Secrets of the Empire

Legend of the Five Rings

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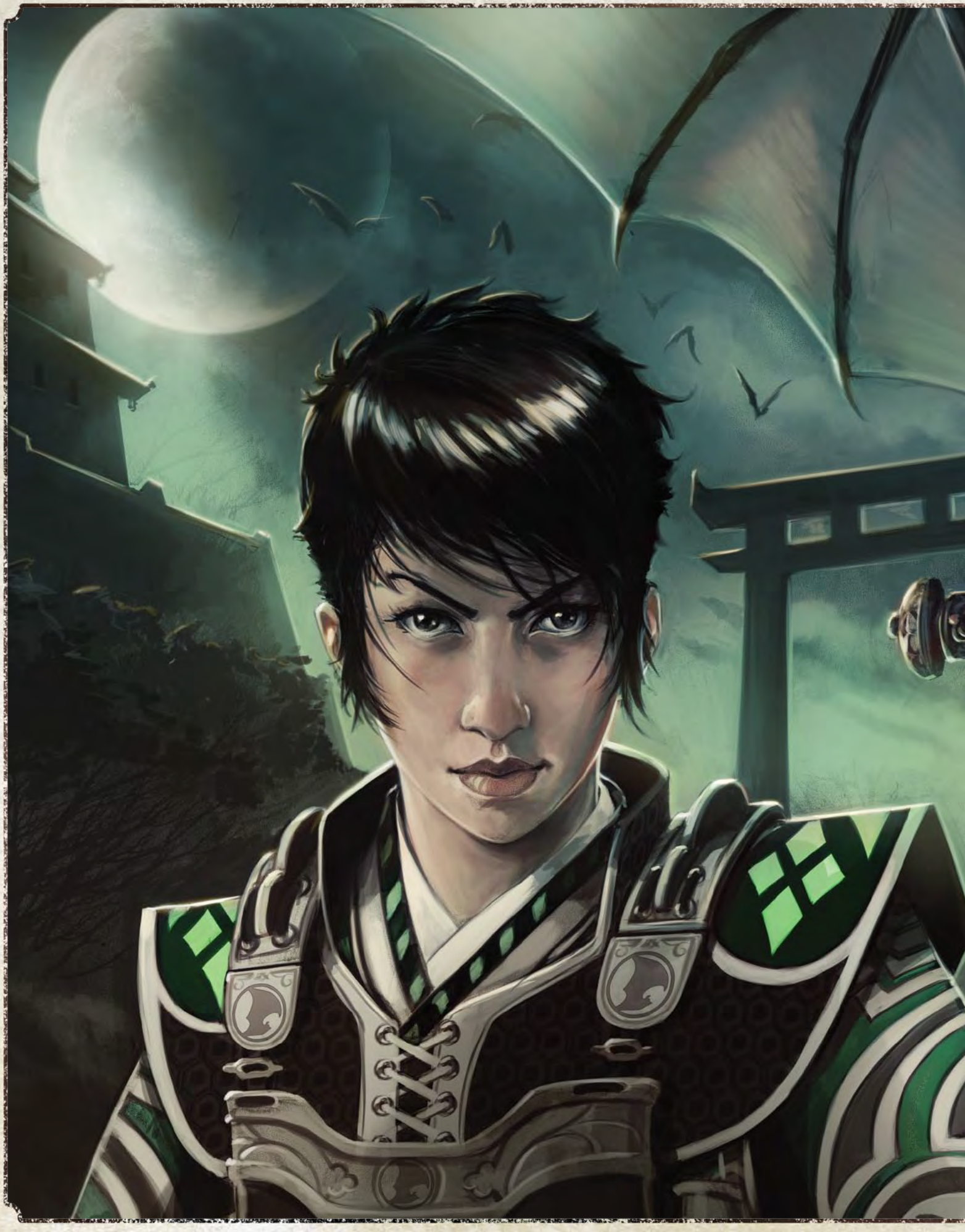


INTRODUCTION

When they reached the apex of the hill, Seppun Munenori held up his hand, bringing the small Imperial caravan to a halt. The Sun had just begun its descent behind the horizon, and it cast orange and amethyst swathes of light throughout the valley beneath them. From this vantage, he could just make out the pagoda-topped buildings of the distant village and the glittering surface of the thin river that wound past it.

Munenori smiled. They would be there by nightfall.

"Is that it?" the boy asked.

Munenori nodded at his son. "That is Kyokusen-Kawa Mura," he affirmed, "the home of our hosts. And, if the Fortunes permit, the home of your future bride."

The boy stared at the village for a long time. "Where is the palace?" he finally asked.

Munenori smiled wryly. "There is no palace in this village."

The boy was silent, but it was clear he did not understand. Every village had a palace, at least as far as he had known.

The caravan resumed its travel, slowly winding down through the valley. Swollen rice paddies flanked the road on either side, and the rice-farmers still worked, squeezing in every last minute of daylight. The boy watched silently as silhouetted forms bent knee-deep in the still waters. He had never seen farming before now.

"Is she a farmer?" he asked suddenly.

Munenori laughed. "Oh no! Of course not. She's the daughter of my friend. You'll meet her tomorrow, my son." His eyes turned toward the distant reaches of the valley and the Dragon Clan's mountains beyond.

"Look," he said, gesturing into the distance. "Those are the Shining Moon Fields. It is said ghosts appear there." He smiled as his son's eyes widened. "When I was young, I once found a diamond there as big as my eye. It was just sitting in the dirt there, with many others."

"The Dragonfly have diamonds in their lands?" the boy asked. "Then why are they so poor?"

"Because it is not important to them," Munenori replied. He thought for a moment. "My son, you may not understand this now, but everything has a purpose in this Empire. From the humble farmer to the noble samurai, everyone has their part. Some of our friends back home have forgotten this. That is why I've brought you here." He looked back to the horizon. "I want you to remember this when you are older."

The boy was not listening right now, but that was all right. With time, he would learn the Empire was far more vast and complex than he had originally believed. Eventually, he might even learn he did not have to understand everything. The world did not ask for understanding, but simply kept presenting new riddles.

"Come, my son," Munenori said, as the Tonbo came out from their houses to greet them. "It is time to meet your mother's people."

Welcome to Secrets of the Empire, the latest sourcebook for the Legend of the Five Rings Role-Playing Game, 4th Edition! Our previous supplements have largely focused on the history, traditions, and personalities of the Great Clans, the Empire's most powerful and influential samurai. Founded by the god-like Kami, the Great Clans are the Emperor's most powerful servants and the center of its history. However, they are far from the only servants of the Empire, and throughout Rokugan's history the actions of lesser players have often taken on epic proportions. In this supplement, we turn our attention from the greatest of the Empire's servants to its lesser-known and – in some cases – its most humble. It is in these often-overlooked corners, in the backwater lands between Great Clan provinces, the hidden courts of the Forbidden City, and the quiet temples to ancient wisdom, that we will truly find the secrets of the Empire...

In Enemies of the Empire, we examined various factions whose goals were often at odds with the Empire, as well as some of the Empire's lesser-known denizens such as spirits and ronin. In this supplement, we seek to do much the same, but whereas that tome spotlighted the Empire's enemies, this book focuses on its citizens and allies. Secrets of the Empire is the first 4th Edition supplement fully detailing the ways of the Empire's Minor Clans, Rokugan's lesser samurai families. Also examined are the traditions and secrets of the Imperial families, the nobility who directly serve the Emperor, and for the first time in 4th Edition we will take a close look at the families of the Empire's three Imperial Dynasties themselves. We also re-examine the Empire's ronin, the masterless samurai who seek their own destinies, and investigate the mysteries of the Empire's greatest religious teachers in the Brotherhood of Shinsei. And finally, we will gaze beyond the veil of the mortal world into the Spirit Realms themselves.

What Is This Book?

While the Great Clans, the Empire's most powerful and influential factions, are the focus of most of Rokugan's history and of the L5R role-playing game, not every L5R player wants to run a "mainstream" character. Playing a samurai from a Minor Clan offers a different sort of appeal than a Great Clan character, allowing for a different and refreshing perspective. Conversely, playing a sacrosanct member of an Imperial family holds an entirely different sort of appeal... and offers different challenges as well. The goal of this book is to offer both GMs and players the information necessary to portray characters from these uncommon walks of life, as well as further enriching the lore and history of the Emerald Empire. And while the information in this book is designed primarily for "canonical" portrayals of these factions, each section can also be used as a guideline for creating your own factions and taking Rokugan down your own path.

The contents of this book comprise the following:

Chapter One: The Minor Clans

This chapter examines the nature and history of the Minor Clans in Rokugan and offers in-depth discussions of ten of these clans, including their history, customs, traditions, and unique aspects. Since previous books have extensively discussed the history of the Mantis Clan (and the three other Minor Clans who joined its ranks) and of the former Falcon Clan which later joined the Crab, this book focuses on the other Minor Clans who have not been greatly detailed in earlier 4th Edition products: the Badger, Bat, Boar, Dragonfly, Hare, Monkey, Oriole, Ox, Sparrow, and Tortoise.

Chapter Two: The Imperial Families

This chapter discusses the role and function of the Imperial Families in the greater Empire. It examines the Imperial Bureaucracy, the three Imperial families who serve the Emperor (the Miya, Otomo, and Seppun) and offers in-depth examinations of the families comprising the Empire's three known Dynasties: the Hantei, the Toturi, and the Iweko.

Chapter Three: Ronin

Continuing the examinations of ronin begun in *Enemies of the Empire*, this chapter recounts the impact of important ronin throughout the Empire's history, shining the spotlight on those larger-than-life masterless samurai and their organizations. Also included is an in-depth look at how the other factions see the Empire's wave-men.

Chapter Four: The Brotherhood of Shinsei

Despite its considerable religious and political influence, the Brotherhood of Shinsei has been largely neglected by L5R 4th Edition up to this time. No longer! In this chapter we examine the history and role of Shinsei's monastic followers and see how the Brotherhood helped shape the world of Rokugan. The chapter also includes an in-depth look at the Brotherhood's various sects and its internal governance, as well as a discussion of heretical groups such as the Fudo sect.

Chapter Five: Beyond the Veil

The spirit realms have been briefly discussed in the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook as well as in *Enemies of the Empire*. This chapter finally examines the spirit realms in detail and reveals their secrets, including their Celestial purpose, their denizens and hierarchies, and their spheres of influence.

Appendix: New Mechanics

The book concludes with an assortment of new game mechanics for L5R 4th Edition, designed to enhance the options for players who run characters based on these various factions. New materials include Alternate Paths for Minor Clans and Imperial characters, many new options for ronin, and new Ancestors and Heritage Tables for these factions.

Chapter One

The Way of the Minor Clans

Suzume Honto crouched behind the makeshift barricade and tried to calm his breathing. The Scorpion were coming. The invasion had struck with almost no warning, but the Sparrow Clan had erected what defenses it could. Now the Sparrow waited to receive the enemy.

The Scorpion troops crested the hill and stopped, banners fluttering, visibly startled by the defenses arrayed before them. It was obvious the Scorpion had not expected the Sparrow to actually fight them. Equally obviously, they did not consider the Sparrow to be a real threat; within a few minutes, several hundred samurai emerged from the ranks and gathered into loose, almost casual, formations. They expected to run right over the Sparrow position.

Suzume Honto could not say he disagreed with their assessment. He had managed to muster only seventy-five Sparrow to defend his position. His men wore the simplest of light armor, if they had armor at all, and their fortifications were crude wooden barricades, often merely wagons on their sides or a few sharpened poles planted in the ground.

We will be slaughtered, *he thought.* But we will make the Scorpion remember we are samurai.

The Scorpion samurai let out a loud "Banzai!" and began to advance on the Sparrow lines, picking up speed as they marched closer. A few of the younger Scorpion, hungry for glory, broke free of their formation and charged the barricades at a sprint.

A flurry of hand-hurled yari brought down all but one of the glory-seekers before they reached the barricades. The last one reached the lines and charged through a gap in the barricades, only to be cut down by the Sparrow standing ready on the other side. Honto permitted himself a brief smile. Did you think us simpletons?

Then the full force of the Scorpion army slammed into the barricades, and the spears and katana of both sides rang against armor and enemy weapons. For a few minutes the battle raged; then the barricades began to fall one by one as the Scorpions' superior numbers overwhelmed the defenders. Suzume Honto drew his own sword and prepared to sell his life as dearly as he could.

Few of the Scorpion noticed when a distant hillside changed its shape, revealing almost fifty men wearing armor in an odd pattern of yellow and black. The strangers calmly raised bows and began to fire. Despite the range, the arrows flew with lethal accuracy, cutting down dozens of Scorpion bushi in moments.

Honto felt a surge of unexpected hope. He shouted to his men to rally, and as more and more Scorpion fell to the flights of arrows the tide of battle began to shift. At that moment the ground beneath the feet of the Scorpion seemed to buckle and heave, as though by an earthquake, and their lines shattered. The Sparrow charged forward, screaming in triumph, as the Scorpion troops ran for their lives. The strange archers unleashed one final volley into the backs of the retreating samurai, then lowered their bows.

Suzume Honto staggered to an exhausted halt, his men around him gasping with similar weariness, as they

watched the last of the Scorpion banners disappear over the hill. A ragged shout of triumph sounded across the battlefield, and the archers echoed it.

After a few moments, Honto spotted two strangers approaching: a tall young man in the archers' yellow and black, and an older man in a simple brown kimono. As they drew near he made out the clan mon on their garments, and a smile cracked through the dirt and blood coating his face. He bowed deeply. "Tsuruchi-sama, Kitsune-sama, you have my great thanks for your assistance, and the thanks of my lord as well. All of the Sparrow Clan is in your debt."

The other two Minor Clan samurai bowed in return, and the Wasp spoke. "It was our pleasure, Suzume-sama. What kind of neighbors would we be if we let the Scorpion march over you and flout the Emperor's law?"

Honto nodded. "I cannot speak for my lord, not yet. But for myself, I pledge to aid the Wasp and the Fox any time you should be in need."

The Fox shugenja smiled, his green eyes sparkling in the sunlight. "Three men standing together will always be stronger than one alone. So may it continue, against all who would threaten any of us."

What are Minor Clans?

The political and military work of the Empire is done primarily by the samurai of the Great Clans. Each Great Clan was assigned a specific duty by the first Hantei, and these duties remain largely unchanged through the centuries, defining the identities of the clans. The Great Clans are essentially static, fulfilling the same roles and seldom changing even in minor ways. By contrast, the Minor Clans have much more limited and often uncertain roles within the Empire. They are vulnerable and ephemeral, formed or disbanded in response to brief events or momentary changes, and more than one Minor Clan has vanished into the Empire's history, destroyed or forgotten.

The basic definition of a Minor Clan is a group of samurai who have the official sanction of the Emperor to call themselves such. Only the Emperor can authorize the creation of a recognized Minor Clan – any group of ronin can call themselves a "clan," but their claim has no meaning until and unless the Emperor approves it. While there have often been large groups of ronin in the Empire, groups in some cases as large or larger than Minor Clans, without the official sanction of the Emperor they can never be more than mere ronin bands, no matter how powerful or well-organized they might be. Some Minor Clans actually began as such ronin bands, such as the Mantis Clan or the Ox Clan, but being a powerful ronin band is not in itself a guarantee of attaining Minor Clan status; just as many, if not more, Minor Clans have been created due to the Emperor rewarding a lone individual, who then gathers followers to create his clan.

Since the reign of Hantei Genji, it has been forbidden by Imperial decree for a Great Clan to make war on a Minor Clan. However, this decree has been enforced differently in various eras, and a number of exceptions have emerged – for instance, a Minor Clan guilty of practicing maho or other criminal activity loses the Emperor's protection. In some eras the Emperor will also allow a Great Clan to wage war on a Minor Clan if the Great Clan can claim a legitimate insult or other justification. Still, taken as a whole it remains generally unacceptable to wage war on a Minor Clan.

Creating a Minor Clan

Only the Emperor can officially create (or disband) a Minor Clan. It can be said that Minor Clans exist on the Emperor's whim, and indeed there have been a few over the history of the Empire which were created merely on an Emperor's personal whim. Most, however, are created as rewards for specific deeds or to serve a specific purpose. The following represent the main reasons for an Emperor to create a Minor Clan:

Solving a Political Dispute

There are times when a political or military clash between the Great Clans becomes so acute that it threatens to result in severe bloodshed and chaos. Occasionally, the Emperor may decide to take an active

hand in such disputes and create a Minor Clan in order to resolve the disagreement without further conflict. The Dragonfly Clan was created, in part, to settle a dispute between the Lion and Dragon Clans. The Wasp Clan was founded following a situation in which the son of a Scorpion and a Lion was betrayed by both clans and captured a border castle claimed by both clans. The Sparrow Clan's creation helped resolve the lingering disputes between Crab and Crane after the First Yasuki War. Other Minor Clans might be created to solve similar border disputes, to settle issues of ownership of lucrative natural resources, or for any number of other such conflict-related reasons.

To Protect a Favored Group

When Shinjo led the Ki-Rin Clan into the Burning Sands, Hantei swore he would protect the members of the clan who remained behind in the Empire. When the Lion went to war against these remnants of the Ki-Rin a few generations later, Emperor Hantei Genji granted the Ki-Rin new lands of their own, made them a Minor Clan, and issued the Imperial decree forbidding Great Clans from waging full-scale war upon any Minor Clan. Other Minor Clans might be created from similar motives any time the Emperor wishes to protect a group of people from being destroyed by a Great Clan; arguably the Dragonfly Clan and the Wasp Clan both benefited from such considerations.

To Accomplish a Specific Task

On more than one occasion the Emperor has recognized the need for some new duty and created a Minor Clan to fulfill that duty. The earliest example of this is the Badger Clan, assigned the duty of protecting the passes through the northern mountains. The Tortoise Clan was also created to conduct a single task, that of keeping watch over the gaijin who had assaulted the Empire at the Battle of White Stag. Other such unusual duties, too unconventional or distasteful for the Great Clans, might convince the Emperor to create a new Minor Clan for the the purpose.

In Reward for Great Works or Service

There have been many heroes and noble samurai in the history of the Empire, and a few of them have been rewarded with the right to form their own Minor Clan. Indeed, this is probably the most common way for a Minor Clan to come into existence. The Tsi family of ronin proved to be such amazing smiths that they were finally given the right to form the Oriole Clan. Toku's heroism alongside Toturi the Black earned him the right to form the Monkey Clan. The ronin warrior Reichin's actions in the eighth century gained him the right to create the Hare Clan. Isawa Chuda's descendants were allowed to form the Snake Clan in honor of his battles against a deadly maho cult. The Falcon Clan was formed after the ronin Yotogi saved an Imperial advisor from an assassin possessed by an evil spirit. The founders of the Boar Clan, Hida Heichi and his followers, survived in the Twilight Mountains after the Crab Clan had given them up for dead. The Bat Clan was formed when Yoritomo Komori performed a great spiritual feat for the Emperor. Any such great act of service to the Empire or the Imperial house can result in a samurai – whether clan samurai or ronin – being awarded the right to form a Minor Clan.

In Acknowledgement of Strength

There are two known instances of a ronin band becoming recognized as a Minor Clan simply because it had grown strong enough to gain the respect of the Emperor. The first of these was the Mantis Clan, a band of ronin formed during the Dawn of the Empire who finally won official clan status from the Emperor in the year 429. The second of these is the Ox Clan in the twelfth century, which became strong enough to play an important role in the War of Spirits. In theory, any other samurai who is able to gather a similar powerful and loyal group of followers might eventually be granted the right to form a Minor Clan.

On a Whim

The Emperor can form a Minor Clan at any time, and might do so in a fit of pique, to shame a political rival, or merely from personal desire. Arguably this could be seen as the real reason for the creation of the Sparrow Clan, formed after Doji Suzume expressed an interpretation of Shinsei's teaching that thrilled the common folk but deeply embarrassed his own Crane Clan. The Emperor commanded Suzume to take his admirers and create a new Minor Clan, though scholars still argue about whether this was a sincere action, an attempt to placate the Crane Champion, or an attempt to shame Suzume.

In Answer to Divine Mandate

Sometimes the Heavens themselves decree that certain samurai are special. When Isawa Azami, the matriarch of a small group of Isawa shugenja, received the personal blessing of Amateratsu herself, the Emperor readily granted her the right to form the Centipede Clan. Any time a samurai shows an amazing spiritual ability or is blessed by the Heavens in some way, the Emperor might acknowledge this by letting the samurai form a new Minor Clan.

The Lost Minor Clans

The number of Minor Clans in existence has varied widely over the history of Rokugan. Some Minor Clans have been destroyed in one way or another, while others have been absorbed by various Great Clans. After the Mantis became a Great Clan, they later absorbed the Centipede, the Wasp, and eventually the Fox. The Falcon were absorbed by the Crab Clan. The Boar and Snake Clans were both wiped off the face of the Empire.

Moreover, over the centuries various Emperors have created other short-lived Minor Clans, some lasting only a few years, others a few generations at best. Some are created for specific tasks which are later completed, rendered them superfluous. Others suffer tragedies in the manner of the Boar Clan, while still others simply fall out of favor with the Emperor and are disbanded and removed from the records. These clans are seldom remembered after their brief lifespans conclude, and no one really knows how many of them have existed through the centuries.

For example, in the twelfth century a scroll was found which detailed the brief history of one of these lost clans, the Tanuki Clan. The Tanuki Clan was founded by a member of the Badger Clan, making it the only known Minor Clan to itself be founded by a member of a Minor Clan. The Tanuki founder, whose name has been lost to history, wandered out of the Shinomen after having disappeared into the forest over a year earlier. He related the things he had seen to the Emperor, who allowed him to form a Minor Clan for the purpose of exploring the Shinomen Forest and sending reports of their findings back to Otosan Uchi. However, when a new Emperor came to power, he decided the project was absurd and ordered the whole clan summoned to the Imperial Court. The order was never obeyed, however, because the entire clan had vanished into the Shinomen; the Emperor spitefully ordered all records of the Tanuki removed from the Imperial Histories.

Many other similar events have doubtless occurred over the Empire's history, and the possibilities for Minor Clans are only limited by the hubris of individual Emperors. GMs seeking inspiration can consider the following possibilities:

In an era where the Emperor is paranoid or rules with an iron fist, he might create a clan of spies and assassins, perhaps the Ferret Clan or the Rat Clan. Such a clan would likely not survive a later change in leadership.

The Price of Being a Minor Clan Samurai

A samurai in a Minor Clan is, essentially, a second-class citizen of the Empire. He will never be as well respected as a Great Clan samurai of similar rank. He will always be treated as ranking lower in the Celestial Order, always considered a person of little importance. He will have to work harder to make the same political gains, to gain the same glory or the same respect. His word will be treated as though it is worth less and his accomplishments are considered less praiseworthy. He is also less well-protected than members of a Great Clan, since many samurai who would be wary of gaining the enmity of someone from a Great Clan will think little of offending a Minor Clan samurai. Ultimately, being a Minor Clan samurai is a constant uphill struggle for dignity and respect.

A particularly pious Emperor, especially during a time of turmoil or ill fortune in the Empire might create a Crow Clan whose duty was to protect mendicant monks. Once times stabilized, there would be no further need for such a clan, which would most likely be absorbed into the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

An equestrian Emperor might create a Horse Clan charged with stocking and maintaining the Imperial Stables. Such a clan would be unlikely to survive the return of the Unicorn Clan.

So You've Founded a Minor Clan. Now What?

What happens after a samurai manages to do something so amazing as to be named founder of a Minor Clan? Most of the time, the Emperor grants the new Minor Clan some land. Sometimes the land is taken from a Great Clan; sometimes it is land that is unaligned or has been left uninhabited. Whatever the case, the clan founder must recruit followers – both samurai and *heimin* – to live on, tend to, and administer his lands. Recruiting samurai is fairly easy, since there are always a few samurai willing to swear fealty for a chance at glory and advancement within a new clan, even a Minor Clan. Peasants can actually be harder to recruit, since they are usually tied to the lands where they were born. In some cases a clan founder may actually have to beg the Great Clans for permission to take a few of their *heimin* for his own use.

Once the founder has recruited his initial group, he must begin turning his lands into a proper home for his nascent Minor Clan. In some cases there will already be villages or a castle on the lands gifted to the Minor Clan by the Emperor, but more often the new clan will need to build its own villages, dig its own rice paddies, and construct its castle from the ground up. Such construction is both time-consuming and expensive; although the Emperor may sometimes gift the new clan with the resources for its initial work, this is by no means assured. Most clan founders must struggle to acquire the resources they need, which can again lead to becoming indebted to a nearby Great Clan.

Finally, the Minor Clan must survive. It is easy for a new clan to be swept up and destroyed by the tides of the political seas, or become so subservient to a great Clan that it loses its individuality and is absorbed. Few Minor Clans have skilled courtiers, so finding political allies without overcommitting oneself is the key. Isolation can also work, although this limits the availability of outside resources and trade.

For any Minor Clan, surviving these first few years of existence is the key to long-term success. A GM seeking a compelling high-stakes challenge for a group of PCs may find the origins of a Minor Clan the ideal setting.

The Badger Clan

Ichiro Kohiro, daimyo *of the Fortress of Teeth, awoke to the sound of the alarm gong. After a brief moment of confusion he looked toward the window and saw an orange glow on the horizon. He frowned and nudged his wife; she rolled over, for a moment looking at him with affection, then sitting up sharply. "What is wrong?"*

Kohiro sighed as he stood up from the futon and quickly began pulling on his kimono and hakama. "I don't know, but you'd best get the children ready to evacuate. Wake Hira and Takashi when you do, and tell them I told them to protect you and the children. They're to guide you on to the Scowl."

She nodded and rose without another question. Her bare feet slapped the tatami mats as she hurried into the outer chambers, calling for servants to gather her traveling bags. Kohiro forced himself not to watch her go; instead he tied his sandals on, snatched his ono from the rack on the wall, and stepped out onto the balcony outside his chamber. The chilly mountain air bit at his skin, but he hardly felt it as he took in the situation.

The horizon to the north glowed an unnatural orange, as if something vast was burning. The men on the castle wall were peering down the pass as if they were not exactly sure what they were seeing.

A scream rang from the barracks. Before it had stopped Kohiro was bounding down the castle stairs, six at a time. Other Badger samurai were answering the screams from elsewhere in the castle, but Kohiro was still the first to reach the barracks door and slam it open.

Inside, all was chaos. Of the ten men who had been sleeping in the room, all but one lay on their blood-soaked futons, dead from slit throats. The one living man was backed into the corner, surrounded by strange men clad in dirty rags who clutched blood-stained daggers. The Badger samurai grabbed one of the dirty men by the head and shoulders and twisted, nearly wrenching the gaijin's head from his shoulders. But as the man died, his body erupted in a massive explosion of flames and heat. The blast threw Kohiro halfway across the courtyard.

A few moments later, Kohiro dragged himself to his feet, swatting out the flames on his hakama. He looked into the destroyed barracks and allowed himself a sigh. No one could have lived though that. The daimyo *turned and climbed the stairs to the fortress walls, calling his men to join him. The past could not be changed, and duty still awaited.*

Looking down the pass, he could see thousands of the same rag-clad foreign men climbing the slope towards the fortress... and toward the rest of the Badger lands, and the Empire beyond. He glanced around and saw that of the twenty men stationed in the Fortress of Teeth, only he and five others still lived. No, seven; he could see the two young samurai, Hira and Takashi, leaving the keep with the wives and children, his own family among them. The two warriors were barely more than boys, but they would have to be responsible for saving the future of the Badger Clan. Kohiro did not speak to them, or to his family; he just made a single gesture, sharp and simple: Go.

The two samurai bowed to their daimyo *and ushered the women and children toward the escape tunnels.*

Ichiro Kohiro turned to his remaining samurai. "Well, this looks like it's going to be it. Some of us lived in the time of the great Oni. Some of us spent time as mercenaries out in the Empire. But we've always known our proper death should be here, defending the Badger lands, defending the Empire. So let's make it worth something. Let's take as many of these flaming bastards with us as we can. Let's see how they like our teeth!"

The five samurai roared a cheer, hurling defiance down the pass toward the gaijin invaders. Together, they moved to one of the enormous boulders set on the battlements, shoving it from its perch. The massive stone rumbled and splintered down the pass, smashing the foreign men climbing the slope. Bodies burst into flames as they were crushed and battered aside by the mighty rock. By the time the boulder reached the bottom of the slope, the whole pass seemed to be aflame, burning with unnatural fire.

Twice more they were able to drop their stone Teeth upon the massing horde. Then the attackers reached spear range, and the Badger switched to nage-yari, snatching the short throwing spears from massive quivers behind the battlements. The spears rained down on the ragged men, each strike followed by a small fireball that engulfed the men around it. Some of the foreigners carried bows, crude things compared to Rokugani weapons, but at close range they were dangerous. One by one, Kohiro's men began to fall.

Exhausted, the daimyo *looked down the pass once more. The enemy seemed endless, and now he could see a large group of them coming up, gathered together as though guarding something. Kohiro wondered if his family had reached the next fortress yet, then forced the thought out of his mind. He was a Badger, and his duty was not done.*

He stumbled across the battlement to the last of the Teeth. It took at least four men, preferably more, to rock the great stones off their perches, but he could see none of his samurai standing anymore. Kohiro nodded to himself, mouthing a prayer to Bishamon, and set his shoulder against the side of the Tooth. He filled his lungs with a great breath and heaved, straining with every ounce of the strength he had spent a lifetime building. The muscles of his chest and arms corded and stood out like iron rods, and his vision turned red and then black, but still he strained against the great rock. His family, his clan, his Empire were all counting on him. No mere rock would ever stand in the way of his duty.

The massive boulder shifted, almost imperceptibly at first, then faster and faster. It toppled over the battlements, and Kohiro for a moment stood where it had been, gasping for breath as his heart labored in his chest.

For a moment his eyes cleared, and he saw the Tooth plow into the cluster of gaijin below. They exploded in a massive gout of white-hot flames. Then his heart stuttered and gave out, and he sank to his knees, his vision fading.

The old Badger thought one last time of his family, and smiled. His children would be proud of him.

The History of the Badger Clan

"I once heard some Crab say they are the Wall. Bah! Walls can be torn down. It's better to be the bedrock the wall is built on."

– Ichiro Chuga

The Badger Clan has almost been extinguished twice, but has survived both times, showing the resilience of the mountains where its people live. The Badger claim to be the second-oldest of the Minor Clans, but there have been many times during the history of the Empire when they would have been altogether forgotten if they had not continued sending in their annual taxes. In fact, during the twelfth century they came close to losing their Minor Clan status entirely. Yet they also gained respect from the Great Clans in that era, and were able to rebuild their clan from disastrous near-destruction not once but twice.

The Founding of the Badger

After the First War against Fu Leng, Shinjo and the Ki-Rin departed the Empire to learn what other threats might lie outside its borders. Hantei saw that the mountain passes the Ki-Rin used to leave the Empire might also be a venue for foreign enemies to enter Rokugan, and decided someone should be tasked with defending them. Unfortunately, he died soon after, and it was not until the year 110, during the reign of his son Hantei Genji, that this duty was finally assigned.

In the interim, the remnants of the Ki-Rin Clan, who lived in the lands to the south of the mountain passes, were displaced by the Lion Clan and settled in the forest far to the south, becoming the first official Minor Clan, the Fox. This left the lands around the mountains virtually deserted, since the Lion did not live in them and had no interest in them. Hantei Genji decided he should hold a tournament to determine who would gain the honor of protecting the northern passes into the Empire. It was determined the contest would be one of strength rather than swordsmanship, since any warriors who were to live in the remote northern mountains would need to be strong and self-reliant.

When the tournament commenced, the descendent of one of Shinjo's original followers, Kitsune Mako, stepped forward to claim the duty he believed should have belonged to the Ki-Rin. Mako was an enormously strong man and at first it seemed no one wished to challenge him. However, before Hantei Genji could declare Mako the undisputed victor of the tournament, a member of the Crab Clan stepped forward. Hida Domogu was taller than Mako but also leaner, and many believed he did not expect to win and was merely trying to make a good showing for his clan. Nonetheless, the Emperor accepted the challenge and the two men faced one another bare-chested in the dueling ring. Their struggle was violent and shocking, for the reign of Hantei Genji had already accustomed his court to more refined and civilized competitions, and while the Crab had undertaken the study of wrestling it would be centuries before sumai would become popular elsewhere in Rokugan. The Fox and the Crab remained locked in their struggle for a long time – perhaps hours, to hear later accounts – but finally Mako let out a cry and Domogu threw him from the ring.

Domogu was granted the duty of guarding the northern mountains, and the right to create a new Minor Clan for that purpose, the Badger Clan. He was given the family name Ichiro, which means "first-born son." Modern historians dispute the reasons behind why the Badger were given this family name; some believe it is because the Badger were the first Minor Clan created from nothing by the Emperor, rather than merely the re-organized remnants of another clan. Others believe they were called Ichiro because they were to be the first line of defense for the northern Empire. Whatever the case, Kitsune Mako became the first samurai to swear fealty to the Ichiro name.

Domogu and his former lord, Hida, had a brief personal conference before he and his followers ventured north. No one is certain what the two men spoke about, but once Domogu and his followers arrived in the northern passes, they immediately began work on a series of fortresses to defend them.

Ten Centuries of Quiet

"I decided to climb the northern mountains. Did you know that there are samurai defending those passes? I think they called themselves 'Badger.'"

– Mirumoto Mohiro, year 675

After the original followers of Ichiro Domogu built their mountain fortresses and the infrastructure to support them, they settled into their lands to wait. They discovered iron in the mountains and they found places to grow rice and vegetables, although in years of bad harvests they

often needed to purchase additional food with the surplus from the mines. Still, as a whole they did not require the support of the Empire to do their duty.

Through the centuries, the Badger continued improving their fortresses, turning the mountain passes into a series of deadly traps and obstacles which an enemy army would find expensive and difficult to cross. From the beginning, their strategy did not seek victory – they knew their clan was too small to withstand any truly determined invasion – but rather delay and attrition, with defenses designed to weaken and slow an invasion and thereby buy time for the Empire as a whole to respond. Unfortunately, within two centuries the Empire had all but forgotten they existed. There were whole generations in which the only Badger samurai to leave the mountains were those who took their annual taxes to the Imperial capital. In fact, on one occasion an Imperial scribe examining the Empire's accounts noticed an influx of revenue that was marked as being from "the Badger Clan" and assumed it was fraudulent, an attempt to mask impropriety or bribes. He launched an investigation into the source of the money that only ended when the Emperor himself recounted in court the story of the founding and duties of the Badger Clan.

The Badger themselves did not particularly care whether or not they were known in the Empire, for as the centuries passed they increasingly made a virtue of self-reliance. They also developed a particular dislike of the Empire's reliance on magic. Shugenja were extremely rare within their bloodlines, and in the Badger mind the strength of a samurai's own muscle was always preferable to borrowing the strength of the kami.

Tragically, this ignorance and lack of contact with the rest of the Empire would almost cause the Badger's extinction, as a people and as a clan.

The Rise of Hideo no Oni

The early twelfth century was a time when the Badger actually sought to have some presence in the rest of the Empire, in part because they feared their duty was no longer accorded proper respect by the rest of Rokugan. There were Badger emissaries in some of the courts, and Badger daimyo did what they could to improve their relations with other clans. However, this renewed involvement in the affairs of the Empire was not without cost; in the year 1118 the Badger Clan Champion, Ichiro Akitomo, was assassinated while attending the Topaz Championship in Crane lands. The crime was never solved. Akitomo's son, Ichiro Chuga, assumed leadership of the clan and attempted to continue his father's policies of outreach, albeit with more caution.

In the year 1126, the Badger Clan faced a sudden and terrible disaster – brought about by none other than two of Chuga's sons, Hideo and Koturi. Ichiro Hideo, the eldest, was handsome and strong, traits much admired by the rest of the Badger Clan. His younger brother, Ichiro Koturi, was a small man with the ability to speak with the spirits, an exceedingly rare trait in the clan. During their youth, Koturi saved Hideo's life, but he never received the recognition he believed he deserved for having done so. As their careers progressed, Koturi was constantly disregarded in favor of his older and stronger brother. Ichiro Chuga, eager to build alliances with the rest of the Empire, arranged a marriage between Hideo and a woman named Agasha Mumoko. Unfortunately, Koturi fell in love with Mumoko and later followed her back to the Agasha lands – ostensibly to train in the arts of the shugenja, but actually to pursue his desperate and hopeless suit for her hand.

The "First" Minor Clan

There is considerable dispute in Rokugan as to which Minor Clan can truly claim to be the first such clan to come into existence. The Fox Clan claim to be the first on the simple grounds that they were the first Minor Clan to be officially named and recognized as such by the Emperor. The Mantis often claim they were the first on the basis of chronology, even though they were not officially granted Minor Clan status until the fifth century. The Badger Clan, however, also has a claim to this title. Some historians have credited Hantei himself, rather than his son Genji, with holding the tournament to create the clan, and claim Domogu was given the name Ichiro to signify that the Badger were the first clan Hantei himself created. These tales also name the man who lost the tournament as Shinjo Mako, not Kitsune Mako, and claim the tournament took place soon after the year 46 when Shinjo left the Empire.

It is up to the GM to decide which version of the Badger Clan's history is the true one in your version of Rokugan.

While in the lands of the Agasha, Koturi found an ancient scroll and experimented with it, anxious to find something which could prove he was a better man than his brother. Unfortunately for him, the scroll invoked a kansen. Using Koturi's resentment of his brother, the kansen tricked Koturi into using his brother's name to summon an oni, the monster called Hideo no Oni. This Tainted Hideo and, more importantly, unleashed an immense demon which ravaged the lands of the Badger Clan. Ichiro Chuga and three-fourths of the clan's strength perished at the demon's hands, and all of their fortresses were destroyed.

Koturi was stricken with guilt and grief, and eventually joined forces with Hideo and Mumoko to hunt down the creature. They defeated it, and both Hideo and Koturi perished in the battle. However, the damage had been done. The Badger, never very numerous to begin with, were almost eradicated, their lands were in ruins, and their clan champion was dead. Also, unknown to them at the time, Hideo no Oni had created several spawn before it was destroyed.

Rebuilding

After Hideo no Oni's rampage, the clan was left a broken remnant. Some Badger worried the Emperor might revoke their status as a Minor Clan, given their extremely weak condition, but at first he did not. (Of course, these events took place just prior to the Scorpion Clan Coup, and Emperor Hantei XXXIX was hardly in a position to take notice of events in such a remote corner of the Empire.) The new Champion of the clan sought new sources of funds to rebuild their strength, and began to send Badger samurai out into the Empire to serve as mercenaries. These samurai cut unimpressive figures to the rest of Rokugan, for they were poor and often lacking in equipment; many employers mistook them for ronin. The Badger mercenaries sent whatever money they earned back to their clan lands, trying to support the remaining samurai in their ancestral home, who were struggling to rebuild their ruined castles. Periodic attacks from the spawn of Hideo no Oni made things even more difficult, though thankfully these creatures did not approach the lethality of the original version.

For a time, the Badger maintained a dojo in the City of the Rich Frog; so many of their bushi were serving outside of their lands that they could not afford the time to return home to train. Gradually, the dire condition of the Badger became known to the rest of the Empire, and many Rokugani began to suggest the crippled clan should be disbanded or absorbed into one or another of the Great Clans – as had been done with the Falcon when they were wrecked by a Shuten Doji spirit.

In the year 1166, an official Imperial inquiry was held in Badger lands to determine whether or not they should retain Minor Clan status. Several of the newly appointed Keepers of the Elements were present for the investigation. The Badger argued strenuously against their own disbandment, but they could not deny their clan was a shadow of its former self and in truth could not defend its own borders, let alone fulfill its duty. It seemed likely the Badger would soon find themselves declared ronin, but the debate was interrupted by an attack from another Hideo spawn. The Badger and the Keepers hunted the creature to an ancient cave deep in the mountains, where the oni was finally defeated. In the aftermath of the battle, the Keeper of Void, Asahina Hira, discovered the cave was actually an ancient shrine, housing nothing less than the grave-site of Ryoshun, the tenth Kami. He concluded the Badger had always had a second, secret duty to protect this sacred shrine. Once this was revealed, the rest of the Empire not only abandoned the effort to disband the Badger but actually pledged their support for the proper rebuilding of the Badger lands.

The War of Dark Fire and Modern Times

Although the Badger made good progress on rebuilding their lands, their efforts were brutally interrupted by the attack of the Army of Dark Fire in the year 1170. The Dark Oracle's massive force of corrupted Yobanjin warriors overran the passes, destroying all but one of the Badger fortresses. The Army of Dark Fire also did great damage to the Shrine of Ryoshun, although a Badger samurai was able to rescue a piece from the shrine's sacred central pillar. Nonetheless, the Badger Clan survived this disaster as it had the earlier attack of Hideo no Oni, successfully evacuating most of its civilians before the invaders could reach them.

After the Destroyer War came to an end, the Badger Clan began to rebuild once again. They began adopting ronin into the clan if they could pass a test of strength, in effect a smaller-scale version of the Crab Clan's Twenty Goblin Winter, and forged closer ties with the Crab and Dragon in order to seek help in reconstructing their fortresses. They even managed to send a small contingent to the Empire's colonies in the former Ivory Kingdoms.

There is a small Badger presence in the Second City and there are a few Badger among the Imperial Explorers. Indeed, some of the most interesting mineral finds in the Colonies have been discovered by Badger explorers who were accustomed to traveling through rugged mountains.

Lands of the Badger

At its founding the Badger Clan was granted some of the most rugged land in the entirety of the Empire: one of the two passes through the Great Wall of the North Mountains. The mountains themselves are tall enough that the tops are covered in snow year-round, and at its peak the pass itself crosses these snow-covered sections. The mountain range is also mildly tectonically active, plagued by occasional earthquakes and a few scattered volcanoes. Thankfully, only one volcano is located within the lands of the Badger, and it has been dormant for the entire eleven centuries the Badger have lived in the mountains.

The Badger respect and admire the mountains in which they live. They know how dangerous the rugged peaks can be, but they also know how beautiful they are. The Badger strive to be like the mountains of their home: strong and unyielding.

Life in the Mountains

Living in the Great Wall of the North is not easy, and a people less strong than the Badger would be unlikely to survive. The limited amount of arable land in the mountain passes is not the most fertile, and the short summers and harsh winters also make it difficult to produce enough food for even a small clan's population. However, the Great Wall of the North does hold a few pleasant surprises. The snowpack on the peaks gives rise to many streams which nourish the soil and allow small fertile valleys to exist here and there throughout the passes. The soil is not ideal for growing Rokugani staples like rice, but the Badger have learned to be adept at growing millet, buckwheat, soybeans, and vegetables in whatever small sections of arable land they can find. In some sections of the pass they also have found underground caves and tunnels which serve as excellent places to grow mushrooms to supplement the Badger's diet. (Indeed, Badger cuisine is noted for its heavy use of fungus.) Almost every one of the Badger Clan's fortresses has a few small farms nearby to help feed its garrison, but the majority of the clan's food comes from the lands surrounding the main castle of Shiro Ichiro. Shiro Ichiro is located in the middle of the Badger lands and is the only fortress not built directly astride a section of the pass; instead, it was constricted as a strategic command stronghold. It is located in the side of a high peak, giving it a good view of several sections of the pass. The slopes below the castle are surprisingly fertile and provide the best farmland in all of the Badger lands.

Although large game is rare in the mountains, the Badger do supplement their diet with wild birds and fish from the mountain streams. The Badger also raise some poultry themselves, and some Badger's fortresses ring with the quacking of ducks and clucking of chickens throughout the year.

Hot Springs and Steam Vents

There are some places within the Badger lands where hot springs and steam vents occur naturally, especially in the vicinity of the dormant volcano known as the Badger's Scowl. Two of the clan's fortresses are actually built atop these features. One of them is heated entirely by a natural steam vent, and several have hot springs baths within their walls or close by. Given the bitter cold of the mountains in winter, the Badger are happy to take advantage of such natural gifts.

The Badger have also discovered several places where hot springs and steam vents are close to the surface but have not (yet) broken through to the surface. In some cases they have plans to use these geographical features to their advantage in the future, with strategically placed traps and mechanisms meant to release steam or scalding water upon enemies in the pass.

The Path of Woe

There are two passes through the Great Wall of the North: the Path of Sorrow, which the Unicorn guard and use to banish people from the Empire, and the Path of Woe, the lands of the Badger. When the rest of the Empire looks at a map, the Path of Woe appears to be a single straight line that runs directly north through the mountains, but in reality it is anything but straight. The pass bends and curves in innumerable places, and its exact route changes from year to year. Rockslides close sections which were easily passable the year before, earthquakes open new sections which were impassable for generations, and sometimes heavy rains and snowmelt create new rivers or streams where none were before, making passage through the pass even more difficult. Any invading army would have a hard time traveling through the pass at the best of times; the Badger, of course, have made it even more challenging, locating their fortresses in those places where the travel is easier and the pass more stable.

Fortresses of the Badger

When Ichiro Domogu brought his followers to the lands of the Badger, he had very specific orders for his samurai, orders which would cause Imperial inspectors consternation until he explained them. Each of his lesser daimyo was assigned to build a keep in the Path of Woe in a place where it could easily defend a vulnerable section of the pass. They were to give no thought to how far away they were from other fortresses, but were to concentrate on the terrain and defense of each section of the pass. There was no mechanism in place for any of the fortresses to be reinforced, and essentially each castle would fight alone against whatever enemy might reach it. Domogu explained his purpose was not to repel an invasion – his clan was far too small to do so – but rather to force an invader to deal with each fortress as it advanced through the pass. Each such battle would slow the invaders down so the Empire as a whole would have enough time to gather its strength and meet the invaders in full force once they breached the pass and entered Rokugan.

Shiro Ichiro

The seat of the Badger Clan is located on a high slope which looks out over several sections of the Path of Woe. The fortress itself is built into a forty-foot rock face, and over the centuries the castle has been expanded deeper and deeper into the mountain. Escape tunnels lead out of the castle to hidden routes out of the Badger lands. The slopes of the hill below the fortress are covered in terraced farmlands, and there is a reservoir built into the mountainside above the castle to store water for irrigation during dry seasons. The reservoir can also be used as a weapon against invading forces; the Badger have designed it so they can release all of the water at once, a torrent which would sweep away any invading force on the lower slopes (and also destroy the terraced farmlands).

Shiro Ichiro was destroyed during the rampage of Hideo no Oni, and was not properly rebuilt for decades afterward. In the year 1166 when the clan's future came under judgment, the castle was still largely a ruin, although the worst of the rubble had been cleared. Aid from other clans allowed a proper rebuilding effort to get underway, but this was interrupted by the attack of the Army of Dark Fire. A full reconstruction of the castle did not take place until the Age of Exploration, when the Empire enjoyed over a generation of complete peace.

The Fortress of Teeth

There is a section of the Path of Woe where the pass winds its way gently up a slope between two rock walls. At the top of the slope is a Badger castle, the Fortress of Teeth. It earns its name from its wall, which looks like it is topped by over a dozen giant misshapen stone teeth,

each at least ten feet tall. Other such "teeth" are located atop the slopes to either side of the pass. In fact, each of these great stones has been placed in its location by the Badger, and is balanced so several bushi working together can roll it off its perch and down onto the pass... crushing anything in its way.

When the fortress is fully staffed, all of the Teeth can be dislodged within an hour's time. There are also winches and extra Teeth behind the walls of the fortress, so given enough time new Teeth can be brought up to crush persistent enemies.

Above the rock walls on either side of the path are a few small fields where the inhabitants of the Fortress of Teeth grow wheat and soybeans, as well as a single copse of plum trees; the basement of the castle has a small brewery for the distilling of plum wine, and this wine is one of the Badger Clan's few minor exports. The inhabitants of the Fortress of Teeth are a surprisingly cheerful group, priding themselves on their individual strength as well as their ability to work in groups. They will often hold boulder rolling competitions, trying to see which team can roll a boulder the furthest.

Like all the Badger castles, the Fortress of Teeth was destroyed by the rampage of Hideo no Oni. Because it is a key point in the defense of the Path of Woe, it was the first of the Badger castles to be rebuilt later, and was fully functional during the attack of the Army of Dark Fire. Once the Destroyer War was over, the Badger – nothing if not stubborn – rebuilt the castle yet again.

The Scowl

As noted, there is a single (dormant) volcano within the lands of the Badger. The volcano blew out its own side at some time in the ancient past, creating a wide slope covered in razor-sharp shards of black basalt. The side of the volcano resembles nothing so much as a large scowling face, and the Badger named the volcano the Badger's Scowl.

Built atop the escarpment opposite the Badger's Scowl is a fortress the Badger call, simply, the Scowl. It is a large fortress with numerous windows looking down on the slope below. The samurai in the Scowl are adept at throwing stones and hurling nage-yari; in fact, they are said to be some of the best in the Badger lands at rock-throwing. However, they also tend to be dour sorts, since staring every day at the shattered side of a broken mountain seems to dampen men's spirits.

There are hidden steam pockets and hot springs all over the area around the Scowl, and the samurai of the fortress have carefully created paths which cross over these obstacles, or underneath places where they can release boiling water or avalanches of sharp stone. The fortress itself is comfortable all year round, heated by a steam vent and a number of hot springs. There are also a few fields in the hills around the Scowl which grow wheat, soybeans, and some vegetables which would normally not handle the northern climate but are able to prosper thanks to the warmth of the hot springs.

Like the other Badger fortresses, the Scowl was destroyed by Hideo no Oni, but was fully rebuilt before the attack by the Army of Dark Fire. During the War of Dark Fire the castle was heavily damaged and eventually evacuated. A second rebuilding effort got underway soon after the Destroyer War was over.

The Shrine of Ryoshun

The Shrine of Ryoshun is a small stone temple nestled in a minor valley. There was nothing remarkable about the location, and through the centuries, only the Clan Champion of the Badger and a few trusted daimyo knew the significance of the site. The Badger defended the site in an unusual way: they ignored its existence. In fact, early in their history they deliberately caused rockslides to fill in the main routes to the shrine. They built no fortifications near it, and other than a few scouts who watched over the area no one knew it was there, let alone its significance.

This practice of ignoring their most important site served the Badger well until the attack of Hideo no Oni, when the death of their clan champion left the clan unaware of the shrine's existence. The spawn of Hideo no Oni sensed the power within the shrine and were drawn to it, eventually leading to the rediscovery of the shrine and the re-dedication of the Badger to its defense. They began fortifying the site to defend against any future attack. Monks from the Brotherhood of Shinsei also came to the Shrine to repair it and offer proper veneration to the memory of the Tenth Kami.

During the assault by the Army of Dark Fire, the Shrine of Ryoshun was almost completely destroyed, although one Badger samurai managed to escape with a fragment of the shrine's central sacred pillar. Years later, after the defeat of the Kali-Ma Invasion and the restoration of peace, the Badger built a new shrine around the original site, along with a new fortress to watch over the place.

Vassal Families

Although the Badger have always been a small clan, they do establish two vassal families over the course of their lengthy history.

The first of these is the **Fureheshu** family, founded by a formidable fifth-century warrior named Ichiro Fureheshu. Although he was a calm and soft-spoken man, he possessed strength that was astonishing even for the Badger Clan, and refused many opportunities for promotion in order to remain a mere bushi and serve on the front line. During his lifetime, a huge oni wandered into the Badger lands, a threat so formidable that the entire clan mobilized to fight it. However, Fureheshu reached the oni before his comrades and fought it hand-to-hand. He crushed the oni's skull with his bare hands even as the demon broke his back.

In reward for his deed, Fureheshu was granted the right to his own family name. The Fureheshu family follows their founder's tradition of embracing strength to an even greater degree than the rest of the clan. The small numbers of sumai wrestlers in the Badger Clan are recruited overwhelmingly from the Fureheshu family.

The **Tashimi** family was formed during the dire years that followed the rampage of Hideo no Oni. After the oni's attack, Ichiro Tashimi was the only surviving sensei of the Ichiro Bushi School, and maintaining the school was regarded as so important that he was offered the position of Clan Champion. He refused, choosing instead to spend his remaining years looking for worthy successors to teach the Ichiro techniques. Eventually, his unflagging efforts led to the creation of a vassal family tasked with preserving the Ichiro school no matter what might happen to the rest of the clan. The Tashimi are a tiny family, comprised almost entirely of sensei.

How Did the Emperor Know About Ryoshun's Grave?

According to the modern official history of the Empire, the Emperor specifically decided to create a clan to guard the Path of Woe because he knew the grave of his brother Ryoshun was within the pass. However, this raises a number of questions. All records of the Dawn of the Empire contain no mention of Ryoshun, and indeed the very existence of the Tenth Kami was unknown to Rokugan until he appeared at Volturnum's Gate during the climax of the War Against the Darkness. Scholars have generally assumed the other Kami did not wish to speak of Ryoshun because he had already died within their father's stomach and they had no desire to remember that horror. So how did the Emperor know about Ryoshun's body having fallen in the mountains? And who built the shrine at the site?

There is a further discrepancy. When Asahina Hira discovered the nature of the Shrine of Ryoshun, he proclaimed Emperor Hantei I must have known about the site of his brother's body and sent Hida Domogu to that place to found the Badger Clan. But the official histories of the Empire agree the Badger were not founded until the year 110, well into the reign of Hantei Genji.

One possible explanation for these puzzles is that Hantei himself, traveling alone, discovered the site of Ryoshun's body during the years the individual Kami were exploring Rokugan, before they agreed to create the Empire. Perhaps it was Hantei who built the shrine, or at least built the sacred pillar in its center. Hantei may have intended to assign samurai to guard his brother's grave, but could not do so before he died of his wounds in the First War. However, he could well have told his son Genji about the shrine and tasked him with protecting it.

Ultimately, it is up to the GM whether to accept this explanation or offer a different one. Perhaps in your Rokugan, the Shrine to Ryoshun does not even exist.

Badger Customs and Traditions

Individual strength allows our clan maximum flexibility. – *Badger motto.*

The Badger Clan was founded after a contest of strength and so, in honor of their founders, modern Badger samurai pride themselves on their strength, both strength of body and strength of spirit.

Like nearly all samurai in the Empire, the Badger are given katana when they reach adulthood and pass their gempukku, but unlike most other samurai the Badger rarely carry their katana. In most cases a Badger samurai's daisho will hang on the wall of his home. Instead, when it is time to fight he will use the largest weapon he can employ effectively. The majority of Badger rely on the no-dachi as their weapon of choice, but there are specific fortresses whose garrisons rely on other weapons such as the ono, the masakari, or the dai-tsuchi. They always choose weapons which benefit from their enormous strength. Indeed, there are those among the Badger who eschew weapons altogether and rely on jiujutsu, using their own strength to break the limbs of their enemies. Badger samurai always prefer to fight their enemies face-to-face, pitting strength against strength; when they have no choice but to fight their foes from a distance, they still prefer to use nage-yari or thrown rocks instead of bows and arrows.

All Badger make a strong study of unarmed combat, regardless of whether they prefer to fight with weapons or bare hands, and every young Badger learns to fight with his hands and feet at the same time he learns to fight with a weapon. After all, weapons can break or be taken away, but hands and feet cannot. Each of the clan fortresses holds jiujutsu tournaments for young samurai in training, and the winners of these tournaments are often granted higher ranks when they pass their gempukku – prowess at jiujutsu is thought to be a sign of a promising career.

Individualism

Each of the Badger Clan's fortresses is built to be self-reliant. While many of the fortresses do receive food and other supplies from elsewhere, the inhabitants all like to think of themselves as self-contained groups who do not rely on others to be able to do their duty. This paradigm of self-reliance has worked its way deep into the psyche of every samurai in the Badger Clan. The clan itself is loathe to ask outsiders for help, which sometimes makes it seem arrogant and standoffish to the rest of the Empire. The samurai of the Badger clan are likewise very slow to ask for help, and tend to be extremely stubborn; this has often served them poorly. Some historians believe if the Badger had asked the Crab Clan for help when Hideo no Oni first attacked their lands, much of the destruction

it caused could have been stopped. The Badger attitude also probably contributed to the Empire's willingness to consider disbanding the clan later in the twelfth century.

The Badger place a lot of value on the individual and his personal achievements. While being born the son or daughter of a daimyo does grant respect (strength does tend to beget strength), such persons must still prove themselves worthy of that respect in the eyes of other Badger. To the Badger, a person is defined not by who he is but by what he has done and can do.

Due to the clan's small size, women are usually relegated to bearing and raising children. However, if a woman can match the strength of the men she will be recognized as their martial equal. A young girl who wishes to become a bushi need only pass the same tests the male children pass. Moreover, wives and mothers are greatly respected for the strength required to give birth and to raise the often-rambunctious Badger children.

Competition

As should be expected from a group of highly individualistic people, the Badger are very competitive. They can make contests out of almost anything, and often do so. These contests serve many purposes. They help the Badger assess who is suited for particular roles in their fortresses; they allow the Badger, who live in one of the most inhospitable places in the Empire, a chance to relax and enjoy themselves for a little while; and they help the Badger to gain confidence in their own abilities... or discover where they are lacking in those abilities.

Badger competitions are often fairly simple and are usually based upon strength, such as testing who can lift the larger stone, who can throw a rock the furthest, or who can win a foot-race while carrying a heavy load. There are also more martial competitions like splitting stones or firewood with a dai-tsuchi or an ono, with whoever splits the most with the fewest swings in the time allotted being declared the winner.

Hand in hand with the Badger love of competition is a love of gambling. However, this does not mean games of dice or cards as it might elsewhere in Rokugan. Instead, the Badger enjoy making wagers on contests. When meeting a member of the clan for the first time, rather than introducing himself a Badger might just as likely challenge the newcomer to a wager on a contest of strength or skill. After the two samurai have determined who is the stronger, the Badger will introduce himself properly.

The leadership of the Badger Clan acknowledges and fosters the clan's love of competition, believing it keeps the Badger from becoming sedentary and complacent in their duties and encourages them to continually work

No Badger Clan?

Depending upon which version of history the GM is following, it is possible the Badger Clan may never have been formed in the first place. If Hantei himself created the clan, Shinjo Mako might have won the tournament and the lands of the Badger would instead have become lands of the Ki-Rin. The additional responsibilities granted to the clan of Shinjo by the Emperor might very well have kept the Lion from later driving the Ki-Rin out of their lands, thereby preventing the formation of the Fox Clan. Rokugan without these two early Minor Clans would be a very different place. Moreover, if the Ki-Rin assumed the duty of guarding the Path of Woe, they would probably have adopted a very different strategy for defending the pass and the Shrine of Ryoshun.

and improve. To celebrate this spirit of competition, the Clan Champion of the Badger Clan holds a tournament called the Great Games each year at Shiro Ichiro. The Great Games offer the Champion a chance to meet with his lower-ranking daimyo while their retainers compete in the various contests, which of course emphasize strength. Nage-yari throwing, boulder lifting, stone throwing, sumai, and boulder carrying are all popular contests. Sometimes the Clan Champion invites the strongest members of other Minor Clans to compete, or allows ronin to do so and rewards the most impressive wave-men with an oath of fealty (a much more common practice after the Destroyer War).

The winners of the various competitions are given prizes and recognition, frequently including promotions within the clan's ranks. The Great Games also provide an opportunity for Badger Clan families to look for marriage prospects for their children; Badger women attending the Great Games often wager on potential marriage offers.

The Great Games are usually suspended in times of hardship, and there were no Great Games at all during the long period of poverty and weakness that followed the rampage of Hideo no Oni. Once rebuilding began in the year 1166, the clan managed to hold a few Great Games before the Dark Oracle of Fire marched through their lands in 1171. The contests resumed again six years after the end of the Destroyer War.

Marriage and Children

Because the Badger lands are divided into several individual self-reliant fortresses with small populations, there is always the potential for the Badger bloodlines to become overly inbred in the manner of Crane and Imperial nobility. To prevent this, most marriages in the Badger lands are arranged between people from different fortresses. There are groups of dedicated matchmakers, mostly women, who travel annually between the fortresses to assess the new crop of marriageable Badger youths. Even the Badger Clan Champion sometimes has his marriage arranged in this way in order to assure a strong match.

Children in the Badger lands are treated a bit differently than those in most other parts of the Empire. They are expected to work the moment they are able to. They perform tasks like carrying food and water to watch-posts, help to replenish supplies of nage-yari and other weapons, and learn to care for armor and gear. This is not

to say they are denied a childhood; they compete amongst themselves in contests of strength and skill like any other children in Rokugan. However, their games are often watched by their elders, and children who show skill in things like stealth or throwing spears tend to be fostered to fortresses which rely on such skills. These children will sometimes return to their home fortress to teach others their skills, but sometimes they will stay in their new home and marry a girl from the fortress where they were fostered. This is another measure designed to spread the bloodlines of the Badger throughout their lands.

Traditionalism

The Badger clan is very insular. There have been many entire generations of Badger samurai who never met anyone who was not also a Badger. Because of this separation from the rest of the Empire and its evolving customs and traditions, the Badger Clan is one of the most old-fashioned clans in the Empire. Their customs and traditions have changed very little through the centuries and are said to resemble those of the earliest generations of the Crab Clan. Indeed, it would be fair to say the Badger follow more of the original Crab traditions than do the modern Crab. One visitor described them as "the Crab Clan without the polish granted by contact with other clans, but also without the grimness imparted by the Shadowlands."

Badger Sumai

The Badger Clan was founded after one of the Empire's first wrestling matches, so it is not surprising that the sport of sumai is popular within the clan, especially in the Fureheshu vassal family. In most cases, Badger sumai is just wrestling rather than the more formal and regulated form of competition favored in the rest of the Empire, but occasionally the clan does stage formal sumai matches with full regalia and rules. The rules and traditions of sumai are one domain where the Badger try to be as up to date as anyone else, and Badger wrestlers sometimes leave their lands to compete in the great sumai tournaments elsewhere in the Empire. In modern times, one of the ways the Badger have worked toward rebuilding their lands and reputation has been by hosting a yearly sumai tournament for wrestlers from the Minor Clans (and even some ronin), with a few samurai of the Great Clans invited as well. These tournaments have brought the clan money, prestige, and friendship, all valuable assets in the era after the Destroyer War.

Shugenja and Magic

Another factor which separates the Badger Clan from the rest of the Empire is their near-disdain for shugenja. It is not that the Badger disrespect the kami or those who can speak to them, but rather that their clan is founded on a respect for individual physical strength. Those who rely on the kami to work for them are seen as lacking the strength to work for themselves. Members of the Badger Clan who are born with the ability to speak with the spirits have few choices in their lives. Many of them ignore the ability and train as bushi alongside their brethren. Others are married into families outside of the clan to promote alliances; the Minor Clans of the Fox and Dragonfly are popular for this option. A rare few are sent away to train as shugenja in another clan's shugenja school, although the Badger often lack the political favors to arrange such postings. All too often, these Badger shugenja never return to their homeland.

The Bat Clan

Komori Maku walked slowly through the jungle, taking the time to inhale the thick moist air around him with each step. "Fascinating", he whispered to himself as he looked at his surroundings. The smells, the colors, the sounds... had any other samurai ever seen this place? Probably not, and the thought filled Maku with excitement. What kind of odd spirits would he find here? What new spells would he be able to devise while surrounded by the unique kami of this area? Would he find a portal to a new Spirit Realm never heard of before? Maku pressed on, lifting up his black kimono so it would not tear from the underbrush. He sensed he was close to finding something.

Sadly, the results were less interesting than he expected. A small group of warriors was sitting in a clearing. Their armor was so damaged and covered in dirt it was impossible to tell which clan they belonged to, if any. They all looked tired and a few were wounded. Clearly they had been in the jungle for many days.

"Greetings," Maku offered with a smile. "My name is Komori Maku of the Bat Clan, and I..."

"You just are as unlucky as we are," one of the men interrupted him, letting out a joyless chuckle. "We've been lost in this jungle for... I don't know how many days. There seems to be no way out. Frankly, we might just kill you as a mercy while we wait for our own fate." He nodded to one of the other warriors, who rose and lazily unsheathed a blade which had already begun to rust.

Maku shivered, but more out of shock and disbelief than real fear. "I... I see!" he answered with another smile, keeping his hands up in a gesture of peace. His would-be executioner paused. "But perhaps the fact you couldn't find your way out was because the spirit of your companion haunts the area and wished for a proper burial? He seems quite upset at having been left behind. Still, since I could only find his remains by riding on the Air kami, I fully understand your troubles. I was able to give him proper rites, and he told me about other men lost in the area, so I sent a message for assistance a few days ago, and he..." Maku cocked his head to the side, listening to something only he could hear. "Ah! He is just a few hours away from here. Why don't we keep me in this Spirit Realm for now, and get you back to civilization before taking any further decisions?"

The men stared at him, speechless.

History of the Bat Clan

As with many of the other Minor Clans, much of what the Bat Clan represents can be understood by looking at its founder, in this case a man named Yoritomo Komori (also called, simply, Komori). Komori was a samurai of the Mantis Clan born in the early twelfth century, but his father was no mere samurai. He was of the *koumori*, the race of bat shapeshifter spirits who police the spirits of the dead to make sure they did not plague mortals. In fact, the *koumori* race had maintained a strong presence in the Islands of Silk and Spice long before the arrival of the Mantis. Legends claim the Mantis Clan founder, Kaimestu-Uo, met a *koumori* storyteller and was inspired by it to forge his own destiny. Some legends even claim they agreed on a pact of mutual self-protection, although this eventually faded from memory.

Yoritomo Komori's father's curiosity led him to mingle with mortals, and his love for one of them eventually gave birth to a half-spirit boy. His otherworldly nature was not immediately apparent to others or himself, but as he grew up he learned his true origins from his father. Embracing his legacy, the boy became a talented shugenja and at his gempukku took the name Komori to honor his secret heritage. Komori's semi-human nature gave him many unique abilities, including great skills at communicating with spirits of all kinds, and also caused him to age far more slowly than a normal mortal. He had plenty of occasions to refine his abilities and talents during his adulthood, as he lived through the days of the Clan War and fought in the ranks of Yoritomo's Alliance. He became Yoritomo Komori after the Mantis Clan was elevated to Great Clan status. Komori fought again during the War Against the Darkness, and was instrumental in pushing back the forces of the Goju during their assault on Kyuden Gotei, the capital of the Mantis lands. He followed his lord to the final battle of the war at Volturnum's Gate deep within the Shadowlands, where he witnessed Yoritomo's demise and helped rescue Yoritomo's Tainted wife Wakiza. She later died giving birth to her daughter, and Komori undertook the duty of watching over the child, officially retiring as a samurai. In time, the Son of Storms' daughter grew up to become Yoritomo Kumiko and reclaimed leadership of the Mantis Clan, again with the help of Komori. By this time, Komori was ancient, and despite his half-spirit heritage his body showed outward signs of advanced age... but inside he felt as capable as ever.

Komori's destiny finally came into its own when he was summoned by Emperor Toturi III. Toturi Naseru wanted to communicate with the spirit of his deceased sister Tsudao, and had heard of Komori's unique spiritual abilities. Komori managed to anchor the dead Empress' spirit in Ningen-do for a precious few moments, long enough for the Emperor to speak with her briefly. Naseru was grateful beyond words, and in reward he granted Komori the right to found his own Minor Clan. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the old man selected the Bat as his new clan's symbol.

Komori immediately set out to assemble followers and find lands to call his own. Although the Mantis Clan allowed him to recruit from its ranks, Komori scoured the whole Empire for his followers, since he did not want to abuse the generosity of the Yoritomo. He selected samurai, mostly shugenja, of a curious and inquisitive nature, with open minds and daring spirits. Komori chose each individual personally; although this was a time-consuming process, it ensured every one of the first generation of Bat Clan samurai was an honorable and capable soul.

For his new clan's lands Komori chose the Island of Lost Wilderness, the southernmost island of the Islands of Silk and Spice, which had previously been declared uninhabitable by Imperial cartographers. After convincing both the Imperial Families (who respected the obvious favor with which the Emperor viewed Komori) and the Yoritomo (who considered the island useless anyway), Komori gathered his followers and set out to tame their new home, bringing along a few peasants and eta recruited

from nearby Mantis islands. Their task was not an easy one, due to both natural and supernatural dangers, but thanks both to Komori's guidance and to a timely alliance with a local tribe of koumori spirits, the settlers managed to not only survive, but thrive.

Kyuden Komori (the name was a bold expression of Imperial favor rather than a practical description) was built as both the home of the clan and a school where shugenja could learn from the clan founder. Komori possessed a vast range of esoteric knowledge which he freely bestowed on his students. Armed with his wisdom, including a way to use the kami to deliver messages across hundreds of miles, the samurai of the Bat Clan started making themselves known to the Empire.

However, this was not the end of Komori's personal adventures. During the Destroyer War, he was part of the expedition headed by Moshi Kalani which discovered the ruined remnants of the Ivory Kingdoms, later to become Rokugan's Colonies. Komori's support was invaluable, since he helped the Mantis dispatch several ancient creatures which plagued the lands. His ability to communicate back with his clan, and through them the mainland, gave the Mantis crucial information during the early days. However, once the Colonies began to be settled, the Phoenix developed a ritual which enabled them to converse with Rokugan, essentially making Komori irrelevant and threatening his clan's unique niche of magical study. Deciding it was time his fledgling clan found a renewed purpose, Komori fully retired, passing the rule of the Bat to Komori Junsaku, a prodigy who was the first samurai to pass gempukku as a Bat.

Junsaku had spent the early years of his life intensely studying any magical topic he could find, and he realized the Bat Clan's unique abilities were useless if not used on the field. He sent some of his best students to the Colonies, tasking them with supporting the Mantis in their exploration of the wilderness, going where the more civilized Phoenix would not dare set foot. Of course, the ruins of the Ivory Kingdoms were quite dangerous, but the Bat Clan's own rugged homeland had prepared them well to face both mundane and spiritual dangers. Meanwhile, Junsaku assigned more senior shugenja to various courts of the Empire, creating a network of magical communication unlike any other. Although most clans remain wary of entrusting important messages to another clan's shugenja, the very obscurity of the Bat has worked in their favor in this regard; few believe they are strong enough to take advantage of whatever they might learn. Thus the clan has been able to win significant allies and favors by making its communication magic available to the rest of the Empire. By the end of the Age of Exploration, it is not uncommon to find a lone Bat Clan shugenja in the oddest of places, from the steppes of the Unicorn to the high mountains of the Dragon Clan or on the very frontier of the Colonies.

At the end of the twelfth century the Bat Clan is still a very small clan, numbering only a few hundred, and it is also the youngest Minor Clan (the Oriole are technically younger, but only if one excludes the long history of the Tsi family before their ascension to Minor Clan status). They maintain excellent relations with the Mantis, who seem to take pride in the fact that a Minor Clan came from own their ranks. This ensures the Bat are never wanting for protection, allowing them to devote their resources to their spiritual studies. Komori samurai's inquisitive nature, particularly regarding magic and spirits, leads them to approach a number of other families for collaboration, including the Kitsune, the Toritaka, the Isawa, the Iuchi, and even the Kitsu. While not always successful, these efforts have done much to further the Bat's presence in Rokugan. Combined with their ability to send messages across long distances, this has given the clan a disproportionate amount of influence considering its young age and modest numbers. The Bat tend to regard the future with optimism, secure in the belief they will become important players in Rokugan. However, their attitude also embraces an element of risk, and the younger generation lacks the veteran experience of the clan founders, so not every venture ends in success. Champion Komori Junsaku believes the rewards justify any problems, and regards the Bat activities in the Colonies as a perfect example of a gambit well worth the effort. Should they keep prospering, the Bat will likely be at the vanguard of the Empire's next era.

Lands of the Bat Clan

Compared to most Minor Clans, the Bat territories are extremely modest, being essentially limited to a single island. As noted in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Air* (pages 64-65), the Bat Clan's island has a rather sinister repute due to the prevalence of spiritual gateways in its deeper jungles. It is located in the southernmost part of the Silk and Spice archipelago, hours of sailing away from even the most minor Mantis holdings, and almost ten days' travel from Kyuden Gotei. This puts the lands of the Bat Clan far away from most Rokugani, and the island receives very few casual visitors. Those who have set eyes on it praise the island's beauty: verdant jungles clinging to steep mountainsides in the center, with white sand beaches around the edges. The weather is tropical, with no real winter season.

For all its beauty, the island is quite unsafe, as the original Imperial cartographers noted. The local fauna and flora present a more extreme example of the dangers found in the Mantis territories. Beautiful flowers and fruits adorn the verdant jungle, but many of them are poisonous, able to severely harm or kill. Early explorers who tried to live off the jungle's natural produce often suffered paralysis, massive pain, or crippling nausea if they survived at all. The fauna is even worse, with a variety of venomous and constrictor snakes, rare and highly dangerous scorpions and spiders, and even a curious species of poisonous frog never seen anywhere else in the Empire. The dangerous reptiles called komodo dragons have also been spotted around the island, as well as the occasional jaguar. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the island is also home to several species of bats, but unlike the other life-forms they have never endangered the human population in any way.

The worst danger on the island, however, is from its thin borders with the Spirit Realms. The mildest symptom of this is an occasional glimpse of what lies beyond the veil; at worst, the barriers can be weak enough to let dangerous spirits into the mortal world, and the island suffers disproportionate troubles with ghosts, trickster spirits, and shapeshifters plaguing any unfortunate soul who encounters them. This is also the reason behind the presence of a large tribe of koumori spirits: the bat shapeshifters have always seen it as their duty to police escaped spirits, particularly those of the dead. The koumori live in deep caves in the mountains near the center of the island, where passages to Chikushudo and Meido allow them to do their work.

The Komori view it as their sacred calling to protect the spiritual balance of the region and ensure no gateway to the other Spirit Realms fully opens. The potential destruction from such a spiritual invasion and imbalance could extend far beyond the island. Accordingly, the interior of the island is kept off-limits to visitors; indeed, the Bat seldom allow their guests to leave the immediate vicinity of Kyuden Komori.

Kyuden Komori

Kyuden Komori is described in detail in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Air* (pages 64-65). The crowning achievement of the Bat Clan, set on a hill overlooking the bay and the village around it, is more of a large estate than a castle proper, and its rather presumptuous title of "Kyuden" is an expression of hope and ambition rather than reflecting any visit by the Emperor. Completing this residence palace was one of Komori's first goals after his people arrived, since he wished to establish immediately that the Bat were a true clan and not some temporary aberration of history. Built mostly from local materials, Kyuden Komori and its associated guest quarters benefit from the exotic woods and stones found on the island, and is visually pleasant (if somewhat exotic) to a Rokugani eye. The main structure is the residence of the Bat Clan Champion and his family, although there is a court chamber and a few other standard features. Visiting dignitaries are housed in a number of yashiki in the town below, and while in the early years these only housed guests from the Minor Clans and the Mantis, over time a trickle of guests from other clans have started to attend the court of the Bat. The Bat make sure each guest enjoys his experience, and the reputation of the area has slowly begun to grow. The eaves of the castle are home to a number of large fruit bats, animals which the clan considers sacred even beyond the respect most Minor Clans give to their symbolic animal. The sight of dozens of large bats flying to and from the castle at dusk or dawn can be quite impressive (and perhaps more than a little alarming) to visitors.

The village below Kyuden Komori houses most of the clan's commoner population; even the eta, while kept separate from the main districts, are not allowed to make their homes in the jungle. Many of the *heimin* are craftsmen, their families first brought in to build the palace and village, and since both continue to see growth and modification they are always busy. The largest group, however, is the fishermen, who ply the surrounding sea for the food to keep the clan alive and even manage to produce a small surplus for trade. The village does have a few rice paddies to provide the Rokugani staple food, but they are limited in size by the encroaching jungle, and the clan must import some of its rice – a process assisted by the Mantis and Crane merchants who occasionally visit the island.

While initially the Bat expected to live in near-isolation, the establishment of the Colonies after the Destroyer War changed that by creating a vital new oceanic trade route. As a result, the island sees significantly increased traffic in the late twelfth century.

Since the Komori family are primarily shugenja, it is no surprise that their settlement holds several temples, with all aspects of Rokugani religion well-represented. The most famous temple, though not the largest, is the one dedicated to Osano-Wo. The temple houses a sacred relic known as the Tetsubo of Thunder, originally brought to the Bat by Yoritomo Iongi (who later swore fealty to the clan and founded its only vassal family). The presence of the relic has attracted a significant monastic presence from the Order of Osano-Wo, whose martial and spiritual teachings have been very beneficial to the Bat. A few pilgrims from the Mantis and Crab Clans also provide Kyuden Komori with additional revenues.

Lost Traveler Village

While the Great Clans have obviously been more industrious in exploring the former Ivory Kingdoms, a few adventurous Minor Clans have attempted to claim their piece of the territory. Perhaps surprisingly, the Bat Clan has been one of the most successful in this enterprise and has founded a small village in the Colonies. Lost Traveler Village is situated on the lower flank of a small mountain range rising from the jungle, and houses only a couple of hundred peasants and a few dozen samurai. The fertile ground has allowed the village to prosper, bolstered by the bounty of the jungle and fish from the mountain streams, and the population is almost completely self-sufficient.

Lost Traveler Village was founded by the explorer Komori Kurisute, a young samurai-ko with a keen interest in the jungle's treasures. While she knew the risks of the Colonial jungles, she urged her superiors to establish a settlement that would give the Bat a permanent position in the new land. Although the resources required stretched the tiny Bat Clan to its limits, Kurisute's plan was sound and the village soon thrived. As the only human habitation for miles around, the village is frequently used to launch expeditions into the deeper jungle, or to repatriate errant travelers – the source of its name. Thanks to the Bat Clan's communication abilities, they are ideally suited to support exploration and request help when necessary. The Bat's alliance with the Mantis has ensured that thus far no Great Clan has threatened to take their new lands, and the village continues to prosper.

Bat Clan Vassal Families

Despite its youth, the Bat Clan has already established one vassal family, the **Iongi** family. The family was founded by Yoritomo Iongi, the Mantis shugenja who discovered the Tetsubo of Thunder on a distant island and later gifted it to the Bat Clan for safekeeping. Iongi is reputed to have become Enlightened; whether or not this is true, he eventually swore fealty to the Bat Clan and was granted the right to found a vassal family in reward for his discovery of the Tetsubo of Thunder. The Iongi family watches over the shrine where the Tetsubo of Thunder is kept.

Customs and Traditions of the Bat Clan

The Bat are a young clan, only two generations old at the end of the twelfth century. However, some traditions have already emerged due to the clan's peculiar lifestyle and outlook. One maintained since the earliest days of the clan is to light a candle at the edge of the jungle when a new child is born, regardless of whether the child is peasant or samurai. While the peasants believe this is done to appease the spirits and prevent them from harming the newborn, the Komori consider the ritual a sign of tribute to their koumori allies. The Bat shugenja also insist on blessing newborn children at night; since this is when their namesake is active, it is seen as an auspicious time.

In the early days of the Bat, the commoner class and the samurai were unusually close due to their shared difficulties in taming their new land. As the clan developed, this connection started to fade, but the Bat still make considerable effort to care for their commoner population. In the first generation, presents are freely given between the two social classes to celebrate births; in later generations, a token present suffices to represent the good wishes of one class to the other. Every samurai parent politely thanks the village headsman for the present from the *heimin*, and farmers proudly display the gifts their children received from their samurai masters. This exchange of good will has contributed to the general stability of Bat Clan territory, although visitors from the Empire frown at the closeness to the lower castes it implies.

When samurai children reach the age to begin their education, they are tested for magical ability. Since the clan founders were recruited overwhelmingly from shugenja, the Komori family shows widespread magical talent, but there is no scorn for those who lack the gift to speak with the kami. These children are trained as bushi to provide the clan with at least a minimal military defense. Typically these warriors train with the Yoritomo, since the Mantis Clan asks only token favors from their Bat cousins to do so. The arrangement has ensured the few bushi of the Bat Clan are skilled warriors who know their way around a boat, crucial for a people whose home is an isolated island.

However, most children do hear the call of the kami or the Spirit Realms before their schooling even starts. They usually attend the clan's own school, which is formalized after Komori himself retires. The lessons there cover the basics of what any shugenja needs to know, from various religious rites to meditation techniques and calligraphy lessons, but also teach the unique ways of their school. Apart from its special communication technique, the Komori Shugenja School most closely resembles the school of the Moshi, which shares its favored Element. Indeed, the Moshi offered the most assistance to Komori himself in setting up his school. While prayers to Amaterasu are not very common in Komori magic, the Bat do share the Moshi's taste for flying and for revelatory magic, which can be useful when dealing with trickster spirits. However, the Komori shugenja also enjoy using a bit of misdirection and trickery of their own to accomplish their duties, doubtless influenced by their koumori patrons, and they practice illusion with gusto. Still, the true talent of the Bat lies in communication, whether with spirits or with mortals. Komori-trained shugenja are so attuned to the speech of the kami they can hear it on a passive level at almost all times, which tends to give them a somewhat distracted appearance. However, the heritage of the koumori means they are quick to react to new situations, dispelling any impression of daydreaming.

Pupils – and indeed all Bat children – are not allowed to enter the jungle before their gempukku. It is a common game of daring for children to go into the fringes of the treeline... but no further. However, sensei will frequently take their students into the village or out to sea, ensuring the young shugenja learn how to use their abilities in practical ways. When the time of gempukku comes, a

senior sensei takes each student into the jungle for the first time, usually at night. The pair travels deep into the wilds of the island, and the student is expected to use his magic and knowledge to care for himself while he follows his teacher. Eventually the sensei will ask his pupil to meditate in communion with the surrounding spirits. Some masters deliberately arrange for an encounter with the koumori or some other spirit creature, but this happens naturally more often than not. Regardless, the young shugenja is expected to deal with the encounter with both tact and wisdom. Finally, the sensei will ask the pupil to send a message back to the temple in Kyuden Komori using his magic; if successful, the message will be answered by a formal confirmation of status. The new samurai receives his wakizashi and returns to the village with his teacher, where a celebration awaits them. On occasion, a koumori shapeshifter will also attend the ceremony in bat form, watching without interrupting; sensei consider this a good omen.

Weddings

Every wedding is a celebration for small Minor Clans, and particularly so for one as small and new as the Bat. Since they are actively trying to increase their numbers, the Bat always favor weddings where a spouse joins their clan, and during matchmaking they offer whatever they can to ensure this happens. All clan weddings take place in the courtyard of Kyuden Komori, as a celebration of their heritage and to foster a sense of clan kinship. Regardless of their heritage, the couple is married at night, both to invoke the blessing of the koumori and to alleviate the tropical heat of the island. The rituals are extensive, as expected with a shugenja family, and involve numerous prayers to the Fortunes and to both ancestral lines. By contrast, the celebration that follows is usually raucous, perhaps due to the Yoritomo heritage or simply out of joy for such a blessed occasion. It is not uncommon for the party to last late into the night, ending on a beach lit by lanterns and candles.

Funeral Rites

Funerals are a somber event in any clan, but especially so for the Bat as each loss to their small numbers is felt painfully. The clan's great reverence for the ancestors and its strong awareness of spiritual dangers also ensures every Bat family pays proper respect to the spirits of the departed. As with all other important Bat rituals, funerals are conducted at night, and if possible they take place on a beach (a holdover from their Mantis heritage). It is not uncommon for all attendees, rather than just the family of the deceased, to wear white kimono for the occasion, a stark contrast with the usual plain black kimono the Bat family normally favors. The prayers for the dead include supplication to the koumori spirits to ensure the soul reaches its final home should it become lost. A week after the funeral, if no signs of haunting have appeared, an offering of thanks to the koumori will be left at the edge of the jungle; in those rare cases when the ceremony took place away from the island, the offering will be made at a local temple instead.

Marital Recruitment

After their founder retired for good, the Komori family began trying to recruit other shugenja with similar spiritual heritages to strengthen their clan's unique abilities. This has proven difficult, however, since such individual are very rare and are often unaware of their own heritage. Nonetheless, the Bat keep trying. They have achieved some success with the Kitsune family, convincing a few lower-status members of that family to join them after the Fox Clan became part of the Mantis Clan.

Customs and Superstitions

The Komori have already developed a few of their own superstitions, which they view as rites to protect themselves from negative spiritual attention. More than any other clan, the Bat revere their animal namesake as both a good omen and a sacred creature. The Komori will protest any harming of bats, and always seek to increase the number of bats in the areas where they reside by building beautiful wooden roosts. Since the bats reduce the local insect population and pollinate flowers (as well as allowing friendly koumori spirits to hide more easily and accomplish their duties), this attitude has many benefits.

Between the Moshi's weather magic and their own Air magic and long-distance communication, the Bat are strong adherents to the four Fortunes of the Wind, and they use the direction the morning wind blows as an indication of the day's omen. West is their favorite, as it is supposed to bring enigmas (which they view as potential discoveries). East is seen as news of prosperity, while North indicates stagnation and the South, progress. The Komori like to interpret the partial directions in between the compass points as well. Also, as skilled practitioners of Air magic, the Komori are all too aware no word is ever unheard by the wind; as a result, they will never utter even a single word when alone.

Another custom of the Bat was created by Komori himself, who asked his students to make sure they learned at least one new fact a day. Many Bat shugenja will record the new fact on a piece of paper and burn it, scattering the ashes to the wind as a token of thanks to the kami for allowing their knowledge to expand.

The relationship between the Bat and the *koumori* shapeshifter spirits has influenced most of the clan's culture and its brief history. However, this remains a subtle relationship, since the *koumori* spirits are very secretive. Many young shugenja explore the interior of the island, hoping to impress one of the shapeshifters enough to become their ally or teacher; while success in such ventures is extremely rare, it has happened once or twice, and Bat students continue to pursue the hope of winning such favor from their clan's namesakes.

The Boar Clan

Hida Ichiro shivered and pulled his kimono tighter around himself, trying to conserve his body warmth. The howling wind made the small campfire in front of him flicker wildly, sometimes getting dangerously close to extinction. Around him the night-darkened peaks of the Twilight Mountains cast foreboding shadows, like somber sentinels disapproving of the disturbance.

His father smiled at him from across the fire. "Not exactly a courtier's room, is it?" Hida Kenzen said.

Ichiro shrugged, unwilling to show weakness in front of his father. "I'll live," he grunted. "It's not the cold though, it's... I feel like..."

"Like someone's watching you?" his father finished for him.

"Yes," the boy nodded. "Do you think goblins could be in the area?"

"Possible," Kenzen said thoughtfully. "Although in small numbers, else I would have noticed the tracks. But I think this has more to do with the fact we are near the lands of the Boar Clan."

Ichiro drew a sharp breath. "I remember the stories," he said after a moment. "A clan of warriors and miners, cousins to the Crab, yet separate from us. Destroyed by Bloodspeakers."

"Very good," Kenzen said, nodding in approval. Forgetting the lessons of the past was an unacceptable error in the Crab Clan. "Doesn't it strike you as odd though, that after so many centuries we have not reclaimed the lands the Heichi once occupied? Surely the mining operations would be worth continuing."

"The Shakoki Dogu," the boy said at once, albeit with a hint of nervousness in his voice. "A powerful ghost or spirit of some sort, the Kuni say. I heard the peasants say it cursed the land, causing landslides, disappearances, accidents."

"Maybe it did," Kenzen agreed. He poked at the fire with a stick, watching sparks fly into the cold windy air as flames erupted anew. "But then again, we are the Crab. We know how to fight evil spirits. Perhaps we simply respect the Boar's memory?"

"Respect, father?" Ichiro hesitated a moment, then forged ahead. "It seems to me the Boar failed in their duties. The Bloodspeakers killed them all, robbed their lands and destroyed their villages. The Boar are all dead. Why should we respect a failed clan?"

Kenzen chuckled, though to his son it had a sad tone. "Spoken like a true Crab," he said. "Yes, the Boar perished. But unlike the accursed Snake Clan," Kenzen spat on the ground, "they fought to the last man and refused to bow down to corruption. The last tales of their heroism are unknown, but not a single Boar was ever known to succumb to the Taint. Their lands didn't give in to the Taint either; they are protected by the Shakoki Dogu. And the Bloodspeakers were eventually defeated. So who's to say the Boar failed?"

Ichiro shrugged silently, unwilling to argue more with his father. But the older man continued.

"And as for 'all dead,' don't you think it's a bit hard to kill an entire clan? Don't you think some of them might have been away when the castle came under attack, or married into other clans? Maybe the remnants of the Boar are closer to you than you think."

Ichiro shivered but kept quiet, glancing around the dark stones uneasily.

In the distance, beyond the edge of the fire's light, a small stone statue with wide eyes watched, and listened.

The History of the Boar Clan

During the late fourth century, the Crab Clan was seeking to expand its territory and exploit new resources. The Twilight Mountains, while they lay within the clan's territorial borders, had always been only partially settled. While they were not Tainted, they presented many natural dangers and were frequently infested with Shadowlands creatures which slipped through the Crab's defenses. However, several iron and jade veins had already been located in the edges of the mountains, so in the year 383 the Crab Clan Champion arranged for a sizable exploration party to be sent into the more remote corners of the range. Initially the expedition was quite successful, establishing a camp and locating several promising veins of iron and jade. The physical conditions were difficult, but the men and women involved were Crab samurai and Crab peasants, neither of them apt to complain.

However, a combination of earthquakes, snowstorms, landslides, and avalanches conspired to cut off the expedition's contact with the Crab and indeed with the entire Empire. Months passed without news of the men and women stuck in the mountains. Eventually, the Crab Clan Champion regretfully declared them all dead, a reasonable conclusion considering the remoteness of the area and the unprecedented weather and geological conditions. The Crab abandoned further efforts.

Over sixty years later, in the year 447, a delegation of samurai emerged from the mountains, escorting large carts loaded with iron and jade. They traveled to Otosan Uchi, where their leader – a man calling himself Hida Heichi – requested an audience with the Emperor. He explained to the Son of Heaven how his people had survived in the mountains despite being abandoned by the Crab, managing to live solely on their own skills and resources. Having finished his tale, he offered the Emperor the contents of his carts. When the Hantei asked him if this was payment for the land his people resided on, Heichi cleverly replied this was impossible, since all land belonged to the Emperor of Rokugan. The shipment merely represented payment of the taxes owed for living on the Emperor's lands for so long. Impressed by the man's answer and story, the Hantei declared the lost group to be the Boar Clan, with the family name of Heichi. (Some accounts say the Crab asked for the Boar to be returned to their own ranks, but were rejected by the Emperor.)

As far as most of Rokugan is concerned, this is the entire story of how the Boar came to be. However, lurking behind this simple tale of survival amidst adversity is a more complex tale. At the end of the First War, the Kami Shiba headed towards the Shadowlands to rescue Shosuro and Shinsei, the sole survivors of the fight against Fu Leng. Shiba perished killing the First Oni, the most powerful demon of the time. However, the First Oni's blood

The Boar in Other Eras

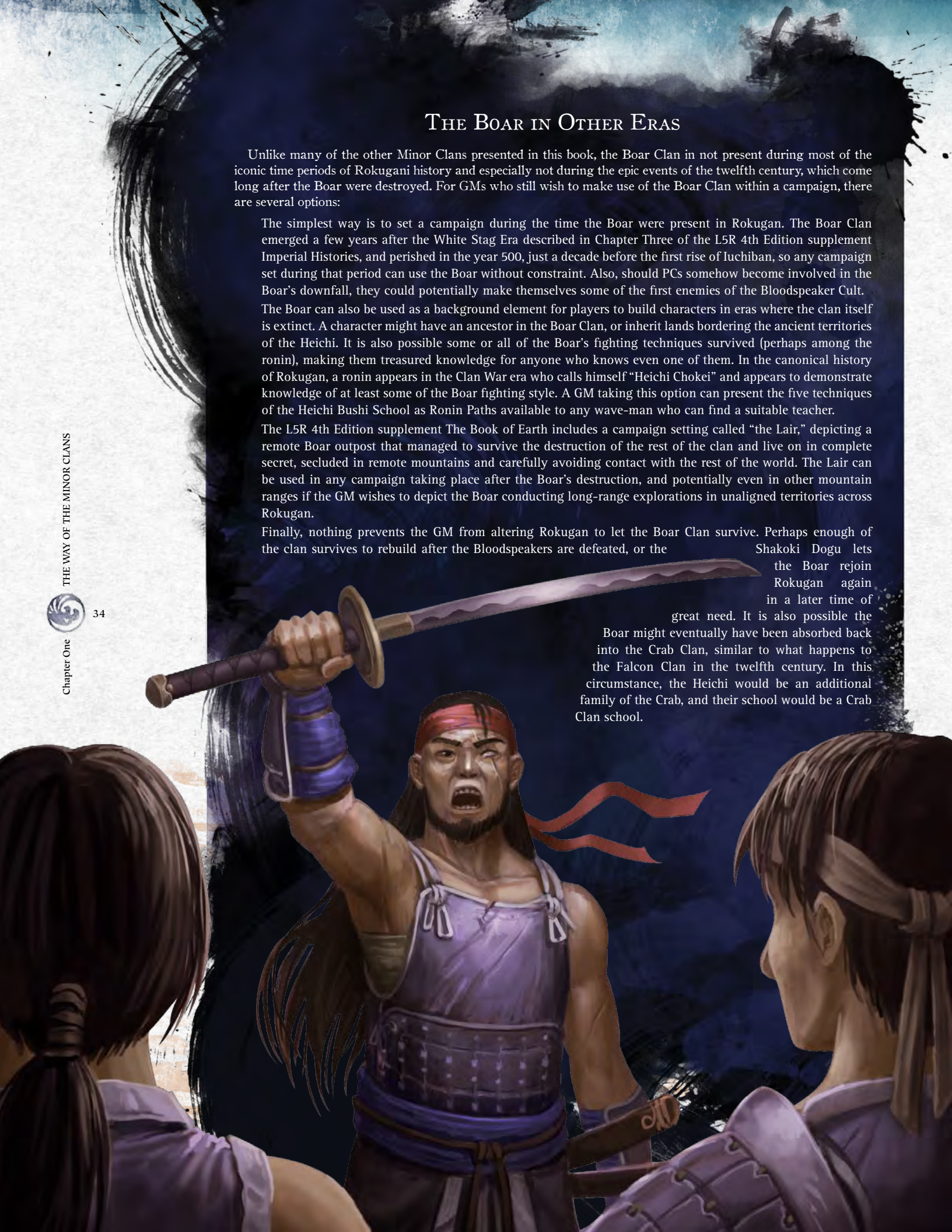
Unlike many of the other Minor Clans presented in this book, the Boar Clan in not present during most of the iconic time periods of Rokugani history and especially not during the epic events of the twelfth century, which come long after the Boar were destroyed. For GMs who still wish to make use of the Boar Clan within a campaign, there are several options:

The simplest way is to set a campaign during the time the Boar were present in Rokugan. The Boar Clan emerged a few years after the White Stag Era described in Chapter Three of the L5R 4th Edition supplement Imperial Histories, and perished in the year 500, just a decade before the first rise of Iuchiban, so any campaign set during that period can use the Boar without constraint. Also, should PCs somehow become involved in the Boar's downfall, they could potentially make themselves some of the first enemies of the Bloodspeaker Cult.

The Boar can also be used as a background element for players to build characters in eras where the clan itself is extinct. A character might have an ancestor in the Boar Clan, or inherit lands bordering the ancient territories of the Heichi. It is also possible some or all of the Boar's fighting techniques survived (perhaps among the ronin), making them treasured knowledge for anyone who knows even one of them. In the canonical history of Rokugan, a ronin appears in the Clan War era who calls himself "Heichi Chokei" and appears to demonstrate knowledge of at least some of the Boar fighting style. A GM taking this option can present the five techniques of the Heichi Bushi School as Ronin Paths available to any wave-man who can find a suitable teacher.

The L5R 4th Edition supplement The Book of Earth includes a campaign setting called "the Lair," depicting a remote Boar outpost that managed to survive the destruction of the rest of the clan and live on in complete secret, secluded in remote mountains and carefully avoiding contact with the rest of the world. The Lair can be used in any campaign taking place after the Boar's destruction, and potentially even in other mountain ranges if the GM wishes to depict the Boar conducting long-range explorations in unaligned territories across Rokugan.

Finally, nothing prevents the GM from altering Rokugan to let the Boar Clan survive. Perhaps enough of the clan survives to rebuild after the Bloodspeakers are defeated, or the Shakoki Dogu lets the Boar rejoin Rokugan again in a later time of great need. It is also possible the Boar might eventually have been absorbed back into the Crab Clan, similar to what happens to the Falcon Clan in the twelfth century. In this circumstance, the Heichi would be an additional family of the Crab, and their school would be a Crab Clan school.



seeped into the earth in the mountains where they fought, eventually turning into a Tainted metallic ore. The blood's presence awoke a spirit within the Twilight Mountains, resulting in the creation of the entity called the Shakoki Dogu. A powerful earth spirit, without form or shape of its own, it used small stone effigies to interact with the outside world, and stood guard over the area for centuries. The Twilight Mountains were empty and desolate, and the spirit grew lonely. When the Crab expedition was forced to settle in the mountains, the Shakoki Dogu saw them as worthy companions, and trapped them in its own realm – a place between the mortal world and the Spirit Realms, where they became its involuntary companions. This was a strange time for the samurai and peasants who would eventually become the Boar, trapped in an empty world of shadows and whispers, like a reflection of Rokugan devoid of any life. Finally, Hida Heichi confronted the Shakoki Dogu and demanded to know the reason for their imprisonment. When he heard the spirit's story, he saw an echo between its protective role in the mountains and the Crab Clan's eternal task. Heichi promised the spirit he and his people would stand forever at its side to aid it in its duties... if it would release them back into the mortal world. The Shakoki Dogu agreed, and thus were the Boar created... though none outside their own ranks knew the truth.

After winning their status as a Minor Clan, the Boar started to expand their settlements and open trade routes with other clans. Their skills at mining the best ores from the mountains soon became apparent; they also developed tremendous talent in armor-forging. The small clan's repute quickly grew and Boar armor became highly prized. This allowed the clan to prosper despite its remote and inhospitable home. The Boar traded freely with all clans, but the Crab and Scorpion were favored partners due to proximity (and in the case of the Crab, kinship). While the Boar Clan never faced any serious military conflicts during its short history, the Heichi's wealth – especially for a Minor Clan – drew some envious eyes. Bandits, ronin, and ambitious clan samurai sometimes attempted to encroach on the Boar's territory to steal their money, ore, and armor. Unfortunately for them, the Boar had developed a unique set of fighting techniques based on a combination of traditional Crab mastery of defensive warfare with a unique long spear called the mai chong, which featured a broad blade and two prongs to trap and ensnare the enemy's armor. The Boar's military strength also served them well in dealing with the occasional rogue Shadowlands creature, which continued to plague the mountains from time to time. Although the Crab often wished the Boar had never left their ranks, they could never argue the Boar faltered in their vigilance.

The Destruction of the Boar

Alas, the Boar's prosperity was not to last. Their fall from grace began in the world of politics, as is too often true for the Empire's warriors. Heichi Shizugai, the son of Clan Champion Heichi Batsuda, accompanied his father to the Imperial Winter Court, where one night he witnessed an illegal duel to the death between a Lion general named Matsu Dainoku and a Dragon *taisa* called Mirumoto Chorude. The duel was not only unauthorized but also won by the Lion through underhanded means, which horrified the young Boar. He reported the Lion's action to the Emerald Champion; however, there was only one other witness to the whole affair, who died in mysterious circumstances. This left Shizugai – who had not yet even passed his gempukku – as the only witness against Dainoku, who claimed his honor had been impugned and demanded a duel. Batsuda accepted the challenge on behalf of his son, and the Matsu general easily slew the Boar Champion.

Shizugai, now hurriedly declared an adult and named as the new Boar Clan Champion, immediately departed the Imperial Court. Bitterly angry over what he saw as the murder of both Chorude and his own father, he declared the Boar would cease paying Imperial taxes until the deaths of his father and the Dragon samurai were properly avenged. This was a very unwise course of action, and the Emperor soon dispatched one of his Legions to the territory of the Boar Clan in retribution. Their goal was to force Shizugai and his family to commit seppuku, allowing the Boar Clan to continue once its leaders paid the price for their foolishness.

However, when the Legion arrived in Shiro Heichi, they found no trace of life. Not a single soul lived in the Boar lands. Instead, blood was scattered everywhere, from hand-prints on the walls to rivulets trickling off stairs and roofs. A small number of odd stone statues were also scattered about. The scale and purpose of the massacre was hard to imagine, particularly since no trace of the assailants was ever found. After brief consideration, the Emperor declared the Boar Clan destroyed and returned their lands to the Crab. Most people in Rokugan assumed the Heavens had punished the Boar for their insolence.

The truth was much darker.

It was not uncommon for the Boar to host students from other clans interested in their mining and forging techniques, since this allowed the clan to obtain many favors. One such student, a Dragon shugenja named Agasha Ryuden, was in fact one of the earliest Bloodspeaker cultists, a personal student of Asahina Yajinden. (Some Kuni scholars who later learned of Ryuden's tale have speculated he was actually Yajinden himself under disguise. The truth is lost to the centuries.) Regardless, Ryuden was a powerful *maho-tsukai* and sacrificed the majority of the Boar Clan to access the solidified blood of the First Oni which lay below their lands. He used the corrupted ore to create the Anvil of Despair, a powerful cursed relic which would continue to plague the Empire for many years to come.

Faced with both the failure of its own duty and the fear of losing its companions, the Shakoki Dogu panicked. It pulled every surviving member of the Boar Clan it could reach out of the mortal realm entirely, forever to exist at its side as incorporeal spirits, not really dead or alive. In their place it left a scattering of its effigies, the small stone statues which mystified the Imperial investigators.

Thus the proud legacy of the Boar was lost, remembered only in stories or rumors from peasants.

The Twilight Mountains After the Boar

After Agasha Ryuden murders the largest part of the Boar Clan and the Shakoki Dogu removes the rest from the mortal world, the Twilight Mountains quickly become even more desolate than before. The castle and other structures built by the Boar fall into disrepair, and the Crab only rarely send any men in the mountains, usually only when in dire need of iron ore. The Shakoki Dogu becomes more active in the area, spying through its effigies, the small humanoid statuettes with wide eyes that the Legion found in Shiro Heichi. Freak earthquakes, temporary confusion, or outright madness brought on by the Shakoki Dogu are risks travelers must face.

Another threat that is somewhat less frequent but much more dangerous is the presence of *maho-tsukai*. Many power-mad sorcerers, both from within the Bloodspeaker Cult and from elsewhere, seek to emulate the deeds of Agasha Ryuden, looking for the blood of the First Oni for their own nefarious purposes. The Shakoki Dogu frequently forces them away or drives them mad, making them even more dangerous. One Bloodspeaker who turned himself into an undead abomination was left prowling through the mountains for centuries, driven utterly insane by the Shakoki Dogu yet unable to die.

The Lands of the Boar Clan

The Boar's territory consisted of only a single province, entirely mountainous, encompassing the northernmost portion of the Twilight Mountains. Like the rest of that mountain range, the Heichi's lands were fairly desolate, with few viable croplands. While the Twilight Mountains are not the highest in Rokugan, they are well-known as being especially treacherous, and landslides such as those which isolated the Boar are commonplace. The numerous ravines and caves hide a number of natural predators, most commonly mountain lions and bears. The area was and remains prone to incursions by Shadowlands creatures, and this problem was actually worse in the time of the Boar since the Kaiu Wall did not yet exist. While all these factors combined to make the Twilight Mountains an inhospitable home to the Boar, the mountains were also the clan's source of wealth. The iron deposits there were legendary in their size and quality, and other rare minerals such as copper and jade could also be found in the area.

The Heichi were a practical and hardy people, and exploited the resources of their land as much as possible. Outside of their main settlement at Shiro Heichi, the Boar established a series of other villages throughout the mountains. These villages were often widely scattered and built in locations which other clans would have considered impossible to settle. Almost all of them were dedicated to mining, located as close as possible to the mineral deposits to save time and effort. A combination of dogged determination and expert engineering allowed the Boar to build mines on the highest peaks and in the deepest crevasses. Each village was semi-autonomous, given the distances to Shiro Heichi, and usually had a small family of samurai ruling it. Usually the bulk of a village's population would be dedicated to running and supporting the mining effort. Still, each village had at least a modest shrine or temple to tend to the population's spiritual needs, and smithies were (unsurprisingly) commonplace. Defenses included a stone wall and a tower where the samurai could keep watch for any dangers. The villages' remote locations made them surprisingly defensible, and many bandits and Shadowlands creatures regretted rousing the anger of the Boar. The clan's only real weakness was the extreme limits on its agriculture, due to the thin and poor soil of the mountains, and the Boar Clan traded for most of its food.

Shiro Heichi

Shiro Heichi, located deep within the Twilight Mountains, was the center of the Boar Clan's lands and power. While the Boar were never a large clan, the wealth they gained through trading iron and armor allowed them to build a rather impressive fortress. The design of Shiro Heichi took advantage of its mountainous location, and it had an irregular layout compared to a regular Rokugani castle. Four external towers connected by a low wall surrounded a central keep, a feat of architecture given the uneven terrain of the area. The Boar designed the place to resist sustained assault from Shadowlands creatures or samurai armies alike, and even the Kaiu recognized the castle as admirable work, although they suggested a larger wall. The four towers were constantly manned, and no one could approach the place without being noticed. At night, torches would be lit outside the walls, for the Boar's vigilance never flinched. While few in Rokugan ever made the difficult trek to Shiro Heichi, those who did were impressed by the strength of the Boar.

The main keep housed the clan's ruling family and their closest vassals. It also held the treasures of the clan: its best armors and weapons, reputedly including several awakened items with mystical properties, along with a fortune in iron, jade, and coin, and detailed maps of the area showing the many veins of ore the clan exploited. After the Boar were destroyed, rumors of these lost treasures often drew ronin and bandits to the area, although none are known to have returned alive with any of the fabled wealth.

A short walk down-slope from the castle was the main town in the Heichi territory. Built as an expansion of the expedition's original settlement, it grew into a large community dedicated to mining, forging, and trade. It lay next to the largest mine in the Boar Clan's lands, and every day scores of peasants went underground to labor at digging out the clan's source of wealth. The town only had the barest level of self-sustenance, relying on a few rice paddies and the fish from a couple of mountain streams,

and most supplies came from the trade caravans which visited regularly to exchange their goods for the clan's armors and metals.

Shiro Heichi was a place of work first and foremost, and its people were used to a rough but productive life. Visitors were often surprised at the town's uneven landscape, with steeply sloping paths and crude staircases making any trip through the settlement into a somewhat demanding journey. The place was also dirty by Rokugani standards, its buildings and inhabitants covered with the dust and waste of the mines. But for the people of the Boar, it was a home they had built through their own struggle and sacrifice, as signified by a large shrine commemorating the spirits of the dead – particularly those lost in the initial effort to reach the place. The inhabitants also maintained a number of smaller temples in the area, including a secret shrine in honor of the Shakoki Dogu itself (this was kept from the eyes of visitors who might have misunderstood its nature).

Customs of the Boar

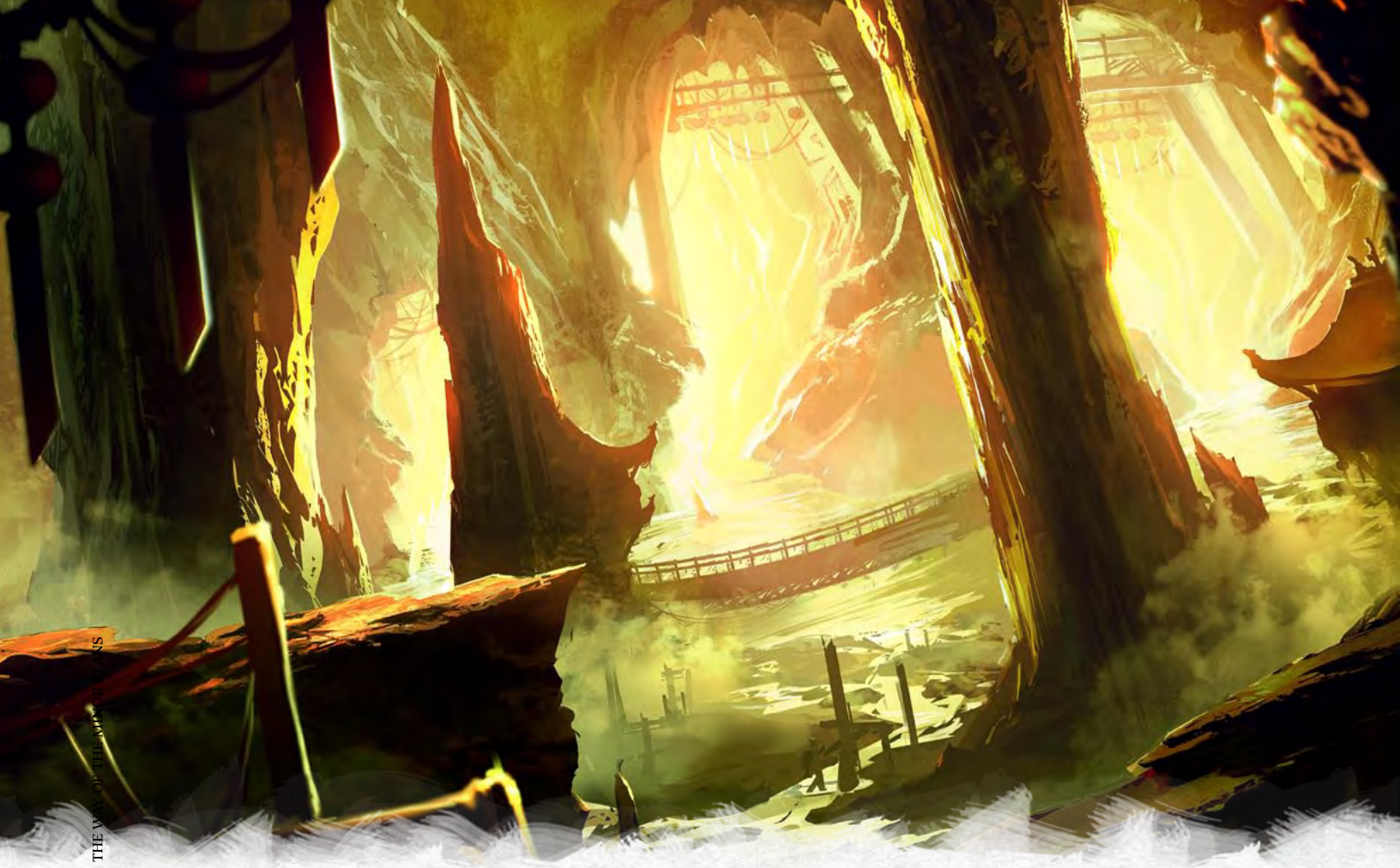
While the Boar Clan was only present in Rokugan for a century, its headstrong attitude and near total isolation from the rest of the Empire produced a distinctive culture. Like many Minor Clans, the Boar celebrated any birth within their small clan as a blessing. However, for them a birth was also a symbol of endurance and survival, crucial tenets of their moral code. The parents were celebrated and honored, and frequently received a new piece of armor – such as a helmet or kote gauntlets – to symbolize their contribution to the clan's renewed strength. They would travel to the mountains as soon as the mother was mobile and leave an offering to the Shakoki Dogu, usually a small amount of food mixed with iron ore. The Boar always knew their existence was a gift from a powerful spirit, and hoped continued acknowledgement of that fact would protect them and their future.

The Boar scrupulously observed the 7-5-3 festival (described on page 202 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*), since they were all too conscious of the dangers of the mountains, and sickness frequently took away the weakest children. Once their children reached the age of seven, the Boar would begin to relax a bit, but they still watched over their children as fiercely as they watched over their lands.

Shiro Heichi After the Boar

After Agasha Ryuden destroyed the Boar Clan to create the Anvil of Despair, Shiro Heichi became a cursed and abandoned ruin. The last people known to lay eyes on it were the soldiers of the Imperial Legion sent to pacify it, and they came back speaking of an eerie and lifeless place, covered in blood and scattered with strange stone statues. Few people have attempted to see Shiro Heichi since that time, and those who try often wind up diverted into other parts of the mountains, for the Shakoki Dogu can hide the place from mortal eyes or block the paths to it.

It is possible to reach Shiro Heichi if one can overcome the Shakoki Dogu's deceptions and convince the powerful spirit to allow a visit. The castle is a crumbling ruin, slowly collapsing under the weight of age, and the malevolence awakened by Agasha Ryuden is still present. The two most dangerous places are the castle itself, which still shows traces of ancient blood and is haunted by countless ghosts of dead Heichi, and the mine where Ryuden found the blood of the First Oni, which is heavily Tainted. In addition, the spirits of the Boar Clan samurai who survived the attack are found in the area in the form of the Shakoki Dogu's stone effigies, and they may also act to drive away unwanted intruders. (On the other hand, respectful and honorable samurai might be able to gain the approval of the Shakoki Dogu and get precious information from its effigies.)



The majority of Boar Clan samurai trained in their clan's bushi school. The clan had very little use for courtiers, and it is not known that they ever possessed a shugenja (making Heichi Chokei, the twelfth century ronin shugenja who claimed descent from the Boar, even more of an oddity). The Boar were very proud of their fighting techniques, developed in isolation and refined in conflicts with the natural and supernatural dangers of the mountains. Although the school was originally based on the Hida techniques (in which Hida Heichi and his followers had been trained), it put a stronger emphasis on raw strength, defensive fighting, and the use of polearms – especially the distinctive clan weapon, the mai chong. Hida Heichi himself is credited with the design of the mai chong, and he probably created the weapon in order to give his followers a clean break from their Crab heritage. The only dojo of the School was in Shiro Heichi itself, and children traveled from everywhere in the province to attend their classes, something which helped promote the clan's unity. Training was exhausting and difficult, and included long trips into the mountains where the children would learn to climb (both bare-handed and assisted) and other aspects of survival in the barren environment. Once a student was ready to pass gempukku and become an adult, a suit of armor would be forged specifically for him. He would then face three adults in armed combat, simultaneously. The goal for the student was not to win but simply to stay conscious for as long as possible; his opponents would use the butts of their weapons to beat the youngster within an inch of his life. Since the official ceremony of gempukku happened the next day, most Boar samurai received their daisho while battered and bruised, barely able to stand. While this was horrifying to most other clans (except perhaps the Crab and some of the Lion), the Heichi saw the ritual as teaching important lessons, such as the inevitability of defeat, the force of will required to keep fighting, and how to stall opponents while outnumbered and overwhelmed. Rare were the students to actually fail, since just showing up the day after the bout was considered proof of success.

The Boar were used to hard work and difficult circumstances, and as such they were not exactly a festive people. They learned early on not to embrace drinking in the manner of the Crab, since a drunken samurai in the mountains could easily die from exposure or fall down a mineshaft. Correspondingly, weddings in the Boar tended to be businesslike affairs, usually arranged just to keep the clan growing. This was seldom a problem, since the Boar were taught from childhood to always follow duty above all, and sneered at the tragic romances of Noh plays. Wedding rituals were kept short and simple, usually overseen by a daimyo due to the rarity of shugenja in the area, and only attended by immediate family. On the night of the wedding, if the bride had changed allegiance to join the Boar, she would be told the truth about the Shakoki Dogu and the blood of the First Oni, and the true duty of the Boar. Needless to say, betraying the Boar's trust by revealing this would meet with swift retribution, but there are no known instances of a new-made Boar revealing the secret. The Boar avoided marrying people who they could not trust – there is no known record of a marriage

to the Scorpion – but once a new spouse was accepted into the clan, he or she would become part of a tightly-knit family. The few Heichi who ever left the clan to join another always swore an oath never to reveal the Boar secrets, and left their armor behind as a symbol of their change of duties.

Beliefs and Superstitions

The Boar were a deeply superstitious people, not surprising given their first-hand contact with a powerful spirit and their home's proximity to the Shadowlands in an era when the Kaiu Wall had not yet been built. They had an aversion to complete darkness, since in the mountains it meant both the absence of warmth (which was often fatal) and unsure footing (equally dangerous). It was common for the Boar to keep at least a small lantern lit in every room of a house, and outside too if the weather permitted it. The Boar also whispered of a legendary creature called the Chouchin no Oni, who stole the lanterns to use them as replacements for the head he once lost, but this was generally considered little more than a tale to frighten children. It also was not uncommon for the Boar to carry small pieces of jade or crystal with them at all times, since they knew the dangers of the Shadowlands could strike anywhere. The Boar always remembered their promise to the Shakoki Dogu to stand at its side; therefore, when a Heichi was forced to travel outside the clan's territory he would carry a bit of dirt from his homeland in a pouch, a reminder of his eternal duties. Of course, the Boar never explained this odd custom to outsiders, and indeed they were extremely insular in their attitudes.

The Heichi were not a particularly pious people, focused as they were on the material world of war, mining, and forging. However, they were painfully aware of the presence of the spirit world around them, even if they could not perceive it. While the Crab always favored the Element of Earth, it can be said the Boar all but worshiped it; after all, the Shakoki Dogu itself was a powerful spirit of the mountains. The Boar also paid tribute to a variety of Fortunes and spirits associated with the mountains.

The Boar had relatively little contact with the Brotherhood of Shinsei, but they did develop a certain affinity for the Order of the Seven Thunders, which taught lessons of determination and will the Boar Clan found congenial. Monks of that Order enjoyed the solitude of the Twilight Mountains and built several monasteries across the land. The Boar also saw the Order as an honorable place of retirement, since the way of the Boar was extremely taxing and many samurai could not keep up their duties after middle age. Since the province had no shugenja, the monks also took care of most religious rituals. It is said that when Agasha Ryuden attacked, the monks of the Seven Thunders fought alongside the Boar, and gave final rites to those they could reach to try to save them from the touch of Jigoku. Whether this is true or not, now only empty monasteries stand in the Boar lands, silent testimony to a forgotten people.

Bullying

A particular habit of Boar Clan samurai was bullying, which they called ijime. Pretty much from the moment they could walk and talk, Boar children would learn to threaten and intimidate each other. This often took the form of physical violence, and brawling among children was commonplace and allowed freely so long as it did not become life-threatening. As adults, the Heichi would tone down their behavior, but it was still common for them to casually remark on how they could break someone's knees or gut them on the spot. This practice was seen as appallingly rude and barbaric by the rest of Rokugan, particularly since visitors had difficulty discerning what was a real threat and what was just a test. The Boar themselves had no problem navigating the sea of constant threats, and indeed their bullying did not seem to impair their forming friendships and bonds with one another. To them, bullying was actually a sign of respect, since only a helpless weakling would be unworthy of such treatment. They saw themselves as forged metal, tempered by a hundred blows and strong as steel. Unfortunately, this also meant on occasion a child would not be able to withstand the constant pressure of bullying peers. The Boar saw such failures as proof of weakness unfitting for the clan, and such children were usually sent to a monastery rather than being admitted to the dojo.

The Dragonfly Clan

"It is an unfortunate circumstance, Matsu-sama, but it seems Lord Taguchi is no longer home. He is currently touring the lands of the Shinjo. However, we are confident he will return within a few weeks."

"A few weeks?!" the Matsu roared. He slammed his fist into the shoji-frame, shaking the fragile door.

The Dragonfly diplomat did not flinch. His smile remained serenely pasted on his face. "Naturally you may remain as long as you'd like, Matsu-sama."

Matsu Usao stared hard into the eyes of the diplomat. Around them, the Dragonfly of Kyuden Tonbo went about their business, seemingly oblivious to the threatening manner of their Lion guest. As if by wordless cue, a servant girl approached and bowed, extending a tray of ceramic cups filled with warm tea. Usao ignored her, focusing solely on the smiling Tonbo who stood before him.

"As I recall," the Matsu said, baring his teeth as he spoke, "one week ago the pass was blocked."

The man nodded. "Snowstorm, Matsu-sama. It could not be helped."

"Such unpredictable weather." Matsu Usao smiled grimly. "Just as in the previous week... what was it?"

"A mud slide," the diplomat recalled. "They are not uncommon along the path. It took some time to clear it away."

"Yes, two weeks, I recall." The Matsu's smile grew angrier. He pointed a finger to a nearby plum tree. "When I first arrived here, that plum tree was bare. Now it is in mid-bloom! I have watched the pass to Shiro Mirumoto all this time, and not once have I seen a single messenger leave this castle for that pass."

The Tonbo said nothing, his smile unchanged.

The Matsu thrust forward a threatening finger, holding it inches from the Tonbo's face. Again the diplomat did not flinch. Usao felt the bindings of frustration, heightened by the man's seeming unflappability. "Hear my words," Usao growled. "When I receive an audience with Lord Taguchi, he will know of this. Be certain of it!"

The diplomat tilted his head. "Matsu-sama, have you been mistreated?" He glanced at the servant, still bowed with the outstretched tray. "We understood this blend was your favorite."

"It will take more than tea and simple pleasures to-"

The Matsu stopped mid-sentence. A contingent of Shiba were approaching from down the hall. The diplomat looked in their direction, smiled, and bowed. The two exchanged words for a short moment, then the Shiba at the head of the delegation showed a document to the Tonbo. Travel papers for the Mirumoto pass. The diplomat nodded, stepped aside, and gestured to the back of the hallway. The Shiba bowed in turn and progressed on their way.

When they were gone, the Matsu stormed forward. "What was that!?" he demanded. "Did you let them through?"

The Tonbo shrugged. "The distinguished ambassador has been granted an audience. Is it not our duty to allow him to pass?"

The Matsu stared at the Tonbo for a long time. Then his hand darted out, grabbing a teacup from the servant's tray. He walked away with heavy steps, flinging words over his shoulder. "Don't think I do not see what is going on here, Tonbo-san. You cannot keep me here forever!"

Usao vanished down the hall. The diplomat smiled. Outside the window at the far end of the hall, the group of Shiba prepared to ascend into the mountains.

The History of the Dragonfly

The founding of the Dragonfly begins not in one place but in two. At the dawning of the eighth century, in the lands of the Dragon Clan, there lived a man named Mirumoto Asijin. He was a peaceful man, in fact so much so that many whispered he was ill-suited to be a warrior. Although Asijin eventually proved himself a capable leader and rose to become a personal lieutenant of his daimyo, Mirumoto Tomo, he still suffered an odd reputation among his peers due to his relationship with his lord. For although Asijin served Tomo faithfully and without hesitation, Tomo always denied anything Asijin asked of him. Whatever the request, Tomo always said no. Once, Asijin asked for his men to be outfitted with new *zori*, and Tomo denied him; Asijin's second in command asked the same thing only a few moments later, and Tomo agreed. Yet somehow there was no enmity between the two samurai; Asijin genuinely admired his daimyo, and Tomo always entrusted Asijin with his most important tasks. It would be fair to say that Asijin was content with his life and purpose.

As fate would have it, however, Asijin came to suffer great misfortune. Before the century's turn, his wife died unexpectedly in childbirth, and the sick child died only days later. Stricken by grief, Asijin asked Tomo to grant him seppuku. He was denied. Some time later, he asked to shave his head and retire. This, too, was denied.

Tomo was not being cruel. The priests at Asijin's birth had foreseen a great destiny for him, and Tomo knew it had not yet been fulfilled.

Asijin was heartbroken, but he bowed and obeyed regardless. For a long time he was a hollow man, conducting his duties listlessly without any sense of purpose. This finally changed with the arrival of Isawa Maroko.

Maroko was a fiery young woman, a samurai-ko of great gifts and great passions. Intelligent, curious, and free-spirited, she was a gifted pupil of the Phoenix Master of Water. When she was only a child, she was betrothed to a Lion called Akodo Yakutsu, one marriage of many intended to solidify a treaty between the Lion and Phoenix. While the arrangement brought much prestige for her family, as time passed Maroko found she did not think much of the brash, headstrong Yakutsu or his extensive martial accomplishments.

Shortly after her gempukku, Maroko accompanied a Phoenix contingent to Dragon lands as a part of a diplomatic mission. She instantly felt at home in the wild mountains, delighted to explore the lands of the Mirumoto alone. Rather than confront the fiery young woman on the impropriety of her behaviors, the Phoenix delegates instead asked Mirumoto Tomo for a Dragon to be assigned informally as her yojimbo during her time in their lands. Thus Mirumoto Asijin became Isawa Maroko's companion, hand-picked for the purpose.

In many ways Asijin was Maroko's opposite, calm where she was passionate, quiet where she was outspoken. Yet the two found they appreciated one another's company far beyond what their masters intended. Maroko's cheerful and outgoing manner soothed Asijin's pain, and Maroko admired the quiet, compassionate man who served on in spite of his sorrow. Soon the two fell deeply in love. However, Asijin knew Maroko was promised to another, and Maroko had no wish to risk Asijin's honor. They never spoke of their affections, even though their feelings were plain to all who saw them together. They carried on in this way for two years. Finally, in the year 703, the day of Maroko's marriage drew near enough that she began to speak of returning to her homelands to prepare for the wedding.

Asijin finally realized he could not face the pain of losing another woman he loved. Recognizing this as a failure of Duty, Asijin begged his lord Tomo to allow him seppuku for his failure... and as always, Tomo denied him. Swept by an uncharacteristic passion, burning with shame, Asijin dared to ask why. But Tomo showed no anger despite the unseemly question. The daimyo replied: "Fate whispers in your ear. Do not ignore it."

That night, Asijin told Maroko the truth of his feelings, and she replied in kind. Though they both knew already, somehow saying it aloud gave them new courage and resolve. They promised to marry, with or without permission, no matter what obstacles might lie in their path. One week before Maroko was to leave for her homeland, Asijin asked Tomo for the right to cease his duties in Dragon lands. Everyone expected Tomo to refuse him, as he had always done before, but instead – to the shock of all those present – he smiled and agreed. "At last, you have chosen to walk your path," Tomo said, and issued the bewildered Asijin his traveling papers.

Asijin returned with Maroko to Phoenix lands, where Isawa Ejuko, the Master of Water, gave them her blessing to marry. Ejuko herself performed the ceremony. The two newlyweds traveled west, taking their attendants, and settling in the foothills of the Dragon mountains. There, Maroko organized a small temple and Asijin founded a dojo, and the two lived happily for some time.

The Battle of Kyuden Tonbo

When word of Maroko's betrayal reached the ears of Akodo Yakutsu, he was furious and demanded the right to avenge his honor. The Phoenix denied him, unwilling to compromise their pacifistic stance. When Yakutsu approached Mirumoto Tomo and demanded retribution, Tomo replied: "If they wish to leave the service of their families for the folly of love, let the Fortunes decide their fate."

Enraged, Yakutsu lobbied his daimyo for command of a small force to attack the treacherous couple directly. So granted, Yakutsu took his small army and invaded Asijin and Maroko's settlement, killing wantonly. With every student of Asijin's who fell to his blade, Yakutsu shouted, "Come and face me, Asijin!" But Asijin never did.

The next day, Yakutsu awoke to find himself surrounded. A Dragon army blocked his passage west, and a Phoenix army blocked his passage east. He was trapped, both armies poised to destroy his inferior force. It was the first time in centuries the Dragon and Phoenix had stood together. They did not allow him to retreat until he swore on his honor to leave Asijin and Maroko alone forever. He returned to Lion lands, humiliated and disgraced.

Word of this confrontation eventually reached the Emperor, and caused the Lion a considerable loss of face in the Imperial Court. The Emperor was so impressed by the unified action of the Dragon and Phoenix that he blessed the union of Asijin and Maroko, granting them their own family name. Thus the Tonbo family and the Dragonfly Clan were born.

Yakutsu's Revenge

The story of the Dragonfly Clan's founding does not end there, for while they had earned their family name, they had not yet found a purpose. As fate would have it, Akodo Yakutsu would help provide the Dragonfly with their identity.

Many years after Yakutsu's unsuccessful campaign, an Agasha ambassador insulted him in court over the incident. Many others had used his failure against him, but never before had a Dragon dared to speak of it. Sensing a chance to seek his revenge, Yakutsu took public offense and defended his actions against the Tonbo. Before the Imperial Court, he spoke of the treachery of Isawa Maroko, who believed vows were merely words to be broken. He painted Mirumoto Asijin as a villain who stole Maroko away from him, disgracing the alliance the marriage was to cement. The Emperor was swayed, and granted Yakutsu the right to seek retribution for the slight to his honor.

However, Yakutsu did not break his vow. He did not march on the lands of the Tonbo. Instead, in the summer of the year 711 he led an army of 5,000 samurai into the lands of the Agasha and brought war to the Dragon Clan, in a conflict known as the Battle of the Great Climb. The Mirumoto defenders fought valiantly, but Yakutsu had grown wise since his earlier defeats, and soon even they could not stand before him. As he laid siege to Shiro

Agasha, he sent word to the Dragon Champion, Togashi Ayoki (the name used by Togashi in that era), saying he would not raise his siege until his honor was satisfied.

Tonbo Asijin was summoned before the Dragon Champion. Togashi told him for the sake of his former clan he must face Akodo Yakutsu in a duel... and lose. Asijin agreed, but only on condition the Dragonfly would have the allegiance and patronage of the Dragon forevermore. Togashi agreed in turn, for he already foresaw what useful allies the Tonbo could be.

On the fifth day of the siege, Asijin approached Yakutsu's command group and challenged the Lion to a duel. Yakutsu immediately accepted, and the match lasted only moments; Yakutsu cut Asijin down without hesitation, took the fallen man's sword, and declared himself daimyo of the Dragonfly. He marched to Kyuden Tonbo with his army to claim Maroko as his bride.

However, Yakutsu did not live long enough to force Maroko into marriage. No sooner did he arrive in the Dragonfly lands than Asijin and Maroko's son, Tonbo Kuyuden, challenged him to a duel to avenge his father's death. Yakutsu readily accepted, confident that if he had slain the father he could kill the son. What he did not know was that young Kuyuden had studied in the Shiba school and had also received personal instruction in *niten* from his father. When the duel was over, it was Akodo Yakutsu's head that rolled across the floor. Some legends would claim that when Yakutsu tried to draw the dead Asijin's sword, it would not leave its *saya*.

Kuyuden now found himself daimyo of a Minor Clan at the age of only seventeen. He soon learned the role the Dragon had played in his father's death, and at first his mind turned to revenge, but his mother dissuaded him. "Too much blood has fallen. Your father knows peace, so let us be thankful and turn our minds to productive matters." Realizing his mother carried no hatred, Kuyuden felt shamed by his own anger. He swore never to draw a sword again, and disbanded his father's swordsmanship dojo to demonstrate his sincere devotion to peace. In later generations the Tonbo became a family of shugenja and scholars, drawing on the heritage of Isawa Maroko.

The Dragon Emissaries

The Dragon kept their promise to Asijin and extended their protection over the Tonbo. The following year, the Dragonfly Clan were officially made the emissaries and gatekeepers of the Dragon lands. Anyone seeking audience with the Dragon Clan was first required to approach the Dragonfly; those who would not humble themselves before the Minor Clan were not permitted to visit the reclusive Dragon. The Dragonfly embraced this duty with serene zeal, housing and tending to their guests while they awaited the privilege of meeting with the Dragon. And so it would remain for nearly four hundred years. Throughout that time the Lion, true to their nature, refused to forget the defeat and humiliation of Yakutsu and nursed an eternal grudge against the Dragonfly, watching always for a chance to attain vengeance.

In the year 1158, during the time of the Four Winds, the Dragon and Phoenix went to war (a conflict actually caused by the machinations of the Dark Oracle of Fire). The Lion Clan sided with the Phoenix and joined the fighting against the Dragon. A Lion general named Akodo Ijiasu, a descendant of Yakutsu, used the war as an opportunity to avenge his ancestor. He marched his army through Tonbo lands, using the excuse of war with the Dragon Clan to justify the maneuver – and to attack the Tonbo when they resisted. The tiny clan was no match for the Lion, and Kyuden Tonbo was razed to the ground. The Minor Clan escaped total destruction only due to the actions of a shugenja named Tonbo Euiko, a sensei in the Tonbo school who had attained great mastery of divination. Forewarned of the Lion attack, she passed word to the Dragonfly Clan Champion, Tonbo Manaka, who managed to quietly evacuate a large number of Dragonfly samurai before the attack. As a result, almost half the strength of the clan survived.

The following year, Toturi Sezaru claimed the ruins of Kyuden Tonbo for his own. Moved by the plight of the Dragonfly Clan, the second son of Toturi dedicated much of his time to healing the wounds of their lands. For a brief time the Tonbo became his protected vassals. Late in 1159, after the climactic events that resulted in the ascension of Sezaru's brother Naseru as Emperor Toturi III, Sezaru took the Isawa family name and left the lands of the Dragonfly. However, before his departure he fully restored the castle to its former glory.

After the time of the Four Winds, the Dragonfly enjoyed a period of peace in which they rebuilt their ravaged lands and resumed their duty as gatekeepers and emissaries for the Dragon Clan. A decade later, however, during the War of Dark Fire their lands again came under attack. Quite unexpectedly, a Lion Clan army led by the hero Ikoma Otemi rescued the Dragonfly from the Army of Dark Fire. Whether this marked an end to the long feud between the clans or merely a pause in that feud remains to be seen.

The Dragonfly Lands

Kyuden Tonbo sits in a shallow valley at the foothills of the Great Climb (Kyodai na Josho Suru), just outside the Dragon lands. The valley forms a sort of gateway to the mountains, and attempts to detour around it are effectively blocked by the surrounding inhospitable terrain. Thus, if visitors wish to enter the Kitsuki and Mirumoto provinces here, they must first pass through the Tonbo family's domain.

The valley itself is wide and hilly, flanked on both sides by low forested mountains that eventually give way to higher rocky crags. The lands are mostly rolling fields with irregular patches of forest. The weather is dependably mild, although the shape of the valley causes unpredictable winter weather. The valley is not especially fertile, and the Tonbo farmers must work hard to produce any decent yield of crops; even then, the harvest is often just barely enough to provide the Dragonfly what they need.

Because of the valley's shape, the Tonbo lands are not particularly defensible. Invaders will almost always have the advantage until they reach Kyuden Tonbo itself, and the castle's own defenses are merely adequate. Anyone wishing to invade Dragon lands must first cross the Tonbo province, but the Tonbo themselves are little more than a minor inconvenience to a prepared army. This is something the Tonbo fully understand, and many times they have elected to stand aside and not disrupt an enemy army en route to attack Dragon lands. For their part, the Dragon do not expect Tonbo intervention against invaders; such is not their role, and they would be ill-equipped to aid the Dragon anyway. Indeed, while the Dragon respect the autonomy of the Dragonfly, they consider the Tonbo provinces to be under their protection and often send their soldiers to patrol the valley.

An unusual feature of the Tonbo provinces, one which underlines the mystical nature of the Dragonfly Clan, is the tendency for the open lands of the valley to occasionally become populated with ghostly phantom spirits. It is not known why this happens (although Tonbo scholars have made many guesses), but it seems to happen most often on nights of the full moon. It has also been known to occur more rarely during the day, at dawn, or when the valley is enshrouded in mist. The phantoms seem to be plucked from random periods of history; Dragonfly samurai have reported coming face-to-face with their long dead ancestors, recently departed friends, or even images of the adults their children will one day grow up to be. Anyone who remains in the valley long enough is bound to see at least one of these ghostly images. The Tonbo seem to accept these occurrences as something normal, much as other samurai might regard a cold breeze or the formation of a pond. Visitors are often taken aback by the Tonbo's apparent indifference to the "haunting" of their lands, but the Dragonfly are quick to point out that the images are not real, do not seem to be self-aware, and are not malicious in the slightest. Indeed, they seem to be a reflection of the illusionary, transitory state of the world. The Tonbo liken these phantoms to the moon itself; though it often vanishes and reappears in the sky, none imagine that phenomenon to be supernatural.

The Tonbo, as a family dominated by shugenja, have built many temples and shrines throughout the valley, some in isolation and others adjacent to peasant villages. After the Lion invasion during the Four Winds era, most of the temples and shrines are destroyed. This loss extends into the modern era, as the Tonbo are simply too poor to replace everything that was lost. After this time, the only true monastery that stands in Tonbo provinces is the Still Water Temple, as much a military temple as it is a monastery to the Fortunes.

Kyuden Tonbo

The lone castle of the Dragonfly is the only defensible structure in Tonbo lands. The stronghold comprises a series of houses, most of them serving as lodging for the guests awaiting word from the Dragon. At the center of the compound is a tiered pagoda-topped tower which houses the Dragonfly daimyo and his family. The Tonbo Shugenja School also maintains its primary dojo in the castle, comprising five larger buildings. Altogether, the entire complex is quite small and unmilitary compared to a typical Great Clan castle, and the architecture is humble and practical. There are a few well-tended gardens and reflection pools, but still the castle is among the smallest which lay claim to the label of 'Kyuden.' Although it is theoretically just large enough to host an Imperial Winter Court, there are no official records of the Emperor ever spending the winter in Tonbo lands.

Kyuden Tonbo burns twice in its history, once during the time of the Four Winds and again during the War of Dark Fire just over a decade later. The second burning is an especially hard blow, coming as it does so soon after the previous destruction, but the Tonbo rebuild with the assistance of the Dragon, the Phoenix, and the Imperial families. Many expected the Tonbo to simply rebuild their castle as it had been before, but the Dragonfly are a clan which understands the impermanence of the mortal world, and they redesigned the castle into a more conventional walled temple complex. The new buildings were plain yet elegant, true to the Dragonfly aesthetic of simplicity.

Vassal Families of the Dragonfly

The Dragonfly Clan has two vassal families, the Senkensha and the Koshei.

The **Koshei** family was formed in the twelfth century after the near-destruction of the Tonbo lands by the army of Akodo Ijiasu. Among Ijiasu's lieutenants was a formidable warrior named Akodo Koshei who put entire

villages to the torch, killing everyone there, peasant or samurai, adult or child. After the campaign, however, Koshei became haunted by the memories of his deeds, and eventually his guilty nightmares grew so intense that he considered seppuku. Then a vision from his ancestors drove him to travel back to the Tonbo lands and offer his services to Toturi Sezaru. Koshei swore fealty to Sezaru, becoming a loyal follower of the man known as the Wolf, and helping to rebuild the lands he had ravaged a year earlier. When Sezaru eventually left to join the Isawa, he appointed Koshei to administer the Tonbo lands in his absence. Within a couple of years, Koshei married a woman of the Tonbo family, and their children became a vassal family of the Tonbo to honor his redemptive efforts.

The Koshei are a very small family, a line of warriors within a clan dedicated to the peaceful ways of the spirits. They serve as yojimbo, and often trade favors to train with the Shiba.

By contrast with the Koshei, the **Senkensha** vassal family is almost as old as the Tonbo themselves. The founder of the family, Tonbo Senkensha, was a woman with a gift for divination, seeing visions of the future in her dreams. Because of her visions, the Dragonfly Clan was prepared for an early and deadly winter that might otherwise have destroyed the clan. The family was created in recognition of her vital service. The Senkensha have no specific duties, although they sometimes manifest the same gifts as their founder.

Customs and Traditions

"Before one studies the Path, mountains are just mountains, and rivers are just rivers. As one begins the study of the Path, mountains are more than just mountains, and rivers are more than just rivers. At last, when one understands the Path... mountains are just mountains, and rivers are just rivers." – Tonbo Euiko

The ways of the Dragonfly are not well understood by the Empire at large. To the pragmatic, the Tonbo can seem esoteric and bizarre. To the spiritual, their ways border on blasphemy and disrespect to the Heavens. To the honorable, they are cowards and shirkers. Indeed, the Dragonfly have few allies, and they do not enjoy the respect of many Great Clans.

There are many reasons for this, but the most predominant is resentment. Ever since the eighth century, the reclusive Dragon Clan has made the Dragonfly its emissaries. Anyone who seeks an audience with a lord of the Dragon Clan must first approach the Dragonfly. The visitor's rank and name do not matter; lord or servant, Great Clan samurai or *heimin*, anyone who seeks the Dragon Clan's council must first humble himself before the Dragonfly. Unsurprisingly, the Great Clans resent having to supplicate a Minor Clan in order to conduct simple diplomacy, and their samurai resent having to bow to a mere Tonbo even more. Yet there is little they can do. The Dragon have made the Tonbo their gatekeepers, and direct

war against a Minor Clan is forbidden by Imperial Edict. Thus, guests have no choice but to endure the hospitality of the Tonbo.

For their part, it suits the Dragon to require the other clans to humble themselves before a Minor Clan before visiting them. The Togashi especially consider it an essential, even enlightening experience. They believe if visitors cannot show proper respect even to those who are beneath them, such visitors are not ready to receive the wisdom of the Dragon. From this perspective, the Dragonfly serve as a sort of testing mechanism for the Dragon to determine who is prepared for their words.

Before the Clan Wars, the Dragon were seldom seen in the Empire in great numbers, and no one really knew how many existed within the clan. During these times, the duty of the Dragonfly was especially important, since encountering any Dragon samurai outside of their provinces was rare. Thus there were always a couple of dozen guests within Kyuden Tonbo, lobbying or waiting for access to the Great Climb and the Dragon lands.

Well over half of all requests for a Dragon Clan audience are denied. The Dragon are notoriously reclusive and loathe to receive visitors even at the best of times, and many requests are outright ignored. However, the Tonbo never turn their guests away, since that would be discourteous. Instead, upon receiving word of a refusal they simply say nothing, allowing the guests to continue waiting in the estates of the Dragonfly. From time to time, a guest may ask his host why he cannot advance into the Dragon mountains. The reply is always a carefully crafted excuse, designed specifically to prevent slight to the Dragon or insult to the guest. No guest is ever encouraged to actually leave. Instead, the Dragonfly supply adequate food, comfortable rooms, and plenty of time to contemplate the serene landscape. If the Dragon continue to deny an audience, the Dragonfly simply provide a new excuse, always careful not to lay blame with anyone. Sometimes a guest will become aggressive and angry at the endless waiting; more than one has accused the Dragonfly of withholding information, or even of not bothering to notify with the Dragon at all. The Tonbo endure these accusations with infinite patience, never arguing, never justifying anger with anger. Eventually, every guest is either permitted entrance or leaves in frustration.

What these guests never know about are the original instructions of the Dragon, from which the Dragonfly have never deviated. When the agreement between the clans was first made, the Dragon Clan Champion proclaimed a specific set of parameters each guest had to meet. Anyone outside of those parameters was to be declined out-of-hand; no explanation was deemed necessary. For those who did meet the parameters, a messenger would be sent to the Dragon lord in question and all would await his reply. If the lord chose to decline the visitor, the Tonbo would not embarrass the guest by suggesting he was not worthy to receive the Dragon's wisdom. Instead, he would simply be made to wait until he chose to leave of his own free will. This was judged preferable to possibly creating a direct insult by turning the guest away.

Of course, there are always those guests who the Dragon are only too happy to receive. The Tonbo keep a list of guests the Dragon permit to enter their lands without delay. Interestingly, an updated version of this list often arrives in the Tonbo lands shortly before the guests themselves, but the Tonbo have never questioned how the Dragon know who will be seeking them. Such things are above their concern. The result is that certain individuals – notably from the Phoenix – are allowed to pass into the Dragon mountains without so much as an hour's wait. Other guests waiting for their turns often witness such things and can become quite agitated, but the Tonbo only reply: "The Dragon have granted them audience. What can we do but allow them access?"

The net result of this is that the very duty which gains the Dragonfly the protection of the Dragon Clan also harms their reputation among all the other clans of the Empire. Many daimyo who have been denied access to the Dragon lands convince themselves the Dragonfly are drunk with the power of their position. The Dragonfly are fully aware of this, but they do nothing to reveal the truth behind their methods. To do so would betray the trust of the Dragon, and the Tonbo family would never disgrace their ancestor's agreement.

Non-Harm

Soon after slaying Akodo Yakutsu, Tonbo Kuyuden learned it was the Togashi daimyo who ordered his father to his death. Kuyuden was filled with anguish and nearly swore vengeance against the Dragon, but his mother Maroko stayed his hand. Maroko understood her husband's death was necessary to end the violence against her family. She reminded her son that all within the material world was merely transitory, and devotion to vengeance could ultimately yield nothing of value. "Akodo Yakutsu devoted his life to revenge. What did it win him?" Kuyuden's eyes were opened and he was shamed by his mother's wisdom. He never drew his sword again. Kuyuden disbanded his father's dojo, and the Tonbo family devoted itself to pacifism, diplomacy, and the ways of the spirits and of Enlightenment. In all the centuries since, even after two invasions and the razing of the Tonbo provinces, the Ancestral Sword of the Dragonfly has never left its saya.

The Tonbo are still a samurai family, and a samurai never shrinks away from the possibility of violence. There are Tonbo bushi as well as shugenja, and all Dragonfly practice some form of martial arts. However, they do not see the embrace of violence as an essential aspect of the samurai way. While a samurai may accept that one must occasionally fight, the Tonbo believe the desire to inflict violence, the mindset devoted to killing, is a symptom of spiritual illness, a sickness of the soul. They liken it to grasping a hot coal with the intention of throwing it at another; the act harms both the victim and the grasper. It is anger and brashness that causes one to grasp that coal, and such a person does not care for his own flesh so long as he might burn the flesh of another. The Tonbo view this as illogical and foolish.

In this way, the Tonbo live a duality as peaceful warriors, somewhat like their distant cousins in the Shiba. They fight only when they must, and they never inflict more harm than is required to end a conflict. Indeed, Dragonfly samurai are known for remaining oddly detached, serene, almost emotionless even in the thickest of fighting.

Embracing Impermanence

In an Empire of traditionalists, the Tonbo embrace change. To them, the nature of the world is tied to impermanence. Everything is in a constant state of change, and to cling to something unchanging is folly. While this is a truth that is studied by the other clans, few have embraced it as the Tonbo have. The Tonbo do not live their lives looking back towards the past; while there is comfort in tradition, tomorrow is a new day and a new world.

Consequently, the Tonbo are far more willing to change or abandon their traditions than any other clan in the Empire. They will at least entertain almost any new idea so long as it does not compromise their basic principles. The sensei of their shugenja school do not praise how well a student masters the casting of a spell, but rather how well the student innovates its casting or its use. This attitude only adds to the Dragonfly Clan's negative reputation in the rest of Rokugan. The Lion especially abhor their stance, claiming it is disrespectful at best and treasonous at worst. The Crab believe the Dragonfly mock what countless Crab have died for, and the Crane always keep their relations with the Dragonfly limited and distant. These things do not concern the Tonbo overmuch, for they believe even their rivals' scorn will change and pass with time.

You Cannot Trust What Is Written

The Tonbo believe that because the material world is in a constant state of change, one cannot rely on it to to find any lasting truth. The Tonbo extend this belief even to scholarly accounts and written doctrine. The Dragonfly believe that while a student must study what is written to gain perspective, he must never rely on it.

The Dragonfly teach their students non-reliance on written words, testimony, and appeals to authority. These things do not reflect an objective truth, but instead are themselves a result of an impermanent world. They cannot be accepted as an empirical source of knowledge because they did not originate from within; they are shaded by the perceptions of others, built on experiences external to the student, which ultimately may or may not be real. At the heart of this rejection is the belief that knowledge ultimately comes from experience, from true insight, not from external sources. The words are the ladle, and the Truth is water in the well; when you are thirsty, on which does your mind dwell?

This philosophy borders on blasphemy to most Rokugani, but the gall of the Tonbo is such that they even apply it to the Tao. The Tonbo believe Shinsei's Tao contains practical observations on the nature of the world, not metaphysical truths. Most in the Empire would consider it foolish to contradict the words of the Tao, but the Tonbo believe it is equally foolish to accept the words as they are written, because while knowledge can be transferred by words, understanding cannot be given in this way. This is why the Tonbo do not merely study the Tao but seek to question and test its principles as well. Thus, what the rest of the Empire sees as a rejection of Enlightenment is actually an application of its principles.

Wild Fox Doctrine

In modern Western culture it is generally accepted that a person can learn something and intellectually know about it without actually believing in it. One can learn a philosophy or a religion and understand it on an intellectual level without internalizing it as a personal belief. Any abstract concept can be learned and known; practicing the concept is not necessary.

This is not the case in Rokugan. To the Rokugani, a student cannot divorce learning and practice, because knowledge, *true knowing*, ultimately cannot come from external influences. It comes from "true insight," which cannot be taught, only experienced. A student can study swordplay, read every existing text on the subject, recite Kakita's *The Sword* from memory, and observe a thousand duels. This will make him an intellectual expert on the subject. But he cannot truly understand swordplay until he picks up the sword and practices it for himself. A warrior can read *Akodo's Leadership*, understand its teachings, and know exactly how to utilize every lesson contained within its pages. But until he actually leads men into battle, he cannot possibly know what it is to be a general. Without practice, a student in essence learns nothing. Experience is how one develops "true insight," the only way to actually know anything.

This is why sensei are generally chosen for their experience, not necessarily their intellect or learning. It is also why an appeal to authority is not considered a fallacy in Rokugani culture. Conversely, to teach something or claim wisdom on a subject which a person has never actually practiced is known as "Wild Fox Doctrine." In essence, a sensei who tries to teach something on which he has no true insight is no better than a wild fox, leading his students in pointless circles in a chase that ultimately goes nowhere.

This is also why showing knowledge concerning the Shadowlands, *maho*, and other unsavory subjects is seen as harmful to a samurai's reputation. If a samurai demonstrates insight on these subjects, there is an inherent assumption that he has actually practiced them.

Individualism

All of these Dragonfly philosophies and beliefs result in a clan culture that is surprisingly individualistic, even as it remains devoted to duty. The Tonbo believe the needs of the individual require the same consideration as the needs of the group, for ultimately all are interconnected in ways often difficult to perceive.

As a clan founded by lovers who abandoned duty, it comes at no surprise that the Dragonfly have a unique view of marriage. In Tonbo lands, marriages made from love are common, and Tonbo nakodo (matchmakers) as a matter of principle never arrange loveless marriages. Tonbo lords try to avoid making their subjects choose between love and duty, a task that is perhaps easier for a Minor Clan with few numbers and fewer duties. This is not to say that arranged marriages do not exist, but such marriages are never finalized without the consent of all samurai involved. This is how the Tonbo honor the love between their founders. Needless to say, this attitude towards marriage has caused friction with the Great Clans on several occasions.

As in most Minor Clans, the birth of every Tonbo is celebrated. Humility is embraced on all social tiers, and every Tonbo is seen as having equal worth in spite of social position. In fact, it is sometimes even the practice of the Tonbo Clan Champion to refer to his subjects with the *-san* honorific, a symbolic demonstration that they are peers.

The ultimate goal of every Tonbo is the cultivation of true insight, the one moment when the curtains of the world are pulled aside and they can see it for its true form. The Dragonfly view Enlightenment as the beginning of a path, not its end, and they understand that even if one becomes a master, one also remains forever a student. To this end, the Dragonfly actively encourage the *musha shugyo* tradition, and anyone who has served the clan for at least five years is never denied a request for a pilgrimage of learning. For this reason, most Great Clan samurai in the modern Empire are likely to encounter at least one Dragonfly outside of his home provinces.

The Hare Clan

The bandit Tsubaki cursed as he ran through the brush. His men strained to keep up, weighed down by the many lacquered boxes they carried. Spotting a small hollow, Tsubaki ducked beneath an overhanging branch and scrambled into a dry stream bed, followed quickly by his men. They crouched there, trying to stifle their gasping breaths as their eyes searched the hostile night.

"Fortunes' curses," Tsubaki growled. He looked for his lieutenants. "Koushun! Tsuda!"

The first appeared immediately, his chest working as he slowly regained his breath. "The texts are secure," he reported, "but we're missing Shoda and Hiro." His face looked grim. "The magistrates must have caught them."

"Damn them!" Tsubaki slammed his fist into the trunk of the overhanging tree, heedless of the pain that jolted up his arm. "How did they know we were coming? We planned this for months!"

His second lieutenant, Tsuda, finally appeared beside him, eyes wide and fearful. "They're coming!" he said. "We've got to move, Tsubaki-sama!"

The bandit leader took quick stock of his assets. Only nine of them left, with three to carry their ill-gotten gains. "We cannot fight like this. We need a plan."

"A cave!" Tsuda shouted, his eyes suddenly lighting up. "We passed a cave on the way! We might be able to hide there!"

Koushun nodded. "And if we're found, it would be more defensible."

Tsubaki hesitated only a moment. "Take us there!"

They found the cave in less than a minute. It was partially hidden behind fallen trees and brush, and the mouth was narrow, requiring a belly-first crawl to enter. But inside it abruptly opened up into a cavern with more than enough room for the nine men and their bounty.

Nine. There had been nine, but now Tsubaki counted again and found only eight.

"Where is Tsuda?" he shouted, his voice echoing through the cave.

"He went back," Koushun replied, "to find Shoda and Hiro."

Tsubaki grimaced. "He's dead, then."

The cave grew silent.

As they sat in the darkness, Tsubaki ran his hand through his hair. Something did not add up, something he had not been able to see while they were running in panic through the woods. "Impossible," he finally said. "It was impossible. They could not have known about our plan." He looked at his men. "Someone must have told them. Someone alerted the magistrates. There is no other way."

Koushun shook his head. "But if that was so, why did they let us take the scrolls? Why not ambush us before we could get our hands on them?"

The bandit leader's eyes moved to the lacquered boxes, so heavy and bulky, laden with the precious texts. Now that he could give it some thought, he considered it had been rather easy to steal them...

He stood. "Open that box," he ordered, pointing at the nearest one.

The bandit closest to the box blinked at him for a few moments, then leapt to his feet and tore off the lid. Within, several rolled-up scrolls sat in a neat row. Each one was a priceless original work of a long-dead artisan, each one worth a personal fortune. Tsubaki narrowed his eyes. Everything seemed to be in order...

He reached in and plucked out one of the scrolls, his carelessness inducing winces from his followers. Ignoring their weak gasps of protest, he broke the caps and unfurled the scroll. His eyes widened as he stared at the image on the paper, and then his fists tightened and shook, crumpling the scroll.

"They're decoys!" he screamed, flinging the scroll to the earth. A crude, tasteless picture from a common wedding-night manual stared up at them. Tsubaki's voice echoed off the stone walls in an angry howl. "We've been tricked!"

It was only then he noticed the grey fog that was forming in the cave, and the growing orange light.

"Fire!" Koushun shouted. "There's fire!"

The bandits erupted into panic. Tsubaki's gaze swung to the cave's entrance; the dry brush and fallen trees formed a barrier of flames, blocking the exit.

As the smoke and flames filled his sight and blurred his stinging eyes, Tsubaki swore he saw Tsuda watching from beyond the entrance.

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Just as the Sun crested the horizon, two Seppun magistrates followed the pillar of smoke and ash to the cave entrance. Sitting just outside, near a still-smoldering pile of brush, a man in ashigaru armor waited expectantly. The magistrates dismounted from their horses. As they approached, the man lowered himself from the rock and bowed.

"Ujina Tsuda?" the younger magistrate asked.

Rising from his bow, the man smiled. "Hai," he replied. "I see you got my message, Seppun-sama." He gestured to the cave. "They're in there, my lords. A few of them still live, but they won't be awakening for a while yet."

The younger magistrate looked around him. Four bodies lay in the dirt. Tsuda followed the man's gaze and nodded. "Ah yes, those ones tried to escape. Pay them no mind. I'll take care of them for you, Seppun-sama."

The magistrate shook his head. Only days ago this bandit gang had boasted twenty-five members. Twenty-five... and now there were none. He stared at the Hare Clan samurai wonderingly. "How did you-?"

The elder magistrate cut him off with an abrupt gesture. "Arigato, Ujina-san," he said, bowing, "You will be commended for your service to my lord's estate."

The Hare samurai smiled. The magistrates returned to their horses and mounted, heading back to give their report. When they were out of earshot, the younger magistrate glanced at his partner.

"Why did you interrupt me?" he asked.

The older magistrate kept his gaze steady. "Never ask an Ujina 'how,'" he replied.

The Tale of the Bloodspeaker Siege

"Arise and take arms, for the Bloodspeakers come to destroy us all!" – Usagi Furiko

Hare tradition contains an elaborate tale of how their clan fought a terrible battle against the Bloodspeakers during the eighth century. Supposedly, Iuchiban himself besieged their castle at the head of any army of over 200 Bloodspeaker cultists. Clan Champion Usagi Gohei knew his tiny clan, numbering only 50 bushi, could not possibly withstand a siege for long, so he sent his wife Usagi Furiko to ride to the neighboring lands of the Great Clans to seek aid.

First she went to the Scorpion at Kyuden Bayushi, where Bayushi Gohaku presided. Gohaku scoffed at her request; he knew the Bloodspeaker forces might threaten a small castle like Shiro Usagi, but they would be easily quashed if they came to the Scorpion lands. Seeing no benefit in assisting the Hare Clan, Bayushi Gohaku turned her away.

Next Furiko rode southeast, through the night and the next day, until the sun was close to setting once more and she reached Shiro Daidoji. The Crane welcomed her and admired her courage in making the journey; they offered her food and flattery, but ultimately they refused to help, while speaking many flowery phrases that made their refusal seem like the wisest course of action. Once Furiko was on the road once more she realized she had again been turned aside and her people were still without succor.

Increasingly desperate, Usagi Furiko spurred her horse to the northwest and rode for two more days, reaching Shiro Matsu as the sun rose on the third day. Realizing the fate of her people lay in what words she chose, she spoke with Matsu Shirogama, a young general known for his brash nature and eagerness for battle. Furiko boasted of what a worthy adversary she had found for the Lion to conquer, and how much honor this would steal from the Crane. "What honor?" Shirogama demanded. "Who is the enemy, Hare woman?" When Furiko told him, he rallied the Lion troops and followed her back to Shiro Usagi.

By the time they arrived, Usagi Gohei was dead on the field of battle, and the castle's wall was about to be breached. Usagi Furiko picked up the clan ancestral sword from her fallen husband's hands and leapt into battle alongside the Lion, striking down Iuchiban with the blade, and the Bloodspeakers were defeated.

Although this story is recounted frequently by the Hare, it is obviously problematic in many ways. The Hare Clan was founded after the second defeat of Iuchiban, so it would have been quite impossible for the Bloodspeaker himself to have led a siege of Shiro Usagi. Neither the Imperial Histories nor any of the Great Clan historical records make mention of the Bloodspeaker Cult mounting an assault on Shiro Usagi, and while the Ikoma records do contain references to an eighth century warrior called Matsu Shirogama they make no mention of him leading an army to Shiro Usagi or fighting a legion of Bloodspeakers. Moreover, many scholars have drawn attention to the improbably short travel times in the story, with Usagi Furiko seemingly criss-crossing the entire southern Empire in just a few days.

On the other hand, the Hare records clearly show a Clan Champion named Usagi Gohei and many of his followers perished in battle during the clan's early history. It seems unlikely the Hare would falsely venerate their own ancestors – surely Gohei's spirit would not allow such a thing to stand. A few scholars have attempted to reconcile the discrepancies by suggesting the Hare were attacked by a remnant group of Bloodspeakers (perhaps bent on vengeance for Reichin's role in their earlier defeat) and later storytellers conflated this event with the deeds of Reichin himself in the clan's founding.

Ultimately, it is up to the GM whether some or all of this tale is actually true.

History of the Hare Clan

During the eighth century, the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban escaped from his tomb and sought to overthrow the Empire for the second time. The full account of these events is found in Chapter Six of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories 2*. From the standpoint of this chapter, the key events of the Bloodspeaker's rampage involved a ronin named Reichin who lived in the Scorpion city of Ryoko Owari. Reichin, who called himself Usagi ("the Hare"), was a thief and a smuggler, but was nonetheless well-liked and respected by the people of Ryoko Owari's lower classes, and his keen mind and charming demeanor even earned him some friendships among the local authorities. Some gossiped he was the outcast son of a Bayushi samurai, while others thought he was a former vassal of the Yasuki (certainly he well understood the intricacies of commerce). He was often arrested by the local magistrates, but he usually escaped all but the most token of punishments. In fact, he became so well-known to the magistrates that he often offered them help and brokered information to them. For one of such low social position he was thus a fairly well-regarded member of the city's community.

Reichin is credited with spotting the approaching Bloodspeaker forces when they marched on Ryoko Owari, allowing the Scorpion to conduct a fighting withdrawal while evacuating the city. Reichin fought alongside the Scorpion and other ronin in the defense of the city, then accompanied the Scorpion army to the later Battle of the Bloody Retreat, where he managed to survive despite the loss of several comrades. At the Battle of Sleeping River he greatly distinguished himself, picking up the banner of a fallen general and leading a group of men into combat despite overwhelming odds. Some tales even claim he managed to wound Iuchiban personally, although these may be later embroideries.

After the defeat of Iuchiban, a sizable number of Bloodspeaker cultists still remained within the walls of Ryoko Owari, under the leadership the dreaded Jama Suru. Emerald Champion Doji Saisetsu asked for a volunteer to sabotage the defenses of Jama Suru, who had taken up residence in the ruins of Ryoko Owari with the remaining remnants of the Bloodspeaker forces. Reichin, somewhat to his own surprise, stepped forward. As a former citizen of the city, he was quite familiar with its winding streets and alleyways, and he was able to easily infiltrate the city and cause chaos within the Bloodspeakers' remaining ranks. Weapon caches disappeared, supplies were spoiled or burned, and all of the cultists' movements were reported to the Emerald Champion, allowing Saisetsu to ambush outlying patrols with uncanny precision. Reichin was so effective that the followers of Jama Suru began to distrust each other, believing their comrades to be hoarding food and weapons for their own use.

Finally, with the Bloodspeaker badly weakened, the Imperial Legions assaulted the city. Near the end of the final battle Doji Saisetsu was almost killed by an arrow aimed at his heart, but Reichin leapt into the way, suffering a grevious wound but saving the Emerald Champion. Saisetsu brought Reichin's many brave deeds to the attention of Emperor Hantei XXII, who awarded the ronin the family name of Usagi and the right to found a Minor Clan. He was gifted with land to the south of Ryoko Owari, the very plains where he had first caught sight of Iuchiban's advancing army, and about three dozen ronin mercenaries pledged fealty to him that very day.

With a few weeks, Usagi Reichin and his new followers laid the foundations of Shiro Usagi on a hill amidst the open plains south of the River of Gold.

In the time between the eighth century and the twelfth century, the Empire as a whole paid little attention to the tiny Hare Clan, and they are barely mentioned at all in the Imperial Histories. The Hare took on themselves the duty of hunting the Bloodspeaker Cult, but their small numbers, obscure history, and remote location made it difficult for them to pursue this task in the lands of other clans.

The Siege of Shiro Usagi

Early in the twelfth century the heir to the Hare Clan, Usagi Ozaki, visited Ryoko Owari to seek a husband for his sister, Usagi Tomoe. While there, he stumbled across an assassination scheme plotting the death of a magistrate in a far off province. As a result, he killed a Scorpion named Soshi Yukio and took possession of a scroll she was carrying, a scroll written in a mysterious cipher. Ozaki and Tomoe fled back to Shiro Usagi, where they eventually broke the cipher; the scroll's contents seemed to hint at a vast conspiracy, transcending clan loyalties – nothing less than the sinister Kolat. Before they could learn more, a Scorpion army led by Bayushi Tomaru arrived to lay siege to their family castle.

The siege of Shiro Usagi is described in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Earth*, pages 47-48. By the end of the siege, almost all the Hare were dead and their castle was razed to the ground. Usagi Oda was slain and Usagi Tomoe was forced to marry Bayushi Tomaru and take his name. Usagi Ozaki escaped the siege, losing an eye during the final chaotic moments of the battle but managing to evade capture. He was able to take both the Kolat scroll and the ancestral sword of the Hare Clan with him.

The Scorpion had technically violated Imperial Decree by making war on a Minor Clan. However, when Emperor Hantei XXXVIII demanded an accounting for the Scorpion action, the clan of secrets was ready. Four witnesses, including the Yasuki family daimyo, came forward to testify that the Hare had become corrupt and begun practicing *maho*. Faced with such testimony, the Emperor ruled the Scorpion had acted correctly, and he officially disbanded the Hare Clan.

Restoring the Hare

When Ozaki heard the news of the Emperor's decree, he swore to unravel the conspiracy which had destroyed his clan. Following the clues from the Kolat scroll, he sought out Ide Gonkuro, the magistrate whose assassination the scroll had ordered. However, by the time he arrived Gonkuro was dying of poison, perishing after whispering only one word: "Kolat." Gonkuro's house contained clues pointing toward the local Yasuki merchants. Unfortunately, the house burned down immediately afterward and Ozaki now found himself a fugitive, charged with murder and arson.

Ozaki spents years dodging magistrates, surviving by his wits while slowly digging up more clues to the mystery. Finally, his quest led him to Yasuki Taka, the strange little daimyo of the Yasuki who had testified against the Hare. Taka proved unexpectedly cooperative; claiming he had been forced to testify by blackmail, he pointed Ozaki at a small conspiratorial group calling itself "Kolat" and led by a *maho-tsukai* named Daidoji Dajan. With the aid of some of Taka's bodyguards, Ozaki was able to destroy

the small fortress of the Kolat and slay Dajan, recovering extensive evidence of the existence and schemes of the Kolat conspiracy. Victorious, Ozaki presented his evidence and Yasuki Taka's revised testimony to the Imperial Court, and Taka used his own vast resources on Ozaki's behalf. Emperor Hantei XXXIX declared Ozaki had the gratitude of the Empire for destroying the Kolat, and ordered the Hare Clan reinstated. Ozaki returned to the ancestral Hare lands, calling together the few other Hare who had survived, and Yasuki Taka contributed some of his wealth to help rebuild the clan's castle.

The Ujina Family and the Modern Hare

After the restoration of the Hare Clan, Ozaki and his followers resumed their traditional enmity with the Bloodspeaker Cult, while also maintaining a careful watch for any resurgence of the Kolat. Since the restored clan was so small, Ozaki himself often left his home to hunt such targets. During the Hidden Emperor era, Ozaki's duties took him to Otosan Uchi, searching for a Bloodspeaker cell that had been murdering citizens of West Hub Village. There he encountered a shady-looking and extremely stealthy ronin who introduced himself as Tokimasa. The ronin claimed the Bloodspeakers had murdered his father, and said he had been researching the organization with the aim of bringing them down. Somewhat against his better judgment, Ozaki decided to cooperate with Tokimasa, and together they hunted down the cult cell. During their battle with the *maho-tsukai*, Tokimasa saved Ozaki's life more than once, impressing the Hare and causing him to rethink his earlier hostility.

Takuan, the Imperial regent, was quite thankful to both Ozaki and Tokimasa for their rooting out of a cult cell within the Imperial City itself. He promised to grant Tokimasa a family name, and Emperor Toturi I later fulfilled this promise, proclaiming Tokimasa the first member of the Ujina family. The newly-named Ujina Tokimasa declared fealty to the Hare Clan, making the Hare one of the few Minor Clans to actually have two family names.

In the decades after the creation of the Ujina, the Hare Clan continued to pursue its traditional duty of hunting Bloodspeakers – a duty which acquired considerably greater significance when Iuchiban escaped from his tomb for the last time during the reign of Toturi III. In 1165, Jama Suru led an army of cultists to assail Shiro Usagi, seeking to finally end the line of Reichin. Fortunately, help arrived from the Daidoji family of the Crane, who sent a large cavalry force to support the Hare. With that assistance the Hare Clan successfully turned back the Bloodspeakers.

The Hare lands came under threat again during the Destroyer War, by which time the clan was led by Ozaki's son Usagi Kashira. Although Shiro Usagi itself avoided danger, the village of Kudo – the seat of the Minor Clan Alliance – was overrun by a major Destroyer force. Still, compared to the disasters of earlier generations, the Destroyer War was bearable, and in the aftermath of the conflict the Hare even sent a few samurai to the Colonies.

The "Dajan Kolat"

Who were the so-called "Kolat" which Usagi Ozaki and Yasuki Taka exposed and destroyed? It should be obvious to anyone who has read Chapter Three of the L5R 4th Edition supplement Enemies of the Empire that this group was not the real Kolat at all. For one thing, they used maho, which the real Kolat carefully avoids. For another, they were based in a small temple in the southern Empire rather than in the pyramidal Hidden Temple near Phoenix lands.

Daidoji Dajan was originally a member of the actual Kolat conspiracy, but he quickly grew frustrated with his inability to ascend into the upper ranks of the organization. With the help of a corrupted Phoenix Inquisitor named Asako Nakiro, he figured out a way to hide from the so-called Oni's Eye, the mystical artifact which the Kolat used to keep tabs on the rest of the Empire. In the year 1107, shielded from the Eye's gaze, Dajan broke away from the Kolat and set out to create his own organization, using *maho* to build his power-base quickly. One of his favorite tactics was to kidnap influential samurai, torture them extensively, and then bind their name to an oni – forcing them to serve the conspiracy in order to save themselves from eventual possession by the oni.

The real Kolat was determined to punish Dajan's treachery (especially since he knew the location of the Hidden Temple), but his ability to hide from the Oni's Eye complicated their efforts. Eventually, however, Yasuki Taka tracked down the location of Dajan's lair. As it happened, Taka also knew that Usagi Ozaki was getting dangerously close to uncovering the real Kolat's activities, so he decided to kill two birds with one stone – diverting Ozaki to Dajan's lair, destroying it and convincing the rest of the Empire that the "Kolat conspiracy" had been quashed.

Lands of the Hare Clan

The Hare lands are modest, though not quite so limited as those of truly tiny clans like the Bat (or the Centipede before they joined the Mantis Clan). The core territory of Shiro Usagi is located south of the River of Gold, but the clan also has some lesser holdings north of the river. In fact, prior to the clan's disbandment in the early twelfth century its lands are even more extensive.

Shiro Usagi

The Hare Clan's ancestral seat of power is located to the south of the River of Gold and east of the Shinomen Forest, an isolated and obscure locale. The original castle was small but highly defensible, with nine-foot walls of solid stone. Later generations added three concentric moats to further enhance the castle's defensive strength. However, the castle was not really large or strong enough to withstand a full-scale assault from a Great Clan army, as Bayushi Tomaru finally proved in the year 1123. The Scorpion's attack laid waste to the castle and the nearby village, leaving the whole place a charred ruin. For several years afterward the ruins were rumored to be haunted by the spirit of the last clan champion, Usagi Oda, although the problem was eventually cleared up by the Phoenix Inquisitors.

After the restoration of the Hare Clan, Usagi Ozaki had the castle rebuilt to be much stronger than before, taking full advantage of Yasuki Taka's offers of money and supplies. The outer walls were made twice as thick and twelve feet high. The new castle was built for function rather than beauty, lacking any adornment on its walls.

Kudo

The village of Kudo is located in a fertile region along the north bank of the River of Gold, with lush green fields and rice paddies extending seemingly as far as the eye can see. Prior to the disbandment of the Hare Clan, Kudo was its most distant holding but also its most prosperous, providing the majority of the food for the clan and typically leaving a surplus for trade. After the Hare were reformed, however, the village fell outside of their borders and effectively became unaligned, its crops shared between the Hare and the Sparrow (a source of tension between those two clans). In the year 1168, a treaty at the Imperial Winter Court led to the village becoming the official headquarters of the Minor Clan Alliance, with a governor from the Toku family of the Monkey Clan.

During the upheaval following the end of the Toturi Dynasty, the Lion Clan took advantage of the chaos to place Kudo under its control. Despite the objections of both the Hare Clan and the Minor Clan Alliance, the Lion Clan refused to relinquish the village until the ascension of Empress Iweko I, who ordered all clan borders returned to their prior locations. This incident soured relations between the Hare and the Lion, and during the subsequent Destroyer War a Lion commander ordered the village abandoned to the Destroyer advance – an action which Hare daimyo Usagi Kashira regarded as payback for the earlier quarrels over the town.

In modern times the Minor Clan Alliance houses its only full legion of troops in Kudo, training and patrolling the region.

Meidochi

Meidochi is the only other notable Hare holding outside of Shiro Usagi. It is a medium-sized village, smaller than Kudo but still home to a thousand or so peasants, and located in lightly-wooded lands along the River of Gold. The village straddles the meeting point of three roads, making it a minor commercial hub, and most of the Hare Clan's trade runs through it. The clan maintains a very small keep on a hill on the west side of the village, overlooking both the town and the river.

Customs of the Hare

As a clan descended from ronin, the Hare prize survival and self-sufficiency, all the more so in modern times after their narrow escape from complete extermination. For example, the Hare rely as much on foraging as on farming to feed their clan. Hare samurai tend to be lean and wiry, avoid excessive leisure or self-indulgence, and often look several years older than their actual age. This is not to say they are overly grim or lacking in humor – they are, after all, a clan descended from a ronin gambler. They are not particularly pious; although they offer the proper veneration to the spirits and ancestors, they prefer the toss of dice or the thrill of the hunt to long prayers or meditation.

Like the other Minor Clans, the Hare see the birth of a new samurai as a great blessing. However, a newborn is not acknowledged by the general populace as being born until it is at least six weeks old; until that time, the birth of the child is not mentioned lest it bring the attention of evil spirits. Once a child has reached its sixth week, it is taken to the nearest temple to be blessed by a shugenja or monk. While children in other clans may have several years to experience

the joys of childhood, the Hare Clan starts teaching its children how to survive in the wild and how to spot the dangers of *maho* from a very early age. Indeed, for Hare children, enrollment in the clan's dojo is merely a continuation of training begun at a much earlier age.

Most Hare train as bushi, regardless of whether they are from the Usagi or Ujina family. (Only a handful of Hare have ever shown the gift of the spirits during the clan's history, and the clan often is unable to train them properly, lacking the political favors needed to enroll them in another clan's school.) The Usagi Bushi School emphasizes quickness of both mind and body, and includes training in the nature of *maho-tsukai* and the Bloodspeaker Cult. After the clan's disbandment and re-founding, the school also teaches its students about the Kolat, although much of the information it shares is of questionable value due to the "Dajan Kolat" deception.

Prior to the twelfth century, Hare Clan marriages are no different than those of other clans. However, after the clan's re-founding, the leaders of the Hare adopt a policy of systematically arraging marriages with samurai from other clans in order to increase the Hare Clan's numbers and build alliances. Such marriage arrangements always stipulate that the spouse join the Hare Clan rather than the reverse. As a result, very few modern Hare samurai get to choose their mates, and they are often wed quite early after their gempukku to encourage the continuation of the line. Hare wedding ceremonies are brief, and due to the lack of shugenja in the clan they are usually presided over by the Clan Champion. A marriage is always a time of rejoicing, since it serves to strengthen the clan.

Hare funerals are somber affairs, with the family members fasting for three days and spending great effort to write the accomplishments of the deceased in beautiful calligraphy; such scrolls are later burned as funeral offerings, to help the soul of the dead to rise up to the Heavens on the smoke. Any Hare samurai who is sent out to hunt Bloodspeakers or other enemies is expected to keep a journal (a concept the Hare learned from the Kitsuki) so that any new information can be added to the clan's collective knowledge. The Ujina are charged with organizing the information from these journals for the benefit of later generations.

Given their nature, the Hare are not especially known for retiring to live in monasteries even before the events of the twelfth century. The few Hare who do retire to the Brotherhood of Shinsei typically still act as eyes and ears for the Hare Clan, relaying information back to their clan and preferring to maintain an active lifestyle rather than spending their remaining years isolated in a single monastery.

The Hare and Honor

As the descendants of ronin, the Hare have never been overly strict about the Code of Bushido. Although they certainly value the tenets of Bushido, especially Courage and Duty, they have a certain pragmatic streak which their period of shameful disbandment does nothing to discourage. Indeed, the accession of the Ujina family to the clan actually encouraged this tendency. The Ujina tend to believe the end justifies the means, and sometimes act in a way that makes even the more pragmatic of the Usagi somewhat uneasy. Whereas the Usagi tend to leap into battle without thought, eager to defeat the enemy even at the cost of their own lives, the Ujina are more likely to assess a situation stealthily and look for a chance to ambush the enemy. Survival is even more important to the Ujina than to the rest of the Hare, since their numbers are fewer than almost any other family in the Empire, and they see no need to throw away their lives unnecessarily. This can sometimes cause friction between the two families, with the Ujina viewing the Usagi as feckless and rash, while the Usagi regard the Ujina as cowardly and too clever for their own good.

Relations With Lower Castes

Because of its humble origins, the Hare Clan finds it relatively easy to work with ronin, and tends to be far less prejudiced toward them than other clans. However, they are wary about accepting fealty from ronin, since one never knows when a Kolat or Bloodspeaker might be hidden within a group of new recruits. Ronin must prove themselves to be capable warriors, apt investigators, and trustworthy comrades before the Hare Clan will consider an offer of fealty, and this process can take several years.

The modern Hare are highly protective of their peasants, and anything that endangers the clan's farmers is quickly dealt with. In fact, it is not uncommon to see contingents of Usagi bushi living in the clan's smaller villages right alongside the peasants to help ensure their safety. The Hare are also more likely than other samurai to give credence to the stories of peasants, since they know the words of a farmer can sometimes be the difference between finding a Bloodspeaker or letting him slip away. This is not to say the Hare consider commoners to be the equal of samurai, but they certainly have a closer and friendlier relationship to the *heimin* than any Great Clan (with the possible exception of the Mantis).

The Monkey Clan

Toku Torao slowly worked her way down the cliff, careful not to lose her footing in the darkness. The waves below her looked ferocious, and while she had trained to swim in her armor it was not a skill she wanted to test anytime soon.

More interesting than the waves was the lantern-lit boat moored at the base of the cliff, and the men who were loading it from one of the numerous seaside caves which dotted the coast in this area. If she didn't act now, it might be months or even years before they came back, and she had already spent many months tracking them down.

Torao thought no more, but acted.

She flung herself out from the cliff with a firm kick from both legs. Her hands closed on the ship's mast and she slammed against it, rattling her teeth and bruising her torso through her armor. She ignored the pain; now was not the time for complaining, since the smugglers had noticed her and were scrambling for their weapons. She drew her katana and slashed at the ropes tying the sail, and it fell heavily, burying the crew in its folds. She dropped after it, landing on one of the thrashing sailors to blunt her fall, then brought the hilt of her sword down sharply on the heads of two others before they could struggle out from under the sail.

Not a bad start, but as she expected the trick hadn't worked on all of them, least of all their leader. A large ronin with scars on his face and dirt in his long hair strode toward her, shouting orders to his men. Tarao crouched into a fighting stance. She was a small woman, lithe but strong, with short-cropped hair. She knew she probably didn't look very impressive to her opponents.

"You are far away from home, Monkey," the smuggler captain said. He slowly drew his own blade as his men spread out across the deck, working around her flanks.

"Justice knows no boundaries," she retorted. "The rice you stole belongs to honest hard-working folk. I will not let you get away with it."

"Bold words, but only words." The captain and his men closed in. "You will perhaps kill one or two of us, and then you will die, and we will continue as we did before. Pointless, neh?"

Torao closed her eyes and focused her mind. Honesty, *she thought to herself.* Courtesy, Courage, Honor, Compassion, Sincerity.

Duty.

She opened her eyes again, smiling. Her katana clattered to the deck. She lunged forward open-handed, caught the captain by the front of his haori, and threw herself overboard, dragging him with her.

The smugglers waited a long time, but no one returned to the surface.

History of the Monkey Clan

After the dark days of the Clan Wars, Emperor Toturi I faced a formidable task in rebuilding the Empire and filling the many vacant positions in the Imperial government. One of the most prominent of these vacancies was the Captain of the Imperial Guard, for the Imperial city's forces had been severely depleted by the final battles against Fu Leng's army. In this as in many other cases, he looked for a suitable candidate among the ronin who had fought beside him during the war, men he knew and trusted – and who came without political entanglements. For this particular office he chose Toku, a virtuous and cheerful young man who had fought with him since the earliest days of Toturi's Army. Much to his surprise, however, Toku refused the offer and confessed the truth: he was no samurai but a mere peasant, a farmer's son who foolishly believed being a samurai was a matter of vocation and not birth. He had picked up the swords of a dead bandit from a battlefield and had taken the steed of a magistrate who died on that same field. Somehow in the chaos of the Clan Wars his accidental deception had gone unnoticed, and once he had realized his error Toku decided the Empire needed warriors more than it needed confessions. Now, however, standing before the Emperor who had once been his fighting comrade, Toku asked to be treated as a samurai one last time: to commit seppuku and purge his dishonorable actions.

Toturi was doubly impressed by Toku's tale and his honesty. He refused the request for seppuku, declaring Toku had been a samurai since the day of his birth, voiding his crimes entirely. In Toturi's view, Toku was more of a samurai than most of those who bore the title by right. He again offered the position of Captain of the Imperial Guard, and also named Toku to be the Champion of a new Minor Clan. Overjoyed with the Emperor's generosity, Toku accepted and chose the Monkey as his symbol, an animal as cheerful and resourceful as he was.

Toku did not have to look far to find men willing to join his new clan. Many members of Toturi's Army had come to respect and appreciate him during the Clan Wars, and they were grateful both for the chance to join a clan and for the opportunity to retain their wartime kinship. At first, however, the new Monkey Clan did not have lands of its own, instead being quartered in Otosan Uchi. In some ways this was almost idyllic, since they shared in the glory of the Emperor's first years of reign, and helped rebuild and protect the capital. (For more information on Toku's early history, see page 177 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories*.)

The Monkey in Other Eras

Due to its particular origins, the Monkey Clan is closely tied to the twelfth century of Rokugan's history. However, there is no reason why a creative GM cannot use the Monkey in a campaign set in an earlier era. A peasant hero who rose to become a samurai and a daimyo, while certainly an unusual tale, is nonetheless something that could happen during any of the great crises of Rokugan's history – indeed, the origins of the Hare Clan are not all that different. A creative GM could even build a campaign in which one of the PCs becomes the "Toku" of another era, giving rise to a different Monkey Clan.

However, Toturi's reign did not remain a peaceful one. Soon the machinations of the Lying Darkness plunged the Empire into a new era of chaos in which the Emperor disappeared and the Scorpion Clan was banished to the Burning Sands for two years. When Toturi finally reappeared, he made two announcements of great importance to the Monkey Clan. First, he granted them their own lands in a valley which used to be part of the eastern Scorpion territories. Second, he ordered them to accompany the Imperial Legions into a war against the Naga, who were besieging the Dragon Clan at the time.

The Monkey fought admirably against the Naga and settled into their new province, which was fertile and relatively peaceful. However, soon after this time the Scorpion Clan returned to Rokugan, and the Monkey found themselves occupying lands which had previously belonged to the Shosuro family. Wary of a war with the Clan of Secrets, Toku offered to relinquish the lands, but the Scorpion refused; instead, they insisted on Toku marrying one of their own. He eventually married Shosuro Inao, the sister of the Shosuro daimyo. This cemented the Monkey's grip on their lands and also created a long-lasting alliance with a Great Clan which was almost their polar opposite. Many Scorpion saw the Monkey as a naïve younger brother, full of good intentions but needing protection from the harsh realities of the world.

When the War Against the Darkness came to a head, the forces of Shadow targeted the Monkey Clan for destruction, possibly because the Monkey were a symbol of hope and virtue in Rokugan. The clan survived the assault, but their fortress was destroyed. Although they soon rebuilt it with generous Imperial support, less than a generation later it was destroyed again, this time during the War of Spirits. The returned spirits serving Hantei XVI did not care for a Minor Clan which had not existed in their leader's original time. Once again, Toku and his followers endured and rebuilt, their spirits undimmed by such setbacks.

Toku lived to an advanced age, fathering four children and ultimately outliving his friend and Emperor, Toturi. A new generation of Monkey samurai was born and grew up, and the clan retained its close association with the Toturi dynasty – indeed, several younger Monkey swore personal fealty to Toturi's eldest daughter, Tsudao, and were allowed to bear the Toturi name. Many Monkey Clan samurai were made magistrates during this era under Imperial authority, and the clan saw itself as a protector of law and order across the Empire. Toku himself remained active until the day he died, sacrificing his life to obstruct the powerful Bloodspeaker Asahina Yajinden. After his death, Emperor Toturi III proclaimed his followers could claim the Toku family name and declared Toku himself the Fortune of Virtue, ensuring his ascension to the Celestial Heavens. The Monkey Clan built the first temple to the new Fortune, and soon Toku was worshiped across the Empire.

Toku's passing was a turning point for the Monkey Clan, which had never really planned for the departure of its founder. His eldest child, a daughter, had already married the Scorpion Clan Champion to further cement the alliance with their neighbor. Eventually, Toku's oldest son Kyoji took up the Clan Championship, becoming Toku Kyoji.

By the year 1170 the Toturi Dynasty, which had created the Monkey Clan, was itself on its last legs after the death of Emperor Toturi III. However, a last sign of favor for the Monkey came from the Emperor's widow, who elevated the clan's Fuzake shugenja vassal family to full fledged family status. Fuzake and his men had been a small group of ronin shugenja from Toturi's Army who labored to heal the Empire throughout the numerous wars it had faced, and they had sworn fealty to the Monkey Clan soon after it was founded.

Not long after this joyous event, the Toturi Dynasty came to an end, eventually to be replaced by the Celestially endorsed Iweko Dynasty. This was both an emotional and a political blow to the Monkey, who had always admired the Toturi Emperors and who had benefited greatly from their favor. Luckily, the clan retained its characteristic indomitable spirit and optimism, so while the Monkey mourned for the past they also looked forward to the future. They refocused on their traditional duties, serving as Imperial legionnaires or fulfilling their role as magistrates, protecting the people at all costs. They also developed a relationship with the new Minor Clan Alliance, contributing some of their wealth and military might to its strength.

As the twelfth century came to an end, the Toturi name faded from existence, with all Monkey Clan samurai now bearing the name of either Toku or, more rarely, Fuzake. The clan continued to prosper, if mostly out of sight from the Empire as a whole. The appointment of one of their own, Toku Hikaru, to replace the retired Imperial Chancellor Bayushi Hisako came as a pleasant surprise and proof that the new Iweko dynasty still respected them for their past service to the Toturi. The Monkey also looked at the creation of the Colonies with interest; as a relatively well-off Minor Clan, they could afford to send several representatives to the new land. A world of new possibilities and new dangers is something the Monkey can both understand and enjoy.

Lands of the Monkey Clan

Situated at the eastern edge of the Shosuro provinces, the Vale of the Monkey comprises the majority of the territory overseen by the Toku. It is a beautiful area, a place of gently rolling forested hills alternating with fertile farmlands, the whole cut through by a slow-paced river. Thanks to the agricultural productivity of these lands, the Monkey are one of the few Minor Clans with a significant production surplus, which they usually use for external trade with the Scorpion or the Minor Clan Alliance. The only flaw with the province is that its borders are essentially wide open on all sides, a particular concern given its central location in Rokugan, close to the territories of the Scorpion, Lion, Mantis, and Crane. Luckily, the Monkey take to sentry duty with as much gusto as any other martial task, and the clan usually assigns young warriors with plenty of energy to patrol the edges of its territory. Other samurai are often surprised, if not outright amused, at how much sincerity and passion the Toku warriors display in carrying out a simple and repetitive duty. On the rare occasion when someone actually tries to force passage, the Monkey do not give in or back down, no matter how improbable the odds. Most potential intruders ultimately decide it is not worth the cost, and as a result the lands of the Monkey remain generally peaceful.

The prosperous farmlands of the clan require a strong workforce to maintain them, and large villages dot the entire valley. The Monkey's reputation for taking good care of their farmers is well known, so much so that they have been forced to refuse immigrants, particularly after some peasants attempted to flee from the nearby Scorpion lands (where *heimin* are considered little more than a commodity). This density of the commoner population has sometimes led to difficulties, such as increased risks of disease and fire, and the Monkey must maintain constant vigilance to keep their lands safe and harmonious. Every village houses at least one samurai, usually accompanied by his family, and these local *gokenin* (landholders) frequently know most of the local *heimin* population by name. Other clans see such an arrangement as a waste of resources and a dangerous isolation of individual troops, but the Monkey prefer to keep a close eye on their people.

Toku Torid-e

The Vigilant Keep of the Monkey sits at the northern edge of the Vale of the Monkey, atop a hill overlooking the surrounding area. While not as impressive as most other castles in Rokugan, indeed smaller than some of the other Minor Clan strongholds (such as those of the Ox or the Badger), the keep is well built and defensible. Despite being destroyed twice within a generation, the rebuilt Vigilant Keep of the Monkey stands as strong as ever, a symbol of the Monkey Clan's determination. Of course, it has also been improved each time, and the modern version includes extensive supply caches in its basements to support a siege – and escape tunnels in case of another defeat. The castle also has small stockpiles of jade and crystal, acquired at great cost from the Crab, since the Toku have twice been defeated by supernatural opponents and have no wish to face a third failure.

As the seat of power for the clan, Toku Torid-e is home to a modest court. Ambassadors from the other Minor Clans are commonly seen here, and there is always at least one Scorpion in attendance as well. Other clans visit more rarely, but when they do they usually send a warrior rather than a courtier; not only do the Monkey offer few entertainments beyond martial ones, they also tend to be overly enthusiastic about the security of their guests. A visiting Crane diplomat, after being attended by multiple dedicated yojimbo each day of the winter, wondered aloud if they would all follow him home after the season.

There are four major shrines inside the modest walls of Toku Torid-e. The main one is of course dedicated to Toku himself, and is the largest shrine to the Fortune of Virtue in Rokugan; indeed, the Brotherhood order which follows the Fortune is based there. The Monkey worship their founder with an odd mix of ancestral and Fortunist rites, but the monks present do not seem to care so long as their devotion is sincere. Next to the shrine of Toku are three smaller but equally respected shrines, dedicated to the three Emperors of the Toturi Dynasty. The Monkey greatly admired Toturi and his children, and although they follow the Iweko Dynasty loyally they still remember and revere the accomplishments of the man who was Toku's friend. The three shrines have collected a number of minor relics which belonged to or were touched by the three Emperors, and bringing another of these is a sure way to earn the favor of the Monkey.

The main dojo of the Monkey Clan is also present within the Keep, and most Toku bushi will study within its walls at some point in their lives. It is not uncommon for the students to be taught at one of the four shrines, or to be tasked with tending them or meditating within them. While kenjutsu lessons take place within the dojo itself, the training of Monkey samurai frequently brings them outside the walls, learning the skills of tracking and hunting in the forests, or studying how to conduct a magistrate's investigation in a nearby village.

Between the troops, the court guests, the shrine attendants, the dojo trainees, the largest village in Monkey lands, and whoever might be present for any other reason, Toku Torid-e often feels busy and cramped. The Monkey do not seem to mind (or even notice), but it can wear down their visitors, especislly those of a sedentary nature.

Shinden Fuzake

After Toturi Kurako made the tiny Fuzake vassal family a full-fledged family in its own right, the Champion of the Monkey Clan decided to give them a place to call their own. He chose a peaceful village near the Scorpion Clan border, one which needed very little protection, and arranged funds for the Fuzake to build a temple to house and train the members of the tiny family. Since there were already an overwhelming number of shrines to Toku throughout the Vale of the Monkey, the Fuzake thought it would be fitting for them to dedicate their temples to the other Fortunes.

All of the other Fortunes.

Shinden Fuzake is a joyously chaotic place where people come and go at all times of the day, praying and meditating and chanting, paying homage to anything from the Seven Great Fortunes to such obscure deities as Isora, Fortune of the Seashore (which is hundreds of miles away). Shintao monks are also welcome, and in fact the Fuzake have never closed their doors to anyone save those who disturb the peace. The temple has a rather erratic layout, with statues of Fortunes greater and lesser in various nooks and corners; moreover, the Fuzake change the layout frequently to accommodate new statues or the elevation of new Fortunes. The temple also doubles as a hospital of sorts for the whole Monkey Clan territory, for the Fuzake family's heritage from the Clan Wars is one of easing the pain and suffering of samurai and *heimin* alike.

The small village which surrounds the temple is, by comparison, very peaceful and quiet. After all, the peasants say, who could be happier than those who are blessed by so many Fortunes?

Vassal Families of the Monkey

The Fuzake were originally a vassal family before their elevation to full status. They were a small order of ronin shugenja within Toturi's Army, led by a young man named Yasuki Garou (later Fuzake Garou) who had left the Crab Clan to follow Toturi. Garou himself was a close friend to Toku and when the Monkey Clan was formed he immediately swore fealty to it. The Fuzake remained vassals within the clan until the year 1168, when the widow of Emperor Toturi III officially elevated them to be co-equal with the Toku family.

There is some confusion as to how the Fuzake name first came to be (with some accounts speaking of an Imperial Edict arranged by the Crane), and likewise some confusion as to its official status and rank, especially since the Toku themselves did not gain an official family name until the Four Winds era. Since the family initially kept to itself and remained largely unknown outside of the Monkey Clan until the official clarification of its status in 1168, it seems unlikely these discrepancies will ever be resolved.

The Fuzake dedicate themselves to healing and to their rather eccentric veneration of the Fortunes.

Customs of the Monkey Clan

The Monkey Clan is proud of its origins, humble though those might be, and even more proud of the gift Toturi I granted by making it a clan. As a result, Monkey samurai develop a strong and distinctive identity almost as soon as their clan is founded. It would be very hard to mistake a Monkey samurai for a member of any other clan.

While the Monkey are significantly more prosperous than the average Minor Clan, the birth of a new samurai child is still an opportunity for them to rejoice. The newborn is brought to a temple of Toku as soon as possible for a blessing. In the rare cases where the child is born outside

the clan's territory, the parents will travel to the nearest temple of Toku as soon as possible. This is not so much to obtain the Fortune's favor (which the Monkey believe the child will earn in due time anyway) but rather to show the clan's founder that his legacy is still alive and growing. However, the Monkey eschew any kind of divination at birth, a contrast to many other clans. Toku was living proof a man can change his destiny, and the Monkey as a whole frown on letting a foretelling control what their children might become. Instead, the Monkey try to inspire their children to greatness, and tell them the stories of past heroes before they can even talk. The Monkey believe one does not need to fully understand a story to be inspired by it, and many of them fondly remember the stories of their own parents from early childhood.

Bolstered by these visions of heroism, young Toku samurai enter the clan's dojo eager to leave their mark upon the world. Of course, one has to train before one can serve, and the dojo sensei must walk a careful line of reminding the students of this without quelling their enthusiasm. A common teaching technique is to assign students gradually more difficult tasks, starting with the very easy and then steadily advancing all the way to the outright impossible... and only letting the student pass if he does not give up. The objective is to push each child to his limits, so he is aware of both his full potential and of how long he can endure.

The teachings of the Fuzake are not that different, for although their duties are intellectual and spiritual rather than physical, they too are taught to embrace the Monkey principle of maximizing their potential. Both schools encourage their students to explore their own path, and it is not uncommon for a young Monkey samurai to learn an unusual weapon or an obscure aspect of theology before passing his gempukku. The gempukku ceremonies for both schools test the students by presenting them with situations they have never encountered before, such as a fight in darkness or while balancing in the branches of a tree, or conducting a complex religious ritual from an obscure text. There is rarely a single appropriate answer to the problem; rather, the intent is for the young Monkey to show the ability to respond to challenges with wits, creativity, and honor. The graduation ceremony itself involves receiving swords directly from the Clan Champion, followed by a loud affirmation of fealty to the clan.

While many young Monkey samurai are ready to sacrifice their lives to protect the Empire or to challenge impossible odds, few pause to consider getting married and raising a family. Arranging marriages is thus usually left to the parents, who work in the background and then surprise their children with the results. Given the nature of the Monkey Clan, however, the parents always try to ensure a harmonious and successful match. A wedding is another occasion for the clan to rejoice in its growing strength. Wedding rites in the lands of the Monkey always include a prayer to Toku, both to honor the patron of the clan and to foster virtue in the new couple. The ceremony is often presided over by one of the Fuzake, a family known for its odd humor and whimsical nature, so it tends to be much less formal than elsewhere in Rokugan; this horrifies traditionalists from other clans, but the Monkey themselves usually appreciate the chance to relieve some of the tension and stress associated with the event. In those instances where a Monkey samurai marries into another clan, his relatives will behave more appropriately to avoid bringing any shame or discomfort to others.

For a clan as lively and joyful as the Monkey Clan, death is not something to be taken easily. Funerals in the Monkey lands are one of the few times where the whole clan becomes somber. Tales of the departed's valor are told throughout the mourning period, since the Monkey consider the remembering of heroes to be of utmost importance. It is customary for the local peasants to mourn the passage of their samurai masters as well, and this can cast a bleak spirit over the entire Vale of the Monkey when the departed was someone especially well-regarded. All the collected stories of the deceased are carefully written down by a family member or friend and then brought to Toku Torid-e for recording. Thus the Monkey can always be confident their deeds will not be forgotten and will continue to inspire future generations.

Religion and Bushido

The founders of the Monkey Clan, ronin led by a mostly uneducated peasant, were not particularly scholarly or religious. They respected the Tao and the Fortunes, of course, but never gave them much deep thought; they were mostly concerned with Bushido and the life of the warrior. In later generations, however, this changed as the younger Monkey began to worship their ancestors and to venerate Toku himself after he was made a Fortune. Suddenly the main family of the Monkey bore the name of a god, one who was respected throughout the Empire, and shrines to the new Fortune of Virtue seemed to appear practically overnight throughout the Vale of the Monkey. Regular prayer and meditation at these shrines is considered a necessity for any true Monkey samurai, and those who reach the age of retirement almost always join the Order of Virtue, becoming monks to provide spiritual service to the next generation of samurai. This further strengthens the social fabric of the Monkey lands, as monks who were once samurai can now freely associate with the peasants.

Many find it odd that a clan which believes in each samurai finding his own place and destiny nonetheless worship a Fortune with so much devotion. But to the Monkey, Toku is not a master to be obeyed but an example to be followed. They know they will retain his favor no matter what so long as they are pure of heart.

Toku had a simple yet sincere understanding of Bushido, one which he passed down to his followers and which is now iconic to the clan he founded. The Monkey are not scholars of Bushido, poring endlessly over the finer meanings and intricate puzzles of honor. Rather, they believe that as long as a samurai keeps the seven virtues of the warrior in his heart and mind, he will remain pure of soul. So literal is their view of honor that the Monkey believe reciting the names of the virtues over and over in one's mind is enough to ward away doubt and confusion or even to disperse evil spirits. This can lead them into somewhat personal and idiosyncratic interpretations of what is honorable or dishonorable, resulting in clashes with the traditional samurai who form the vast majority of the Empire. Still, no one denies the Monkey have good hearts.

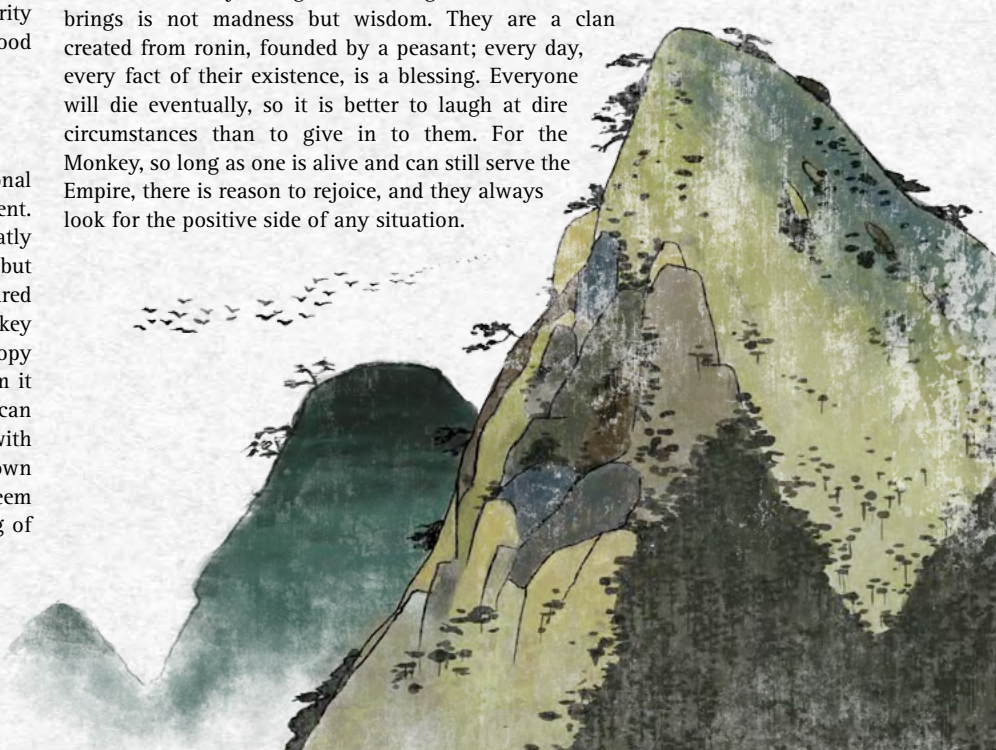
Habits and Beliefs

A common habit of Monkey samurai is to keep personal journals and pass these on to their children upon retirement. Originally these were given to Toku himself (who greatly enjoyed reading them... once he finally learned how), but after his death they became family heirlooms, treasured alongside a family's blades and armor. Many Monkey also emulate their founder's custom of carrying a copy of Akodo's *Leadership* wherever they go, reading from it whenever idle. Lion find this practice admirable, but can be somewhat surprised when they discuss the text with a Monkey samurai; the Monkey formulate their own personal interpretations of Akodo's words and do not seem to care what is considered the "correct" understanding of the Kami's writings.

The Monkey Clan's background gives its members a unique view of the Celestial Order. They respect the differences between the classes, for not doing so would insult the Emperor and the Fortunes – which they would never dream of doing. However, they believe each and every soul serves the Empire in its own way, and every person has the potential to be a hero. Thus they prefer to treat persons as much on their individual merits as on their origins. The Toku are both a scourge and a godsend for ronin, since they have no tolerance for crime whatsoever but also frequently offer honest wave-men work or even fealty. Similarly, the Monkey frown at peasant revolts of any sort, but will readily take up the defense of a farmer against a samurai if the farmer is in the right. The Monkey believe in both justice and compassion, and this mixture drives their actions. Other clan samurai who have heard stories of how honorable the Monkey are can be quite shocked when a Monkey suddenly takes up arms to defend a peasant from his lord or to shelter a wounded ronin whose sole crime was to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The Monkey never hesitate to take such actions if they believe them to be right, regardless of the potential consequences to their clan or themselves.

The Toku and Fuzake families have both become famous in the Empire for another peculiarity of their nature: their uniquely upbeat attitude toward life, full of cheerfulness and humor even in the face of the darkest times. Considering how deadly and serious a place the Empire can be, and the many terrible crises it has faced since the inception of the Monkey Clan, it is not surprising that some of the other clans wonder if the Monkey are truly sane. Stories of the strange optimisim and humor of the Monkey are told throughout the Empire. For instance, a Toku bushi who lost an arm in combat on the Kaiu Wall asked a nearby Crab to lend him a hand, then burst out laughing. A Fuzake shugenja fell asleep at his writing desk and the candle set fire to his kimono; he declared himself blessed by Osano-Wo, who had obviously decided to wake him up with the gift of fire.

To the Monkey, being able to laugh at whatever life brings is not madness but wisdom. They are a clan created from ronin, founded by a peasant; every day, every fact of their existence, is a blessing. Everyone will die eventually, so it is better to laugh at dire circumstances than to give in to them. For the Monkey, so long as one is alive and can still serve the Empire, there is reason to rejoice, and they always look for the positive side of any situation.



The Oriole Clan

From Tetsuya's *Reflections on the Tao*:

In the time of Hantei XX, there was a ronin named Koushuun. The son of a samurai, and versed in the ways of the Tsi, he became an important swordsmith and retainer to an Akodo. However, he fell in love with the Akodo's wife and they had an affair. When this was discovered, his master grew angry, and in self-defense Koushuun slew the Akodo with his own sword. In shame, the Akodo's wife committed jigai*, and Koushuun fled the lands of the Akodo, living in disgrace for many years.*

As time passed, Koushuun began to regret what he had done. He was older now, saw the folly of his youth, and wanted only to make amends for his mistake. After thinking on this for many years, he finally resolved to do something good with his life, to create something that would benefit the Lion as a symbol of his atonement. Yet he only knew the craft of the sword, and so he decided to create a masterpiece katana, one he would present to the Akodo daimyo *and then submit himself to justice.*

So he drafted the plans and gathered the materials, working the steel and creating the blade. But each sword he forged he deemed not good enough. Over time, he created one hundred blades, each one more balanced and exquisite than the last. Yet none seemed good enough to erase the stain on his honor. Fifteen years passed, and at last he believed he had the insight to create his masterpiece. He gathered only the finest steel and meditated for three days in preparation for the task.

The day before he was to begin, a Lion samurai arrived and called him outside his meager hut. It was the son of the Akodo samurai Koushuun had slain, come to avenge his father's death in the manner of samurai.

Koushuun did not resist. He said, "I am guilty of this crime, and I submit to you. However, I only ask that you allow me to finish my masterpiece. It is the final blade I will ever forge, and I intend to surrender it to your daimyo*. The very moment it is finished, I will allow you to kill me."*

The Lion was hesitant, but he knew Koushuun was a Tsi, and the masterpiece of a Tsi smith was a rare and wondrous gift. So he relented, agreeing to wait until Koushuun was done.

Days passed, and the Lion grew tired of waiting. He began to study the smith's work, and then began to help with its craft, hoping it might be done sooner. As the days turned to weeks, the Lion began to admire Koushuun's work, his determination, and his skill. He thought less and less of this man as a criminal who killed his father, and more of him as the man who was creating an unrivaled blade for the Akodo.

Two months later, the blade was complete. As the sun rose in the sky, the smith tested it on a falling leaf, cleaving it in two. He offered the sword to the Lion, bowing deeply. "You may cut off my head now," he said. "My work is finished. Cut off my head, avenge your father, and take this sword to your daimyo*."*

The Lion, tears in his eyes, replied, "How could I sever the head of my teacher?"

The History of the Oriole Clan

The Oriole Clan is one of the youngest Minor Clans in Rokugan, yet contains one of the Empire's oldest families: the Tsi, some of the Empire's most celebrated sword-makers. Their name is synonymous with blades of legend, unparalleled in both form and function. In a warrior culture like Rokugan's, the craft of sword-making is celebrated as a sacred art, and this makes the Tsi one of the most well-regarded Minor Clans in the Empire. Even a minor blade of the Tsi is a prized treasure in the hands of any clan, and the blades of mere apprentices are actively sought out. No other clan, Great or Minor, has ever accomplished what the humble smiths of the Tsi have done.

Although the Oriole were granted Minor Clan status by Emperor Toturi III in the year 1168, the history of the Tsi family goes back to the time of the Shining Prince in the fledgling Empire's first century. Their origins are traced not within Rokugan's borders, but beyond, from the lands of the Yobanjin beyond the Great Wall of the North Mountains. The Yobanjin were formed from those tribes of people who would not follow the Kami after their fall from Heaven, choosing instead to live in exile. Among these people was a tribe called the Sons of the Wind, and in that tribe lived a man named Wenfu.

Wenfu was a prodigy among his people, excelling at his family's craft of weapon-making. In those days, the Yobanjin tribes made crude weapons from inferior metals, lacking access to the fine-quality iron or the folded tamahagane steel the Empire had already developed. Yet Wenfu's aptitude for his craft astounded even his peers, and his ingenuity led to the creation of weapons that exceeded the limitations of their materials. The Yobanjin's distinctive weapon, the so-called "ring sword," is attributed to him, a creation his people still use in modern times.

Although Wenfu was born into the Yobanjin, his mother always claimed his father hailed from the Empire to the south, from the Isawa family of the Phoenix (although she called them the "tribe of Isawa"). Throughout his young life, as he learned his craft at the feet of his teachers and then honed it on his own, he often looked towards the Empire and wondered what sort of man his father was. It was tradition among the Yobanjin for young men to undertake a spirit quest when they attained adulthood, and when it came time for Wenfu to do so, he chose to venture into the Empire and find his father.

Wenfu's quest was doomed to failure. As a Yobanjin he was not welcome among the Rokugani, for his people were considered traitors and barbarians who had abandoned service to the Kami and forsaken the civilization they built. While the people of the early Empire did not attack him, neither did they aid him in any way. Need-

ing money and knowing no other skill, Wenfu resorted to forging simple weapons and selling them to keep himself fed and clothed. He set up a shop in a village near Kyuden Asako, and sold his creations to anyone who would buy them. Wenfu might have passed into obscurity if not for fate... and the keen eye of the daimyo Akodo Gempachi.

The winter after Wenfu's arrival brought the Imperial Court of Hantei Genji to Kyuden Asako, the third Imperial Winter Court it had hosted in its short history. The delegation of the Lion arrived weeks early and spent some time camped just beyond the village's borders. By chance, one of the visiting Lion samurai came upon Wenfu's shop and took a fancy to one of his lesser Yobanjin blades. Amused by its novelty, the Lion purchased the blade as a conversation piece and took it with him to Winter Court.

Due to an error made by a servant, this Yobanjin blade accidentally fell beneath the gaze of the Lion Champion during one of his morning kata. Akodo Gempachi was taken aback by the weapon's beauty, balance, and form. Especially stunning was that the weapon appeared to be made from plain bronze, yet in his hands it soared to its target as surely as his own steel katana. Gempachi demanded to know where the weapon came from, and soon the Lion Champion stood before Wenfu. Unconcerned that the man was *gaijin*, Gempachi commissioned a katana, supplying Wenfu with several bricks of *tamahagane* steel to craft it. Wenfu had never seen metal of this like before, but he quicly found it was oddly easier to fold the metal and strengthen the blade. Within one month the sword was finished, and the resulting blade was of a quality far beyond any Gempachi had ever seen. The Lion was so impressed that he commissioned a second sword, and this one's beauty and grace exceeded the first.

Gempachi brought this second blade to Hantei Genji, offering it to the Emperor as a gift. The Shining Prince was amazed by the sword and summoned Wenfu before him. Hearing the man's story of his Phoenix father, Genji nodded sagely. "This man tells the truth," he said. "He is one of us." Having declared the man to be full-fledged Rokugani, the Emperor made Wenfu his personal smith, granting him an estate in the East Hub Village of Otosan Uchi and bestowing him with a family name. From that day forward, Tsi Wenfu was known as one of the greatest swordsmiths in the Empire.

Vassals of the Emperor

Wenfu's descendants inherited the Tsi family name and continued honing his craft, passing on his unique insights through the generations. With time they refined their techniques, incorporating (and eventually improving) the Rokugani methods of forging. The Tsi were in an odd social position during these centuries, little better than ronin for all that they possessed a family estate and an Imperially-granted family name. This troubled them less than it did others, however, for they did not desire any higher position in life, content simply to refine their techniques and perfect their art. The rest of the Empire found it easiest simply to ignore them.

This changed, however, during the reign of Emperor Hantei XXX. By that time the Tsi name was virtually unknown outside of the select fraternity of sword-smiths, their history a minor footnote known only to the most devoted scholars. The Tsi were essentially a well-kept secret of Otosan Uchi, a loosely-associated group of ronin forgers who all claimed the name of "Tsi." Whenever a samurai broke his blade (a great shame to any samurai regardless of circumstance), trusted friends would point him to the unassuming estate in East Hub Village, and to the ronin forgers who mended blades, forged new ones, and – most importantly – asked no questions.

There were a few within the Tsi who traveled the Empire, pursuing their art wherever their journeys took them, and because of this the Oriole Clan's story takes another fateful turn. A Crane diplomat and artisan called Kakita Harunobu was passing through a simple village when he happened to spot a ronin craftsman cooling metal blades in a stream. Harunobu noticed something unusual about the blades, and surreptitiously watched the ronin as he skillfully worked the metal. Eventually the Crane resumed his journey, but his mind returned many times to the ronin; as one who appreciated the artistry of a forged katana, he recognized the man's immense skill and could not put it out of his mind.

Some months later, Harunobu encountered a Lion samurai cleaning his sword and recognized it as the same blade he had watched the ronin forge. Now it was complete, exquisite in its balance and flawless beauty. When he asked about it, the Matsu explained "some ronin" had forged the blade, and described the village Harunobu had visited. The Crane immediately gathered his entourage and traveled back to the village.

They found the ronin forging plows for the village farmers. After a short conversation, Harunobu offered to take on the ronin as his apprentice, to show him Yasurugi-style blade folding and the Crane secret of making five-layered blades. The ronin accepted... but only on the condition the Crane pay a tithe to the farmers for the services they would lose. The ronin called himself "Tsi," nothing more.

Tsi took to the Crane style of forging as though it were his own. His ingenuity impressed even the most experienced Crane master smiths. And once Harunobu revealed to him the secret of forging a five-layered blade (three layers were the norm), the quality of Tsi's weapons increased twenty-fold, surpassing even those made by his teacher. It was as if a great curtain had been drawn from the man's eyes and he had finally found the last piece his art was missing. Everyone who held one of Tsi's blades knew it was of extraordinary quality, but only those who forged weapons themselves could truly appreciate the majesty of what he created.

History repeated itself. In the year 879, word of Harunobu's magnificent student reached the ears of Hantei XXX. Impressed, the Emperor commissioned a blade for his son, and Harunobu and Tsi worked on the blade together. It was their magnum opus, the most magnificent katana and saya that either of the men had ever produced. But Tsi was the one who forged the blade itself, and it sang a note at even the slightest gesture. The Emperor was so taken by the resulting work that he summoned Tsi to the Imperial Palace. From that day onward, Tsi would only serve the Emperor.

After the Emperor's proclamation, the historians of the court recalled that Tsi was a family name granted to ronin in the time of Hantei Genji. Upon hearing this, the Emperor declared that all ronin who claimed that name were, in fact, vassals of the Hantei, and the Tsi effectively became an Imperial vassal family. It was also the start of a long-standing tradition: henceforth the Tsi name would be passed on not by marriage or blood, but by skill. Only those who were worthy would retain the Tsi name and serve the Son of Heaven. All others would become ronin again and wander the lands in search of their own destinies.

Born from Darkness: The Founding of the Oriole

For many years the Tsi worked only for the Hantei, forbidden from forging weapons for anyone else without the Emperor's blessing. During this time the Tsi's techniques reached such a peak that they were considered unrivaled as swordsmiths throughout the Empire. They were capable of folding their steel as many as twenty times without ruining the metal, and their swords had as many as seven layers, a feat no other smith could replicate, not even the master smiths of the Kakita and the Kaiu. However, with few exceptions their weapons were created as works of art, not devices of war. It was during this era, in the year 1133, that the master smith Tsi Xing Guo ascended to the Heavens and became the Fortune of Steel, creating the eight Celestial Swords of the Great Clans in the forges of Tengoku itself. The Tsi revere him as the greatest of their line.

But fate had one final test for the Tsi. In the year 1159, Otosan Uchi was attacked by the forces of Daigotsu, the so-called Dark Lord of the Shadowlands. The Tsi were unprepared for such a savage assault, and by the time the city fell they had been reduced to a mere fifth of their former numbers. Scattered, their daimyo slain, the Tsi became easy prey for the Ninube, the shapeshifting servants of Nothing, who kidnapped the remaining members of the family. The Tsi were enslaved, forced to create weapons for the Ninube ninja, turning the greatest weapon-smiths in Rokugan against the Empire.

The new daimyo of the Tsi, a man named Zutaka, was unwilling to bend his knee to the Ninube, but he knew his family could not defy them outright. Furthermore, he knew the shapeless Ninube were always watching and would hear of any rebellious scheme, crush even the slightest act of defiance. However, Zutaka was clever, and he devised a plan. Following the command of the Ninube leader, Zutaka forged a sword, folding the metal and hammering the blade as he had always done. On the surface, the blade was unmatched, every bit as worthy as the blades of ten Emperors... but in reality, it was flawed, deliberately weakened in several places. The flaws were so subtle that only an experienced swordsmith would be able to identify them. When Zutaka presented his sword to the Ninube leader, he said only: "This is my finest work." All the other Tsi took a single look at the blade and understood exactly what Zutaka was doing. Soon every blade leaving the Tsi forges was flawed in ways the Ninube could not detect. On the surface, the Tsi had succumbed to their captors, but in their hearts and their work, they were still defiant.

In this way Zutaka and the remaining Tsi slowly sabotaged the Ninube over the course of years. Finally they were rescued by the Jade Champion, Asahina Sekawa, and brought to the Emperor.

It was then Zutaka revealed his greatest gambit. During his time among the Ninube, he had discovered the sword of Emperor Toturi I and hidden it so it could not fall into the hands of the enemy. Toturi Naseru was so moved by this act and by the entire tale of the Tsi family's suffering that he decreed the Tsi were blessed by Heaven. They had risked everything for the safety of the Empire, and the Empire would reward them accordingly. They were no longer a vassal of the Imperial house; now, they were the Oriole Clan. Having made this proclamation, Naseru immediately commissioned Zutaka to forge a new sword for the Toturi Dynasty, a blade that came to be known as the Sword of the Righteous Emperor.

The Oriole's Plumage

In the years following the Oriole Clan's founding, they rose to become one of the most influential Minor Clans in the Empire. No longer bound by their ancient oaths to the Emperor, they could now offer weapons to any who sought them, and samurai from all the Great Clans flocked to the Oriole in the hopes of procuring one of the legendary Tsi blades. The influence and wealth of the Oriole rose swiftly.

However, the transition from Imperial vassal to Minor Clan also brought new challenges, many of which the new clan had not foreseen. No longer connected to the Imperials, the Tsi no longer enjoyed the protection of the Emperor. They could no longer be merely skilled smiths; a Minor Clan needed bushi, diplomats, architects, merchants, shugenja, perhaps even generals. If the Oriole were to survive they would have to grow, and Zutaka dedicated his life to building the foundations for such growth. He abandoned the traditional Tsi doctrine of restricting their weapons to artistic gifts and began trading them, even the ones crafted by his own hands, for political favors. In return, Tsi samurai trained with Crane and Scorpion courtiers, and the Phoenix built temples to attract the Brotherhood to Tsi lands. Zutaka married his eldest daughter Tsi Jieza to Hida Rezan, a prominent Crab warrior, in exchange for the Crab Clan's insights into battle and war. Zutaka's sons trained with both the Lion and the Dragon Clans, and upon returning home they established the first Oriole bushi dojo in West Hub Village, just beyond the ruins of Otosan Uchi.

The eldest of the Tsi resisted these changes. To them, it was not the place of the Tsi to reach for such glories, and it was not proper for Tsi to make weapons for war rather than for artistic display. But Zutaka knew it was not glory the Oriole sought, merely their own place in the Empire. Before he retired in the year 1184, he ensured his son Tsi Soshu would continue on this path to secure the future of the clan.

The Lands of the Tsi

Most Minor Clans claim only a single province or at best two or three adjacent provinces as their homeland, usually focused around a single core stronghold. The Oriole, uniquely among the Minor Clans, have lands and holdings scattered throughout the Empire, a wide chain of territories resulting from political gifts and Imperial favors. While these territories are still negligible compared to the provinces of the Great Clans, they provide the Oriole with more resources and taxes than many other Minor Clans. Indeed, with mines, holdings, and strongholds spread from the Carpenter Wall to the Utaku Plains, the influence of the Oriole exceeds that of most other Minor

Clans and arguably rivals that of the less politically influential Great Clans. And anyone seeking the services of the Tsi can easily find them.

With these unique advantages come unique challenges. For a clan so tiny to be so widespread hinders its strength and coordination. Most Oriole daimyo resort to hiring ronin to guard their holdings and patrol their roads, with the promise of fealty if they prove worthy. The distance between holdings is sometimes so great it can take a week or more to receive even the simplest proclamation. Because of this isolation, most Tsi strongholds are encapsulated and self-sufficient, requiring little guidance from their Clan Champion.

Tsi Uchi

The seat of the Oriole's influence is as humble as the Tsi themselves. Known simply as the "House of the Tsi," the Clan Champion's home is a medium-sized estate in Toshi Ranbo. It was granted to Tsi Zutaka by the Emperor in the year 1168 and became the Oriole Clan's primary headquarters. Tsi Uchi is not a military fortress but simply a residential estate, comprising a few humble structures, gardens, and a shrine, all surrounded by a stone wall.

Tsi Uchi typically houses fifty or so Oriole samurai, including the immediate family of the Clan Champion. Heralds from the Oriole's lands and delegations from the other clans are a common sight within the estate, a constant train of entering and exiting diplomats, merchants, and courtiers.

Kyuden Tsi

The Oriole Clan's only true castle is still incomplete at the end of the twelfth century, although the work done so far holds much promise. Plans for a palace worthy of an Imperial visit were originally conceived by Tsi Zutaka, and architects of the Crane and Phoenix drafted the plans in the year 1170. However, the tumultuous events of that era slowed the project significantly, and actual construction did not begin until after the Destroyer War concluded. The building has faced many setbacks since then, but the Tsi are a patient people. They understand it takes time to forge a perfect blade or to build a perfect palace. When it is finally completed, Kyuden Tsi will become the new headquarters of the Tsi family and will be the most splendid palace among all the Minor Clans. Until then, however, Kyuden Tsi is little more than an incomplete construct, a shining aspiration... and a perpetual drain on the clan's coffers.

The half-built palace is located a short distance westward from the Imperial City of Toshi Ranbo. The architecture is a merging of Kakita and Isawa aesthetics, yet fits the humble, understated attitude of the Oriole. Thanks to the marriage of Zutaka's daughter to Hida Rezan, the design also incorporates the strengths of Crab architecture, and the Yasuki have taken it upon themselves to advise the Tsi on how to finance the building. Planned features for the completed palace include a Hall of Blades and a great shrine to the Fortune of Steel.

The Ruins of Otosan Uchi

As an Imperial vassal the Tsi family held numerous minor estates in Otosan Uchi, mostly small forges and modest housing. Showing no manner of ambition, the humble Tsi never sought to gain more lands or holdings, remaining content with what they had. Now and then the Imperial families would grant them a forge further abroad in the Empire, but the Tsi never actively sought these gains. For them, Otosan Uchi was enough, a place to gather and discuss their sacred craft.

After Otosan Uchi was largely destroyed by Daigotsu's attack, the Tsi were held prisoner in its ruins by the Ninube. However, after the Ninube were purged by the Jade Champion, the Tsi returned in small numbers to their old ruined holdings. Heedless to the danger, they gradually recovered their old estates and rebuilt their forges. Many deem this to be foolish; the city is a condemned ruin, Tainted in places, and cannot be restored. But the Tsi persist, for these holdings are for all intents and purposes their only ancestral lands. The Tsi cannot abandon them even in the wake of such dark history and complete devastation. Instead, they use these forges to create weapons which are not decorative at all, but rather are designed specifically to smite the darkness that dwells over the ancient city. These weapons are only given to the ronin family called the Yotsu, who stand guard over Otosan Uchi; the Oriole will not give them to anyone else, not for any price.

East Hub Village Estates

While the East Hub Village has usually been dominated by the Tortoise Clan over the centuries, the Tsi have always held a significant presence there, ever since Tsi Wenfu was bestowed an estate by the Shining Prince himself in the year 172. After the fall of Otosan Uchi, the Tsi still maintain their simple holdings there, sharing the village presence with the Tortoise and Mantis, who maintain the docks.

West Hub Village Estates

For most of its history, the Tsi were but a footnote in West Hub Village, but after the fall of Otosan Uchi this changed drastically. In the late twelfth century the Tsi virtually run this village, under the patronage and protection of the Dragon Clan. The village has recovered far better than the other surrounding lands, thanks in part to the diligence and dedication of the Tsi, and is now a prosperous town with many inns, a sake works, and several temples.

Oriole Clan Customs

The Oriole Clan revolves around the sacred task assigned by the Emperor. Tsi culture is built on producing the Empire's greatest swordsmiths (and the Empire's greatest swords). However, after being granted Minor Clan status, the Tsi's way of life slowly begins to expand as the scope of their duties becomes more complicated. Now they are entrusted with the protection of land and are part of the dance of diplomacy conducted in courts throughout the Empire. The Tsi mindset, which in the past focused only on the task of sword-forging, expands to incorporate these other things. It is a transition most Tsi find difficult.

In past ages, the leadership of the Tsi did not take an active role in the family's affairs, content simply to practice their art and craft on behalf of their Imperial masters. With the new status as a Minor Clan came new responsibilities, and the rulers of the Tsi are slowly accepting the challenge of proactive leadership. This is hindered somewhat by the fact that the clan is spread so thinly across the Empire, but the Tsi's allies in the Miya have alleviated this somewhat.

Within their first three years as a clan, the Oriole encounter their first crisis: marriages. Before, when the Tsi were merely a ronin vassal family in service of the Emperor, there was no need to perpetuate their bloodlines. Gifted swordsmiths could earn the family name as a reward; marriage and inheritance were not necessary. This is no longer the case. Moreover, increasing the clan's numbers has become a new priority, so daimyo are now expected to make sure their vassals marry and start families. The Tsi follow the most simple and conventional traditions concerning births, marriages, and deaths; they have never seen the need for any special ceremonies in lives dominated by the pursuit of craft.

The Forging Traditions

While the whole Empire reveres swordsmithing as a samurai art, the general consensus is that a swordsmith is creating the tools of warfare, and a sword's beauty is often secondary to its deadliness. The Tsi, however, elevate the sword as the pinnacle of art, and to them art and function are one and the same. They do not differentiate a sword's deadliness from its beauty, because they believe a sword with a perfect form cannot be matched by any other.

To the Tsi, the forged sword is a form of expression, as surely as a poem, a painting, or a sculpture. Indeed, many Tsi refer to themselves as *Chōkoku-ka* (sculptors) instead of as smiths. They forge swords with the same mindset as an artist preparing the creation of a painting. That the sword might eventually be wielded by a warrior is ultimately inconsequential to them. In fact, most Tsi do not like to think their swords will ever be used in practices of war. They cringe whenever they witness one of their swords being drawn in a duel or used to deflect an attack, much the same way an artist might cringe at the misuse of one of his sculptures. This is not because they have an unrealistic view of sword-craft, for even the most esoteric Oriole smiths grudgingly acknowledge their blades might someday be used. Rather, it is because to them the true purpose of their blades is simply to be admired. The craftsmanship, the deadliness, the sleek flawless form of the curved blade... these things cast a shadow over a sword's potential to kill. To the Tsi, the ultimate practice of martial power is abstaining from its use. A quote attributed to a ronin who eventually became a Tsi master smith illustrates this mindset: "A sword is most desirable when it is sheathed."

For any smith to be considered for membership of the Oriole, he must demonstrate his dedication to this ideal. Great smiths, unparalleled craftsmen, and even former Kaiu and Kakita forgers have all been denied fealty to the Oriole due to their taking joy in the violence inflicted by their creations. In the Tsi view, a master forger takes no joy in what his masterpieces can do, but only values the crafting of the blade, the appreciation for its form, and the anticipation of his next project.

Forging a Sword

To better understand the Oriole, one must understand the forging of a sword, which the Tsi often view as a metaphor for how a man must forge his life. A man is born as raw iron which must be cleansed of impurities, folded into ideal material, plunged into heat and cold, and beaten again and again before he can become shining steel. But there is more than one way to forge a blade, and more than one type of sword that can result.

Details on sword-forging in Rokugan can be found in Chapter Five of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Fire*, pages 107-112.

Master and Apprentice

The art of the Tsi is sacred knowledge, passed down through generations. At the heart of this tradition is the master-apprentice bond. From a young age, Oriole children are taught the ideal qualities of a swordsmith, especially serenity of mind and the ability to recognize and understand metals and blades. When they are old enough, each child is apprenticed to a master forger, typically only one or two (or rarely, three) students to one master. The students live with their master and help with the daily tasks of forging.

The language of this arrangement is very careful. The master is never referred to as a "sensei." Indeed, he is not expected to actually teach anything. Instead, the responsibility is on the student to absorb the master's knowledge. The student must assist the master in any way he deems appropriate, all the while watching him carefully, studying and assimilating the master's techniques. And all the while, the student must practice. By the end of their time together, the master will assign the student one forging, and it is on the quality of this forging that the student is judged either worthy... or not.

Some believe the student's time as an apprentice ends at the time of his gempukku. This is not true. Once a samurai is apprenticed to a master, that samurai is forever the master's apprentice. The opposite is also true; while that master will forever be the master of his students, all the while he is forever the apprentice to his own master. In this way, there is never an absolute "master of the art." The Oriole consider it folly to believe anyone has reached the peak of the craft, not even Tsi Xing Guo. Indeed, when they start their first steps towards their futures, the Oriole students are always reminded: "Even the Fortune of Steel is just an apprentice."

Living Without The Gift

When the Tsi were vassals of the Hantei, they did not have to concern themselves with anything more than forging swords. Anyone could seek the Tsi family name if they wished, and the Tsi would accept anyone into their ranks so long as they proved worthy. In the same vein, the Tsi name was not passed on by birth alone, and those who had no skill for the forge had to relinquish it and become mere ronin once more.

This all changed when the Oriole became a Minor Clan. Without an explicit connection to the Imperial families, the Tsi could no longer afford to cast aside any of their samurai. Anyone born into the Tsi would remain a Tsi, regardless of talents. If the new clan was to survive, it had to grow.

This change in policy was not initially favored by most of the clan. The Tsi elders, masters of the forge, had dedicated their lives to the craft and had earned the Tsi name through their own toil, sweat, and dedication. Allowing those who showed no promise at the forge to remain part of the Tsi was an insult to them, and it spat in the face of every master smith their line had ever produced. But Clan Champion Tsi Zutaka knew the clan would need more than smiths if it was to survive, and ultimately the clan's respect for its leader, the man who had saved them from both Otosan Uchi's collapse and the clutches of the Ninube, won out.

In modern times the Oriole are still a clan centered on the arts of the forge. From birth, their members are brought up to be forgers of legendary blades. However, those who show little aptitude for the forge are assigned to other duties. These individuals often feel deeply ashamed of their inability to upnhold the traditional Tsi arts, but the clan finds use for them nonetheless.

The simplest way is to train them in other crafts. The Tsi name is inextricably linked with quality, and anything made by the hands of a Tsi is assumed by the Empire at large to be an exquisite piece. Even the works of apprentices are sought out by Rokugani lords. Consequently, the modern Tsi have become known for making things other than just blades. The Tsi create armor, shrines, furniture, kimono, and even lesser weapons like tetsubo. What is not commonly known, however, is that those Tsi who dedicate themselves to these crafts are often those who lacked the proper aptitude for sword-forging. While these Tsi crafters are essential to the operations of the clan, and are often praised throughout the lands as masters of their arts, within the clan they are not afforded the same respect. In fact, they are the lowest-ranked samurai of the clan, the equivalent of ji-samurai in other clans.

In recent times, Tsi armor has grown popular among Great Clan samurai. In fact, the Dragon and Mantis both commission armor from the Tsi quite often, and even the Imperial families have taken a liking to their understated aesthetic and life-saving quality. This has caused the Tsi armorsmith's peers to relent somewhat in their negative views, and for the first time the Oriole armorsmiths are beginning to conduct themselves with the same pride as their swordsmithing cousins. This is something the Clan Champion's family looks upon with great hope, because it means the attitudes of the smithing-centric elders may be fading amongst the clan's youth. They know the future of the clan will depend on its unity.

The Roles of the Samurai: Bushi and Diplomats

Now that the Tsi are a clan, they need bushi, and this is the most common role for those who do not show an affinity for any sort of craft. These Tsi are looked down upon by their peers even more than those who follow other crafts, even though their duties are essential to the survival of the clan. In fact, the Oriole have so few bushi that it is common for Oriole lords to hire ronin to protect their lands. Every "home-grown" bushi is thus doubly valuable to the Oriole, and the attitude that they are somehow inferior to the crafters and sword-smiths is something that makes other samurai in the Empire shake their heads. Within the Oriole Clan, however, most of the bushi quietly accept their peers' judgement, for they believe it themselves.

While all of the Oriole practice kenjutsu to better understand how their swords might be improved, it is only the clan bushi who practice it as a true martial art. Only recently have the Oriole established a proper kenjutsu dojo, and while they have yet to develop any martial techniques of their own, they are making considerable progress under the guidance of their Dragon-trained sensei. The Oriole Dojo teaches every common *kata* known in the Empire, and its students often excel at the execution of these *kata*.

Most Tsi bushi do not begin their training in the Oriole dojo, however. The Dragon and Lion both open their schools to promising Tsi students in the hope that the Oriole may offer a Tsi Blade in exchange. The sensei of the dojo usually notice their students seem unusually old to be starting on the path of the bushi, but they never draw attention to this fact. Oriole students usually return to their clan after learning only the first technique of their school, but this alone puts them well above most hired ronin. Such Tsi can usually look forward to distinguished careers. In an effort to change the minds of the clan, the Clan Champion has always shown great respect to those who walk this path. Perhaps with time the rest of the clan will follow suit, and bushi will be considered equal to those who honor the path of the Tsi's oldest ancestors.

The Tsi also require representatives in the courts, heralds to travel between their vastly scattered lands, and merchant patrons to manage their wares. When the clan was first formed, Tsi Zutaka called in many favors from the Great Clans to try to fill his new clan's ranks with such professions. However, such duties usually mean an individual has little time for forging, and thus once again this training was relegated to those who proved themselves unworthy of the traditional Tsi path.

Ironically, these Tsi are usually subject to the least amount of prejudice, because they spend most of their time away from their homelands and their peers. Diplomats conduct their business in the courts of other clans, and heralds and merchants spend most of their time on the road. There are not yet any Tsi shugenja, but with the number of cross-clan weddings taking place within the Oriole Clan, it is likely some will be born soon. Whether they too will face prejudice for failing to be proper smiths remains to be seen.

The Ox Clan

Uzume wiped the top of his counter, gently humming a popular tune from his childhood village. Behind him he could hear the dice rolling in the cups, the men shouting at each roll, shouting with happiness or despair. It was late at night and he did not expect any more visitors. The tavern in the front of his establishment was empty, and even the number of gamblers was diminishing as the marks ran out of money. Just as well. Uzume could use the rest of the evening to finish cleaning up and get things in order for the next day.

As he was putting away the sake cups, the door slid open, letting in a gust of brisk winter air and a swirl of snow that scattered across the floor. Uzume was about to curse at the new entrent for ruining his cleaning work, but then he realized it was a samurai. A woman samurai at that, dressed in a full suit of armor in dark blue and black. If she had been wearing her helmet instead of holding it in one hand, he would never have realized she was a woman. As it was, her long unbound black hair floated in the wind like silk. Not that Uzume would have said that aloud, not to an armed samurai-ko. Instead he jerked his head at Ijio, the ronin bouncer lounging in the corner. The large bald man rose to his feet and stepped in front of the samurai-ko, towering over her.

"Good evening," she said with a clearly unintimidated smile. "I am Morito Tsuchide, of the Ox Clan. I am looking for a man named Chiriyo."

"He's not here tonight," the ronin grunted.

"Ah, so this is his establishment!" Tsuchide smiled. "I was not sure. Perhaps I could meet with one of his lieutenants then? Hokoryu perhaps?"

"He..." the ronin paused. "I don't know him. There's nothing for you here, Ox."

"I see," Tsuchide nodded. "Thank you for your time."

She simply left, closing the door behind her. Uzume let out a sigh of relief and waved Ijio back to his seat.

Before the ronin could move, the door literally burst open, the wooden panels smashed out of their frame by violent force. Ijio barely had time to grope for his sword before the hooves of a horse smashed into his chest and knocked him to the floor. The horse stormed the rest of the way into the room; astride its back, Morito Tsuchide straightened up as she cleared the door-frame, her wild hair now partially contained within her helm. With her right hand she pulled her katana free of its saya.

Two more ronin emerged from the back room, swords in hand. Tsuchide swiftly spun her horse around, its hooves smashing into one ronin's torso while the samurai-ko's sword took off the other man's head. Uzume could hear the gamblers in the back room scrambling to escape. He himself turned to flee as Tsuchide swung down smoothly from her saddle.

A small but terrifyingly strong hand closed on the back of Uzume's neck as he lunged for the door to the back room. A moment later he was slammed down onto his own counter, gasping for air as the impact drove the wind from his lungs. Tsuchide sheathed her sword and leaned over his head, smiling down at his red-purple face.

"Now," she said, her tone still as relaxed as before, "where were we? Ah yes, I remember now – you were about to tell me where Chiriyo is. And I know you will, because I am already... rather annoyed. I would be more annoyed if I have to beat it out of you."

Uzume closed his eyes, drew a gasping breath, and told her everything he knew.

History of the Ox Clan

The founder of Ox Clan was a man named Morito, although he bore other names through the course of his life. He was born Otaku Morito in the Unicorn Clan, and as a boy he only dreamed of riding in battle on the beautiful steeds of his family. Of course, this privilege was reserved to the *shiotome*, the Battle Maidens of his family, but that did not stop Morito from dreaming. While the men of his clan typically served as stable masters or in the infantry units of the Unicorn Clan, or perhaps at best rode with the Shinjo family, he would have none of it. One night he sneaked into the stables of his family and tried to mount one of their famous horses. Sadly, his plan went horribly wrong, as the horse tried to fling him off and broke one of its legs in the process. Morito was publicly shamed for his actions and cast out as a ronin. His younger brother, a shugenja named Tokei, was the only one who supported him and left the clan with him. Otherwise, Morito was alone.

Embittered and disillusioned, Morito became a mercenary and occasionally a criminal, resorting to whatever means needed to survive. However, he still wished to serve the Empire somehow, and when the Clan Wars came and Toturi the Black started to gather an army of ronin, Morito and his brother joined it. They fought in countless battles alongside the many heroes of that time, and eventually lived to see Toturi triumph and become Emperor. Morito was one of Toturi's trusted commanders, hailed as a hero, and the Unicorn welcomed him back into their ranks, granting him fealty to the Shinjo family. However, Morito soon distanced himself from them again when the War Against the Shadow began and the Empire once again knew chaos and violence. Tired of fighting for others and seeking to claim a legacy of his own, Morito led his men to the unaligned region where the Dragon Heart Plain meets the Northern Wall Mountains and claimed it for his own. While these lands had formerly been claimed by the Phoenix, they currently lacked the manpower to patrol the area and could do little more than protest Morito's actions. In truth, some of them were secretly grateful for his presence. The Emperor let Morito do as he wished, and for years he and his men protected the area against many dangers. It was during the War of Spirits that Morito truly gained the recognition he craved, as his forces constantly harassed the armies of the Steel Chrysanthemum. For their deeds the Emperor granted them the title of the Ox Clan.

There was, however, a darker design at work behind Morito's actions. During his days as a disillusioned ronin he was inducted into the Kolat conspiracy, seduced by promises of casting off the shackles of destiny and the gods

to see mankind rise to its true potential. During the War Against the Darkness, he realized the hidden temple of the Kolat in the Phoenix mountains was dangerously exposed due to the armies of the Shiba being stretched so thin. Morito cleverly positioned his followers to protect the hidden stronghold, and under the cover of his own personal ambition the Kolat's home was able to remain hidden. When the returned Kami Shinjo purged her clan of its Kolat infiltrators, Morito offered many of them a home in his lands, saving them from certain death. In recognition of his efforts and in view of the upheaval the conspiracy was facing, Morito was elevated to the rank of Kolat Master, becoming the first head of the Steel Sect, dedicated to the protection of Kolat interests. The legitimation of his claim to the lands as Champion of the Ox Clan gave him even more leeway, and the Kolat helped him secure the friendship of the Phoenix by offering them several priceless gaijin artifacts.

During the reign of Toturi III, the Ox Clan was granted the Morito family name; the Emperor realized they were the only Minor Clan left without a family name, and he did not want to slight one of his father's strongest followers. This cemented the existence of the Ox Clan as one of the stronger Minor Clans of the Empire. However, their good fortune did not last long. Their secret association with the Kolat was about to become a terrible liability.

In the year 1170, the Scorpion Clan learned about the location of the hidden stronghold of the Kolat from a traitor within the conspiracy. They quickly mounted a large covert expedition, storming first Shiro Morito and then attacking the Hidden Temple itself. Morito was killed along with over one-third of the Ox Clan's samurai – all those who could be identified as Kolat. Several of the other Kolat Masters were also killed and the Hidden Temple was razed. The Scorpion decided to leave the Ox Clan in the hands of Morito's distant nephew, Morito Garin, since they did not want to draw attention to their actions or to what they had retrieved from the Kolat stronghold. Garin, who had no prior knowledge of the Kolat, was ashamed at the extant of his clan's treason but did not want to see its positive heritage wasted. He surrounded himself with trusted vassals and covertly sought the help of the Unicorn in purging his clan of the Kolat conspiracy's last bits of influence.

Luckily for Garin, a chance to prove himself came quickly when Yobanjin tribes under the command of the Dark Oracle of Fire started attacking Rokugan's northern borders. Garin saw the War of Dark Fire as an opportunity to rededicate his clan to nobler ideals, and when Shiro Morito emerged victorious from a siege against the gaijin forces, it became a beacon of hope for all of Rokugan. The Ox fought savagely during the whole war and the Destroyer War that followed, eager to redeem themselves and wanting Rokugan to remain free at all costs. This helped the Ox gain the respect of the other clans, both Great and Minor, and once the war was over they received considerable aid for rebuilding their lands and forces. Garin eventually married a samurai-ko of the Bayushi family and retired when his son came of age, secure in the knowledge his clan was now free of Kolat influence and had returned to a semblance of a traditional existence.

At the end of the twelfth century, the Ox Clan is prospering under its new leader Morito Naname, benefiting from a period of relative peace in Rokugan. Naname hopes his clan can become a major player in Rokugan's affairs, and to this end he has dispatched a few troops to the Colonies, which he believes are key to Rokugan's future development. The Colonies are an eclectic environment in which the Morito samurai do well; their military strength contributes to a unit called the Minor Clan Irregulars, barracked in the Second City and led by an Ox samurai-ko named Morito Tsuki, who has won the respect of local commanders through her efficient service.

In Rokugan proper, in the absence of major conflicts Naname has begun using his forces to crack down on organized crime. The Ox always maintained an ear on the underbelly of Rokugan, and indeed this was encouraged during their time of service to the Kolat, but Naname has instead used this knowledge to discretely but violently dismantle some of the larger criminal operations in Rokugan. He sees it as his duty to continue fighting the enemies of the Empire, those who would shackle the people under false pretenses of freedom or superiority. And if the Ox Clan has to seize the funds or equipment of criminals to keep supplying itself, or operates without the knowledge or authorization of local magistrates, so be it.

The Lands of the Ox Clan

The territories of the Morito family are divided into two distinct and very different zones. In the south lies Dragon Heart Plain, a gently rolling plain which is quite fertile despite suffering from harsh winters. The Ox only occupy the northern edge of the Plain, since much of it used to be the territory of the Snake Clan. This means the southern border of Ox territory, while prime land for villages to grow food, is also vast and wide-open, difficult to defend. Luckily, the Ox have a large military force with considerable strength in cavalry. The patrols of the Ox cover a lot of ground, and each village has a small waystation for warriors and mounts alike to pause for rest. The region also has a scattering of small keeps which can house a few squadrons at a time. During the winter, the village populations increase as many peasants from the clan's mountainous areas come down to stay with their cousins in the plains where the weather is more bearable. This is the opportunity for small celebrations as the peasantry rejoice in the arrival of their friends and prepare to endure the harsh winter season.

Villages in the eastern part of the plain are the most populated, since they frequently trade with the Phoenix Clan. In the west the villages face the border with the Dragon Clan, but rarely see a visitor. This area is sparsely populated and has been known to hide bandits, so the Ox maintain strong patrols. Beyond the southern edge of the Ox territory is the ancient home of the defunct Snake Clan, said to house cursed ruins and demonic creatures. The Ox constantly patrol this border in case something unwholesome comes from the Plain.

The northern mountains are a difficult terrain to patrol, especially in winter when the small passes become all but impassable. However, given the threat of incursion from the Yobanjin tribes, controlling these passes remains an important focus for the Ox Clan. The villages in the mountains are smaller but also more self-sufficient, as they can easily become cut off for months by snowfall or avalanches. Most of them exploit the numerous mountain streams for both fishing and brewing sake, supplementing the rice grown in the south. A few villages also breed mountain ponies, which are used by the Ox to patrol the tallest peaks and most rugged trails. The Morito maintain several keeps in the area, usually overlooking the most prominent passes to the rest of Rokugan. During the time of the Kolat, some of these keeps also protected the road to the Hidden Temple, but in later eras those are abandoned or torn down; they have no strategic value once the conspiracy has been uprooted.

During the summer, when patrolling the mountains becomes more practicable, the Morito will frequently organize long-ranging scouting parties to monitor Yobanjin activity. While the region is too vast for the barbarians to be fully contained, these expeditions allow the Ox to keep pressure on them and grant a head start in case of any massive incursions.

The Ox Clan in Other Eras

Like the Monkey Clan, the Ox Clan is closely tied to the events of the twelfth century. However, a man like Morito could have appeared at almost any time after the founding of Rokugan, and there are many eras of history in which the Kolat might have seen value in organizing a Minor Clan to screen the approaches to their Hidden Temple. Conversely, it could also have been possible in many other eras for a disillusioned Unicorn to have formed a Minor Clan dedicated to fighting criminals and the underworld.

Shiro Morito

The nexus of the Ox Clan's strength, Shiro Morito is an impressive fortress situated on the lower slopes of the Great Wall of the North Mountains. It is a very large military keep, larger than any other Minor Clan's fortress and indeed larger than some Great Clan installations as well, and totally dominates the area, visible from the plains long before travelers arrive. It was built in a traditional style, with no frills or decorations, since Morito wanted a functional and powerful stronghold. The castle is said to be large enough to house the entire clan in case of need.

Winding paths approach the stronghold from three directions, arranged to allow riders to quickly retreat to the fortress if needed, while the mountains on the castle's north side are so steep as to make any approach virtually impossible. The main keep has extensive reserves of food, weapons, and fresh water, all carefully maintained. Shiro Morito was always built to withstand extensive siege, initially due to its role in protecting the Kolat's hidden

fortress. (When the time came, though, the Scorpion struck so quickly and covertly that all its strength was for naught.) Ironically, the defensive feature originally built to hold off fellow Rokugani later made the castle a rallying point for Rokugani armies during the War of Dark Fire. Since then Shiro Morito has acquired a reputation as a key element of Rokugan's northern defenses.

Shiro Morito is also famous for its horses, raised on the plains and used to train and equip the Ox warriors. Indeed, it is known to have the largest stable outside the Unicorn lands. The main dojo of the Morito Bushi School is also located within its walls, and although a large part of the training happens outside, the majority of Ox Clan bushi have set foot in the castle at one time or another. The entire place is dedicated to war, and the Ox make no pretense of being anything other than warriors.

The small town lying at the stronghold's feet strongly supports this, housing several armories and smithies providing the gear the Ox army needs. However, as the seat of power for the whole clan, Shiro Morito also hosts a small court. The most frequent attendees are from the Phoenix and Dragon Clans, the immediate neighbors of the Ox, although Unicorn and Scorpion samurai can often be found in small delegations as well. The Ox also usually host an ambassador of the Minor Clan Alliance, since the clan is one of the Alliance's key players and the source of much of its military might. Guests are always well treated, since in all eras the Ox are careful not to attract hostile attention to any of their activities. As a result, and despite their odd customs and foreboding fortress, the Ox are generally considered fair hosts, and some guests have come to appreciate the rugged beauty of their lands.

Red Horn Village

Situated in the southeastern corner of the Ox Clan's lands, Red Horn Village sees increasing levels of activity in the late twelfth century. Originally it was just one village among many others in the area, but Morito's successors promoted it as a center of trade and diplomacy, taking some pressure – and attention – off Shiro Morito during the difficult years after the purge of the Kolat. While the most important visitors are still hosted in the clan's capital, lesser merchant patrons and diplomats are met in Red Horn Village, and since this shortens the trip for many of them they frequently agree.

The village takes its name from the high number of Phoenix guests there, and they have a permanent residence in the village, the House of the Jade Dawn. The Phoenix often buy rare herbs and plants from the Ox, who have excellent access to such items in their mountains (and occasionally the Yobanjin lands). The Ox prefer to take hard coin in exchange, or rice when their harvest does not measure up to their needs. The town is also somewhat of a festive resort and has several gambling establishments. While they appear of dubious nature to many eyes, they are in fact all under the tight control of the Morito family, which uses them to monitor any attempts at establishing criminal organizations in these lands. Very often, a traveling merchant will attempt to resell goods of dubious nature to one of the local establishments, only to have a Morito samurai arrive to impose swift punishment.

The only businesses exempt to this rule of strict control are those under the protection of the Scorpion Clan. While the Scorpion never allow anything of illegal nature to enter the lands of the Ox, they do use the village as a point of entry for their operations in the Phoenix lands. The Ox are fully aware of this but know better than to endanger their post-Kolat friendship with the Scorpion Clan. Of course, the Scorpion are helpful to the Ox as well, and fully cooperate with the Ox in any matters not directly related to their own interests.

The Western Keep

This small castle is the base of operations for the sentries who protect the western and southern borders of the Ox provinces, and is also the seat of power for the Kijuro vassal family. The keep is little more than a stable and barracks combined, with no formal dojo or sensei, although there is an informal training ground the men use for sparring.

Mountain's Bounty Village

Nestled within the Great Wall of the North Mountains, this village is built around a mountain river that feeds into a large lake to the southeast of the Ox provinces. The water is fresh and crystal clear, and is used for brewing sake and other alcoholic beverages. The village's main product is sake, although it also harvests fish from the river.

Vassal Families of the Ox

The Ox Clan has a single vassal family, the **Kijuro**. The family is named after Morito Kijuro, a dedicated warrior but a rather earthy samurai (known for drinking and chasing women when he was off duty) who guarded the Ox Clan's western border. During the time of the Four Winds, Kijuro accompanied the Imperial Herald, Miya Shoin, on a lengthy quest to hunt down a dangerous murderer; ultimately, he died at the end of the quest, helping to save the life of the man who would become Emperor Toturi III. In reward, his widow and son were granted the Kijuro vassal family name.

Ironically, this hero of the Empire was actually a Kolat. However, this knowledge died with him. His son, Kitaji, never learned the dark truth about his father. As a result, the Kijuro vassal family survived the later purge of the Kolat and continues to serve the Ox Clan by watching over its western border.

Customs of the Ox Clan

The Ox Clan was founded by ronin, and while most of them came from the Unicorn Clan, some were recruited by Morito from all across the Empire. They existed as a coherent group for years before becoming a Minor Clan, and this shaped their culture. An example of this is seen in their celebrations of childbirth, which are not merely joyous but outright lavish. As soon as the mother is able to walk, the couple is invited to an extensive dinner prepared by family and friends where they are treated to the finest food, gifts, and drinks. Like many other events in the lands of the Morito, this is accompanied by the ingestion of a great deal of strong sake and other liquors, and usually ends up in drunken revelry. Even among the peasantry, an extensive dinner and drinking bout is the norm, and while this is far less lavish than among the samurai it remains quite a tumultuous event. The Ox look the other way for a day, allowing the lower class to have their share of happiness before returning to work. Since Morito Garin's time, there is also a special celebration when the Champion's wife gives birth, a week-long festival all across the clan's territory. A Crane Clan ambassador present for the birth of Garin's first child said it was the most chaotic affair he had ever seen, although he seemed to have forgotten most of the details.

Training in the Morito Bushi School is a much less light hearted business. The founders of the clan were all veteran warriors used to hardship, and their teaching methods reflect this. The techniques of the Ox require peak physical condition, and students are worked hard from their first day. They learn how to ride, fight, and track in the hostile territory of their homeland, and winter is no cause for interruption. Weakness or failure is not tolerated, and students are taught to endure until they succeed. By the time they pass their gempukku, most Ox samurai already have a few scars and are well used to extreme climatic conditions. They also learn about the nature of criminal organizations and how to counter them (or use them to the clan's advantage). The gempukku ceremony itself is surprisingly easy, since the student is considered to have proved himself already by surviving the training years. The new samurai is embraced by his teachers and fellow warriors and offered alcohol to celebrate, all the failures and reproaches of his formative years forgotten. In the days of Morito, the gempukku was followed for many members of the clan by a secret induction into the Kolat, while others would be watched for development and future potential as recruits. After Morito's death, this is replaced by a revelation of the clan's dark past, a discussion of the Kolat and how to fight them. This is a bitter pill to swallow for many idealistic young warriors, but the clan's leadership considers it necessary to prevent past errors from being repeated.

Weddings in the Ox Clan are, surprisingly, rather formal occasions. Emphasis is put on the additional duties the couple is taking on, and they are expected to meditate on their responsibilities as they are joined under the clan's gaze. Like many Minor Clans, the Ox lack a shugenja tradition to support these rituals, and while they often rely on monks to perform the services, for higher ranked samurai sometimes a Phoenix or more rarely a Scorpion shugenja will perform the ritual. When a samurai marries into the Ox from the outside, the samurai's family receives lavish gifts, since the Ox realize such a marriage means joining not only a life of hardship but also a shameful burden. When a samurai leaves the Ox to marry into another clan, gifts are also customary, since the Morito realize this probably means a better life for the departing samurai and want him or her to remember the clan fondly. Of course, they also make sure the Ox association with the Kolat is never revealed, and past members of the Ox know better than to risk the fury of their former brethren.

Funerals are actually the largest celebrations commonly seen in the Ox Clan lands, even larger than those held for childbirth. The idea is for the living to keep the dead in their memories, and so the more numerous the attendees the better. Deeds of the departed are recounted in a grandiose and exaggerated manner, while alcohol flows freely. On the surface this seems like a joyous occasion, since the amount of drinking leads to what looks like a party, but for many this masks the true pain of losing a family member or a comrade in arms. Proof of this can be observed the morning after, as the guests quietly leave as if nothing happened, letting the family grieve in peace. No one mentions the deceased in conversation for a week or more, for fear of attracting his spirit. It is also common for the family of the deceased to bury the ashes somewhere in the wild parts of the Ox territory, keeping the location of the urn a secret. This is seen as a form of freedom for the spirit of the deceased.

Religion and Beliefs

The hardships and tribulations of the Ox Clan over the years have led it to observe its own set of beliefs, some of which may seem odd to other samurai. For example, due to their martial history the samurai of the Ox place a great deal of respect in all their weapons, not just the katana. When a weapon draws blood for the first time in battle, the Ox will frequently murmur a small prayer of thanks to its spirit. The more superstitious members of the clan do so every time the weapon kills an enemy, since they think otherwise the spirit of the weapon will grow tired and leave, causing it to break. The Ox are also apprehensive when they hear the sound of thunder, since rainstorms can result in a flash flood on the plains, while lightning strikes can cause grass fires. In modern days, the Ox also completely refrain from killing a scorpion, even a dangerous one, since they do not want to attract the attention of Bayushi more than they already have. This has led to the occasional fight with Tsuruchi samurai, who kill any scorpion on sight.

Originally, since most of the Ox were uncouth ronin and a fair share of them also Kolat agents, they did not spend much time on the worship of the Fortunes. After

Morito died and the Kolat were purged, the clan encouraged the construction of more temples as atonement for previous faults. The Fortunes of the Four Winds are popular among modern Ox, as well as the Fortune of Travels, Natsu-Togumara, and the Fortune of Battles, Hachiman. Osano-Wo is respected but not worshiped, and the Ox believe the frequent storms on Dragon Heart Plain are proof of his ongoing displeasure with their Kolat associations.

After the War of Dark Fire, the Ox hold a yearly festival to celebrate their victory in that conflict. However, the festival was designed by the Soshi and not the Morito, so it sees quiet reverence and offerings to the kami rather than the drunken revelries the Ox are more commonly known for. Morito himself is an odd figure of ancestral worship, since despite his fall from grace he was still a hero of the Empire and the founder of the clan... plus, not worshiping him could draw undue attention. To compromise, the temples dedicated to Morito also usually include worship of Garin, and in the future they will probably venerate all past Champions of the clan.

Unicorn Heritage

Due to the Ox originally having so many former Unicorn in their ranks (including Morito himself), they have maintained a few gaijin customs over the years, although more out of practicality than out of pride. Furs and leathers are still frequently worn during the winter months. The Ox embrace each other and shake hands, eat red meat (usually game hunted from the mountains), and drink a variety of strange liquors in addition to sake. One obvious change, however, is that the Ox consider their steeds as nothing more than tools to be used, not as allies or friends. They will not casually endanger or waste a horse, naturally, since the beasts are both useful and expensive to raise, but when need arises they do not hesitate to sacrifice them. In fact, in dire times the Ox have consumed horse meat, which would horrify the Unicorn if they knew about it. Also, most of the Morito family has given up on gaijin names, since they see little need to maintain a heritage which is no longer theirs. The Morito occasionally employ Yobanjin weapons and techniques, but only if these are deemed truly effective; otherwise they have little respect for the barbaric people.

Social Structure

A final oddity of the Ox Clan, probably the result of their early years as ronin, is that outside of the Champion himself there are few real positions of authority in the clan. Of course, they do maintain something close to a traditional military hierarchy, but this is mainly for use on the battlefield. Outside of war, the Ox are quite informal with each other, and every Ox samurai is allowed a voice in most decisions regardless of rank. Even in the army, the soldiers eat, drink, and celebrate alongside their own officers, blurring the lines of authority. This is part of a more general philosophy of liberty, for the Ox hate to bow to anyone who has not earned their respect. They respect the Champion who leads their clan and the Emperor above him, but few others, and this leads to many clashes with other samurai.

In the early days, this rebellious spirit was encouraged by the Kolat, who saw it as fertile ground in which to grow their own ideals of replacing the Celestial Order with the authority of man. After the purge of the Kolat, the conspiracy is actually decried as another example of unearned authority, since it sought to exert total control over its agents and the Empire. The Ox long to be free, to carve their own destiny – an ideal not too dissimilar to that of their Dragon neighbors. Of course, for most of the Morito their destiny is to live or die by the edge of the blade, but they at least know that when they die it will be on a path of their own choosing.

The Sparrow Clan

Seppun Iyboshi watched as the Suzume woman inelegantly drank his family's signature blend of tea. With masked horror, he observed as she wiped moisture from her face with the back of her hand, then smiled. Why the nakodo believed he would marry a hayseed like this was beyond him.

Even compared to the least of his other suitors, Suzume Kayo failed to impress him. She was pretty enough, perhaps, but her hair was too short, and her skin was tanned from the sun, not pale and beautiful like a proper lady's complexion. It seemed to him she had no shame; he caught her once stooping to help the gardener, pulling weeds from the ground with her own hands! When she smiled, she showed too much of her teeth; inelegant, another symptom of her country rearing. And worst of all, she was always talking. Telling stories, long stories with no point, and asking constant questions. He had no interest in her or her family, yet she never shut up about either. The truth was she annoyed him in a way no one ever had before. He would not have been surprised to learn she was doing it on purpose.

Yet the nakodo insisted she was the best match for him. It was clearly time to get a new matchmaker.

"This is excellent tea!" Kayo commented. "Excellent" was a word she had heard often in the court, and now she was saying it about everything. "Did you say it was a family blend?"

"Hai," he replied, maintaining the mask of pleasantry that etiquette demanded. "We make it sweet. A touch of honey."

Her eyes widened and sparkled. "Bee honey?!"

He sighed inwardly. "Is there any other kind?"

She blinked for a moment, then laughed at the comment. Quietly he clenched his jaw. The dullard did not even realize when she was being insulted!

"Lord Iyboshi has many nice things," she said. She was quiet for a blissful moment, then her face turned serious. "Which I suppose brings me to my question."

Iyboshi lowered his cup. "Right," he said, "the favor you wanted to ask..."

"Iyboshi-sama, some time ago your father bestowed my village with a small gift of pear trees."

He nodded. "It was a just reward for your father's service," he said. After a moment, he added, "It is why you were invited to this court, I believe."

Not because you have any sort of chance at my hand, you see.

"I understand." A pause. "Well, I'm afraid there was an unexpected frost last winter. It could not be helped, but it seems the pear trees died."

"How unfortunate." Iyboshi lifted his cup and sipped.

"There is so little food in the village," she continued. "We were truly grateful for the trees and the fruit they gave. I was hoping that perhaps you would be willing to demonstrate the generosity of your father."

He smiled. Set the cup down. "Suzume Kayo-san... I mean no offense, but does it make sense to try again? It is clear the trees will not grow there."

"I can understand why you would think that," she began, "however-"

"The fact is," he overrode her, heedless of the breach of manners, "I do not think it is possible at this time. There are others who could better care for those trees. I am sorry for your loss, but there is little I can do." It was not the whole truth, perhaps, but it was true that a gift of his family's famous pear trees would do more political good elsewhere than in the hands of the lowly Sparrow Clan.

"I see," Kayo said, lowering her eyes. There was a long silence. Then she looked up, and for a moment their eyes met. "Iyboshi-sama," she said, "I know you believe I am a dullard." Another pause. "Your servant told me so."

Iyboshi's smile faded. He lowered his cup.

"And you think I am here to win your hand," she continued, "but this is not true. I do not expect any such thing. I am a mere ignorant hayseed to you, after all. However," her voice began to grow in strength, "I want you to know I am here for a purpose. My village depends on me, and I won't fail them."

Iyboshi opened his mouth, but found he had no words, struck dumb by her audacity. He had never before seen a woman with such spirit, such strength! He regarded her with barely-concealed wonder.

Quietly, she gestured to the kimono she wore. "This is a fine kimono. Don't you think? Perhaps not as fine as yours, but it is the finest I have ever worn." She paused. "This kimono could feed my village for a year. I am wearing a year's worth of food. The very thought horrifies me, Iyboshi-sama. But a kimono such as this was required in order to attend your court, and so the village sacrificed to give me this. Perhaps many will go without food this winter as a consequence. Perhaps they will starve."

She looked once more into his eyes. Her own eyes were deep, a stunning shade of brown. He saw an intelligence there he had not recognized before, and a determination that was as gentle as it was unyielding. "So you see," she said, "I will not fail them." Sitting back, she crossed her arms. "I know I am poor, but I am willing to do anything. I will even indenture myself to you. Name anything in exchange for those pear trees. I will do whatever is required."

In that moment, Iyboshi realized the nakodo had been right all along.

She was perfect.

He refilled her cup. "You will have your pear trees," he said, smiling for the first time with genuine warmth. "But first, please, tell me more about your family."

The History of the Sparrow

To most scholars and historians, the Sparrow Clan and its founding is equal parts proof of kharma, demonstration of Imperial wisdom, and political joke. Among Rokugan's *heimin*, the Minor Clans, and many other vassal families of the Empire, the story of the Sparrow's founding is tale of destiny rewarded, but to Rokugan's social elites it is a warning of how important it is to know when to keep one's mouth shut.

History recalls the story of a prominent Crane diplomat named Doji Onegano. Onegano was a wealthy and well-known courtier, a high-ranking member of the Doji family. He had a reputation as a clever negotiator, having built a fortune in gifts and favors for settling minor disputes. Onegano was raised in wealth, and as he accumulated accolades, so too did he build his taste for finer things. Yet he was miserly in spite of his wealth, so many of his followers believed he was greedy. This, combined with his haughtiness and the high taxes he levied in his territories, made him unpopular with those who served him. He was often warned by his sister, a minor courtier named Doji Masako, that his bad kharma would be his undoing. Onegano did not believe in such things. He would reply: "The life of a peasant does not compare to the convenience of a samurai."

However, Onegano was burdened with a son named Doji Suzume, a somewhat witless young man who tended to speak before thinking. He was a popular youth, being well-humored, likable, and quick to laugh, but he was not bright by any means. His father at first had high hopes for him on the courtier's path, but he showed little aptitude for politics. His sensei whispered he was a "dim lantern," shaking their heads at the poor fortune of Suzume's father. Undeterred, Onegano often brought his son with him to courts and negotiations, hoping the experience would rub off on the boy.

In the year 400, an Imperial Edict ended the first Yasuki War and required the Crab and Crane Clans to settle their final border at the negotiating table. At first these negotiations went well, for both clans were weary of war, but over time they became more acrimonious as the Crab and Crane diplomats argued about progressively smaller and less valuable pieces of land. Shipping rights and tariffs become objects of bitter debate. Finally, they deadlocked over the most barren and unusable lands that remained, a strip of rocky terrain west of the Doji provinces overlooking the Golden Sun Plains. Eventually the Crane Clan Champion, Doji Mizobu, came to the meetings of his diplomats at the house of Doji Onegano, demanding they find a solution and bring an end to the war without further loss of territory. As the Champion sternly told his followers to offer solutions instead of more problems, the meeting fell into a long uncomfortable silence.

Then Doji Suzume spoke up. Perhaps what he said was merely a flippant comment, an attempt at humor to break the awkward silence. Perhaps it was spoken without any thought at all.

"Maybe the Crane should simply give their wealth to the peasants?"

He was met with silence and horrified looks. The Crane Champion glared at Onegano, then withdrew without a word.

Onegano quickly apologized to the remaining lords for his son's foolish words, but the damage remained. Onegano knew he would be smoothing over his son's poor joke for some time, but he had no idea just how far those words would go. Within days, everyone in Onegano's lands was speaking of Suzume's comment, and within weeks it had spread beyond to the rest of the Empire. No one believed it could be a mere joke; instead, rumors spread far and wide that Doji Suzume was an enlightened young man who profoundly understood the wisdom of Shinsei. After all, the son of a skilled politician like Doji Onegano would never say such a thing by accident. He must have been expressing sincere wisdom.

The Crab, for their part, sensed division and weakness in the Crane ranks and began pressing for more concessions. The Crane bristled at the suggestion they were beset by infighting

(after all, the war had been started by the defection of the Yasuki family), and some among them tried to salvage the situation by insisting Suzume was acting under his father's orders. "Our lord is playing a deep political game," they told each other. "He was manipulating the meeting to make a point against the others." As the situation escalated, there were even a few new clashes along the Crab-Crane border.

By this time, the story of Suzume and his philosophy of "Honorable Poverty" was on the lips of every *heimin*, and monks were spreading it to temples all across the Crane lands and the Empire beyond. *Heimin* began leaving their fields and flocking to Onegano's lands to seek the wisdom of the enlightened young Crane. Pious samurai, ronin and clan-aligned both, came to swear fealty to him.

Finally, Emperor Hantei V summoned the young Crane and his father to Otosan Uchi. "I have heard of your noble philosophy," he said, "and I am intrigued. The monks claim you have touched Enlightenment, and thousands now wish to follow your path. It is a moving story. I have heard your intentions to give away your wealth, and since the Crab are short on their taxes this year, I will allow you to follow your kharma. I accept all your family's wealth as tribute in their place. Doji Onegano-san, you and your son should take your followers and claim the lands overlooking the Golden Sun Plains, the lands which have been so much in dispute in these final negotiations. They will become a peaceful barrier between Crane and Crab so that this terrible war may finally end. And there you will certainly achieve your goal of Enlightenment through simple life and poverty. May the light of the Tao guide you!" The courtiers nodded at the Emperor's wisdom, and congratulated Doji Onegano on raising such a pious and enlightened son.

A few days later, Suzume found Onegano severing his topknot. "This is all your doing," he snarled in disgust. "Let your new clan take your name. I will have no more part in this." Having lost everything due to his son's foolishness, Onegano joined a monastery and lived out his remaining life in obscurity.

The Suzume

Thus at the age of 17 Doji Suzume found himself the leader of a new Minor Clan. For the first time in his life, he was in a position of authority. The *heimin* believed he was a man of wisdom and enlightenment, and there was no shortage of samurai ready to swear fealty to his name, to know more of "Honorable Poverty" and wisdom through hardship. As the weight of what was required of him finally sank in, Suzume began to quietly panic. Thousands of *heimin* and samurai now depended on him, and they were surrounded by bleak lands that seemed unlikely to ever yield a grain of rice. Yet all trusted he could lead them through any hardship, that it was all a part of a wise and noble plan. Philosophy had been an idle pastime for him and he had never been taken seriously before; now someone was willing to die for every word he spoke. He could never tell them it had all been an accident, that he had no great plan. Poor Suzume did not know what to do.

Fortunately, he was joined by his aunt, Doji Masako, who was by now an elderly Crane matron. Masako was oddly pleased with her nephew's fortunes and took him under her wing. Claiming Suzume had done her a great service (she refused to ever elaborate), she pledged herself to him and became his chief advisor. Her legitimate wisdom and compassion melded with Suzume's charisma and philosophical leanings to build the foundations of what would become the Sparrow Clan.

At first their circumstances were dire. The land produced little food no matter how hard it was worked. Even with samurai laboring alongside the peasants in the pursuit of honorable poverty, crops were poor and hunger stalked the new clan. Over half of Suzume's followers died or left in the clan's first ten years... but those who remained were the truly dedicated, who believed in Suzume's ideals with all their hearts.

In the year 410, the Imperial Chancellor assigned the Sparrow a sacred task: guard and protect the Golden Sun Plains bordering their lands. In truth, this was a subtle insult. The Golden Sun Plains, among the most fertile in the Empire, were already protected by Imperial Decree forbidding anyone from farming them. Since none would dare break an Imperial Decree, the Sparrow Clan's new duty was wholly superfluous. However, Suzume embraced this new task and his clan adopted it as an official service to the Empire.

And so it remained for hundreds of years. The Sparrow found ways to wrench subsistence from their bleak homeland, living quiet lives of honorable poverty in the lands now called the Suzume Hills... just beyond sight of the sacrosanct Golden Sun Plains. Although the Sparrow samurai dirtied their hands with manual labor, something other samurai sneered at, they knew in their hearts that they followed the path of wisdom.

For the most part, the Sparrow had no involvement with the rest of the Empire or indeed with anyone from beyond their borders. A notable exception came in the year 859 when a Nezumi tribe, the Tattered Ear, attempted to ally with the Sparrow in the same manner as other tribes had allied with the Crab. Unfortunately, as a diplomatic gesture they gifted the Sparrow Clan Champion with a fetish crafted from his dead brother's thighbone. The Sparrow were outraged and thereafter slew any Nezumi that dared step foot within the Suzume Hills.

The Twelfth Century: Alliances

The Sparrow lived quietly, mostly unnoticed by the Great Clans, until the early twelfth century. At that time they stumbled into conflict with the Scorpion Clan. The exact cause of the conflict is something of a disputed matter among historians, with some claiming the Scorpion coveted the handful of arable land in Sparrow territory, while other reports say they actually intended to attack the Crane and saw the Sparrow lands as simply an obstacle to be crossed to reach their real objective. Regardless, in the year 1121 the famous Scorpion general Bayushi Tomaru (soon to become notorious for destroying the Hare Clan) marched his army into Sparrow lands.

Tomaru seems to have expected an easy victory, but he was in for a surprise. Not only did the Sparrow resist fiercely, but two other Minor Clans in the vicinity – the Wasp and the Fox – joined the battle, turning the tide against the numerically superior Scorpion army. Tomaru's men broke and retreated back into their own lands, and the Scorpion general was publicly rebuked by his Clan Champion.

The Battle of Mitsu Otoko Rengo Heigen, as it became known, had much farther-reaching implications than initially appeared. Three Minor Clans had successfully asserted themselves against a Great Clan and prevailed, demonstrating a combined strength equal to a supposedly superior foe. The three clans formed an alliance, the so-called Three-Man Alliance, which would successfully avert any resumption of hostilities with the Scorpion. Among those who took note was the Mantis Clan Champion, Yoritomo, who began to contemplate whether similar or even greater victories might be possible in the future.

When the Clan Wars erupted a few years later, the Three-Man Alliance and several other Minor Clans joined with the Mantis in the larger coalition known as Yoritomo's Alliance, fighting against the forces of the Shadowlands on several different battlefields. However, the Sparrow contributions to the Alliance were relatively minor compared to most of the other participants, and when Yoritomo later embarked on a series of wars against the Crane and Phoenix during the Hidden Emperor era, the Sparrow quietly withdrew back to their own lands. Two generations later, when the other Minor Clans joined together in an alliance of their own, the Sparrow willingly joined in... although, as before, they could make only the most meager contributions to its strength.

The Spider Infiltration

During the time of the Race for the Throne, the sinister Spider Clan undertook a plan to infiltrate the Sparrow Clan and use it as a base of operations for a more general infiltration effort across the Empire. By the year 1168, the Spider had successfully infiltrated the leadership of the Sparrow Clan, and through a series of "accidents" and other manipulations they began to replace important Suzume samurai with their own members. Within a year, Clan Champion Suzume Yugoki was surrounded by Spider advisors and guards who stood poised to kill him if he ever became aware of what was happening. The Sparrow had effectively become puppets of the Spider, large numbers of whom joined their ranks. Those Sparrow samurai who started to suspect the truth were either killed or reassigned outside the clan.

However, in the year 1173 the Spider became a Great Clan and were largely exiled to the Colonies. There was suddenly no longer a need for the Spider infiltrators within the Sparrow, and the Spider Clan cut all ties to them. Seemingly abandoned, many of the infiltrators began to leave the valley to rejoin their comrades, while those who remained behind began to more fully adopt the lifestyle of the Sparrow, effectively becoming genuine Suzume and leaving their old lives as Spider behind.

By the year 1197, intermarriage and a new generation of Spider-Sparrow children made the remaining Spider infiltrators nearly indistinguishable from the original Sparrow. However, the leadership among the infiltrators remained active, patiently awaiting new orders from their true clan. Unknown to them, the new Sparrow Clan Champion, Suzume Ryosuke, had seen the truth of what had become of his clan, and began praying daily for the Fortunes to give him a way to free his people from the Spider's grasp. The way of the Sparrow is to be patient and wait for the proper time to strike, so Ryosuke bided his time, waiting for the chance to take back his clan.

Kharma is an interesting thing. After they seized control of the Sparrow, the Spider soon discovered the harsh reality of living in the valley. Soon they too were working the fields alongside the farmers, and they too were subjecting themselves to the same honorable poverty... not to fool the locals, but simply to survive. As time passed and the Spider leadership contacted the infiltrators less and less, those Spider living among the Sparrow began to sympathize with their hostages. Many even came to prefer the Sparrow's way of life, and by the end of the twelfth century most of them considered themselves more Sparrow than Spider.

Eventually, the Spider leadership in the valley attempted to seize complete control of the clan. However, Sparrow sympathizers within the Spider helped Suzume Ryosuke to escape, and with the help of a Moshi ally he exposed the Spider machinations to the rest of the Empire. While this admittance shamed the Sparrow greatly, causing them to lose much clout with the other clans, it also effectively severed the Spider Clan's control. Demonstrating her compassion and wisdom, Empress Iweko I decreed that all Spider infiltrators would have to swear fealty to the Sparrow and become their vassals. The Sparrow sympathizers within the Spider rejoiced in this decision and served their new champion loyally. For the infiltrator leaders, however, this was a fate worse than death, and many chose to fall on their swords rather than become simple farmers.

The Spider Infiltration in Your Campaign

The Spider Clan's infiltration of the Sparrow is a specific side-effect of events in the canonical L5R storyline, particularly during the Race for the Throne when the Spider used the Minor Clans as stepping-stones to worm their way into the Great Clans. The later transition of the Spider to a Great Clan living primarily in the distant Colonies left the Sparrow peppered with estranged Spider infiltrators who became cut off from their masters for almost two decades, undermining the Sparrow's ways for many years.

However, no GM should feel overly constrained by the "official" storyline. If the Spider do not work in your campaign, or if you simply dislike the idea of forcing the Sparrow into such a difficult and tragic position, you can ignore the whole infiltration plotline and leave the Sparrow peacefully tilling the fields in their valley.

The Lands of the Sparrow Clan

The domain of the Sparrow is tiny, even by most Minor Clan standards. It consists of a valley in the rugged hilly lands located northeast of the Crab and northwest of the Crane, adjacent to the Golden Sun Plains. This remote and stony landscape is deeply inhospitable, with swampy marshlands to the south and rocky dry soil to the north. It contains almost no natural resources, and everything it does have was imported by the Sparrow or cultivated over generations. Also, there are no gradual season-changes in the valley; winter comes all at once, and summer brings a heat that dries the soil until it is sandy and parched. The land is inhabited by bears, snakes, and other unpleasant creatures. Wise travelers avoid the region altogether. It is a small miracle that the Sparrow were able to survive here at all, much less endure over centuries.

After generations of living in this valley, the Suzume have learned how to survive with virtually nothing. They are able to live on very little food, and can coax crops from even the most infertile land. Every Suzume knows his own tract of land extremely well, able to recall every inch from memory. There are no maps of any kind, for the climate is unforgiving to parchment and paper, so instead the Suzume memorize every step of their territories.

There are only two real passes in and out of the valley, one to the north and one to the south.These are always guarded by at least six Sparrow, armed and adept with slings, a weapon associated with the clan.

Kyuden Suzume

Built during the clan's first fifteen years of existence, the rather ambitiously named Kyuden Suzume is in fact little more than two one-story buildings with a shrine between them. Its first visitors confused it for a storehouse. It is perhaps the most humble "palace" in all of Rokugan, bestowed the "Kyuden" title out of the Emperor's respect for the Sparrow ideals rather than from any actual capability of hosting an Imperial Winter Court. The structures are devoid of any flourish or exterior decoration, but then, decoration is impractical given where the Suzume live. Unpredictable weather can strip a building of all ornamentations, and statuaries, paint, and adornments are all quickly worn away by the harsh climate. It is difficult enough just to keep a structure standing in the Suzume Hills, and the Sparrow have no resources to devote towards making their homes attractive.

The interior of the building has a large courtroom that doubles as a dojo. Indeed, it was the only dojo in Sparrow lands until the establishment of a dedicated external one in the year 618. Smaller rooms surround the courtroom, some concealed in the walls. The second building contains the residence of the Sparrow Champion and his immediate family, as well as a few honored advisors and servants. The inside of the castle has the only Sparrow artworks, mostly *shoji* screens and statues, protected from the harsh air outside.

The most notable feature of the castle is what lies beneath it. A maze of tunnels and subterranean rooms stretches out beneath Kyuden Suzume for miles in every direction. The Sparrow do not reveal this feature to outsiders, keeping it a secret known only to themselves. Secret entrances to these warrens dot the landscape, hidden by foliage and brush. Many Sparrow spend days within these tunnels without ever seeing the sun, but they claim it gives them time for contemplation and serenity.

The Plains of the Golden Sun

As noted in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire* (page 23), the Golden Sun Plains are a lush expanse of fertile land, filled with golden wild grains, rich groves of fruit-bearing trees, and docile creatures. No farming is permitted here, no harvesting of wild foods, no building of structures, no blade drawn, no blood spilled, and no invocations to the kami. By Imperial decree, the lands remain pristine. Travelers are permitted with proper documentation, but none may tarry. These plains are sacred to the Emperor, and so they are sacred to the Empire.

The Suzume are charged with protection of the Golden Sun Plains, and this is their most sacred duty, their justification for existence in the eyes of the Empire, their claim to the rights of a samurai. Their job is to ensure no harm comes to these lands, that they remain pristine and untouched. Of course, this is a nearly unbearable temptation for many Sparrow. Their own lands are harsh

and unyielding, a place where even the simplest crops do not sprout without severe effort. Yet here, barely a stone's-throw from their borders, are lands eager to bestow a generous bounty. It is the special burden of the Sparrow that they must watch and protect these lands yet never touch them themselves. Even one simple farm here would double the clan's wealth and ensure its future, but the Sparrow have never built one. Their honor is worth more to them than their ensured survival.

Even so, due to the temptation only those Sparrow who show the greatest discipline and honor are allowed to patrol the Golden Sun Plains. Members of this group, who call themselves the Vigil, care for the lands and protect them from all intruders. They are sometimes gone from their homes for days, but they never dare to build anything larger than a campfire, and they never take anything from the lands themselves, eating only what humble supplies they brought with them. This hardship is a testament to the Sparrow's purity and the strength of their philosophy. A common saying among Vigil members sums it up: "The truest test of honor is to see your heart's desire every day, and every day turn it aside in favor of duty."

Vassal Families of the Sparrow

The Sparrow Clan has a single vassal family, the **Edakumi**. The family was founded by Doji Edakumi, an artisan who came to the Sparrow lands soon after the Minor Clan was founded. Supposedly he was summoned by Doji Suzume himself (though it was more likely Suzume's aunt, Masako), who wanted to offer his people some manner of art or beauty to alleviate the dreary toil of their existence. Edakumi was the founder of the Sparrow artistic tradition, especially their storytelling and poetry, and became the most popular and welcomed samurai in the clan's territory. He eventually joined the Suzume family through marriage; after his death, his accomplishments were honored with a vassal family name. Ever since, the members of the Edakumi family have been known as the best storytellers in the clans.

Life in the Valley

The reputation of the Sparrow is a mixed bag of good and ill. On one hand, the Sparrow's tenacity, honesty, and quiet determination are admired even by members of the Great Clans. On the other hand, their simple natures and lack of learning and refinement are constant sources of derision, and their tendency to speak frankly on any subject can be infuriating. A Sparrow does not easily command respect from others; he owns no nice clothes, has dirt beneath his fingernails, speaks a rural dialect, and eats foods associated with the peasantry. He is humble to a fault, rustic and unpolished, and the value of expensive things seems lost on him. Sparrow are often called "hayseeds" or "country bumpkins" or other less flattering terms. A favored slur among sophisticated samurai is *goshi*, a term meaning "country-dwelling samurai," but over the course of centuries the Suzume have embraced this term as their own identity.

Most samurai are loathe to perform manual labor or simple crafts. Such work is beneath them; it is disgraceful and shaming to dirty oneself or to become tanned by the sun. The Sparrow, however, embrace these things willingly, working on peasant crafts such as carpentry, masonry, or even farm labor. There is no *heimin* work that is below them; they do what is necessary for survival in their valley. All the while, they conduct themselves with a sort of lighthearted dignity. To their minds, the necessity of their daily tasks makes them no less samurai. They are still lords, warrior-nobles who revere Bushido, masters of the blade and servants of the Emperor. Thus they are a social contradiction, one that makes many other samurai uncomfortable.

Marriage and Childbirth

Life in their valley, far away from the courts and cities, has given the Sparrow a relaxed outlook on certain aspects of a samurai's social life. The Sparrow are less concerned with breeding and lineage than other samurai, and while they venerate their ancestors and seek to preserve their bloodlines, they are not particularly worried about keeping that blood "pure" or breeding stronger generations of warriors. For this reason, arranged marriages are less common in the valley. Suzume nakodo are usually just friends of the family who know the children well and can judge who would be compatible, and more marriages are requested by the samurai involved than are arranged ahead of time. Indeed, marrying for love is not an uncommon occurrence among the Sparrow; as long as one's duty to the clan comes first, it is rarely seen as a problem.

In fact, there have even been marriages between Sparrow samurai and *heimin*. If a Sparrow takes a particular liking to a farmer's son or daughter, he or she makes the intention to marry known to the peasant's parents, and the Clan Champion pays them a modest stipend, usually in the form of a gift (as the Sparrow have little else), for permission to marry their child. This marriage does not change the social standing of the *heimin* spouse, but any children born of the union are considered samurai. While this arrangement is considered acceptable by the Sparrow, it is utterly appalling to most other samurai in the Empire, reinforcing their views of the Sparrow as ignorant country folk not really worthy of being considered true samurai.

While the birth of a child is a reason for celebration in Sparrow lands, it is also a matter of careful consideration. A child is, after all, yet another mouth to feed. The valley is sparsely populated, and with good reason; it can only support so many people, and too many children will drain the Suzume's limited resources and imperil the entire clan. Sparrow families are limited by law to only two children per couple so as not to overburden their lands. Only a handful of times has this ever been changed, usually when the population drops sharply or on the few occasions when new land becomes workable. The only exception is the family of the Sparrow Champion, who is expected to produce multiple heirs in case of disaster. Yet even the Sparrow Champion will only have enough children to ensure his bloodline is secure, not a single one more.

Honorable Poverty

At the heart of the Sparrow's way of life is the philosophy of "Honorable Poverty." Among other things, it condones a rejection of material wealth and abandoning any motivation to seek personal gain. The Sparrow believe wealth, indeed all material desire, taints the heart. Wealth needlessly complicates things; one cannot be mindful if occupied with material trappings. It draws attention away from the spiritual aspects of life, places transitory things above duty. To attach oneself to anything material is folly, because the world is transitory, as are all things in it. In a land as harsh and unforgiving as the Suzume hills, this is a truth the Sparrow grapple with daily.

On the surface, this philosophy is not objectionable to any samurai. Indeed, samurai are not supposed to seek wealth. Even handling money or simple commerce is considered beneath the dignity of a samurai. However, the lengths to which the Sparrow have gone to ensure there is no opulence in their lives is odd to even the most ascetic samurai. This is because, whether a samurai will admit it or not, wealth and prestige are what separates them from the bonge. Most lords will admit that managing wealth is a necessity for performing their duties. A samurai is expected to rise above these trappings, not forsake them. Because of this, and because it is considered disgraceful for samurai to perform manual labor, the philosophy of "Honorable Poverty" is regarded as more than a little extreme, although it is not outright denounced.

The Sparrow practice Honorable Poverty by embracing necessity. The Suzume way is to do nothing unnecessary. Nothing opulent, nothing wasteful, nothing selfish. Excess is needless and a waste of spirit. In the eyes of a Sparrow, to waste anything is disrespectful at best and soul-staining at worst. A Sparrow who looks at a fine kimono sees not a beautiful piece of clothing, but the food and rice it could have bought. Furthermore, the Sparrow rarely seek material gains except where such is required for survival or the execution of one's duties. In essence, the Sparrow seek a simple life... or as simple a life as a samurai can attain.

Due to this attitude, many Great Clan samurai view the Sparrow as barely above peasants and monks. This attitude ruffles the Sparrows' feathers, for they are in truth just as much samurai as anyone in the Great Clans, but they endure such barbs with quiet patience. They cannot expect samurai whose hearts are tainted by wealth and desire to understand their pure and simple ways.

In all fairness, though, Honorable Poverty is an easy philosophy to adopt when one is living in a hostile valley where death can come at any time. Although the dangers of the Sparrow lands are underestimated by more urbane samurai, they are very real. Besides wild animals, unpredictable weather, and unforgiving terrain, the greatest dangers are death from exposure or starvation. A simple trek through the valley can swiftly become a grim ordeal. Poverty and hardship are all one can expect from living in such a place.

Yet life in the Suzume Hills has not produced a culture of grim-faced, hardened men and women. Indeed, the truth is quite the opposite: it has forged the people of the Sparrow into a patient, determined, and generally optimistic lot. The typical Sparrow samurai is quick to smile, regards life with a wry observational humor, accepts all he faces, has a strong work ethic and a fierce sense of loyalty, and is full of folksy wisdom. A life of voluntary hardship has bestowed the Sparrow with a deep appreciation for life and an ability to embrace the current moment. If something needs to be done, they do it, even if it is something normally considered beneath samurai. They are a patient people, willing to wait and watch for a long time, learning everything they can before acting, but when the time comes to act, they are as courageous as any other warriors.

Sparrow Art

One might expect a society that emphasizes doing only what is necessary would produce little material culture, but this would be a mistake. The Sparrow's Crane ancestry becomes evident when one considers their artistic traditions, which originated in their earliest years with Doji Edakumi's practices. The Sparrow are avid students of the Iki art tradition and aesthetic (see the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Fire*, page 130), and as such their art is not overly refined or complicated. Instead, it expresses simplicity, spontaneity, refined natural beauty, and measured control. They favor *sumi-e* paintings, *haiku* (in the form of *kakejiku*), calligraphy, and sometimes even *ikebana*, all made from simple and easily obtainable items. For those who ask if these hobbies are necessary, the Suzume answer a resounding "yes." The creation of these things is a focus for the mind and soul, a release of the stresses that come with life in such a dangerous place, and a way to sort out thoughts that might otherwise distract the mind. Some Sparrow even extend this to the crafting of furniture or the construction of roads and bridges, claiming the manual labor gives them additional release and focus.

Absent from their artistic culture are things that require a lot of ceremony (such as the tea ceremony and *kabuki*) or materials (such as metal sculpture and *kodo*). There is simply no time to devote to such disciplines, and the resources are unaffordable in any case.

Sadly, the climate of the valley is not kind to works of art. The dry winds and humid marshlands alike degrade paper quickly, disintegrating masterpieces into dust. Nothing remains constant in the valley. However, the optimistic Sparrow simply take this as an excuse to create new artworks. Just as the world is filled with natural wonders that fade with time, so too are the homes of the Sparrow filled with works that are constantly replaced. Finally, the climate encourages the Sparrow toward their strongest artistic and scholarly traditions of all: poetry and storytelling.

To describe the Sparrow as "warrior-poets" would not be too outlandish for truth. While the oratory arts of poetry and storytelling are well-respected throughout the Empire, to the Sparrow they are the height of samurai art. Of course, what the Sparrow value about these arts is not necessarily what is valued by the rest of Rokugan. Because of the harsh climate, there are few written records kept in the valley, and oral traditions have become very important to Sparrow society. Events that cannot be written down are instead memorized as stories and passed down from generation to generation.

In fact, it is fair to say storytelling is the most important Sparrow tradition. It is the one thing (other than being poor) which the entire Empire associates with the Sparrow Clan. Stories are how the Sparrow preserve their knowledge and pass on wisdom, whether through simple fables, complex legends, observational *haiku*, or personal anecdotes. It is how their teachers instruct students and impart knowledge, how their elders recall the clan's past victories, how parents teach ethics to their children, and how the Sparrow as a whole preserve their identity. Storytelling is as inseparable from the Sparrow mindset as Honorable Poverty. Every Sparrow can recite the names of his ancestors as well as any Lion, and can tell an entertaining story about almost every one.

"Saigo" Versus "Goshi"

Rokugan is a stratified society, consisting of many tiers and divisions. This is partially because the Rokugani value order in their lives above most other things. Everything has a specific place and role, and to cross the lines of stratification, to question one's role, is to invite disaster.

These lines of stratification exist in many places. There are castes based on social status, with the *Bonge* at the bottom, the *Buke* above them, and the *Kuge* at the top. Within these tiers are a spectrum of ranks, such as the division of the *Bonge* into *hinin* and *heimin*. Yet this is just a simplified presentation of what is actually a very complex system. Stratification exists virtually everywhere, even among the samurai caste. It can exist within clans, based on things such as profession, dialect, or even something as simple as which dojo one has attended. In some cases, these communities are completely encapsulated, creating entire societies onto themselves, such as the "Willow World" of the *geisha*.

One of these stratifying lines is drawn between the *Saigo* and the *Goshi*. To put it simply, a *Saigo* is an "urban samurai," one who hails from a city, major castle, or cultural hub. A *Goshi* is a "rural samurai," hailing from the country.

The differences between *Saigo* and *Goshi* are trivial at first glance, but they mean everything to a rigid conservative society like Rokugan. Samurai of the city tend to be better educated, more refined, wealthier, and more influential. Rural samurai are more practical, independent, down-to-earth, and hardier. Originally, the term *Goshi* referred to samurai who had to outfit themselves for war without a daimyo's assistance, usually due to living far from their lord's home, but as time passed it came to refer to any samurai who lived remotely from the so-called "hubs of culture."

To say that *Saigo* look down upon *Goshi* is perhaps an over-simplification, but it is not far from the truth. *Saigo* commonly refer to *Goshi* as "country bumpkins," lacking the social niceties and breeding of their betters. The *Goshi*, meanwhile, see the *Saigo* as haughty and self-absorbed socialites, bestowed their positions not due to their own work but as political appointments or inheritance. While both offer the other respect, the resentment between the two groups is still evident.

A country samurai visiting a city might find himself subjected to ridicule or disrespect due to his position in life. He will be assumed to be "simple." The same could be said for *Saigo* visiting the country, who are assumed to be incapable of caring for themselves. Yet rarely do samurai attempt to fit in to their surroundings. One must eventually return to one's own homeland; returning *Goshi* who have accidentally picked up a taste for the finer things, or even just the city dialect from their time among the *Saigo*, will find themselves shunned by their peers, a stranger among their own people.

Because storytelling takes the place of written records among the Suzume, a great deal of effort is spent memorizing and recalling details. The Sparrow are quite aware of how time can change a fact that is not written down, so they take great care to ensure their stories do not change with each telling. To aid in this, the Sparrow will often adopt certain repetitive techniques in their storytelling, formulaic patterns of set phrases imprinted with specific important details. The Sparrow take great care to preserve all the details in their stories, and their most impressive storytellers are the ones who can recall all of these details flawlessly and consistently with each re-telling.

This particular aspect of the Sparrow's oral tradition is not quite as impressive to Rokugan at large. Outsiders tend to consider Sparrow storytellers to be long-winded and boring. A Suzume will let no detail escape his consideration, no factor go unexplained, no character vanish into the narrative. However, most Sparrow are at least partially aware of the differing storytelling tastes in the rest of the Empire, and when telling a story to others for entertainment they will try to be more succinct than they would be among their peers.

The Sparrow are also skilled at poetry. Their traditions are strongest with *renga*, which incorporates some aspects of their storytelling methods, but they are especially fond of *haiku*. While storytelling is as much a form of record-keeping as it is entertainment, *haiku* is considered to be far more individual. It is a fragment of a person's mindset frozen and preserved in time, a spontaneous expression of a transitory state. It is ironic that the Sparrow, who are so well-known for their lengthy and long-winded storytelling, would excel at such a short and elegant poetic form. Even the most rustic Sparrow bushi can create a moving *haiku* on demand, perhaps the only thing that he and other clan samurai might have in common.

Farmer and Samurai

When a Suzume is not practicing his swordplay or his art, he is likely in the fields tending to his crops. The samurai of the Sparrow are notorious for working the fields alongside their *heimin*, doing what they must to ensure their clan's survival. This is a bizarre and often downright eerie sight to most visitors: samurai hunched over, arms in the dirt or feet submerged in flooded paddies, tending to crops with farming implements. For Great Clan samurai, the very idea of stooping so low as to dirty their hands with the work of *heimin* is unimaginably disgraceful. Yet the Sparrow do not mind; to them it is a matter of survival, and they are no less samurai just because they coax crops from the dirt.

The sorts of crops that grow in the valley are, in a word, hardy. The delicate white rice of the Empire does not grow here. Neither does wheat, nor cherry trees, nor plums... not even buckwheat. Instead, the Sparrow eat wild rice and barley, and they cultivate foods that will grow in their difficult climate. Roots such as yams, taro, and potatoes are common, and although these foods are typically associated with *heimin* the Suzume eat them

too. There are also *sansai*, or "mountain vegetables," a term referring to vegetables that are not farm-grown but instead are foraged in the wild: wild mushrooms, many kinds of simple greens, and so forth. Most outsiders refer to anything grown in the Suzume Hills as "*sansai*," whether it was raised on a farm or not.

Martial Traditions

While few deny the practicality of the Sparrow mindset, students of the Suzume dojo can be surprisingly philosophic and esoteric. Their training focuses on meditation, observation, and clear thinking just as much as it does on the katana. The unique martial traditions of the Sparrow call on stories and ancient tales as memory aides for performing kata, and rely on observation and analysis of the opponent to achieve victory. "The Sparrow is patient," their sensei say, "flying away only at the exact moment when it is necessary. It does not hesitate to act, but it does not act until the time has come."

Yet to summarize the Suzume techniques as "patient" is a subtle misnomer. The Way of the Sparrow is not so much about waiting as it is about *knowing when to strike*. The entire school is centered around learning about one's opponent in the first few moments, recognizing the proper time to attack, and then ending the fight. One who expects hesitation from his Suzume opponent will be unpleasantly surprised.

In battle, a Sparrow gives no thought to himself. He focuses only on his opponent. He maintains an extended fight at greater risk to himself in order to learn everything he can from his enemy. In war, just as in peace, he accepts short-term sacrifices for long-term gains. He is unswayed by his opponent's feints and false openings, instinctively avoiding the easy victory. Life is full of temptations, and the Sparrow learn from birth to resist them.

The only truly unusual or outlandish aspect of the Sparrow's martial training is the incorporation of what has become a trademark weapon of the clan: the sling. Simple, cheap, and easy to use, the simple sling can strike with surprising accuracy. With just two rotations (one for seating and one for power) and a flick of the wrist, a Sparrow can hurl a stone swiftly and powerfully within inches of his intended target. While not as graceful or noble as the bow, the sling is far more practical for a land with few resources... but so many rocks. Most samurai scoff at the Sparrow demonstrating this art, but they change their tone after they are struck.

The Tortoise Clan

Two cloaked figures, small and slender, slipped into the small house, doing their best to be inconspicuous. The interior of the home they entered was... unexpected. A spicy smoke filled the air, casuing one of them to cough lightly. Everywhere an eye could turn there was some strange charm. Braided ropes hanging from the ceiling, bowls filled with bones or leaves, scrolls scattered everywhere in some haphazard methodology only the owner knew.

"This is a bad idea. We should leave," said the first.

"We cannot. She is our only hope," said the second.

Both jumped when a cracked third voice asked, "Hope for what?"

Behind them stood a hunched old woman leaning on a walking stick, her one good eye darting back and forth between the two strangers. Between her words, her tongue flicked free, only rarely stopped by the last tooth in her mouth.

The two figures glanced between themselves before the taller stepped forward. "We search for Kasuga Yaniko."

The old woman snorted. "You've found her, whoever you are."

At that the two pulled back their hoods, revealing faces as young as Yaniko's was old. The taller was a girl whose hair bore the copper dye of the Lion, while the smaller boy behind her had the white of the Crane. "We have come to be married."

Yaniko cackled, shuffling slowly past the pair. "And have you now? Two young samurai from fine families who should long ago have been properly betrothed. Why bother an old woman of ill repute about such things? Why would such prestigious samurai need my advice?"

The Lioness answered, "We are betrothed, but not to one another. My hand is promised to an Ikoma."

The Crane added, "And mine to a Doji, to secure her cousin's place in the Dueling Academy."

Yaniko busied herself with straightening her scrolls, although it seemed she was merely shifting the chaos from one part of the room to another. "Then your parents and their nakodo *have done their duty well. Why would you have need of me?"*

The Lion girl stepped forward, her voice rising. "We have every need of you! We..." She broke off, words sticking in her throat.

The Crane finished for her. "We are in love. We would be married to one another."

Yaniko laughed.

The Matsu growled, "Do not dismiss us so casually, old woman!" Her hand clenched on the hilt of her katana.

The Doji tugged at his paramour's sleeve, then bowed deeply to the old woman. "My apologies, Kasuga-sama. The fires of love make us easily distracted. We bring you only respect and honor."

Yaniko turned at that, regarding him over her shoulder with her one good eye. "Respect and honor. Hmm. And payment?"

Remaining bowed, the Crane spread his hands. "My family fortune has been lost. I offer a favor for the future. It is a small thing, but..."

"Hah!" The Tortoise's laugh cut through the small home. "You are fortunate I am no Scorpion, boy! You'd find that such a favor would be no small thing." She shook her head. "I am old. I cannot wait for you to come into a position useful to me, even if you could after such a foolishly defiant marriage. I am sorry, it is not enough." She turned, beginning to walk away from the two.

The Matsu spoke: "I bring you knowledge."

Toru whirled toward her, whispering urgently. "Shi-chan, no! We need that to establish a home!"

The Matsu girl smiled at him. Her hand lifted as though she wished to touch his cheek, then pulled back. "If she does not agree to help, Toru-kun, there will be no home for us."

He sighed and his shoulders slumped, defeated. Matsu Shiko reached under her cloak and pulled out a scroll. "Your payment."

Yaniko regarded the scroll with raised brows. "And what is this, hmmm?"

Shiko tensed, face flushing with shame. "I... visited my promised husband this year. He was tasked to copy some scrolls of the Lion for sharing with other lords. This one is the location of Shima no Quehao."

The speed of the old woman was shocking. She snatched the scroll from the Lion's hand and unrolled it in a single motion, her one eye squinting as she scanned through it. The young couple held their breath. Finally Yaniko nodded to herself and rolled the scroll up with a quick ruffle of wrists. "It is enough."

Before the two samurai could relax, Yaniko turned toward them with a bustling air. "You were both born in the tenth year of Iweko's reign, correct? It is not of good fortune to have two years matched so. Four years between the couple is ideal." She paused, glancing at the ceiling. "It will be an hour until the Jade Sun sets. When the Obsidian Moon rises, I can consult the charts to see if yours will be an auspicious marriage."

The two moved unconsciously nearer one another. Shiko asked, "And if the divinations frown upon us?"

Yaniko grinned, her one tooth glistening. "Frown upon the joining of two youths who so clearly have the blood of Thunders inside them? My dear child, the Fortunes would never be so cruel. Come, I'll have my grandson make you some tea while I prepare for the readings."

As the couple followed her farther into the house, Doji Toru cleared his throat. "And you can arrange an Imperial seal to over-rule the nakodo *our fathers commissioned?"*

The old woman cackled. "When marriage is between two clans, not within a clan, it requires a higher authority. I have lived through three dynasties and served seven Emperors. You think I cannot arrange to forge an Imperial endorsement? Then why are you here at all?" After a moment, the two youths allowed themselves to nervously join in her laughter.

Small talk followed, but Kasuga Yaniko paid it little attention. Her clan had sought the location of the Lion's island library for years. If gathering such knowledge caused the fracturing of families and broke carefully arranged diplomatic agreements, it was of no concern to her. Let the Great Clans have their petty squabbles; the Tortoise would endure. The Shell of the Tortoise would turn aside all threats.

The History of the Tortoise Clan

In the year 442, the Empire fought a tragic battle with gaijin interlopers. The seventh Hantei Emperor perished, along with the Lion Clan Champion and thousands of other samurai. The gaijin were defeated, the remnants of their fleet escaping to the south, leaving only a few scattered survivors on Rokugan's mainland. Some of these gaijin wound up in the care of a man named Agasha Kasuga, a Dragon shugenja who had befriended many of them when the foreigners first came to Rokugan. He hired several Yasuki shipmasters to transport the gaijin back to their homeland. (For a full account of this era, see Chapter Three of the L5R 4th Edition supplement I*mperial Histories*.)

A year after his departure, Kasuga and his Yasuki allies returned to the Empire and quietly surrendered themselves to Imperial authorities. Kasuga had a private audience with the new Emperor, Hantei VIII, and while the contents of that audience remained secret, afterward the Hantei proclaimed Agasha Kasuga as the daimyo of a new Minor Clan, the Tortoise. They would serve the Hantei Dynasty directly, the Emperor declared, though he was oddly silent regarding just what form that service would take.

The new clan was a small and strange collection of people. The Yasuki who had sailed with Kasuga were folded into his new family, but along with them came many others. Some were members of other samurai families who sought a higher place in a smaller clan. Some were ronin, eager to find a better place in the Celestial Order. Some were even *heimin*, whom Kasuga allowed to swear fealty just as readily as he allowed samurai.

And secretly, unknown to the rest of the Empire, some of them were gaijin, refugees who had been unable to escape after the Battle of White Stag.

The Tortoise were granted land just outside Otosan Uchi itself, close enough for the Hantei to keep an eye on his favored personal clan. A couple of years later, Hantei Muhaki did provide them an official duty: to watch over the Bay of the Golden Sun, giving them command over the twin peninsulas known as the Antlers of the White Stag and the lighthouses on each that helped guide ships into the bay. No one would directly challenge the Emperor over making the Tortoise guardians against a return of gaijin ships, but several clans kept a close eye on the Tortoise, just in case ... and were soon repulsed by what they saw.

The Tortoise proved themselves little more than coin-counting merchants who used their new position to benefit their own interests. They seemed to abandon the proper ways of the samurai completely, forsaking war and art in favor of mere love of wealth. Of course, one could not expect more from a clan of former merchants and ronin, led by an eccentric shugenja who sympathized more with commoners and gaijin than with his own caste. Within a few years it was quite apparent the Tortoise were content with being nothing more than glorified merchants, and the rest of the Empire did its best to forget about them. Only the Crane, whose lands abutted those of the Tortoise and whose own trade interests often clashed with those of Kasuga's clan, continued to watch the Tortoise in any real way. When Emperor Hantei Muhaki passed on from life, the Crane hoped his successor, Hantei Retsuhime, would finally cleanse this stain from the Imperial records (and the Crane were naturally ready to move in to the Tortoise lands as caretakers). However, the aged Agasha Kasuga asked for a private audience with the new Empress and, as before, it was granted. The next day, Hantei IX announced the Tortoise would not only continue their duties, but those duties would be expanded; henceforth they would also be caretakers for the Imperial City of Otosan Uchi, keeping the streets clean, repairing the homes, and performing other such menial but necessary tasks. The Crane were aghast, but the other Great Clans simply shrugged, having already relegated the Tortoise to the status of a shameful cousin best unobserved. By the time of the tenth Hantei, even the Crane had given up and adopted this view, and ever since that time the Tortoise have loyally served the Emperor and the Empire, grubbing away with their coin and their filth, scarcely noted by anyone. Even after the destruction of Otosan Uchi in the twelfth century, even after the ascension of not one but two successor dynasties, the Tortoise have continued on their lowly path.

Of course, all this is but the shell of the Tortoise. The heart of the Tortoise is quite different.

The True Role of the Tortoise

When Agasha Kasuga fled Rokugan with the gaijin Teodoro Cornejo and his people, Teodoro knew he owed Kasuga a life's debt. He sought to repay it every way he could. Over the months of their travel together, he taught Kasuga the gaijin techniques of navigating by the stars, how to read their sailing charts, how to use the strange magic of the device they called a compass, and much more besides. Kasuga was a man of rare wisdom, and he realized these tools and skills could easily lead the gaijin to Rokugan again – perhaps in greater numbers, coming as invaders rather than explorers or traders. The sea would be no barrier to these men if they knew of the Empire's location. Someone would have to watch over the gaijin, to make sure they never returned to threaten the Empire. And when he saw the great harbors and cities of Teodoro's home kingdom, the land called Merenae, he knew he was right.

This was what he told the Hantei, and this was why the Emperor not only spared Kasuga's life but gave him a new clan and a new duty. The true mission of the Tortoise Clan, never to be spoken of to anyone, was to spy on the gaijin nations under the guise of common merchants. They were also to control and manage the secret smuggling trade with the gaijin, using that trade to allow a small trickle of foreign items into the Empire – just enough to satisfy those few who were enthralled with such things, while keeping away the more dangerous items and concepts. This meant those of Kasuga's new clan would have to spend long months beyond the ocean, intereacting with things from outside the Celestial Order, corrupting their morals with commerce and their souls with gaijin influences. But in so doing, they would protect the Empire from threats beyond its sight.

To this day, they Tortoise continue to commit what the rest of the Empire would consider to be serious crimes, living dishonorable and shameful lives in the service of the Emperor. Each time a new Emperor takes the throne, the Tortoise Clan Champion will request a private meeting in which he gives a full detailed accounting of all the Tortoise have done, lists all of their crimes, and offers his sepukku. And each time, the offer is refused and the Tortoise are told to continue their work, unseen and unrecognized by anyone.

The Tortoise and the Iweko Dynasty

Like all her predecessors, Empress Iweko I met with the Tortoise Clan Champion soon after her divinely mandated ascension to the Throne. Kasuga Taigen explained his crimes and offered his *sepukku*, and it was rejected as always.

However, a few years later Iweko summoned Taigen to another audience, and this time she commanded him to perform the rite of the three cuts. Not for his crimes, but for failing his duty. The Tortoise had failed to warn the Empire of either the Army of Dark Fire or the Destroyers, both of whom came from outside of Rokugan. In the wake of this event, the rest of the Tortoise redoubled their efforts to learn more about the gaijin, and Tortoise sailors were present on most of the ships that carried Rokugani to the Colonies during the Age of Exploration.

The Lands of the Tortoise Clan

The ancestral lands of the Tortoise are quite small, consisting of the northern White Stag Penninsula (also called the Peninsula of the Dawn) and some coastline abutting Otosan Uchi. These lands extend just shy of Dragon's Guard City, and their only notable stronghold is Kyuden Kasuga itself. The rest of their holdings are fishing villages, watchtowers, and a few prosperous farms. Their roads are well-developed and Imperial patrols are regular. Kyuden Kasuga itself is modestly sized but richly apportioned, located midway along the peninsula and overlooking the bay. Its outward design resembles a turtle's shell decked out in the Tortoise Clan's colors. During the era of the Minor Clan Alliance, the castle also mounts heraldry from the other Minor Clans as a show of solidarity.

The Library of the Tortoise, located within Kyuden Kasuga, bears special mention. As with any clan library, the lineages and personal mon of the family are all recorded, but the Tortoise Clan's special status allows it to retain scrolls no other clan would dare to keep. While the Scorpion and Lion historians make sure to 'correct' any historical accounts that show dishonor or disgrace in the Emperor's history, the Tortoise still secretly retain many of the original shameful truths, unknown even to the Shosuro-Ikoma alliance. The Tortoise also quietly keep an eye on the lineage of the *heimin*, a task no other clan would lower itself to touch.

The clan's chief official port is a coastal village called Slow Tide Harbor. Slow Tide earned its name by being a swampy lagoon, overgrown by a canopy of half-drowned trees that shelter the coming and going of ships from prying eyes; however, this also prevents more than a handful of ships from docking at one time. It is simply too small for most others to care about; even the Mantis think of it as more trouble than it is worth.

At the edges of the northern and southern peninsulas that frame the Bay of the Golden Sun are two watchtowers. During much of the Empire's history these are manned by Seppun guardsmen, but the Tortoise maintain their own troops to supplement the garrisons in case of invasion. The northern tower, the Tower of Dawn, falls during Daigotsu's attack in the mid-twelfth century; the southern tower (the Tower of Sunset) survives, but when the Empire's capital is relocated to Toshi Ranbo it loses importance. The Tortoise continue to maintain it, however, and light fires on its peak to guide ships at night.

Over the years, the Tortoise have expanded beyond their original territory in some unusual ways, gathering a number of small out-of-the-way locations to call their own. Moreover, individual Tortoise samurai are scattered far and wide throughout the Empire, never taking up much room or calling much attention to themselves. The Miya have been known to claim there is a Tortoise in every province in the Empire, a saying no one has disproven, but the Tortoise never rule over domains or hold political offices – both through their own choice and because no one would ever grant them any. Tortoise can be found in the Shinomen Mori, high in the Spine of the World Mountains, peddling wares in the unaligned lands, keeping up shrines in inhospitable climes, or running a small shop deep in the heart of a city's eta district. They are everywhere, always watching, hiding in plain sight.

Otosan Uchi

The ancient Imperial City had an extensive tunnel network beneath it which the Tortoise used for centuries to conduct their smuggling operations and store their wealth and foreign goods. In fact, the Tortoise had a hidden port in the tunnels which conducted more commerce than Slow Tide Harbor itself. However, most of these tunnels are abandoned in the twelfth century when the city falls to Daigotsu's invasion. When the Empire subsequently moves the Imperial Capital to the city of Toshi Ranbo, the Tortoise Clan sends half of its people to settle around the new city's walls, picking up their sacred duties as protectors of the walls and cleaners of the streets.

The Tortoise continue to maintain a modest presence in Otosan Uchi's ruins after the fall of the city, although they leave most of the actual defense of the place to the ronin band called the Sword of Yotsu.

Distant Turtle City

This is a small settlement in the Mantis Islands which is technically ruled by the Tortoise, occupied by a dozen Kasuga and hundreds upon hundreds of Yoritomo. While it is often stated the Mantis gifted the city to the Tortoise to demonstrate brotherhood, more likely it was little more than a bribe, probably an attempt to lure the Tortoise Clan into merging itself into the Mantis as the Centipede and Wasp had already done. Regardless of the truth, the Tortoise have been able rulers, amiable to Mantis desires and happy to be able to keep a closer watch over their trade with the Ivory Kingdoms and the later Colonies.

Kaya Mori

This is a tiny forest shown on no maps of the Empire, small enough that it could fit within the boundaries of some samurai lords' gardens. It is located in the Spine of the World Mountains near the borders of the Unicorn and Miya lands. Here the Tortoise tend to a stock of Kaya trees, the superb wood used in the construction of Go boards. Kaya takes centuries to properly mature and the steadily increasing popularity of Go threatened to eradicate the tree entirely. The Hantei chose the Tortoise to look over the trees and ensure they would be available for future generations.

Vassal Familes of the Tortoise

Despite its small size, the modern Tortoise Clan actually has two vassal families, the Someisa and the Hyobe.

The **Someisa** family is based around the legend of Someisa, the woman who supposedly learned Shinsei's last secret, lived to be 300 years old, and finally transformed into a tortoise. (See Chapter Four for details of this legend.) Although the tale is quite likely apocryphal, the Tortoise Clan believes it to be true, for they have somehow come into possession of an ancient and seemingly immortal tortoise. How the Kasuga found the animal is unknown, but their records show it is has been in their care since the founding of their clan, making it the oldest mortal being in the Empire. The Tortoise Clan long ago appointed a single family to care for and watch over this sacred tortoise, and at some point prevailed on the Emperor to bestow the name of Someisa on that family.

The **Hyobe** family, by contrast, is a product of the twelfth century. The family was founded by a warrior and sea-captain named Kasuga Hyobe, a highly capable man and a supporter of the alliance with the Mantis Clan. Unfortunately, after a strange incident at sea he developed a crippling fear of the ocean, so the clan re-assigned him to protect its land holdings. His family serves as the officer corps of the tiny Tortoise military and handle the defense of its various minor holdings.

Kameyama Jima

When the Tortoise clan was first founded, Agasha Kasuga was worried that trips to foreign lands would make the natives curious about the source of the treasures they were buying. Since greed seemed to be a constant among the gaijin, there was a real risk they might attempt to follow the Tortoise back to the Emerald Empire, defeating the entire purpose of the clan's mission.

With the Hantei's blessing, the Tortoise were given a distant island, a place sometimes used by gaijin ships to resupply their stores, to serve as their home away from home. Kameyama Jima was small, but large enough for what was needed, serving as a sort of juncture point between Rokugan and the gaijin. The island is home to a hundred Tortoise samurai and over a thousand *heimin*, with quite a few in both castes showing the traits of gaijin blood. There are two ports on the island, one on the western side and one on the eastern, each large enough to accommodate three or four ships. The island is twice as far from the gaijin lands as it is from Rokugan, a recognition of the unfortunate reality that foreign ships are far more seaworthy than those of Rokugan.

Trade with the gaijin lands is launched from the eastern port. Goods brought in from that port are transported to a large village at the center of the island, where the materials are sorted and examined to see what is worthy of sending on to Rokugan. A small fraction of goods are allowed through to the western port, where they are shipped back to Slow Tide Harbor and from there distributed for sale. Likewise, Rokugani goods that are desired in foreign lands, such as silk or pearls, are brought in through the western port, transported to the central village, and then passed on the eastern port to be loaded for shipment to the foreign lands. Two ships are authorized to visit gaijin lands each year, one in the spring, one in the fall; their authorization papers always bear the red seal of the Kasuga daimyo, thus creating the term "Red Ships" which is widely used on the island.

Nature and Customs of the Tortoise

The Tortoise have never been a large clan. Although they grew quickly in the years immediately after their founding, they soon stabilized at around a thousand samurai (and about ten times that number of *heimin*). For most of their history they have remained at this size, although they increased their numbers somewhat during the twelfth century after they were forced to split their responsibilities between Otosan Uchi and Toshi Ranbo.

The average Tortoise is not an attractive Rokugani. They are seldom physically impressive people, and often deliberately emphasize their unappealing looks – for example, the men will grow long mustaches without beards. Both men and woman have a tendency to be overweight due to the indulgence allowed by the clan's mercantile ways, and the men often refer to their bloated stomachs as *'shochu* bellies.' They also have a reputation for bad teeth, perhaps due in part to their tendency to serve far past the normal age of retirement. Rare is the Tortoise who could not pass for a commoner with a change of clothing... which is probably exactly why they cultivate such an appearance.

The Tortoise refer to themselves as following the Path of No Path, in which each and every member of the clan chooses his own path separate from the whole. Thus, when a problem arises, some member of the clan can always step forward with the skills and special knowledge to deal with that particular challenge. Diversity of focus is seen as a source of strength and pride to the clan. This belief in finding one's own path, combined with the rigors of long voyages across the sea, have given the Tortoise a very specific advantage... they enjoy being alone. Tortoise will wander the roads on their own for years with no fear in their hearts. Those who choose to settle in an area will do so with no worry as to whether any other Tortoise lives within five days of them. Outside of their own modest lands, only the capital city sees any large number of Tortoise gathered in one location.

Due to the nature of the Tortoise Clan and the special protection they enjoy from the Emperor, the internal affairs of the Tortoise tend to remain internal. Most samurai are unwilling to interact with them more than absolutely required, worried that some of the stench of dishonor will rub off on them. After all, the Tortoise openly conduct commerce, freely interact with lowly *heimin*, and are even known to show acceptance to the eta... to look too deeply into these matters risks one's soul, and few samurai are willing to do so. Those few who do dig into Tortoise affairs – the most dogged magistrates or the most curious Scorpion – find their efforts blunted by Imperial interference, or else they simply vanish. In over seven hundred years, no one has ever discovered the secret duty of the Tortoise, and it remains unlikely anyone ever will.

This 'shell' of protection, combined with their famous streak of individualism, has allowed the Tortoise to gradually bond with the most unscrupulous predators of Rokugani society: bandit gangs, packs of thieves or smugglers, corrupt merchants, ninja cults, religious heretics, even groups backed by the Scorpion count among their members a handful of Tortoise who are seemingly in line with the goals of these sinister organizations. In truth, the Tortoise follow a plan of gradual infiltration, happily allowing each organization to continue unmolested (or even supported) so long as these activities do not threaten the Empire itself. What does it matter to the Tortoise if ninja kill a provincial lord, or if the Scorpion make coin by selling illegal opium? They happily cooperate in these operations, doing their best to help these groups find success, letting them feel they are in control. Should any threaten Imperial rule, then and only then it is time for the Tortoise to act, after years or even decades of loyal membership that has allowed them

entry into the higher levels. And if magistrates should come across the occasional Tortoise while rooting out such criminal groups, such folk are clearly rogue agents abusing their clan's Path of No Path, with no connection to the Tortoise leadership.

The Tortoise Path of No Path has largely prevented them from establishing many of the traditions more typical clans embrace, a problem made worse by the Tortoise predilection for being scattered about the Empire, settling where they wish. However, their long history of studying gaijin knowledge has given them a tendency to ignore traditions in favor of an approach that might almost be called "scientific." Although the Tortoise respect the Fortunes and kami, whose power can be directly observed, they are largely free of the mundane superstitions that are normal in other clans (especially other sailors). They have no fear of 'bad luck' from, say, improper use of chopsticks. Indeed, some Tortoise delight in making other uncomfortable by flouting such superstitious traditions, amused by the discomfort this causes. Of course, this is yet another strike against the clan's already poor reputation.

Having absorbed the wisdom of both their Yauski founders and the gaijin, the Tortoise have a long tradition of medical knowledge, one more hands-on than other clans are usually willing to undertake. Since they listen to *heimin* and *hinin* as readily as to samurai, they have learned arts of bone setting and anatomy from their eta that few others even know about; only the Kuni have a greater knowledge of anatomy. Of course, medical knowledge is especially important for a clan that has virtually no shugenja. Most Kasuga carry minor herbal remedies about them to deal with dental pain, muscle aches, or similar minor afflictions.

Few Tortoise bother with the arts, although the wealthier among them collect the artworks of other samurai. However, they do have a certain reputation as tenders of trees due to their administration of Kaya Mori. Thus, while the Tortoise are not particularly adept at the creation of paper or the cutting of lumber, when a tree blight erupts one of the Kasuga will often be summoned to issue apologies to the Kodama spirits and apply proper remedies to restore the tree to health. And the art of *bonsai* does have a few practitioners among the family, especially sailors who carry bonsai trees on their ships as a reminder of their duty to the Empire.

Chapter Two

The Imperial Families

Otomo Koji looked up and offered a slight frown to whoever had just entered his office. True, the door was just an opening onto the department of the Imperial Ministry of Protocols he oversaw. Still, he was entitled to some deference—

Except from this man. Seppun Izo was his superior, overseeing four departments. Koji bowed. "Your pardon, Seppun-sama. I had not expected you..."

Izo returned a perfunctory bow. "I know. However, I have difficult news, Koji-san."

Koji projected an expression of concern. Behind Izo he noticed another man, a Crane he vaguely recognized as carrying the name Doji Kakyou. The Crane was not looking at Koji; his gaze was fixed beyond him, on the working floor of the department. Dozen of clerks knelt there, dozens of brushes hissing softly across paper, nudging along governance one kanji at a time. But Koji sensed the Doji's real attention was on him and Izo... and knew why.

"If this is about the reports for the past month, Seppun-sama, I realize they are late, and for that I apologize. However, accuracy must sometimes prevail over deadlines—"

"No, Koji-san, it must not. We require accuracy and timeliness. And that is the essence of my unfortunate news." Izo sighed. "Your transgressions can no longer be ignored. I am forced to name your replacement. Doji Kakyou will assume your duties immediately." At his name, the Doji turned and finally lifted his eyes from the clerks. His expression was appropriately bland, but Koji saw the smug satisfaction in his eyes.

"I regret that this is necessary, Koji-san."

Koji could only bow and prepare to leave. There was nothing more to say.

***

Otomo Koji watched the koi bump around the edge of the pond, their mouths popping at the water's surface. He considered tossing crumbs from his rice cake to them, but a voice preempted him.

"Those koi are fat enough, Koji-san."

He bowed as his mentor, Otomo Yasuyo, knelt in the grass beside him. "Can koi get too fat, Yasuyo-sama?"

"Anyone can get too fat." She winced as her knee popped. "I understand you were discharged today."

"I was."

"That took longer than expected."

"Seppun Izo-sama is a diligent but tolerant man."

She sniffed. "It will be his downfall. Who replaced you?"

"The Crane, as expected."

"Tell me again, how many of those serving in the department are yours?"

"Of the thirty-six on the working floor, I appointed twenty-nine."

"And how long before the Crane begins to fail at his duties?"

"He will appear to be mostly competent for the next several weeks."

Yasuyo narrowed her eyes. "Who is likely to replace him?"

"A Scorpion and a Phoenix are both candidates."

The older woman stared at the koi for a moment. "The Phoenix, I think. Their relationship with the Crane is too comfortable."

"I will ensure the necessary things are said in the department."

Yasuyo looked up from the koi. "This is an excellent arrangement, Koji-san. Our daimyo *is most pleased. How would you like to fail as overseer of several departments next, this time in Ryoko Owari?"*

Koji bowed. "I would be most honored."

The History of the Imperial Families

"An Otomo, Miya, or Seppun has no greater value than as a spouse." – Bayushi Paneki, Scorpion Clan Champion

When he spoke those words, Bayushi Paneki was obliquely referring to the unique role played in Rokugan by the Imperial families. Unlike the Minor Clans, the Imperial families are not viewed as a mere adjunct to the Great Clans; indeed, while their numbers, lands, and holdings are considerably less than even the smallest of the Great Clans, in many respects they are much more important than any of those clans. As their name implies, the Imperial families have a direct connection to the ruler of the Empire. Three of the Imperial families that appear over the Empire's history – the Hantei, the Toturi, and the Iweko – are truly "Imperial," for the Emperors and Empresses who have reigned over Rokugan have come from their ranks. The other three families considered to be Imperial – the Seppun, the Otomo, and the Miya – stand close to the Throne by virtue of a combination of blood, duty, and history. All of them wield enormous political and cultural power, far out of proportion to their relatively small numbers and limited "footprint" on the landscape of Rokugan. Thus the Great Clans all vie for the attention and favor of these small but powerful families... as Paneki indirectly admitted.

The Hantei Family

"All things belong to the Hantei." – Seppun Baka

For over one thousand years the Hantei are the ruling family of Rokugan. They trace direct lineage from the original Hantei, the Kami who fell from Heaven at the dawn of the Empire along with his brothers and sisters. Shortly after landing in the mortal realm, the Kami held a tournament to determine which of them would rule the new Empire they had decided to create. Hantei emerged victorious over his siblings and assumed his place as their leader, the first Emperor of Rokugan. The consolidation of the Empire continued through the reign of the First Hantei and his son, Hantei Genji (Hantei II, The Shining Prince), who also established many of the basic institutions that would come to define the Empire, such as the Imperial Court and the office of the Emerald Champion. His successor, Hantei Ningi (Hantei III), further consolidated the patterns and social customs of Rokugan – for example, it was Ningi who established the legal principle that all lands belonged to the Emperor, and it was also Ningi who proclaimed the peasants would no longer be allowed to carry weapons.

Subsequent Hantei rulers, known as *tenno* (Heavenly Sovereign) – or *tenno-ko* if female – reigned over Rokugan for the next eleven centuries. With a few exceptions, the histories recorded by the Seppun and the Ikoma generally portray the Hantei Emperors as effective sovereigns, if not always particularly noteworthy as individuals; certainly, none are remembered as having the same fundamental influence as the First Hantei, his son, or his grandson. Some theologians have suggested Hantei's mother Amaterasu, the Sun goddess, offered her guiding hand to her beloved child and his immediate successors. If so, this guidance appears to have waned after Hantei Ningi, who many consider to be the first truly "mortal" Emperor from the Hantei line. In any case, those subsequent Hantei rulers who gained notoriety (whether good or bad) were far less prominent and their influence far less comprehensive than the line's founders.

A notable period of weakness in the Hantei line, which proved to be costly and disruptive to the Empire was a whole, occurred in the late fourth and early fifth centuries during the reigns of Hantei Fujiwa (Hantei V) and Hantei Kusada (Hantei VI). This was the period of the Gozoku Alliance (described in detail in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories*, Chapter Two), when a trio of ambitious Great Clan nobles from the Phoenix, Crane, and Scorpion Clans effectively seized control over the Throne. Although the Gozoku were able to take advantage of the relatively weak Hantei V and Hantei VI, manipulating them into virtual puppets and remaking the Imperial bureaucracy into their own agency, the conspiracy ended abruptly with the ascension of Hantei Yugozohime (Hantei VII). Backed by the Lion and Dragon Clans and the combined political might of the Otomo, Seppun, and Miya families, Hantei VII broke the Gozoku's hold on the Throne, then established measures to ensure such a conspiracy would never again seize such power. (Hantei VII later made the controversial decision to consider relations with gaijin foreigners from over the sea, an experiment which ended disastrously in her death at the Battle of White Stag – see Chapter Three of *Imperial Histories* for details.)

Other "notable" Hantei Emperors included Hantei XI, whose brother Otomo Jama became the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban and unleashed the Battle of Stolen Graves which almost brought down the Imperial line; Hantei XVI, the "Steel Chrysanthemum," who was a tyrant of such malignancy that his reign was all but erased from the official histories after his death; and Hantei XX, who reigned during a period of severe famine and whose callous response to it led to a widespread peasant revolt. (GMs seeking specific examples of these Emperors' reigns may wish to consult the two *Imperial Histories* supplements, specifically Chapter Four of *Imperial Histories* and Chapter Five of *Imperial Histories 2*.)

Perhaps the most notorious and egregious example of such an "exceptional" later Hantei, however, is the last member of the family to sit on the throne: Hantei Sotorii, also known as Hantei XXXIX. In the early twelfth century, following the Scorpion Clan Coup and during the period known as the Clan Wars, Hantei XXXIX became the vessel for the Dark Kami, Fu Leng himself. Although Fu Leng was defeated on the Second Day of Thunder, this also resulted in the death of Hantei XXXIX's mortal body, effectively ending the Hantei line.

Hantei Succession and Other Conventions

Perhaps not surprisingly, during the more than one thousand years of Hantei rule in Rokugan there was considerable intermarrying and mingling of Hantei blood with other families. This was particularly true with the other Imperial families, especially the Otomo, but it was also common in the Crane Clan and, to a much lesser extent, some of the other Great Clans as well. During periods of uncertainty over the succession (such as following the death of Hantei Retsuhime, Hantei IX, who left no obvious heir) the Imperial scholars went to considerable effort to trace the family's blood lineage to the nearest living candidate for ascension. In the case of Hantei IX, her successor Hantei X was actually the son of a cousin of Hantei VII and his Doji wife. Hantei X chose to surrender his old family and personal names when he ascended, beginning the subsequent custom of the Hantei Emperor having no personal name and being known only by title once he ascended to the Throne.

Another important issue among the Hantei was what to do when there were too many potential heirs. Younger brothers and sisters of the heir created an inherent problem for the Empire, since Imperial custom allowed only the current ruler (and spouse) to use the Hantei name. More practically, the existence in the Imperial hierarchy of numerous people bearing the name "Hantei" could potentially create great confusion and uncertainty, particularly among the common folk. The solution was first suggested by the decision of Hantei II's younger brother Yamato to join the Otomo family, eliminating any possibility he might contest his older brother's position. This was later formalized as the Ritual of Abdication, by which the younger brothers and sisters of the heir would formally renounce both their claim to the Throne and to the Hantei name. Customarily, these abdicants would then join the Otomo family, undergoing the appropriate gempukku ceremony, although some of them joined the Seppun family instead. An Imperial spouse whose child ascended to the Throne would also take the Otomo name to eliminate any confusion. Likewise, if the reigning Emperor chose to retire due to age or infirmity, he would renounce his name and join the Brotherhood of Shinsei, allowing the Hantei name to formally pass down to the next heir in line.

The Hantei and Shinseism

Shinsei, the "Little Teacher," is remembered in the Empire as the spiritual mentor who shared his wisdom and advice with the Kami in general and with Hantei in particular. Shinsei spoke at length with the Emperor, and their discussion was recorded by Shiba in what would become the Tao of Shinsei, Rokugan's preeminent spiritual document. Shinsei also guided the Seven Thunders to their costly but ultimately successful battle to defeat Fu Leng, returning from that quest with the sole surviving Thunder, Shosuro.

However, Shinseism was not the only form of religion practiced by the Rokugani in the early Empire. Before the Kami fell to Rokugan, many tribes worshipped the divine beings known as the Seven Fortunes, as well as sometimes venerating the Sun and Moon themselves. The Fortunes were part of the very Celestial Heavens from which the Kami had fallen, and the worship of such beings was acceptable to the Kami, so Fortunism was also a widespread religion in the burgeoning Empire.

It was Hantei Genji (Hantei II) who undertook to reconcile Shinseism and Fortunism into a single coherent religious practice. In the year 61, he declared the two religions were actually both aspects of the same belief, which he called Shintao. This pre-empted what could otherwise have become a disastrous religious/spiritual schism among the Empire's subjects. In particular, his decree paved the way for many of the tribes who had not yet joined the Empire to do so, since they too revered the Seven Fortunes. Although Genji sought unification between the two religious traditions, he recognized the preeminence of the Tao of Shinsei in Rokugani spiritualism because of the pivotal role played by the Little Teacher in the war against Fu Leng; thus while the worship of the Fortunes was and remained the most popular aspect of religion among the common folk, Shinseism became the more widely-studied aspect of theology among samurai. Indeed, Genji required every temple and dojo in the Empire to have a copy of the Tao of Shinsei on the premises. Subsequently, Genji encouraged the widespread construction of temples and shrines dedicated to the new unified religion, a program strongly supported by the Dragon and Phoenix Clans. Genji's descendants continued this program, and countless places which were considered holy (whether because they had been visited by the Kami, had seen a visitation by the Fortunes, or because Shinsei had walked or spoken there) became the sites of religious holdings and institutions.

Thus, the Hantei family was responsible not only for the establishment of Shintao – the unification of Shinseism and Fortunism into a single official belief system – but also for maintaining and extending that belief system through the nearly thirteen hundred years of Imperial history which followed the founding of Rokugan.

The Imperial Mon

The Imperial mon is a stylized rendering of the chrysanthemum blossom. The chrysanthemum is considered blessed by Amaterasu, Lady Sun, the divine mother of the Kami. Originally adopted by the First Hantei as his family's mon, the chrysanthemum was used throughout the Hantei Dynasty and was subsequently adopted by the Toturi and Iweko dynasties as well. No other person or group in Rokugan is allowed to display the chrysanthemum device unless they are given special permission or are in the direct service of the Emperor (for example, the Emerald Champion or the Imperial Legions). To date, the only instance of special permission is the Seppun family, because of its close ties to the Throne. The Seppun are allowed to use the chrysanthemum in their family mon, but only as part of a larger emblem.

The Toturi Family

"Let my reign herald a time of new peace." – Toturi I

With the death of Hantei XXXIX's physical body in the year 1128, the Empire was freed from the horrific fate of falling under the heel of Fu Leng, for whom the last Hantei was merely a mortal vessel. Even so, as corrupted as he was, Hantei XXXIX was the Emperor, a descendant of the First Hantei; indeed, some Rokugani (especially in the Lion Clan) refused to turn against their Emperor even when the dark influence on him became clear. After his death, the Empire faced a dire situation, one entirely without precedent: there was no Emperor on the Throne and no heir available to replace him. Hantei XXXIX had left no children, and all of the closely-related branches of the Otomo and Seppun had perished during the years of the Clan Wars. Tracking back the Hantei lineage to some distant, remotely-connected Otomo would require time the badly-damaged Empire simply did not have – and there was no guarantee of success, since many of those who could conduct such a search were dead and it was likely no such distant heirs had even survived. Nevertheless, it was clear the Empire desperately needed a new Emperor to restore order and prevent rival factions from seeking the Throne. Accordingly, the Lion Clan Thunder Akodo Toturi took the throne and became Emperor Toturi I (also called the Splendid Emperor). This established the beginning of the Toturi Dynasty, which would endure for forty tempestuous years of Imperial history.

The Scorpion Clan Coup and Clan Wars periods are described in detail in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories* (Chapters Five and Six). Following that turbulent period, the new Emperor was able to make considerable headway in restoring the Empire from the depredations of war. Between 1128 and 1130, he oversaw a period of relative peace and cooperation between the clans as they worked to rebuild Rokugan. In particular, he gave new Imperial Charters to each of the clans, ensuring their renewed attention to their ancient duties to the Empire. However, in the year 1130 Emperor Toturi abruptly disappeared under mysterious circumstances. The Scorpion Clan, still viewed with suspicion in the wake of their Coup against Hantei XXXVIII, were initially blamed; they were stripped of their Great Clan status and exiled to the Burning Sands. The chaotic struggle which followed these incidents is variously known as the War Against the Darkness or the Hidden Emperor Era, and is recounted in *Imperial Histories*, Chapter Seven.

With the defeat of the Lying Darkness, a period of relative peace and prosperity seemed to settle over the Empire once more as Toturi I resumed the Throne. However, new forces were already plotting against him. The violent and paranoid former Emperor Hantei XVI, the "Steel Chrysanthemum," had returned from death at the Battle of Oblivion's Gate and sought to reclaim the Throne for himself. The resulting War of Spirits (detailed in *Imperial Histories*, Chapter Eight) lasted almost twenty years and was a confusing time for Rokugan's Imperial rulership. Toturi I had been recognized as the rightful Emperor not only by the people of the Empire but by the Celestial Heavens themselves, who showed their approval when Amaterasu remained over the Imperial Palace for an entire day. However, Hantei XVI was also a legitimate claimant to the Throne by virtue of his clear status as one of the Hantei Dynasty (and despite his horrific record as a dangerous and paranoid ruler). It was this ambiguity which led to such a long and protracted conflict, although the forces of Toturi I eventually prevailed. In the year 1150 Hantei XVI finally permanently abdicated his claim to the Throne of Rokugan, thereby cementing the place of the Toturi family as the ruling Dynasty of the Empire.

The Children of Toturi I

In the year 1158, Toturi I was ambushed by Shadowlands forces while journeying from the Imperial capital to Ryoko Owari. His death left the Empire without a clear succession, for while Toturi and his wife Kaede had three children – a daughter, Toturi Tsudao, and two sons, Toturi Sezaru and Toturi Naseru – he had also fathered a fourth child, Kaneka, by a geisha. Although Kaneka was illegitimate, he was older than Toturi's true-born children by Kaede, and it was widely believed Toturi was journeying to Ryoko Owari to acknowledge Kaneka and name him as his heir. Without proof, the Empire was plunged into a struggle for succession, described in detail in Chapter nine of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories 2*. Initially, it appeared Tsudao would prevail in the struggle, especially since she was the oldest legitimate child of Toturi I and had the support of the Imperial Legions. However, when

Tsudao named herself Empress only the Phoenix and Crane Clans, along with part of the Lion Clan, accepted her claim. Ultimately, the jockeying for power among the four siblings did not end until Tsudao was killed in a confrontation with the Dark Lord Daigotsu. Her youngest brother Naseru became Emperor Toturi III (he retroactively acknowledged the reign of his sister, naming her Toturi II) while Kaneka and Sezaru both renounced their claims.

This difficult struggle to secure the Throne presaged the ultimate doom of the Toturi Dynasty. Lacking the standardized traditions of the Hantei Dynasty's thousand-plus years of rule, the Toturi could not rely on social tradition and continuity to maintain their position. Each Toturi Emperor, in effect, had to prove his legitimacy and authority for himself. Moreover, the breakdown of the Empire's peace which had taken place during the Clan War was never fully repaired in the Toturi Dynasty – the Hidden Emperor era seemed to plunge the whole Empire right back into war when the ashes of the Clan Wars were barely cold. The consequences of these problems would be seen in the short and ultimately failed reign of Toturi III.

The End of the Toturi Dynasty

Toturi III inherited the same legacy of strife and conflict as his father had faced. His reign saw a major conflict between the Lion and Unicorn Clans over the City of the Rich Frog, as well as a civil war within the Mantis Clan and, worst of all, the return of the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban to Rokugan. As if that were not enough, the ancient Gozoku conspiracy was briefly resurrected by one of its original founders, Bayushi Atsuki, who had returned to life through Volturnum's Gate. Finally, fearing the rise of Iuchiban could threaten the very existence of the Empire, a descendant of Shinsei named Rosoku revealed himself and issued the Challenges of Enlightenment to the Empire.

Although Toturi III oversaw the victory of the Empire against these threats, there was a clear sense that his reign was chaotic and his control over Rokugan seemed weak. When an ambassador from Daigotsu arrived in the Empire, demanding recognition of the Lost as a Great Clan, Toturi III chose to go into seclusion to consider all that had happened under his reign. Eventually he decided to wander the Empire, seeking Enlightenment and meeting the many other samurai who also claimed to have attained this state due to Rosoku's influence. The Emperor's quest finally led him to enter the Shadowlands, traveling to the legendary tomb where the original Seven Thunders had been interred; the result was a great clash between the demonic forces of Jigoku and a group of loyal Rokugani samurai seeking to rescue their Emperor. The Rokugani forces prevailed, but Toturi III himself perished.

The Emperor had left a wife, Kurako, but no children. As the Emperor's consort she did not hold a legitimate claim to the Throne and could only act as a regent. Once more, Rokugan faced an uncertain succession. Although Naseru had intended to name his half-brother Kaneka as his heir, his letter doing so was never delivered, and both Kaneka and Sezaru later died during the so-called Winter of Red Snow in the year 1168. With no other offshoot bloodlines to draw upon, the Toturi Dynasty was rendered extinct barely forty years after its birth.

The Legacy of the Toturi Dynasty

The Toturi Dynasty ruled during one of the most turbulent periods in the Empire's history. Beginning with the Scorpion Clan Coup in 1123, the twelfth century saw nearly fifty years of almost continuous warfare, including struggles against profound existential threats such as Fu Leng, the Lying Darkness, the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban, and the Dark Lord Daigotsu. The Toturi Dynasty oversaw nearly all of this chaos and bloodshed.

Throughout this difficult period of Rokugani history, the Toturi Dynasty sought to remain true to the conventions and customs established by its Hantei predecessors, including the prevalence of the Celestial Order as a means of dictating social and political station, the preeminence of Shinseism and Fortunism, the role of the Imperial bureaucracy, and the general social, economic, and cultural order of the Empire. Indeed, it can be said the Toturi Emperors were responsible for maintaining the Empire's traditional structures in the face of one of the most chaotic and disruptive eras it had ever seen.

What sets the Toturi Dynasty apart from that of the Hantei (and its successor, the Iweko Dynasty) is the fact that the Toturi family did not rule with a clear Celestial mandate. Although Amaterasu had shown favor to Toturi by resting above the Imperial City for a full day, the degree to which the Dynasty was truly blessed by the Celestial Heavens (as opposed to simply tolerated by them) was very much open to question. The Kolat conspiracy, which sought to have man rule the universe free of divine influence, saw the Toturi Dynasty as a major step in that direction, strengthened by the later ascension of two mortals, Hitomi and Yakamo, to replace the original Moon and Sun. It was no coincidence that the fall of the last Toturi was followed, within a year, by the emergence of two new Celestial entities, the Jade and Obsidian Dragons, to supplant Yakamo and Hitomi as the new Sun and Moon. Soon after, the Celestial Heavens created the new Iweko Dynasty, restoring the full influence of the divine on Rokugan.

Alternatives to the Fall of the Toturi

The limited history of the Toturi bloodline would seem to offer few opportunities for alternative historical scenarios. However, the intense events of that period do present a number of possibilities. The alternate-history setting "The Shadowed Throne," found in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories 2,* is one example of such a possibility, and creative GMs can easily develop more of their own.

For example, if Toturi Tsudao had survived her confrontation with Daigotsu, she would have returned to Rokugan triumphant and resumed her title as Toturi II. Her brothers might have accepted this, as depicted in the Shadowed Throne setting, but they might also have continued to pursue their own claims to the Throne and sent the Empire into a further series of succession wars. A timeline in which a war of succession was layered onto the other struggles facing the Empire in those decades, with the Great Clans struggling to choose and support their particular contender, could have meant a long-term murderous conflict comparable to the real-world Wars of the Roses in fifteenth century Britain.

GMs can also speculate what would have happened if the Toturi Dynasty had not ended with the death of Toturi III. What if he had fathered children and produced his own heir, or what if he had established a clear succession by Kaneka or Sezaru? (The alternate "future history" called Heroes of Rokugan, found in Chapter Nine of *Imperial Histories*, is based on such an outcome.) If the Toturi bloodline had continued, would the Celestial Heavens have still sought to replace it and restore their divine influence in the mortal realm? Would this have led to a struggle between mortal and divine forces for control of the Empire? Or would the Toturi Dynasty have actually ushered in a true "Age of Man" as the Kolat hoped?

The Iweko Family

The Iweko family is established in the year 1170, the ascension the new dynasty (in the person of Empress Iweko I) putting an end to a period of nearly two years in which the Throne of Rokugan sat empty. Following the death of Toturi III, the Unicorn Clan Champion Moto Chagatai marched on Toshi Ranbo, attempting to either force Kaneka to take the Throne or, if that was not possible, to claim it for himself. He reasoned the Empire needed an Emperor, any Emperor, in order to remain strong in the face of both internal unrest and external threats. However, he was stopped short of his goal, and both of the remaining Toturi siblings (Kaneka and Sezaru) perished during the fighting, as did Toturi III's consort, the Regent Kurako. Thwarted, Chagatai withdrew and the Throne remained vacant.

In response to this chaos, the Celestial Heavens at last took action. Yakamo and Hitomi were cast down from the Heavens by new deities – the Jade Sun and Obsidian Moon, both Celestial Dragons. Subsequently, the Oracles of these new divinities – the so-called Voice of the Sun and Voice of the Moon, both formerly mortals – proclaimed that the samurai who best exemplified the virtues of Bushido would prevail in the sight of Heaven and would be anointed as the new Emperor. The Voices invited all of the Great Clans to send their most worthy representatives to a tournament which would be held on Seppun Hill, where the Kami first fell into the mortal realm.

Although the tournament was glorious and was ultimately won by a Unicorn named Moto Jin-Sahn, its true purpose was to reveal the character of its many participants. Once the contests were over, the Voices gathered all of the contestants and announced they had chosen a new Emperor – Kitsuki Iweko, daimyo of the Kitsuki family. When they asked her if she was truly worthy of the ascension, Iweko replied she was not. The Voices answered, "None are," but affirmed that of those present she was the most worthy. Iweko was illuminated with a divine radiance, a moment of Celestial harmony that granted her insight into all things, and in that moment a new Dynasty was born.

It was immediately apparent that the touch of divinity on the new dynasty was strong and unambiguous. Iweko could no longer interact with mortals as before. She was not only elevated but also isolated, and now relied on the Voice of the Emperor to speak on her behalf to her subjects. Only those she specifically summoned could enter her presence, and her Voice was the only person permitted unrestricted access. For the first time since the Empire's founding, its ruler was held apart from her subjects, her person hidden behind veils and screens, her words relayed through others. Subsequently, Iweko I chose a husband, a Lion named Akodo Setai, who became her Imperial Consort and the father of her children.

Following her ascension, Iweko enacted a series of decrees intended to stabilize the Empire. She named a new

set of Emperor's Chosen to help her govern the nation and created a new office, the Imperial Treasurer, to oversee matters of commerce and taxation. More controversially, she named a ronin as her Imperial Advisor. However, there was a secret underlying this latter decision – the divine insight she had received at the moment of her ascension had revealed the dark truth about the so-called Spider Clan. The Spider were outlawed, but those among them who were not Tainted — including her new Imperial Advisor — were allowed to prove their worth as loyal subjects to the Empire.

The Empire's joy at having a new Celestially-endorsed dynasty was short-lived, however. Perhaps because Tengoku took such a direct hand in mortal affairs, the evil realm of Jigoku also selected a new champion for its purposes in Ningen-do, replacing Fu Leng with an evil gaijin goddess called Kali-Ma. The full story of the subsequent Destroyer War is recounted in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories 2*, Chapter Eleven.

At the end of the Destroyer War, Iweko I made her most controversial decision. Faced with a new Festering Pit, a gateway to Jigoku in the heart of the Empire, Iweko I chose to parlay with Daigotsu, agreeing to accept his followers in the Spider Clan as a Great Clan in Rokugan in exchange for the Shadowlands Taint no longer being an involuntary affliction.

Iweko I's decision fundamentally changed Rokugan. Those who followed Fu Leng and Daigotsu were now treated as loyal subjects of the Empire, and those of them who were Tainted were exiled to the former Ivory Kingdoms where they conquered the now-depopulated territories in her name. As recounted in Chapter Twelve of *Imperial Histories 2* (the "Age of Exploration"), these Colonies became a focus of Imperial attention for the next generation and more. Initially, Iweko I intended the Colonies become a source of raw materials needed for rebuilding Rokugan from the Destroyer War. However, her own policies set in motion events that would lead to the Colonies becoming a distinct part of the Empire in their own right.

The Future of the Iweko Dynasty

Shortly after the end of the Destroyer War, Iweko I gave birth to two sons, Iweko Seiken and Iweko Shibatsu, and later a daughter, Iweko Miaka. Shibatsu, the younger son, was fostered to the Spider Clan (as part of an agreement with that clan) and raised in the Colonies. Seiken, the elder son, remained in Rokugan and became acquainted with all of the Great Clans, but developed a particular affinity for the Lion. Thus, it would seem the future of the Iweko Dynasty is secure. However, Iweko I appears to be aging more slowly than a normal mortal, suggesting the divinity that infused her on her ascension has given her an extended life (but not true immortality). Thus, while Seiken is officially the heir to the Throne, it is possible that by the time Iweko dies or retires he might be too old to inherit, perhaps passing the position to his own children.

The Iweko Dynasty is the reigning power in Rokugan in the current timeline of the L5R Collectible Card Game, and thus its "official" future is still to be written. Although the history of the Empire in Iweko's early reign has been comprehensively recounted in "canon" materials (including the aforementioned Age of Exploration chapter), the subsequent era – everything after roughly the year 1200 — is an entirely blank page. Of course, as the official L5R storyline progresses, events will be presented to fill in this period, but there is still enormous scope for a GM to develop his own campaign exploring the future of the Iweko Dynasty. Moreover, there is a more expansive geographic setting available for such campaigns, since the Empire now consists of not only its traditional lands but also the Imperial Colonies.

Regardless of whether Iweko Seiken, Iweko Shibatsu, Iweko Miaka, or one of their children or grandchildren assumes the Throne when Iweko I dies or steps down, the GM can use them to explore different potential futures for Rokugan. Clearly, the Empire's status will be different if Iweko is succeeded by a "traditionalist" Emperor (Seiken is raised in Rokugan proper and has a close affinity for the likewise traditional Lion Clan), a "progressive" Emperor (Shibatsu, who is raised by the Spider Clan in the Colonies, away from the Empire itself), or a naïve Empress (Miaka, who has lived a sheltered life). An intriguing possibility is that both brothers could "ascend," Seiken inheriting the Throne in Rokugan while his younger brother breaks away and forms his own "Empire" in the Colonies, setting the stage for a period of conflict between two competing visions of Rokugan.

The Seppun Family

"The Seppun are the largest of the Imperial families, and the family with the most difficult logistics. Fortunately they have brilliant souls who ensure they are never without what they require." – The Voice of the Empress

While the Hantei, Toturi, and Iweko families are Imperial families in the strictest and purest sense of the term – that is, the families from whom the rulers of Rokugan are drawn – the Seppun family and its cousins in the Otomo and Miya families are "Imperial" by virtue of their particular station relative to the Throne.

The Seppun family can trace its origins literally to the very dawn of the Empire. When the eight Kami fell from Heaven, they landed at a place that came to be known as Seppun Hill. The name derived from the very first mortal to greet the Kami after their fall, a woman called Seppun. This was not her actual name, which is lost to history; rather, it was her title, which was used by her people to denote the most holy among them. Seppun offered herself to the Kami as their loyal servant, and Hantei accepted her service on behalf of his siblings, making her the first mortal follower of the Kami. Her husband, a man named Akagi who was chieftain of their people, quickly followed suit, although their followers were initially doubtful. However, soon afterward the tribe came under attack by the Tribe of Noriaki, a violent and predatory warband that had been their enemy for some time. (In fact, the conflicts had already claimed the lives of two of Seppun and Akagi's sons.) Hantei and the Kami intervened, driving the Tribe of Noriaki away, and Seppun's grateful people devoted themselves to their saviors.

The modern Seppun family, which took its name from its first leader, is the closest of the three Imperial families to the Emperor. Others may vie for the Emperor's favor, the Otomo may boast of containing more of his bloodline, but the Seppun always have his loyalty simply by virtue of who they are. For above all other things, the Seppun are known throughout the Empire as the Emperor's protectors.

Protectors of the Emperor

While the Kami were powerful and near-divine beings, they were not invincible. When they fell into the mortal realm, they took on some of the attributes of mortals – they could be injured, they could bleed, they could grow weary and weak, and while they could not perish of old age, they could die from violence or illness. The Seppun, the earliest followers of the Kami, therefore took it upon themselves to guard Hantei, protecting him from the all-too-present threats of the mortal world. This devotion continued as the Hantei line continued, and with time it hardened into tradition and custom, with the Seppun established as the foremost defenders of the Emperor. The Seppun are always prepared to sacrifice themselves so the Emperor may live. This is not simply fanaticism; it is a far more subtle and deeply ingrained duty. This is their true place in the Celestial Order. No other family in the Empire can claim such devotion to the Throne.

The Seppun *miharu* (guardsman) are the personal bodyguards of the Emperor and his family. Only members of the Seppun family (or, in rare cases, members of other Imperial families with Seppun mothers) may join the ranks of the Seppun Guard. Every *miharu* is utterly devoted to the welfare of the Emperor and his family, and will not hesitate to place himself between his charge and danger. Only once in recorded history have Seppun Guardsmen betrayed this loyalty and turned their steel on the Emperor: when Hantei XVI, the Steel Chrysanthemum, ordered the death of his own mother in open court, some among the Seppun *miharu* made the fateful decision that the welfare and perhaps even the existence of the Empire hung in the balance. The Steel Chrysanthemum was struck down, the *miharu* variously either assisting in this act of regicide or choosing not to intervene. All of the Seppun Guardsmen involved then committed seppuku, recognizing that no matter how much their actions might have served the greater good of the Empire, they had personally failed in their ancient duty.

Seppun Guardsmen are among the most accomplished warriors in the Empire, but their skills are all honed to a single purpose: protecting the Emperor. Defense and service as yojimbo is their ultimate focus. Even their skill in iaijutsu is intended only to allow

them to draw their blades quickly against sudden attack, rather than for actual dueling.

Of course, not all threats that may endanger the Emperor can be detected with simple vigilance, no matter how diligent, nor may they all be thwarted with steel and loyalty. The Hidden Guard, another Seppun institution, protects the Emperor against supernatural threats. The shugenja of the Hidden Guard are devout priests of the kami, devoted to the teachings of Shinsei, but are just as prepared as the *miharu* to place themselves between the Emperor and harm. Members of the Hidden Guard are particularly adept with wards and other defensive forms of magic, making sure all areas frequented by the Emperor and his family are guarded against magical intrusion or attack. The Imperial Throne Room in Otosan Uchi (and later, Toshi Ranbo) is likely the most heavily warded place in the Empire. However, many other locations within the Imperial City are also endowed by the Seppun with powerful protective magics. Indeed, some members of the Hidden Guard spend their entire adult lives doing nothing but tending to these wards, ensuring they are functioning properly and the kami maintaining them are appropriately importuned and rewarded. Other Hidden Guardsmen are more proactive, seeking out potential spiritual threats and either monitoring or countering them, alone or working with others as needed. There is much interaction between the Hidden Guard and groups such as the Asako Inquisitors of the Phoenix; the more pragmatic of the Seppun are also known to work with the Kuni family and its Witch-Hunter order, although given the unpleasant reputation of the Kuni they make sure to do so well away from prying eyes.

Advocates of Shinseism

When Seppun first met the Kami on what became Seppun Hill, she was already the most holy of her people, a devoted worshipper of the Sun and Moon. It required very little "leap of faith" for her and her people to accept that these children of the Sun and Moon were divine beings worthy of their reverence. More surprising, however, is the extent to which the Seppun became fervent disciples of Shinsei, the Little Teacher, when he later appeared to the Kami. Seppun herself was an old woman by that time, but she took Shinsei's teachings very much to heart. In particular, she saw to it that four great temples were constructed around what would become Kyuden Seppun. From Kyuden Seppun and its Four Temples, Shinseism spread and flourished across the growing Empire, guided and promoted by Seppun and her followers. Ever since, the Seppun have been among the most devoted adherents of Shinseism and the most fervent guardians of its teachings and records. The Four Temples remain central places in the practice of Shinseism, although they are now part of the larger unified religious tradition of Shintao. A full description of the Four Temples (and of Kyuden Seppun overall) can be found in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Air,* pages 66-67.

Despite her advanced age, Seppun played an important role in unifying the originally separate tenets of Shinseism and Fortunism. Because of her own tribe's devotion to the Sun and Moon, Seppun and her followers had no trouble reconciling the divine existence of the Kami with those two heavenly presences, and she had also been quick to embrace Shinseism as a guide to an enlightened vision of mortal life. However, the Fortunism practiced by the followers of Isawa and other tribes presented a more fundamental problem. Was Fortunism an entirely distinct understanding of spirituality, and therefore a possible source of heresy, or could it be reconciled with Shinseism? Seppun provided much wise counsel to Hantei Genji, helping convince him that Fortunism and Shinseism should be viewed as two aspects of the same belief system. This counsel in turn led Genji to make the official proclamation merging the two faiths into one single religion, Shintao.

Seppun Vassal Families

Vassal families are relatively rare among the Imperials, but the Seppun acquire on in the aftermath of Hantei XVI's tyrannical reign: the **Hanako** family. After the mad Emperor is finally slain, a courtier named Seppun Hanako writes a treatise on proper government, the need for the law to incorporate justice and mercy, and the responsibilities of those who reign to those who are ruled. Hantei XVII is so impressed by this book that he names it the Articles of Heaven and agrees to enact nearly all of the reforms it proposes. He appoints Hanako herself to put her ideals into practice as his chief magistrate – the first of the Ruby Champions. She is also honored with the right to create her own vassal family. The modern Hanako family still serves the Seppun as magistrates and courtiers, trying to uphold the noble ideals of their founder.

In the mid twelfth century, the Seppun offer fealty to the ronin family known as the **Yotsu**. Although the Yotsu do not actually join the Seppun, they are considered to be sworn vassals with a status similar to a conventional vassal family. For more information on the history of the Yotsu, see Chapter Three.

The Seppun Family Mon

The Seppun Family mon depicts two branches of bamboo hanging wreath-like beneath the Imperial Chrysanthemum. The Seppun are the only group in Rokugan allowed to show the chrysanthemum on their mon, emblematic of their extremely close ties to the Emperor. Even then, they are not allowed to use the chrysanthemum alone, since that privilege is reserved solely for the Emperor and those who represent him directly, such as the Emerald Champion. The two bamboo branches represent the two most important purposes of the Seppun: the protection of the Emperor and advocacy for the Tao of Shinsei. This is also reflected in the Seppun family motto, attributed to Seppun herself: *"Follow the Emperor, and follow the Tao. In one, you will find the other."*

The Otomo Family

"The role of the Otomo is more important in times of peace than in times of war. In times of peace samurai need enemies, and the Otomo provide them." – Otomo Demiyah

The Otomo family is among the oldest families in the Empire, by some measurements second only to the Seppun in age. Otomo was the younger son of a great tribal warlord whose name has been lost to history, fostered as a boy to Seppun's tribe. As a result of Seppun's influence, Otomo became a skilled diplomat and later used these talents to save his tribe after it was nearly destroyed by his older brother's warmongering. He watched the growth of the new Empire of Rokugan with interest, and within a few years he led his people to join the growing throng of those loyal to the Kami. Otomo and his people swore fealty to Hantei, and the Otomo family was born.

Otomo's wit and cunning did not go unnoticed by the Hantei. Along with Seppun, he became a close confidant of the Kami, so much so that when the First Hantei lay dying after the war against Fu Leng, Otomo and Seppun remained constantly at the Emperor's bedside. When the First Hantei finally died, however, it became clear to Otomo that his family was lesser in stature than Seppun's in the eyes of the new Emperor, Hantei Genji. While Otomo did not particularly resent this fact, it was in his nature to try to do something about it. Eventually, he hit upon the idea of having one of his own followers found a new Imperial family. He chose Miya, who had done such excellent work in spreading the news of Fu Leng's defeat across the Empire and had subsequently been instrumental in the Empire's efforts to rebuild from the war. Otomo lobbied Hantei Genji and his closest advisors, albeit in the subtle way that was his hallmark. Hantei Genji eventually decided to reward Miya by allowing him to found a third Imperial family, an honor most believed had been the Shining Prince's own idea. Miya, however, knew the truth, and was forever indebted to Otomo. This greatly increased Otomo's standing and influence in Hantei Genji's court without making it obvious what he had done. Such a subtle – perhaps even insidious – approach to politics would become the way of the Otomo family throughout the rest of the Empire's history.

The Otomo are second only to the Seppun in their closeness to the Throne, and in terms of their ability to exploit the power of their connection to the Emperor they are arguably the stronger family. However, for the first four centuries of its existence the Otomo family played a relatively minor role in the affairs of Empire, mostly focused on housing the non-inheriting members of the Hantei line and helping to keep peace within the sometimes fractious ranks of Imperial subjects. The early Otomo were skilled negotiators who could end conflicts with just a few words to the parties involved. The family's most notable achievement during this time was a codification of the foundations of Rokugani law. Based on the teachings of the famous magistrate Soshi Saibankan, a courtier named Otomo Kuchiru wrote a treatise which detailed the concept of *ritsuryo* law, in which testimony and honor weigh more heavily than physical evidence. This approach to law, based on the idea that a man would not lie while giving testimony because of the harsh judgment of his ancestors, remains the essential underpinning of Rokugan's judicial system.

After the fall of the Gozoku conspiracy in the fifth century, the role of the Otomo changed dramatically. The Empress needed a trustworthy group to run the Imperial bureaucracy which the Gozoku had created, and more importantly, the Hantei Dynasty needed to ensure that never again could the clans unite to undermine the authority of the Throne. The Otomo would take on that task.

The Serpents in the Garden

The Gozoku conspiracy demonstrated that a weak Emperor could be controlled by the machinations of others. Even a relatively strong Emperor could become a pawn if subjected to sufficiently subtle and clever manipulation. The hard fact was that no matter how loyal the overwhelming majority of Imperial subjects might be, the imperfect nature of mortals meant there would always be some who would try to take advantage if given the opportunity. Hantei Yugozohime, whose ascension broke the power of the Gozoku, wanted to ensure such individuals would never again have that opportunity. Accordingly, she commanded the Otomo to take whatever measures were necessary to protect the Throne from those who might seek to compromise it. Since the loyalty of the Imperial families was considered above reproach, the most likely such usurpers were from the Great Clans, and the primary task facing the Otomo was to ensure the Great Clans could not unite in such a way as to threaten the Emperor. The family took to this new task with diligence, cultivating an approach to Imperial politics that made them the serpents in the garden of the courts.

This was exemplified by the Otomo courtier school, which developed and refined an approach called *seiyaku* (which means "covenant" or "agreement") – an ironic title, given that its techniques are specifically designed to sow discord. The Otomo were serpents with a very specific pur-

pose, however. Although their actions are often vexatious and harmful – even to loyal samurai of Rokugan – they are never malicious simply for the sake of malice. The Otomo recognize a greater good, the security of the Throne, and devote themselves utterly to that greater good. They do not hesitate to use the most underhanded tactics, such as deception, bribery, and blackmail, as well as more conventional courtly methods such as flattery and trading favors. At their best, the Otomo function behind the scenes, manipulating others to achieve their ends. Indeed, any particular Doji scheme or Bayushi plot may actually be the work of Otomo courtiers well-removed from the action – puppet-masters with exceedingly long strings.

Some may consider such ruthless and unabashedly manipulative actions to be dishonorable, unworthy of a samurai and the Virtues of Bushido he is expected to follow. However, the Otomo see themselves as diligent defenders of the Emperor, no less loyal than their cousins in the Seppun *Miharu* or the Hidden Guard. In their minds, their role as absolutely essential, preventing the Great Clans from ever coming together against the Throne by keeping them perpetually off-balance, focused entirely on one another as rivals and enemies. Of course, since the Otomo cooperate with the Ikoma and Shosuro to construct the official histories of Rokugan, there is no record of how many inter-clan conflicts throughout the Empire's history may have been nudged along or outright provoked by the Otomo.

The great danger, of course, is that some among the Otomo themselves may succumb to the temptations of ambition and power. After all, they are just as much imperfect mortals as any other samurai. The Otomo family, of course, denies any such failures of duty have ever happened, but nonetheless has measures in place to prevent them. There are watchers among the watchers, and life in the Otomo family is often a world of constant intrigue in which every samurai is always glancing over his own shoulder.

Other Roles of the Otomo

While their reputation is one of keeping the Great and Minor Clans off-balance and at odds, the Otomo fulfill other duties for the Empire as well. They fill many key positions in the Imperial bureaucracy, and effectively control the entirety of that organization (although the actual membership includes plenty of Seppun and Miya, and a smaller minority of clan samurai). The creation of this bureaucracy was another outgrowth of the Gozoku era. In order to cement their control over the Empire, the Gozoku had prevailed on their puppet Emperor to create a new Imperial family, the Nasu, which was elevated above the Seppun, Otomo, and Miya and placed in charge of all the key positions in the Imperial government. When the conspiracy was defeated in the year 435, those of the Nasu who were not actual traitors were absorbed into the Phoenix as a vassal family, hiding them away from a vengeful Empire. The Otomo took their place, filling the sudden vacuum in the leadership of the Imperial bureaucracy (which itself had greatly expanded during the Gozoku era), and the family has retained this role ever since.

The Otomo Family Mon

The Otomo family mon is four snakes inscribed in a circle, all emanating from the same source in the middle of the circle. Each snake is biting the one next to it with no regard for its own protection from the snake which is biting it in turn. Officially, the Otomo claim the mon was designed by Hantei Genji himself, in gratitude for their unwavering sacrifice in protecting his house from threats regardless of the cost to themselves. However, within the Otomo it is generally recognized that the mon probably dates from much later, most likely sometime following the Gozoku conspiracy; it is symbolic of the way the family keeps the Great Clans divided and in conflict so they cannot unite against the Emperor.

The family's motto is said to be the only recorded quote from Otomo himself: "*In difficulty lies opportunity.*"

As noted in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Fire* (Chapter Three), the Otomo work together with the Ikoma and Shosuro to make sure the official histories of the Empire only reflect the positive side of the Imperial line. In their view, this is simply another aspect of their role of protecting the Emperor from political threats; after all, disloyal samurai might try to cite past failures of the dynasty to support their treasonous schemes.

Perhaps the most common secondary role of the Otomo family is as a place to shelter the younger children of the Emperor who are not expected to inherit the Throne. Following the Ritual of Abdication, such younger Imperial siblings usually join the Otomo family (although some occasionally choose to join the Seppun family instead), undergoing a gempukku ceremony regardless of their age and taking the Otomo family name. During the long reign of the Hantei Dynasty the Otomo family became a sort of repository for the Hantei bloodline, so if an Emperor died without an heir the bloodlines could be traced back to the most direct Hantei relative. Typically, this Otomo would then reverse the Ritual of Abdication and assume the Throne as the new ruler of Rokugan. (In the twelfth century, the Toturi and Iweko Dynasties did not follow this practice, but this is in part due to their brief reigns. The Iweko may yet decide to resume the practice once the time comes.).

Finally, the Otomo are also steeped in those aspects of Rokugani politics which may seem unimportant on the surface, but are actually pivotal in gaining and wielding courtly power. For example, the Otomo family rivals the Crane in both its practice of matchmaking and its influence on the Empire's art and culture. Music, art, and literature created by Otomo samurai or sponsored by Otomo wealth are among the most influential in Rokugan. Like the Crane, the Otomo realize that every note of every musical composition, every strike of a mallet on a sculpting chisel, and every brush-stroke on a scroll or a shoji-screen can serve a specific political purpose. To the Otomo, beauty is simply another tool for either gaining power themselves or keeping it out of others' hands.

The Imperial Bureaucracy

The Imperial Bureaucracy of Rokugan is a study in contrasts. Outwardly simple in its organization, it is vastly complex in detail. As rigid as the hardest steel, it nonetheless changes constantly, adapting to the whims of its masters like sand in a river delta. Commoners fear it, samurai curse it, and even the powerful find it troublesome. Without it, though, Rokugan would cease to function as an organized state.

At its core, the Imperial Bureaucracy is as an enabler, creating little of value itself but nonetheless making it possible for the civilized Empire to exist. It does not issue edicts, collect taxes, deploy troops, or police the Empire, but it makes all those things possible. In effect, it is a vast engine, consuming energy and resources to provide the energy and organization for all the other aspects of Imperial governance and administration.

When Rokugan was new, the Bureaucracy was a mere hint of what it would become. Its functions were extremely basic: maintain communications across the nascent Empire, make records of activities and proclamations to ensure they were commonly recorded and understood, and survey the new Imperial lands. Under the First Hantei, there were no more than a few dozen advisors and subordinates who carried out all these functions. With the founding of the Imperial capital, Otosan Uchi, and the creation of permanent structures and systems of government, the Bureaucracy slowly began to grow. A loose structure became increasingly organized and rigid, while advisors became permanent staff who in turn required more staff to assist them. To some extent this growth was driven by human motivations: a craving for order, a need for rules and systems, and personal ambition among those who sought positions of power. More compelling, however, were the demands of the growing Empire. There were more and more settled lands, more people living in them, more laws to be upheld, more taxes to collect, more infrastructure to build. By the end of the long reign of the Shining Prince, the Bureaucracy was a well-established institution. By the end of the reign of the Gozoku conspiracy two centuries later, it was a vast apparatus, with hundreds of senior officials served by thousands of assistants, archivists, messengers, scribes, and other functionaries. While clan samurai filled some of these roles, after the end of the Gozoku era the Bureaucracy was overwhelmingly dominated by the Imperial families, especially the Otomo. In later centuries the Bureaucracy would change in detail, shedding some functions and adopting more, but it was always growing, always becoming more powerful and influential. By the twelfth century, it had become so essential to the Imperial government that Rokugan was, on more than one occasion, able to continue functioning for extended periods while the Throne itself remained empty.

The Bureaucracy, in its essential post-Gozoku form, is organized into a series of Ministries, each designed around a particular function of governance. While the Bureaucracy is very political in nature, it is generally not composed of politicians. The true politicians of Rokugan are the kuge — the Emperor, his Chosen, the Jeweled Champions, the daimyo of the Imperial families, and the Great Clan Champions. Those who attend the various courts of Rokugan represent the kuge and their interests; bureaucrats also originate from the same ranks, but are generally simple functionaries who carry out administrative tasks. Some very senior bureaucrats do travel and operate in the political spheres of the courts, but this is the exception rather than the rule. Most Rokugani bureaucrats will never step foot into an Imperial or clan court except to deliver messages or retrieve paperwork. Of course, this does not stop them from being hugely influential, and the Otomo in particular have made an art of using the Bureaucracy to their own ends. (A detailed discussion of the Otomo control of the Bureaucracy may be found in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Earth*.)

The Ministries making up the Imperial Bureaucracy have changed and evolved but the following descriptions depict its most consistent form over time.

The Ministry of Exchange

True to their view of commerce as a crass activity, something which honorable samurai will avoid, the Rokugani have applied many different names to this ministry through history. Responsible for planning and overseeing the collection of taxes and their subsequent disbursement for mandated uses, this ministry has been known variously as the Ministry of Receipt, the Ministry of Due Loyalty, and the Ministry of Balance. Euphemisms aside, the Ministry records the annual Imperial taxes and revenues (whose actual collection through most of history is a function of the Emerald Magistrates) and their subsequent distribution. Ministry bureaucrats receive and tally taxes, see to their proper accounting, and ensure that the correct amounts are disbursed to the clans and the rest of the Imperial government in accordance with Imperial edicts. Originally, taxes consisted of goods and foodstuffs — mainly rice — allowing a form of equalization to balance poor harvests in some regions with better ones elsewhere. The koku coin, and more generally the entire concept of coinage, was developed to streamline the process. Within a couple of centuries the Empire's economy was running mainly on coin rather than direct exchange of goods, and the Ministry placed correspondingly more emphasis on the minting and management of money itself.

In the time of Empress Iweko I, with the appointment of an Imperial Treasurer as one of the Emperor's Chosen, the Ministry becomes known as the Imperial Treasury and begins using its own operatives to collect taxes instead of relying on the Emerald Magistrates.

The Ministry of Service

This Ministry is small, as befits its narrow focus on the Empire's human resources. The Ministry of Service conducts the periodic Imperial census and maintains the records collected from it. Occasionally, after a major war, famine, disease, or some other catastrophe has depopulated parts of the Empire, the Ministry has overseen the relocation of farmers, laborers, and artisans to the affected areas.

This Ministry also has other lesser responsibilities, such as maintaining records of marriages and other exchanges of people between the clans, and working with the Ikoma and Otomo historians and the Imperial Archives to maintain a coherent picture of clan and family lineages among the major samurai families. During the Age of Exploration, this Ministry also is in charge of selecting *heimin* for transportation to the Colonies.

Traditionally, the Imperial Chancellor is the political head of this Ministry.

The Ministry of Territories

This sprawling Ministry is responsible for overseeing the lands and holdings of the Empire, conducting and maintaining records of surveys and cartographic works, enumerating real estate holdings, and seeing to the design, development, and maintenance of infrastructure such as roads and bridges. All of the Ministries operate closely with their clan counterparts, but the Ministry of Territories is particularly enmeshed in the affairs of the clans thanks to its complex and ever-changing responsibilities and jurisdictions, as well as due to frequent border adjustments resulting from conflicts or political agreements.

This Ministry, as well as the Ministry of Justice, falls under the political oversight of the Emerald Champion.

The Ministry of Justice

This Ministry is strictly an enabler, providing administrative and bureaucratic support to the Imperial and clan magistrates who maintain law and justice in the Empire. Ministry bureaucrats maintain legal records, act as the functionaries of the courts, and oversee the details of punishments such as fines (which are immediately turned over to the Ministry of Exchange, although sometimes they are sent back to the Ministry of Justice for things like compensation payments to victims), periods of incarceration, and other penalties that do not require the direct and ongoing involvement of magistrates.

Actual training of Imperial magistrates is not performed by this Ministry, but instead falls under the purview of the Ruby Champion.

The Ministry of Martial Levies

Like the Ministry of Justice, this Ministry is largely an enabler, responsible for providing administrative support to the Imperial Legions (and more indirectly, to the clans). Records of troop levies and armaments are maintained by this Ministry, which also arranges matters such as mustering and discharging levies, maintaining supplies, and movement and housing troops throughout the Empire.

For most of history this Ministry also fell under the political oversight of the Emerald Champion. However, after the creation of the position of Shogun during the reign of Toturi III, this Ministry becomes answerable to that individual.

The Imperial Archives

While the libraries of the Ikoma, the Otomo, and the Shosuro focus on keeping historical records of events in the Empire, the Imperial Archives have a much more prosaic task. Simply put, this institution is the repository for the endless multitude of legal documents, proclamations, edicts, missives, and records produced by the entire Imperial Bureaucracy. If the libraries of the Great Clan families are lakes of information, then the Imperial Archives are an ocean, spanning many locations throughout the Empire and filled to the rafters with carefully stored documents, most of which are of little interest to anyone aside from their long-dead authors.

The Archives fall under the jurisdiction of the Imperial Chancellor, though in practice they are largely ignored by everyone but the clerks who maintain them.

The Ministry of Proclamations and Protocols

This not a "ministry" in the same sense as the others, but rather is a small cadre of senior officials responsible for overseeing the entire Imperial Bureaucracy. It also contains its own sub-organizations, such as the Department of Heraldry (responsible for authorizing and maintaining records of all heraldic symbols in the Empire) and the Department of Edicts (responsible for ensuring the effective promulgation of Imperial decrees throughout Rokugan). Finally, there is a Department of Oversight, whose magistrate-like powers are focused on policing the rest of the Imperial Bureaucracy. The existence of this last group is an acknowledgment that even bureaucrats can abuse their positions, whether individually or as part of larger conspiracies such as that of the Gozoku; perhaps unsurprisingly, it is completely dominated by the Otomo.

This Ministry falls under the official jurisdiction of the Imperial Chancellor, but the Emerald Champion also holds considerable sway in its policies and operations.

The Otomo in History

Despite their efforts to remain largely behind the scenes, the Otomo have come to prominence several times during the history of the Empire. During the reign of Hantei X, for example, the Otomo became deeply concerned about the insidious and convoluted spy network which the Scorpion Clan had established throughout the Empire. Fearing the Scorpion might use this network against the Emperor, the Otomo undertook a campaign of rumors and innuendo designed to discredit the Scorpion. The Scorpion responded the Otomo were simply jealous of the reach of their spies. After much political maneuvering, the Otomo prevailed and the Emperor ordered the Scorpion Champion, Bayushi Hajioki, to dismantle his spy network. Hajioki complied, although what was dismantled was actually a sham network built around the ninja myth. (See the Scorpion chapter of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans* for details.) The fact that the Otomo were able to win such a political struggle against the Scorpion amply demonstrated the extent of their power and influence.

In the twelfth century, another notable incident of the Otomo gaining prominence was the tenure of Otomo Suikihime as Governor of the Imperial Colonies in the former Ivory Kingdoms. Suikihime sought to strengthen the Colonies in order to have them better serve the Empire, but her actions were eccentric and she was seen as having overreached her station. An Imperial Legion was dispatched by the Emerald Champion to enforce the authority of Empress Iweko I, but a series of misunderstandings and ill-considered actions by various parties led to a violent conflict which left hundreds of Imperial subjects dead and the principle city of the Colonies, the Second City, partly in ruins. Suikihime was judged to bear the primary responsibility and was stripped of the Otomo family name, the first such discomfiture of a prominent Otomo in recorded history.

Otomo Vassal Families

It should not be surprising that a family as traditional and hidebound as the Otomo is not known for producing vassal families. Indeed, the entire history of the family has produced only one, the **Reju** family. This family is descended from Otomo Reju, a member of the Gozoku conspiracy who used his position within their ranks to promote his own special cause: education. He arranged for the construction of many schools, believing that education was vitally important for raising virtuous samurai. Unfortunately, he also made many enemies by speaking out against the perceived lack of virtue among the Great Clans. Reju eventually turned against the Gozoku, but his foes – who included the Lion, close allies of Empress Yugozuhime – did not forgive him. In order to preserve his positive accomplishments while isolating his negative reputation from the rest of the Otomo family, the Otomo daimyo arranged for Reju and his bloodline to be made a vassal family.

In modern times, the Reju family oversees education and schooling among the Imperial families, and its shameful origins are largely forgotten.

Gaming the Imperial Bureaucracy

Some players may be interested in running characters who are members of the Imperial Bureaucracy, and indeed the L5R supplement *The Book of Earth* includes game mechanics for the notorious Otomo Bureaucrats. GMs interested in trying to use the Bureaucracy as a setting for a game will find this entirely possible — indeed, with imagination and suitable conflict, any setting can be made to work as a gaming experience. However, it should be kept in mind that the Imperial Bureaucracy is an ancient, hidebound institution, practically fossilized by the weight of its own policies and processes. GMs who want to be authentic to the nature of Rokugan should portray it this way, regardless of whether the Bureaucracy forms the backdrop to an entire campaign or is only something the PCs encounter once or twice during the course of play. Dealing with bureaucrats should be frustrating, only successful in small increments, since each bureaucrat is devoted to protecting his particular place and function in the system. The older and longer they have been in the bureaucracy, the more entrenched and inflexible they should be. Thus, playing a bureaucrat may not be the most engaging of experiences, unless the GM allows the PCs to be the proverbial young reformers "bucking the system."

The Miya Family

"Even when there is no Emperor to issue decrees, we will continue to serve the land and its people. It is not merely our duty, but the Will of Heaven." – Miya Shoin

The Miya family is the youngest of the three non-dynastic Imperial families, formed after the passing of the First Hantei. Miya was a loyal follower of Otomo, a young man barely past his gempukku, quick-witted and charming. He became a favorite among those close to the Emperor, and Otomo trusted him enough to act as his personal courier while he stood vigil over the wounded Emperor. As a result, it was Miya who the Emperor commanded to spread the news of the victory over Fu Leng to all those living in the Empire. The young man, amazed the Emperor had chosen him for this task, turned to his many friends for assistance. Samurai from the Great Clans gladly complied, providing Miya with a horse, food, weapons, and protective charms. Five ronin also pledged themselves to Miya's service, determined to protect the young herald as he rode across the still largely wild Empire with the news of Fu Leng's final defeat.

Miya's journey across the Empire revealed to him a weary and desperate people. He soon came to feel that simply informing them of the victory while they struggled and starved amid the ruins of war was hollow and cruel. Miya and his five loyal retainers took it upon themselves to assist the Empire in rebuilding from the First War. Each morning, Miya and his party would arrive early and work tirelessly, usually without explanation, restoring buildings, digging new wells, tilling soil, and helping in every possible way to bring villages back from ruin. Only at midday would he gather the villagers and announce the Empire's great victory. When he and his followers finally left the village, what remained behind was not only joyous news but also a new sense of hope and purpose. Every day, Miya repeated this practice, spreading what became known as the Emperor's Blessing slowly but steadily in his wake. As he progressed he attracted new followers, and by the end of two years Miya led a small army of carpenters, artisans, and farmers devoted to rebuilding the depredations of the war. Finally he arrived back at Otosan Uchi, where he was greeted as a great hero. Sadly, the First Hantei had died in the meantime, and his son Hantei Genji was preparing to assume the Throne.

It was now that Otomo saw opportunity. If the popular Miya returned to his service, it would gain him significant favor...but if Miya founded his own family thanks to Otomo's intervention, he would dramatically increase his own influence and would be forever indebted to Otomo. The wily Otomo went to work, calling in favors and drawing on all of his political skills, and Hantei Genji soon decided to allow Miya to found his own family. On the day of the new Emperor's coronation, the Miya family was formally created.

The Miya have always been the smallest of the Imperial families, and the one with the least direct influence on (and access to) the Throne. However, they are also the most popular, beloved throughout the Empire, so they wield influence of a different sort. Since they carry the edicts and pronouncements of the Emperor to his citizens, the Miya are readily welcomed by all the clans, giving them relatively easy access to places where a Seppun or especially an Otomo might be viewed warily. Moreover, since they are generally viewed as impartial, with no loyalties beyond the Emperor, they are also trusted — even by those who do not trust others easily. This allows the Miya to act as the guileless, dispassionate eyes and ears of the Imperial families, noting and recording events affecting the Empire without bias and reporting them back to the Emperor.

This is not to say the Miya are simple or easily duped, however. They are intimately familiar with the Empire and keen observers of its goings-on. More than a few samurai in positions of power have foolishly attempted to deceive Miya couriers, trying to conceal things they do not want seen or to obfuscate improper activities. Congratulating themselves on their cleverness, they are then horrified to find the Miya have reported exactly what transpired — including the attempts to deceive by the hapless officials in question.

The Imperial Heralds

Foremost among the duties of the Miya are their role as *shisha* – the heralds of the Emperor. It is their task to deliver Imperial edicts and proclamations quickly throughout the Empire. To this end, members of the Miya family put great emphasis on training in athletics, running, horsemanship, stamina, and navigation, as well as communication skills such as writing, oratory, and memorization. It is not uncommon for Miya heralds to travel alone or in small groups, and while they are capable of defending themselves, they are more accustomed to using speed and evasion to ensure their messages are delivered successfully. While traveling the Empire, the Heralds constantly observe the land around them, taking note of anything which could prove to be significant or troublesome, even if it seems unimportant at the time. For example, a Miya courier travelling south along the River of Gold through the Scorpion lands once noticed a particular rock protruding above the water. On her return journey several days later, she noticed much less of the same rock was visible. She immediately reported this fact to the nearest Scorpion Magistrate, urging the evacuations of villages on the nearby floodplains. This proved quite wise, for the river was swelling from intense rains at its source in the Seikitsu Mountains and soon overspilled its banks. Many lives were saved by the astute observation of this simple herald... whose name was never recorded.

It should be noted that one particular office among the Emperor's Chosen, that of the Imperial Herald, is traditionally held by the Miya daimyo. Unlike the typical Miya heralds who carry news and pronouncements from any number of different Imperial personages, the Imperial Herald is specifically tasked with proclaiming the words of the Emperor himself. This is not to say the lesser heralds will not also carry such pronouncements — it would be impractical, after all, to expect a single person to deliver the Emperor's word to the entire Empire — but it is always the Imperial Herald who first announces the Emperor's edicts and who then delegates the promulgation of those edicts to his subordinates. In a way the Imperial Herald is a ceremonial position, but it is one regarded with great respect in the Empire.

The Miya Family Mon

The Miya family mon superficially resembles a complex seven-pointed star, but is actually seven half-moon shapes arranged around two concentric circles with their "horns" pointed outwards. Each half-moon represents one of the seven original Great Clans. The inner of the two circles represents the Emperor, while the outer is the Miya themselves, keeping the whole emblem in balance and serving as an intermediary between the Emperor and the clans.

The Miya family motto is *"There are no Miya heroes."* This reflects the unbiased nature of the family as mediators and peacemakers. They do not seek glory and do not need it to carry out their ancient duties.

Other Duties of the Miya

The Miya are known throughout the Empire as peacemakers. A secondary but still vital part of their duties to the Throne is to negotiate peace whenever martial conflict in the Empire threatens to cause too much harm or damage. The Miya heralds often intervene in inter-clan wars, using their authority and prestige as representatives of the Imperial Throne to force the warring parties to accept mediation of their conflict. Numerous wars have been ended – or averted before they could start – by the intervention of the *shisha*. Their reputation for loyalty to the Emperor and for impartiality in their dealings with others, combined with their high repute throughout the Empire, serves them in good stead in such duties. Similarly, *shisha* often serve as arbitrators and judges in lesser disputes, overseeing matters ranging from simple arguments over borders and property to complex issues of Imperial law or judging sanctioned duels between samurai.

In addition to serving in their own family's role as heralds, the Miya are frequently found in the ranks of the Imperial Legions and the Emerald Magistrates. Their repute and skills serve them well in both such roles. Miya who serve as Emerald Magistrates are especially well known for standing above all clan loyalties, devoting themselves entirely to the greater good of upholding law and peace in the Empire.

The Miya have always had a particular affinity for the Minor Clans, showing them a respect usually lacking from the Great Clans or the other Imperial families. When Minor Clans find it difficult to obtain audiences with key Imperial offices or senior members of the Great Clans, they often enlist the help of the Miya family. Doors which refuse to open to emissaries from the Sparrow or Hare will readily slide aside when those same emissaries are accompanied by a Miya. This is actually a beneficial arrangement for all involved, because the Great Clans and senior Imperials know if a Miya sees fit to attach himself to a particular Minor Clan issue it is probably worth their attention as well.

Miya's Blessing

Miya's original journey through the Empire at the behest of the First Hantei came to be known as the Emperor's Blessing, and it became a tradition which continued into modern times – in the process eventually changing its name to Miya's Blessing in honor of its founder. The Blessing evolved into a formal and organized event, an annual gathering of food, supplies, and craftsmen deployed to those places in the Empire deemed in most need of help. It is always led by a young Miya, selected from among the promising members of the family who have passed their gempukku in the preceding year.

In the early days of the Empire, the Blessing simply wandered Rokugan, performing tasks of rebuilding wherever they might be found. In more modern times, the Blessing became formalized and politicized. Each year three regions of the Empire are chosen to receive the Blessing's aid, and the clans vie with each other to win its attention to their own lands and holdings – or try to deny it to their current rivals. Competition for the Blessing is particularly fierce in the Imperial Winter Court, where it forms a key focus point for political maneuvering. Nonetheless, the deployment of the Blessing ultimately remains solely at the discretion of the Emperor (in consultation with the Miya daimyo), and the Son of Heaven has been known to punish clans who try too hard to politicize the Blessing by withholding it from them in spite of their needs.

Miya Vassal Families

The Miya family has long enjoyed the services of the **Anou** vassal family, descended from a man named Kaiu Anou who was a surpassingly skilled architect. His grand-daughter later created a temple at the behest of the Emperor, and the Son of Heaven was so impressed by her work that he ordered her entire family to swear fealty to the Miya. In this way, the Emperor declared, their skills could benefit the entire Empire via the annual Miya's Blessing. The Anou have been a distinct sub-group within the Miya ever since, contributing to the Blessing each year.

In the twelfth century, the Miya rather unexpectedly acquire a second vassal family due to the questionable activities of a family daimyo named Miya Satoshi. Alienated from his elderly father, Satoshi was fostered to the Lion and grew into a belligerent and militaristic young man who sought to forsake the Miya family's traditional peace-making in favor of war and aggression. Satoshi ultimately was corrupted by the relic called Kenshin's Helm and came to a shameful death, but his son preserved the martial traditions he had started. Satoshi's heir served with distinction for many years and eventually won the right to create a vassal family so that the name Satoshi might be a source of pride to the Miya rather than shame. The Satoshi family is home to the few Miya with a taste for martial exploits, and seeks to maintain the original honorable intentions of its namesake.

THE FOUR GREAT FAMILIES

Chapter Three

The Way of the Ronin

"Strike me," Uesho said, "if you can."

Nari exhaled, setting her feet. She had practiced this many times before, but never against a human target. Uesho stood still, waiting. Not passive – no, it would be a mistake to read his stillness as relaxation. He knew every move she was about to make. Only by executing them to perfection could she succeed... and perhaps not even then.

To delay any longer would be cowardice, not preparation. Nari slid her hand down the hilt of her sword until she felt the pressure of the tsuba against her knuckle.

Then she moved.

Three running steps, blade raised as if to strike the way any fumble-handed swordsman might. Uesho's own sword flashed up to block. But she was already dropping, knee to the ground (how many times had she bruised it, practicing?), sliding and then pivoting to strike at the backs of Uesho's legs.

Which were no longer there.

Nari only realized what he was doing after it was done. Uesho had thrown himself backward, springing over her blade like an acrobat on a street corner. Had she anticipated the move it could never have worked... but she had not, and his momentary vulnerability was over.

She had failed.

Her body refused the verdict of her mind. Nari was moving again, lunging toward Uesho before he could restore his balance. Her blade scraped along his kote, just below the elbow.

A glancing strike at best, and she had failed the test itself. But she had struck him.

Uesho stepped back and bowed gravely. "Congratulations, my daughter."

Nari struggled not to gape. "But – Grass Beneath the Feet. I did not succeed."

"You executed it perfectly," Uesho said. His pleasure shone through the mask of his formal expression. "But I would be a poor teacher if I had no counter for the technique I myself developed. You have passed the test, Nari-chan."

Reflexively, she knelt and bowed. Her father took a cloth-wrapped bundle from behind a boulder and there, on the grass of a remote field, presented her with the katana and wakizashi of her adulthood.

She could not help asking: "Father – why the testing? I have fought at your side a dozen times before now. Real battles, not training. Why..." Her voice trailed off.

Uesho heard what she did not say. "Why bother with this mockery of a gempukku?"

Nari bowed, face burning.

"Yes, compared to the gempukku of the Great Clans, or even the Minor, this is a mockery. There are clan samurai who would challenge me if they saw us today, or would simply cut me down where I stood. There is a reason we came to this remote village to do this. But I will tell you, daughter, the same thing my father told me, when I asked him the same question on the day of my own gempukku.

"You are samurai. Never forget that. Though you have no clan name, no dojo beyond what little I can teach, you are samurai. Carry the memory of this day with you: the day you were tested, and proved your worth."

Wave-Men Through Rokugan's History

"Who am I? I am anyone. I am everyone. I am Rokugan."
– Genmyo, Ronin Actor

Despite their underprivileged and downtrodden existence (or perhaps because of it), more than once a single ronin or a small band of wave-men have made an indelible mark in the history of Rokugan. Underestimated and despised, ronin are normally all but ignored by the rest of the Empire, and when one of them becomes the hero of the day it is usually a surprise to all involved. Sometimes, the event is so momentous that the clans even allow their histories to record it for posterity.

The sad reality for most ronin is that clan samurai and peasants alike form their opinions about wave-men long before actually meeting one (if they ever meet one at all). While this can be an advantage in certain circumstances, usually it is not. Since ronin in general tend to be judged by the most recent example known to the populace, in most eras the typical Rokugani is far more likely to think of ronin as criminals or bandits than anything else. And even when Rokugan embraces a more positive attitude (such as due to the heroic deeds of notable ronin recounted later in this chapter), individual provinces or villages may base their attitudes on some terrorizing criminal or wandering killer who remains largely unknown to those outside the area.

Few Rokugani bother to make a serious study of the different types of ronin or to learn the differences between their various groups (known as *otokodate*). This is partly because few Rokugani care enough to bother, and partly because ronin as a group are actually extremely diverse. Ironically, it is the very diversity that leads others to judge them based merely on the latest noteworthy ronin... treating all others as though they are the same.

Moreover, even in times and locations where the population might be somewhat favorably disposed toward masterless samurai, the default attitude remains one of distrust and general wariness. Ronin are seen as dangerous because they have no loyalty, no devotion to a lord to guide their path, so they have little to lose by committing dishonorable or criminal acts. The typical Rokugani view is that such people will do almost anything, acting out of greed or desperation, seizing whatever they can get and hoping to evade the consequences.

Despite such obstacles, over the course of the Empire's history several ronin have left enduring examples for others to follow – and in some cases, enduring legacies of shame for others to revile. While the following section is certainly not an exhaustive list of such ronin, it comprises most of the best-known examples.

Sun Tao

The celebrated general and military philosopher Sun Tao is something of an enigma to the Empire, a mystery man whose origin, nature, and ultimate fate all remain unknown. He had a significant impact on how the Empire viewed ronin, especially since he was the first wave-man to earn respect from both the Great Clans and the Emperor.

Accounts differ as to when Sun Tao lived, but all agree he undertook a lengthy odyssey across the Empire, studying war under each of the Great Clans in turn. (A full account of Sun Tao's life may be found in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire,*

page 230.) He gained an impressive reputation over the years, and amassed followers at a rate that some clans found alarming. There were even cases of clan samurai requesting to take a *musha shugyo* to travel with Sun Tao, or renouncing their oaths to their lords in order to do so. This sort of thing earned Sun Tao a great many detractors, although the general always acquitted himself with honor and wisdom at every turn and won many allies and admirers. By the time he left the Empire, he was widely perceived as a paragon of learning and a master of both the philosophical and practical aspects of the art of war. His ronin followers stayed behind, led by his chief deputy Terumoto, and eventually formed a band calling itself the Disciples of Sun Tao (see the next section, "Ronin Factions," for details on the Disciples).

The impression Sun Tao created – of an honorable soul and a deep intellect – had a significant impact on public perception of ronin. Sadly, less honorable ronin soon found ways to exploit this surge of goodwill, effectively reversing the trend. While many ronin did comport themselves honorably (or at least stayed out of the public eye), more than one would-be bandit lord passed himself off as a wise and noble disciple of Sun Tao. Such men would enter a region and demand compensation from the peasants (and in some instances even the local daimyo) for their martial "expertise" and protection. They would waste the time of their hosts with worthless military advice while exploiting the peasants and subverting the loyalty of local ronin and even clan samurai. The backlash from these frauds was swift and terrible, and within a generation after Sun Tao's departure a handful of opportunistic wave men had managed to paint all of their kind as thieves and liars.

Tsunetomo's Watch

The man known as Tsunetomo led the first major *otokodate* (ronin band) that presented a threat to a Great Clan, and thus his name is remembered and invoked by those who insist no ronin is trustworthy. Tsunetomo was born to ronin parents in the fourth century; his parents were both relatively well-known and well-liked among other ronin, and Tsunetomo spent his early years learning and traveling with them. He picked up a great deal of philosophy and lore, but tragically he was orphaned in his teens when his parents died to a minor plague.

Living on his own, the young Tsunetomo grew in both stature and experience, and came to despise his treatment at the hands of the Great Clan samurai, cultivating an unwavering hatred of both the clans and the Empire's social order as a whole. By nothing more than accident of birth, he claimed, these men and women laid claim to great wealth and comfort. And though they insisted the Celestial Order made them superior because of this birth, he constantly saw examples of how these samurai neglected and abused this supposed divine favor.

Tsunetomo's intelligent but blunt nature earned him a following among other wave-men. This was a small group at first, but grew as Tsunetomo learned how to organize them for greater efficiency and benefit to all. Eventually, he and his small army settled into "unclaimed" lands formerly belonging to the Ki-Rin clan and occupied by the Lion. There they protected and worked with the peasants of the area – peasants who had been all but forgotten by the Lion Clan. After several years, the Lion finally realized the taxes and tributes from these remote provinces were much lower than they should have been. When the Lion learned most of the income was instead going to support a ronin band, they acted swiftly... but perhaps rashly. The first army the Lion sent to crush the "bandit gang" was a small one, and it wound up being soundly defeated – by

Ronin in the Early Empire

In the early generations after the Empire's founding, the concept of ronin did not really exist yet. There were still many tribes and warriors who had not fully integrated into the rule of the Kami, including some who simply had not yet been discovered and brought under Imperial rule, as well as many individual warriors who were still looking for a chance to swear fealty to one emerging noble house or another. Such men were not especially remarkable in this era and were not yet considered outcasts from the Empire's social structure, which was itself still coming together into a coherent whole. Moreover, while banditry was a widespread problem, most bandits were not "ronin" in any real sense – they were simply wandering strongmen or the remnants of tribes which had not submitted to the Kami.

It was not until the second century, well into the reign of Hentei Genji, that the social order of the Empire solidified enough for the term "ronin" to emerge as a description of warriors who did not have a lord. Even then, they were still a rare phenomenon, and Rokugan did not yet quite understand what they were or how they should be treated. Indeed, this early uncertainty has never altogether vanished; even in modern times, when they number in the tens of thousands, ronin are not truly a recognized part of the Empire.

The Sun "Family"

Sun Tao's origins are obscure, but it is generally known that he claimed a family name – Sun – by no later than when he presented his writings to the Emperor. This family name was not held by any other samurai in Rokugan at the time, and of course the personal name "Tao" which he claimed is not one which other samurai would readily adopt lest they be seen as insulting the teachings of Shinsei. It is widely speculated that "Sun Tao" is simply a pseudonym which this ronin claimed for himself, asserting a name without higher authorization – not an uncommon event in the early centuries of the Empire's history, when the social order was not quite as rigid and tightly defined as it became later.

The most common theory among Rokugani scholars is the famous general created the name for himself, and by the time anyone realized it was not actually formally granted by a Kami or the Emperor it was already recorded on texts all over the Empire. Either as an acknowledgement of the man's greatness or simply to avoid the headache of correcting so many records – or perhaps some combination of both – the Hantei Emperor and the Imperial Histories treated the name as if it had always been legitimate.

After Sun Tao departed to the gaijin lands, his name disappeared from the Empire for centuries. Occasionally, various ronin would claim to be descendents of the illustrious martial scholar, only to be proven wrong eventually. The ronin band calling itself the Disciples of Sun Tao never laid claim to his family name, despite being founded by many of his most devoted followers.

In the twelfth century a man calling himself Sun Doru traveled from the Burning Sands to Rokugan, claiming to be the original general's descendant. Though many were skeptical, he convinced the Scorpion and several others that he was in fact genuine, and the Scorpion even offered him fealty. Sun Doru refused to speak about the specifics of his ancestor's fate, but shared Sun Tao's ancient writings with his hosts. Apparently he intended to travel to each Great Clan in turn, much as his ancestor had done, to learn from their current martial philosophies and training as well as share with them his ancestor's writings from long before.

The ultimate outcome of Sun Doru's quest has thus far been left undefined in the official L5R storyline, allowing GMs free rein to play it out as they see fit. Perhaps he could create his own noble house, or join the Scorpion or another clan as the founder of a vassal family... or even, given the fame of his ancestry, a full-fledged new family.

that time, Tsunetomo's own army was the size of a full legion of troops. True to form, however, the Lion Clan did not repeat its mistake and sent a far more serious force to resolve the matter. Tsunetomo knew the end had come and commanded the majority of his men to flee while he took the rest to a suicidal delaying action.

The official histories record only that Tsunetomo's army was crushed, and the Lion and the other Great Clans learned to be ever-vigilant toward the growing ronin population. These wave-men, after all, had managed to practically usurp a province from the Lion right under their noses, and canny samurai learned to avoid underestimating the threat such ronin bands could pose.

The official histories did not record that many of Tsunetomo's men – now calling themselves Tsunetomo's Watch, or just The Watch – remained in the area to protect the peasants they had befriended. The Watch operated in secret and in small groups to avoid the notice of the Lion, and often fought against other ronin and bandit gangs who found the lightly-defended area suitable hunting grounds. However, this is not to suggest the members of The Watch were noble and altruistic men; rather, they had grown accustomed to a steady supply of food and koku from the peasants in the area, and their relationship with those peasants was equal parts protection and (mild) extortion.

Members of The Watch formed their own bloodlines, and those who thought to betray the *otokodate* were turned over to the clans as bandits and thieves in order to keep the band and its loyal members safely anonymous. In fact, this ronin band would continue to operate in the region until the Unicorn returned and reclaimed the lands. At that time the remaining members scattered to various sections of the northern Empire, effectively ceasing to be a single group, although the different sub-bands retained a sense of brotherhood and identity.

The rise of the Spider Clan in the late twelfth century proved the *otokodate's* final undoing. Many of the ronin believed the Spider cover story of being a force for the protection of the downtrodden and swore fealty to the Spider Clan, not knowing what they were truly agreeing to until it was much too late. Although individual ronin claiming descent from Tsunetomo's army still existed, The Watch as an organization came to an end.

The Kaeru Family and the City of the Rich Frog

The City of the Rich Frog (Toshi sano Kanemochi Kaeru, also known more colloquially as "Kaeru Toshi") is a city and trade hub located on the border between Lion and Unicorn territories. During the eight centuries the Unicorn were gone from Rokugan, it was a Lion holding, but after the Clan of Shinjo returned and reclaimed their provinces the city effectively became an unaligned buffer between the two clans' lands. The source of the city's peculiar name is a matter of some dispute, with some legends asserting it was founded by a mischievous frog-spirit from Chikushudo.

Although the Lion technically ruled the city for much of its history, its location on the outer edge of their core territories caused them to pay it relatively little attention, and the place was usually protected by an Imperial magistrate rather than a Lion garrison. This made the city a popular home for ronin, and the resident magistrate came to rely on wave-men to help him enforce the law and maintain order. This eventually gave rise to an *otokodate* called the Machi-Kanshisha (described on page 202 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*) which supported the magistrate and helped keep peace within the city. The Machi-Kanshisha were led by a secretive group of blood-related ronin calling themselves the "Kaeru" (the word for "frog") and at some point in history – no one knows exactly when – this self-titled family became the effective rulers of the city which bore their name. This unofficial position became far more meaningful after the return of the Unicorn, when the Lion withdrew from Kaeru Toshi and the city became unaligned and thus independent.

In the year 1090, the resident Imperial magistrate died and before his replacement could arrive a local bandit leader attempted to storm and loot the city. When the bandits reached the city gates, they found a single unarmored ronin standing in their path. He challenged them to defeat him in single combat, with control of the city as the winner's prize. The bandit warlord initially was amused and accepted the challenge, but after the ronin defeated over two dozen bandits, he changed his mind and ordered his men to simply kill the duelist. Although the ronin was quickly overwhelmed and slain, his sacrifice won time for Unicorn forces to arrive from the west and wipe out the remaining bandits.

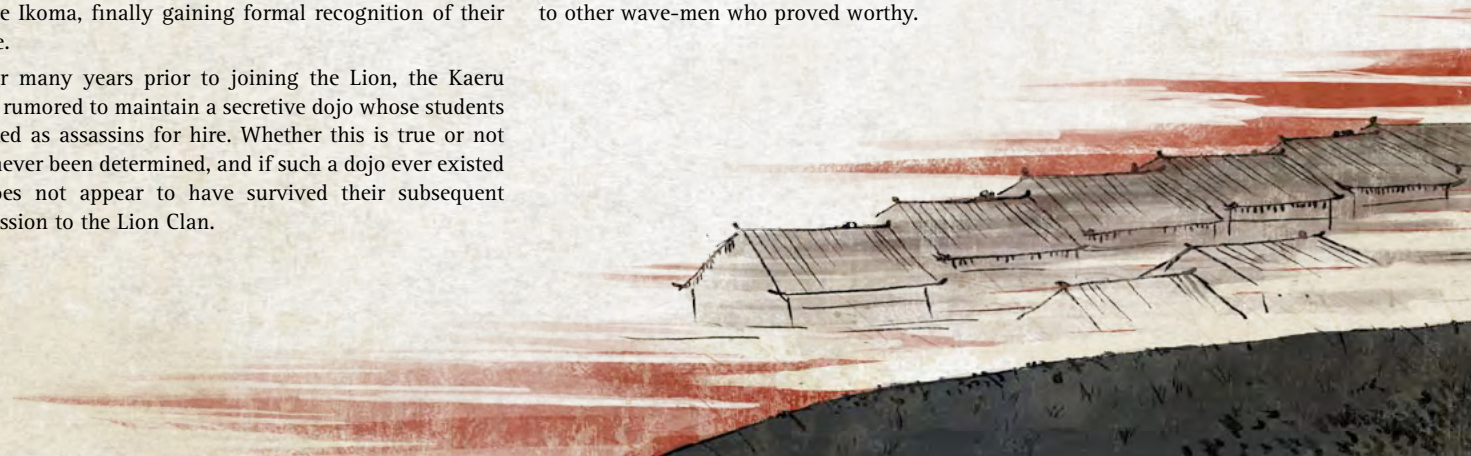
Although the Kaeru and their Machi-Kanshisha warriors continued to govern and protect the city all the way into the mid-twelfth century, their "family name" was not officially recognized by the Emperor or by any clan. This finally changed during a series of conflicts between the Lion and Unicorn over the city and its surrounding territory. When the Lion Clan took control of the city, the Kaeru offered to swear fealty to the Lion in return for becoming the city's formal administrators. The Lion accepted the offer, and the Kaeru became a vassal family of the Ikoma, finally gaining formal recognition of their name.

For many years prior to joining the Lion, the Kaeru were rumored to maintain a secretive dojo whose students worked as assassins for hire. Whether this is true or not has never been determined, and if such a dojo ever existed it does not appear to have survived their subsequent admission to the Lion Clan.

The Yotsu Family

The story of the Yotsu ronin family originates with a warrior who called himself Yotsu and who lived in a hut in the Mountains of Regret. He claimed his grandfather was an *ise zumi* who left the Dragon lands to marry the woman he loved. Whether this is true or not, Yotsu himself was happily married and had eight children: three daughters (Ureiko and the twins Seou and Seiki) and five sons (Shoku, Sumei, Utai, Ukeru, and Kyoden). Unfortunately, Yotsu's wife was eventually killed by an earthquake which destroyed the hut where they lived, and the family later relocated to the outskirts of Otosan Uchi, the Imperial City.

Yotsu might have lived a life of obscurity had he not stumbled by chance across a moment of great significance: a Bloodspeaker conspiracy to kidnap the Emperor's wife and son. According to the tale, Yotsu was able to rescue the Hantei heir by sacrificing his own son Kyoden to take the boy's place. The Emperor was so impressed by this act of selfless loyalty that he awarded the ronin a new name: Yotsu Yatoshin, the new personal name taken from the Emperor's own father. As if this were not sufficient honor, the ronin was also granted a small fiefdom in the Mountains of Regret and rule over one of the outer districts of the Imperial city. Yatoshin and his family formed their own *otokodate*, the Sword of Yotsu (see page 203 of *Enemies of the Empire*), and began granting fealty to other wave-men who proved worthy.



In the year 1118, Yatoshin died of old age. On his deathbed, he spoke to his children of a statement passed down from his grandfather, who supposedly heard it from Togashi himself: "When a man falls he also rises. Remember this, and when ten thousand men have fallen to your name, you will join the stars in the Celestial Heavens and your place will be among the Fortunes." Yotsu's eldest daughter Ureiko believed this meant ten thousand men must fall on their knees before the Yotsu, while his oldest son Shoku believed it meant ten thousand foes would have to perish at Yotsu hands. Either way, though, the family was convinced their line would someday give rise to a new Fortune.

The Yotsu continued to govern their district within the Imperial City and participated in many of the great events of the early twelfth century – with the result that many of Yatoshin's children died in battle. By the time of the fall of Otosan Uchi during the Four Winds era (the year 1166), Yotsu Seou was the only surviving heir of Yatoshin. After the destruction of the city, Seou chose to have her family remain in the ruined (and in some places Tainted) city to defend those who were unable or unwilling to leave their homes. The family continued to actively recruit other ronin into the Sword of Yotsu, enlisting them into a tradition of honorable service and the protection of the weak.

The Yotsu as Seppun Vassals

In the year 1168, an aging Yotsu Seou attended the Imperial Winter Court in Kyuden Otomo, where she formed a personal friendship with Seppun Kiharu, the daimyo of the Seppun family. This led to the Yotsu being accepted as sworn vassals of the Seppun, although they did not actually become a "vassal family" in the conventional sense. They kept their own name, remained for the most part independent of the rest of the Seppun family, and continued to carry out their traditional duty of protecting the ruins of Otosan Uchi and the people who lived in and around that place. However, direct Imperial sponsorship did afford them a level of protection they had never enjoyed before, as well as access to resources and aid whenever they needed them.

Nanashi Mura

The town known as Nanashi Mura – literally, Anonymous Village – was founded during the reign of Emperor Hantei XXXVII as a result of the activities of a former Unicorn samurai. Shinjo Fuyari was made ronin after he launched unauthorized attacks on the Crab and Dragon territories, and in retaliation he gathered a sizable army of wave-men to mount a vengeful strike against his former clan. However, just as he began his march on the Unicorn lands he encountered a strange hooded figure calling himself Nanashi. After a private conversation between the two men, Fuyari abruptly abandoned his vengeance and led his followers to the southern edge of Dragon lands, where they founded a village. The Dragon Clan Champion, Togashi Yokuni, issued a decree that the ronin would be allowed to live there so long as they did not construct any walls or other defenses.

Nanashi Mura soon became one of the most populous ronin settlements in the Empire, a magnet for wave-men from all across Rokugan. Any ronin who arrived at Nanashi Mura were allowed to live there and asked no questions about their past so long as they caused no trouble. The Dragon kept an eye on the city and assigned a magistrate to enforce the law, but otherwise left it untouched so long as the inhabitants followed Togashi's decree. The village's long-term inhabitants formed an *otokodate* called the Eyes of Nanashi (see page 200 of *Enemies of the Empire*), dedicated to protecting the place and assisting the Dragon magistrate in maintaining order. They also sometimes hired themselves out as mercenaries to earn funds for the village, but they refused to take any contract which might involve combat with the Dragon Clan. (In later years, they also extended this consideration to the Lion Clan in light of their relationship with Toturi, the former Lion Clan Champion.) Over time they also became known for developing a group of emissaries called the Masters of Games to conduct diplomacy with their clan neighbors.

At various times many famous ronin have stayed at Nanashi Mura. During the early stages of the Clan Wars, Toturi's Army set up camp near the village; the Eyes of Nanashi initially viewed him with suspicion, even going so far as to consider assassinating him, but ultimately they were won over by his honor and dedication. Many members of the village swore fealty to Toturi and joined his army – including Takuan, the leader of the Eyes at that time. Later, both the Wolf Legion and the Legion of Two Thousand maintained a presence in Nanashi Mura as well.

Toturi's Army

The story of Toturi is known to nearly every man and woman in Rokugan after the events of the Clan Wars. Born Akodo Toturi, he became Champion of the Lion Clan when his brother Arasou died in battle against the Crane. He was disgraced during the Scorpion Clan Coup and reduced to a despised ronin, only to rally a great army of wave-men, become a hero of the Clan Wars, and finally emerge as the Lion Clan Thunder and Toturi the First, the Splendid Emperor. A full account of the Clan Wars era can be found in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories*, Chapter Six; this section deals specifically with the history of Toturi's Army during that time.

After Akodo Toturi was stripped of his name and made ronin by the new Emperor, he wandered the Empire alone, trying to adjust to his new life as nothing more than a homeless vagabond. His story might have ended there, save for a chance meeting with the young man known as Toku. The two samurai shared similar ideals about Bushido and the role of a samurai in Rokugan. They formed a strong personal friendship and decided to gather other ronin together to fight for the Empire. The initial group which assembled under Toturi's leadership was quite small, known popularly as the Twelve Ronin, but soon won admiration for its battles against bandit gangs and goblin incursions. As the ronin band's fame grew, so did its numbers, attracting powerful individuals such as Naka Kuro, the Grandmaster of the Elements, as well as a number of idealistic clan samurai. By this time the Clan Wars were underway and Togashi Yokuni, the Dragon Clan Champion, extended his support to Toturi's ronin force, recruiting it to help fight the many threats looming over the Empire. Later he would also give Toturi the direct command of a large Dragon army, and Toturi's joint ronin/Dragon force twice clashed with the corrupted Crab armies at Beiden Pass; Toturi's smaller force emerged victorious each time. As the Clan Wars grew worse, Unicorn troops also aligned themselves with Toturi against the Shadowlands threat, and even the ancient Naga race joined forces with the ronin against their mutual enemies. Where once Toturi had been alone, now he found himself commanding the most diverse and varied army in the Empire. But despite all this growth, the core of Toturi's Army was always the hand-picked group of ronin who had followed him from the beginning: the Twelve Ronin.

After the victories at Beiden Pass, Toturi found himself and his army swept up in many other conflicts of the Clan Wars, fighting to help his old friend Doji Hoturi in the Crane lands and battling Lion forces under the infamous "butcher" Matsu Gohei. By the start of the year 1128, Toturi's Army seemed to be on the brink of destruction. Despite victories against the Crab and Lion, the army was desperately low on supplies and many ronin had fled the ranks for easier and safer work. Nonetheless, Toturi and his most loyal followers fought on, surviving many more battles and frequently prevailing against superior opponents. Ultimately, they joined with the Great Clans to fight the forces of Fu Leng on the Second Day of Thunder, and their service on that day marked them as one of the greatest fighting forces ever assembled in Rokugan.

Who Was Nanashi?

The identity of the strange hooded figure who persuaded Fuyari to abandon his violent path has never been revealed. However, some years later another mysterious hooded man began to appear all over Rokugan, bringing aid and wise counsel wherever he was needed. Eventually, this Hooded Ronin (as he was popularly called) was revealed to be the reincarnation of Shinsei himself, and led the heroes of the Great Clans to battle Fu Leng at the Second Day of Thunder.

Was Nanashi actually the Hooded Ronin? No official history has ever said so, but the resemblances are certainly compelling. On the other hand, the Kami Togashi was also known for occasionally making mysterious interventions in the rest of the Empire, sometimes in disguise, and it is certainly a remarkable coincidence that he issued a decree supporting the creation of Nanashi Mura so quickly after Fuyari and his followers arrived there.

Ultimately, individual GMs should decide for themselves who Nanashi really was in their campaigns.

Ronin in the Reign of Toturi I

After Toturi ascended to the Throne and became Emperor Toturi I, his life and career continued to impact the treatment and perception of ronin for generations. His powerful *otokodate* had helped save and reunite the Empire, and once he became the Emperor he did not wish to turn his back on his former followers. These men and women had been his brothers and sisters in arms and had proven their worth many times over. His solution was the sort of thing he was known for: eschewing the normal alternatives to create an unexpected victory.

The Imperial Legions had been severely weakened by the Clan Wars and the corruption the last Hantei; many of the individual Legions had been destroyed outright, and most of the rest were unfit for duty. Over the course of several months, Toturi re-organized the Legions and appointed many of the former members of Toturi's Army to be Legionnaires. Indeed, by the time he was done six of the ten Legions had ronin commanders. Moreover, Toturi also named his ronin lieutenant Takuan as Imperial Chancellor, and other wave-men found themselves receiving Imperial appointments in all levels of the Imperial bureaucracy. It became almost commonplace for a time for an obvious ronin to carry the badge of an Emerald Magistrate or other Imperial agent. While these wave-men were no longer "ronin" in the literal sense, since they now served a master and had sworn allegiance, for the most part they were still ronin in their demeanor and their thinking.

The ramifications for the rest of the Empire were significant, although the Emperor attempted to make the transition as smooth as possible. While many ronin had to adjust to comporting themselves appropriately for their new stations, samurai of the Great Clans also had to adjust to the notion that the rough-looking and somewhat impolite ronin in front of them might actually be an Imperial magistrate or Legionnaire. Inevitably, this change led to a generally higher opinion and better treatment toward ronin, whether out of fear of accidentally insulting an Imperial official or simply because Toturi's actions had led to ronin being associated with bravery, heroism, and honor.

Not every ronin from Toturi's Army served in the Imperial forces. Some of them swore fealty to the new Monkey Clan, founded by Toturi's most loyal and heroic ronin follower, Toku. Some of them remained wave-men, forming a number of new *otokodate* – most notably the Legion of Two Thousand, which received official Imperial sanction from Toturi himself, and the Legion of the Wolf, which contained many of the more old-fashioned among Toturi's original followers and sought to uphold his legacy of protecting the common folk.

The influence of Toturi's followers within the Imperial government itself soon went into decline. Many of them died during the War Against the Darkness, including Takuan. By the time the Empire prevailed against the Shadow in the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, the thousands of ronin who had enlisted in the Legions and elsewhere within the Imperial government had been reduced to a few hundred. A very few of these former ronin would eventually take the Toturi name, although they did not pass it on to their descendents. A greater number were eventually released from their service by the Emperor, for Toturi felt great pity for those who had served him so loyally and endured such suffering and misery as a result. In all cases, though, these survivors commanded great respect from those who knew their history.

Toturi's era was a splendid time for honest wave-men everywhere in the Empire, since the deeds of his army taught all samurai a greater appreciation for the nobility and honor which even a ronin could possess. Of course, this repute was also inevitably exploited by less scrupulous ronin, much as Sun Tao's name had been exploited centuries earlier. It became sadly not uncommon for bandit thugs to present themselves in outlying villages as agents of the Emperor, demanding higher taxes or tribute. Forged badges of office and fake travel papers became more widely used by ronin to bluff their way past officials who in former times would have been more suspicious. Although the real members of Toturi's Army always sought to root out and punish such deceivers, they could never catch all of them.

Nonetheless, despite such negative counter-influences, the age of Toturi saw a general improvement in the Empire's attitude toward ronin. Even after the ascension of the Iweko Dynasty, Rokugan as a whole would still treat ronin with more respect than it did before Toturi's reign.

Tamago and the Legion of Two Thousand

The peculiar history of the ronin called Tamago is linked to the mysterious artifact known as the Egg of Pan'Ku, an item with the power to create twisted duplicates of living persons. During the reign of Emperor Toturi III, the Egg came into the possession of the Kitsu daimyo, Kitsu Juri, who recognized it from his family's records. He explained its duplicative powers to the Lion Clan Champion, Matsu Nimuro, who decided to use it to create a copy of himself. Unfortunately, the experience of being copied left Nimuro dazed and bewildered; the newly made False Nimuro seized the opportunity, identifying himself as the real Nimuro and labeling his counterpart "Tamago" (literally, "egg"). He declared the duplicate could not be trusted and ordered "Tamago" imprisoned in the Kitsu Tombs, a command which Juri dutifully carried out.

For the next year and more the Lion Clan was ruled by the False Nimuro, who finally perished in battle during the war over the City of the Rich Frog. The real Nimuro remained imprisoned in the Kitsu Tombs; when he learned his duplicate had died, he made one last attempt to convince Kitsu Juri to set him free. It failed, and in desperation Tamago strangled Juri to death and fled the Tombs. Knowing that revealing the truth about himself could shatter the Lion Clan, he decided to become "Tamago" in truth, a simple ronin wandering the Empire.

As a ronin, Tamago was both a skilled warrior and an honorable man, although not without a certain heritage of ruthlessness from his Lion upbringing. During his wanderings through the Lion lands he met a plain-faced but compassionate ronin woman named Utagawa who had become embittered over the suffering of the common people during the recent Lion-Unicorn war. Nimuro convinced her to abandon her plans for revolt in order to spare the peasants from the Lion Clan's wrath. The two traveled together after that, and Utagawa became Tamago's student, his lover, and eventually his wife and the mother of his children.

Ultimately, Tamago and Utagawa joined the Legion of Two Thousand, one of the ronin forces created from the old Toturi's Army. He became one of the Legion's key members and eventually rose to command it, employing his old skills as Lion Clan Champion to powerful effect. Although he never sought to return to his old position at the head of the Lion Clan, during the Celestial Tournament in the year 1170 he was recognized by the then-current Lion Champion, Akodo Shigetoshi. When Shigetoshi spoke with him, Tamago replied: "You have made a mistake, my lord. I am a simple wave man, nothing more. I will never be anything else. Never."

After a moment, Shigetoshi understood, and replied: "Of course. I must have been mistaken."

Notable Ronin Factions

Ronin are exceptions to the Celestial Order, almost impossible to generalize, since each one is different from the next. It is odd to think of such individuals forming cohesive groups and organizations, but in fact most wave-men come to realize that a wolf cannot survive on its own indefinitely, and many of them do try to join together into larger groups, either out of self-preservation or due to pursuing some higher goal. Most of these ronin bands are short-lived, failing to survive even a generation, since they are created from specific circumstances in specific times. However, there are exceptions to this rule.

The most common form of ronin band is a criminal one: the *juzimai* bandit groups, which are a constant threat to the Empire's security. However, more honorable or more dedicated ronin may also form groups, and these ronin brotherhoods are known as *otokodate* (literally, "manly fellows"). These groups may gather around a single charismatic

Ronin Mon

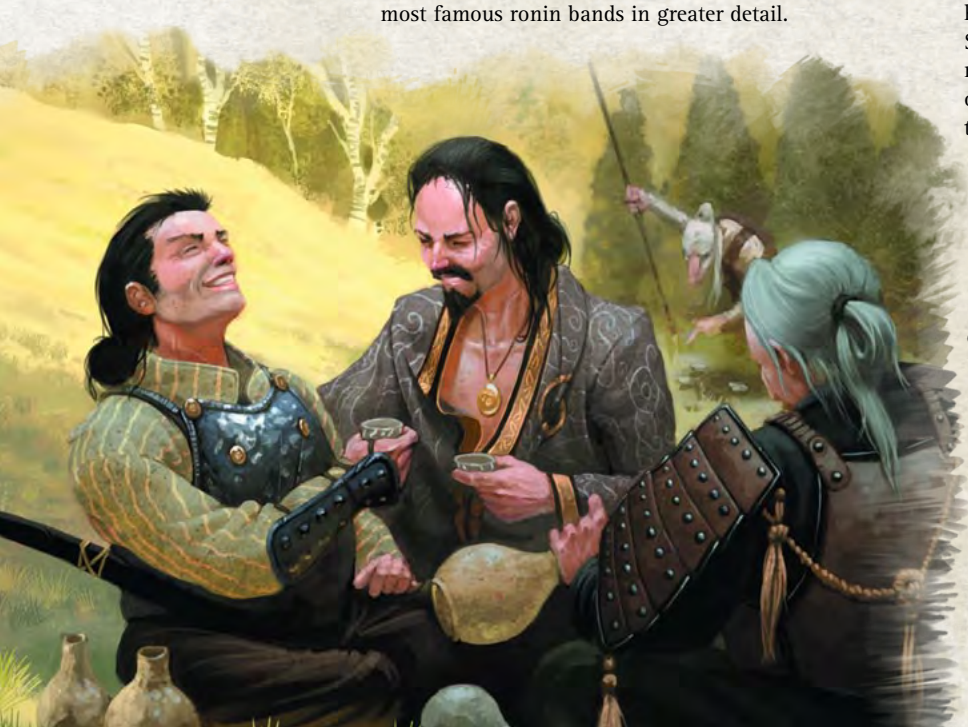
Any ronin may choose to create a mon to represent himself, and *otokodate* routinely do so in order to enhance their recognition and sense of identity. Indeed, the wolf-shaped mon of Toturi's Army (later inherited by the Wolf Legion) was one of the most recognizable and famous symbols of the Clan Wars.

Very rarely, a ronin's deeds may lead to his mon being granted official recognition by the Imperial house. Such a privilege is not quite as rare as a ronin being granted a family name, but it is still extremely exceptional, and such mon are treasured and carefully preserved by the families who win them.

leader, such as Toturi's Army in the twelfth century or the People's Army during the Great Famine, or they may be drawn together by a shared ideology or ideal, such as the Disciples of Sun Tao.

Whenever ronin gather together, it is a cause for concern for the rest of the Empire. After all, the majority of such groups are bandit gangs. Regardless, the existence of large ronin organizations is almost always perceived as a threat by the Great Clans. Indeed, the very concept of ronin banding together and finding their own way without a daimyo compounds their sins against the Celestial Order in the eyes of many clan samurai. Even after the great deeds of Toturi's Army in the twelfth century, most Great Clan samurai regarded *otokodate* with far more suspicion than admiration.

There have been many hundreds of ronin *otokodate* over the course of Rokugan's twelve centuries of history, most of which never impacted the greater Empire at all. Brief descriptions of many notable *otokodate* can be found in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire,* Chapter Ten. The following sections describe several of the most famous ronin bands in greater detail.



The Thousand

One of the more successful ronin bands in the Empire's history, the Thousand existed for over four hundred years. They were formed during the First Yasuki War under the banner of a ronin named Tamedaore. A skilled fighter whose lord was slain in the war, Tamedaore had a knack for both military organization and mercantile commerce, which allowed him to forge a ronin band far larger, better supplied, and better organized than had been previously seen in Rokugan. By the year 400, fully a thousand men marched beneath his banner, and the band lasted long enough for that to become its name. During the latter years of the Yasuki War, the Thousand fought mainly for the Crane Clan, which was happy to pay wave-men to fight the brutal soldiers of the Crab.

While the Thousand earned a strong repute during the war, the subsequent peace took a toll on their numbers. Although the band remained together and continued to hire itself out whenever an opportunity was available, its numbers gradually diminished over the centuries that followed. By the end of the eighth century the band was at a low ebb and had taken up farming in the remote villages of the northern Empire in order to survive. The last remnants of the Thousand were wiped out by the returning Unicorn Clan in the year 816.

The Disciples of Sun Tao

Sun Tao was perhaps the greatest mortal general in the Empire's history, and his legendary treatise the Book of Sun Tao is studied across the entire Empire. Its one hundred forty-five sections rival Akodo's Leadership as the philosophical underpinnings of Rokugani warfare.

During his wanderings, Sun Tao amassed a considerable number of ronin followers. Terumoto, Sun Tao's second in command, was his most ardent student. He was also a learned man in his own right, skilled in the ways of the Empire's law and bureaucracy, and on more than one occasion he convinced hostile clan magistrates that the band of ronin behind him was not a threat. Terumoto and his fellow ronin came to call themselves the Disciples of Sun Tao, and when their master departed the Empire they remained behind as one of the most well-organized bands of ronin in Rokugan. It was not unusual for the Disciples to be contracted for service by clan armies or even by the Imperial Legions, and many individual Disciples found service as advisors to daimyo or generals. None understand the Book of Sun Tao as well as the Disciples do, and an army led by one of them has rarely been beaten.

The Disciples have remained an active organization ever since their leader's departure, enduring long past the death of his lieutenant Terumoto. The reason for this is simple: the Book of Sun Tao holds them together. In fact, the Disciples privately claim to have the only complete copy of the book, passed down from Terumoto to his own disciple, Aikumo, and thence through the centuries from one generation to another. Of course, they do not openly boast of this, since it could have been seen as

treason to the Hantei Dynasty to keep such a work secret. (For that matter, the Scorpion Clan – which was also entrusted with one of the original copies of Sun Tao's journal – would not abide the knowledge that a more complete copy was in the hands of mere ronin.) Only a select few within the ronin band know of the journal's existence, and only the leader of the Disciples is allowed to read it. Some among the Disciples claim their copy of the journal contains terrible secrets which would destroy the Emerald Empire, while others claim it records tactics which bear no similarity to any in Rokugani warfare. Only their leader knows the truth.

The Wolf Legion

After Toturi became the Emperor of Rokugan, many of his followers joined the Imperial Legions, others joined the new Monkey Clan founded by his loyal comrade Toku, and still others joined the Legion of Two Thousand. However, some of Toturi's followers chose to remain outside all of these new groups and to continue their legacy as an independent force of wave-men, albeit often serving alongside the Imperial Legions. These samurai called themselves the Legion of the Wolf, and their commander was a man named Saigorei, a former Akodo who had become a ronin when the family was disbanded in the wake of the Scorpion Clan Coup.

The Wolf Legion fought for the Empire throughout the War Against the Darkness, the War of Spirits, and the Four Winds era. During that latter period they were based primarily in the Dragon lands, at a fortress called Wolf Keep near the trade city of Heibeisu. They also maintained a presence in Nanashi Mura, assisting the Eyes of Nanashi in upholding law and order within the ronin village. By then, Saigorei was an old man, and the destruction of Otosan Uchi in the Four Winds era left him feeling as though his long service to the Empire had been in vain. Ultimately he passed the command of the Legion to a Dragon, a warrior named Mirumoto Shokan, who won over the Legion by embodying many of the same virtues as Toturi himself.

The Wolf Legion's honorable career came to an end in the year 1170 when it joined the larger ronin group called the Legion of Two Thousand (see below). However, it retained its own identity as a separate sub-unit within the larger force.

The Legion of Two Thousand

"Let it be known that the Legion of Two Thousand, for their valor and service during the time of the Destroyer War, shall function as an extension of the Imperial Legions, enforcing the law of the Empress and answerable to her and her Chosen." – The Voice of the Empress

The Legion of Two Thousand stands distinct among nearly all ronin organizations for being able to act with full Imperial sanction and power. The Legion was originally created by Emperor Toturi I, who was seeking new roles for his loyal ronin followers. Toturi recognized the limits of the Imperial Legions and the armies of the Great Clans in enforcing order throughout the Empire, and created the Legion of Two Thousand as a small elite force to patrol Rokugan and protect its people from bandits, maho cults, and general unrest, restoring order in the places no other fighting force could reach. Though the Legion mixed ronin, Imperials, and worthy clan samurai together, Toturi intended it should always be commanded by a ronin. He felt a ronin commander would keep the Legion from becoming embroiled in political conflicts between the Great Clans and Imperial families. Initially, however, Toturi feared this decision might anger too many of the Empire's conventional samurai – especially since he had already appointed ronin to command of several of the regular Imperial Legions – so the first commander of the Legion of Two Thousand was officially a notable clan samurai, Kitsu Motso. However, it was Motso's subordinate, the ronin Kado, who actually issued the orders. Later, when Motso left the Legion to assume leadership of the Lion Clan, the organization was well-established enough for a ronin to be officially placed in command.

The Legion served the Toturi Dynasty with honor and glory. It held the Kaiu Wall during the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, and some accounts claim it was the Legion that finally killed the infamous bandit lord Yugoro. It repeatedly battled the forces of the mad tattooed monk Kokujin, defeating his revolutionary peasant army in the year 1169. In all their engagements, the Legionnaires lived up to the ideals of Emperor Toturi I, and eventually this led to the inheritors of Toturi's Army, the Wolf Legion, joining their ranks.

In modern times, the Legion has made its home in the remote castle known as the Palace of the Breaking Dawn. The famous battle there against the mad shugenja Karatsu is described on page 44 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Earth*. As a reward for both its heroism during that battle and its service to the Empire through several decades, Empress Iweko I granted the Legion an Imperial charter, finally confirming this unique fighting force as an official arm of the ruling Imperial line, subject only to the direct orders of the Empress, the Shogun, and the Emerald Champion. This has effectively given the Legion of Two Thousand the same status as the First Imperial Legion, producing deep rivalry and enmity between the two organizations.

The Order of Isashi

Ronin shugenja are rare in the Empire at large, and most of them wander alone or affiliate themselves with the humble monks of the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Despite this, there are several small orders of ronin shugenja. Perhaps the most revered of these is the Order of Isashi.

The ronin shugenja known as Isashi first appeared in the eighth century near the end of the second war against Iuchiban. He traveled in the wake of the Bloodspeaker's armies, healing the wounded and speaking prayers over the dying. His honorable and merciful behavior infuriated Iuchiban's followers, who eventually tracked him down and murdered him. However, Isashi's deeds were not in vain; a dozen other ronin shugenja were inspired by his selfless actions and noble sacrifice, and formed themselves into an *otokodate* in order to carry on his work.

The Order of Isashi has endured from that day all the way into the modern Empire. Its members constantly travel across Rokugan, always going to the most war-torn and disaster-plagued regions, healing the injured and treating the sick with no expectation of payment or reward. They often appear in the Crab lands, where they are welcomed without hesitation; in other lands the local samurai tend to look on them with more suspicion, especially since their actions can be perceived as shaming the local clan shugenja for callousness.

The Order of the Five Weapons

Though several of the ronin shugenja orders focus on healing or other selfless activities, a few of them have dedicated their studies to warfare. The most prominent of these is the Order of the Five Weapons.

Legend claims the shugenja Ekuro was one of the greatest warriors of his age. Supposedly, he was a Void Tensai who was cast out of the Phoenix Clan (or perhaps left the clan voluntarily) for unknown reasons. Ekuro wandered the northern Empire for a time; he was fascinated by the lives and practices of bushi, and asked to train in the dojo of every village he traveled through. With time he became skilled in all manner of weapons. His abilities as both a priest and a warrior would be put to the test in the Lion village of Houko.

As part of some minor war lost to history, a force of Mirumoto bushi attacked Houko, shattering the defending Lion troops. Ekuro knew the general in command of the Mirumoto and thus knew Houko would be put to the torch, a cataclysm the peasants would not survive. The shugenja stood at the gates of Houko and challenged the Mirumoto to take the village from him. Though he wore no katana, he summoned a sword of fire to his hand. When a Mirumoto swordsman disarmed him, he summoned a bo of water. When that was broken, he called forth a tetsubo of earth to smash Dragon armor. And when the tetsubo cracked and failed, a yari of air darted into the enemy ranks. Finally, after hours of fighting, the Mirumoto general appeared to confront Ekuro. The priest flung a dart summoned from the Void itself, piercing the general's heart and finally defeating the Dragon army.

Only then did Ekuro allow his injuries and exhaustion to overwhelm him. He spent months recovering under the care of the grateful villagers of Houko. During that time, the story of his deeds spread from the disbelieving mouths of the two armies who had witnessed them. Shugenja from across the Empire, ronin and even some from the clans, came to him to learn his lessons. Ekuro taught them how to create and wield the Elemental weapons, and for many that was enough. A few, however, stayed by Ekuro's side, and before long the wandering priest found himself the sensei of a new ronin *otokodate*.

Ekuro eventually joined his ancestors... but the Order of the Five Weapons survived him.

The Clans and Wave-Men

Although the Empire's overall attitude toward wave-men has tended toward the negative through much of history, each clan and faction within Rokugan has its own perspective on ronin.

The Crab Clan

"Come to the Wall, ronin of Rokugan, and test your mettle. Any samurai who enters the Shadowlands and returns with the heads of twenty bakemono shall have fealty with the Hida. No questions asked."

– Hida Kuroda, Crab Clan Champion

Ever the practical samurai, the Crab tend to view ronin like they view most other things – ignoring, tolerating, or respecting them based on their usefulness. The Crab are not overly accepting of ronin, but they are not particularly hostile towards them either. Indeed, a Crab is likely to treat an unfamiliar clan samurai and an unfamiliar ronin practically the same.

Ronin tend to be somewhat more common in the lands of the Crab than in those of many of the other clans, so the average Crab samurai or peasant is more familiar with wave men and less hostile toward their odd social status. This can be traced back to the time of Hida himself, who rallied strong men and women to join him in carrying out his duty to the first Hantei. Hida did not immediately grant fealty to those who came to him, instead waiting to see if their resolve and skill matched their eagerness. The talented or remarkable were eventually given leave to take Hida's name or that of one of his vassals, but the mediocre were rejected, or at best given a chance to prove themselves again at some later time.

It is from this founding practice that the unique Crab tradition of the Twenty Goblin Winter eventually arose. The Crab Clan is the only Great Clan that routinely invites those with no master to prove their worth and be granted fealty and service. The clan's eternal war against the Shadowlands is a matter of duty and death, not of pure bloodlines, and when their ranks are thinned by heavy combat they are more than willing to offer fealty to any who prove they are able and willing to stand against the Shadowlands. Naturally, such ronin are not granted immediate entry to the great houses of the Crab, but instead are sworn to vassal families, usually the Moshibaru vassal family of the Hida.

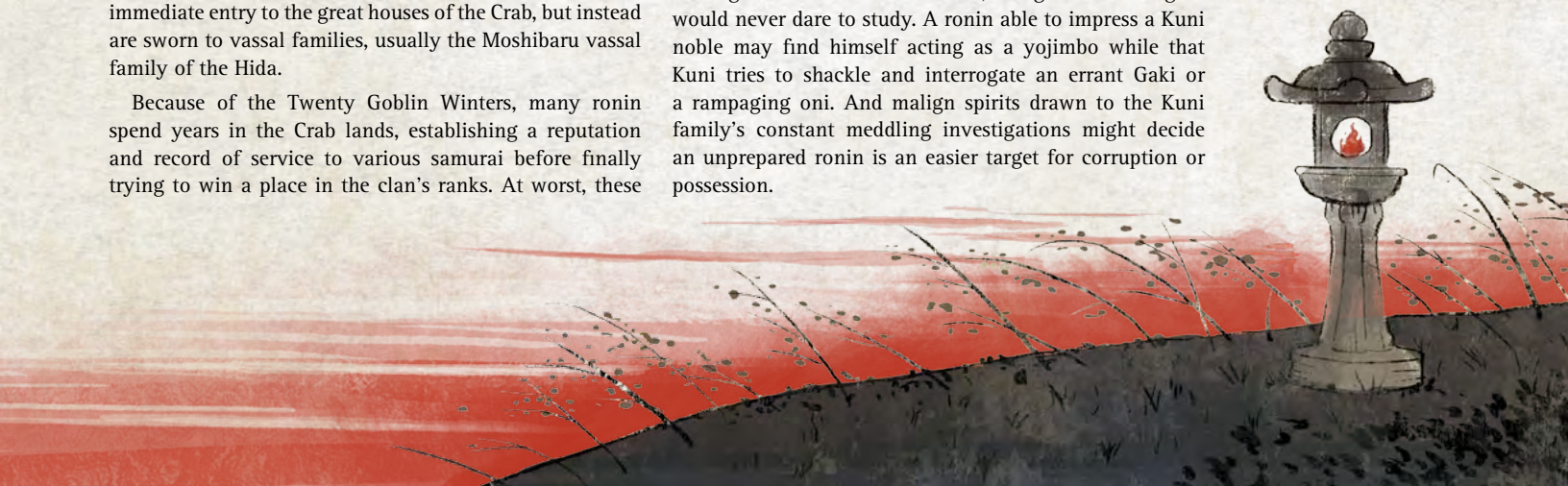
Because of the Twenty Goblin Winters, many ronin spend years in the Crab lands, establishing a reputation and record of service to various samurai before finally trying to win a place in the clan's ranks. At worst, these wave-men know they will be treated more reasonably here than elsewhere in the Empire, even if they never manage to make it through the Twenty Goblin Winter (or have no interest in doing so). There is also plenty of work to be had; although the Crab are wary of using too many ronin on the Kaiu Wall, they happily employ wave-men to bolster their forces elsewhere in their lands.

Additionally, there are many ronin who come to the Crab lands to avoid punishment for crimes they have committed in other parts of the Empire. After all, a ronin hiding in the Crane lands is easy to spot; a ronin in Crab lands is one among thousands.

Of all the families in the Crab Clan, it is the Yasuki who are the most accepting of ronin. The Yasuki family's mercantile interests mean they have an unending need for guards, a need which is difficult to fill with Hida or Hiruma troops busy handling the threat from the Shadowlands. Ronin easily find a place in the lands of the Yasuki so long as they do not turn up their noses at commerce and the occasional bit of menial labor (such as loading and unloading merchant wagons and ships). Since the Yasuki themselves are rarely above such tasks, most ronin see no insult in such assignments (if they even have enough pride to care). The Yasuki are careful, however, to make sure their ronin employees do not learn more than they should – after all, their mercantile rivals are not above bribing ronin to gain advantages.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the Kuni are hostile to ronin, surprisingly so when compared to the rest of the clan. The Kuni are of course well-known for their secrecy, cloistered dwellings, and borderline paranoia; the brotherhood and understanding they share with the rest of the Crab mitigates these attitudes somewhat when dealing with their cousins in the other Crab families, but there is no such relationship in place with ronin. A wave-man who attempts to gain employment with a Kuni can usually count himself fortunate if he is simply turned away with a harsh refusal. More likely, he will meet with open hostility or even violence, especially if he says or does anything to so much as suggest he might be some manner of Shadowlands infiltrator. This is not to say the Kuni blindly strike out at any ronin, but the family has little to gain and much to lose from opening itself up to outsiders, and wave-men are the ultimate outsiders.

On those rare occasions when ronin do get accepted into Kuni employment, they may find themselves wishing they had not. The Kuni have a well-earned reputation for dealing with the darkest matters, things most Rokugani would never dare to study. A ronin able to impress a Kuni noble may find himself acting as a yojimbo while that Kuni tries to shackle and interrogate an errant Gaki or a rampaging oni. And malign spirits drawn to the Kuni family's constant meddling investigations might decide an unprepared ronin is an easier target for corruption or possession.



The Crane Clan

"I doubt most ronin would know what to do in a bath house if you led them in and gave them instructions. Still, they have their purposes, don't they? They will do things a proper self-respecting samurai would never lower himself to consider. That can be a valuable asset."

– Daidoji Minoru

Doji's clan probably holds the dimmest view of wave-men of any Great Clan. The Crane view all ronin as bandits, miscreants, and uneducated filth unless specifically proven otherwise. Of course, the Doji and Kakita are always polite when dealing with ronin... but they also make sure a ronin in their presence does not forget his inferior place. The Daidoji tend to ignore them completely unless it is necessary to deal with them. Only the Asahina are somewhat tolerant of ronin, though even they remain wary and guarded around them.

Despite these facts, ronin are often drawn to the lands of the Crane Clan for one reason: koku. The Crane have vast fertile territories and immense wealth, but only two small armies to defend their possessions. During almost any era the Crane are liable to face threats from their neighbors, especially the Lion, Crab, and Scorpion. Consequently, the clan learned early on to use its deep coffers to supply itself with expendable ronin soldiers.

The Crane offer some of the most lucrative contracts for ronin, but also some of the most demanding. When a Crane hires a bodyguard, for example, he expects a bushi who can at least approach the standards of the Kakita duelists and Daidoji yojimbo. Likewise, when the Crane enlist ronin for their armies they make no effort to disguise the fact that these ronin are little more than sword-fodder in their war efforts, and a warrior who wishes to gamble his life for Crane koku must be willing to accept that. Additionally, ronin hirelings must prove themselves suitably honorable and trustworthy, a feat nigh-impossible for many wave-men. (Or, if they work for the more controversial elements of the Daidoji family, they may have to prove themselves highly dishonorable... but still trustworthy.)

The upside to all this is that the Crane are known to honor all agreements made in good faith with their ronin employees. Though the Crane have no love for masterless samurai, it is all but unknown for them to back out of payment or to try to renegotiate a deal once it is finalized. This fair treatment is something ronin cannot usually rely on, since their standing in society normally leaves them with little recourse against those who cheat them. Magistrates and clerks often simply ignore an aggrieved ronin's claim against a clan samurai. The Crane, however, value honesty of both deed and word, and will sharply rebuke one of their own for disgraceful acts.

Because many ronin are drawn to Crane lands for a chance at making money, the clan takes steps to make sure this transient population does not grow too large – or worse, too permanent. In times of war, the Crane lands swell with ronin, but the clan makes sure they are quickly organized and sent off to combat. In times of peace, ronin who take up residence in Crane lands are carefully monitored by clan magistrate, and at the first sign of trouble (which is often very loosely defined by the Crane) they are firmly asked to leave. Those who refuse are treated as bandits. Thus despite the Crane's repute for being good employers, their lands generally have few ronin at any given time.

Twice in the clan's history, their vigilance against ronin declined and they found groups of wave-men forming communities in their lands. In both cases the Crane turned to the Mantis Clan for assistance; at the time, the Mantis were a Minor Clan and tended to be willing to work for pay, albeit at much higher rates than ronin. The Crane found the Mantis more reliable for truly difficult tasks than the often-cowardly ronin, and used them as mercenary shock troops many times over their history.

An interesting (and nearly unique) contrast to the general Crane attitude toward ronin is found in the Kakita Artisan Academy, which has a history of accepting highly talented ronin into its school. This is not commonplace by any means, but the various masters of the Academy believe truly gifted souls should be nurtured for the good of the Empire, no matter their background. Of course, a ronin seeking acceptance into the Artisan Academy must gain the patronage and sponsorship of a member of the Crane Clan, something not easily done. Such a Crane is effectively putting his own reputation and honor at stake by endorsing the ronin, and could suffer great loss of face

if the wave-man proves a disappointment. Since very few ronin are talented enough to gain consideration for this honor at all, and fewer still are able to find a patron, the admission of a ronin to the Academy is something which happens at best perhaps three or four times in a generation. And a ronin attending the Kakita Artisan Academy must deal with both the worst and best of the Crane: access to peerless teachers and techniques, but constant humiliation from those Crane who remain unconvinced a ronin can ever be worthy of the honor bestowed on him.

The Dragon Clan

"It is impossible to know what is in a box until one has removed the lid." – Togashi Yokuni

The Dragon Clan's attitude toward ronin is difficult to summarize – but then, the Dragon attitude toward almost anything can be difficult to summarize. The different families of the clan have wildly different philosophies on the nature of ronin and what their existence means in the Celestial Order. What does remain constant throughout the clan is an overall attitude of distance and disinterest. No matter what a typical Dragon tends to think of ronin, it is likely he does not hold the viewpoint very strongly. Ronin are a diverse and unpredictable group, after all, and Dragon samurai recognize that while thinking about wave-men as a category can be an interesting philosophical or mental exercise, it is ultimately futile.

The Dragon Clan's indifference tends to be returned by many ronin, albeit for more practical reasons. The clan has little opportunity to offer employment to wave-men and also has no great wealth or food resources, with its settled areas barely able to provide for their own inhabitants. Ronin looking for fame or for money are unlikely to find either in the lands of Togashi's clan.

Nonetheless, a few ronin can be found in Dragon territories for one simple reason: they wish to be left alone. The life of a wave-man is one of intolerance, derision, and distrust. Though some seek to rise above these circumstance (either honorably or through less admirable means), others find the greatest appeal to be a quiet life where they are not troubled by others. A life lived in simple peace, perhaps serving occasionally as a caravan guard or a village watchman.

The Dragon do not usually pay much attention to ronin who move through their lands, and indeed the very nature of their territories make such wanderers unlikely. The relatively accessible Kitsuki and Mirumoto provinces are well-guarded by samurai who tend to be good judges of character. The Tamori (and before them, the Agasha) may lack this sort of insight, but their lands are much more remote and hostile, as well as lightly populated, limiting the amount of trouble an errant wave-man can cause. And the lands of the Togashi actually reject those who would be unwelcome; sudden snowstorms and rockslides, confusing roads through the mountains, and the wandering tattooed monks themselves all seem to simply know when a troublemaker has come.

Of course, occasionally a ronin will be drawn to the lands of the Togashi by some inexplicable force, later emerging as a newly-accepted member of the tattooed orders. Also, samurai from the other Dragon families sometimes form specific relationships with ronin for one reason or another. The Mirumoto, for example, are not above recognizing the talent of a masterless swordsman and allowing such a prodigy to train in their dojo (though this is even rarer than the instances of ronin attending the Kakita Artisan Academy). And the Kitsuki sometimes make use of ronin yojimbo and assistants during their investigative duties in the larger Empire.

Before their defection to the Phoenix, the Agasha family had little use for ronin, seeing them as merely a curious aspect of the Empire not worth engaging with directly. However, their successor family the Tamori has a more extensive relationship with ronin. After the defection of the Agasha, those who remained behind to become the Tamori were extremely few. Accordingly, the new family sought to bolster its numbers by offering fealty to ronin shugenja who showed sufficient promise. Since that time the Tamori have not forgotten their roots, and they tend to be somewhat more welcoming and hospitable to ronin than the rest of their clan – though the days of readily granting fealty are long over.

Finally, mention must be made of the Dragon Clan's association in the eleventh and twelfth centuries with the ronin village of Nanashi Mura (described earlier in this chapter). The Dragon appoint a magistrate to watch over the village, but otherwise leave it to police itself so long as it does not build defenses and does not let its own small garrison grow beyond a certain size. This sort of benign semi-neglect toward a ronin settlement would be highly unlikely in any other clan's lands, to put it mildly, but for the Dragon it is simply one more facet of their odd relationship to wave-men.

The Lion Clan

"Bandits and thieves, liars and cheats, the scum of the Empire, failing to show even the Celestial Order its proper respect. All the better if they shamble into formation against us. Their stolen honor can be no match for ours."
– Matsu Gohei

The Lion have both the most simple and the most complex view of ronin. A typical Lion will view any random ronin he meets as strictly inferior. After all, ronin lack both the secure family identity and the training and education of a true samurai. Thus, while it is theoretically possible for them to be just as honorable as a clan samurai, it is highly unlikely for such lowly persons to attain that level of dedication. The Lion like to say that while Honor can bring a low man to greatness, if a ronin was truly honorable and had such greatness within him he would not be a ronin to begin with.

Despite this attitude, however, the Lion do ultimately understand there is more to a samurai than his family and training. A ronin who manages the nigh-impossible feat of truly impressing a Lion will be held in exceptionally high regard. After all, that ronin overcame adversity and hardship a clan samurai could never know, and steadfastly refused to turn to a life of crime or banditry. Ronin of this sort prove something the Lion hold dear to their heart: Bushido can overcome any obstacle. Such wave-men are given a level of respect and trust which most other noble families would never dream of bestowing on a masterless samurai.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, ronin who fit into the negative stereotype of their kind – bandits, extortionists, liars, and so on – make every Lion's soul burn with rage. For any samurai, even a lowly ronin, to commit such acts is unforgivable. While the Lion are meticulous about hunting down criminals and other such threats to their lands, lawless ronin earn a special priority among such targets. On more than one occasion, the Lion have risked war with neighboring noble houses simply to ensure a notorious ronin criminal is found and eliminated. In one notable instance a Matsu commander took a legion of infantry and marched across the border to a Crane estate where the criminal had taken on employment; the Matsu burned it to the ground with the ronin inside. Although the reality that the Crane had been inadvertently protecting a criminal allowed the Lion to avert the worst of the consequences for this act, it was still a major scandal with long term repercussions.

Among the Lion families, typically the Ikoma are tasked with dealing with ronin. Although both the Akodo and the Matsu often hire or conscript ronin troops to help fight in their various campaigns, the Ikoma – the clan's voice and heart – handle the actual work of recruiting these troops. Although any Lion can judge a wave-man's combat potential, the Ikoma are better-suited to discerning the worth of a ronin's character. If they judge a man unsuitable, the Lion will not even use him for sword-fodder. On occasion, ronin with too high an opinion of themselves let their temper get the better of them when they are dismissed by the Ikoma; such men seldom live to talk about it.

The Lion's unusual attitudes cause some particular difficulties in the rare cases of ronin shugenja. Though the clan does not put a great amount of stock in magic (especially when compared with clans like the Phoenix or the Unicorn), the Lion fully recognize the significance of a shugenja's gifts. The ability to speak with the spirits is seen as the favor of the Celestial Order... but a ronin is one who has lost his place in the Order. When faced with such people, the Lion attitudes are pushed to extremes. A Lion typically believes a ronin shugenja must have done something terrible indeed to lose his place... but a ronin shugenja who has proven himself is treated almost as a walking incarnation of the will of the Heavens. Ronin shugenja with good reputations can expect a great deal of respect and accommodation from the Lion Clan.

Ultimately, though, regardless of whether they are respectful or hostile toward a particular ronin, the Lion still hold them at arm's length. A ronin gaining fealty with the Lion is an extremely rare event, and realistic ronin do not bother to aspire to such a near-impossibility. In the few cases where it has happened, the ronin in question was usually part of a larger group of ronin retainers who faithfully served a family line of Lion samurai for generations. This arrangement – a ronin and his descendants serving a Lion family – is usually the best a respected wave-man can expect from the Lion Clan. Those who attain such a position live well, though each generation is expected to prove itself worthy of continuing the arrangement.

Even such trusted retainers are not permitted to participate in matters that are strictly for the clan – family traditions, private observances, and so on. Most ronin who have reached such a position understand these limitations, but occasionally resentment will arise, usually ending badly for the ronin involved.

The Mantis Clan

"Never look down on them, never underestimate them, and never fail to recognize an opportunity. Our clan is descended from their kind and that above all else must be remembered."

– Yoritomo

Of all the clans, the Mantis have the most affinity and respect for ronin by a large margin. Though the Mantis are proud of their own lineage and their right to be called a Great Clan, they never forget their clan was founded by a man who felt he had lost his place in the world, a man rallying ronin to his banner. Even after the Mantis were officially recognized as a Minor Clan by the Emperor, they often served as mercenaries, much like ronin. And as a Minor Clan of questionable repute, the Mantis dealt with a lack of respect that was also much like that faced by wave-men.

Because they were for so long closer in philosophy and relationship to ronin than to Great Clan samurai, the Mantis became quite skilled at locating and hiring reliable wave-men to supplement their own forces or to work for other clans as needed. Essentially the Mantis became a brokering service for ronin looking for steady employment or a chance to make a name for themselves. Moreover, the Mantis were not at all averse to offering fealty to ronin who proved themselves worthy of it, and in modern times a significant percentage of the Yoritomo family can trace its lineage back to wave-men.

Sometimes the process ran in reverse, as well. The Mantis would occasionally purge their ranks of their more shameful samurai or their most egregious pirates (usually during periods when they were seeking improved relations with the mainland). Thus, there are also large numbers of ronin in the Empire who can trace their lineage back to Mantis samurai.

This fact serves to highlight the more general reality that despite the Mantis Clan's overall positive attitude toward wave-men, relations between them are not always completely smooth. For much of the Empire's history, many ronin believed the Mantis were attempting to edge unaligned samurai out of Rokugan's society by taking on tasks and attitudes typically relegated to wave-men. In eras when Mantis mercenary operations thrived, ronin who did not work for the Mantis had far fewer avenues for employment. Some saw the Mantis as nobles playing at being ronin but without a true understanding for the plight of the typical wave-man. Tensions sometimes flared between the Mantis and the notable ronin brotherhoods, and for centuries the Empire's ronin were split into two camps – those who embraced the Mantis, and those who saw such friendship as betraying the brotherhood of true wave-men.

When the Mantis ascended to the position of Great Clan, their wealth and influence expanded rapidly... but they also had to adjust how they operated in some areas. Behavior which had been only occasionally noticed when they were a Minor Clan now had serious consequences. While they did not completely abandon their roots, ronin were kept at a greater distance than before to forestall opportunistic accusations of dishonor or disgrace. Naturally, the Mantis did not execute this change in a fashion the other clans might have – rather than abandoning the ronin who had served them in the Clan Wars, they allowed them swear fealty if they chose. This created a large influx of new samurai to bolster the clan's ranks, but also effectively shut the door on their former policy of open dealing with ronin. Subsequently, the Mantis took an approach closer to the Crab Clan's, viewing ronin as potentially useful outsiders who needed to prove themselves. Still, beneath this surface attitude many of the Mantis retain their sense of kinship with ronin, and most wave-men have a positive view of the clan.

Notwithstanding the changes after the Second Day of Thunder, the Mantis still know how to work with ronin and understand them far better than any other Great Clan. The Tsuruchi are particularly adept at such dealings, due to their prior history as bounty hunters, but the Yoritomo do nearly as well, retaining many connections among the ronin population. A Tsuruchi magistrate is often able to get information and cooperation out of ronin who would never speak with others, while the Yoritomo have the potential to raise an entire army of ronin, should one be needed. The clan has also retained its reputation for dealing fairly with wave-men, never cheating them or reneging on an agreement... unless the ronin betray their trust.

The Phoenix Clan

"They can be distasteful and rude. They can also be honorable and fair. They are peculiarities of the Celestial Order, and can be worthy of study from that perspective."

– Isawa Taeruko, Master of Earth

It is no surprise that the insular, scholarly, and honorable Phoenix Clan has little regard for ronin. However, many are surprised by the main group behind this attitude. It is not the pacifistic Isawa or the soft-hearted Asako (or in modern times, the eccentric Agasha) who have the strongest feelings about wave-men – rather, it is the Shiba family. The Shiba find the presence of ronin bushi in the Phoenix lands to be both a threat and an insult. What need could any Phoenix have for a masterless warrior when the Shiba family itself is available – and indeed is woefully underused by the clan? Although the Shiba will occasionally hire ronin themselves to bolster their ranks during the clan's rare conflicts, any other ronin in the Phoenix lands is seen as a direct insult to their duty.

This is not to say the Shiba are overtly hostile or rude to ronin; quite the opposite. The Phoenix as a whole are widely known for being polite and honorable in their attitudes towards all samurai, regardless of origin or status. Nonetheless, warriors of the Phoenix Clan are always quick to point out there is little need for ronin in their lands, and politely but firmly direct wave-men to the lands of other clans, or suggest they should retire to a life of contemplation and study as a monk or a scholar's assistant. (Ronin who accept such guidance are welcomed and treated fairly.)

The ultimate insult to the Shiba is if one of the Phoenix shugenja, scholars, or courtiers takes on a ronin yojimbo, usurping the most basic and vital duty of the Shiba family. To pass over the legendary protectors trained by the Shiba dojo and instead choose an unknown outsider working for money is to insult the entire Shiba line. While this is a rare event, it has happened from time to time – in some cases deliberately, due to quarrels between the Phoenix Clan's families – and it always creates quite a stir in the courts as the Shiba demand explanations and apologies.

Those ronin warriors seeking fealty from the Phoenix are seen by the Shiba as delivering a similar insult, and are usually rebuffed with great firmness – albeit still politely so long as they behave themselves. There are very, very few cases of ronin gaining fealty to the Shiba over the history of the Empire.

Outside the Shiba, the other families usually ignore ronin. The Asako have little need to deal with wave-men at all, since their lands are well-protected and they seldom leave home without a Shiba yojimbo. The Agasha, once they join the clan, have a broadly similar attitude but due to their Dragon Clan roots they are more likely to find individual ronin somewhat interesting. The Isawa likewise have little to do with ronin warriors in most instances (except when they are quarreling with the Shiba), but things change dramatically when ronin shugenja become involved.

Most clans take at least some interest in ronin shugenja, simply because the kami's gift is so rare. The Phoenix usually have no need for the talents of unaligned shugenja, but take a great deal of interest in them all the same. The Isawa are deeply distrustful of untrained and unaccountable shugenja, for they see themselves as the guardians of magic in the Empire (whether or not there is a Jade Champion active). Inexperienced or ignorant shugenja are potential disasters in waiting, so the Isawa and the Phoenix Inquisitors are quick to interrogate such men and women when they enter their lands. Ronin shugenja know to avoid the attention of the overzealous Phoenix whenever possible, for the slightest indication of untrustworthiness can result in spending weeks or months in custody. At best, such ronin can only hope their experience remains painless and is ultimately resolved, but there are no guarantees – the Inquisitors especially have a reputation for detaining ronin shugenja almost indefinitely, simply as a precaution if nothing else.

The flip side of this is that a ronin shugenja who is highly talented and honorable can win favorable treatment from the Phoenix. Although it is rare for the clan to offer fealty (with the exception of difficult periods such as the aftermath of the Clan Wars), they are still willing to train unaligned shugenja who prove themselves trustworthy. Many outside the clan are surprised to hear the long list of ronin shugenja who trained and studied with the Phoenix over the course of history. While the clan never shares its deepest secrets or most powerful magic with such ronin, it does willingly teach them how to properly control and use their abilities.

The Scorpion Clan

"The Empire mocks us for our honesty and is ignorant of our true loyalty. In this we have much in common with the wave-men. When you use them, remember that."

– Bayushi Ogoe, Clan Champion

Given the repute of the Scorpion Clan, it should not be surprising that few wave-men gladly enter into employment with the clan. Of course, such reluctance does not stop them from taking jobs when such are available, and the Scorpion are more than happy to make use of them. For their part, the Scorpion see ronin as one of the Empire's few truly perfect human resources: desperate, poorly educated, and without personal or organizational power. A Crane may be difficult to contend with in the courts, a Dragon may be too canny to deceive, a Lion too dangerous to anger... but a ronin? What will a ronin do if he finds he has been deceived or manipulated? Indeed, the Scorpion will make a point of explaining this reality to any wave-man they employ, freely admitting to being notorious liars, backstabbers, and double-crossers. And having made this point, they will simply ask if the ronin would like to eat this season or not. While the Scorpion rely on confusion and trickery when dealing with other clans, they find that with ronin they can rely on the simplicity of a knife held against the throat.

Of course, this is not the only approach taken by individual Scorpion when speaking with masterless samurai. Many Scorpion are polite, honest, and faithful to their agreements. Some are gruff and short, but fair. Others lie and distort the truth to get what they want, for no better reason than because it entertains them to do so. Such widely varied tactics keep others off their guard, uncertain what to expect from any particular Scorpion, and this method is especially effective when dealing with wave-men. After all, if the Scorpion were always upfront and honest, ronin employees might balk at duties that seemed unclear or dishonorable. Conversely, if the Scorpion always relied on manipulation and lies, most ronin would avoid the clan completely regardless of need.

Regardless of their methods of recruitment, the Scorpion tend to treat ronin as expendable assets and show them little to no compassion. They use ronin as front-line sword-fodder in war, as bodyguards and escorts when needed, and especially as patsies whenever such might serve their interests. The Scorpion often hire a ronin anonymously to perform some task or to attack a foe, putting the hapless wave-man in the wrong place at the right time. These assignments almost always end with the death of the ronin, making it easier to repeat the trick time and time again. After all, death is a risk a ronin takes every time he accepts payment, and few take notice when ronin do not return from dangerous tasks.

Unlike the Crane, a wealthy and high-minded clan that deals rarely but honorably with ronin, the Scorpion know they do not have wave-men trampling each other for a chance at their coffers. Indeed, most ronin are wary of employment by Bayushi's clan, for the reasons already described. Because of this, the Scorpion take an approach opposite to that of most clans: they present the outward face of welcoming any ronin who wishes to make some koku. All a ronin has to do to work for the Scorpion is... be willing to work for the Scorpion.

The Shosuro and their cousins in the Soshi, the two subtle backers of the ruling Bayushi family, most often deal with hiring and managing ronin. They both have networks of agents, spies, informants, magistrates, and others who make it easy for them to locate suitable wave-men for whatever task might be required. Such tasks vary widely, from the aforementioned battlefield and assassination work all the way down to serving as an aka – a slang term for someone hired to take a beating from students of a dojo. While such a job may seem cruel, it is only the start of the creative uses which some Scorpion find for ronin. Many Scorpion nobles have odd or cruel tastes, an unfortunate side-effect of their role as the Empire's designated villains, and it is not uncommon for a ronin to be hired as a target for whatever abuses might amuse such lords. Sometimes ronin are hired simply to embarrass themselves in public, so that a Scorpion or an ally can appear as a hero by rebuking or beating the ronin... or even executing him.

Of course, one should not imagine the Scorpion cannot recognize the value of a reliable wave-man. On the contrary, ronin who prove themselves useful are a valued resource to the clan, since they can perform the most dishonorable actions without reflecting on the Scorpion themselves. The ability to kill others efficiently and quietly is a rare gift, one not unique to the Shosuro, and the clan willingly employs ronin with such talents... although it is not above assassinating such men when they outlive their usefulness or learn too much. The latter outcome also points to the reality that it is quite rare for a ronin to be granted fealty by the Scorpion; no matter how reliable a wave-man might be, he can never be trusted in the same way as one who grew up in the bosom of the clan.

The Unicorn Clan

"Who are we to look down on the wave-man? We who the Empire regards as outcasts and strangers, we who practice ways ill-understood by others. Ronin can be friends or enemies, but in either case they have our respect and understanding."

– Shinjo Yokatsu, Clan Champion

The Unicorn are used to being treated as outsiders by the rest of Rokugan, and they cherish compassion and understanding. The clan understands that worth and nobility can be found in the most unlikely places, and thus tends to take an open and positive view of ronin. Even the stoic and intensely honorable Utaku are likely to treat a wave-man with more respect than most other clans would offer... at least until they are given a reason to do otherwise. However, this is not to say the clan tolerates any sort of misbehavior from ronin. While the Unicorn may appear tolerant, they do not permit that tolerance to be abused.

Ronin are normally welcome in the Unicorn lands, and the clan's own somewhat nomadic lifestyle means the borders are relatively open, allowing masterless samurai to come and go freely. However, if a ronin proves himself a bandit or thief, Unicorn scouts and magistrates will hunt him to the ends of the earth; escaping the justice of the Unicorn Clan is a near impossibility. Few mounts in the Empire can match the famed Unicorn steeds, and there is little chance of finding sanctuary in the cold mountains of the Dragon, let alone the heavily patrolled lands of the Lion, who will happily cut down any ronin criminal. The only other route of escape is the Shinomen Forest, haunted by spirits, wild animals, unknown creatures, and the occasional Tainted beast.

Despite such dangers, the welcoming nature of the Unicorn and their rich holdings and possessions often proves too much of a temptation for ronin who are lacking in honor. Foreign artifacts or exotic furs can fetch a high price from collectors who are willing to forego questions about their origins, and of course there are many samurai who will pay almost anything to gain a horse from the famed Unicorn stables. Such thievery is only rarely successful, but the huge potential payoffs are enough to be tempting.

Wave-men who reject such villainy in favor of honorable employment and lawful conduct can have a good life in the Unicorn lands, so long as they can put up with the clan's odd ways. After all, the Unicorn live in strange buildings and tents, have peculiar habits of behavior and diet, and so on. Although some ronin are pragmatic enough to ignore such foibles, many of them find it difficult to stomach things they see as dishonorable, shameful, or simply disgusting. Moreover, those who comment on such things can easily find the formerly welcoming attitude of the Unicorn turning instantly into cold hostility.

Ronin who can successfully endure the Unicorn Clan's peculiarities find employment by them to be preferable to working for most other clans. The Unicorn pay well and are less likely to use ronin troops as expendable sword-fodder. Ronin hirelings are typically used to supplement the infantry side of a Unicorn army; even if they do have mounts of their own, the clan knows better than to expect such nags to keep up with their own horses. The Moto, Shinjo, and Otaku/Utaku all employ ronin soldiers for this basic purpose of bolstering the clan's infantry units, though a wave man who shows exceptional talent and skill at mounted combat may be given the honor (and pay) of riding with the Unicorn cavalry.

The Ide sometimes hire ronin for bodyguard duties, whereas the Iuchi show little interest in them. Unicorn shugenja tend to be self-sufficient, due to both their training and to the general attitude of the nomadic clan, and have little need for a bodyguard or traveling companion. The Ide, however, make almost a tradition of employing ronin, especially those who are down on their luck or seem to need an opportunity to prove themselves. Ide are trained to be good judges of character but also to see the positive potential in others, making them quite likely to take pity on such wave-men. They often enter into a sort of mentorship over these ronin, treating them with respect and encouraging them to find the greatness within themselves. Such ronin often find their entire lives changed, as if their whole fate has been rewritten, after serving as a retainer to a charming and friendly Ide for a year or two. Of course, should a ronin take advantage of an Ide's generous nature, the other members of the clan will avenge such betrayal as harshly as they punish any other criminal.

The Minor Clans

The Minor Clans are often in situations ronin can understand – they are far less powerful than the Great Clans, command much less respect, and have little leverage when negotiating with them. Despite these similarities, however, the Minor Clans are generally even more wary and distrustful of ronin than their Great Clan counterparts. This is, in fact, precisely because of the aforementioned limited resources. A Great Clan has the manpower to hunt down any ronin criminal or bandit, but a Minor Clan may find this far more challenging.

Unfortunately, this also means the Minor Clans are also more likely than the Great Clans to feel the need to employ ronin. Caravans that leave a Minor Clan's lands often cannot be properly escorted with clan samurai, lest this siphon too many warriors away from the clan's borders. And while the Great Clans are technically forbidden from making outright war on the Minor Clans, there is always the threat of an "incursion" or "border dispute" or similar problem, requiring a quick expansion of the Minor Clan's army. Finally, because the Minor Clans' numbers are so low, they must be more pragmatic about the issue of fealty, always on the lookout for a ronin who might be worth bringing into the fold rather than waiting passively for the rare ronin who might impress them.

Ronin, as a group, tend to see the Minor Clans either simply as smaller versions of the Great Clans or as resources to be exploited. A small minority take a more generous view. These ronin, either due to innocence (rare but not wholly unknown) or a sense of compassion, see the Minor Clans as sharing many of their own problems and miseries. Such ronin often try to prove themselves to a Minor Clan in the hope of joining its ranks and bolstering its numbers. Leaving aside such cases, most ronin know they have a much better chance of gaining fealty among the Minor Clans than they would with the Great Clans. And while the rewards might seem less inviting, even a Minor Clan offers privileges and protections a ronin can never have in normal life.

Ronin of a more ruthless or vicious nature see the limited reach and power of the Minor Clans as all the excuse they need to steal, lie, and cheat whenever dealing with them. After all, Imperial authorities are far less likely to care about bandits in the lands of some remote Minor Clan than about threats to the great houses of the Empire. In some cases, bandit gangs have taken up more-or-less permanent residence in Minor Clan territories, becoming serious threats to the clans' survival.

Regardless of specific cases, all Minor Clans know they must be careful when dealing with ronin. The Mantis, prior to their promotion to Great Clan status, was the most successful in dealing with wave-men, as were the Fox and Wasp (before their inclusion in the Mantis Clan's ranks). The Centipede also employed ronin to help protect their lands, recruiting carefully to ensure honorable service. At the other end of the spectrum, the Hare Clan, Ox Clan, and (while they existed) the Falcon Clan and Boar Clan are all generally unwelcoming of ronin, at times downright hostile toward them.

Finally, a particular aspect of the Minor Clans' uneasy relationship to ronin is worthy of special note: many of the Minor Clans were themselves founded by ronin. While the lives of most ronin end with ignominious death, occasionally a wave-man may display heroism of such exceptional caliber that it leads to recognition and reward from the Emperor himself. These lucky few become the founders of Minor Clans and are granted a name and lands to pass on. The Hare Clan began this way, as did the Monkey Clan and the Falcon Clan. Even the Mantis Clan itself is descended from ronin origins. Names like Kaimetsu-uo, Usagi, Tsuruchi, and Toku are forever etched in the history of Rokugan. There can be no greater dream, no higher destiny for any ronin.

Cast Adrift Upon the Waves: Employment of Ronin

The reasons for a particular samurai being cast upon the waves of fate are many and varied. He may have been born to a ronin parent, or born the illegitimate and unacknowledged child of a clan samurai. He may have lost his lord and been unable to find another. He may have been punished for some disgrace by expulsion from his clan, or he may have been part of some larger group punished in this way (like the Akodo and the Scorpion after the failed Coup in the early twelfth century). He may even have become a ronin by his own choice, either temporarily (for a *musha shugyo* pilgrimage) or permanently.

But one thing all ronin have in common, from the most honorable idealist to the lowliest cur, is that they must eat. The upkeep of samurai is expensive, from the rice they eat to the silks they wear to the sacred oils for their blades, and a ronin has no lord to call on to provide him with what he needs. No, a ronin must work for his coin... if he can find anyone to hire him.

Ronin and the Spider Clan

"All can earn honor and glory in my name."
– Daigotsu

Prior to their sanction as a Great Clan, the Spider were welcoming to ronin. This was not due to any special compassion toward wave-men, but rather because the Spider Clan wanted to expand its numbers in any way possible. During the Race for the Throne, the Spider outwardly professed to be an organization dedicated to the protection and advancement of the powerless, such as peasants, merchants... and ronin. Spider warriors would sweep into areas distressed by bandit attacks, bring law to lawless territories, and in the process recruit from the local ronin populations. Spider monks tested ronin (and even peasants) to see if they had the mettle to join their Order. Daigotsu's bushi put prospective recruits through intense training and indoctrination, seeking out those who could be brought into the Tainted inner ranks of the clan. The Chuda, ever greedy for power, sought out the most disillusioned, angry, and power-hungry ronin to teach them the secrets of *maho*.

Of course, not all ronin were suitable recruits for the Spider Clan. Some of these failed prospects were allowed to join the clan but were kept on its outer edges, where they would not encounter the dark truth of a "clan" which accepted the Taint and worshipped Fu Leng. Such men and women provided a useful front for the rest of the clan. Others, deemed wholly unacceptable, were simply killed.

A great deal of this changed after the newly ascended Empress Iweko I declared the Spider outlawed. Leaving the Spider was not really an option for most of the ronin who had joined up – they already knew betrayal was something the Daigotsu family punished brutally, and many of them had become too dependent on being part of a clan. Thus, the majority of recruits remained within the ranks and later fought in the Destroyer War. They shared the fate of their fellows at the end of that war, when Daigotsu became lord of Jigoku and the Empress reluctantly raised the Spider to be a Great Clan and dispatched them to conquer the former Ivory Kingdoms.

After the Spider were publicly recognized, however, their repute among the Empire's ronin did not recover. They were now seen less like the welcoming Mantis and more like the Scorpion: liars and deceivers who were more likely to ruin a ronin's life than to help it. The only real exception was the small Susumu family, the un-Tainted ambassadors of the Spider to the rest of the Empire. Due to their extremely small numbers, the Susumu were often in need of bodyguards within the Empire (there were few Daigotsu bushi without the Taint, and the *sohei* of the Orders of Venom and Spider were not truly samurai and thus unwelcome in many settings). Ronin filled this need, and the Susumu were willing to hire any wave-man who could behave properly in polite company... and who were willing to enter into an agreement with the Spider.

Rural Ronin

By far and away the most common form of employment for an honorable ronin (as opposed to a bandit) is that of village protector. While the Great Clans each boast a vast number of samurai, the Minor Clans have far fewer, while the unaligned lands have almost none. Villages away from the more travelled roads are easily forgotten, left unvisited by any save the tax collectors and the occasional courier or Miya Herald. Such places are all but unprotected by their lords, if they even have lords, and thus are deeply vulnerable to banditry. Such villages often quietly encourage any passing ronin to stay as long as they might wish, eating and drinking as they will, in the hope that the ronin will defend the village from any threats. (Of course, an unscrupulous ronin can easily exploit this tendency, bleeding a village dry and then slipping away when things get dangerous.) When a ronin does this in a village which is part of a clan, the headman will keep a careful tally of all the resources he consumes so that when the tax collectors come, the ronin's upkeep may be deducted from the village's obligations. Generally speaking, a lord will overlook such activities so long as the ronin behaves properly, since this spares the lord from having to protect the village himself.

More rarely, a remote village may outright "hire" one or more ronin, explicitly offering payment (usually food) in exchange for the ronin's services as a warrior and protector. This is most common in unaligned villages, where there is no prospect of help from a lord, but it may occasionally take place in remote or isolated clan villages, especially during dangerous periods such as war or plague.

Regardless, the role of a village protector is a dull one, filled with tedious days of boredom interrupted only by the rare terror of banditry (or even more rarely, the supernatural). Many such ronin end up relishing the prospect of combat simply to break the monotony, and the more honorable sorts of ronin may also see a fight as a chance to prove or redeem their honor by dying in battle. Of course, as noted, there are also a great many ronin who turn tail and run when trouble rears its head; such is one of the perils of trusting a samurai who serves no one but himself. Some village protectors are little more than gluttons, bandits in all but name, who demand vast quantities of food and drink, harass the daughters of the village, and take whatever they want from peasants who have little ability to defend themselves. These base villains can live in this way for years in the Empire's unaligned lands, until other ronin dislodge them by force or the villagers finally summon the nerve to stand against them.

Ronin and the Taint

Ronin have always been favored targets for the corruption of Jigoku. As outsiders from society, they are often suffused with anger, bitterness, or envy, making them vulnerable to the whispers of kansen or the easy power of *maho*. Though the long history of the Empire, literally thousands of ronin have fallen to the Taint, swelling the ranks of the Shadowlands Horde. Many instances of ronin committing vile crimes or running amok with their swords are due to the influence of the Taint, and it is probably not exaggerating to say that Jigoku is responsible for a significant portion of the bad reputation which wave-men have endured over the centuries.

Ronin are also vulnerable to the appeal of cults, religious heresies, and other such movements which recruit from the downtrodden. The Bloodspeaker Cult is adept at recruiting ronin, and various other Tainted cults have also sought followers among the wave-men. In the late twelfth century, when Daigotsu's bargain results in the Taint becoming voluntary rather than infectious, the forces of Jigoku make an art of tricking or manipulating ronin into accepting the power of the Taint.

Urban Ronin

For those ronin who choose, there are great opportunities in the towns and cities of Rokugan, where service is paid for in coin rather than hospitality. Living on wages is an awkward and uncomfortable state for new-made ronin who never before needed to worry about coins or about how much it costs their lord to feed them. Such ronin often lead difficult lives; merchants swindle them, true samurai mock them, and if they find no employment they must go hungry. Even experienced ronin can sometimes run into trouble if the work market is bad or there is too much competition.

The most common role for a ronin in the city is to serve as a hired guard for a merchant or as a bouncer for an entertainment establishment like an inn or a geisha house. Serving those of low status is demeaning, and some ronin find it impossible to accept such duties. Such jobs may offer room and board, especially at an inn, but more often these ronin are simply paid cash – typically a few zeni a week (or a few Fu per day) with an occasional bonus. Merchants usually only hire ronin briefly, to protect their goods while moving from town to town, while inns and geisha houses offer longer-term employment but at the price of a more demeaning job.

Less common is the role of sellsword, putting one's daisho up for bid in the service of whoever can pay. Avenging a matter of honor, serving as a champion for a duel, acting as muscle for a battle between rival gangs, or simply murdering someone for pay all fall into this category. These sellswords are infamous for creating problems for the local magistrates, and they tend to be

the ronin who ruin what little good impression their more honorable fellows create. Usually they care little about this, since once they decide to kill for coin they seldom care how they are seen by others. This is not to say these sorts of men cannot be honorable, of course. A ronin who pits his iaijutsu skill against a magistrate to show his client is an innocent man is undertaking a noble endeavor, as is a ronin who works for an elderly man who cannot himself avenge a blight to his family's honor. Sadly, however, the dire actions of selfish ronin are far more easily remembered and color the perceptions of the populace. For example, a popular Kabuki play in many parts of the Empire is the tale of Taka the Carpenter, who hires a ronin to kill his chief rival.

Far more rare are those ronin who enter into long-term service with a specific patron. Such warriors can eventually become trusted retainers, given responsibilities and treated almost like a member of the family. For example, magistrates will often hire ronin to serve as their *yoriki*, and these arrangements can easily turn into long-term partnerships in the cause of law and order. More unusually, some geisha houses maintain long-term alliances with ronin who seek out new girls for apprenticeship. Armed ronin can travel safely through remote villages, searching for young girls who are fair of face or who show talent for song or dancing. The ronin purchase the contracts of these girls and then sell them in turn to the geisha house, and success may even lead to their eventually being able to buy their own geisha house and retire to manage it.

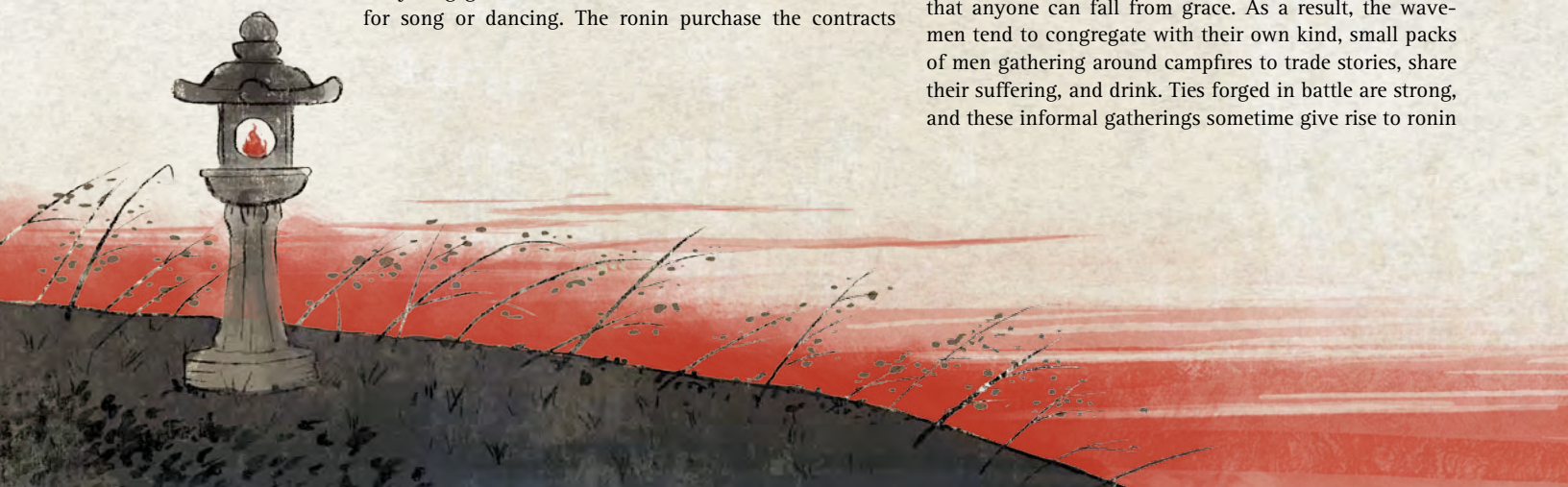
A few ronin are able to turn their unique skills to more unusual types of employment. For instance, *heimin* are rarely literate, so a samurai who is skilled in calligraphy might be hired to write for a village headman, or to train his son to write in a more respectable style. Truly unfortunate wave-men may find themselves reduced to the role of entertainer, performing in public for coin, a status lower than even a beggar. After all, it is honorable for a samurai to have artistic talent, but shameful to use such talent for crude monetary gain.

The Warrior's Way

The most desired job for any ronin, of course, is that of soldier. After all, they are still samurai, trained to kill and to seek death in honorable combat while serving a lord. Being hired for military service is as close as most ronin can get to a true samurai's life, and most of them hurl themselves into battle with a recklessness that rivals the Deathseekers of the Lion; as they see it, they have nothing to live for but everything to die for. Ronin hired for war are usually treated as an expendable resource, more trusted than peasant levies but unlikely to follow difficult orders. Those ronin who serve with distinction are allowed to stay on, while the rest are released once the battle or campaign is over; their upkeep is a burden a commander does not need during peacetime.

In longer conflicts, a ronin may wind up serving both sides, getting released when one side is victorious only to be hired by the losing force for the next battle. Such floating servitude is foreign to true samurai, but for a wave-man it is not all that unusual. "You go where the waves send you" is a common saying.

Ronin in military service are mocked and derided by true samurai, since they are an uncomfortable reminder that anyone can fall from grace. As a result, the wave-men tend to congregate with their own kind, small packs of men gathering around campfires to trade stories, share their suffering, and drink. Ties forged in battle are strong, and these informal gatherings sometime give rise to ronin



otokodate who can then command a much better price for their services. Most of these bands form around a colorful character who leads them, and fall apart when he later dies, but a rare few survive for generations. Typically such ronin bands are the size of a squadron or less, and are named after their commander. Successful bands can gather enough ronin to serve as a company, but growing any larger is highly challenging, especially given the problem of resources. The number of ronin legions in Rokugan's history can be counted on the fingers of two hands.

Banditry is always an option for ronin whose lust for battle cannot be sated by military service, but there are also instances of ronin joining uprisings or revolutionaries, or fighting on behalf of peasant revolts. Depending on the circumstances, this may be done for pay or out of genuine moral conviction. A rare ronin might rise to lead such revolts himself, perhaps hoping to overthrow a lord and gain his lands, or even trying to carve out his own independent kingdom. These efforts usually fail, but not always; when resources are tight, some daimyo are willing to look the other way if a strong ronin overthrows a weak lord. If such a ronin proves a capable lord, he may be offered fealty and his crimes expunged... but if he proves inadequate to the authority he has claimed, the Empire will soon destroy him. Such is life on the waves.

The Forgotten Coin: The Fu

Unknown to most samurai is the fourth coin of Rokugan, the Fu. Made of poor quality iron, forged by the blacksmith of the local lord, these coins are only of use within a specific local area and are not recognized in neighboring territories; in effect, each lord issues his own Fu for his own lands. This is because the Fu are used only by *heimin* – who by their nature seldom travel.

While the value of the Fu fluctuates from one area to another, in general a copper Zeni can be traded for ten Fu. And since a Zeni usually buys a week's worth of rice, a Fu is generally measured as a bowl filled with a single day's rice, a hot kettle of noodles with vegetables, or two bowls of noodle soup. A single drink of cheap shochu can be purchased for a Fu (a full bottle costs a Zeni).

While no ordinary samurai ever bothers with such trifles, a single Fu can mean the difference between life and death for a ronin, between a full belly and an empty one, and they hold them tight indeed.

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Chapter Four

The Brotherhood of Shinsei

The cracked bell resounded throughout the stone temple as Shinjo Itigawa approached. He showed his papers to the monks who greeted him. Not long after that he stood in the temple's courtyard. Men and women with saffron robes and shaved heads walked all around him, seemingly oblivious to his presence. Finally one of the older monks approached him. "Welcome, young man," he said, "Fortunes bless your steps! Have you come seeking guidance?"

Itigawa cleared his throat and bowed deeply, remembering how respectfully one must treat a monk of the Brotherhood. Many were just heimin, of course, but some were retired samurai, and in any case insulting a monk was a sure way to damage one's kharma.

"I have come seeking Shinjo Nobuhito," he explained.

The monk furrowed his brow. "Nobuhito? Hmm... I'm afraid there is no one here with that name, young man. Are you sure you are looking in the proper place?"

Itigawa paused for a long moment. "This is the monastery of the lotus sutra, yes?"

The monk nodded, smiling pleasantly.

"I am in the right place," Itigawa affirmed.

The old monk shrugged his skinny shoulders. "Well, if you are so sure..." He flagged down a nun, a woman balancing a wide bowl of sand on her head. "Chiaski," he asked, "is there a man named Nobuhito here?"

She could not shake her head, so instead she closed her eyes. "I'm afraid not. There is no one-" Her eyes popped open, and she gasped, startling the young Shinjo. "Wait!" she cried triumphantly, "I recall that was Koryu's old name, wasn't it?"

Itigawa approached her urgently. "Would you take me to him?"

The man they called Koryu was seated lotus-style in a secluded corner of the temple garden, hunched over a tiny juniper bonsai. He was old, at least sixty, the skin on his face yellowed and crinkled and worn like paper that had been folded too many times. A pair of clippers rested in his hand, suspended above a tiny branch, but he made no movement to cut it; he was an unmoving saffron-enwrapped statue.

Itigawa fell into seizen a respectful distance away. "Nobuhito-dono," he said, bowing deeply, "I am honored to finally meet you."

The man did not reply. He was still staring at the bonsai.

"I am Shinjo Itigawa, a lieutenant of your grandson," the samurai continued. "I have studied your treatise on mounted tactics." Wide-eyed admiration shone from his face as he continued. "I have come seeking your wisdom. They say you are the only one who has ever successfully defended Tsugi-Shichi-Mura from invaders. In one week, the Lion will attack that village. How should we defend it?"

Again, no reply came. Even the clippers in the monk's hand did not waver.

Itigawa paused, confusion showing on his face. "Nobuhito-dono?"

The monk finally moved, tilting his head very slightly in the young man's direction, yet not truly looking at him. "Who are you talking to?" he asked in a voice filled with gravel. "There's no-one here by that name."

The young samurai was silent for a moment, flabbergasted. Finally he said, "Were you not once the great Shinjo Nobuhito? The greatest general of the Haisho province?"

"What of it?" the monk replied. "My name is Koryu, not Nobuhito. The man you refer to is not here. Why do you seek him out here, where he does not exist?" The monk finally turned fully to the samurai and met his eyes. "Seek him within yourself," he said. "That is where Nobuhito exists."

Quietly, the monk returned to the bonsai, steadying his clippers around the tiny branch, seemingly more concerned for the fate of his little bush than the fate of his former clan.

Itigawa slowly stood, a scowl plain twisting features. "How shameful," he said. "So this is what has become of the great general Nobuhito, the hero of Haisho province, master of Haisho-style Yabusame."

The monk smiled. "A fitting end," he replied, "for Nobuhito the heartless, the butcher of Kagasura-mura, the man who razed a temple to Hotei." He glanced at Itigawa. "Which one, again, was the man you admire?"

Itigawa said nothing.

Koryu shrugged, then again concentrated on his bush. The edge of the clippers narrowed slightly, just touching the small branch. "Whoever I was in the past doesn't matter," he whispered. "Not anymore. That world is gone."

He squeezed the clippers, severing the branch. It fell neatly to the ground. He regarded the plant again, nodding to himself. Quietly he put the shears away.

When Itigawa spoke again it was in a quiet voice, almost a heartbroken voice. "I have followed your words all my life. I studied your treatise. I memorized your exploits. You were the greatest in my mind. I followed your grandson, because he carried on your greatness. When I heard of the Lion's approach, I knew only you could save us." He shook his head slowly. "Was I truly such a fool to come here seeking your help?"

The monk straightened his back. "Did you hear how Nobuhito nearly missed the Battle of Tsugi-Shichi-Mura?" When Itigawa did not reply, the monk continued. "Word reached him of an attack on the village, and he knew he could not delay in returning there with his army. But his forces were on the wrong side of a fast-moving river which had grown angry from a recent rain. There were no ferries, and the bridge was washed away. There seemed no place to cross the river. They could have waited until the waters abated and calmed, but he knew they had to reach the other side soon or it would be too late to save the village.

"Then he got an idea. There was a nearby forest, and he ordered his men to tear down trees and vines and fashion rafts with which to cross the river." He closed his eyes. "They had to leave their horses behind, because the rafts would not carry them and the river was too fierce for the beasts to swim. It meant going into battle without their steeds... unthinkable to even his most hardened men. But the alternative was the destruction of the village, which he could not abide. And so they made their rafts and managed to cross the river, leaving behind their precious horses."

The monk paused. Itigawa was sitting once more, carefully listening to the old man's tale. "It was because of the rafts that Nobuhito made it to the battle in time to repel the attackers. Even without his horses, he still managed. But tell me, young samurai... what do you suppose Nobuhito did with the rafts that carried him across the river? They'd served him well and saved his men... did he therefore carry them with him?"

Itigawa thought for a long time. "No," he finally said. "You... I mean, Nobuhito... would not have done that. He would have left the rafts behind. Even though they'd helped him across, they were of no use to him afterward. They would have only weighed him down."

Koryu spun around without warning. Itigawa suddenly was staring directly into the old man's eyes. His hero's eyes.

"Nobuhito has helped you to cross the river," the monk said. "Now it is time to leave him behind."

The History of the Brotherhood of Shinsei

The Brotherhood of Shinsei is almost as old as the Empire itself, though its organization has changed significantly over time, and it can trace its origins to even older groups. Long before the Little Teacher appeared, before even the Kami fell from the sky, there were wise men and women who venerated the Fortunes and worked for the spiritual betterment of mankind. Some legends speak of a woman named Sakura who was the first to begin comprehending the way of Enlightenment, and whether she existed or not, it is undeniable that a good part of the wisdom ascribed to Shinsei actually comes from his predecessors. How much, of course, is a matter for dispute, and the lack of written records from the dawn of the Empire means the dispute is unlikely to ever be resolved.

For lack of a more concrete starting point, the history of the Brotherhood of Shinsei is generally considered to begin with Shinsei himself. Of course, the Little Teacher is himself a quite mysterious figure. None truly know where he came from, how he became Enlightened, or how he was able to understand the need for seven Thunders to face Fu Leng. Some apocryphal tales have claimed Shinsei learned about the thousand-year struggle with Jigoku from an ancient ruin of the Kenku race, but left unexplained by these stories is how Shinsei was able to understand the Kenku writing. Other stories claim he learned from a wise woman named Sakura who asked many of the questions which Shinsei later answered. Regardless, it is generally understood that Shinsei was not a "monk" as the term is used in the modern Empire – he lived as part of the world, not in an isolated monastery, and he left descendants. It is also known that he survived the Day of Thunder and subsequently departed the Empire to carry his wisdom to other peoples and nations.

Just before he traveled into the Shadowlands with the Seven Thunders, Shinsei supposedly gave a final lesson which eventually became the second book of the Tao, the *Book of Duties*. This short lecture laid out the two hundred and twenty-five rules for monastic living (ascetic self-denial, virtuous living, regular meditation, and so forth). The *Book of Duties* recommended monks should wander the land as Shinsei had done, but also meet frequently to share information and discuss important issues. This document essentially founded the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Afterward, followers of the Little Teacher began to travel all over the Empire, learning new things, aiding the people, and sharing Shinsei's teachings with any who

The Tale of Someisa

It is said that when Shinsei was leaving Rokugan to travel to the gaijin lands, he stopped at several small villages. Each time he was asked many questions as the people sought a small scrap of his wisdom. In the last village he visited, at the very edge of Rokugan, a woman named Someisa waved aside the other villagers to speak with him herself. In a tired voice he asked what her question was, and in response she smiled and said, "Do you have any questions for me?"

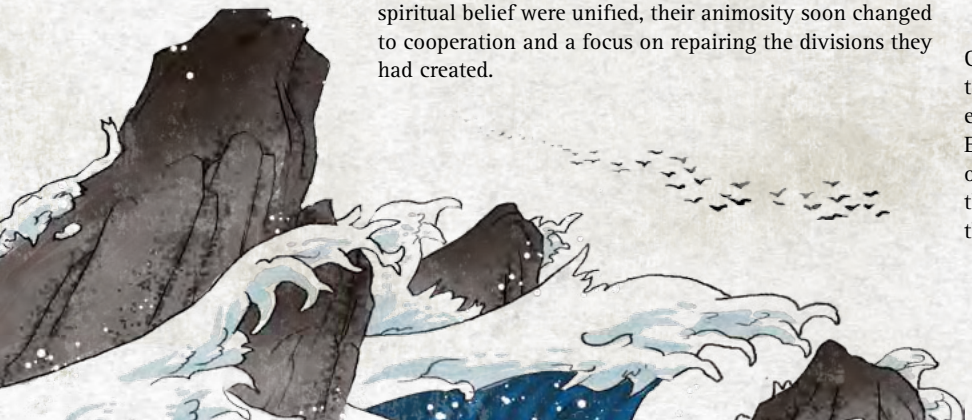
Shinsei broke into a grin, then leaned forward and whispered into her ear. Afterward, he told her she must never share his question with anyone else. The next day he departed the Empire, never to return.

For the first hundred years, Someisa held to her oath and told no one, but eventually she could not help herself and shared it with the trees of her garden, which bloomed as never before. A hundred years later, she shared it with the village's river, which bubbled with joy as its waters flowed pure. A hundred years after that, the Emperor visited and commanded her to share Shinsei's words with him. In answer she only smiled and bowed... and transformed into a tortoise. The Hantei nodded, bowed deeply, and left, content with the wisdom he had observed.

The story of Someisa is generally considered apocryphal – as potent as Shinsei's wisdom may have been, there is no reason to believe it could extend someone's lifespan. Nonetheless, the tale continues to be told, and the Tortoise Clan even watches over an ancient tortoise which they claim to be Someisa herself.

would listen. Soon, they began founding monasteries and temples so their fellow mendicants would have places to meet and rest.

Initially, this led to animosity between these new monks and the traditional religious priests who venerated the Fortunes and the Elemental kami. While the two groups rarely came to outright blows, the division was a serious one, and both sides began assembling political and spiritual power in order to prevail. This could well have escalated into a religious civil war, but Emperor Hantei Genji solved the problem by decreeing the two religions were actually a single faith: Shintao. Once the two sets of spiritual belief were unified, their animosity soon changed to cooperation and a focus on repairing the divisions they had created.



By the end of Hantei Genji's reign, the Brotherhood of Shinsei had attainted its basic organizational form – that is, a network of temples, shrines, and monasteries scattered across the Empire, all staffed by monks pursuing lives of ascetic self-denial, intense spiritual focus, and scholarly study. The first sutras had developed Shinsei's teachings into an organized theology. The tradition of samurai joining the Brotherhood of Shinsei after retirement also emerged during this time, and the Brotherhood was already dividing itself into a seemingly endless array of orders, sects, and philosophical viewpoints, a process which continued throughout the subsequent centuries.

For the most part, the Brotherhood's internal development had little impact on the larger Empire, and the monks generally held themselves apart from Rokugan's politics and internal conflicts. However, there were a number of exceptions, instances in which the Brotherhood became deeply involved in Rokugan's affairs. The following sections outline the more prominent examples.

The Gozoku Era

During the time of the Gozoku conspiracy, Emperor Hantei Kusada sought to work around the Gozoku by using his position as nominal head of the Empire's religion to recruit members of the Brotherhood of Shinsei as his spies. The Brotherhood had no choice but to obey, and in truth many of them were happy to do so, since they saw the Gozoku as an affront to the Celestial Order. Unfortunately, the monk spies were eventually caught and many of them were brutally tortured and executed. (The full story of this event is recounted in Chapter Two of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories*.)

Ironically, the failure of the monastic spies actually worked against the Gozoku, as the martyrdom of so many pious monks and the subsequent burning of three monasteries caused the common people to turn against the conspiracy and even created divisions within its own ranks. This ultimately made the defeat of the Gozoku and the transition back to proper Imperial rule smoother than it might have been. However, the modern Brotherhood sees this era as a dark spot in its history due to its involvement in the sordid world of politics, and one entire sect – the Anshin sect – fell into heresy as a reaction to its brutalization by the Gozoku.

Notwithstanding the Brotherhood's overall attitude toward these events, every now and then rumors still crop up about monks serving as spies for the Emperor.

The Five Rings Heresy

In the early sixth century, a controversial monk named Gorinno threw the Empire into chaos when he decided to step into the arena of politics. Gorinno proposed that each clan in the Empire should be matched to a suitable Element, and claimed Rokugan was experiencing a state of spiritual imbalance and elemental disharmony because there were two "Air" clans but only one clan for each of the other five Elements. The full story of the Five Rings

Heresy is recounted in Chapter Four of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories 2*. Ultimately, the Heresy nearly threw the Empire into civil war; the chaos did not end until the Brotherhood formally declared Gorinno's doctrine to be heretical, requiring all his followers to forsake his teachings or be expelled.

The Steel Chrysanthemum

Emperor Hantei XVI was one of the worst tyrants the Empire ever saw; he exploited and tortured his own people and turned Rokugan into a police state. (The full story of his reign is recounted in Chapter Five of *Imperial Histories 2*.) During this time of turmoil, the Brotherhood followed its preferred approach of avoiding politics but looking out for the common people. Monks distributed whatever food and medical aid they could to alleviate the suffering imposed by the Emperor, and continued to teach the Tao and venerate the Celestial order as they had always done. Their activities gave hope to many whose lives were destroyed by the Steel Chrysanthemum's maddened reign, reminding all that spiritual purity and the path of the soul were more important than transient mortal suffering. Some historians claim more peasants became monks during this era than any other before or since.

The Brotherhood also served a vital purpose in this era for the samurai of the Empire. A large number of Hantei XVI's enemies (real and perceived) escaped his wrath by quietly retiring to the Brotherhood, vanishing into one of the thousands of temples across Rokugan. Others were forced into retirement, but accepted that fate as better than the alternatives; after all, the Steel Chrysanthemum could be very creative in his methods of dealing with his enemies. By giving these people a secure home, the Brotherhood made certain their knowledge and wisdom were not lost to future generations.

The Great Famine

There are countless times in the history of Rokugan when small communities of peasants rise up against oppressive or overly callous samurai lords. In some of these cases, monks of the Brotherhood have stood alongside these peasants or even led them. But no other such instance can match the immense convulsion of the Great Famine, when a monk called Rojin – actually the retired Lion Clan champion – and his fellow Brotherhood *sohei* stood alongside the so-called People's Legion in their massive revolt against Emperor Hantei XX.

Rojin saw the famine and the events that followed it as a continuation of the cruelty he had perpetuated when he was the Lion Clan Champion, and he was obsessed with helping the peasants starving due to the Empire's cruel indifference. His military skill, and the dedication of his monastic brothers, help keep the rebellion alive for three years before it was finally crushed by overwhelming force. The rest of the Brotherhood generally disapproved of Rojin's actions, but did not see them as outright heretical since they were in keeping with the general tradition of allowing each temple and sect to follow its own path.

In the end, when the People's Legion was defeated Rojin came to see the ultimate futility of his actions. He returned to the Brotherhood a broken man, and died a few years later at the hands of his Lion Clan successor.

The Redemption of Hantei XXII

After the peasant revolution caused by the Great Famine, the vindictive Emperor Hantei XX imposed harsh new restrictions on the peasants of the Empire, extending some of these to the Brotherhood as well. Although the return to normal weather and full harvests blunted the pain of these laws, the Empire's lower castes nonetheless remained restive, while the monks of the Brotherhood patiently endured. The next Emperor, the cheerful but rather ineffectual Hantei XXI, maintained these restrictions more or less by default. When he died, the Throne passed to his grandson, who had just recently completed his gempukku.

Hantei XXI had died while touring the Scorpion lands in the spring, and the Imperial caravan – which included the young Hantei XXII – immediately began the lengthy trek back to Otosan Uchi. As the caravan was crossing a river, two events transpired which changed the Empire forever. First, one of the men carrying the Emperor's palanquin stepped on a loose rock and twisted his ankle, falling into the river and the palanquin into the water as well. Second, the spring thaw decided at that moment to flow down from the hills, sending a surge of water down the riverbed. The

Emperor's palanquin was torn out of the hands of his other bearers and swept downstream, where it smashed into rocks and instantly killed two servants who were inside. The Emperor himself was knocked senseless, his robes torn to shreds.

When Hantei XXII awoke, his injuries has been bandaged and he was lying on a threadbare *tatami* mat in a simple peasant hut. An old monk in a monk's saffron robe was seated nearby, stirring a pot of soup. The monk nursed the young Hantei back to health, and as he did so he taught the Emperor about the Tao of Shinsei. When the Seppun guards tracked down the Emperor many days later, he was a changed man. Before he had accepted his grandfather and great-grandfather's assumption that peasants and monks were ungrateful fools, drains on the resources of the Empire, but his time with this nameless monk showed him otherwise. Hantei XXII rescinded the laws and restrictions imposed by his predecessor, and during his reign he commissioned numerous new temples, as well as repairing many roads used by religious pilgrims. His enlightened rule almost certainly contributed to the Empire's subsequent hard-fought victory against the second appearance of the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban.

Fighting the Bloodspeaker

When Iuchiban emerged for the second time and ravaged the Empire with an army of Bloodspeaker cultists, undead abominations, and foul demons, none suffered more than the peasants. While the official histories speak mostly of the brave deaths of samurai in actions like the Bloody Retreat, they barely mention that entire villages of peasants were slain as blood sacrifices or to supply more corpses to re-animate as undead soldiers. And while the samurai were heroes for the Empire during this grim struggle, it was the monks of the Brotherhood who became the heroes of the people.

The histories of the Brotherhood recount many stories of the deeds performed during those days. There are tales of secluded monasteries taking in hundreds of peasant refugees and then holding off sieges by *maho-tsukai* and the countless foul creatures at their command. Other stories speak of monks sacrificing themselves to avenge the people of destroyed villages, or exhibiting sudden spiritual powers to resist the maho of the Bloodspeakers. Many of these accounts are thought to be apocryphal, but what is certain is that the Brotherhood of Shinsei went out of its way to protect the peasants during this time of strife. It is also certain that if they had not done so there would have been small armies of undead and Tainted madmen scattered throughout the Empire, and the defeat of Iuchiban would not have ended the war.

The Emperor Monk

Rokugan has had over forty Emperors through the centuries of its recorded history; while many of them are well-known and their deeds recounted for each generation, there are some whose tenures remain largely unknown outside of the archives of the Imperial Histories. One such is the reign of Hantei XXIV, the Monastic Emperor. Hantei XXIV spent his childhood studying the Tao rather than politics and military tactics, and when his father died suddenly, he felt unprepared to take the Throne. He called on the Brotherhood to provide him with advisors, and a group of very pious monks answered the call. At their suggestion, Emperor Hantei XXIV began to implement changes designed to bring about a stricter adherence to the tenets of Shintao, especially the emphasis on ascetic self-denial and virtuous poverty.

The Emperor's policies did not go over well with Rokugan's samurai, who were long accustomed to enjoying lives of wealth and privilege in return for their service to the Empire. Some accounts suggest there were plots underway to remove the Emperor from power (perhaps by persuading him to retire) and replace him with a more suitable monarch from the Hantei family line. Eventually, however, the Abbots of several of the more prominent temples sought audience with the Emperor. They explained to him that Enlightenment could not be imposed by law; it could only be attained through an individual path, a path different for every person. After days in conference, the Emperor reluctantly rescinded his policies; soon after, he himself retired and joined the Brotherhood.

The Battle of Thunder Plain

The Brotherhood is generally a peaceful organization, but there are a number of sects and orders which take a more martial approach. (Supposedly even Shinsei was a capable warrior, and there is no question his reincarnation in the twelfth century was a formidable swordsman.) In the year 1005, a daimyo of the Iuchi had a disagreement with a daimyo of the Kaiu. The Unicorn decided he would march an army across the Plains of Thunder to destroy the Kaiu's village. Rather than allowing the sacred plain to be sullied by such an act, the *sohei* of the Temple of Osano-Wo marched out to meet the Iuchi forces.

A defensive battle ensued, with the *sohei* turning back a series of cavalry charges with their polearms. When the Iuchi shugenja tried to call on his magic to support his attacks, the kami refused to answer, and finally the Unicorn had no choice but to turn around and

head home. The Brotherhood refers to this engagement as the Battle of Thunder Plain, and holds it up as an example of how monks can stand against an impious act when such is necessary. The Unicorn, on the other hand, have done their best to forget about the whole thing... although they have never again attempted to march armies across the Plain of Thunder.

The Hooded Ronin

The events of the Clan Wars and the Second Day of Thunder are among the most pivotal in Rokugani history, and a key player in those events was Shinsei himself – or rather, Shinsei's reincarnation, born from his bloodline. The man who called himself the Hooded Ronin grew up within the Brotherhood, which had carefully protected Shinsei's descendents for over a thousand years. When the Empire began to come apart in war and chaos, the Hooded Ronin left the shelter of the temples and began traveling the Empire, setting the events into motion that would eventually lead to seven mortal samurai once more facing off against the dark god Fu Leng.

The Hooded Ronin was not a particularly memorable person, yet much as with his ancestor he seemed to have an extraordinary knack for saying the right thing and being in the right place to ensure events transpired as they needed to. Legends say he met with Toturi the Black, and it was after their meeting that Toturi became the man whose strength would reunite a divided Empire. Legends say he met with Bayushi Kachiko and set her on the road to being the Scorpion Thunder. And those same legends say it was the Hooded Ronin who opened the last Black Scroll on the Second Day of Thunder, returning the last of Fu Leng's power but also trapping him in the mortal body of Hantei XXXIX, where he could finally be slain.

It is difficult to determine exactly how much the Hooded Ronin affected Rokugan during the Clan Wars, especially since the number of stories about his deeds have multiplied over time. Still, there is no denying that without the reborn Shinsei, the Empire would have fallen into darkness.

The Conflicts with Hitomi

During the Hidden Emperor era, Mirumoto Hitomi's flirtation with the power of the Lying Darkness caused her to go mad for a time. Among other strange acts, she threatened to kill all *ise zumi* who did not renounce the Togashi name and take hers in its place. Many of the Togashi fled the mountains of the Dragon and took shelter with the Brotherhood of Shinsei. The Togashi and the Brotherhood were a good fit, since both were monastic ascetics dedicated to the pursuit of Enlightenment. The Togashi brought the monasteries which housed them many insights into the world of samurai, and some of the most notable theological writings of the time were created by Togashi sheltering with the Brotherhood. Although the Togashi would eventually return to the Dragon Clan after Hitomi recovered her sanity, they remained close to the Brotherhood thereafter, and some of them would eventually join its ranks permanently.

The Brotherhood also became deeply involved in the war between Hitomi and the ancient race of the Naga. Togashi Hoshi, the son of the dead Kami, was staying with the Brotherhood at the time, and at his urging the monks joined with the Naga in their march on the Dragon mountains. This was perhaps the only time in history that the Brotherhood marched to war en masse, and probably only the voice of Togashi's son could have stirred them to such action. However, when the battle for Shiro Kitsuki began, the monks of the Brotherhood were horrified by the bloodshed and withdrew from the alliance. Hoshi later apologized for drawing the Brotherhood into the conflict, although he still believed Hitomi would not have escaped her madness otherwise.

Rosoku

Like his father, the Hooded Ronin, the man called Rosoku had an enormous impact on the history of Rokugan. Indeed, Rosoku had a much more direct impact on the Empire than any of the earlier descendants of Shinsei (aside from his father, of course). His father begged him on his deathbed not to abandon Rokugan as the first Shinsei had done, and in response Rosoku emerged from hiding and issued the challenges of the Books of the Elements. He believed the prophecies of Uikku – the so-called "Dooms of the Clans" – had not been defeated by Rokugan's victory at the Second Day of Thunder, but merely pushed back and delayed; he hoped that by guiding Rokugan toward Enlightenment the Dooms could be further delayed or perhaps defeated altogether.

Rosoku's challenges led many samurai to find their way to Enlightenment, most notably the six Keepers of the Elements who secured the Empire's spiritual future. Sadly, this intervention in the Empire's affairs brought him to the attention of the Bloodspeaker Cult, which eventually assassinated him. However, Rosoku did leave a son behind to carry on the bloodline of Shinsei to future generations.

The New Tao

In the year 1129, following his ascension to the Throne of Rokugan, Toturi I had a long conversation with the Hooded Ronin. This discussion was written down by a young Phoenix prodigy named Isawa Osugi, and came to be known as the New Tao. However, the Brotherhood of Shinsei found it to be a mystifying document, speaking as much of danger as of enlightenment, and full of bizarre riddles and puzzles. Further difficulty arose when the forces of the Lying Darkness attempted to destroy the New Tao; although half of the document was saved, it was never entirely recovered.

What many did not realize at the time was that the New Tao also had connections to the Kolat. Osugi herself was a member of the conspiracy, as were several others involved in the study and promulgation of the document, such as the prophet and seer Itako and the scholar Ikudaiu. In fact, the Kolat Master named Akodo Kage actually commanded these monks to "revise" the New Tao to better reflect Kolat philosophy, although it is unknown to what extent they succeeded.

After the War Against the Darkness, the remaining original fragments of the New Tao were placed into the care of the Four Temples sect. The Brotherhood remains of two minds as to whether the document should truly be considered as having the same importance as the original Tao, and it is notable that the Hooded Ronin's son Rosoku never made reference to the New Tao during his later interactions with the Empire.

Many sayings have been attributed to the New Tao, and some of these have made their way into Rokugan's general culture as aphorisms or koans. Some of the better-known ones include the following:

"The way to Enlightenment is hidden in the pattern of the sun through the trees."

"A man's greatest weakness lies where he cannot see the truth."

"Only if you bend before the cutting rush of the wind will you rise again in the following calm."

"One cannot define a color using coarse words. So it is with enlightenment."

"Truth is too valuable to be given to the fool that dares ask for it."

"The strength of the will is the strength of the mountain, seek it not in words, but in deeds."

"Be master of mind rather than mastered by mind."

"When an ordinary man gains knowledge he is a sage. When a sage gains knowledge, he is an ordinary man."

"Promises to enemies are meant to be broken."

"When the way come to an end, then change – and having changed, pass through."

"To shrink something, first expand it. To weaken something, first strengthen it. To rebuild something, first destroy it."

"Some rise by treachery, and some by virtue fall. A true hero conquers both."

"Evil beginnings have evil ends."

"Sometimes the greatest victory is also the most precious loss."

"Ill fortunes arrive only when the door has been left open for them. Good fortune knocks, and is too often turned away."

"Learn to let go, and you will find freedom within yourself."

Organization and Hierarchy of the Brotherhood

The Brotherhood of Shinsei is one of the largest organizations in Rokugan, although most samurai have little idea of its true size. There are literally thousands of shrines, temples, and monasteries spread throughout the Empire, from tiny roadside shrines to the massive temples of the Imperial City, and tens of thousands of monks serve in these holdings. Philosophically, the Brotherhood encompasses both the teachings of Shinsei and all aspects of Fortunism, resulting in a myriad of different sects and monastic orders.

All newly enrolled monks are granted the rank of Initiate. This is done regardless of their age or their former standing in life, and more than one powerful samurai has been bitterly humbled by finding himself a lowly initiate, working the fields alongside young *heimin* monks who have grown up within the Brotherhood.

After a monk has made sufficient progress in understanding the Tao and his place in the Celestial Order, he may be named as a senior, a *rishi*. This promotion is made on the judgment of the monastery's abbot (or *sojo*) in conjunction with the monastery's other senior members, the *sozu*, whose principle duty is to assign tasks and chores. The *sozu* are chosen by a consensus among the ranks of the *rishi*; a new *sozu* is only chosen when a prior one advances to a higher rank or dies. The abbot is chosen by a vote of the entire monastery, and is supposed to be the one monk who stands closest to Enlightenment. The Brotherhood believes anyone worthy of such a position will display all the qualities necessary, such that even Initiates will recognize his worth. Much as with the *sozu*, a new abbot is only chosen when the previous abbot dies or advances into the upper ranks of the Brotherhood.

As might be expected, maintaining an organization of such size is a daunting task, and the Brotherhood is to a significant degree decentralized. All of the monasteries and temples are part of various Orders, such as the Order of Seven Thunders or the Order of the Ten Thousand Fortunes, and each Order is led by a Grand Master (or *dai-sojo*). These individuals are the closest thing to internal rulers the Brotherhood possesses. At the absolute head of the Brotherhood of Shinsei is the Emperor, granting him total spiritual authority throughout Rokugan. However, the duties and responsibilities of the Emperor typically prevent an active search for Enlightenment, and it is quite rare for the Son of Heaven to involve himself in the actual administration of the Brotherhood. Typically, when someone needs to call on the leadership of the Brotherhood, the preferred method is to speak with the Grand Master of the Order of the Four Temples, who is considered the most prestigious and influential of the *dai-sojo*.

Periodically, the Grand Masters and other senior and respected monks assemble in a meeting called a Great Convocation. These assemblages are rare, and are usually called in order to discuss some major event or theological dispute which is affecting the Brotherhood. For example, during the era of Gorinno's Five Rings doctrine, a Convocation was held to determine whether his belief was heretical.

Mendicant and Hermetic Monks

Not all monks seek Enlightenment as part of an organized monastery. Many choose to emulate the original *Book of Duties* and seek the wisdom of Shinsei as the Little Teacher himself did: wandering the towns and villages of Rokugan, learning all they can, helping the unfortunate, and teaching any who will listen. These wandering monks are still part of the various Orders of the Brotherhood, and usually work in cooperation with any local monasteries, but they choose to follow the Tao in a way that precludes staying at length in any one place. Such monks are known as mendicants, and since they have no fixed home, they often rely on donations from pious samurai or generous commoners to eat and live.

Some monks eschew even informal contact with the rest of Rokugan. These monks usually live deeply isolated lives, high in the mountains or deep in the forests of Rokugan. Sometimes called *yamabushi*, they are also known as hermetic monks. They believe that only by giving up the outside world completely can Enlightenment be properly sought. There are many legends of these hermits descending from the mountains and performing miracles; some of them are even true.

The Origin of Sects in the Brotherhood

"There are as many sects in the Brotherhood as there are words in the Tao." – Gaman

The Tao of Shinsei is the foundational document of religion in Rokugan, and in its modern form (first attained during the reign of Hantei Genji, with minor modifications since then) it takes the form of three scrolls. The first of these is the *Book of Discussion*, which chronicles Shinsei's famed discussion with Hantei, along with several stories about Shinsei's earlier meetings with the other Kami and his journeys through Rokugan before the Day of Thunder. Many of these stories are considered apocryphal, but they have been in the Tao for centuries and it would be considered impious to remove them. The second scroll is the *Book of Duties*, the guide to the monastic lifestyle. It contains two hundred and twenty-five rules, supposedly all presented by Shinsei in his final lesson to his followers. These rules, most of which involve various forms of self-discipline and self-denial, are supposed to guide the body and soul along the path to Enlightenment. The third and final scroll is the *Book of the Soul*, and unlike the rest of the Tao is not attributed to Shinsei at all. Rather, this third book comprises the various writings of the earliest and most enlightened members of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, and serves both to interpret Shinsei's teachings and to unify them with Fortunist religion.

The Book of the Soul is considered to be the first and greatest of the *sutras*. *Sutras* are writings on Enlightenment, based on the Tao, and are usually created by monks of great wisdom or learning, especially those who have attained the rank of Grand Master. Some *sutras*, such as the Path of Purification, are based directly on sections of the Tao. The Path of Purification outlines the lifestyle of monks, expanding Shinsei's rules from the *Book of Duties* into uniform guidelines applied at almost all monasteries.

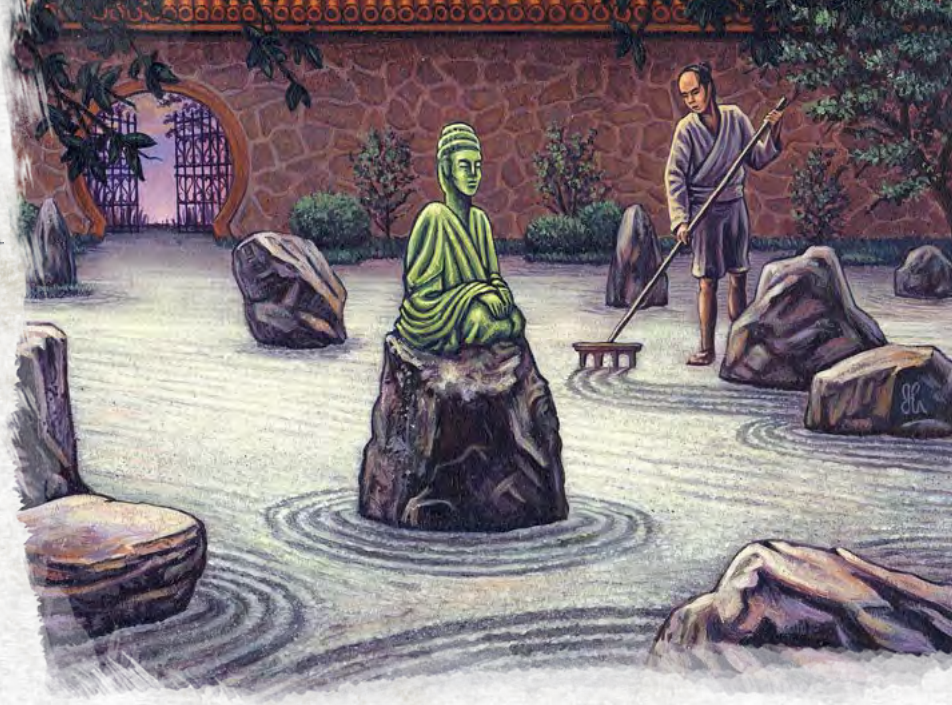
The Path of Purification is one of five *sutras* – including the famous Lotus *sutra* – which the Brotherhood generally attributes to Shinsei himself, claiming he wrote them in order to clarify and expand the lessons recorded in the Tao. The large and influential Shintaoist sect of the Brotherhood focuses its doctrine on these *sutras* and places them above all others.

Other *sutras* fall into the more common category of interpretations of the Tao by later authors. The most controversial of these is the Diamond *sutra*, an expansion of the Lotus sutra introduced to the Brotherhood by the monk Basso, who claimed it was a lost teaching of Shinsei. The Diamond *sutra* asserts the Seven Thunders were avatars of Shinsei, and therefore the true battle on the first Day of Thunder was between the mortal Shinsei and the Kami Fu Leng. However, the origin of the Diamond sutra has been questioned for centuries, and while it is the principle guide for the Shingon/Shinmaki sect it is not officially considered to be one of the five true Shinsei *sutras*.

Who Becomes a Monk?

When a samurai retires, the most typical choice is for him to shave his head and join the Brotherhood of Shinsei, living out his remaining years in peaceful contemplation. The traditional age for this is forty, although prominent or high-ranking samurai will often delay retirement (and in the Crab they seldom join the Brotherhood even if they do retire). Thus, most temples and monasteries will contain a significant contingent of aging monks and nuns who used to be samurai. In some cases, these former samurai find it difficult to leave their old lives behind, and there are many instances of a "retired" warrior leaving the monastery and putting his armor back on to defend his family or clan. However, there are just as many instances of former samurai who leave their old existence completely behind, fully embracing their new identities as monks. Occasionally, these devout retired samurai will even rise to prominence or positions of leadership within their new lives as monks.

However, retired samurai ultimately form only a minority of the Empire's monks and nuns. The majority of the Brotherhood are recruited from the common people. They may be ordinary folk who feel the call of Shinsei or the Fortunes, or former criminals who sought refuge in a temple. Most frequently, though, they are orphans, abandoned children, or runaways who are raised within the monastery walls, growing up in the Brotherhood and knowing no other life. Every Rokugani, commoner and samurai, knows the Brotherhood will never turn away a child who is left at the steps of the local shrine. Thus, simply by existing the Brotherhood of Shinsei is able to give life and purpose and even the hope of enlightenment to countless souls who might otherwise have died as infants or young children.



The Life of a Monk

Most monks of the Brotherhood fall into the hermetic category, and live in a single religious holding – a temple, shrine, or monastery – for their entire lives. Life within these places is simple but also demanding. The monks share in all the mundane duties of the place, such as cleaning, cooking, laundry, and repairs. Most of this work is done by the Initiates, but in most orders the senior monks participate in such activities as well. The rest of the day is divided into periods of meditation, prayer, scholarly study, and physical exercise. (Even the most peaceful sects engage in physical training in order to maintain health and encourage clear thinking.)

All monastic orders obey the basic constraints set out in the *Book of Duties* and the Path of Purification. The most important of these include the eight virtues of the Brotherhood, known as the Eight Petals of the Lotus: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Individual sects do sometimes disagree on what exactly these virtues mean, and such disagreements often give rise to theological debates or even new sects of the Brotherhood.

The flip side of monastic life is the variety of constraints on monks' lives and behavior, also derived from the Path of Purification. All monks are prohibited from eating meat (except for fish). They must avoid causing violence and cannot cause death to any being. (Many sects make exceptions to these rules when facing religious heretics or creatures of the Taint.) Monks are expected to remain celibate, regardless of gender, since physical pleasure is a distraction from the quest for enlightenment. (The sole exception to this are Fortunist monks dedicated to Benten, the Fortune of Love.) Likewise, monks must avoid any sort of intoxicant. A monk must speak no harmful language, a difficult injunction when facing arrogant samurai or heretical belief. A monk cannot defile any sanctified place, and mendicant monks often make a point of restoring shrines which have been abandoned or disgraced. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a monk must never – through action or omission – allow evil or ignorance to flourish.

All of these principles are upheld almost universally within the Brotherhood (although, as noted, there are a few exceptions). In addition, many sects and orders impose additional constraints on themselves as part of their specific approach to the quest for enlightenment. Vows of silence, practices of physical self-denial, and similar practices are not uncommon.

Monasteries typically enforce their rules through special gatherings held every twenty days. The *Book of Duties* is read out to all the monks, and after this is done any monk guilty of a violation is expected to step forward and confess. If the monk is known to be guilty of violations but refuses to confess, the order will cast him out and the entire Brotherhood will shun him. If the monk does confess, some manner of punishment may be imposed, such as extra duties, meditation and penance, exile, or even physical disfigurement. However, some orders do not punish a monk who has confessed, believing they should emulate Shinsei's dictum: "To speak is a moment's shame, to remain silent is a lifelong shame." Regardless of whether punishment is imposed, the Brotherhood believes a sinful monk's bad kharma will punish him. Since the Brotherhood rejects lethal violence, disobedient monks are never executed; even if they are found to be Tainted, this simply means they are sent to one of the remote monasteries where the residents drink Jade Petal Tea.

Koans

"Enlightenment can only be found without words, but cannot be approached without words." – Shinsei

A *koan* (literally a "public proposition") is an enigmatic riddle, statement, story, or question designed to lead others toward the goal of Enlightenment. Typically, the puzzle presented by a *koan* cannot be solved through simple reason, and instead is intended to provoke intuitive understanding or a moment of clarity. They often present deliberately untrue statements, self-negating paradoxes, mysteries which are impossible to prove true or false, and similarly confusing things. Typically, the person delivering the koan is trying to demonstrate the futility of expressing wisdom in words at all.

Koans are used as teaching tools by enlightened scholars, monks, and shugenja. They are especially widespread within the Brotherhood of Shinsei, where a common method is to present a koan to initiates and then require them to meditate on its meaning. A few sample *koans* include:

"There are only three steps to Enlightenment. The first step kills your parents. The second step kills me. The third step kills yourself. Are you ready to walk that path?"

"What is most useful of the cup: what is there, or what is not?"

"Do not believe anything I would tell you. To find the answers you seek, we must all be wrong."

The Major Sects of the Brotherhood

Although the Brotherhood of Shinsei contains a seemingly infinite variety of different monastic Orders, the vast majority of its members fall into one of four basic sects: Shintao, Fortunist, Lotus, or Questioners. Nearly all of the Orders adhere to one of these four basic approaches to Rokugani religion.

Shintao

Shintao is one of the two oldest and largest sects in the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Its Grand Masters claim the first teacher of Shintao was Shinsei himself, and they believe the leader of the Order of the Four Temples follows directly in Shinsei's footsteps. Shintao is the most popular sect amongst the samurai class, and most retired samurai continue in that tradition when they join the Brotherhood.

Shintao focuses on meditation as the way to see the true self, and the sect believes that once the true self has been glimpsed one has attained Enlightenment. Thus the monks of this sect tend to be more contemplative and isolated than others, remaining within their monasteries in order to spend as much time as possible in meditation. However, they do teach others about Shinsei's wisdom in order to advance the Empire's spiritual purity. One of their favorite teaching tools is the *koan*.

Fortunist

"The Tao may show the path of enlightenment, but it is the Fortunes we trust with our daily concerns." – Takuan

Fortunist monks are, arguably, the most numerous and the most sought-after monks in all of Rokugan. Most monks of *heimin* origin follow the Fortunes, and since the majority of the Brotherhood is recruited from the *heimin*, Fortunist monks naturally predominate. They can also legitimately claim to be the oldest sect in the Brotherhood, since the worship of the Fortunes pre-dated Shinsei himself. Though Fortunist monks study Shinsei's teachings as all monks do, their primary concern is the worship of the Fortunes, both Great and Lesser. Fortunist monks focus on the *Book of the Soul*, and seek to unify Shinsei's words from the Tao with spiritual understanding of the Fortunes and the Celestial Heavens.

A Fortunist monk believes in serving all of the Fortunes, no matter how famous or how ignominious such service might be. Only through diligent faithful service will a Fortune free the adherents' soul from the kharmic wheel and thus allow them to attain enlightenment. Such monks also provide the manpower for maintaining the countless shrines and temples to various Fortunes all over the Empire. Such monks find their services in frequent demand. Farmers seek the blessings of Inari or other Fortunes associated with nature, farming, and health. Samurai seek aid in invoking Bishamon's strength or Emma-O's cold fury. Lovers seek the blessings of Benten. There is never a shortage of pilgrims seeking the help and protection of the Fortunes, and the monks of this sect are always busy.

Lotus

The Lotus *sutra* is one of the most controversial of the five Shinsei *sutras*. It speaks of dogged adherence to empty-mind meditation, focusing on the phrases contained within the *sutra* itself. Adherents of the Lotus sect practice the most severe and intense meditation in the Brotherhood. They believe a single sincere perfect utterance of the Lotus sutra will grant Enlightenment, so

Lotus monks continuously seek new ways to express the *sutra*. A Lotus monk will typically be found in the most inhospitable environments, such as remote mountains or deep forests. Only in those situations, they believe, can the mind be truly emptied and thus filled with the purity of the *sutra*.

Lotus monks are fairly rare, and are usually located in the more remote and isolated monasteries.

Questioners

The Questioners are also a somewhat controversial sect, albeit less so than the *Shinmaki* (see sidebar). Started by Nonin, one of Shinsei's first followers, the Questioners believe the physical world is an illusion, an illusion that can be dispelled through the proper challenging of perception. Once the illusion is dispelled, they believe, Enlightenment can begin. Questioners have created more *koan* than any other sect in the Brotherhood, and they consider the creation of new *koan* as a sacred art. Questioners are also fond of pranks and other kinds of humor, seeing them as a way to challenge perceptions and change views.

The most notorious aspect of this sect is not their wise sayings or fondness for pranks, but relates to their name. The Questioners believe in questioning all things, using questions to frame perceptions and make their students think about their understanding of the world. Thus they will frequently call attention to problems with the Empire's social order, the misbehavior of samurai, and other such topics considered off-limits by everyone else. Questioners have even been known to doubt the entire Celestial Order itself, since it could be an illusion as well. Thus, out of all the sects of the Brotherhood, it is Questioners who have most frequently died the hands of outraged samurai.

The Shingon/Shinmaki Sect

The *Shinmaki* sect, originally known as the *Shingon* sect, was one of the earliest recognized sects of the Brotherhood and the first to be inspired by a *sutra* not definitively written by Shinsei. Founded by the monk Basso, who promulgated the Diamond *sutra* (and may have also written it), the *Shinmaki* remain one of the most mysterious groups within the Brotherhood. Their bizarre practices are described in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*, page 192-193.

It is extremely uncommon for a *Shinmaki* master to teach more than one student, and *Shinmaki* monasteries are the smallest maintained by the Brotherhood. Despite their lack of numbers, every year on the third moon during the Month of the Monkey, the entire sect meets at a monastery founded by Basso. The topics of discussion at such meetings are unknown to outsiders, and it is considered highly improper to ask.

The Major Brotherhood Orders

Although there are many Orders within the Brotherhood, the majority of monks belong to the five major Orders listed here, all of which can trace their lineage back to the earliest centuries of the Empire. When a samurai thinks of a Brotherhood monk, he is generally thinking about monks from these Orders.

The Four Temples

Devotion: Shintao

Though not the oldest sect in Rokugan's history, the Four Temples have influenced the role of religion in Rokugan more than almost any other sect. The original Four Temples were founded and built by Seppun herself, who constructed them at Kyuden Seppun when organized religion in Rokugan was being born. While the Emperor is considered to be the titular head of Shintao and thus of all religion in Rokugan, it is the leader of the Four Temples monks who serves as the public mouthpiece for the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

The monks of this sect have always served at the highest echelons of power. Eschewing the traditional ascetic isolation of many other monks, the followers of the Four Temples recognize that man is a social creature and in order to obtain Enlightenment he must interact with the world. These monks have often served as advisors to Clan Champions, daimyo, generals, and other powerful leaders. Unlike their counterparts in the lesser-known Autumn Leaf Temple most of the individuals within the Four Temples sect are not former courtiers, but instead come from all walks of life, from the lowliest commoners to the most prestigious of former samurai. Indeed, more than a few daimyo have joined the Four Temples after retirement, and in some cases subsequently rise to the upper ranks of its leadership.

The Four Temples are also known as a repository for countless artifacts and relics. This includes original copies of the Tao of Shinsei (and in the twelfth century, the fragments of the New Tao). The Temples also maintain ancient relics of the Hantei dynasty and numerous other Imperial *nemuranai*. They are particularly well-known for the Chimes of Purity: four bells located at each of the Four Temples, rumored to be able to hold back the forces of Jigoku. (After the destruction of Otosan Uchi during the Four Winds era, the monks of the Four Temples chose to relocate the Chimes, taking each one to a different temple. Three went to shrines in the lands of the Crane, Dragon, and Unicorn, while the most potent was taken to the new Imperial Capital at Toshi Ranbo. Each of these temples was renamed after the Bell which it received: Daikandaiji, Yakushiji, Asukadera, and Kawaradera, the greatest of the Bells.)

Four Temples monks maintain close ties to every other monastic group within the Empire. Due to their position as the leaders of the Brotherhood, the Four Temples monks also serve the Emperor and the Brotherhood as an information network, sharing theological resources and debates from all across the Empire. The monks are also able to share details on many other aspects of the Empire's affairs because of their roles as advisors to some of the most influential players in Rokugan's politics. This allows the Brotherhood as a whole to remain informed on the latest political trends, especially when these might impact religious matters.

The Shrine of the Seven Thunders

Devotion: Shintao

To be a monk of the Shrine of the Seven Thunders is to understand that perfection is possible... but can only be attained through imperfection. The main temple of the Seven Thunders, the core of the Order, is nestled within the Spine of the World Mountains with only a single road leading to its gates. Reaching the temple is a difficult trek, sometimes taking a week or more. During the journey, awestruck visitors gaze on one of the greatest works of art in the Empire – the giant sixty-foot-high sculptures of the original Seven Thunders, painstakingly carved into the mountainsides along the path. The monks claim the souls of most of the original Thunders reside within these mountains; they privately acknowledge two are missing (Shosuro and Hida Atarasi) but make no effort to spread this knowledge to the outside world. Inside the temples the monks maintain artifacts of all seven Thunders (and in the twelfth century they add relics of the second incarnations of the Thunders as well).

The monks of the Shrine of Seven Thunders are reclusive in the extreme. Most focus their lives on dedication to a single Thunder, excluding all others. In some ways these monks are almost caricatures of the ascetic lifestyle, and they only occasionally seek the company of anyone from outside the mountains. However, because of the great importance of the Seven Thunders' legend to Rokugan, the outside world does admire this Order and sometimes calls on their aid, forcing them to expose their reclusive and socially inept natures to popular observation.

The Order of the Seven Thunders attributes each of the original Seven Thunders (and their newer counterparts, after they appear) with perfection in their own unique areas. In essence, each Thunder represents an idealization of an aspect of Shinsei, while also showing the imperfection of mortal humanity; the Order believes this shows how true perfection may be obtained from flawed souls.

The Shrine also maintains an extensive library which is probably the Empire's greatest source of knowledge on the history of each Thunder (old and new). The monks do not publicize this, since they know many dangerous and shameful secrets on each of the Thunders, secrets better kept hidden from the unscrupulous.

The Temple of Kaimetsu-Uo

Devotion: Fortunist

When an artisan's story or peasant's rumor spreads tales of a wandering honorable monk who helps the common folk, it is often the result of activities by the monks of Kaimetsu-Uo. According to legend, this sect originated when the famed *ise zumi* Togashi Kaze visited a remote shrine prior to his death in the year 251. Kaze discovered a seemingly abandoned monastery with overgrown fields and untended grounds, but when he explored it he found a group of monks so intent upon meditation that they neglected all worldly pursuits. Kaze took it upon himself to teach the sect a new style of meditation that required physical movement, keeping them engaged in the real world. This was, in fact, a variation of his martial art, Kaze-do. At first skeptical, the group soon became avid practitioners of the art. Thus transformed, they eventually came to pattern their entire Order after a warrior, the son and avenger of the Fortune of Thunder: Kaimetsu-Uo.

After Togashi Kaze's death, the monks of Kaimetsu-Uo became the primary source of Kaze-do training, spreading his legacy throughout the Empire. Though the Order focuses on martial training and the courageous legacy of their namesake, they are actually closely aligned with doctrines of tranquility and peace. They see their physical training as a way for individuals to elevate themselves mentally and physically, searching for self-perfection through physical perfection. The Temple emphasizes martial teachings on self-defense, avoiding unwarranted combat. In addition, they prohibit any sort of bragging or intimidation, instead seeking to protect and purify the world around them while freeing themselves from the corruption and distraction of the mortal realm. Because of their focus on both purification and the defense of the populace, adherents of Kaimetsu-Uo have become popular and well-known among the *heimin*.

The Seven Thunders Order & the Second Day of Thunder

In the twelfth century, the Second Day of Thunder is a particularly momentous event for the Brotherhood's Order of the Seven Thunders, since they are able to see their beliefs played out before their eyes. The Order believes the modern Thunders are superb examples of their doctrine that imperfect mortals can embody the perfect Avatars of Shinsei's nature.

- The Crab Thunder represents the Avatar of Protection, and Hida Yakamo attained that position after previously succumbing to the Taint and rampaging across the Empire as a brutal war-leader.
- The Crane Thunder is the Avatar of Honor, attained by Doji Hoturi after a life as a shallow womanizer.
- The Dragon Thunder is the Avatar of Knowledge, yet Mirumoto Hitomi pursued a mad quest for vengeance that nearly consumed her.
- The Lion Thunder is the Avatar of Purity, yet Akodo Toturi was a dishonored ronin who was ruined by his love for a geisha.
- The Phoenix Thunder is the Avatar of Rebirth, but Isawa Tadaka was corrupted by the Shadowlands and nearly fell to the Taint.
- The Scorpion Thunder is the Avatar of Destruction, but Bayushi Kachiko was a courtier and manipulator, the foremost seductress of her time.
- The Unicorn Thunder is the Avatar of Mercy, yet Otaku Kamoko was a ruthless warrior known for her deeds on the battlefield.

The Order of Kaimetsu-Uo maintains three major temples, one each in the lands of the Crab, the Lion, and the Mantis. The greatest of these, Kaimetsu-Uo Seido, is in the Kaze province of the Mantis Isles, hardly surprising given the Order's close association with the founder of the Mantis Clan. Theologically, the Order espouses a somewhat unusual mix, placing first emphasis on Fortunist teachings but also intensely studying the words of Shinsei; it is perhaps the most "balanced" of all the major monastic sects. The Order also studies Kaimetsu-Uo himself, but views him differently than those of the samurai caste. The monks regard Kaimetsu-Uo's life as a demonstration of deliberately avoided needless conflict, eschewing a war of succession with his half-brother in the Crab Clan and instead embracing the hardship of exile to the Mantis Isles. The Order believes his subsequent friendship with the *koumori* spirits is proof that he followed an Enlightened path.

Rumors about this Order spread easily because so many of its adherents are mendicant monks. Monks of Kaimetsu-Uo rarely stay in one place for long, choosing instead to seek out rumors of corruption, protect defenseless villages, and purge sources of great dishonor. Of particular interest

to the sect are any rumors of fellow Brotherhood monks who might be abusing their spiritual abilities or religious authority. In addition, the monks often try to oppose the abuses of callous or corrupt samurai lords, although they do so not through direct violence but instead by teaching the populace of a harassed village the art of Kaze-do.

The monks of Kaimetsu-Uo maintain close ties with all other monastic orders, and are also unusually close to the samurai caste, especially the Mantis. This allows the monks to stay well-informed about any trouble in the Empire which may need their attention, as well as to learn about new martial techniques they may be able to incorporate into their martial meditation practices.

The Temple of Osano-Wo

Devotion: Fortunist

Aside from the seven Great Fortunes, Osano-Wo is perhaps the most well-known of all Fortunes worshiped within the Empire. In fact, the second Crab Champion has not merely one but two major temples dedicated to his worship.

The first of these is located in the Mantis Clan's City of Lightning. The famed Temple of Lightning was founded by early explorers in the year 107, after Osano-Wo gifted them with a prophetic dream punctuated by a terrible bolt of lightning. Toshi no Inazuma grew around that site and is one of the most impressive sights on the Islands of Silk and Spice.

The second and better-known of the two is the Shrine of Osano-Wo, located in the Plains of Thunder to the west of the Scorpion lands. When Rokugani speak of the Shrine of Osano-Wo, they are generally referring to this location. Founded in the year 97 by Umaso, who had been a vassal of Osano-Wo in life, the Temple houses the most well-known group of *sohei* (warrior-monks) in the Empire. These monks consider themselves to be somewhat separate from the remainder of the Brotherhood, rarely interacting even with the Four Temples sect. They are aided in their seclusion by their location on the dangerous Plains of Thunder, where torrential rain and violent thunderstorms are a regular event.

Although the Osano-Wo monks recruit from all walks of life, their members tend to disproportionately come from violent or martial backgrounds. This includes not only samurai but also commoners, and the Order is somewhat notorious for taking in and rehabilitating criminals who seek refuge in its shrine. Conversely, many former Emerald Magistrates (and even a few Emerald Champions) have joined the Order after retiring from samurai life; this is encouraged by the monks' conviction that the Emerald Champion, chosen by a tournament held at this very temple, is the chosen of Osano-Wo.

The prevalence of *sohei* warrior-monks within the Order of Osano-Wo is so overwhelming that many outsides consider them one and the same. *Sohei* monks have an unusual practice of wearing cloth wraps around their bodies and faces; the wraps cover ritual scarification and mortification of the flesh. The monks earn each of their scars through painful trials, including dangerous combat, tests of fortitude, and spending time in the midst of the great thunderstorms that wrack the Plains of Thunder. If the experience itself does not create a scar, the monk creates one by cutting the skin and applying ash to the wound. The scars are believed to ward off evil spirits; they also denote status and skill, and are said to occasionally grant their owners unusual luck. *Sohei* typically bear scars on their faces, backs, bellies, legs, and arms.

The monks of the Fortune of Fire and Thunder only rarely venture out into the world, for their aggressive nature is unwelcome in most peaceful communities. However, when the need arises, these *sohei* are the first to defend their brethren in the rest of the Brotherhood, eagerly step forward to face attacks from the Shadowlands, and often engage entire armies without fear.

The Temple of the Thousand Fortunes

Devotion: Fortunist

The Temple of the Thousand Fortunes is less a specific order of monks and more of an idea, or perhaps a congruence of lesser sects worshipping many different Fortunes. This sect is the oldest in Rokugan, pre-dating the Empire itself, and can trace its roots directly to the ancient religions of the tribes who dwelt in this land prior to the Fall of the Kami. All other Fortunist Orders have at least some connection to this sect, which is home to at least half of all the monks in Rokugan.

The monks of the Thousand Fortunes sect are most commonly found in the seven great temples to the Great Fortunes that are scattered across the Empire and in the single massive Temple to the Seven Fortunes in the

Imperial Capital. Thess massive temples are the Empire's most powerful and well-known centers of Fortunist worship, receiving many hundreds of pilgrims each year. The great Temple to the Seven Fortunes in the capital is traditionally the largest and most splendid temple in the Imperial City, visited by thousands of worshippers every day. Dotting the landscape between these eight major temples are hundreds of shrines dedicated to the lesser Fortunes (the so-called *mikokami*) and overseen by monks of this conglomerate order.

The monks of this large sect are the most varied of any in the Empire, although they tend to be more visible and well-known than other sects through their sheer numbers. They seem to be equally close to people of all social classes, and recruit both commoners and samurai into their ranks with equal alacrity.

The Temple of the Thousand Fortunes possesses an unusually high degree of political power. While the monks of the Four Temples sect hold most leadership positions within the Brotherhood, the Fortunist monks tend to carry more favor because of their day-to-day interactions with the people Empire-wide. Moreover, the accepted leader of the Temple of the Seven Fortunes in the Imperial City is usually the monk asked to advise the Emperor on the elevation of new Fortunes from the ranks of mortal men.

In modern times, the Seven Fortunes monks have also become noted as the ones most willing to accept and acknowledge new changes to Rokugan's religious structures. For example, the gaijin gods known as Shi-Tien Yen-Wang quickly gained veneration from this order, as did the ill-regarded Dark Fortunes of Jigoku. It is also the monks of this order who see to the veneration of the infamous Fortunes elevated by Hantei XVI (such as the Fortune of Dung and the Fortune of Torture).

The Lesser Brotherhood Orders

While the five sects listed above are all ancient and widely known, there are also huge numbers of lesser sects within the Brotherhood. Some of these may be as small as a single shrine with a couple dozen monks, while others are Empire-wide with hundreds of acolytes. Some can trace their history back to the dawn of the Empire, while others are brought into existence by events in the twelfth century. An array of these lesser-known sects have been described in the L5R 4th Edition supplements known as the Elemental series (*The Book of Air, The Book of Fire,* and so forth). The following section lists a variety of other such lesser sects.

The Acolytes of the Incorruptible

Devotion: Shintao

Few who seek the High House of Light, the legendary stronghold of Togashi within the Dragon Mountains, ever manage to find it. Agasha Hakeo was among those who failed, but unlike his fellows, he neither died in the mountains nor left to continue his life elsewhere. Those who belong to the Acolytes of the Incorruptible give many answers as to why Hakeo stayed. Some say he recognized the imperfection of his body and spirit made him unfit to join the *ise zumi*, and sought to purge those imperfections from himself in the hope of finally reaching the High House of Light. Others say he was punishing himself for his flaws. Still others claim that in his wanderings Hakeo became Enlightened and saw a new path before him.

Hakeo's true thoughts may be lost to time, but his practices remain. Those who join his Order (many of whom, like him, sought and failed to become *ise zumi*) subject themselves to the most difficult tests the Dragon lands can provide – fierce winds, icy rivers, deep snow – while restricting themselves to an unusually sparse diet. The most dedicated among them, however, follow Hakeo's personal example, a practice so extreme even the tolerant Dragon flinch from it.

A monk who wishes to emulate Hakeo first spends a thousand days eating nothing but nuts and seeds, all the while continuing the rigorous ascetic and physical habits of his brethren. When he has worn all the fat from his body, he spends the next thousand days eating only bark and roots while drinking tea made from the poisonous sap of the lacquer tree, which desiccates his flesh. Finally, his brethren wall him into a stone tomb, with only a small hole through which air and a string may enter. The string is attached to a bell, and when the bell ceases to ring, the monks seal up the tomb until the final thousand days have passed. At the end of that time, the tomb is opened. If the ascetic has achieved his aim, his body is perfectly mummified – a sign, the Acolytes say, that he reached Enlightenment.

This practice is technically in violation of Hantei XII's edict that all bodies should be cremated to prevent their use by *maho-tsukai*. Hakeo's own self-mummification predated that edict, but the Acolytes of the Incorruptible are still permitted to continue with their practices. This exception to the Emperor's decree is traditionally explained by a story told within the Brotherhood. Supposedly, a *maho-tsukai* found the tomb of Hakeo many years after his self-mummification and attempted to re-animate him as an undead revenant. Hakeo indeed rose from his tomb . . . but snapped the neck of the *maho-tsukai* before returning to his resting place once more. The Acolytes claim this tale as the source of their sect's name and claim it vindicates their continued practice of Hakeo's self-mummification. Thus far, the Empire has not forced them to do otherwise, so long as the tombs of those attempting self-mummification are well guarded.

Needless to say, the Acolytes have few adherents, almost none of them from outside the Dragon lands. Apart from guiding those who fail to reach the High House of Light, they make few attempts at recruitment; those who come to them are invariably driven by some powerful inner need. Even within the Brotherhood, they are viewed as borderline heretics, with only the *Shinmaki* Order and the Temple of Persistence having any real toleration for them. The Brotherhood has considered expelling them several times, but thus far has not taken this drastic step.

Autumn Leaf Temple

Devotion: Hotei, Fortune of Contentment

In theory this sect exists primarily to provide a home for courtiers who are ready to retire and devote themselves to a life of contemplation, reflecting on their achievements in this life in preparation for the next. In practice, such retirement rarely goes further than shaving the head and exchanging fine kimono for simple robes.

The order was founded early in Rokugan's history by a retired samurai-ko named Doji Tanie after her daughter Taniyo took up her duties at the Imperial Court. Tanie was reluctant to leave her daughter without support, and soon after joining the Four Temples she returned to court under the monastic name Awa, spending the next twelve years as Taniyo's advisor. During that time Awa negotiated a grant of land and financial support to a new monastic order, allied with but separate from the Four Temples, which subsequently grew into the Autumn Leaf Temple.

Monks of the Autumn Leaf are almost exclusively retired courtiers who are seeking a degree of distance from politics but are not yet prepared to leave the courts behind entirely. The life they lead is far from ascetic; the order's wealth is substantial, and although the monks do pay appropriate reverence to Hotei (hoping to find equal contentment in their next life), their attention is also devoted in equal measure to influencing political matters through their kin and the lords they advise. Prominent members of the order have been known to say they achieved more success after retirement than they ever did while still officially pursuing their samurai duties.

The temple's main strength has always been in Crane lands, and its fortunes have waxed and waned elsewhere according to political tides. The order has a certain amount of appeal for courtiers of other clans, such as the Asako, Ide, and even the Bayushi. A small number of Otomo have also joined them, though Imperial courtiers are less inclined than most to retire even into the most luxuriant monastic life. From time to time, however, their leadership has exerted too much influence on behalf of Crane interests, causing them to fall out of favor with local lords. Of course, such things can go both ways: a lord who makes a generous donation to the Autumn Leaf Temple may find Crane courtiers more willing to consider his point of view in the next negotiation.

The sect's home is an opulent monastery in the far north of Crane lands, just outside the village of Tsuma where the annual Topaz Championship is held. This puts Autumn Leaf monks within easy distance of Kyuden Otomo, Kyuden Seppun, and the Imperial Capital (both old and new), which they find very convenient... though those among them from the southern Crane provinces sometimes complain about the "brutal" winters.

The Barefoot Brethren

Devotion: Koshin, Fortune of Roads

According to the members of this odd and scattered sect, their order was founded by the bushi Hiruma Idaten, a man who ran from Shiro Kaiu to Kyuden Hida to bring news of a great victory to the Crab Clan Champion. By the time he arrived before the Champion he had worn clean through the soles of his rope sandals, leaving only a few straps dangling free.

There is no record in the Imperial Histories of a bushi by that name, nor of any specific battle at Shiro Kaiu that might have necessitated such a

message (which could more easily have been carried by a mounted courier, or delivered by the Air kami). Nevertheless, since there is no better explanation for the origin of the Barefoot Brethren, most others choose to leave their story unchallenged.

The Brethren will carry a message, written or verbal, to any point in Rokugan, asking no price except food for their journey. They are famed for their endurance, regularly outpacing even Unicorn horses over long distances. Many of those they serve are *heimin*, who have few other ways to communicate with distant kin, but samurai with insufficient resources to engage a proper courier (or those who wish to communicate discreetly outside normal channels) also make use of their services. The Minor Clans in particular have made use of the Barefoot Brethren, who were vital to the Three Man Alliance in the pre-Coup era.

Most members of this order are peasant-born, though retired samurai (usually Hiruma) may occasionally be found among their ranks. They are most common in the Crab lands, where they are numerous and widespread enough to form a regular communications network. Small enclaves are found elsewhere, especially in the southern half of Rokugan. Some claim a new outpost is founded any time one of the Brethren is sent a long distance with a message and the recipient declines to send back a reply: the monk settles down where he is, gathers followers, and establishes the sect in new territory.

As their name implies, the Brethren are poor even by monastic standards, often owning nothing more than robes, plain wooden chopsticks, and a bowl for food. Their very humility is their primary resource, since magistrates will generally let them pass without papers. They eschew the ordinary prayers and devotions of other monastic orders, instead using walking and running as their meditative practices. They maintain no formal sacred sites, and what leadership they have is centered around Shiro Kaiu, although the title of an "abbot" of the Brethren is usually nothing more than an indication the monk's knees are no longer up to the task of carrying out his usual duties. They rarely have much influence in the Brotherhood as a whole, although their practices bring them into contact with a wide variety of sects. They tend to be looked down upon by the wealthier orders, but the rest view them with benign friendliness.

The Followers of the Way

Devotion: Shintao

Those who hear of this sect often find its name strange. Should all Rokugani who observe the Tao of Shinsei not be considered "followers of the Way"? The answer lies in the history of this order, which is found solely within the Lion lands.

Akodo Segitomo was a renowned general in the seventh century, distinguishing himself in many battles against the Crane. When he grew old enough that his strength waned, his Clan Champion sent him to found a branch of the Akodo bushi school in the northern part of their lands. As is the custom of the Lion, the finished dojo included in its library a copy of the Tao of Shinsei – a lovely text intended to be displayed but never read.

Segitomo, however, was curious. He opened the Tao at random and read the first line his eye fell upon: "All things are necessary – war, peace, the edge of the sword, and the sound of a poem. With understanding, all things are one."

He later described the experience as like unto a sunrise, shedding light and warmth across the landscape of his mind. Although he – like most Lion bushi – had always disdained the Tao as irrelevant to his concerns, that single line showed him the error of his ways. Akodo might have asserted his sword was his way, but Segitomo became convinced there was no meaningful distinction between Akodo's way and Shinsei's. The two things were one.

His attempts to teach this philosophy to the students of his dojo were not well-received. Segitomo's persistence eventually led his Champion to dismiss him from his post – a disgrace that would have shamed most Lion samurai into seppuku. However, Segitomo – faithful to his beliefs – asserted that whether he was general, sensei, or monk made little difference to him, for all three were one. He shaved his head, took the monastic name Hesshu, and continued proselytizing the Tao of Shinsei to those around him. True to Shinsei's philosophy, he did not turn aside *heimin* who sought to join him, but his primary concern was to persuade other Lion samurai to listen to the words of the Little Teacher.

Needless to say, even after centuries of effort, the Followers of the Way have made little progress among the followers of Akodo. They survive largely through the assistance of other Shintao-focused factions within the Brotherhood, particularly (in later years) the Wind's Grace Order. They also receive support from the Isawa and Asahina, an arrangement that wins them no friends within their own clan. Their sole monastery, located near the Lion-Crane border, is placed to give them many opportunities to preach to bushi... but that sword cuts both ways, and on at least two occasions the monastery has been burned to the ground by irate Matsu commanders.

The Order of Heroes

Devotion: Shintao

The Order of Heroes is a perfect example of the complexity found within the religious systems of Rokugan. It was founded in the year 1165 by a retired ronin shugenja named Koan, formerly the leader of a sect called the Order of Strength (followers of the Fortune Bishamon). The Order of Heroes combines a heavy focus on the Tao with worship of the great Thunder Dragon and the Fortune of Heroes, Goemon. It follows a very specific mantra: within every mortal soul lies the potential for greatness waiting to be set free.

The Order of Heroes is small and remains so, for its adherents consider it vital to perform their role behind the scenes. The monks' focus on subtlety ensures all credit falls to those they have guided into action rather than to themselves. Such heroic actions then become legends for future generations to follow – all without acknowledgment of the guiding hand of the Order of Heroes. Despite their best efforts, however, rumors of the Order's true activities have spread within the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

Recruits to the Order of Heroes are traditionally guided to existing members of the Order by those who know the sect's true goals. However, a discerning individual can find one of their shrines or temples scattered across the Empire. The Order's leadership is based out of Juujiro Mura (Crossroads Village), a village located between Unicorn, Dragon, and Lion lands in an Imperial-owned backwater region. A few years before the Order's founding, this village was the site of a great showdown in which a small group of samurai defeated forty-eight bandits. After their success these individuals went on to become champions of Bushido for their time, with each surviving samurai continuing to even greater success and legend. Some rumors claim Koan himself orchestrated these events, although this has never been confirmed.

Notwithstanding Juujiro Mura's prominence, the followers of the Order of Heroes mostly operate autonomously, usually in a pair forming a master/student relationship. Each pair travels the Empire constantly, seeking places of strife and potential heroes who may be guided toward the tasks at hand. Due to these aspects of their duties, the monks of the Order train in martial skills and defensive fighting. However, the ability to recognize the inner workings of a samurai's soul is far more important to the Order of Heroes than the ability to fight. Masters of the Order teach new initiates to be able to recognize the potential honor and hidden talents of others.

The skills and activities of the Order of Heroes put them in good alignment with other Brotherhood groups active in the political realm. The rumors and gossip of the court can be quite helpful to the Order in finding its heroes and spreading their legends afterward.

The Order of Peaceful Repose

Devotion: Emma-O, the Fortune of Death

Although many Rokugani imagine the world before the Fall of the Kami to be a purely formless era, with no government or religion to give shape to society, the people of that time had their own traditions. Most of these have altered so much over the centuries as to render their origins unrecognizable, but the Order of Peaceful Repose takes pride in the knowledge that it is arguably older than the Empire itself.

Of course, its early form was not so organized as it is today. The monks of Peaceful Repose have their roots in pre-Kami funerary traditions. Then as now, some who died did not pass peacefully from Ningen-do, their spirits lingering to trouble the living. Priests of that era developed methods of pacifying or banishing these troubled ghosts, and their methods persisted even through the transformation of society under the influence of the Kami.

Pockets of this sect may be found throughout Rokugan, although few are prominent enough to wield any noticeable power. Every Great Clan has at least one small monastery of Peaceful Repose somewhere within its lands; where warfare or local spiritual conditions make ghosts more common, these monks are more numerous. They enjoy a particularly close bond with *heimin*. Samurai may believe their superior position in the Celestial Order makes them more important in death as well as in life, but the truth is that an angry farmer's ghost is just as likely to trouble his family as a vengeful bushi's spirit. Since *heimin* vastly outnumber samurai, the monks of Peaceful Repose spend the majority of their time conducting funeral rites and dealing with the restless spirits of peasants, or even eta.

In the twelfth century the monks of this Order form an alliance with the newly-formed Brothers of Rebirth, whose aims they see as harmonious with their own. Troubled ghosts, of course, cannot move on in the kharmic cycle, while those who are prepared for their next life rarely linger in this one. The sect constructs a new monastery outside the City of Tears, whose spiritual history makes it an ideal location for collaborative study between the two orders and the Phoenix scholars.

Some within the Brotherhood view this order as embarrassingly primitive, unleavened as it is by any significant influence from the Tao of Shinsei. There is no denying that monasteries of Peaceful Repose seem out of place in modern Rokugan; they deliberately eschew the graceful architectural standards developed by later generations, keeping instead to the crude styles of early centuries. The blocky geometric designs painted on their robes are similarly outdated. The monks of Peaceful Repose counter such criticisms with a simple truth: the purpose they serve may be primitive, but it is still needed. When the day comes that all rest peacefully after death, then they will cede the field to their more advanced brethren.

Penitents of the Empty Hand

Devotion: Shintao

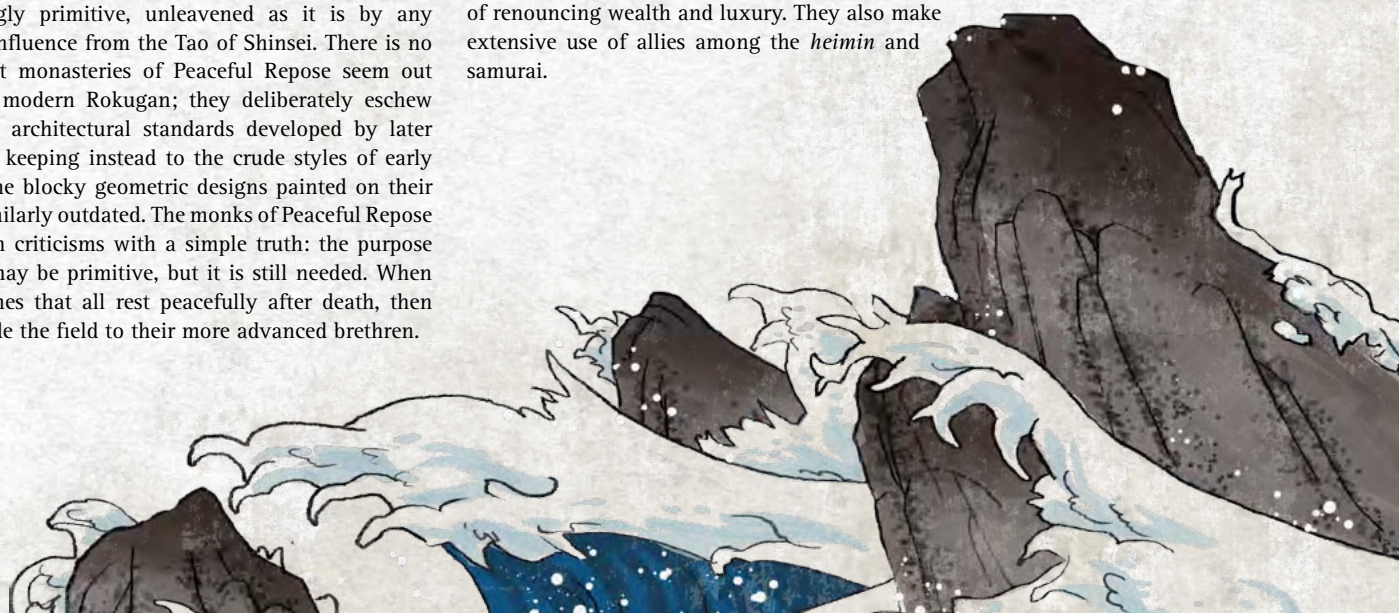
In the early sixth century, a strange alliance developed among the merchant patrons of the Yasuki, Daidoji, and Bayushi families. The Bayushi, looking for a way to disguise their income from illicit enterprises, found it advantageous to serve as go-betweens for the Yasuki and the Daidoji, who otherwise were reluctant to deal with one another. This alliance grew to include members of the Mantis and Tortoise Clans, and for a time their members' wealth was rivaled only by the dishonor of their mercantile and criminal activities.

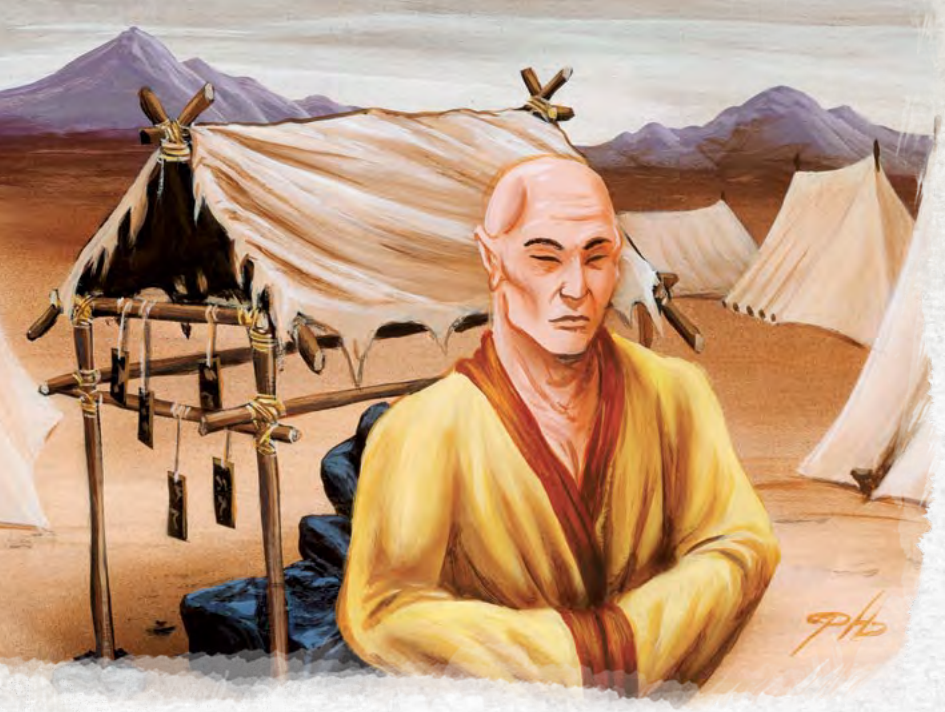
Eventually a group of Emerald Magistrates uncovered their dealings and the leaders of the shameful cabal were forced into monastic retirement. Naming themselves the Penitents of the Empty Hand, they took vows of personal poverty which their followers imitate to this day. The Penitents refused to keep any donations bestowed on their order, instead giving them away to fund beneficial works such as the construction of new roads and bridges or the excavation of wells.

At least, that is their public face. Behind the scenes the Penitents still act much as their ancestors did, serving as an illicit network for disguising criminal activities such as smuggling. Their humble status as monks allows them to move subtly among the *heimin* while being largely ignored by samurai, and since many members of the sect are actually innocent of wrongdoing, it takes a highly dedicated magistrate to prove any accusations against those who are guilty.

The rest of the Brotherhood is largely unaware of the Penitents' work. A few individual monks have stumbled across the disgraceful truth, but concluded the good the Order does for peasants means its sordid aspects can be tolerated. Also, many other orders are also dependent upon charitable donations to function, and a well-timed gift from the Penitents can mean the difference in a monastery's survival when winter comes.

Because of their secret activities, the Penitents are much more selective than most sects in their recruitment. Like the Autumn Leaf Temple, they draw many of their samurai-born members from among former courtiers, but those who join them always make an ostentatious point of renouncing wealth and luxury. They also make extensive use of allies among the *heimin* and samurai.





Pure Song Shrine

Devotion: Shintao

The Tao of Shinsei says, "It is the sound of purest harmony, the sound of the universe. Make your soul sing its song, and you will find there is nothing you cannot accomplish." This small but passionate monastic order has dedicated itself to the harmony of which Shinsei spoke.

All Rokugani above the rank of eta are expected to maintain certain basic standards of purity: not to touch corpses, not to eat red meat, not to wear clothing made of leather or fur. (The Unicorn are a partial exception to this, of course.) Bushi cleanse themselves of blood after a battle, spiritually as well as physically, and some monks and shugenja abstain from eating flesh of any kind so as to better conduct their spiritual duties. For this sect, however, purity is more than merely a standard. It is the road to Enlightenment.

In pursuit of this, the Pure Song monks hold themselves to a stricter standard than any other community in Rokugan (save only the extremists among the Acolytes of the Incorruptible). Not only do Pure Song monks refrain from eating the flesh of any living creature, they also forgo eggs and even root vegetables, whose loss kills the plant. They refuse all garments of silk, wearing robes woven from hemp. Those who have taken full vows wear bells on their ankles and their staves to warn creatures of their approach, in the hope they will not crush even a single ant beneath their feet. Under no circumstances will a Pure Song monk take violent action, even to defend another – though he will not hesitate to lay his own life down, if only to delay an attacker for a second or two.

Mystery surrounds the order's founder, a man named Bonsou. He is known only by his monastic name, and his origins are lost to history. Some believe he was a Phoenix samurai, as suggested by his extreme pacifism, while others claim he was born *heimin*. Even the exact years of his life are unknown, though all agree he lived in the early days of the Empire not long after the first Day of Thunder. One tale suggests he may have been involved in the formation of the Shrine of the Seven Thunders before departing to form his own order. The Pure Song seems to have existed as a movement within that larger sect for some time before achieving formal recognition as a separate group, and some of the Seven Thunders order's influence can still be seen.

Many profess to admire the way of this order, but few truly understand it, and even fewer can commit themselves to its intense strictures. Among rougher samurai such as the Crab or the Mantis, Pure Song monks are often objects of mockery – a fact which does not surprise them, since Shinsei said "Evil spirits are the result of an impure life." They find their greatest welcome among the Phoenix, the Moshi, and the Asahina, whose lands play host to the sect's main monastery.

One odd talent of the order wins them admission to unexpected places: their beautiful music. Although Bonsou himself had no interest in any form of art, his later followers took Shinsei's words very much to heart. Several Pure Song monks have risen to great fame as singers and musicians, rivaling even the best Kakita artisans. All members of the order habitually chant or sing while meditating, or improvise harmonies around their bells as they pursue their duties.

Rising Earth Temple

Devotion: Shintao

During the wanderings of the Ki-Rin Clan in gaijin lands, a farrier named Yuutaro began to preach the belief that the well-being of the clan could best be served by improving the health and care of its *heimin*. His argument was based on the homely observations of his work: a horse's hooves were vital to the health of the creature as a whole. One small stone could lead to an infection that would kill even the most valuable mare or stallion, but a horse with strong feet could run as swiftly as the wind. So, too, would the samurai of the Ki-Rin benefit from superior *heimin*.

Yuutaro's beliefs found many adherents, but they did not develop into a formal religious order until after the Ki-Rin became the Unicorn Clan and returned to Rokugan. Once accepted by the Brotherhood, the Rising Earth Temple found success in many parts of the Empire . . . but that success was not merely due to their appeal. The Kolat had long since found its own use in Yuutaro's arguments, and worked diligently to position Rising Earth monasteries throughout Rokugan. Those who accepted the sect's beliefs were well-primed for further development as Kolat resources. Unsurprisingly, this infiltration was the most thorough in Unicorn lands.

In the twelfth century, the Rising Earth Temple suffers a great blow when Shinjo returns and purges the Kolat from her clan. Ironically, though, the conspiracy's assistance also helped ensure the order's overall survival. While the central monastery in Shiro Shinjo was razed, those elsewhere suffered much less. By the time of Empress Iweko's reign, the temple's greatest strength was in Phoenix and Dragon lands, as well as along the Kaiu Wall.

Formal recruitment for the Rising Earth is almost exclusively among *heimin*, many of whom come from Rokugan's cities rather than its fields. The monks do not accept the vows of samurai, although they welcome samurai (retired or otherwise) as teachers. The subject matter may be anything: falcon training, ikebana, puppet plays of the ninth century. The point is to share with *heimin* some portion of the education samurai receive. Whether this is of any benefit to the *heimin* in question is open to question, but the leaders of the Rising Earth Temple insist that someday their efforts will raise the common people of Rokugan to match the current strength and skill of the samurai, while the samurai themselves will therefore be greater still.

To some, of course, this doctrine is a challenge to the Celestial Order. The influential monks of the Four Temples and their allied brethren have no love for the Rising Earth, and used the discovery of Kolat within its ranks to weaken the order throughout Rokugan. The Brothers of Rebirth and the Order of Heroes are both staunch supporters, though, since the efforts of Rising Earth monks may prepare *heimin* for greater things in the next life – or even in this one.

Scholars of the First Dawn

Devotion: Sengen, Fortune of Mount Sengen

This small order exists only in a single monastery at the foot of Mount Sengen, from which the monks range forth to climb the mountain's slopes and meditate upon its crest. They believe that Enlightenment transcends time, and limiting themselves to texts and practices developed during the history of Rokugan would blind them to the deeper truths of the cosmos. First Dawn monks therefore devote themselves to the study of the world that existed not only before the fall of the Kami but before the appearance of mankind itself in Ningen-do. More than any other order in the Brotherhood (and indeed most groups within Rokugan) they have sought out knowledge of that distant past, knowledge of the Naga, the Nezumi, the Kitsu, and so on.

The First Dawn monks believe the cosmos cycles through periods of balance and imbalance, and the current dominance of human beings is as transient as any other. Humans must understand their place in that cycle in order to correctly fulfill their purpose. They view humanity as one small piece of a vastly larger whole – a view that does not sit well with Rokugani accustomed to thinking of themselves as the centerpiece of the Celestial Order.

Despite the monks' unflagging study of the past, their knowledge remains fragmentary at best. Some take this as evidence that the Scholars' efforts are foolish. Their response is always the same: the fool is the architect who shows no concern for the foundation of his building, the smith who disregards the source of his ore, the farmer who pays no heed to the soil in which he plants. The wise man seeks to understand the origin of the materials he works with. Imperfect though their knowledge may be, it grows a little each year.

Attentive readers may recognize the Scholars of the First Dawn from Chapter One of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories 2*. That chapter depicted an alternate Rokugan in which Togashi became Emperor, and the First Dawn was a major monastic order tied to Hantei's Owl Clan. This far smaller version of the Order is the one which exists in the normal "canonical" version of Rokugan, although from a game-mechanic viewpoint there is no difference between the two.

Shrine of the Sacred Emperors

Devotion: Fortunist

The Emperors of Rokugan all ascend into the Celestial Heavens after death (unless they are villains or blasphemers like Hantei XVI). Although this does not actually give them the same status as true Fortunes, the monks who venerate them nonetheless associate with the Fortunist faction within the Brotherhood. They view each Emperor after Hantei as the equivalent to a minor Fortune, embodying one or more ideal characteristics.

The origin of this shrine lies in the earliest days of the Empire, when the shugenja Seppun Mittoru devoted himself to writing *Radiance*, a paean of gratitude and admiration for the First Hantei. Following the death of Hantei Genji in the year 247, an unknown Ikoma scholar wrote a similar text venerating the second Emperor, this one titled *Resplendence*. These two documents are the founding texts of the order, which became formally recognized during the reign of Hantei Bosai (Hantei IV), with a main shrine outside Otosan Uchi and a major monastery near Kyuden Ikoma.

Monks of this sect dedicate themselves to studying the lives of the Emperors of Rokugan in detail, extracting ethical and philosophical lessons from them. The writings they produce are masterworks of political tact: every lesson is framed in a positive way, never speaking critically of the Emperor in question, but at the same time scrupulously honest. Only a few Emperors, notably the Steel Chrysanthemum, are left out of their works.

The tumultuous events of the twelfth century make matters very difficult for this order, and a number of schismatic questions divide its members. Should Hantei XXXIX be considered a proper subject for study despite his possession by Fu Leng? Are his deeds attributable only to the Dark Kami, and should Fu Leng be considered an Emperor of Rokugan and studied as such? A faction within the order refuses to include the Toturi Dynasty in its writings owing to Toturi's non-divine origin. Later, the Celestial blessing upon the Iweko Dynasty worsens this divide, since Toturi's endorsement by the Heavens was far less comprehensive.

This sect enjoys close ties with the Shrine of the Seven Thunders, with which it has much in common. An early conflict with the Four Temples, however, persuaded the monks of this order it was best not to begin any study of an Emperor until after his death. Their stated reasoning is that a picture may not be understood from seeing only one part of the whole, but the truth is that to begin earlier invites political entanglements of a sort which these scholarly and philosophical monks prefer to avoid.

The Silent Ones

Devotion: Tsugumu, the Fortune of Secrets

Even within the Clan of Secrets, a samurai sometimes finds himself in possession of knowledge too dangerous or too painful to bear. This may be a matter as large as his daimyo's plans for a strike against the Lion, or as small as knowing of a beloved wife's infidelity. When this happens, the samurai visits a single well-hidden monastery, home to the Silent Ones.

This tiny order, never encompassing more than a dozen full members in total, is unknown outside the Scorpion lands and barely known within them. These monks spend most of their lives in meditation, but this is not merely due to preference; it is because they literally cannot speak. When an initiate takes his vows to join the Silent Ones and serve the Fortune of Secrets, as soon as the last word is spoken his tongue vanishes from his mouth. Moreover, if a supplicant tells such a monk a secret, the knowledge is thereafter guarded by the power of the Fortune of Secrets, and can never be taken from his mind in any way, even through torture or intrusive Air magic.

Information must be willingly spoken out loud for the Silent One to receive it in this way. Many who come before the Silent Ones are eager to rid themselves of an unwanted burden; those with less enthusiasm often still cooperate in light of available alternatives. The Scorpion find the Silent Ones a deeply useful order, and the upper ranks of the clan keep careful note of the temple's location.

The sect is believed to date back to the years after the creation of Iuchiban's Tomb. Initiates are always chosen for their trustworthiness, and may be drawn from among samurai or *heimin*; the only requirement is their utter dedication to keeping the secrets of the Scorpion Clan. Those who take the full vows are exceptional even among their devoted brethren; it is said that the secrets they bear expose them to everything the world has to offer, and thus they find peace only in the silence of meditation.

The Sons of the Moon

Devotion: Onnotangu, Lord Moon

The matriarchal Moshi family is renowned throughout Rokugan for its devotion to Amaterasu, the blessed Lady Sun. Few are aware of the darker shadow to their devotion: the small, obscure, and sinister order known as the Sons of the Moon. The Sons are a sect of the Brotherhood specifically dedicated to the worship and veneration of Lord Moon, and are believed to have originated in the earliest days of the Empire, although they have remained largely out of the wider Empire's sight for much of their history.

Unlike the notorious Anshin sect, which fell to corruption from the Shadowlands and the Lying Darkness and became the Cult of Lord Moon (see "Heresy in Rokugan" later in this chapter), the Sons of the Moon have remained true to their original intent. Unfortunately, that intent is not without its own perils. In their prayers, they beg Lord Moon to gift them with his blessing – a blessing the rest of Rokugan more commonly refers to as a curse. The Sons actively cultivate madness: not spirit possession or the pollution of the Taint, but the madness of Lord Moon (mechanically represented by the Disadvantage in the L5R 4th Edition Core rulebook). They believe true wisdom and Enlightenment may be found by surrendering oneself to Lord Moon's power. Indeed, what other Rokugani call "enlightened madness" the Sons merely call Enlightenment. If those who experience it do not behave in the same way as Shinsei, this is simply because the Heavens have given them a different purpose.

This pursuit of Onnotangu's "blessing" makes this sect very much a borderline group within the Brotherhood, which has several times contemplated condemning it for heresy. Most clans are hostile to the order (the Centipede Clan itself bars the Sons of the Moon from its lands), although the Dragon are more accepting. The monks of the Moon are known for being pale and colorless men (the order is entirely male), and even their temples sometimes take on a gray and lifeless aspect.

In contrast to the priestesses of the Moshi, the Sons of the Moon weathered the twelfth century's series of changes in the Heavens surprisingly well. The identity of the Moon may change, but its nature as the source of madness does not, and neither does their devotion to the Moon's "blessing."

The Temple of the Five-Fold Balance

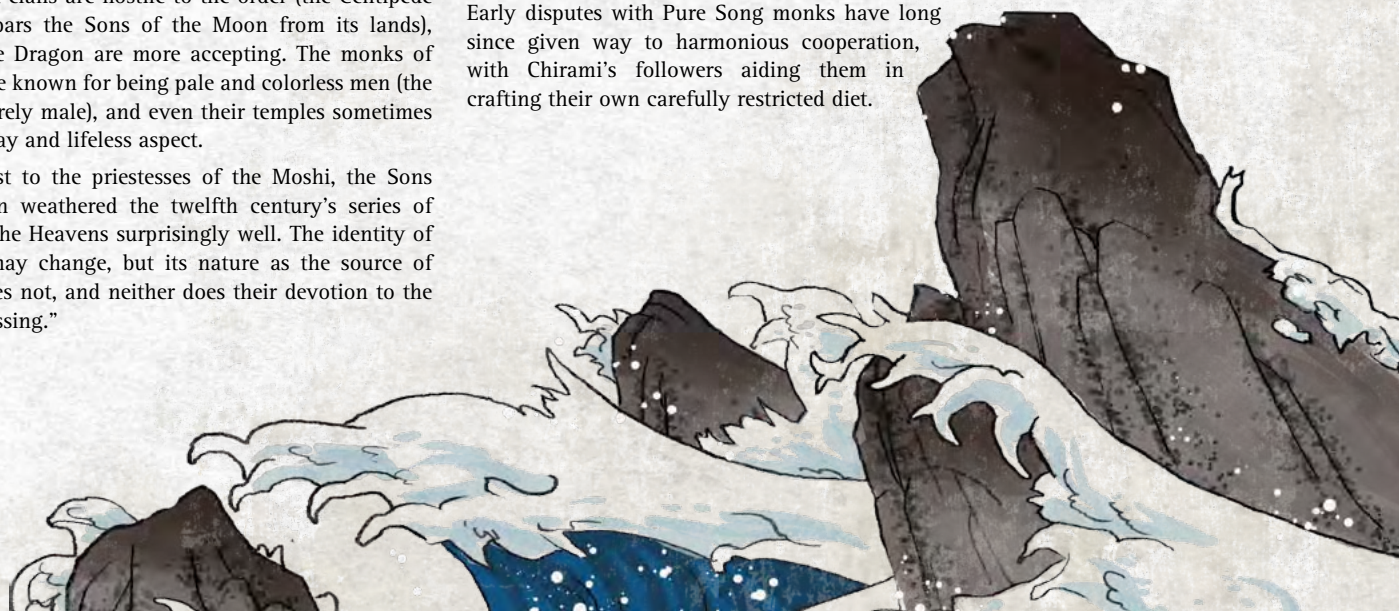
Devotion: Gobai, Fortune of Balance

During the early fourth century, political intrigue forced the artisan Shiba Machiko into early retirement at a monastery of the Shrine of the Seven Thunders, where she took the name Chirami. Assigned to assist in the preparation of meals, she began meditating as she worked, hoping to find Enlightenment in that simple task. Her artistic inclination soon found an outlet in her work; she sought to perfect each slice with her kitchen knife, to arrange the humble meals to be as aesthetically pleasing as humanly possible. In time Chirami rose to oversee the monastery's kitchen, and she began to study the balance of Elements in different foodstuffs, combining them in new ways to foster spiritual as well as physical well-being in her fellow monks.

Her efforts might have remained unknown outside that single monastery had a storm not forced a prominent Isawa lord to take shelter among them. Upon tasting Chirami's food, he declared it to be a gift from Tengoku itself, and immediately set out to found a new monastic order based on her work, with Chirami as its first Abbess.

Monasteries of the Five-Fold Balance are uncommon and are mostly found in Phoenix lands, but the basic principles of Chirami's philosophy have spread to many other orders within the Brotherhood, such that "temple cuisine" is a recognized tradition in the modern Empire. It is a vegetarian diet, with each dish chosen so as to promote a balance of the Elements; experienced practitioners tailor their dishes to the individual recipient's needs. Some wealthy or pious lords, especially shugenja, have a Five-Fold Balance monk among their retainers to oversee their personal meals.

By and large the monks and nuns of this order restrict themselves to the kitchen, but some have taken advantage of their position near the heart of power to involve themselves in the Empire's political affairs, with some going so far as to exert a subtle influence on the lords they serve. This occasionally makes this sect an ally of more overtly political orders such as the Four Temples and the Autumn Leaf, though the loyalty of a Five-Fold Balance monk ultimately tends to lie with the lord he serves. Early disputes with Pure Song monks have long since given way to harmonious cooperation, with Chirami's followers aiding them in crafting their own carefully restricted diet.



Heresy in Rokugan

As the centuries pass, new authors interpret Shinsei's wisdom in new ways. The Brotherhood of Shinsei never turns down new writings on the wisdom of the Little Teacher, and the organization as a whole is inclusive even of extreme sects like the Questioners, the Shinmaki, or the Pure Land. This stems from the basic belief that there are many paths to enlightenment, and thus no one should deny any of them.

However, Shinsei himself established that wisdom seekers could walk down a false path. This aspect of the Tao is one that created dissent within Shinsei's later followers. No path should be unexplored, Shinsei said, but mortals could nonetheless fail and in so doing lose their soul to a False Path. The Brotherhood of Shinsei remains vigilant against these False Paths, and when they are certain a sect has fallen into such error they take action, with a Convocation declaring the doctrine heretical and expelling those who will not give it up. Sadly, despite these efforts many monks have succumbed to False Paths in the centuries since the Brotherhood was founded. A few of the more notorious False Paths are discussed below.

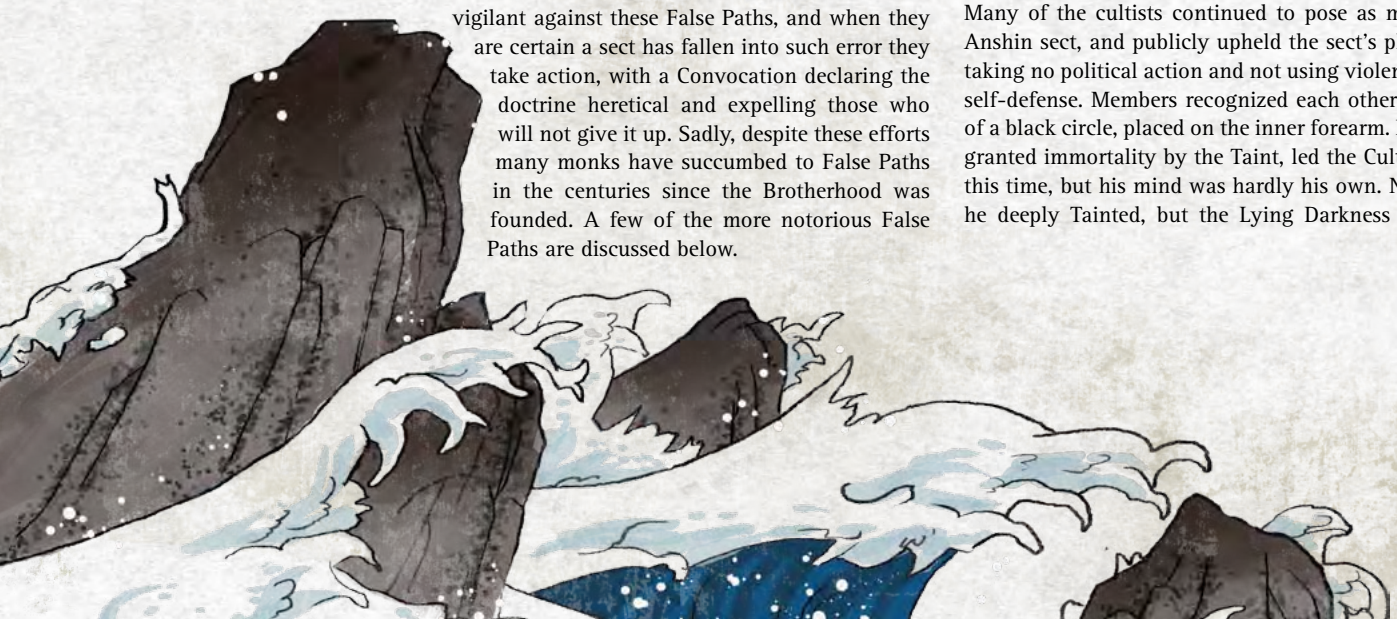
The Anshin Sect and the Cult of Lord Moon

The Anshin sect was an ancient order devoted to Shintao. It was founded at least as early as the reign of Hantei Genji, with some histories suggesting it may have formed even earlier when Hantei first ordered the Tao distributed across Rokugan. The monks of the sect believed Enlightenment could only be found through separation from the troubles of the physical world, so they deliberately isolated themselves from the Empire's politics and wars (a contrast to the Four Temples order). They also kept apart from the rest of the Brotherhood, although this isolation was driven solely by philosophy and not by any sort of overt hostility.

During the reign of the Gozoku, the Emperor recruited spies from various monastic orders to try to undermine the Gozoku conspiracy's control. Several of these monks were from the Anshin order, chosen by the Emperor because of their isolation from the Empire's political affairs. Tragically, their activities were discovered and they were brutally tortured and executed by the Gozoku. The Abbott of the order at that time, a monk named Bunrakuken, was deeply embittered by the Emperor's failure to protect those who died for him. He and his followers abandoned their temple and fled deep into the Seikitsu Mountains.

There, far from civilization, the monks stumbled across a cave containing a long-forgotten shrine to Lord Moon. Although the shrine may once have been genuinely dedicated to Onnotangu, by this time it had become a stronghold of darkness, home to a sinister kansen whose whispers easily overcame Bunrakuken's mind. The Abbott abandoned the teachings of the Tao and proclaimed his order would henceforth venerate Lord Moon; any who refused would be killed. In that moment the Anshin sect ceased to exist, becoming the Cult of the Moon.

The Cult survived and grew for many centuries, organizing in a cell structure (similar to the later Bloodspeaker Cult) and spreading into different territories. Many of the cultists continued to pose as monks of the Anshin sect, and publicly upheld the sect's philosophy of taking no political action and not using violence except in self-defense. Members recognized each other via a brand of a black circle, placed on the inner forearm. Bunrakuken, granted immortality by the Taint, led the Cult throughout this time, but his mind was hardly his own. Not only was he deeply Tainted, but the Lying Darkness (through its



connection to Onnotangu) was also aware of the cult and subtly influencing its members, bestowing its own powers on them and using them to spread Shadow corruption across Rokugan.

The Cult was involved in a number of different strange plots and schemes, most of which involved some sort of attempt to overturn the Celestial Order and restore Lord Moon to uncontested dominion. None of these efforts ultimately succeeded, although the Cult did cause much damage and havoc over the years. Things changed dramatically for the Cult after the War Against the Darkness, when Onnotangu died and the Cult lost the powers bestowed by the Shadow. Bunrakuken undertook a new goal of trying to assassinate the new Lady Moon, Hitomi, and resurrect Onnotangu to replace her. Needless to say, these efforts were ultimately no more successful than the earlier ones. Finally, in the year 1168 a Phoenix samurai located and killed Bunrakuken, effectively destroying the Cult (although many individual cells survived).

The Order of the Five Rings

As noted earlier in this chapter, during the early sixth century the monk Gorinno promoted the idea that the Empire could only be in harmony if there was one Great Clan for each of the five Elements. Since both the Scorpion and the Crane were clearly "clans of Air," the only solution was to merge the two clans together. Gorinno's ideas won many converts in the uncertain environment that prevailed after the recent rise of Iuchiban, and for a time he had the ear of the Emperor himself. A new monastic sect, the Order of the Five Rings, quickly grew up to promote Gorinno's philosophy, and they soon began clashing – with increasing violence – with those samurai and monks who rejected the Five Rings doctrine.

Ultimately, Gorinno and his followers were officially labeled a False Path by the rest of the Brotherhood, bringing an abrupt end to their activities. The full account of these events can be found in Chapter Four of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories 2*.

Fudo

Little is known about the monk known as Fudo, whose writings have been all but purged from Rokugan, and his name appears nowhere in the Otomo or Ikoma histories. Legends say he was once a simple member of the Brotherhood of Shinsei who wrote extensively on the subject of Enlightenment but otherwise lived a hermetic lifestyle. His writings were deeply controversial and caused much chaos within the Brotherhood, though they also won him a number of followers. Eventually he was summoned to a meeting with the Emperor; not even the most arcane of Fudo legends say what happened at this meeting, and even among his own latter-day followers there is a major dispute as to whether or not the meeting even happened. Regardless, soon afterward Fudo left the Empire and traveled into the Burning Sands, never to be seen again.

Additional information on Fudo's peculiar philosophy, and the impact it had on Rokugan at the end of the twelfth century, can be found in the "Age of Exploration" chapter of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories 2*.

The Order of the Spider

The Order of the Spider is a *sohei* sect founded in the twelfth century by the fallen monk Roshungi. While not outwardly different from other *sohei* orders, the Order of the Spider is actually an arm of the sinister Spider Clan. As part of the Spider Clan's attempt to infiltrate Rokugan, the Order of the Spider presented itself as though it were a normal Order of the Brotherhood with a focus on giving aid to peasantry in need. Due to the Brotherhood's large size and informal organization, most other monks accepted this story without question. It was only at the end of the Destroyer War, when the Spider Clan stood revealed before the armies of Rokugan, that the truth became known. However, with the Empress' reluctant endorsement of the Spider Clan, the Brotherhood was forced to accept the Order of the Spider as an organization in its ranks. Although this has been deeply unpopular (especially among the more militant orders such as the Temple of Osano-Wo), many monks believe it is ultimately a good idea since it keeps the Order of the Spider out in the open where it can be easily observed.

The Order of the Spider has a number of questionable beliefs, most notably its belief in Enlightenment through raw strength and martial power. Roshungi, a former

follower of the tattooed madman Kokujin, witnessed firsthand the power that Enlightened individuals possessed and sought to teach that strength to his followers. One of his favorite dictums was, "Only once we have mastered our own power can we begin to master others." This teaching made the Spider *sohei* some of the most feared warriors in Rokugan, with some legends even claiming one of them killed a Fortune.

The Order of Venom

Unlike its fellow Spider Clan sect the Order of the Spider, the Order of Venom originated within the Brotherhood as a normal sect focused on martial teachings. However, its obsession with combat eventually became a False Path, overturning the quest for Enlightenment in favor of embracing violence for its own sake. The monks of the Order of Venom became notorious for lashing out against anyone at the slightest and most trivial provocation, and this eventually led to the sect being declared heretical and officially disbanded. Most of the monks of Venom refused to accept this judgment and continued to follow their leader, Tansen.

Eventually, the Order of Venom heard about the Spider Clan and pledged itself to Daigotsu's cause. In contrast to the Order of the Spider, which sometimes embraces the Taint in the pursuit of greater strength, the monks of Venom are entirely free of Jigoku's mark, making them useful to the clan in many ways. Like the Order of the Spider, the Order of Venom has been able to gain a grudging acceptance from the Brotherhood based on the Empress' acceptance of the Spider Clan as a whole, but it remains to be seen whether this uneasy truce will endure.

Chapter Five

The Spirit Realms

The young man knelt in meditation before the small altar, praying softly. His murmurs were barely audible, offered in a language only understandable to a race of beings now long dead. He had been doing so for hours upon end when finally the faintest of whispers could be heard in the room, the faintest sense of another's presence.

He went completely silent, pressing his face to the floor and pushing forward the bowl of rice and food set aside for his ancestors. Burnished gold embroidery on his immaculate kimono brushed along the wood floor of the family shrine. There was a faint murmur, as of approval, from the altar. The presence did not seem displeased.

"What is it that you wish to speak of today, little Mokuna?" The ancient, rumbling voice sounded more like a growl than human speech. The incense smoke that flowed upwards from the altar seemed to resolve itself in a shape, like a wild lion's head and mane, gazing down at him.

"I wish to ask of you a greater understanding, my ancestor," he whispered softly. "There is a thing that troubles me, and I do not wish to fall into blasphemy through a lack of understanding."

The mane of the creature shook as it chuckled softly. The young Kitsu was not the sort to ever fall willingly into any sort of blasphemy, and it was almost comical he would say such a thing. However, the spirit knew the shugenja was grievously concerned about such matters and took them with the utmost sincerity and seriousness. He could be a touch too fearful at times, prone to flights of fancy, but his heart was in the right place.

"Ask, my son," the spirit rumbled.

"I am confused," he breathed. "There are realms within the whole of creation that I do not understand. I see Toshigoku's vast blood-stained fields and I am left to wonder why they are kept so far from the plains of Meido. And of all of these I least understand the meaning of something such as Sakkaku, or of the realm ruled by that fallen abomination of a god."

Ah, so that was what it was? No surprise, really. All of the students who could actually travel the realms at some point or another were struck by such thoughts. "Each of these things, even that realm, has a place within creation... though there are things in this world that have their place far from creation and would deny that role. Jigoku, the realm of Evil. It is a thing that exists as darkness to the light. Balance must exist. Look to the Dragons. For each Oracle of Light, there is an Oracle of the Dark to stand as counterpart. Where there is a moral judgment or a thing is called righteousness, in that moment wickedness comes into being. Without righteousness, there cannot be villainy, for one defines the existence of the other. Just by proclaiming the Heavens must be good, evil must stand against them. This is the price that comes with the existence of such ultimate good and nobility, my son. But remember, it is evil that cannot be content with its place, just as Heaven is eternally content with its own. Thus evil seeks to claim all within its dominion, a thing that can never be permitted."

Mokuna bobbed his head and nodded. "And Toshigoku? It must stand because..." He thought for a moment. "There must be a place for those who have fallen too far, who are beyond redemption and beyond cleansing by the kharmic cycle. It must it be a place mindless in its rage, far from all else."

"Yes, my son. You begin to see the right of it," the spirit agreed.

"But... what of Sakkaku?"

The Kitsu spirit frowned for a moment. Then there was a small breeze as a chuckle seemed to flow through the room. It permeated through everything, and Mokuna felt the ripples within his own belly. "Sometimes, creation simply needs to laugh. It is a lesson I often wish more than your Ikoma would learn, my son. Promise me, as payment this day, that you will find a time and place to laugh."

Kitsu Mokuna blinked, a little shocked at the suggestion. Of course, he was not about to refuse a command from Soli Tendo. He pressed his head to the ground. "I will do so. And perhaps one day I will understand. Until then, I thank you for your wisdom."

The only reply as the incense snuffed out was more soft chuckling.

The Nature of the Spiritual Realms

All Rokugani know their world is not the whole of creation; all know of the power of Heaven and the terrible threat of Jigoku. The physical world is only a fragment of the cosmos, one realm among many that comprise the totality of creation. The Heavens watch over a panoply of different realms, each fulfilling its own role within the whole. This diverse collection of spirit realms centers around Ningen-Do like the spokes of a wheel, with Tengoku the axle that holds creation together.

In the early days of the Empire, the Rokugani had only a vague understanding of the other spirit realms. They knew of Heaven from their worship of the Fortunes and the Kami, and they knew of Jigoku from the First War. All else was a mystery. Only slowly, over many generations, did the scholars and shugenja of the Empire come to fully understand the different spirit realms and their complex interactions with each other. Moreover, this knowledge did not necessarily disseminate among ordinary samurai, much less the *heimin*. For example, as late as the eleventh

century, many ordinary Rokugani still broadly lumped together Meido, Yomi, Gaki-do, and Jigoku into a generic "Realm of the Dead."

Broadly speaking, most of the spirit realms may be categorized by their Celestial purpose. The first of these might be termed the axis of Creation: the realms of Tengoku, Ningen-Do (the mortal world itself), and Jigoku. Ningen-Do lies at the center of an eternity-long struggle over the dominion of order and chaos throughout the Heavens and the earth. It serves as the primary (though not the only) battleground between the forces of Jigoku and Tengoku. Tengoku, representing order and purity, rules over all of creation and maintains its integrity. Jigoku, representing chaos and corruption, constantly vies to remake all in its own image and attain dominion over all. While some of the particulars of Jigoku's nature change with the rise of Daigotsu as the new Dark Lord, in general this rule holds universally true.

The second major grouping of realms is the axis of Reincarnation: Ningen-Do, Meido, Gaki-Do, Toshigoku, Yomi, Chikushudo, and even the newly formed Maigo no Musha all fall into this category, and all have a part to play within the great Celestial Wheel of reincarnation. These realms all deal in various ways with the cycle of life, death, and rebirth, and the kharma present in all mortal men's lives (and even in the lives of animals to a lesser extent). It serves to maintain the Celestial Order established by Tengoku.

There are two realms which do not fall into either of these two primary groupings: Sakkaku and Yume-Do. Yume-Do exists out of necessity, because all things – even gods and demons – must dream. By contrast, Sakkaku appears to exist as much as a cosmic joke as anything else, perhaps a reaction to the stress of the constant struggling between order and chaos. It is a single realm playing an endless prank at creation's expense.

Travel Between the Realms

Passage between the different spirit realms is difficult without either a location that is specifically linked to another realm – one of the so-called spirit portals – or the special magics known primarily to the Kitsu family of the Lion Clan. Such spiritual travel is rare at best, and always hazardous because of the strangeness of these realms.

On occasion, people do blunder into positions close to another realm and may find themselves accidentally transferred into it, after which they usually have a difficult time escaping. Some realms are closer together than others; Yume-Do and Meido are markedly close, for example, while Jigoku and Chikushudo are quite distant from each other. In a few cases the realms are completely barred, making travel between them only possible through special circumstances (or by passing through an intermediary realm first).

Control and Jealousy

All spirit realms are to some extent self-aware and, in a fashion, 'alive.' Some realms, such as Ningen-Do, are barely self-aware and do not exert any sort of active influence upon their inhabitants. Others, like Jigoku or Tengoku, are pro-active, alive, aware, and very much influential on those who enter their domain, though the ways in which this influence is felt vary from realm to realm.

The possessive jealousy of the realms is impressive and can be a fearsome thing to behold; however, most realms are limited in the nature of their jealousy. They each exist for a reason, a reason that ultimately is the very point of that existence. When things do not relate to that reason, the realms almost invariably ignore them. A soul that is not dead is not important to Gaki-Do, for example. If it is not going to participate in the kharmic cycle and expunge its sins, it has no place within the realm, but similarly it is no threat to Gaki-Do so long as it does not interfere with that realm's purpose. Only when something either coincides with a realm's influence or somehow attempts to interfere with that influence does the realm react... but when a realm does react, it is often very aggressively.

Jealousy is exerted through what is sometimes called "Control." Generally speaking, only a very few realms extend any sort of ongoing control outside of their own plane of existence. The most well known of these controls is that of Jigoku: the Shadowlands Taint. Most of the other realms will exert influence only so long as a person remains within their domain, but attracting a realm's attention is a good way to become trapped within that realm forever, making the point rather moot.

Mechanically, "Control" is usually resisted through Willpower rolls, similar to the Earth rolls used to fend off the Taint. Details are included where appropriate in the Control section of each Spirit Realm's description later in this chapter. The vast majority of these are simple rolls to avoid an increasing influence that will otherwise eventually trap the victims and make them permanent residents of the realm. In some cases, this Control can only be felt if a person willfully accepts the influence into their mind and soul, such as in Chikushudo and Yume-Do.

GM's Options: An Alternate Rokugani Cosmology

This chapter's depiction of the various Spirit Realms and their relationships to each other represents the standard "canon" version of Rokugan's cosmology, which has been in place since the publication of the L5R supplement *Fortunes & Winds* in 2003. However, in the original 1st Edition version of Rokugan published in the late 1990's, the cosmology was simpler and somewhat vaguer, as well as bearing a closer resemblance to the actual mythology of historical feudal Japan. GMs who wish to give their version of Rokugan a more "old school" feel may wish to consider the following alternative approach.

In the "classic" cosmology, there are only three realms outside of Ningen-Do: the Celestial Heavens (Tengoku), the Realm of Spirits, and the Realm of the Dead.

The Celestial Heavens are essentially identical to Tengoku as it is depicted in this chapter – a realm of divine beauty, order, and glory, ruled over by the Fortunes and the Elemental Dragons, with the Kami and the souls of past Emperors as lesser inhabitants. Normal mortal souls may occasionally be vouchsafed a brief glimpse or short visit to the Heavens, but are never permitted to remain there.

The Realm of Spirits exists alongside Ningen-Do, and indeed outwardly resembles the mortal world save for the absence of the works of man. This place is the domain of animal spirits, shapeshifters, trickster spirits, and other such creatures. Passage between the Realm of Spirits and the mortal world is fairly easy, especially in deep forests and other remote wilderness areas, and the spirits visit Ningen-Do frequently to aid, investigate, harass, or bewilder mortals. For their part, mortal men and women can often find themselves stumbling into the spirit realm with little or no warning, and visit it regularly in their dreams. In game terms, the Realm of Spirits combines the effects of Chikushudo, Sakkaku, and Yume-Do.

The Realm of the Dead is a more complex and sprawling domain. When souls leave the mortal world, they arrive in the Realm of the Dead and receive Emma-O's judgment. He may order them to be immediately reincarnated, or he may send them to one or another region of his realm to be punished or rewarded for a time (perhaps even for eternity) depending on the state of their kharma. Specific regions within the Realm of the Dead thus resemble the realms of Meido, Yomi, Toshigoku, Jigoku, and Gaki-do. All of these regions are simply portions of the larger whole, with no barriers between them other than distance, and it is thus theoretically possible to travel all the way from the blessed domains of the most honored ancestors to the deepest pits of the demon realm. However, Emma-O normally does not allow the souls within his purview to do this; in proper circumstances only outside intruders, such as Kitsu shugenja, can travel freely in this way. (Naturally, cosmic events such as the Battle for Oblivion's Gate can override the normal control of the realm.) Aside from the Kitsu, travel from the Realm of the Dead to the mortal world is rare, and usually confined to rare physical portals found in specific locations, such as the Festering Pit and Oblivion's Gate.

A further complication arises in relation to the darkest and most sinister region of the Realm of the Dead: the land of demons, where the oni and other dark spirits dwell and where the most sinful souls are dispatched for torment. This portion of the Realm of the Dead in many ways functions independently from the rest, often defying the normal order of things by sending demons, evil spirits, and the Taint into the mortal world. It may be that the opening of the Festering Pit or the arrival of Fu Leng is what caused this disruption to the normal functioning of this place, or perhaps it is simply a reality of the cosmos that Evil will never wholly obey the rest of the Celestial Order.

The Rokugani themselves do not fully understand this conundrum, and this confusion can be seen in their terminology. The term "Jigoku" is used both as a general label for the Realm of the Dead and as a specific term for that realm's demonic region, with the distinction made through context and tone. In loose terms, the two different usages of "Jigoku" may be translated as "the afterlife" and "hell." GMs wishing to clarify the situation may opt to label the domain of Evil as "Meifumado," the Buddhist hell.

Finally, a few other general observations should be made about this cosmology. First, the concept of Tengoku and Jigoku being locked in an eternal conflict does not exist in this cosmology. The aggression of Evil and the resistance of Heaven are both sufficient unto themselves, and do not require some larger concept of cosmic "balance" in order to be justified. This also means, of course, that if Evil triumphs it will endure until the turning of the Celestial Wheel restarts the universe – there will be no automatic emergence of a new counterbalancing force. Likewise, there is no concept of a "Champion of Jigoku" in this version of the universe, and events such as Fu Leng's replacement by Kali-Ma cannot occur; Fu Leng is the only lord of Evil. Finally, and most obviously, a place such as Maigo no Musha cannot exist at all in this version of the universe.

The GM should be careful in allowing too many "Control" elements to have ongoing impact beyond the realm where they have influence. Control is meant to reflect the psychological and spiritual impact of remaining too long in another plane of existence, allowing oneself to be influenced by it. Using these systems elsewhere in the L5R setting can result in an overly complicated situation in which players are forced to track their status with regard to multiple different forms of Control. Accordingly, it is recommended that all game effects of Control be dropped once a character leaves the realm that was exerting the Control. (The exception, of course, is the unique power of the Taint. The distinction between the Taint and other forms of Control highlights the different and malign nature of Jigoku, the only realm actively seeking to spread its touch into the rest of the Celestial Order.)

Chikushudo, The Realm of Animals

Chikushudo is a curious anomaly in many respects. It is distinctly part of the kharmic wheel and the reincarnative cycle. However, it is a realm that is distant from Meido, and unlike Toshigoku this is not out of any sort of spite or malice, nor is there any desire to avoid its influence spreading to the realm of the dead. Emma-O, the Fortune of Death, rarely even thinks of the existence of Chikushudo; he is aware of its place and its purpose in the kharmic wheel but largely unconcerned with it so long as it fulfills that purpose. Chikushudo is essentially an offshoot of the wheel, a location where the dead are brought who are destined to take a step down in the cycle and be reborn as animals, and where the spirits of those who have not yet become human dwell. It is a kind of side-story in the great ongoing cycle of rebirth that Emma-O oversees, and the ultimate reason for its obscurity is very simple: it is not human.

Humanity, ever since its birth from the tears of Lady Sun and the blood of Lord Moon, has been the central pivot point in all the dealings of creation save those of Tengoku itself, and even Heaven is affected by the presence of mortal man. Humanity represents the most malleable, mutable, and influential presence in the entirety of the spirit realms, and so the cycle of rebirth has grown over time to reflect the human race above all others. Chikushudo, as a realm devoted to the spirits of animals, has dwindled into the background ever since the rise and primacy of man upon the Celestial Wheel.

Oddly, the realm and its residents rarely seem to be deeply bothered by these facts. Only the five ancient races and the occasional oddity amongst truly ancient and powerful *hengeyokai* ever truly seem to resent the primacy of man. Despite this, even they have largely given up whatever arguments they might once have had. The Kitsu have bowed before humanity; the Kenku hail from Sakkaku but have largely accepted humanity's place and dwell in solitude within either this realm or Ningen-Do; the trolls are lost, corrupted by Jigoku's influence forever; the Ningyo remain embittered but have regressed and submerged themselves into the depths of the sea, only occasionally dealing with the outside world; and the Zokujin, too, have descended far into the earth where men's eyes rarely see them. The rest of Chikushudo and all of the other residents of the ancient realms save perhaps the Naga have all generally accepted that humanity has claimed primacy of place. Despite this secondary role, however, Chikushudo is still a force of great power within the realms, and one not without its own part to play.

Where Yomi, Toshigoku, Maigo no Musha, Gaki-Do, and Meido all deal primarily with the spirits of humanity, Chikushudo is the realm of animals. Here the wilds are held in reverence and the spirits of all beasts walk with impunity. This is a place of beauty and solitude, where the animal spirits linger until it is time for them to be returned to the mortal plain. Its divine purpose is somewhat akin to that of Meido, since animal spirits seldom acquire enough of a kharmic debt from their life to require any sort of purgation in a realm such as Gaki-Do. Only rare spirits such as the kitsune-tsuki might ever merit such a fate, and they are universally considered pitiable creatures for having fallen so far.

Beyond its reincarnative role, Chikushudo's primary purpose is as a sort of watchguard. It is close to Ningen-Do and there are many passages between the two realms. Chikushudo ensures the wilds of the mortal world are

protected and guarded. While humanity's primacy is accepted, its reach cannot be allowed to extend too far, lest there be a complete imbalance in creation. Deep forests, remote mountains, and other such wilderness locations are watched over by Chikushudo, protecting them from human intrusion.

The Topology of Chikushudo

Chikushudo appears almost identical to the world of Rokugan, not just in overall appearance but in its specific landscapes and geographical features, with only one true change: there is none of what people would consider 'civilization.' To the untrained eye, the Realm of Animals looks like the world of Rokugan would if there were no people present. It is as wild, untamed, and beautiful as it is feral and occasionally dangerous. There are no roads here, no rice paddies to be cultivated, no cities or roads or canals. There is not even a hint that such things might once have existed. However, a closer inspection reveals subtle differences between the landscape of Chikushudo and that of Rokugan. Rivers are a little wider, hills a touch bigger, forests more extensive. And most notable of all, the beasts of the field walk unafraid of the steps of man. All animals here are at peace with their role in the natural world and the continuation of the cycle, and there is a deep and all-encompassing sense of harmony that pervades every inch of the realm.

This is not to say that there are no features of note. There is one massive change to the topology from that of the mortal world: the extinct volcano Kurokazan stands at the center of the realm, visible from vast distances – indeed anywhere in Chikushudo. This black mountain is covered with snow in its upper reaches and by thick, lush forests around its foothills. Its summit is so high that it is lost in the clouds. The Fortune of Rice, Inari, makes his residence there. Some rumors say he dwells in a palace, while others say his dwelling is a mere cave, but few spirits know and no mortal has ever trespassed upon his home and returned to tell the tale.

The only structures to be found in Chikushudo are small shrines which can be seen at widely scattered points, usually in the wildest and loneliest of places. These are always built as though to be as much in harmony with the natural world as possible, and many of them could easily be mistaken for natural occurrences. They are tended by powerful *hengeyokai*, and venerate ancient spirits of the animal world. Few mortals even see these places, their sanctity inviolate and never defiled.

One portion of the Realm of Animals is truly identical to its counterpart in Ningen-Do: the Kitsune Mori. The depths of that forest are actually present in both realms simultaneously, the veil between them so thin that even an ordinary visitor can accidentally cross over to the world of animal spirits. A similar but much smaller location of

this sort is the so-called "Eye of the Needle," a small copse of old-growth trees within sight of Kyuden Doji. There are doubtless other such locations, perhaps within the Isawa Mori or the Shinomen, though mortals have not confirmed their existence. The Shinomen in particular is slow to give up its secrets, both in the mortal realm and in Chikushudo.

The Denizens of Chikushudo

The residents of Chikushudo are almost entirely animal in nature. It is the place of the wilds, and only Inari himself is truly an anomaly within the realm. Given his affinity with foxes, nobody ever comments on his choice of dwelling place. Almost all animals are represented in this realm, including those whose *hengeyokai* are more commonly found in Sakkaku (such as Saru, Tanuki, and Bakeneko spirits). The animals live in this world in a purified, perfected version of their natural selves.

Beyond the ranks of the simple animals are the *hengeyokai*, the shapechanging animal spirits who reside amongst their mundane cousins. Most of these beings are natives of the realm, living there for most of their lives and only occasionally making *soj*ourns into the world of men, usually out of curiosity at mortals' strange behavior. Some of these spirits are incredibly ancient, as old as the Fortunes themselves, and in a few cases possess almost unimaginable levels of power. Perhaps the most famous examples of this are the legendary nine-tailed kitsune spirits, who are akin to goddesses of Chikushudo; there are no more than a handful of such beings in all of the realm at any time.

The *hengeyokai* are capable of incarnating themselves as men and being born into a mortal life in Ningen-Do; they occasionally do so in order to live among mortals – usually due to some emotional motivation such as love. (One tale recounts a fox spirit who felt compassion for a peasant couple who could not bear children, and incarnated himself as a mortal in order to become their child.) Such acts do place them into the kharmic wheel, although given their inhuman nature it is rare for them to actually accumulate any good or bad kharma. More commonly, these spirits prefer to simply visit the world of men under the pretense of a false identity to sate their curiosity about mortals.

The Elemental kami exist in the realm of Chikushudo much as they do in Ningen-Do; after all, the realm is a harmonious mirror to the physical world, and thus for the kami it is one of the most pleasant and beneficial realms in which to exist. In general, the kami are more active and somewhat easier to understand in this realm, as the harmony of the world causes them to always be in a state of blissful contentment.

Hierarchy of Authority

Inari is arguably the lord of Chikushudo, and is certainly the oldest and probably the most powerful entity in the entire realm. However, Inari does not make any effort to actually rule over the entirety of Chikushudo, much less emulate Emma-O's iron-fisted dominance over Meido. One reason for this may have to do with the ancient beasts and *hengeyokai* lurking in the realm's deepest recesses. Some of these creatures are on the same level of raw power as a minor Fortune, and they all retain their own small kingdoms far from the eyes of others, deep in the most wild and remote parts of Chikushudo. Any being encroaching on their territory, even Inari himself, might find them too dangerous to take lightly.

Whatever the truth, Inari does not attempt to function as a ruler of the realm. He remains within it by choice rather than by duty, wishing to dwell among his beloved foxes and kitsune. They serve him out of mutual respect and adoration, while the rest of the animals in the realm respect him. Regardless of the specific reasons, this arrangement has continued since time long forgotten, and shows little sign of changing any time in the future.

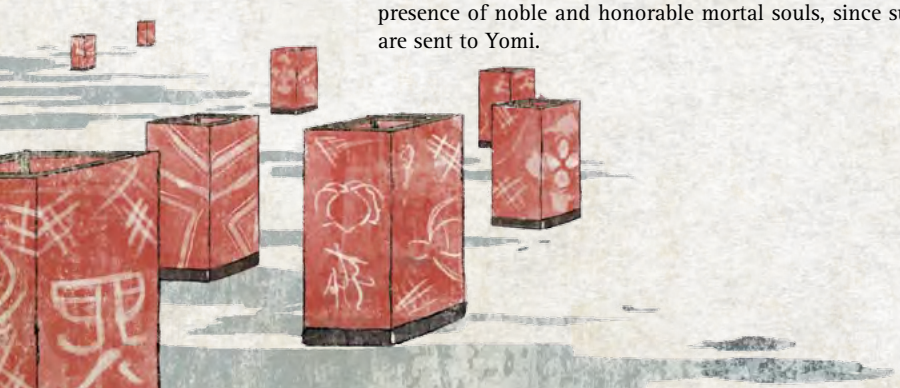
Individually, 'authority' within the realm of Chikushudo is a relationship of expressed respect and awe rather than one of rule and servitude. The animals defer to those of great age and wisdom, in much the same way that peasants will defer to the wisdom of the elderly. This is not to say there is no possibility of anyone issuing an outright command, especially among the kitsune spirits where the nine-tailed foxes can command obedience from any other fox. Rather, the truly ancient and wise are respected, venerated, and obeyed without any need for authoritarian enforcement.

There is a small amount of inherent authority that seems to pervade the whole realm, in the sense that 'native' animal spirits tend to hold greater sway within it than those from Ningen-Do who are there awaiting reincarnation. There is no hard and fast rule – indeed, the very nature of the realm seems to reject the idea of firm rules – but it is clear these 'native' spirits do tend to show a greater influence than others.

Control

There is no active sort of control in Chikushudo; the jealousy of the realm is extremely weak. Although Chikushudo is not quite as lax as Yume-Do, the realm sees no reason to intentionally extend its influence over those who are visiting... so long as they are only visiting. The only true danger in the realm comes from the temptation to remain voluntarily.

Chikushudo is not a corruptive influence, but it can nonetheless be very appealing to those who visit. Its world is 'perfect' in an obvious sense. To many samurai, particularly those from more rustic clans such as the Mantis, the Unicorn, the Crab, and especially the Fox, it is a world in which everything is harmonious and as it should be. The stain and corruption of Jigoku is found nowhere within the realm. Even jaded and tormented spirits like the kitsune-tsuki, who are occasionally seen here, are more like natural hazards than anything else; they threaten one's life but not one's eternal soul. The stain and damage of humanity's failings, of war and destruction, have not touched the beauty of the landscape. Food is plentiful, game is readily available, and man's presence is not feared and loathed in this place so long as one is respectful of the natural order of things. The only thing missing is the presence of noble and honorable mortal souls, since such are sent to Yomi.



The longer a mortal is present within the realm, the more this temptation grows. It is not a force exerted by the realm in any conscious or even subconscious fashion; rather, it is the simple appeal of Chikushudo's natural beauty. Game mechanics are not really needed to represent this effect, which is fundamentally a matter of role-playing. However, if the GM wishes to use a mechanical effect, a simple Willpower roll with a modest TN can suffice. This should not be brought into play unless a person has been present in Chikushudo for longer than a week or comes frequently to the realm (such as through the Kitsune Mori). In the end, a character always has freedom of will with regard to this temptation; there is no magical compulsion, and any character who can master his own desires can leave the realm by his own volition.

However, if a mortal chooses to voluntarily remain in Chikushudo, he has chosen to remove himself from the kharmic cycle, an act that could be viewed as either blasphemously self-indulgent or incredibly humble depending on the motivations. As a result, over a period of months a change will happen, and the character will become more and more animalistic, eventually becoming a native inhabitant of the realm (and in game terms an NPC). Such a transformation would not cause the person to become a *hengeyokai*, but rather simply an animal spirit like all the others in Chikushudo. If the character is removed from the realm prior to the completion of this process, he will return to normal after a week or two in Ningen-Do, but will likely retain at least one small touch of Chikushudo for the rest of his life, such as birthmarks on the skin or thicker facial hair.

Relationships with Other Realms

As already noted, Chikushudo is a mirror to Ningen-Do and is quite close to the realm of mortals, with a few key points where even ordinary mortals can breach the barrier between the worlds by design or accident. Chikushudo is also close to Sakkaku, the Realm of Mischief, and many *hengeyokai* dwell in that realm more than in their own. The creatures of Chikushudo can travel fairly freely between these three realms and do so with some regularity.

Gaki-Do, Jigoku, Meido, and Toshigoku are all far from the realm of animals, and travel to Toshigoku or Jigoku is almost impossible. The idyllic fields of Chikushudo are so drastically different in nature from those realms that there are no connecting points for corruptive influences to even attempt to pass through. Meido is distant simply due to the fact that animal reincarnation is handled separately from human reincarnation. Only those rare cases where a spirit is deemed ready to have their merits judged to enter the human kharmic cycle requires any sort of communication. As for Gaki-Do, only a few rare spirits like kitsune-tsuki have reason to be sent there or even to visit.

Tengoku, on the other hand, is barred from this realm completely. The lofty heights of Heaven are considered truly and thoroughly above the mere beasts. Chikushudo – and Inari – finds this notion somewhat humorous, but

the realm has never seen a purpose in defying Heaven's attitude. Only Inari himself has the ability to travel between these two realms, and the few scholars who know of this believe he must travel via Meido or another distant realm rather than directly passing from the heights of the Celestial Heavens to the depths of the animal realm.

Mechanical Effects of Chikushudo

Normal Elemental spells are somewhat easier to cast due to the harmony of the kami in this place. This may be represented by awarding a Free Raise on Spell Casting Rolls.

Any spell or other ability that involves summoning or controlling animals or animal spirits – such as certain abilities of the Kitsune family – will not function here. The animals of Chikushudo within their native domain cannot be bound or controlled by mortals.

On the other hand, communicating with animals is easier here. Characters receive a Free Raise on all Animal Handling Skill rolls.

Gaki-Do, the Realm of the Hungry Dead

Nothing exists without the will of Heaven... save Jigoku, which exists as the absolute nadir of all that Heaven represents. However, Gaki-Do and Toshigoku may be considered as necessary and ameliorated evils by the standards of lofty Tengoku. They are both pivotal realms, without which the kharmic cycle of Rokugan could never operate properly. However, neither realm is one that Tengoku and its residents would wish to so much as acknowledge, much less think about for any length of time.

Gaki-Do is the dumping ground of Meido. It is impossible to know how many souls have been condemned to the domain of the Hungry Dead over the centuries – Emma-O has no particular desire to share his tallies of the fallen with others. However, it is probably a safe guess to say that of the three most common destinations of those dead who are not immediately reincarnated, Gaki-Do is the most frequent place for a soul to be dispatched. Because 'wickedness' is an extremely broad term, and because the sins and above all the Desires and Regrets that consume most mortals' hearts throughout their lives are so numerous, it is far more likely for a soul to be sent to Gaki-Do than for it to go to Toshigoku or Yomi. (Toshigoku's immense population only exists because its residents generally never leave.)

In theory, the purpose of Gaki-Do is to cleanse souls so they may resume their time on the kharmic wheel. Thus in a sense Gaki-Do is the eta of the spiritual realms, tasked with purifying the dirty and otherwise untouchable souls of the sinful so they may eventually return to the world of mortals for another life. This purification process is commonly done through a ravenous, all-consuming hunger for some base and undesirable thing, something that will shame and sear away the sins within the person, a penance by which they expiate their failings before being reincarnated and given another chance. Many of the souls sent to Gaki-Do endure their punishment for decades or even centuries, but then are finally born anew in the hope of a more honorable and proper life. However, not all souls are able to cleanse themselves in this way. Because the indulgence of such hunger is itself an aspect of the Sin of Desire, many gaki wind up adding to their kharmic burden even as they seek to lighten it. Moreover, the proximity of Gaki-Do to Jigoku means some souls become corrupted, unable to properly reincarnate.

Nonetheless, Gaki-Do is absolutely necessary; the alternatives would be unthinkable. Souls reincarnated with the full stain of their sins upon them would be infinitely more likely to fall into greater and greater depths of depravity, dragging with them honorable and worthy souls who would otherwise eventually bolster the ranks of Yomi. On the other hand, simple obliteration would deny these souls any chance for redemption and would thus weaken the entire fabric of the Celestial order. Thus, as harsh as their punishment might seem, the souls of Gaki-Do possess a certain cruel sense of hope amidst their apparently hopeless and eternal hungers. And when they are finally sated, they are sent on to rejoin the reincarnative cycle.

The Topology of Gaki-Do

Like all the realms that serve as part of the true kharmic cycle, Gaki-Do reflects the world of Rokugan itself. Its fields, its groves, its many castles and halls are all quite similar to those found in the world of men, though only the most permanent man-made structures have a defined presence here. Many of them are dilapidated, making it difficult to tell what they are, and some structures of true purity or righteousness (such as the Imperial Palace)

are not even present within the realm at all. These are holy and worthy places, not things to appear in a place of penance. Even major cities and great forests like the Shinomen sometimes have only a vague representation in Gaki-Do, and vast swaths of the realm are little more than tumbled, featureless plains of decaying organic material, grist for the ravenous hordes of the hungry dead.

In truth, whatever reflection Gaki-Do possesses is a dark and morbid one. Anything familiar can disappear in a heartbeat under an undulating mass of feasting gaki, only to return half-decayed in some other place. Ruddy skies overhead roil with eternal thunder, and the very ground shifts with the agony of the permeating presence of spiritual corruption. The buildings and streets are rife with offal, and the most rancid scents of spoiling degraded meat and ruined woodwork permeate every street and field. The realm is full of the signs and smells and sounds of eternal decay and corruption – not the spiritual evil of Jigoku, but simply raw decay.

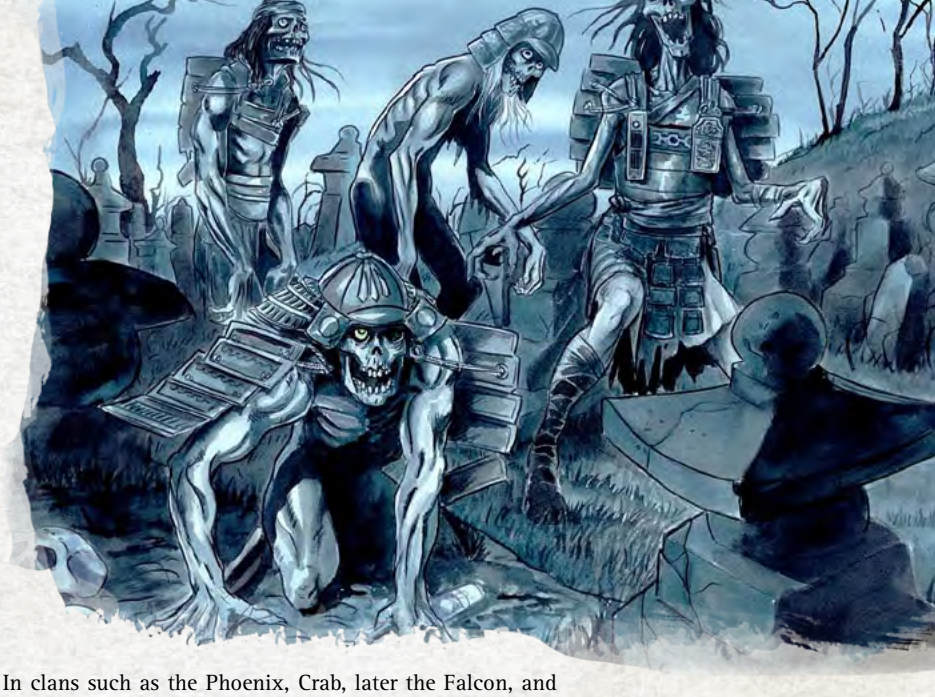
There are regions of relative stability and 'peace' in Gaki-Do, but these are few and far between. There is little real order, rhyme, or reason to the realm. Overall, the world of the hungry dead is a deeply unpleasant place, not meant to coddle its residents but to reinforce the idea that this is what their kharmic sins look like in the full light of judgment. These vile things must be devoured and scoured from the face of their future lives, never allowed to enter into them again.

The Denizens of Gaki-Do

The inhabitants of Gaki-Do are homogenous in nature but extremely varied in their specifics. The only native residents of this realm are gaki. Outside of the extremely rare visitor – divine beings, powerful shugenja, and other roaming entities such as demons and Tsuno – the gaki are the only things one will ever find wandering this realm. Death is the only legitimate reason for a soul to be present in Gaki-Do, and while Jigoku is close by, its influence thankfully touches only a small fraction of the residents.

Gaki come in many different forms and sub-types, but the vast majority fall into three basic categories: Muzai-gaki, Usai-gaki, and Shozai-gaki. Within each of these types, of course, there is considerable variation, especially with regard to the particular hunger that each Gaki experiences.

By far the most common type – and perhaps the most unfortunate – are the Muzai-gaki. These ephemeral creatures yearn for something that is either ill-defined or unidentifiable. They are denied the capacity to actually fulfill their hunger themselves, and the expiation of their sins comes through their experience of the lingering and burning sensation of that hunger, gnawing at them constantly. They are vaporous, vague, and indistinct creatures, frequently growing increasingly frustrated in their rage at being unable to solve their situation. When they interact with the realm of Ningen-Do, they frequently



behave like poltergeists, causing objects to topple or break and otherwise venting their rage wantonly... albeit with only limited real harm.

On the other hand, Usai-gaki are arguably the most fortunate of creatures in Gaki-Do. These are spirits forced into living as insects or other vermin who must feed upon one particular substance, something considered deeply offensive to the Rokugani people, such as dung and offal, rotten food, dirt, sweat, or other such substances. Like other gaki, they sometimes manifest in the realm of mortals, but are often not even recognized as gaki when they do so. Some of the more benevolent Fortunes, such as Jizo, will also occasionally permit these spirits to manifest in the mortal realm and eat offerings in their temples. Once these creatures have found enough of the food they are to eat, either in Gaki-Do or in Ningen-Do, their kharmic debt is repaid and reincarnation is possible. Occasionally, these sorts of gaki do sometimes become Tainted, transforming into malignant and destructive forms such as the infamous Skull Tide that lurks in the waters of the Shadowlands.

Shozai-gaki are probably the most well-known creatures that fall under the term 'Gaki.' These are beings whose sins were great enough that the food they must consume is something considered ritually impure, like human flesh, bile, or blood. While Muzai-gaki seem on the surface more tormented, their punishment is frequently much shorter and much lighter in nature. By contrast, Shozai-gaki often hunger for extremely long periods, in part because access to such impure substances is extremely rare in Gaki-do and what few sources exist are jealously guarded by those that find them. Shozai-Gaki tend to be very violent spirits, and are the type of gaki most likely to succumb to the power of the Taint. Because of their dark nature, they are not intended to touch Ningen-do, but lesser portals between Ningen-Do and Gaki-Do exist in many places (primarily to serve the needs of the Usai-gaki) and Shozai-gaki sometimes use these to enter the mortal realm and seek to slake their hungers there. Shozai-gaki have no restraints on their behavior and frequently engage in vampiric, murderous, or destructive behavior toward mortals, such as the Tainted Gakimushi who torture their victims for prolonged periods, or the flesh-eating Kwaku-Shin Gaki. In general, all types of Shozai-gaki are dangerous creatures, and priests watch for them and seek to banish them back to their realm whenever possible.

Specific Gaki Sub-Types

There are innumerable sub-types of Gaki within the three broad categories of Muzai-gaki, Usai-gaki and Shozai-gaki. Some of these have been depicted in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*, pages 274-275. The following section briefly discusses several other types.

Aoandon, the "Blue Lantern Ghost."

More of an apocryphal tale than confirmed knowledge, it is unclear if the Aoandon actually exists. Somewhere around the fifth century, peasant superstitions began to take root in some of the lower ranks of samurai culture. In clans such as the Phoenix, Crab, later the Falcon, and sometimes even in Lion gatherings, all of whom had an interest in matters of the spirit, samurai developed in interest in sharing ghost stories, and out of these traditions emerged a legend: if one hundred blue lanterns were lit on a moonless night, and one lantern was doused after each ghost story was completed, when the last lantern went out a unique blue creature would be summoned, a demonic gaki with the face and features of a fanged and horned woman.

The Aoandon is a real form of Shozai-gaki, though there are exceedingly few of them. They do not normally seek the realm of mortals, but rather feed from a distance upon fear and stories of spirits. Frequently they are the souls of playwrights or housewives who spun too many fearful tales in their mortal lives and reveled in the fear they inflicted. In principle, the Aoandon are harmless... unless summoned. The ritual of the lanterns binds them to the mortal plane until sunrise, something that infuriates them and drives them to seek to inflict as much fear upon their summoners as they can, frequently causing lethal harm in the process.

Fujo-Ko-Byaku, the "Flesh Eaters."

One of the worst possible fates for an Usai-gaki is to become a maggot. This is generally reserved for the souls of those who defile temples, especially through false or poor-quality offerings that desecrate the site and anger the Fortunes. These creatures are among the only Usai-gaki that are corruptible by Jigoku, and corrupted Fujo can become hideous abominations.

Jiki-Kiwa

Frequently taking the form of small flying insects, the Jiki-Kiwa are those whose purification takes on a very literal form, and arguably the only type of Gaki given free dispensation to enter Ningen-Do. They seem to do so without any serious impediment, and their craving for Ningen-Do is due to the particular compulsion they possess. The Jiki-Kiwa feed upon fire, literally, and in the process are themselves consumed by the fire and returned to Gaki-Do. These spirits are harmless and their sentence in Gaki-Do is usually brief.

Are Gaki the Undead?

The Rokugani have a broad and rather vague concept of what constitutes "the undead," and the category includes a great variety of different beings and spirit realms. For example, corpses re-animated by Tainted kansen are considered undead, as are creatures like pennaggolan which are created by the merging of a Tainted *yokai* spirit with a mortal body. However, the Rokugani also apply the term "undead" to the Slaughter Spirits of Toshigoku and the hungry predators of Gaki-Do, which are both simply the souls of dead mortals. Likewise, a true ghost – a mortal soul which refuses to stay in Meido and returns to Ningen-Do in pursuit of some unrequited desire or incomplete duty – is also considered to be "undead."

This confusing terminology also contributes to the general difficulty which the Rokugani have in dealing with the threats from these beings. Because each of these types of "undead" comes from a different source, each has different motivations, different purposes, and different strengths and vulnerabilities. Small wonder that most Rokugani, even shugenja, seem at a loss when facing such creatures. Only a few families and schools, notably the Kuni and the Toritaka (and to a lesser extent the Kitsu), have made a truly in-depth study of these entities.

Further confusion is introduced by the tendency of the Rokugani to use terms like "ghost," "spirit," and "Gaki" somewhat interchangeably when discussing these creatures. It is not uncommon for a shugenja or monk to mis-label an unhappy *goryo* (a vengeful ghost) as a Gaki, or to confuse a corpse animated by a kansen for a self-willed undead created by a *yokai* spirit. Similarly, the frequency of Tainted Gaki leads to some Rokugani conflating Gaki with demons from Jigoku. For example, in the ninth century a group of Phoenix shugenja defeated a powerful Tainted spirit called a Shimushi, but the Falcon Clan mistakenly labeled it as a Gaki, causing later generations to refer to this entity as a "Shimushigaki."

A cousin of theirs among the Usai-gaki is the so-called "Night Moth." Peasant superstitions claim that wives who do not tend properly to their households and servants who neglect their duties in life are both doomed to come back as moths that devour silk. These beings are among the most rapacious and greedy Usai-gaki known.

Hierarchy of Authority

There is no form of authority within Gaki-Do. The spirits are too consumed by their own hunger to worry about the idea of power or dominion. Only a very few attempt to rise above the muck and mire and claim some larger slice of the midden-heap. However, such efforts never attain more than the small patch of ground they claim. Individual Gaki will often attempt to control a small region in which they feed, and this can lead to conflicts between them, but otherwise the Gaki generally leave each other alone.

Rarely, a Gaki may have enough will and initiative to try to deliberately enter Ningen-Do and offer warnings and guidance to its mortal kin, perhaps hoping they can avoid its fate. However, such individuals seldom number more than a dozen in the whole realm at one time.

Control

Like many spiritual realms, Gaki-Do exerts a certain amount of control over its 'guests' in order to make sure they fulfill their kharmic purpose. As a general rule, this does not extend to those who do not belong within the realm. So long as they do not participate in the realm's activities, or 'assist' the Gaki in their hungers, and pass through quickly, the realm seems to have no concern with them. The Gaki themselves are dangerous, of course, and may well attack visitors to their domain, but the realm as a whole shows no hostility to visitors from other places. Likewise, Gaki-Do is largely unaware of and unconcerned with the affairs of the other spirit realms. It exists to fulfill a necessary kharmic function, and it does so with blind and mindless dedication. Anything that does not belong within its borders does not matter to it, so long as such intruders do not interfere. Unfortunately, this indifference is why the corrupt abominations of Jigoku can sometimes subsist at the fringes of Gaki-Do; they are able to operate within the bounds of Gaki-Do's normal purpose with only very slight changes, worming their way into the realm like maggots in the meat.

However, when a visitor steps out of line in a fashion that might affect the kharmic cycle that is Gaki-Do's entire purpose for existing, the realm lashes out. It will attempt a sort of kharmic retribution, inflicting its powerful and mindless hunger and jealousy upon the person. In mechanical terms, as soon as a character begins to transgress upon the kharmic fates of the Gaki within the realm, he must roll Willpower every minute to resist having his self-will slowly drained away. The TN for these rolls begins at 10, but increases by +1 for every minute the transgressor remains. Each failed roll temporarily

reduces the character's Willpower Rank by 1, and if this effect reduces Willpower to 0 the character is transformed into a Muzai-gaki, forced to fulfill a short but very real sentence within the realm before reincarnation. Escape from this state is not wholly impossible, but would most likely require attaining the aid of powerful beings from outside the realm (such as a Fortune). If the character departs Gaki-Do before Willpower reaches 0, the effects wear off within an hour.

Relationships with Other Realms

Gaki-Do has an intrinsic relationship with those realms that share in its service to the Kharmic Cycle: Ningen-Do and Toshigoku. There is technically only one obvious and permanent entrance between Gaki-Do and Ningen-Do: the so-called Furnace of Ameterasu, a lone spot of purity deep in the Shadowlands within the heart of a volcano. Otherwise, spirit portals between these realms vary from place to place and time to time, although they are sometimes more likely in places where great sins were once committed.

Gaki-Do is also close to Jigoku, which is unfortunate since that realm represents a dark corruption of kharmic purposes. The encroachment of the Realm of Evil into Gaki-Do's territory is not significant, and Jigoku cannot truly influence Gaki-Do itself, but individual Gaki are recruited into the service of Jigoku with alarming regularity, especially from among the Shozai-gaki. Many of the truly malignant Gaki who plague the mortal world have been corrupted by Jigoku's influence, making it highly unlikely they will ever purge their kharma and be reborn.

Like Toshigoku, Gaki-do is explicitly distant from both Tengoku and Meido. The halls of the highest Heavens are offended to even know Gaki-Do must exist and remain aloof to its plight. Similarly, Emma-O has no desire to let souls from Gaki-do pollute Meido after he has already condemned them to their penance.

Mechanical Effects of Gaki-do

Due to the corruptive nature of Gaki-do, there are few (if any) Elemental kami within its bounds. Any Spell Casting Rolls suffer a +10 TN penalty. Also, at the GM's option, spells cast near the boundaries of Jigoku may attract kansen rather than normal kami.

The guidance of Ancestors cannot reach into Gaki-do, due to the great spiritual distance from Yomi.

PCs who suffer from Disadvantages that are related to Gaki-Do's role of punishing the Three Sins (such as Greedy, Lechery, or most kinds of Compulsion) will find the TN to resist these Disadvantages increased by an amount chosen by the GM.

Amaterasu's Furnace

Amaterasu's Furnace is a volcano of considerable size, a unique location within the ever-shifting heart of the Shadowlands. The outer cone of the mountain is as corrupt as any other part of the desecrated realm, but within the core of molten lava is an island of pure calm and placid peace. Due to its location deep within the Shadowlands, the Furnace was largely unknown to the Empire until the twelfth century.

The first known instance of the broader Empire learning of the volcano came when the Unicorn shugenja Iuchi Karasu emerged from the Shadowlands, crippled and maddened, raving of having witnessed a constant and ongoing battle between Hida and his Taint-corrupted first son, Atarasi. Those who heard Karasu's story knew it to be false, for Hida's spirit had resided in Tengoku since his death in the early years of the third century; however, some truth did lurk behind what he had seen, and it is possible Karasu may have glimpsed a spiritual echo of the battle fought so long ago.

In the year 210, an aging Hida marched into the Shadowlands in search of his lost son. Hida Atarasi had fallen to the Taint after the Day of Thunder and became an abomination, the first of the so-called *akutenshi*. Hida found Atarasi at the site of what would become Amaterasu's Furnace, and there the two warriors fought a colossal struggle unseen by any other eyes. Finally, Hida struck a fatal blow to his son, and the blow was so powerful that it broke open a hole in the world itself, opening a rift into Gaki-Do. Victorious at last, Hida fell and died, and his divine mother Amaterasu blessed the site of his death, rendering it forever untouchable by the power of Jigoku.

The gate to Gaki-do within the Furnace is nearly impossible to reach because of the flames and magma that fill the volcano's heart. It is, nonetheless, a permanent and stable portal into the Realm of the Hungry Dead, and due to the purity of Amaterasu's blessing it is effectively impossible for the forces of the Shadowlands to ever use it. Supposedly, only the truly virtuous can survive the fiery heat and pass through the gateway.

Jigoku, the Realm of Evil

It is unwise, to say the least, for a Rokugani to ever suggest Jigoku serves any sort of divine purpose. Jigoku is the nadir of all that is good, honorable, pure, orderly, and holy. It is the very essence of corruption, vice, destruction, chaos, and evil, the self-willed existence of the most depraved and debauched, whose sole purpose is the spreading of its filth to all other realms, refashioning the entirety of creation to its foul design in place of the ordered serene hierarchy of Tengoku.

However, a scant few individuals throughout the realms, such as the Great Fortunes and the Elemental Dragons, know the secret truth about Jigoku... a truth unknown to the Kami, the blessed ancestral spirits of Yomi, or even to Fu Leng himself.

Jigoku must exist.

Shinsei was perhaps one of the few mortal men to even partially comprehend this, though he never fully expressed it. Still, some of his comments in the Tao hint at the truth: "Give evil nothing to oppose, and it will disappear by itself." The very existence of Tengoku defines what is good, pure, and noble. It establishes the transcendental order that rules all creation. It favors and upholds what is orderly and beneficial, what is most beautiful and worthy of awe and respect. However, by doing this, it has also defined the nature of what is evil, corrupt, chaotic, morally bankrupt, and debauched. By knowing what is good, one knows what is not good, and thus what becomes evil. The Realm of Evil is the shadow of the Celestial Heavens; so long as there is light and purity, there will be darkness and corruption. Tengoku, simply by existing, creates an opposing force that lashes out against its will. Jigoku came into existence at the same instant as Tengoku itself, and it will endure so long as Tengoku endures.

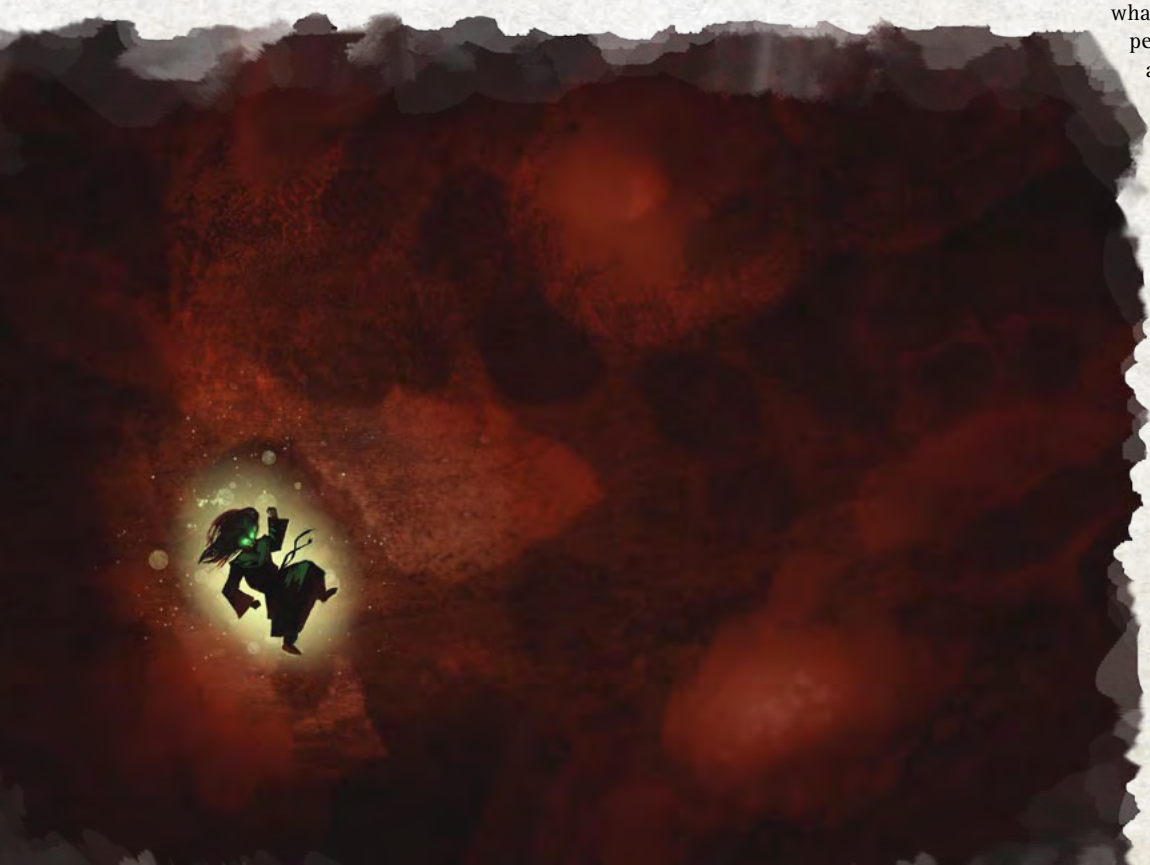
This principle of spiritual evil existing as a reflection of spiritual virtue extends to lesser aspects of these realms as well. For example, when the Elemental Dragons bring their authority to bear within Ningen-Do, they incarnate the Oracles of Light to do their bidding. However, the existence of the Oracles of Light later gives birth to the corresponding Dark Oracles of the same Elements.

Neither Tengoku nor Jigoku can ever truly transcend the other in their constant eternal struggle, because if one of these two polar realms were defeated, the Celestial Wheel would create another to rise in its place. However, while the rulers of Tengoku are aware of this, the malevolent power of Jigoku does not recognize the pointlessness of its struggle. It strives constantly to subsume all creation under its control, unknowing that if were ever truly successful, a new Tengoku would arise to supplant the old. In truth, the realms exist in a twisted sort of symbiosis. Creation inherently craves a 'balance' between the realms, but because of the dominating and corrupting nature of Jigoku this balance plays out as an ongoing struggle. Jigoku constantly seeks to claim the other realms as its own – especially Ningen-Do, which it can use as the staging ground for the conquest of all that lies under Heaven. It will never rest until all has been subsumed in its own foul image, and it will keep pursuing this impossible goal until the end of time itself.

Topology of Jigoku

Much of Jigoku is nearly formless and shapeless, while other parts of it bear a vague twisted similarity to Ningen-Do or Tengoku. The realm's vast dark emptiness takes on whatever shape its rulers will for it, and permanent or semi-permanent regions are generally only found within the domains of powerful oni and other creatures of similar potency. Outside of these regions, the Realm of Evil is shapeless, amorphous, and dark, at best taking on the vague aspect of an empty plain without features or directions. The oni of the realm take their essence, their being, and their shape from this semi-amorphous mass, coming into existence in a heartbeat and vanishing again just as quickly.

The "pocket realms" of Jigoku's most powerful inhabitants, such as the greatest oni and the souls of Jigoku's most powerful mortal champions, display the traits and tendencies of their various rulers. Thus the domain of Moto Tsume resembles a twisted reflection of a samurai's castle, while the realm of



the Oni Lord Akuma is a landscape of shattered stone and ruined castles. None of these sub-realms are very large compared to the entirety of Jigoku, but to mortal eyes they appear quite expansive. Naturally, all are incredibly dangerous to outsiders.

The whole of the realm carries with it an oily sort of pervasive corruption, the result of the innumerable kansen which suffuse it. Jade corrupts almost within the instant of being present within Jigoku, melting away into black sludge in mere seconds. The feeling of something trying to invade the mind and will is so overwhelming that it is almost like having someone stare directly into one's soul, knowing all one's darkest secrets and worst vices.

The Denizens of Jigoku

The Realm of Evil is the home domain of the oni, and these terrible demons may be found here in limitless numbers and variety. Most of them do not bother to take on physical form within the realm, instead simply existing as incorporeal spirits, but they can manifest a physical form instantly if something happens to draw their attention. Jigoku is also the home of the kansen, the evil counterparts to the mortal world's Elemental kami, and to countless *yokai*, the souls of those mortals who have fallen to the Taint. The *yokai* spend most of their existence here being tortured endlessly by the oni; eventually, they either become oni themselves, or are sent into Ningen-Do to create various undead and other evil entities.

Aside from these three primary groups, there are countless other evil creatures in Jigoku, such as the souls of the powerful Lost known as *akutenshi*, corrupted gaki who have crossed over the border from Gaki-Do, and a vast array of other demonic monsters who are not powerful enough to be truly considered oni. Jigoku's will to evil is limitless, and its dark creations are equally infinite.

Hierarchy of Authority

Jigoku is the only truly pro-active and self-willed realm, the ultimate master over all within its purview. Nothing happens within Jigoku without its will, and its unbridled power means anything is possible within the realm itself. However, Jigoku rarely directly exerts its authority save in the case of selecting a Champion. These Champions effectively rule the realm on its behalf, acting in practice as absolute monarchs of the Realm of Evil until such time as they are defeated or Jigoku itself decides to discard them. Moreover, it is possible for a Champion to be defeated by other denizens of Jigoku as well as by outside foes such as mortal heroes or the powers of Tengoku; thus, for much of its existence the Realm of Evil sees a near-constant state of flux in its leadership. Even when a powerful Champion such as Fu Leng is in control, smaller kingdoms are constantly being carved out by Oni Lords, *akutenshi*, and other such beings. The realm is in a constant state of internal warfare as each of these individuals vies for more and more power, always striving to supplant the current Champion.

The Champion of Jigoku claims his authority through raw power and in return is granted considerably greater control over the lesser denizens of Jigoku for the duration of his reign. To Rokugan, by far the most well-known of these Champions is Fu Leng, the fallen Kami, who acquired his position after he fell from Heaven and crashed through Ningen-Do into Jigoku itself, creating the massive portal known as the Festering Pit. Fu Leng is finally supplanted in the late twelfth century by the gaijin goddess Kali-Ma, and her ultimate defeat leads to a major upheaval in the hierarchy of the Realm of Evil (see the nearby sidebar for details). It is theorized by certain shugenja and scholars, especially those familiar with the history of the various nonhuman races which preceded mankind (the Kenku, the Naga, the Ogres, etc), that Jigoku has had many other Champions in the past, although most Rokugani would dismiss such a notion.

The constant warfare and struggling in Jigoku seems to be simply an aspect of its very nature, but it also seems to serve a purpose in ensuring the Realm of Evil is always ruled by the most powerful of its creatures. Any demon which seems content with its small niche of power and uninterested in further expansion is recognized as a weakling and immediately set upon by all the vast hordes that surround it. Only the strongest can remain at the top, perpetually fending off challengers from below them.

A few of the formerly mortal *akutenshi* who carve out kingdoms within Jigoku attempt to create their own "courts," mockeries of the courts of the mortal Emperors they once served. It seems the *akutenshi* crave what they remember as displays of power and authority from their mortal lives. In imposing their will on their surroundings they instinctively created social and physical structures they understand, false versions of Rokugan deep within the Realm of Evil itself. These usually reflect specific aspects of their former lives, mental lifeboats of a sort in the wash of Jigoku's endless tides of chaos and madness.

Jigoku After Daigotsu's Ascension

In the late twelfth century, at the end of the Destroyer War, the nature of Jigoku's rulership changes suddenly and drastically. Perhaps the will of Jigoku was the very reason for the change; craving more and more powerful Champions, demanding constant results in its effort to claim the realm of Ningen-Do, it became impatient, and fragments of its essence were granted to two beings at once: Kali-Ma and Fu Leng. When both of those beings perished, the *akutenshi* called Daigotsu was able to subsume both portions of Jigoku's essence while trapping what remained of Kali-Ma forever within the Tao of Fu Leng, a text of similar power to the Black Scrolls. This allowed Daigotsu to gain sufficient power to overwhelm the will of Jigoku itself and make himself its true ruler. In effect, the realm had finally found a Champion with the sort of power it craved... but gained more than it bargained for.

The Dark Lord dubbed himself the Master of Jigoku and became the first Dark Fortune, ruling over the Realm of Evil in the same manner as the Fortunes ruled Tengoku. Moreover, with the incredible power Daigotsu possessed he was able to elevate his most loyal followers into other Dark Fortunes, designed as vile mirrors of their counterparts in the Heavens. The four new-made Dark Fortunes stood at his side, while the *akutenshi* and Oni Lords bowed before his might.

It is difficult to say whether or not Daigotsu's rule over Jigoku is as absolute as he claims. Much like before, various oni can defy his will to some extent, especially if they flee into Ningen-Do or another spirit realm. However, Daigotsu's exertion of authority over the Taint itself, Jigoku's form of control, implies that the Dark Lord most likely is everything he claims to be. During his rule, the realm is absolutely under his control and subservient to his whim... a whim that is generally far more constructive and ordered than the random chaos of conflict in prior eras.

If it is difficult to gauge Daigotsu's true power, it is downright impossible to say if his ascension represents a permanent change within the Realm of Evil. After all, Jigoku is not a realm that permits mastery easily, and it has never before tolerated the sort of complete dominance Daigotsu holds. While his rule may be unshaken for a time, Jigoku is unlikely to be held in check forever. Even gods can fall.

Control

The control of Jigoku is the force known to Rokugan as the Shadowlands Taint. The mechanics of the Taint are depicted on pages 276-281 of the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook. After Daigotsu's ascension, the Taint ceases to be "infectious" and is only bestowed on those who seek its power voluntarily; the ramifications of this are discussed in detail on page 87 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Earth*. It may be noted that voluntarily entering Jigoku itself – whether by passing through one of the Festering Pits or through another spirit portal – is always considered by Daigotsu to be "accepting the Taint."

Relationships with Other Realms

Jigoku is alarmingly close to a variety of other realms, including Sakkaku, Gaki-Do, Ningen-Do itself, and even Yomi. Each of these realms has some level of connection to the nature of Jigoku. Sakkaku remains an almost infuriatingly difficult realm to corrupt and alter, but shares in the breaking down of the common assumptions of the other realms, treating Jigoku as nothing worse than a joke gone a little too far. Gaki-Do actually allows fairly easy access to Jigoku, thereby creating the more corrupt and dangerous types of Gaki. Ningen-do's closeness is obvious, as the realm serves as a battleground pitting Yomi and Tengoku against the forces of Jigoku. The most obvious point of entry is the Festering Pit (with a second Pit forming in the Scorpion lands at the end of the Destroyer War), but the Taint allows Jigoku to extend its influence far and wide within the domain of mortals. Yomi shares boundaries with Jigoku because of the close association both realms have with the subject of honor.

Toshigoku and Chikushudo are distant to the realm, largely because its concerns are so completely outside of their own. Jigoku is a realm of cosmic Evil, while Toshigoku is one of simple slaughter and destruction for their own sake. The slaughter spirits of the Forge could care less about the subject of Evil, wishing only for their own bloodshed to continue. Chikushudo, being a realm of nature, stands outside of any concern over morality. These two realms would be corruptible only after the fall of many others.

Meido is barred to Jigoku, but passage in the other direction is possible; Emma-O sometimes condemns souls to Jigoku even if they are not yet Lost. Tengoku is barred utterly and completely. These two realms are the final bastions of creation, one protected by the will of the Celestial Dragons and the other by the will of Emma-O.

Mechanical Effects of Jigoku

Jade, even blessed or awakened jade, will instantly corrupt the moment it enters the Realm of Evil. It turns dead black and flows away as a foul greasy sludge. Crystal of all kinds will likewise crack, splinter, and corrupt the moment it enters Jigoku. Obsidian will function normally, but will instantly become Tainted if it is not already.

The Dark Fortunes

The five Dark Fortunes that arise in the late twelfth century are a new aspect of creation, and it is difficult to say what influence they truly exert beyond the realm of Jigoku. Worship of these Dark Fortunes is forbidden outside of the Spider Clan, but the monks of the Brotherhood maintain shrines to these dark creatures as they do to all other Fortunes. Although only the Spider actively worship the Dark Fortunes, other Rokugani do make offerings to them. The reason for this is simple: the curses of the Dark Fortunes fall upon mortals as easily as the blessings of the proper Fortunes, so offerings can potentially avert their displeasure. The Dark Fortunes are capricious beings, though, and on occasion offer (mostly) unwanted blessings, an act which further complicates their relationship to the average Rokugani.

It is theoretically possible these beings might eventually be able to influence mortal affairs as easily as the true Fortunes, but so far they have not shown much tendency to do so beyond the occasional bestowal of blessings and curses. This is probably because of Tengoku's far more pronounced influence over Ningen-Do since the dawn of the Empire. It seems likely that continued or extended worship will gradually increase the Dark Fortunes' power, giving them a greater foothold in the mortal domain. Other Dark Fortunes might rise up in the future (or even secretly exist already), but in the Age of Exploration only the original five are known.

- Daigotsu himself is of course the most powerful Dark Fortune, the ruler of Jigoku itself.
- Akuma, the former Oni Lord, is the Dark Fortune of Power.
- Shahai, Daigotsu's former lover and the mother of his only child, is the Dark Fortune of Blood.
- Susumu, at one time the Imperial Advisor, is the Dark Fortune of Deception.
- Kyoso, the woman who was once possessed by Kyoso no Oni, is the Dark Fortune of Obsession.

Generally speaking, in the Spider Clan (and among those few who secretly venerate them outside of its ranks) Akuma is favored by warriors of all types, Susumu by courtiers and scholars. Shahai is obviously a Fortune favored by *maho-tsukai*, though it is rumored her rise to power had as much to do with Daigotsu's love as anything else. On the other hand, *maho-tsukai* are prone to escaping Jigoku's control and pursuing their own agendas, so placing a Dark Fortune over them may have been a precaution to avert such problems. Kyoso is the only Fortune favored by a more broadly-based group of worshippers, and probably gains the most offerings from those outside the Spider Clan, since it can be quite important to avoid the curse of Obsession.

Within the Realm of Evil, characters will gain Taint in the same manner as they would in a Tainted area in Ningen-Do – but the effect triggers every hour instead of every day. Food and water instantly become Tainted and diseased if they are carried into Jigoku, even if well-sealed or preserved. Eating or drinking anything from within Jigoku automatically imposes the Taint. Also, wounds and diseases will not heal naturally in this place.

The only Elemental spirits to be found in Jigoku are kansen. Consequently, it is almost impossible to cast a spell here without gaining Taint from the kansen.

Void Points and spell slots do not recover naturally in Jigoku, and while the Meditation skill can theoretically still work for recovering Void, the extremely hostile nature of Jigoku means all Meditation rolls are at +20 TN. Needless to say, it is impossible to perform a tea ceremony inside of Jigoku.

Dying inside the Realm of Evil is a very bad idea. If a mortal dies in Jigoku, his soul will be trapped there, unable to escape to Meido.

Maigo no Musha, the Realm of Thwarted Destiny

The Realm of Thwarted Destiny (sometimes also called the Realm of Lost Heroes) is the sad result of a terrible mistake, a piece of spiritual scar tissue across a wound in creation itself. Uniquely among the spiritual realms, Maigo no Musha did not exist in the time before the Kami's fall, and in fact did not come into existence until the opening of Oblivion's Gate at the end of the War Against the Shadow. In essence, the realm exists as the only solution Tengoku could achieve to the karmic imbalance represented by those souls whose lives were touched by spirits returned through the gate, lives whose death defied their proper fate. Such deaths created a karmic imbalance that prevented these souls from being properly judged in Meido.

This issue was unavoidably created by the influx of so many spirits through Oblivion's Gate, along with the massive spiritual effect of the Lying Darkness being named as Akodo at that crucial moment. The re-embodied spirits and re-named mortals did not truly belong in the mortal plane and had not reincarnated properly. While kharmic imbalances like these had occasionally occurred before, now they happened on a colossal scale that had a huge impact on the events of subsequent years. The spirit realm of Maigo no Musha came into existence to handle the effects of this spiritual "overflow."

Subsequently, a conflict occurred between different factions trying to assert control over the new spirit realm. Iuchiban sent the Legions of Blood to try and conquer Maigo no Musha, while Yomi responded by dispatching the Legions of the Dead. Yomi's agents prevailed, helping to secure and maintain the realm as a bastion of hope for those whose fate had been perverted or defied by kharmic imbalance. After their victory, most of the heroic spirits returned to Yomi, but the soul of a ronin named Sanzo remained to watch over the place. Some legends claim the realm's name – Maigo no Musha – was actually derived from the name of Sanzo's horse.

Maigo no Musha has lingered on since that time, the smallest of all the spiritual realms. Its continued existence serves as a convenient way to address what would otherwise be occasional problems and annoyances for Meido. Those who die influenced by something that represents a significant karmic imbalance (such as a returned spirit) cannot be judged properly, since their fate has been subverted or defied and their ability to perform their proper role has been broken. Emma-O, the Fortune of Death, is greatly displeased by such deaths since they make it impossible for him to render a proper judgment on the souls in question. The Fortunes Fukurokujin and Jizo, who occasionally join in (or intervene with) the decision process, are more likely to become involved in such cases as well. Maigo no Musha provides a place where such souls can "bleed off" their imbalance and be reincarnated naturally into their next life. As such, the realm allows the Celestial Wheel to turn more smoothly, and so Emma-O has been content to let it remain in existence, barring it from Meido and thus freeing his own realm from its imbalances.

Jizo has occasionally argued that Emma-O's decision is an incomplete and short-sighted one; however, the Fortune cannot deny the results. Spirits granted a new lease on life through the Realm of Thwarted Destiny have proceeded through the kharmic cycle properly afterwards, and ultimately mercy has prevailed to some extent. Still, Jizo and Fukurokujin worry that this sort of solution may one day come back to bite the Celestial Order, and may even be a symptom of the inherent problems which humanity presents to Tengoku's model of perfect balance.

The Topology of Maigo no Musha

Maigo no Musha resembles the mortal world, but is empty of natural life and shrouded in gray fog. Much of it is a bleak, empty plain, although portions of the realm are almost exact replicas of physical locations and regions in Ningen-do – aside from the constant obscuring fog and the complete lack of any living creatures. There are no obvious gates or points of departure, although the outer edges of the place show a certain "blurring" that signifies the proximity of other spirit realms. Sanzo does maintain a small outpost within the realm to continue his eternal vigilance against any further intrusions from Jigoku.

Denizens of Maigo no Musha

"Every day souls die with their destiny denied. That place will test them as it tested us. Someone must be here to guide them." – *Sanzo*

Normally, the only inhabitants of Maigo no Musha are souls who are trapped there awaiting reincarnation. They are silent, restless but unable to truly lash out, and show a certain resemblance to both gaki and the souls waiting in Meido in their constant yearning and inability to do anything about that yearning. There is a faint hope within all of them for their eventual reincarnation, but they are otherwise unchanged and unchangeable until it is time for them to leave.

In the early days of Maigo no Musha, the Fortune of Heroes, Goemon, spent time within the realm as the leader of the Legion of the Dead. After the departure of the Legion of the Dead, the spirit of the ronin Sanzo remained in Maigo no Musha, and can still be encountered by those who visit the realm.

Hierarchy of Authority

None. In principle, Sanzo exerts some small level of authority within the realm, but for the most part this has been only to keep the peace and prevent interlopers from invading from Jigoku. The denizens of the realm are, by their nature, fairly docile and not prone to confronting outsiders. There is no real need for control in this realm, and Sanzo seeks nothing further.

Control

Maigo no Musha's "control" is nearly identical to Meido's. It does not exist unless one is a native resident of the realm, and occurs instantly after entry into that realm. Unlike Meido's control, however, it is not the exertion of the will of any Fortune, and even the Fortunes who have occasionally come to this realm seem unable to alter its natural state. The realm's control keeps the spirits there in an emotional state of preparation, building eternally towards the moment in which they have paid off their kharmic imbalance and are able to achieve reincarnation through Ningen-Do (or Chikushudo for the occasional *hengeyokai* spirit). It imposes an inability to conceive of any attempt to escape the realm, and is nearly irresistible. Otherwise, the realm seems to have no will of its own, only keeping those souls who find themselves trapped in it there until they are ready to move on.

Meido, the Realm of Waiting

Meido is the lynchpin of the kharmic cycle; without it, the cycle of reincarnation in Rokugan cannot operate. Death would hold no meaning without this place; it serves a function that is limited in scope but absolutely pivotal to the Celestial Order. Meido is the grand waiting room of the court of Emma-O, the judge of the dead. It has little to do with the other realms aside from sending spirits to those realms as judgment for their mortal lives. It is a bleak, silent place where souls await judgment, and in most respects is extremely boring. The rest of the realms largely leave it alone, and in truth through all of recorded and forgotten history Meido has seen only one error of any real magnitude: the escape of Fu Leng.

The purpose of Meido is straightforward. Each soul that comes to the realm is weighed and judged. Mortal human souls are judged on their lives and their kharma, and from that judgment they can be sent to Jigoku, Gaki-Do, Toshigoku, or Yomi, or reincarnated back to Ningen-Do. This process of judgment is an intricate one, based not on simplistic questions such as "Did he follow Bushido" but rather on whether or not the person fulfilled his proper place in the Celestial Order and made progress toward his ultimate destiny. The simplest explanation of the process is to say that every person is judged on whether or not he was the person Heaven intended him to be. Those who attain this are blessed to leave the reincarnative cycle and enter Yomi, where they can dwell for eternity. Those who fail are assigned other fates, based upon how far they fell short, and why. An *eta* who lived out his place in the Celestial Order fittingly, performing his role and duties properly, might greatly reduce his karmic burden and be reincarnated as a *heimin* or even a samurai. Conversely, a samurai who lived a dishonorable or blasphemous life could easily be reborn as an *eta* or even an animal. This weighing and judging process can become exceedingly complex at times, particularly in the case of those who failed at some of their duties but nonetheless made progress toward their ultimate destiny.

The *hengeyokai* and other spirits of Chikushudo are judged separately from the humans in Meido, but they are judged nevertheless if they arrive in this realm instead of being transferred immediately to Chikushudo upon their deaths. Most are sent back to the Realm of Animals, but a few do attain the realm of Yomi. Only particularly failed creatures like the kitsune-tsuki ever find themselves condemned to Gaki-Do, a realm designed more around man's requirements in the Celestial Cycle. Spirits of Sakkaku, even in death, rarely find themselves here and usually are transported directly back to their own plane; Emma-O has neither the time nor the patience to deal with them.

Relationships With Other Realms

Since the victories of the Legion of the Dead, Maigo no Musha has situated itself in closer proximity to Yomi than to Jigoku. It retains that closeness along with a closeness to its inhabitants' two reincarnative destinations: Chikushudo and Ningen-Do. Effectively, the realm exists for only one purpose, a purpose that must be fulfilled in order to stabilize the reincarnative cycle. As such, it remains close only to those realms that require its presence, the final destinations for souls that are to be drawn back into the world. Yomi's closeness is the result of that realm's tireless efforts during the struggle to determine Maigo no Musha's fate, but beyond that the realm is largely left to its own devices.

The only truly stable gateway to the realm is a single passageway from Yomi. There are actually no stable portals to Chikushudo and Ningen-do, since reincarnation only requires souls to exit the realm, not to enter it. The gates of Meido are barred and passage between those realms is effectively impossible, since the kharmic imbalance of these souls is not something Emma-O permits to touch his own realm. Sakkaku is far away, since even the denizens of the Realm of Mischief cannot find anything humorous in this bleak domain.

Mechanical Effects of Maigo no Musha

The Realm of Thwarted Destiny does contain Elemental kami, so visitors can potentially cast spells normally. However, many regions within the realm contain only Air and Earth kami due to the bleak and empty nature of the landscape.

Any character with the Great Destiny Advantage or the Dark Fate Disadvantage cannot benefit from those mechanical effects while in Maigo no Musha.

Meido and the Five Ancient Races

What happens to the souls of the ancient races of Ningen-Do when they die? Do Ningyo, Kitsu, Kenku, Zokujin, or uncorrupted Trolls undergo the judgment of Emma-O? Are they reincarnated or condemned to other realms when they die?

No one really knows, though there are some hints. The five surviving Kitsu who took human form and joined the Lion Clan all went to Yomi after their deaths, for example, which suggests this race did function as part of the Celestial Wheel and has kharma in the same manner as mortal men. The affinity of the Kenku race to Shinsei's teachings also seems to suggest they might understand and participate in the Celestial Wheel. On the other hand, no one has ever actually found the soul of a Ningyo, Kenku, Zokujin, or Troll in Yomi. For that matter, the only Kitsu souls found there are those of the Kitsu who joined the Lion Clan.

Some Rokugani scholars who have learned pieces of the truth about the Five Ancient Races have speculated that the souls of these races might dwell in another region of Yomi, greatly distant from the domain of human souls, or perhaps even in an unknown spirit realm of their own. Ultimately, though, this is just speculation. Thus, it is left to the GM to decide whether these races are part of the cycle of reincarnation or not.

Of all of the realms, Meido changes the least in its nature over the course of the Empire's millennial history. The only notable alteration is the introduction of the gods known as the Shi-Tien Yen-Wang in the twelfth century, but their presence does not change the realm's fundamental nature. Whatever tension may exist between those gods and Emma-O, their relationship is one of convenience for all involved, and helps maintain the consistency of the realm.

The Topology of Meido

Meido's physical appearance is among the most basic and simple of all of the spiritual realms. It is essentially a flat, featureless gray plain. The plain lacks any differences or distinguishing characteristics; it is an infinity of sameness without a single rock or plant to set one area apart from another. The entire domain offers an unimpeded view of the colossal edifice that is its sole true feature: the palace of Emma-O, and the Gate of the Dead within it.

The Gate of the Dead is a nexus to all realms associated with the kharmic cycle itself: Ningen-do, Yomi, Gaki-Do, Toshigoku, and Chikushudo. (The Gate can also access Jigoku, but only does so at the will of Emma-O.) This massive gateway stands behind the judgment seat of Emma-O himself, a seat of bone-white stone from which his gaze extends to the entirety of his realm. All who dwell in the Realm of Waiting shamble slowly forward towards his palace and throne until the moment their names are called, drawn inexorably to hear his assessment and proclamation. Then they pass through the Gate to their next place or final reward.

During the twelfth century, the raging spirit of Fu Leng was briefly shackled within this realm prior to his escape. Later, a number of small palaces spring up in Meido, all at equal distances from each other and from the Gate. These are the courts of the ten Lords of Death, the Shi-Tien Yen-Wang. From these points they observe the realm, keep the peace, and ensure Emma-O is unperturbed in his task as the judge of the dead. What little his gaze does not see, they do, and since their arrival the realm has been kept free of interlopers.

Denizens of Meido

In principle there are only two types of beings residing in this realm: the dead and the gods. The dead stand in silent attendance, inexorably drawn by the all-encompassing will of Emma-O, waiting until the time of their judgment. They are without thought for anything but awaiting that moment. For the most part, these spirits have no will to resist and no need to concern themselves; they cannot be slain or destroyed, since they are already dead. Happiness or pain, sorrow or change, none of these things have meaning until they stand before the judgment seat. Further, interfering with them always brings retribution from the lords of the realm.

The notable exception to this pattern are those souls whose emotions and yearnings from the mortal world are so strong that they cannot let go of Ningen-Do. Such souls find themselves inevitably drawn back to the mortal world to become ghosts, usually *yorei* (yearning ghosts) or *goryo* (vengeful ghosts). Typically, a soul which becomes such a ghost never truly "arrives" in Meido at all, but is drawn back to the mortal world by its own emotions before Emma-O can properly exert his will upon it.

Outside of the endless throng of the dead, there are only a very limited number of Celestial beings who enter or reside within the realm of Meido. These are led by Emma-O, but also include Jizo, Fukurokujin, and Ryoshun. After the mid-twelfth century, the Shi-Tien Yen-Wang also become residents of Meido.

Emma-O is the Fortune of Death, lord of the realm and absolute monarch over all that he sees. In appearance, he takes the form of a giant suit of ebony armor with an empty helm where his face should be. Emma-O is the judge of all souls; his rule is eternal, his gaze is something no mortal can hope to hide from, and he has no patience for anything which might disrupt his eternally monotonous realm. In truth, he seems to be indifferent to almost everything but his Celestially ordained role. However, once every several centuries he leaves his realm for a single day and enters the mortal world to free himself from his endless duty. In a few instances this has resulted in children, born from his trysts with mortal women. Aside from these very occasional indulgences, he is an emotionless tyrant with a singular purpose: to judge everyone who enters his realm legitimately and to expunge anyone who does not belong.

Emma-O takes his task of judgment with the serious devotion of obsession, and to ensure it is perfect he frequently calls upon the advice of the Fortune of Wisdom, Fukurokujin. This ensures his eyes are unbiased in any particularly difficult cases. Since he is all but devoid of compassion, he reluctantly allows Jizo, Fortune of Mercy, to attend his court and plead on the behalf of those deemed worthy. Finally, Ryoshun, the last of the children of the Sun and Moon, dwells in his palace and watches over the Gates of the Dead, guiding each soul to its proper destination after it has received judgment. Ryoshun briefly returned to life during the War Against the Darkness when he passed through Oblivion's Gate, but later died once more and returned to his place in Meido.

After the Shi-Tien Yen-Wang become part of Meido, they serve as Jizo's counterparts in negotiations, speaking as devil's advocates to remind Emma-O of the vices of mankind. While Emma-O still judges mortals, the Lords of Death choose specific punishments.

Beyond these beings, no one else has a place in Meido. Trespassers are not tolerated unless they are respectful of Emma-O's rule... and even then they must leave quickly lest they earn his wrath.

Hierarchy of Authority

In the Realm of Waiting there is but one authority, one power, and one lord: the Fortune Emma-O, who rules over Meido with an iron fist and has done so since times long forgotten. Only in the twelfth century do the Shi-Tien Yen-Wang become secondary authorities during a period of Celestial crisis. After this time, Emma-O retains his overarching authority and continues to judge the dead, proclaiming their fate with the assistance of his newfound "allies," and declares how long a reincarnating soul will remain in Meido. The Shi-Tien Yen-Wang, meanwhile, exert authority over the souls who wait, punishing them as they deem necessary and ensuring no further disturbances interfere with the court of the dead. While the relationship is not entirely amiable, it serves as a convenient one for both parties.

In effect, the rule of Meido is entirely at the whim of Emma-O. Even with the Shi-Tien Yen-Wang's presence, this authority is absolute and they function as a part of it. All denizens of his realm are subservient to him.

Control

Meido exerts control only upon those souls which enter in the traditional fashion: death. Any other person who enters the realm is either removed by Emma-O or the Shi Tien Yen-Wang, or eradicated if they interfere with his court. Emma-O and the Lords of Death have an uncanny knack for knowing the difference between accidental interlopers – the rare mortal who wanders into Meido – and those intent on disruption, and they treat the latter with swift and instant punishment of the most exceptional severity.

Souls entering at death come very swiftly under Emma-O's control, after which they are bereft of need, want, or desire, and left to wait until the time of their judgment. There is no need for any sort of game-mechanical representation of this control, since it only applies to the spirits native to this realm, and is completely absolute and unquestioned by them. It is effectively impossible to resist unless the spirit in question is the soul of an immensely powerful being such as a Kami or Fortune, and even then it is quite rare. Indeed, only Fu Leng is known to have resisted Emma-O's control with any level of success. A mortal soul has no hope of opposing his will, and guests only visit because he and the Shi-Tien Yen-Wang permit them to do so.

Relationships with Other Realms

Meido has close relationships with Toshigoku, Yomi, Ningen-Do, and Yume-do. These realms require ease of access for Emma-O to perform his tasks, save in the case of the Realm of Dreams. Ningen-Do has no clear entrances into Meido, but death means automatic passage for any soul that does not become lost or distracted along the way. Souls assigned to Toshigoku or Yomi must travel swiftly to their destination, so several passages to each of these realms exist beyond the great Gate. Yume-do is close more by accident; because Meido is close to human perception through death, while Yume-do is close through dreams and visions, near-death experiences often involve contact with both realms equally, making the barriers between them weak. Emma-O does not particularly like this fact, but it is something he cannot change. However, there is very little actual traffic between the realms.

Chikushudo and Gaki-Do are separate from the realm, despite being tied to the kharmic cycle at least partially in one case and definitely in the other. Only a few spirits of the *hengeyokai* ever end up in Meido, and these are immediately shunted through the Gate to be dealt with in their own realm unless their cases are particularly unique. A few mortals are also reincarnated as animals as punishment for failed lives, but otherwise Meido has nothing to do with Chikushudo if it can help it. Gaki-Do is kept at a distance to avoid its sordid and sinful nature touching Emma-O's world, and there is only a single passage connecting the Gate to the Realm of Hungry Dead.

Jigoku, however, is a special case. No influence from Jigoku is allowed to enter Meido – the Realm of Evil is wholly barred. The souls of those who become Lost to the Taint never arrive in Meido at all – the Taint drags them directly to Jigoku to become *yokai* and undergo endless torment by the oni. Those who are Tainted but not yet Lost are freed from the Taint upon death, and arrive in Meido to be judged normally; however, if they willingly served the cause of Evil, Emma-O will send them to Jigoku anyway, ejecting them from the kharmic cycle forever and expelling them from Meido through the Gate. Those who were marked by the Taint in life but are not judged to be willing servants of Jigoku sometimes undergo harsh punishments to purge them of the sins that invited Jigoku's influence before they go on to rebirth or another destination. Emma-O's distaste for the Taint is renowned as higher than that of any other Celestial being save perhaps the Jade Dragon, and he will tolerate none of it within his realm.

Finally, Sakkaku is kept at a distance from Meido for the simple reason that Emma-O has no patience for that realm's frivolity.

Mechanical Effects of Meido

The Realm of Waiting contains almost no Elemental kami. It is impossible to cast Water or Fire magic within Meido at all, and Air and Earth magic both suffer a +15 TN penalty to the Spell Casting Roll due to the scarcity of the spirits involved. Moreover, Emma-O and the Shi-Tien Yen-Wang both have the ability to deny Elemental spellcasting powers to anyone intruding on their realm.

No one feels any need for food, drink, or sleep within Meido. However, the flip side of this is that wounds cannot be healed and spell slots and Void Points cannot be regained here.

The power of Ancestors cannot reach into Meido – the spirits of Yomi respect Emma-O's authority and do not intrude on his realm.

Sakkaku, the Realm of Mischief

It is hard to say why Sakkaku exists, and the Realm of Mischief is a source of puzzlement to those shugenja and scholars who have bothered to study it at all. Tengoku, presumably, knows what purpose the realm serves, yet answers mortal questions with riddles and veiled insinuations. Sakkaku has existed for far longer than mortal man has trod upon the earth of Ningen-Do. Perhaps it is a cosmic joke, a sign that even Heaven recognizes the need to laugh at itself and all its rigid rules and hierarchies. Or perhaps the cosmic joke is that Heaven itself does not realize it actually needs this capacity to laugh, and so continues watching Sakkaku's near-blasphemous behavior with an eternally dour eye, never once recognizing that underneath it all the very stresses it creates with its rigid structures necessitates the existence of such a realm. It is impossible to say if either of these explanations is true. Sakkaku certainly is not going to answer, since it finds uncertainty far more amusing.

Regardless of its purpose (if there is one), Sakkaku is ultimately just what has been described: a cosmic joke. It is an eternal punchline to the other realms. It crafts and conjures from its ranks a whole host of creatures and presences whose sole purpose is to find something in the other realms to mock, to blaspheme, to infuriate, and to annoy. It takes nothing seriously other than taking nothing seriously, which it pursues with a devotion bordering on the obsessive... when it feels like it. Attempting to understand it generally leads to either a headache or madness, if not both at the same time.

For the most part, mortal scholars have ceased trying to understand more than the most basic information about the nature of the Realm of Mischief or the spirits that dwell there. The Kitsu shugenja generally view the realm as off-limits save in the most dire circumstances or for the most specific needs. Isawa scholars who study it are quite rare. Even those Kuni who bind mujina to their will rarely deal with anything more than these base creatures and do their best to ignore the rest of Sakkaku's inhabitants. The reason for this is rather simple: the more one attempts to understand Sakkaku, the more likely one is to draw its interest. Scholars who delve into the mysteries of the realm all too often find themselves staring into the smiling eyes of some curious and potentially very dangerous spirit creature.

To date, few treatises have ever been successfully completed on the nature or inhabitants of Sakkaku, though it is clear that it and Jigoku bear some similarities. The key difference is in the intent of the realms. Jigoku is an unmitigated evil, a completely wicked and vile place seeking the corruption and possession of the entirety of creation. Sakkaku, on the other hand, wishes nothing more than to laugh. Thus, while the denizens of the two realms sometimes display similar tactics, attitudes, and purposes in the mortal plane, Sakkaku does not unleash the all-encompassing corruption and malignance that Jigoku does. It wishes a good laugh at the expense of whoever is unlucky enough to meet it, and when one joke is done it simply moves on to the next. Killing or corrupting everything around it, as Jigoku tries to do, just seems silly.

This is the essential truth: Sakkaku's purpose, while occasionally malicious, is never far-reaching. It never cares about anything beyond the next joke. Perhaps this is why the other realms tolerate it as they do not tolerate Jigoku.

The Topology of Sakkaku

Sakkaku is a realm that looks, on the surface, quite similar to Ningen-Do. However, the more one travels its plains, hills, and occasional mountains and forests, the more something becomes clear: there are no truly natural features. Everything is more akin to a set piece for a grand dramatic play than the random arrangements of the real world. Aside from simple sustenance, the environment seems to be designed as a sort of grand prop to support the pranks of the creatures that reside here.

If one explores Sakkaku at length, one discovers there is actually nothing of permanence or importance there other than its residents; there is nothing about Sakkaku's topology that is in the least bit memorable, and it is extremely easy to get lost in the realm. In fact, getting lost is a real threat in Sakkaku; escape is difficult, unless one has the means to breach the barriers between realms. Even the nearby realms do not have many entrances to this domain, although there are regions that are similar enough to make travel easier. (Wild places might correspond to Chikushudo, places where a town should exist might correspond to Ningen-do, and dark and ominous places to Jigoku.) However, these loose connections do not actually create spirit portals; they just make it slightly easier for such portals to form.

Sakkaku does not constantly shift its landscape in the manner of Jigoku (or its mortal-world counterpart, the Shadowlands), nor does it change its features at the whim of its denizens as happens in Yume-do. Rather, the landscape is simply not all that important to Sakkaku. Anything that is not a prop or an aid to a joke is just not given much effort.

Denizens of Sakkaku

The inhabitants of Sakkaku are as numerous as the sands on the seashore, and as varied as the blossoms in a Crane garden at the height of spring. However, by far the most numerous and easily-met of these creatures are the mujina. Indeed, these mischievous spirits seem to reflect in the purest way what this entire spirit realm represents. They are normally relatively harmless (although their pranks can become quite vicious if they are angry), known for utterly irreverent behavior and attitudes. They flit in and out of Sakkaku with the ease of an errant breeze through an open door, apparently able to create their own spirit portals on a mere whim. They are easily amused but also easily bored, and it is hard to keep a mujina performing the same prank or staying in the same place for long. The only way to truly hold them to a task is to bind them magically, an act that infuriates them deeply. In fact, the only thing all mujina will agree on is tormenting anyone who does this. Of course, this can often lead to more of their number being captured.

Beyond the mujina, Sakkaku is home to a wide range of different creatures whose diverse natures are impossible to truly catalog. However, among these creatures a few stand out as particularly notable. The pekkle, for example, are creatures who generally get a worse reputation than they deserve, mainly due to the existence of their Tainted brethren, the Pekkle no Oni. True pekkles are shapeshifters who take the forms of children and young people, seeking out chances to live lives as the adopted children of human parents, waiting until almost the age of maturity to disappear and end their extended prank. Their dire repute is due to their particular susceptibility to corruption by the Taint of Jigoku. The corrupted Pekkle no Oni are vicious and malignant entities, delighting in causing havoc and spreading Jigoku's touch wherever they go.

Bakeneko and saru are animal spirits who are more at home within the wild plains of Sakkaku than the peaceful realm of Chikushudo. They are joined in Sakkaku by the *hengeyokai* of any animal which is particularly prone to trickery and chicanery. The saru monkey spirits are known for their whimsical and playful nature, enjoying light jokes at the expense of others. The cat-like bakeneko, however, have a far crueler and more vindictive twist to their games. This is especially true if a bakeneko feels it has been wronged by someone, or if cats under its protection have been wronged by that person. Particularly villainous people are also targets for their games, many of which can be quite deadly.

Kenku and kappa are also residents of Sakkaku, although they are less overtly bizarre and mischievous than others. The noble kenku, widely revered in the realm of Ningen-Do as one of the Five Ancient Races and associated with both Shintao and the ways of the sword, are nevertheless originally from Sakkaku. The humor of these bird-like creatures can be felt in their riddling and whimsical nature, although their tricks tend to teach lessons rather than merely deceiving. The kappa, by contrast, are malicious and violent pranksters who delight in causing harm to any who take them lightly, making a game of their murderous impulses. The kappa are actually more common in Ningen-do than in their own realm, and could even be thought of as exiles from Sakkaku, their humor just too malicious for the realm's nature.

In contrast to all of these, one other race native to Sakkaku are the orochi, surprisingly dour creatures who find their existence in the Realm of Mischief to be a trial. These great serpents prefer to swim in the depths of the ocean, enjoying a regal and natural existence far from the games of mujina, creatures they despise. Although there have been one or two instances of orochi showing an odd sense of humor, for the most part they are completely serious creatures, find the company of their fellow Sakkaku spirits too irritating to tolerate long, and rarely wish to speak of their native realm. In the twelfth century, this desire to stay away from their own realm leads to an alliance between the orochi and Rokugan's Mantis Clan. (See the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*, page 252-253, for details.)

Beyond these major races, any number of other creatures may be found within the Realm of Mischief. The only consistency between them is that all of them tend to be focused around some sort of ongoing joke. Many are almost buffoonish replicas of creatures from Ningen-Do, and their abilities rely largely on trickery, chicanery, and manipulation – making them far from harmless, but at the same time rarely truly dangerous.

Hierarchy of Authority

The very idea that there is any sort of hierarchy in Sakkaku is perhaps one of the greatest jokes of all to its residents. Anyone who attempts to verify who is in charge of the realm will ultimately find themselves the butt of merciless jokes and ribbing from creatures who find such questions immensely entertaining.

The reality behind this is that most of the creatures who dwell in the Realm of Mischief keep to themselves. Only the animal spirits spend any time amongst each other, and even they do not truly organize to any real degree. The 'exiled' Orochi and Kappa were the races most likely to have any sort of hierarchy within their own ranks; that modicum of structure may have been one of the reasons for their departure to the mortal world.

The more one searches, the more it becomes clear the realm is meant to defy the very notion of authority. There is no hierarchy in Sakkaku and there never will be. Any attempt to control the realm would be like trying to hold sand in one's hands. Perhaps a few grains will stay in one's grasp, but all the rest will slip giggling through the fingers.

Control

Some shugenja believe Sakkaku holds sway over those who visit it, and exerts a more thorough control over its native residents. The truth, however, is that Sakkaku wields no control whatsoever over its own residents, for there is no need to do so. Fashioned from the innate humor that makes up the realm, they need no urging to wreak havoc upon the world that surrounds them. To add anything further would be needless overkill, not to mention blunting the joke – something Sakkaku never accepts.

Guests are not so lucky. The longer a person remains inside of Sakkaku, the more likely that person will be influenced towards a lack of self-restraint, making him more and more like the native creatures of the realm. Mechanically, this process is resisted by either Awareness or Willpower (whichever is higher), making a Trait Roll every day, beginning at a TN of 10 and increasing by 5 each day. Failure initially creates a minor Compulsion toward inappropriate behavior. Repeated failures increase the TN of the Compulsion by +5 until it reaches TN 20... at which point further failures result in the acquisition of additional Compulsions. Each subsequent Compulsion will be even more inappropriate than the last, perhaps even blasphemous, until the character is wholly unable to do anything but behave like a native resident of Sakkaku.

This influence is generally only effective within the boundaries of Sakkaku. Once outside, the Compulsions quickly fade, reducing the TNs by 5 per hour until there are none left. However, if at least one Compulsion reached TN 20, the GM may opt to allow some glimmer of this effect to remain behind for an extended period, a permanent

effect of the realm's influence. This could be represented by permanent Disadvantages like Compulsion, Can't Lie, Obtuse, Lechery, etc. This is extremely rare, however, and should generally be reserved for characters who willingly accepted or reveled in Sakkaku's nature rather than those who did their best to resist it.

Relationships with Other Realms

Sakkaku is generally closest to Ningen-Do and Chikushudo, followed by Jigoku and Yume-Do. There is no particular reason why these are the realms Sakkaku is closer to, but scholars who have bothered to think on the subject believe it is simply that Sakkaku is more tolerated by these realms and so has managed to develop easier access to them than to other realms. Jigoku has frequently attempted to manipulate this closeness to its own ends, but so far its only success has been the creation of the Pekkle no Oni. For the most part, the denizens of Sakkaku simply do not care for Jigoku's goals, and cannot be bothered to be corrupted unless the joke is very good... which, given Jigoku's nonexistent sense of humor, is usually a mocking 'no.'

The greater distances to Meido, Tengoku, and Yomi are easily understood. Those realms all loathe the irreverence and disruptive mischief of Sakkaku. Meido is almost completely barred to Sakkaku, since the cycle of reincarnation has nothing to do with this realm and Emma-O will tolerate no attempts to disrupt his court. No matter how badly the mujina might wish to play pranks on his realm, they know better than to provoke a major Fortune, and so only very rare, foolish, and bold creatures enter Meido from Sakkaku. Tengoku and Yomi are not quite so distant, but nevertheless it is a rare and strange day when those realms touch Sakkaku.

Mechanical Effects of Sakkaku

Although the realm of Sakkaku contains the full panoply of basic Elemental kami, all Air spells cast within this realm suffer a +5 TN penalty, since the playful Element of Air is subverted by Sakkaku's mischievous nature. Moreover, Sakkaku is not a place where the Void can be easily or consistently touched, so all Void spells suffer a +15 TN penalty.

The difficulty of touching the Void applies to all visitors, not just Void shugenja. Any time someone spends a Void Point in Sakkaku, there is a 50% chance it fails to have any effect (although it is still expended).

Both the Luck Advantage and the Unluck Disadvantage are considered to be one Rank higher in this realm. If a visitor earns the enmity of Sakkaku, the Luck Advantage will cease to function here.

Any mortals within Sakkaku will encounter frequent minor annoyances and accidents (non-damaging but irritating) – things like ponytails or braids coming untied, a sandal-strap breaking, a samurai tripping over his own feet, and so forth.

Tengoku, the Celestial Heavens

The Celestial Heavens are the highest pinnacle of creation. They are the center of all that is, all that was, and all that ever will be. As the focal point of all the spirit realms, the Heavens are the managing entity that observes, facilitates, and protects the integrity of all those realms... save Jigoku, their antithesis. Tengoku is the glue that holds the universe together, and without this realm the kami have no power, the Fortunes do not rule over their different aspects of creation, and all that exists would crumble to ash. Thus, Tengoku is the single most important of all of the realms.

Like Jigoku, Tengoku has only a minimal relationship with the kharmic cycle, for its interests and goals are far broader and more all-encompassing than the mere lives and souls of individual mortals. Unlike all of the realms who show jealousy in their control over visitors, Tengoku does not actively reach out to take mastery of spirits or souls. It does not need to do so and would not stoop to tricks it considers beneath its nature. Rather, simply by existing and performing its necessary role, Tengoku naturally draws the attention of all creation toward it, inspiring lesser souls toward the perfection and enlightenment it represents.

Mortals are rarely welcome within the Celestial Heavens. Those who ascend to become Fortunes are no longer considered human, having been elevated into Celestial beings to serve specific duties for all eternity. The only other human souls allowed to remain in Tengoku are the former Emperors (each of whom became divine upon death) and those who have enough of the Imperial blood that they too are considered lesser divine creatures upon death (such as Seppun Mako, General of the Fushicho at the gates of Heaven). Tengoku is never a destination for normal human souls, who are sent to Yomi once they finally complete their destinies.

Tengoku is the opposite of its cosmic opponent, Jigoku, except for one sense: like Jigoku, Tengoku is self-willed and sentient, its existence embodied in an entity known as the Celestial Dragon. This being, reputedly the most powerful of all the Dragons, represents the cohesive unity of all existence, while the lesser Elemental Dragons encompass only individual facets of creation. However, the Celestial Dragon's will is almost never felt in an active sense. Its agents – the lesser Dragons, the Fortunes, and

the Sun and Moon – are more than capable of reaching out and accomplishing what it desires, and so its voice is heard in the Heavens perhaps once a generation (if that). Of course, it is worth noting that even the Fortunes, the Sun and Moon, and the Dragons very seldom actively touch the mortal plane. In large part this is because their power and influence are sufficient for most situations from afar, but it is also because if they attempt to make their presence felt too strongly amongst mortals they can create imbalances of the Celestial Order, with potentially terrible consequences.

All of these beings are deeply concerned about ensuring Celestial balance and the purity of the Heavens (especially during the so-called "Age of Man" during the Toturi Dynasty of the twelfth century). The Dragons prefer to act through their proxies, the Oracles of Light, and even that can sometimes be too disruptive to the harmony of the universe. As a result, Tengoku as a whole prefers to act by investing its authority in its mortal representatives, especially the divinely appointed Emperors (the Hantei Dynasty and the later Iweko Dynasty). Those lines, kharmically infused with authority from Heaven, have enough connection to the mortal world that their actions do not overly distort the balance of Ningen-Do.

The Celestial Heavens are a realm of absolute purity, but also one of absolute duty. All who dwell within the Heavens know where they belong and what they must do. Shifts of authority are tightly controlled, and while there may be arguments between the beings of the Heavens, ultimately everything is kept within very clearly defined rules and constraints lest the realm become lost to the chaos of mortal behavior. Due to the realm's preference to work through proxies, other domains perceive Tengoku as aloof, indecisive, distant, arrogant, and sometimes wholly out-of-touch. At the same time, Tengoku has if anything taken an even more hidebound and limited view of creation with the passing centuries, one that views humanity with open distrust because of the chaos mortals create.

The Topology of Tengoku

All of Tengoku is a swirling, cloud-filled eddy of peace and light, where all may be altered at the whim of those who rule the place. Only a few places maintain an eternal physical consistency (aside from the bridge leading into the realm). Lesser beings such as minor Fortunes control the smallest portions of the Heavens, while Greater Fortunes and the Dragons can craft far larger portions of the realm. However, because all these beings' will and whims change with their duties, there is no consistency to most locations within Tengoku.

The Celestial Palace is a gigantic structure located at the spiritual center of Tengoku. It has the rough look and feel of the ancient palaces of Otosan Uchi, but on a scale which dwarfs the mightiest structures of the Imperial City. Indeed, there is no visible end to its height. Dwelling within it are the tennin, ryu, fuschicho and tennyo, the servants who see to every need of the courts of Heaven. Its gates are guarded by the elite of the fuschicho, and in later centuries these forces are commanded by Seppun Mako, the finest general in the history of the Seppun family. Most of the greater residents of Tengoku make their home within these halls.

The other notable structure in Tengoku is the Court of Heaven. It is located outside of the Palace and dominated by the twin thrones of the Sun and Moon. Here, surrounded by gardens that would shame the Doji with their grandeur, Tengoku's lords gather to deal with any business that must be decided between them. The thrones are only occupied during times of the gravest or most joyous importance. The throne of the Sun remained unoccupied during the reign of Yakamo, out of respect for the mother of the original Kami and his wish not to be seen as a tyrant who claimed the throne by force or arrogance.

Finally, there is the domain known as the Dragonlands, the home of the Celestial Dragon and all its lesser kin. The Dragonlands are said to resemble a perfect, ideal, completely balanced form of Rokugan. Here the Kami Hantei hid from his vengeful and jealous father, Onnotangu, and trained for the day when he confronted Lord Moon and saved his siblings. It is said the Dragonlands contain another court, the Dragon Court, where these beings may meet separately from the other rulers of Heaven. Aside from the Dragons themselves, the only beings to visit this part of Tengoku are the Ryu and the Ki-Rin.

Denizens of Tengoku

The realm of Tengoku is home to some of the most powerful beings in all of creation, including the Dragons, the greater Fortunes, and the Sun and Moon. The Elemental Dragons oversee the maintenance and integrity of the Elemental forces comprising all creation, while the Thunder Dragon acts as the champion of mortal heroism. The so-called "Ten Thousand Fortunes" (in truth, the exact number is unknown) each oversee a particular aspect of life for those who dwell in Ningen-Do, and to a lesser extent all of

the various spiritual realms save Jigoku. The original Kami and the Emperors also serve as lesser divinities within the Heavens, watching over the deeds of mankind.

Beneath them are lesser servants such as the tennin, tennyo, fuschicho, and ryu. Tennin and tennyo are messengers, servants, and scouts of Heaven. These spiritual beings are basically humanoid in nature, though faceless and without defining features other than an ethereal sort of beauty, although they are distinctly individual beings if one converses with them. They dress in feathered kimono which grant them the power to ride upon the air. Most carry with them a divine article of some sort, such as a lotus blossom to represent enlightenment.

Fuschicho are phoenix spirits, firebirds that are symbols of resurrection; they are effectively immortal so long as they are within the realm of Tengoku, since they resurrect the next day any time they die within that realm. Many of them serve as the guardians and soldiers of the Celestial Palace.

Ryu are fragments of the divine essence of the Dragons. A ryu is born from a single scale of one of the greater Dragons, a scale that is shed and takes on a life of its own. They serve in a fashion similar to the Tennyo, but specifically for the Elemental Dragons, and tend to be enigmatic observers of the mortal world. However, when they are called on to fight they can be fearsome opponents - not surprising given the fragments of divine essence they possess.

Each of these creatures has a place, and everything within Tengoku must remain within its place. Even during periods where shocking events take place, such as Fu Leng's assault on the Heavens during the time of the Four Winds, the realm's behavior remains rigid, formalized, and precise. Likewise, when the redeemed demon called the Oni no Okura became the guardian of the bridge to Tengoku, her new duties were clear-cut, her role limited, and her place very obviously set in stone.

Hierarchy of Authority

The hierarchy of Tengoku is complex but rigid, and all who dwell within Heaven are bound into the Celestial Order in very specific ways. Exceptions may be granted (such as the aforementioned Oni no Okura) but these must fall within equally rigid limitations. Nothing in Heaven is allowed to be outside of its place.

Authority in Heaven ultimately comes from the Celestial Dragon. In a sense, the Celestial Dragon is reality itself, in a way incomprehensible to mortals or even to the Fortunes. As such, its will is absolute – though rarely felt. Beneath it are the Sun and Moon and the other Dragons. In essence, these create two separate hierarchies of authority within the halls of Heaven.

Beneath the Sun and Moon stand the Kami and the Greater and Lesser Fortunes. The seven Great Fortunes rule over the countless Lesser Fortunes, and all pay homage

Tengoku During the Age of Man

After the Second Day of Thunder, the Toturi Dynasty saw the ascendancy of a human-ruled Empire in the mortal world, but with this so-called "Age of Man" came a series of key errors that nearly led to the complete destruction of the cycles of creation, including the death of the heir of Shinsei, the over-involvement of Oracles in human affairs, the deaths of the Sun and Moon and their replacement by mortals (Hida Yakamo and Mirumoto Hitomi), the Lying Darkness' attempt to unmake reality, the return of vast numbers of departed souls to mortal life, and Fu Leng's assault on Heaven itself.

In the end, the Age of Man was deemed a complete failure by the Celestial Heavens, and Tengoku chose to place mankind back under the heel of Heavenly dictate once more for the sake of reality's survival. The rigid hierarchical structure of the Celestial Heavens was re-established in both Tengoku and in mortal world. In the Heavens, Yakamo and Hitomi were expelled and replaced by the Jade and Obsidian Dragons, while in Ningen-Do the divinely-mandated Iweko Dynasty replaced the defunct Toturi line.

to the Sun and Moon. For the most part these beings watch over the ideals and behavior of man and ensure that every aspect of creation is observed, protected, and maintained by divine authority. They are thus the most likely of Tengoku's denizens to interact with humanity, though they generally do so only through extremely distant proxies (priests, monks, and shugenja), with very occasional direct manifestations.

The Dragons, on the other hand, are generally more concerned with 'reality' itself and with maintaining its fabric, both in the Heavens and in Ningen-Do. The five Elemental Dragons observe and uphold the very fabric of creation, using their lesser servants, the ryu, to maintain its integrity.

Beneath the Fortunes stand the tennin, tennyo, fuschicho, and all other natural denizens of Heaven. These are individual functionaries, messengers, and servants who obey the will of their betters without question. When Tengoku requires a message to be delivered to other realms, frequently it is the tennyo or the fuschicho who are sent to accomplish the task. They also make up the bulk of the military force that protects Heaven. Alongside them in the Court of Heaven are the few humans who have been granted authority to be present, such as certain individuals of the Imperial line. Some of the Thunders have also been granted stars in the Heavens for a time.

Beneath these are a few other beings, generally singular exceptions to the norm, with very specific and limited powers and duties. A good example of this is the aforementioned Oni no Okura, an oni who became purified in the twelfth century and was permitted to serve as guardian of the bridge into Tengoku. She never actually entered Heaven proper and remained forever at the entrance, watching for intruders.

Control

Tengoku's authority is absolute. Its control cannot be resisted by anything short of at least an Oni Lord. If Tengoku wishes for a thing to happen, for a mind that is present within its realm to be rewritten, for a body within its domain to be shaped to its whims, it will happen, and there is nothing mortal man can do to stop it. However, so long as humanity does not transgress in its hallowed halls, Tengoku almost never actually exerts this authority other than to simply exist as itself. On those rare occasions when mortals visit the realm as guests, it makes them intimately aware of its authority and allows the awe and majesty of what it represents to be sufficient.

Since Tengoku's control is effectively irresistible for mortals, there are no mechanics to represent it. However, the GM should always exert such power with the utmost care and consideration; after all, the Heavens never act without the greatest of need.

Relationships with Other Realms

Tengoku has always retained an incredible distance from almost all other realms, for it is a place whose power operates overwhelmingly through proxy. It is nearly barred to Maigo no Musha from the moment that realm comes into existence, regarding that shameful excuse for a spiritual domain as nothing more than a correction for humanity's own kharmic oversights. Ningen-Do, Sakkaku, and Gaki-Do are similarly distant realms to Tengoku, the Heavens preferring to manage them from afar and only permitting entrance from these realms when it sees fit. Even Yomi is more distant than

one might expect, the only true entrance point being the vast mountain at the center that ascends to the bridge of Heaven, guarded by the finest elites of both realms. Only Yume-Do is at all close, for even Fortunes must dream, and in dreams even the lowliest mortal can sometimes touch the faces of the gods.

Chikushudo is simply beneath the concern of Heaven (outside of Inari's personal visits to the Realm of Animals); so long as the Dragons maintain creation properly, the animals will look after themselves. Only Jigoku is absolutely barred, as the antithesis of all that Tengoku represents, and the two realms remain at war for all eternity. In essence the other realms, especially Ningen-Do, serve as the proxied battlegrounds of these two realms, and only through a victory there could Tengoku truly be assaulted.

Mechanical Effects of Tengoku

Game mechanics are for the most part meaningless in Tengoku; all that transpires there happens at the whim of Heaven, and anyone who presumes to use violence will be summarily expelled or destroyed by Celestial will. However, one aspect of the place which may be of note is its effect on spiritual Disadvantages. In essence, any Advantage or Disadvantage that involves other spirit realms (such as the various Touch of the Realms Advantages) will cease to function within Tengoku. Also, no mortal who carries even a hint of the Shadowlands Taint will be allowed to enter Tengoku at all – the realm is wholly barred to all those who carry the mark of Jigoku's control.

Toshigoku, the Realm of Slaughter

Toshigoku is one of four realms intimately linked with the cycle of kharmic rebirth. However, unlike the other three (Yomi, Meido, and Gaki-Do), there is a dark and unfortunate aspect to the Realm of Slaughter: this is the domain of those who fall off the kharmic wheel. Toshigoku is a sort of spiritual 'dumping ground,' but one of far greater finality than Gaki-Do. The spirits sent to Toshigoku are never meant to leave it. They are deemed by Emma-O to be in some fashion irredeemable, consumed by sinfulness and violence, and their souls are proclaimed unrecoverable, making them unfit to ever be reborn and better themselves.

In many respects, Toshigoku represents the complete corruption and destruction of the samurai ideal. Its residents are souls who were consumed during life with hatred and slaughter. Their selfishness transcended their willingness to serve their lords, causing them to embrace both desire and wrath. Because of the propensity toward war that is common to the way of the samurai, souls such as these are more numerous than might be imagined. Emma-O recognizes that reincarnating such souls would lead Ningen-Do inexorably toward more and more senseless and futile conflict, regardless of how many times they might be reborn. Thus they are cast away as an affront to the kharmic cycle.

The fact that Toshigoku even exists is troubling to Tengoku. It is a blight that grows ever larger with every passing generation. Although the number of souls sent to this realm is far less than those reincarnated, sent to Gaki-Do, or blessed with residence in Yomi, the fact that the souls in Toshigoku never reincarnate means the population of the realm slowly builds over time, fed by centuries of death and carnage in the many wars that fill the history of Rokugan. Some might consider this realm to represent a flaw in the structure of reality, one that can be blamed on the existence of mortal men and their effrontery toward the Celestial Order. Certainly the vast majority of Toshigoku's inhabitants are human in origin, suggesting Toshigoku's rise in prominence is a sign of inherent flaws in the Sun and Moon's accidental creations.

The realm of Yomi would disagree with the notion that this place has no potential for reincarnation, and this is perhaps the only point on which Yomi and Tengoku truly disagree. To the souls of Yomi, many of those within Toshigoku are not completely beyond redemption, and they deem Emma-O's judgment premature. Indeed, the blessed ancestors would argue the Battle of Oblivion's Gate and the behavior of some of the less monstrous of the Toshigoku spirits who returned to the land of the living is a sign that Heaven should not be so hasty to judge forever. However, outside of the Fortune of Mercy Jizo and the founding Kami, the ranks of the Fortunes and Dragons have remained adamant in their stance. There are stories of those from Yomi who risk themselves attempting to 'save' souls from Toshigoku (and even from Jigoku) and give them some chance or hope at a reincarnation, either by guiding them back to Meido to appeal to Jizo, or by bringing them to carefully separated parts of their own realm. The results are usually tragic, suggesting Tengoku may be right to view the Realm of Slaughter so harshly. This debate seems unlikely to ever end, since

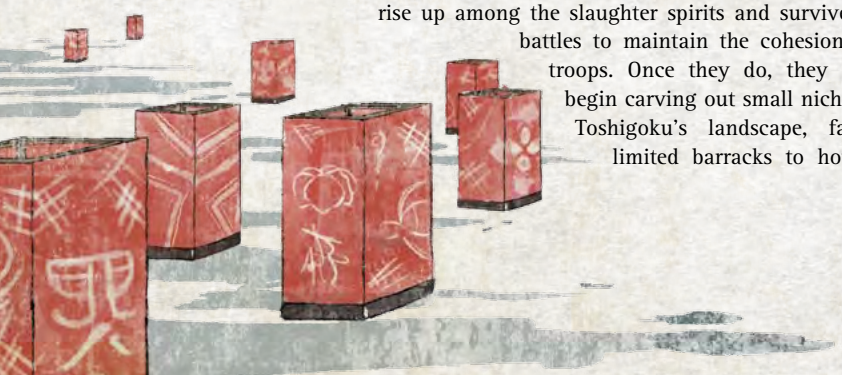
despite the increasing population of Toshigoku, it could take thousands of years before the realm's size ever truly becomes a problem for the rest of creation.

Topology of Toshigoku

Like all realms that serve as part of the kharmic cycle of rebirth, Toshigoku is a vague reflection of the realm of mortals. However, unlike Gaki-Do and Yomi, or even the bleak expanse of Maigo no Musha, Toshigoku is meant to be a final resting place for those too far gone to be redeemed. It resembles its counterparts only in the most basic topology of the landscape. It is like a Rokugan in which all proper life has been torn asunder. There are no trees, no birds in the fields, no fish in the stagnant waters of the brackish rivers that serve mainly as obstacles armies must cross.

The realm is bleak, barren, and cold, its ground little more than cracked and parched earth, with boulders heaped up in the form of mountains roughly where they would be in life. In theory, the clans have the same holdings in this expanse of bleak horror as they do in the mortal world, but there is no recognition among the slaughter spirits for any sort of real order or governance. Each morning when they rise for war, they take up ranks with whatever soldiers are there among them, and former dire enemies may find themselves on the same side in a later conflict. Thus, clan boundaries and identities are futile and meaningless concepts.

The only real way in which Toshigoku's landscape is distinguished are the mini-kingdoms carved out by beings of exceptional willpower... and the domains of the Tsuno. The former are rare things, dangerous to approach. Leaders of extensive charisma and willpower sometimes rise up among the slaughter spirits and survive enough battles to maintain the cohesion of their troops. Once they do, they generally begin carving out small niches within Toshigoku's landscape, fashioning limited barracks to house their effectively immortal armies, and waging war against any bands that rise up against them. These 'kingdoms' are usually short lived and poorly constructed, eventually collapsing when they suffer a defeat or when they break up internally due to a lack of external foes. Only rarely do they have any real permanence.



The Tsuno dwelled within Toshigoku for thousands of years, banished there by their Kitsu brethren before mankind ever trod upon the earth. Although they eventually learned to travel between the spirit realms and thus escape their imprisonment, the dark violence of Toshigoku left its mark on their nature. Their domain is a warped, twisted, and horrifying portion of the land, deep within an area similar to the Spine of the World Mountains, and no slaughter spirit is foolish enough to ever trespass near it.

Denizens of Toshigoku

There are only two true denizens of Toshigoku: the slaughter spirits – sometimes called the Legacy of the Forge – and the Tsuno. It is actually the younger of these two groups of creatures that may be more accurately termed the natives of the realm. The Legacy is a term coined by priests to refer to spirits condemned to dwell within Toshigoku, or who have found themselves trapped here. In some ways these spirits are completely uniform in nature, far more so than gaki or the honored ancestors of Yomi. They are decreed by the nature of their realm to reside here forever and fight the endless, meaningless wars of the Realm of Slaughter.

The Legacy can be loosely divided into three parts: the rank and file, the commanders, and the new recruits. All of these share in the same basic properties. The slaughter spirits are not mindless, but their wills are bound entirely to the endless warfare of the Realm of Slaughter. They can think only in terms of battle, of tactics and strategies, of hatred and the lust for violence, and they generally focus on the most short-term battle commitments. They can make battle plans, prepare siege engines if the resources are available, form up in ranks, drill immediately before combat, or any number of other related activities, but anything not focused on preparation for the next fight is generally lost on them.

The spirits of the Legacy show no obvious signs of former allegiances from life. Friend and foe can frequently be found at each other's sides in the midst of conflict. Whenever these spirits are slain in combat, they rise up again the next day and rejoin the eternal struggle. This means command structures among them tend to be fluid, depending on where and when they die, and they usually form up under whatever the most convenient arrangement might be at the moment. Those figures accustomed to command (former officers or daimyo) and who have the charisma to do so can often force others under their service immediately before battles, but maintaining their authority afterward is far more difficult.

"New recruits" is a term among the slaughter spirits for those souls which are freshly arrived within the realm. Even if they are not destined by Emma-O's judgment to come to the Realm of Slaughter, anyone who remains too long risks entering the ranks of the Legacy. Most of those who arrive in Toshigoku are initially somewhat confused, and may try to maintain their will and their old identity against the realm's influence, but usually within a short time they become simply more of the Legacy's main body.

The only figures who truly stand out over the long term are legendary soldiers and leaders who have enough will, cunning, and malicious determination to maintain their identity within the Realm of Slaughter while nonetheless participating in its endless warfare. Perhaps the most famous examples are the paired 'heroes' Hida Tsuneo and Emperor Hantei XVI, who were condemned to share each others' fate in the afterlife. Such souls can survive enough battles to maintain fragments of their mental stability and separate themselves from the will of the Realm of Slaughter while still appeasing the violent nature of that realm. This allows these individuals to carve out small kingdoms for themselves. The longer they remain active, the more powerful they become, though there is always an upper limit to their self-will. They remain bound to the violence of the realm, and anything beyond their role as military rulers is impossible.

The Tsuno are a unique case among the residents of Toshigoku. As recounted on page 186 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*, the Tsuno were banished to the realm before the first human soul ever arrived. As a species they retained self will, using dark and twisted magic that manipulated the spiritual realms to become one with Toshigoku's violent essence without losing their own identity. Over millennia they became bestial versions of the noble Kitsu they once were and reveled in the opportunity to perform the acts of slaughter the realm so dearly desired. They have in a sense become "native" to Toshigoku, and are difficult if not impossible to truly kill outside of that domain. Perhaps the only true blessing is that they have never been a numerous race, making them a danger but not an overwhelming one.

Hierarchy of Authority

There is no form of true authority within Toshigoku. As noted, specific exceptionally strong-willed souls may very occasionally rise above the rank and file of the Legacy, but nobody can ever truly be said to rule in this realm. Likewise, even with their considerable spiritual powers, the Tsuno could never be considered masters of this realm. Regardless of whether anyone would try, there is arguably nothing to be gained by mastery over the Realm of Slaughter, and to be the lord of Toshigoku would be a

title without real meaning. The slaughter spirits, consumed as they are with violence and hatred, are incapable of obeying a single master.

Control

Toshigoku exerts one of the strongest forms of control to be found among the spirit realms; indeed, for the inhabitants of the realm its control is effectively absolute. Anyone who enters the realm will begin to feel its pull almost immediately; the longer they remain there and the more they participate in its activities, the more likely it is to establish control over them. Crystal can protect for a time against this influence, operating in a manner similar to jade's resistance to the Taint, but it degrades within hours. Eventually, no matter how much crystal is brought along and no matter how strong-willed one might be, Toshigoku's control will prevail.

The flip side of this, however, is that if a spirit escapes Toshigoku, the realm's hold diminishes as quickly as it took control in the first place. This makes the incomprehensibly large army of the Legacy nearly useless in attacking any other realm. Freedom from the realm's control results in complete chaos in the ranks as old identities and loyalties swiftly reassert themselves.

Mechanically, if a character enters Toshigoku he must make Willpower rolls every hour, beginning at TN 10 and increasing by +5 with each successive hour. Also, any time a character enters into combat with the spirits of Toshigoku, he must make a Willpower roll at the current TN. Failing a roll results in the character's Willpower being effectively reduced by one Rank (however, this effect does not have any impact on the Earth Rank for the purpose of determining Wounds). If the character's Willpower reaches 0, or if he dies in Toshigoku, he is permanently turned into a slaughter spirit, a member of the Legacy like any other. A character who carries crystal can avoid these rolls, in a manner similar to using jade to protect against the Taint, but the crystal diminishes in increments of hours instead of days.

Any person who leaves the realm of Toshigoku will feel its influence fade over the next week, with Willpower Ranks returning immediately. (The amount of time required depends on whether the character actually joined the Legacy and if so, for how long.) Any slaughter spirits who escape in this way regain their free will and identity, but are wholly incapable of protecting themselves from Toshigoku's influence if they should ever return to the realm; it will immediately reassert its control over them. Moreover, the touch of Slaughter does not leave easily; even if they never return to Toshigoku, these spirits will always suffer from the Brash and Overconfident Disadvantages, reflecting the inherent violence and insane confidence of that realm.

Relationships with Other Realms

In principle, Toshigoku is closest to Meido and Gaki-Do. It is closest of all to Gaki-Do, since both realms are places where spirits are sent to be far from the rest of the kharmic cycle. Meido remains close to ease the work of Emma-O in sending souls to that realm, but all entry-points to it are carefully monitored by his servants (and later, the Lords of Death). In principle, there are several gateways between these realms, but very few of the slaughter spirits have ever been confirmed as leaving through them. If such spirits enter Meido, they are always captured and returned. If any such spirits have entered Gaki-Do, their names are unknown, and it seems unlikely more than a handful have ever done so. The kharmic cycle does not take well to being circumnavigated by those it deems beyond salvation.

The farthest realms from Toshigoku are Yume-Do and Jigoku. They have almost nothing in common with the realm, and even Jigoku is aware of the potency of its control and deems it best to leave the corruption of the realm until after the defeat of Ningen-Do.

The realm of mortals is also blessedly far from the Realm of Slaughter, but despite that distance there are occasional instances of direct contact between the two realms. Up until the twelfth century the city of Toshi Ranbo was a persistent weak region where members of the Legacy were known to emerge into the mortal realm from time to time, doubtless due to the many savage battles fought there. Other places of great carnage or murderous battle, especially places with multiple battles over the centuries, may also manifest temporary portals to Toshigoku. Enterprising and foolish *maho-tsukai* have also sometimes conjured up portals to Toshigoku, perhaps hoping to take control of the slaughter spirits and use them against others, but this has never ended well.

Mechanical Effects of Toshigoku

Many shugenja spells are harder to cast in Toshigoku, since the local kami are not only sparse but also wild and chaotic, infused with the realm's violent influence. Water spells are at +15 to the TN, Earth and Air spells are at +10, and Fire spells are at +5. Offensive (damage-inflicting) Fire spells will function normally, with no penalty. Void spells do not work in Toshigoku.

A Scenario Seed: Spirit Quest

Challenge: One of the PCs learns of the death of a family member. Soon after, an ancestor visits the PC in a dream and warns that the spirit of the deceased family member has been judged and sent to Toshigoku. The ancestor is unwilling to allow the judgment to stand and demands the PC try to go to Toshigoku, rescue the condemned soul, and bring it to Yomi to be 'saved.'

Focus: Pursuing this quest will require the assistance of the Kitsu family, which does not come without a significant price. The PCs might need to accumulate massive political favors, undertake dangerous tasks on behalf of the Kitsu, hunt down some fabled artifact, or otherwise commit themselves in order to win Kitsu assistance.

Strike: If and when the PCs finally manage to enter the Realm of Slaughter, they discover the whole quest has been a ruse and a trap. One of the Tsuno is duping the spirits of Yomi in order to draw a Kitsu-blooded shugenja into the realm to be corrupted and sacrificed for their dark magic. The PCs will have to fight for their lives while resisting the power of Toshigoku... and there is still the matter of the fallen relative, who has indeed been condemned to the Realm of Slaughter.

Yomi, the Realm of Blessed Ancestors

The Realm of Blessed Ancestors is a part of the kharmic cycle along with Gaki-Do, Meido, and Toshigoku. However, in contrast to Gaki-Do and Toshigoku, Yomi is the pinnacle of the cycle. It is the reward for those who fulfill their destiny, resisting the Three Sins and purifying their kharma to the point where they can finally fulfill their role in the Celestial Order, standing above all others as a symbol of what it means to be samurai. It is the hope of all noble samurai to be considered worthy to dwell for all eternity in its blessed halls.

Yomi also serves as a sort of defensive buffer zone between Tengoku and other realms, since the bridge to the Celestial Heavens comes from Yomi. In effect, the reward of Yomi to all the samurai who dwell within it is a life of eternal service to the Celestial Order, guarding the pathway into the divine realm. The Blessed Guard, the elite force which protects both the borders of Yomi and the approaches to the divine bridge, contains within its ranks the greatest samurai of history, all united in service to the Heavens. The souls who dwell here, known as shiryo, consider this position to be an honor and a last lingering duty from their mortal lives. When not performing their duty, however, their most cherished reward in Yomi is the realm's nearness to Ningen-Do. Through the thin veil between the world of men and the Realm of the Blessed Ancestors, the shiryo contact their children, grandchildren, and more distant descendents, sharing guidance, criticism, and the wisdom of a full and honorable life. Through their support they expect their blood relatives to grow to be still greater and more shining examples of true samurai.

Life within Yomi is essentially an idealized form of the life of a samurai. Warfare takes place, but it is a thing of demonstrations and tests of skill rather than open bloodshed. The art of the sword is pursued in the most perfect and idealized manner, and the various skills once used in violence and dire need are now hobbies, pastimes, and artistic accomplishments. shiryo spirits spar and display their stances instead of striking in duels. They perform the various arts of courtly debate, artistic development, and erudite scholarship, adding greater wisdom and greater beauty to a realm that is always in the midst of an eternal perfect spring.

For most of the shiryo, this is exactly what they always hoped for. Here they can ascend to the absolute perfection of their arts. Here they can hold the honor and privilege of guarding Heaven itself, serving as the elite guard of creation. However, there have always been spirits who grow restless within the idyllic halls of Yomi. They are not of any particular clan or group more than another, but are simply men and women who cannot stand on their laurels even after attaining the reward of a completed destiny. They are not ungrateful of course, and see their mortal works and triumphs as deeply meaningful, but the fact remains that shiryo tend to look upon Ningen-Do as the "real world." The Realm of Mortals is where their actions matter more than anywhere else. This is why so many shiryo try to share the vast scholarship, wisdom, courage, and beauty of Yomi with their mortal descendents. However, some spirits feel they are not accomplishing all they could, and after a time some of these souls

choose to depart Yomi and be reborn back into Ningen-Do, willingly permitting themselves to reincarnate despite their purified kharma so they can once more serve alongside other mortal men and women. Indeed, there are a few spirits in Yomi who have returned to the realm repeatedly, earning admission each time from a different mortal existence. Only within the golden halls of the Realm of Blessed Ancestors can they recall completely their many different lives and their deeds throughout history. These rare souls are among the most venerated and unique of all in Yomi's ranks, though few remain long in the realm; the pull of mortal life is far too strong upon them.

Topology of Yomi

Yomi is essentially a highly idealized variation of the world of Rokugan. Palatial estates rest in the midst of green fields and rice paddies tended by dutiful and loyal servants. Beautifully apportioned castles overlook the lands, and every honorable and noble pastime imaginable is present. The Dojo of the One True Blade accepts all students who search for true perfection in their art, regardless of petty mortal quarrels over stylistic differences. Unique among the structures of this land is the single mountain which ascends into the sky from the center of the realm, and which is known as the "Path to Heaven." Technically, Yomi is not a close realm to Tengoku, but there is a direct connection to that realm from the top of this mountain, whose peak rises out of sight far above the clouds. The Path of Heaven is closely guarded by the shiryo, and only those summoned by the heralds of Tengoku may ascend it. To climb the Path beyond a certain point without the call of Heaven is the height of blasphemy and is punishable by exile from Yomi. Of course, no shiryo has ever done such a thing, but visitors (and invaders) have sometimes attempted it.

The Path stands at the center of the entire realm of Yomi, and at its base is the "Imperial Capital" of the realm, populated by the rulers of the Great Clans from generations upon generations. Clan Champions who were once fierce enemies stand side by side, working together to rule over the realm alongside those members of the Imperial line present here instead of in Tengoku itself. They debate with the greatest scholars and courtiers of history over spiritual matters and their eternal duties.

Elsewhere in Yomi, many of the familiar cities and castles of Rokugan are reproduced in idealized forms. While the Imperial city itself (Otosan Uchi and later Toshi Ranbo) is supplanted by the Path of Heaven, other familiar sights are still quite present. Even the Kaiu Wall is duplicated, called simply the "Great Wall" and standing as the line of defense against all pathways between Jigoku and Yomi. Those who gain admission to Yomi while nonetheless living in a less than honorable way (most frequently found among the Crab, Mantis, and Scorpion, although every clan has a few such individuals) often find themselves serving Heaven on this wall. Of course, this is not considered a 'punishment' but rather an honor commensurate with their deeds, and entire legions of the Blessed Guard also serve in the wall's defense without qualm or question. Duty is always paramount for the shiryo.

Denizens of Yomi

The residents of Yomi are predominately the shiryo, the blessed ancestors themselves. The Elemental kami also are bountiful in this realm, far more so than anywhere else outside of Ningen-Do, for the Elemental Dragons make sure the Elements here are powerful. Here the relationship between shugenja and kami is one of mutual benefit and harmony, rather than the placation and frequent confusion that permeates Ningen-Do. A small number of spirits of the Kitsu race also reside in the blessed halls of Yomi, but they do not often interact with any but the Blessed Guard. There are also a bare handful of slaughter spirits and *Yokai* who have been captured and brought to Yomi for purification by the Guard. (This is quite rare, since most souls which go to Toshigoku or Jigoku are deemed to be far beyond redemption, but there have been a handful of special exceptions over the centuries.) Finally, there are some spirits here known as Shutsudohin, the spirits of awakened *nemuranai* which were physically destroyed. These items' spirits appear to have grown strong enough to endure beyond the physical destruction of their original forms, ascending to Yomi and offering their own rather unique perspective to the counsels of the shiryo.

The shiryo, the ascended spirits of mortals, appear as idealized versions of themselves from their former mortal lives. They take on whatever age and form they held when

they reached the pinnacle of their true nature and destiny, be that in the vigor of youth, the respect of middle years, or the veneration of old age and wisdom. Whatever their outward appearance, however, no decrepitude of old age is ever felt in their bones and they are as spry, strong, and healthy as they were at the height of their lives. However, perhaps the most distinctive physical feature of the shiryo is the masks which cover their faces. Each shiryo has its own mask, and while they can easily perceive each others' identities from the shapes and markings on these facial coverings, mortal visitors have a more difficult time. (Indeed, one of the most important venues of study for the Kitsu sodan-senzo is how to distinguish and recognize the masks worn by the blessed ancestors.) It is not known why the realm of Yomi requires its residents to wear these masks, although some scholars have speculated that it symbolizes their universal service to the Celestial Order.

As the centuries pass, the shiryo spirits become ever more idealized, reaching pinnacles of achievement not possible while still mortal, states of purity and perfection which cannot be retained if they are ever reborn into the mortal plane. They are serene, without any conflict with each other, and while they remember the sins and vices of mortal life such weaknesses are easily resisted in this realm.

Spirits like the shutsudohin are rarities and powerful curiosities in this realm. They are almost always extremely potent, since otherwise they would never have been found worthy to ascend into Yomi at all. However, their perspectives are by definition not human. While the shiryo have learned how to speak with them, visitors from the mortal realm can find communication frustrating and difficult. Moreover, the shutsudohin are almost completely unwilling to seek further traffic with mortal men. Their role in Ningen-Do has been fulfilled, and only exceptionally rarely do they return to the world of mortals again, usually only by divine command.

Hierarchy of Authority

The shiryo organize themselves in the fashion to which they were accustomed in mortal life. Clans retain boundaries of a sort, and there are monasteries, dojo, palaces, and other such social and bureaucratic institutions. However, there is no conflict amongst the clans; rather, even those who were once hated enemies show absolute courtesy to each other, and all the spirits can at least tolerate each other's presence. There is no absolute leader for these various clans and organizations, since almost all the Emperors reside in Tengoku itself (with

The Blessed Guard

Samurai are not complacent creatures. The fact that many Shiryo ultimately choose to reincarnate despite having earned their eternal place in Yomi is the perfect proof of this. The spirits of men are restless things, and seeing their descendents struggling in Ningen-Do makes them yearn to stand with their fellows once more. However, the duties of Yomi are just as important, and if all Shiryo reincarnated none would remain behind to guard the Path of Heaven against assault from Jigoku. Thus, those Shiryo who feel the pull of Duty most keenly often choose to serve in the Blessed Guard.

The Blessed Guard is an elite organization drawn from the greatest warriors and shugenja of Rokugan's history. These samurai come together to create a tremendous army, greater in size than any seen in the mortal world. They train tirelessly, working to perfect their martial arts beyond any mortal level, ascending to untold heights of purity and devotion.

The Blessed Guard patrols all the borders of Yomi, watching for intruders of any kind. It also stands guard at the Great Wall alongside the ancestors of the Scorpion, Crab, and Mantis to protect the realm from Jigoku's touch. A sizable detail watches over the Path of Heaven at all times. Although the Blessed Guard is primarily a defensive force, occasionally it will take the offensive and assault the borders of Jigoku or Toshigoku, capturing lost souls and trying to cleanse them of spiritual corruption and return them to the Celestial Wheel after they see the folly of their lives.

Aside from these rare expeditions, the members of the Blessed Guard are not seen outside of Yomi. The sole exception was after the War Against the Darkness, when a small number of the Blessed Guard wound up stranded in the mortal world when Oblivion's Gate closed. These Shiryo lived out their lives in the mortal world before returning to Yomi after their second deaths. During that time, a handful of mortal men showed themselves worthy of the learning the sacred fighting techniques of the Blessed Guard. Of course, such honorable souls would never share their knowledge with those of lesser purity, and carried their knowledge with them into the realm of Yomi after death.

a few noted exceptions such as the Steel Chrysanthemum). Therefore, the most powerful shiryo gather at the base of the mountain which leads to the Path of Heaven. They see the Path as a physical embodiment of Tengoku's authority, proclaiming Heaven's presence at least in name. There they debate all matters of import to Yomi (and indeed to all the spiritual realms) with calm and courteous wisdom. Decisions are rarely unanimous, but it is even rarer for the minority to persist in objection once a decision is reached.

Champions for each clan gather in the principal palaces of their respective lands to conduct the business of their own people. This is done in much the same way as the overall leadership of Yomi, though there are usually one or two shiryo who are considered as elder statesmen and treated as the effective 'head' of that clan within Yomi. Such personages can change, depending upon the needs of Yomi and the spiritual realms at the time.

Control

Yomi exerts very little control on visitors or, for that matter, its inhabitants. Although a mortal observer might expect the realm to push the souls within it toward greater honor and nobility of character, in point of fact Yomi's touch is never felt pro-actively. All those who dwell within Yomi already considered it a blessing and a reward, and the ancestors who have been honored to enter its hallowed halls are the absolute expression of what they once were in life. Scorpion become the most Scorpion they can be, true to the nature of their founder, and likewise all other shiryo embrace their inherent nature. While this might seem to lead to certain conflict, in reality there is a natural acceptance of the roles they played in their mortal lives and the importance of these roles within the Celestial order. They would not be within Yomi if they did not belong in Yomi, after all; to claim otherwise would be the height of blasphemy, something shiryo are all but incapable of doing.

Since the realm is usually very 'unaware' of its residents, content to leave them at peace, conflict between the shiryo is not completely unknown. However, when anyone – native or visitor – seeks to sunder the inherent peace of the realm with violence, he feels a gentle but powerful pull to cease such improper activity and to 'toe the line.' Mechanically, any attempt to disrupt Yomi with violence or some other subversive act requires a Willpower roll, the TN to be determined by the GM. The more significant, dangerous, or blasphemous the action, the higher the TN, but in general it should not start below 25 and may ascend as high as 40 or 50 in some extreme cases. Failure simply means the action cannot be performed, and all participants will be unable to understand why they ever considered it in the first place. Repeated actions of this nature (whether or not they are successfully performed) may draw the attention of the Blessed Guard, alerted by their connection with Yomi to the presence of improper activity.

Otherwise, so long as visitors do not offend against the nature of the world, they are left largely unmolested during their time within the realm.

Relationships with Other Realms

The closest realms to Yomi are Meido, Jigoku, and Ningen-Do, though most of the residents of Yomi have little to no traffic with Meido. The realm is close so that those spirits who choose to reincarnate can enter Meido and petition Emma-O for reincarnation (something that is almost never denied to a shiryo, since it is a right they have earned in their previous mortal life). Otherwise, the two realms have little to do with each other.

Jigoku and Ningen-Do are the realms Yomi has the greatest dealings with. The former is in a state of constant warfare with Yomi, the legions of Evil constantly seeking entrance into the home of Tengoku's greatest allies. However, outside of the single incident in the Four Winds era in which Fu Leng managed to invade the Heavens after his escape from Meido, Tengoku itself has never been successfully assaulted (and that one failing is something the Blessed Guard takes with the utmost seriousness, vowing never to permit it again). The Great Wall has stood the test of millennia, the spirits standing upon it in constant warfare with the most devastating forces Jigoku has to offer.

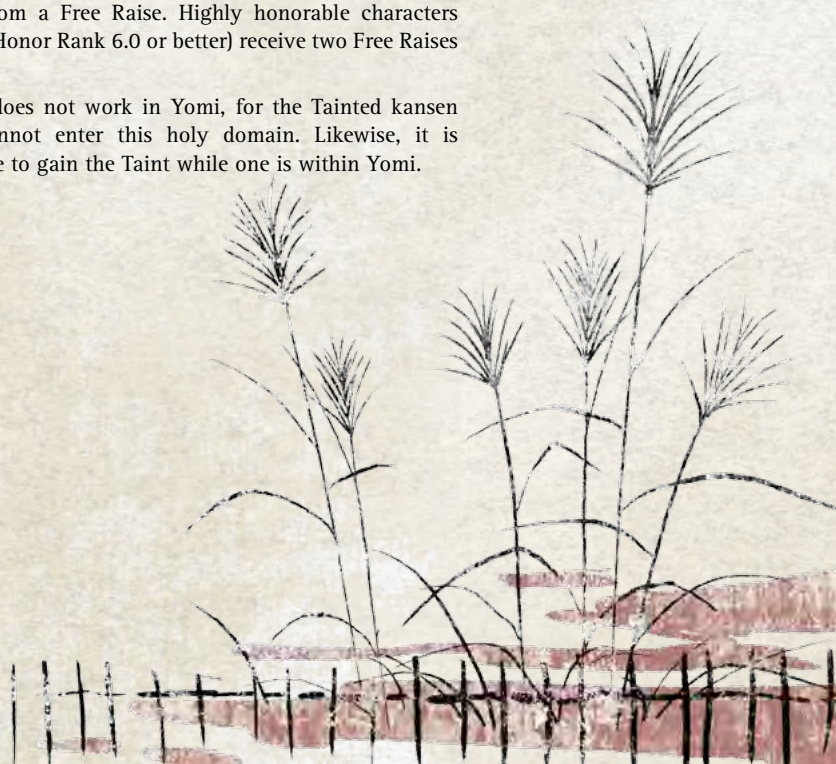
Ningen-Do receives regular attention from Yomi for a much more benign reason: the constant communication between the blessed ancestors and their mortal kin. The shiryo are honored with the right to contact and guide their descendents, and this makes it necessary for the two realms to be close.

The realms most distant from Yomi are Sakkaku and Chikushudo. This is not due to any real antipathy between them but rather because they simply have nothing in common. These realms are so radically different from Yomi that there is no need for them to contact each other at all.

Mechanical Effects of Yomi

The great power and enthusiasm of the Elemental kami within the realm of Yomi means that all Spell Casting Rolls benefit from a Free Raise. Highly honorable characters (those of Honor Rank 6.0 or better) receive two Free Raises instead.

Maho does not work in Yomi, for the Tainted kansen spirits cannot enter this holy domain. Likewise, it is impossible to gain the Taint while one is within Yomi.



Yume-Do, the Realm of Dreams

All creatures dream. Gods dream, the Dragons dream, and even spirit realms themselves may dream. It is even possible that some of the dead also dream. There is no creature in all of creation that can go through its existence without dreaming, and from this one constant the realm of Yume-Do came into being. Like many of the various realms, its existence comes from necessity. All sentient life, even divine sentient life, must dream, and these dreams have collected together in the almost incomprehensible mish-mash that is Yume-Do.

Aside from this raw necessity, it is very difficult to say what divine purpose Yume-Do actually has. It exists purely because it must exist, and almost seems to be a sort of natural barrier to keep the dreams of multitudes of creatures from intersecting and thereby corrupting their various minds with co-mingled dreams. Otherwise, individual consciousness might be lost.

That is not to say dreams are never shared, infiltrated, corrupted, or explored. However, the natural barriers which Yume-Do creates between dreams make it difficult to do so. These protective layers help keep the individual minds of dreamers separated, allowing them to enter their own dreams safely and (with rare exceptions) return secure to their waking lives, having gained rest and perhaps some small fragment of enlightenment from their time in the realm of dreams.

Although it serves a protective function, Yume-Do also represents – perhaps more than any other realm – sheer raw creative potential. Within its bounds lie the hopes, aspirations, fears, and random musings of the denizens of every other realm in the entirety of creation. Even distant realms like Toshigoku still have a glimmer of presence here (though that domain's inhabitants sleep only very rarely and dream of nothing but war and violence). If all these hopes, fears, and possibilities could be explored and studied, untold secrets might be revealed. A dreamer who could share the knowledge and imagination of so many different minds would attain near-incomprehensible power and wisdom.

Underneath these possibilities, however, lies a risk that is deeply inherent to the realm of Yume-Do. Although the realm offers all possibilities, the connection of a dreamer to his own realm can become increasingly tenuous if he delves too far or too deeply. The more a visitor embraces the realm's potential, the more he becomes suffused with its power, the more he will cease to be what he once was – becoming far more like the native baku who populate Yume-Do. Only a rare few races and beings – most notably the Nezumi Transcendents – seem to be able to avert this fate and exist safely within the depths of the realm of dreams. However, even these incredibly powerful creatures are themselves no longer able to return to their original home realm. They may not have become baku, but they have become something else than what they were.

The fundamental temptation of Yume-Do is that anything is possible within its borders, but one must limit what one takes from the place – or else in the end what is taken will be oneself.

Topology of Yume-Do

Yume-Do is without question the largest among all the spirit realms. The only argument is whether or not Yume-Do dwarfs the entirety of the realms combined, perhaps representing a collective space that exists between all of them, filling in the gaps of creation. All of the dreams of every soul that sleeps exist within Yume-Do's vast expanses. Each dream creates a temporary realm, sometimes no larger than a single room, sometimes as expansive as a kingdom or an entire world. The more powerful and imaginative the dreamer, the more detail, presence, and life these realms have. Most of them come and go within the span of a single night, so the topology of Yume-Do is always shifting, changing with dizzying frequency. It is effectively impossible to become familiar with the realm, since only a few of the dreams are themselves lasting enough to have any semblance of permanence.

The permanence of the myriad realms created within Yume-Do varies widely. However, they tend to parallel the imagination of the dreamer, the level of desire associated with the dream, and the dreamer's potential power to shape his own destiny. Thus, the dreams of

Fortunes and Kami are incredibly potent, but are also almost universally bound and shuttered away by the strictly limited Celestial roles of those gods; as a result, normally only they and the baku who serve their dreaming needs may interact with their dreams. On the other hand, these god-spawned dream realms can persist almost indefinitely, even after their creator dies. After all, while a god may die, that divine being's wishes and dreams are themselves eternal, and so within the boundary of Yume-Do they cannot be removed. Particularly powerful dreams of notable and imaginative mortal individuals also do not always go away with the passage of time, and such places may be glimpsed in the depths of Yume-Do by those who visit.

Yume-Do does not seem to obey the traditional laws of time and space that exist in Rokugan (or in most of the other spirit realms). Within the lingering dreams of men and gods, all of the ages of man and even the ages before mankind ever walked the face of Rokugan can be found. All of recorded and unrecorded history has some level of permanence within Yume-Do, though the farther back one goes the less survives and the harder it is to find, lost deep in the farthest recesses of the nebulous realm. The farthest and most ancient dreams are inaccessible to any creature that still would term itself mortal, only truly navigable by the baku. The spaces between dreams, meanwhile, are little more than nebulous unformed chaos, only the baku able to float through them.

Despite all this seeming chaos, there is a semblance of order to the whole of Yume-Do. The dreams of denizens from a particular realm are always closer to that realm than to the others, meaning the dreams of Fortunes, for example, are found closer to Tengoku than to Ningen-Do. Also, the older, more powerful, and more long-lasting a dream is, the farther it is from any of the other realms. When they become permanent, these pockets of Yume-Do begin to float further and further away into distant reaches difficult for mortals to traverse without losing themselves. Beyond these basic patterns, however, there is little else to clearly delineate the structure of the realm unless one is a baku. The few natural baku who mortals have encountered give scholars the impression they navigate Yume-Do by some ineffable 'sense' rather than through intent or physical effort. Only these native beings truly understand Yume-Do's inner workings, and the place is dizzying and dangerous to travel for all those who visit.

Whether or not these pocket realms within Yume-Do are actually 'real' in a metaphysical sense is a subject of considerable debate among those who know about them (primarily the Kitsu and the Isawa). The Kitsu believe some of the most distant and persistent realms are actually as "real" as Ningen-Do, and the fact that creatures and people from these realms have occasionally entered Rokugan would seem to suggest they are right. However, such beings always seem to have a certain lack of permanence to them, something that separates them from the rest of reality.

Ultimately, the only thing that can truly be said about Yume-Do is that there are almost no hard and fast rules for anything there, even for its own residents.

Denizens of Yume-Do

In a sense there are only four true inhabitants of Yume-Do. These are the baku, their corrupted cousins the Baku no Oni, the Nezumi Transcendents, and the naga.

baku are essential to the very existence of the realm. They are literally the stuff of dreams given life. Everything that exists in dreams is made up of baku, shapeshifting spirits that are native to the place. In their "true" form they resemble blue quadrupedal creatures with vaguely trunk-like snouts, but they are almost never seen in this state, for they take different forms in every dream. As soon as they make contact with a dreamer's essence, they collectively take on the forms of everything in that dream: the people, places, objects, and all other aspects of its world. They are happy to do so, delighting in bringing to life the visions the dreamer creates, and it seems the baku exist only for the purpose of doing so over and over again. To them, this is an immortal existence of bliss.

Some baku take on these forms for long periods of time, or even permanently, when they inhabit persistent dreams that last beyond a single night or even outlive the dreamer's death. The longer these dreams exist, the more the baku themselves lose their identity and simply become part of the dream. They effectively cease to be baku and become whatever they are in the dream: a person, a sword, an Ashura, or whatever else the dream might require. To the baku this is actually a little like death, something they dread but not something they necessarily avoid. It is also one of the only ways to truly destroy a baku, for once they permanently assume the form of something mortal or perishable, they can share its fate.

Baku no Oni are corruptions of this process, spawned from the dreams of the entities of Jigoku. The terrible dreams of the Realm of Evil are usually barred from contaminating the dreams of other realms by the separations within Yume-Do (indeed, Jigoku itself is also protected by these separations, not that it would ever admit it). Some of the baku touched by the Tainted dreams of Jigoku become changed, forever and irrevocably twisted. They lose the normal potential of their nature and take on a selfish and greedy self-will that hungers for the dreams and hopes of others, devouring them quite literally from the flesh of their victims. Blessedly, these monstrous shapeshifters have a difficult time escaping the dreams of Jigoku without aid, and so are usually only seen within those dreams. However, on those occasions when they do cross into the dreams of others, the consequences can be dire.

The Nezumi Transcendents are some of the few non-native residents of the realm of dreams (along with a very few unique individuals of other races). They are former name-shamans of extraordinary power whose ability to change the very fabric of their own reality allowed them to permanently enter into the realm of dreams, granting themselves a form of immortality and thus guiding the rest of their race from afar. (This process is described in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*, Chapter Six.) These eternal Nezumi are only distantly similar to

The Other Worlds

Within Yume-Do can be found all possibilities, all times, all things. The dreams of gods, such as the Thousand Years of Darkness dreamed by Fu Leng during his imprisonment after the Second Day of Thunder, are potent reminders of this fact. However, Fu Leng's vision is far from the only eternal dream. Many others have also gained a sense of permanence within the realm. Each of these may be thought of as a small "pocket dimension," a bubble of reality that is a sort of alternative to Ningen-Do itself, and GMs who wish to offer a truly unusual challenge for their players (either for an extended campaign or just for an unusual session or two) can explore the most drastic sort of "What If" scenarios.

Some alternate settings of this sort have already been made available in the L5R 4th Edition supplements *Imperial Histories* and *Imperial Histories 2*. However, the GM need not feel confined to these alternate settings, nor does the GM have to present such differing realities as entirely realistic. In the realm of dreams, the world may be very different indeed from anything recognizable to mortal men.

There are two complications involved with visiting these bubbles within Ningen-Do: Arrival and Escape, and Eccentricities.

The first problem is relatively simple. If the characters lack the ability to breach the barrier of the spirit realms, they will require the assistance of a powerful person or entity such as a Kitsu spirit, a potent Sodan-Senzo, or access to one of the rare physical portals to Yume-Do. The latter option is the most viable, since these portals are created at times by malicious Baku no Oni. If the dangerous spirit can be dispatched, the characters will be free to briefly roam the dream from which it escaped into the mortal plane. In such cases the GM should try to give the characters at least some indication they are under a time constraint and that eventually the rent in the realms will fade, since otherwise they will end up trapped in Yume-Do, perhaps forever. Of course, dreams – even permanent dreams like these – do not obey time normally, so the characters could potentially still be able to spend many days in Yume-Do before the portal closes. There is also the possibility for the dream to end while the characters are within it, returning them abruptly and shockingly to the mortal plane – or possibly marooning them in the formless shadows of Yume-Do until they can find their way into another dream.

The problem of Eccentricities refers to the fact that no dreamer has a perfect recollection of the world from which he dreams. Even gods can be 'off' on some of the details, and the Baku who leap in to create their worlds will create things to match the dream rather than matching the reality of the world which inspired the dream. Baku do not care one whit what the real world is like, and work entirely from the dreamer's wishes and recollections. Thus, the GM should always include inaccuracies – both subtle and significant – within a dream realm, things small and large that reflect an erroneous or altered perception of the world. A Crab's recollection of the events of the First Yasuki War would be drastically different, for example, from the dream of a Crane. And if the dreamer is unhappy, drunk, or worse yet insane, the eccentricities may expand into truly surrealistic visions that leave visitors bewildered and terrified. *Alice in Wonderland* is a delightfully funny story to read to children – but what would it really be like to live in that dream?

the race they were born from, and while their role toward the rest of the Nezumi is not unlike that of the ancestors of Yomi to humans, their immortality comes with the price of losing a great deal of their original personalities. It also ensures they can never again walk in Ningen-Do under the light of the Sun and Moon. Most of them dwell at the very edges of the dream realm, speaking only to the Nezumi, and delivering only cryptic and distant guidance.

The Naga have a similar existence within Yume-Do to that of the Nezumi. The collective soul of their race, the so-called Akasha, has much of its presence within the realm of dreams. However, the Akasha is a blending of all souls rather than a set of individuals like the Transcendent, and individual souls or portions of souls may be reborn into new bodies.

Hierarchy of Authority

Hierarchy has no meaning in Yume-Do. It is true that the most powerful dreamers can take on a role within their own sub-realms that borders on the divine; opposing them within Yume-Do is nearly suicidal. However, the vastness of the realm is so limitless that not a single one of these entities can hope to control anything beyond its own domain. It would be easier to swallow the ocean than to bend all of Yume-Do to one's will. So while these dreamers may be potentates supreme within their own realms, such as Fu Leng's dream of victory known as the Thousand Years of Darkness, none of them have any sort of authority outside of their own place. The rest of the realm is inhabited solely by the Baku, who do not have any sort of ranking or structure to their existence.

Control

The Realm of Dreams has no sway or control over dreamers. While a Baku no Oni might kill someone in his dreams, the realm itself cannot stop a person from awaking. Dreamers can only be controlled by more powerful dreamers, a rare occurrence. In general, no visitor to Yume-Do ever experiences any level of control from the realm.

This, however, is not to say that Yume-Do has no control. Rather, its influence is a far more subtle thing, felt only by those who enter its realm through some method other than sleep and who elect to remain within the realm for a long period of time. In order for Yume-Do to begin to control a visitor, that person must wish for it to control them. There are many reasons to seek such a thing, but

in the end they all come down to the same one: without submitting to this control, there is a distinct limit to how much a person can truly achieve within Yume-Do. The difference between what a controlled visitor can do and what a casual guest can attain is terrifying, but it comes at the cost of losing connection to all other realms.

In some senses, the control of Yume-Do is almost a reflection of the visitor himself beginning to develop control over the realm around him. In order to achieve such greater control, he must remain within the Realm of Dreams for at least a week, intentionally allowing the realm to enter into his being. Doing so changes a person forever, and once undertaken this change can never truly be revoked. Moreover, moving beyond the most basic level of this state, called Yumeji, requires decades, and attaining the third level can require centuries. Anything above these stages is generally wholly beyond the conception of a mortal mind; indeed, by the time anyone ever achieves the third rank, they have ceased to have a real connection to the world of men, becoming more like baku and Transcendents than mortals.

Yumeji, a Detailed Look

Yumeji, the influence and control of and over Yume-Do, is subtle but also potentially very powerful, since one who fully embraces it will gain great power within the Realm of Dreams. GMs should therefore think very long and carefully before implementing it within their games. Unless the GM wants to run an entire campaign built around the adventures of dreamers within Yume-Do, introducing Yumeji is more likely to be disruptive to the game than to be interesting. That being said, anyone who physically visits Yume-Do and willingly accepts the realm's control can attain Rank One in Yumeji.

Rank One

This is the only level of Yumeji at which someone can still have a 'normal' existence in their own world. A soul with this rank of Yumeji may choose to remain indefinitely within his dreams while sleeping, and can to some limited extent begin to travel to the dreams of those nearby (though doing so may be perilous, since these dreams are largely controlled by their own dreamer and can harm the person visiting). While within Yume-Do, the character ages at one-tenth of the normal rate and gains +2k2 to resist the Taint and a similar bonus to resist any attempts to mentally or magically control him (such as through Courtier Techniques or spells). Such characters may wake from their dreams at will, but require 50% more sleep each night; if they are woken early, they are groggy and are considered Fatigued until they sleep fully.

Rank Two

The second Rank of Yumeji can only be achieved after at least a decade of time spent in the world of dreams. At this point the character requires twice as much sleep as a normal person, meaning that a typical character will now need 12-16 hours of sleep a day. Normal functioning in society will not be possible unless the character has the Advantage "Blessing of Yume-do." The character continues to age at one-tenth the normal rate, and now has a +4k4 bonus against Taint and attempts to control him. However, he must roll Willpower at TN 20 to be able to wake up at all; failure means he remains asleep all day and cannot try again until the next day. While awake, the character is always considered Fatigued.

The payoff for this decline within the waking world is that the character gains the ability to naturally navigate through the Realm of Dreams and freely enter (and leave) the dreams of others. Doing so usually requires a Hunting/Perception roll, at a TN chosen by the GM. It is normally not possible to play a character who gains more Yumeji than this, although the GM can always make exceptions for unusual campaigns.

Rank Three

Achieving this Rank requires at least a century of time within Yume-Do, something normally only possible because of the slow aging which Yumeji imposes. At this Rank the character is almost incapable of waking; without a Willpower roll at TN 30, the character will sleep indefinitely. While in this state, the character does not age and does not require food and water. If the character does awaken, he is not only considered Fatigued but also suffers an additional +10 TN penalty to all actions. He is now immune to any attempts to mentally, spiritually, or physically control him within the Realm of Dreams, and may freely travel anywhere within Yume-Do.

Rank Four

Once Yumeji has been embraced to this extent it is impossible to leave Yume-Do, and any former physical body in the waking world simply dissipates and fades away. The process of reaching this level is unknown, but can be assumed to take multiple centuries. The character is now more dream than reality and can gaze at will upon any location within the realm of dreams – except those places controlled by someone with the same or higher Rank in Yumeji. He can travel to any point in the realm of dreams with a thought, again so long as he does not enter a realm barred by other powerful dreamers. Similarly, he can bar other beings of the same or lesser power from entering his dreams, and he can fashion the dream world around him to his taste, like pottery in a master craftsman's hands, controlling the Baku with words and thoughts. If there is a struggle between two such individuals, it is resolved with a Contested Willpower roll.

However, at this rank of Yumeji these individuals can no longer affect the residents of other realms. They can communicate with them via dreams, but cannot harm or alter them in any fashion. While they may create terrible visions, these are mere nightmares with no real power. However self-willed they may be, they are now dreams, unable to influence other worlds.

Relationships with Other Realms

In a sense, Yume-Do is close to all realms save Toshigoku. All creatures dream, even the damned, so there are tendrils of the realm that feel close to all presences, unconcerned by the influence of any realm. However, among these realms, those with more powerful dreams (such as Tengoku) and those with large numbers of dreams (such as Ningen-Do and Sakkaku) are the closest, since they possess the most frequent connections to the realm. Meido is perhaps the most unusual case among the realms with a close connection to Yume-Do. Death and dreams are both so close to mortal man's life that it is impossible to completely separate them, so the barrier between these realms is nearly non-existent. Thankfully for Emma-O's sense of self-control, his realm is never invaded by the Baku, since they care nothing for other realms and never leave Yume-Do of their own choice.

Toshigoku is the only distant realm, since its souls do not often sleep. However, even they dream occasionally, unleashing visions of murderous bloodbaths within the Realm of Dreams.

Appendix

New Heritage Tables

Minor Clans Heritage Table

Table 6.1: Minor Clans Heritage

D10 Roll	Result
1-3	**Shameful Past:** Roll on Table 6.11
4-7	**Illustrious Past:** Roll on Table 6.12
8-0	**Mixed Blessings:** Roll on Table 6.13

Table 6.11: Minor Clans Shameful Past

D10 Roll	Result
1	Your ancestor was a disbeliever and has passed down this lack of belief to his descendants. You begin play with the Disbeliever Disadvantage.
2-3	Your ancestor thought he was getting the better end of a deal with a Great Clan merchant patron, only to discover too late that he had been tricked. Your family has been impoverished ever since. Start with two fewer koku in your Outfit.
4-5	Your ancestor failed to perform a service for the clan, tarnishing his honor and standing. His failure haunts your line to this day. Your starting Honor is 1.0 lower and your starting Status is 0.1 lower.
6-7	Your ancestor was considered one of the ugliest men in Rokugan, and you have his face. Gain the Disturbing Countenance Disadvantage.
8-9	Your ancestor got the better of a Great Clan courtier in the Imperial Court. The courtier's family has held a grudge against yours ever since. You gain the Sworn Enemy Disadvantage.
0	Your ancestor was a member of one of the fallen Minor Clans or families (Snake, Boar, Gusai family, etc). Gain the Dark Secret Disadvantage.

Table 6.12: Minor Clans Illustrious Past

D10 Roll	Result
1	A particular kami took an interest in your family line, and it senses a similarity to your ancestor in you. You may take the Friendly Kami Advantage (if you are a shugenja) or the Friend of the Elements Advantage for one less Experience Point.
2-3	Your ancestor made political connections with members of a Great Clan, connections which have lasted to this day. You gain a 3-point Ally Advantage in that clan for no Experience Point cost.
4-5	Your ancestor was a genius on the battlefield. Due to his actions, others believe you and your family are honorable warriors as well. Gain 1.0 Glory.
6-7	Your ancestor was extremely skilled in the ways of your clan, and you have carried on his legacy. Gain one Rank in an iconic School Skill for your school.
8-9	One of your ancestors helped establish one of your clan's original villages. Your family has been caretaker of those lands since that time. Your starting Outfit gains 2 koku and you may take the Gentry Advantage for one less Experience Point.
0	Your family has always lived in the heartlands of your clan and you have grown up learning its fields and hills like your own home. You gain the Way of the Land Advantage for your clan's land.

Table 6.13: Minor Clans Mixed Blessings

D10 Roll	Result
1	Your family has long maintained a close relationship with the Imperial families, but this has caused you to suffer from the jealousy of Great Clan samurai. You begin play with a free 3-point Ally among the Imperial families (if you are Tortoise, it is a 4-point Ally instead), but you also start with a 3-point Sworn Enemy in a Great Clan.
2-3	Your ancestor discovered something very interesting — and very taboo. You may take the Forbidden Knowledge Advantage for one less Experience Point.
4-5	Your ancestor saved the life of a paragon from a Great Clan family. That family has looked out for your line since that time and recently arranged for your marriage to a member of the Imperial families. You gain the Imperial Spouse Advantage, but are under a 3-Point Obligation to the family who arranged the marriage.
6-7	Due to various mishaps and misfortunes, you are the last of your line and have all your family's titles and responsibilities resting squarely on your shoulders. Perhaps there is a reason your family members keep dying mysteriously? You gain +1.0 Status but also gain the Bad Fortune (Unknown Enemy) Disadvantage.
8-9	Your ancestor was involved with some shady dealings with a member of one of the Great Clans. The deals went in your ancestor's favor, and the details have been passed on to you. You gain a 3-point Blackmail Advantage against someone in one of the Great Clans, but since they know that you hold the information you also gain the Sworn Enemy Disadvantage with them.
0	Your ancestor was a craftsman of singular skills. One of his creations was passed on to you. You gain a single item of superior quality (an Excellent item if using the optional advanced crafting rules in this book); however, the item was originally intended as a gift for a member of a Great Clan, and his family wants it back.

Brotherhood of Shinsei Heritage Tables

Table 6.2: Brotherhood of Shinsei Heritage

D10 Roll	Result
1-3	**Shameful Past:** Roll on Table 6.21
4-8	**Illustrious Past:** Roll on Table 6.22
9-0	**Mixed Blessings:** Roll on Table 6.23

Table 6.21: Brotherhood of Shinsei Shameful Past

D10 Roll	Result
1	Your master was a heretic who was devoted to a False Path rather than to following the Tao or the Fortunes. As a result, your own teachings are fatally skewed. You must take the Consumed Disadvantage.
2-3	The shrine or temple where you were trained was in an exceptionally impoverished area of the Empire. You begin play with the Ascetic Disadvantage for no points.
4-5	Your temple teaches that everyone should always question the world at all times in order to have any chance of Enlightenment. You gain the Contrary Disadvantage for no points.
6-7	The temple in which you were trained is home to monks who have little true piety and often engage in improper behavior. Many of them do not really follow the Tao or the Fortunes at all. You gain either the Disbeliever Disadvantage or the Infamy Disadvantage (your choice) for no points.
8-9	The temple where you were trained teaches obsessive self-reliance above all else. You gain the Overconfident Disadvantage for no points.
0	Something within the temple where you were raised is tainted by darkness. Gain either 1 Rank of the Shadowlands Taint or one Shadow Rank, as chosen by the GM.

Table 6.22: Brotherhood of Shinsei Illustrious Past

D10 Roll	Result
1	The calm of a placid lake flows through all those trained in your temple. You gain the Balance Advantage.
2-3	Your temple focuses on physical advancement more than on spiritual study, and thereby promotes bold actions. You gain the Daredevil Advantage.
4-5	Your temple was built on a location beloved by the spirits of a particular Element, and all monks of that temple are favored by that Element. You gain the Elemental Blessing Advantage in whichever Element your temple favors.
6-7	Your temple has a singular martial tradition which uses a specific weapon to teach unity of body and spirit. You gain 1 free Rank in a Weapon Skill of your choice.
8-9	You and your temple have protected a group of villages from harm for generations. Word of the deeds of your temple has spread among the commoners. You gain the Hero of the People Advantage.
0	You were taught by an exceptional sensei, perhaps even a descendant of Shinsei himself, and gained deep insight into the world and yourself. You may take the Enlightened Advantage for only 3 points.

Table 6.23: Brotherhood of Shinsei Mixed Blessings

D10 Roll	Result
1	Your temple is the keeper of knowledge entrusted to it by a powerful samurai, perhaps even the Emperor himself. You gain the Forbidden Knowledge Advantage and a 3-point Obligation to the samurai who entrusted the information to your temple.
2-3	Your temple is known to be far more worldly than it should. You gain the Infamous Disadvantage, but add 2 koku to your Outfit.
4-5	The temple where you were trained focused upon individual study of the Tao above all else, including human contact. You gain the Sage Advantage but also a 2-point Antisocial Disadvantage..
6-7	One of the Fortunes smiles upon your temple, but this has caused the monks there to focus solely upon the things that Fortune finds important. You gain either the Seven Fortune's Blessing Advantage or the Inari's Blessing Advantage, but also gain the Driven Disadvantage in a form connected to the goals of the chosen Fortune.
8-9	You were born a samurai, but were forced to join the Brotherhood before completing your gempukku. There are members of your family who are not happy about this fact. You gain the Forced Retirement Disadvantage but also gain a 3-Point Ally Advantage with someone in your former clan.
0	Your sensei venerated certain moral values highly, but rejected others as unimportant. You gain the Paragon Advantage for one tenet of Bushido, but also gain the Failure of Bushido Disadvantage for a different tenet. (This overturns the normal restrictions on taking these Advantages/Disadvantages.)

Ronin Heritage Tables

Table 6.3: Ronin Heritage

D10 Roll	Result
1-2	**Shameful Past:** Roll on Table 6.31
3-5	**Illustrious Past:** Roll on Table 6.32
6-0	**Mixed Blessings:** Roll on Table 6.33

Table 6.31: Ronin Shameful Past

D10 Roll	Result
1	You started your life as a criminal and your deeds haunt you today. You gain the Infamy Disadvantage and have a magistrate and/or a bounty hunter as a 3-point Sworn Enemy.
2-3	You grew up with no permanent home and have no connections to any location. You may not take the Way of the Land, Hero of the People, or Ally Advantages..
4-5	Your difficult life up until now has left you with an unfortunate addictive habit. You gain a 3-point Compulsion (alcohol, opium, gambling, etc).
6-7	You or your parents antagonized a clan samurai, and although you managed to escape the consequences at the time, he has not forgotten you. Gain a clan samurai as a 4-point Sworn Enemy.
8-9	Your difficult life has given you a hot temper, and you find it hard to restrain yourself even when you know you should. You gain the Brash Disadvantage for no points.
0	Your family has rejected Bushido in favor of a more selfish path. You gain the Consumed Disadvantage for no points..

Table 6.32: Ronin Illustrious Past

D10 Roll	Result
1	Your family maintains connections to a ronin band or religious order in another part of the Empire. You may learn a higher-Rank ronin Technique of your choice once you attain the appropriate Insight Rank.
2-3	You have benefited from extra training, either due to your family's personal traditions or a connection to an ally. You gain +1 Rank in one Weapon Skill of your choice.
4-5	Your family has carefully maintained the patronage of a Great Clan samurai family. You gain a 3-point Ally Advantage in a Great Clan family of your choice.
6-7	You are a popular and successful member in a ronin band, allowing you to benefit from both better training and from the friendship and protection of your fellow wave-men. In addition to the normal effects of starting as a member of a ronin band (True Ronin #2, as per page 234 of the L5R 4th Edition Core rulebook), you also gain the Ally Advantage with two ronin NPCs (2 points each) who are in your band.
8-9	You are known as a compassionate ronin who helps the common people. Whether or not this reputation is actually deserved, you gain the Hero of the People Advantage.
0	Your family is descended from a Great Clan samurai and has carefully preserved the weapon he once carried. You may purchase the Sacred Weapon Advantage for your ancestor's Great Clan.

Table 6.33: Ronin Mixed Blessings

D10 Roll	Result
1	You or your parents grew up in a Brotherhood temple which took in orphans, and this religious legacy impacts you in many ways. You may take the Friend of the Elements Advantage for free (or the Friend of the Brotherhood Advantage if you are a shugenja), but also gain the Ascetic Disadvantage.
2-3	One of your parents won a notable duel against a clan samurai... and that samurai's family has not forgotten. You gain +1 Rank in the Iaijutsu Skill, but also gain a 3-point Sworn Enemy from that clan.
4-5	You belong or were previously associated with a ronin band which was unusually successful and wealthy. Unfortunately, this was because it engaged in criminal activity. You add 5 koku and one weapon of your choice to your starting Outfit, but also gain the Disadvantage of Dark Secret: Criminal
6-7	You have had – or perhaps are still conducting – a secret love affair with a Great Clan samurai. As a result, you may take both the Kharmic Tie Advantage and the Ally Advantage with that samurai, but also gain either the True Love or the Lost Love Disadvantage (as appropriate) in relation to that same samurai.
8-9	Either you or your parents were born as clan samurai but became ronin due to the manipulations of a rival. You retain many connections within your former clan, including friends who would gladly help you avenge yourself. You have a 5-point Sworn Enemy within your former clan but also may purchase up to three Allies (each of a maximum of 3 points) within that clan.
0	For whatever reason, your family has often flirted with the powers of darkness. You gain the Advantage of Forbidden Knowledge: Maho, but also gain 1 Rank in the Shadowlands Taint.

Imperial Families Heritage Tables

Table 6.4: Imperial Families Heritage

D10 Roll	Result
1-2	**Shameful Past:** Roll on Table 6.41
3-7	**Illustrious Past:** Roll on Table 6.42
8-0	**Mixed Blessings:** Roll on Table 6.43

Table 6.41: Imperial Families Shameful Past

D10 Roll	Result
1-2	Your ancestor committed a very unfortunate act, but your family's political power allowed it to be covered up... so far. You gain the Dark Secret Disadvantage.
3-4	Your ancestor imposed the Imperial will against a troublesome member of the Great Clans, and the act has not been forgotten. You gain a 4-point Sworn Enemy in one of the Great Clans.
5-6	Your ancestor was exiled from the courts after an unfortunate failure. You start with 0.0 Glory and Allies cost you 1 additional Experience Point.
7-8	Your bloodline has long been associated with minor and obscure aspects of service, and your family seldom even visits the Imperial Court. You may not purchase Social Advantages at character creation.
9-0	Your ancestor failed in his duty to the ruling Dynasty, and the shame of that failure remains with your bloodline. Gain the Black Sheep Disadvantage.

Table 6.42: Imperial Families Illustrious Past

D10 Roll	Result
1-2	Your line is known for its piety and all of your ancestors have made regular visits to the Four Temples. You start play with a free 4-point Ally in the Four Temples Order of the Brotherhood of Shinsei.
3-4	Your ancestor did a great favor for a clan samurai, and his line remains beholden to you. Any Ally you take from that clan gains +1 Devotion.
5-6	Your ancestors protected the Dynasty in one of the great battles of the Empire's history – perhaps they fought alongside Hantei Fujiwa against the Shadowlands, or joined one of the Imperial Legions during crises such as the return of Iuchiban or the Destroyer War. You gain +1.0 Glory and +1 rank in the Battle Skill.
7-8	Your ancestor was a loyal and skilled ***miharu*** who protected the Emperor from an assassination attempt. You gain +1.0 Glory and +1 rank in the Defense Skill.
9-0	Your ancestors used their connections and Imperial power to gain wealth and influence. You gain the Gentry Advantage and you may purchase the Ally Advantage for one less Experience Point.

Table 6.43: Imperial Families Mixed Blessings

D10 Roll	Result
1	Your ancestors were among the ***miharu*** who overthrew the tyrant Hantei XVI and then committed ***seppuku*** to atone for their betrayal of duty. You gain +1.0 Honor, but also start play with the Infamy Disadvantage.
2-3	Your ancestors have been part of the Imperial Bureaucracy for generations, and while this duty is obscure it grants you many useful connections. You start play with 0.5 Glory and 0.5 Status, but may purchase the Ally Advantage for 1 less Experience Point.
4-5	Your ancestors were involved with the Gozoku conspiracy, but managed to save themselves by switching sides at the right time. You gain the Crafty Advantage but also start with one less Rank of Honor.
6-7	Your ancestors helped organize the Imperial system of laws and magistrates during the reign of Hantei Genji, and in the process disrupted the improper activities of other samurai. You gain +1 Rank in the Lore: Law Skill, but also gain a 3-point Sworn Enemy in a clan/family/faction of your choice.
8-9	Your ancestor was both influential and highly religious, and became deeply involved in a theological dispute which obsessed the Empire at the time. Some within the Brotherhood of Shinsei considered his behavior to be arrogant and improper. You gain +1 Rank of Lore: Theology, but also gain the Cast Out Disadvantage for one major sect in the Brotherhood.
0	Your ancestor was known for his great wealth but also for his infamous self-indulgence and luxurious lifestyle. You gain four Ranks in the Wealthy Advantage, but also gain either the Compulsion Disadvantage or the Lechery Disadvantage (your choice).

New Game Mechanics

New Ronin Mechanics

The Legion of Two Thousand [Ronin Advanced School]

Sponsored by the Imperial house, the Legion of Two Thousand – recruited from some of the best soldiers in Toturi's ronin army – enjoys resources and support which most ronin can only dream about. As a result, it has been able to develop extensive martial techniques, an extremely rare accomplishment for wave-men.

Requirements:

- **Rings/Traits:** Fire 3, Water 3
- **Skills:** Battle 3, Defense 4, Kenjutsu 3
- **Other:** Must have Honor 5.0 or better and be recruited into the Legion of Two Thousand ronin band.

Techniques

Rank One: Stand as Two Thousand

The Legion earned fame in its early years for protecting remote corners of the Empire and for helping defend the Kaiu Wall. You gain a +1k0 bonus to your Defense Skill rolls. When you are fighting in defense of the innocent or of the common people, this bonus is +1k1 instead.

Rank Two: Kuronada's Honor

The son of the tyrant Karatsu embraced honorable ways despite his father's legacy and became one of the most famous commanders in the Legion. So long as you have an Honor of 5.0 or better, you gain a bonus of +2k1 whenever you spend a Void Point on a roll with a School Skill, rather than the normal +1k1. This ability cannot be used in the Center Stance.

Rank Three: Tamago's Expertise

The ascension of the brilliant tactician Tamago to the leadership of the Legion of Two Thousand leads to the Legion developing more advanced training. You may make melee attacks with Samurai weapons as Simple Actions.

GM's Option: Universalizing the Legion

The Legion of Two Thousand is a very timeline-specific organization, born out of the origins of the Toturi Dynasty. However, there is no reason why a ronin band in another historical era could not have gained Imperial or Great Clan support for one reason or another. The GM can use the Legion's School to represent any large ronin band which receives extensive support and manages to last longer than a single generation.

GM's Historical Note: The Legion of Two Thousand and the Wolf Legion

During the Destroyer War era, the Wolf Legion merges with the Legion of Two Thousand. Thereafter, the Wolf Legion technique (a Rank 5 Technique found in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*, page 204) becomes available to samurai in the Legion of Two Thousand.

The Disciples of Sun Tao [Ronin Advanced School]

The Disciples are an ancient ronin band based around Sun Tao's legendary book. The leaders of the band believe they possess the only complete copy of Sun Tao's writings. Due to the band's age and dedication, it has actually developed multiple Techniques. Those raised within the band usually learn the Gaze of Sun Tao initially before moving on to study the Disciples' advanced teachings. However, the Disciples also recruit other ronin who have learned different basic Techniques.

Requirements:

- **Rings/Traits:** Fire 4, Water 3
- **Skills:** Battle (Mass Battle) 4, any two Weapon skills at Rank 4
- **Other:** Must be born into or recruited into the Disciples of Sun Tao ronin band.

Techniques

Rank One: Terumoto's Lesson

Sun Tao's chief disciple was a skilled warrior who embraced his master's doctrine of studying battle in all its forms and mastering all types of warfare. Choose any three Weapon Skills; you gain a +1k0 bonus to your rolls with those Skills.

Rank Two: Sun Tao's Legacy

All members of the Disciples study the Book of Sun Tao, which binds them together as a group. You gain a bonus of +1k1 to your Battle Skill rolls when rolling to determine who is winning a battle, and a bonus of +1k0 when rolling to determine your status on the Mass Battle Table.

Rank Three: Aikumo's Perfection

The second leader of the Disciples perfected their teachings and his Technique is the pinnacle of the band's training. You may make attacks with melee weapons as a Simple Action.

The Thousand

The Thousand were formed during the First Yasuki War under the banner of a Crane ronin named Tamedaore who had a knack for both military organization and mercantile commerce. His ronin band peaked at over a thousand men and fought for the Crane during the latter years of the Yasuki War. Afterward, the band remained together but its numbers gradually diminished over the centuries; their last remnants were wiped out by the Unicorn Clan in the year 816.

New Ronin Path: The Thousand [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank:** 2
- **Requirements:** Iaijutsu 4, Void 3

Technique: Tamedaore's Secret

While you are in the Center Stance and on the Round immediately after you leave the Center Stance, you gain a bonus to your Armor TN equal to 2x your Void Ring.

The Order of Isashi

This ronin shugenja order was founded in the wake of the second war with Iuchiban. Its members travel across Rokugan, always going to the most war-torn and disaster-plagued regions, healing the injured and treating the sick with no expectation of payment or reward. They are welcomed in Crab lands but tend to encounter suspicion and hostility in most other regions, since their actions can be perceived as shaming the local clan shugenja for callousness.

New Ronin Path: Order of Isashi [Shugenja]

- **Technique Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Ronin shugenja 3 (any ronin shugenja school)
- **Requires:** Medicine 3, Honor Rank 5.0 or better

Technique: Isashi's Mercy

The Order of Isashi devotes itself to healing the sick and the injured. You gain a +1k0 bonus to Medicine Skill rolls and a Free Raise when casting any spell that heals Wounds or cures illness.

The Order of the Five Weapons

Founded by a Void shugenja named Ekuro, the Order of Five Weapons teaches mastery of the Elemental weapon spells, and also maintains a secret spell taught to its most trusted members.

New Ronin Path: Order of the Five Weapons [Shugenja]

- **Technique Rank:** 4
- **Replaces:** Ronin shugenja 4 (any ronin shugenja school)
- **Requires:** At least Rank 3 in the Skills of Kenjutsu, Heavy Weapon, Spears, and Staves
- **Special:** Must be able to cast at least two of the four Elemental Weapon spells (Yari of Air, Katana of Fire, Tetsubo of Earth, Bo of Water)

Technique: Ekuro's Weapons

The founder of this order perfected the use of weapons summoned from the Elemental kami. You may cast any of the four Elemental Weapon spells as a Simple Action (rather than a Complex Action). You may spend a Void Point (as a Free Action) to be able to attack with these summoned weapons as a Simple Action for a number of Rounds equal to your Insight Rank.

If you have the Ishiken-do Advantage, you may learn the secret spell "Dart of Void."

New Spell: Dart of Void

- **Ring/Mastery:** Void 4
- **Range:** 100'
- **Area of Effect:** One target creature
- **Duration:** Instantaneous
- **Raises:** Range (+100' per Raise), Targets (+1 target per two Raises, maximum targets equal to your Void Ring)

The Dart of Void spell was created by the shugenja Ekuro in his famous battle. The spell has been preserved as a secret of the Order of Five Weapons, but it is believed the Phoenix may also have the spell in their libraries, and it is possible other shugenja families have copies as well. Casting this spell requires spending a Void Point; the spell summons forth a missile of pure Void which flies out and unerringly strikes any one target within range. The Dart inflicts damage with a DR equal to your Void. This damage ignores Invulnerability and Reduction from all sources.

GM's Option: A Generic Ronin School

The ronin mechanics in the L5R 4th Edition RPG are designed to reflect the unfortunate reality of a wave-man's life – namely, most ronin bands are only around for a short time, and are unable to develop more than one Technique. Even the rare ronin groups that manage to endure for a long time or gain prestigious support, such as the Legion of Two Thousand, are hard-pressed to establish the sort of infrastructure and long-term continuity required to maintain a full-fledged bushi school. The game design reflects this with a system which forces most ronin to rely chiefly on their innate capacities (represented by Skills) with only one or two Techniques.

Although this approach is realistic for the setting, it does put ronin significantly behind clan characters (even Minor Clan characters) in terms of their game-mechanic capabilities. This can be frustrating for players who are running ronin characters. GMs who wish to mitigate this frustration can opt to make this "generic ronin school" available for play. Although a "generic" school does not really fit the concept of what schools are supposed to represent in the world of Rokugan, it does allow greater options for players, which is a virtue in itself. GMs can thus have the freedom to decide whether they wish to focus their campaigns more on setting authenticity at the expense of game-balance, or more on game-balance and maintaining fairness between players.

Although this school is intended primarily to represent ronin, it can also be used to represent any other situation in which a character could have martial training without access to a "named" bushi school. For example, it could represent the training of Great Clan samurai who belong to minor vassal families without access to their clan's main dojo. It could also represent Minor Clan samurai in clans like the Fox, Dragonfly, Oriole, or Bat who have bushi in their ranks but lack any bushi school of their own.

New Basic School (Optional): Generic Ronin

- **Benefit:** +1 Agility
- **Honor:** 4.5
- **Skills:** Athletics, Defense, Hunting, Intimidation, Kenjutsu, Knives, any one Weapon Skill
- **Outfit:** Light Armor, Sturdy Clothing, Daisho, any 1 weapon, Traveling Pack, 1 koku

Techniques

Rank One: Strength of My Father

Ronin are known for their resilience in the face of adversity. When you are suffering TN penalties due to Wounds, you may make an Earth Roll (ignoring Wound TN penalties) during the Reactions Stage of each Round, with a TN equal to 5 + 5x the number of Wound Ranks you are currently suffering. If the roll is successful, you may ignore the effects of your Wound penalties until the next Reactions Stage. This Technique does not work once you reach the Down or Out Wound Ranks.

Rank Two: Never Yield

Ronin are accustomed to being the underdogs. When you are outnumbered in a skirmish, you gain a bonus to your Armor TN equal to the amount by which the number of enemies exceeds the number of your allies. This bonus cannot exceed the total of your School Rank x2.

Rank Three: Bite of the Wolf

Veteran ronin are swift and deadly fighters. You may attack as a Simple Action when wielding a katana or a knife.

Rank Four: Twice-Cutting Spirit

As ronin become truly experienced, they become ever more deadly with many different weapons. Choose one additional melee weapon: you may attack with that weapon as a Simple Action. Once per skirmish, you may spend a Void Point on a damage roll, regardless of what weapon you are using.

Rank Five: Valor of the Wolf

Those ronin who survive long enough to perfect their skills become legends of the battlefield, able to endure all manner of hardship and prevail in spite of severe injuries. Choose another melee weapon: you may attack with that weapon as a Simple Action. Additionally, you may spend a Void Point to activate your R1 Technique without requireing a Willpower Trait Roll; when you activate it in this way, it lasts a number of Rounds equal to your Fire Ring.

New Minor Clan Mechanics

The Ichiro Pass Wardens

The first duty of the Badger Clan is to protect the pass from invasion, and the clan has long trained a group of specialized warriors whose sole duty is to defend the pass with spears and hurled rocks. Their task is to inflict as much damage as possible on any invaders. The Pass Wardens spend most of their lives within the fortresses of the Badger lands, seldom visiting the rest of the Empire.

New Alternate Path: Ichiro Pass Warden

- **Technique Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Ichiro Bushi 3
- Requirements: Strength 4, Spears 4, Athletics 4.

Technique: Hold the Passes

Your range with hand-hurled missiles is doubled, and you add +1k0 to damage rolls with thrown weapons; if the weapon is a nage-yari or a rock, the bonus is +1k1 instead.

The Dragonfly Advisor

One of the things generally agreed among the Tonbo to be a mark of Enlightenment is an understanding of something they call "dependent arising" – the nature of cause and effect; the realization that all things exist only as a result of other causes and conditions. Nothing spontaneously comes into being without a precedent giving birth to it, and an Enlightened person comprehends the consequences of every action and condition. The Tonbo Advisors use their studies on this aspect of existence to become effective diplomats and also to gain insights into the ways of divination.

New Alternate Path: Dragonfly Advisor [Courtier/Shugenja]

- **Technique Rank:** 3
- Replaces: Tonbo Shugenja 3
- Requirements: Intelligence 3, Meditation 5

Technique: Seeing the Pattern

The Dragonfly Advisors are trained to understand all the patterns of cause and effect around them, letting them perceive the potential consequences of their actions. You gain a +2k0 bonus to all Divination and Etiquette Skill Rolls.

GM's Note: Generic Ronin and Paths

It is up to the GM whether or not to allow a "generic" ronin to take one or more of the various ronin Paths presented in the L5R 4th Edition rules. Adding these options allows the potential of stronger mechanical combinations, so GMs should exercise care. Also, if this level of flexibility is used, there is the potential for the characters to have a different Rank One Technique... which, in turn, makes the Generic Ronin Rank Five Technique problematic. (One option in that case is to let the character gain the "basic" Rank One ability at Rank Five, perhaps with the advantage that it can now last a number of Rounds equal to Fire.)

The Fuzake Shugenja School

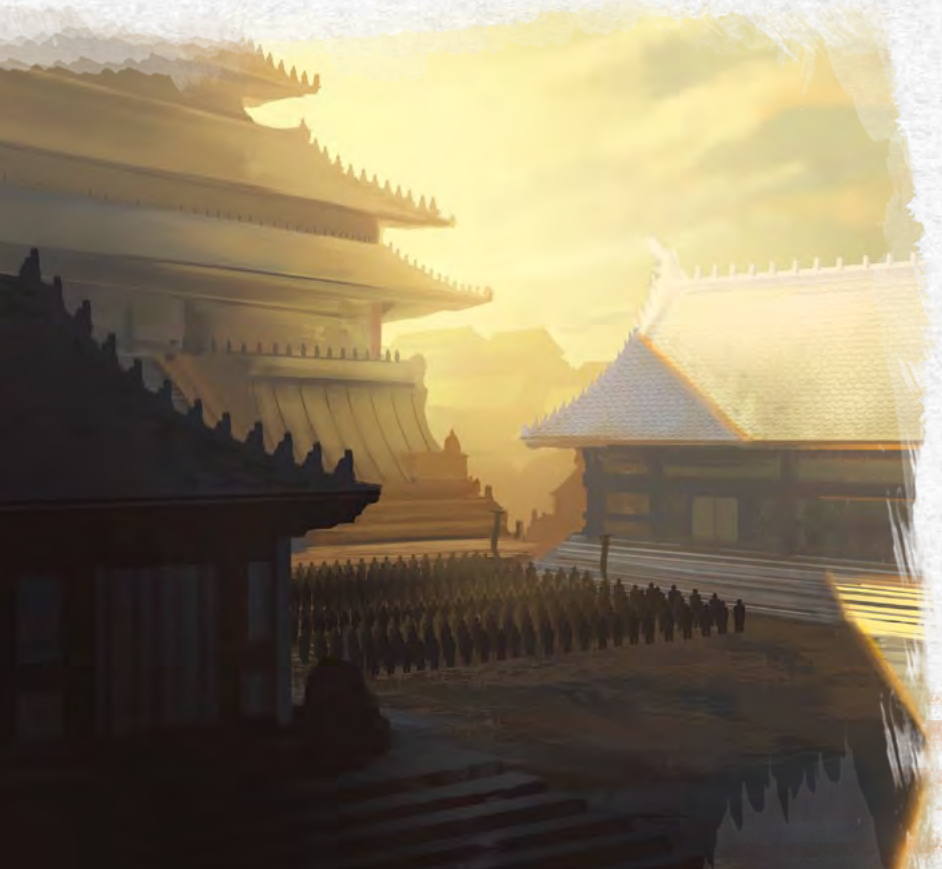
The Fuzake originated as a small order of ronin shugenja within Toturi's Army, led by a young man named Yasuki Garou (later Fuzake Garou) who was a close friend to Toku. When the Monkey Clan was formed he immediately swore fealty to it. The Fuzake dedicate themselves to healing and to an intense but rather eccentric veneration of the Fortunes.

New Basic School: Fuzake Shugenja [Shugenja]

- **Skills**: Calligraphy, Defense, Etiquette, Lore: Theology, Medicine, Spellcraft, any one High or Merchant Skill
- **Starting Honor**: 5.5
- **Outfit**: Robes, Wakizashi, Knife, Scroll Satchel, Traveling Pack, 2 Koku
- **Affinity/Deficiency**: Earth/Fire
- **Spells**: Sense, Commune, Summon, 3 Earth spells, 2 Water spells (one is automatically Path to Inner Peace), 1 Air spell

Technique: The Sideways Path

The shugenja who came to be known as Fuzake Garou was originally trained by the Kuni, but spent much of his life trying to protect and heal those around him. Over time he found ways to call on his Earth magic to support his efforts, and after his disappearance and apparent death at the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, his followers pursued and eventually perfected the crude technique he devised. When casting a spell that heals Wounds or cures poison or illness (such as Path to Inner Peace or Peace of the Kami), you may opt to also expend one or more Earth spell slots; each such slot awards a Free Raise on your Spell Casting Roll.



The Ox Clan Vigilant

After the Ox Clan is purged during the Scorpion Clan's assault on the Kolat in the late twelfth century, the new Ox leadership seeks assistance from the Unicorn Clan's Shinjo family in keeping itself pure of further Kolat influence. The small order known as the Vigilant is the result. Initially focused solely on hunting for Kolat, the organization soon expands into a more general role of rooting out criminals and conspirators of all types.

New Alternate Path: Ox Clan Vigilant

- **Technique Rank:** 4
- **Replaces:** Morito Bushi 4
- **Requirements:** Investigation 5

Technique: Seek the Guilty

The Ox Vigilants are trained to root out lawbreakers and conspirators by seeing through their deceptions and tricks, finding their underlying moral weakness and using it against them. When investigating someone for possible lawbreaking or Kolat activity, you may make a Contested Roll of your Investigation (Interrogation) / Perception against the target's Sincerity (Deceit) / Awareness. If you succeed (and the target is actually guilty – GM's judgment), you gain a +1k1 bonus to all Intimidation rolls and attack rolls against that target for the next 24 hours.

GM's Option: Shinjo Vigilants

The Ox developed the Vigilant organization with the assistance of the Shinjo family, who also had a strong history of rooting out the Kolat in their ranks. Some GMs may wish to reflect this by making the Vigilant Path available to the Unicorn Clan's Shinjo Bushi School as well.

The Suzume Storytellers

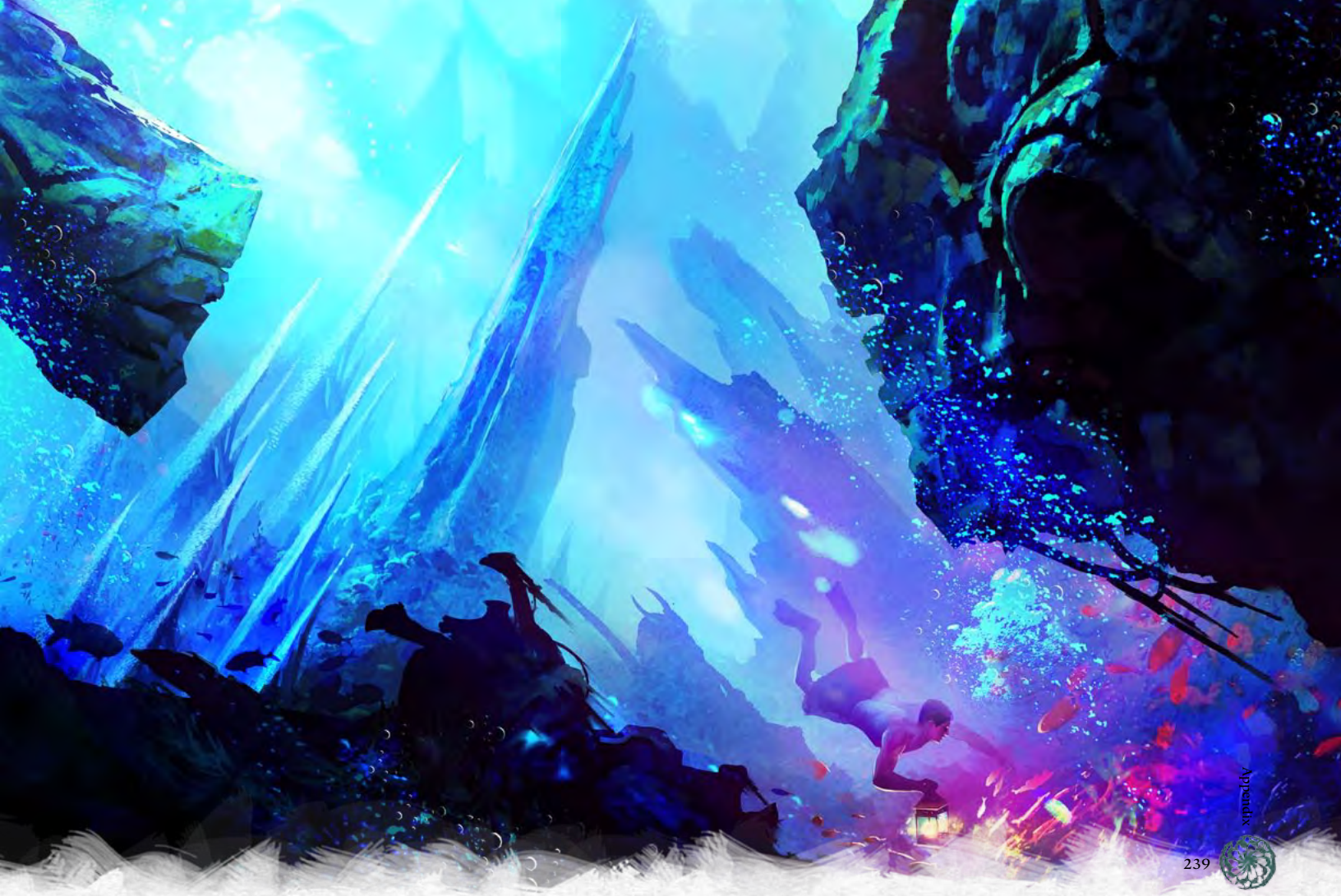
The Storytellers are the closest thing to true artisans in that poverty-stricken clan. Their tradition originated with Doji Edakumi, a Crane artisan whose descendents form the Edakumi vassal family of the Sparrow. Edakumi was the founder of the Sparrow artistic tradition and became the most popular and welcomed samurai in the clan's territory; the members of the Edakumi family are known as the best storytellers in the clan and perhaps in the Empire.

New Alternate Path: Suzume Storyteller [Courtier/Artisan]

- **Technique Rank:** 2
- **Replaces:** Suzume Bushi 2
- **Requirements:** Perform: Storytelling 3, Precise Memory

Technique: The Heart of the Story

The Suzume Storyteller can use a skillfully crafted story to make virtually any point he wishes. When making a Courtier Skill roll, you may spend a Void Point to add your Perform: Storytelling Skill Rank to the total.



The Sling

A humble weapon dismissed by the typical samurai, the sling is essentially a length of cord or sash with a pouch in the center for holding a stone. The wielder holds both ends in one hand and whirls the sling to build momentum, finally releasing one end and flicking his wrist to unleash the stone. This allows a stone to be hurled much farther than by hand alone. Although most samurai would never consider using such a crude weapon, monks and ashigaru have no such qualms, and ronin, Sparrow samurai, and Unicorn samurai have all been known to use the weapon from time to time. Members of the Sparrow Clan consider the sling to be an acceptable weapon despite its peasant origins, and should not lose Honor when using a sling. At the GM's option, this can also be true for Unicorn samurai, especially those who are more in tune with their gaijin legacy.

New Weapon: Sling

- **Keywords:** Small, Peasant
- **Range:** 100'
- **DR:** 1k2
- **Special Rules:** The sling uses the Athletics / Agility Skill to attack; GMs may opt to allow a Sling Emphasis. Strength is not added to the DR for slings. Reduction is doubled against sling attacks.

The Tortoise Killers

The Tortoise Clan's limited military capabilities consist primarily of those trained in the Tortoise Guard technique (published in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories*). However, due to the unique nature and duties of the Tortoise Clan, the clan has long found it useful to train certain men and women in the arts of murder and assassination. Some of these killers go on to serve in the Guard, disguising their true nature beneath conventional martial duties, while others remain within the ranks of the Tortoise merchants and sailors.

New Alternate Path: Tortoise Killer [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Tortoise Smuggler 3
- **Requirements:** Agility 3, Stealth 4, any two Weapon Skills at 4

Technique: The Poisoned Frog

The Tortoise Killers are trained to dispose of their targets with whatever weapon comes to hand, while maintaining the outward appearance of an ordinary sailor or soldier. Once per opponent per skirmish, when making an attack roll you may spend a Void Point to cause your Raises for damage on that roll to award +1k1 rather than +1k0 to damage. You may never take more Raises than your Void Rank when using this Technique.

GM's Toolbox: Alternate Weapon-Forging Rules

The current Crafting rules (found on page 258 of the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook) do not really support the ability to create unusual or powerful items, which can be frustrating to players running craft-oriented characters such as Kaiu or Tsi. GMs who wish to allow greater flexibility may wish to consider the following optional additions to the basic Crafting rules. However, these rules have the potential to be abused, and GMs should carefully consider their potential impact before allowing them into their game.

The Value of a Katana

While a katana is socially considered to be priceless, for the purpose of the Crafting rules a katana has a value of 25 koku. This means the TN to Craft a katana is 35.

Crafting Extraordinary Weapons

Skilled weaponsmiths are capable of creating unusual and high-quality items... assuming they have the proper materials, equipment, and time. Weapons crafted by the basic rules in the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook conform to the normal weapon stats in the L5R rules and are considered to be of "Average" quality. Weapons of higher quality are said to be "Excellent"; such weapons possess special properties that set them apart.

To create an "Excellent" weapon, the regular Crafting rules are used. However, the cost of materials and the koku value of the weapon are both tripled. This means an Excellent Wakizashi will have a value of 45 Koku, an excellent Naginata will have a value of 30 Koku, and so forth. (Use this value when determining the base TN for Crafting the weapon.)

A smith must have a Craft: Weaponsmithing Skill Rank of at least 7 to create an Excellent weapon. A Kaiu or Tsi smith may create an Excellent weapon with a Skill Rank of at least 5.

A smith who creates an Excellent weapon may call Raises to confer one Special Quality on the weapon. However, failure on the Crafting roll means the weapon is wholly ruined and useless; the smith must try again. A list of Qualities and the associated Raises is provided below. Characters trained in the Tsi or Kaiu schools receive one Free Raise for the purpose of conferring Special Qualities.

Weapon Special Qualities:

- **Balanced**: The wielder gains +1k0 on attack rolls using this weapon. Raises: 4
- **Radiant**: This weapon counts as Jade for the purpose of attacking Invulnerable targets. Raises: 6
- **Signature**: This weapon bears a unique signature stamp, identifying it with its creator. Raises: 2
- **Swift**: The wielder gains +5 to his Initiative score while using this weapon. Raises: 4
- **True**: This weapon decreases the target's Reduction by the wielder's Strength. Raises: 6
- **Unbreakable**: This weapon cannot be broken. Raises: 5

Crafting Sacred Weapons

A smith of a clan that possesses a Sacred Weapon (as per the Advantages in the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook, page 152-153) may attempt to make one using a Craft: Weaponsmithing roll. The smith must create the appropriate Excellent Quality weapon with 7 Raises (6 Raises for a Kaiu smith).

A samurai may only attempt to create a Sacred Weapon of his own clan. A Crane can only attempt to make Kakita Blades, a Crab may only attempt to make Kaiu Blades, and so forth.

New Imperial Families Mechanics

Satoshi's Legacy

Miya Satoshi died in disgrace, but his effort to militarize the Miya family left a legacy of trained warriors who wished to continue serving their family and to cleanse the dishonor which Satoshi had brought on himself. Their warrior tradition is carried on by the Satoshi vassal family. Of course, GM's may also use this Technique to represent the legacy of any Miya leader who tried to militarize his family.

New Alternate Path: Satoshi's Legacy [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank**: 4
- **Replaces**: Miya Herald 4
- **Requirements**: Kenjutsu 5

Technique: Fire and Ice

The Satoshi vassal family teaches an aggressive fighting style derived from their founder's training with the Matsu family. You may make attacks as Simple Actions when you are in the Full Attack stance.

The Seppun Hidden Guard

Although all Seppun shugenja are tasked to help protect the Emperor and the Imperial City against magical and supernatural threats, but the elite order of the Hidden Guard receives special training for this purpose. The Hidden Guard are in charge of the direct magical and spiritual protection of the Emperor, his family, and the Imperial Palace. Many of them spend their entire lives doing nothing but endlessly watching, reinforcing, and maintaining the wards and other magical protections over their charges.

New Alternate Path: Seppun Hidden Guard [Shugenja]

- **Technique** Rank: 3
- **Replaces**: Seppun Shugenja 3
- **Requirements**: Must be chosen for service in the Hidden Guard

Technique: Harmony in All

The Hidden Guard are tasked with warding and protecting the Emperor, the Imperial family, and their possessions and holdings. You gain a Free Raise with all spells that have the Wards or Defense properties.

New Brotherhood of Shinsei Mechanics

The Barefoot Brethren

The Barefoot Brethren carry messages all across Rokugan, asking no price except food for their journey. They are famed for their endurance, regularly outpacing even Unicorn horses over long distances. Many of those they serve are *heimin*, who have few other ways to communicate with distant kin, but samurai also make use of the Barefoot Brethren.

New Alternate Path: Barefoot Brethren [Monk]

- **Devotion**: Koshin, Fortune of Roads
- **Rank**: 2
- **Replaces**: Any Fortunist Brotherhood Monk 2 (may not belong to the Order of Osano-Wo)
- Requires: Ascetic, Meditation (Fasting) 3, Athletics 4

Technique: Koshin's Favor

You gain only one Kiho at this Rank. The strength of Koshin prevents you from becoming Fatigued from travel or lack of sleep, but not from the lack of food/drink. You gain a +1k1 bonus to all Meditation rolls.

Technique: Emma-O's Insight

You may detect the presence of ghosts (yorei or goryo, but not gaki) by spending 10 minutes in meditation and making a roll of Meditation / Awareness at TN 25. You may do this a number of times per day equal to your Void Rank. You may call Raises on this roll to learn the following additional information (one piece of information per Raise): the ghost's identity, its manner of death, and its connection to the mortal world. For three Raises, you can gain specific insight into what will lay the ghost to rest. (GM's discretion as to exactly what you learn, but it will always be directly useful to resolving the ghost's presence in the mortal world.)

The Order of Peaceful Repose

Pockets of this sect may be found throughout Rokugan, especially in places where warfare or local spiritual conditions make ghosts more common. They dedicate themselves to serving Emma-O by laying ghosts to rest, without regard for whether those ghosts are the spirits of *heimin* or samurai. In the twelfth century the monks of this Order form an alliance with the newly-formed Brothers of Rebirth, whose aims they see as harmonious with their own.

New Brotherhood Basic School: Order of Peaceful Repose [Monk]

- **Devotion**: Fortunist (Emma-O, the Fortune of Death)
- **Benefit**: +1 Awareness
- **Honor**: 4.5
- **Skills**: Athletics, Calligraphy, Jiujutsu, Lore: Ghosts, Lore: Theology (Emma-O), Meditation, any one Skill

Pure Song Shrine

For this sect, purity is more than merely a standard – it is the road to Enlightenment. Pure Song monks not only refrain from eating the flesh of any living creature, they also forgo eggs and even root vegetables whose loss kills the plant. They refuse all garments of silk, wearing robes woven from hemp. Those who have taken full vows wear bells on their ankles and their staves to warn creatures of their approach. Under no circumstances will a Pure Song monk take violent action, even to defend another – though he will not hesitate to lay his own life down to save others' lives, even if it is only a momentary reprieve.

The Pure Song is a movement within the Shrine of the Seven Thunders for some time before achieving formal recognition as a separate sect.

One odd talent of the order wins them admission to unexpected places: their beautiful music. Several Pure Song monks have risen to great fame as singers and musicians, rivaling even the best Kakita artisans. All members of the order habitually chant or sing while meditating, or improvise harmonies around their bells as they pursue their duties.

New Alternate Path: Pure Song [Monk]

- **Devotion**: Shintao
- **Rank**: 4
- **Replaces**: Shrine of Seven Thunders Monk 4
- **Requires**: Willpower 4, Defense 4, Meditation 3, any one musical Perform Skill at 3
- **Special**: You may not learn or use Martial Kiho

Technique: The Pure Song

You gain a +1k0 bonus to all Perform Skills that involve music. You may never deliberately attack another living creature; if you ever do so, the spiritual pollution causes you to permanently lose the ability to perform Kiho. However, while you remain nonviolent and thus spiritually pure, you gain a +1k1 bonus to all Defense rolls, and any time you spend a Void point to negate Wounds, you negate 20 Wounds instead of 10.

The Silent Ones

This tiny order, never encompassing more than a dozen full members in total, is unknown outside the Scorpion lands and barely known within them. However, the upper ranks of the Scorpion Clan find the Silent Ones a deeply useful order, and keep careful note of the temple's location. These monks spend most of their lives in meditation, but this is not merely due to preference; it is because they literally cannot speak. When an initiate takes the full vows to join the Silent Ones and serve the Fortune of Secrets, as soon as the last word is spoken his tongue vanishes from his mouth.

- **Devotion**: Fortunist (Tsugumu, the Fortune of Secrets)
- **Rank**: 3
- **Replaces**: Any Fortunist Brotherhood Monk 3
- **Requires**: Willpower 4, Meditation 4
- **Special**: A character who joins this Path becomes mute (his tongue vanishes from his mouth)

Technique: Tsugumu's Silence

A member of this order who is voluntarily told a secret can never give it up. The knowledge is guarded by the power of the Fortune of Secrets, and can never be taken from the monk's mind in any way, even through torture or intrusive Air magic.

New Ancestors

Imperial Families Ancestors

Otomo [6 Points]

The clever and notoriously serpentine Otomo was often underestimated by his foes, but his smooth tongue and flexible mind seldom came out second-best. His guidance bestows similar blessings on his descendents. Otomo's supervision grants you a +1k1 bonus when using the Courtier Skill with the Manipulation or Rhetoric Emphases.

- **Constraint**: Otomo despised two things: stupidity and disloyalty. If you ever willingly betray the Imperial house, or are ever tricked or outmaneuvered by a political rival with equal or lower Status Rank, Otomo will forsake you.
- **GM's Note**: The terminology of "tricked or outmaneuvered" is deliberately open-ended to allow for the wide variety of possible situations in social conflicts. However, it is not intended to mean that the character can lose Otomo's guidance simply due to a failed Social Skill Roll.

Seppun [10 Points]

The Lady Seppun was the first follower of the Kami and the first of the old religious order to fully and unreservedly embrace the ways of Shintao. Her guidance allows you to touch the harmony of the universe more easily. Once per session, you may gain the benefits of a Void Point without actually having to spend the Void Point.

- **Constraint**: Seppun was a deeply pious woman and was wholly devoted to Hantei. If you ever embrace a heretical religious viewpoint or if you ever place your own needs, goals, or desires ahead of the Imperial house, in even the most minor way, she will abandon you.

Miya [5 points]

The first Miya tirelessly and selflessly spread the word of the Empire's victory over Fu Leng, and also labored to rebuild the damage from the First War. So long as you are on the business of the Imperial house, Miya's guidance allows you to ignore the effects of lack of rest/sleep for a number of days equal to your Honor Rank.

- **Constraint**: Miya expects his descendents to show his same compassion toward those suffering from war or disaster. If you ever turn away from helping those suffering from either of these events, Miya will abandon you.

Minor Clan Ancestors

Badger Clan Ancestor: Ichiro Fureheshu [9 Points]

The founder of the Furehershu vassal family had such extraordinary strength that he defeated an oni with his bare hands. Fureheshu's guidance allows you to call on your own Strength in unusual situations. When performing a Skill roll with a physical Trait, you may spend a Void Point to use Strength in place of the normal Trait.

- **Constraint**: Fureheshu expects you to always embrace Strength with the same fervor as he did. If you ever lose a contest of Strength, he will abandon you.

Bat Clan Ancestor: Komori Iongi [5 Points]

Yoritomo Iongi was an enlightened Mantis samurai who rescued the Tetsubo of Thunder and later swore fealty to the Bat Clan. Those who have his guidance are inspired to similar heroic accomplishments, gaining one extra Void Point per session.

- **Constraint**: Iongi lived a life of glorious heroism and expects his descendents to do the same. If you ever pass up the chance to do something heroic or glorious, he will forsake you.

Boar Clan Ancestor: Hida Heichi [4 Points]

The founder of the Boar Clan was a man not only of courage but also possessing wisdom and tact, able to persuade the Shakoki Dogu to release his people and then devising the means by which the Boar might appease the Emperor. Those with his guidance gain a +1k1 bonus to all Social Skill rolls made against more powerful persons and beings.

- **Constraint**: Those who are guided by Hida Heichi must emulate his self-control. If you ever lose your temper in a social situation, Heichi will forsake you.

Dragonfly Clan Ancestor: Tonbo Kuyuden [3 Points]

The first true daimyo of the Dragonfly Clan avenged his father's death but then forsook the sword to embrace the new clan's ways of peace and diplomacy. Those who have his guidance gain a +1k1 bonus to all Courtier or Etiquette rolls made for the purpose of defusing violence or finding peaceful solutions to conflicts.

- **Constraint**: If you ever willingly choose violence when diplomacy is still an option, Kuyuden will abandon you.

Hare Clan Ancestor: Usagi Reichin [7 Points]

The founder of the Hare Clan was a man known for both his cheerful nature and for his clever tactics and great courage against the Bloodspeaker Cult. His guidance grants you a +1k1 bonus when resisting Fear effects; if the Fear is caused by a Bloodspeaker, the bonus is +2k2 instead.

- **Constraint**: Although Reichin was a pragmatic ronin, he also fought with supreme courage in the Battle of the Bloody Retreat. If you ever flee from a battle with a Bloodspeaker when there is still a chance of victory, Reichin will forsake you.

Monkey Clan Ancestor: Toku [3 Points]

The founder of the Monkey Clan is legendary for both his heroism and his extraordinary good fortune. So long as Toku watches over you, you are considered to have a Rank in the Luck Advantage (an additional Rank if you already possess your own Luck).

Constraint: Toku believed in Bushido to an almost idealistic degree. If your Honor Rank ever drops below 5.0, or if you ever commit an outrageously dishonorable act regardless of your Honor Rank, Toku will abandon you.

Oriole Clan Ancestor: Tsi [6 Points]

The ronin called simply "Tsi," descended from Tsi Wenfu, was such a skilled swordsmith that the Emperor declared him and his family to be Imperial vassals. His guidance allows his descendents to display skills that almost transcend mortal limitations. Your Raises with the Craft: Swordsmithing Skill are not limited in any way.

- **Constraint**: Like all of his family, Tsi saw swordsmithing as an art that had little to do with actually killing. If you ever use one of your own swords in combat for any purpose other than self-defense, Tsi will abandon you.
- **GM's Option**: If the GM is using the Alternate Crafting Rules from this book, the following alternate version of Tsi may be used. Instead of lifting all constraints on Raises, the guidance of Tsi awards a Free Raise for the purpose of using the Alternate Crafting rules.

Ox Clan Ancestor: Morito Garin [5 Points]

After the purge of the Kolat, Morito Garin labored to restore his clan's reputation and to hunt down any remaining Kolat influences. His guidance grants you a +1k1 bonus to any Perception-based or Awareness-based roll that is trying to determine someone's true loyalties.

- **Constraint**: Garin demands you share his dedication to rooting out the Kolat. If you ever knowingly cooperate with the Kolat, or even simply leave them alone when you have a chance to oppose them, Garin will forsake you.

Sparrow Clan Ancestor: Doji Suzume [4 points]

Suzume founded the Sparrow Clan after the rest of the Empire saw deep wisdom in his unthinking remark. If Suzume watches over you, you find it easier inspire others, gaining a +1k1 bonus to any Social Skill roll to persuade others to follow your guidance/example. However, once in your life (at a time chosen by the GM) a simple or random comment by you will be perceived as holding deep wisdom and meaning. The consequences of this could last a lifetime...

- **Constraint**: Suzume stayed with the people who followed him, and did his best to lead them despite his own confusion and many adverse circumstances. If you ever abandon followers who have come to you because of your words of wisdom, Suzume will forsake you in turn.

Tortoise Clan Ancestor: Agasha Kasuga [5 Points]

Agasha Kasuga was a man possessed of great curiosity, but also a man who placed the security of the Empire above all else, including his own purity. His guidance awards you a +1k1 bonus to any Skill Roll in which you are performing a dishonorable act (one that will cause you a loss of Honor) that is sanctioned by your duty to the Imperial house.

- **Constraint**: Kasuga expects you to share his self-sacrificing loyalty to Rokugan. If you ever place your own Honor above the needs of the Empire, he will abandon you.

Ronin Ancestors

It is quite rare for a ronin to cleanse his kharma and enter the Realm of Yomi after death. However, it does occasionally happen, and such fortunate souls try to watch over their descendents as best they can. A ronin ancestor will only watch over a True Ronin character – clan ronin can never have ronin ancestors.

Sun Tao (10 points)

Perhaps the greatest ronin soldier in Rokugan's history, Sun Tao's influence encompasses every clan and every war since. Many ronin claim to be descended from Sun Tao, but only a few actually win his guidance. Those who are advised by Sun Tao's spirit share his ability to adapt to different environments and fight with equal skill in any sort of battle. You gain a +1k0 bonus to all Battle Skill rolls. If you make a Bugei Skill roll which fails, Sun Tao's guidance allows you to spend a Void Point on the roll after it is made (rolling and adding 1k1 to the roll), but in return you lose the benefit of any Raises to the roll.

- **Constraint**: Sun Tao expects you to always seek to advance your knowledge of the ways of war and battle. If you ever turn down a chance to work for or train with a military force where you have not served before, Sun Tao will abandon you.

Chiroru (8 points)

Chiroru led the ronin vanguard of the Empire's army at the Battle of Sleeping River. A proud man who forged bonds of intense loyalty with his fellow wave-men, Chiroru refused an offer of fealty from the Fox Clan, declaring he could not go to the afterlife wearing a mon – after all, if he did, his brothers and sisters from the battle might not recognize him. Those who are guided by Chiroru's spirit share his ability to forge powerful bonds of loyalty to their comrades. You may choose a number of individuals up to your Void Rank to be your "siblings" – you are considered to have a Kharmic Tie with each of these individuals, and you will always be aware if any of them are in danger.

- **Constraint**: Loyalty cuts both ways. If you ever forsake, abandon, or betray any of your "siblings," Chiroru will forsake you in turn.
- **GM Notes**: It is recommended that players be allowed to have their character choose the "siblings" one at a time over the course of play, rather than having to select them all during character creation. At the GM's option, a character could be allowed to select a new "sibling" if an earlier one dies or betrays the friendship.

Miyuko (12 points)

The simple peasant woman called Miyuko was the first and greatest apprentice of the legendary shugenja Naka Kaeturo, the first Grandmaster of the Elements. Despite her humble origins she possessed profound wisdom and insight. After Kaeteru's death she was offered fealty by the Phoenix, but chose instead to remain unaligned and travel the Empire sharing her late master's teachings with all. Only ronin shugenja can benefit from the guidance of Miyuko's spirit, and they share in her deep insights into the nature of magic and the Elements. You are considered to be one School Rank higher for the purpose of casting spells (Mastery level, Spell Casting Rolls, and spell effects).

- **Constraint**: Miyuko sought to share her wisdom with all who would listen, and she expects the same of you. If you ever refuse to share magical knowledge with an honorable person, Miyuko will abandon you. This means those guided by Miyuko will freely share their spells with others, in sharp contrast to most shugenja.

Brotherhood of Shinsei Ancestors

Since the vast majority of monks are expected to remain celibate (except for Fortunist monks devoted to Benten), few members of the Brotherhood have children. Moreover, with the exception of Shinsei's bloodline the Brotherhood does not track ancestry or lines of descent. Thus, when a monk fulfills his destiny and ascends to Yomi, he does not watch over his own blood descendents. Instead, he offers guidance to those of the Brotherhood who follow his beliefs. In game terms, the GM should restrict access to monk ancestors based on devotions and sects. At a minimum, an ancestor will only guide a Brotherhood character who belongs to the same devotion (Shintaoist, Fortunist, etc), and many ancestors will only help a character who belongs to the same monastic order or sect of belief.

Basso [Shinmaki Sect] (9 points)

The founder of the Shinmaki Sect claimed his Diamond Sutra was written by Shinsei, although many others believe Basso wrote it himself. Basso's order, with its bizarre meditative practices, remains the most controversial major sect within the Brotherhood. Those who have Basso's guidance are able to gain true perception through their meditation, piercing the veil of illusions around them to see things as they truly are; you may see through any illusion or deception as a Complex Action with a Meditation/Void roll (TN chosen by the GM based on the strength of the illusion/deception).

- **Constraint**: Basso demands almost super-human dedication from his followers. You must meditate for at least four hours each day and must be absolutely ascetic, forsaking all worldly pleasures and indulgences, even the most minor. Any voluntary violation of this lifestyle will result in Basso abandoning you.

Sakura [Shintaoist] (10 points)

The woman called Sakura is said to have been the first mortal to understand the possibility of Enlightenment, and some Brotherhood traditions maintain Shinsei himself was among her students. Some legends claim Shinsei's crow was actually Sakura, transformed, and other legends suggest she may have been a kenku. Although Sakura never attained what modern Rokugan would consider true enlightenment, she understood many truths about the universe. Those who have her guidance are able to comprehend the world at a deeper level than others. You are considered to be one Insight Rank higher for the purpose of learning and using Kiho.

- **Constraint**: Sakura sought to share wisdom and enlightenment all her life, teaching everyone who would listen. If you ever pass over a chance to share enlightenment or the ways of the Tao with others, Sakura will abandon you.

Mizumoto [Questioner] (7 points)

Mizumoto was a Crane courtier from the time of Hantei Genji, widely admired for his intellect and education. After retirement to the Brotherhood, he became one of the Empire's foremost experts on the Tao, renowned for his understanding of the sacred text's meanings. Those guided by Mizumoto share his intellectual gifts, gaining a +1k1 bonus to all Intelligence-based rolls.

- **Constraint**: Mizumoto sought always to extend his knowledge of the Tao and the ways of Enlightenment. If you ever voluntarily pass over a chance to learn about a new teaching, sect, or belief within the Brotherhood, Mizumoto will abandon you.

Togashi Kaze [Fortunist/Kaimetsu-Uo] (5 points)

Although Togashi Kaze was originally a member of the Dragon Clan, he also founded what became the Order of Kaimetsu-Uo when he renovated an abandoned monastery and began teaching the local monks a form of "meditative exercise" based on his martial art techniques. Kaze's spirit teaches some of his unarmed techniques and meditative abilities to his favored disciples. So long as your Meditation Skill Rank is at least equal to your Jiujutsu Skill Rank, you gain a Free Raise on unarmed attacks.

- **Constraint**: Kaze expects you to uphold his principles of using violence only for defense and refraining from killing, no matter what the provocation. If you ever kill another human being with unarmed attacks, Kaze will abandon you.

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"Show me a man who has no secrets, and I will show you either a corpse or a terrible threat to the status quo."

- Otomo Banu

Consumed with their own affairs and agendas, the Great Clans of Rokugan rarely pay attention to the goings on of the other groups that share the Empire with them. The Minor Clans, ronin, the Brotherhood of Shinsei, and even the Imperial families themselves are often overlooked in the schemes of the Great Clans, and often to the detriment of those who fail to take them into account.

Secrets of the Empire presents, in great detail, information concerning these groups, including an exhaustive list of Rokugan's Minor Clans, the political intrigue of the Imperial families, and much more detail on the workings of the Empire's wave men and the ubiquitous Brotherhood of Shinsei, not to mention the mysterious Spirit Realms that lay just beyond the reach of the mortal world. In this book you will find:

- Ancestors for each of the groups mentioned above!
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