!" He shouted. "Come, and bend your knee before my sword!" Looking once more upon the ground at his feet, the youngest son reached for his katana and turned toward the hill.

"Ah, brother," Akodo grinned. "It will be as bright as the Celestial Heavens. The Empire I shall build will be a tribute to the strength and mercilessness of the stars in the sky. It will shine as our Mother herself, and be as cold as ice. Kneel before me, and let us begin our glorious task!"

"What do you know of the Heavens?" Hantei asked, readying his sword. "What have you seen of the Sun's true light? Come, brother, enough posturing. Let us be done."

"I have no need to see, Hantei," Akodo snarled. "For I am as much Sun as she, and as much Moon as our Father. There is nothing banned from me, and nothing kept apart. I know my soul, and no sorrow rests in my heart this day."

Their battle is recorded in the texts of Shinsei, the scrolls of the most ancient and revered historians, and in all the legend of the

Empire. Where they stepped, mountains rose from their footprints. The rivers flowed from their sweat, and the earth still rumbles with the echoes of their battle-cries.

At the last, Akodo furiously raised his sword above his head to crush his brother, all thought of blood and family lost in his rage. Hantei, too, lifted his blade, but not to meet his brother's katana. Rather, its surface caught the light of the sunset, blinding Akodo with the reflection of her face. "Now you know. Now, my brother," Hantei stood, as Akodo's face was lit with the blinding truth of the Sun. "Now, you can understand my sorrow at what we have lost."

In that moment, the Celestial Heavens opened before Akodo's eyes, and he knew. Sinking to his knees, his fury left him, and his sword hung limply at his side. Akodo stared into Hantei's blade, facing the full light of the Heavens, and was conquered by its power.

"I would have killed my youngest brother..." Akodo whispered as Hantei sheathed his sword.

He has only delayed what is inevitable. His children will be the death of yours.

"You are forgiven."

The Lion shall steal your throne, and your last son will die by their hand. Destroy him, my son, and your future will be assured.

"Let all know," the new Emperor proclaimed, helping his brother to rise, "that with the family of Akodo, so too stand the sons of my line."

In the distance, Togashi whispered, "And when the last Akodo falls, so falls the last Hantei."

Cultural History and the Celestial Order

To many, the culture of Rokugan seems foreign, intricate, and difficult to understand. In actuality, it is very simple and very practical. All of Rokugan is based on a hierarchical structure called 'The Celestial Order.' Rokugani believe that humanity has a role to play, that everyone has a destiny. The Celestial Heavens, or 'Takamagahara,' are the lands of the Moon and Sun. From them, the Kami fell, and to them, the ancient Dragons were forced to return, leaving the affairs of men to mortals. However, not all things which 'retire' to the Celestial Heavens stay there, and not

all men are content with the state of the firmament under which they live.

Rokugan is very formal. There are three classes of people in Rokugan: Nobility (those who make war), Peasants (those who work), and Clergy (those who pray). Those who fall outside of this structure are considered 'non-people' (or *hinin*) and are not protected by the Emperor's justice. Rokugan itself is a feudal state. The Emperor owns everything under the sun. Lesser nobles (*daimyos*) swear fealty, govern the territory they are loaned by the Emperor, and make certain the laws are obeyed and enforced. In exchange, they gain the right to tax the land they govern.

The First Tier: Nobility

The highest social class in Rokugan is the warrior, or samurai. All those born into a samurai family are considered samurai, regardless of their cultural bent (*bushi*, *shugenja*, artisan, etc.). The Emperor and his family are the top rung of the samurai's cultural ladder. The major *daimyos* of the Seven Clans are the second most powerful stratum within the feudal system, and the lesser *daimyos* of vassal families are the third. Thereafter come the samurai who have sworn fealty to the family *daimyos*, and lastly, the *ronin*, masterless warriors who wander the countryside. Only a samurai is allowed to wear *daisho*: two swords tucked into the belt, or *obi*.

The Emperor creates all the laws and is the head of the Shintao religion. He has a bureau of administrators (typically *Otomo*, *Miya*, or *Doji*) who handle the daily affairs of state. Justice is meted out by the Emperor and his rightly appointed officials. The Imperial Court are the direct members of the Emperor's family. The members of the court do not inherit land from their position. Without land, the Imperial Court does not have access to real resources, so they must trade political favors for money.

While the Emperor holds the highest position in the Empire, he keeps it through prestige and not real military or political power. The most powerful positions in the Empire are really held by the *daimyos* of the Seven Clans. The Emperor holds power because of the *daimyos'* respect, and tradition. While the Emperor lacks real power, the *daimyos* can take no action without his blessing. The Emperor is the final authority in all matters.

Economics and Koku

The fields and valleys of Rokugan are one of its most valuable resources. Covered with rice fields, grain and fertile grounds for hunting, most parts of the Emerald Empire have no shortage of food. However, organizing those lands into a standardized system was necessary to allow the Hantei to completely control the Empire. All land belongs to the Emperor. Each field, river, and forest is part of the Sun Mother's gift to her youngest son. Historically, the Seven Clans maintained themselves through

basic agriculture. More people and planning were needed, however, in order to create enough food to provide for the Crab and Dragon, both notoriously short of fertile regions. The Emperor therefore allocated his lands among his brothers and sisters, so that the food grown there would be maintained and traded between the lands of the Empire.

In order to accomplish this tremendous feat of administration, a grand capital was needed. The tremendous city of Otosan Uchi was built to accomplish the tasks of bureaucracy, along with maintaining roads, taxes, a standing Imperial army, communication, and the political infrastructure of the Empire. Although the Emperor is the logical apex of this structure, most of his time was spent dealing with the various political troubles among the Seven Clans. It fell to Lady Doji and her son, Nio, to create a system of administrators, courtiers and advisors who could gather the information, revenues and taxes of the Empire.

All of the food raised by the clans belongs to the Emperor, who then gives out portions of the rice to his people. Instead of actually transporting this huge volume of rice to the capital city, a system was devised in which the rice was counted according to a specific volume – the amount necessary for one man and his family to survive the course of a year. This volume of rice, termed a '*koku*', was then represented by small pieces of marked wood (which rapidly became the golden *koku* with which most Rokugani are familiar). Each year, the administrators of the Emperor go from clan to clan, counting the rice and taking an amount of *koku* equal to the Emperor's share. Then, the Emperor returns an amount of *koku* that each *daimyo* can redeem out of the Emperor's stores over the course of a year. Each clan's yearly supplement of *koku* is marked clearly, as the gold is minted by the Imperial artisans, and marked on both sides with the Imperial mon of the Emperor and the Clan mon.

Economy in Rokugan is based on commerce and yearly crops. Because some years produce poor crops, the value of a *koku* of rice increases or decreases. In years where rice is plentiful, the value falls; when scarce, the value rises. Hence the erratic nature of economy in Rokugan, and the reason it is difficult for even the clever Yasuki to create a 'price guide' for items. A guide to the value of a thing is all very well for a single season, but when the next crops come in, the *koku's* value may change radically, making the prices completely different.

The Emperor's noble *daimyo* are essentially 'landkeepers' for the Emperor, and must turn over all rice to him. Then, the Imperial Revenue and Census-takers count the number of dependents a given *daimyo* has, including nobles, peasants and eta. The Emperor then gives the *daimyo* (typically through his Clan Champion) a sum of *koku* suitable to feed them all.

Also, above and beyond the amount necessary to feed their peasants, each landholding samurai might be given three to seven *koku* for the year (the starting amount for a samurai in the RPG). It can be assumed that the *daimyo*, through the coffers of their clan, is also given one additional *koku* per samurai in their service. This money is intended to provide outfitting costs. Finally,

landholders receive as much as ten additional koku per village; that's commonly how much money a daimyo sees in a year. Ten koku may not sound like much, but it's the cultural equivalent of 10 family salaries per year!

Samurai: Nobility versus Gentry

Under each of the clan daimyos are the greater vassal families. The head of each family swears fealty to the champion of their Clan, typically the family daimyo of the Great Family. In many clans, samurai who perform well are 'adopted' into the Great Family of the clan, or allowed to begin their own house name within the family's protective banner (such lesser vassal families, such as the Crane's Tsume, are still considered part of their original family).

It's important to note that there are actually two kinds of samurai: nobility and landed gentry. Nobility are those lucky enough to be born into samurai families, such as the Akodo, Bayushi and Doji. Gentry, on the other hand, are warriors who have proven themselves in combat or some other noteworthy activity, and have been granted land and title (a family name). In a very real way, many nobles look upon gentry as 'new money,' or families that have yet to prove their worth. Gentry are constantly reminded of their status by older families and required to prove themselves worthy of the names they have 'borrowed.'

For example, a young peasant spearman named Reju (no family name) in a Crane army happens to save a Doji samurai in a fierce battle. After the battle is over and the land has been captured (a castle and seven villages), the Doji decides to reward the spearman with land and title. He allows the spearman to change his family name to Doji, and bestows upon him three of the seven villages to tax and administer.

Doji Reju (our new landed gentry samurai) now lives in the captured castle along with many other samurai of the Doji family. He moves his family into the barracks of the castle, and once per year, rides out with a small retinue of men to collect the taxes from the villages. He is allowed to keep a small portion of the taxes he's collected, but the rest go to his lord. His lord, of course, keeps a percentage of that and sends the rest to *his* lord, and so on, all the way up to the Emperor.

After several generations, Doji Reju's great-grandson (also named Reju) rescues an Imperial Princess from certain doom at the hands of a Shadowlands Oni. Extremely impressed, the Doji daimyo grants Reju two more towns, the right to raise and maintain a standing army of twenty-five men, and also grants to him (with the Emperor's permission) the family name Osuka. Osuka Reju (still called Doji Reju in the Imperial scrolls and still sworn to the Doji house and *mon*, though his family name is used within the Doji house) now has a great deal of prestige, and is a minor member of the *kuge* political class (see below). The clan



daimyo will consider his requests and listen to his difficulties, as well as send (or request) aid in time of war.

Religion

*"The Tao is a task to be studied,
A hymn to be learned,
And a memory to be remembered..."*
— Tetsuya

There are two main religions in Rokugan: veneration of the Seven Fortunes and the study of the Tao. Although unified by Imperial Edict, these belief systems have little in common besides their practical, straight-forward methods. They both speak of 'becoming one with the universe' and encourage a practitioner to seek enlightenment – the understanding of the Five Rings of Nature.

One of the oldest religions in Rokugan, the ancient religion of the Isawa is still practiced without interruption in the lost city of Gisei Toshi. To the Isawa, the 'Way of the Gods,' *Kami-no-michi*, is the first religion of Rokugan, and the Seven Fortunes still hold their prestigious place in the heavens throughout the Empire. Rokugani believe the world is filled with supernatural beings with the power to affect their lives. These are the Thousand Fortunes: Lady Sun and Lord Moon, Ebisu, Bishamon, Inari and a myriad of nature spirits. Every rock, river and grove has its own deity. The kami protect villages, bring rain, protect fishermen on their journeys and much more. When angry, they cause calamity and hardship, bad luck, torrential storms and illness. Properly appeased, they bring good fortune, health and calm weather. At important times such as birth, harvest, or calamity, Rokugani call upon the Fortunes to bless their lives.

Perhaps the oldest of the religions in Rokugan, ancestor worship venerates the souls of those who have gone before. Rokugani believe the spirits of the dead live on in a portion of Jigoku known as Yomi, the Underworld, where they work off negative karma accumulated in life. One's ancestors, honored spirits free of their tasks in Yomi and compelled to maintain contact with the mortal world, watch over the family. They provide aid in the form of advice, or reproach in the form of hauntings. People make offerings of food, prayer and incense to their ancestors, in gratitude for the gift of life and a way to ensure future prosperity.

The Kitsu teach that the living can help free a soul languishing in Yomi by offering prayers and incense. Thus, honoring one's ancestors not only encourages good fortune, it helps speed the ancestor to reincarnation. Neglected ancestors, or those who don't have anyone to pray for them, often return to feed on the living or terrorize the disrespectful family. Angry spirits who died a shameful or ignominious death stalk the world, seeking revenge before they can be reborn. Properly cared-for spirits, however, sometimes return to provide guidance or supernatural aid to their descendants.

Monks and shugenja serve the needs of the Fortunes, as well as providing for the blissful rest of the spirits in Yomi and Jigoku, thus helping to unify the two religions. Their position in the political strata is an extremely limited one, restricted to serving the needs of others through the foundation of the religions of Rokugan. Monks are not expected to involve themselves in political situations; therefore they are granted no permission to approach or address a daimyo or superior in any manner relating to worldly concerns. However,

where matters of faith and enlightenment are at hand, the monk (or shugenja) is given full leeway, and welcomed at the side of the daimyo, the court, or the Emperor.

GUESTS AT THE WINTER COURT: YOGO RESAI

Earth 1 (Willpower 2) Fire 2 Water 3 Air 2 Void 5

Yogo Resai (Soshi Shugenja 3) has served as the Emperor's loyal Magistrate for more than ten years, completing missions in the Unicorn, Crane and Dragon provinces – and that was where his troubles began. Resai has been contemplating retirement, but a run-in with a mad *ise zumi* changed his mind.

The madman, calling himself 'Togashi Okkio,' accosted him, hoping that he was a member of their esteemed order. When he discovered that Resai was no more than he seemed, he kept the Magistrate tied in his hidden encampment for fourteen days, subjecting him to ranting protests against the Dragon, and forcing him to watch as Okkio cut the tattoo from another *ise zumi*'s dead body.

Resai managed to escape, and returned to the site with a group of Mirumoto bushi, but there was no trace of the man. The Mirumoto have called Resai's 'madman' no more than a sadistic bandit, and refuse to allow the Yogo to further investigate the case.

However, Resai knows that what he saw was real, and has every intention of discovering the secret behind the outcast *ise zumi*. He skillfully uses his abilities to gain information on the tattooed monks while at the Winter Court, and will be gathering a group of brave Magistrates in order to return to the lands of the Dragon once the spring has come – whether the Togashi Champion wishes his investigation, or not. (For more information on Togashi Okkio, see *Way of the Dragon*.)

Political Ranks

"The will of the Emperor is the will of the land.

The Death of an Emperor is the winter, and his rebirth is the springtime rain. What can harm our Empire, while the favored child of Amaterasu tends it?"

— Shinjo Yokatsu

In addition to advancing within the elaborate social system in Rokugan, a great deal of the Empire's politics come from moving within a single social level: for example, a samurai might wish to be a great general, or a courtier might hope to become of the Emperor's advisors in his court. These 'political rankings' may appear arbitrary, but they are strictly adhered to in the Emerald Empire, and their relevance is taken into account every day. Further, such moves are much easier to achieve than advancing to a higher social class: it is likely that a samurai maiden of low family might be allowed to marry into a more prestigious one if her dowry is exceptional, while it is extremely unlikely that a *heimin* will be allowed to marry even the lowest samurai.

THE KUGE

The *kuge*, a social class of inherited nobility intertwined with powerful positions in the central government, are the 'elite' of the samurai class. A wide social disparity has always existed between the floating grandeur of the Imperial Capital the harsh reality of life in the outlying provinces. The *kuge* includes the Hantei, Otomo and Seppun of the Imperial House, the daimyo of each Great Clan, and the members of their immediate families.

While there are thousands of samurai in the Empire with the family name 'Doji', only a very few are actually part of the Doji noble house. Others, including feudal daimyo who care for the Doji lands, are actually adopted into the house. These lesser house members, or 'vassal families,' actually have the house name (in this case, Doji), but in many cases also have their own family name (such as Tsume Retsu from *Honor's Veil*). These vassal houses are not considered part of the *kuge* class, although they are samurai and members of the nobility. They are also considered members of the noble house to whom they owe fealty, and commonly introduced in court as a simple member of their noble house (Retsu would be listed in the Imperial scrolls as Doji Retsu, and the house name 'Tsume' would not appear). Any samurai who is so bold as to use his own personal house name in official matters, rather than the name of his lord's house, insults his lord's name.

THE BUKE

Below the *kuge* are the *buke*, or the hereditary/official military class. The *buke* makes up the bulk of the samurai caste: the generals, warlords and other powerful but non-landed individuals of a clan. Originally formed of farmers gathered to serve in the military of the Seven Clans, the original *buke* rebelled against

high taxation. From them came a form of proto-samurai: farmers and lesser samurai who were trained as bushi and could be called to battle in short order. The *buke* class, then, encompasses the gamut of warring types, from the lowest foot-soldier (*ashigaru*) to the most illustrious governor-general (*daimyo*).

The *buge* also includes the lesser sons and daughters of the *kuge*, those who would not inherit their family's power or land. Often, these *buge* are treated as less than their siblings, as if they had fallen from the Celestial Order by virtue of their birth. They are expected to regain their position and maintain their family's good name by their deeds.

THE BONGE

At the bottom of the political scale are the masses of commoners, *hinin* and *heimin*, known as the *bonge*. This class includes not only the peasants and merchant class, but also the social 'untouchables' known collectively as *eta*. These poor unfortunates have the lowest social ranking besides *gaijin*.

Because of the lack of segregation in the political field, non-*eta* commoners are therefore eager to distinguish themselves any way possible, hoping to one day be allowed to join the ranks of the *buke*, or be accepted (by marriage) into the lesser, 'vassal' families of the *kuge*. Members of the *bonge* class are unable to approach the Emperor or the great houses of the *kuge* under any circumstances, although if they rise to become members of the *buke* class, they are allowed to speak on military matters.

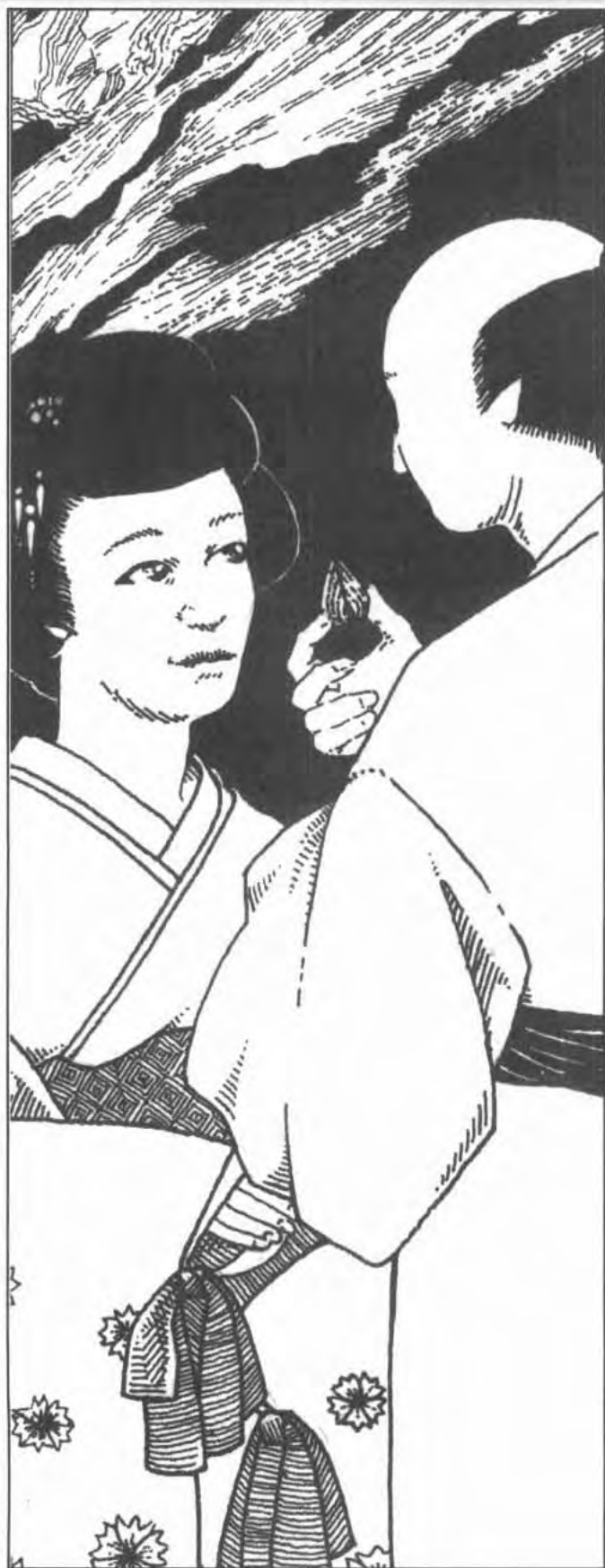
Geisha are not officially included in the *bonge*, but are considered a separate class. Because of their position, they are allowed to speak to members of the samurai class on many occasions, and are expected to comport themselves as if they were samurai, although they gained none of the rank, social prestige or political power gained by the *kuge* or vassal families.

Ji-SAMURAI

Ji-samurai, or 'half-samurai', are the warriors from the 'vassal' families. They are expected not only to maintain their family's honor, but to raise their social and political position through glory in battle. Consequently, these warriors often have to be forcibly restrained from throwing their lives away in the heat of battle.

Gifts

In Rokugan, gifts are given to celebrate good service, to announce favor or disfavor with an individual, and to recognize a service or honor. The value of a gift is not chosen for its monetary expense, but rather for its sentimental value. If a daimyo wanted to make a very public statement of favor toward his loyal servant, he'd probably give them something dear to his heart, like his father's fan, or the kimono that Emperor Hantei 13th once wore while resting in his palace for the weekend. While many Western economies are based on the bartering system, Rokugan's is based on gift giving. While this may not seem to be a great difference,



it is one of the most fundamental differences between western cultures and Rokugan. The way a Rokugani gives you a gift can tell you if he respects you, if he is a friend, or if he is your deadliest enemy. Because samurai are given everything they reasonably need, giving something for its usefulness is considered impolite, if not an outright insult to the samurai's daimyo. Armor, weapons, horses – all are provided by a samurai's clan (or, by the Emperor or Emerald Champion, if they are in service to the Throne). A samurai's response to being given money would be "Are you implying that my daimyo doesn't provide for me?"

Similarly, a gift of money is a veiled insult. If a samurai needs something, he asks his Lord; unless it's impossible or impractical, the samurai gets it. What the samurai cannot ask for is the honor of owning the favorite fan of the Lady Kachiko, which she held at the coronation of Hantei the 38th... now that's a gift!

Purchasing gifts can be an equally difficult task. Buying something is considered dishonorable for a samurai, and often, if something must be purchased, a servant is sent to do so. However, if he is attempting to purchase a gift for, say, the daimyo of the land, certain things must be taken into consideration. A daimyo can simply take anything in his province that he wishes. It's all 'his', anyway; he just has to decide he wants it. Once he does, the heimin merchant is only too honored to give it to him (it's good for business, after all, when the daimyo selects your wares for his personal use). So, buying something as a gift isn't going to make too much of an impact. It's not a bad idea, but it is not going to get you into the Emperor's Winter Court.

Literally, in Rokugan, it's the thought and presentation that counts, more than anything else. Significance, personal meaning, and enlightenment are all key words for gift-choices. Examples of these ideals are:

- **Significance:** It's the very first fan ever made.
- **Personal Meaning:** It bears your father's mon, and was carved from the wood of a tree which was planted on his grave...
- **Enlightenment:** "There is a story of how the wise Shinsei held a fan such as this one in his hand. He spoke this tale..." (Here, the samurai tells the enlightening tale.) "I hope that when you see this humble fan, Shinsei's wisdom will rest upon your shoulders, great Lord of the Lion."

Bathing

Observing proper samurai bathing etiquette is a delicate task, particularly when the traveling party is comprised of both sexes, and members of different houses. What's considered obscene and what's considered normal can be radically different among the various Clans and families. Bathing is extremely important in Rokugan. Cleanliness is an imperative, and those who do not bathe and keep their clothing and armor clean will be treated as peasants with a title. In addition, nudity does not have nearly the stigma that it does in Western cultures. With the exception of the Unicorn (who, because of the foreign culture they have adopted,

tend to be less openminded and more inhibited about such things), Imperial Magistrates of all clans and families do not find any difficulty about properly chaperoned co-ed bathing in times of need. While a noble house most definitely has segregated bathhouses, many peasant villages have only one area for bathing.

Co-ed bathing is not frequently encouraged, or taken frivolously. If there's an opportunity, members of the samurai class of Rokugan usually wish to bathe alone, or in sexually segregated groups. But if that isn't possible, they will certainly choose to bathe together rather than not at all.

Some public bath-houses exist for the purposes of providing travelers with the opportunity to keep themselves clean and wash their clothing and equipment. Such houses are traditionally maintained by a samurai of some minor status, and are kept up by a small group of house-servants, often those who have become too old or infirm to do more than sit in the bathing chamber and perform 'chaperone' duty.

For the most part, while traveling on the road, samurai scrub down once a week or so with a sponge; exposing themselves in public (without the benefit of a closed-in bathing house) is taboo. Swimming is also done in light clothing, although samurai are not dishonored for removing their clothing before swimming in a private place. In many cases, whether a character will engage in chaperoned same-sex bathing under extreme circumstances depends on the character, the methods of bathing, and their social upbringing. A Crane lord's artisan daughter follows different rules than does a sworn samurai-ko: the samurai-ko may bathe with her companions, but a lord's daughter is expected to uphold a more strict decorum.

Etiquette

"Each thing you are is reflected in each thing you do."

— Isawa Uona

Rokugan is a land obsessed with etiquette. There is a proper way to do everything. All of this stems from the Celestial Order. Each action which a samurai takes reflects his social standing, his house, his clan, and his ancestors – and are treated with equal seriousness. Here is a list of common social situations, and the appropriate behavior for each one.

SAMURAI-KO

Samurai-ko are treated with the deference due a lady of their station, ignoring their ability as a bushi unless they are dressed and prepared for war. If a samurai-ko is dressed in 'mannish' attire, she is referred to with her military title, in addition to (or instead of) her 'social' one. Samurai-ko have all the rights of men, including the ability to rule a house or land, speak for their clan, and go to war on behalf of their daimyo. In no way are they restricted in their actions, so long as they dress and act appropriately to their station.

Samurai-ko, however, are also female, and there are many social conventions to which female members of the samurai class are expected to conform. Women are expected to speak more softly than men, use smaller gestures and motions, and move more slowly. While samurai-ko are not always expected to be perfect 'ladies', they are still expected to remember their sex. Unmarried women and men, for example, are not allowed to be alone together; thus, female samurai-ko often have an 'honor retainer', or a person of their family who follows them about, ensuring that they follow all proper conventions and are never alone with a man who might stain their virtue.



ENTERING AND EXITING A HOUSE

A samurai's house is a sacred place, filled with the spirit of his house and family, and respected by all members of the samurai caste. This respect even extends to enemies of the family, and people the samurai would consider 'untrustworthy'. By carrying their weapons into another samurai's house, they disrespect a thousand years' worth of ancestors, and risk angering their own.

When a samurai arrives at another samurai's home, he is expected to announce himself to the gateman (usually a peasant or ji-samurai), and await the reception of his host or hostess. If the host is not at home, the gateman will politely offer the visitor a cup of *cha*, telling them that the host is unavailable, and will be back tomorrow. 'Will be back tomorrow' is the conventional response, even if the samurai is away for several weeks. It is considered inappropriate to inquire the host's whereabouts, as the host may in fact be home with a more prestigious visitor.

The common way to announce yourself when you arrive at the home of another samurai is to present a copy of your chop (or personal mon, if you have been granted one) to the gateman, with a short speech identifying yourself, any positions or rank you hold, and your business inside the home. Even if the host is not at home, the samurai's mon will be kept so that the host knows who his visitor was.

ASKING TO SEE A LORD

If samurai have need to speak with their lord, it is proper for them to speak to the lord's advisor (or house shugenja) and make an 'appointment' to formally discuss the matter. Even if the samurai sees his lord on a daily basis, any important or formal questions (such as permission to commit *seppuku*, get married, or journey out of the daimyo's lands) must be handled appropriately.

The daimyo will set an appointment for the samurai - though, if the daimyo wishes, he may simply say 'the appointment will be arranged' and never return to the samurai with a date. Such treatment is, of course, extremely dishonorable, and will be noted by other samurai who serve the lord, decreasing their loyalty and respect for such an individual.

PRESENTING THEMSELVES

A samurai may present himself before a ranking individual if he has been introduced by the shugenja or advisor to that noble lord. Often, if a lord wishes to see another daimyo's retainer, he will have his advisor request that the retainer ask for an appointment with the lord. Then, the lord immediately sets the appointment date (often, within hours) and has the meeting.

If the samurai is approaching the lord, he must first present himself, a copy of his chop (or personal mon) and his questions to the house advisor. If this advisor is the lord's wife or first courtesan, it is sometimes appropriate for the asking samurai to provide a gift for her, as well as his information.

BRAGGING

Samurai are famous for their pre-battle bragging. Bragging is also a way of calling out your opponent. By stating your name, lineage and deeds, you are telling the opponent that you have no fear. You're not worried who he is; he should be worried about who you are. It also identifies a samurai who wishes it to be known he is at the battle, thus bringing prestige and honor to his family and Clan.



*"Winter solitude -
In a world of color
The sound of wind."*

- Rezan, The Ronin Poet

Culture. Society. Power. The Hantei name is synonymous with Rokugan. For over one thousand years, the family of the Emperor has ruled in an unbroken line, severed only by civil war, and righted through the heroic actions of the Seven Clans. Within the Empire, each clan praises the Emperor, shouting their loyalty and service to the heavens, each performing a service to society and to the Hantei line. The Crab, stalwart protectors of the Empire. The Crane, keepers of culture and civilization. For military protection, the Lion stand ready, and the Scorpion hold truth behind their delicate masks. To the north, the enigmatic Phoenix offer enlightenment and arcane lore, while the Dragon provide a neutral perspective on the machinations of the Empire. The Unicorn - when they returned from their eight-century journey - brought valuable lore, items and new innovations to almost every aspect of the Empire.

But what contributions have the Hantei made? Political stability? Divine right? Ikoma historians count several instances in their libraries where the line dissolved, only to be reborn again through a nearly-lost son or daughter miraculously discovered in the histories. Cranes have intermarried with the sons and daughters of the Hantei almost exclusively, giving the Imperial line as strong a connection to the gentle Lady Doji as to the brash and fierce Hantei.

Yet the Hantei continue to rule, and their voice shakes the firmament of Rokugan. When the Emperor raises his hand, the world moves. When the Shining Court pauses, the stars freeze in their paces, waiting with shallow breath to see what wisdom the cherished son of Amaterasu will reveal.

The three vassal families of the Imperial House, the wise Seppun, manipulative Otomo and cautious Miya, each reveal a facet of the divine enigma which is the Imperial house. Step into the court of the Shining Prince, and let the Sun Goddess smile upon your lands. The Emperor's path awaits.

History

The four families of the Imperial House are unique, distinct from each other and the rest of the Empire. Although the Empire revolves around the Shining Court, the Emperor's line has manipulated the destiny of more than the Seven Clans: it has held the hand of prophecy and godhood. Any blessing that falls upon the land is a favor from Amaterasu to her beloved son, and any bad fortune is Her curse. Such a burden placed on any mortal man begins to wear through the veneer of royalty, and even Imperial hands grow weary.

This chapter discusses the history, philosophy and secrets of the Hantei and their loyal followers. As with all the Kami of Rokugan, Hantei's story is unique. His descendants follow the path laid out for them by their ancient forefather, though they walk the most dangerous path of all. If they fail in their duty, they do not condemn a house: they condemn an Empire.



The Hantei Family

*"If the sun rises, it is out of love for the favored son.
When the world ends, it will be from the hand of the Emperor.
All things belong to the Hantei."*

— Seppun Baka

The Hantei are the ruling house of the Emerald Empire, ruling as the political head of the nation as well as the leader of the Rokugani religion. As the Emperor is descended from Amaterasu

Omikami, the Queen of the Fortunes, so her son's line is the ruler of all mortal life, from the greatest of the Seven Clans to the smallest turtle on the shore. The First Hantei was proclaimed Emperor of all Rokugan by his siblings, but his Empire was truly unified under his grandson, Hantei Ningi (Hantei III), who created the Imperial Court and established the Emerald Champion. To his credit, Hantei Ningi was a brilliant man, perhaps guided by the hand of his great-grandmother Amaterasu, but some claim that his was the first true 'mortal' ruler of the Hantei line. Both his grandfather and his father were said to have ascended into the Celestial Heavens when they tired of rulership, leaving behind the mortal flesh of the worldly firmament.

The reigning emperor is referred to as *tenno*, or 'Heavenly Sovereign.' In ancient times, both *tenno* and *tenno-ko* have served as the leader of the Empire, keeping Hantei's ancient promise to guard her people and guide her path. The heir presumptive is known by the title *kotaishi*, and traditionally educated by the foremost Shintao priests in the Empire. Because it will be the Emperor's task to decide matters of state and doctrine, it is integral that each *kotaishi* is thoroughly familiar with the religion of the Fortunes as well as the Tao of Shinsei.

Children of the Hantei

For many generations, the Imperial line of the Hantei has remained apart from familial in-fighting and brotherly rivalry over the throne. One means which the Hantei use to keep the line of succession clear, both to the people of Rokugan and in their own minds, is the Ritual of Abdication. The Ritual is performed shortly after the coronation of a Hantei Emperor, on the death or retirement of the previous Emperor.

The customary line of succession, from father to eldest son, is clear. But what about the other children of the Emperor? Once the aged Emperor retires, he renounces his claim to the name 'Hantei', and becomes a monk of Shinsei, as is customary for the elders of Rokugani society. His son becomes the new Hantei, and his wife and children also use the Imperial surname. However, only the direct Imperial family is allowed to use the name of their ancient kami, and thus, once a child has been born to the Imperial line, any other children of the retired Emperor must undergo the Ritual of Abdication.

Those who are of the Imperial lineage but do not become Emperor may choose to join either the Otomo or Seppun families, changing their surname to that of their new house and undergoing a formal *gempukku* procedure. During this initiation into their new lives, they abdicate their claim to the royal throne in favor of the direct line of descendants of the current Hantei.

However, when there is no son born to the ruling Hantei, or if the Emperor's children die before they ascend to their father's throne, the direct line of succession is unclear. In some cases, such as with the Empress Retsuhime, a daughter of the Hantei line has claimed the throne and ruled the Empire. In others, Otomo or

Seppun brothers of the ruler were given permission by the Throne to renounce their Abdication, and take back the Hantei family name. In other, stranger stories, the line of the Hantei was all but destroyed in a terrible catastrophe and the Imperial line had to be traced through the Otomo line, to the closest blood kin of the ruling Hantei.

HANTEI GENJI, THE SHINING PRINCE

Almost one thousand years ago, Hantei Genji (Hantei II), son of the First Hantei, lifted the arts to their high status within the court of Rokugan's elite. In the *Tale of Genji*, he is portrayed not only as a magnificent statesman, but also as an accomplished poet and painter. Within the circles of the Imperial Court, he was seen as a true visionary, coupling his father's ethics and his mother's love of beauty into one feudal system which would last for a thousand years.

Genji believed that the ability to compose verse was the highest asset of a truly skilled politician, for it represented a complete mastery of voice and language. The court of Rokugan adopted this view, and from it they derived the belief that poetry could bring peace and understanding to human relationships.

Genji has long been the divine patron of arts in the court, and is remembered as the Hantei who first gave respect and value to the many diverse artistic endeavors of the Kakita and Shiba

artisans. His methods have become tradition, and the rituals and customs of statesmanship which he invented have become the standard for the Rokugani people.

Hantei names are often a subject of controversy, as a Hantei Emperor has three 'naming' periods in his life. First, there is the birth-name, or child-name, which is given by the mother and the father of the child, and is the name by which the young prince will be known until his *gempukku*. At that time, the prince chooses their own 'adult-name', typically from the rolls of the Hantei histories, or the name of some famous hero of the Empire.

If the prince is crowned as ruler, he again changes his name - but this time, he simply loses his personal name, and becomes simply the Hantei. At this time, all records of his previous name are officially struck from the Ikoma records, and he is never again referred to with his 'adult name'.

Until Hantei X, this was not the tradition. The Hantei Emperors, like the daimyo of the other clans, all continued to have and use a personal name. However, as the culture of Rokugan became more formal, the Emperor chose to leave behind his personal name as a symbol that he had joined the ranks of the Celestial Heaven, and left behind the trappings of the mortal world.



DEATH OF THE FIRST HANTEI

"Yes, Hantei-sama. You are going to die, and you are going to be alone. But one day, we will come after, to be by your side again."

- 'Death of the First Hantei' by Shosuro Furiyari

The First Hantei, father of Hantei Genji, died shortly after the First War with Fu Leng. Wounded in the final battle, Hantei continued to rule from his palace in Otosan Uchi, slowly weakening from his wound, and eventually dying with his brothers and sister (Doji) at his bedside.

The famous play "Death of the First Hantei" was written by Shosuro Furiyari, the Scorpion playwright. It is one of his most well-known works, and although the Asako scoff that it is clearly apocryphal, it tells the sad tale of the final days of the First War, and the sorrowful death of the youngest son of Amaterasu.

According to the play, Hantei is saved in combat by the bravery of his only son, Genji, who then returns from the battle bearing his fatally wounded father. When his father gives him the sacred golden no-dachi, symbol of the Hantei line, Genji returns to the war, destroying all that remain of Fu Leng's terrible armies. Doji, Akodo and Bayushi stand by the bedside of their brother, tending his wounds until he finally succumbs.

The Ikoma and Asako insist that the First Hantei continued to rule for a short period after the war, guiding his son in his first years as Emperor. Then, one day, the Hantei simply vanished in a cloud of smoke and sunlight, returning to the Celestial Heavens to be with his Mother for all eternity.

The Imperial Religion: Shinseism

After the death of his father, Hantei Genji made great strides to establish the religion of Shinseism into the Empire. Assisted by the Seppun, he created temples, established the holy sites of the *kami*, and taught the traditions and legends of the Celestial Heavens to all the people of the realm. Shortly after his coronation, Genji proclaimed that the religion of the Seven Fortunes and the words of the Tao were of one mind, and that the two religions should instead be viewed as aspects of the same belief, thus unifying many of the primitive tribes of Rokugan with the body of the Empire.

In the years immediately following the initial introduction of Shinseism, images of Shinsei and the Seven Thunders came to be revered within the halls of the Seven Clans. At the Emperor's decree, many wealthy and influential households began to build shrines, temples and statues in the images of Shinsei and the *kami*. The famous stone statue of Mirumoto was carved by a young Agasha apprentice, supposedly after a miraculous vision beheld by three members of the Dragon Clan upon the death of their *kami*, Togashi. Following the example of Agasha Akukadera,

other full-scale religious institutions were built throughout Rokugan both by the Clans and by the Imperial House. According to Asako Shoki (the greatest historian of the day), the 12th year of Emperor Hantei Kusada (Hantei VI) there were 24 temples within Otosan Uchi's main district. The majority of these were considered 'holy sites' where Shinsei walked, gave speeches, or performed some miracle.

Other, semi-private 'clan temples' (*ujidera*) built by the Seven Clans rapidly became available over the next hundred years, as chronicled by the Ikoma and Asako. These sites, dedicated to the wisdom that the little monk unveiled to the founders of the clans, have since become the cornerstones of Shinseism within the



provinces of Rokugan. They are sites for pilgrimages, and many of them claim to be the homes and sacred sites of the first *kami*, children of the Sun and Moon.

SHINSEISM IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Because it is the chosen religion of the Emperor, the study of the Tao and the practices of Shinseism are common to all parts of the Emerald Empire. Although the Seven Fortunes are also revered, the words of the little monk hold greater prominence within the hearts of the Rokugani people. Each home, whether poor or wealthy, noble or peasant, holds some small token of Shinsei's words, thoughts, and the wisdom of the famous Tao. By Imperial edict, Shinseism is the official religion of the Emerald Empire. The Tao of Shinsei is held in great esteem by the Hantei house, and each Emperor has been required to read the entirety of the text before they ascend the throne.

Shintao prayers at shrines or at home follow roughly the same pattern (there exist several variations due to region, province or clan): First, the supplicant purifies himself by cleaning his hands and mouth with clean water. Then offerings (e.g. coins at a public shrine or food at a home shrine) are given to the ancestors; the supplicant bows twice deeply, claps his hands twice, bows deeply once more and begins prayers to the *kami*.

In many cases, particularly in larger or more affluent houses, Shintao priests and shugenja perform the family rituals. Priests often live with the family, doing constant service to the religious needs of the household or clan. They maintain the upkeep of the family shrine or temple, and keep up any holy sites in the nearby area. The priests can marry and have children, and there are even female priests who serve as do their male counterparts. Some of these priests are of middle age, retirees from the clans who have gone to serve the temple, but the majority are simple folk who felt the calling of the Tao, and continue to seek enlightenment through their dedication to the temple.

These priests are usually assisted by young ladies (*taomiko*) in white kimono, members of the samurai's house who learn about the Tao while educating themselves in many of the rituals of a home which a wife will need. These *taomiko* help the priest at rituals and in other tasks in the shrine, and must be unmarried. Often, the *taomiko* are the priest's daughters or the daughters of the local daimyo. Shintao shrines in the home are places of worship and are considered the homes of the family's ancestral *kami*. Most shrines celebrate festivals (*matsuri*) regularly in order to show the *kami* the respect of the family, and allow them to remember the world outside the shrine.

When Shintao was introduced to the primitive people of Rokugan during the reign of the First Emperor, conflicts occurred between the religion of the Seven Fortunes and the ethics and morals of the Tao. But soon, especially thanks to the works of the Phoenix Clan, the Empire reconciled the two religions by decreeing that the Seven Fortunes are manifestations of the immortal *kami* of nature and the Celestial Heavens. Before Emperor Hantei Genji's edict commanding the unification of the

two religions, Shintao shrines were organized by the communities, while the Emperor performed the imperial Shintao rituals at the court – an important governmental task.

Hantei and Shinjo

When Shinjo left on her travels, only a small portion of her children chose to remain in Rokugan. One of these, a young samurai named Kitsune, came to the Emperor and asked if they could continue to live in the lands of the Unicorn. The Emperor, weak and ill from wounds suffered at the hands of Fu Leng's armies, refused, and relocated the clan south of the Spine of the World Mountains. When asked why, Hantei claimed that he wished Shinjo's children to remain near to him, and that he had promised his wandering sister that he would care for them as if they were his own.

So he has. The Fox Clan, formed from the remnants of the Shinjo who stayed behind, were the first Minor Clan to be formed in the Empire. They have remained in one of the richest provinces in the south, and continue to be accepted at the Emperor's court, no matter what the circumstance. The special place which the Fox hold in the Hantei's heart is directly related to the circumstances of Shinjo's departure.

Shinjo was always a wanderer. When the *kami* fell upon the world, she created and understood the languages, made the maps, and traveled the surface of the world in order to understand what existed. The realm of possibility was Shinjo's playground, and every journey she undertook furthered her own knowledge and satisfied her curiosity.

Every journey, that is, save the last. Since before the war with Fu Leng, Shinjo wished to journey beyond the northern mountains, across the face of the world. Shortly after the war (say the Asako historians), she became disconsolate. Her favorite brother, Fu Leng, had been destroyed, and the children of the Shadowlands made it impossible for her to continue her journeys there. Thus, there was no other place for her to go, save north.

The Hantei, knowing his sister's desire, called her into court. He spoke to her about her desire to travel; but she refused to go. "My brother is dead," she said. "If I go, who is to say that I will ever see the faces of my family again?"

Hantei argued, he cajoled, he entreated Doji and Akodo to persuade his sister to follow her heart, but to no avail. However strong her desire to see the world, her love for her family overruled her wishes.

At last, Hantei called her into his throne room. Covered in fine silks and attended by courtiers, he spoke to Shinjo, and his voice was filled with thunder. The two spoke for hours. Hantei persuaded, argued, and finally commanded, and at last, Shinjo agreed to leave. But she had one request. The children of her clan who wished to stay in Rokugan were her eyes and ears, and they must be allowed to serve in her place until her return. Until the Ki-Rin came back to Rokugan, she bargained, they must be

treated as her chosen people, and all things which would be told to her must be told to them. Thus, they would have records of all things which she would miss in her time away, and be prepared for her return, no matter when that came.

Hantei agreed, and since that day, the Fox libraries have filled with recorded conversations, thoughts, and celebrations directed at Shinjo, in the hopes that one day she would return.

The Imperial Court

The lands commonly considered the border of the 'northern' lands of the Crane are held by the Emerald Champion. Since that position is often held by a Crane, the lands of the Emerald Champion are usually under Crane control. The palace of the Emerald Champion, and the great city of Otosan Uchi, have stood upon the plains for centuries. Since the beginning of the Emerald Empire, the Crane have felt a certain kinship with the family of the Emperor. Every Hantei has chosen a Crane to marry, a graceful, artistic Kakita or a clever, diplomatic Doji. Blood unites the Hantei and Doji houses - blood and honor.

In the court of the Emperor, centered at the grand palace of Otosan Uchi, the diplomats and courtiers practice the art of civilization: arranging marriages, negotiating alliances, and conducting business for their Clans. Within the walls of the Court, houses rise and fall, wars are fought without loss of life, and agreements are made that affect the entire nation. But how does the court of the Emperor affect the lives of common samurai, serving their Lord as they have sworn?

The Imperial court is not a place, not a conglomeration of walls and rooms, but a living entity comprised of dozens of ambassadors and diplomats who follow the Emperor on forays into Rokugan, and serve their Clans as instructed by their Champions. The court itself spends six months of the year in Otosan Uchi, and the rest of its time in the court of one of the major Clans. To host the Emperor and his entourage is a great honor, given to each Clan in turn. Of course, those who have observed the Emperor's journeys through his Empire may note that he is more prone to visit the lands of the Crane and Phoenix than those of the reclusive Dragon or honorless Crab. Those Clans often complain of the favoritism which the Emperor shows the Doji and the Isawa, but their bickering is lost in the world of the great court.

The Imperial Court is also called the "World of the Shining Prince" in direct reference to the lineage of Hantei Genji and his descendants. The City of the Shining Prince, Otosan Uchi, is clean and neat. A quiet atmosphere is the rule, rather than the exception. The gardens of the Emperor spread for miles outside the brilliantly carved and crafted walls of the palace, with spreading trees, lakes and magnificent flowing hedges covering the land. These gardens are often the site of courtly meetings. Discussing matters of war or trade among the weeping willows of

a stream is not uncommon, and such lovely settings only serve as a counterpoint to the negotiations.

The setting of any given meeting of the court is considered carefully by the Emperor's primary advisor, who knows that the Rokugani emphasis on symbolism will color any presence of tree or flower. Kakita Yoshi, the current Imperial Advisor, goes to great lengths to see that all is perfectly prepared for the Emperor's presence, often sending envoys to the courts of the Seven Clans as much as six months before the Winter Court. These envoys prepare the rooms and gardens which the Emperor will inhabit and seek out anything which may endanger him during their stay, including anyone with access to the Imperial Chambers.

Imperial authority is based on the principle that no one in Rokugan owns land. As the direct descendant of the Sun Goddess, the Emperor is the only owner of territory in the Empire, although he has given certain Clans the right to farm and rule them in his stead. The Emperor also authorizes the teaching of the Tao, and has final authority over all religious and ethical debates. The whim of the Hantei, in such cases, can change the religion of the people, although no Emperor has ever altered the Tao itself. Alterations of the readings, however, or of the premises based on the information of the Tao, is entirely within the Emperor's jurisdiction.

The Emperor, wherever he is staying, is the center of the aristocracy. Even the most minute change in the feudal system of Rokugan, from the smallest creation of a *daimyo* to the granting of samurai status to a *heimin*, must be approved by the Emperor, although he often leaves such trivial affairs to his Imperial Advisor. Although it is rarely done, if the Emperor forbade a samurai to become the Champion of their Clan, he or she simply could not take that position. Peasants and other samurai would not be required to listen to their orders, nor acquiesce to their demands. A new Champion would have to be chosen, one which the Emperor approved. The Emperor himself approves most major appointments, although the advice of the Emperor's Advisor weighs heavily upon the man on the Emerald Throne.

The Emperor has the authority to give formal and religious sanction to all events in the Empire, and to delegate such rights to those he finds appropriate. The creation of Imperial magistrates and diplomats, as well as the courtier's official role as the voice of the Emperor, is a part of the delegation of authority.

The protection of the Emperor confers protection from all harmful actions, whether physical, political, or otherwise. If anyone harms someone traveling under the Emperor's protection, the entire Empire will shun him. The wrath of the Emperor and his court can be harsh, ranging from removing Major Clan status to merely ordering a public execution. Indeed, no one in the Empire angers the Hantei line out of hand, and never when they could be caught doing so.

The Wife of the First Emperor, and the Naming of Michi ni Mayotta Musume

The following story is popular in Crane lands, and is repeated from Way of the Crane. The story has been told in the lands of the Hantei and the Doji for hundreds of years, and is kept in its original form here.

There is a small island in the bay near Doji palace, one of many, known as Michi ni Mayotta Musume (Lost Daughter Inlet). It is a sacred place, not only to the Crane but also to the Hantei family. On this island, say the tales, the First Hantei found his



mortal bride, a daughter of the Doji family whose origins were common but whose wit and beauty were legendary. They tell the story once a year, on the last day of the month of the Dog, when the current Emperor sends pilgrims to the island. If the Emperor (or his heir) is to be married, his betrothed spends one night alone on the island, communing with the spirits of the other women, past and future, who will share the life of the Hantei and bear the children of the next generation.

Once, so the ancient texts say, the First Hantei searched the country for a wife. He arrived unexpectedly in the Doji lands, and the Crane Clan searched desperately to find the most beautiful women in the territory in order to gain his approval. In those days there was a small town near the sea, known as Ikieto. The women who lived there had been hardened by their work. When the samurai came to look for a suitable maiden, all the women they found were old, or calloused and displeasing. Therefore the Doji did not stay, but continued on their errand.

The samurai did not know that one fisherman had heard of their search, and had hidden his only daughter. Her name was Doji Mioko, and she was as beautiful as the stars on a clear night. Fish would come to the side of the boat when she sang, and her father would simply scoop them in his net each evening. He feared she would be taken away, and he would no longer have the easy wealth his fishing brought. So he hid her on a small island far from the village, planning to fetch her home when the Emperor had gone.

The Emperor saw the maidens that the Kakita brought to the palace, and though they were noble and honorable women, none of them stirred his heart. "I have seen the lands of the Lion, the Crab, Scorpion and Phoenix, and yet no woman has caught my eye," he said. "No face I have seen among the courts of the Unicorn has given me pause, and there is none among the mysterious maidens of the Dragon Clan whose heart I would seek." The Emperor spent his time in solitude, and retired to the highest balconies of Doji palace, thinking only of his loneliness.

One morning, the Emperor and his samurai rode across the lands of the Crane, seeking sport and amusement. While chasing a hunting-bird, Hantei was separated from his loyal servitors and found himself on the ocean shore. The wind blew in from the sea, and in the breeze he heard a faint, haunting melody. The voice was so beautiful that he stopped in amazement. By the time his guardsmen found him the song had ended, but he told them of its beauty. The Crane Champion took Hantei to the nearby village of Ikieto, and commanded the fishermen to take the Emperor to the island just off the shore.

Mioko's father took the Emperor in his small boat, rowing to the island. They sailed all around it, but you could see no place to land. "I heard a voice singing on that island, fisherman," Emperor Hantei said, "Who lives there?"

"No one lives on that island, but I have heard that the wind blows through the coral. The noise is said to resemble singing. Majesty," the fisherman said cleverly. Finding nothing, the Emperor returned to Doji palace.

That night, the fisherman went to a hidden cave in the island to bring his daughter food. "I saw you sailing this morning, father," Mioko said to him. "Who was the young man in your boat?"

"It was but a beggar, daughter, that I found on the shore."

Mioko had seen the handsome young man from her hidden cave within the cliffs of the island, and she had fallen in love with him. After her father left the island, she tied a thin silken cord to the leg of her pet bird, and on that ribbon she wrote a haiku.

When Mioko released the bird, she said a prayer to the Sun Goddess, hoping the bird might find its way to the young beggar-man. That night, the Emperor was dancing with the maidens of the Crane Clan when he heard a disturbance in the bushes of the gardens. There lay a white dove, tangled in the branches by a thin silk ribbon. When he read the words on the ribbon, he said to the Crane Champion, "The maiden who has written these words, only she will I marry, in all the lands of Rokugan."

The nobles of the house of Crane were alarmed. Who knew what peasant maiden had written the poem, and how were they to find her? The samurai of the Crane again scoured the lands, but no one, villager or noble, could tell them the words on the ribbon. The fisherman went to his daughter on the island and told her of the Emperor's proclamation. Mioko fell into tears, and told her father, "Those words on the ribbon were mine, father, written to the beggar-man who shared your boat. Now the Emperor has claimed them for his own, and I will never see my love."

The fisherman was a clever man, and in this problem, he saw a way to make his life even easier and more wealthy. "I can help you, daughter," he said. "Tell me what was written on that ribbon, and I will tell it to some young woman from the village. The Emperor will marry her, and I will help you find your beggar when they are gone." Delighted, Doji Mioko eagerly told her father the small haiku, pleading with him to hurry in his task.

The next day, the fisherman went to see the Emperor, with a young woman on his arm. The woman told the Emperor the words of the little poem, and the Crane lands rejoiced. But the Emperor was not satisfied. He agreed to marry the village maiden, and the wedding was planned for the following evening.

That night, Hantei followed his bride-to-be to her chambers. "Speak to me more of your poetry, gentle Doji maiden," he beseeched her. "Tell me another haiku like the one you wrote upon the ribbon." The girl tried to create a poem, but her efforts were feeble and there was no love in her words. Furious, the Emperor demanded to know who she was, and how she had known the haiku on the ribbon. Falling to her knees, the frightened girl told the Emperor all she knew of the fisherman and his hidden daughter. The Emperor thought long on the matter, and went to see the fisherman the next morning. Hantei showered the man with gold and jewels, saying, "You have brought the woman I am to marry, and I am pleased with your loyalty. But before I am wed, I wish to hear again the wind in the

coral of your island." The fisherman could not refuse, and rowed the Emperor to its rocky shores.

When Doji Mioko saw her father's boat returning, she hid in the cave as she had before. However, when she saw that her father had brought the beggar as he had promised, she ran from the cave to greet them.

The fisherman was caught in his web of lies, and the Emperor saw Mioko at last. It is said that when Hantei approached her, he fell to his knees. "You are the woman I have sought in all the lands of Rokugan, and I will marry you and no other." Tears of joy fell upon the beach at her feet, turning into the purest jade. The Emperor gathered his sparkling tears, and gave them to the Champion of the Crane in exchange for Mioko's hand in marriage.

As for her father, when Mioko discovered that her beggar was the Emperor, she pleaded that he show pity on her father for his deceptions. The Emperor loved his bride, and agreed to her wishes. Instead of death, the fisherman was condemned to live on the little island for the rest of his days.

The Crane Clan still keep the Tears of the First Emperor, small tear-shaped pieces of jade which sparkle and shine unnaturally even in the dimmest light. They are entrusted to the Doji daimyo's wife, who must keep them safe throughout her life and pass them on to her child's bride. It is said that they have the power to bring hope and release to those tainted by the Shadowlands or darkened by evil.

The Emerald Champion and the Jade Champion

At the first celebration of the building of Otosan Uchi, the First Hantei held a festival to determine which mortal was the most honorable, the most intelligent, and the most skilled with a blade. After the tournament, one man stood out as a shining example of the mortal soul. That man was Kakita, who became husband to Doji, and took the position of Emerald Champion. Because of Kakita's insistence upon the rights and nobility of the people of the Empire, the position of Emerald Champion has long been required to keep the law within the realm, administering justice, bringing peace, and watching for danger.

The Emerald Champion is the keeper of the Imperial Magistrates, defender of the Imperial law, and protector of the Hantei line. The position has been filled by every clan save Unicorn (who left shortly after it was established, and have only competed in five tournaments since their return two hundred years ago), and carries with it the respect of the Empire, as well as a fief of lands, servants and wealth. When the Emperor is incapable of carrying out his duties, it is the responsibility of the Emerald Champion to keep the Empire safe.

The Jade Championship has been less fortunate. Established after the first rise of Iuchiban's undead minions, the position was

intended for the most powerful and noble shugenja of the land, suited to serve and protect the Empire in its struggle to destroy the Shadowlands and the *maho* which it spawned. However, the Phoenix argued against such a position, insisting that it interfered with the duties of the Elemental Council of Five. Did the Emperor not trust the Council to maintain spellcraft within the Empire? Were the Isawa not capable of policing their own?

At last, the Champion's post was abandoned, useless and powerless. The position remains on the records of the Hantei, but has remained empty for hundreds of years.

Hantei and Togashi

Of all the *kami*, Hantei and his brother Togashi were perhaps the least alike. They fought often, as Hantei attempted to rule an Empire from which Togashi withdrew. In the beginning, Hantei knew that Togashi could see everything in the world, but could not see his own role in the future he beheld. For that reason, more than any other, Togashi and his 'children' have always stood apart, afraid to change the future they beheld, and unsure if their actions would cause the outcome to be better or worse. Yet, always, the children of Hantei have called upon their enigmatic brothers in the Dragon clan for one ability.

Togashi, and all the Dragon Champions since his time, have had the ability to see the past and understand the future. Yet, without comprehension of how his own actions could alter or modify that future, the Dragon have preferred their watchful isolation. Hantei and his descendants, however, have always had another view of their cousin's awesome power. So long as the Togashi remained distant from happenings in the Empire, the future he saw would be certain. The Hantei have always known this, and at times have used it against the Togashi, for the good of the Empire. If an outcome detrimental to the Empire was certain, Hantei would call upon his enigmatic brother and force him to send troops or make a commitment, thereby gaining the possibility of change in that 'certainty'.

Iuchiban

Very little is known of Iuchiban's early life, though some suspect that he was part of, or somehow attached to, the Hantei Emperors. The Hantei know this more than any, for they alone bear the records of his true birth and nature. The youngest child of the Emperor, Iuchiban struggled with his rank and dedicated himself to the destruction of the Imperial Throne.



When the Imperial forces first put him down in the year 510, he was a man of thirty, so most records place his birth on or around 480. His original name, the clan he came from... all have been lost to the sands of history – but not to the line of Hantei. Through the dedication and patience of their most trusted Otomo advisors, Iuchiban's lineage has been changed, erased and rewritten. The Scorpion Clan records alone present three different versions of Iuchiban's origin; none of them are correct. Over the last centuries, the Empire has forgotten his origin – forbidden to speak of it, the populace quickly lost the knowledge.

But the Hantei remember.

The Imperial descendants have always known that Iuchiban was born a Hantei, a favored child of the Sun. They understand his rage and frustrated impotence at the politics and games of the Seven Clans, but refuse to admit to his bloodlust or hatred for the Empire. To them, Iuchiban was a madman, untouched by the Sun's light, and driven to darkness through his own desire for power. He broke the Celestial Order, rose up against his brother, and resorted to blasphemies and black rites to claim the throne – and failed. The unwritten history of his shattered coup holds all

the contempt of the Hantei, and all the bitterness of a brother betrayed.

Somehow, Iuchiban acquired a text of blood magics, written in the cryptic hand of a mad Kuni. He studied, absorbed and built upon the meticulous notes, formulating theories and hypotheses which the earlier shugenja had only hinted at. He saw how he could seize the Emerald Throne for himself, using *maho-tsukai* powers to give him the force he needed. For years, he pursued his unholy research, telling no one, revealing nothing. He attained a total mastery of black magic in secret; whatever horrid paths he walked during those years, he walked alone. When he emerged from his studies, he took the secret name "Iuchiban," and let the shadows of his heart consume his very being.

Iuchiban knew that, as the Emperor's dutiful brother, his word would be obeyed, his commands followed. In his brother's palace at Otsan Uchi, he planned and tempered his evil powers, using unwary servants or minor courtiers to feed the hunger of the blood. When questioned, he called upon the right of his noble lineage – and no one ever asked twice. At last, he discovered the power to use the bodies in the Imperial Graveyard: a ground filled with the remains of ancient heroes, Emerald Champions and many of the Hantei Emperors. Raising their bodies as hideous undead remnants, the would-be Emperor attacked his brother, and was put down. In his fury, the Emperor struck Iuchiban's true name from the records, forever condemning his memory to a black silence, deeper than any grave.

Wisdom of the Heavens

"The only substitute for truth is poison." – Bayushi Kachiko

The Wisdom of the Heavens lists the final words spoken by each Emperor, collected by the Seppun scribes at every Hantei's deathbed. The Seppun keep close record of the text, and none but the Imperial Scribe and the Emperor himself may read it. Some snippets of the manuscript have 'leaked' to the Ikoma libraries and the Bayushi scrolls, but for the most part, its contents are unknown to the people of Rokugan. The original text is kept in the Imperial Chambers within Otsan Uchi's golden walls.

The following statements are supposedly from the Scroll of the Emperor, although some may be forgeries, placed in the records by clever courtiers who wished to undermine the Hantei line.

IT IS NOT IMPORTANT TO FIGHT BEST. IT IS IMPORTANT TO FIGHT LAST. THAT WAY, WHEN YOU DEFEAT YOUR OPPONENT, THERE ARE NO OTHERS TO TAKE HIS PLACE.

ONLY GET INVOLVED IN THE FIGHTS YOU KNOW YOU CAN WIN.

WHEN POSSIBLE, ALLOW OTHERS TO DO YOUR SPEAKING FOR YOU – THIS WAY, YOU CAN ACCUSE THEM OF MISUNDERSTANDING.

BE A MOTHER TO THE EMPIRE – GIVE IT WHAT IT WANTS, AND IT WILL NOT LOOK ELSEWHERE FOR ITS NEEDS. TREAT IT AS A CHILD, AND PROTECT IT FROM ITS OWN DESIRES, AND IT WILL FLOURISH. KEEP YOUR THOUGHTS AND JUSTIFICATIONS TO YOURSELF: A CHILD NEEDS TO KNOW ONLY WHAT TO DO, AND WHAT NOT TO DO. ANYTHING ELSE CONFUSES THE ISSUE, AND EXPLANATIONS MAKE YOU APPEAR FALLIBLE.

ALWAYS HAVE A SCAPEGOAT.

THINK COMPLEX, TALK OF COMPLEX PLOTS, BUT ALWAYS USE SOMETHING SIMPLE.

DO NOT DEVOTE TIME TO THE PLAN. PUT ALL OF YOUR ENERGY INTO CONTINGENCIES. SOMETHING WILL ALWAYS GO WRONG WITH THE PLAN.

NEVER KILL A FANATIC, OR HE BECOMES A MARTYR. A LIVING MAN IS EASY TO DESTROY: A DEAD MAN IS UNQUESTIONABLE IN THE EYES OF HIS FOLLOWERS.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY'S WEAKNESS, BUT DO NOT USE IT. ALLOW OTHERS TO KNOW IT, AND LET THEM PERFORM YOUR WILL.

KNOWLEDGE IS NOT POWER. POWER IS THE ABILITY TO DENY KNOWLEDGE.



"Too often, salvation sounds like a lie, and lies are taken for the truth."

– Isawa Tomo

The woman rested on the hillside, her robes swirling in the morning mist. It had been a strange morning, and her tribe was weary of journeying. At last, she thought, this would be a place to call home. The rolling valley was magnificent, filled with a small river and a lush forest, and the high cliffs of the mountains provided shelter from the winter storms.

She was the holy woman of her people, keeper of their gods and speaker to the Sun and Moon. Raising her staff, she looked



up into the sky. "Great One," she cried, "send me a sign that this is the time for your people to know your path!"

As she spoke, thunder rippled through the heavens, pushing aside the clouds and stars. A tremendous wind sprang from the seashore, and the roar of the Heavens shattered the silence. The woman cowered, falling to her knees before this celestial movement, praying to the Great One for guidance.

When the thunder ceased and the sky turned the rose of dawn, she looked up at the hilltop. Eight figures with eyes of flame stood before her, dressed in fine silk robes.

"Stand, woman," one of them spoke, and his voice was the music of the rivers. "Tell us your name."

"Seppun," she cried, afraid. "Seppun." It was a title rather than a name, used to refer to the holiest of celestial servants. Surely these godly beings would take pity on her, and allow her to stand with them, serve them, and guard their path.

"Allow me to serve you, great one," she asked, lowering her head to the ground in respect. "And I will forever guard your children, teaching them of the ways of the Great Ones and the small."

"Seppun." The man responded, looking out at the ocean. "Rise, Seppun, first of my people, and tell me of your world."

The Seppun are perhaps the closest to the Emperor, both by blood and in fellowship. Others might vie for the Emperor's attentions, but the Seppun are always in the Imperial graces. From the beginning, Seppun was the most dedicated to the ideals and words of Shinsei, bringing her perspective to the religion of the Tao. She sponsored the first temples of the Tao, helped work with the Isawa to unify the two religions, and brought education and enlightenment to the nobility of the new Empire. Certainly, once the Four Temples were created around Kyuden Seppun, the influence and respect accorded the Tao began to increase.

Kyuden Seppun

At the base of the mountains to the north of the Crane provinces, within view of the golden walls and high banners of Otosan Uchi, stands the palace of the Seppun. Kyuden Seppun, the ancestral home of the Imperial Family of Seppun, is a wide-spread, sprawling structure, as ancient as the Imperial City itself. While the city was being constructed, Hantei and his sister Doji remained within these dark-stained walls, keeping company with the first Seppun and his family. Once the Emperor moved to his home within Otosan Uchi, Kyuden Seppun became 'the Second Home of the Hantei'. It has large shrines for the study of scholarly texts, magnificent gardens filled with rare and exotic plants, and elaborate rooms for the courtiers. Within the libraries of the Seppun Palace are ancient scrolls and texts filled with history, culture and administrative methodology. Although not as grand or all-encompassing as the Ikoma libraries, nor as blessed with

ancient texts as those of the Isawa, the libraries of the Seppun contain many valuable scrolls and lessons.

It was here, in Kyuden Seppun, that Shinseism was introduced and Shinseist art saw its first flower. Shortly after the Seven Thunders vanished into the Shadowlands, and after Shosuro died here within the Grand Court Chamber, the Four Temples of Shinsei were constructed outside the walls of Kyuden Seppun. Each was built on a foundation set with a cornerstone taken from the Hill of Otosan Uchi. On each is a carving of symbols, depicting one of the four most important lessons of Shinsei.

From Kyuden Seppun, Shinseism blossomed. Teachers, trained in the mysteries of the Tao by Lady Seppun herself, traveled the land spreading the wisdom of the little monk to the Seven Great Clans of Rokugan. The teachings of Shinsei grew as they were accepted by the children of the Kami, and more temples sprung up across the land. Many of the monasteries and sanctuaries built during this time resembled Kyuden Seppun's Four Temples. New types of knowledge and new working techniques, integrating Shinsei's doctrines and advanced concepts of government, were introduced. Kyuden Seppun quickly consolidated its functions as the administrative and cultural center of the time. Even today, hundreds of years later, the palace and temple sites, *kofun* (graves used by the primitive Rokugani before the coming of Iuchiban and the use of cremation ceremonies), stone figures and other man-made reminders of the times remain in considerable numbers.

Many of the natural features and other places within the Seppun Palace's walls have been lauded by the great poets of the past. Doji courtiers have often celebrated the magnificent architecture, the exquisite hospitality and the beauty of the Seppun court. Kyuden Seppun has no guarded walls, no legions of bushi. The small villages that ring nearby Otosan Uchi also provide its sister, Kyuden Seppun, with supplies and food. The palace stands at the base of the Mountains of Regret, near a small river known as the Toyura. It runs directly to the ocean, providing a magnificent setting for the gardens of the Seppun.

The Ikoma libraries state that the palace of the Seppun was first built as a temporary residence for Hantei as his Imperial City was being built. Since then, it has served as a 'summer home' for the Hantei, and also as a separate home for the Emperor's children,

should they marry before the Emperor retires from his throne. In such a case, the Heir Apparent lives in the palace of the Seppun for the first year of his marriage, in order to remain undisturbed by Imperial politics and troubles. The palace of the Seppun also provides a place for certain political, administrative and ceremonial activities, as it has since the beginning of the Empire.

As the framework of the Empire assumed a more ordered form, palace construction came to include a number of administrative offices in addition to the Emperor's residence. Kyuden Seppun was enlarged over time; entire wings were added to incorporate the political courts, and to allow the representatives of the Seven Great Clans to stand by the side of the Hantei.

Unusually shaped granite stones can be found in various parts of the central region, and the local peasants make great trade by carving stone figures. Brimming with a droll sort of sturdiness, these figures display completely different qualities from the sculpture of the Asako, the Kakita or the Soshi. It is also customary for the Seppun monks to carve a statue dedicated in the name of a daimyo on the day of their ascension. The statue is



stationed within the Seppun gardens for the duration of his service.

The Grave of Seppun

There is a famous grave located in the Ugiwa district of the Seppun province which, because of its religious significance, was spared from the Imperial Edicts. Long ago, after the rise of Iuchiban, the Emperor commanded that all bodies of the dead be burned 'by the Sun's holy fire', yet the grave of the Lady Seppun was spared. It stands on the edge of the palace grounds, hidden by a twisted path through tall willow trees. Vines and trees hide the mausoleum, and the site is considered to be haunted. Certainly, the Seppun believe that the spirit of their founder still walks by the small stream there, whispering secrets of the Emperor's line. The mausoleum is open to any who wish to pay their respects, carved from the stone of the ground and covered in magnificent paintings. Wall frescoes depict the building of Otosan Uchi, from an open green field and rolling hills to the final opening of the golden gates. Each detail is covered in exquisite color, showing the trail of Kaiu carpenters and stonemasons, the laying of the foundations, and the creation of the four great walls. The mausoleum exhibits a distinctive construction process found only in the primitive culture which surrounded Otosan Uchi before the coming of the *Kami*. The mound was built up in alternating layers of clay and sand.

The ceiling of the great tomb depicts the first constellations (*seishuku*), and the surrounding walls depict the sun, the moon, the Seven Fortunes, and their servants and earthly attendants. This miniature universe was formed to accompany Seppun in her journey into the Celestial Heavens, where she was to sit at the side of the First Hantei and serve Amaterasu herself. However, something went wrong, and it is said that Seppun's spirit could not ascend, her servitors waiting on the walls of the tomb while her ghost walks the grounds. One day, she will go to the Heavens, and the walls of the mausoleum will be bare of Seppun's servants for the first time.

The Four Temples

The four grand temples which surround the Seppun palace are the site of numerous pilgrimages throughout the Empire. Their ancient white marble walls, now covered with trailing vines and hidden by tall trees, hold some of the most prestigious relics and shrines in Rokugan. Many daimyo throughout history have retired to these temples, seeking enlightenment until the end of their days. The current High Monk, speaker for the Four Temples, is Tetsuya, once known as Kaiu Oshuda, retired daimyo of the Kaiu. Although still a loyal Crab, Tetsuya has adopted a new name ('tetsuya' means 'hopeful servant') and used his skills and abilities

to reinforce the temples, as well as assisting the Seppun with the construction of a new wing for this Winter's Court.

The Four Temples are built of marble, stone and wood, and each has an arched entrance, topped by a huge ceramic bell. The four bells, said to be made of the clay upon which Otosan Uchi was built, have shining crystal panels baked within their clay structure, allowing the Lady Sun to shine through them. Each is hung with precision, so that the sun strikes through one of the bells at every hour of the day. The bells are covered with inscriptions from the Tao and the names of each of the Four Temples: Daikandaiji, Yakushiji, Asukadera and Kawaradera.

The Imperial Library

A large number of poems associated with Hantei are preserved in the Seppun palaces. Many were composed at the time of the events they describe, including the massive military expeditions to the Shadowlands during the reign of the Empress Saimei; various artistic and cultural innovations; the dynastic residence and the building of the capital city at Otosan Uchi; the uprising of Seppun Toshiasa and the *jinshin-no-ran* revolution; and the deaths of various imperial scions. Together with other poems relating affairs of the heart or describing the natural landscape, they give valuable information about the consciousness and feelings of Rokugan's past. A scholar who chooses to research in the Seppun libraries may not find cold, 'historical' fact, but they will find revelations about the emotions, motives, and political disturbances of the last millennium.

Through every era, one common artistic thread has persisted through Rokugan's culture: a profound interest in natural scenery and landscape. For the Emerald Empire, the portrayal of nature and religion should be the predominant subject of art. A number of basic tenets underpin this belief: nature is beautiful, nature is harmonious, and in certain ways nature can have an ethical or moral dimension. These ideas are shaped by the Shinseist belief that mortals exist by the order of nature, beneath an omnipotent Sun and Moon, and within the profound order of the Celestial Heavens. *Mono no aware*, 'the pathos of things', is a term which the Rokugani use to define their sense of 'place'. The term is based upon a deep affinity with nature and beauty, and a spontaneous, emotional response towards them. They also use it in a broader sense to define the union between the children of Earth, the *Kami* of the land, and the other creatures in the universe.

The antithesis of this, of course, is the Shadowlands. Having no sense of 'place', the undead exist past their time, outside of the natural order of the Celestial Heavens, and in defiance of the Sun and Moon. The Oni serve their Dark Lord as creatures constructed by his hate. They never entered into the order of the worlds at all, and exist only to destroy and tear it down. *Komai no aware*, the 'removal of things', is the common term used to describe their existence, and their deep hatred of all life.

SETSUGEKKA: THREE SYMBOLIC ELEMENTS

One of the most well-known artifacts within the Seppun libraries is the original copy of a famous speech delivered by Doji Nio, the eldest son of Doji and Kakita. Although copied into several manuscripts for historical purposes, the original version is said to be the most beautiful example of calligraphy and handwriting in history. Entitled "My Mother, the World," the oration focuses on a discussion of the phrase 'setsugekkau, or 'the three elements of nature'. These three elements: snow [setsu], the ocean [gekio], and flowers [ka], are the spirit of the ever-changing world of the Emerald Empire. Because of the beauty of his speech, these elements appear repeatedly in traditional Rokugani painting and fine arts. Snow expresses the heart of the winter, home of court and society; the ocean symbolizes eternal change yet is an eternal constant; and flowers represent the myriad plants and trees in endless transition amidst the cycle of the four seasons.



"There are those who say that lies are powerful. Of course, they also assume that you will believe them."

- Kakita Toshimoko

The Gozoku

In the early days of Rokugan's political history, the Hantei ruled with an iron fist, refusing to delegate any political administration to those outside of the Imperial Line. This system worked for four centuries, according to the records of the Ikoma and the Seppun. However, with the rapid expansion of the Great Clans it became more and more difficult for the Hantei to administer all the troubles of the Empire single-handedly. During the 4th and 5th centuries of Rokugan's history, the administration of the country's politics fell into the unified hands of three of the Great Clans: the Crane, led by Doji Raigu; the Phoenix, led by Shiba Gaijushiko; and the Scorpion, led by Bayushi Atsuki. This powerful and organized alliance of daimyos was called 'the

rulership of the gozoku. The gozoku held power for over a century, taking advantage of the Emperor's age and vanity. The gozoku council maintained a great deal of control over the decisions of the Hantei for two successive reigns (Hantei V and Hantei VI) through gaining strength through allegiances and secrecy. Still, even their unified will was not enough to overcome the power of the ruling Emperor when the young and very popular Hantei Yugozohime (Hantei VII) took the throne. Yugozohime, the first ruling Empress, was supported by a strong Lion backing as well as a unified Imperial House (the Seppun, Otomo and the Miya), and with strength and wit, restored the full power of the Hantei line. Shortly thereafter, around the middle of the 6th century, the administrative power of the 'gozoku' fell to the Seppun and Otomo, and has never been returned to the Great Clans.

Since that time it has become custom for an Otomo to travel in the Emperor's place, visiting both battlefields to command peace or encourage 'justified war', and the courts of the Great Clans to bring the voice of the Emperor. While the Seppun shone in matters of law and record-keeping, the Otomo kept themselves below the surface of Imperial politics, serving the Emperor in the background.

During this time, the Otomo emerged as the Emperor's administrative and cultural center, shining almost as brightly as the Crane in art and literature while administering the personal and political affairs of the Emperor. However, the Otomo have another purpose to their political tangles. Using the famous Doji and Bayushi courtiers as their unwitting pawns in a greater game of intrigue, the Otomo fight for the security of the Emerald Throne. Never again, swore the Otomo, would an alliance of daimyos threaten the power of the Hantei. Thus, they subtly encouraged the Seven Clans towards conflict, disagreement, and war. This divisive strategy has cemented the Emperor's power through history and continues today.

In order to achieve this, the Otomo have encouraged new movements, both culturally and politically. They quietly support and control rebelliousness, smuggling information to those who were opposed to current domestic trends. Although their schemes have been incredibly subtle, they have often encouraged more direct political groups which aim at throwing off old structures. An Otomo adage is 'A common enemy can build a common state.'

Otomo Yamato

One of the youngest sons of the First Hantei, Otomo Yamato, set his last thoughts down in a scroll which has since become known as the 'Divine Branch'. Yamato was the first son of the Hantei line to renounce his claim in favor of his elder brother, and adopt the name of a lesser house instead. His courtesy has become tradition, and now, all younger brothers and sisters of a ruling Hantei adopt the name of a lesser house, and step aside, so

that in all the realm, there is only one Hantei family: that of the Emperor himself.

The 'Divine Branch,' a rather esoteric text written in a primitive version of calligraphy that shows little skill. Some say that the text is no more than the mad ramblings of an old man,



but others claim it holds great secrets which have yet to be understood.

The 'Divine Branch' details the relation between man and the *kami*, and relates a discussion between Hantei and his Heavenly Mother. The topic of the text is the shattering of the foundation, the lifting of the Celestial Heavens from the mortal world. In it, the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, spoke at length to her divine child, Hantei, during the years of his childhood. As they lived in the Celestial Heavens, only Hantei knew the pleasures and delights of the heavenly worlds, and of all the children of the Sun and Moon, only he could appreciate what had been stolen from them when they fell to earth.

The myths and tales related in the Divine Branch text revolve around Hantei's youth, and frequently describe the Imperial *kami* as an individualist, a solitary hero who survives to rescue his brothers and sisters, although he had never even met them. His sacrifice, choosing to face his powerful father in the name of his mother and her lost children, represents the strength of the Hantei line, and their willingness to give up their own lives for the sake of the Empire they serve.

Wielding *kusangi-no-tsuru*, the 'Cloud-Cluster Sword,' Hantei became the model of bushido, living the way all samurai strive, yet knowing nothing of the rules of bushido itself. In this way, Hantei was the incarnation of the warrior spirit, his soul one with the ideal all samurai strive to emulate.

Law

The popular system of law was created in the third century by the daimyo of the Otomo house. Inspired by the Scorpion magistrate Soshi Saibankan, Otomo Kuchiru wrote a lengthy text on a system of law which relied on the spiritual guidance of a man's ancestors - and on the honor of the man in question. This '*ritsuryo*' system of penal and administrative law advocated testimony and honor over physical evidence. Without honor, a samurai was nothing - worthless to his lord, and to his ancestors. Over a course of a century, and eventually backed by Hantei decree on this, *ritsuryo* was established as the country's fundamental legal code, and the general populace eventually accepted its validity. After all, what man would choose to lie, knowing that his ancestors could hear his words? Whoever defended a criminal must face their own ancestors - not in a spiritual sense, but in a tangible, literal manner. Relying on the *Kitsu* to bring forth the revered souls in *Jigoku*, a samurai was required to testify to their actions before the very spirit of their house - their fathers, grandfathers, and souls long ago lost to the material world. With such a jury, a samurai could hardly choose to lie.

The Miya Family

The origins of the Miya family can be found in the final days of the first war against He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Once the Seven Thunders defeated the Dark Brother, the Empire's armies quickly swept away the many hordes that had terrorized Rokugan for over a decade. However, in the final days of the war, a single Oni of subtle power penetrated the capitol. The First Hantei's bodyguards slew the unspeakable creature, but not before the damage was done: Hantei had been struck by a single poisoned claw. Wracked with delirium, the Emperor was cloistered away from the public eye, Seppun and Otomo constantly at his side. The Emperor's siblings were summoned. It seemed likely that Hantei, the first Son of Heaven, would die.

Miya was a young samurai, his *gempukku* only a year gone by. A servant of Otomo, his quick mind and ready charm made him a favorite in the halls of the capitol. It was a sign of his favor in the eyes of his lord that he was allowed to carry packages to his master while Otomo stayed at the Emperor's bedside. One fateful day Miya delivered a most important message. With great joy Otomo read to the weakened Emperor: the war was won. The last of the Oni Lords was dead, its army broken. Akodo was hastening to his brother's side and Rokugan would at last know peace! Hantei's eyes cleared at this news. Gathering himself up, he addressed the messenger who had brought such news. "Young man..." Miya's heart nearly stopped as he realized the Emperor was speaking directly to him!

"Young man, you have brought me the greatest gift any man can receive. Hope. Go now, and tell all my people that the Emperor sends his blessings, for now the People of Mother Sun will know peace at last!" Stammering thanks, Miya fled in his haste to carry out his Emperor's will.

Overwhelmed by the immensity of the task, he turned to his friends. An Ide provided him with a mount to spread the blessing; a Kaiu gave him the sketchy map that was the best record of the lands claimed by the Emperor. Each clan stepped forward to aid the youth: food from the Crane, charms of protection from an Asako. Without a word, an Agasha brought him a simple wood-saw. But perhaps the most important were five men, ronin



without clan or station, who came forward as Miya passed through the gates of Otosan-Uchi, and pledged their lives to guarding "the Emperor's Herald". Shocked, he accepted their pledge and rode out into a much younger and wilder Rokugan.

THE EMPEROR'S BLESSING

While the histories of the Ikoma record that the first Hantei died shortly after the Great War, they also record that Hantei I's final decree was for the samurai known as Miya to carry his word across the land. And those same histories say that it was Hantei II's first act to grant the loyal Miya the right to found a house, which was to carry on as Miya had, bringing the words of the Hantei to the farthest corners of the Emerald Empire.

In the aftermath of the war, Miya found a tired and desperate people. Without the Imperial roads, it was hard for even an armed band to travel from one village to another. While he spread the word of the Emperor's Peace, he saw it would be only a mockery without some evidence of the brighter future he promised. Looking at the wood-saw, he had a vision. At every new town he and his followers appeared at dawn and worked without explanation for hours. Repairing a house. Sinking a well. Burying the dead. At noon each day he would finally speak, proclaiming the Emperor's blessing before riding on to the next village. He worked and rode and spoke with the tireless energy of a driven man. Sometimes a man or woman left homeless by the war joined his growing group. Within a month, Miya lead a sizable crew, and with daily practice their skill grew. In a frenzied morning of work, they could set a village on the brink of collapse squarely on the path of recovery. The "Emperor's Blessing", as Miya's passage was called, crept across the empire at a steady march, and in its wake there was peace at last. The Emperor's Blessing survives to the present day, as crews of carpenters wander the provinces.

It is said that the Blessing passed through every single village that survived the war. Over two years later Miya, now unquestionably a man of strong bearing, returned to the capitol. Much had changed in his absence. Where he had left as a lone boy, he now headed a band of fanatical followers. The walls he passed of Otosan Uchi were worked with the strongest Isawa magics, so that the tragedy of the Oni assassin would never be repeated. Hantei the Second sat firmly on the Emerald Throne, his formal coronation only days away.

And, among the courtiers of the realm, there stood Otomo.

The Otomo were clearly second to the Seppun now, a lesser partner in Hantei's alliance. But in Miya, Lord Otomo saw opportunity. If he were taken into Otomo's house, it would strengthen the Otomo's position greatly, but if Miya were to found a new house, one deeply indebted to his own... he might double his standing.

Otomo's whispers drifted throughout the Imperial Court. Favors were exchanged and notions were planted. By the time Hantei II's coronation came, Miya's ascension was assured. In a somber ceremony, Hantei Genji, the Second Hantei, took up his

father's throne with Seppun, Otomo, and Miya standing at his side.

Return of the Unicorn

When the Unicorn Clan arrived in Rokugan it sent a shock through the Imperial Court. While the Lion and Crane histories record the pivotal moment as the Shinjo presentation of the ancient sandalwood fan that the Lady Doji had given them, the family traditions of the Miya pass down a different tale. The Miya, in their many duties to the Emperor, had always had a close bond to the minor clans. They were often the instrument that delivered the Emperor's approval when a petition was granted, and had kept particularly close ties to the Fox Clan. The Miya always remembered that an Ide had been the first to come forward and aid their founder. When the Unicorns appeared, the Fox were the first to recognize their lost kin, and they rushed this news to their allies. The Miya carried the message, and through their influence a foreign barbarian was allowed into the Emperor's court to present the astonishing evidence. And the Miya were the first to carry the Emperor's welcome to the Unicorn Champion. Again a Miya spread the Blessing of the Hantei, and again peace followed in their wake.

The Miya have always found kindred souls in the Unicorn Clan. The Ide's devotion to peaceful contact, and harmonious negotiation mirrored their beliefs, and many journeyed to their new provinces to learn their ways.

The Miya Today

While the Miya do not have the glory of their early days, nor the privilege that comes from Hantei's siblings joining their ranks, they remain a strong force in Rokugan politics. Miya fill many positions within the bureaucracy, and a surprising number hold posts as magistrates. Their even temper and devotion to the Emperor's Law, both its letter and its spirit, makes them highly sought arbitrators and judges. They are the only group outside the seven Clans that have hereditary positions among the Emerald Magistrates.

Another important post that they control is that of the Emperor's Herald. Traditionally, the daimyo of the Miya holds this title. However, the current daimyo, Miya Yoto, has passed this role on to his son Satoshi. Many suspect he will turn over the leadership of his family to Satoshi this winter. Yoto himself has sparked a fair bit of scandal with his outspoken view about ronin (whom he holds in surprising regard). Many in the Empire think it would be best if Yoto retired to teaching at the Miya school... before something unfortunate happens.

Virtues of the Court

It's been mentioned before, but it is impossible to stress the difference between perception and reality too strongly. Honesty is considered rude. Although in many cultures lying is considered dishonorable, in Rokugan it is an art form. Telling someone what you think can only be done through a veil of caution and courtesy, and so it is possible to understand one another without a single word. Topics such as love, hatred, and other emotional subjects are grounds too dangerous to tread upon, and often, a samurai will spend hours discussing tea with someone – and meaning much more.

One of the exceptions to this rule is a samurai under the influence of *sake*. A samurai who drinks too much is always excused for his behavior and any insults he makes, so long as his actions do not involve such disgraces as murder, disloyalty or treason. When a man is drunk, he cannot be expected to cover his 'true face', and is given more leeway to act as he wishes. It is a delicate loophole, though, and not one to be abused. This, and other virtues of polite society, are important to note for anyone who plans to make a journey to the Emperor's Winter Court.

The greatest virtues of Rokugani political culture are sincerity, loyalty, and justice. The two greatest principles are *giri* (duty) and *on* (indebtedness). Sincerity does not mean honesty; sincerity is the ability to appear honest. A samurai is expected to lie to protect his family's honor. That is why in court, the testimony of family members is not considered valid.

A samurai is expected to be ready to give up his life for his daimyo at any moment. The

concept of loyalty goes both ways. A daimyo will be loyal to a fallen samurai's memory by rewarding his family in return for his devotion. This concept of giving one's life to better one's family is very important. In Rokugan, nothing is as important as your family. Without family, a samurai's life (or even a peasant's life) is worth nothing.

Samurai are official representatives of their daimyo and the daimyo are representatives of the Emperor. In case the daimyos and their men are too far away, or unable to keep the peace, villages sometimes have *heimin* 'police' who inherit their position. Rokugan has a very unforgiving justice system, but before anyone can be brought to justice, a confession must be made by the perpetrator, or the criminal must be caught red handed. Torture is a common method of obtaining confessions.





Minor Clans

"Do you want to see the future, little samurai? It is carved into my soul..."

– Dairya

Traditionally, ronin come from the ranks of *ji-samurai* (lesser sons and daughters of a noble house), or the illegitimate children of a samurai father and a *heimin* mother. Because children are always considered part of their father's caste, children of such a union are samurai, despite their common birth and 'stained' origins. However, unless the samurai can prove his father's identity with witnesses, the 'samurai' is considered ronin, able to claim some status, but not far removed from *heimin*. Many of those claiming to be samurai are actually simple peasants, with no testimony to support their supposed familial tie, and no skill with the blade to enforce their claim.

Ronin are an enigma to many parts of the Emerald Empire. They must be treated as samurai, yet not so grandly as those of the nobility. They are something more than peasants, but less than the *buke* class. For the most part, they are ignored and reviled, refused a part in society, yet not willing to descend into the hierarchy of peasants.

Lesser sons and daughters of minor houses often become ronin when their father's land is divided. Unless they have made a name for themselves, they may be removed from their oath of fealty by a jealous brother or sister, or forced to renounce their familial claim by political coup. The children of such samurai are also considered ronin, propagating the wave-men within the Empire from generation to generation.

It is from these lesser samurai, however, that some of the greatest tales of bravery and courage come. When a samurai has nothing to lose, they have everything to gain.

If a ronin performs some great feat, they may be accepted into a clan as a minor member of that family. They will be expected to swear fealty, forsake all former ties and alliances, and obey their new lord in all things.

Small bands of ronin often gather together to join forces toward survival. Such bands, known as *juzimai*, often wreak

havoc as bandits, mercenaries and thieves, further sinking from their part in the social hierarchy, and casting off all restraint of the Code of Bushido. Others struggle to create a life for themselves, a village or other permanent structure, or by joining the troops of a minor clan. (See the adventure *Code of Bushido* for further information on one such ronin band.)

During war, political and social rules often fall by the wayside, and ronin are given opportunities they might not otherwise have seen. In times such as these, Minor Clans are born. There are thirteen Minor Clans in Rokugan during the reign of Hantei XXXVIII, including the Mantis, Dragonfly, Fox, Hare and Falcon Clans.

THE FOX AND THE MANTIS

The two most powerful Minor Clans in the Empire are the Fox and the Mantis. These two families are the only ones allowed to maintain ambassadors to the Emperor's court, and they are the oldest of the Minor Clans. The Fox, descendants of the original Unicorn Clan before Shinjo left on her great journey, have since gained the surname 'Kitsune', and often serve as hunters, scouts, and woodsmen for the Emerald Champion. The Mantis were once given a surname during the reign of Hantei XIV, but had it stripped from their records when one of their daimyos attempted to assassinate Hantei XVII.

ATTAINING CLAN STATUS

Minor clans do not simply 'appear'. Instead, they are created by the Emperor, formed of bands of ronin or lesser houses of the Seven Great Clans. When a group has earned the right to Minor Clan status, they are formally given a katana from the Emperor's hands – a weapon which will become the symbol of their house for the rest of the clan's existence. If the Minor Clan is ever disgraced and has their Clan status revoked, their clan weapon is broken by the Emperor's hand.

It is exceptionally difficult to become a minor clan, and most bands who attain that status have years of history, performing dramatic deeds for the Emperor or a major lord, using exceptional courage and prowess, or completing some impossible task.

And not all Minor Clans have family names. Over half of the Minor Clans have no 'first' or house name. House names are given separately, also by the Emperor's command, and only on rare occasions – only seven family names are recorded to have been given to Minor Clans in the history of the Empire. (More information on the creation of a Minor Clan will be in the forthcoming supplement *Way of the Minor Clans*.)



Chapter Two: Afternoon

Greetings, my friends!

Here at the Winter Court, it is very important that you understand the culture of our great Empire, for you are about to be wholly immersed in its practices, customs - and its secrets. Oh, yes, the Emerald Empire has its secrets - though, I suspect, no more than any other. I hear the Unicorn complain that the court of the Hantei is twisted and convoluted, yet I see their own strange practices and I shudder.

Let them find reason in their own traditions, and then look for it in ours.

Our culture is rich in heritage, custom and ceremony, yes, such as the delicate way in which we burn our honored dead, the beauty of the tea ceremony, and the numerous festivals of our calendar. These are things to be revered, and respected.

Come, my friend, and walk by my side. There is so much to see! The afternoon sun burns her way through the peaceful sky even as we speak, and the winter's day lingers in the still pool.

Let me show you the Way of the Empire.

Kakita Ryoku



A Dangerous Game

Part Three

The fan was Kachiko's, but no one needed to know how he had received it. Hoturi smiled, watching the court move and turn in delicate patterns. The feast was not for two hours, and there was plenty of time for a game.

"Of course, Yusuko, this is all very quiet. I should not know myself, save that my... companion of last evening asked me to intervene." The courtesan giggled, covering her mouth with both hands. "You'll do this small favor for me, won't you, my dear?"

Her agreement was swift, her eyes filled with hope as the lord of the Crane bowed – a touch deeper than necessary, making the courtesan's eyes widen and her giggles increase. After a small bow of her own, she scurried off, nearly falling over her train in her haste to complete the task.

The game has begun, my dear.

"Koshurin, this is intolerable," the Kuni ambassador hissed, his fists clenched. "Your daughter will have to marry a Hiruma. If not Maruku, then his brother, Atsumatsi. It was agreed."

Koshurin snarled. "Your man is dead."

"His brother has first claim. The Crane – Hoturi himself – has said they will support us in our rightful cause if we choose to press the matter. No champion will spring from the background to save your honor this time, Scorpion."

There was a pause, and then Koshurin smiled at the still form of his daughter, kneeling by the windowsill on a silk cushion. "Then take her. I'm sure she will provide no resistance."

"Another duel? You must think we are fools."

Koshurin's stare pierced the Crab daimyo through his black heart. "No duels this time, Crab."

"We will marry them tonight." Kuni Yori's voice was glass and stone. "Hiruma Atsumatsi will come for her himself, with a guard of ten men. If you wish for this to be war, Koshurin-san, then keep your daughter close, and refuse them passage. Tonight, she will be the bride of a Crab." With a stiff bow, Yori and his retinue swept out of the Scorpion's chambers.

The chamber was still and silent, and after a moment, Kachiko looked up at her father, fury clear upon her face. "You said..."

"I said nothing. You are a traitor to our house, girl. You deserve no better."

"Shoju will have your head for this." Her whisper was bitter, angry, and her lips snarled in hate.

"Clean your face. You look like a *junshin*, easy to read and easy to control." Koshurin swept past, his robes brushing the floor near his daughter's pillow.

"I'll see you dead, father."

Koshurin's mocking laugh pierced the chamber, echoing in the still wind of the palace corridor.

Hoturi, Hoturi, my little Crane. Was this the best you could do?

"Itagi-san," Matsigoshi lamented, "Why do you break our contract?" His voice was louder than he had intended, and immediately courtiers of all clans paused to look in their direction. "We had negotiated..."

"Yes, yes," Itagi hurried, motioning to the Lion to lower his voice. "But plans have changed. Another prospect has offered itself, and my Lord is most unwilling to insult them by refusing." The Unicorn turned a golden fan in his effeminate hands, twisting it this way and that with a self-satisfied shrug.

"This means, of course, that our families shall have no further commerce! On any grounds!" Matsigoshi began to work himself into a screaming frenzy. "You cannot insult my house this way, Unicorn!"

Itagi bowed, confident in his new allies. "I'm sure you will see it differently once your obvious disappointment has subsided, Akodo-san. And if you do not," he smiled and lifted the fan, smelling the faint perfume it carried, "then perhaps you should reconsider our alliance. My house has no further need for your friendship. We have made much greater allies today." With that, Itagi strutted away, his prancing steps barely containing his excitement.

Within moments, the court was abuzz with rumor. As the Scorpion courtiers descended from their chambers, Kachiko was surrounded by whispers.

"... marrying that Unicorn?..."

"... obviously a waste... family was so ashamed..."

"... Unicorn, and the daughter of Shosuro..."

At the end of the isle, she saw the pudgy Ide, her golden fan tucked carefully in his belt. As she glanced at him, his smile broadened, and his hand brushed against its scarlet tassel.

Hoturi. Her eyes narrowed, and her smile turned seductive. I see our game has become more complex. Perhaps I underestimated you.

A marriage to either of the two – Crab or Unicorn – would ruin her chances to become the Scorpion daimyo's wife. Hoturi certainly knew that – and he knew she could foil one or the other. But both...

"Ide-sama," she bowed, listening to the titters of the court around her. "I am so glad to see you this afternoon. Are you well?"

As she spoke, she moved to his side, gently encouraging him to walk along with her entourage.

"Oh, yes, my lady Shosuro-sama, most certainly." She could hardly contain her revulsion as his eyes wandered over her thin kimono, taking in her body as though it were some piece of *gaijin* food.

"Such a lovely day." She let her eyes look empty, filled with no thought other than the pleasure of his companionship – a most difficult task. "I am glad to share it with you, Ide-san."

"Only because you are here, Shosuro-sama." His chest puffed out, nearly shredding his silken vest. "You make the sun blush with pride at her children's beauty. Your skin is like a snowy day, and your eyes like twin pools of starlight..." A thin thread of drool touched his lips, and he licked it away with a fat tongue.

"Yes, yes," Kachiko snapped. The man could not even give a compliment effectively. "My father is most interested in an alliance with your family," Kachiko whispered, lifting her fan as if to hide her words from prying ears. Her breath brushed past his ear, and she saw his flesh ripple disgustingly. The smell was overpowering.

"I... I am very pleased..." the Ide stammered.

"Your skills are well-known throughout the Empire, you know. Everyone speaks of you with such regard and honor. I only hope that you could find it in your heart to speak to me, on occasion. It is so difficult, being so far from the heart of the Empire, and so distant from those..." Kachiko looked through lowered lashes at Itagi. "Those you wish to be close to."

His pride was uncontrollable, and he burst out, "I should be most delighted to speak to you, my dear. In fact... I... I want to marry you, my dear Ka... Shosuro-sama. Do you think your father will agree?"

The man was not simply a boor, he was a moron.

"He will never agree. But, once we are married, I will convince him." The lie was simple. "Tonight, in the Shosuro chambers, at sunset. You will come?"

"With my best men to accompany me." The Ide's face was red, filled with triumph.

"Akodo-san," the Kitsu courtier murmured in the small man's ear, filling his cup with *sake* before the feast. "I am so sorry to hear that the Ide diplomats have refused you. Such a tragedy."

"Hmm. Yes." The Lion raised his chopsticks, pretending to watch the dancers perform.

"I have a suggestion of a different marriage from interested parties, my lord, that merits your attention..."

Watching the exchange from across the room, Kachiko lifted her cup to her lips to cover her smile.

In the Scorpion Clan's wing of the palace, Hiruma Atsumatsi stormed out of the marriage chamber, his guards quickly falling in line behind him. As he approached the end of the hallway, the doors slid open, revealing a line of Unicorn guardsmen surrounding the obese bulk of Ide Itagi.

"You!" Itagi snarled, pretending he had courage. "I have come for the hand of Shosuro Kachiko. You will not stand in my way. I am Ide Itagi, son of Ide Fugoki, daimyo of the Gakko province!"

"I am Hiruma Atsumatsi," the Crab barked, pushing through his guards to approach the courtier. "I am brother to the fallen Maruku, who was to be husband to this... this... horrendously ugly woman."

"Insult my bride at your own risk, Crab."

At first, the Hiruma thought to take the comment as an insult, but after a moment, he burst into laughter. "You wish to marry her, Ide, you fool?" The Unicorn bristled, and their hands swung to their obi. The Crab bushi quickly did the same.

Waving his hand to order his men back, Atsumatsi shouted, "I, Hida Atsumatsi, hereby renounce all claims the Crab Clan have to the hand of Shosuro Kachiko, wretched beast that she is. We refuse our ties of engagement, and take back our offer of hospitality. You want her, Unicorn?" Atsumatsi smiled mockingly. "You can have her." At that, the Crab pushed their way past the stunned Unicorn guardsmen, leaving only Atsumatsi's laughter in their wake. "You can *have* her!"

Quickly turning toward the chamber, Itagi rushed past his guards to the open door. Within, seated in her wedding finery, three ladies flocked together, sounds of weeping coming from the bride.

"Oh, my lady," Itagi rushed to her side. Her body was enchanting, covered in the fine red and white of marriage. Kachiko's perfume hung softly in the air, and the Scorpion maids assisted their lady to her feet, one running to fetch the monk who would officiate. Despite her tears, her face was lovely, covered by the shroud of her wedding veil and thickly painted makeup.

"I am so glad he did not hurt you," Itagi whispered, petting her soft hands. "Do not worry, I have no care for what a Crab thinks of a Scorpion. They are all rumors, my dear, and vicious lies. Quickly now, we must marry before your father arrives." This sentence was met by another volley of cunning tears. "Do not cry, my love, dry your tears. Once we've been joined, I know that your father will allow us to have the wedding that your station demands. Come, come."

Within moments, it was over. The small monk waved his hands through the air, beginning the completion of the ritual of joining as the rice-paper doors to the Scorpion chambers slid open once more.

"What's this?" cried Akodo Matsigoshi, his men standing in the doorway behind the Unicorn guards. He looked first at Itagi, then at the Scorpion bride on his arm, and the priest of the Tao behind them, murmuring sacred words. "Where's my daughter? Shosuro-sama!"

"I am here, Akodo-san." Kachiko whispered, another servant sliding open a set of doors that led more deeply into the chambers of the Scorpion. The Scorpion maids fell to their knees as the daughter of their daimyo entered the room, bowing low to cover their restrained smiles.

"What... What's this?"

"Your daughter is married, as I promised, to a man of great station. I hope you are pleased, Akodo-san."

"To *him*? I thought you meant to marry her to your brother!" The Lion's outrage was clear. Across the room, Ide Itagi stared at Kachiko with a stunned expression.

"If you are there, then...?"

"Ogoshiko?" the Akodo roared.

"Here, father," whispered the bride, lifting her veil to reveal a most hideous visage, covered in paint and a Scorpion mask.

Itagi stared in horror at the lady on his arm as the monk intoned, "May their spirits and bodies be one, in your eyes, and the eyes of the Sun Mother, Amaterasu." The ritual complete at last, he looked down on the newlyweds with wide eyes. "May you have many happy years, my dear."

At that, the Akodo maiden burst into tears once more.

Your turn, Hoturi. Kachiko's eyes narrowed in pleasure. Let us see how well you place your stone...



The Winter Court

The Winter Court of the Emperor has been respected for hundreds of years. Although many of the Great Clans hold a Winter Court, the Emperor's is the most prestigious. In preparation for each winter, the clans have cutthroat political negotiations to determine where the Emperor's next court will be held. For some clans, such as the Crane, it is a matter of keeping the Emperor's favor. For others, it means that the wealth of the Imperial Court will be in their provinces, and that the Emperor will be physically present in their palace for three to four months. If Hantei stays at a clan's palace, he will be able to address the troubles of their lands and their daimyos, and to hear their side of any disputes first. Lastly, the clan who holds the Emperor's court can see to the 'comfort' of the ambassadors and nobility of the other clans, ensuring that their petitions and requests are not as well-executed or received as they might be.

During a year of war, the location of the court is integral to how the conflict is seen and supported. Thus, the Winter Court is one of the most important political periods of the year, an open

season for the subtlety and dangers of the nobles of all Seven Clans.

During the first week of the month of the Rooster, the Emperor officially announces the location of his Winter Court for the year. Often, the announcement is celebrated with much pomp, great speeches and many formal exchanges of gifts between the Emperor and the Clan (or family) who will be hosting him.

Invitations

Shortly after the official announcement, invitations go out to those allowed to attend. These invitations, 'officially' given by the host but written at the command of the Emperor, represent the only individuals permitted to stay the winter in the Emperor's presence. Other invitations will be sent to the Seven Clans, to be distributed to the more common members of their families; but those invitations do not allow access to the Hantei, only to his court functions. Of course, the host's family will have almost unlimited access (its their *kyuden*, after all) – another prerogative of the host.

By right of birth, an invitation always goes out to the highest daimyo of the Seven Families (Hida, Shiba, Bayushi, Doji, Shinjo, Togashi and Akodo), as well as the highest member of the monastery of the Tao, and the daimyos of the Seppun, Otomo and Miya. Only on two occasions have invitations to the daimyo of the minor families (Kuni, Kaiu, Daidoji, Kakita, etc.) not been offered, both in times of war. Members of the Imperial Court are always invited, including Imperial Advisors, courtesans, ambassadors of each of the seven clans, and the formal courtiers of rank and station.

The Emerald Champion always receives a number of invitations, for himself, his immediate family, and the most prestigious members of the Emerald Magistrates. On one hand, these invitations are as genuine as any other, but it is commonly known that the Emerald Magistrates at the Winter Court will be responsible for any troubles, dangers or difficulties that the Emperor encounters while en route.

The Imperial Scribes write these invitations, on the finest paper, and bear the mon of both the Emperor and the family hosting the occasion. Also, the clan daimyos receive a number of additional invitations, that they can give to those ambassadors whom they feel are most worthy (or most valuable). Other invitations can be requested by each clan, assuming that they use political negotiations and call in favors in order to receive them.

Minor clans receive very few invitations, and they are always clearly marked with the name of each recipient. Certainly, minor clan daimyos do not have the leeway that the daimyos of the Seven Great Clans do. Their invitations are marked so that the Emperor knows exactly who will be attending. Of course, if they ally with one of the greater clans, they can often wheedle more invitations from their allies, but such assistance always requires a favor in exchange.

In many cases, the invitations to the Seven Clans are not carefully traced – they can be given freely with little notice of where they were obtained. While the host family and the Imperial Advisor is responsible for the conduct of all those invited, the invitations themselves can become a very tradable item. The Emperor usually realizes that they will be exchanged as favors, and in Rokugan, this is all considered very appropriate.

Ronin are rarely found in the Winter Court. The one time that an individual's invitation will be questioned is if they are a ronin samurai. Unless he is someone of great importance (such as the Master of the Elements or the ancient poet, Rezan), they will not be accepted into the court of the Emperor on their own. If they choose to come as a member of someone's retinue (a bodyguard, a member of the Emerald Magistrates), they may attend, although any samurai or daimyo who brings a ronin to the Winter Court will be treated as if they have committed a serious social error.

Traditions of the Court

The Imperial Appointments from one of the most important traditions of the Winter Court. Daimyos are made, inheritances formally given, and positions of the court arranged, all within the period of the Court. Several different functions take place only at

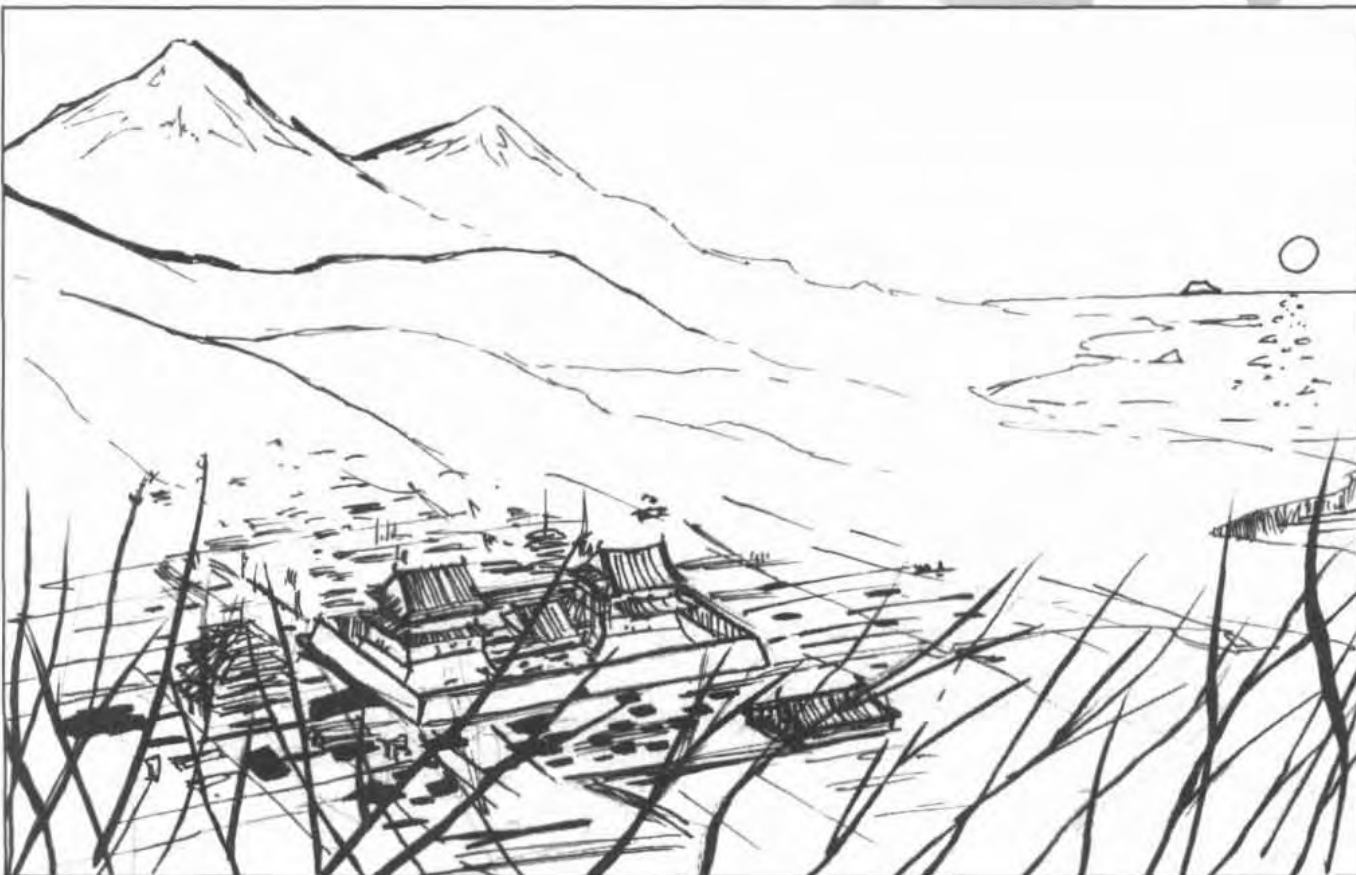
Winter Court, such as the tournament of the Emerald Champion, any Imperial weddings or formal clan alliances, and the appointment of the Imperial Advisor.

The ceremonies take place only after much political wrangling. Politics are an essential part of the court, primarily because of the great power that the Emperor wields over the Rokugani nobles. Without the Hantei's support, all other clans will refuse to accept a daimyo as the Champion of their house. Unless the Emperor approves of it, a clan cannot appoint a new ruler of a house, or give a member of the noble house in marriage.

Of course, Scorpions often comes to courts to observe and keep their Clan's interests alive. At many different Winter Courts, the Scorpion have deliberately sent their most beautiful maidens (and most accomplished courtiers to serve as go-betweens) to marry them to wives and husbands in other Clans. Thus, they ensure that the Scorpions have a say in – or, at least, information on – politics around the Empire.

THE IMPERIAL ADVISOR

One of the most important appointments of the Imperial Court is that of the Imperial Advisor. Although the Emperor has many advisors, for each major aspect of court – financial, political, tactics and warfare, etc. – the Imperial Advisor is the head of the Emperor's advisory council. It is his job to make appointments to



the court, to advise the Emperor in all matters of court, as well as making certain that the Hantei is familiar with all events in the Empire, updating them before they receive visitors or give Imperial Decrees.

The Imperial Advisor, therefore, has a great deal of political power – both to gain and remove the Emperor's favor, as well as ensuring that an ambassador or message is received by the Emperor in a timely manner. The Imperial Advisor is the Emperor's ears and eyes, his direct line to the Seven Clans, and as such is the most prestigious non-inherited position in the Imperial Court. The current Imperial Advisor is Kakita Yoshi, though Bayushi Kachiko, the lovely wife of the Scorpion Clan daimyo, seems to be inheriting his position at this Winter Court – an action which has angered the Kakita daimyo greatly. It is whispered that she is gaining her position by blackmail and seduction, and that the aging Hantei XXXVIII is a prisoner in his own palace. Some, more willing to risk their lives, even whisper that the son she bore to Shōju may be the half-brother of the Imperial Heir, Sotorii.

Inception of a Daimyo

The formal inception of a daimyo is one of the most important types of ceremonies at the court. Although lesser, vassal houses can be officially ratified by their superior, and all of the minor daimyo within a clan are ratified by the Clan Champion, the primary daimyo of each family and the Champions of the Seven Clans can only receive their titles from the Hantei himself. If a death occurs during the year, the person who would inherit the title immediately takes up the responsibilities and tasks of his predecessor, but only gains the title *sozokunin* daimyo, or 'heir to the throne'. Until the Emperor formally recognizes the *sozokunin*, their position is not official.

This often causes problems. If the Emperor chooses another to lead the clan, hard feelings are certain to appear between the outgoing *sozokunin* and the newly appointed Champion.

Although rare, the Hantei's will sometimes differs from the blood lineage of the clan (although no Emperor would choose someone outside the clan's noble lineage to take up the position). In these cases the Emperor usually appoints a 'more capable' second son or daughter over the first-born of the house.

Formally, the Emperor only needs to 'recognize' the new Champion, but the appointment of the leader of a family or clan involves many traditions and rituals. Often, when an Emperor appoints the Champion of a Great Clan, the Winter Court that year will be held in that clan's lands, to honor (and test the courtesy of) the new Champion.

In one unique case, the Champions of the Crab and Scorpion clans both died in a massive battle over disputed territories. The Emperor, furious at the war, immediately sent his own *sozokunin* Champions (members of the Seppun house) to rule both clans until the Winter Court. While these 'temporary' daimyos were in place, the clans could not shed each other's blood, and were forced to resolve their differences.

Popular Custom and Etiquette

By popular custom (as well as the teachings of bushido), each move a samurai makes reflects his or her entire being. If a man chooses to step first with his left foot, for example, he is

considered always ready for war. A man who steps with his right is afraid, and will go to any length to keep himself alive. Even samurai who are not courtiers learn the tenets of 'appropriate behavior' early in their lifetime, or else quickly sent to serve in a minor post and die in obscurity. Just as a loyal retainer commits *seppuku* to follow his daimyo into death, so a samurai's body must follow his mind.

It has been said that a samurai's life hangs on mastering duty, discipline and death. By doing so, the samurai has conquered his body, his mind, and his spirit – defining the quintessential

THE HUNT

Challenge: The Player Characters have been asked to accompany a minor Seppun daimyo on a falconing hunt through the cold winter forests of Kyuden Seppun. The daimyo is a very wealthy man, not too bright, and extremely excited about his new hawk. He insists, despite impending snow, that he hunt today.

Chasing a partridge or other small animal, the Seppun daimyo, becomes separated from the rest of the group, and races off to capture his prize. As the PCs catch up, they realize that he has seen a Yuki-no-Onna (see *Way of the Phoenix*), a cold snow maiden of the forest. The Seppun is consumed with adoration, and insists that the characters return to the court without him.

Focus: If the Seppun daimyo stays, he will surely die of cold. If the characters force him to leave, he may wish to revenge himself on them. Either way, the PCs are bound to have their hands full with this wealthy courtier.

Strike: The Snow Maiden, uninterested in the Seppun, has become infatuated with one of the PCs. If the PC returns her affection, he will surely die. Also, if he is discovered to be harboring feelings for the spirit, the Seppun daimyo will be infuriated. If the PC refuses her attentions, she will be hurt and angry, planning to steal away the PC and keep him trapped forever in a prison of ice and snow.

mastery of bushido. Once he has done so, he ascends through the Celestial Order, arriving at the side of the Fortunes with honor. Compared to grace and nobility, the virtue of duty is all-important. The samurai nature, and his detachment about success or failure reflects this.

Servants, on the other hand, must accept their lesser place in the order of nature. A servant must follow very specific rules and regulations, such as carrying all food meant for samurai above her head so as not to defile it, or never allowing a member of the samurai caste to see the bottom of her feet. The attitude and countenance of a servant can bring good or bad fortune to a house

A servant's clothing must be neat and as clean as possible, particularly if they serve a respected or noble house. On the other hand, a samurai's clothing does not matter. It may be dirty, ruined, or even rags. Only his weapons need polish or shine – for they are the soul of the samurai. When a samurai takes up his weapons, he bows his head to honor their spirits, and the spirits of those who once carried them.

Samurai entering a house, whether be an enemy's or his most trusted lord's, will leave their katana at the door. A samurai who refuses to give up his weapons dishonors his ancestors by suggesting he would make war in a place of peace, and also insulted his host by implying that she would cause a fight in an honorable home. Teahouses, inns, and the tent of a samurai would also fall under this consideration.

No matter the circumstances (except deliberate defilement), a home is a sacred place, and should be treated as such. If the samurai is invited into the house of his lord, or an ally of his lord in times of peace, he may even remove his wakizashi when seated. Only the most trusted advisors and bodyguards may enter a daimyo's presence armed. No matter what the samurai's rank, how close he is by birth or how noble and respected his reputation, he must remove his weapons before he speaks to his daimyo.

In many cases, a samurai will act with the honor required of a man who serves his lord. This means he will take any advantage that gives him the upper hand over his enemy. In the minds of many samurai, there is no such thing as an unfair fight. The Daidoji and Bayushi, in particular, agree with this tenet, although the more traditional Isawa and Hiruma may disagree. A Bayushi daimyo in the Emperor's Winter Court once stated: "Any battle which leaves your enemy dead is a service to your lord. The dead have no power, they cannot threaten, they cannot impede or cause trouble, while the living can still destroy, even from a point where they seem powerless. A dead enemy is the only enemy that can be trusted."

Seppuku

"I have borrowed my ancestors' name. I must return it to them untainted."

– Matsu Tsuko

Fear of death is not only improper, it is also dishonorable. Because the Rokugani believe in a spirit world (*jigoku*) where the souls of the departed go to await rebirth, they expect to join their ancestors in the spirit world after death. Two worlds: *jigoku*, the land of the dead, and *Yomi*, the ancestral haven, await the samurai after he has finished with this life. Reincarnation is a fact of life: once a soul has 'unlearned' its life in *jigoku*, it is returned to Rokugan to again attempt to reach the perfection that is attainable through enlightenment.

One of the most important rituals in the Emerald Empire is the ritual of *seppuku*, or formal suicide. Death is the final testimony, a permanent record of protest or support, and is only performed if the situation is of the most extreme seriousness.

Seppuku (chest cutting) is the ritual of proving one's courage in the face of death. Though it ends in the death of the practitioner, the important purpose of the ceremony is not the death blow, but rather, the moments leading up to the final cut.

Before the ceremony, a samurai spends the day in a temple dedicated to a family kami or appropriate Fortune, writing poems and letters to beloved ones. At sunset, the samurai is blessed and consecrated, dressed in ritual white, and approaches the dais upon which he (or she) will perform the ceremony.

At the beginning of the ritual, the samurai kneels on a mat to protect the soil from his blood. After reading a copy of his final haiku (or death poem), he announces his will and the purpose of his *seppuku*. Then, he draws his wakizashi and makes three deep cuts in his torso. It is of utmost importance that the samurai not cry out in pain, for that is considered a disgrace and dishonor to the samurai and his house. Once he has completed the final cut (or, in some cases, if he appears to be about to make a sound), a close friend or relative will make 'the final cut' – from a standing position behind the participant, the 'second' will use his katana to

remove the head of the individual, ensuring that he dies with honor.

Samurai do not commit seppuku to protect their own honor, but to protect their family's honor. Only in extreme cases will a samurai commit seppuku - it is not a simple way to remove a personal stain, and is not appropriate in cases where the samurai has simply blighted his own honor. Only when the purpose is larger than the samurai's life is seppuku appropriate.

The concept of *seppuku* is among the most important, and most commonly misunderstood customs, in Rokugan. Seppuku, the ritual suicide of the samurai class, may not be entered into without express permission of the feudal lord which a samurai serves. No matter what the offense, or how dire the dishonor, samurai may never kill themselves unless their lord orders it. Seppuku could take place (and would likely be approved) only under specific circumstances, such as if the samurai in question needed to resolve a loyalty conflict between one's lord and the Emperor. Atoning for dishonorable actions is also appropriate, especially if the action had stained the samurai's house or family. Samurai may also commit seppuku in order to avoid dishonorable defeat, and often, a daimyo will grant his generals permission to do so before they leave for the field. In some cases, a samurai gains permission to commit seppuku in order to avoid execution for a major crime. Execution is considered the most dishonorable of deaths.

One of the least used reasons for seppuku is called *kanshi*, or taking one's life in order to reprove the actions of their own lord. Of course, the daimyo in question rarely accepts *kanshi* politely, but the samurai must ask and receive permission anyway. It is considered bad form to refuse a *kanshi* request, as it angers the spirits of the house, and may bring bad fortune down upon the daimyo.

If they are not samurai-ko, female members of the samurai caste are allowed to commit *jigai* by cutting their throat with a tanto. This is considered a less vicious form of death, although no less honorable. At times, a male child who has not yet reached his gempukku will also be allowed to kill himself with *jigai*. If a child is too young to kill himself in order to fulfill a daimyo's seppuku request, it becomes the duty of the parents to kill their own children before they commit seppuku.

Customs of War

GUESTS AT THE WINTER COURT: YASUKI PUKUN

Earth 3 Fire 2 Air 2 Water 3 Void 2

Yasuki Pukun is a jolly, good-tempered merchant lord, whose only goal in life is to have the finest collection of clan swords in the Empire. He has managed to purchase a Kaiu sword, and hopes to gain a Kakita blade at this Winter Court.

However, Pukun is not a duelist, and has little ability with the blade (*Kenjutsu* 2; *Iaijutsu* 1). He is in need of a famous duelist, to aid him in his quest - for certainly, if a duelist of another school can prove himself worthy, he might be able to gain a sword from the Crane, in respect, and then give the sword to his patron, Pukun.

The last thing that Pukun wants is for the Crane to know he is the one sponsoring the duel - he has quite a reputation among the Doji as a swindler and crooked merchant, and knows that they will refuse the sword if they believe that he is involved. However, he is willing to pay a hefty sum...

Samurai have a particular method of putting on their armor, and it is always followed exactly. A samurai who did not put their armor on in precisely the traditional order would be considered unlucky, and many times, would not be allowed to fight - a great dishonor.

Example: Matsu Tsuko is preparing for war, and her noble retainers have brought her armor to her tent so that she may dress for the battle. First, she puts on her *fundoshi*, a loin cloth that covers the bushi's chest and torso. Rather like a long tabard of the medieval ages, it provides protection against the armor's chafing. Tsuko then asks for a *shitagi*, or shirt, and then a plain obi to hold the shirt. Once they are arranged, she is ready for the *kobakama*, a set of trousers. Placing the left leg

into the socket of the pants first, and then the right, Tsuko follows the duty of her martial spirit. The left leg is the sign of awakening the martial soul before battle; by putting it in first, Tsuko readies her fiercest chi. The socklike *tabi* are given to Tsuko for her approval, and placed over the bottom of the kobakama. The *tabi* are divided between the first and second toes of each foot, so that the sandals may be placed on the feet properly.

Next comes Tsuko's actual armor. As seen in the basic *Legend of the Five Rings RPG*, a samurai's armor is formed of metal plates lacquered and laced with silk cord. Tsuko certainly has not used dense lacing for her armor-plates, as the cord would absorb

water. Waterlogged cords are more difficult to clean, last less time, and often attract ants and other bugs. (Further, a samurai's sweat will soak into the cord, making the armor smell.)

Then, she places *kiahana*, or armored shin coverings, followed by the sandals. Now, Tsuko can step outside her tent and begin the long process of arranging the heavy suit of metal armor awaiting her. Because she is the daimyo of the Matsu family, she might have as many as thirteen servants, each holding a piece of armor ready to be worn.

Tsuko next receives the *Suneate*, over shin guards which are heavier than the *kiahana* and less flexible. Afterwards, the thigh-coverings, known as *haidate*, come next and then the *yugake* or gloves. The *kote* are Tsuko's armored sleeves, formed of a single piece of thick material, and laced up beneath the arm. The sleeves do not attach to the body armor, and are occasionally covered with metal plates for extra protection.

Now, Matsu Tsuko asks for her main body armor. This elaborate piece of protection is made up of the *wakibiki* and the *do*, both for her upper torso, and both made of tightly laced plates. If Tsuko had been an archer, or engaged in extremely light combat, she might do without the *wakibiki*, but since she's a heavy combat bushi, her armor must be much more protective. A *kusazuri* hangs from her *do*, giving her armor a skirt-like appearance. She then ties another belt on, this time called an *uwa-obi*. It holds the armor close against the body. Tremendous *sode*, laced shoulder plates, follow, and then the katana and wakizashi are reverently placed in Tsuko's *uwa-obi*.

Finally, Tsuko places a throat protector, called the *nodowa*, around her neck, and the *hachimaki*, or head cloth, is worn over her skull. A *hoate*, or half-mask may be worn under her helmet, or a full *mempo* can be worn. At last, she lifts her *kabuto*, or helmet, and places it firmly upon her head. She is finally ready to go to war.

With this much preparation and ritual, it is easy to see why samurai did not wear their armor every day. Although Crabs usually wear their armor, they also are used to the smell of the plates and lacings after a few days in the harness. One does not wear armor in court under any circumstances.

Other rituals are integral to the battlefield as well. For instance, samurai in Rokugan test their blades by passing them through the bodies of executed criminals. A truly superior katana must cut entirely through seven corpses with one stroke. Most katana can only make it through three. Further, a samurai is so attached to his sword (the *wakizashi*, after all, is the soul of a samurai), that an insult against the sword is an insult against the bushi, his family, and his clan. Such an insult, particularly from an enemy or a servant, can only be removed by using the sword – usually against the offender. Any minor offense, such as accidentally touching the sword or *saya* (scabbard) is enough. Another ritual includes wearing your sword blade down, as an indication of peace. This is a common symbol of a bushi's



peaceful intentions, as he cannot make a true iaijutsu draw if the sword is reversed.

Taking the head of one's enemy is also an important battlefield ritual, and often, samurai wear 'head bags', or sacks designed to carry their enemy's head, on their obi. These bags absorb blood, remain waterproof, and keep the head from rotting in the heat of travel. After a battle, the heads of the defeated are usually taken, identified, washed by eta, mounted on a board with a spike and presented to the victorious daimyo. If he is satisfied, he will send them to their families for proper burial. However, if he was displeased with his enemy's bravery and honor on the battlefield, he might leave the heads on the field for the animals: one of the most dishonorable ways to treat a man's remains.

Duels

When a samurai considers challenging his opponent to a duel, several traditions must be followed. First, the reasons for the duel must fall within acceptable parameters, and a proper challenge must be made; second, the type of duel must be decided; and third, the appropriate ceremonies and rituals must be performed.

When a samurai feels that his honor has been insulted, he may avenge it with a challenge to duel the person who has insulted him. It is also allowable for a samurai to carry a challenge for someone else, such as a courtier, his daimyo, or his wife or daimyo's wife. It is not considered acceptable to challenge someone to a duel if they are of significantly higher station than you are (more than 3 points of Glory), or if your own honor was not insulted (you cannot claim someone else's insult as your own unless you have been asked to intercede). Insults from a superior of much higher station should be borne with honor. If they cannot be ignored, the samurai should ask his daimyo to take up the responsibility for avenging the insult to their house.

Further, a samurai may not initiate or accept a challenge to the death unless he has gained the full support of his daimyo. For a samurai to fall serving his lord is honorable. For him to fail in his duty to his lord because he threw his life away is considered shameful.

There are many types of duels in Rokugan. The duel to first blood (*ketsuiki*) is the most common, as it allows samurai to defend their honor without bringing the attention of their lord or causing shame to their house. *Ketsuiki* usually involve the iaijutsu skill, and end when blood is first drawn. Any samurai



who strikes after the first wound is considered extremely dishonorable. A second, less common duel is the duel to the death (*shi*). These duels (also commonly *iai*jutsu) always take place over extremely serious circumstances, usually on the battlefield, or in a formal setting between two bitter enemies. To challenge someone to this type of duel over a lesser insult is dishonorable, and the challenged samurai may refuse with honor, particularly if his daimyo forbids him to accept such a demeaning challenge.

Shugenja have their own method of dueling with spells, known as the *taryu-jiai*. The two shugenja spend their magical ability, and use the power of their raw spellcraft to determine the victor (see *Way of the Phoenix* for more information). Shugenja take these duels as seriously as the duels of bushi; they are often even more dangerous than those of their sword-wielding associates.

Duels allow other weapons as well, provided both participants agree. A duel between two courtiers might include a poetry competition, or an acting challenge, in which each participant is given an impromptu character to portray. Two Crabs might decide to duel with *tetsubo* (using the appropriate skill) and two warriors on the battlefield might not use *iai*jutsu because they cannot resheath their swords.

Witnesses are integral to a duel environment. In formal duels, a messenger delivers the challenge, carefully written in calligraphy on rice paper. The challenge must be made in public – even spontaneous duels must begin with the formal proposal of the duel. It must entail all the insults or dishonors which spurred the challenger to duel (“He said my mother was a *heimin*!”) and the challenged may freely admit to the truth of those words (“His mother *was* a *heimin*. Here is the testimony of his father!”).

Afterwards, witnesses are assembled. A duel which held without witnesses is no more than an honorless battle, and the participants will gain no glory or honor. Preferably, the samurai’s daimyo should attend a duel, particularly *shi*. If a proxy is involved (a bushi defending the honor of a female courtier, for example), the noncombatant in question will certainly attend.

If a duelist championing the cause of another fails, that person is expected to suffer the same fate as his champion. Many courtiers, in a show of alliance with their champion, will use a knife to inflict similar wounds on themselves, once the duel finishes. In this way, a bushi who takes a minor wound to his arm might see the courtier whom he defended take a knife and cut their own arm open as well.

Once a duel ends, the matter is finished. No further accusations or clarifications can be made. Ever. It is considered an insult to the spirits of the two duelists to have the matter brought up again, even if further testimony arises to deny the insult (“I’m his mother, and I’m a *heimin*!”). The duel is considered the absolute arbitration of the matter.

Art and Culture

Rokugani art has a profundity that transcends many of its ‘simplistic’ conventions. The basic principles of life, the simple essence of each thing – these are the heart of what Rokugani see as beautiful. Their love of the imperfect stems from an acknowledgment of the inherent limitations of human creative powers. No matter how hard humans might try, we are ultimately incapable of creating perfection. The Crane understand it best: their greatest artist, Kakita Wayozu, once said, “It is not attaining perfection that matters, but the act of striving towards it.” The artistic piece that emerges from its creator’s efforts is the end product of a spontaneity beyond human control. It is evidence of the wondrous and unpredictable powers of nature, before which Rokugani culture stands in humble awe.

Common mediums such as sculpture and painting are only a few manifestations of the grand and mysterious power of nature. Another example is *ikebana*, the art of flower arranging. In *ikebana*, the artist arranges the flowers in such a manner as to reproduce them in their natural, uncut setting. The principal location for displaying an *ikebana* arrangement is the *tokonoma*, or main alcove in a tatami-matted room. The *tokonoma* is not regarded as part of the interior space, but rather, a sacred place where communion occurs between the people on the inside and the grand forces of nature on the outside. Here, even a single flower serves as a symbol of universal truth, providing the medium through which mortals can become one with the *kami*. The superior or successful work of art has not achieved perfect beauty, but rather has morally purified the world, the environment, and in turn, the beholder.

Almost one thousand years ago, a young prince known as Hantei Genji (Hantei II) lifted the arts to their high status within the court of Rokugan’s elite. The Tale of Genji, known as ‘The Shining Prince,’ portrays him not only as a magnificent statesman, but also an accomplished poet and painter. Within the circles of the imperial court, the ability to compose poetic verse has been long regarded as the highest asset of a truly skilled functionary. This view derived from poetry’s power to harmonize

human relationships, and to infuse harmony, beauty, and moral astuteness into every human setting.

The tea ceremony also stands out as one of Rokugan's favored arts. Many of the finest Kakita *iemoto*, or 'headmasters' of the various schools, attend the Emperor's Winter Court in order to bring their art to the finest nobles of the land. Ikebana masters often attend as well, although the bleakness of the winter landscape often constrains their arrangements. One of the most famed ikebana artists, Isawa Shinriso, used spellcraft to keep many different kinds of flowers alive for use at the winter courts. The artisans of the court still remember his beautiful ikebana work, and mourn his death only three years ago.

Similarly, aristocrats, nobles, and even heimin and hinin study Noh, Kabuki, and other related forms of song and dance. Other arts, such as calligraphy, are practiced during the long winter months, and become the subject of competitions which honor those who compete. In Rokugan, calligraphy - the art of fine writing - has been elevated to a status similar to painting, and is also the subject of much praise in court.

The Tea Ceremony

The tea leaves used in the formal Rokugani tea ceremony come from a plant known as the *dan-cha*, whose leaves are steamed and made into thick, brick-like packages for preservation. When it is ready for preparation, the brick is ground into flour, and then boiled in consecrated water to stay fresh. The leaves of the *dan-cha* are so precious that they are only used for the special beverage of the ceremony, and at the coronation of an Emperor in the Temple of Otosan Uchi.

Not every instance of tea-drinking has a ceremony associated with it, of course. All social and political classes of Rokugan drink tea, and a separate tea made of a plant known as *macha* is served in every home across the land. This tea, known as *sadou*, is a greenish beverage, served warm and with little ceremony.

The ceremony, known as the *cha-no-yu*, is one of the most important private social customs in Rokugan - an ancient and revered practice that has continued from the time of Lady Doji's

only daughter, the Thunder Konishiko. Konishiko's sense of a unified nation led her to break common segregations of class and social standing, and create a single form of tea-serving for nobility and heimin alike. Once people entered the room of the *cha-no-yu*, she believed that they would be equal and free from their social positions. However, despite its popularity among the comparatively egalitarian Crane Clan, her ideas were not readily accepted among the nobility and feudal lords of the Emerald Empire.

Although the tea ceremony was originally considered refined entertainment, it slowly developed into a means of communion between a host and his guests. As its popularity grew, more and more clans began using it to show their social grace and willingness to understand

one another (very important for most political proceedings). It remains so today, and daimyos rarely bring diplomats to their house without immediately inviting them to a tea ceremony to show the host's good intentions.

The most formal ceremony, known as the *shugo-no-chaji* can take as long as 4 hours, and every movement has its own rules. The formality creates a permanent sense of unity - each thing is done at its own time, and at its own rate, so that all tea ceremonies are exactly the same. Even the Unicorn, who traveled for eight hundred years, had very few changes to their ceremony when they returned.

Each participant in the *cha-no-yu* has their role to

play. From the *teisyu*, or host, to the highest guests (the *sou-kyaku*) and the lower guests, (*otsume*), all have important duties to fulfill. The first step is the offering of the invitation. When the host invites people to his tea gathering, he writes very personal letters to the people about its purpose and method. The letter should include the finest calligraphy, the freshest paper and only the most well-ground inks, and be signed with the host's clearest chop.

On the day of the ceremony, the guests arrive slightly earlier than the appointed time. They are taken to a formal dressing room, given a fresh kimono jacket and kimono socks so that they

THE FEAST

Challenge: The Scorpion Clan's Bayushi Kachiko plans to hold in honor of Kakita Ichiro's *gempukku*. Ichiro, an arrogant lad, is Kakita Toshimoko's only son, whom he fathered on a concubine at the command of the Crane Champion fifteen years ago. Toshimoko feels little kinship with the boy, and his 'rejection' of his son has caused ill feelings. The boy's uncle, Kakita Yoshi, has raised him and taught him the skills of a courtier - which has not raised his father's opinion of him.

Focus: The Bayushi, Kakita and many other guests of all clans arrive at the Bayushi suite for the feast. As the centerpiece, once all the guests have begun eating, the Bayushi bring out a beautifully prepared main course - a whole crane, cooked by the finest chefs in the Scorpion Clan. If the Crane refuse the meal, the Kakita insult the Bayushi's attempt to 'honor' the young man. If the Kakita eat the meal, they insult the spirit of their own clan.

Strike: Ichiro, convinced that his father owes him a great deal, has made a deal with the Scorpion to deliver his father's sword after the feast. He will take advantage of the awkward situation to attempt to blackmail his father into giving him the sword, and will then turn it over to the Scorpion in exchange for their support as the next Kakita daimyo.

will be clean for the ceremony. On the way to the ceremony, (which is held in a garden set aside for such purposes) the guests often exchange greetings and are served with small fruits or warmed water. When the host comes out to greet the guests, he arrives at a gate known as the *cyu-mon*, and personally invites each guest inside the garden gate.

The guests are expected to recognize their host, approach the gate and bow formally in silence. Next, in order of status, each guest enters the inner portion of the garden and approach a stone bowl of water. They purify their hands and mouths with the water, still in silence, and then continue to the tea hut (or *seki-iri*). The tea-hut door is extremely small, and each guest must bow and crawl carefully through. This action was designed to show each participant that they are alike: all bowed before the beauty of the ceremony.

The hut contains calligraphy, drawings, and haiku poems about the season. Stories of the friendship between the two clans, or anything else appropriate adorn the walls or alcoves of the *seki-iri*. A well-educated guest will know which order to look at the paintings and other the items in the room, and will be familiar with even such small details as the position and direction of a fan set on the floor. After a short time, the guests may ask about the poems, compliment the garden and tea hut, and discuss the beauty of their surroundings.

Food is served, and the participants eat lightly, accompanied by small talk and discussion. The food at a tea ceremony is always the same, consisting of light rice and fish meals arranged beautifully on the plate. After the meal, the *teisyu* begins the *syozumi-temae*, or tea ceremony proper, which is very similar to the normal *cha-no-yu*. The host takes charcoal from a nearby container and places in the fireplace. He burns incense in respect to the house's spirits and ancestral kami, and invites the guests to look at the tea container over the coals. The host serves the tea carefully, fulfilling the correct directions and preparatory rituals (such as turning the cup three times after receiving it). At last, small cakes are given, known as *huchidaka*. The participants eat these cakes slowly; once finished, all participants rise and bow, leaving the tea hut one by one in the order in which they came in.

Fashion

The ladies of the Imperial Court determine year's noble fashions, such as the patterns and colors of kimono and obi worn

at the Winter Court. These choices will be emulated throughout the Empire during the coming year. Although this may not seem like an important part of Imperial politics, in actuality, fashion can add quite a social stigma or beneficial distinction. For purposes of game play, any characters who take the time to emulate the popular style of Winter Court over the next year gain a free raise to any seduction or etiquette roll for that year.

Certain fashions do not change style. Kimono in clan colors, the wearing of family mons, and colorful obi with beads matching the clan colors of the individual have been popular for many centuries. Hairstyles, ribbons, and other accouterments change from year to year, as the subtle changes of the court dictate.

The Mon



Heraldry in Rokugan is less formal than heraldry in the West. All samurai sworn to a clan wear the *mon*, or Clan symbol and colors. Nobles often wear a *kamishimo*, or small vest over the kimono that bears the *mon*, on formal occasions. A samurai wears the clan's *mon* on his back, and the *mon* of his family on his left sleeve close to his heart, or his right sleeve to guide his sword.

A samurai usually incorporates his clan colors into his formal clothing; private clothing tends to be drab grays and browns. Samurai often wear hats for formal occasions, which can be very simple or very extravagant, depending upon the wearer's mood.

Heraldry can be broken down by clan, family, house and individual. Typically, heraldry is done in a combination of two colors: a dark, and a light. The crest of a family is a simple, elegant design intended to symbolically identify that house within the Great Clan to which it owes fealty. Usually, the colors are the same as the Clan's, differing only in intensity and hue. Each major family has its own *mon*, and each vassal family has a variation of that major family's *mon*. This can become extremely complex, particularly for a courtier who attempts to determine if an approaching band of bushi are friend or foe.

Many of the motifs represented in the *mon* are based on nature, particularly animals with whom the clans identify (the Crab, the Scorpion, etc.). The Imperial Mon is the Chrysanthemum, and only members of the direct Hantei line may wear that particular crest. Other representatives of the Emperor wear the crest of his Emerald Champion, the laurel wreath.

The Imperial Court often flies flags over the current residence of the Emperor, to show his authority. These flags, known as *ban*,

bear the Imperial Mon, followed by the mon of the Clan and family hosting the Emperor.

Another type of ban is the smaller, rectangular-shaped banners carried during travel, or on the field. These ban, known as *hata*, are the source for the respected office of *hatamoto*, or 'banner bearer', for such advisors carry of the daimyo's words to the rest of his clan. (See *Way of the Crane* for further information).

It is not unusual for a samurai to be granted his own mon by his daimyo. Such things arise for notable honor or courage, and are not passed from father to son. To be granted one's own mon is a personal honor, one which speaks highly of the samurai. If the samurai is particularly impressive, the mon may be extended to his house, and from there, to any vassals the samurai procures.

Example: If you were to see the mon of a lesser samurai, Shosuro Juti, it might follow this format: The top of his banner displays the mon of his clan (the Scorpion). Juti's own kimono would represent the colors and mon of his house, the Shosuro. If a viewing courtier looked more closely (or more successfully made their Heraldry check), she would notice a smaller mon on the sleeve of his kimono that stated his name (Juti).

Poetry and Plays

Popular poetry over the year will often be read at the Winter Court, bringing fame and honor to the author. It is also appropriate for these poems and plays to depict important events of the past year, or anticipation of events which will be occurring in the near future.

This year, for example, the Miya are sponsoring the Imperial Acting troupe known as the Jade Tear in a formal *kabuki* play called 'The Passing of the Cherry Tree'. The ancient play concerns a daimyo who has lived a long and full life, and passes down the burden of his family's trust to his young son. The Scorpion, in return, have proposed a new play known as 'A Ronin's Death', which promises to be quite scathing. Although the play has not yet been performed, and none of the actors will speak of it, the court whispers that the play will mock Miya Yoto's famous leniency in dealing with the wave-men.

The Tournaments

Tournaments of skill and daring are held throughout the year, from iaijutsu duels to kenjutsu battles (with wooden *boken*, of course). The Crab Clan customarily holds a tetsubo competition as well, giving the victor a magnificent tetsubo covered in jade.

Courtiers carefully watch these tournaments, for both good and ill purposes. On one hand, the courtiers attend to reward honorable and skilled bushi with glory and prestige. On the other hand, they carefully observe and make note of all skills which the samurai have attained, keeping tabs on their enemies, their allies, and any minor daimyos who join in the festivities.

The Emerald Champion often sponsors his own tournament, insisting that three-man bushi teams, with all three members drawn from differing clans, be joined in open-format competitions: poetry, kenjutsu, iaijutsu, grace, etiquette and athletics. The victors of this tournament receive much glory (up to 3 points each) and may sit at the Emerald Champion's table for that night's feast.



Flowers of the Court

While very little romance can be found in a marriage, the same cannot be said for affairs outside a marriage. Although society usually ignores a samurai's extramarital affairs, he is expected to be discreet, so he does not insult his wife's family. When samurai seek such company, they often find it in the arms of a geisha. Geisha are entertainers, trained in the arts of music, poetry and conversation. While highly respected for their skills, they are still only *hinin* in the Celestial Order.

There are ten ranks of geisha, from the novices of rank one to the masters of, rank four or higher. A council of 'Madams' in Otosan Uchi assigns these ranks by visiting popular teahouses and rating the ladies on their courtesy, grace, beauty and knowledge. Geisha are not prostitutes, receptacles for sex or any other carnal desire. They allow the frigidity of the samurai attitude to break for a brief moment: to permit them laughter, pleasure, sorrow or fear. A geisha's finest moment comes when she can help a samurai face and accept their emotions – to help them experience the humanity that the feudal structure of Rokugan forces them to deny.

Geisha are not courtesans. They are not usually members of the samurai caste, although they may have been born to samurai parents. They are usually beautiful daughters of *heimin* or *ji-samurai*, girls who would otherwise have no future other than hard work and a wasted beauty. Madams from geisha houses across Rokugan send ronin samurai to visit towns and peasant villages, hoping to find such a girl, and purchase her from her parents on behalf of the house. In order to do this, of course, the ronin must have proper identification, papers from the geisha house, and a significant amount of *koku* to pay for the daughter. Once a geisha house buys their contract, they lose all rights and privileges. Their only purpose is to serve well in the geisha establishment, honor their duty, and perhaps one day, buy their own contract and use their skills for their own goals. Although a few geisha (usually women of the sixth rank or better) are purchased by rich daimyo and become courtesans, it is an unattainable hope for most.

When entering a geisha tea-house, samurai leave their katana at the door (to avoid bloodshed within). Legends are filled with samurai falling in love with geisha, and the danger that such passion brings. A samurai is expected to have such passion for one thing only: the protection of his lord. Passions towards a geisha compromise the samurai's devotion to his lord, and are frowned upon greatly in Rokugan.

Certainly, with so many samurai-ko in the Emerald Empire, there are also male geisha. Although rare, such men usually come from backgrounds similar to that of their female counterparts, and although there has never been a male geisha above Rank 4, they are still respected by their peers within their profession.

Geisha are taught the finest arts and culture of the Empire, and often appear in the Winter Court, brought by daimyos who wish to show off the finest cultural arts of their domain. Although the Crane rarely bring such ladies (their own Kakita Artisans are usually superior in their own fields), the Scorpions commonly use them to impress and enthrall the nobles of the Empire.

Many times, famous geisha are immortalized in poetry, song, and even plays and literature. Their beauty is well-known, but their contributions to culture and the arts is their most appreciated skill, and their greatest addition to Rokugani society.

Funerals

Funerals are one of the most serious, and ritualized, traditions in the Empire. Whether the deceased samurai died in battle, at home, or through some dastardly circumstance, the funeral always remains the same. Such adherence to tradition allows the 'emotionless' Rokugani to deal with grief and loss in a very structured form, giving expression to the feelings they may not normally display. Although many of the Great Clans have modifications to this ritual, they all base it on a common ceremony – a ceremony used since the reign of Hantei XII, the first Hantei to be thus buried. Before his time, corpses were buried in the ground, or large ritual tombs. However, with the rising of Iuchiban's Bloodspeakers and the blasphemous raising of the dead in servitude to his dark power, the Hantei mandated an Imperial Edict that all bodies be cremated before reaching

their final resting place. This ceremony has continued until the present day.

On the funeral day, typically four days after death, the anointed and purified body is cremated. The days leading up to the actual ceremony fill with prayers, offerings to the kami and the Sun Mother, and a ritual burning of scrolls filled with 'last words'. These 'last words' typically comprise the final parting words of the living to the dead. It is believed (and the Kitsu formally express this as the truth) that for those four days, the spirit of the dead still walks beside their remains, listening to all that the living have to say, and observing their actions.

A ritual funeral has many parts, from the preparation of the body of the dead for cremation, to the official mourners, to the death notice sent out to friends and family of the deceased. Only *eta*, the 'unclean' caste, touch the dead bodies (for reasons of tradition, ritual, and cleanliness), but nearly all shugenja and monks (especially the Kitsu) are well-trained in the preparations and rituals necessary for a state funeral.

Immediately after the death, *eta* moisten the lips of the deceased, giving them their 'final food and drink.' This gives the spirit of the dead the strength necessary to make the long journey from the material world. Afterwards, *eta* wash, oil, and clean the body immaculately, washing the hair and scrubbing beneath the fingernails and toenails, as well as the eyelids and other orifices. After they complete these preparations, the body lies in state in their bedchamber, watched constantly by an honor patrol of the house's finest samurai. This tradition not only stems from respect, but also from Crab practicality which has been passed on to other clans. More than one 'dead' body has risen from beyond, and the Great Clans are always wary that a beloved friend might have been a *maho-tsukai* in secret. Placing an honor guard is a polite way of taking these precautions, and a common practice in Rokugan.

The bedside is decorated with ribbons, carvings and lucky tablets, purified by the Shintao monks or the house shugenja, and prepared to receive visitors. A 'chief mourner' is chosen - typically the closest person to the deceased, such as a wife, relative or best friend. They ensure that the deceased is constantly mourned. A spirit who does not feel properly missed may become restless and take revenge upon the living; thus, a steady stream of mourners must remain by the body during the visitation period.

The house shugenja typically prepares a death notice, detailing the circumstances of the death as well as the location and arrangements for the funeral and visitations. Some service is always given to each member of the deceased's family, no matter how small. Each person is honored by the role they serve, and it is thought that the dead will speak well of those involved in the ceremony.

Servants place wreaths and hanging lanterns throughout the house. These lanterns are made of white paper, the only time which non-colored paper is used in such a manner. This way, the death is announced to visitors, and to those passing by. The family wears mourning dress, typically spartan white with small black



or house-colored ornament. Ladies paint their hair, faces and hands white for the occasion. It is not uncommon for a child, spouse or parent of the deceased to cut their hair short and wear it undressed, placing a wreath of it in the hands of the body before cremation.

Food is constantly being prepared in the house of the deceased's family, and special dishes served only in funeral occasions are offered in the visiting room. Such food is called *otoki*, and made of unseasoned rice and special grains. *Otoki* dishes served in memorial services are always completely vegetarian. The word 'otoki' was formed by combining the words *otogi* (to keep awake) and *toki* (to purify and coordinate). The ritual meal is intended to perform both tasks.

On the day of the funeral, eta dress the body in finery and placed in an unpainted pine palanquin with white silk curtains, and ready to be transported to the funeral site. The house shugenja or monks prepare an altar approximately 20 feet from the pyre. The monks cover the altar in white and orange ribbons and talismans of the Shintao religion and the Seven Fortunes, as well as depictions of a family kami or ancestral spirit. A guidepost bearing the name and deeds of the deceased is placed outside the house, at the entrance to garden, or other ceremonial site where the cremation is to be held. The monks carry the body (already in the palanquin) and place it upon the unlit pyre. Afterwards, the foremost official anoints and blesses the wood of the pyre in a special Shintao ceremony.

Before the ceremonial burning, the first guests arrive for a meal in the crematorium.

Only the closest friends and family of the deceased may participate in this meal; the rest of the guests arrive between the meal and the ceremonial lighting of the pyre. Typically, the body of the dead will be present, although it may be in another room, or already upon the pyre. After the body is burned, relatives pick the few remaining bones out of the ash and pass them from person to person by chopsticks.

Afterwards, Shintao monks perform a secondary ceremony to assist the spirit on their journey to Jigoku, teaching them the way

across the Bridge of Lights. The Bridge of Lights, the one of only two known ways to cross the River of Stars and travel from the material world into the spiritual, is a sacred image - particularly to the Kitsu, who have visited its misty corridors on many occasions. Often, at state funerals of Clan Champions or daimyo or a member of the Imperial House, a Kitsu will 'journey with' the spirit for the next 35 days, guiding them safely into the land of Jigoku. During the meal, the chief mourner must handle any possible outbursts or untoward occasions which arrive, making sure to maintain an atmosphere of respect and solemnity at all times.

As the other guests arrive, monks of the house bless and purify each mourner. The guests wash their hands and mouths in purified water, and receive a small white ribbon covered in calligraphy, containing a prayer for the spirit of the deceased. The family of the deceased, including any close friends and attendants take seats along a long row, with the pyre at the north end of the ceremonial aisle. The officiating priest enters and offers incense to the spirits. He invokes the ancestors of the deceased, asking that they guide the spirit to its place in the Celestial Heavens and prepare it for rebirth. At the order of the officiating shugenja or monk, the pyre is lit.

After the body is burned, the guests attend to the *kotsuage*, a ritual to gather a person's ashes and place them in the burial urn. The ashes of the deceased are collected with wooden or bamboo chopsticks; the mourners participate in order of kinship and honor ranking. Mourners select the ashes of the body with ceremonial chopsticks, handed down the

line, and then placed into the urn by the officiating shugenja or monk. These bones are chosen in a very particular order: first the legs, then the arms, hipbone, back bone, teeth and finally, the skull are placed in the crematory urn.

The crematory urn stays an altar at the family's house and kept there for 35 days, the length of time it takes the spirit of the dead to travel from the material world into the realm of Jigoku. Incense sticks called *osenko* are burned around the clock (special 12 hour-sticks for the night exist). Visitors will come to the house,

GUESTS AT THE WINTER COURT: ASAHINA HANUKO

Earth 1 Fire 2 Air 3 (Awareness 4) Water 2 Void 3

Hanuko, daughter of Asahina Tomo and just past her *gempukku*, has been sent to the Winter Court by the Crane to seek a husband. She is extraordinarily shy, and unable to seem as cultured and witty as the other maidens of the court. The Unicorn maidens, in particular, tease her about her 'crush' on an older Unicorn daimyo. She is infatuated with him, creating small Ki-Rin (*Woodcarving 3, Tsangusuri 2*) and leaving them without a note or identifying name at the doorway to his suite.

The Unicorn, Iuchi Okupo, is an older gentleman, confused by these gifts, and curious to discover who is the benefactor with the beautiful skills. All four of the Ki-Rin statues have some small magic - a distinct sound, when touched, that rings as beautifully as a pure bell, and can be used to assist in meditation.

Hanuko is afraid that when Okupo discovers it is she, he will not be interested in her (he is 32, she is only 15), and she is not eager to come forward with the information. She has no real 'friends' in the court, so no one knows that the gifts are hers. Only if one of the PCs takes special consideration, or treats her with great care and friendship, will she step out of her shyness and confess her feelings for the debonair gentleman.

burn a stick, and talk to the family. The discussion usually contains memories of the deceased, and it is believed that the spirit can hear these discussions for as long as the incense sticks continue to burn. After 35 days, the urn is finally buried, either in a family plot or sacred site, or in a temple of Shinsei.

A religious service known as the *Jikoma-asuru* is held for seven days after the cremation of the body, and a purification ceremony is held immediately after the cremation. Purification salt is very important throughout both rituals, and is commonly kept close to the doors and front gates of the family's house, so that visitors can purify their hands and faces before visiting the relatives of the deceased.

At the end of the 35 day period of mourning, the house shugenja comes by and gathers the salt bowls, chanting prayers and final blessings upon the home. With him, he brings an *ihai*, or formal mortuary tablet containing the name of the deceased and their closest living relatives. This tablet is placed at the final resting place of the cremation urn. The memorial service held at the placement of the tablet is the final ceremony for the dead, and afterwards, the spirit is assumed to be at rest. Often, as much as a year later, a visiting Kitsu will meditate within the family's graveyard, to see that all the spirits there have had their needs attended to, and are resting in *Jigoku*.

Some families, such as the Akodo, prefer to take their most valued heroes and place them in locations where their remains can be visited often, and taken care of by a trusted family member. The Akodo Hall of Ancestors is one such site. Rokugani commonly visit their ancestors' graves on many occasions during the year: especially during the week-long Bon Festival, the anniversary of the death of the individual, and the equinoctial weeks. 'Bon' is the festival for honoring and remembering the ancestors and is celebrated in the month of the Dog.

Funeral Implements and Other Ceremonies

Matsugo-no-mizu, also called 'water of the last moment' is the act of giving food and water to the deceased in hopes of his/her revival in *Jigoku*. It is commonly performed by preparing a new writing brush, covering it with sanitary cotton, and preparing a

bowl of water and salt. Eta then soak the cotton in the water and salt, and moistened the lips of the deceased repeatedly with the mixture. The household shrine, graveyard, or other holy sites are prepared with a ritual known as the *kamidana-fuji*, by which the shrine is confined from use or visitation until the body has been cremated. The shrine is concealed from the household with a white paper covering, the flap doors closed. This keeps the household safe from being contaminated by the impurity of death.

The decoration by the bedside of the deceased is known as *makura-kazari*, and consists of a small table covered with a white or silver altar cloth. Family members place a flower, a stick of incense and a lighted candle upon the cloth, as well as a bowl of rice, dumpling, and water. It is considered proper to spread open the petals of the

flower, and to light the incense and the candle from left to right as you face them. Servants then place a hanging picture of the deceased in the family alcove (a recessed spot considered a place of honor). At the alcove, it is believed, the soul of other dead ancestors or the divine spirit of the family kami will arrive to chaperone the dead through the funeral process. The family alcove forms a border between spiritual world of *Jigoku* and the real world, and is treated with great respect through the mourning ritual period.

The practice of turning the dead person's head to the north is known as *kitamakura*. The north is also the placement of the

THE FUNERAL

Challenge: In the Winter Court, young Isawa courtier is suddenly struck down by a strange disease. His lips have turned black, and his fingernails have a strange greasy substance under them. After testimony has been given, the Isawa gain permission to have the young man burned and buried within the Four Temples of the Seppun. The Isawa whisper that he was murdered by Unicorn spies who suspected him of dishonoring Otaku Kamoko with his frequent comments about her beauty and the time she spends alone at court.

Focus: The Isawa was indeed insulting Otaku Kamoko, and had every intention of blackmailing his way into her bed. Of course, he was less than successful, and she openly threatened him on the practice field last evening. Overhearing the conversation, the Scorpion decided give the man a mild poison to use against Kamoko. The Scorpion then intended to blackmail him for their own purposes.

Strike: Unfortunately, one of the *mujina* plaguing the Isawa at this court decided to enjoy itself at the Scorpion's expense. It changed the labels on their materials, and in their haste, the Scorpion mixed the wrong poison - one which killed the courtier as he attempted to place it on her food unnoticed. Kamoko is fine - the poison never got near her - but the courtier is dead, and the Scorpion are furious. However, the poison is ten times more toxic than the one they had intended to use, and they are desperate to know what was in it, so that they can reproduce the effect at some later date. They will do anything to be invited to the funeral or interview the *eta*, so that they can determine what the poison included.

crematory pyre at the end of the funerary isle. According to the teachings of Shinsei, the north is a sacred direction, safe from the scourges of the Shadowlands. If the person's head turns toward the south, the evil influences of the Dark God may corrupt the soul and cause it to travel in the wrong direction. The soul could become forever lost on the material plane, or worse, seduced into traveling toward the Shadowlands and becoming trapped by the Dark One's power. If the body cannot be turned north, it is acceptable to turn it to the west, in the hopes that the Sun Mother will take the spirit with her as she descends into Jigoku.

Shinishozoku, or 'grave clothes,' are the dress for the soul's journey to eternity. On the deceased, the eta place a robe with a tight-fitting hood, as well as a money pouch containing six pieces of wooden koku. This costume has a close resemblance to a traveling outfit, and is thought appropriate for their journey into the spirit world. The money in the pouch is used as a fare for crossing the River of Stars and entering Jigoku, in case the spirit is unable to locate the Bridge of Light. *Mofuku* is the traditional mourning dress worn by those who attend the funeral.

White lanterns and salt bowls placed around the house are part of the *kichu-fuda*, the period of mourning. Also, a white-bordered paper notice with the symbol of the *kichu-fuda* written upon it may be hung outside the house.

The mortuary tablet, or *ihai*, assists the spirit to hear the prayers of its descendants in the physical world, and serves as a bridge between the spirit and its past. A plain wooden tablet is initially used by the family during the 35 days of prayer, and will be replaced with the black lacquered tablet when the mourning period expires.

One of the most important parts of the funeral is the *kiyome-shio*, or purification salt. This salt can only be made from seawater and is carried by most Kitsus at all times. The salt feeds the body during the *matsugo-no-mizu*, cleans and purifies the body during the anointing ritual, and blesses the house and its visitors during the 35 days of prayer, as well as in other rituals. It is an established custom to sprinkle the mourner coming from the funeral with salt before they enter the house of the family, for the purpose of exorcising any evil spirits who might have come to take advantage of the sorrow and grief of the mourners.

Lastly, the tradition of *koden-gaeshi*, in which each mourner gives a token, some personal trinket or small amount of koku as an obituary gift. It is also custom for the family of the deceased to provide every mourner with some gift worth about half the amount of the received obituary gift. This return gift, called the '*shonanuka*,' is always offered to the mourners on or about the 35th day of death. By this custom, reception of the obituary gift is acknowledged and mourners are notified of the end of mourning period.

Chopstick Etiquette and Funerals

Rokugani society frown upon certain activities because they are linked to funeral rites and death, and, therefore, the cause of bad luck. It is particularly ill-advised to stick your chopsticks into food straight up, especially into rice. Only at a funeral service are chopsticks stuck into the rice at the final meal, just before the cremation. Instead, when not using chopsticks, diners should place them horizontally on the table or across the dish. It is also impolite to give food from your chopsticks directly to another's; the bones of a burned body are passed in that way from person to person after a funeral. Pointing at someone with the chopsticks is also considered impolite. When separating a piece of food into two pieces, it should be done step by step by exerting controlled pressure on the chopsticks.

Inheritance

When a samurai, lord, or Emperor dies and there is no first son, the inheritance of land, wealth and position can be disputed for months, or even years. The daimyo of the deceased decides the official order of inheritance. The most powerful, and closest, daimyo will take charge of the matter, particularly if the deceased owed fealty to him. However, if there is some important land or item in dispute, the Emperor may send Magistrates to the area, to 'oversee' the division of property. In many cases, this 'supervision' ensures the loyalty of the local daimyos, as well as the strength of fealty of those involved. The Emperor often sends Emerald Magistrates on this business – as does the Clan Champion, often causing minor friction between the two.

Where the daimyo and his spouse had lived, or to whom they had sworn fealty, could also bring conflict. Certainly, if the child of the deceased who would inherit was born of a wife or concubine who belonged to another clan, the title could be in dispute. If the land is on the border of one clan's territory and the will of the deceased gave his property to another clan, both daimyos would have the right to argue for confiscating the lands.

If a samurai of a male-dominated family dies without a will, and has only daughters, other daimyos can dispute the inheritance, although it is somewhat more difficult. If approved by the daimyo of the deceased, the first daughter may inherit, particularly if she is already married. If she is not, and can prove that she is a worthy and competent heir, the daimyo may directly award her the lands and titles of her father. Certainly, if one of the daughters (usually, the oldest) has a powerful husband, it is very likely that he will inherit because of their family tie. Clan magistrates, their feudal superior or daimyo, or possibly the servants of the Emperor will settle this, and in the case of inter-

Clan marriages, magistrates of both Clans will often be called in to oversee the situation.

In Rokugan, the testimony of a Kitsu is sought in cases of dispute, although their testimony will be disputed in the lands of non-Lion families. The reading of the will (and thus, the decisions about any disputed inheritances) is performed after the final monument has been placed. Thus, the spirit has gone to Jigoku, and cannot be consulted about their choices in the matter (also, there are few Kitsu in the realm, so their abilities are rarely even an option). Even if the ghost of the deceased is standing in the spirit realm, yelling "give my sword to my wife, you morons!" the deceased's wishes do not matter legally unless written into the will and witnessed before the individual's death.

Some circumstances can legally disqualify a child their inheritance. Although these vary from clan to clan, there are many which are law throughout the Empire. In complex circumstances, Emerald Magistrates may arrive to clean up the problem. Seppuku can clean the family's honor if a descendant's 'dark secret' gets out, but the Emperor believes that an 'unsuitable' individual should not be allowed to inherit in the first place. Once they do, their possessions must be divided according to their will – and the situation becomes more and more difficult. A scheming Scorpion or Crane will certainly be interested in the inheritor's background, because any troubles can be manipulated to affect who inherits the wealth.

Except in cases approved by the Emperor's Magistrates, noble bushi can not disown their legitimate children, and must resort to commanding their seppuku if a child performs a dishonorable act. Shiba Ujimitsu is a good example of this – his young daughter, overcome with grief, dishonored herself and her family. Because Ujimitsu had no recourse, he was forced to take her life. Daimyo can disown samurai, forcing them to leave the house and become ronin. However, a father cannot remove a legitimately born child from his family lineage: only from the protection and respect of their clan. This becomes quite a complication if some half-*hinin* child, born of a non-clan courtesan or geisha, turns up; they are considered technically samurai and able to inherit. It becomes worse if the mother was a samurai and the father a *hinin*. Unless the child is born of a Matsu or Otaku mother, it is always considered to be of the father's caste.

Courtesans

Rokugani samurai and daimyo often have official concubines, although such a practice walks the line of dishonor and disgrace. Samurai-ko may have an equivalent if they are of impressive enough station, although there will likely be a great deal of gossip. Emperor Hantei XXXVIII has quite a few concubines, all beautiful and cultured, elegant ladies of the



Imperial Court. They receive a certain amount of status, particularly because there is no current Empress.

Courtesans can include daughters of station, sold to geisha houses by their parents, or given to the Emperor as gifts of the clan (an arrangement much like marriage, and often includes dowries and negotiations). Those of samurai station or above often maintain courtesans, sold to them by poor merchants. There were often called upon specifically for purposes of creating a (male) heir if the wife was barren, uncooperative, or seems to be producing only daughters (and therefore disputable heirs).

Concubines receive one-half of the Glory ranks of their 'master', and may move freely within their lord's territories. In many clans they receive nearly the same respect due a legal wife, and often head their lord's household, responsible for the finances and supplies of the house. If they were not born samurai, however, they do not receive that status simply through association, although they are not treated as true heimin (if they were merchant's daughters who were sold), or hinin (such as those who were originally geisha). In no case can a courtesan inherit legally, although her children may be eligible for receipt of wealth or title because of their relationship to their father.



Four seasons make up the cycle of life in Rokugan, and these define all farming, war, and other activities. Spring is the time of planting, when treaties which were made during the winter are ratified, and the people of the Great Clans celebrate the return of warmth. For the farmer, it is planting time, the most difficult season of the year, and one of celebrations and festivities. The falling of the cherry blossoms, a powerful image in Rokugan, are an indication that summer is on its way.

Summer is the most difficult season, filled with tremendous heat and oppressive humidity, very little rain, and massive drought. Little manual labor can be done, and wars are difficult because of the blistering conditions. At the end of the season, the monsoon period comes, bringing lashing rain and tremendous winds which whip Rokugan's delicate rice fields into mush.

At last, autumn arrives. Peasants harvest rice, warring clans begin to return home in preparation for the winter, and daimyos

begin to collect the yearly koku. Winter, a period of three to four months, is bitter, filled with snow and sleet. The roads rapidly become impassable and cold, and rain lashes the land below the southern mountains. Winter is the time of the courtier, when treaties are again negotiated and the practices of the artisans are brought out to be admired. It is the time of civilization and culture, when the Seven Clans show off their greatest feats of art.

Then, when the spring returns, the courtiers and artisans vanish, to be replaced by the spring merchants and trade goods traveling through the newly-thawed roads.

Festivals

The Rokugani celebrate many festivals and important events during the year. Often, these festivals acknowledge the changing of seasons, or remember a past battle or hero. Thousands of people attend the most popular festivals each year, traveling to the major cities of Rokugan from every corner of the Empire's provinces. Many of these festivals are hundreds of years old, and represent the most sacred traditions and ideals of the people. The following list is by no means comprehensive - there are thousands of festivals throughout the year, some celebrated only by certain clans, families or villages.

OSHOGATSU (NEW YEAR'S DAY)

The festival of the New Year, celebrated on the first day of the month of the Hare, is not only the most important and elaborate celebration in Rokugan, it is also the most significant. Because the Rokugani people all celebrate their 'birthday' at the turn of the New Year, all family celebrations are held during this time (see *Way of the Crane* for more information). Temples, homes and city streets are decorated and families plan gatherings, visits to temples or shrines, and formal calls on relatives and friends. Because of the importance that the Rokugani place on nature and seasonal change, their New Year is held on the first day of the month of spring, celebrated with flowers, fireworks and parades.

A 'proper' family will spend the day after the festival at home, thanking the kami for another fruitful year. At the palace of Otosan Uchi, the site of the Hantei Emperor's *shihohai* ritual, in which he offers prayers for the well-being of the nation, becomes one of the most highly attended festivals on New Year's day. The Emperor encloses himself in his private shrines after dusk on the first of the Hare, and spends the next twenty-four hours in meditation, speaking to Amaterasu on behalf of the Rokugani people. After his fasting and meditation end, a grand feast is held to celebrate the close relationship between the Sun Mother and her most beloved son.

Afterwards, the public may enter the inner palace grounds, and see the gardens and vistas of the Golden Palace of Otosan. Many games and ceremonies are held on the palace grounds, including a popular game of chance called *karuta*.

7-5-3 FESTIVAL

This festival, held on the thirteenth day of the Dragon, celebrates the children of the Empire. At dawn on this day, all five-year-old boys and seven- or three-year-old girls go to the local shrine, where the monks of Shintao bless and pray for their futures. Because these numbers are considered unlucky, these children may be most vulnerable to the influence of evil spirits and bad luck. The Shintao monks burn incense, ring bells and light candles to pray for their safe and healthy future.

The children dress in their finest clothing for the occasion, and are followed by their families, all of whom wear white veils over their faces. The veils keep the spirits from paying attention to any of the family members, so that the ancestors and good spirits will only see the children. After visiting the shrine, it is considered lucky to buy *chitose-ame*, also known as 'thousand-year candy,' so that the ancestors of the last thousand years will be included in the rite.

CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL

The Emerald Empire does not view flowers, grasses, and trees merely as tangible objects, but as symbols of life itself. Thus, many of Rokugan's festivals have names in honor of flowers, such as the Chrysanthemum, Iris and White Orchid. In flowers, the Rokugani perceive the universal laws of nature, the unending cycle of the Celestial Heavens: birth, death, rebirth. These events have been celebrated each spring since ancient times. The first record of cherry blossom viewing, for example, appears in *The Tale of Genji*, a historical tale written in the second century to celebrate the life of the eldest son of the First Hantei. An entire chapter of this work devotes itself to a description of a cherry-blossom viewing party, where members of the Emperor Hantei's court gathered under the cherry blossoms to make merry with food, music, and poetry until late into the night. It is here that Genji, the 'Shining Prince,' met his eternal love, Oborozukiyo, the 'Lady of the Misty Moon.' The Cherry Blossom Festival is held on the twenty-third day of the Dragon.

Cherry-blossom viewing has long had special significance in Rokugan, since the First Hantei and his bride planted a cherry

tree in the gardens of Otosan Uchi to celebrate the birth of their son, Jamausuki, a major island in the Islands of Silk and Spice, is said to have been one of the earliest centers of religious faith in the Empire; to this day, massive cherry trees cover the entire island. A legend speaks of Daikaihime, daughter of Kuroshin (kami of agriculture), viewed as a goddess of spring and vernal abundance. According to popular belief, her spirit can take possession of a cherry tree, enabling her to descend from the Celestial Heaven to Rokugan. Through the ages people have gathered under blossoming cherry trees and offered up their prayers to Kuroshin for a plentiful year's harvest, believing that his daughter will carry their prayers to his court.

HOURS, MONTHS AND SEASONS

The Rokugani calendar is divided into twelve separate months. While most of the Empire uses the 'common' calendar of the animal spirits, the noble class often uses the more formal calendar of the kami. Because the calendar was only ratified by a recent Emperor (Hantei XXXV), many of the provinces of the Empire still use the colloquial names for the months. As the PCs travel through the lands of the Great Clans, they will notice that some months have two names. The most popular names for three of the commonly 'altered' months include the month of the Crane (instead of the Rooster), the Tortoise (instead of the Dragon), and the Sheep (instead of the Goat).

The months of the years each have 28 days, and cycle in the following pattern: Hare (Spring-April), Dragon, Serpent, Horse (Midsummer-July), Goat, Monkey, Rooster (Fall-September), Dog, Boar (Winter-November), Rat, Ox, Tiger.

The calendar of the kami arranges the months in the order of the final battle of the Emperor: Sun, Moon, Hantei, Akodo, Doji, Shiba, Bayushi, Shinjo, Hida, Togashi, Fu Leng, and the month of the Tenth Son, or Mankind.

The hours of the day are named in a similar fashion: Hare (6-8 A.M.), Dragon, Serpent, Horse, Goat (2-4 P.M.) Monkey, Rooster, Dog, Boar, Rat, Ox, Tiger. (For more information on the hours of the day, see *Night of a Thousand Screams*.)

DOLL FESTIVAL (KITE FESTIVAL)

On the twenty-fifth of the month of the Serpent, the Doll Festival is held. Originally only for girls, it has recently become the custom for male children to join in the festivities. While girls show their dolls, boys fly kites sporting brilliant colors and magnificent styles. The children often receive expensive gifts from their families, intended to be of use once they have grown into an adult. Young girls, trained by courtiers and the finest handmaidens of their families, wear green kimonos and arrange their dolls in the front hallway of their homes, as if the dolls were imperial courtiers. They arranged tiered platforms for the elaborate and expensive dolls, a set of which represents emperor, empress,

attendants, and musicians in full court dress. The girls then visit their friends, expressing to each other their respect for the beauty of the dolls.

CHRYSANTHEMUM FESTIVAL (CHOYO NO SEKKU)

On the sixth day of the Horse, believed to be the day the kami fell to the earth a lavish festival takes place all across the Emerald Empire. Although it is the most celebrated festival, the Chrysanthemum festival enjoys its popularity not because of its importance, but because of its ritual. For seven days (four before and three after), all labor stops, and even peasants may not take up their tools. As work halts, and the Empire celebrates the

lineage and longevity of the Hantei. Only on the day of the Festival itself can anyone take up their work, and even then, only in celebration of the kami.

The chrysanthemum is the symbol of the royal family, their ancient ties to the Sun Mother, and all of the kami who came down from the Celestial Heavens. It is not only the celebration of the Emperor's House, but also of the founders of the Seven Clans themselves.

It is said that on the fourth day following the celebration, the inhabitants of the Shadowlands stage a massive, bloody bonfire, hurling captives and other unfortunates in. The Rokugani believe they are celebrating the Return of the Dark One: the legendary day that Fu Leng will rise from his Festering Pit and steal the power of the Imperial House. For that reason, on the tenth of the Horse, many Rokugani choose to remain indoors – just in case.

SETSUBAN FESTIVAL

Other festivals, including the famed Setsuban celebration, incorporate flower offerings to ward off illness and natural disasters. Just as blossoming cherry trees have been a revered symbol of spring, so brightly tinged leaves have long symbolized autumn. Since ancient times, people have gathered to admire autumn foliage. The Rokugani fondness for making excursions to view autumn leaves has a formal outlet in the Setsuban Festival. It celebrates the turning of the year from the time of war in spring and summer, to the long months of peace in the snowy seasons. Because of this, the Setsuban festival is held on the eighth of the Monkey (a day considered very lucky). No man may shed blood upon that day, all executions are put off, the occasional prisoner is given freedom, and the Empire is expected to celebrate the coming of peace.



KANTO FESTIVAL

Together with the Chrysanthemum Festival and the Iris Festival, the Kanto Festival originated during the primitive periods of Rokugan's history. In fact, the Kanto Festival derives its name and purpose from a legend cherished by the ancient tribes of the Isawa, who believed that, "during summer, you are overcome by sleepiness from heat and intense labor and catch a sleep disease."

Thus, on the second day of the Rooster, in the hottest part of the summer, the Rokugani people raise *kanto*, great poles of lumber with chips of rose quartz, to drive the sleepiness away. They cover these poles with lanterns, lit both night and day for three days. The people hope to draw out the sleepiness and encourage productivity and activity. Also, the *kanto* are intended to resemble the ear of the rice plant, in the hope for a bountiful harvest of crops.

BON FESTIVAL

On the last day of the month of the Dog, the Bon festival occurs. This celebration gives honor to the dead, and appeases the souls of the ancestors. It is also a time of remembrance, when people speak to their long-departed friends and family, and seek to understand the mysteries of death. It is an honorable festival, in which the ancestors hear the supplication of their families, and seek to help them through the coming year.

The streets of Otosan Uchi (as well as most other cities of Rokugan) fill with representations of the Great Kami, the Dragons of Myth, and white-faced 'ghosts' and spirits of the past. During the Bon Festival, the dead souls of the past come closest to their heirs on the world. You ancestors look upon every action you have done in the past year, and ask you to atone to them for any misdoing. As recompense, the ancestors are expected to reveal wisdom you will need in the times ahead, and to look favorably on their descendants who honor them properly.

Fireworks mark the festival, along with parades, music, traditional dances, and long twisting streamers. Cakes made of bleached white rice and covered in brown sugar, remind people that death (symbolized by the white) is a part of all life, no matter where it hides. The festival celebrates life as well as death, and people revere the life they have and enjoy the great parades through the streets of the city.

It is customary to signify the end of the Bon Festival by light small, colored paper lanterns, marked with the names of the spirits of all those who had died during that year. Spirits unable to cross the Bridge of Stars into Jigoku can then follow the lighted lanterns and find their way to peace. These lanterns can also light the way back to the land of the dead for the ancestral spirits who had returned for the Festival. (for more information on the Bon Festival, see *Night of A Thousand Screams*)

FESTIVAL OF THE RIVER OF STARS

Above the palaces and villages of Rokugan lies a thick and brightly lit portion of sky referred to as the 'River of Stars' or the 'Necklace of Amaterasu'. On either side of this road lie two tremendously bright jewels known as the Weaver Star and the Cowherd Star. These two stars are said to be lovers who could meet only once a year on the ninth night of the ninth month. So long as the river of stars did not flood, the lovers could cross the sky and spend one night a year together.

The first star was named after Isawa Tanata, a weaving maiden taken from her family when Shinjo left for the Burning Sands. In the legend, Tanata was so fine a weaver that the Fortunes beseeched Shiba to allow her to live forever and weave them clothing. The second star, Akodo Ujihata, was a minor member of the Akodo house, a simple cowherd. The two were not

allowed to marry, and so they wished for the Fortunes to grant them a way they could be together. When they died, the Fortunes took them into the heavens and placed them by the River, so that they could see at one another across the star-road, without dishonoring their families. Then, once each year, the two were allowed to be together.

People from all over Rokugan turn out on this night, to 'chaperone' the two lovers in the heavens. This holiday is the most romantic day of the year, and lovers meet secretly while their friends and family are away at the festival. In addition, the Rokugani often write wishes and romantic aspirations on long, narrow strips of colored paper and hang them on bamboo branches along with other small ornaments.

THE FESTIVAL OF THE MOON'S WRATH

Rokugan celebrates winter festivals, such as the Festival of the Moon's Wrath, during the time of the Winter Court. Snow (*setsu*) is, of course, a symbol of winter, a white covering that blankets all that is visible in other seasons. At the same time, however, a snowscape, though seemingly devoid of anything, offers a hint of new life, whether it be a single plum blossom coming into bud or a tiny blade of new grass – harbingers of a scene soon to unfold. Thus, snow is the symbol of the Winter Court, a time when the families of the Empire gather in peace to discuss the old year and begin the new. Plans are made, treaties signed, and new hope for peace is brought – a single bud of new life, in a world of winter. Snow is a favored backdrop in Rokugani drama for precisely this reason, especially in Kabuki performances. The snowy landscape shows the contrast between a completely white cover that buries all life, and the budding of hope in the face of death. Whereas flowers and fall foliage reveal the life force of nature, snow serves as a symbol of the world of winter, darkness, and death and as a foreshadowing of life to come.

While safely surrounded by friends and family, courtiers cease all speech from sunset on the seventh day of the Rat to the sunrise on the ninth day of the Rat, in order to silence the earth in tribute to the Moon. Rokugan celebrates the Festival of the Moon's Wrath in complete silence, with no words spoken throughout the two days. Anyone who breaks the silence is said to incur the wrath of Lord Moon.

The moon, ever present in the night sky, watches over the land of the Emerald Empire with a jealous eye. The Rokugani believe that the moon is the abode of Onnotangu, father of the Kami and husband of Amaterasu Omikami, the Sun Mother. In it resides all the hatred which Father Moon lavishes upon the people beneath him, the contempt and anger he felt toward the children he tried to destroy, and his bitterness at being tricked by his wife, so many years ago. The moon always remains in the sky, no matter how much a person might move about, walk from place to place, or even travel across the world. The Father watches, always ready to destroy what he feels he lost through the deepest treachery.

Why, then, a festival to celebrate the Moon? In part, to turn away his wrath and spend another year safely beneath his

sleeping eye. Although the moon is but a single entity, it reveals itself again and again, in perfect form, everywhere. As a reflection it can appear in a solitary drop of water in the palm of one's hand or in a droplet of dew on a blade of grass. Yet, despite this seeming power to divide and multiply, the moon itself is constant, a unity that never leaves.

SHOUTING DAY

Shouting Day, a peasant festival celebrated annually on the fourth day in the month of the Tiger is the holiday where Rokugani men of lower classes gather to relieve accumulated stresses and anxieties, by shouting at the top of their lungs to Osano-Wo. Samurai usually steer clear of the event, (it is below their station). Many villages make Shouting Day a contest where the participants compete upon the content, loudness and time of their shout. Shouts include gripes about the previous harvest, disobedient children and disrespectful wives.

The largest celebration of Shouting Day occurs at Mura Sabishii Toshi, the community which founded the festival. The origins of Shouting Day date back to a tsunami that struck the coastal village. An entire year's worth of crops were lost along with many of the farmers that grew them. The village was left in disarray. An older farmer by the name of Iochi saw the tsunami as an unprovoked attack by Osano-Wo. He stood upon a large stone and began screaming at the top of his lungs, shaking his fist to the air. The populace of the village overheard his rants and made their way to the stone, then joined him in his rant. The sun set on the survivors of the village shouting and shaking their fist at the sky. Villagers later moved the stone into the village and now use it as the platform or stage for the annual event. It is not uncommon for participants to walk many days to the village so that they can participate in the original Shouting Day ritual.

TOSHI NO ICHI

The year-end fair, called the toshi no ichi, is held just before the Festival of the New Year, (on the twenty-eighth day of the month of the Tiger) and is designed to prepare the Empire for the coming New Year. Participants prepare for the kami and the Sun Mother to visit the land, and it is thought that they look down upon Rokugan with favor on New Year's day. Houses are cleaned, streets are brushed clear, and new clothes are customarily given to all the peasants by their daimyo.

During the fair, the Rokugani peasants hang a rope of straw known as the *shimenawa* inside their houses so that the evil spirits of the old year cannot enter. After the festival ends, these strips of straw are burned with the trappings of the festival, so that the old spirits will be sent away. Inside the house, the family creates a special altar known as *toshidana*, and cover it with rice cakes and sake, as well as other foods to honor the spirits of the New Year.

At dusk on the evening before the New Year, the Shintao monks hold a great ritual for the cleaning of their temples. All across Rokugan, the temples empty, their walls and floors

scrubbed with fresh water, and their bells rung. After the bells have been rung 49 times (seven times seven, for the benevolent and wrathful aspects of the Seven Fortunes), the monks welcome peasants and nobles back into the temples.

THE SEVEN FESTIVALS OF THE KAMI

Celebrated throughout the year, the Seven Festivals of the Kami are rarely acknowledged outside of their home clan. The Dragon celebrate their founder's day on the seventeenth day of the Hare; the Unicorn on the twentieth of the Horse. The Scorpion celebrate Bayushi's wisdom on the twenty-eighth day of the Goat, and, by odd

coincidence, the Phoenix revere their kami on the following day: the first of the Monkey. Crane descendants have a magnificent festival on the first day of the Rooster (also known as the month of the Crane), while the Crab attest to Hida's bravery in a bragging competition on the third day of the Boar. Finally, the Lion hold the festival of Akodo on the fifteenth day of the Tiger, when brave hearts are said to be especially blessed by the Fortunes.





Chapter Three: Night

Oyasuminasai, my companions!

Evening has come to our gentle court, with all of its rich splendor and grace. Do you see the rising moon in the heavens? Its cold beauty is more fair than the face of the loveliest maiden - but its wrath is just as deadly. You do not understand, I see? Well, let me grant you the simple wisdom of a woman, used to whispers in the night. You believe that all of Rokugan's dangers lie in politics and wars?

Young one, you have much to learn.

The sparks in a man's eyes when he sees the maiden he loves, the whispers they exchange in the night - overheard by some ambitious Scorpion. These are the most careful negotiations, the politics of love and the warfare between two souls. Marriage? Oh, no, of course not, my friend. Love has nothing at all to do with marriage. Some strange Unicorn must have put that idea into your mind.

Ah, but the prospects of marriage are great, as well, at the Winter's Court. The great nobles of the Seven Clans, gathered in the evening for poetry and song, seeking warmth against the winter's chill and hunting the most delicate game - the meat and bone of alliances.

And the stories! From Doji Shizue's tales of honor and glory to Bayushi Goshiu's dark tragedies and Juchi Daiyu's legends of a burning and distant land - such magnificent listening! Here we learn the secrets beneath Rokugan's surface, and here, if you are careful, we can see pieces of the Empire's future. Come, my friend, and listen closely to the tales, for the Phoenix whisper of a growing blackness, and the Crab's rumblings have become louder, trapped on their distant wall. And, while you listen to their words, if you should happen to catch the eye of some brave Matsu maid or lord, I am certain an introduction can be arranged...

Kakita Ryoku



A Dangerous Game

Part Four

The black stone nestled in her fist, covered by the silken touch of her fingers. It had arrived at her chambers shortly after the wedding of the Matsu maiden, and its cold hardness reminded Kachiko of her father's eyes.

"Of course, you speak for your father in this, my lady..." The Mantis courtier seemed nervous, frustrated and upset. "But we would rather deal directly with him. Or his heir..."

"My father sent me because the court does not track my movements as they do his. Do you wish our alliance to be known?"

"No, no, of course not."

"Then listen to me, my friend," Kachiko watched the Mantis swallow nervously, and stepped closer to him, her arm brushing his. "The way will be clear for you. You have the men? All right." She smiled, carefully judging its effect. "We have the political power to back your clan's effort."

"This is what you need to do..."

Your play, Hoturi-san.

The courtiers moved in their graceful patterns, fully aware of the danger that threatened them. It was a fragile, delicate dance of wits and politics, ever vigilant for some weakness. One wrong motion, and the Emperor's wrath would draw down the anger of Amaterasu. One wrong motion, and the other clans were as likely to destroy you as the wrath of the distant Sun.

As the Emperor called forth the ambassadors and representatives of the Seven Clans, Hoturi found his eyes wandering to the Scorpion maiden. She was more clever than he had thought, and she had proven herself in the games of the court. For two months they had played this game of cat and mouse, passing the black stone between them. He smiled slightly, watching her approach the Emperor alongside her brother. Her father was not with them... strange. For the Shosuro daimyo to be absent at such a gathering was notable, but more expressive than his absence was the triumphant gleam in his daughter's eyes. It was a gleam with which Hoturi had become familiar, and recently, begun to enjoy.

"You... your... Sir." Hametsu gulped, bowing low and kneeling on the cushions before the Imperial Dais. Remembering his manners, he bowed a second time, and saw the Hantei nod in return. "Our Clan, the keepers of your Southern Provinces, have brought for you this small gift..."

Our father would have done a much more competent job, thought Kachiko smugly. Of course, with only ten minutes to prepare, who could expect her idiot brother to understand the games of the court? Poor Father. Too bad Hametsu would have to inherit the position of Shosuro daimyo under such questionable circumstances...

Hametsu continued to speak, his voice drab and halting, and she saw the Emperor's eyes lose focus.

Now.

Taking advantage of her brother's awkward pause, Kachiko murmured, "Your Imperial Majesty, the Clan of the Scorpion, and the most loyal house of Shosuro, wish to thank the Sun Mother for giving us this day, your son, and your most esteemed presence." The inflection was perfect, smooth and flattering without being obvious. Her eyes lowered politely, and she turned her head gracefully to the side, for best effect. Beside Hantei XXXVIII, his Kakita advisor smiled approvingly.

"My father," Kachiko continued, ignoring her brother's useless gape, "sends his finest regards. He regrets to inform you that he is most ill this day, and does not wish to bring ill fortune to your presence."

"May the Fortunes preserve him." Seppun Baka, to the right of the Emperor, waved his hand in the air in an obscure religious gesture. *Fool.*

In moments, Kachiko had achieved the dream of every courtier - she had gained the Emperor's complete attention. Moving softly on her cushion, she ensured that the folds of her kimono whispered about her body, drawing his attention away from her cunning eyes. "We can only hope," Kachiko smiled once more, "that you find our small token worth your consideration..."

After the appropriate custom, the Emperor's advisor took the small gift away, and the Scorpions stood. Kachiko felt the eyes of the court caress her with newfound hatred, and when she bowed at the door, she dared for an instant to look into the Emperor's eyes.

He was watching... she thought, a curl of victory to her lip.

As they turned, Hametsu hissed, "Father will have you killed for this, *girl!*" For once, she did not care.

Her world was filled with the approving gaze of one young Crane.

"Outrageous!"

"Yes, Toshimoko-sama, you have already said that." Hoturi's patience was frayed, worn like the tattered silken cords of a Crab's armor.

"Outrageous! How dare they! And in the Emperor's Court!"

"Where else would you expect them to make a declaration of war, sensei?" snapped Hoturi. He sighed, passing a hand over his eyes. "The Mantis have made their move. Now it is time for ours."

The Mantis advisor – a wretched beast named Hogosha, ill-favored and little liked in the Imperial Court – had stood before Hantei XXXVIII and formally declared the Mantis occupation of Kyuden Suru Kokai, a small fortress on the sea-cliffs of the Doji.

"It's not the fortress that concerns me, Hoturi-san," Daidoji Uji hissed from the shadows of the window. "We can retake the fortress, *if* your father comes from the northern Asako court to lead us. The snow is our worry."

"Battles aren't fought in the winter! That arrogant windbag Yoritomo knows his men will die!" Toshimoko's iron brows moved up and down like vultures competing for the flesh of some fallen warrior.

"And so will ours." Uji's voice was acidic.

"Enough. *Enough!*" Hoturi's voice was not as commanding as his father's famous bellow, but something in his tone made the other two men look up in sudden silence. "My father cannot make the journey from the Asako lands – the roads are thick with ice and snow. If there is to be a battle, I will lead it. Uji." Hoturi raised a hand as his general scowled. "The Doji must retaliate. The insult is ours."

Toshimoko's eyebrows raised. "The insult, daimyo-sama, is to our entire clan. The Doji do not have the armies to retake the fortress alone."

"And that, my sensei," said Hoturi sternly, "is why Uji-san will be at my side. But he will take orders from *me*, in the place of my father. Is that understood?"

As the two lords of the Crane stared in obedience at the young Doji daimyo, the rice-paper doors of the Crane suite opened, a pale-looking Kakita Yoshi stepping in with an elegant bow.

"My lords." The Kakita daimyo raised his chin, offering a folded piece of rice-paper. "The Scorpion have formally pledged their support. They have proposed sending a neutral ambassador to speak with the Mantis on the Emperor's behalf. The Shosuro talk of peace, and the Emperor has agreed. The emissary has just left the Imperial Palace."

"Peace?" Toshimoko glared. "The Scorpion always talk of peace. They also always lie." From his shadowed corner, Uji nodded, taking a *tanto* from its sheath to test the sharpness of the ancient blade.

"What ambassador do they send?"

"The daimyo's daughter." Yoshi's tone was mocking. "The Lady Kachiko-san."

After a moment of stunned silence, the generals of the Crane burst into surprised laughter. "So," Toshimoko wiped tears of amusement from his aged eyes, "the Scorpion think to seduce him out of the castle. Outrageous!"

Alone among them, Hoturi's face was grim. *I see the stakes have been raised.*

Crane armies massed on the road to Kyuden Suru Kokai as snow fell furiously along the mountain pass. The fortress, cold and black, rose above the stark winter landscape like a stone pillar in the ocean's waves. Atop its high tower flew the green and gold banner of the Mantis.

"They seem like little ants, my lord, compared to your power." Yoritomo did not turn, his huge shoulders still against the whipping wind. He had not heard her approach, but her voice was clear in the bitter air.

"My lady Scorpion." His voice was rough, uncultured and held an edge of danger. "You seem to think that the wall is a place for women. I would advise you to step inside."

"I am not your prisoner, Yoritomo-san." Contempt hung in her soft words, though her eyes were inviting and her lips smiled. "Remember our bargain. The Crane prepare their attack, and then we tell them that you have agreed to withdraw – and gain a great deal of advantage in the Emperor's court, with our help." Kachiko's fingers trailed along the edge of his armored shoulderplate. "There is no need for war."

"No." Yoritomo growled. "Not while there are weak men willing to stand in the way of glory."

"Your clan will be brought to the Winter Court, given the Emperor's ear, his favor and abundant trade rights in the northern provinces of the Empire." Suddenly, the game had taken a deadly turn. "You do not consider the Emperor's favor to be glorious, lord?"

Yoritomo turned, the scar on his brow apparent against his wind-chapped skin. "Watch your words, Scorpion, or you will find yourself speared by them." Kachiko smiled playfully, but her heart tore in her chest. The Mantis daimyo was unpredictable – and worse, he did not understand or respect the game.

That made him the most dangerous opponent of all.

Two figures stood atop the wall of Suru Kokai, and a scarlet kimono flashed in the winter wind. Through the snow, Hoturi could make out the woman's figure, but no more.

When we return, my sweet Scorpion, you will owe me your life. Without knowing, you have already placed your first stone... on my board.

A solemn-faced Miya bowed before the Doji lord, carefully avoiding the horses which passed by on the road to the keep. "Doji-sama," the Emperor's Herald spoke, his voice curt and carefully neutral. "The Mantis have agreed to negotiate."

"Excellent." Hoturi smiled, and from the corner of his eye, he saw Uji bow. The Daidoji would make certain that all went as planned.

"Should you attack," the Miya continued, looking at the forces assembling before the fortress's gate, "you break the treaty. While the Scorpion remain in the keep, you must bide your time here."

"My men are cold, Miya-san," Uji hissed. "They need warmth and the fury of battle, not the whispers of court. Tell the Scorpion to return."

Doji Hoturi smiled inwardly, seeming to contemplate the matter. "Go to the Mantis," Hoturi said, withdrawing a rice-paper letter from his satchel. "And give them this. That should end the negotiations."

Taking the letter in both hands, the Miya bowed sharply, then turned his steed toward the gates of Suru Kokai. Three Seppun guards followed, the Imperial *mon* blazing on their banner.

Uji smiled beneath his leather veil, recognizing the *mon* on the paper. "The letter was from the Isawa courtiers?"

Hoturi nodded. "I believe the Mantis will find their upcoming trade agreement to be... somewhat less than they had envisioned." With a sinister smile, Uji nodded.

Your play, my lady. I look forward to enjoying my reward...

"You summoned me, sir?" Kachiko's voice was cool. The letter which Yoritomo flung landed a few feet before her trailing kimono, skittering along the stone of the reception room floor. Barely pausing to bow, Kachiko looked down at the water-stained *mon*, still legible despite wear.

The mark of house Isawa.

"There is your testimony, lady." Yoritomo stood, his golden armor creaking with each heavy step.

"Mine?"

"Your clan has negotiated trade rights, oh, yes. The Phoenix are most generous."

"I have no time for these games, daimyo-san." His heavy hand reached for her arm, twisting it.

"Nor do I." He snarled, motioning his men forward. "The Scorpion have decided to keep the trade rights for their own. The Phoenix are most grateful for the generosity of your clansmen."

Hametsu.

"Throw her off the wall." Yoritomo's guards surrounded Kachiko, their hands on their katana. "Struggle, my lady. Scream. Let me see how Scorpions die."

With a defiant look, Kachiko slid out of Yoritomo's grasp, her eyes afire. "No, my friend," she whispered, and her voice was as

smooth as the finest silk. "Let us see, instead, how the Mantis survive when the Emperor's wrath is upon them."

Yoritomo's confusion was genuine.

"Did you forget, *my lord*," the sarcasm dripped from each syllable, "that I am under the Emperor's protection? If you kill me, all that you have worked for will be destroyed." Her soft movements betrayed none of her tension. "You must be prepared for the consequences, of course. You have readied your white robes for the ceremony..."

"Seppuku?"

"Of course." Her eyes smiled, but her face was a deadly mask. He gauged her, his focus sliding from her features to her

stance, testing the strength of her resolve and the depth of her lie. For a moment, she thought that she had lost - that he was willing to take the chance and destroy himself for a moment of revenge.

"Take her to her chambers." His snarled command covered the faint release of her muscles. As the guards led her away, he continued, "If the Emperor covets her so dearly, then let him pay for her return."

His laughter echoed in the empty halls of Suru Kokai, but no sign of fear touched Kachiko's features.

She had already discovered her way out.

"Prisoner?"

"They demand a ransom of ten thousand koku, my lord," the Miya replied. "The Emperor's patience with this debacle is growing thin."

Hoturi nodded. "Then we attack, and save the Emperor his serenity."

Before noon, the Crane released the first spray of arrows upon the keep, raining down amid the snow and sleet. The day was gray, covered in mist and ice, dangerous ground for warfare.

Yoritomo's forces held their ground with bloody patience, trusting in the thick stone walls and their own archers to keep the fortress clear of Daidoji. When the first shouts came from within the courtyard, the Mantis turned in shock, unwilling to believe that they had been betrayed.

GUESTS AT THE WINTER COURT: SHINJO USUIA

Earth 4 Fire 4 (Agility 6) Air 5 Water:3 Void: 4

Shinjo Usuia is a happy-go-lucky samurai with little thought to the future, save for his next lesson. Though fast approaching 40, he is eager to learn anything life sets before him, and with typical Unicorn perseverance, he usually does.

One of his greatest loves is *iaijutsu* (*iaijutsu* 4), the swift-moving skill of duels and the perfect strike. He speaks of it constantly - not bragging of his great battles, as many duelists do, but rather attempting to learn anything new, anything which can be taught to him. He hopes to speak to the great Toshimoko at this Winter Court, and perhaps challenge the great Master to a duel of skill, hoping to pick up a few pointers.

Usuia knows that his family is attempting to maneuver him into the Emerald Champion's position, and he does not mind. He is not eager for the task - indeed, he has no love for the law - but he does hope that it might allow him access to the scrolls of the Seppun. Those scrolls, he wonders, might hold the secret to the location of the Ukyo Blade. Once wielded by the Fox, an a gift from Shinjo herself to those who remained behind, it was lost in a cataclysmic earthquake that destroyed the ancient Fox palace near the hills of Otosan Uchi. Now, the Fox live elsewhere, and the location of their old palace is lost.

Usuia intends to find a way into the Seppun libraries while he is here - one way or the other.



"We saved the Emperor eight thousand koku, my lord Hoturi." Uji's face was darkly amused. "I should hope he will be pleased."

A thousand Crane stormed Kyuden Suru Kokai, forcing Yoritomo and his men to relinquish their grip on the seaside fortress. Although the Mantis general escaped, the Battle of Ice and Snow became legendary. The Doji daimyo was commended by the Emperor for his swift end to the conflict, and received numerous honors when he returned to the Winter's Court.

But one part of the story is never told. Though Uji and his men took the palace, they found the Scorpion maiden's chambers empty, the windows closed and locked, and all signs of her passage erased.

Only the whispered laughter of the Scorpion and the faint scent of her perfume remained to show the way.

Neatly done, my lady Scorpion, though I have won the round. We both know there are many moves to come before the game is finished...




The evenings of the Winter Court are filled with distractions, poetry readings, celebrations and feasts. It is a time of merriment, when secret lovers can meet, and private negotiations occur away from the peering eyes of the court. It is also a time for reflection. Across the palace, courtiers, daimyos and their servants revel in the quiet snowfall of the night, or watch the stars rise above the spires of Kyuden Seppun.

The gentle movements of the court audibly change as the sun dips below the horizon. A mood of silence falls, and whispers echo through silent corridors. Dinner is prepared – the one meal at which the entire court gathers – and the ladies come in their finest kimono, hoping to catch the eye of some eligible young samurai. The bushi speak of the glories of the day – the hunt that went well, the duels and brave competitions at which they excelled.

Other events are common as well. Nightly services at the Four Temples include meditations, rituals of peace and harmony (often performed in complete silence), and the respectful ceremonies of retirement. The retirement of a daimyo, one of the few formal

political events performed after the sun sets, is a very traditional ceremony. Those who retire at this court will likely remain at the Four Temples, in order to serve at the monastery and seek enlightenment for the rest of their lives.

Moon-viewing festivals, star-watching and fireworks fill the winter, and often the Jade Tear, the Imperial Acrobats, or other famous artisans perform. Unlike the busy attitude of the morning or the fast-paced intrigue of the afternoon, the night is a time to relax, to move slowly as the darkness falls. And, of course, it is the time for murder. Dangerous enemies lurk behind every fan at the Winter Court, many of them asleep only corridors away: temptingly within reach of a brave assassin. Imperial Guards tend to the Emperor and his family, but those who walk the hallways are often young, inexperienced, taken in by the beauty and opulence of the court. The night is a time for caution, and a time for long knives.



Love and Marriage

While the concept of love is often tragic in western literature, it can also be uplifting. Not so in Rokugan. Passionate love has no place in a samurai's heart; there is room only for complete, unquestioning devotion to one's daimyo. Any other emotions conflict with one's devotion, clouding loyalty. Samurai consider passionate love an emotion for 'lower people' such as courtesans and geisha. Only very rarely does a love story end happily for samurai. While this may be an accepted truth in Rokugan, lovers who can overcome the odds are often seen as heroic and honorable, while those who fail are tragic and sometimes even vilified.

One of the simplest purposes of the Winter Court is to bring people together in order to create alliances and cement bargains for the upcoming year. What better way to assure trust than through a well-arranged marriage? Fathers and mothers of noble lineage bring their most gifted children to the court, hoping they will catch some royal eye. Samurai seek pairings to better their station, increase their land or prestige, or cement some goal through blood ties. Because of the proximity of the children and their parents, marriages are often arranged at Winter Court, to be performed in court, or the following spring. Marriages are

arranged by the parents of the bride and bridegroom, and only occasionally do the two find themselves in the throes of romance. Frequently a middleman arranges the marriage, often a Crane, who are always aware of births in the royal families of Rokugan. The bride and groom are usually introduced to each other sometime after their *gempukku* ceremony.

Samurai-ko and Marriage

As a rule, unmarried women and men in Rokugan may not alone together unless they are chaperoned by a trustworthy source. While this causes problems for the typical traveling samurai-ko, chaperonage is not necessary if the samurai-ko has taken a vow of celibacy – and who in their right mind would accuse an Otaku Battle Maiden of betraying her oath of celibacy? Celibacy is not mandatory for samurai-ko, however, and in the wilderness or on magistrate duty, unmarried samurai-ko can have difficulties which will compromise their honor. For this reason, male and female samurai are usually not paired together alone, even while carrying out their duties as Imperial or Clan Magistrates.

In this way, the traditional 'chastity oath' which many samurai-ko take is as much a genuine vow as it is a way to keep rumormongers from accusing them of dishonorable behavior. After all, if a samurai-ko sleeps with a man out of wedlock, she has not only compromised her future husband, but has given her lord cause to question her loyalty by keeping secrets, and allowing emotions to rule her behavior.

Generally, male and female samurai are simply careful never to be 'alone.' This can be done a number of ways, but the most traditional gives the samurai-ko a retainer called a *kogoto*, or 'handmaiden,' whose only purpose is to ensure that she is never in a compromising position. Although *kogoto* are typically female, it is not unheard of for a male member of the samurai-ko's family (such as a brother, grandfather or uncle) to assume the responsibility. *Kogoto* typically follow the samurai-ko on her duties as a magistrate, ensuring (through their testimony) the Lady's virtue and her word of honor.

A samurai-ko makes her vows of celibacy and chastity upon her *gempukku*. If she marries, she does not necessarily stop being a samurai-ko, although that is traditional in many families. Being a samurai-ko is a lifetime duty, not 'absolved' upon marriage, nor denied because the nobility expects a woman to create a home and children. However, society places expectations on women, including caring for their husband's finances, and keeping a careful eye on the political climate of her house and lands. If she wants, and is capable of performing both duties, she can go on being a battle-ready samurai all her life – as long as her daimyo (and/or husband, if he is of greater status) agrees to it, of course. In some houses, such as the Matsu and Otaku families, married samurai-ko continue their service as bushi. In others, such as the

Crane, the samurai-ko is more likely to take up the traditional duties and leave behind her kenjutsu training.

The more 'traditional' clans and families, such as the Crane, the Isawa family of the Phoenix, and the Crab, rarely have samurai-ko within their ranks. Such maidens are a strange anomaly, and often treated as though they had less than their actual honor. They are not scorned nor treated poorly for their choice, though; the Otaku and the Matsu are role-models for such young women. If a samurai-ko marries into one of these families, they may be pressured to forsake their bushi ways, particularly once they have borne children. It is possible, however, and legally allowed with the approval of their lord (and their husband, if he is of greater status) for a samurai-ko to marry and still retain their independence and position as a clan or Imperial magistrate.

If a samurai-ko's daimyo and her superior agree, the samurai-ko can continue serving her duties. If she was a Lion or Unicorn, she would be encouraged to do so, while her husband remained at home, fulfilling the responsibilities of the traditional 'wifely' role. To prevent this, Otaku females don't usually marry until they're ready to retire from Battle Maidening.

Weddings

Rokugani weddings are celebrated in a great variety of ways. Traditionally, the religious wedding ceremony is held in Shintao style at a shrine, either within the family home or in a temple of Shinsei. A Shintao priest or the family's shugenja conducts the ceremony, which is attended by only the couple's immediate family members. During the proceedings, the couple are purified with salt, drink sake, and read the words of commitment. At last, they give symbolic offerings to the *kami*, the ancestors of the both houses, the house's founding spirit, and to the Seven Fortunes. After the ceremony, the newlyweds welcome guests at a lavish reception party. The reception is attended by 20 to 200 guests, among whom are relatives, friends, and, if the couple is of a noble line, a representative of the Emperor.

The party normally starts with the introductions of the bride and groom. Afterwards, a meal is held and several guests make contributions such as speeches, poetry, or songs. In many cases, a noble sponsors a favored artist to perform for the ceremony rather than performing himself.

During the celebration of a marriage, the bride and groom change their clothing several times. On the morning of the wedding day, the bride wears white, the color of death. This symbolizes that she is now dead to her family. Afterwards, during the ceremony, she changes clothing repeatedly, slowly revealing more and more red clothing under the white. The white vestments are removed to show a red dress underneath, symbolizing her rebirth. After the ceremony, the groom's mother typically takes the bride away to teach her the skills she will need to be a good wife. The husband goes on a pilgrimage to a holy place to celebrate and offer incense to the Fortunes in the hopes

of a happy marriage. There he performs rituals, including meditation on this phase of his life and the changes he must make to his lifestyle.

Spring and winter are the most popular wedding seasons, immediately after and sometimes during the Winter Court. The political season is a fertile ground for young couples to court under the watchful eyes of their parents and peers. During the Winter Court, wedding ceremonies and receptions are popular, and many couples choose to marry at once. As many as forty couples have been united and congratulated during the Winter Court on a day of particular fortune.

Mi-Ai

The practice of *mi-ai*, or arranged marriages, is customary in Rokugan. Used to seal bargains or alliances between clans and families, it is not expected for the couple to be in love, or even know one another. *Mi-ai* begins with a formal interview between the parents of a young man and woman. Sometimes the two who are to be married are as young as infants; other times, they are significantly past their *gempukku*. If the participating man (or, in the Otaku and Matsu houses, the female) is old enough, he may choose to arrange his own marriage. Sometimes, particularly when the man and woman live very far apart, a third party is brought in to act as go-between.

A marriage is proposed with due consideration to the social background of both prospective participants, as well as their personalities, the financial and political aspects of the union, and the children who would be thus produced. Neither of the parties are expected to believe that a *mi-ai* interview is a guarantee of marriage. Usually, these preliminary studies are done to help assure a successful union.

In the long history of Rokugan, the marriage system has gone through various changes as the social system has changed. One of the most traditional practices of marriage include the *muko-iri*, wherein a bridegroom enters the family of his bride after the wedding. On the other hand, the *yome-iri* implies that the bride will be accepted into her bridegroom's home. Both of these unions are covered in more detail under *Joining a House*, below.

Joining a House

When a noble couple marries, it raises the question of 'joining houses', or deciding to whose house they will belong after the marriage. This decision determines which house owes dowry, to whom the couple's fealty will be given, and in which clan or family their children will be raised. For most, this is a decision of no concern. If the marriage is within the same family of a clan (Shinjo to Shinjo, for example), little consideration is made outside of the family, and the decision is made with a minimum of difficulty.

If any samurai, particularly a samurai-ko, leaves her clan, their life is radically altered. A samurai-ko who becomes a traditional

Isawa's wife will find that her life of adventuring is over. She is pressured to attend to her husband's household affairs, bear and raise his children, and take the traditional role of wife. The children of such a union are raised as full members of the clan into which their mother married. They would certainly not be acknowledged as a member of their mother's clan, although any uncles or relatives in that clan may treat them fondly. Any member of one clan who finds themselves married into another will no longer be trained in their family's techniques, nor will they be supported in any way by their old clan.

The daimyo of the families involved must be alerted of all samurai marriages, and the Clan Daimyo must approve all marriages involving out-of-clan unions. The alliances created by marital ties can be difficult to maintain, and the lords of the Great Clans carefully control such unions. This goes on even when the couple involved are of low political status. On some occasions Imperial magistrates, shugenja, or governors approve or disapprove marriages by proxy for their lords, so long as a full report is given of the decision. Emerald Magistrates (such as typical PCs) may investigate and approve a cross-clan marriage, and if they refuse to grant the license, the marriage simply cannot occur. If they are not careful, though, the daimyo in question (the ones who approved the marriage on both sides) will go over their heads. If they cannot support their reasons for refusing the marriage, the Magistrates will lose Honor for misrepresenting their superior's word.

Marriages which cause changes in the samurai caste (a lesser noble marrying the son of the Lion Champion) must be officially approved by the Emperor. Otomo Sorai, the Emperor's aide, typically handles smaller changes. Marriages performed without this approval are not considered legal or binding, and the daimyos of the married parties could simply take them away (physically if necessary) and marry the offenders to someone else. Also, the daimyo may command that the two commit *seppuku*, for betraying and shaming their family.

There's no Romeo-san and Juliet-ko in Rokugan. After being discovered, he cuts his belly open, and her father (because she's lost her virtue to this loser) sells her to a geisha house. Bye-bye samurai caste, my dear Juliet!

UNIFYING HOUSES

When a samurai or samurai-ko marries outside of their own house, certain social customs must be observed. As with any marriage, the glory ranks and social position of the two determine who leaves their house and becomes part of another, regardless of their sex or experience. Barring outside circumstances, the one with the lower social standing joins the other's clan and family, forfeits his or her name, and becomes a new member of that clan. They no longer learn techniques from their own school, nor are they considered 'family' (with the rank and social prerogatives) anymore.

Any immature (not yet of *gempukku* age) children of this marriage (or a previous one) are considered members of the same



clan as their parents. If the female had the higher social standing, then the whole family takes her name; if it's the male, then the family takes his name. There's no going back, either way. This is one of the reasons that everyone, no matter how 'inconsequential', needs the direct permission of their family daimyo to marry outside the clan.

Otaku Battle Maidens and female Matsu often *gempukku* earlier than members of other families, precisely because when they marry, they sometimes leave the house and choose not to continue their lives as samurai-ko. Often, such women have to retire from their adventuring life in order to bear children – for the sake of continuing the bloodline of the family, if nothing else. Indeed, an Otaku mother who bears many daughters brings great prestige to her family. As stated in *Way of the Unicorn*, marriages are arranged with Otaku women based on the prospective husband's ability to produce female offspring. Other houses of the Empire consider it odd, but the Otaku have taken the concept of selective breeding and applied it to their own philosophy.

Again, if the Otaku maiden marries someone outside her clan, whether out of 'love' (extremely rare) or as an arranged marriage, her parents and daimyo must approve. Of course, they probably would not consent to the marriage unless the groom's family had a reputation of producing female children. Likewise, the Unicorn Clan would have to benefit politically from the marriage agreement. The Otaku family in particular reverses the roles and responsibilities of the husband and wife, and often the family will veto an inter-clan marriage that takes the Battle Maiden out of the clan (they are only allowed to marry husbands with less Glory). Even so, as part of the dowry negotiation, the man traditionally must agree to marry into the Otaku family; he then becomes the manager of the family and household affairs.

After the Marriage

During the early age of Rokugan's aristocracy, a bridegroom would visit his bride at her home, in a special apartment known

as the *fukirio*, or 'wiving house'. Only after the birth of a child or the loss of parents to the bridegroom or husband would the bride be accepted in the man's home. This tradition has changed dramatically, and now, a married couple lives together from the day of their wedding.

Among common people, *hinin* and *heimin*, labor power is essential to maintaining a family. The wiving house continues as an accepted practice in the Isawa lands; a bridegroom lives with his bride's family, and offers his labor for a certain length of time in exchange for her hand in marriage. In such cases the husband lives in the chambers of his wife, and their marriage is celebrated once the duration of the 'indenture' was completed.

After nightly visits from a samurai courting his would-be bride (often done during a Winter Court, so that the families can become familiar with each other and the prospects of the marriage) he might be invited inside by her parents and offered rice cakes. *Tokoro-arawashi*, as the ceremony is called, is one the most important functions in an aristocratic wedding, and all formality is observed.

Thus, marriages are arranged by a *nakodo*, or go-between, who is very familiar with the appropriate customs and rituals. In this way, the groom could impress the parents by purchasing a proper go-between. The *nakodo* arranges the courtship and begins the negotiations with the

family of the bride on the groom's behalf. The *nakodo* is also of critical importance in aristocratic courtships occurring outside of the Winter Court, as the bride and groom-to-be may live hundreds of miles apart and be unable to meet in person.

NAKODO

A *nakodo* helps the families of the prospective bride and groom barter without causing emotional displays on either side. Often, the *nakodo* is trained in negotiation as well as courtly functions, in order to gain the most beneficial dowry for the bride and husband. He or she further makes certain a bride has no secrets in her history and no stain of dishonor which would compromise the marriage. When the couple has been married, if

GUESTS AT THE WINTER COURT: MIYA TATANKO

Earth 3 Fire 3 Water 5 Air 3 Void 4

Miya Tatanko is a shugenja, trained and raised by the Kuni house. Her background in the Shadowlands is extensive (*Lore: Shadowlands 4*), and her particular field of study is the Bog Hag. Which is useful, because she is one.

The true Tatanko died on the way to the Winter Court, no more than a few weeks ago, and the Hag has been carefully maintaining her identity ever since. She has very little sign of the Taint, as the Hag was most careful with her new acquisition, but she does have an exceptional ability to gain the attentions of men (*Seduction 4 with one free raise for Court Fashion*).

Tatanko's purpose at the Court of the Emperor is to cause havoc in a subtle a way as possible. She wants to prove that the court of the mortals is a laughingstock, and most of all, she wants to leave with something more unique than the finest Jade Sake: Hantei Sotorii.

She knows his destiny, and is determined to play her part. If she can corrupt or Taint the boy, she is willing to do so, even if it means giving up her own life in the service of her Dark Lord.

After all, she can always return...

the bride is found to have been compromised, or to be unsuitable after the wedding has been completed, the nakodo often must pay heavy fines to the groom's family.

A go-between provides the prospective bridegroom and bride with an initial opportunity to know each other personally, either through letters (which the go-between reads and carries back and forth), or through a physical meeting. Even if the marriage is successfully agreed to, the man and woman concerned are usually given months to get to know each other and learn to accept each other.

The nakodo's proposed marriage is accepted by the ceremonial exchange of drinks between the nakodo and the bride's parents, and the nakodo and the groom's parents, known as *yui-no*. Once the traditional drinks have been completed, a messenger is sent to the bride's home, so that family members can hold a farewell party before the ceremony.

The Ceremony

A traditional Shintao wedding is performed in a temple, or before a family's sanctuary, carefully arranged for the occasion. It is prestigious for weddings arranged at the Emperor's Winter Court to be performed on the first day of spring in the northernmost of the Four Temples of the Seppun. This temple is famed as the place where the First Hantei married Doji Mioko, and is considered to be extremely lucky for the couples given in union there.

No matter where it is held, a monk or house shugenja always presides over the ceremony. Members of both families attend the wedding, as well as close relatives. After the ritual, the family ancestors and *kami* are called upon to witness the marriage, and bestow their blessing and favors on the newly-weds. Thereafter, the bridegroom reads his oath to keep faithful to the wife and her needs, and she accepts a red ribbon in commemoration of his oath. It should be noted that 'keeping faithful' in bushido and Rokugani culture means simply that the groom will see to his wife's physical needs (such as a house, servants and clothing), care for her, and give her his protection. The groom's oath may be given by the go-between in his behalf.

The *san-san-kudo* or 'ceremony of the three-times-three' is the traditional exchange of nuptial cups, similar to the tea ceremony. The bridegroom and bride perform it in front of all their guests and the officiating priest. Then, the bridegroom and bride proceed inside the sanctuary (temple or familial shrine) in order to burn seven twigs of *sakaki* – a sacred tree – in worship of the Seven Fortunes.

WEDDING RECEPTIONS

Rokugani wedding receptions include many small traditions and rituals, many of which are the custom of the local clans, or of the couple's home provinces. These smaller 'family' rituals may take as long as three hours. The traditional costume of the bride

is elaborate. She wears *kanzashi* ornaments – sticks of wood, covered in hanging flowers or pearls – in the hair, but are hidden under a hood known as the *tsuno kakushi*. The *uchikake* is the rich and splendid gown worn over the colorful wedding kimono, and is often worth as much as the entire dowry which the bride will receive. Bridal dresses are sometimes handed down in the family, and are always created of red and white silks. Even the soup served at the reception may have ingredients of red and white, to symbolize the wedding colors.



To serve the Tao is to serve the Empire.

the one cannot be parted from the other, no more than the sea can be parted from the land.

– The Tao of Shinsei

In Rokugan, when a samurai reaches the age of 40, he is offered the *inkyō*, or 'seclusion'. This is the first opportunity he has to remove himself from leadership and choose a more reflective path. Further opportunities are offered at age 50, 55, and 60, at which point a samurai begins to shame his house if he remains in society. Some samurai choose this path, others do not.

Traditionally, retirement is the process by which a samurai removes himself from the position of the head of a household, and passes the rights and privileges of that duty to his first-born son (or daughter in the Matsu and Otaku clans). Once the samurai has retired, he traditionally joins a monastery, but many samurai prefer to move to a separate house, or lesser quarters within the family's main house, and continue their lives as samurai without the burden of leadership. A woman can also retire, and couples often choose to do so at the same time, so that the transition of the home can progress smoothly. A non-bushi woman's retirement is known as *shufu*, symbolized by the passing down of an ornate ladle, the representative of the wifely duties of her husband's house.

The 60th year of a person's life is considered one of the most important years of their life, because of the astrological significance of that number. By the time a person is 60, their full zodiac cycle has been completed, and they 'return' to the year of

their birth. Thus, if a man retires at age 40, he holds another ritual at his 60th year to celebrate the full cycle of his life.

In Rokugan, samurai feel a great deal of responsibility for their elders. Once a samurai has retired, his family continues to make donations to his temple, or continues to give him all that he requires if he stays in the home. Peasants are not expected to work beyond their 40th year, although many continue to do so, and are rewarded by their feudal lords for it. A peasant's retirement is more gradual than a samurai's, due to the lesser responsibility which a peasant passes down to his children.

Male samurai often join a *sogya*, or community of monks who study, meditate and search for enlightenment through the Tao. Leaders of such a community – often samurai who retired at a young age, or who were forced to leave the samurai caste through some dishonor or disgrace – are known as *shinpu*. Nuns, or female samurai who retire to the monastery, are called *ama*. Samurai-ko who join the monasteries are treated no differently than their male counterparts.

When samurai join a *sogya*, they shave their heads (even the females), and take vows of celibacy and poverty known as the *an*. Their primary activities include meditation, studying the Tao, and serving the Seven Fortunes. Such monks are expected to remember their family and clan in their rituals, and often return home to their clan or family and perform rituals of marriage, funerals, or other duties. The chief administrator of the many temples within the Empire is known as the *sogo*, a position currently held by the Master of the Four Temples, Tetsuya.

The three ranks of monks are the *sojo*, the *sozu*, and the *risshi* (the lowest ranking, traditionally samurai who have only been in the monastery for a few years). Warrior-monks, known as *sohei* were trained as bushi, and have chosen to retain their skill as a means of defending the temples and maintaining their physical fitness. It is not unusual to see these *sohei* performing the duties of guards at the temple gate, or of servants for a traveling Master.

One of the most important daimyos in the Empire, Miya Yoto, celebrated his 60th birthday this New Year's day, and is expected to announce his retirement at the Winter Court of the Seppun. Once a samurai has announced his retirement, a very particular chain of events must follow. In this case, Yoto is not only a member of the samurai caste, he is also the daimyo of a major house with vassal families.

Once he has received his superior's permission to retire (in this case, the Hantei), he will make a very private announcement to his family. They will prepare his way, be it arranging for a wing of rooms within their castle, or to speaking to the monks at Yoto's chosen *sogya*. Once all arrangements have been made, a formal announcement will be arranged; the court is expecting that announcement in the Seppun palaces this year.

Once the public learns the samurai's intention, the change of leadership of the house begins. The son of the daimyo begins to take charge of the household, speaking with his superior (here, the Hantei), any lesser daimyo under his domain, and servants within his personal retinue. The elder samurai performs a ritual,

with the assistance of his son and the family *shugenja* or monk, whereby he officially turns over his responsibilities, duties and titles to his heir. If she wishes, the wife of the retiring samurai takes part in the ritual, turning over her wifely duties to the wife of her son.

Lastly, the retired samurai makes a final pilgrimage to the most sacred site of their family – the Akodo Hall of Ancestors, the Champion's Stone of the Crane, or some other famous location. Once they complete their journey, and they have made their final libations to the ancestors, the samurai takes a new name to represent the focus of their new life. They are no more referred to by their previous title.



Astrological Events

In the evening, the young samurai of the Winter Court gather to watch the cold night sky, telling stories about the constellations, and discerning the future from their paths in the heavens. Although astrology is not extremely well-known in Rokugan, enough advances have been made to allow *shugenja* to make predictions for the coming year. Indeed, more often than not these predictions come true, and certain phenomena are seen as omens of potential doom or coming fortune. Asahina Tampako, the foremost authority on astrology in the Empire, rarely comes to a Winter Court (indeed, he hardly ventures from his hermitage at all), but many of his students do.

This year, many notable events lie on the horizon, marking the year to come as an important one, filled with glory, heroism and warfare. The portents of war hang on the horizon, and many of the court's astrologers warn that the current border conflicts between the Lion and the Crane may evolve into more deadly – and widespread – bloodshed. Some of the more debated astrological events of the year (many seen at this Winter Court), include:

The return of the Dragon's Tail Star. Thought to have heralded the original return of the Unicorn Clan to the Empire, this star is said to be the sign of a great change. Its appearance over the Winter Court has sparked considerable debate. Some say that this event will be the return of Shinsei; others speculate that

the Lion or Crane will attempt to usurp the Emperor's throne in the absence of a powerful heir.

A brilliant red star shone at dawn on the celebration of the young Prince's birth. Many in the Empire have whispered that it marks the Sun's disapproval of the Prince; that she feels he is not a worthy heir to his line. This portends a time of darkness, a difficult future for the Empire.

A solar eclipse, thought by many to herald the return of a great hero. All eyes have turned to Matsu Tsuko and Hida Yakamo, wondering if their souls are the incarnations of some great warriors. If this is so, then perhaps the whispers that the ancient artifact known as the Jade Hand will return are true.

The alignment of two wandering stars, the Weaver and the Kappa. This unusual convergence of stars occurs only once every hundred years, and heralds the rise of the Shadowlands over the Empire. Certainly, on the day the stars combined, the foul denizens of that land launched a massive assault on Kuni castle, nearly obliterating the forces there. (See the events in *Twilight Honor*.)

For three minutes, over the Ancestral Hall of the Akodo, the sunlight rained down as tears of crystal. Many of these crystal pieces have been brought to the Imperial Court for the amusement and wonder of the courtiers. This omen, while startlingly dramatic, has yet to be interpreted by the astrologers of the land.

A tremendous star fell from the heavens, leaving a tear in the Phoenix lands that is over a li in diameter. At its center lies a strange lump of rock and clay, the bones of the star which died. Astrologers of three clans – the Scorpion, the Phoenix and the Dragon – have rushed to the site of the impact, and monks of the local temple continue to perform banishing rituals at the edge of the crater, hoping that whatever evil spirits infected the star will be sent away by the grace of Amaterasu. Just before Winter Court, the Shiba ambassador let the news slip that they intended to move the star's bones, and perhaps bring them to the Emperor for viewing.

Battles of the Year

The impending war between the Lion and the Crane has rocked the Empire this year. Once restricted to minor border skirmishes, it has recently threatened to break out into full-scale war. The samurai at the Winter Court this year are glowering, and the Akodo and Doji ambassadors are both spending a great deal of time trying to gain the Emperor's favor.

One of the battles, a recent disaster on the plains of Gaiju Shindai, took more than five hundred samurai on each side of the conflict. Gaiju Shindai was epic; courtiers have rethought strategy, using the bloody battle as fertile ground for boons, favors and other political gain. One of the most unpredictable factors in this 'minor war' is the friendship between the Akodo daimyo, Toturi, and Doji Hoturi, the son of the Crane Champion. Both are present

at the court, and neither seems to be speaking to one another – almost certainly on the orders of the Crane daimyo and Emerald Champion, Doji Satsume.

To the north, the Phoenix have recently suffered an 'invasion' of mujina and kappa, harassing villages and destroying caravans with their malicious tricks. Although the Crab deny it, the Phoenix accuse them of allowing such creatures through the Kaiu Wall in order to harass the trade of other clans. Among the most ardently outspoken critics of the Crab is the Master of the Council, Isawa Tsuke. There is some debate as to whether this argument will become the first real conflict between Phoenix and Crab in the history of the Empire. Certainly, if Hida Kisada or his son, Yakamo, were at the court, more than words would be flying. But, as usual, none Hida have come to grace the Emperor's court, leaving their courtly duties to the mysterious and enigmatic shugenja Kuni Yori. Courtiers whisper that his presence, and the public knowledge that he has alliances with the Scorpion daimyo, Bayushi Shoji, is not helping the matter.

In the far south, nezumi scurry through Daidoji lands, stealing everything that isn't nailed down. The Daidoji, ever practical, have refused aid from the amused Crab, insisting that a plague of ratlings is not worthy of a samurai's interest. The ratlings have sent what can laughingly be called an 'ambassador' (a female named Iyaktakko) to the court of Garden Under Shadow City, and



insist that their migration has been caused by a "bad-bad walking dark, runs strong through the night on many legs." Negotiations continue, as the Daidoji continue to slaughter entire tribes of the creatures which threaten the peasants in seaside villages near Earthquake Fish Bay.

THE FALCON VILLAGES

Another trouble which weighs heavily on the court is the bloodshed in far west of the Empire, near the lands of the Falcon Clan. This minor clan, barely represented in the court, controls some rich and prosperous farmlands on the border of the Shinomen Forest. A farmer living in the woodlands there reported an attack by 'long, snake-like, green-skinned men' who spoke a strange tongue. Unable to defend themselves, and frightened of the evil which lives in the depths of the forest, the peasants of the area have fled their homes, and refuse to work their fields. The crops have soured, and the village has lost much of their food.

In an attempt to help their peasants defend themselves against this strange threat, the Falcon turned to the Crab Clan for assistance. The Crab, insulted because the Falcon diplomat (a relative newcomer to Imperial politics) seemed to imply that these creatures were 'escapees' from the Shadowlands, rapidly conquered the Falcon territory and installed their own peasants in the village. Hida Tsuru, one of the most powerful Crab generals, now holds the province. Falcon threats and arguments have done them no good, as the Crab claim that the village was abandoned and the Falcon had not fulfilled their duty to protect the Emperor's people in the area.

The Unicorn, particularly the Iuchi, whose palace is near the disturbance, have offered to help the Falcon – for a price. At this Winter Court a representative of the Falcon, Toritaka Tsimari, is expected to seal the bargain with the powerful Iuchi Daiyu. If the bargain is completed, it may mean that the Unicorn will go to war with the Crab on behalf of the Falcon Clan. Many of the most powerful politicians and advisors in the court would dearly love to know what the Falcon is offering that would entice the Unicorn to go to war with their close allies the Hiruma, and many more would pay to stop the bargain from taking place.

In the Court

"Never be afraid to speak, even if the men of this world are blind to the truth, for the words of a true samurai are recorded in the Celestial Heavens."

– Doji Satsume

Other events occurring at this year's Winter Court include the formation and execution of numerous small plans, carefully planned webs of deception and lies which form the backbone of Rokugan's political intrigue. Many of these plans are not public, and their participants have no desire to make them so. Anyone

who 'discovers' that they exist may have significant political leverage – or a new enemy.

THE CRAB

The Crab have sent few ambassadors to the court of the Hantei, and while this is not unusual, the choice of attendants certainly is. Kuni Yori, daimyo of the dark shugenja family of the Crab, has come with a letter for the Emperor, to be delivered at the Festival of Lights, near the end of the winter. Some believe that the letter asks permission to make war upon the Unicorn for their impudence in the Falcon matter, and others whisper that it is a request for the Crab to deal with the *nezumi* 'problem' in the Crane lands. The Crab dislike the Crane's open killing of the ratlings, but realize that not all the clans of the Empire agree with their friendly stance towards the *nezumi*. Of course, if the *nezumi* are considered cause for the Crab to march, then the Crab can certainly take all of Rokugan under their heel – not through force of arms, but merely by breeding ratlings.

Still others, familiar with Hida Kisada's contempt of the ruling Hantei, mutter that the letter is an open threat of war against the Imperial House. Kisada has long condemned this Hantei as a weakling, scorning his political practices and lack of decisive action. In the minds of some, notably the Scorpion Clan, the Crab are on the brink of rebellion against the Emperor – ready to march their army from its place on the wall and begin a new era for the Empire. An era, some say, that would place Kisada's mighty bulk upon the Emerald Throne.

THE CRANE

The Crane are at a loss. Despite the frequent attacks by the crazed *nezumi* in the Daidoji lands, they have more important matters requiring their attention. At first, the 'war' between the Lion and the Crane was laughable. The Crane had a significant advantage in foodstuffs and other items which the Lion could not risk losing. If the Matsu and Akodo attacked Crane lands, the Doji would simply 'cash in' all the Lion koku they had saved over the past five years, effectively stealing every scrap of rice in their lands. If that occurred, the armies of the Lion would grind to a halt as their men slowly starved to death.

But the Lion have been receiving supplies from an unknown source. Able to keep their storehouses filled, the Lion have marched a tremendous army east, toward the Crane border on the fields of Osari. If this army continues, war will surely follow. However, if the Crane can discover who is supplying the Lion with their extra foodstuffs, the Doji courtiers can certainly find a way to stop the transaction, creating the stalemate which would force the Lion to retreat.

In addition, the son of the Crane Champion, Doji Hoturi, has been acting strangely these days. He seems distracted, unable to remember his purpose at the court. Although courtiers whisper that his legendary affair with Bayushi Kachiko may have resumed, the Lady still seems as cold as ice when Hoturi's name comes up. Kakita Toshimoko, a lifetime friend to the young man,

suspects that Hoturi is unhappy with the potential war. If such a war comes, Hoturi will be forced to lead Doji troops against the Akodo – and may even meet his friend, Akodo Toturi, on the field.

Further, the second son of the Champion, Doji Kuwanan, is still being held in Lion lands, despite his father's letter asking the young man to return home. While hostages of this sort are common in dealings with the Scorpion, the Phoenix and the Unicorn, the Lion rarely stoop so low as to keep a brave warrior from defending his family's name and lands. Certainly, there must be some other reason that Kuwanan has chosen to remain beyond his appointed time – and some courtiers whisper that Kuwanan has treacherously changed allegiance.

THE DRAGON

Little that occurs in the Dragon territories is spoken of at the Emperor's court. The Kitsuki representatives in the Imperial Court speak glowingly of their Champion's wisdom and his loyalty, but little of his plans.

What is certain, however, is that Togashi Yokuni does have plans. The Dragon daimyo has been seen in the Scorpion lands, meeting with Bayushi Shoji on some unknown matter. Their talk lasted only hours (according to Phoenix spies), but when it was done, Shoji seemed tense and his mood was dark. He immediately retired to his chambers, unwilling to discuss the matter.

Yokuni was nowhere to be seen.

THE HANTEI

If the players have allowed Otomo Yoroshiku (see the adventure module *Code of Bushido*) to keep her position, and if she survived the module, she will certainly be at her uncle's court, showing off her new husband. No matter which clan she chose to marry, that clan will have significant political advantage at this year's court, and will be allowed numerous small favors (such as the Emperor's blessing to a questionable marriage, an extra portion of koku for their peasants this year, or a small amount of new territory). Her true father, Shinjo Gidayu, is also at the court. Unknown to the majority of the courtiers, he is a major factor in the bargaining between the Falcon Clan and the Unicorn. A Falcon spy learned the secret of Yoroshiku's birth, and has threatened the Unicorn daimyo with blackmail if he does not help them convince the Iuchi to help them retake the village from the Crab.

The Seppun, masters of faith and knowledge, have sponsored many challenges and tournaments through the season, requesting poems using the lines of the Tao, and other themed artistic endeavors. Meanwhile, their daimyo, Seppun Daiori, slinks like a serpent through the court, humbly requesting audience with the Akodo, and offering all but tribute to the Matsu line – activities which cause the rest of the Emperor's families to quickly rebuke the Seppun for their impolitic behavior.

THE LION

Apart from the Seppun, the Akodo and Matsu families have the greatest number of dignitaries at the Winter Court this year; possibly to gain the Emperor's favor in their efforts against the Crane. Both Akodo Toturi and Matsu Tsuko are here, although the latter seems more interested in acquiring maps of the area, particularly the border that the Seppun share with the Crane.

Akodo Toturi has met with the Emperor privately on three occasions at the beginning of the winter, and each time the Lion Champion appeared calm and pleased as he leaves the Hantei's presence. Toturi has also spent time negotiating with Doji Hoturi, Kakita Yoshi, and Kakita Toshimoko, attempting to bring a lasting peace between the two families.

However, the Kitsu have their own plans. Spurred on by Matsu anger, they have discovered the link between the nezumi and the Crane, and plan to exploit it. The ratlings, driven from their homes in the Shadowlands by a tremendous Oni in the territories just southwest of Earthquake Fish Bay, claim to be searching for a mystic artifact known as the Bow of Jade, reputed to be able to destroy the rampaging beast. The Crane have no knowledge of such an item, but the Kitsu have spoken to the spirits of the dead, and heard tales of a small temple, just south of the Yasuki Yashiki (Palace of the Black Crane), which holds the item.

Of course, if the Kitsu can get the Jade Bow first, the Crane will be unable to aid the ratlings, and their provinces will continue to suffer from the 'invasion.'

Another cause which the Lion sponsor at the Emperor's court involves the Unicorn. Matsu Tsuko, daimyo of her family, has demanded that the Unicorn make good on their bargain to provide the Lion several caravans of rice. The Unicorn claim that the caravans have been 'stolen' by bandit activity throughout the Iuchi provinces. The Lion have all but accused the Unicorn of theft, and the Iuchi refusal to substitute more foodstuffs in the place of the lost caravans has infuriated the Matsu commanders.

On the way to the Winter Court, a terrible attack on one of the Lion dignitaries has caused even more trouble. The ambassador, a major Matsu vassal, escaped with few injuries, but the Lion claim that Crane treachery spawned the attack. They will certainly draw the blood of a Crane vassal in the spring if the insult is not avenged at court.

And within the house, the Akodo and Matsu strive desperately to heal the rift between their families. Tsuko and Toturi are rarely seen in company, and two messengers have been killed for failing in their duties when running commands from the Akodo lord to his Matsu daimyo. The Lion refuse to discuss the matter, but cunning Crab eyes have seen the hatred which the Matsu hold for the 'weak, spineless Toturi' and his men.

THE PHOENIX

The Phoenix have long been revered as the most peaceful clan in the Empire, but that reputation has been tested this year. Mujina run amok across their lands, and the famous Isawa reserve has buckled. Their temper has snapped several times at

the Winter Court already, as they discover their clothing has changed color, their hair has grown a foot in length, and entire scouting troops in the Phoenix provinces have been waylaid and sent to the wrong places.

What's worse, two of the wretched beasts have followed them to the Emperor's court.

The Phoenix are desperate to hide the pranks of the mujina and gain support from the Emperor to get rid of the ones still in the Isawa lands. The Isawa woodland, once a solemn haven of thought and repose, has become a field of humiliating tricks. The ambassador of the Isawa, Isawa Kaede, has repeatedly attempted to force the Crab to send experienced units into the Phoenix lands to aid them.

Isawa Tsuke, Master of Fire, has also come to the court, and repeatedly threatens to find a way to burn the mujina out – at any cost. The rivalry between Tsuke and the Acolyte of Void has grown over the year, as she has stepped more and more into her father's shoes. Her quiet voice speaks out on the council more and more often, and Tsuke's forceful leadership is beginning to falter. This, coupled with the mujina's constant pranks, have not made the Master of Fire a pleasant addition to the Winter Court.

If anyone of another clan meets with the Phoenix for very long, they will undoubtedly begin to notice the unusual occurrences in their quarters. At first, the Phoenix will smile enigmatically and refer to them as 'captured spirits, bound by the power of our magics', but as the disturbance grows, the Isawa become notably upset, and cut the negotiations short. This has not aided the Phoenix in the court of the Emperor.

THE UNICORN

The Unicorn have sent their finest iaijutsu master, Shinjo Usuia, to the court of the Emperor, in order to provide a serious contender at the next Test of the Emerald Champion. Although Doji Satsume, the 'Grinning Crane', shows no sign of ceasing his duties, he is nearing the age of retirement and may soon be forced to resign from his post. If that occurs – and from the Unicorn point of view, when it occurs – the Shinjo intend to seize the position as smoothly as possible.

This is the first Winter Court for the Unicorn's newest daimyo, Otaku Kamoko. She became daimyo of her family last spring, after a skirmish with Lion troops. Her assistant for the winter, Ide Tadaji, is instructing her in the ways of the court, but Kamoko seems bored, annoyed, and unhappy to be here. She has already committed numerous minor faux pas, including challenging a Scorpion to a riding contest – which she won handily, but gained the enmity of the Scorpion in the process.

Tadaji fears for the daimyo's life, but understands her dislike of the court and its simpering courtiers. Though he attempts to control Kamoko's anger, he has barely averted numerous conflicts between her and the daimyo of the Matsu family, Matsu Tsuko. Kamoko is obsessed with avenging her mother, who died at the hands of bandits, and she believes that the Matsu were involved.

If an unfortunate confrontation were to occur, Kamoko may not return from the battleground of the Imperial Court.

Further, the tension between the Lion and the Iuchi is yet another stumbling block. The Iuchi do not have the supplies to send to the Lion, yet the Lion insist that the missing caravan be replaced. If the Lion cannot be assuaged, faced down, or given an equal amount in trade, there may be war between the Iuchi and the Ikoma. The Iuchi would then not be able to follow through on their negotiations with the Falcon clan, and the Crab will retain the villages near the Shinomen forest – directly on the border of the Iuchi's richest farmlands. If the Crab continue to move north, the Unicorn will have lost a significant amount of their resources. It may be enough to spur the Unicorn to war on two fronts – a war which they cannot possibly win.

To avert this situation, the Ide and Iuchi ambassadors have been furiously attempting to engage the Crane in negotiations to get more foodstuffs with which to turn aside Lion anger. The Crane have no idea that this is the purpose for their trade, and in fact, have been convinced that the food is going to the Falcon Clan, to aid in their rebuilding. If the Crane discover that they are, in fact, feeding the Lion, they will certainly cease trade with the Iuchi.

THE SCORPION

The Scorpion's plans are far too complex to discuss as 'minor notes', such as we've done with the overarching political goals of the other clans. Some of the webs and snares below may not be completely appropriate for your campaign, and, as with any of the information presented in Winter Court, should be changed or ignored to suit your game.

The Scorpion are involved in every aspect of the Winter Court, or at least they know of them all. They are particularly interested in two things: Kisada's seeming hatred for the Emperor, and his mysterious letter; and the difficulty surrounding the Seppun daimyo. One of these could betray their greatest plans; the other, confirm them.

Deep beneath the Bayushi palaces, near the Sleeping Lake, a chasm as deep as the world opened up in the Bayushi Labyrinth. Originally, the Bayushi assumed that this dark pit was designed to capture and destroy any approaching invaders. In an attempt to map out the reaches of the labyrinth, a group of intrepid Yogo searched the boundaries of the pit, lowering one of their members as far as he dared. What they found was beyond their dreams.

An ancient staircase, worn and broken, carved into the rock at the edge of the pit, showed the way. Though no longer usable, and half-destroyed by rock slides, it led them to a broken wooden door hidden in the side of the cliff. Behind that lay a room filled with the dust of centuries past. Scrolls, weapons, and items of jade and gold littered the floor, scattered like a child's playthings under tons of fallen rock. Part of the room lay open, filled with strange items, while the rest lay hidden under the fallen granite. To one

side of the room, barely visible past the cave-in, a tall metal case lay. Beside it were the skeletons of three men.

Only one wore a fractured mask.

Bayushi Shoji immediately set his most trusted servants and bushi to excavating the small cavern, bringing its contents to the Bayushi libraries to be studied and identified. Yogo Junzo, Shoji's most powerful shugenja, has personally seen to the operation, and both he and Shoji remained home from the Emperor's court in order to assess the items. Not wanting to insult the Emperor, and unwilling to allow the Scorpion to miss the opportunities that abound at the Winter Court, Junzo suggested that the Champion's wife be sent to represent them. After all, the court of the Emperor

is work for ladies and men who cannot handle the strength of the sword, emphasized Junzo.

So Kachiko has come to the court, but her spies at home bring frequent messages to their Lady. And hidden within her bags of clothing, another, greater secret lurks: a fine mirror, entirely of obsidian, that her ally among the Yogo saw fit to bring to her... before his companions found the broken cave.

She has not yet fully discovered how to use its powers, but on occasion, it has shown her activities at Bayushi Palace as clearly as if she were there.

Shoji, in particular, seeks the Black Scrolls of the Dark One, stolen from his clan and sold centuries ago by the traitor Bayushi Tesaguri. The Scorpion have only seven of the scrolls; the Phoenix, three. The other two are lost, and the Scorpion (particularly Yogo Junzo, who feels it is his responsibility to guard the scrolls) wish them returned – at any cost.

Shoji knows his ally's thirst to recover the scrolls, but does not trust his motives. Certainly, with the first of the scrolls in his possession, Junzo could have released their forbidden power at any time, but his loyalty to the Scorpion has always stopped him. Still Shoji ponders: *Could this be the Yogo who will betray our trust?*

At the Court of the Hantei, Kachiko continues to further her clan's interests. She knows of the Unicorn-Crab difficulty, and has given the Falcon Clan needed supplies to aid them in the difficult winter months – primarily to keep them negotiating with the Crab and Unicorn. It wouldn't do to have the Falcon Clan fighting the Crab without drawing the Unicorn into the fun, now would it?

As for the Phoenix, Kachiko and her servitors are unsure what is causing the Isawa's strange behavior, but they taking full advantage of it. They manufacture reasons to keep the guests in the Isawa quarters, to extend negotiations with the clan, or to draw out the Isawa before their meetings, so that the guests will be alone with the Phoenix 'spirits' as long as possible. This tactic has allowed the Scorpion to secure valuable trade agreements with minor clans such as the Mantis that would otherwise have certainly gone to the Council of Five.

Kachiko's deeply desires to have her son, Bayushi Daiyu, introduced into Imperial society. If she can foster him to the Seppun, during which time he can gain important knowledge of the Seppun, the Otomo and the Hantei. This is the reason the Scorpion are so interested in the



Seppun daimyo's apparent connection to the Lion Clan, and his strange obsession with his son.

Kachiko, and the rest of the Scorpion Clan, know precisely how precarious the Emerald Throne is, between an aging and weak Hantei and his young, inexperienced heir. With a small push, Kisada could marshal enough troops to take the throne, and the line of the Hantei could fall. The Scorpion are determined to prevent that, as their duty to the throne. If they cannot prevent it, Bayushi Shojū has sworn to avenge the Emperor's death. And, if necessary, the Scorpion are ready to take any advantage that follows... even if the road leads to the Throne itself.



Many times, Ikoma historians, Asako librarians, and other authorities have written the 'history of Rokugan', and always, they have been proven inaccurate. On some occasions their accounts are clearly representational, while others may never have occurred at all. Certainly, there is little which remains to mark the site of many great battles spoken of in our folklore and history. Thus, it is with a poor historian's pen that I write this small text of our Empire's past for the Winter Court of the Seppun, hoping that its inconsistencies and inaccuracies may be overlooked in respect to the greater truths.

Wherefore I set my hand,

Ikoma Kaoku,

This twenty-first year of the reign of Hantei XXXVIII, IC 1123

The Ancient Time

First, there was nothing.

Then, from the nothing, came the time of the Three Gods Whose Names Cannot Be Spoken. The Sun Goddess Amaterasu and the Moon God Onnotangu were born from the thoughts of the Nothing and its servants, and they walked upon the world in peace. While they were yet young, they did not wish children, and so they chose to remain apart from the beasts of the world – the snakes, the rats, and the animals.

This was the Age of the Ancients, the time of the legendary Naga. This was the face of the beginning – said in myth to be the time when the Sun and Moon named all things upon the world and caused them to grow. Man was not yet alive, the children of the Sun and Moon had yet to be born, and the Celestial Heavens were one with the mortal world.

In time, Lady Sun bore Lord Moon nine children. As the nine Kami – Hida, Doji, Togashi, Akodo, Shiba, Bayushi, Shinjo, Fu Leng, and Hantei – came forth from their mother, Father Moon looked upon their faces. He thought to himself that he did not wish to share Lady Sun's love with any others, and thus, he sought to destroy his children by eating them. All of the children were swallowed by the Moon God, save for the youngest, Hantei. Hidden in a cave and fed by the animals of the earth, Hantei grew to manhood and faced his father in combat to free his mother's love. As he cut open his father's belly, the other children fell from the sky, landing upon the mortal earth among Lord Moon's blood and Lady Sun's tears. From this immortal blood and divine tears, mankind was born.

The Age of Myth

"In the Time of Shinsei, the land was quiet. The Clans were united, and the Darkness driven back. Ah, that those heroic times of war and salvation could come to us once more..."

– Akodo Kage

Humans, banded together into primitive tribes, once roamed the land, seeking escape from their troubles. Formed from the blood of the Moon and the Tears of the Sun, they waited for the kami to come from the sky and lead them into civilization. This was the time of the Tribe of Isawa, the Oni known as 'Naga,' and all manner of beasts and evils. The people practiced *maho*, the dark way, and knew nothing of the Celestial Heavens. Then, the kami fell, and the primitive people were organized into seven Great Clans. The land was enlightened and all manner of evil receded and withered. Under the guidance of the kami, the first roads, palaces and temples were built. The Emperor Hantei I ruled from his sister's palace as the great city of Otosan Uchi was built. A stranger, using a thin blade, arrived from the mountains, and called himself 'Kakita'. He became the first Emerald Champion, proving that mortal man was capable of honor and duty, and married Lady Doji.

During this time, the two famous treatises were written: *Niten*, by Mirumoto; and *The Sword*, by Kakita. The people of the Seven Clans prospered and grew, spreading out over the Emerald Empire. Then, in the midst of their joy, tragedy and terror rose. The first attack by Fu Leng's hordes, the first rise of the Shadowlands was unleashed upon human lands. Unable to understand their brother's hatred, the kami declare war. For the first time in man's remembrance, all the powers of mortal man were called together, but despite the aid of the kami, the humans began to lose.



Then, from the west, over the mountains from a strange land, a small man who called himself 'Shinsei' arrived at Otsan Uchi. The word means 'New Way', and he was allowed to speak to the Emperor. Shinsei, our immortal monk, the keeper of all secrets, impressed Hantei with his wisdom, and proposed a way to defeat Fu Leng. Shiba's record of Shinsei's words, filled with wisdom and the five keys to enlightenment, became the *Tao of Shinsei*.

Shortly thereafter, Shinsei took seven mortal followers, one from each clan, and journeyed into the Shadowlands. These seven samurai, Hida Atarasi, Doji Konishiko, Lady Matsu, Lady Otaku, Lord Isawa, Lord Mirumoto and Bayushi's daughter Lady Shosuro, were the Seven Thunders of legend and myth, and by their hand was evil defeated. The last of Fu Leng's followers were forever banished to the far south, and the Crab, under the strength and dedication of Hida, swore to always guard Rokugan from the Shadowlands. Soon after, the Unicorn left for their journeys, following Shinjo.

The Thousand Years of Peace

There are two systems of dating the year in Rokugan. First is the Emperor's Right, referring to the time that the current Hantei

has reigned: *e.g.* 'The fourteenth year of the reign of Hantei XIX'. This causes some difficulty when a Hantei dies, when suddenly the name of the year changes to the 'first year of the reign of Hantei XX'. Because these dates refer to the year in which the Hantei is crowned, not born, things become more confused. Also, the years are referred to, in the same order as the months, by the titles of the animals which favor them, such as: 'the second year of the Rat, in the reign of Hantei XIV'. Finally, with one mistake, (remove 'of the Rat' from the above example, for instance), an entire historical scroll is ruined and the dates become incomprehensible.

A second, and less common way of referring to the year, is Isawa's Calendar, which dates events since the founding of the city of Gisei Toshi. Of course, that city is purely mythical, but the Isawa have maintained the date for consistency's sake. The following dates are created using the Isawa calendar, in the hopes that the Unicorn among the Emperor's court will be able to more accurately learn the history of this great Empire.

All dates have been taken from the scrolls in the Ikoma libraries, and are represented as closely as possible to their probable actual occurrences. However, as with all myths and legends, many of them no doubt never actually occurred at all, but rather are apocryphal in origin. Many obviously true events (such as the founding of the Hare clan) are not included at this time, due to insufficient proof of the accurate date, or dispute as to the origin of the information. Once they have been proven to the Imperial Scribes, more events will be added to this timeline, for presentation at next year's Winter

Court.

FIRST AND SECOND CENTURIES

The founding of the Mantis (by Osano-Wo's Lion son) and Fox clans (from the remnants of the Unicorn Clan).

THIRD AND FOURTH CENTURIES

Battle of the Cherry Blossom Snow Lake.

A minor skirmish between the Phoenix and the Lion, resolved with a treaty at Mamoru Kuotei Toshi.

On the Unicorn's journeys, they meet with a *gaijin* named Moto, who so proved his worth that his descendants became a noble family in the Unicorn clan.

The Crab-Crane war, the first large-scale internal war in Rokugan.

Many minor wars, including the destruction of the Snake Clan by the Isawa.

FIFTH CENTURY

The first *gaijin* ambassadors arrive at the Imperial Court.

The *gaijin* invade, occupying White Stag.

Battle of the Raging Seas, on the ocean surrounding Otsan Uchi.

Battle at White Stag. *Gaijin* influence purged from Rokugan.

The Mantis Clan granted a family name - 'Gusai'.

Crab & Lion Champion in the Shadowlands (Matsu Itagi and Hida Tadaka).

The Unicorn battle the Living Darkness in distant lands.

Victory with No Strike. Lion battle Phoenix until Crane intercession. Isawa Asahina begins destroying Crane villages in revenge, meets Doji Kiriko and forms the Asahina house of the Crane.

SIXTH AND SEVENTH CENTURIES

First battle with the Blood Speakers and Iuchiban.

Battle of Kenson Gakka (Humility's Lesson). Scorpion defeat caused by the Dragon joining with the Lion. The general of the Dragon, Mirumoto Dehoda, dies of poisoning two weeks later.

The Mantis shame their name by attempting to assassinate the Emperor. The noble family are granted the right to *seppuku*, the name 'Gusai' removed by Imperial Decree. They remain a minor clan.

EIGHTH AND NINTH CENTURIES

Attack by the Shadowlands against the Crab. Loss of the Hiruma Castle.

Battle of the Cresting Wave – Kuni Osaku holds the river against the Maw while the Crab construct the Kaiu Wall.

Battle of the Sleeping River. Iuchiban's horde attacked, and all the clans sent their legions to do battle with the Blood Speakers and their undead hordes. Mirumoto Gojanuwan was the leader of the Dragon forces, and his *shirekan* was Agasha Hanujito. The current Champion of the Crane was Doji Hejiu. Asahina Yajinden, the Crane betrayer to the Bloodspeakers, is sentenced by the Asahina.

The castle at Morikage Toshi is destroyed. Ghosts have continued to haunt it up to present day. Numerous attempts have been made to 'retake' the castle; all have met with failure.

Sparrow Clan forms from dissatisfied Crane clan members.

Agasha Kitsuki forms the Kitsuki house of the Dragon Clan.

Daidoji support the Crab against the Shadowlands, across the tidal landbridge.

The Return of the Unicorn, and their assault on the Kaiu Walls. Within weeks

thereafter, another large battle was fought on the Seven Day Battle plain, before the Unicorn were accepted back into Rokugan.

The Unicorn fight the Lion and the Scorpion in the Battle of White Shore Plain.

Kitsuki's apprentice, Agasha Daijoku, discovers the secret of Agasha's coded messages.

Battle at Kyuden Tonbo. Dragon samurai (Mirumoto Asijin) and Isawa shugenja-ko (Isawa Maroko) fell in love and married despite her previous engagement to a Lion samurai (Akodo Yokutsu). A battle ensued. The Dragon and Phoenix supported the couple. The couple formed the Dragonfly clan, at the base of the Dragon mountains.

Akodo Yokutsu is insulted in court by a Kitsuki diplomat. Akodo Yokutsu attacked the Dragon clan lands. Yokutsu dueled Mirumoto Asijin, and proclaimed himself daimyo of the Dragonfly. His claim is quickly challenged by Tonbo Kuyuden, Asijin's son, who slew Yokutsu, and began the enmity between the Lion and the Dragonfly clans.

TENTH AND ELEVENTH CENTURIES

Night of Falling Stars. Crane lose Shiro no Yagin to the Lion. Daidoji Yurei born.

Battle at Kyuden Kitsune: Fox versus Hare.

Wasp Clan founded by Tsuruchi. Granted minor clan status by Hantei XXXVIII.





Chapter Four: Epilogue

"In greeting, we part, and once parting, meet again. So the seasons turn, and the Empire plays its part in the Wheel of the Celestial Heavens..."

- The Lady Shinjo

And so, my dear friends, the winter snows are lessening and the warm winds of spring blow.

The Winter Court of the Emperor begins its sad parting, and the guests prepare to return to their homelands, refreshed by their time in the presence of the Divine Hantei. It may be another year before we see our dearest companions again, another cycle of battles and bloodshed before we gather once more in peace. We may never see some of the kind faces with which we became familiar. The Fortunes choose whom they will, and even the mighty Oracles cannot see all that the future holds.

So, gentle ones, it is time that I bid you farewell, that you may journey to your own homelands, back to the quests and interests of the remainder of the year. But take with you all that you have learned of the Winter's Court, and remember with fondness your lessons here. May Amaterasu herself smile her grace upon you, and may the Seven Fortunes see that your path is clear.

I will see you next year, no doubt, when the cold breath of winter returns, and the golden gates of the Winter Court open wide once more.

Kakita Ryoku



A Dangerous Game

Part Five

In the quiet stillness of the evening, Kachiko walked through the corridors of the Imperial Palace, the whispers of her retainers following closely behind her.

"...with the Doji..."

"Shoju will be furious..."

"...knows the truth. Who would want to marry the Scorpion daimyo?"

"...beneath his mask..."

The whispers stopped suddenly as Kachiko turned to face the courtiers, her fan swaying gently and her face composed. "Do you think the spring will be warm this year?" Her words were warm, but her tone menacing. "I have been told that the gentle winds already blow at Kyuden Bayushi, and that the Lord Shoju will be arriving within the month."

"I had heard as much, my lady," one of the Shosuro maids bowed elegantly. "For your wedding, is it not?"

"Yes," Kachiko murmured, turning back to her calm pace. "The Emperor has approved our union."

The maids smiled behind their fans, but they did not see Kachiko's malicious eyes. Soon, all three of her late father's spies would be married as well - to the carefully selected sons of a minor Kitsuki lord. If they were fortunate, they might see the court once more in their lives: on the day of their ill-suited marriage. How very sad.

How very appropriate.

She reached the garden gate as the sun reached its zenith, but the courtyard was empty. Only the faint brush of buds that peeked above the greening grasses inhabited the little grove. Kachiko smiled as she entered, looking at the stone *go* board that waited beneath the thickly covered pine limb.

To the side of the board, off the carefully carved area of intersecting lines, stood a single black stone.

"A pleasant game, indeed," she whispered, lifting the stone, feeling its smooth surface. The months at court had passed swiftly, consumed by the game between the Shosuro daughter and the

Doji son. Each day had been a challenge, and each evening, she had savored the admiration and respect of the young daimyo. Though whispers flooded the court, no one had the skill to prove their meetings existed. Most believed their game was sexual. They were fools, who knew nothing of true pleasure or true power. Few would believe that the two were capable of the ruthless plots and sub-plots which had twisted about the court.

Only Hoturi, with his bright eyes and clever mind, understood the game as she did.

"I see you have found your stone, my lady." The voice was warm, filled with respect... and something more.

"Why, my lord Doji." Kachiko turned, offering him the black pebble. "You placed this stone on our board, but I see that someone has moved it from the line. I know you will replace it for me, so that our game can truly begin."

He smiled, pleased. "Well done, Kachiko-san." It was the first time he had called the daughter of the Shosuro daimyo by her given name, and a faint thrill echoed in her veins. "But I am certain that stone was meant for you." He stepped to her side, and they stood beneath the shielding tree, feeling only joy. The silence spread between them, surrounding them with a comfortable awe.

They did not speak of her marriage. The subject seemed foreign, distant from their path. They did not speak of love, or passion, or pillowbooks filled with tragic unions. Nothing spoke save their hands, which once - and only once - raised, each longing to feel the touch of the other.

He will come tomorrow. Neither spoke the thought, but both knew that it was true. *Tonight, the final game must begin.*

No matter what the price.

In the garden, when the warm sun rested below the horizon, a dark figure moved. It waited beside the brook, confident of the future, awaiting its guests.

His name was Shiba Burisagi, Champion of the Phoenix.

He had watched the court dissolve beneath one disaster after another. Although the Emperor's Winter Court was never dull, this year it had seemed to take on new life and new direction. A direction that seemed forced, manipulated by higher powers than his own.

He feared that some danger lay hidden within this mystery, some secret cult or power of the Shadowlands, but what he found was two children, playing at games. *And now, he told himself, their cruel amusements will end.*

Kachiko stepped out of her chambers, hidden beneath a robe of black silk and a hood of shadow. Her brother, asleep in his chambers, lay too far away to hear her passing, and her maids all slept soundly - assisted by her nanny's favorite tea. Rain drifted down around her, but it rolled from her cloak and soaked like warm dew into the frozen ground.

It was earlier than she had thought, and faint music drifted across the garden from the festivities inside. The Unicorn were

presenting another one of their *gaijin* plays, an amusement that her brother had not wished to see. As the strange, humming melodies reached her ears, she smiled. Even if the rain continued, it would be no matter. Soon enough, he would come.

She expected other amusements tonight, beyond the scope of play or fantasy. A darkened figure waited for her at the end of the path, just beyond the turn of shadow.

"Shosuro Kachiko-san." The voice was unpleasant, unfamiliar. "You are behind this plague that has destroyed the peace of the Imperial Court."

She paused, looking closely at the moving shadow, half-convinced that it was someone she knew. "Sir, I do not know your clan. Come out, so that we might speak reasonably."

"Reason? Whimsy, my lady. You are a shame to your Empire. Even for one of your hated family, you go too far. You have overstepped boundaries that have stood for centuries, and you have made others suffer for your sinister purpose."

Stepping closer, she saw that the figure was Burisagi's. "My lord Phoenix," she whispered, the sultry tones ringing in the silence of the gardens. "I see you share my fondness for the night air..."

"But not for cruelty and spite, my lady." He stepped close, the shadows and the rain playing on his fury. "I have seen your games, your petty machinations. For what cause? Pleasure? Indulgence? Lives ruined, futures destroyed - and all for your games and your pride."

"My lord?" Carefully cultivated, the surprise in her voice masked her anger.

"When your lover comes to meet you, I will take both your heads to the Emperor."

At last, her eyes filled with rage. "You will do nothing to me. And nothing to *him*."

"A feeling from your black heart at last, Scorpion?" His laughter was bitter. "How touching."

"Now I see that your hatred of our clan has led you to this." She reached for the collar of her kimono and tore, the thin fabric shredding beneath her fingernails.

Surprise rocked his face. "What are you doing?"

Another rough yank, another sound of tearing fabric. "Your words were sweet, dear Phoenix, but convincing my maid that my brother wished to see me here, alone...that was breathtaking."

"Woman, I do not understand..." Burisagi backed away another step, toward the lighted ground of the court. Inside, music played and courtiers watched the play, unaware of the dangerous dance just a few feet away.

"Did you think to kill me once you had defiled me, or were you content to let me live with the shame?" Her hands reached up, pulling at her hair, tumbling it down in disarray.

"No..."

Her scream of fear and outrage broke the still beauty of the court.

The Emperor's guard tore down the path toward the choked scream, rounding the corner in leaps. The light of the porch spread across a brutal scene. Kachiko lay upon the grass, her torn kimono sullied by stains and mud, her neck bruised and reddened from the touch of unkind hands. Sobbing, she pointed one slim finger at the Phoenix. Her meaning was all too clear.

Burisagi took one step from her side, his rain-covered hakama stained with mud, his sword in his hand. "The woman was screaming... and..."

The Emperor lowered his fan, pointing it at the Shiba Champion.



With a single precise blow, Hoturi took the man's head.

As the Scorpion courtiers came to help their lady to her feet, Toshimoko looked at Hoturi's handiwork, the body still twitching on the ground. "A good stroke, my student," he muttered, peering up through the rain at Hoturi's darkened face. "Why did you not allow him to sheathe his sword? A duel would have been more honorable, and he was a man of honor."

"A man of honor, *hai*, Toshimoko-san." Hoturi watched as the *eta* came for the corpse. "But not a man of the Code. If he had been a true bushi," Hoturi turned, sheathing his sword, "he would already have been prepared to die."

His eyes met those of Shosuro Kachiko, and a faint glimmer of unity burned between them. Then, in an instant, it was gone.

Black stones, white stones... and no stones at all.

The wedding of the Scorpion daimyo was surrounded by all the beauty and honor of the court. Shoji, resplendent in the black and red of his clan, came to take his lady at the Emperor's request, filling the court with all the flowers of spring.

The courtiers spread rumors, gossip and envy, but in the end, it was worth nothing at all. Her name was now Bayushi Kachiko, and she was the most powerful woman in the Empire. Even Hantei XXXVIII offered her a place at his side upon the Imperial barge, and said she would always be welcome in the court of the Hantei.

A hundred men died inside when she married, but none more than the young Crane lord.

The evening approached more swiftly than she would have thought possible, and the darkness came. With it came the last night in the Imperial Palace, at the side of her new lord. She should have been content, she thought to herself as she brushed out her long dark hair. The wife of the most powerful daimyo in the Empire, a man who wants me for my beauty and knows the power of my mind. A man who can understand my strength...

But a man I can never love.

In the half-light of the moon, Kachiko looked into Shoji's eyes and reached for the scarlet cords of his elaborate mask. His hand stopped hers, shaking with desire, frustration, and understanding.

The rice-paper screen moved imperceptibly as the guard opened the door to the Crane Daimyo's chamber. Seated in the windowsill, staring at the cold moon above him, Hoturi said nothing. Every movement radiated his loss, but his face was emotionless.

"My lord," the guard's voice echoed softly into the room. "Your courtesan has arrived."

Content with her nameless embrace, Hoturi nodded. "Very well."

As she approached, the moonlight reflected from her pale features, obscured by no mask, no hood or guise. She was nothing more or less than a woman, and he, only a man.

"My lord," she murmured softly, "I am yours."

Her hand opened as she gazed into his blue eyes, pressing a gift into his palm.

A single black stone.



How to Use This Book

All right, you've got a massive amount of information about politics, ceremony, court and Rokugan's more 'delicate' side. Now what do you do with it?

Much of the information in the *Winter Court* supplement is designed to advance campaigns, rather than play as single adventures. The political games, goals, and negotiations in our version of Rokugan are simply ideas which you can use in your own campaigns, in order to further the overall story you and your players tell.

We've deliberately filled this supplement with adventure hooks, story hints and ideas, and insight on the negotiations of the Seven Clans in the Imperial Court, so that you can build on any one (or more) of them which suit your campaign. Further, we're including some information about skills, abilities, advantages and disadvantages considered appropriate for heavily political campaigns - after all, in Rokugan, knowing how to perform the Tea Ceremony isn't useful only when you're thirsty.

New Skills

FALCONRY (AWARENESS)

Falconers have the ability to train and care for all birds of prey - hawks, falcons, and osprey. In order to train a bird of prey to respond to command, the falconer must spend upwards of 20 hours a week with the bird, all the while wearing a heavy leather cloth on the hand to protect it from the strong claws of the bird. It can take months to train a single bird, depending on the trainer and the bird. A master falconer can train a bird in five weeks,

while a beginner may need four months. Once the falcon is trained, it responds to verbal commands and gestures, usually in the forms of a single word or hand signal or show of colored cloth or ribbon.

The base time to train a falcon is two months, at 12 hours per week. If the time is exceed by 8 hours per week, or by one month, the falconer earns a free raise against the final training check. For each week short of the two months that is spent in training, the TN is raised by 5. No less than 10 hours a week can be spent to train a bird of prey. A TN of 20 is rolled each week to see if the time spent was valuable. If not, the week is lost and the trainer must extend the training time by another week.

When the training is completed the Falconer rolls a contested roll against the bird's Intelligence score. Success finds the falcon loyal, with each raise increasing the level of difficulty in commands that the falcon understands. Failure results in the animal's escape.

OBIESASERU (WILLPOWER) (SEPPUN, OTOMO OR MIYA ONLY)

This is a specialized form of the Intimidation skill, used only by members of the Imperial Guard, or the Emerald Legions (including Emerald Magistrates on duty for the Emerald Champion. By appealing to the target character's belief that the Emerald Legions are the best-trained, most frightening bushi in the Empire, and that the entire Celestial Order stands behind them, a member of the Imperial House can freeze a samurai in their tracks. The guard makes a contested *obiesaseru* roll against the target's Willpower to freeze the target for one round. Raises can increase the number of rounds this works, or the number of people frozen. The character can still move to flee or defend himself, but cannot move forward or attack the Seppun or anyone behind him. Against non-humans or non-Rokugani, this becomes the same as the normal Intimidation skill. *Obiesaseru* is a bugei skill.

In order to use this skill, the character must have some obvious token of Imperial authority – the armor of an Imperial Guard, wearing the mon of the Seppun, or some other easily-seen token. If the skill roll fails, the individual who was being intimidated immediately knows what the Imperial Guardsman was attempting, and will most likely have a very bad impression of his would-be oppressor.

ANCESTOR: SHIBA MURAYASU (9 POINTS)

Shiba Murayasu (418–479) was born to a Phoenix father and a wealthy Otomo mother. He spent his youth traveling between the Imperial Gardens at Otosan Uchi and the dojo at Kyuden Shiba. His days of training as a bushi showed a quiet brilliance. His simple explanations and natural examples of the essence of Shiba swordsmanship earned him a place as a junior sensei, and his steady growth in the art of the sword never faltered. At the age of 26 he became one of the youngest full *sensei* the school has ever known.

When Hantei XVI met his tragic end, his son (a childhood friend of Murayasu) ascended the throne. Hantei XVII requested that Murayasu return and teach at the Seppun dojo. Thus did Shiba Murayasu become the sensei of one of the few ruling Hantei to be trained outside of the Kakita Academy. In fact, Hantei XVII (though married to a Doji) fell in love with one of Murayasu's cousins, and broke tradition a second time to be buried in Phoenix lands upon his death. The burial ground, known as Pale Oak Plain, is a popular site for lovers. Both the Otomo and the Shiba revere Murayasu's memory, celebrating his passage on the 11th day of the Rooster.

Characters touched by Murayasu's spirit possess his remarkable calmness, both in combat and everyday life. The character's TN to hit anyone who has declared an attack on him that round (including duels) is reduced by 5. The character also declares his action last, regardless of his initiative roll (actions still resolve in the order rolled). This balanced demeanor has a price, however. The character never gains more than one additional die to roll when making a Full Attack.

considering the wishes of the husband, his clan, or their alliances. Although she has changed her name to suit her wedding, a Seppun is always a Seppun. Thus, the character may be constantly plagued by well-wishers, sycophants, and threats from the Imperial Families as they make certain that 'our cousin is well-treated'.

GENTRY (VARIES, SEE BELOW)

Most samurai characters are not responsible for any land, instead sworn to samurai of greater Rank, and paid a stipend from the taxes their lord's collect. Characters with the Gentry

New Advantages

IMPERIAL SPOUSE (2 POINTS)

In rare cases, a member of the Seppun or Otomo families marries someone of the Seven Clans, and chooses to join the household of their spouse. Having an Imperial Cousin as a wife or husband is a mixed blessing – they will certainly know the events of the Imperial Court, even as far away as the Phoenix or Crab lands (letters from the Emperor's family travel rapidly). Also, they will be able to secure invitations, audiences with the Imperial Advisors or one of the daimyos of the Imperial House (Seppun, Otomo or Miya), or extra koku and supplies for troubled times. However, if an Imperial wife is in danger, the families of the Emperor may choose to take direct action, without

Advantage have land they must attend to and collect taxes from. This provides the samurai with additional income, but also requires some responsibility. After all, the samurai must now deal with bandits, wandering ogres, *maho-tsukai* and all other threats, real or imagined, to his fiefdom. Administrative duties over the area (cataloging births and deaths, etc.) are also now his responsibility, although he may assign an assistant to handle most of it.

A character must spend at least 5 Character Points on the Gentry Advantage. These grant him one village to tax and govern. Additional points can be spent for additional villages, or to augment the villages he's already purchased. See the table below to determine exactly how much.

Cost for Village: 5 Points

Every village the character is responsible for costs 5 Character Points. A village provides a samurai:

- 5 Koku a year in taxes (at least 3 go to the lord who granted the samurai his title)
- 1 Yoriki (peacekeeper stationed at the village)
- 50 farmers
- 10 Ashigaru soldiers (commissioned at tax time)

Villages may be augmented with character points.

Farm: 1 Point

Each village is considered a farm, but for 1 CP, the village has an additional farm, which provides more rice, and thus more taxes. See *The Harvest* below to determine how much more.

Holding: 2 Points, 4 Points, 6 Points

There are many kinds of Holdings, and each provides the village with new taxes. A samurai who governs a village with a blacksmith has an exploitable resource for new armor and arms. Creative samurai can find a benefit in any kind of Holding, from sake works to geisha houses.

Holdings are either Basic (2 Points), Fine (4 Points) or Excellent (6 Points). For each additional two points spent on the Holding, the quality of merchandise they provide is just that much better. There are few if any holdings in Rokugan over 10 points, however. Basic Holdings provide just what they promise: merchandise that sells. Fine Holdings have a bit of a reputation for providing memorable and striking quality. Excellent Holdings, on the other hand, provide merchandise known throughout the Clan, and perhaps throughout the Empire. Some examples of Holdings include: Blacksmith, Mine (gold, silver, copper, etc.),

Sake works, Tea Works, Geisha house, Silk Works, Leather Works, Hawks and Falcons, etc. Players of the CCG should be able to come up with a few creative holdings on their own.

Followers: 2 Points

Samurai may acquire a retinue of soldiers to assist them in managing a particularly difficult area. Characters can build a retinue of soldiers commissioned to their service. These soldiers will serve their lord's commands, even unto death (they are all samurai themselves, after all). Samurai must be at least Rank 2 to purchase Followers. Every 2 Character Points spent on Followers gains the samurai 10 additional soldiers (Rank 0 samurai).

Rank 0 Samurai all have a 1 in each Ring, and a 2 in one Ring of your choice. They have 3 High Skills, and 2 Bugei skills. They have yet to attain a technique and are fresh out of their gempukku. More information on Rank 0 Samurai can be found in the *GM's Guide to Rokugan*.

HARVEST AND TAXES

At the beginning of each harvest (there are two each year, one of rice and one of grains), the governing samurai must collect taxes. As mentioned above, he is given (at least) 10 ashigaru to aid him in this task.

Expenses

At least 3 Koku goes to the samurai's lord.

At least 1 Koku goes to each soldier under the samurai's command.

ANCESTOR: SEPPUN (4 POINTS)

The Lady Seppun (birth and death unknown) was the first Imperial follower, and the most prestigious. Her house follows her crusade to educate and enlighten the Emerald Empire by teaching the Tao to this day, and many temples bear memorials to honor her spirit. It is thought that Lady Seppun continues to serve the Emperor, rather than ascending to her rightful place in the Celestial Heavens (a place promised to her by the Sun Mother herself), because Seppun was unwilling to leave the side of the Imperial Line.

Characters with Seppun as an ancestor can draw on her near-fanatic desire to protect the line of Heaven, even after his death. They also have his ability to fight with honor against the foulest foes. Whenever the character leads troops to defend the Emperor, the opposing (human) general cannot use more Battle skill than he has Honor.

Roll	Event
1	Catastrophe! (Roll for type below, lose 3 dice of Koku)
1-5	Plague
6-0	Famine
2-3	Bandits! (Lose 2 dice of Koku)
4-6	No Event
7-9	Unusual or Supernatural Event
0	Bountiful Harvest (Add 2 dice of Koku to taxes)

When the samurai collects taxes, roll on the following tables to determine the fate of the village:

The Harvest

For each farm in the village the samurai controls, roll one die (each village has at least one farm). You may re-roll 10's as usual. The total is the number of Koku in rice that the samurai takes from the village. The samurai then gives this rice to clan magistrates to give to his daimyo. At this time he receives the actual minted Koku. Add 3 Koku to the result for each Basic Holding, 4 for each Fine Holding and 5 for each Excellent Holding. The village itself provides 5 Koku, so even the smallest village produces 1 die+5 Koku per year.

Events

Samurai must also roll on this table every harvest season to determine any events that may affect the annual harvest. Because of the rising prices of rice, floods and other plagues which torment Rokugan's farmers, these effects may be beneficent or malevolent (depending on the severity of the event and the quick thinking of the local peasant headman). The difference between a good harvest season and a terrible year can be as small as a single man.

There are a few adventures inherent to owning a village, and GMs may wish to give the players a small village to manage when they reach rank 2.

When a player rolls an 'unusual or supernatural' occurrence, the GM should take into account unusual weather conditions, movement of ratling tribes, strange visitors whose presence seems to have blighted the harvest, and other minor events. In no way are we suggesting that three out of every ten years the Void Dragon ravages random territories of the Empire.

New Disadvantages

CRUEL (3 POINTS) (4 POINTS FOR OTOMO)

The Imperial Court is prone to create people with very different tastes from the rest of Rokugan. Cruel people are not an exception. Beyond being uncaring, a cruel person delights in the suffering of others. In Rokugan, there are few that would be considered so dishonorable as to take pleasure in the pain of others, but there are those who think nothing more enjoyable than watching a samurai squirm. The cruelty need not manifest itself as physical, but instead could be just glee in making someone dance on their strings.

A Cruel person can never spend their last Void point, nor raise their Void Ring above their lowest Ring. In addition, their Awareness score is considered one less when interacting with anyone socially, and their honor score is one full point lower during honor tests. A truly cruel character is expected to behave in a cruel manner, and if ever caught engaging in a cruel act, may suffer greatly for their transgressions.

SPOILED (3 POINTS)

A spoiled character is used to having the best of everything. Like the Compulsion disadvantage, a Spoiled character must make a Willpower roll to resist the object of their desire. If they succeed against a TN of 15 (or greater in instances where the object is of extreme value) then the object is merely admired and jealously desired. However, if the character fails their roll, they must find a way to acquire the item or under the GMs discretion allow them to find a similar copy.

Obviously if the item in questions is unique or very rare, like a daimyo's sword, a duplicate will not work. In instances where a unique item or object is sought after the TN should be exceptionally high.

A spoiled character also desires people, and this is exceptionally difficult and abusive when the person is already taken by another - servant, spouse, craftsman, or otherwise. This disadvantage is very akin to the Compulsion disadvantage, with less focus over what it is the character desires. Such is the way of a spoiled individual.



Imperial Families and Schools

The Imperial Schools of the Seppun and Otomo are exclusive – only members of the Imperial House can attend, unless some pretty hefty favors have been called in. Even then, only those who can prove a direct bloodline to one of the original seven *kami* are accepted (5 points of Social Position).

All Seppun or Otomo characters must also purchase at least 3 points of Social Position simply to be allowed to play the character, thus placing them within the Imperial House. If a full 5 points are spent, the character may have some small tie to the actual ruling house of the family. We do not suggest PCs being members of, or directly related to, the Imperial Hantei line.

Because of their close ties to the Crane, a Seppun or Otomo character may buy Benten's Blessing for 2 points. If they do, they must also accept a two-point Obligation (to their own house) with no cost. The Imperial Families make use of those members of their house gifted in speech or beauty.

While we have not detailed any skills or abilities for the Hantei Imperial family, assume that members of the Hantei house (and those Otomo or Seppun who once were Hantei) can have any high or bugei skill, advantage or disadvantage in any of the *Legend of the Five Rings RPG* books. They are related by blood to all the clans, though most closely to the Doji, and no one in Rokugan would dare tell the Emperor that he 'cannot' learn a skill.

An exception to this rule is, of course, *kaze-do*, the 'peasant fighting' of the Dragon Clan. Further, no member of the Emperor's family can learn Low or Craft skills. Rank forbids it.

The Seppun Family

The Seppun grow up with the knowledge that their highest duty is to serve the son of Heaven, and their lives may be all that stands between him and certain death. They are willing to die at any time if that serves the Empire best. They do not see this as fanatical; it is simply their position in the Celestial Order.

Benefit: +1 Willpower

THE SEPPUN MIHARU (GUARDSMAN)

The Seppun *Miharu* school is only open to members of the Seppun family (or in rare cases, children of the Imperial House with Seppun mothers). They train an average of sixteen hours a day, rarely allowing their students to leave the school's confines. For this reason, Seppun guards have higher skills at younger ages than any other school in Rokugan. Their studies focus primarily on bodyguarding and single combat, but they are also capable generals. Their *iai-jutsu* training exists primarily for the sake of drawing their swords quickly when surprised rather than for duels (the Hantei line has the Emerald Champion and an ever-ready supply of Kakitas to duel for their honor).

There are only a few hundred Seppun guards in Rokugan, so they generally command troops of Lion or Crane bushi rather than leading their own men. Thus, Seppun guards often spend a year studying at either the Akodo or Daidoji school (just enough to understand the techniques, not enough to learn them), and can take Allies in the Crane or Lion clans for one point less at character creation.

Benefit: +1 Perception

Skills: Archery, Battle, Defense, Etiquette, Iaijutsu, Kenjutsu, Obiesaseru

Beginning Honor: 3, plus 5 boxes

Starting Outfit (all items are considered fine quality; one item of excellent quality): Heavy armor, katana, wakizashi, bow, 20 arrows, yari, kimono, steed, helm, any two weapons, emerald badge of office, 20 koku.

TECHNIQUES

Rank 1: Never in Darkness

The Seppun understands that loyalty to the Hantei line supports the pillars of the world, and cannot be swayed from his duty by any desire. He may add his School Rank to his Willpower or Honor (to roll and keep), for purposes of resisting any temptation away from his duty, including fear, fatigue, seduction, bribery or the pleas of his own dying children.

Rank 2: The Clouds Part

The Imperial Guard learns to use his senses to move through an attacker's defense as quickly as Lady Sun's rays part the morning clouds. For the first round of any combat, the *Miharu* may roll an additional number of dice equal to their Perception, keeping one additional die. In addition, he may make a simple Perception test to avoid being surprised in an ambush or assassination attempt. The TN for this test is 5 x the attacker's Honor. Attackers actually trained at an assassin's school add 5 x their School Rank to this TN.

Rank 3: The Sun's Light Reveals

After so much time spent in the presence of the son of Amaterasu, the Imperial Guard no longer sees with the clouded eyes of mortals. His discerning gaze can pick out the true nature of all that he views. The character rolls his Honor against a TN of the target character's Awareness x 5 to see through physical disguises, Mists of Illusion spells, ninja magic, Oni shape-

changing abilities, Shosuro Actors, and so on. This may also be used (at a TN determined by the GM) to see the true nature of a disguised item (i.e. noticing hidden doors, concealed traps or poisons and so on).

Rank 4: Speed of Heaven

Even the constraints of time itself cannot keep a Seppun from his duty. At this rank, the Seppun guard has two actions per round. These can be used for attack or for any other purpose (e.g. jumping in front of arrows, slinging the Emperor's heir onto his horse and riding away and so on).

Rank 5: Heaven Never Falls

The Seppun's bond with his charge has the strength of Lady Sun behind it. Even when his attentions are elsewhere, he is attuned to any danger. Whenever he is within his School Rank in yards of the person he is guarding, the bushi may spend a Void point to transfer damage or harmful spell effects inflicted on that person to himself. This ability works even if the bushi's back is turned, eyes are closed or he is knocked out by a sleeping draught.

Normally, this ability is used to protect a member of the Hantei line, but the bushi may choose another recipient. At the dawn of each day, the bushi must declare who the technique is attuned to, and he will remain attuned to that character alone until the following morning.

The Otomo

The Otomo are the serpents in the paradise of Otosan Uchi, the vipers which destroy peace and keep the daimyo at each other's throats – all for the good of the Hantei. They serve as courtiers, ambassadors, and keepers of the law in far-off provinces, often carrying the Emperor's judgment and wisdom to the daimyo of the Seven Clans. If two clans appear to be gathering their forces, possibly threatening the power of the Hantei house, the Otomo gather swiftly to stop them. If rumors of a coup are in the air, you can be certain that the Otomo will come to destroy anyone who challenges the supremacy of the Hantei.

Benefit: +1 to any mental trait (Perception, Intelligence, Willpower, or Awareness)

THE OTOMO SEIYAKU

The Otomo house school takes its name from the Rokugani word for 'covenant' or 'agreement'. A *seiyaku* devotes their life to furthering the Emperor's power, over that of any daimyo, Champion, or mortal authority. They speak with the assurance of the Emperor's line, and the right of blood.

Benefit: +1 Intelligence

Skills: Courtier, Calligraphy, Etiquette, Kenjutsu, Obiesaseru, Manipulation, Law

Beginning Honor: 3, plus 7 boxes

Starting Outfit (all items are considered fine quality; one item of excellent quality): Light armor, katana, wakizashi, kimono, steed, traveling pack, badge of office, 20 koku.



THE SEPPUN MON

The mon of the Seppun family is two branches of bamboo formed into an inverted wreath beneath the Imperial mon. Because of their close ties to the Imperial family, the Seppun are allowed to wear the Imperial Chrysanthemum – but only so long as it is part of their own mon, never alone. That priority is reserved for the Hantei alone.

The Seppun are primarily concerned with the welfare of the Imperial line, and the continuance of the Tao. More than any other family in the Empire, the Seppun are devout, fanatically devoted to these two tasks. Their fonder, the Lady Seppun, is credited with the house motto:

*"Follow the Emperor, and follow the Tao.
In one, you will find the other."*

TECHNIQUES

Rank 1: Destiny Has No Secrets

Otomo courtiers get their information from a variety of sources – both inside and out of the court. Because the Otomo are in charge of trade into and out of Otosan Uchi, as well as serving as the Emperor's eyes in any negotiations between clans, they are privy to a great wealth of information – and they share it with other courtiers of this school. Once per week per rank, an Otomo courtier may 'speak to their contacts' in any city, court or province and learn one critical fact about the adventure (determined by the GM).

Rank 2: My Master's Voice

Peasants, infiltrators, and even loyal guards instinctively trust the *seiyaku*. Because of their position in the court, even if the character has a flaw such as Bente's Curse, a *seiyaku* may visit and listen to the delicate negotiations of other clans (after all, they are the Emperor's ears and eyes).

Any time someone actively disagrees with the *seiyaku*, or accuses him in public of twisting the truth, the accuser automatically loses a number of boxes of honor equal to the *seiyaku*'s School Rank. If the disagreement occurs in private, the courtier may choose to spend one day spreading rumors through any public forum (court, a city, a major port). If the *seiyaku* succeeds in an Intelligence + Courtier roll versus their target's

Honor x 5, their target will lose a number of boxes of honor equal to the seiyaku's School Rank.

The Otomo cannot use this skill if there is no basis – no 'false premise' will withstand the critical investigations it must withstand to reduce someone's honor. A false accusation will not make an individual feel that they have 'dishonored' themselves to the Emperor's ambassador, and therefore, no amount of rumormongering will be taken seriously.

Rank 3: Dividing the Stars

If an Otomo courtier spends as little as ten minutes speaking with someone, they can 'slant the facts' to imply the most horrible outcome possible. In this way, an Otomo who simply mentions that a Lion might be hot-tempered will cause others to recognize him as a brash, rude and violent individual. Therefore, those individuals will be sure to have many guards around when dealing with that Lion. If the seiyaku mentions a Crane militia has been called in the Daidoji lands, a Crab might suddenly realize that a nearby village is unprotected and decide the Crane are going to attack. At that point, of course, the seiyaku will tell the Crane that the Crab – who are now sending troops to the border village – are preparing for an invasion.

It is possible for an Otomo courtier to cause individual disputes, conflicts, or even (with prolonged activity) minor battles and wars. If an Otomo wishes to cause someone to believe the worst about something, they must make a successful Intelligence + School Rank roll against a TN determined by the complexity of the action, and the amount of truth in their suggested perception. If the Otomo uses their first rank technique three times in order to gather information about the matter they wish to misrepresent before they attempt this, they will receive a free raise to their action.

The difficulty depends on the particular circumstances of the action. Causing a Crane to mistrust a Lion, when the two personalities already dislike each other might have a TN of 5. Creating border conflicts between two already edgy opponents could be as high as a 15, while convincing someone that their

best friend (or mother) is trying to start a war with them is probably closer to a 35.

A seiyaku should be warned, however: their successful divisions often become true. If a Crane begins treating the Lion with distrust, the Lion will most likely begin to respond with dislike, and shortly, with violence. If the Crane and the Crab were not about to begin a war, moving their troops to the border on the suggestion of the Otomo will almost certainly cause one, if the situation is not defused.

Rank 4: The Emperor's Protection

At this rank, an Otomo Courtier has been noticed by the members of the Hantei family themselves, and given a commendation for their devoted and dedicated service. The Empire knows that this seiyaku, by blood and association, is under the direct protection of the Hantei, and further, that any physical harm which befalls him or her will be investigated by the highest authorities in the land.

No one will challenge a seiyaku to a duel, nor attack them, or otherwise injure them unless the individual attempting to assault the courtier has one of the following: a Glory of 7 or higher, the permission of the Otomo courtier's daimyo, the Emerald Champion, or the permission of a member of the Hantei family.

If someone is foolish enough to choose to assault the seiyaku, they will be

horribly reprimanded: executed immediately (no trial) without honor or seppuku; their family name removed from the rolls of the clan; or the offender's hands and feet are cut off, their honor permanently removed, and their family sword broken.

Indeed, it is considered unwise.

Rank 5: Virtues of Command

At this point, the seiyaku is considered the voice of the Emperor in all political negotiations. If they spend a Void point, they may order a member of the samurai class to obey their wishes. If the person does not obey them, and their honor is less than the seiyaku's, they will be forced to either become Ronin, or



THE OTOMO MON

The mon of the Otomo family consists of four serpents, twined about one another and born from the same source, each attacking the other with no regard to its own safety. The Otomo say that their mon was designed by Hantei Genji, in gratitude for their superior skills at keeping the Empire safe from dangers which would threaten his house. But secretly, they know that it is instead a representation of their purpose: to divide the Empire, and maintain the absolute power of the Hantei.

Otomo himself was a small man, described as serpentine and with an unblinking stare that unnerved even the bravest Lion.

His only recorded quote is the house motto, though many have argued that it is inappropriate and does not reflect the vision of the family. Still, the Otomo smile craftily, and a dry, unwavering stare is their only reply.

"In difficulty lies opportunity."

commit *seppuku*. In effect, the samurai has refused or failed an Imperial Command.

If the seiyaku's command contradicts or dishonors the samurai's daimyo, the samurai may spend 2 Void points to successfully (and carefully) refuse the command with honor. If a PC samurai agrees to a seiyaku's command, and dies attempting to fulfill it, the player may make his next character according to the Kharma rule, with an additional rank (free of cost) to one of the following: A Trait, their Honor, or their Glory.

Who's Who in the Winter Court

In this portion of the chapter, we'll give you information on the most important inhabitants of the Winter Court: the members of the Imperial House. Also in this area, you will find 'updates' on characters from the RPG who have advanced in some way since the publication of their clan supplement – or who are hiding some great secret that only the Emperor can reveal.

The Hantei

HANTEI THE 38TH

EARTH: 2

WATER: 1

Perception 4

FIRE: 3

Intelligence 5

AIR: 3

Awareness 7

VOID: 3

School/Rank: Kakita Bushi 5

Skills: Archery 5, Bard 5, Calligraphy 3, Courtier 5, Etiquette 5, Falconry 5, History 5, Horsemanship 2, Iaijutsu 5, Kenjutsu 5, Law 5, Lore: Bushido 4, Lore: Shadowlands 3, Lore: Shugenja 4, Manipulation 4, Meditation 2, Poetry 3, Sincerity 3, Shintao 4, Tea Ceremony 5, Subojutsu 2, Theology 3

Honor: 3

Glory: 10

Advantages: Social Position (Emperor), Sensei (Kakita Toshimoko)

Disadvantages: Low Pain Threshold

"He is a fool. The doddering, diseased product of a corrupt and dying bloodline. The Hantei are descended from Gods, yes, but by how far?" – Hida Kisada

"Understanding the mind of an Emperor is like looking into the face of the Sun." – Akodo Toturi

The Imperial Lord of the Emerald Empire is an aging man, over 45 years old. His son, Sotorii, was born of a young Crane concubine, many years after his third wife died. Immediately upon his birth, Hantei married the courtesan and became the Empress. Only three years later, she died of a terrible fever.

Hantei Jodan, as he was known before his coronation, was a daring young Prince, filled with dreams and ideals of a better Empire. Since the day he was crowned, however, that has all changed. He is weary, aged, and bitter toward an Empire that seems eternally divided against itself. The Hantei is an unusual man, buried in tradition and the expectations of an Empire. His fondest wish is to retire and leave his son with some fragile peace upon which the glories of Rokugan can be rebuilt.

Certainly, some courtiers look upon the Emperor and see that he is not the epitome of honor that the courtiers tell, but those are the infants and children who do not know the dangers of running



an Empire. A man sacrifices his honor for many things, but the Emperor must sacrifice himself for all things. The glory of the Empire is the honor of its Emperor.

HANTEI SOTORII

EARTH: 1

WATER: 1

FIRE: 2

AIR: 1

VOID: 2

School/Rank: Rank 0 Kakita Bushi

Skills: Archery 1, Bard 2, Etiquette 3, Falconry 2, History 1, Horsemanship 3, Hunting 1, Iaijutsu 1, Kenjutsu 1, Law 1, Lore: Shadowlands 1, Lore: Shugenja 1, Meditation 1, Shintao 2, Tea Ceremony 3

Honor: 3

Glory: 9.7

Advantages: Social Position (Heir to the Throne), Sensei (Kakita Toshimoko)

Disadvantages: Gullible, Child, Dark Secret (Whispers)

Note: Sotorii's Rings indicate his youth and inexperience, not incompetence or weakness. Sotorii is a boy, just on the edge of becoming a man. When his abilities have flowered, he will be given his *gempukku*.

Hantei Sotorii is a youth, as impatient, rebellious, impetuous and brash as any other boy of ten. He enjoys falconry, swordplay and stories of his ancestors, and strives to be worthy of the blood in his veins. Sometimes, he stands before the Emerald Throne of his father, straining to hear the whispers of the Sun Mother that all Hantei before him have claimed to hear.

He has never heard Amaterasu's voice, but he has heard something far darker. In his dreams, for the last several years, Sotorii has listened to whispers speaking of blood and revenge. He does not know who the voice belongs to, or why it has chosen him, but he fears the night, and he hates to sleep.

Because, in his sleep, the voice awaits him.

Sotorii was born of a Crane mother (a cousin of Doji Satsume) and the current Emperor. In his short lifetime, he has traveled through the lands of the Crane, the Lion and the Phoenix, and only last year was allowed to spend time in the Otaku provinces while his father journeyed to oversee some trouble among the Unicorn. What the young prince learned there changed his life.

A dour and practical girl, barely older than himself, rode to greet them on a tremendous grey horse. Though her voice was deferential, she carried resentment in her eyes, and Sotorii was afraid of her. "The boy must return to your city. He can go no further." There was an argument, and the Imperial Guard bristled, making the troupe of Battle Maidens following the young girl narrow their eyes warily.

Strangely compelled, Sotorii stepped out of his palanquin, his voice breaking as he shouted his father's favorite command, "Stop this nonsense at once!" Though his knees shook and his eyes watered with nervousness, the Imperial Guard at once fell to their knees in deference.

"My Lord," an older Seppun samurai spoke, "these samurai-ko say you cannot go to the palace of the Otaku."

As if ignoring anything the Seppun said, the girl stared directly into the eyes of the Shining Prince. Her horse took a few steps sideways, and Sotorii walked slowly to the front of the group.

Behind him, he heard the muttered whispers of the Otomo, surely planning what they would say to his father when they returned.

"What..." His voice broke again. Coughing slightly, Sotorii said, "What is the problem, girl?"

At once, he knew he had chosen the wrong thing to say. Her body straightened, and her hand crept an inch to the left, toward her saya. Immediately, the *miharu* tensed.

"My Lord Prince," the Otaku said respectfully, though her voice was ice cold, "the river has washed away its banks. Your grand palanquin," she said the word as if it were a serpent in her mouth, "cannot possibly cross. The servants would drown. You must return to your palace."

Behind him, he heard an Otomo whisper, "Impossible, to speak to the son of the Emperor this way. She should be..."





Sotorii challenged her with his eyes. "If the river is impassable, how did you cross?"

The Otaku patted her tremendous steed. "We rode."

For over two hundred years, the Otaku have given a mated set of steeds to the Emperor on his coronation, and for two hundred years, a small group of their horses have lived in peace on the fields of Otosan Uchi, untouched by bridle or saddle, whip or tether. In all the time that the Unicorn have ever returned to the Empire, no Hantei has ever attempted to ride the magnificent, foreign and untamable beasts.

For two hundred years, only women of the Otaku line have ever ridden the horses of their ancestress, a tradition which has never been successfully challenged by husband, daimyo, or Emperor.

"Then I shall ride as well," said Sotorii, lifting his pale hand up toward the maiden's.

A long pause hung in the air around the kneeling courtiers. The Battle Maidens stared, riveted, and even their leader did not know what to say. Then, the usually temperamental grey steed which she rode looked adoringly at the young Prince, and gently whuffled his hair with its breath. Without a word, the Maiden

reached down to help him mount, her face filled with awe and respect.

Sotorii crossed the river that day, and though he has never ridden another Otaku steed, he has sworn that the herd which races through the Emperor's plains will serve their new Hantei with honor.

The Miya

MIYA YOTO (DAIMYO OF THE MIYA)

EARTH: 2

WATER: 2

Perception 3

FIRE: 2

Intelligence 3

AIR: 3

VOID: 3

School/Rank: Doji Courtier 4

Skills: Bard 3, Calligraphy 1, Commerce 2, Courtier 4, Etiquette 5, Law 4, Lore: Hantei Line 2, Lore: Otosan Uchi 3, Meditation 1, Painting 5, Poetry 2, Sincerity 5, Shintao 4, Tea Ceremony 3, Theology 1

Honor: 4.6

Glory: 8.7

Advantages: Benten's Blessing, Voice

Disadvantages: Gullible

Miya Yoto, the aged and weak daimyo of his family, continues to impress the Emerald Empire with his insistence on the ethics of peace. He is a skilled negotiator, encouraging the best resolution to every situation. Instead of using his abilities to gain power or prestige for his family, he has always been at the forefront of every war, risking himself to try to bring peace.

The Miya have always been the Emperor's Heralds, responsible for spreading the news of Imperial Decrees. Recently, the aging daimyo passed this role on to his son, Miya Satoshi. Although he has not yet officially retired, Yoto has been preparing to for three months, and most believe he will officially shave his head and join the monasteries of the Seppun after this Winter Court.

Yoto, a distant descendant of the famous ronin poet Rezan, has sparked a bit of scandal with his outspoken view about ronin (whom he holds in surprising regard). For years, he has struggled to bring the wave-men into a better light within the Empire, and even invited the now-famous ronin shugenja Koan to visit him at the Miya palaces. Because of his outspoken views and irregular practices, many think it would be best if Yoto retired to teaching at the Miya school, and let his son handle the affairs of the clan.

However, Satoshi isn't the son that Yoto would wish for. His rampant rejection of all ronin, as well as members of Minor Clans (whom he calls 'fodder for the Empire') have earned him quite a few enemies. Although Yoto still struggles to teach his arrogant

son to be more accepting of men's misfortunes, Satoshi refuses to change his opinions or alter his views. When he is daimyo of the Miya, it is whispered, the Minor Clans will gain a powerful enemy in the Emperor's court.

Satoshi and Yoto are both in attendance at the Winter Court of the Seppun, and both deny any whisper of the incipient change in leadership for the Miya. As Heralds for the Emperor, they speak often of the wisdom and strength of the Hantei, and the eager mind of the young Sotorii, but very little is said about their own family business.

The Otomo

OTOMO BANU

EARTH: 1

Willpower: 2

WATER: 1

Perception: 4

FIRE: 2

Intelligence: 3

AIR: 2

VOID: 2

School/Rank: Otomo Seiyaku Rank 2

Skills: Bard 2, Calligraphy 2, Courtier 3, Etiquette 3, Kenjutsu 1, Lore: Bushido 1, Lore: Otosan Uchi 1, Obiesaseru 1, Manipulation 3, Law 4, Sincerity 2, Tea Ceremony 1, Theology 2

Honor: 1.9

Glory: 3

Advantages: Blackmail (several), Clear Thinker, Social Position,

Disadvantages: Bad Reputation (Two-Faced), Cruel, Haunted (1), Insensitive, Small

Banu's oldest memories of his childhood are of his father beating a villager to death. Banu was only five, but he remembers with great clarity the incident as his father took a hard leather lash to the farmer's small frame and fatally bludgeoned him in front of a crowd of onlookers. After the farmer lie bleeding and broken, Banu's father ordered the death of the village's headman "for standing by and doing nothing." A few months later, Banu's father died.

The rest of Banu's childhood was difficult and odd, to say the least. His mother was an Otomo *Seiyaku* who had little time to raise him, and left him to his studies under a very domineering sensei woman named Otomo Gayuko. Gayuko was unforgiving and bitter toward the young Banu while training him as an Imperial Courtier. By the age of 13, Banu had a distinct vision of how to treat people, and how to get what he wanted. His duality as a cruel yet tempered individual begin to take shape, and when his *gempukku* neared he had finally mastered the art of manipulation and deception.



Banu is an effete man. His features are soft, and his attendants are all stand-offish and lovely young men with no respect for station or authority. Yet Banu's deportment suggests that he is beyond reproach. He is so concerned with his looks and the attainment of power that he has forgotten his duty as a regent of his station. Although well known for his ability to look good while the rest of the world lives in filth, he would certainly appear weak-willed and effeminate if placed in a room of truly great men.

Banu takes great pleasure in the discomfort and annoyance of others. He often sets events in motion to make a samurai look foolish, and then gleefully draws attention to him. He has earned quite a few enemies because of this, but does not care. After all, he is Otomo. Who would dare touch him?

OTOMO SORAI (DAIMYO OF THE OTOMO)

EARTH: 1

Willpower: 2

WATER: 2

Perception: 5

FIRE: 2

Intelligence: 4

AIR: 1

Awareness 5

VOID: 3

School/Rank: Otomo Seiyaku 5

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Courtier 5, Dance 2, Etiquette 5, Kenjutsu 1, Law 1, Lore: Seven Clans 2 (or better), Lore: Otosan Uchi 2, Manipulation 4, Music 2, Obiesaseru 2, Painting 1, Poetry 1, Rhetoric 4, Shintao 1, Sincerity 5, Tea Ceremony 3, Theology 1

Honor: 2

Glory: 6.8

Advantages: Allies (Countless), Benten's Blessing, Social Position

Disadvantages: Driven, Insensitive

The thin and ineffective-appearing Otomo Sorai has been responsible for more trouble than any three Imperial courtiers combined. His family has charged him with sowing dissent among the seven great Clans in order to keep the Hantei strong. He takes great relish in his duties and performed them brilliantly. No one has kept the Hantei so powerful – or cost the lives of so many thousands in needless bloodshed – than he.

Born into the rank and privilege of the Imperial families, Sorai became accustomed to the comforts of his station. Nothing was denied to him as a child, no pleasure or luxury kept from his grasp. As is often the case with spoiled children, he quickly grew

bored with his privileges and sought new entertainment – by manipulating his playmates. He would start fights between rivals, engineer disputes over particular toys, and otherwise push the buttons of every child he came into contact with. As he grew older, he graduated to the palace servants, and soon had them tied in knots following his convoluted schemes. He found it all highly amusing.

His family recognized the raw talent he displayed, and encouraged it through formal schooling. By the time of his *gempukku* (a mere formality, for he would never see a battlefield), he had become a political player of breathtaking ability. Not even the canniest Scorpion could match his skills for devious control, which he kept hidden beneath a pleasant wit and beatific smile. His parents took care to make him understand his duty to the Emperor, then set him loose to do what he truly loved – wreaking havoc among others.

As an Otomo Seiyaku, he has been a smashing success. He can take the most cordial alliance between Clans, and with a few words of carefully-placed innuendo smash it to pieces. He has begun wars through the careful plying of his political skills, and toppled daimyos who thought their power unquestioned. The bloodshed he engenders has never bothered him: a pointless war that kills thousands and leaves leagues of countryside scorched is perfectly desirable so long as it keeps his targets occupied. He has never forgotten his duties, and always takes care to inflict such damage only on those who would threaten the Emperor. That being said, he truly enjoys his work. He takes sadistic glee in watching his “playmates” scurry like ants and cackles madly at the thought making the Emperor’s court dance to whatever tune he calls.

He is also very good at hiding the damage he causes. Few, if any, courtiers are aware of just how manipulative he is. Most consider him a dignified and honorable man, above the petty squabbles of the average courtier. Daimyos and family heads constantly vie to invite him to their parties, and his presence at a given function is considered an incalculable honor. Most nobles believe that he attends only to bestow favor upon a given host. In truth, he selects the events which place him in close proximity to his targets. Those in his presence often suffer from his ministrations, although none are ever aware of it.

Now well into his thirties, Sorai appears every inch the noble courtier. His thin body is draped in the finest silk robes and his dextrous fingers always hold a fan or other expensive object. He has recently taken to shaving his head – a sign of his “pious devotion” – which has become a fashion trend among some of the younger nobles. He appears warm and friendly at all times, and can disarm the most suspicious samurai with his voice. Only his eyes betray his true self – cold and hard, with a glint of cruelty at the core.



The Seppun

SEPPUN BAKA

EARTH: 1

WATER: 2

Perception 3

FIRE: 2

Intelligence 5

AIR: 3

VOID: 3

School/Rank: Doji Courtier 4

Skills: Courtier 3, Dance 2, Etiquette 3, Heraldry 4, History 5, Law 4, Lore (Shinsei) 5, Meditation 1, Shintao 5, Sincerity 2

Honor: 1.5

Glory: 5

Advantages: Allies (Hantei XXXVIII), Clear Thinker, Luck, Social Position

Disadvantages: Bad Reputation (Sycophant), Sworn Enemy (many)

When the Emperor needs advice on religion or history, he calls upon the Seppun. When he needs profound advice on religion or history, he calls upon Seppun Baka. Most Isawa cannot match his knowledge of the Tao of Shinsei and the Prophecies of Uikku, and no one but Baka can deliver the sermons of these holy texts to the Emperor so sweetly. As the Emperor's Chief Historian, his influence is as unquestioned as it is hated by those below him.

Baka began life with the intention of becoming a holy man, and studied the ancient texts with passion and zeal. But he became enraptured by the intricacies of the court, and the delicate dances of the nobility. He vowed to live out his life in that opulence and luxury, not sequestered in some library. Thanks to his family position and to the diligence with which he kept to his studies, despite his desires, he earned a position in the Emperor's library when he came of age. This allowed him to apply his bookish skills while still remaining close to the court that he loved so much.

The Emperor grew to depend on him for advice. When a question arose on the teachings of Shinsei or the beliefs of one of the original Kami, Baka could always provide a clear and accurate picture. Within a few years, he had moved up from a mere court historian to the Hantei's inner circle of advisors. He was thrilled, and eternally grateful to the Emperor for the chance. Now he could bask in the glow of a nobleman's life and enjoy prestige unheard of for a religious researcher. He struggled to ingratiate himself as deeply as he could into the Hantei's trust, making himself invaluable in the process. Among the Emperor's inner circle, he is the most openly fawning and the most often turned to in times of trouble. He loves every minute of it.

Baka is despised among the courtiers as a sycophantic toady. He dotes upon the Emperor like a dog upon its master, and is rarely away from the Hantei's side. The nobility is jealous of his



access to the Son of Heaven, and knows that he can bend the Emperor's ear as no other. Many have sought to control him, only to be rebuked; the Emperor will not have his favorite advisor beholden to any sullied Clan interests. The result has only increased the jealousy and hatred among those beneath him. He's noticed, of course, but is beyond caring. As long as he holds his position, none of them can touch him. Not only has the current "old man" embraced him, but his son and heir, Hantei Sotorii, has taken a liking to him as well. Baka may well stay the Emperor's favored sycophant for the rest of his natural life.

Baka is a small man, hunched over from years of poring through ancient texts. He dresses in dark robes, well-made but ignorant of any sense of fashion. He also tends to wear perfume, bought at great price from the Unicorn Clan. Those who hate him say it smells like corruption. He has compensated for a rapidly receding hairline by growing his hair long, and his bare forehead is often wrinkled in thought. He speaks in a wheedle, constantly referring to the humility of his position and how 'unworthy' he is to hold it. Some find his words soothing; others want to throttle him at the first opportunity. Over the years, he's become very good at telling one from the other.

SEPPUN DAIORI (DAIMYO OF THE SEPPUN)

EARTH: 4

WATER: 3

Perception: 4

FIRE: 3

Intelligence 5

AIR: 5

Awareness: 6

VOID: 4

School/Rank: Seppun Miharu 4

Skills: Archery 4, Armorer 1, Bard 2, Battle 3, Defense 4, Etiquette 3, History 3, Iaijutsu 4, Jiujutsu 2, Kenjutsu 5, Lore: Bushido 2, Lore: Otosan Uchi 3, Obiesaseru 4, Painting 2, Poetry 1, Sincerity 3, Subojutsu 2, Theology 1, Weaponsmith 1

Honor: 3.4

Glory: 8.4

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Way of the Land: Otosan Uchi, Large, Social Position

Disadvantages: Blackmail (by Akodo Kage), Chemical Dependence (Opium), Dependent (Hotaitaka), Permanent Wound

The daimyo of the Seppun is a tall, stern man with hawklike features and a long courtier's braid. Although he has only been the daimyo of the Seppun for seven years, his countenance is already stern and aged, as if the weight of an Empire rests on his shoulders alone. Companion to the Emperor in their youth, Daiori served in the Miharu, leading a career of honor at the side of the Imperial line. He has been wounded many times protecting an Imperial Courtier or other dignitary from harm. He fought against the Crab during their attack on an Otomo herald only ten years ago, and still bears a scar upon his left hand from the incident. Since then, he has been of little use to the Miharu, serving

instead as an advisor in all military matters. He was Captain of the Imperial Guard for several years, and served with such noble guardsmen as Akodo Kage and Shiba Katsuda.

At 35, Daiori is aging but not yet 'old.' He thought once to serve in the Emperor's legions until the age of retirement, but when his brother unexpectedly died in service, defending the Hantei Prince from Oni, he ascended to the leadership of his house. He is unfit for leadership in the court, but his ethics and stern military bearing have served his family well, raising their influence to a level unsurpassed in four generations. Their influence has allowed the Crane to keep the palace at Toshi Ranbo wo Shien Shite Reigisaho, kept the Unicorn from assaulting Kyuden Ikoma, and maintained peace between the Crab and the Iuchi over the usurped Falcon Clan villages.

At the Winter Court, Daiori seems distracted, and speaks sharply to those who attract his attention. He spends a great deal of time in the presence of the Lion Clan, though his influence seems firmly behind the Crane. His young son, barely four, accompanies him. Since the death of the child's mother, Daiori has raised the boy alone, refusing to leave his care to any nurse, maid or courtesan. The boy's name is Hotaitaka, and he is a jolly, happy-go-lucky child. Anyone who treats the boy with care and courtesy will be looked upon with quiet approval by his father.

Beneath his precise and cautious demeanor, Daiori is a man in turmoil. Seven years ago, while head of a legion of Imperial Guardsmen traveling with his older brother (the Seppun daimyo), he was attacked by bandits. Akodo Kage, head of the guards, led the counterattack, and valiantly attempted to save the Seppun royal family. He failed, and that evening, Daiori found out why. Kage intended to place Daiori on the throne of the Seppun, and control him as a friend and counselor. Recoiling, Daiori threatened to reveal Kage's plan, but to no avail. Kage located six guards who could testify that Daiori was at his brother's side at the time of his death, and the wound which killed him came from a closely-placed knife.

The wound which Daiori received at that battle has never healed properly, and to ease its frequent pain, he takes drugs prescribed by the daimyo of the Soshi, Bantaro. Though its use disturbs him, Daiori has continued to take the opium, hoping that it will ease the agony enough that he will be able to wield a sword if he is in great need.

Since that time, Daiori has been firmly in Kage's camp - although that hasn't always supported the Lion. Kage's influence caused the Seppun to bend the Emperor's will to the battle at Toshi Ranbo wo Shien Shite Reigisaho, and Daiori waits to hear what Kage feels must be done about the Unicorn and the Crab. He hates being a pawn, but fears incrimination - not to himself, but to his young son.

Hotaitaka was born to Daiori's wife only three years ago, after sixteen years of childlessness. Daiori, trapped in the situation, has never asked who the father of the child is, but knows that Hotaitaka is not his own. That has not stopped him from loving the child dearly. In the month of the Monkey, just before the



Imperial Invitations to the Winter Court were sent, Daiori stood with the Fox clan against a Yasuki trader selling questionable goods in their lands. Shortly afterwards, his wife died of a strange disease while visiting the Phoenix lands. He soon received a letter from his 'friend' Kage, who politely inquired about the boy's health and lamented the unfortunate death of the mother.

Since that time, Daiori has kept his only child close.



SEPPUN ISHIKAWA

EARTH: 4

WATER: 4

Perception: 5

FIRE: 4

Agility: 5

AIR: 4

Reflexes: 5

VOID: 4

School/Rank: Seppun Miharū 4

Skills: Archery 3, Armorer 2, Battle 4, Defense 5, Etiquette 3, Iaijutsu 3, Intimidation 3, Jiu-jutsu 2, Kenjutsu 5, Obiesaseru 3, Subojutsu 2, Wrestling 3

Honor: 4.0

Glory: 5.3

Advantages: Ally (Suzume Mukashino - Hatamoto Advisor), Ally (Emperor), Balance, Combat Reflexes, Great Destiny, Leadership, Sensei, Strength of the Earth 1, Social Position

Disadvantages: Soft-hearted

Born during a New Years celebration in Otsan Uchi, Seppun Ishikawa was the first son of an influential Imperial retainer. After demonstrating a gift for martial skills, he studied swordsmanship at the famous Kakita Academy. Though his acceptance to the academy was largely due to favors owed his father, he quickly established himself among the foremost students of his class, developing not only his skill with a sword, but also a keen tactical intellect.

Following his return to Otsan Uchi, Ishikawa was offered a position with the Imperial Guard. Though accepting such a post meant the removal of his family name (a practice instituted to discourage family rivalries between servants to the Imperial family), Ishikawa quickly accepted.

His dedication and ability allowed him to quickly rise through the ranks. His ability caught the eye of Doji Satsume, the Emerald Champion, who recruited him to serve as an Imperial Magistrate for a few years, but he was sorely missed in the Imperial Palace. Ishikawa returned to the palace upon becoming the Captain of the Imperial Guards a few short years ago.

Though Ishikawa fulfills his duty to the Imperial family, he also cares deeply for them and would not hesitate to lay down his life in their service. Such devotion is expected of samurai, but few are focused enough to make such a sacrifice without thought.

Ishikawa does not look greatly different from most of the men in the Imperial Guard, standing only slightly taller than average and possessing an normal build. Those who look beyond the simple disguise of flesh, however, have noted great strength in Ishikawa. He has a destiny to fulfill.

SEPPUN KOSSORI

EARTH: 2

Willpower: 3

WATER: 2

FIRE: 2

Agility: 3

AIR: 3

Awareness: 4

VOID: 2

School/Rank: Doji Courtier 3

Skills: Bard 1, Courtier 3, Dancing 3, Etiquette 2, Heraldry 1, History 1, Manipulation 3, Origami 1, Poetry 2, Political Maneuvering 3, Seduction 2*, Sincerity 3, Tea Ceremony 1

*It is very dishonorable for Kossori to have this skill. She knows the trouble it would bring her if she were caught.

Honor: 2.7

Glory: 2.1

Advantages: Benten's Blessing, Different School (Doji), Favor (Emperor), Favors - Many other, Gentry 7, Wealth 6, Social Position

Disadvantages: Bad Reputation (Tease), Compulsion (Sake), Frail Mind, Obligation (Bayushi Akeu), Spoiled, Vanity

Kossori's childhood reeked of opulence and splendor. The only daughter to a powerful Seppun, she was spoiled and treated to ever desire of her lavish and luxurious appetite. As she grew older her tastes matured, and her desires manifested in ways that her parents would have never imagined. When she was six she told her father, "I wish to marry a Doji man when I get older." Her choice for husband showed more than anything how spoiled and decadent her life had become, and how little appreciation she had for what she had been given.

It was then, that her mother and father both agreed that she should attend the Doji school and learn what they are made of. "Perhaps then she will learn to be a lady." It was the worst decision they could have made.

Kossori's schooling had the exact opposite effect on her development, and her penchant quickly accelerated. The Doji school taught her how to get what she wanted, and soon she was prying favors from the hands of everyone she could. At first she tried to maneuver - to "practice" what her charms could get her, but soon she learned that her power over men was much stronger than her power over women. She learned that men would do almost anything for her, and many a morning she awoke next to a samurai who had offered her his favor, or a precious pearl that he intended for his wife.

As an adult she has developed a taste for *sake*, especially the strong *shochu*. This has reduced such inhibitions as she possesses, and often times she will 'not remember' or will disavow knowledge of 'questionable' actions that have haunted her past. Once, while drunk, she attempted to seduce Bayushi Akeu; he has not forgotten the act. He continually reminds her that her

transgression would certainly cost her her head if word were to get out of her attempted seduction of a Scorpion.

Kossori is not very bright. She continues to drink (although less now than before) and get herself into situations with men that should would be better off forgetting. But every lapse of judgment is followed by a samurai providing her another favor or delivering another gift.

Kossori is never seen in any less than the most extravagant kimonos, and she is always covered in fine jewelry, silk, perfume and make-up. PCs who take time out to talk to Kossori will find themselves drawn in by her beauty and charms very quickly, but may notice a lack of substance to her discourse.

The Doji

DOJI (SEPPUN) MASEKERI

EARTH: 2

WATER: 2

Perception 4

FIRE: 3

Intelligence 4

AIR: 3

Awareness 4

VOID: 4

School/Rank: Seppun Courtier 2 (Considered a Doji for game mechanics)

Skills: Bard 2, Calligraphy 1, Courtier 3, Dancing 1, Etiquette 4, Gardener 3, Heraldry 2, History 3, Lore: Hantei 3, Origami 2, Painting 1, Poetry 2, Sincerity 4, Tea Ceremony 3

Honor: 3.2

Glory: 3.7

Advantages: Bente's Blessing, Favor - Invitation to the Bayushi Court, Gentry 4, Social Position, Kharmic Tie - Mother Seppun Toseriko (3), True Friend (Doji Shogo)

Disadvantages: True Love

Masekari's mother died when she was very little from a rare and untreatable disease called '*ogugai*'. This debilitating disease slowly leaches the life from the sufferer, bringing the strongest bushi to a state of extreme weakness. After several months, they generally die in their sleep, a pale imitation of their former self.

Masekari spent most of her childhood years learning to be a woman from the family's most loyal and gracious servant, Hojiki. By the time she was eight she was a perfectly polite and dignified individual. About that time she learned she would marry Doji Shogo at her *gempukku*. Although she had never met him, she looked forward every day to their union.

Some thought that she would reach her *gempukku* much sooner than most and her anticipation grew. Her formal teachers disagreed and at the age of 14, when she was expecting to finish her studies, Masekari's sensei approached her father, Seppun Guri. It is not known what the discussion entailed, but afterwards



Guri informed his daughter than she would have to wait two years before her gempukku. Sullen and depressed, Masekari spent the next two years in seclusion, making time only to attend her courses and perform the most minimal of tasks.

Unable to console her, Guri did his best to allow her the room she required to "mourn".

The next two years passed slowly and miserably for Guri, and when the time came for her gempukku, her temperament barely changed. Hojiki worried for her health – frightened that she would succumb to the ogugai – and constantly attended to her needs. When they finally came, the announcement of her gempukku and wedding became common knowledge and all of the nobles of Otosan Uchi arrived to witness the event.

At the wedding, Masekari met the young Doji who was to be her husband for the first time, and Shogo's charm and bright smile shook her from her stupor. Soon after the wedding, she was smiling again. Although the early months of their marriage were difficult, Shogo proved to be quite a catch, and their marriage was blessed with good fortune.

Two years into the union, she bore their first son. His child-name was Ogoru, and happiness again blessed their home. At the same time Shogo's station increased with his Clan and his service to the Emperor became more and more evident. Years passed as their fortune flourished, and another child was born – a girl – after six years of marriage.

Now the pride of the court and the family shine on Masekari, and many speak highly of her charmed life, while the strong morals she learned from her father allow her the strength to not overindulge in the praise of others.

Recently, Shogo has been called away to serve on the Kaiu Wall. Because he attended the Kakita dueling academy during his youth, his skill with a blade has catapulted him to an important and dangerous station. Word of his well-being has lapsed of late, and now she fears for his safety. Since his disappearance, a Scorpion courtier named Bayushi Akeu has taken a strong interest in Masekari. Through subtle taunts and 'friendly advances' she has learned only one thing about him: he seems all too familiar with her husband.

Conversations with Akeu always leave Masekari feeling uneasy and distracted. Recently, it has begun to affect her judgment and disposition. Rumors and gossip course through the Imperial Court and Masekari is finding herself out of step with

the company she keeps – people that once envied her lifestyle. Now word has come that her husband is dead, and the evil rumors cloud her mind further. All the while Akeu tries to simultaneously assuage and feed her fears. PCs who meet Masekari likely find her pensive or distracted.

Masekari is a lovely maiden, slightly overweight but very pleasant to see. She has a warm laugh, and a genuine friendliness to her conversations that leave the most cautious Scorpion feeling pleased. Masekari's eyes are Doji blue, a trait she inherited from her mother, though her skin and hair are dark.

She has no love for Akeu, but he is as close a friend as she has in the court, and his attentions seem genuine...

DOJI SHOGO

Challenge: Doji Shogo's father's obligation to the Scorpion is well known among the previous generation of courtiers. Now, Shogo's own transgressions have taken him deep into the Crab lands to assist a friend, Bayushi Tanitsu. Rumors of his death have returned to the court, and Masekari, his wife is stricken with grief and worry.

Focus: The PCs should be friends of Masekari or have met her recently. A loyal servant of Masekari, Hojiki, has approached the PCs and asked them to investigate Shogo's disappearance. She remembers the name of a Scorpion – Tanitsu, she thinks – but she is not sure of his association with Shogo. At last contact, Shogo was in the Shishoko village in the Crab lands, but this was over a month ago. That is all she knows.

(continued)

DOJI SHOGO

EARTH: 2

WATER: 2

FIRE: 4

AIR: 3

Reflexes 4

VOID: 3

School/Rank: Kakita

Duelist Rank 2

Skills: Archery 1,

Calligraphy 2, Courtier 2,

Etiquette 3, Heraldry 1,

History 3, Horsemanship 2,

Hunting 2, Iaijutsu 4,

Kenjutsu 1, Lore (Bushido) 3,

Lore (Crane) 2, Lore (Otosan

Uchi), Meditation 1, Music 1, Painting 2, Poetry 3, Shintao 3, Sincerity 3, Tea Ceremony 3, Theology 2

Honor: 3.9

Glory: 4.1

Advantages: Benten's Blessing, Gentry 3 (as Seppun Masekari), Imperial Spouse (Seppun Masekari), Kakita Blade

Disadvantages: Obligation (4 pts – Bayushi Atsu), True Love

Shogo was born to a great courtier named Doji Tobuzu, whose desire above all things was to see his son wield a blade with the fury of the greatest Kakita. Renowned in court for his skill as a speaker and deal maker, Tobuzu – even before his first son could walk – bargained for his child to attend the Kakita school. In addition, he claimed, his son would marry a Seppun.

The discussion lasted several days in court, and by the end of it, not only had Doji Tobuzu earned his son a Seppun bride, but he had offered the Seppun two Doji brides of their own. Tobuzu was displeased, but he agreed to the arrangement. Afterwards, the aged Tobuzu was forced to offer Shogo's first-born daughter to the Scorpion courtier who spoke on the Emperor's behalf. He never spoke of the reasons, but the Scorpion were only too happy to accept the offer.

Young Shogo excelled in his schooling and found great peace in the art of Bushido. His sensei was most impressed with his knowledge and skill and by the age of 15, he was prepared for his *gempukku*. At his ceremony, his father presented him with two gifts: a Kakita blade, and the news that his bride would be Seppun Masekari. Although younger than he, the Seppun were confident that she would be prepared for marriage in three years. Shogo's station as a bushi rose quickly in the interim, and three years later, he was ready for marriage. In expectation, Shogo had assembled his trophies and commendations from the Emperor as a gift to the girl's family. But as the day of marriage approached, Shogo was told that Masekari would not marry for another two years. Her *gempukku* was being put off, which brought much shame to the Seppun family.

Shogo took the matter in stride, not wishing to point out the indiscretion to such a fine samurai as Seppun Guri. He spent much time in seclusion, learning the fine arts of painting, poetry, calligraphy, and his favorite – the tea ceremony. Shogo came to be respected in numerous geisha houses as a fine courtier and a gentleman, though he never stayed the night with any of the ladies.

At last, the day of the wedding arrived, and Doji Shogo went to meet his bride, Seppun Masekari. Shogo wished to present a gift to her father, and before the ceremony he brought forth a large screen painting of his family's history. Kanji were drawn perfectly, with flare and accuracy, and it was obvious to Guri that Shogo has spent much time on the painting. As they looked at the painting, Shogo drew from his saya and cut his own hand upon it. Using the blood, he drew the Kanji for 'life' on the screen and kneeled before Guri. Guri was moved to tears and told Shogo, "Tobuzu-san would be proud of you." Shogo smiled.

The wedding was well received and although Masekari seemed distant and uncaring at first, Shogo's charm and inner spirit drew her from her shell. By the end of the evening he had her smiling. Although many marriages of Rokugan are conveniently arranged, Shogo found pleasure in the beauty and charm of Masekari and she in him. Their love blossomed and in their time together he grew more and more proud of what they had.

When their first son was born, Shogo offered all of the peasants in his fief a week of rest. The headmaster of one of the village organized a celebration, and peasants began calling the new birth Ogoru, meaning free food and entertainment. Shogo smiled with pleasure over the name and chose it for his son's birth-name.

Four years later Masekari gave birth to another child, a daughter. Though Shogo's disappointment did not show on his face, in his heart he knew this child was destined to marry the Scorpion, by his father's bargain. Hojiki, Masekari's servant was always attentive and has been a caring nurse to the both youths.

Soon after the birth, Shogo's duty summoned him to the wedding of his younger sister and Bayushi Akeu. His wife, bed-ridden, could not attend, but instead asked him to give her favor to the groom, and a necklace she had created to the bride.

The wedding was a splendid affair, and Shogo found himself indulging in a very fine plum brandy afterwards. It was sweet and

vibrant and before Shogo was aware, he had consumed more than his fill. His inhibitions seemed to leave him, and he began to flirt and carry on with a young Scorpion woman. She was seductive and alluring, the opposite of Masekari's charm and natural beauty. He flirted with her for sometime until he found himself in her arms.

DOJI SHOGO

Strike: Evidence of Shogo's location is sketchy and unreliable. However, if they interview courtiers about what they know, they will be directed to speak to Shogo's father Tobuzu. Tobuzu (see Shogo's history) will reveal the arranged marriage of his second daughter to the Scorpion, Bayushi Akeu. Shogo has been known to spend time with Akeu since the marriage, despite the questionable associations of the acquaintance. If the players do not ask a courtier, an Intelligence + History roll at TN 40 or an Intelligence + Courtier roll at TN 30 may be rolled to see if anyone remembers to speak to Shogo's father.

If they follow the lead to Bayushi Akeu, they may learn that he asked Tanitsu to lead Shogo to a remote Crab village far from any cities. There they could embarrass him in an elaborate, harmless prank. Without telling too much, he will reveal that the Crab Clan came through the village conscripting peasants, and that contact with Tanitsu and Shogo ended sometime after that. Akeu will direct them to the village of Gyugurin and offer his own servant as an escort.

The truth is that Shogo attached himself to the Crab garrison and is inside a dilapidated keep on the northern edge of the Shadowlands. Recently the keep came under attack by goblins and ogres, slowly starving the samurai inside. Shogo is as honorable as they come, and would rather die fighting these abominations than from starvation. The players must act quickly to free him from the keep, or he will surely fall at the hands of a superior Shadowlands army.

All the while, Akeu courts the beautiful Masekari.

When morning came, the young woman was gone, and Shogo awoke. His kimono had been removed and the room smelled of perfume and alcohol. Bayushi Akeu leaned over the dizzy frame of his guest and informed the confused Shogo, "My sister did not care for your advances. She was most displeased that a samurai of such station could carry on in such a way." The Scorpion chided, "At your own sister's wedding. Hmmm."

Shogo was stunned. Never in his life had he acted so foolishly, and his behavior would surely cause him a great dishonor. He spoke to Akeu and asked him how he might amend such a terrible act without making a public matter of his indiscretion.

Akeu smiled and said, "We shall talk another time. Go home, speak nothing of what has happened here, and do not tell your wife my name. I wish to introduce myself. There will be a feast here in three months to announce your sister's pregnancy, and you both must come." Shogo did not take time to digest the meanings of the words, but quickly gathered his belongings and rode home. His servants had already been dismissed, and on the journey home it became obvious to him Shogo, that more than a day had passed.

Upon returning from the wedding, Shogo spoke nothing of it, and immediately indulged himself in his children and beloved wife. Masekeri sensed that something was wrong, but never pushed. She never learned that the Bayushi trickster who now courts her was so close a relation, and she may never learn of his activities.

It has been two years since Shogo's dishonorable act, but he still carries the shame. Although his face is calm and complete, he waits every day to hear what Akeu will ask next. So far, the Scorpion has arranged for a series of feasts, and each time, Shogo refused all alcohol. Three months ago he was invited to a small village in the Crab lands, named Gyugurin. A Scorpion friend of Akeu's named Bayushi Tanitsu is escorting him, and there he will discover (the Scorpions say) the final favor that Akeu requires. Since his departure, no news of his whereabouts has reached Otsan Uchi.

Shogo is a very handsome man, with rough features and an uneven smile. His teeth are straight, his eyes a stunning blue-grey, and his hair as black as the night sky, save one streak of grey. Shogo does not wear the typical samurai top-knot, nor does he dye his hair white in remembrance of the First Daidoji. Such things, he says, are for the courtiers. His father was a courtier, that is true, but as for Shogo considers himself very much a bushi, and dislikes the trappings of the court. Although he agrees that the court did much for his life, he also knows its pitfalls... and its hatreds.

The Bayushi

BAYUSHI AKEU

EARTH: 2

WATER: 2

FIRE: 2

Intelligence 3

AIR: 3

VOID: 2

School/Rank: Bayushi Courtier 2

Skills: Courtier 2, Etiquette 2, Forgery 1, Investigation 1, Law 1, Manipulation 1, Poison 3, Sincerity 3, Seduction 1, Shintao 1

Honor: 1.9

Glory: 1.2

Advantages: Blackmail - Doji Shogo, Clear Thinker, Voice

Disadvantages: Insensitive, Meddler, Small

Born to a Soshi family, the young Akeu, at the age of eight, stood before a Bayushi samurai just past his *gempukku* and proclaimed, "I wish to serve the Bayushi family. Please make it so?" The man was moved by the boy's simple words, and impressed that at such a young age Akeu could speak with sincerity and reverence. The Bayushi was convinced. He met Akeu's parents and told them that the child would best serve the clan by joining the ranks of the Bayushi. Though fearful that their small, frail son would be a burden to the clan, the always loyal Soshi did as they were asked, and bid their youngest son good-bye. The man then took the boy to the Bayushi Courtier school and said, "I wish to see this boy serve this clan with his gift of speech."

The sensei replied, "Yes, Lord Aramoro-sama."

Since that day Akeu has been developing his skills as a speaker and a doer. His size is not an issue, although he wears big robes to appear larger; he has never really come to grips with his small size. Akeu is smart, however, and understands the purposes of the Clan very well; he has amassed quite a number of favors. Although others would call his action blackmail, Akeu revels in the idea of asking a Crane who 'owes him a favor' to come visit him at his home. His brother-in-law, Doji Shogo, is an example of a man that he has enjoyed toying with.

Akeu has been busy in the Winter Court this year, though as a young courtier, his invitation to the court was a shock. His recent marriage to a Doji girl has been noted by the Bayushi, and only the fates will tell where young Akeu finishes his years.

Bayushi Akeu is a quiet, reserved man. He likes to keep himself from the center of attention and prefers to wait in the background, and watch the others. When he does speak he always has something eloquent to say. He is at present spending most of his time with the beautiful Doji Masekeri.

The Suzume

SUZUME MUKASHINO

EARTH: 2

Willpower: 6

WATER: 2

Perception: 5

FIRE: 2

Intelligence: 5

AIR: 1

Awareness: 2

VOID: 5

School/Rank: Sparrow Bushi 3

Skills: Bard 4, Calligraphy 1, History 5, Iaijutsu 1, Kenjutsu 2, Lore: Shugenja 2, Lore: Samurai 3, Lore: Bushido 4, Lore: Shinsei 2, Lore: Hantei 2, Lore: Children's Stories 3, Lore: Poetry 2, Lore: Other 1, Poetry 1, Shintao 2, Stealth 1*, Theology 3

Honor: 3.8

Glory: 3.1

Advantages: Voice, Way of the Land: Crane, Lion, Sparrow

Disadvantages: Low Pain Threshold, Obligation: Seppun Baka and Bayushi Taberu, Bad Reputation: Garrulous, Venerable

*Mukashino's footfalls are very quiet; he does not actively try to hide his actions. He is just very good at finding his way next to a samurai or courtier.

Mukashino is aged and wise. With age and wisdom comes a new understanding of time, and patience. With time and patience comes a plateau of understanding and wisdom. With wisdom and understanding comes comprehension of order in the universe. With order comes perfection and with perfection comes eternity. At that point, we get Mukashino: an aged samurai whose stories are long, ponderous, and distracting.

Known for his power of speech, and his drawn-out story telling techniques, Mukashino is a pariah in the courts to those that see him coming, and a revered samurai to those ambushed by his stories. Yet somehow, each year, a Scorpion invitation to Winter Court makes its way into Mukashino's hands. And each year, bushi and courtiers alike shudder when they see who has arrived.

His favorite tactic is to find a samurai of high rank alone or in repose. He approaches quietly and begins telling a story. They begin innocently enough - a young boy fishing, a ship sailing into a calm sea - but soon they encompass every detail of Rokugani culture. The recipient of the tale sees his or her interest dissipating as the story becomes more and more involved. It is considered a great dishonor to oneself and to Mukashino to ignore his stories or to leave before he has finished.

Whispers in the Empire

BAYUSHI KACHIKO & DOJI HOTURI

After a prolonged romantic affair many years ago (lasting well into the first year of her marriage), Bayushi Kachiko suddenly refused to see the son of the Doji Champion. She made the decision with no warning and no explanation. Hoturi was turned aside at the gates of Bayushi castle, and has never been alone with the Mother of Scorpions again.

Less than a year later, Kachiko bore a son to her rightful husband, Bayushi Shoji. Although Kachiko has been pregnant since, she has produced no other children. The child, Bayushi Daiyu, is now a beautiful boy of nearly twelve. He is extremely adroit for his age, with beautiful blue eyes. The Scorpions laud his skill with the sword, as well as the smooth and flattering tongue he inherited from his mother.

BAYUSHI SHOJU AND YOGO JUNZO

The two finest minds in the Empire both belong to the Scorpion Clan - and they are moving mountains with their ambition. Whispers from the Scorpion say that Junzo's misplaced loyalty to his lord could cause him to do almost anything, no matter what the cost. Others say that Shoji is using Junzo's loyalty as a master does a puppy, turning his wrath this way and that in the name of their clan.

Neither Shoji nor Junzo are present at this Winter Court, although many other Scorpion have attended in order to further their plans, including Kachiko. The Soshi murmur among themselves that an ancient vault, long hidden beneath the Scorpion castle, has been opened and excavations are underway to dig out the remnants of the castle's famous labyrinth. If asked, Scorpion courtiers will say that such a thing is possible, of course, and that the excavations would obviously be why their Champion has not attended the festivities of the Hantei.

DAIDOJI UJI

Daidoji Uji, the strange dark-complexioned samurai of the Crane, came to the Winter Court at the behest his Champion, and given a definitive demonstration of his school's techniques at the Emperor's request. Although some say that Uji is too backward,

that his attitude about the gaijin blades is dishonorable, many others whisper that he knows secrets even the Emperor fears.

During the course of the year, Uji has mastered the last of his father's techniques, advancing to School Rank 5, and earning a Fire of 3. He also gained a new skill with the tetsubo (Subojutsu 1) while visiting in the Crab lands.

In addition, Uji has brought one of the strange gaijin *sai-bors* with him to the court as a curiosity. He will not describe the techniques used with this weapon: learning gaijin weaponry is forbidden by ancient edict. However, the strange beauty of such an item (when seen as only an object of art) is not.

TOGASHI MITSU

Togashi Mitsu, the enigmatic Dragon tattooed man, has begun a new pilgrimage through the lands of the Emerald Empire, visiting the court of each clan. As Togashi Yokuni's official emissary, Mitsu has brought his unique wisdom to the provinces of Rokugan. His most recent 'stunts' involve his mastery of acting (Acting 2), which has allowed him to impersonate peasants, nobles, and even his own Champion.

Some say that Mitsu does not travel alone, and claim that another man accompanies him. That second man is tall, and swarthy, and seems very familiar with the practices of the Dragon, although he bears no tattoos or armor. Mitsu seems very comfortable with the stranger.

SHIBA UJIMITSU

Shiba Ujimitsu, Champion of the Phoenix Clan, bears a heavy secret upon his broad shoulders. Years ago, he lived a happy and fulfilling life. His wife, a member of the Imperial House named Seppun Shimiko, bore him a daughter who was the joy of his life. Unlike many families in Rokugan, Shimiko and Ujimitsu genuinely loved one another, and their marriage was happy.

Together, they lived in peace and harmony, reveling in the joys that wealth and title brought to them. Although Ujimitsu was born the son of a very minor daimyo, the touch of fate elevated his status – the kami of Shiba, incarnate in all the Champions of the Clan, chose him to lead the Phoenix for the next generation.

Their child, Shiba Saija, was eight years old when tragedy struck.

Ujimitsu's wife's father, Seppun Waritsu, was branded a traitor to the Emperor's court. Waritsu was discovered passing documents to a Scorpion agent (although Shoji denied any knowledge, claiming the man was a ronin masquerading as a Scorpion). Though the accusation had no real 'proof', the testimony of numerous courtiers placed Waritsu at the site of the betrayal, and many knew that the scrolls were his to maintain. The case was resolved swiftly. In fury, Hantei XXXVIII proclaimed that Waritsu and his entire line must commit *seppuku*. He demanded no mercy, no pity for the young, and absolutely no rest for their souls. Their bodies were to be left out for the buzzards, denied a funeral, and allowed no peace.

Forced by Imperial Decree to order the death of his innocent wife and daughter, Ujimitsu went to the Imperial Palace to beg forgiveness from the Emperor. Hantei was resolute, and he

demanded that Shimiko and Saija be brought before him immediately, so that his command could be carried out. As Ujimitsu returned to bring his family before the Hantei, a strange spirit stopped him in the halls of the Imperial Palace. For a moment, he saw the shadow of a hooded figure pass before his eyes and felt his soul – the soul of the *kami* within him – rejoice. A *ronin*, thought Ujimitsu, feeling strangely detached, *within the Emperor's walls?*... Then, there was a moment of darkness, and Ujimitsu awoke with no memory of what had passed.

He brought his wife and their beloved daughter to the feet of the Hantei, and watched impassively as Shimiko committed *jigai* – ritual *seppuku* for a samurai female. As her body fell limp to the ground, the eight year old Saija leapt forward and cradled her dying mother in her arms, against all bounds of propriety or decorum.

"I curse you, Hantei!" she cried with all her strength, tears coursing down her cheeks. "You have sent your last innocent woman to her death. By the time the Weaver Star sets over Otsan Uchi, your line will be destroyed, your family ruined, and your own son will betray your house more deeply than my mother ever did!"

In shock, the court stared, appalled. Lions reached for their blades, but Ujimitsu was swifter. Something deep within him welled to the surface, and he heard, for the first and only time in his life, the voice of his kami from deep within. *Take her head with a clean stroke, Ujimitsu-san, the voice directed, if you love your daughter – truly love her – and are willing to give your life for her not once, but twice, we shall save her.*

Ujimitsu trusted in the power of his guiding ancestor more than in the fury of the Hantei, and was desperate to help his innocent daughter, despite her dishonor. His blade struck, the steel was true, and Saija's body crumbled atop her mother, denied the honorable death offered by the Hantei. As he did so, Ujimitsu felt his strength drain, and the ancestral sword of the Shiba burned in his hand with the heat of the Heavens.

Shiba Ujimitsu has no memory of the next few hours; only the look of gratitude on a grateful and stunned retainer's face stands out through the haze of pain and sorrow. Shiba Jimen, father of Shiba Norihakeu and a young daughter the same age as Ujimitsu's own, bowed to the Champion of his clan. "I do not know how you came to be here, my lord," the man said, "But surely, your presence saved the life of my daughter. If you had not come and healed her with your spirit-magic, her sickness would certainly have taken her life this night."

Ujimitsu looked down at the girl's body, lying on a bed in the Shiba palace, and suddenly realized he was hundreds of miles away from the Imperial Court. At his hand, on the pommel of the Ancestral Sword lay across her chest. The girl turned and looked up at her daimyo, her face sleep-clouded and filled with innocence, and Ujimitsu's heart leapt.

She had his daughter's eyes.

The spirit of Jimen's daughter had gone to the Celestial Heavens, where her sacrifice had been given wings. Deep within

his soul, Ujimitsu knew that the girl on the bed – his daughter – was of critical importance to the future of the Empire, and their sacrifice had been for Rokugan itself.

Since that day, Ujimitsu's strength has never been as great as it once was, and often, he feels the pain and stiffness of his body, debilitated by the task of saving his daughter's life. (In game terms, his Water Ring remains 5 while his Strength has dropped to 3, which isn't normally possible.) Yet, as he looks into the eyes of the samurai-ko known as Shiba Tsukune, he remembers the love he felt for his daughter, and rejoices that her soul has been given a new home.

As for Tsukune, she has no memory of her life before the coming of the plague that nearly killed her as a child – neither Saija's spirit nor Tsukune's body seem to have any clear memory of either life. All of her memories are clouded, faint and disturbing, hidden by the veil of sickness. Yet, at times, she looks upon the face of her Champion and a strange sense of love and pride surges in her.

She may never know the reason.

ISAWA UONA

Isawa Uona, the youngest daughter of a mediocre shugenja family, was apprenticed to the famous Isawa Eju, Master of Air. Shortly before the Winter Court, Eju grew ill, and passed into the Void. His will named Uona as his heir, the lawful Master of Air

and a member of the Council of Five. Her formal induction ceremony, an occasion rarely witnessed by the Empire, will be held at the Winter Court of the Seppun, offering a rare insight into the most ancient traditions of the Phoenix Clan.

MATSU GOHEI

On the battlefields of the Lion, a certain samurai has only begun to make his presence known.

His name is Matsu Gohei, son of Matsu Ochiman, son of the Matsu daimyo of old who was grandmother of Matsu Tsuko. He is a male of the line of the Matsu daimyos, filled with rage and anger toward a system which he feels is unfair. Though younger than Tsuko, his blade is keen and his skill is becoming feared through the Empire.

He cares nothing for the Lion, or for his house, except as a soldier on the field. I serve my duty alone, he says to those who question his brutality and rage against the Crane enemy. Perhaps one day, he will come to the front of his clan, leading them in time of war and peace, but for now, he is simply another soldier on the Lion front.

One day, in the coming year, he will become much more.



Imperial Nemuranai

Of all the magical and arcane items in the Empire, the relics of Amaterasu are the most important. Three items, the Mirror of the Sun, the golden No-Dachi of the Hantei line, and a piece of the purest jade, are the most sacred artifacts in Rokugan. Each symbolizes the purity and power of the unbroken Hantei line, all the way back to the Sun Mother herself.

The relics of the Hantei each contain some essence of the Imperial line, from the warrior spirit of the no-dachi to the reflection of the mirror (said to have shown the Sun her own face when she sorrowed for the loss of her children). Lastly, the jade orb represents the power of the Hantei to protect the Empire from the Shadowlands.

THE SWORD OF THE EMPEROR

Forged by Doji Yasarugi, son of Lady Doji and Kakita, the blade of this tremendous no-dachi has grown more golden over the centuries since its creation. One of the most important

legends about the sword (named Akkuai-uo) concerns the fifth Hantei.

That Prince, known to legend as Hantei Fujiwa, carried the sword into his first and only battle, some eight hundred years ago. The Crab, led by a weak daimyo, were being politically attacked by both the Lion and the Crane, and their forces were thinly drawn across the borders of their provinces.

At last, tempted by the easy prospect, the Shadowlands attacked the Crab lands. The Emperor himself, desperate to save Rokugan and rescue the Crab, led his troops from Otosan Uchi, and personally defended the border against the Oni no Usu and her legions. It is said that Hantei Fujiwa stood in the gate of Hida Castle side by side with the Crab, refusing to allow a single creature of Fu Leng's dark realm to invade the Empire.

As he fought, the blade in his hand began to glow yellow, as if inspired by the light of the sun herself. Fujiwa stood in that breach until the horde was defeated. When he was done, the Crab Champion fell to his knees in supplication, and the Emperor mandated fierce reprisals against the Crane and Lion for the greed which had almost destroyed the Empire.

Akkuai-uo resembles a massive bronze or golden no-dachi, and shines with a coppery light. When wielded by a member of the Seppun, Otomo or Hantei line, it bursts into a dark flame, delivering damage as if its wielder had a Strength of 6. Further, it doubles its damage against creatures who do not owe fealty to the Emperor of Rokugan, or anyone outside the Celestial Order.

THE MIRROR OF SEPPUN

The Mirror stays in a shrine within the Miya lands, a place sacred to to Amaterasu, and is not in the Emperor's possession. It has always been the duty of the Miya to defend the mirror, as it has always been their duty to carry the word of the Emperor throughout the land. The Shrine of Amaterasu in Miya lands lies on the spot where Amaterasu appeared to Seppun; the mirror was said to be a gift to remind the mortal world that the sun's light will never be far from their souls. The Mirror of Amaterasu is one of the three most prized nemuranai in the Empire, and is one of the symbols of the Imperial Line. When an Emperor is coronated, it is brought forth from its shrine by the Miya, who officially give it to the new Emperor, only to have it returned at the end of the ceremony.

THE ROCK OF THE KAMI

In the center of a small town near the coast of Rokugan, in the lands of the Doji, a rolling hill stands at the center of a small garden. In this garden, dedicated Seppun monks tend magnificent flowers, kept blooming year-round through the magic of Asahina shugenja who have dedicated their lives to the task. The center of the garden is the destination of numerous pilgrimages, covered in flowers and offerings from the people of the Empire: a small dark stone, no more than three feet in diameter, its surface worn by wind and time. The stone rests on this hillside, and is known as the "Stone of the Sun." Legend marks it as the place where the



children of the Sun first set foot upon the earth. From the hilltop, the great castle of Otosan Uchi can be seen, as well as the distant mountains to the south encompassing the Doji palace.



Many of the high skills in the basic *Legend of the Five Rings* RPG and in the *Way of the Clans* series are much more useful than they may appear. Any courtier worth his salt knows how to turn a situation, skill or talent to his advantage. Now it's time to teach your players to do the same!

As with all of the precedents set forth in our material, the High Skills are only as useful as the players' creativity and their GM's

willingness to allow them to 'push the limit'. While we are not suggesting that all High skills hold some innate advantage, there are many ways a skill can be used within Rokugani society without actually performing its main function. As an actor typically knows something about costuming, or a computer expert often knows a great deal about electronics, characters with skills should be allowed a certain amount of extrapolation on their skill base. Taking into account the numerous things which a character with a skill will have 'half-learned' is impossible, of course, but if the players can present a logical argument, a character with a related skill should be allowed to attempt something not directly covered by their skill base. Here we will give some examples of this, and further detailed descriptions of these High Skills.

CALLIGRAPHY (AWARENESS)

The calligraphy skill is more than the simple ability to write: it is the ability to write beautifully. Many of Rokugan's nobles can read and write, but still hire a professional scribe to administer daily tasks. Some of these tasks include writing reports to their daimyo, or drawing their personal or family mon on invitations or letters announcing their presence (to be delivered at the door, when visiting the house of another samurai). A character with a high calligraphy skill will have an easier time when trying to get permission to see his lord (or another samurai), because they will be impressed with his ability to write beautifully.

ETIQUETTE (AWARENESS)

While many players believe that the etiquette skill is only useful when trying to impress their daimyo, or another lord, the skill is actually much more useful than they would believe. Etiquette does not only apply to those who are of higher status, as it can also be used with those of less station. A servant or liegeman who is treated politely, and given the respect due their rank (without insulting them by being too polite), will be more dutiful, more willing to serve, and more loyal to their lord.

MEDICINE (INTELLIGENCE)

Medicine is a very common skill among samurai, for it includes basic first-aid and simple techniques of healing. The character may brew healing tea, and understands the flow of *chi* in the body. Other abilities are herbology lore and an understanding of the Five Elements that, while not as complex as a shugenja's, gives a character a change to see if something is wrong with a person's *chi*. A successful roll will reveal if the subject is sick, or some other problem (insanity, an unbalanced emotional state, or drugs).

SHITO DAMA

The wandering spirit of a dead person, Shito Dama are Rokugani will o'wisps. These vengeful souls appear as balls of fire who have lost their way to Jigoku. Shito Dama endlessly wander, seeking someone to show them the way by luring others to their deaths and following them to the River of Stars. Typically, they trick victims to their doom. They playfully frolic, sometimes calling out in familiar voices, then drift off in the hopes of luring them off a cliff or into a noisome bog. Cunning Shito Dama trick the living into believing they are the spirit of a relative or lover, then convince them to commit *seppuku*.

The easiest way to get rid of a Shito Dama is to ignore it. Shugenja simply pray for them, sacrificing food on their behalf so they do not become ghosts. Communing with a Shito Dama, some shugenja try to guide them to Yomi (an aspect of Jigoku), though this is often fruitless.

Willpower: 1

Intelligence: 2

Beginning Shadowlands Taint: 1

Special Abilities: Beguile, Insubstantial

Beguile: The will o'wisp is able, with a successful contested Intelligence roll against the PC, to make a person follow them for miles – even forgetting where they came from, or who they are. The individual thus beguiled may be shaken out of his trance by anyone wishing to take the action).

MEDITATION (VOID)

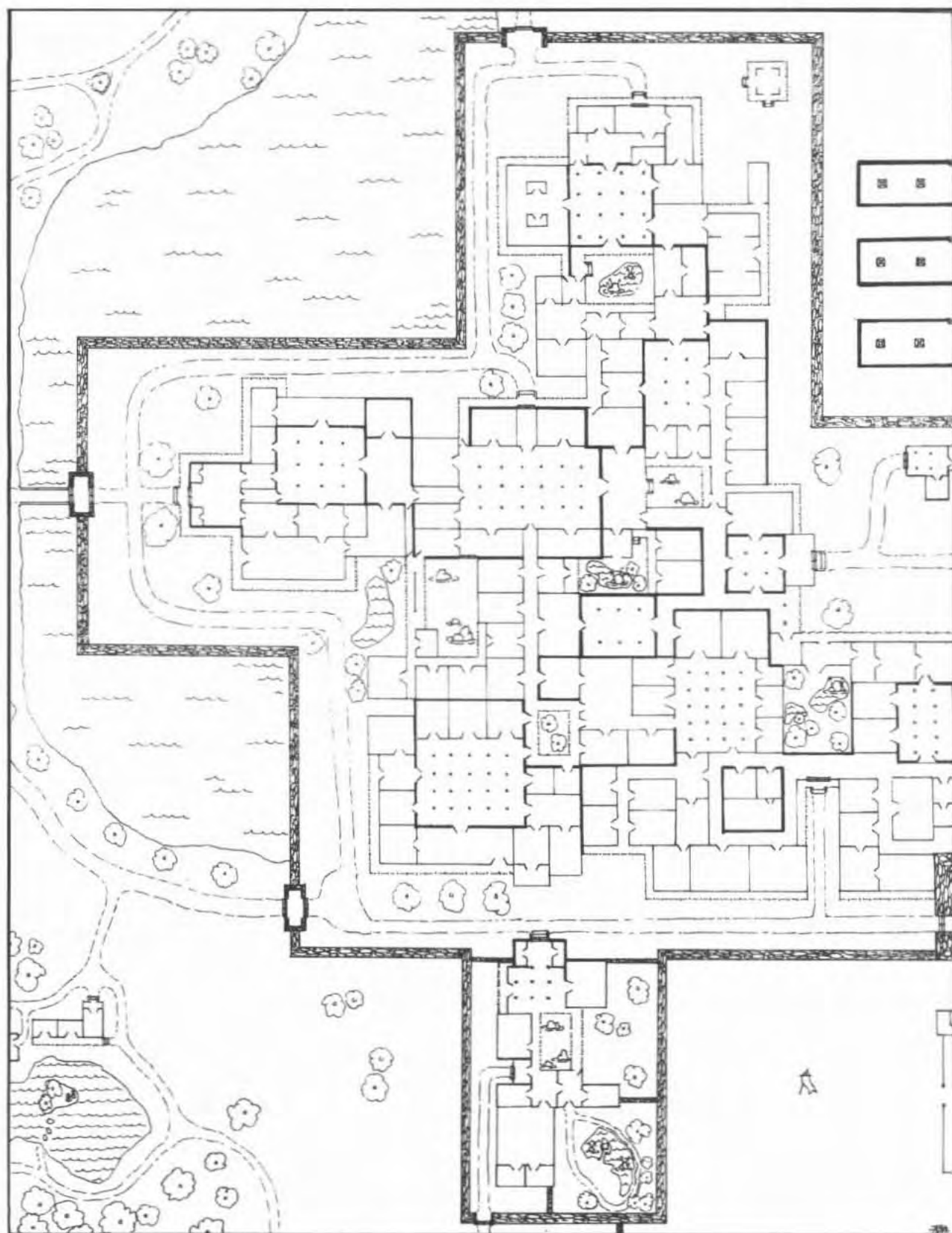
Used for inspiration, the meditation skill can assist a character to remember forgotten things, and to sharpen their mental acuity. If a character meditates on a single problem or situation, the GM should determine if they are given an 'insight', or revelation about the problem at hand. Meditation can also 'shut out the world', and allow the individual to gain control of their emotional state. If a character were angry, upset, or otherwise losing face, they might be commanded by their daimyo to meditate for several days to restore their equilibrium.

THEOLOGY/SHINTAO (INTELLIGENCE)

The study of the Fortunes is known as Theology; study of the Tao is Shintao. Theology allows a character to know the Seven Fortunes, and at higher ranks, the names and aspects of the *mikokami*, or Lesser Fortunes. They also know where many famous religious shrines are, and what the history (in myth) of each Fortune is said to be. The Shintao skill confers knowledge of the Celestial Order, and a passing understanding of the Code of Bushido (which is discussed heavily in Shinsei's Tao). Further, it can be used as an Etiquette skill when dealing with monks.

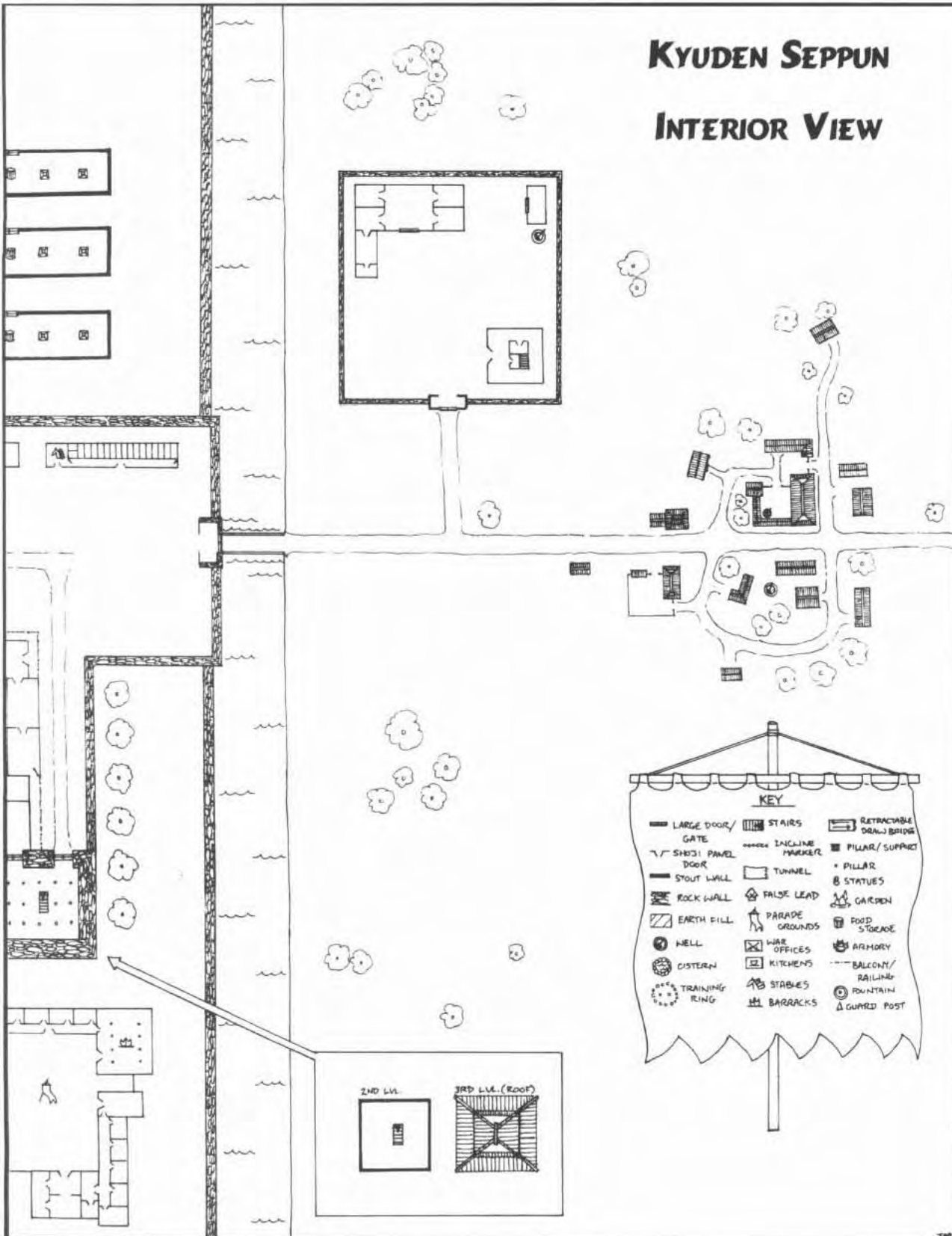
MANIPULATION (AWARENESS)

The Rokugani art of manipulation is the knowledge of psychology, and the understanding of your own mind. If someone is using manipulation on a character who also has the skill, the target may make an Awareness+Manipulation roll (TN of 5 x opponent's Manipulation) to see if they perceive that they are being influenced.



KYUDEN SEPPUN

INTERIOR VIEW



KYUDEN SEPPUN EXTERIOR VIEW

