The Book of Air

Legend of the Five Rings





The Book of Air

Written by: *Shawn Carman, Robert Hobart, Brian Yoon; Kevin Blake, Dave Laderoute, Max Lemaire, Seth Mason, Ryan Reese.*

Edited by: *Robert Hobart, Todd Rowland*

Art Director: *Todd Rowland*

Cover Design: *Hal Mangold*

Cover Artist: *Mario Wibisono*

Layout: *Hal Mangold*

Original Graphic Design: *Edge Entertainment*

Artists: *Christopher Appel, Steve Argyle, Gonzalo Ordonez Arias, Mathew S. Armstrong, Daren Bader, Drew Baker, Jason Behnke, Tom Biondolillo, Leonardo Borazio, Beet, Manuel Calderon, Mike Capprotti, Paul Carrick, Miguel Coimbra, Conceptopolis, Audry Corman, Ed Cox, Edwin David, Molly Denmark, Thomas Denmark, Randy Elliot, Steve Ellis, Jason Engle, Anthony Francisco, Carl Frank, Randy Gallegos, Joachim Gmoser, Gong Studios, Anthony Grabski, Troy Graham, Andrew Hepworth, Jeff Himmelman, Quinton Hoover, David Horne, Aurelien Hubert, IFS, Paul Prof Herbert, Jonathan Hunt, Llyn Hunter, Hugh Jamieson, Michael Kaluta, Michel Koch, Michael Komarck, Heather Kreiter, Amandine Labarre, Stephanie Law, April Lee, Monika Livingston, Eric Lofgren, Anson Maddocks, Slawomir Maniak, Thomas Manning, Britt Martin, David Martin, Malcolm McClinton, Patrick McEvoy, Peter Mohrbacher, William O'Connor, Glen Osterberger, Jim Pavelec, Ben Peck, Ramon Perez, Eric Polak, Mark Poole, Angga Satriohadi, Erich Schreiner, Chris Seaman, Douglas Shuler, Steve Snyder, Ron Spencer, Florian Stitz, Beth Trott, Charles Urbach, Luis Vasquez, Diana Vick, Franz Vohwinkel, Byron Wackwitz, Corene Werhane, Mario Wibisono, Matt Wilson, Jarreau Wimberly, Wackwitz & Daily*

Production Manager: *David Lepore*

Senior Brand Manager: *Todd Rowland*

Chief Executive Officer: *John Zinser*

Head Playtester: *Brian Bates*

Playtesters: *Team 1 (Dave Smith, Patrick Chen, Aien Elmi, Jason Kang, Ki Chang Kim, Roger Liang, Arthur Nguyen); Team 4 (Becca Hobart, Kevin Blake, Todd Stites, Daniel Briscoe); Team 6 (Timar Long, Erykah Fasset, Chad Kirby, Mike Brodu, Maxime Lemaire, Ray Rupp); Team 7 (Jason Shafer, Nathan Shafer, Matt Strout, Liza Strout, Joe White, Terry Moore, Eric Newlin); Team 8 (Edward Reynolds, Mathieu Brebouillet, David Whitney, Richard Whitney, Stuart Biggs, Robert Knight); Team 8b (Michael Hill, Phil Pheeny, Shane Pheeney, Chaedy Ritherdon, Tarl Cowley); Team 8c (Thomas Atwood, Ryan Castilla, Henry Joiner, Brandon Woodmen); Team 17 (Tom Lewis, Jamie Kipp, Gavin O'Hearn, Shawn MacLean, John Taylor); Team 18 (Dave Laderoute, Mike Clark, Chris Talarico, Chris Masdea, Lee Vollum, Richard Hewitt, Bill Hrenchuk); Team 19 (Charles Caswell, Vincent Stanton, Eddie Sweeden, Chuck Sweeden, Justin Cross, Fox Whitworth); Team 20 (Matt Tyler, Timothy Hill, Stephen Mumford, Matthew Linkswiler, Paul Casagrande, Robert Zapf); Team 21 (James Freeman-Harris, Sarah Koz, David Wright, James Mosingo); Team 22 (Scott Shepard, Dawn Dalton, Andrew Doud, Justin Davidson, Jon Huskey, Trista Lillis, Tim Murphy); Team 23 (James Wagner, Kevin Pason, Ryan Bataglia, Chris Foster, Jim Friedman, Jason Whiston, Phil Jenicek, Dan Sulin, Izzy Lombardi-Friedman); Team 24 (Tony Love, Kassandra Mullin, Brian Tieken, Kimberly Wajer-Scott, Phillip Scott, Nicholas Love, Jerry Fleenor, Patrick Wiliams)*





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Introduction

Kakita Saburashi stands in the classic Crane dueling stance, his sword-hand resting atop the hilt of his katana as he watches his opponent with steely focus. His white hair is tied back in a high topknot, and a few loose strands whip about in the chill wind. Facing him, Mirumoto Kanjo stands in an open and almost casual stance, his swords already drawn and held loosely at his sides. His gaze seems remote... possibly even disinterested.

The two duelists face each other for an unmeasurable moment. Is it a minute or an hour? Occasionally one of them shifts posture very slightly—moving a foot, raising or lowering a shoulder.

Someone in the audience murmurs softly, wondering when the duel will start. Saburashi's lead student answers in a sharp whisper: "It has already begun."

Finally Saburashi slides one foot forward, very slightly, sand crunching beneath his sandal.

Then he is in motion, his sword whipping free of the saya in a silver blur. Kanjo flows forward to meet him, both swords coming up, and there is a loud clang and a shower of sparks. An eyeblink later the two men are on opposite sides of the field, their backs to each other. Glowing sparks still hang in the air between them where their blades met, slowly fading as they drift toward the earth.

Mirumoto Kanjo slowly straightens up and sheaths his swords.

Kakita Saburashi lowers his own blade and stares, unbelieving, at the cut which is staining his left kimono sleeve red. "The perfect strike," he whispers unbelieving. "How... how did you..?"

Welcome to *The Book of Air*, the latest sourcebook release for the Legend of the Five Rings Role-Playing Game, 4th Edition! This book represents a new concept for the 4th Edition line, and is the first in a planned series of five books that will explore the Emerald Empire of Rokugan through the perspective of the five Elements which the Rokugani believe make up all of reality: Air, Earth, Fire, Water, and Void. Each book will add new depth to the world of Rokugan and new mechanical options for your L5R 4th Edition campaign.

What Is In This Book?

The Elemental Series, of which The Book of Air is the first, will explore Rokugan—its culture, its people, and above all its samurai traditions—from the perspective of the five Elements. Each book will view the Empire through the prism of that Element, examining how it influences everything from fighting styles to social interaction to magic and mysticism.

The chapters in this sourcebook comprise the following:

Chapter One: Winds of War

This chapter deals with those of the fighting arts that are associated with Air. Obviously the most notable of these is the iaijutsu duel, and the chapter devotes considerable discussion to the history, traditions, etiquette, and physical nature of dueling. Other martial topics related to Air are also discussed, including archery, spear-fighting, and the famous Dragon martial art known as Kaze-do—"the Way of Air."

Chapter Two: The Winds of Court

The world of court and politics is heavily Air-oriented; indeed, it would be fair to say that Rokugani politics is dominated far more by Air than by any other Element. This chapter discusses the methods of those political clans and groups who rely most heavily on the ways of Air—understanding the feelings and needs of others, and using those to one's own ends. It also discusses several notable political groups whose philosophies can be said to be Air-oriented, as well as a number of prominent castles in the Empire whose courts are Air-dominated.

Chapter Three: Winds of Magic

There is no part of Rokugan more dominated by the nature and characteristics of the different Elements than the study and practice of shugenja magic. This chapter discusses those groups of shugenja in Rokugan who pay



special attention to the Element of Air, and also includes an extensive review of the use and value of the major Air spells. Finally, the chapter offers a detailed discussion of the Air kami themselves, their nature and behavior, and their interactions with the other Elements.

Chapter Four: Winds of Enlightenment

Samurai are not the only people in Rokugan who study the Elements closely. This chapter reviews those monastic orders (both famous and obscure) whose traditions show a strong focus on the ways of Air. It also discusses the usage and social impact of the major Air Kiho, the strange mystical powers which are a special province of the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

Chapter Five: The World of Air

This chapter deals with a host of different aspects of Air in the lives of the Rokugani, ranging from the mundane—weather, kite-flying, sailing—to the supernatural—Fortunes, creatures, and magical artifacts.

Chapter Six: Kyuden Kurogane-Hana

The final chapter in this book offers a complete campaign setting themed around courtly intrigue and social interaction—the themes of Air. Kyuden Kurogane-Hana is designed as a "generic" castle which can be placed into any clan's lands, allowing the GM to easily adapt it for use in any L5R campaign or era.

Appendix: New Mechanics

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

Air-Themed Gaming: Improvisation

Most role-playing games follow a traditional structure in which the GM prepares an adventure in advance, then runs the player characters through it. The GM will have a specific plan for how the adventure will play out, perhaps with a few contingencies to cover the more obvious alternative paths the PCs might follow. Some GMs will plan out their adventures in great detail, trying to anticipate every possible choice the PCs might make, identify and describe every NPC, and so forth.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with designing such detailed and comprehensive adventures, and indeed a great many successful RPG campaigns have followed this model. Pre-generated adventures and organized convention-based campaigns like Heroes of Rokugan also tend to follow this model, since their adventures have to be read and run by many different GMs and many different groups of players. Likewise, certain types of scenarios—mysteries, for example—require much more detailed planning to ensure their various clues and plot elements fit together smoothly. We will examine this sort of detailed planning for adventures in the upcoming Books of Earths and Fire.

However, elaborate and detailed planning is not the only way to run a role-playing game. GMs who feel confident in their creative powers can opt to follow the path of Air and take a more open and free-form approach to their campaigns, using only loose plot outlines and a list of NPCs. The GM adjusts the plot on the fly, and adds (or abandons) plot elements and NPCs in response to the players' actions and choices. This allows the adventure to constantly grow and change in response to both player interaction and new GM ideas.

This option is not for everyone, of course. Some GMs prefer to have the "safety net" of a more detailed adventure design to back them up. In order to run a more free-form game, the GM must be willing to give up that safety net. In return, the GM gains much greater flexibility, and is able to adjust his adventures constantly to the players' actions and choices. This approach can work especially well in a campaign that follows the Open World, Relationship Mapping, or Character Driven models (as described on pages 294-296 of the L5R 4th Edition core rulebook). Conversely, an improvisational game will not work quite so well in an Epic campaign or a Location-Based campaign, both of which tend to require more careful planning. In an Epic, the GM must have a strong overarching plotline that the PCs can follow to their fated destiny, while in a Location-Based game the GM will need to plan out the location and its inhabitants in great detail before starting play.

Reactive and Adaptive Plotting

If the GM does decide to run an improvisational game, one of the aspects of doing so is a willingness to "let go" of plot control. The GM must be prepared to change plots, abandon storylines, and launch new ones at any time, reacting to the players' actions and choices. This means the GM will sometimes have to abandon a storyline he really wants to pursue, or to follow a storyline which he finds less interesting.

This can be frustrating even for the most innovative GM, but there is another side to this problem: just as the GM may be forced to abandon a planned storyline, he is also free to introduce new elements into the story at any time, and this can be a good way of re-tasking ideas that didn't work before. A creative GM can let the players change the plot to solve the original problem, but then send a new problem at them crafted out of the unused pieces of the old one.

For example, suppose the player characters are working as a magistrate's yoriki in a large city. A strange new monk comes to the city, preaching a heretical off-shoot of Shinsei's philosophies that condemns the samurai caste's rule as unjust. Soon many of the common folk are embracing the monk's strange ideals and becoming increasingly restive. The PCs face a quandary. If they do nothing, the monk may well incite a revolt. However, the lord of their city is very pious and will not listen to their suggestions that a holy man should be executed for sedition. Besides, if they have the monk killed, they may well trigger the very rebellion they wish to avoid.

However, the players take a creative approach: they have some commoner allies kidnap the monk and dump him on a trade barge headed for another city. The disappearance of the monks takes the wind out of the rebellion's sails and things swiftly simmer down. The GM, who had been planning a whole series of challenges built around growing commoner unrest, silently curses the players' creative approach... but a few months later, the PCs get word from trade ships coming up the river. It seems the monk has raised a true peasant revolt out in the countryside, and his army his headed this way...

Embracing Player Input

A creative GM should always be looking for chances to incorporate the players' actions, ideas, and choices into the storyline of his campaign, but this is especially important in an Air-type improvisational game. In an improvisation-driven campaign, the GM should be actively seeking ideas from the players and freely adding them to the story wherever possible. Indeed, in a properly run game of this type, the players will often be contributing just as much to the storyline as the GM himself.

One of the temptations which the GM should avoid in an improvisational game is the urge to protect key plot-



lines or NPCs by "cheating" on their behalf in various ways—giving a villain extra Wounds or disallowing an action that would defeat him, for example, or creating a plotline that will advance to where the GM wants no matter what the PCs might do. In a planned campaign where the focus is on a relentless plotline and carefully developed dramatic confrontations, these sorts of tricks can be justified to some extent in order to make sure all the GM's careful work does not go to waste. (Though even in a planned game, using GM fiat to save NPCs and maintain stories should be done carefully and sparingly—otherwise the players will quickly grow frustrated with a game in which they are little more than spectators.)

But in an improvisational game, this sort of manipulation should be avoided as much as humanly possible. The whole point of an Air-type game is that the players can change the plot as easily as the GM, so a GM who wraps his NPCs in "plot armor" is violating this. This means the GM cannot always rely on some of the conventional methods of story development and player motivation, such as a recurring villainous mastermind who perpetually thwarts the PCs' plans. In an improv game, the PCs may well be able to catch and defeat the villain in his first plot! But the counterpoint to this problem is the huge advantage that the players get *themselves* invested in the game as they see their ideas and choices becoming part of the game-world.

Sometimes this approach can add quite unexpected depths to the GM's campaign. NPCs in particular can develop in unusual and exciting ways if the GM is willing to embrace the players' contributions. For example, suppose the GM has a minor NPC in his court scenario, a quirky artist whose only intended role is to add flavor to the game. In one scene the GM has this NPC speak to another, more prominent NPC who is opposing the player characters. Suddenly the players become convinced that this little artist is actually the villainous mastermind who is responsible for all their troubles. In a normal game, the GM would ignore this distraction and the players would eventually forget about the little artist and track down the *real* villain the GM has been planning for them to fight. But in an improvisational game, the GM can embrace the players' idea and retask his seemingly harmless artist as the author of all the PCs' woes.

To take another example, consider something that happened in one of my own campaigns. The players were running through an adaptation of the classic L5R adventure *Night of a Thousand Screams*, originally published by AEG in 1998. During one scene, the player characters (pursuing the trail of a rampaging oni) meet a minor NPC, a half-senile old man who is the retired father of a prominent Crane nobleman. The old man asks the PCs for a game of Go, and in the course of the game he reveals an important clue—which he apparently found by accident. The PCs are left wondering if he is truly senile or is actually a cunning and perceptive old samurai.

In the original adventure, that's the end of it—the PCs move on and the old man, a "throw-away character," is forgotten. But we were running a more improvisational campaign, and the players kept going back and visiting the old man over and over again, playing Go with him, trying to figure out how he had found that clue that everyone else had missed. Soon they became convinced that he was actually far more than he seemed, perhaps a retired Harrier who kept his old ninja gear hidden in his room. So, eventually, I decided that was in fact exactly what the old man was, and introduced a new set of plotlines based on his covert past coming back to haunt him. An entire storyline emerged from this NPC, solely because the players became interested in him and wanted to add depth to his personality and backstory.

A skilled GM will embrace such contributions. Even in a highly planned game, the GM should not be afraid to let some Air in to play, to let the players and the creative impulse of the moment take the game in exciting new directions. His campaign will be the better for it.



Chapter One



Daidoji Kirasi strode into the clearing with her arms outstretched, showing empty hands and peaceful intentions. The young Crane's white-dyed hair was noticeably disheveled, while dirt and dust stained her light armor, but the simple daisho at her belt was clean, its hilt wrappings pristine. Kirasi stopped a few feet inside the clearing and called out in a clear, calm voice: "I am Daidoji Kirasi, yoriki to the honorable Emerald Magistrate Shinjo Kobara. I am here to speak with the ronin called Hojaro, who was once known as Kakita Hojaro."

The clearing seemed to spring to life as two ronin scrambled up from around a nearly-spent fire. One snatched up a spear, pointing it menacingly toward the young yoriki, while the other hurriedly pulled his sword from its saya. Their eyes darted between her and the small tent set near the fire.

After a few moments the tent flap opened and an older man in a soiled blue kimono stepped out. He looked to be well into his fourth decade, but his long hair was still black except for the old remnants of white dye on the final six inches or so. His face was seamed with dirt and grime, and contempt twisted his features as he looked at Kirasi. Finally he chuckled. "I suppose I can talk to you before we kill you, girl." The other two ronin looked at each other uneasily, but stepped back and lifted their weapons.

Kirasi bowed slightly, as a samurai would bow to one of lower station. "Thank you for your consideration Hojaro-san. I have come to take you into custody so you may face charges of banditry and the murder of clan samurai. I prefer to do so peacefully, but if it must come to a contest of arms, I am willing to stand against you."

"Do you hear that boys, she wants me to come along peacefully." Hojaro grinned broadly, showing strong yellow teeth. "As if this little girl could make me come along any other way." The other bandits continued to look uncertain, their gazes wavering from their leader to the Crane samurai-ko to the edges of the clearing. Hojaro snorted at them derisively and turned back to Kirasi. "All right, stripling. You want me to come with you, and I don't want to go...obviously. How about we settle this the old fashioned way, the Crane way? You and me, a single draw, winner lives, loser goes to see her ancestors."

Kirasi nodded slightly, her face set and serious, and sketched a shallow bow. "As you say. A duel, then." She stepped back and set her right hand on the hilt of her katana, widening her stance slightly, her eyes narrowing as she tuned out everything but her opponent.

The older man sneered as he moved to stand in front of her, his own hand on his sword-hilt. "Very pretty stance. Did you learn that in the dojo last week? It won't save you." His thumb pressed against the tsuba, loosening his sword in

its saya. "When I killed the last magistrate they sent after me, I thought for sure I was safe from then on. Maybe they'll stop wasting lives after they get your corpse back."

The young yoriki said quietly, "And when my predecessor killed all of your men before you ambushed him, we thought you would go to ground for a long time. I suppose we were both disappointed."

The two duelists faced one another for a long moment. At an almost imperceptible signal, both of them drew, blades flashing silver in the afternoon sunlight. In an instant they were past each other, their swords still held in the final pose of their attacks.

Hojaro's grin held for a second. Then his face went slack as he fell to the leaf- strewn floor of the clearing. Kirasi staggered a moment, then dropped to her knees; a long gash creased her left leg, blood soaking through her blue hakama. As she dropped, the other two ronin stepped forward, one raising his spear to strike.

A hiss cut the air and an arrow flew from the trees in a flash of yellow and green. The shaft buried itself in the ronin's throat. The bandit fell to the earth, thrashing wildly, gurgling his last through bloody lips. His comrade looked around fearfully, waving his sword as though to ward off ghosts. Then he froze as a knife touched his back. A man in a simple black kimono and mask stood behind him, resting the point of his tanto over the bandit's kidney.

The man in black tilted his head toward Kirasi. "I told you entering the clearing alone was foolish."

Daidoji Kirasi tore a strip of cloth from her kimono sleeve and began wrapping it around her wounded leg, staunching the bleeding. "Maybe, but he wouldn't have dueled me if I hadn't. He'd have fled again, and this time we might not have been able to track him."

A young man stepped out of the trees, holding a bow lacquered in yellow and black. "I don't think so, Kira-san. I'd have killed him before he could run."

"Regardless, it worked," the young Crane shrugged. She turned to the single living ronin. "For all I know you've done nothing except to choose the wrong man to serve. We know Hojaro hasn't performed any acts of banditry since recruiting you. You may go, ronin. Run. And remember, if you follow your master into a life of banditry and murder, you will meet the same fate as he. You cannot outrun justice."

The ronin nodded, gulping, as the Scorpion bushi stepped back and sheathed his knife. The former bandit fled the clearing as if wolves were chasing him, barely pausing long enough to snatch up a bundle of clothes.

As he crashed away through the trees, the young archer called after him with laughter in her voice. "You also can't outrun my arrows!"

Air and the Ways of War

The Element of Air is fickle and unpredictable. It can be as soft and subtle as a child's whispered prayer, or as loud and violent as the bellow of a hurricane swallowing a coastal village. Typically, when one thinks of samurai who best exemplify the philosophy of Air, the tendency is to think of courtiers. Those who serve in the courts do indeed embrace the ways of Air, and their methods and approaches are discussed in Chapter Two of this book. However, while the way of Air can be the way of subtlety and stealth, it can also be of swift decisive action and, at times, irrevocable destruction. Thus, warriors from those clans who closely follow the philosophy of Air are often discounted and underestimated. They tend to show restraint until the time is right, quietly restraining themselves and subtly affecting the perceptions of those around them, friend and foe alike. Then, when the time comes for decisive action, they sweep across the battlefield in a tempest of violence, blasting aside all who stand in their way with ferocity and finality.

The duelists of the Crane and the stealthy warriors of the Scorpion best exemplify the philosophy of Air on the battlefield, but there are groups within every clan who follow the ways of Air in one manner or another.

The Crane Clan

"One man, one sword, one strike. All other styles are false."

—Kakita Furagami

The Crane philosophy of Air owes its origins to one of the clan's founders, the man called Kakita. When he married Lady Doji and joined the nascent Crane Clan, he brought with him a unique philosophy of life and of battle, a philosophy he refined and perfected throughout his long life. He articulated most of his views in his treatise *The Sword,* and Crane warriors have pursued his philosophies and methods ever since.



The modern Crane are the acknowledged masters of the art of iaijutsu, the style of dueling which the samurai of the Empire use to settle questions of honor. Iaijutsu dueling is in many ways the epitome of the martial philosophy of Air, but it is not the only way that Crane bushi are taught to follow the way of Air. Even as children, Crane samurai are taught to pay attention not only to what they perceive but also to what they feel about the things they see and hear. They are told to use both perception and feeling to construct a complete picture of the events around them. This unity with their own feelings means that many Crane warriors are also artists. They channel the intensity they feel on the battlefield into other pursuits when combat is not in the offing. There have been many famous Crane warriors who were as well known for their poetry or painting as they were for their prowess on the battlefield.

Of course, this sort of training can be a double-edged sword. Hyperawareness of what they think and feel about everything sometimes leads young Crane samurai to indulge in anything that lets them feel more intensely—an obsession with art or music, for example, or a series of passionate romances (even embracing the un-Rokugani notion of falling in love), and so forth. There is a reason why Crane figure more prominently in plays about romance and loss, and it is not just that more playwrights are themselves Crane. Inevitably, those of less firm and honorable character sometimes follow their urges into unhealthy and shameful actions such as drinking, opium abuse, or gambling.

Thankfully, such excesses are rare. Most Crane samurai use the skills they learn in childhood to become assets to the Empire and their clan. Their study of meditation and iaijutsu focuses and disciplines their feelings, allowing them to maintain their intense awareness of their surroundings and react with nearly inhuman swiftness. This sensitivity is not solely limited to duelists, of course; it also helps make the Daidoji some of best yojimbo in the Empire, and helps Doji courtiers sense the flow of court and negotiations faster than their counterparts. Crane archers are also known for their devotion to the perfect awareness that comes with an intense devotion to Air. Dueling, however, remains the most essential and basic way in which the Crane follow the path of Air.

The Scorpion Clan

"Do not look at my sword, fool. The blade you do not see is the most deadly."

– Bayushi Akusai

The Scorpion Clan follows the philosophy of Air closely, in large part because it meshes quite well with the directive given to their founder, Bayushi, by his brother Hantei. The Scorpion Clan was to do what the others cannot do, thereby keeping the Empire safe. Bayushi himself said, "Historians will some day write great tales of Akodo's bravery and Doji's charm, while we who lurk in shadows will be the villains in their stories. Tricksters and liars: those will be our roles." Lurking in the shadows, quietly flowing through the world unseen, exemplifies the Scorpion approach to the philosophy of Air. While the Crane exemplify the intangible awareness and sudden violence of an unexpected wind, the Scorpion exemplify the quiet and stillness which are also essential parts of Air. Just as it is impossible for the Rokugani to create a vessel which is completely airtight, so too is it impossible to keep the Scorpion from learning any secret they might set their minds to discovering. They are the Empire's undisputed masters of stealth and guile, and this is reflected not only by their courtly activities but also by the way their warriors learn to fight. Where other Rokugani samurai might assault their foes with the raging fury of an unchecked

An Excerpt from The Sword

To observe without moving the eyes, to sharpen the mind as well as the body—the enhancement of the sixth sense should be practiced and refined in order to gain full control of one's mental attitude. In both peaceful times and at war, one's attitude should be the same—refined, noble, and disciplined. Ascertain the truth from the outside in—take in the broad viewpoint, and sharpen the mind until you find the truth within all things. Even when the body is at rest, the mind should be controlled and in a state of concentration. Walk the path of various arts and skills, broaden your knowledge of the world and do not be deceived. If your mind is strong then your spirit will never be hampered by your physical condition, even when you are exhausted or in pain.



wildfire, the inescapable menace of a tsunami, or even the unstoppable force of a crashing avalanche, the Scorpion approach battle with the quiet subtlety of a soft breeze.

It is said by philosophers that a single movement of a butterfly's wings can cause a breeze that will build and build until it becomes a typhoon. It is this subtle manipulation of minor events that makes Scorpion courtiers so effective, but Scorpion bushi also follow this philosophy. If they can quietly arrange for the death of an opposing general before they must face him openly, they count it as victory, even though there was no battle. If a Scorpion bushi seemingly misses a step as he advances on a foe, it is most likely the first of many subtle actions designed to deceive his enemy, leading eventually to total victory. Their adherence to the subtler philosophies of Air is what makes Scorpion bushi so very difficult to assess in combat—and so very dangerous. Like the wind they emulate, it is impossible to know in advance which way they will blow.

The Other Clans

While the Crane and Scorpion are the Great Clans who most exemplify the philosophy of Air, there are families and schools among many of the other clans whose adherence to the way of Air is almost as complete.

The Crab Clan

The Hiruma schools of the Crab Clan combine a fighting philosophy of lightning speed, one some might consider more characteristic of the warriors of the Crane Clan, with an understanding of the practical necessity of stealth that is closer to the Scorpion Clan. While the warriors of the Crane clan use their amazing swiftness to try to fell their enemies with a single perfect strike, the Hiruma prefer to strike their foes many times, wearing them down the way the wind and water slowly but inevitably wear away at stone until it falls to pieces. In the early days of the Empire the Hiruma were sometimes called (somewhat derogatorily) Hummingbird Warriors because they never seemed to be in the same location or to strike from the same place when in battle, instead moving continuously and striking whenever they saw an opening, no matter how small.

Modern Hiruma have been forced to embrace Air even more closely due to the loss of their original school for over three centuries and the development of its replacement, the Hiruma Scouts. The Scouts follow the philosophy of Air even more closely than their predecessors. They flow over the Shadowlands like a quiet breeze, disturbing little but making a big impact in the battle against the forces of Fu Leng. The Hiruma scouts also strike swiftly and unpredictably, but unlike the Hummingbird Warriors they also seek to fade away between each strike, never giving their foes a target to attack. Like the wind, they seek to slip through their foes' grasps and return to fight them again and again.

The Mantis Clan

An archer must trust the Air so much as to let his weapon float upon it, to be aided or at times hindered by its power. Moreover, not only do archers entrust their missiles to the wind, but the very art of archery in Rokugan is largely a matter of instinct. A Rokugani bowman does not aim his shots as a gaijin does, but instead pulls and releases the bowstring in an almost continuous motion, instinctively aware of when he must release the arrow in order to hit the target.

No family in the Empire embraces the way of the bow more closely than the Tsuruchi. The master archers of the Tsuruchi family trust their own instinctive reflexes, their awareness of the way the wind is blowing, of how far the arrow will drop over a given distance—these and innumerable other factors that can affect the flight of an arrow are all sensed and responded to instantly, without the need for conscious thought. In its own way this exemplifies the philosophy of Air as perfectly as an iaijutsu strike.

Iaijutsu: The Definitive Fighting Art of Air

"Some men will tell you of their duels as if they were counting stones on the shore. I cannot do so. I do not know how many duels I have fought, and I cannot tell you how many breaths I have taken. To number them dishonors the brave men who have fallen before the sword, and transforms the instinctual into something contrived. Dueling is a natural art, one which must be practiced before all other things, and one whose reward for perfection is nothing more than life itself. Wielding a sword should be as natural as being alive. The sword must live within you. The stances are its walk, and the rhythm of the swing is the speech of a warrior. Honor is the heart of the duel—the breath and the blood of the sword."

– From the introduction to Kakita's *The Sword*

To most in the Empire, iaijutsu is nothing more than the traditional ritual to settle disputes of honor without resorting to open warfare. However, in truth iaijutsu is much more than just a Rokugani version of rapiers at dawn or an Old West gunfight at noon. It is an art, and hundreds of samurai come to see iaijutsu masters face off against each other. To these aficionados, viewing a perfect strike is like listening to the final poem of great artist, or eating the greatest meal a chef has ever made: it is a moment of perfection that can only be experienced once and then is gone forever. For those who truly seek to master the art of iaijutsu, it is a way of life, something to which they dedicate their entire being, knowing they will probably never truly master it.

The History of Iaijutsu

While the philosophy of "one man, one sword, one strike" has been practiced by the people of northern Rokugan since before the founding of the Empire, its use as an official method of resolving disputes and determining guilt did not come into widespread application until the reign of Hantei II.

Before the fall of the Kami, each of the individual tribes in the lands that became Rokugan had their own ways of resolving disputes. These were often martial competitions of one form or another, and were usually tailored to the traditions and proclivities of the tribes involved. A tribe of large warriors who fought with axes might hold a trial by combat using those selfsame axes, while a tribe of sailors and fishermen might solve a dispute with a race through a treacherous shoal. In some regions many tribes lived near one another, and while their disputes often led to open warfare, at times these tribes adopted a more peaceful and codified method of settling their differences, such as contests of skill or one-on-one battles to the death. While the contests were often broadly similar across tribes, each tribe had its own individual rules and traditions, and some rejected such contests completely.

When the Kami fell, they too chose a way to resolve their differences without warfare, holding the Tournament of the Kami to determine who would lead them and become the first Emperor of Rokugan. Historians are unclear about what the rules were for this tournament, though all agree it was a martial contest. No one is certain as to how it was officiated, what weapons were allowed, what fighting styles were permitted, or how it was judged, but the cultural influence of countless later generations—each offering their own plays, poems, and art to commemorate the great Tournament—has led many modern Rokugani to believe this was in fact the Empire's first contest of iaijutsu. This can be seen as a testament to how deeply the concept and ideals of iaijutsu have permeated Rokugani culture, since in reality the first recorded master of iaijutsu, Kakita, did not appear until many years after the Tournament of the Kami.

Kakita is credited with the true introduction of iaijutsu to Rokugan during the tournament to choose the first Emerald Champion. All accounts agree that Kakita was a small man from an obscure northern tribe, but he won the Tournament and eventually married Lady Doji. While his efforts to promote the concept of "one man, one sword, one strike" were instrumental in bringing the practice of iaijutsu to the forefront of Rokugani consciousness, he was not actually the only warrior to practice the style at the inception of the Empire—merely its most skilled master. The people of what would become northern Rokugani tended to be smaller and more agile than those from other parts of the future Empire, and as such they developed a fighting style which relied on speed and agility rather than strength. Many of them would go into combat with a sheathed blade in order to lure their opponents into a false sense of complacency, since opponents would approach an iaijutsu fighter with a sheathed sword much less warily than they would a man with a bared blade, axe, or spear. The northern tribes also held ritualized duels to settle conflicts, both between individuals and between tribes. These were seen as religious rituals that called on the Fortunes to judge the truth of the matter, and thus the outcome was accepted as binding to both sides—an early form of the customs which the Empire would later build up around iaijutsu dueling.

By the time he ventured south to join the Emerald Tournament, nineteen-year-old Kakita was already a master of this style of combat, far superior to the others in his tribe. He had been a prodigy since his early teens and studied the fighting arts more intensely than many warriors who were twice or even three times his age. Thus when he came to prominence at the Emerald Tournament, his iaijutsu fighting was amazingly practiced, fluid, and efficient, and easily overcame everyone he faced in battle—including Lady Matsu, who had been widely expected to win.



As word of Kakita's great victory spread across the Empire, the iaijutsu style drew everyone's attention. Every ambitious warrior wanted to learn it. Some of them merely wished to become more powerful, or to defeat a rival who had already learned iaijutsu, but many—especially younger warriors—greatly admired Kakita himself and sought to emulate his skill and artistry. The immense influence he gained through both his positions as the Emperor's champion and his marriage to Lady Doji allowed Kakita to both refine and disseminate his fighting style. Within a few years of the first Emerald Tournament, many of the courts in the lands surrounding Otusan Uchi had adopted iaijutsu as their official method of resolving disagreements and conflicts of honor. Naturally all of Crane courts did so, as well as the new Imperial court. However, at this early stage most outlying courts and strongholds did not yet accept iaijutsu, especially in the lands of the Crab and the Lion, where the warriors clung to their own—often more brutal—methods of conflict resolution.

Over time, however, the cultural influence of the Crane and the dissemination of early works such as Kakita's *The Sword* and Kakita Takamitsu's second-century novel *The Journey of a Single Strike* led to the steady spread of iaijutsu across the Empire and the growing acceptance of the art as the proper way of settling disagreements. When Soshi Saibankan and Doji Hatsuo codified the laws of Rokugan in the year 153, iaijutsu was officially adopted as part of the legal system. In situations where a samurai's guilt was not clear, or where his honor and repute had come into question, he could demand a trial by combat with iaijutsu. The laws also codified the rules for official (and therefore lawful) duels, requiring samurai to gain the permission of their lords before entering a lethal duel. Up until this time duels of all kinds had been quite commonplace, and many warriors would challenge others to duels for the slimmest of offenses, or merely to prove their strength or eliminate a rival. Some samurai traveled the Empire, challenging others wherever they went, or hiring themselves out as champions. The new laws greatly reduced these sorts of abuses and reinforced the social conventions which the Crane Clan was trying to erect around dueling.

In modern Rokugan, iaijutsu dueling is accepted everywhere as the true, proper, and honorable method of resolving differences between samurai. Although some clans still maintain their own internal traditions—the Crab sometimes resolve quarrels with wrestling matches, the Tsuruchi with archery contests—for the Empire as a whole, iaijutsu reigns supreme. Consequently, almost every bushi in the Empire has learned at least the rudiments of iaijutsu dueling so they can defend their honor if called to do so, and almost every clan can boast of at least a few iaijutsu masters who have devoted their whole lives to the art.

Famous Duels

"A duelist learns the limits of his mind and body, so that he may bypass them for one perfect moment."

– Kakita Toshimoko, Kakita Dueling Master

Since the founding of the Empire there have been thousands of iaijutsu duels. Many of them were over trivial matters, although doubtless they seemed at the time to be of grave importance. But there were some which shook the very foundations of the Empire itself. The following section lists a few of the more famous and important iaijutsu duels in the history of Rokugan.

Kakita vs. Matsu: The First Emerald Tournament

Although this match was not actually a traditional iaijutsu duel, it is the fight that first brought the art of iaijutsu to the attention of the Empire at large. Emperor Hantei announced a competition to choose a mortal warrior as his personal champion and bodyguard. Samurai from all across the new Rokugan entered the competition, as did many who did not yet follow one of the Kami. Kakita was one of the latter. His swift and unexpected fighting style allowed him to pass easily through the tournament, although he showed respect to each of his opponents and complimented their skill. In a few instances he even offered advice to younger opponents.

By contrast, the lady Matsu, follower of Akodo, belittled and mocked her opponents, while using her great strength and force of personality to intimidate and defeat them. Kakita was angered by her behavior, and when he met Matsu in the finals he decided to teach her a lesson. Their battle was a clash of opposites. Matsu was a flurry of action, movement, and fury, attempting to intimidate Kakita so that he might make a mistake. Conversely, Kakita was an island of calm—and won the fight in a single flash of motion. Instead of bowing to the fallen Lion as he had to all of his other opponents, Kakita turned his back on her and walked away. Matsu was furious and swore vengeance, beginning the great feud of Lion and Crane that lasted a thousand years.

Although this duel is best remembered for the blood feud that it spawned, it is also famous for first showing the effectiveness of Kakita's single-strike style. Kakita, installed as the Emperor's champion, soon married Lady Doji and his fighting technique spread all across the Empire.

Kakita vs. Mirumoto Hojatsu: Two Duels

This famous pair of first-century duels cemented iaijutsu's place as the preeminent martial form, but also demonstrated that the *niten* two-sword style created by the Dragon samurai Mirumoto was a potent rival to Kakita's one-sword style.

In the early years of the Empire the discussion of which style of sword-fighting was more effective—Mirumoto's *niten* style or Kakita's one-sword style—was an intense topic both in the courts and in the dojo. Warriors often came to blows over whose sensei taught the superior fighting art. Near the end of Kakita's tenure as Emerald Champion, the Emperor asked him to duel the acknowledged master of the *niten* style, Mirumoto's son Hojatsu, to determine once and for all which style was superior. The two swordmasters faced each other on the field of honor, neither moving. It is unclear how long they faced each other—some legends say they stood for mere moments, others claim hours or even a full day. All accounts agree, however, that at the end both men bowed to the other and walked away, neither able to dare a strike against the other.

A few years later Kakita and Mirumoto Hojatsu faced each other for a final time during a minor skirmish between the Crane and the Lion. Hojatsu knew this might be his last chance to face the aging Kakita, and joined the Lion as an advisor to meet his old rival on the field of battle. While the combat raged around them, the two men faced each other and at some unspoken signal struck, all but simultaneously. Hojatsu was slain instantly, but Kakita was mortally wounded. He called for his son to bring him Hojatsu's sword, said, "Finish the job your master began," and fell upon the blade.

Although the second duel proved the one-sword style was marginally superior to *niten*, the death of both masters proved the difference was slight indeed—and the honor which the two men showed each other in both matches ensured their followers did not allow the rivalry to grow too bitter. Although the followers of *niten* still consider their method of fighting to be the best overall, they grudgingly acknowledge the superiority of the Kakita style in iaijutsu dueling.

Hantei Yugozuhime vs. Hantei Soujiro: Duel for the Empire

In the early fifth century, a duel decided nothing less than the future of all Rokugan. For two generations the Gozoku conspiracy had reduced the Hantei Emperors to figureheads, controlling the Empire from behind the scenes while two successive puppet Emperors did their bidding. When Hantei VI died in the year 435, the Gozoku prepared to install his eldest son Soujiro as successor. However, when Soujiro arrived at the capital of Otosan Uchi to assume the throne, he found himself confronted by his sister Yugozuhime. Princess Yugozuhime had been raised among the Lion, who taught her the ways of honor and the true role of the Hantei as unquestioned Emperors of Rokugan. With the support of the Lion and the Dragon, Yugozuhime challenged her brother, naming him a traitor to his family, and demanded he face her blade in hand. Since Soujiro had not yet been crowned, he lacked the rank to simply dismiss Yugozuhime's challenge, and with the entire Imperial Court in attendance he could not refuse it without catastrophic loss of face.

Yugozuhime and Soujiro faced each other in the main court chamber of Otosan Uchi with all of the Empire's senior officials watching. Yugozuhime's blade struck swift and true, and her brother fell dead at her feet. She immediately claimed the throne as Hantei VII, and with the strength of the Lion behind her the Gozoku Alliance was overthrown within a matter of weeks.

Togashi Nyoko vs. Hida Raiden: The Duel of the Moment's Edge

During the reign of Hantei XVI, a Crab warrior named Hida Raiden emerged as one of the few Crab to ever truly master the ways of iaijutsu. So impressive were his skills that his lord gave him open permission to travel the Empire and challenge any duelist to a lethal contest, bringing fame to the Crab and intimidating those who might oppose the plans of the Clan of Hida. In the dark reign of Hantei XVI such an act drew little censure, so Raiden roamed all across Rokugan, fighting numerous duels and winning all of them. In time, many duelists came to fear him and avoided his attention, knowing that to accept one of his challenges was to seal their own doom.

That finally changed when Raiden arrived in the city of Ryoko Owari Toshi to challenge Togashi Nyoko, a woman known for simultaneously pursuing the ways of the Togashi order, the art of swordsmithing, and the path of the duelist. Raiden mocked her lifestyle, claiming it was impossible to do all three. Nyoko responded that she would prove all her paths could work in harmony, and met Raiden on one of the city's bridges at sunrise.

The duel began and ended in an instant, Raiden falling with a deep slash in his belly. "Impossible," he gasped, "no one alive is so fast!"

Nyoko replied: "I am alive and dead; dead to the past and dead to the future, because I live at the moment's edge." Seeing comprehension in Raiden's eyes, she cut off his head and ended his life before his pain could drive him to dishonor himself.

In memory of this legendary clash, the bridge was renamed as the Bridge of the Moment's Edge, a name it still carries in modern times, and the tale of Hida Raiden's fight with Nyoko is still remembered in Ryoko Owari Toshi.

Mirumoto Satsu vs. Hida Yakamo: Sword Against Tetsubo

The duel between Mirumoto Satsu and Hida Yakamo is remembered not because it was an honorable duel or one of artistry and beauty, but rather because of the blatant disregard Yakamo showed for Rokugan's dueling tradition.

In the early twelfth century Hida Yakamo, son of the Crab Clan Champion, was accused of improper remarks by the wife of Mirumoto Satsu, son of the Mirumoto family daimyo and one of the finest duelists of his generation. As is customary in such situations, Satsu offered Yakamo the chance to apologize for his actions, but the Crab warrior refused, insisting that Satsu's wife was a liar. Accordingly, Satsu challenged Yakamo to a duel to the death to prove his wife's honor. Yakamo had no choice but to accept, and the next morning the two faced each other on the field of honor, with hundreds of witnesses present. But as Yakamo approached the dueling circle, all could see he had brought his tetsubo, the spiked club favored by the Crab. When the duel began, Yakamo simply smashed Satsu down with the tetsubo, finishing the match by crushing the Dragon's skull. It was an unprecedented action, disregarding every tradition and disgracing the Crab warrior.

Since Yakamo was the son of the Crab Clan Champion, he suffered little direct repercussion for his disregard for honorable behavior. However, his actions brought about a blood feud with Mirumoto Satsu's younger sister, Hitomi, which would last for decades after. That feud would eventually be responsible for the deaths of thousands and the ascension of mortals to the positions of Sun and Moon.

Some sages claim Satsu lost the duel on purpose, that a skilled swordsman and duelist could never have lost legitimately to a brute like Yakamo in a formal duel. According to these claims, Clan Champion Togashi Yokuni ordered Satsu to lose so that Yakamo could live to become the Crab Clan Thunder. The Crab Clan, naturally, denies this claim completely. Whatever the reason for Satsu's loss, this incident remains one of the most egregious examples of disregarding the etiquette and traditions of dueling in Rokugan.

Akodo Kaneka vs. Yasuki Hachi: Victory With No Strike

Not all of the Empire's famous and memorable duels have been duels to the death. A few have been the simplest (some would say the purest) of duels: a comparison of stances. Such was the case in the year 1159 when Yasuki Hachi, the Emerald Champion and daimyo of the Yasuki family, faced Akodo Kaneka, bastard son of Emperor Toturi I, in Friendly Traveler Village in the provinces of the Yasuki.



The Empire was in the midst of a crisis known as the Four Winds Era, as Kaneka contested with his three legitimate half-siblings for control of the Throne. Evidence had emerged which seemed to give Kaneka a closer familial connection to the previous Yasuki daimyo (through his mother's side) than Yasuki Hachi, whose own posting as daimyo was a source of considerable controversy already. Kaneka had built up an army and gained support from some of the clans, but unfortunately, his mother was known to be a simple geisha, and much of the Empire laughed at his claims. When Kaneka arrived in Yasuki territory to take control of the lands he believed were rightfully his, Yasuki Hachi and the entirety of the Fifth Imperial Legion rode out to meet him. Kaneka and Hachi exchanged first pleasantries and then insults, each trying to goad the other into a duel. Finally Kaneka voiced an insult that caused Hachi to touch his sword-

hilt, an obvious challenge which Kaneka immediately accepted. In point of fact, Hachi did not want a duel, but he could not retract the challenge without losing face and dishonoring his office, himself, and his clan. He knew that if he won the duel he would be killing one of the sons of the Emperor, which would cause severe political damage to the Crane Clan and likely drive the Lion and Crane into war. But if he lost, it would mean the death of the Emerald Champion during a time of great political strife, again causing immense political damage to the Crane Clan.

Hachi resolved the problem by doing what the Crane Clan does best: he ceded a smaller issue to gain advantage in the future. Kaneka expected the two warriors would draw and one of them would die. Kaneka was himself one of the most feared duelists in the Empire at the time and had defeated dozens of foes, including the previous Kakita daimyo. Hachi was an extremely skilled duelist in his own right, having bested all he faced in the Emerald Championship. Rather than draw, Hachi asked Kaneka to show him his stance. Kaneka was confused, but Hachi reminded him not all duels must be to the death. Kaneka took his stance and drew with a fluidity that Hachi knew he could not quite match. Hachi then took his own stance, but drew with the clumsy ineptitude of a first year samurai, imitating the most basic of Akodo kata. Having subtly insulted Kaneka with his draw, Hachi bowed before the son of Toturi and withdrew from the field.

Hachi's willingness to duel Kaneka without bloodshed allowed both men to faithfully serve the Empire for years to come. No one knows what would have happened had the duel gone differently, but it is likely that the loss of one or both men would have had dire consequences for the Empire.

Iaijutsu Training

Two dozen children waited in orderly rows on the polished wooden floor of the dojo. A middle-aged man in a simple blue kimono stood in front of them. "Today we learn to master our breath," he told the assembled children. "Prepare yourselves, my students."

From somewhere near the back of the room, stifled laughter emerged from a pair of boys. The sensei's face did not change, but he strode quickly to the back of the room, his eyes bearing down on the students like a hunter seeking prey. "Someone is amused. Please, share this entertainment with the rest of the class."

After a moment one of the boys spoke. He was immaculately groomed, dressed in clothing which, despite the plainness of training garb, was unmistakably of very high quality. His voice held exactly the correct amount of respect, no more, no less, "Sensei, we are here to learn how to duel. All you've taught us for the last week is how to breathe. When do we get to use swords?" The young man's eyes brightened eagerly as he said the final word.

The sensei nodded slightly, as though to himself. Perhaps he uttered a small sigh, although the students could not be sure. "Iaijutsu is about more than swords, my student. It is about mastery of the body, mind, and soul. Without that mastery, you will never be able to understand iaijutsu, never be more than a crude brawler no matter how many hours you practice with your blade. This year you begin to learn to master yourself. Next year most students will be allowed to touch bokken, and in the third year you may...perhaps...be allowed to draw a sword. Of course, for some students it takes longer for them to master themselves, and they do not get to use bokken until their third year and swords in their fourth." The student gulped, and the sensei permitted himself a faint smile. "Now, shall we focus on our breathing? Or do you wish to wait four years before you touch a katana?"

All Rokugani clans teach their students the basics of iaijutsu during their initial training. However, because iaijutsu plays such an important role in Rokugani society, there are several schools and dojo that teach the art exclusively. Although these are most prominent in the lands of the Crane and the Dragon, small dojo teaching iaijutsu dueling can be found in almost every clan. Of course, these dojo vary widely in size, curriculum, and prestige. Some are simply places where samurai train intensely in the basic skills of iaijutsu so they will not be completely incapable of dueling if they are required to do so. Others are specialized schools which cater to specific groups of samurai and teach enough about iaijutsu that their students will have a superior chance in a duel. And of course there is the Kakita Dueling Academy, an entire school in which students live the art of iaijutsu every day.

The following section describes the most prestigious dojo which teach iaijutsu dueling. Of course, "prestigious" may mean something different for a clan like the Crab, where dueling is regarded as at best a necessary evil, than among the Crane or Dragon where it is seen as the summit of the warrior's art.

Crab: Unbreakable Blade Dojo

Few samurai of the Crab have any interest in learning much about iaijutsu. Disputes between Crab are often settled with a simple fist fight or a drinking contest. Serious conflicts or questions of honor may be settled with a wrestling match or a semi-formalized fight in full armor, using whatever weapon each combatant prefers. However, even within the Crab there are those who understand that the Empire is more than just the Wall and that when they are in the lands of other clans they must conform to the traditions of the rest of the Empire. These samurai founded the Unbreakable Blade Dojo.

The Unbreakable Blade is the one place that Crab can go to learn the art of iaijutsu. There are very few students at the dojo at any one time, and most of them are samurai slated to serve as yojimbo for Crab diplomats. It may be noted, however, that even among the Crab there are those

who embrace the way of the duel for its own sake, and every Clan Champion of the Crab spends at least some time at the dojo.

Notwithstanding the Crab Clan's overall reputation for spurning iaijutsu, the instructors at the Unbreakable Blade are surprisingly skilled and have produced more than one notable duelist—most famously Hida Raiden, whose final duel in Ryoko Owari is still remembered in the twelfth century. However, the Unbreakable Blade sensei do understand that the true strength of the Crab is not in their speed but in their endurance. As a result, they teach their students that while striking first in a duel is best, there are times when it is better for a duelist to strike second. The instructors make sure their students can stay alive through the first strike to deliver the final one.

Crane: The Kakita Dueling Academy

"A skilled swordsman can defeat one enemy. A skilled teacher can defeat thousands."

– Doji Hoturi, Crane Clan Champion, twelfth century

The art of iaijutsu and the Kakita Dueling Academy are inexorably linked. Kakita himself founded the Academy and most Rokugani believe that anyone who truly wishes to master iaijutsu must train there. However, the reverence with which most of Rokugan holds the Dueling Academy has both good and bad aspects. Every year, thousands visit the Academy, hoping to get a glimpse at the inner workings of the greatest iaijutsu school in the Empire, a veritable temple dedicated to the art. The Academy also receives thousands more requests to train every year, many from the other clans. This is a tremendous asset to the Crane, since admission to the Academy is a mighty prize. But with so many visitors, it is often difficult for the Academy to safeguard all of its secret techniques, and over the centuries many aspects of those techniques have shown up in the training of other schools.

Since gaining admittance to the Kakita Dueling Academy is one of the highest honors a samurai child can receive, competition to win a place within the school is intense. Any who succeed are said to be destined for great things in life. And the greatest of all honors is to win readmittance to the Academy later in life to train among the elite Kenshinzen, a prize that marks a samurai as one of the best duelists in the Empire.

The list of famous graduates from the Kakita Dueling Academy is long indeed, and includes almost every Hantei Emperor and many of the Empire's greatest heroes, such as Doji Hoturi and Kakita Toshimoko.

Dragon: The Dojo of the Mirror

A sensei among the Kitsuki once asked his students, "What do you see when you look in the mirror?" Each replied, "I see myself, sensei." The sensei said, "Do you not also see the rest of the world? Are you so vain as think that you are apart from the rest of creation?" This lesson is the foundation for the teachings of the Dojo of the Mirror.

In the centuries since the duel between Kakita and Mirumoto Hojatsu, those who have studied *niten* use the two-sword technique when dueling, rather than the Crane one-sword strike. In their own way the Dragon still study iaijutsu as fervently as any other samurai, but their training methods are radically different from those of other clans. However, traditional one-sword iaijutsu dueling is also taught in the clan, chiefly among the Kitsuki. They believe it is important to know all that one can about those outside of the lands of the Dragon, to see all of the Empire rather than merely themselves. These students train in the Dojo of the Mirror.

In the Dojo of the Mirror the instructors teach their students the art of iaijutsu, and their most famous graduates are the Kitsuki Justicars who use duels to support their quest for truth and justice. The sensei teach them to recognize other duelists' stances and the patterns of their strikes, teach them to recognize what schools they may have attended and what weaknesses each school creates in its students. Its graduates include the noted duelist and magistrate Kitsuki Kaagi and the famed duelist Togashi Nyoko who defeated Hida Raiden in the duel of the Moment's Edge.

It may be noted that the Dojo of the Mirror is not solely devoted to iaijutsu—in keeping with its philosophies, it also teaches other unconventional weapons and fighting techniques, such as heavy weapons and sumai wrestling.



Lion: Heart of the Katana

Almost all Lion bushi learn at least the rudiments of iaijutsu so they can defend their honor when necessary, but only a few pursue the art with true dedication, for the career of a soldier seldom allows for such personal commitment. Those who do manage to embrace the ways of iaijutsu usually train at the Akodo family's Heart of the Katana dojo, which is also where the Akodo train their famous Kensai swordmasters. While the Heart of the Katana is not solely an iaijutsu school, all of the instructors and students take the dueling art very seriously. The students' training in iaijutsu is of course not nearly as comprehensive as that which they might have at the Kakita Dueling Academy, but nonetheless many skilled duelists have emerged from the Heart of the Katana. Matsu Ketsui, the twelfth century Matsu family daimyo who fought many victorious duels, was a graduate of the Heart of the Katana.

Mantis: The Green Blade Dojo

The Mantis are of all the Great Clans the one least interested in the art of iaijutsu—unsurprising given the history of the Minor Clans who joined together to create them. The Yoritomo lived for centuries as sailors and pirates, fighting with peasant weapons and seldom touching a katana at all. The Tsuruchi rejected the sword for the bow, and while some in their ranks accepted the sword in later generations it remains a poor second to archery in their ranks. The Kitsune were swordsmen at need, but lived so isolated from the rest of Rokugan than they seldom if ever faced a duel. It was the Moshi family, the most traditional in their social attitudes if not in their other customs, to realize that a Great Clan with no skilled duelists was at a severe disadvantage in Rokugani politics. Thus was the Green Blade Dojo founded, a process assisted by cashing in some favors with the Crane Clan.

The Green Blade lacks the long history of other iaijutsu dojo, for it was not created until after the Mantis Clan became a Great Clan in the early twelfth century. Its curriculum is simple and straightforward, and there are seldom more than two dozen students training in the school at any given time. Thus far no graduates of the Green Blade have earned lasting fame in Rokugan, though doubtless that will change with time.

Phoenix: The Shiba Bushi School

The Phoenix are a traditionalist clan and fully understand and respect the importance of iaijutsu in Rokugani society, but iaijutsu training has never been a primary focus of their warrior teachings. Rather, it is a secondary but important aspect of their more general training to serve as protectors and personal yojimbo to the shugenja of the Isawa. Thus there are only a few sensei in the Shiba Bushi School who teach iaijutsu, but they are all acknowledged masters in the art, and those who train under them can expect to become skilled and capable duelists. Because the Shiba are so self-effacing in their duties, always letting the Isawa lead, the duelists among them seldom achieve great fame—and when they do become famous, it is usually not for winning duels. Shiba Toriiko, the Clan Champion who shamed Lion and Crane into peace at the Battle of the Broken Daisho, was a quite skillful duelist, but she is remembered for refusing to draw her sword when she faced Kakita Gosano on that field.

Scorpion: Bayushi Bushi School

The Scorpion, surprisingly, take iaijutsu and its traditions very seriously. After the Crane, the Scorpion are the most conventional clan when it comes to dueling traditions, for the strength of a duel can overturn any number of political attacks. If a Scorpion scheme is uncovered or a Scorpion courtier is humiliated, a Scorpion duelist is always ready to step forward and turn back the threat with the edge of his blade.

All Scorpion bushi are taught the basics of iaijutsu, and anyone with real talent will receive advanced training as well. They must also learn the traditions that other clans follow when dueling so they will never be caught unprepared in a situation where a duel may result. Some of the more gifted students are also taught how to make it seem they are a more (or less) talented duelist than they are, so as to intimidate their foes or lull them into a false sense of confidence. The specialized duelists known in modern times as Saigo's Blades are masters of using intimidation and deceit to gain an edge in their duels, and it is these skillful warriors who usually stand for the clan when victory is absolutely required.

However, the Scorpion also conduct a unique variation on iaijutsu training: they learn how to lose duels without letting others realize they lost on purpose. While the Scorpion Clan likes to win when it can, it also recognizes that there can be much advantage gained from letting their enemies believe them weak or defeated. No other clan considers defeat an acceptable outcome to a duel, but among the Scorpion, all that matters is what ultimately benefits the clan.

Unicorn: The Single Strike Dojo

When the Unicorn returned to the Empire they discovered a land which had developed a great many divergent traditions over the course of eight hundred years. The custom of iaijutsu dueling had only just started to emerge when Shinjo left Rokugan, and the universal acceptance of the duel as the proper way to settle disputes did not come into being until long after. During the Unicorn Clan's long journeys through the Burning Sands and other gaijin lands, the forms and skill of iaijutsu were completely forgotten, and when the clan finally returned the ways of dueling had to be learned all over again.

Fortunately, the Unicorn gained the early friendship of the Crane Clan, who contributed sensei to teach the ways of dueling to their new allies. Within a few decades the Ide, recognizing the importance of iaijutsu in matters of

Dueling in the Shadowlands

Through most of history, the Shadowlands has ignored the art of the duel. The beasts of Jigoku and the murderous Lost have no respect for Rokugani social traditions, dueling among them. That changed somewhat after Daigotsu founded the City of the Lost and began to organize the Lost into a pseudo-samurai society, a dark mirror of Rokugan. This led to the creation of the Cursed Blade Dojo, an evil mockery of a true Rokugani dojo in which the Lost learned the ways of Rokugani swordsmanship, including the art of iaijutsu.

The Cursed Blade dojo was burned to the ground when Daigotsu abandoned the City of the Lost and took most of his followers into the Empire to form the Spider Clan. Spider bushi generally relied on individual instructors to teach them iaijutsu, often learning from non-Tainted bushi who joined the clan in the misguided belief they were serving a noble cause.

diplomacy, opened a dojo to specifically teach iaijutsu: the Single Strike Dojo.

In modern times any Unicorn who wishes to learn more than just the rudiments of iaijutsu—typically those who must serve as yojimbo—travels to the lands of the Ide to train at the Single Strike Dojo. The Single Strike has a truly eclectic collection of sensei, accepting any who the staff deems worthy to teach iaijutsu. On one occasion the dojo even had a ronin as head sensei for a few years. Although the dojo's teachings are effective, it has thus far not produced any duelists of great note; the path of the duelist does not seem to appeal to Unicorn samurai in the same way as to others.

Ronin: Nanashi Mura—the Dojo of the Eye

Ronin have as many reasons to learn iaijutsu as other bushi do; indeed, given that they have no lord who can protect them from frivolous challenges, they often need iaijutsu skills more than any clan samurai, simply to protect their lives. For the most part, ronin dueling techniques (such as the Gaze of Sun Tao) are passed down personally from one warrior to the next, although the more skilled wave-men will sometimes open private dojo to teach their skills in return for a fee.

In the twelfth century the Dragon sponsor a permanent ronin settlement in the town called Nanashi Mura. The ronin brotherhood known as the Eyes of Nanashi, tasked with protecting the village, formed their own dojo to assist their training: the Dojo of the Eye. Its task is to ensure the ronin of Nanashi Mura will always be able to defend their city—and this means iaijutsu training as well as more conventional martial studies. However, the Dojo of the Eye has never produced a famous duelist from among its ranks. Most of the truly famed ronin duelists, men such as Dairya from the Clan War era, are individuals of unique talent, relying on their natural gifts rather than secret Techniques to prevail over their foes.

Imperial Families: The Sapphire Blade Dojo

The Seppun stand ready to defend the person and the honor of the Emperor at any moment. To do so they must be trained in all ways of combat, including the art of iaijutsu. The Sapphire Blade Dojo, located in the Seppun Training Grounds in Otosan Uchi (later moved to Toshi Ranbo after Otosan Uchi was burned), teaches every young Seppun bushi how to fight on behalf of the Emperor.

Iaijutsu is an important part of the Sapphire Blade Dojo's curriculum, for every Seppun warrior is taught that he might at any time need to defend the honor of the Emperor in a duel. Where a Lion, Crab, or Unicorn might learn iaijutsu on the off chance of someday facing a challenge, the Seppun know their duties will require them to use the skill, and treat their training as seriously as life and death. For all their dedication, however, the number of genuinely famous Seppun duelists in the Empire's history is rather short—their duties to the Emperor leave them little time to seek glory elsewhere. Indeed, the Seppun themselves believe their duties should always take precedence over personal fame. Probably the most notable exception in the family's history was Seppun Toshiken, a formidable duelist who became Emerald Champion during the reign of Emperor Toturi I.

The Art of the Duel

"The secret of swordplay is not the swift defeat, not the prolonged strike and block. A pure stroke will defeat any technique."

– from Kakita's The Sword

Iaijutsu dueling is the traditional method of settling disputes in Rokugan, and is wrapped about in a great variety of traditions, customs, and rules. The following section offers detailed explanations for when and where duels are warranted and how they are to be conducted and completed. For the sake of example, we will accompany these discussions with the tale of a clash between two honorable men, Matsu Yoshi and Kakita Hiro.



When is a duel warranted, and how is one commissioned?

"Only a fool initiates a duel he cannot win."

- Doji Kishio

It should always be remembered that the Rokugani have never codified any specific rules for what sort of offenses are worthy of a duel. Each offense is judged individually, and often each clan, family, or local daimyo will have a different idea of what kinds of insults require redress with a duel.

A duel is most commonly demanded when one samurai is insulted by another. (It should go without saying that only samurai can challenge or be challenged—commoners are never permitted to engage in duels.) A samurai can challenge another samurai when he has been personally insulted, or in response to an insult against his family, lord, or clan. He can also issue a challenge on behalf of family members who do not have the ability to challenge for themselves (such as a spouse or child).

Conversely, a samurai cannot challenge another over a personal insult to another samurai. The insulted samurai must defend him- or herself. For example, if Matsu Yoshi calls Kakita Hiro a cowardly geisha, Hiro may challenge Yoshi to a duel, but if Yoshi offers the same insult to Hiro's friend Ide Taro, Kakita Hiro may not challenge Matsu Yoshi on Taro's behalf. However, a samurai can serve as champion for a fellow samurai who has issued a challenge but does not carry a sword of his own (e.g. a shugenja or courtier)—in this case, the champion fights in place of the challenging samurai, who shares his fate if he loses. Continuing the above example, let us suppose Ide Taro is a courtier who does not carry a sword. Taro challenges Matsu Yoshi for his insult, and Kakita Hiro agrees to serve as Taro's champion. If Hiro loses the duel, Taro will have to commit seppuku, sharing his champion's death.

It should be noted that a challenged samurai can usually get out of a duel by sincerely apologizing for the insult or misdeed that caused the challenge in the first place. Of course, making such an apology entails a loss of face (and with it, a loss of Glory), so many samurai prefer to fight a duel rather than admit a mistake.

There are a few situations where challenges can be dismissed or ignored. If the challenger is of significantly lower social station (two or more Ranks of Status), he is acting beyond his rank, and the challenged can opt to simply shrug him off and dismiss his accusations. (In some cases, however, a higher-Status samurai may choose to accept the duel anyway in order to defeat and humiliate the one who dared to challenge him.) For the same reason, a challenge from a ronin can be easily ignored if a samurai wishes, although many clan warriors accept such challenges, calling them "dueling practice."

It may be noted that redressing insults is not the only occasion on which a duel might be called for. Any magistrate is allowed to authorize a duel if an accused samurai wishes to prove by trial of combat that he or she is innocent of a crime; as one might expect, these duels are always to the death. Duels may also sometimes be used informally to settle minor disputes between samurai of equal social position. For example, suppose a Lion and Unicorn magistrate both track a criminal into unclaimed territory and corner him in an inn. Both magistrates have an equal claim to the criminal, and neither wishes to give him up to the other. In these circumstances the two magistrates might duel to first blood to decide which of them will take the criminal into custody.

Duels may also take place on the battlefield. Often these are nothing more than simple one-on-one fights between samurai who single each other out, but on some occasions two samurai may actually go into iaijutsu stance and face each other formally amidst the chaos of battle. When this happens, other combatants will go out of their way not to interfere with the duel, and when the combatants are of great fame or stature the battle may actually come to a halt (at least in the near vicinity) as the other soldiers watch the outcome. The outcome of such a duel may have a significant impact on morale and the course of the battle, especially if high-ranking officers or prominent heroes are involved; the Crane Clan makes a practice of using such duels to cripple enemy leadership, turning the tide of otherwise unwinnable battles. It should go without saying that duels on the battlefield do not require authorization—it is implied when the battle begins.



Dueling Protocol

Once a challenge has been issued, the two duelists must decide upon the form of duel. Will it be to first blood, an acceptable response to a minor insult, or to the death, as required for a grievous offense? It is also possible for both parties to agree to a duel waged in some manner other than iaijutsu, although this is unusual. Iaijutsu is the traditional form of dueling, accepted all across the Empire, so other forms of dueling are only used when both parties agree—otherwise it will be an iaijutsu duel by default. For example, if Matsu Yoshi and Kakita Hiro are to duel each other, Yoshi might wish to make it a duel of simple kenjutsu rather than iaijutsu, but unless Hiro agrees (unlikely) the duel will have to be iaijutsu.

After the duel's form is decided, if it is to be fought to the death official protocol calls for both parties to petition their direct superiors for permission—after all, a samurai cannot throw his life away without his lord's orders. In most cases, authorization is routine, but on rare occasions a lord will refuse permission—usually in order to shame an underling who is dueling over trivial or childish causes.

Once a challenge has been accepted and (if necessary) authorized, the challenged party may choose the time and location of the duel. In theory, any time within a year and any place within the Empire is acceptable. In practice, delaying a duel for a long time can be seen as cowardice unless there are circumstances beyond everyone's control, such as an extended war. Most duels to first blood take place the same day of the challenge, and even lethal duels can take place very quickly if high authorities are available to authorize them promptly (such as at Winter Court).

The choice of place is often calculated to make the challenger as uncomfortable as possible, such as in the challenged samurai's home castle where he can rely on a large and sympathetic audience to gain a psychological advantage. Truly skilled duelists, however, do not require such tricks and will choose a location that reflects the beauty of the art of iaijutsu, such as a beautiful forest glade or an elegant garden. Cowardly duelists may try to demand dangerous or unreasonable locations (such as the top of the Kaiu Wall), but if they take such choices too far they will shame themselves with their arrogance and frivolity, allowing their foe to claim victory.

Once both duelists arrive at the assigned time and place, various preparatory rituals will take place, varying according to the clans involved. Each clan has its own set of traditions to be followed when a duel is to take place. For example, when Lion duel they will generally spend time (sometimes as much as a half hour) reciting their heritage and the deeds of their ancestors. The Crab often duel in full heavy armor with abundant ceremony and symbolism. The Phoenix have shugenja bless the dueling circle and lead the assembled audience in prayer. The Crane proclaim their school and sensei, a custom popular enough that many other samurai emulate it. The Mantis require that truly important duels take place on the deck of a ship at sea, and so forth.

Every formal duel has three participants: the challenger, the challenged, and an impartial judge who oversees the proceedings. It is this judge's responsibility to make certain all proper dueling protocol is carried out and that the duel is honorable and fair. Judges are sometimes experienced duelists themselves, but are just as likely to be the lord of the castle or court where the duel is taking place. In cases where legal proceedings are involved, the presiding mag-

Enduring the Shame

A samurai is always entitled to issue a challenge for an insult from someone of equal or lower social standing. However, if a samurai is insulted by his superiors—his lord or military commander, his Clan Champion, the Emperor, etc.—he is expected to maintain face and endure the insult with dignity. Indeed, the more honorable the samurai, the more stoically and serenely he will endure humiliation and abuse at the hands of his lord. Such samurai are remembered for their honorable behavior long after their abusive and disgraceful superiors have been forgotten.

Sometimes, the abuse of a superior becomes so severe that even the most honorable samurai can no longer endure it. When this happens, a proper samurai will respond by committing *kanshi*—protesting seppuku—to shame the superior with this honorable act. On a few rare occasions, samurai have even gone so far as to challenge their own lords, although such acts typically result in the immediate execution of the samurai issuing the challenge.

istrate will serve as judge of the duel. Regardless, the judge is responsible for inspecting the area where the duel will take place, making certain it is suitable, as well as observing the match itself to make sure it is fought properly and without interference. There is no official size for a proper dueling circle, but the area must be large enough so the duelists have room to move and those watching will not be in danger. In a formal duel with proper preparation, the dueling circle will always be cleared of any obstructions and is usually blessed by a shugenja or monk (although this ritual is far more extensive among the Phoenix).

Every duel begins with the judge announcing the names and titles of the challenger and challenged, after which he lists the offense over which they are dueling. The challenged is then given one final chance to apologize or retract his offense (on some occasions this does happen, but it is rare). The judge then announces to those assembled (most formal duels have observers) that the results of the duel are binding and the matter will be settled once it is complete. The challenger is allowed to choose his or her position in the dueling circle, and the challenged takes a position opposite. Often, at this point the judge will ask if either duelist has anything to say before the duel commences. In some parts of the Empire (such as among those Unicorn who worship the Lords of Death), duelists will recite a death poem as if they are about to commit seppuku or enter a hopeless battle, since this will be their last chance to do so. More often, however, they will say little or nothing.

Once both duelists take their stance, the judge moves between them and raises a hand or fan. He then drops it with the word: "Begin!"

The Art of Iaijutsu in Action

"Those who are skilled in dueling do not become angered; those who are skilled at winning do not become afraid. Thus the wise win before the fight, while the ignorant fight to win."

– Kakita Shimazu, twelfth century

At the beginning of an iaijutsu duel, the opponents face each other at a short distance apart—usually around ten feet apart, so that they can close the gap when they strike. Sometimes the distance will be closer or farther based on circumstances, but roughly ten feet is typical. In the traditional iaijutsu method, as pioneered by Kakita and copied down the centuries by most other clans and families, the sword is kept sheathed, and the duelist will stand with his right hand resting above the hilt, ready to draw. A few dueling traditions diverge from this customary stance, most notably the followers of Mirumoto's techniques. The students of Niten usually start their duels with both swords already drawn and held down at their sides, although some employ the Kakita single-sword draw and a few of them even practice a two-sword draw.

An iaijutsu strike is truly an example of the philosophy of Air in action. It begins with stillness, as the iaijutsu artist quiets his body and mind. The duelist extends his senses outward while measuring each breath and controlling every movement of his muscles, offering his opponent not the slightest sign that he is about to attack. At the same time, the duelist focuses his senses upon his opponent, seeking any sign of the enemy's intentions. Silence and stillness reign, much as the wind quiets and dies just before a storm sweeps over the land.

Then, usually acting on instinct honed by years of training, the duelist suddenly knows it is time to strike. In the traditional Kakita forms, his right hand (formerly resting above the hilt of the sword) turns suddenly to grasp it. At the same time he pulls back on his saya with his left hand, making the drawing motion even faster. The katana springs free and arcs upward and outward, a single smooth motion that is, to the duelist, as natural as breathing.

A Mirumoto traditionalist does not draw, for his swords are already free of their saya. Instead he suddenly flows forward, both blades rising with the speed of the wind to simultaneously strike and block. Typically he will strike

Champions

In almost every case, a samurai who carries a katana is expected to defend himself in a duel. However, some samurai—including the vast majority of courtiers and shugenja—do not carry katana. When these samurai issue a challenge or receive one, they may request a champion to fight for them. If they have an assigned yojimbo, he will be the champion by default, but in other circumstances the champion may be assigned by their lord or may simply be another samurai who has a personal or family connection to them and is willing to defend them in a duel. Champions may potentially come from another clan, especially an allied clan; they can even be ronin, although this is unusual.

If a samurai's champion is defeated in a duel to the death, the samurai must share his fate by committing seppuku.

In some rare cases, a samurai who does carry a katana may still be allowed to appoint a champion. The obvious example is the Emperor, who is always defended by the Emerald Champion whether or not he chooses to carry a katana for himself. Other instances may include aged or semi-retired samurai who carry the katana as a mark of their station, or samurai who have been physically injured in some way that precludes their dueling for themselves even if they still carry a sword. Such examples are rare, however, and in the vast majority of cases a samurai who carries a sword has no choice but to fight for himself.



with the katana in his right hand while blocking with the wakizashi in his left, although the most proficient Mirumoto swordmasters may use each blade in either role.

Regardless of form, if the duelist has judged the moment correctly, has achieved the true oneness of body, mind, and soul that is the heart of the dueling strike, his blade will cut down his opponent first. If not, he will have to try to perfect the art in his next life.

Once a duel is concluded—which may take anywhere from a few seconds to several hours, depending on the combatants—it is also up to the judge to proclaim the winner. It is usually obvious who won, but in situations where both duelists struck at almost the same instant, or where both perished from a kharmic strike, the situation may be more complex. In particular, in situations where both duelists are killed it is up to the judge to determine whether one died before the other.

The Aftermath

Officially, once a duel is resolved, so is the issue which caused it. Insults are retracted, testimony is proven to be lies (or truth, as the case may be), and criminals are proven innocent or guilty. Honor and custom dictate that the results of a duel are final and cannot be disputed. However, not all Rokugani can accept a result that brings shame or defeat to them or their family. Those who believe a duel was handled improperly, or that the other side forced a dishonorable result, will often swear a blood feud rather than endure in silence. Thus, far from always settling matters forever, a duel can also trigger long-term enmities which last for generations, much like Kakita and Matsu's feud in the dawn of the Empire.

Left-Handed Duelists

Rokugan does not share the Western world's view of the left hand as the menacing "hand sinister." However, the Rokugani do train to fight with the sword in their right hand. This is because they view the right hand as the hand of war (hence the Lion Clan is the Right Hand of the Emperor) while the left hand is the hand of peace (hence the Crane are the Emperor's Left Hand). These views also account for the extensive protocol and symbolism involved in the placement of one's swords—swords worn or placed on the left side are easily drawn with the right hand, meaning one is prepared for violence, while swords on the right side are more difficult to draw, meaning one is peaceful.

Because of these traditions, iaijutsu training always assumes the bushi will draw and strike with his right hand, regardless of which hand is dominant. However, occasionally a duelist will train to draw with his left hand instead—either because his left hand is so dominant that he cannot draw effectively with his right, or because he recognizes that his opponents will have more difficulty facing a left-handed draw. Some of the Emperor's more notoriously pragmatic duelists, especially among the wave-men, have fought with their left hand. The Scorpion Clan also makes a habit of training its duelists to fight with their left hand in order to give them a small extra edge against their opponents.

Air and the Way of Kyujutsu

Taro was the best in his squadron, his instructors had always told him so. He hit the straw target in the heart every time he threw his yari, and in training he bested all of his classmates, even some of his instructors when they sparred. For an ashigaru, that was something to boast. Perhaps he could be more. Perhaps if he did well enough in this war, he would be named a samurai, permitted to swear fealty to one of the minor vassal families. It was the most a peasant soldier could aspire to, could dream of.

Taro knew he would survive this day, survive this battle. He was the best, and anyone he met would die on the end of his spear. He waited with the rest of his fellow ashigaru at the head of the army, pulling down his straw hat to shield his eyes from the bright noonday sun. Signal flags waved, a great shout went up from the army, and the troops began to march across the field. The enemy army waited on the far side of the wide valley, their ranks clearly thinner. Taro felt a grim smile pull at his mouth. His side would be victorious this day, and he would distinguish himself.

Halfway across the field he stumbled a moment as the noonday sun was shrouded and the world became like twilight. Taro looked and knew a final moment of surprise as little slivers of death fell from the sky by the thousands.

In Rokugan, an enormous emphasis is placed on honorable combat between samurai, especially with the sword. Much less prestige is given to archery, the art of Kyujutsu. However, archery is one of the martial arts most connected with the philosophy of Air, and those families and schools which do pursue the way of the bow do so with the same devotion as duelists apply to their swordsmanship. The lithe grace of the draw, the sudden smooth violence when the arrow is released, and the delicate grace of the arrow in flight, cutting through the wind on its way to the target—all these things make the art of kyujutsu among the most graceful of the Rokugan martial arts as well as one of the more underappreciated.

The History of Archery in Rokugan

The use of bow and arrow in Rokugan predates the arrival of the Kami. Human tribes used bows of various sorts for decades, perhaps centuries, before the Kami fell from the Heavens. Most of these tribes used bows primarily for hunting, for in those ancient times the prejudice against red meat had not yet emerged and many Rokugani tribes

Way of the Horse and Bow: Rokugan versus Japan

In the history of the Japanese samurai, the bow was long considered the pre-eminent martial art, and most samurai served their lords as mounted archers, with the sword as only a secondary weapon for when they were forced into melee combat. The way of the samurai was considered synonymous with the way of the horse and bow; only peasant soldiers had to fight hand-to-hand.

Later in Japan's history, melee combat became more predominant in warfare, and the role of the bow declined somewhat while the prestige of the sword increased. However, the true cultural dominance of the sword did not come until the long peace of the Tokugawa Shogunate, when swordsmen were free to pursue their art without concern for the pragmatic realities of warfare.

In Rokugan, the role and duties of the samurai are depicted in a more idealized manner than in real-life Japan, and the sword—and its close cousin the naginata—are treated as the most honorable and prestigious weapons. However, a GM who wishes to give Rokugan a more historically authentic feel may wish to allow the bow to hold a place of equal honor, and to depict Rokugani warfare as utilizing archery more widely and effectively. If this option is taken, bows should be considered to have the Samurai trait.



ate deer, boar, rabbit, and other such game animals. Archery was an imminently practical hunting art, allowing a hunter to stalk and kill his prey from a safe distance. Enterprising tribesmen soon realized that if they could kill prey animals from afar they could also kill their enemies, and archery became a tool of war as well as of survival.

The original Rokugani bows were crude and simple designs, and did not require exceptional skill to make. The arrows that went with them were fairly simple as well, with points made from stone or, later, bronze or iron. As the art of warfare progressed in the years leading up to the fall of the Kami, so did archery technology. Fletchers and weaponsmiths experimented with different types of wood and different methods of crafting the bows themselves. Combining horn, strips of wood, and sinew in various combinations made it possible to create bows which were much stronger and more reliable than those made from a single piece of wood. Arrows developed as well: points narrowed and sharpened to better penetrate the hides of animals and the simple armor of enemy warriors. A few tribes even accidentally discovered the art of making signal arrows, hollow-pointed shafts which made a high whistling sound when fired.

When the Kami fell, they chose to treat honorable melee combat as the preferred fighting art, a choice which baffled many of the tribes who were skilled with archery. They believed, correctly, that the Kami were trying to make all of the tribes in Rokugan act and think alike, and their teachings in combat were one aspect of this crusade. Many of these tribes resisted the new ways, and the more stubborn among them were eventually exterminated. The rest learned to balance their archery traditions with the martial styles preferred by the Kami.

Of course, not every Kami was equally determined to make melee combat predominant. Shinjo was open to all the ways of her people, and her followers included many horse-riding tribes who favored the bow over the sword or the spear. These folk had recently developed the predecessor to the modern Rokugani dai-kyu: an asymmetrical bow which could be fired from horseback. This allowed these mounted warriors to fire arrows at their foes while maintaining superior mobility to those on foot. These mounted archery traditions would be carried down through later generations of Shinjo's followers and eventually become central to Unicorn war tactics.

Among the other six clans, the ways of archery did not gain such great acceptance, but the practical value of the bow on the battlefield meant that archery was never abandoned either. In modern Rokugan, the way of the bow is taught by almost all bushi dojo, but in most cases it is simply one more fighting art, taught alongside other combat skills such as yarijutsu, jiujutsu, and iaijutsu. Only a few families and specialized schools, most notably the famed Tsuruchi, afford archery a dominant role in their teachings.

Notable Instances of Archery in Rokugani History

Although the sword has done more to turn Rokugan's fate than any other weapon, there are nonetheless several points in the Empire's long history when kyujutsu played an extremely important role.

Matsu Koritome at White Stag

A year after the death of Empress Hantei Yugozohime at the hands of the gaijin, her successor Hantei Muhaki sought an end to the hostilities with the lingering remnants of the foreign invaders. When these remaining gaijin offered to meet with the Emperor in order to negotiate their surrender and withdrawal from Rokugan, Hantei Muhaki readily agreed. The meeting, however was merely a ruse designed to ambush the Emperor and thus to behead the Empire of Rokugan.

When the Emperor and a contingent of Seppun and Lion guards met with the gaijin, the treacherous foreigners opened fire on them with their blasphemous explosive weapons. They quickly slaughtered almost all of the Emperor's guards. When the smoke started to clear, however, a single Lion samurai still stood on the field: Matsu Koritome. He raised his yumi and fired again and again, killing gaijin after gaijin. Although the gaijin weaponry wounded him several times, he used their fire to locate their positions and ultimately killed all of them. In his last moments, he returned to the side of the wounded Emperor and planted his tanto in the heart of the treacherous gaijin emissary who had led them into the ambush.

In honor of Matsu Koritome's honorable death and his superb prowess with kyujutsu, the Emperor held a tournament and invited the most skilled archers among the Lion to attend. After days of competition, the two hundred most skilled archers were granted positions in the newly formed Koritome family, vassals of the Matsu, with Koritome's own eldest brother appointed the family's new daimyo.

Koritome and his brother had come from a long line of archers and the Koritome vassal family continued this tradition; in modern Rokugan the Koritome are known as some of the most honorable and courageous warriors in the Lion Clan, and the Lion are fond of claiming they are the best archers in the Empire—though the Tsuruchi would certainly dispute this.

Shinjo Tarajin at Shiro no Soshi

During the tenth century, the Empire was still adjusting to the presence of the newly returned Unicorn Clan. The Scorpion Clan in particular seemed to find it difficult to interact with these strange newcomers, and in the year 935 the Soshi daimyo, Soshi Arashi, bitterly offended the Unicorn in court. In response, a Unicorn army led by the general Shinjo Tarajin swept into the northern Scorpion lands, proclaiming their intention to punish the insult to

their clan. Arashi's own forces were meager and the main strength of the Scorpion was still some distance away, so he retreated behind the walls of Shiro no Soshi to endure a siege. He knew the Unicorn had no siege engines and thus had no real chance of taking the castle by storm; reinforcements would arrive from the rest of the Scorpion lands long before his castle could be starved into submission.

A week into the siege, Soshi Arashi received word that the promised reinforcements were indeed on the way. He appeared on the walls of his family's castle and mocked the Unicorn forces, urging them to flee before they would be defeated. In response, Shinjo Tarajin rode out alone in front of his army and raised his bow, drawing back to his ear. To the bewilderment of the Scorpion, he did not immediately fire, but instead held the drawn bow for almost a minute. Just as Arashi began to wonder if the Unicorn warrior had gone mad, Tarajin released his shot—and the arrow flew across the intervening quarter mile to piece the Scorpion daimyo's neck. Arashi fell dead, and the Unicorn army immediately rode back to their own lands, satisfied that the insult to their clan had been avenged.

Shinjo Tarajin's famous shot was Rokugan's first encounter with the art of *yomanri*, the foreign style of archery which the Unicorn brought back from the Burning Sands. Although the rest of the Empire would never adopt yomanri for itself, the Unicorn have continued to study it and practitioners can still be found in their ranks in modern times.

The Founding of the Wasp Clan

"I will never again carry the samurai's weapon. For I am samurai no longer."

—Tsuruchi

How, in a society based on Bushido and the way of the sword, is a minor clan formed with a philosophy that reveres kyujutsu above all else? The answer lies in the story behind Tsuruchi, regarded by some as the greatest archer that Rokugan has ever seen.

Tsuruchi's full story is told in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*, page 103. Briefly, the tale began when his father, a Scorpion daimyo who held a strategic castle, fell in love with his mother, the daughter of an influential Akodo daimyo—who may well have been a descendent of the Koritome bloodline. The two of them married and had a son in defiance of both their clans. That son was Tsuruchi ("Little Wasp") and he lived to see his parents betrayed by the Lion and Scorpion alike. Tsuruchi escaped the fall of the castle with a group of his most loyal followers.

After his betrayal by the Lion, Tsuruchi turned his back on Bushido and the katana, which he saw as the symbol of those who follow it. He broke his own katana over a stone and swore to never touch one again. His followers followed suit. Eventually, he managed to recapture the castle by stealth and petitioned the Emerald Champion for justice, resulting in his being named daimyo of the newly formed Wasp Clan.

The tiny Wasp Clan dedicated itself to the study and perfection of kyujutsu, and recruited new members through an annual archery tournament in which the ten best participants were allowed to join the clan. Each was required to break his own katana upon joining the clan. Although these extreme policies were moderated after the Wasp joined the Mantis Clan, the family remains intensely devoted to the study of archery, as well as advancing the art of crafting bows and arrows.

A Discussion of Rokugani Archery

"The space of a single breath is all I need."

– Tsuruchi

Rokugani archery follows a rather different tradition than western archery. The Rokugani do not carefully line up a single shot in the manner of Robin Hood splitting his previous arrow. Instead, they fire swiftly and instinctively, allowing the arrow to find its target without effort. This style is learned and executed in a number of ways.



First, archers are taught to focus on their own body and mind before they ever think of their target. If the archer's body is not in harmony, how can the arrow find its way to the target? In fact, young samurai who are learning the art of kyujutsu are not allowed to fire an actual bow for a considerable time after they begin their training. They are first taught the proper way to stand so their body is properly oriented toward their target. They are taught how to regulate their breathing so it will not alter the flight of their arrow. They are taught to envision their shot, imagining the arrow striking the target they wish to hit. When they can do so with perfect clarity, standing and breathing correctly, they are allowed to begin using a bow... without arrows.

The second stage of training in kyujutsu is learning the proper way to draw the bow. Unlike western archery, in which the bow is drawn at or below waist level, in kyujutsu the bow is raised above the archer's head and then lowered as he pushes out on the bow and pulls backward on the string. And where a western archer would draw the bow back to his cheekbone, a practitioner of kyujutsu draws the bow all the way to behind his ear. This obviously does not provide the same view of the arrow and target that a western archer has. The kyujutsu student practices his draw over and over, in concert with keeping his footing aligned properly and making sure his breathing is in sync with his draw. Once he has mastered all of these things together, he is allowed to actually fire an arrow.

Students who are sufficiently advanced to actually shoot arrows will often fire as many as a thousand arrows a day, repeating the motions over and over until the ritual of setting the feet, draw, and release becomes automatic. For many it can even become a form of meditation, and some monks within the Brotherhood of Shinsei pursue archery in this vein, cleansing their minds and souls as their arrows fly true.



The Eight Steps of Archery

"You need not see the target to know it is there.
Why then must you see the target to strike it?"

—Gahei the ronin

Sensei who teach the art of kyujutsu have refined the ritual of shooting arrows into eight separate steps, each of which must be followed for the archer to be successful.

The first step is placing one's footing, a process called *ashibumi*, during which the archer stands with his left side facing his target. He points the toes of his left foot toward the target, then widens his stance so the space between his feet is the same distance as he draws a bow: usually, half of his height. Then he envisions a line drawn from his back toes through his front toes and on through the target. This is the line which the arrow will follow if the archer completes the rest of the steps correctly. Finally, having envisioned his line, the archer moves his toes so they are at an angle of around sixty degree from one another, gaining stability in his stance.

The second step is aligning the body, called *dozukuri*. The archer makes certain his shoulders are lined up parallel to the invisible line he has already envisioned and that he is in perfect balance. Then he arches and straightens his back. This makes certain the bowstring cannot catch his hakama strings as he fires and that he will not hit his face with the bowstring when he releases.

The third step is readying the bow, *yugamae*. During this step the archer places his left hand in the proper grip on the bowstave, then places the arrow and grips the bowstring with his right hand. Finally he turns his head to face the target.

During the fourth step, preparing to draw (or *uchiokoshi*), the archer raises the bow above his head to the position from which he will draw it.

The actual draw is completed in the next two steps. In the fifth step, drawing apart (or *hikiwake*), the archer pushes the bowstave forward with his left hand and pulls the arrow and bowstring back as far as his eyebrow. Then in the sixth step, the full draw (or *kai*), the archer pulls the bowstring back

the rest of the way to anchor it just below his ear at the corner of his jaw.

The penultimate step is the release, or *hanare*. The archer makes certain his breathing is correct and then releases the arrow, setting it in flight. If all of the other steps have been completed correctly, the arrow will follow the line the archer envisioned during step one... and hit the target.

Finally, there is the continuation of the shot, or *zanshin*, in which the archer holds his position as he regains the state of mind he had before the release—assuring he can shoot his next arrow in the same way as the previous—and lowers his bow.

Although this process seems outwardly complex, experienced kyujutsu artists can complete these eight steps exceedingly swiftly, doing them almost by instinct. Of course, they still remember each individual step and will sometimes go through them very slowly as a form of meditation.

The Tools of Archery

The samurai of Rokugan employ several different kinds of bows, each with their own specific usage. Most Rokugani bows are crafted from bamboo and backed with wood and purified horn, leather, and sinew. Much as with other uses of animal products, the horn, leather, and sinew are blessed beforehand so they will not bring uncleanness on their wielders... although the bowyers of the Unicorn Clan forget this step.

The most common Rokugani bows, the yumi and the daikyu, are asymmetrical in design, with the handgrip on the lower third of the bowstave. This facilitates the Rokugani style of archery while allowing these bows to be quite long and powerful; it also makes it easier for the daikyu to be fired from horseback. Because of the great strength of Rokugani bows, the bowstrings tend to wear out fairly rapidly and every Rokugani archer carries plenty of extras for when their string inevitably breaks.

The yumi is the standard footman's bow used by most archers in the Empire. Yumi are usually four to five feet tall, sometimes as much as six feet; the exact height of the bow is determined by examining the length of the individual archer's draw, which is usually about half the archer's height, and crafting a bow of appropriate size.

The dai-kyu, the standard horseman's bow, is significantly taller than a yumi, often topping seven feet. They are also balanced so as to be easily fired while astride a horse, although this combined with their height makes them unwieldy on the ground. The specific height of a daikyu, like that of a yumi, is determined by examining the archer's draw length.

The other commonly used type of bow in Rokugan is the han-kyu, a small and simple bow used in situations where the size of the yumi and dai-kyu will be problematic. Han-kyu are usually made from a single piece of wood rather than a laminate design, and are generally not crafted to match individual shooters. They are very short compared to the other two bows, often as small as three feet in height, but are correspondingly more portable and less obtrusive. Magistrates often carry these bows when traveling on investigations... and they are also popular with shinobi.

A few families make bows that are distinctive from those found in the rest of the Empire. Some of the Tsuruchi, for example, craft bows which are taller and more powerful than standard yumi, with thicker staves and heavier draws. There are also some among the Unicorn who still use bows of the foreign style they brought back from outside the Empire. These gaijin bows are very distinctive, shorter and more symmetrical than Rokugani bows, with recurved staves that end in hook-like tips. (In terms of game mechanics, these bows are statistically identical to yumi, but must be fired using the foreign archery technique known as *yomanri*.)

Rokugani arrows are crafted from bamboo and are usually fletched with feathers from a hawk or eagle, though in times of war other types of feathers may be used. When an arrow is made, it is considered either male or female, and is crafted with feathers from opposite sides of the bird. Arrows which are deemed male spin clockwise when released from the bow, while arrows deemed female spin counterclockwise. Archers will usually alternate their shots between male arrows and female arrows, and only rarely fire two of the same type in a row. This is done so that even if the archer performs the eight steps of kyujutsu exactly identically with each shot, the two arrows will not collide with each other when striking the target.

The standard Rokugani arrow type is known as the *ya* or willow leaf. It is tipped with a broad sharp-edged head and is the normal arrow used during both combat and target shooting.

Rokugani also make armor-piercing arrows with much narrower points, designed to punch through heavy armor (or thick-hided beasts) and the corresponding flesh-cutter arrows (*watakusi*) with very broad heads and sharp or barbed edges, designed to tear flesh apart; although easily stopped by armor, they are very effective against unprotected opponents, and are also popular with hunters.

Humming-bulb arrows are nearly blunt, with hollow tips that whistle and whine when they fly through the air. They are used to signal troops or to sound the alarm when coming under attack.

Finally, the Rokugani also have a special type of arrow designed to cut ropes: the *karimata*. These were originally developed by sailors, and have a wide crescent-shaped head with a sharpened curve. They are heavier than normal arrows and thus do not fly as far, but for their intended role great distances are usually not required.

Uses of Archery in the Empire

"First the arrows feed, and then come the black birds, finding the spaces between armor."

– Rezan, ronin poet

Like many of the other martial arts which the Rokugani practice, kyujutsu has a place both off and on the field of battle. While archery is first and foremost a way to kill the enemy, it is also practiced by some as an artistic act or a form of meditation.

Many Rokugani daimyo host periodic kyujutsu tournaments, such as the Koritome vassal family's annual veneration of their founder Matsu Koritome's death. Larger tournaments such as the Topaz Championship traditionally include an archery competition as well. Most of these tournaments follow a standard format: each archer fires four arrows, after which some of the competitors are eliminated and the remainder advance to another round of the tournament and again fire four arrows. Usually each arrow is fired at a separate target at a different distance away from the firing line. One target will be very close, allowing the archers to concentrate on their firing technique, while the others are progressively farther away, with the most distant target usually about sixty yards out. Those who participate in these tournaments earn fame and may be granted rankings against among other kyujutsu artists, similar to the *dan* ratings for go masters.

Hunting is another popular use of archery. Samurai, especially the *buke* nobility, often entertain themselves by hunting boar, stag, and other such animals. Bows are the preferred weapons for such hunting, and may be fired either on foot or from horseback. Indeed, among the more traditionalist clans this is often the only instance of firing bows while mounted.

Of course, the most frequent use of archery is on the battlefield. In battle Rokugani archers usually form a single line and fire their arrows straight across the field toward advancing infantry; as the enemy closes the range, the archers either fall back or drop their bows and switch to spears or swords. Archery units may also operate from behind the lines, dropping long-range fire on enemy units or harassing their flanks.

When the Unicorn returned to the Empire in the eighth century they brought with them several new battlefield tactics, tactics which for a time gave them considerable advantages over the other Rokugani armies. Among these new tactics was the use of mounted archery. While traditional Rokugani archers fought on foot, the Unicorn preferred to fire from horseback, combining archery's traditional range advantages with the mobility of cavalry. This allowed them to wear down their foes with relentless barrages of arrows, pulling back whenever the enemy threatened to counterattack. Unicorn horse archery remains a very distinctive aspect of their approach to warfare; while some clans have developed a few elite horse-archer units,

Rokugani Archery Aficionados

While Rokugani tradition reveres combat with a katana as the pinnacle of martial accomplishment, there are a number of groups within Rokugan's samurai culture who are strongly devoted to the study and advancement of kyujutsu.

The Tsuruchi Family of the Mantis

It is all but impossible to discuss kyujutsu in modern Rokugan without mention of the Tsuruchi. Although they did not come into existence until the very end of the eleventh century, no other clan or family could ever claim to be devoted to the way of the bow as they were. In their early history as the Wasp Clan, the children had bows placed in their hands as soon as they could walk, the adults refused to carry swords, and kyujutsu was a way of life for everyone in the clan. The Tsuruchi fighting techniques, created and perfected by the Wasp Clan's founder, quickly gained widespread respect as the finest in the Empire's long history.

After the Tsuruchi were absorbed into the Mantis, they were forced to compromise their stance slightly. A small minor clan can get away with being somewhat eccentric (especially if it has the protection of the Emerald Champion), but representatives of a major clan, especially one newly elevated to its status, must at least pay lip service to Imperial tradition. The Wasp gave up their earlier tradition of breaking their katana, and most of them also adopted Bushido rather than the earlier Code of the Wasp. Young Tsuruchi samurai were required to learn kenjutsu and the ways of Bushido alongside their own traditions in the art of kyujutsu, and a significant divide formed between those who embraced this training and those who regarded it merely as an inconvenient necessity.

Despite these changes, the Tsuruchi family is still home to the greatest number of skilled archers of any family in the Empire, and their training in the way of the bow remains second to none. Indeed, clans who desire a connection to the Mantis Clan often foster children gifted in archery to train with the Tsuruchi.

The modern Mantis army relies heavily on Tsuruchi archers to wear down its enemies and create openings for the Yoritomo to exploit. Typically each Mantis legion will include at least one squadron of Tsuruchi who are tasked to serve primarily as archers, drawing their swords only if it is absolutely necessary. Although this does sometimes weaken the coordination between the Tsuruchi and the rest of the Mantis troops, the sheer skill of the archers of the Tsuruchi usually makes up for it.



Koritome Vassal Family of the Matsu

The origins of the Lion Clan's Koritome vassal family are described earlier in this section. The warriors of the Koritome are considered to be among the most courageous and honorable in the Lion Clan, and they are accorded greater respect than many vassal families enjoy. After all, they originated with a man who sacrificed his life to save the Emperor himself. As such, both Clan Champions and powerful daimyo have trained in the Koritome dojo over the centuries, and the clan's leadership regularly seeks the counsel of the Koritome family daimyo.

The Lion armies' primary application of ranged attacks on the battlefield are their elite spearmen, who are as accurate with a thrown yari as many of the Tsuruchi are with an arrow. However, the Koritome are an essential—albeit smaller—part of those armies as well. Koritome archer units fire on strategically important targets such as enemy reserves or commanders. Further, their use extends beyond their skills with archery; Lion generals know that whatever task they give the honorable Koritome, no matter how dangerous, it will be accomplished without fail.

The Asahina Archers

Although the Crane Clan is large, it is not the most martial of clans and when it is forced to wage open warfare it often finds itself at a disadvantage against the more martial clans such as the Crab, Lion, or Unicorn. Thus the Crane have always sought to find a way for every family to contribute to defense of the clan. In the case of the pacifistic Asahina, this proved a considerable challenge, but there was always a small minority within the family who lacked both the ability to commune with the kami and the contemplative philosophy required to live in Shinden Asahina's monastic environment. Determined to find a way to serve their clan, these iconoclasts embraced the path of archery, seeing it as a way to defend the Crane without embracing the cruel brutalities of hand-to-hand combat. The development of these samurai into formal archer units was a natural combination of their sensibilities combined with the needs of the clan armies. Their training and technique called on the family's natural affinity with Air to fire their arrows with the same precision and lethality that a duelist uses when striking.

The Asahina Archers are taught in a small castle near the border between the Asahina and Daidoji lands, and draw expertise from both families in developing their teachings. Although their numbers have never been great, they have played a useful role in the Crane armies for centuries. During the War Against the Darkness in the twelfth century, however, the Crane Clan was briefly wracked by a civil war in which the Asahina Archers killed many of their own clanmates. Shaken by this incident, the Archers swore an oath to never again fire upon another Crane, and during the later War of Spirits many of their sensei

The Unicorn and Gaijin Archery

During the eight centuries they spent away from Rokugan, the Unicorn Clan encountered foreign peoples who used a very different form of archery than the Rokugani. Whereas in Rokugani archery the draw and release are almost the same motion and the archer does not aim so much as intuits where the arrow will go, gaijin archery—which the Unicorn call *yomanri*—instead takes the approach of first aiming the arrow and then firing. A *yomanri* archer draws his arrow to his cheek and sights down the shaft, then releases it once he is confident in his aim.

Although many Unicorn continued to practice Rokugani archery during their travels abroad, a significant number of them chose to learn the gaijin style of archery. When they returned to the Empire, they maintained the practice, and *yomanri* archers remain a significant factor in the Unicorn armies even in modern times.

Yomanri is a distinctly Unicorn style and draws a certain amount of controversy. Anyone from outside of the Unicorn Clan who uses it will surely be looked at strangely, to say the least, and the use of *yomanri* might well be considered a Low skill for non-Unicorn.



and senior officers committed seppuku rather than fire on Crane serving the Steel Chrysanthemum.

The Dragon's Flame

The mountains of the Dragon Clan are inhospitable and dangerous places, seldom troubled by the tread of enemy soldiers. But the Dragon Clan is nonetheless a clan of warriors and the repute of their lands rests as much on their skills as on the obstacle posed by the mountains themselves. The Dragon's Flame Archers are an elite unit of Dragon warriors tasked with defending their homelands when they are attacked; becoming a member of the Dragon's Flame is considered a high honor among the Mirumoto, since it shows that the samurai is trusted enough to defend his home.

Due to the nature of their mission, the Dragon's Flame Archers spend much of their time practicing firing their bows from different elevations, on various types of precarious footing, or against moving targets. Their training emphasizes using the rugged terrain of their lands to their own advantage, maneuvering around rocks and cliffs to gain effective shots and place their opponents in danger. These tactics often enrage their more traditional opponents, such as the Lion Clan, but the Dragon have always been known as a clan that follows its own enigmatic path regardless of what others may think.

The Hiruma Family of the Crab

The Hiruma have always focused their fighting style on speed, avoidance, and lethality rather than the endurance and brute force favored by the Crab Clan's ruling Hida family, so it is no surprise that they also have always tended to favor archery more than the Hida bushi. However, this tendency increased sharply after the Hiruma lost their original school during the attack of the Oni Lord known as the Maw. They were forced to develop a new school—the Hiruma Scouts—built around stealth and ambush, and this school came to emphasize archery even more strongly than its predecessor. With the passage of years, the best archers among the Hiruma honed their skills until they became an elite order within the clan, the so-called Hiruma Snipers.

The Snipers are specifically trained for the fighting environment found on the Kaiu Wall, where the ability to stay calm and shoot accurately can be the difference between success and doom, not just for the archer but for everyone with him. Sniper training focuses on striking precisely at their targets' weakest points, so as to evade the thick hides and resilient shells of Shadowlands creatures. Such training has value on the conventional battlefield as well, of course, since precision shooting can evade the protections of samurai armor.

In modern times, after the Hiruma family recovers its lost school techniques, the Hiruma Snipers are trained in the family dojo alongside others of their line. They also sometimes visit the dojo of the Toritaka family's Falcon's Eye, trading knowledge with the Crab Clan's newest family.

The Shinjo Horsebowmen

A sizable portion of the Unicorn army is cavalry, and while the clan's training emphasizes melee—especially for the ferocious warriors of the Moto and Utaku families—the Unicorn also have a long tradition of mounted archery, one with its roots in the clan's origin as the Ki-Rin Clan at the dawn of the Empire. The Shinjo family in particular has long studied archery alongside the ways of sword and lance, and the clan's legions of horse archers are often referred to colloquially as the Shinjo Horsebowmen. Mounted archery is a perplexing tactic for other clan armies, since they have no real response to it. Unicorn horsebowmen sweep across the battlefield, often shifting directions seemingly at random like a breeze across tall grass. They shower the enemy ranks with arrows but then immediately dart away, bleeding their foes but never allowing them to approach. Standard Unicorn battle tactics rely on their horsebowmen to whittle down enemy defenses before sending in a cavalry charge to break them.

As noted, Unicorn horsebowmen are trained primarily in the Shinjo Bushi school, which teaches its students to fight equally well with bow or sword when mounted. Al-

though the Moto and Utaku schools do teach the basics of archery, they do not make it an important part of their training.

The Falcon's Strike

Ever since its founding the tiny Falcon Clan has trained its bushi to be aware of their surroundings at a level which few others can match. This is primarily due to the clan's focus on ghost-hunting, but such clarity of the senses can have other benefits as well, and within a century of their founding the Falcon developed a knack for archery. This gave rise to the Falcon's Strike Dojo, which selected its students for keen vision and sharp senses and taught them to rely on their focused senses rather than the mechanics of drawing and firing to hit their targets. Indeed, students of the Falcon's Strike are famed for their ability to locate and strike their targets regardless of obscurement or distraction.

For much of its history the Falcon's Strike was a tiny group, numbering only a few dozen students at best. However, after the Falcon are absorbed into the Crab in the twelfth century, the dojo begins drawing students from the rest of the Crab Clan, greatly increasing its size and fame.

The Order of Wind's Grace and the Taoist Archers

Within the Brotherhood of Shinsei there are scores of different paths to enlightenment, including some that involve mediating on one or another form of martial art. Kyujutsu is no exception, and within the ranks of the Brotherhood are a few elevated souls who have managed to attain a state of perfect harmony with the bow, pursuing archery with the same dedication others might apply to mediation or fasting. In modern times many of these monks belong to the order known as the Wind's Grace, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

The tradition of the Taoist Archers, who seek perfect harmony through the study of kyujutsu, has existed within the Brotherhood for centuries, but it did not begin to disseminate into the rest of the Empire until the Pre-Coup era, when a ronin named Gahei learned its ways. Although Gahei was not a monk himself, he was an ascetic who dedicated himself to the way of the bow, and the Taoist Archers saw him as a kindred spirit. Gahei mastered their technique and in his later years began to teach them to a few selected students. In this way the unique kyujutsu style of the Taoist Archers made its way into Rokugan's ronin community, although it remained quite rare and obscure even there.

Air and the Way of Yarijutsu

Since the dawn of the Empire, the spear has been one of the simplest and most effective of weapons. A single katana can take months to craft, and a yumi can take days or weeks, but a spear can be crafted in mere minutes. Almost anyone can sharpen a stick into a usable spear. Spears can be used both as a melee weapon and a ranged weapon with equal effect. Thanks to both the effectiveness and the flexibility of the weapon, the spear has survived into modern Rokugan, and the fighting art of yarijutsu can be surprisingly elegant. As with all martial arts, true mastery of the spear can take years or even a lifetime. More than one bushi school continues to teach the ways of yarijutsu and some families choose to specialize in such weapons. And of course, the simplicity and effectiveness of the spear means it remains the primary weapon of peasant ashigaru soldiers all across the Empire.

History of the Spear in Rokugan

Long before the first craftsman pounded steel into the shape of a sword—or even iron into an axe—someone sharpened a stick and created a spear. While the design and materials of spears have advanced greatly over the intervening ages, the basic concept has remained unchanged: stick the pointy end into the enemy.

The spear, like the bow, began primarily as a hunting



weapon in the tribes who would later become the people of Rokugan. Later, as conflict between tribes became more common, spears became the primary weapon of war as well. Initially most spears were just simple wooden shafts with pointed tips, sometimes hardened in a fire. Later generations added separate points to the spear: stone, bronze, iron, and finally steel.

By the time the Kami descended onto what became Seppun Hill, many of the tribes in what would become Rokugan already had a rich tradition of spear-fighting. The Kami saw spears as lesser weapons than swords or bows, but recognized they were useful for armies composed primarily of common folk. Instead of forcing the tribes who used spears to change their ways completely, the Kami encouraged them to teach spear fighting to their ordinary soldiers while their strongest warriors learned kenjutsu from the Kami and their strongest followers.

While many Rokugani accepted this solution, a few saw it as the Kami intruding on their traditions. For example, in some tribal cultures the materials used in a man's spear and the ornamentation on it were signs of social status. Giving spears to all soldiers and treating yarijutsu as a lesser art than kenjutsu went against all they believed. Typically these tribes left the Empire, becoming foreign peoples like the Yobanjin, but a few stayed and fought. Their spears afforded them no advantage over the Kami-aligned forces, and for the most part these tribes were exterminated to a man, although a few were ultimately allowed to bow and submit to the superior might of the Kami.

Ultimately, the will of the Kami and their favoritism toward swordsmanship meant the yari would never again hold the prestige it once possessed among the pre-Empire tribes. However, neither did the way of spear-fighting pass out of use, especially once Fu Leng appeared and launched the First War. Spears could be quickly manufactured to fill out the ranks of the Empire's armies against the Shadowlands invasion, and the longer weapons were often better for fighting against large foes like demons and ogres. Akodo One-Eye, always alert to new tactical opportunities, began using elite units of spearmen in his armies, and soon after they appeared in the other clan armies as well.

In the thousand years since that time, the way of yarijutsu has continued to thrive in Rokugan—not as the most pre-eminent of martial arts, but certainly as the most widespread and practical. While samurai are still taught that kenjutsu and iaijutsu are the purest and most honorable of the martial arts, the peasants who are drafted into service to serve as the vanguard of most Rokugani armies are taught yarijutsu. There are also a few groups of samurai who esteem yarijutsu as one of the highest of the martial arts, second only to the sword. As a result, there are probably more men in modern Rokugan who are trained in the basics of yarijutsu than there are in any other weapon form. Many ashigaru and samurai take extreme pride in their spears, almost as much as with swords. They will ornament the hafts with tassels or streamers, designed both to give the spear a decorative appearance and to distract the enemy. Some yarijutsu artists will engrave art onto the blades of their polearms, while others carve intricate designs into the haft, and the blades are protected with sheaths lest they fall victim to rust or dirt.

Types of Spears

There are a considerable variety of polearms used by Rokugani warriors, differentiated both by length and by the shape of the head. Although the L5R game mechanics draw a distinction between "spears" and "polearms," in terms of broad military classification they are all very similar weapons and are used in similar ways. Irrespective of differing RPG mechanics, all such weapons fall under the martial art of yarijutsu in Rokugani eyes.

The most common spear used by Rokugani warriors is the simple yari. This basic spear is usually six to seven feet long, tipped with a straight, narrow, double-edged blade between eight and twenty-four inches in length (the length of the blade varies based on the clan which crafted the weapon, with the Daidoji of the Crane Clan generally favoring the longest blades). Most yari heads are made of average-quality steel rather than the top-quality metal used for katana (though still well ahead of the metal used for kitchen knives and other mundane implements). Samurai yari have hafts made from well-seasoned hardwood, such as ash, but lower quality yari use bamboo hafts instead.



While the common yari is the weapon of choice for ashigaru, many samurai foot-soldiers prefer to carry the shorter weapon known as the nage-yari. Nage-yari are only three to four feet long and have a fairly short head, and are designed to be well-balanced for throwing. Their small size makes it possible for a single samurai to carry several of them in a bandolier or quiver, and their shorter length makes them easier to use in close-quarters fighting than a normal yari. Lion spearmen are particularly well-known for carrying nage-yari.

There are also a myriad of different sub-designs of yari, each with a different type of head. For example, *sankaku yari* have heads which are triangular rather than flat, making them better at piercing armor in exchange for losing their cutting edge. The *maga yari* has three blades, two of which are curved and perpendicular to the central blade, allowing it to snag and trap enemy swords; the *tsukinari yari*, on the other hand, has a longer curved blade which is used for slashing and as a hook to pull a foe off his feet. These two variants are popular among ashigaru, who need every advantage they can get against better-trained and better-equipped samurai. When not serving in war, peasants also sometimes make use of the kumade, a simple peasant weapon comprising a four-foot shaft of wood with a pointed metal tip at one end and a rake at the other.

In contrast with the yari, which tends to be used more by ashigaru than by samurai, the naginata is used by samurai exclusively, and with such enthusiasm that it is almost as iconic for Rokugani bushi as the katana itself. Naginata are essentially full-length katana blades on full-length spear hafts. The naginata can grant a samurai a decisive advantage in reach and leverage over an opponent with a sword, and is thus popular both on the battlefield and among yojimbo. Most naginata blades are made of steel that is slightly inferior to that used to make katana, but in some families where the tradition of yarijutsu is strongest, naginata blades are made with the same quality steel and the same artistic care as katana blades. The Shiba family of the Phoenix are especially noted for their love of the naginata.

The nagimaki is a naginata with only a three-foot haft, essentially a katana with a lengthened wooden hilt, and is used far less often than the normal naginata. Among the more militant orders of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, meanwhile, there is great favor for the bisento, a slightly shorter naginata with a much wider and heavier blade, difficult to use due to being quite top-heavy.

Not all applications of yarijutsu are found on the battlefield, and a few unusual types of polearms are used in specifically non-military roles. The sasumata or "man-catcher" is a seven-foot haft of wood surmounted by a crescent-shaped steel head with barbs along its inner curve. Magistrates and their enforcers use the weapon to hold law-breakers immobile, for once the crescent is slipped over an opponent's head he must remain immobile or be gouged by the vicious barbs. The sodegarami or "sleeve-catcher" is also used by law enforcers to catch at criminals' garments and drag them down; it is especially useful for pulling fleeing lawbreakers off of horses. It has a seven-foot haft topped with a T-shaped head covered in hooks and barbs, allowing it to easily tangle in Rokugani robes, kimono, and hakama.

Game Mechanics for Variant Polearms

In an L5R campaign with many spear-wielding PCs, the GM may wish to introduce some additional mechanical variation to reflect the many sub-types of spears and polearms that exist in Rokugan. In general, weapons like the sankaku yari or the tsukinari yari will be mechanically similar to a normal yari, especially in terms of their Damage Rating (DR) and the applicable skills. However, a GM might wish to allow a PC who takes an Emphasis in a particular yari sub-type to gain a modest mechanical advantage that reflects the design of the weapon. A sankaku yari could ignore 1 or 2 points of Reduction from armor, for example, or a maga yari could allow a small bonus to Disarm attempts. The GM should be wary of letting these benefits grow too strong, however, lest a character be defined more by his weapon than his skills and Techniques.

The Art of Yarijutsu

Spears are very versatile weapons. They can be used at ranges much longer than a sword, striking foes before they can reach the wielder; they can stab, they can slash, they can block or trip, and they can stop a mounted charge in its tracks. However, this very versatility means becoming a true master of yarijutsu is a daunting proposition.

There are three levels of training with yarijutsu. Most ashigaru receive only basic training, but samurai undertake more advanced training and true masters spend as much time on a spear as a Kakita spends practicing iaijutsu. It is only at this highest level of training that yarijutsu ceases to be mere combat practice and evolves into an art form.

Basic spear training is, however, the foundation for all forms of more advanced yarijutsu. Beginning trainees learn a few simple forms, generally a thrust, a block, and a slash. The primary focus for ashigaru training is to perform these simple kata in groups, so as to produce a fairly predictable battlefield performance, whereas the primary focus for early samurai training is using the spear to keep a foe at a distance.

The second stage of training is when one first begins to see hints of the greater art of yarijutsu. Students expand on the basic spear kata, learning to thrust at different levels and distances, to slash at enemies who are too close to take advantage of the extra length of the yari, and to use the blunt end of the yari as a weapon in its own right. As a student gains confidence with these yarijutsu forms, they begin to flow together into continuous smooth motions, much like a summer wind sweeping across a field of ripe grain. The intermediate yarijutsu student also begins to learn to form a 'lethal space' around himself, an area where no enemy can enter without being slain, much like the lethal arc of a swordsman's reach.

In the most advanced yarijutsu training, the student discovers the earlier kata are just the foundation for a lifetime of future learning, for changes to the basic kata can transform them into entirely different forms. Just as a subtle puff of wind can start the fall of thousands of cherry blossoms, so can tiny changes in direction and speed bring dramatic differences in the way a spear moves. A subtle flip of the wrist can cause the point of a moving yari to strike in a sharply different direction. A twist of the wrist can cause the shaft of the yari to stop spinning while the head snaps forward like a striking viper. Watching a master at yarijutsu go through his forms is like watching an endless dance in which the moves are similar yet never duplicated. At this level the yarijutsu student becomes utterly lethal to anyone who enters the reach of his spear, and such men and women are easily spotted on the field of battle—there is always a cleared ring around them, the length of their yari. Within such rings exist only the yarijutsu masters, the dead, and the dying.

For advanced students of yarijutsu, the art can become a form of meditation, much as with other Rokugani martial arts. The flow of the forms helps focus the mind and free the spirit, even while offering a truly impressive sight to any witness.

Cinematic Spearfighting

Many martial arts films depict warriors using spears in an extremely flamboyant and dramatic manner, far different from the straightforward depiction of yarijutsu in a semi-realistic combat system like L5R 4th Edition. Chinese films in particular, such as *Hero*, *Three Kingdoms*, or *Red Cliff*, tend to feature an extremely impressive cinematic style of spear-fighting.

Although "normal" L5R does not really fit this sort of action, GMs who are taking a more cinematic or heroic style to their game may wish to enable a form of yarijutsu similar to the dazzling displays of athleticism and reflexes used in these films. A GM might allow the players to announce some sort of secondary move accompanying their attack, then make an Athletics Skill Roll (alongside their normal Spear or Polearm attack roll) to pull it off. For example, "I grasp my yari near the end and whirl it about me in an unpredictable pattern, creating a swirling wall of steel my foes cannot enter." The GM could award mechanical benefits to successful rolls, such as a bonus to the character's Armor TN, or simply reflect it in play through the actions (or lack thereof) of the enemy.

GMs who wish to take this sort of cinematic action even farther, and extend it beyond the domain of spear-fighting, may wish to consult the discussion "Air and Free-Form Action Role-Playing" at the end of this chapter.

Devotees of the Way of the Spear

While they are not great in numbers, there are military units, families, and even entire Minor Clans who revere the spear as their primary weapon. By the twelfth century, some of these groups are extinct, but others still serve the Empire in the best way they know how: practicing the art of yarijutsu.

The Boar Clan

"When the world is against you, and you believe that you have already lost, it is in that moment you must rise up again. In that action, you will feel the courage of the Boar."

—Heichi Mariako

The Boar Clan only officially existed for a relatively short period of Rokugan's history, although their roots were considerably older. During the fourth century, a large group of samurai from the Crab Clan were believed killed by an earthquake while exploring the Twilight Mountains. Nearly a century later, in the year 447, several samurai emerged from the mountains, travelled to Otosan Uchi, and presented the Emperor with carts filled with iron and jade. The samurai explained they had managed to survive within the mountain passes and valleys until they could re-open the routes to the rest of the Empire. The wealth they offered were the taxes they owed for having lived on the Emperor's lands for over a hundred years. The Emperor was so impressed by their cleverness and resilience that he granted them their remote mountain lands as their own, proclaiming them the Heichi family and the Boar Clan.

In the year 501, all of the members of the Boar Clan within their own lands mysteriously disappeared, leaving behind only pools of blood. In fact, they had fallen victim to the machinations of the Bloodspeaker Cult, which had begun sacrificing them on a terrible relic called the Anvil of Despair. A group of ancient spirits called the Shakoki Dogu, who lived deep within the mountains, absorbed the remaining Boar to save them from the Bloodspeakers,



leaving nothing behind. It would be over six hundred years before the rest of Rokugan would learn the secret behind the Boar Clan's mysterious fate.

Through the centuries since the Boar Clan's disappearance, various ronin have claimed Boar ancestry and even occasionally shown knowledge of the clan's lost yarijutsu techniques. However, the clan was declared extinct by Imperial decree, so these ronin were never able to lay claim to the Boar Clan's lands or name.

The Boar were known as tough, resilient samurai—hardly surprising given that they were born from Crab stock and lived in a remote mountain stronghold. Their home was often beset by bandits, Shadowlands creatures, and sometimes vicious wild beasts. The Boar samurai developed a fighting style which capitalized on their defensive abilities: tenacity, resilience, and the unparalleled abilities of their weaponsmiths. Their techniques centered on a finely crafted spear which they called a *mai chong*. It was about eight feet in length and capped with a very unusual tip: a main blade one foot long, with two other blades of equal length standing out at right angles to the main blade. Further, the main blade was barbed by two large spikes protruding from it, allowing the wielder to slash with it as well as to thrust.

The versatility of the mai chong made it extremely effective when used correctly, but also difficult to learn to use to its fullest extent. It is said a master of the mai chong could cut the laces of an opponent's armor from ten feet away, but even within the Boar Clan only a few elite samurai ever rose to such a level of technique. After the Boar were extinguished, the knowledge of how to make the mai chong died with them, and only a handful of the weapons exist in modern times, circulating through the ronin community.

The Tsume Vassal Family of the Crane

The Tsume are a minor family of the Crane, vassals to the Doji. For most of their history they have lived in the Kintani Valley, a geographically isolated valley adjacent to the lands of the Lion and the Phoenix. It has been the scene of numerous battles between the Lion and the Crane, most notably in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries when the Tsume emerged from the valley to capture the castle of Shiro Kyotei and the city of Toshi Ranbo, triggering a series of ferocious wars against the Lion.

Facing repeated attacks by the Lion, the Tsume developed defensive techniques built around spear-fighting, eventually earning the title of Tsume Pikemen for their skills with polearms. Their technique allows infantry using yari to use the aggression of their opponents against them. Every young Tsume who trains as a bushi is taught the techniques of the Tsume Pikemen, and the family has endured repeated Lion assaults on the strength of this training.

The Tsume technique focuses on defensive action, using the momentum of charging attackers against them. Pikemen learn to be reactionary fighters, watching their foes for weaknesses in their defenses and then using the reach of the yari to exploit those weaknesses.

The Daidoji Regulars

Although the Tsume are the best-known masters of yarijutsu within the Crane Clan, the entire Daidoji family has also earned a reputation with this fighting art, mainly due to the fighting skills of their Iron Warriors. Partly due to their tradition of defensive war, and partly because of their frequent assignment as yojimbo, the Iron Warriors train rigorously to use the yari and use it well. Many Daidoji kata are built around polearms, especially spears, and the family is also known for training its ashigaru more extensively than in other clan armies. A few Daidoji have even advanced the way of yarijutsu into a display art, the so-called Resplendent Crane Yarijutsu.

The Lion Elite Spearmen

During the First War at the dawn of the Empire, the Kami Akodo formed an elite unit of spearmen within the Lion army, and that unit still exists in modern Rokugan—although some Lion commanders view it as antiquated. Nonetheless, these elite spearmen serve as one of the primary ranged-attack units in the Lion armies. There are many stories to explain why the most capable army in all of Rokugan still uses these units, but the most common explanation is that Akodo supposedly did not think the bow was a proper battlefield weapon, believing it was best

used for hunting. Other tales claim that when Akodo lost his eye in the First War, the warriors he fought alongside stopped using their bows because he could not use his, instead switching to throwing spears. Whatever the actual reason behind the existence of the Lion Elite Spearmen, they have a long and distinguished history of service to the Lion Clan.

The Lion Elite Guard are unusual in that they function as a hybrid between a ranged unit and an infantry unit. They are masters of the nage-yari, a shorter type of yari which is typically only three or feet long. Each spearman carries a quiver of eight to ten nage-yari onto the battlefield. They advance on their foes, throwing their spears as they do so, then draw their swords or switch to using their spears as melee weapons when they reach close range. Though archery units are effective at a much greater range, the ferocity and courage of the Lion Elite Spearmen allows them to continue being a meaningful force on the modern battlefield.

Shiba Bushi and Utaku Battle Maidens: The Naginata

Both the Shiba Bushi and the Utaku *Shiotome* (Battle Maidens) are esteemed as acknowledged masters with the naginata. These two groups of warriors train with the bladed polearm for different reasons, but both use them with grace and style... and to great effect.

A Shiba Bushi's only task in life is to make certain the Isawa, and by extension the Phoenix Clan, are protected. At a basic philosophical level, every Shiba is a yojimbo, regardless of specific training. This is one of the major reasons why the Shiba train extensively with the naginata. In a battle where the majority of the warriors are wielding katana, a naginata can hold a significant advantage, allowing a single warrior to stand on even terms with multiple opponents. Despite its size a naginata is a surprisingly fast weapon; combined with superior reach, this makes it an almost perfect weapon for any yojimbo. The Shiba take great pride in their skill with the naginata, often holding informal duels in which combatants display their battle prowess with naginata in the most dazzling and graceful way possible.

The Utaku Battle Maidens also use naginata, though for different reasons than the Shiba. Naginata allow the Battle Maidens to engage infantry armed with spears or other polearms on an equal footing, denying the foot troops the advantage of reach, while gaining reach against those armed with katana. It is rare to see an Utaku Battle Maiden on the field of battle without a naginata, and indeed the naginata has become something of a symbol of their order.



Ashigaru and the Spear

"What we do is art. What peasants do is merely adequate."

– Tsuruchi Nobumoto, daimyo of the Tsuruchi, twelfth century

While it is by no means uncommon for a samurai to fight with a yari, the majority of those in the Empire who use spears in combat are ashigaru, peasant troops. Samurai are valuable—they are relatively few in number, they hold and protect lands, they require years of training to master their skills. By merely existing they are instruments of power, political alliance, and social order. Peasants, on the other hand, are both numerous and expendable, making them ideal as conscript troops.

When the Kami organized Rokugan at the dawn of the Empire, only a minority of the mortals they encountered were found worthy to hold the position of samurai. Generally only the finest warriors and most capable leaders impressed the Kami enough to be sworn into their service. The rest of the people became peasants, doing their duty in the Celestial order by completing the everyday menial tasks that are beneath the notice of a samurai. However, when war comes a few peasants are allowed to share the primary duty of a samurai and fight alongside them. Every clan in the Empire has a standing army, sometimes multiple armies, and each of these armies has a core of ashigaru foot soldiers. Even the Unicorn use ashigaru to form part of the infantry "base" of their army, fixing the enemy forces in place for the samurai cavalry to strike.

Ashigaru serve two purposes. First, they provide a large portion of the army's general-purpose ground troops, often charging in great masses to clash with the equally great masses of the opponent's ashigaru. Secondly, they provide an army's labor force, felling the trees needed for siege engines, digging and reinforcing earthworks, building camps and digging latrines, and a thousand

The Tale of Daidoji Yari

It is said that in the tenth century the Daidoji family daimyo was traveling through his lands when a sudden storm arose, forcing him and his personal yojimbo to shelter in a small village. The next morning the daimyo woke to the sounds of battle outside the simple hut where he had slept the night. The village had come under attack from a pack of ronin cavalry. The only defense was a group of five doshin, four young and one older, all of them unarmored and carrying only their yari. The doshin moved together as one, more fluidly and capably than most samurai, showing skill in the art of yarijutsu unlike any the daimyo had ever seen. When his yojimbo stepped forward to join the battle, the daimyo held out a hand and stopped him from interfering in the fight.

As far as the daimyo could see, there was never a moment when the fight's outcome was in the slightest doubt. Despite being outnumbered more than two to one, with no armor and no swords, the doshin easily prevailed, felling seven of the ronin before the others fled, and dropping another with a thrown yari as he tried to flee. The sole injury to the doshin was a single slash across one man's cheek.

With the battle ended and the wound bandaged, the daimyo called the leader of the doshin to stand before him. "Who are you, and how do you make your yari dance like that?" The old doshin bowed deeply and answered: "Me, samurai-sama? I am an ashigaru, son of an ashigaru, grandson of an ashigaru, and my sons after me are ashigaru." He gestured to the other four doshin, who bowed as one. "My father named me Yari, and I named my eldest Yari. I don't make the spear dance, samurai-sama. The spear knows where to go if you listen to it. I just help the air carry it there."

The daimyo mused over the simple wisdom of the old doshin for a time, then smiled. "Daidoji Yari, how would you like to share your wisdom with others?" Supposedly, the daimyo elevated the doshin and his family to the rank of samurai on that very day, and within the year Daidoji Yari became a sensei at the Daidoji Training Grounds, teaching young Daidoji bushi to listen to their spears and help the air carry them where they needed to go.

other menial tasks that are required by an army but beneath the dignity of samurai (even Crab samurai).

A good percentage of ashigaru come from families with a history of such service, sometimes able to trace their lines back for centuries or even to the founding of the Empire. Such families are extremely proud of their lineage and the honor bestowed upon them to help defend their lord's lands. In a few cases these families are even permitted to retain their spears and armor, passing them down from generation to generation, though more often their gear is kept by their lord during peacetime.

In times of open warfare, a clan will send samurai out into its villages and conscript ashigaru for service. Some of these recruiting samurai march into villages and demand a specific number of men come with them, while others send messages to the village headman or personally handpick their soldiers. Regardless, the village has no choice but to offer up the number of soldiers required. Career ashigaru will usually volunteer for service, of course, but most peasants have little interest in fighting and are chosen by the headman, through a lottery, or in a similarly involuntary fashion.

Freshly recruited ashigaru are generally regarded with scorn by the veterans, many of whom serve in clan armies for years at a time. Typically, a few of these experienced ashigaru will be appointed to serve as sergeants and supervise the new conscripts, teaching them the basics of using yari and fighting together as a group. Ashigaru are fond of saying that unlike samurai, it is not through the strength of individuals that they prevail, but rather through their ability to work together: a group functioning as a single entity. Skilled ashigaru use this philosophy to great effect, and many a samurai charge has been stopped in its tracks by a large mass of ashigaru acting in concert.

Ashigaru are always equipped with yari; somewhat more rarely, they may be given bows as well. Their armor is simple, often little more than padding, and they usually wear a plain metal jingasa as a helmet. They are of course expected to take care of their own gear, and this is part of the training which the experienced men pass on to the new recruits.

As might be expected, ashigaru suffer heavy casualties in any major engagement. Despite such losses, there are usually still plenty of ashigaru left when a war comes to an end, and most of these "surplus" men are sent back to their villages to resume their lives as farmers or craftsmen (at least until the next war). However, a minority are allowed to remain in the ranks to ensure there is always a core of trained men for any sudden eruption of conflict. Also, experienced ashigaru are the ones most often chosen by their lords to serve as doshin (peasant law enforcers) or as budoka (personal armed retainers to samurai).

It is not uncommon for an experienced ashigaru to become particularly skilled with his spear, especially those ashigaru who have managed to survive many battles or who serve as doshin in villages that are troubled by bandits or marauding Shadowlands creatures. These ashigaru can sometimes rise above the simple slash, thrust, and block they are taught in training, rise to the point of embracing yarijutsu as a fighting art in the same way as their samurai masters. Although such advanced ashigaru seldom match the true artistry of a Daidoji or a Shiba, their skills are also unencumbered by the habits formed from learning other martial arts and unfettered by the established rules and traditions that constrain samurai. Such men are impressive indeed, for they throw all they have into their art, drawing on every ounce of creativity and artistic spirit they possess—after all, they have nothing else.

On very rare occasions, an experienced or courageous ashigaru may be noticed by a daimyo and elevated to the rank of samurai. Such exceptional accomplishments are quite rare, of course, and the majority of those peasant soldiers who master the art of yarijutsu live and die as peasants—defending their villages, or perishing unknown and unmourned on a distant battlefield, their deeds and skill never noticed by their samurai masters.

Air and Unarmed Combat: The Way of Kaze-do

Once long ago, during the dawning of an autumn, an old man was walking through the hills. He walked slowly, leaning on a gnarled stick and stopping frequently to breathe the crisp air and gaze at the turning leaves. He spent days in the hills with only himself and nature for company. One morning, as he was passing a stream, three young men stepped out from behind the trees and stood in his path. They were clearly bandits, for they wore ragged mismatched armor and each carried a weapon: one held a spear, another a sword, and the third clutched a battered club. The three bandits demanded the old man give them all of his possessions. He answered them calmly: "You may not have all that I own, but I do have enough tea and food to share. I will be stopping for lunch at midday, so you may travel with me and share my meal if you are truly hungry."

The three young men laughed, and said if he would not give them his possessions they would take them. The bandit with the spear moved forward and thrust at the old man, but he merely took a single step back and gently set his hand on the haft of the spear, causing the point to plummet into the soft earth. The spearman stumbled and fell into the nearby stream. The bandit with the club moved in next, more carefully than the spearman. He swung his club at the old man's head with enough force to shatter a stone to dust, but the old man merely bent his knees, sliding his hand down his staff as he did so. His ankle twined around the bandit's and sent the younger man sprawling face down into the soft earth beneath a gingko tree.

Finally the bandit with the sword approached. As he did so, the old man rose, his joints cracking and popping as he stretched to his full height. The swordsman approached warily, circling, then darted in to strike. The old man stepped to the side, then reached out with one hand and twisted. The swordsman fell to the ground stunned. When his vision cleared, he was lying face down, dirt in his mouth, his arm held painfully behind him by the old man...who was simply putting pressure on the swordsman's index finger. The butt of the old man's staff, meanwhile, was pressed against the back of his neck.

The other two bandits stood up, but kept carefully away from the old man and their fallen comrade. Finally one of them asked, "How did you defeat us so easily?" The old man smiled and said, "If you know what you are looking for, and have a little patience, your opponent defeats himself." The two bandits looked thoughtful, and then the spearman said, "Please teach me." The man with the club added, "And me." Finally the swordsman spat the dirt from his mouth and asked, "Please, Master, me too."

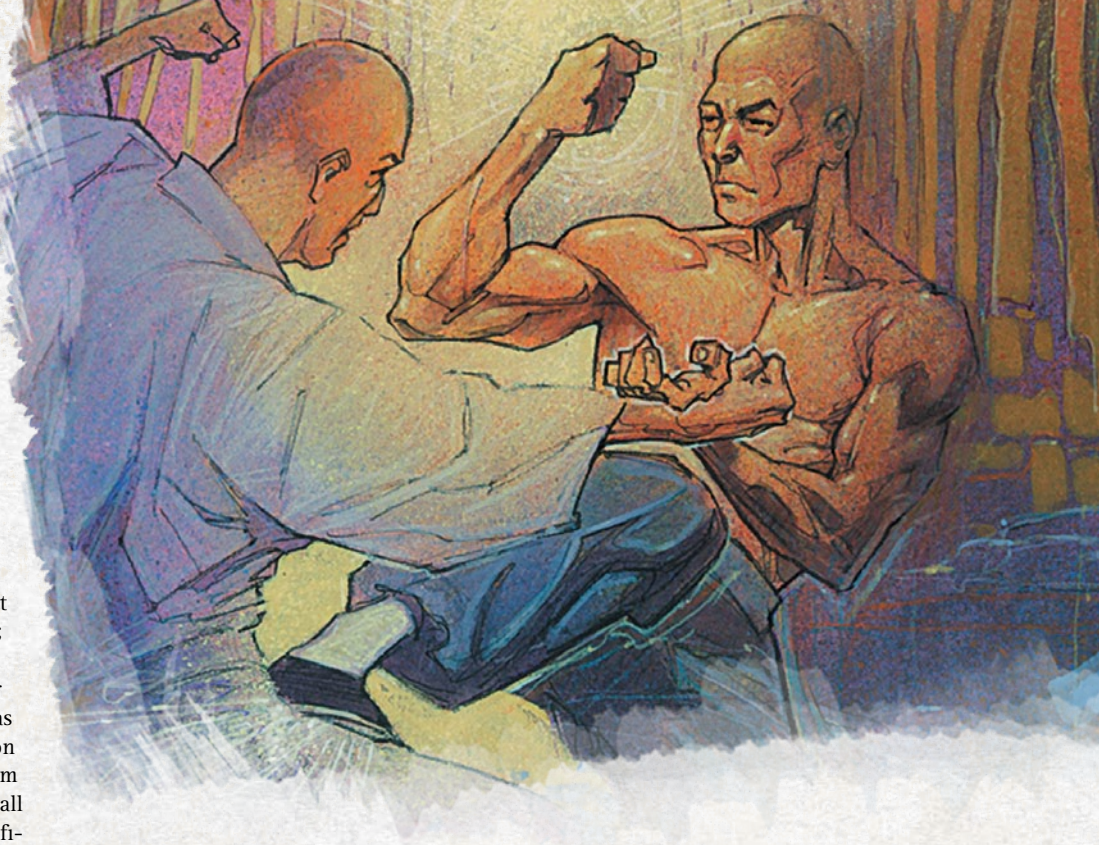
The old man nodded and let the swordsman up. "Of course, but first we should enjoy the autumn air, and perhaps have some tea. Then you may begin to learn."

-- from the tales of Ota, Kaze-Do Master, and his three disciples



Though Rokugani culture can fairly be said to worship the sword, a number of unarmed fighting styles have developed over the centuries. Some of these techniques are merely intended to aid their practitioners in meditation, but most of them are effective fighting arts, albeit regarded with less admiration than those using weapons. While there are many different styles and sub-styles of unarmed combat, almost all of them can trace their roots back to the style created by Togashi Kaze in the third century, the style which bears his name today: Kaze-do.

The History of Kaze-do



"Victory is easy. Be like the wind and your opponent will defeat himself."

– Togashi Kaze

The origins of Rokugan's first unarmed martial art are found in the reign of Hantei Ningi, the third Hantei Emperor. It was Hantei Ningi who first declared that peasants were no longer to bear weapons; he believed the Empire had become fully civilized during the long reign of his father Hantei Genji, the Shining Prince, and it was time for the common folk to finally abandon what remained of the warrior traditions from the pre-Empire days. His edict prohibited all commoners from bearing arms unless specifically authorized to do so by a samurai.

While the decree was effective in separating the peasants from the last of their tribal past, especially in the more civilized areas of the Empire, it had some unforeseen consequences as well. Despite the efforts of Hantei Genji, the Empire was still not a wholly secure place. In mining villages in the mountains, in farming villages at the edges of great forests, in farms far away from any samurai outpost, danger still lurked. Bandits, Shadowlands creatures, and in some cases even wild animals took advantage of the helpless peasants in every possible way.

An ise zumi named Togashi Kaze was moved by the troubles of the people, and resolved to do something about it. Drawing on a number of inspirations, including a flowing form of physical meditation that was common among the ise zumi of the time, Kaze developed a defensive form of martial arts which came to be called Kaze-do, "the Way of the Wind." Kaze travelled the Empire, focusing on the wilder and more remote regions, and taught Kaze-do to any peasant who wished to learn it. He refused, however, to teach it to a samurai. "You have your weapons, samurai-san," he would say. "Why do you need more?"

Kaze-do proved to be an extremely effective style of combat and Kaze demonstrated it every chance he got. Indeed, he often purposefully insulted other samurai and then humiliated them, leaving them disarmed and face-down in the street. In time rumors of his activities reached even to the Imperial Capital, and the Emperor demanded Togashi Kaze be brought before him. What happened next became the stuff of legend: Kaze refused to demonstrate his fighting style to the Emperor, and the furious Hantei ordered the ise zumi killed for his insolence. The Emerald Champion, Doji Kuzume, committed seppuku rather than obey the order, and the Emperor immediately named the senior Lion in court to replace him. This second Emerald Champion carried out the Emperor's orders and Togashi Kaze was slain, having never taught his martial arts style to another samurai.

Since that time, many of the techniques of Kaze's style have spread into the world of the samurai, but only the peasants, the Brotherhood of Shinsei, and the ise zumi order hold the secrets to all of Kaze's ancient techniques. Even in modern times, every now and then a traveling samurai will encounter a ronin or even a peasant in the more remote portions of the Empire who knows some of the true secrets of Kaze-do, passed down from father to son since his ancestor learned it from Togashi Kaze himself.

Kaze's Three Principles

Like many of the tattooed men, Togashi Kaze was a philosopher, and he taught his students how to live as well as how to fight. He spoke of esoteric matters like the harmony of the universe and the ebb and flow of the elements, but he also discussed ethics and proper behavior, and he insisted his students learn three maxims to govern their practice of Kaze-do:

Killing is for the cruel. Kaze believed his art was only for defense, not killing, and those who used it to bring needless pain and suffering shamed both themselves and the art.

Avoidance is preferable to violence. This is the most controversial of Kaze's principles, since he himself often picked fights with samurai in order to demonstrate his skills.

Defeat is unavoidable. Kaze believed the idea of an "invincible fighter" was a fallacy, and insisted his students learn humility and accept their own weaknesses. Of course, the flip side of this was that even a seemingly invincible foe could be brought down.

What is the Art of Kaze Do?

"If you are fast and wise you will always be able to see what the enemy is doing before he acts. If you are fast and wise, you will always be able to defeat him. Killing is for the cruel."

– Togashi Kaze

Kaze-do, the Way of the Wind, is a largely defensive martial art. It holds a peculiar place in Rokugani martial arts, for it was created by a samurai (the Tattooed Men are technically of the samurai caste) but was intended for use by peasants. It is a defensive art whose sole purpose is to allow the weak to defend themselves from the strong, and it may be fairly said that those who follow the Way of the Wind truly understand the philosophy of Air.

Kaze-do relies on throws, evasions, leg sweeps, and grapples to do its work. There are very few offensive techniques in Kaze-do, and those that exist are there mainly to facilitate a grab or a throw. Practitioners are taught to be like the wind. The wind cannot be told where to go, it cannot be grasped, it blows where it wills and when it wills. It can be slow and gentle or swift and tempestuous, and so too should be the movements of a Kaze-do fighter.

Students of Kaze-do are first taught the basic motions of the art. They practice these basic forms for hours at a time until they become as natural as breathing; only then are they allowed to try using them against another. Performing the forms of Kaze-do gives the student an awareness of the way his own body moves and the ability to move it where he wishes without thinking. The students are also expected to watch their fellows while they practice, learning through observation as well as experience. Watching others grants the student an awareness of the way others move so he can better predict where and how an opponent will strike.

Kaze-do teaches that one cannot hit the wind; an enemy cannot strike someone who is not there. Kaze-do students learn to evade the blows of their enemies, gauging the reach and angle of an opponent's attack and leaning or sliding so it does not hit them; as a last resort, they shed an opponent's blow with a block, deflecting their weapon with a shove or blow to the foe's arm or leg.

As the wind pushes a leaf where it will, so the Kaze-do student is taught to guide his opponent where he wants him to go, using the enemy's own speed and momentum against him. A Kaze-do fighter will grab his opponent as he attacks and use the enemy's own momentum to bring him to the ground, or he will evade an opponent's blow and sweep his feet out from underneath him, exploiting the fact that most opponents are off balance if their blows do not connect. These basic skills are also used for more advanced maneuvers like disarming a foe or putting them into a submission hold. Of course, it should be noted that most of these more advanced techniques are only found among the Tattooed Orders—few peasants had time to learn all of Kaze's secrets, and fewer still have managed to preserve them through the centuries.

Kaze-do artists rarely kill their opponents, for this flies in the face of Kaze's ethics of self-defense. Instead they seek to stun, disable, or grapple their foes until they either submit or fall unconscious. More than one angry bandit or drunken ronin has given up in frustration after being knocked down a dozen times.

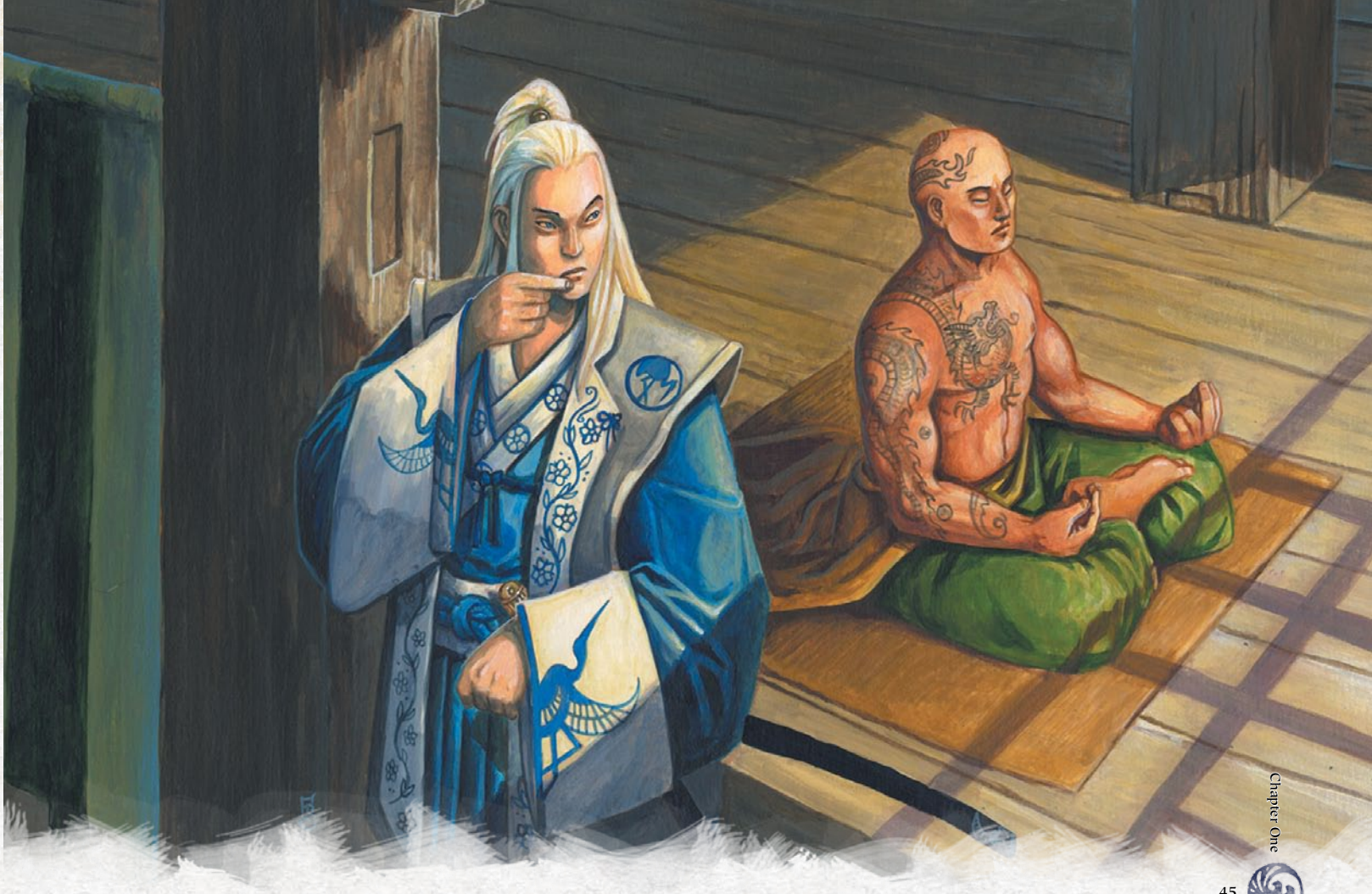
Air and Free-Form Action Role-Playing

Legend of the Five Rings is by design a role-playing game that places considerable emphasis on style, role-play, and incorporating the "flavor" of the world of Rokugan into its mechanics. However, it still uses a fairly robust rules system which regulates what actions can be taken in combat, how Techniques work, how attacks and damage are resolved, and so forth.

There is no requirement that all gaming groups must use the L5R rules in their strict written form. L5R has always been a "story driven" game, one where the dramatic demands of creating a tale of samurai action and drama take priority over a legalistic interpretation of the rules. Although the L5R 4th Edition rules-set allows for a fair amount of creativity and improvisation in combat and action scenes, some GMs and players may prefer to free themselves from the restraints of the rules and adopt a more flowing, free-form, and (dare we say it) Air-driven approach to action.

Consider, for example, an approach which does away with the complexity of School Techniques and Stances in favor of encouraging the players to describe what their PC does in combat each Round. If the PC's actions are thematically appropriate for his School, the GM can award him some Free Raises, or simply reduce the opponent's Armor TN. A PC who fights defensively might gain bonuses to his own Armor TN, but the bonuses could be modified based on the description of the PC's actions rather than simply the result of a Defense/Reflexes roll. This sort of approach will encourage the players to think of their characters as participating in a dynamic action scene rather than just engaging in abstract manipulations of dice pools.

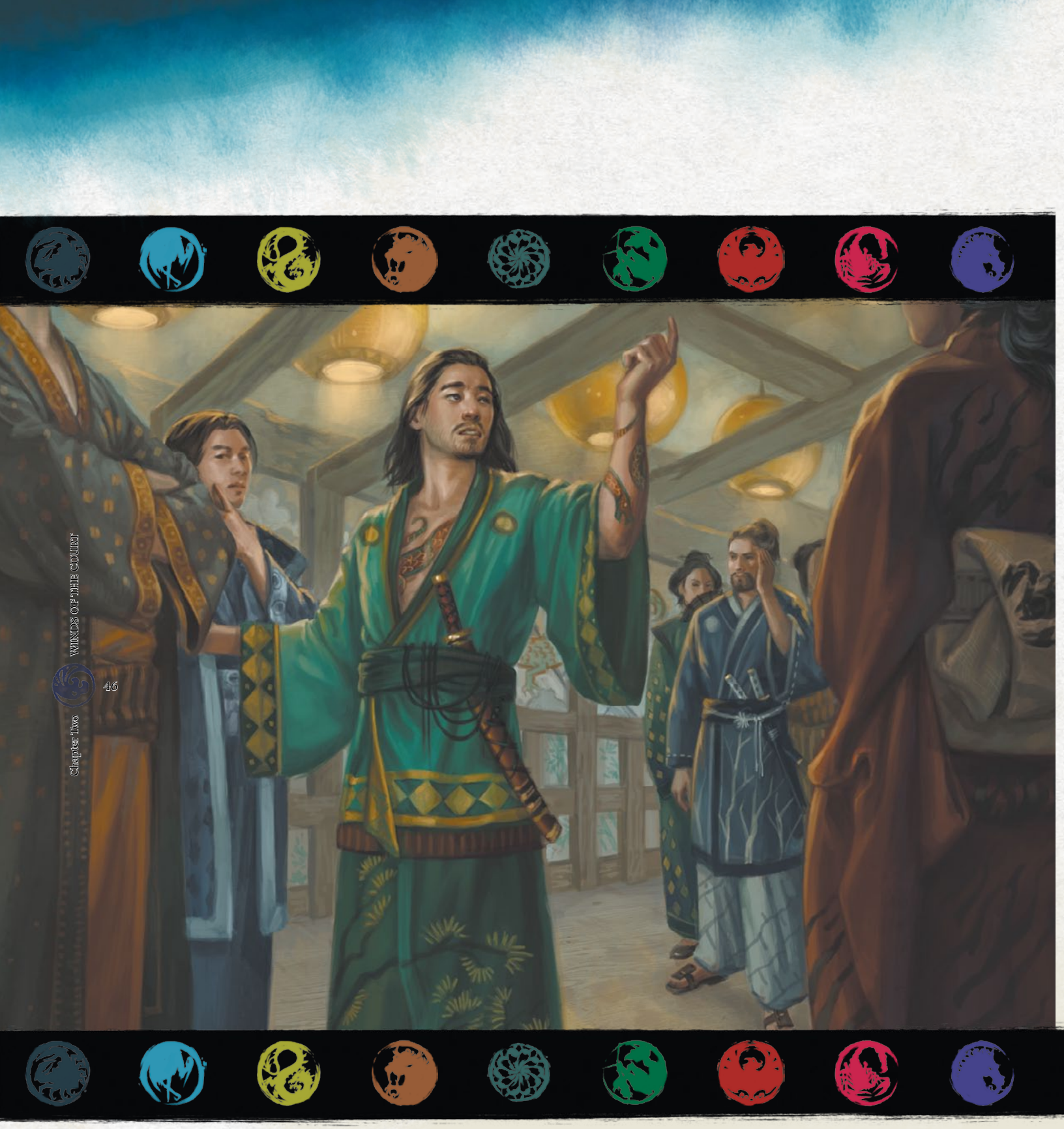
It is worth noting that this sort of approach encourages the players (and the GM) to think of their Techniques as actual fighting moves rather than just mechanics. It is one thing to simply say, "My Matsu uses his Rank 2 Technique." It is quite another to describe how your Matsu warrior charges his foe, uttering an ear-splitting *kiai* shout, his face contorted into a rictus grin of fury and bloodlust!



As another option, consider a game that does without Initiative rolls. Instead, all the players tell the GM what they are doing for the Round, and the GM determines how these actions interact with each other. This will put a lot of demands on the GM, of course, so a variant of the same idea would be a game in which the PCs act in the order that the players announce their actions—encouraging the players to get into the adrenaline-pumping excitement of the action and, in effect, act as their characters. If this approach is taken, it is recommended that in most cases the GM should have enemy creatures and NPCs react to the PCs rather than jumping in and acting ahead of them—although an especially powerful villain or potent rival can emphasize that power by acting first. Best of all, this approach does away with the need to spend time on rolling Initiative and writing down scores at the start of a fight—the GM can send the PCs plunging straight into the action.

These sorts of approaches can work especially well if the GM is trying for a cinematic action style based on Asian film, especially Chinese action movies with their famously dynamic fight scenes. The rules and Techniques of L5R may not lend themselves well to depicting a warrior who does a forward somersault while lashing out with his sword, or who backflips away from an enemy attack, but a free-form approach will not only allow such a style of action but will actually encourage it, resulting in combats as swift, unpredictable, and dramatic as the Element for which this book is named.

Of course, free-form action does not have to be over-the-top in its style. It can also be gritty and deadly. A GM who wants to encourage a free-form style more in keeping with realistic samurai cinema (such as the works of Akira Kurosawa, or more recently Takashi Miike's superb remake of *13 Assassins*) may want to consider doing away with Damage rolls. The extra roll after resolving the attack does tend to slow things down, and can occasionally lead to anomalous situations such as a triumphant hit that beats the Armor TN by a huge margin producing only a meager amount of actual damage. Instead, the GM can opt to inflict a "standard" amount of damage with a normal hit, increasing it for successful Raises. (This also has the advantage of encouraging both calling Raises and the dramatic descriptions of action that can earn Free Raises.) Or the GM can base Damage on the amount by which the PC beats the opponent's Armor TN—an option which encourages both dramatic combat and the use of Void on attack rolls. Finally and most dramatically, the GM can do away with Wounds and Damage altogether, with a successful strike wounding, crippling, or killing the foe depending on the weapon used and the success of the attack roll. Combined with a dramatic free-form approach to combat itself, this can result in action scenes which are swift, knife-edge tense, and deadly—much like the action scenes in the best of samurai cinema.



Chapter Two



The Hiruma watched the performance, and in his mind's eye he could see the grand waste of it all. His life had been spent among horrors the actors could never have envisioned when they wrote their precious little play. The cost of the set could have fed the men of his squadron for a month or longer, provided jade rations for weeks. The waste was disgusting, and though the actors and actresses were skilled and their costumes undoubtedly beautiful, he sat in a sullen silence, doing his best not to glower openly.

The Doji sighed wistfully to herself. She could feel the emotional struggle of the characters in the perfect motions of lead actor's body and the tones of the music as it rose to crescendo. Her heart fluttered at the tragedy of romantic love, knowing that ultimately it would come to naught as these things always did, even with the couple married as they were in this story. Even as she enjoyed the emotions evoked by the play, though, in the back of her mind she was composing a carefully phrased poem she would share later tonight with the young Shiba she had found time to walk with in the gardens last evening. Of course, her affair would be a properly discrete one, unlike the victims of this dramatic tale.

The Kitsuki barely suppressed a yawn that would have tipped his feelings to the rest of the adience, masking the moment with a motion of his fan. He had seen the same story depicted better by another playwright. The tragedy of Hataki and Shamate barely interested him, and this whole event was consuming time that could be spent more constructively in negotiations or at least in quiet meditation. Unfortunately, attendance at such events was expected. Keeping his eyes upon the performers, he idly busied his mind with other things, mainly wondering what the Scorpion hoped to achieve by offering this performance today. He let his glance slide momentarily to the Lion delegation, and permitted himself to relax slightly after noting their impassive faces.

The head of those Lion, an aged Matsu, very carefully kept a tear from forming in his eye. A samurai was not permitted such frivolities as emotion, and he would not dare lose his face before so many rivals and enemies. However, he had known young Akodo Hataki in life, and he could feel the pain of past loss welling up. He wanted to be angry at the play and its performers, but to his frustration it showed compassion for both of the doomed lovers even in the face of the folly of their hearts. He made a note to send some form of thanks to the playwright later, carefully so as not to give the Scorpion the impression they had made headway against him. Still, he could not shake the feeling this play had been meant for him and his kin. Perhaps some of the Scorpion still remembered the meaning of Honor.

The Tsuruchi maiden glowered, silently fuming at the entire display. It was difficult not to simply storm out, watching the puffed-up Lion sitting proudly across the hall from her, as if they were somehow being lauded by this

foolishness. It was even harder to see the witch in red and black, that vapid creature, seated near the Lion. The bounty hunter could practically feel the Scorpion's conniving from here. It was obvious, currying the favor of the Lion by telling this tale favorably. The self-deprecation of showing their own faults through the portrayal of Shamate did not fool her one bit. She could see through all of this, see all the manipulations, all the hypocrisy of the Lion, and she desperately wanted to say something—or to simply be sick. But she knew it was death to do either, so she remained silent, teeth clenched.

The Shiba was not watching the play. Its action formed a backdrop in his mind, but other things troubled the void within him. His soul quavered as he looked covertly across the room at the lovely Doji, her perfect face focused entirely on the play. It was so hard to concentrate with her in the same hall. He tried to remember details of the story unfolding on the stage, but they flitted about in the back of his mind like caged sparrows. He fidgeted, knowing they would speak afterward and she would expect him to know something of the play, to be witty and charming.

The Shosuro did not allow any signs of triumph in her features or her posture. This was not the time to gloat. She knew that the Mantis would be watching for that and did not want to give the judgmental witch the satisfaction. Still, the suggestion to the playwright had been inspired. The play's opening was going perfectly, and while the old Matsu would not be turned to her side by it alone, he would certainly be more receptive to her line of thought tomorrow when they spoke again.

The Utaku, for her part, watched the whole thing impassively. So many displays of improper behavior, so many small mistakes and breaches in decorum. It was disgraceful, but she was above teaching them their errors, especially while the play was still being performed. Its artistic display was beautifully rendered, and she could feel just the faintest quiver in her heart at the tragic tale, though she would never admit it even to herself. A true samurai-ko did not have time for such lowly thoughts and feelings. A samurai-ko had time only to serve, maintaining her face and repute so that no shame came upon her lord.

While they all watched and observed, an actor waited in the wings, watching them—each and every one. The mask and makeup were already in place over his features: the visage of the honorable Scorpion cousin, soon to expose the tragic affair and bring it to an end. Soon he would stride onto the stage and join the performance, but for now he could still watch. He could see them all, each of their reactions, each of their thoughts. They gave themselves away with faint shifts of their seats, tiny changes in their faces. They each felt what they thought was their own feelings, but in truth they saw and experienced only what he and his fellow actors wished them to feel. They were puppets dancing before him, marionettes pulled upon the strings of his fingers, responding to the faintest of pressures.

In the Silken Smile, the guests always thought of the actors upon the stage as the performers. They were trained to do it, to think the only display was what they saw before them. But the true performance was not on the stage. Shosuro Chihiro knew that and reveled in it, along with all the other actors here today. It was the audience who offered the true performance. Their hearts danced to the tune he and his fellows played, and in the end it would be the actors who enjoyed the performance most of all. Only they would see the truth behind the thousand masks worn this night.

The Philosophy of Air in the Courts

It is probably fair to say that the ways of court are governed more by the Element of Air than by any other. Politics and art flow through the courts like the wind, sometimes delicate and even playful, other times with the howling fury of a typhoon. A courtier who truly wishes to thrive in Rokugan must master the way of Air, master the ability to shift and change his position from moment to moment as the court's tenor changes around him, master his own emotions while sensing and exploiting the feelings concealed beneath the stern faces and raised fans of his rivals.

To understand the courtiers, advisers, and retainers who follow the philosophy of Air, one must recognize the most basic lesson they all learn: to listen. It is a difficult lesson for those unaccustomed to following these paths, since it requires something most samurai are rarely able to do nearly so well as they might think.

Students of the Earth are patient, thoughtful and resolute in the face of criticism or crises, but they cannot often feel what is going on around them. The followers of Fire burn with a thousand plans and pierce the clouds of mystery with the light of intellect, but their flames only illuminate what they choose for them to shine over. Those who follow the path of Water are closer to the song of the world than all others, seeing truth within the reflection cast upon a pool, but they are so focused on their search that what passes by them may be missed. None of them can simply listen and hear the language of the heart.

Those trained in the ways of the Air are always taught the specific rituals, expectations, and protocols of the court, for they know such things govern the emotions of those within each court. Where other philosophies tend to train specifically in those fields they most espouse, those courtiers who follow Air often embrace a broader and more comprehensive education without an overt focus on



particular fields. If they can be said to have a focus, it is the nuances of court and social interaction, the thousand subtle differences of the human mind and heart.

This obsessive teaching of the details of court, to the point where they are ingrained beneath the level of thought, is designed to free the mind of the courtier. A samurai who is completely familiar with the ways of the court does not have to be constantly thinking and worrying about what is happening and what he must do; his mind remains still and silent, allowing him to listen to those around him, to hear the rhythms of the court flowing past like a whisper. It is this mental freedom that allows the masters of the courts of Air to appear almost effortless in their graces, maneuvering through the swirling patterns of politics and intrigue while giving the impression they are not even really trying.

Crane courtiers sometimes speak of listening to the song of the court. It is a faint and delicate song, lurking under the breeze that passes through a shoji screen as it shuts or the breath of a whispered conversation, and only those who know how to listen even know it is there. The Scorpion believe that every heart whispers to those who can listen, whether its owner knows it or not. Hearts always pulse with the feelings and thoughts which their owners try to keep locked away from others. Either way, to be able to hear such things is not a matter of the senses but of the mind and soul, of becoming attuned to the hidden language spoken by everyone, even when they do not know or understand what they are saying.

The Crane and Scorpion are foremost among those whose courtiers follow the way of Air, but there are other families and paths which embrace this philosophy as well. Where these various groups differ is not in their ability to hear the song of the court but rather in how they interpret and interact with it.

For the descendents of Ide, the song is a strange and wonderful thing, something they can sense but often can barely understand much less manipulate. Traveling amongst so many different cultures for centuries, they learned to hear the commonalities amongst all people, the simple universals that underlay every human gathering. The Ide seek first and foremost the means to keep many songs in harmony, to smooth the flows of passions and enmities that roar through the world around them. To them, the philosophy of Air guides them toward peace in all things.

Lady Doji shared much in common with Ide, but her grace was naturally divine and required almost no training. To hear the song in the winds of court was second

Pedro Munuera (order #3968235)

nature to her, and so she passed on to her children the secrets of making themselves receptive to other people's unseen depths. Like Ide, Doji and her children loved harmony and detested unnecessary conflict, but they were far more proactive in their approach, seeking to tug at the strings inside others, to draw all together through friendships and alliances. They did not pull or yank at others' hearts, for a discordant note could ruin the purity and elegance of the song they heard. Rather, they sought only to claim their rightful place at the head of the choir of others' souls, to draw them together into a single melody under their direction.

Bayushi could hear the song of Air as well as his sister, but he did not see it the same way she did. He was fascinated by the things people tried to keep secret within themselves. For him it was child's play to ferret out the secrets underneath their actions, to hear the faint quavers in their voices, to catch the nuances behind their choices of words. He taught his children and their children to listen, but did so not to breed harmony in the song but to learn its hidden notes, to ferret out all the mysteries and secrets behind the shoji screens. They used them to manipulate others, to pull the strings of others' hearts to their own demands. Ultimately, though, Bayushi's children were, more than anything else, collectors. They watched and heard so many secrets they could never use them all, but their appetite to know the truth of all men's hearts was unquenchable.

The kami of the air delight in the games that courtiers play, in their clever words and subtle emotions, their delicate perfuse and beautiful court dress. Even though the vast majority of courtiers cannot directly speak to the kami, nevertheless they speak in ways the spirits can perceive. Indeed, the courtiers of Air are often more in harmony with the kami that flow through the court chambers than they may realize. Their words sometimes carry more weight because the very spirits can feel them brushing against other men's hearts. To join in these games of words, to enhance the subtle song of the courts, is a splendid way for mischievous Air kami to pass the time. It is thusly that courtiers are always aware of the reach and power of their words, whether or not they recognize that at times the very elements grant them further weight. Any truly skilled courtier, and most especially any courtier who embraces the philosophy of Air, knows the power of their words and the great damage they can inflict if unwisely wielded, often far greater damage than might have been expected. More than one arrogant courtier, lacking the wisdom and foresight of the true path of Air, has ruined not only his own repute but the fortunes of his family or even his clan.

Political Organizations of the Air

"The spirit of Rokugan is more than steel. It is in the respect between two old friends, or even that between two old enemies. Politics and sincerity are its lifeblood, and war is only its visceral unpleasantness."

—Otomo Taneji, Otomo family daimyo, twelfth century

All of Rokugan's Great Clans study the art of politics to some degree, and all of them sponsor and train those in their ranks who are gifted with clever words, skill in negotiations, and good political instincts—or at the very least, with intelligence or a smooth speaking voice. However, within those clans and families who pay particular attention to the philosophy of Air, there is a strong focus on developing additional organizations and techniques which can draw on their strength in that element. The Crane in particular have devoted great energy over the centuries into finding every possible way to pursue the ways of Air in court, commerce, and art; however, they are not alone in such pursuits. The Scorpion and the Unicorn have also devoted considerable resources to the path of Air, and in more recent centuries they have been joined by other groups, even some founded by ronin.

Crane Clan: The Doji Innocents

"I had never before met a truly innocent soul. Ironic that such a person could be so dangerous."

– Bayushi Nomen

During the reign of Hantei II, the Shining Prince, Rokugan enjoyed a time of relative peace and harmony. However, rivalries were beginning to emerge as the various clans jockeyed for the favor of Hantei Genji and for control and influence across the increasingly prosperous and civilized Empire. No longer under the direct guidance of the Kami, clan samurai began to realize the nearly impossible standards of Bushido as it related to the emerging art of politics. Certainly, the basic principles of honor could be followed in most situations, but too rigid an approach could prove to be incredibly harmful to a clan's political prospects and goals. Nowhere was this reality more painfully apparent than amongst the Crane.

Many within the clan leadership felt that small compromises were necessary to ensure the clan's position in court and the arts remained paramount. Over time their voices were heard more strongly and within a few generations most Crane had come to accept that any involvement in politics entailed a certain amount of unavoidable dishonor. However, there were always a few who felt the clan's origins in honor and courage, and especially the examples of Lady Doji and her children, made such compromises



impermissible. In the early centuries they had little influence, and their movements would typically die out within a generation or two, only to invariably resurface later—generally during times of crisis when the clan's leadership seemed to be faltering.

The Innocent movement finally acquired real headway in the aftermath of the Gozoku era, a time when it seemed the clan's willingness to compromise its principles had pushed it to the very brink of destruction. In the reign of Hantei VII and Hantei VIII, it was those Crane who foreswore all dishonorable activity, even in the domain of politics, who rebuilt the clan's reputation and political power. In recognition of their accomplishments they were finally permitted to establish their own academy within the Doji school's chambers at Shizuka Toshi, preserving their tradition for the future. Although the clan's more dominant pragmatic approach to politics eventually regained its pride of place, the Innocents were never again wholly expunged and remained a small but persistent part of Crane tradition from that day forth.

Aside from the post-Gozoku era, the Innocent movement has seldom managed to exert enough influence to be noticed outside of the training halls of the Doji. The return of the Unicorn was a period in which they gained prominence at least briefly, the sudden changes in the political climate creating opportunities for their intensely honorable approach to prevail. In the twelfth century they also gained prominence once again after the Crane Clan Champion, Doji Domotai, purged the Harriers and sought to restore a more honorable tone to her clan.

Crane Clan: The Daidoji Trading Council

"The Crane rely upon their mastery of both court and of commerce, though few would admit the latter."

– Miya Shoin, Imperial Herald

The polar opposites of the Doji Innocents are found in the Daidoji family and its notoriously pragmatic approach to almost all aspects of its service to the clan. In many ways, the Daidoji are outsiders to the rest of the Crane Clan, the odd men out in its traditional appearance. They comprise the core of the clan's armies, forming a strong bulwark of defense in times of war, and their scouts (and in certain eras, the Harriers who evolved out of those scouts) are willing to sacrifice honor for the sake of battlefield victory. Most Daidoji believe it is their duty to undertake the unsavory practices required for the clan's survival, so the Doji and Kakita may remain both pure and safe. This is a duty they accept without complaint and take very seriously indeed. The Daidoji Trading Council is the natural result of the interaction between that duty and the outcome of the First Yasuki War, and for all its strange nature, in its own way it embraces the philosophy of Air just as strongly as the rest of the clan.

With the loss of the Yasuki family to the Crab at the conclusion of the war, the Crane found themselves in a difficult position. The Yasuki had originally been the family tasked with the practice of commerce, which most samurai found distasteful at best; without them, the vast wealth of the Crane was imperiled, and the clan's ability to use trade as a weapon and a tool of diplomacy was greatly reduced. In response, a number of samurai within the Daidoji family volunteered to take the clan's commercial duties upon themselves, accepting the shame of such dubious activities to ensure that the wealth of the clan was properly protected and managed. The alternative was to leave the clan's commercial interests in the hands of unsupervised and possibly untrained peasants, and the Crane were not about to do that with such vital matters as ensuring the clan's winter food stores.

The Daidoji Trading Council is the collective body of the Crane Clan's most capable merchant patrons, drawn almost entirely from the Daidoji family itself. Those merchant patrons who attain great success or prominence in gathering wealth for the clan are admitted to the Council, where they are granted additional political influence and additional control of the clan's mercantile efforts. Each member of the Council commands the patronage of any-

where from a dozen to as many as a hundred merchants, artisans, and craftsmen, including many of great repute and success. After the formation of the Hiramichi vassal family in the mid-sixth century, the predominate leadership of the Council is usually selected from among their number, not surprising given that family's focus on all things mercantile.

The Trading Council's operations are a complex mixture between carefully collecting information (often through contacts among the clan's courtiers) and skillfully manipulating trade relationships and markets to the advantage of the Crane. Because so much of Rokugani trade is controlled and influenced by clan authorities, manipulation of things like tariffs and travel authorizations can shift prices dramatically, potentially devastating the clan's rivals. Indeed, few other samurai recognize how powerful the Trading Council's impact can be. On the surface, most Council members are not of very high social standing, certainly not comparable to *hatamoto* or district governors. However, every Council member has access not only to considerable raw resources but also immense political influence through the innumerable connections they build across the Empire. When they do intervene in a political negotiation, their opponents quickly learn not to overlook them, since the flow (or lack thereof) of logistical and financial resources can easily cripple any political or military venture. Controlling and guiding this flow is the essence of the Trading Council's methods, and they learn to listen to the voice of trade in the same way that Crane diplomats listen to the song of the courts.

The training of the Council members tends to be broad, emphasizing a variety of approaches to the problems of managing one's merchants and their operations. All members are well aware that direct lines of contact to other clans are crucial and a flexible, multifaceted approach to commerce—indeed, an approach as flexible as the wind—is required to keep ahead of rivals in the Mantis, Crab and Unicorn rivals. Some Council members are classically trained courtiers, but the majority are recruited from more practical fields of training such as the Doji Magistrate and Daidoji Scout schools. Any Daidoji who shows the proper skills and success can be considered for the Council, and men and women who have attained commercial wealth will often pull strings and call in favors to gain admission to its ranks. Once admitted, of course, they gain access to the impressive accumulated financial and political resources of the Council, further improving their own success.

Although the Trading Council is acknowledged (among those who care about the topic at all) as the pre-eminent mercantile group in the Empire, it is not without its rivals. The most notable are of course the Yasuki family of the Crab, whose own approach to commerce is both more direct and often more legally questionable than the Daidoji's way. The Mantis Clan's ruling samurai are also prominent merchants, as are certain elements of the Yogo and Soshi families among the Scorpion and the Ide family in the Unicorn. Each of these factions has served at one point or another as an economic rival to the Crane, but while their fortunes have risen and fallen throughout history, the Daidoji have remained a constant and dominant success in the Empire's mercantile domain. Only the Yasuki can claim to rival the Daidoji over the long term, which is not surprising given their own origins within the Crane Clan, and they often serve as a thorn in the side of Crane interests. Technically speaking, the Yasuki do tend to have more skilled traders, and they are much more likely to manage their trading directly rather than maintaining a distance between themselves and their commoner assistants. However, their skills often come to naught when they encounter the difference between raw wealth and the political influence available to Council members.

The larger historical animosity of the Yasuki and the Crane means the commercial rivalry between the two groups is relentless and often destructive—and the fact that the Council would not need to exist had the Yasuki not defected in the first place only adds more bitterness to the mix. Whenever the opportunity comes to strike at each other they do so, backing off only if their clan interests are endangered. The Daidoji Trading Council relishes conflict with the Crab, seeing every political, military, or economic clash as an opportunity to bring the Yasuki low.

Scorpion Clan: The Shosuro Defilers

"It would be unwise to mention such crimes in the court when I could speak equally of your own with an even greater eloquence."

– Bayushi Goshiu, early twelfth century

Anyone who operates within the courts of the Empire is well aware of the dark reputation of the Scorpion Clan. To some extent this reputation is blown out of proportion, exaggerated by overly cautious sensei warning their students and by embittered samurai who have been disgraced or ruined by the clan. In reality, Scorpion courtiers (aside from a few unusually gifted shugenja) are not actually capable of reading others' minds; they do not know every secret another samurai has been hiding the very second they meet. However, their reputation does have a basis in fact. The Scorpion are quite gifted at ferreting secrets out of others and at destroying rival reputations, and none of them are quite so skilled at this as the group known within the clan as the Defilers.

The Defilers are a small sub-organization within the Bayushi Courtier School; they developed out of a peculiar form of competition found only within the Scorpion Clan. In those conflicts, two challengers—generally courtiers, although the clan's small groups of shinobi also sometimes participate—are given the same task. The one who accomplishes it first, or is most instrumental in its completion, is deemed to be victorious. These tasks are carefully chosen to avoid placing any vital clan interests at risk, and tend to revolve around the destruction of a rival or enemy's



reputation, or manipulating someone outside the clan into doing something beneficial for the Scorpion.

Defilers are trained to excel in these focused manipulations. They are gifted not in the raw acquisition of secrets but in turning those secrets into weapons to destroy the enemies of their clan. They do not engage in the subtle blackmail and careful manipulation employed by other Scorpion courtiers; while a typical Bayushi will blackmail an individual without letting the target fully understanding what is happening to them, press others' weak points and guide their actions without tipping their own hand, the Defiler will take a more direct approach. In place of blackmail or subtle control, Defilers excel above all in personal destruction and character assassination.

The organization trains its students in the fastest and most the most devastating techniques of slander and the most effective methods of disseminating incriminating evidence to where it can do the most damage. Defilers often directly accuse their targets, but just as often will spread their accusations and innuendoes through indirect methods, mercilessly poisoning a target's reputation. A normal Scorpion walks into a court chamber and immediately starts determining the rivalries and enmities among the attendees, figuring out who has authority and who is waiting for the opportunity to bring down an opponent, seeking out all the subtle patterns that allow a court to be guided and controlled... all without looking like they have done a thing. A Defiler, however, looks for something simpler: who are the enemies of the Scorpion, and how can their names and honor be destroyed.

It is the understanding of where to strike and how much effort to put into their attacks that makes Defilers so effective; in this way, they embrace the philosophy of Air as strongly as their more conventional courtier cousins, reading the subtle currents of the courts to know just where to strike for maximum effect. Of course, they also have access to their family's large information network, an asset which no other clan can truly match.

The existence of Defilers is not widely known outside of the Scorpion. The clan makes no real effort to advertise their nature or activities, and most samurai do not realize that the occasional ruthless political and verbal assaults they face from Scorpion courtiers are the product of specific training rather than merely a malignant nature. The Defilers can be seen as actually matching what the other clans assume to be true about all Scorpion courtiers, so they prefer to assume that role and keep their true nature and techniques concealed. Most Defilers appear to be nothing more than normal courtiers, flitting through the court like a harmless breeze... until the moment they strike, shattering a life and career with a well-chosen and viciously targeted accusation.

Most Defilers do not serve in Scorpion lands, aside from the handful of sensei teaching in the Dojo of the Brother's Gift and the Dojo of Lies (the two major dojo where the Defilers are trained). Instead, they spend almost all their time in the courts of enemy clans. Their training and methods require familiarity with multiple clans' hierarchies and the internal political structures of many courts and families. Given the nature of their duties, even the most skilled Defilers sometimes cannot avoid political fallout from their actions, so they must be prepared to switch to a new court at short notice.

While the Defilers do not to allow most of the Empire to be aware of their explicit existence, they do relish the implied reputation their actions cause. The destruction of some poor fool invariably causes people to whisper of the Scorpion Clan's power in the courts. This keeps enemies on edge, and gives other Scorpion the ability to intimidate and control their rivals more easily.

Unicorn Clan: The Hand of Peace

Ide was a man known above all for his talent at easing tensions. So skilled was he that he was chosen as the personal voice of peace for a goddess, and with his diplomatic abilities he was able to bring the Unicorn through countless different societies while avoiding any major armed conflicts. Ide's very nature seemed to permeate those in his company, as though he made it harder to think aggressive thoughts without the guilt of such acts weighing on the soul.

However, there was a poignant element to Ide's peaceful demeanor. He was a man trained as a samurai and wore his daisho at his side. However, it is widely believed he never actually drew his blades in all the long decades of his life, and it is certainly know that when visiting others for diplomatic purposes he would always leave his blades behind with a retainer, supposedly with the stern warning that if they were ever drawn only the retainer's blood would be spilled.

The teachings of the courtier school which bears Ide's name are drawn from his own life and principles, but there have always been some among the Ide Emissaries who adhere to the beliefs of their founder with a far more dedicated and even obsessive devotion. Known collectively as the Hand of Peace, they are diplomats whose sole purpose in life is seek peaceful resolution to any conflict, to avoid violence at all costs, even the cost of their own lives. Their tradition emerged during the long years of Unicorn travel through the gaijin lands, passed on by personal instruction from one generation to the next; after the Unicorn returned to Rokugan, the followers of the Hand of Peace became an established part of the Ide School.

The devotion these men and women take upon themselves borders on a monastic vow or even religious fanaticism. Most practitioners of the Hand of Peace are at least slightly ascetic, and additional vows of self-denial are not uncommon. However, the sole consistent characteristic of the vows that they take upon themselves is that while all carry their swords, they are sworn never to draw their blades to kill. The honed edges of their blades are kept sealed away inside their saya and only removed each day for cleaning and care, ensuring the blade never rusts or pits. At all other times, the tsuba is tied to the saya with an elaborate peace knot, making it impossible for any but the strongest man to wrench it free without untying it. Many of the Hand of Peace also cut their thumbs very slightly with the base of their swords each night, a reminder that only the servant who draws the blade may ever be harmed by it. A few of the followers of the Hand train with bokken or shinai to keep their warrior skills honed as their duty requires, nevertheless resolving never to kill or wage war. Should their vows ever be broken, many commit seppuku immediately, while the rest undertake extensive religious penance—sometimes months or even years of mediation, fasting, and contemplation. The shrines of Jizo, Fortune of Mercy, are especially popular for such penance.



While some might view the Hand of Peace as displaying physical cowardice, few of the organization avoid places of conflict or violence. To the contrary, they seem to be drawn to times and places of strife, both within their clan and without. They will bravely stride forward, exuding

the aura of command, and calling out to their fellow samurai to put down their weapons and think of their duties to their lords, trying to bring others to the same peace they possess.

The Hand of Peace are considered more than slightly unusual even by some of their Ide brethren, but nevertheless they have some limited influence within the clan as a whole. The Moto openly revile them, and when that family stands in authority over the Unicorn, they are generally relegated to unimportant secondary assignments, keeping them out of the public eye. The Shinjo show them greater respect, however, and there are always times when the Hand of Peace's skills and unique knack for calming the most enraged souls serve the needs of the Unicorn Clan. In particular, the Unicorn have found them to be invaluable during negotiations with the more mystic clans such as the Dragon and Phoenix. The Hand particularly shares much of the Phoenix Clan's pacifism, and even Moto lords who would prefer that the organization never existed are willing for members of the Hand to talk with the lords of magic, if for no other reason than saving the trouble of having to do so themselves.

The Hand's membership is rarely over thirty samurai in a given generation. The semi-monastic lifestyle they favor is much too self-denying for most Ide to bear, and the innate practicality of the Unicorn Clan makes the idea of training in swordplay while never intending to actually draw the blade bizarre and even repugnant. In the end, however, there is something about these strange souls that seems to draw on the essence of their forebear. It is very difficult to take violent action against them, and almost as hard to do so against another under their watchful eye, as if Ide himself were watching through them.

Spider Clan: The Dark Whisper

"Your enemies are all around you. They have you defeated, my friend. But there is someone who can help you, if you are only willing to listen."

—Daigotsu Masisha

The group known as the Dark Whisper was a small elite body within the Spider Clan during the period when it was infiltrating the Empire. It was envisioned and built up by a particularly industrious and clever member of the Chuda family, who were maho-tsukai of considerable skill. Chuda Eiichi, one of the family's most skilled weavers of magic, developed the idea of binding a kansen of Air—one of the evil elemental spirits spawned by the Taint—into a willing host, usually a courtier. By carefully controlling the process, Eiichi was able to perform it without Tainting the courtiers, giving them access to some of the supernatural powers and secrets of the kansen while minimizing the chances of detection. In return, the kansen got the chance to spread chaos and sin among the courtier's targets.

While Eiichi's process was successful, it was not foolproof—the Air kansen could still sometimes be detected, and the courtiers tended to rely too much on its powers and neglect their own skills. Accordingly, the Dark Lord Daigotsu deemed it too dangerous to use the practice on a large scale lest the Spider Clan's true nature be unearthed by its enemies. This decision was further aided by the mental instability of many early test subjects, whose minds were twisted by the constant whispers of the kansen bound to them. Indeed, most of these early subjects went mad within the first year. However, Eiichi was unwilling to give up entirely, and there were some courts in the Empire where the risk of detection was so minimal as to be effectively nonexistent. Accordingly, the Dark Whisper remained a part of the Spider Clan's diplomatic arsenal until the Chuda finally left the clan and fled back to the Shadowlands in the aftermath of the Kali-Ma Invasion.

The Dark Whisper method bridges the gap between priests and courtiers in a fashion that is both disturbing and subtle, allowing its subjects access to unusual abilities and considerable versatility. Dark Whisper courtiers are incapable of magic themselves; in fact, the process of binding a kansen renders even blood magic out of their reach, since the possessive and jealous kansen bound into their souls will not permit fraternization with any other spirits than itself. However, the courtier himself remains physically free of the Taint, making it easier to conceal his true nature from the rest of the Empire—only a few specific spells and rituals can detect the presence of the bound kansen. The kansen grants its host a nearly mystical ability to ferret out sin and depravity in other people, indeed to push others toward their darkest impulses like moths to a flame.

The Dark Whisper in Other Eras

As noted in its description, the Dark Whisper courtiers are a product of a fairly specific time in Rokugan's history—the years of the Race for the Throne and the subsequent Kali-Ma Invasion, when the Spider Clan was working to infiltrate the Empire. Prior to that time, the Spider Clan did not exist, and after that era the Chuda family left the Spider (whose own nature changed significantly).

However, this does not mean the Dark Whisper is only usable in that era of play. The GM may use the mechanics of the Dark Whisper to represent any maho-tsukai group trying to infiltrate the courts of the Empire, such as the Bloodspeaker Cult. (In fact, given the frequent connections and alliances between the Bloodspeakers and the Chuda family, this would make perfect sense.) GMs who wish to depict the Shadowlands infiltrating the Empire in another era of Rokugan's history can use the Dark Whisper to represent such a scheme.

The Dark Whisper's training focuses not only on ferreting out the presence of sin but also on exacerbating it in others. This allows them to sow chaos and discord even in the most honorable courts, fueling the sinful desires, regrets, and fears that lurk in the hearts of all those around them. They become the eyes of passionate storms that form in the courts, all the while appearing outwardly innocent even as others fall into dishonor all about them.

The Spider Clan treated the Dark Whisper as a combination of courtly shock trooper and secret agent. However, their deployment was handled with great care, since the exposure of just one of them could set the whole Spider Clan back severely. They were almost never sent to the courts of clans or families with strong priestly heritages or skill in hunting for Shadowlands infiltration. Instead, they were sent to areas where such knowledge was limited, sowing the chaos, contention, and strife needed to advance Spider interests.

Ronin/Scorpion: The Silken Promises

"A woman of samurai birth would never stoop to work as a geisha. Which of course makes her the perfect agent to lower the guard of drunken samurai."

– Shosuro Toson

The Silken Promises are not an organization as such, and there has never been anything even remotely akin to formal leadership to the group, much less a political power structure. However, they are also one of the oldest organizations in the Empire, dating back to the invention of the first geisha houses in the second and third centuries, when commoner women began training for lives as entertainers. The Scorpion Clan recognized the huge potential in such women, who were with samurai in their most vulnerable and incautious moments, and subtly encouraged them to band together in an informal manner. Out of this emerged the Silken Promises, a body of women throughout the Empire's floating world that exerts subtle influence while operating less from a set agenda and more along a general philosophy.

The Promises' power derives from the nature of geisha themselves. Trained in music and artistry to the point where some of them can rival the finest artisans of the Crane, gifted in the ways of manipulation as much any Scorpion seductress, and educated to the point where they can carry on conversation like a lesser Phoenix Loremaster, the best geisha are sometimes better at behaving like samurai than the lords they entertain. It is hardly surprising that the more intelligent and capable geisha came to realize that they had some power to shape the Empire's political landscape and to study how they might increase that power... especially with the Scorpion Clan nudging them in that direction.

The Silken Promises pass their secret technique on from geisha to geisha, carefully choosing their students from among the best young girls in each generation. The Scorpion also periodically insert their own agents into the ranks of the Promises, usually drawing them from specially trained female members of the Shosuro Acting School. Although male geisha do exist, they are rare, and by longstanding tradition the Silken Promises is an all-female organization, its teachings relying on the (very) careful manipulation of male emotion to produce the desired results. The organization has no real leadership as such, although its most important and influential members are generally found within the elite geisha houses of Scorpion lands. This means the Promises do not exert nearly as much influence on the Empire as a whole as their numbers and talents might imply. However, this decentralized nature is advantageous as well, since it means few samurai ever so much as suspect that such an organization exists, much less that it is manipulating them.



Were it to exert its full potential, the Silken Promises might actually pose a threat to the political machinations of some of the Empire's major lords. Its numbers are not as large as most clan institutions, of course, but they are all highly influential, with access to numerous friends, allies, and lovers. However, the Scorpion Clan has always subtly discouraged the Promises from truly uniting, preferring to keep them decentralized and thus largely invisible. And of course

the very Celestial Order which the women of the Silken Promises rely on to protect themselves and their interests also prevents them from rising above their stations. Thus the group largely tends its own interests, using its skills and contacts to carve out small kingdoms of influence and protect its own.

Ronin: Masters of Games

For the most part, true ronin seldom have the opportunity even to attend court, much less study and develop the kind of specialized techniques required to excel in that environment. However, a small exception to this principle took place at the end of the eleventh century with the establishment of the ronin village of Nanashi Mura south of the Dragon lands. A seemingly permanent home for wave-men needed some kind of presence in neighboring courts, if for no other reason than to avoid misunderstandings. The limited resources and support available from the ronin city's Dragon sponsors left the inhabitants with no choice but to try to pursue their diplomatic efforts on their own.

Aside from the Kaeru family, centuries-long rulers of the City of the Rich Frog, no other ronin group had ever established a long-term settlement and political presence, so there was no prior tradition of ronin court training for Nanashi Mura to call upon. At best, past ronin had relied on swift wit, a proper bow, and a solid read of other men's intentions to avoid the worst consequences of a visit to court. Nanashi Mura, however, was intended from the start as a safe-haven for wave-men, an opportunity (and perhaps an experiment of sorts) for them to build a better life for themselves. Some sort of courtly representation was vital for such a project.

Lacking formalized training (or much in the way of social refinement), the intrepid would-be courtiers of Nanashi Mura sought long and hard for something that could serve as a focus for their studies without treading on the methods of their betters within the Great Clans. One of the first would-be sensei of the school began to notice a certain similarity between the behavior of samurai in court and those he had played in games like Go and Shogi. There was a commonality between the art of persuading someone in court and maneuvering them on the Go board, even in a Go game played in an unsavory gambling den. From this insight he developed a basic social technique that came to be known as the "Voice of Nanashi" by those within the city, its practitioners earning the title "Masters of Games" for their skill at maneuvering safely through the world of court.

The group soon became invaluable to the ronin of Nanashi Mura, giving them a unified voice in courts all across the northern Empire and ensuring there was always someone who could speak on their behalf if the need arose. However, the Voice of Nanashi is a fairly loosely knit organization, gaining more influence through its reputation than its actual achievements—it is, after all, one of the only known groups of its kind. Its actual membership generally keeps close to Nanashi Mura, and their goals revolve around that region and the town itself. There are rarely more than two dozen members of the group at any one time, not enough to truly impact the Empire beyond their local geographical region.

Still, the methods of the Masters of Games have been known to occasionally take veteran courtiers by surprise. They simply do not expect a ronin to have any skills at all in the courtly arts, and are thus caught off-guard by even the limited talents the Masters have developed. Indeed, the Masters of Games make a point of letting themselves be underestimated, much like ronin swordsmen, waiting for a key moment to use their full skill as effectively as possible. Moreover, since they are ronin, they often possess martial skills that other courtiers lack. A Crane or Scorpion courtier may need a champion to fight on his behalf, but a Master of Games usually learns to fight for himself, and to do it well.

Courts of the Air

Rokugan contains a great many famous courts, of course—even in the lands of clans known for their lack of diplomatic acumen, such as the Dragon and Crab. However, certain courts and strongholds seem to have a particular affinity for social and political interactions that rely on the philosophy of Air. This section presents detailed descriptions of five notable courts of Air: three from the Great Clans, one Imperial, and one from the Minor Clans.

Chapter Six of this book presents another Air-oriented court, a "generic" stronghold which GMs can use to set any sort of courtly campaign.

Kyuden Doji

Almost a courtly city rather than a mere castle, Kyuden Doji stands as one of the Empire's great wonders of human craftsmanship, a place of such splendor that it can seize a man's heart with a single glimpse. Few who have walked its hallowed halls have walked away unchanged, and for many the experience of visiting the ancient home of the Lady Doji becomes a life-altering experience.

Kyuden Doji stands atop a high cliff-edged plateau, overlooking the Umi Amaterasu and a sprawling port city that is one of the major Crane trade centers. It was never built with military defense in mind, and is in fact one of the most poorly defended castles in the entire Empire. While the plateau is surrounded by a wall, it is low and meant more as a boundary to demarcate the vast yashiki that comprise the palace grounds. Likewise the mighty ten-story structure of the Kyuden itself is designed for beauty rather than military protection. This lack of heavy defense, however, has for the most part been irrelevant, since the castle lies in the heart of Crane lands and far from any potential foe. Only once, during the great Clan

War, has Kyuden Doji come under concerted attack, and the clan rebuilt it swiftly afterward.

The clan's true seat of war is the nearby Shiro Daidoji. Kyuden Doji, sometimes called the Esteemed House of the Crane, is instead the heart of the clan's political power and prestige. Its original physical design was a gift of the Kami Doji, and was quite similar to (though not identical with) the Imperial palace of Otosan Uchi. Later architects have been loath to change Doji's divine vision, even during the castle's reconstruction in the twelfth century.

The impressive ten-story keep offers perfect views of both the sea and the surrounding countryside, with ample court chambers to manage not only the Crane's own diplomatic needs but also the Imperial Winter Court, which is held in this castle more often than in any other. In fact, the Crane maintain Imperial guest quarters elsewhere atop the plateau to host the Emperor's many visits. The keep is surrounded by yashiki of immense size and palatial accoutrements, easily able to host well over a hundred dignitaries of note and their entire entourages in the finest state. Its display of austere beauty, grace, and hospitality are legendary, a sparkling wonder of wealth and political power.

The Crane for generations prided themselves on an unspoken 'competition' (of sorts) with the Imperial Palace of Otosan Uchi. The Crane knew they possessed the wealth and resources necessary to have a palace of greater grandeur than the Imperial Palace, but they did not dream of ever doing so. Instead, they kept careful track of any changes in the Imperial Palace. If gardens were removed, such would be done likewise at



Kyuden Doji. If sections were added, the Crane would do so as well... but their own additions were always slightly smaller and of slightly less splendor. Thus, Kyuden Doji was always the finest castle in the Empire... except for the Imperial Palace itself.

The city's beauty has never been merely a garish display of the wealth of the Crane. Kyuden Doji has always been a carefully calculated tool of the highest level of court politics. From this central location the courtiers of the Crane spread the gossamer strands of an intricate web of alliances, favors, and contacts, building the intricate system of that maintains the political integrity of the clan and indeed of the Empire at large. Senior courtiers within its halls conduct correspondences with every court in Rokugan and send out delegates who report back to this castle on a routine basis. No courtier of rank or status anywhere in the Empire can help but feel the distant presence of the Crane on the castle at the edge of the sea.

Although Kyuden Doji may lack in military defenses, it is one where the very notion of violence is almost abhorrent. The Esteemed House of the Crane is not a place where war is conducted by blade or arrow, and violence besmirches the delicate flow of art and diplomacy that flows through its heart. Doshin and yoriki patrol its streets regularly (albeit very politely), ensuring criminal activity is minimal even by the standards of the most rigid households. The most hated enemy of the Crane can walk the streets of Kyuden Doji without the slightest fear for his well-being.

Regardless of clan, none but the most senior and experienced courtiers are ever sent to Kyuden Doji, for an assignment there is a mark of distinction and honor—not to mention a difficult duty to uphold, much like confronting the Lion on the field of battle or the Phoenix in a competition of magic. Even the Crab Clan sends only the best-trained of its representatives and the most polite of retired commanders to this city. Within its walls the political acumen and perfect grace of Lady Doji's descendents is felt in full by all. The slightest misstep may damage one's standing among the allies of the Crane, resulting in lasting damage to one's political career. Yet on the surface no tension is ever visible, only the gracious smiles and pleasant grace of perfect hosts and hostesses.

The most famous gardens in the entire Empire were originally the personal flower gardens of Lady Doji. After her death, her descendents not only maintained but vastly expanded them; in modern times they cover the area of a sizable village, taking up a large portion of the estate within Kyuden Doji's outer walls. They are predominately a series of story gardens, sand gardens, rock gardens, and floral displays, all carefully manicured to offer the most perfect and enlightening experience for visitors. To enter these fabled gardens is to enter another world, set completely apart from the necessities of court and politics. It is a breath of the freshest and purest air, sweetly perfumed by nature, freeing one of the burden and demands found elsewhere in the castle. Here any visitor need only appreciate beauty for its own sake, beauty such as one can see nowhere else.

Gardeners whose families have served the Crane for hundreds of years see to maintaining the grounds. These gardeners have mastered the arts of planning and landscaping to a level that is almost unheard of in other parts of the Empire. Traditions handed down from father to son have taught each new generation how to ensure the vast grounds are landscaped perfectly; no matter where guests might explore, they will see displays of tailored floral beauty regardless of the season.

Although the gardens' greatest value is their august reputation, they also serve as a diplomatic tool. Guests feel relaxed and at ease within their borders, and the Crane often find diplomatic arrangements easier to achieve in these blissful surroundings. Favors are brokered, treaties proposed, and marriages arranged within the gardens, where all but the most hardened souls are more amenable to the possibilities of a peaceful relationship with the Crane.

One of the secrets to the nearly perfect grace of the Crane courtiers who reside in Kyuden Doji is found not in the castle itself or even in the surrounding city, but in a small village to the north. Shizuka Toshi lies sequestered an easy day's journey from the castle, surrounded by temperate woods. Here a beautiful palace may be found, built in imitation of Kyuden Doji itself: the academy of the Doji Courtiers. Here the clan's future aides, seneschals, diplomats, and karo are trained in relative seclusion.

Shizuka Toshi hosts training in all of the social arts of the Crane, the ways discovered by Lady Doji herself. Sensei are always men and women with decades of experience, selected from the best of the clan's retired courtiers. Students typically remain within the school's walls for four years prior to their gempukku, and serve underneath the watchful eyes of their sensei for another three years at minimum, until the clan is confident of their skills. As a rule their early duty postings are to minor courts in other clans' lands, places where they can build reputations and accumulate favors without placing vital Crane needs at risk.

An unspoken truth behind this arrangement is that most members of other clans never meet a legitimately 'junior' delegate of the Crane. The Doji would not dare compromise the perfection of the courtly arts by sending an unprepared neophyte barely past gempukku into a hostile social environment. Instead, they give their newly-trained students secondary tasks in minor courts, allowing them to cut their teeth without too much danger and ensuring the courtiers who actually attend major courts are completely dependable, the finest examples of the clan's qualities. Naturally, the most experienced courtiers of all are assigned within Kyuden Doji itself.

One of the most sacred sites of the Crane Clan lies on the rocky outcroppings of the coast below the city of Kyuden Doji. It was there that the Lady Doji was last seen in the mortal world. Believing herself to be the last of her siblings, and having already lived long past her mortal husband Kakita, she walked out onto the rocks as the sun was setting. As her Heavenly mother's last rays fell on her, she raised her arms and a great wave crashed against the

shore, carrying her away. Her body was never found. Since that day, the outcrop has been known as the Lady's Rest, and is regarded as a sacred place of awe and reverence.

All Clan Champions of the Crane traditionally spend a night on the Lady's Rest. They pray to their clan's founder for guidance and wisdom in ruling the Crane. In addition, each year during the Chrysanthemum Festival, maidens from all of the clans gather here and adorn the rock with flower blossoms; it is said the Lady Doji blesses those who do so with success in love, just as her own life was enriched by her life with Kakita.

One of the more curious locations in the vicinity of Kyuden Doji is a small, verdant, elliptically-shaped forest that stands just in the shadow of the castle itself, barely beyond the city's walls. Supposedly, as a child Emperor Hantei XXIII ran away from his guards and spent the night in the forest; he claimed he was protected there by a silver fox who fed him berries and told him stories, watching over him all through the night. Ever since, the Crane have proclaimed the forest sacrosanct and inviolate. Though its trees are of excellent quality and its game is fresh and abundant, none are allowed to hunt or collect timber there, a restriction enforced by the watchful eye of the Doji. The name of the forest is a curiosity. No mortal knows precisely why the grove is called the Eye of the Needle; the choice of name was proclaimed by the Hantei, who said it was drawn from the fox's stories.

The reality behind the grove is unknown to most of the Crane, who rarely enter its small but untamed territory. In the heart of the grove is a portal to Chikushudo, the Realm of Animals, and it was in fact a kitsune spirit who watched over the young Emperor so many years ago. Because the Crane protect the sacred region so assiduously, the animal spirits who dwell there sometimes offer blessings and aid to the local humans, and more than one fox spirit from this grove has married a mortal spouse.

Shiro no Shosuro

"There are few places more dangerous than the courts of the Scorpion Clan. The battlefield can claim your life, but the Scorpion can claim far more than that."

– Ikoma Asa, twelfth century poet

Shiro no Shosuro is one of the two principle locations where major courts are held in Scorpion lands. It is a strange and almost surreal place, even for those who live within its walls, and some say that to pass through the gates of the complex is to enter into something close to a dream. Shiro no Shosuro rests atop low hills, overlooking the River of Gold on the west and offering an extensive view of the surrounding countryside. Although it is guarded by walls and embankments, it is not built with military defense foremost in mind; the interior grounds are spacious and the central keep is of relatively modest height. The rest of castle is a sprawling series of yashiki within the outer walls, with a modest attendant city below at the base of the hill.

Shiro no Shosuro is never the same from year to year, or even from day to day. The art and decorations of the castle's interior are constantly in flux, constantly changing to adjust its aesthetics to the needs of the moment. Although the main keep does not completely reinvent its interior layout in the manner of Kyuden Bayushi, its subtler shifts of appearance and decoration can be just as disorienting to visitors. And the smaller structures which occupy the rest of the complex are deliberately designed to be easily dismantled and rebuilt as needed, often without even letting guests realize the changes are happening. The staff that maintains the Shiro is skilled at both swift construction and at remaining unobtrusive, and the Shosuro spare no expense in acquiring the services of the most talented of carpenters, engineers, and artisans for this staff. The result is a castle which often seems to change itself as easily as an ephemeral dream, as if the castle's form is merely something created and perceived only in the instant of experience and lost again afterwards. When a confused guests asks about this phenomenon, the Shosuro prefer to smile and say the whims of the kami call them to search for the most harmonious aesthetic of the moment.

The court of Shiro no Shosuro is among the subtlest and at the same time the most challenging in Scorpion lands. The Shosuro are master deceivers, and just as the physical appearance of their stronghold is deceptive, so too those who are invited to their courts are soon lost in a bewildering maze of confusion and misdirection, a mirror-world in which they cannot even be sure if the courtier they are speaking with today is the same one they met yesterday. To add further to the confusion, the Shosuro will claim to be the only truthful samurai in the Scorpion Clan, warning visitors against trusting Scorpion from other families. Naturally, this is a total lie, yet in the shadowy maze of the Shosuro court it is a lie which can easily be believed. The Shosuro always strive to make their guests as comfortable as possible, to be the most attentive and charming hosts imaginable—which in many cases only serves to make their guests even more uncertain of themselves. Shiro no Shosuro is not a place of crass manipulations. The castle is like a lotus blossom, its petals opening gradually. In the beginning, a visitor sees only the surface, the visual world of temporary beauty and focused elegance. Beneath that veneer, however, may be found layer on layer of subtleties, hidden beneath the most rigid and carefully maintained air of proper courtesy and etiquette. Other clans know better than to send their premier courtiers to Shiro no Shosuro—instead, they send those whose dishonor or compromise will not be a serious blow.

The gardens within Shiro no Shosuro's walls are almost as famous as those of their Crane rivals at Kyuden Doji, but the Shosuro Gardens carry a somewhat darker reputation. For almost a thousand years the family has maintained one of the most beautiful floral collections in the Empire, but its repute does not come from its gorgeous colors or splendid vistas, or the quiet serenity of sheltered corners where one may speak privately. Rather, the repute



comes from the number of dangerously toxic plants which grow within the gardens.

Most of the Shosuro Gardens are open to the public, although certain selected areas are restricted. Whereas the gardens of Kyuden Doji are highly ordered and traditional in their design, focused on very precise arrangements and placements, the gardens of the Shosuro tend to be looser and more natural in their layout, with plants permitted to grow in a fashion more befitting their whims. Of course, they are still kept trimmed and constrained for the enjoyment and ease of visitors, but they are not laid out in the precise patterns of Crane gardening.

The unique reputation of the Shosuro Gardens derives in greatest part from the fact that they grow every known poisonous plant in the Empire. These sinister crops are sanctioned by Imperial decree, and their presence is ostensibly so that antidotes may be prepared at a moment's notice should the need arise. The Shosuro make no secret of this fact, and the whispered rumor that occasional samples go missing is just loud enough beyond their halls to give the garden both a dire repute and a certain dangerous allure—especially since many of the most dangerous plants are also the most beautiful, and the Shosuro do not post any warnings as to which plants are safe and which are not. Guests are politely warned that the gardeners' permission must be sought when any plant is needed for an ikebana arrangement or similar use, and only the very daring and well trained (or the very foolish) would question the wisdom of this advice.

One of the most popular and famous playhouses in the entire Empire stands, appropriately enough, in the very shadow of Shiro no Shosuro. The Silken Smile, founded in the year 231, is an iconic presence in the city, and some of its walls are older than those of the castle's central keep. The city simply would not be the same without the beautifully appointed hall of the Silken Smile. In fact, the theater's fame is so great that over the centuries a body of dramatic works have been written about events at the Smile itself.

Numerous playwrights, Scorpion and otherwise, have debuted their most famous works in the Smile, and such performances almost invariably produce unexpected emotions and startling experiences. Samurai unprepared for the skill of the Shosuro *butei* (actors) who perform here are often overwhelmed by the power of their performances. Although this usually results in displays of honorable and forthright appreciation of a perfect art, it can also give rise occasionally to acts of violence, passion, and dishonor. Though the Shosuro officially disapprove of such tragic events occurring so close to a haven of honorable hospitality like Shiro no Shosuro, none will deny the butei are serving their purpose in inspiring both greatness and folly.

Countless lords have sought to close the Smile after seeing a family member, subordinate, or themselves defamed because of events there, but all have failed, unable to prevail against the political power of the Scorpion Clan. Even the twin exiles of the Scorpion Clan in the twelfth century did not succeed in closing the Silken Smile, as the theater was sponsored during that time by a powerful and influential nobleman named Otomo Banu who had been deeply impressed by the performances there.

The Smile, as one might expect, fulfills multiple purposes for the Shosuro. Beyond the simple value of controlling one of the finest theaters in the Empire's history, the Smile also serves as a means for the Scorpion to shame and destroy particularly problematic individuals without openly admitting they are doing so. The apparent autonomy of its staff protects the Shosuro rulers themselves from suspicion, and regardless, no samurai who allows himself to be shamed by something as trivial as a play can offer much defense.

From the early tenth century on, in the north of Shiro no Shosuro can be found a small grove with a stone shrine that commemorates the deaths of Bayushi Itoru and Shosuro Temare. Much like the somewhat naturalistic approach within Shiro no Shosuro itself, the grounds around the shrine are allowed to remain somewhat fallow by the monks who tend them. Weeds are removed, of course, but aside from that there is little effort to guide the plant life. Consequently, the fragrant flowers known as Kempi grow in abundance in the presence of the shrine. The flower is small, bearing four blood-red petals, and carries a particularly pleasant odor while it blooms during the spring and early summer. It is also associated with the notorious incident to which the shrine is dedicated.

Itoru and Temare were young samurai of the Scorpion in the late ninth century. They belonged to closely associated households and trained in the same bushi school, learning the ways of the duel; the two young soldiers fell in love with each other during their time together at the courts of the Bayushi, serving as yojimbo and champions to the clan's courtiers. Unlike so many other doomed lovers, however, the two remained carefully devoted to their vows and families. When Temare's family found a marriage match for her with the Shinjo, a match advantageous to clan and family, both she and Itoru showed every sign of behaving properly and accepting their duty. The only time they spent together after the announcement of the engagement was in public training.

As the winter season before the impending marriage came to an end, Temare and Itaru announced they would perform a duel as a public exhibition, a last chance for Temare to display her skills before she took up her new married life. Their family and friends applauded the idea and many whispered about which of the talented duelists would emerge victorious from such a test of skill. On the day of the duel, however, the two executed a perfect kharmic strike to each other's hearts, falling dead to the ground. When their bodies were removed by the eta, two identical kempi flowers were found on their persons, each worn over the heart, each pierced by the other's sword. In the stunned aftermath, the families realized the two dead bushi had actually performed an act of loyalty, killing each other rather than allow their passions to lead them into illicit dishonor.

The shrine to their memory is a place of pilgrimage for those who wish to honor Benten without surrendering their loyalty to Bushido. Lovers who wish to maintain their propriety will sometimes come to the shrine to seeks the blessings of the two lovers, hoping their pure souls will inspire them to similar paths of loyalty to their clans.

Pale Oak Castle

Aojiroi Oku Heigen is a curious exception to the normal condition of Phoenix lands. A relatively recent construction, dating from the seventh century, it is controlled by the Isawa but is not dedicated to scholarly learning or the mysteries of the kami. Rather, it is one of the two most important political strongholds within the entirety of Phoenix lands, and carries the unusual distinction of being one of the very few locations considered appropriate to host the Imperial Winter Court that is not already the seat of power for a major samurai family. Indeed, Pale Oak Castle has hosted the Emperor on more than one occasion.

Pale Oak Castle was founded around the gravesite of one of the only Emperors not to be cremated and interred among his fellows in the Imperial City. Hantei XVII was a colorful figure, best known for his appreciation of beauty in all forms; he returned many of the finest works of art gifted to the Hantei Dynasty to their original homes, wishing to distribute beauty throughout the Empire. Hints and allegations of his love for beautiful women were for the most part carefully quashed by dutiful Ikoma and Shosuro historians working to protect the honor and reputation of the Imperial line. Nevertheless, despite their best efforts the Emperor's enduring fascination with beauty and love was never completely silenced. As he neared death, the Emperor ordered that his body not be cremated. Instead, defying the traditions of his time, he commanded his body be buried in the lands of his true love's birth. Despite his marriage to a proper Crane Empress and his many dalliances with other beauties of the court, so carefully kept quiet, the Emperor truly adored a woman of the Phoenix and demanded to be laid to rest in her lands. Although the order caused a scandal, the word of the Son of Heaven could not be denied, and the Seppun reluctantly saw to it that he was buried on a low hill overlooking the most lush and fertile farmland of the Phoenix Clan.

Within a few years, an exquisite pale oak of surpassing beauty and perfect health sprouted from the gravesite of the Hantei. Sensing an opportunity, the Isawa erected a castle around the blessed tree, ostensibly to protect it, especially since rumors were already spreading that the tree's bark carried medicinal properties. However, the castle was also built with the purpose of serving as a court to host visiting dignitaries, a court which would surpass even the beauty of Morning Glory Castle in Asako lands. The effort was remarkably successful, and Pale Oak Castle soon

became the primary diplomatic site within Phoenix lands, hosting delegations of the highest status and, within a few generations, the Emperor's Winter Court.

Aside from their perpetual rivalry with the Asako family, the Isawa family's other main purpose in establishing this court was to eliminate the need to host major events at their own stronghold of Kyuden Isawa. Given the sensitivity of many Isawa research projects and the potential danger from interference by outside parties, the family had always been leery of accepting guests who do not meet with its personal approval. Pale Oak Castle serves as a buffer-zone for guests from other clans who the Isawa deem inappropriate to venture to Kyuden Isawa itself. Since Pale Oak Castle is a truly splendid place, much more readily accessible than the distant Kyuden Isawa, and built with all of the comforts one would expect in the finest of Rokugan's courts, few guests are insulted at being housed there instead of in the seat of Isawa power. And of course the guests can boast of having seen the miraculous oak born from the history of Hantei XVII's burial on the site.

Aojiroi Oku Heigen reflects Phoenix sensibilities at their finest. It is a place of peace and tranquility, guarded by not only several details of Shiba guardsmen but some of the Empire's more skilled shugenja in the arts of warding and security. Its beautiful halls are made from the finest and most exotic of lumber, crafted painstakingly to keep its beauty suitably subdued and temperate. Minor nemuranai known as Lanterns of Serenity dot the grounds, ensuring the Air kami of the region—and thus the guests—enjoy a constant sense of peace and harmony wherever they go. Artisans and senior courtiers are always in attendance here, and the castle boasts many of the entertainments expected in only the highest courts.

In a great many ways, Pale Oak Castle is the epitome of what a high court is expected to be; its perfection is marred only by its isolation, for beyond its walls lie the farmlands of the Phoenix and little else. There is no great city or port of trade adjacent to it. It is an isolated gem, finely honed and crafted by the Isawa to draw all eyes away from what the family truly prizes.

Surprisingly, the vast size of the legendary pale oak—one of the largest trees in the Empire—has nothing to do with Phoenix magic, contrary to what some might surmise. The white oak that stands over Hantei XVII's grave has grown naturally to its impressive stature. It towers over the surrounding buildings and dominates the castle grounds, looking impressive even compared to the adjacent central keep of Pale Oak Castle itself. It occupies a large courtyard, easily accessible from the castle, and those who enter it are often seized briefly by the impression that the tree seems more real than the rest of the castle. Even animals seem at times to be caught in a meditative state by its presence. Although no guests are allowed to actually touch the tree, they frequently dine in rooms with a clear view of it, and it is quite common for samurai to meditate in the shade of its boughs. The seemingly unending energy and joy that filled Hantei XVII in life permeates the courtyard centuries after his death.

Rumors abound of the healing properties of the tree's bark, but the truth of these is known only to the Isawa. The tree in fact does offer the blessing of health and virility, and the Isawa have speculated this is because Jurojin, Fortune of Longevity, laid



a similar blessing upon the Hantei. The Isawa collect the bark that falls from the tree each year, distilling it into a broth that possesses remarkable recuperative properties, on par with some healing magic. The Isawa rarely permit others to imbibe the mixture or know of its existence; to receive it as a gift is a mark not only of the family's favor but also of their trust.

Just outside of the walls of Pale Oak Castle lies a large shrine devoted to Hujokoku, the Fortune of Fertility, established not long after the rumors of the pale oak's medicinal properties began to circulate Adherents to this minor fortune, closely associated with the far better-known Jurojin, are rare, and the local Isawa priesthood must assist the handful of monks who manage the temple.

The Shrine is the other local structure (besides the castle itself) that draws guests from great distances. However, as such places go it is still relatively modest in its size and splendor, and its reputation is not nearly so great as Pale Oak Castle itself, making it somewhat surprising that anyone remembers the shrine is actually there. Yet despite its unassuming nature, the shrine draws a steady stream of pilgrims. Families who have had difficulty conceiving children often travel a considerable way to visit the shrine, and the number of children supposedly conceived by such families is seen as proof of the fortune's favor.

Kyuden Komori

There are few courts of the minor clans that can actually host a major gathering of any significance. Only the Mantis Clan ever managed to boast sufficient accommodations to maintain Imperial guests at the opulent estate of Kyuden Gotei, although they were never actually honored with the Emperor's Winter Court until after they attained Great Clan status. However, a few minor clans have managed to develop courts sufficient to host notable dignitaries (whether or not they actually do so), and among these is Kyuden Komori, the seat of the tiny Bat Clan that is founded in the twelfth century.

The rather boldly named Kyuden Komori is home to almost the entirety of the tiny and relatively poor Bat Clan, and is built with the assumption of a future growth and in the hope of eventually becoming the seat of a major city. Although it is located on a small island across the Umi Amaterasu, close only to the Mantis Isles, it has nonetheless managed to attract a surprising number of diplomatic visitors, in part because the clan's tiny size and lack of major political connections make it ideal neutral ground for courtiers who cannot be seen to lose stature by visiting a rival's center of power.

The actual grounds of the "Kyuden" itself are of course quite modest, designed to house the family and personal retinue of the Clan Champion, nothing more. While it is easily the largest individual structure in the town, it is not really a castle so much as a large residential estate, and only dominates the region because it stands atop one of the only hills on the island's coast. It is guarded less by walled fortifications and more by the natural defenses of the only physically safe harbor on the island; there is only one true land approach to the settlement, through a cleft in the rocks leading up from the bay into the wild jungle beyond the coastal farmlands.

Guest housing is provided via a series of yashiki on the upper edge of the city proper, along with the barracks housing the Komori family's modest military garrison. Due to the small number of samurai actually dwelling on the island, there are actually more barracks than are needed, enabling a larger number of guests to visit. The largest of the yashiki, directly at the base of the hill where the family estate stands, has been converted into a court-chamber of sorts, serving as a bureaucratic hub for the clan and a meeting place for visiting dignitaries (assuming their business is not with the Clan Champion himself).

Curiously, though the Komori are not a wealthy family, the accommodations they offer are considered spacious and of high quality (as well as somewhat exotic) by most visitors. Their island has plentiful and unique resources found only in such a tropical environment. Fish is abundant in the ocean, so sushi and sashimi are always as fresh as can be, as well as in great variety. The tropical wood in the dwellings is used primarily because no other is available, but it is as elegant and fragrant as it is exotic. Many unusual fruits grow well in the local climate, adding a variety of delicacies to Komori cuisine. Entertainment, while rustic and physical, is also enthusiastic and heartfelt. Thus, guests always enjoy their stay and often regret having to leave.

One of the truly unusual aspects of life on the island is the relationship between the samurai and the commoners. Because the isolated location and sometimes harsh conditions of the island force them to work in close contact, there is less social distinction made between the samurai and the lower castes. Although this closeness is not so extreme as among the Sparrow Clan—Bat Clan peasants still show proper obeisance—but there is an undeniable closeness between the castes that can be unsettling to more traditional samurai from the Great Clans.

Despite these oddities, Kyuden Komori remains a popular site for diplomatic gatherings. Were the Bat to become politically ambitious, there is the distinct possibility that they could become the second Minor Clan in history (after the Mantis) to host an Imperial Winter Court. To be sure, it is the humble charm of the Bat lands that give them part of their appeal, something the frenetic atmosphere of an Imperial Winter Court might mar.

The island of the Komori family does carry with it a somewhat sinister reputation. The island was originally proclaimed uninhabitable due to the strange experiences of early Imperial explorers from the Miya family. It took many years of hard labor by the Komori, along with the raw magical power of the family's half-spirit founder, to tame the island and claim it as their own. Still, even after the city and its immediate surroundings became a completely safe haven for the inhabitants, the island's deep-jungle core has remained a wild and surreal region that can be quite dangerous to the unwary. Visiting priests of-

ten speak of the nearly hallucinatory nature of the island's interior, comparing it to walking through a strange dream. However, it is not a safe and harmless dream, and the deeper reaches of the island's interior are visited only by scouting parties led by Komori shugenja.

The reason for this lies deep within the island's central jungle, where the boundaries between all spiritual realms are thinned. While the barriers are still enough (barely) to keep large numbers of creatures from the other spirit realms from entering into Ningen-do, it is very easy for small numbers of such entities to cross the barriers or for mortals to make contact with such entities. This has made the region both treacherous and surreal, and those who visit encounter sudden visions and occasional attacks by beings from another realm. Many report seeing dark shapes out of the corners of their eyes, moving indistinctly amidst the trees.

The Komori view it as their sacred calling to protect the spiritual balance of the region and ensure that no gateway to the other realms fully opens and overwhelms the others. The potential destruction from such an imbalance could be far-reaching and potentially devastating to the Empire at large. As a result, the interior of the island is kept off-limits to the people of the Bat Clan. The clan places markers to designate the region of safety, and the territory beyond these markers is off-limits for both guests and locals without the express permission of the clan champion. Anyone who does gain permission to explore these regions is escorted by Komori shugenja to ensure they do not stumble into danger. The Komori themselves send regular patrols into the jungle to look for possible threats.

A few years after the founding of the Bat Clan, Yoritomo Iongi left the Mantis Clan to join the Komori family, offering them the Tetsubo of Thunder as a family heirloom. Consequently, a shrine to Osano-Wo was established on the island. It is not as significant or as large as the major shrines to the Fortune in other locations, but it is without a doubt the most well-tended structure on the entire island. The sacred weapon carries the touch of his demanding presence, and the Komori would not dare risk any offense to him.

A small contingent of the Order of Osano-Wo resides on the island to serve in the shrine, tending to its upkeep and making regular martial displays in the Fortune's honor. It is considered a task of the highest honor for any of the Komori priests to join in tending the temple, and none shirk the opportunity to show favor to the Fortune who has blessed the small clan.

The actual design of the shrine is based upon Iongi's recollections of the long-lost shrine where from which he helped retrieve the Tetsubo of Thunder. Supposedly, this shrine was originally constructed by Osano-Wo's son Hida Kenzan while mourning his father's death. The Komori family's copy of the shrine is the tallest structure in the town, a large temple boasting a very high spire at its central point. Allegedly, during intense thunderstorms lightning has been known to strike the spire, and these incidents are considered by the locals as blessings and signs of favor from Osano-Wo. Of course, they can be quite startling to unprepared visitors.

Kyuden Komori in Other Eras

The Bat Clan and its associated seat of power are specific to the mid-twelfth century, and thus may be of less use to GMs than the other courts depicted in this chapter. However, there is no requirement that the Bat Clan must exist only in the twelfth century. The events which led to the creation of the clan are by no means inextricably tied to that era, and could just as easily have taken place in almost any earlier (or later) era of play. For that matter, a GM can easily shift Kyuden Komori to being the seat of power for a different Minor Clan (or even a large ronin group) with a name change and a few cosmetic modifications.

The Bat Clan is not the only long-term resident of the island. A considerable number of koumori, a race of shapeshifting bat spirits from Chikushudo, dwell in the most remote portions of the island's jungle. The Bat Clan's founder, Komori himself, was the half-blooded offspring of a koumori spirit and a mortal; he originally chose this island as the location of his clan in order to make contact with these distant kin. The spirits' duty is to help souls along their path to the proper place in the afterlife, and the tribe on the island is there to ensure that any confused spirits who breach the thin boundaries of the realms are quickly led back to their homes. The Bat Clan maintains a close relationship with them; in return for privacy and occasional aid in protecting the jungle from spiritual imbalances, the komouri offer both physical and magical support to the clan, particularly in training the clan's shugenja.

The koumori spirits live in a village of sorts within the deepest heart of the jungle. It is a network of dark caves in the side of one of the small forested mountains near the island's center. The caves contain several portals to Chikushudo and the bat spirits frequently travel between that realm and the island. While in Ningen-do the koumori usually take human form unless need requires otherwise, so visitors may not realize they are meeting animal spirits. Of course, guests from other clans are almost never permitted to even know this place exists, let alone to visit it, unless the shapeshifters themselves grant permission.

Kyuden Seppun

Kyuden Seppun, the seat of the Seppun family, is one of the oldest and most sacred strongholds of the Imperial Families. Although the Seppun are not the premier family among the Imperials (that honor belongs to the Otomo, whose ranks traditionally include the non-inheriting scions of the Emperor's line), throughout the thousand years of the Hantei dynasty it was the Seppun who could boast of their own separate stronghold while the Otomo were content to dwell within the core of the Imperial City itself. Thus Kyuden Seppun could boast of hosting nearly as many Imperial Winter Courts as Kyuden Doji itself. In many ways Kyuden Seppun is associated with the very concept of an Imperial Court. In addition, its location—outside the bounds of Otosan Uchi, but within two days' ride of the Imperial Palace—made it a favored destination for Hantei Emperors who simply wished a certain amount of time away from the pressures of the capitol city without actually leaving its sight.

Kyuden Seppun lies at the northern edge of Crane lands, and the great walls of Otosan Uchi are visible from its highest towers. It is an easy journey from Kyuden Seppun to the southernmost of the four Hub Villages surrounding the capital. The lands specifically assigned to the castle are limited, and most of its material needs are supplied by the Hub Villages, rendering the Seppun family home dependent on Otosan Uchi. In truth, the Seppun would have it no other way.

For most of its history the palace of the Seppun is effectively unguarded; it is a palace, not a military fortress, and the only troops based there are the minimal number required for maintaining security and showing honor for the family's guests. No retaining wall or other fortification surrounds the splendid gardens and sprawling complex. This seeming weakness is hardly a difficulty, however, since no clan in history has ever dared to so much as think of threatening one of the most sacred sites in the Empire. To do so would be tantamount to blasphemy. Only the forces of Jigoku have ever dared to threaten Kyuden Seppun, and not until the twelfth century were they able to do so.

Kyuden Seppun is a vast sprawling complex in which gardens, barracks, temples, and yashiki are joined by covered walkways and smaller buildings, melding seamlessly into the central keep. The facilities afford guests access to almost every honorable entertainment imaginable, from art and music to martial arts and religious meditation. Only two sets of structures are distinctly physically separate in their placement and construction: the Imperial Libraries and the Four Temples.

The walls of the main keep are ancient, older than Otosan Uchi itself. It was here that Doji and Hantei lived while the Imperial Palace itself was under construction. Although they moved as soon as the Palace was completed, Lady Seppun and her followers worked to expand their home into a safe retreat for the Imperial, and the castle reached its current size soon afterward. It has stood ever since, enduring many crises and disasters that afflicted other great palaces in the Empire. Even when Otosan Uchi fell during the assault of Daigotsu, Kyuden Seppun survived unscathed. No guest visiting its hallowed halls can fail to sense the age and history within its ancient oaken beams and polished floors.



Four major temples surround Kyuden Seppun, one at each corner of the great complex. These temples are the heart of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, where monks first studied the Tao of Shinsei in the early days of the Empire before going forth to spread the Little Teacher's wisdom to the rest of the Empire. Lady Seppun herself oversaw the initial construction of these temples, and many of the Brotherhood's greatest scholars and most pious and enlightened souls have studied here over the centuries. They are among the most frequent destinations for pilgrimages in modern times; samurai and commoners come here from hundreds of miles away to pray and meditate, and men of standing both great and small retire to them to contemplate enlightenment in their waning years.

The Four Temples are the original center of the Shintao sect of the

Kyuden Seppun in the Post-Hantei Era

Kyuden Seppun remains a prominent court location even after the fall of Otosan Uchi. Despite the loss of direct access to the Imperial Capitol, the castle remains the seat of power for a major Imperial family and thus a favored destination for diplomats of all the clans. The Four Temples of the Order of Shinsei and the Imperial Libraries likewise remain at the palace, drawing monks and scholars from across the Empire. However, the castle does acquire a more somber tone due to the Seppun family's sense of shame over their failure to defend the Imperial City from Daigotsu's attack.

One particularly notable change concerns the so-called Sun Balcony, a location on the upper floors where the Emperor and his attendants could gather and look upon the distant walls of Otosan Uchi. After the fall of the capital, this chamber was walled in and enclosed, and a Seppun artist painted a vast mural on the walls showing the distant city in flames and lines of samurai marching to battle. The room becomes a private retreat of the Seppun family, where they sometimes go to meditate on their failure to protect the Imperial capital.

Another change from the past is that Kyuden Seppun's location immediately outside the ruins of the old capital—ruins which are now haunted by bandits and sometimes worse things—makes it a less secure location than before. Although the majority of Seppun troops are stationed in Toshi Ranbo to protect the new Imperial City, Kyuden Seppun takes on a larger garrison than before. To respect the inviolate nature of the palace, however, the soldiers are stationed in barracks nearby rather than within the grounds themselves.

Brotherhood, although adjunct temples were constructed in both Otosan Uchi and, later, Toshi Ranbo. In the late twelfth century the center of the sect was moved to the Imperial capital and it was renamed the Order of Ten Thousand Temples, but even in that era the head of the Shintaoist order was still housed within the ancient walls here.

The temples are glorious structures, multi-tiered pagodas with marble pillars and walls of the finest wood and stone. Vines cling to the external walls and great evergreens offer shade and protection from the wind. Each of the four temples—called the Daikandai-ji, Yakushi-ji, Asuka-dera, and Kawara-dera—stands almost nine stories in height. They are easily taller than Kyuden Seppun itself, and are the most visible structures to guests approaching the castle. Each temple is entered by means of a grand archway facing one of the cardinal directions, different for each one. Ceramic bells baked from the clay on which Otosan Uchi was built hang above each of these arches.

Within the temples may be found some of the most ancient shrines and holiest relics in all the Brotherhood. In their foundations are carved four of the most important teachings of Shinsei; in the central chamber of each temple is a great statue depicting the Little Teacher in a manner reflecting the temple's particular saying.

- Daikandai-ji: *"As the bee collects nectar and fragrance, so let the sage dwell on earth."*
- Yakushi-ji: *"When you are doing one thing, be concerned with that one thing and nothing else. Distraction breeds disaster."*
- Asuka-dera: *"Death is not to be feared so much by one who has lived wisely."*
- Kawara-dera: *"Those with pure purpose have the strength to never fail."*

The Imperial Libraries are not as grand or complete as the libraries of the Ikoma or Asako, but are nevertheless impressive. The large and imposing physical structure of the library stands just outside of the main grounds, entered by a great gateway with statues of guardian fu lions standing to either side. Guests are welcomed, and while a few volumes are restricted, for the most part the library is meant as a resource the enlightenment and education of both guests and religious pilgrims.

The contents of the Imperial Libraries are dominated by ancient and rare books, especially those dealing with historical or religious topics. No subject is comprehensively covered in the way it might be in a more focused library devoted to that field, but the breadth of knowledge available is truly staggering, and most subjects can be researched here to at least some extent. It is notable that the Seppun librarians are less concerned with a complete account of history (a task left to the Ikoma family) and more with preserving original copies of ancient texts, particularly those of historical and artistic value. Perhaps the most prized pieces within these halls are the actual poetry written by Hantei himself, as well a vast array of documents created by his descendants in the Hantei Dynasty. Other notable works include "My Mother, the World," a treatise by the son of Kakita and Doji that uses three elemental metaphors of the snow, ocean and flowers to describe the spirit of the ever-changing world in the eyes of the Lady Doji—a literary style called "*setsugekkau*." The piece is so famed that such imagery has found its way into countless later works reflecting on natural beauty.

Just behind the palace grounds is a low, winding path surrounded by thick willow trees. At the end of that path lies the grave of the Lady Seppun, a stone mausoleum built in an archaic style dating back to the era before the fall of the Kami. Its outer frescoes depict the construction of Otosan Uchi, while its interior walls depict the Sun, the Moon, and the greater Fortunes in exquisite detail. The ceiling portrays the constellations visible during the time of the Kami's fall. This ancient artistic masterpiece is unique not only for its age but also because the Lady's remains are still present within the tomb. Although the Hantei Emperors proclaimed that all bodies should be cremated after the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban profaned the dead within the Imperial City, this location was spared the cleansing fires in honor of the purity of the woman interred within. The wrath of Heaven itself would fall on anyone who fared to blaspheme against the remains of the first and most honorable of the Kami's followers.

The Gamemaster's Toolbox: Court Scenarios

Running an adventure set in an environment of court intrigue can be challenging for any GM. Indeed, the very concept of an "adventure" which consists of elegant noblemen chatting to each other in a palace chamber or a beautiful garden can seem counter-intuitive to many players. Where is the excitement, the drama, in mere diplomatic negotiations? A skilled GM, however, can invest such seemingly "boring" scenes with just as much intensity as a battle with enemy soldiers or a hunt for a Shadowlands monster. This section attempts to offer some advice for GMs trying to make court intrigue a more interesting and central part of their campaigns.

Court and Non-Player Characters (NPCs)

In a court scenario, the non-player characters (known shorthand as NPCs) play an especially important role. Because court intrigue plots are driven by the people in the court, any effective court campaign needs strong, memorable NPCs and strong interactions with those NPCs.

Make a list of NPCs. A long list. One of the most effective ways to convey the complexity of court is to populate it with a large number of memorable individuals. This can seem intimidating—how can you possibly give full personalities and backgrounds to a huge number of NPCs? The answer, of course, is that you don't have to. Instead, give each NPC a key memorable feature—a distinctive description, a verbal or physical tic—and a single specific goal or motive, such as trying to win trade concessions for their clan or trying to marry a particular person. This creates a set of basic touchstones you can fall back on whenever the players interact with that NPC.





Have the NPCs each choose a particular player as the focus of their attention. A seductress might set her sights on a particular male PC, or a Crane diplomat might decide to develop an alliance with a specific PC from another clan. This individual targeting allows the GM to rotate through a series of smaller one-on-one encounters rather than trying to constantly engage the entire party. (Of course, the GM should be wary of staying too long with one PC lest the other players get bored.)

As the players interact with the various NPCs, some of those NPCs will draw more player attention than others. The GM can then flesh out these specific NPCs, giving them more depth of personality and more complex motivations. Thus rather than having to write up detailed personalities and backgrounds for two-dozen NPCs, the GM need only develop them for the three or four people the PCs really care about.

Mannerisms In and Out of Court

A Rokugani court is a highly formalized location where all conversations are elliptical and all movements are precisely choreographed. The GM should always depict NPCs in court as behaving in a strictly regimented fashion, with precise and predictable phrases, gestures, and styles. Subtlety of word and gesture should be the rule. If the players don't completely pick up on the signals being sent in court, that's fine—even trained courtier don't always catch all the clues, and the players can learn as their characters do. It is important for the GM to remain consistent, however; this is a society based on tradition, after all. And when an NPC does behave differently, it will be a red flag to the PCs that something is going on. Why is the normally flawless and serene Crane fidgeting with his fan?

It is worth remembering that a lot of court intrigue does not actually happen in court. A court-intrigue adventure or campaign should include plenty of trips outside the court to other locations—local temples, geisha houses, restaurants and tea houses, hunting and hawking trips, and so forth. Aside from breaking up the monotony of "yet another day in court," these scenes also allow the PCs to interact with the NPCs in a different and less formal setting. The same NPCs who were so tightly controlled in the palace of the Crane can now become less formal, more individual, and show personal interests and quirks, allowing the GM to deepen their personalities and draw the characters into closer emotional connections with them.

Of course, even in a private environment the typical Rokugani—especially a courtier—will be quite self-controlled compared to a modern Westerner.

Scheming and Indirect Goals

"Trust and respect your allies, but never become dependent upon them. That leads only to failure."

-Otomo Madoko's The Subtletly of the Court

The courtiers of Rokugan are well-known for using indirect methods in their negotiations, especially the master courtiers of the Crane and Scorpion Clans. This does not just apply to their conversational mannerisms but also to their methods. A courtier will often pursue a goal that seems odd or counterproductive, or even one which seemingly helps a rival, in order to set up schemes which come to fruition only much later. Obviously, even the smartest and most creative GM cannot come up with such schemes beforehand, but as a GM you have advantages that your NPCs do not—you know what is happening in the entire game, what the players and the other NPCs are planning, and what motivates them. By allowing an NPC to have a little bit of "omniscience," the GM can create the illusion of elaborate Machiavellian scheming. Some players and GMs may see this as a form of "cheating," but in truth it is simply counterbalancing for the fact that the GM must play all of the NPCs and thus cannot devote the same energy and effort to each individual NPC that the players can devote to their characters.



Winds of Magic

At first no one knew why the Phoenix had chosen to hold their own Winter Court in Shiro Sousei. The so-called Castle of the Twins was a small and unassuming stronghold in the Asako lands, close to the Phoenix Mountains; hardly the sort of place where the Isawa and Shiba were accustomed to hosting the samurai of half a dozen clans. Still, they had invited some of the most influential courtiers in the Empire to the court, and many were curious enough to attend. Once they arrived, the reasons became clear: the Son of Heaven had suggested a road be built through the mountains near this very castle, to facilitate travel to the Shrines of the Ki-Rin and of Jurojin. Although the Phoenix were loath to speak directly against the Emperor's idea, they nonetheless spent the winter working against the idea, maneuvering to push other clans away from the idea while remaining oddly evasive about their motivations. Despite their campaign, though, by the time winter wound to a close the Imperial, Crane, and Dragon delegates had convinced nearly everyone in the court that the road project should proceed for the spiritual well-being of the Empire.

As the snows began to melt, the Phoenix held a final banquet for all their guests, an event to celebrate and close the court. As the fine meal concluded, servants led the guests into the castle gardens, where they found an old man in a faded orange kimono sat behind a small wooden table. Nearby, a young man in shugenja robes chanted softly, his words little more than a soothing mumble.

Shiba Kosaka, the Clan Champion, bowed to the assembled guests. "Honored friends of the Phoenix," he said, "we thank you for your company during this fruitful winter. With your permission we will offer a final piece of entertainment. The honorable Shiba Wari-san will tell you a story from Phoenix legend."

The old man behind the table began to speak, his voice deep and sonorous, carrying gravity and warmth together.

"Early in the life of the Empire and the Phoenix Clan, we were plagued by more than just the remnants of the ancient forces of He Who Must Not Be Named. We fought a nearly constant battle in these mountains with the foreign barbarians who call themselves the Yobanjin." As the old man spoke, the young shugenja began move his hands slowly, almost as if moving a paintbrush. As he did so, images sprang up from the surface of the wooden table. Mountains, green with the first flush of spring and clearly recognizable as the same mountains which lay near the castle. The guests murmured softly, delighted with the magical display; a few thought they could even hear faint wind and birdsong from the image.

"This is the tale of twins from the Isawa family, Isawa Ishi and Isawa Oriko, who protected a village near these mountains. Oriko was a powerful shugenja, but her brother had not been born with the gift and served as her yojimbo. The two were inseparable and for ten years they protected their village from all manner of dangers." As the old man

told the tale, the scenes he described played out on the table. Images of the twins rose into sight, fought, bled, laughed, and cried, while their foes fled or died. The seasons changed, the mountains going from the deep green of summer to the icy white of winter's heart, and the twins aged.

"Finally," the old man continued, "Ishi and Oriko faced a foe they were not prepared to fight. A dark sorcerer of the Yobanjin barbarians began to terrorize the villages near the mountains." A strange an alien figure appeared among the images on the table, and the twins quailed before his power. They fought the strange sorcerer with everything they had, yet he still thrived. To the audience, wrapped up in the tale, it seemed as though the old man's words merged with the magical images, the two becoming one single tale. When the sorcerer cornered the twins in a blind canyon, soft gasps echoed from the guests, and the light in the garden seemed to grow dim, the air more chill.

The old man was silent for a moment and then continued in a much softer voice, so that many in the audience leaned forward slightly to hear his words. "The sorcerer bragged to the twins that he was immortal and nothing they could do would ever kill him. Then Oriko spoke. 'I may not be able to kill you, but I can trap you within these mountains so that you can never escape.' She called on the kami with all her strength, even her very life itself. The kami wrapped her and the Yobanjin in bounds of earth and began to drag them into the ground. Oriko told her brother to run, but Ishi stayed by his sister, unwilling to leave her. Then the sorcerer began to rise again from the stone. 'He is too strong!' Oriko cried. 'Run Ishi, warn the others!' But Ishi did not run. Instead he took his sister's hand and added his life-force to hers. Together they were stronger than the sorcerer, and all three were pulled into the heart of the mountain."

"It is said they remain there to this day. The twins live so long as the sorcerer does, and their life-force keeps him chained within the earth."

The view of the blind canyon on the simple table seemed to fly outward and away from the mountains, as it did so the years passed swiftly. Finally the image showed a castle not very far from the mountains, a castle surrounded by melting snow. And then the image faded away like a shadow at dawn.

A long silence fell over the garden. Finally the guests began to speak, each expressing his appreciation of the story and the magical way in which the tale was told. The old man held up his hand, and after a moment all fell silent, the only noise the soft chanting of the young shugenja.

"We do not ask for your appreciation," the old man said. "All we ask is that you remember." As he spoke, he seemed to flicker and fade, vanishing from sight just like the images of his tale. Silence fell again on the garden as each guest considered the meaning of what they had seen and heard. Only a few noticed that the young shugenja had finally stopped his chant.

The Ways of Air Magic

The Element of Air is often considered to be the weakest of the Elements a shugenja may study. After all, magical effects created by the Air kami are often subtle to be point of being imperceptible, unnoticed save by those actively looking for them. Wheras a shugenja of Fire or Earth confronted by a bandit might simply throw lightning or boulders at him, an Air shugenja might influence the man's mind to dissuade him from attacking, place an illusion to lead him astray, or shift the man's balance so he falls flat on his face. However, notwithstanding this reputation, there are times when the element of Air can be as ferocious as Fire, unleashing howling tempests and devastating hurricanes that sweep aside all in their path. Those who underestimate Air for its subtlety are making a critical mistake. Air can lurk beneath notice, unleash unparalleled violence, or even do both at the same time.

There are several different families of shugenja in the Empire who follow the path of Air, and just as the Element itself is changeable and unpredictable, its followers embrace several different philosophies. They run the gamut from the pacifistic Asahina to the manipulative Soshi, the spirit-focused Komori, the Sun-worshiping Moshi, the traveling Iuchi, the illusion-masters of the Shiba, and of course the Air-oriented wing of the Isawa school. Each of these groups views the element of Air differently and utilizes it in ways that match their individual philosophies.

The Asahina of the Crane Clan

The Asahina were founded in atonement for a life of violence. Isawa Asahina had been an extremely violent and prideful man, but a single act of compassion made him reexamine his own life and turn his back on his past, marrying into the Crane and adopting the ways of peace and humility. In the centuries since then, most of the family has followed in Asahina's footsteps, embracing the ways of pacifism, meditation, and artistry.

The Asahina use their Air magic to further their philosophical approach to life. Much of their magical effort is focused on the art of creation, including many forms of art and the potent nemuranai known as fetishes or *tsan-*



gusuri. In the early years of the family they also crafted some weapons of war—the infamous traitor Asahina Yajinden was a brilliant swordsmith—but as the years progressed, their pacifistic beliefs caused them to gradually stop doing so. On the rare occasions that they become directly involved in a violent incident, they are most likely to use their magic to try to stop a conflict before it begins, or failing that, to use nonviolent methods to bring an end to hostilities. Air magic is quite effective for this sort of approach, since it is quite possible to use the power of Air to suppress or control a foe without harming him.

The majority of the Asahina devote themselves to lives of mediation and study, remaining within their temples and shrines and almost never visiting the rest of the Empire. However, a minority of Asahina do visit the rest of Rokugan; because of their closeness to the Element of Air, these men and women most often serve in the courts alongside the Doji rather than pursuing martial roles. Even those of them who do learn to fight, however, prefer to do so in a way that embraces the path of Air—namely, the Asahina Archers.

The Asahina who pursue their love of creation also sometimes leave the temples, sharing their artistic work with the rest of the Empire or even joining the Kakita Artisan Academy. Their deep connection with Air gives these shugenja-artists an intrinsic understanding of the way art impacts emotion, allowing them to create work of profound meaning and simple purity.

The Moshi of the Mantis Clan

From its founding, the Moshi family has always had a special connection with the Sun, worshipping and revering Amaterasu far above any other Fortune or Kami. They kept this reverence after becoming a part of the Mantis Clan, even after the death of Lady Sun and the ascension of Lord Yakamo, and in modern times celebrated the ascension of the Jade Dragon to become the new Sun.

The Moshi reverence for the Sun is the driving factor behind the way they use the magic of Air. They believe that flying, allowing oneself to be carried on the wind by the Air kami, brings one closer to the Sun and thus is a profound form of religious tribute. Their mountain home already brings them closer to the Sun and makes it easier for them to ride the winds whenever they wish.

After the Moshi join the Mantis Clan, they also lend their expertise in Air to the service of the clan's mighty fleets, using the mastery of wind to control the weather and guide their ships safely to their destinations. The sight of a Moshi flying above a Mantis vessel is a common on in the twelfth century.

Many of the Moshi shugenja (who are of course all women) wear robes longer and looser than those favored by most Rokugani priests, allowing them to better feel the currents of the air as they fly. Within the safety of their home valley these robes can be almost impractical because of their size and length, but while flying they become veritable works of art.

The Isawa and Shiba of the Phoenix Clan

The Phoenix Clan has always had a close association with all of the Elements, favoring none over the others. As the Empire's acknowledged masters of magic, they study all of the Elements and individual shugenja within their ranks achieve mastery of whichever Element fits them best. There are also a number of groups within the Phoenix Clan dedicated to the study and promotion of individual Elements, including Air. Those shugenja who focus completely on a single Element are known as the Tensai, and the Air Tensai are acknowledged as some of the most powerful Air shugenja in the Empire.

The Phoenix Elemental Guard are shugenja dedicated to defending the Phoenix in time of war. Each legion is devoted to a single element, and the Hurricane Initiates

are the legion dedicated to the Air, using the fierce powers of the Element to sweep their foes from the field. Few enemies can stand against them when they unleash the cyclonic forces of enraged Air spirits.

Finally, there is a small group of dedicated Phoenix shugenja who study the art of Air magic solely so they can use it to entertain. The Shiba Illusionists, founded by Shiba Tsuna in the ninth century, study the ways of Air solely in order to create illusions which entertain others. Although their practices are frowned on by the Isawa, who see them as an overly frivolous and disrespectful use of the kami, they nonetheless have been able to serve the Phoenix ably for many years.

Of course, not every Isawa shugenja who venerates Air is a member of these groups, of course. There are many Phoenix who follow the path of Air without joining more specialized orders, simply embracing the Element which they find most congenial. Because of their connection to the Element, they tend to be more graceful and sociable than their brethren, and most Phoenix shugenja who attend the courts of Rokugan are trained in the ways of Air. Some also serve aboard the few ships the Phoenix use, ensuring these vessels always have fair weather and good wind.

The Soshi of the Scorpion Clan

It is well known that the Soshi family shugenja are devotees of Air, especially those aspects of the Element that deal with thought, deception, and illusion. What is less well-known is that for much of their history, the Soshi treated Air as a secondary aspect of their training. For more than ten centuries the Soshi centered their studies around something far more sinister, the so-called Shadow Magic, power taken from the Lying Darkness. The ability of Air to deceive, manipulate, and trick others was seen as a useful supplement to the sinister powers of the Nothing, rather than as a primary focus of their training.

However, this is not to say the Soshi do not grasp the potential of Air. The playful and mischievous kami of Air are ideally suited to magically supporting the Scorpion Clan's activities in both the courts and on the battlefield, ferreting out secrets and shifting others' feelings in suitable directions. Soshi shugenja are trained to conceal their spellcasting from others, and sometimes even masquerade as courtiers in order to avoid warning their foes that they are using the power of the kami. Although samurai from other clans consider such actions highly dishonorable, the Air spirits do not share mortal morality, and to them such deceptions are merely another amusing game to play.

The Iuchi Travelers of the Unicorn Clan

While most of the shugenja of the Unicorn Clan are devoted to the element of Water, the Element associated with movement and the one which most readily allows communion with the clan's precious horses, some few of them also make intense studies of Air as well, since the speed and energy of Air is also associated with travel and speed. The tradition of the Travelers began during the centuries the Unicorn spent outside of Rokugan, but gained greater recognition and value after the clan returned to the Empire and found itself forced to wage frequent war to protect its position against the encroachments of the other clans.

It is said that the most powerful of these shugenja can actually use Air magic to transport a mount and rider for hundreds of miles in the blink of an eye. Their most famous interaction with the rest of the Empire came during the event known as the Winter of Red Snow, when the Khan Moto Chagatai sought to seize the throne of Rokugan from the faltering Toturi Dynasty. Almost the entirety of the clan's order of Iuchi Travelers gave their lives in a single massive ritual that



moved Chagatai's army beyond the encircling Lion forces, allowing it to attack the lightly defended capital city.

The Komori of the Bat Clan

The founder and first daimyo of the Bat Clan was the son of a woman of the Mantis Clan and a *komori* bat spirit from Chikushudo. Though Komori's father had long since returned to Chikushudo when he was born, Komori always had an affinity with the Air spirits and the *komori* spirits who still dwell within Rokugan. Komori eventually became a formidable shugenja, and in time his abilities earned him the right to found the Minor Clan of the Bat. Komori was renowned for his ability to use the air to communicate with both spirits and living people, often at great distances, and his apprentices within the Bat Clan developed techniques based on his abilities.

The shugenja of the Bat Clan revere the spirits of the Air and the *komori* as if they were family. They have learned from their founder the ability to reliably communicate instantly with others anywhere in the Empire, a capability that could transform the Empire if it ever becomes widely used. In theory, other Air shugenja could learn this ability, and such rapid and reliable communication could profoundly change the very way the Rokugani see the world and interact with it. Whether this potential change ever takes place, however, remains to be seen.

Bat Clan shugenja listen almost constantly to the whispers of the Air kami and the *komori* spirits, and thus they often seem to be somewhat distracted and unfocussed. Sometimes this distraction is genuine, but just as often the shugenja remains fully aware of his surroundings—something which can come as a surprise to those who might underestimate the students of Komori.

Air and the Art of Illusion

"One must learn to see what is to be seen and to see through what others wish you to see."

– the Tao of Shinsei

The Rokugani concept of truth can be difficult for outsiders to understand. Whereas a Western culture sees a clear distinction between truth and lies and categorize everything as one or the other, the Rokugani view things in a more complex light. In the Rokugani mind there are not two but three categories: lies (things that are blatantly untrue), truth as it appears, and truth as it is. Lies are disdained, of course, and any who are caught lying are regarded as dishonorable and contemptible. But the appearance of truth is, to the Rokugani, just as honorable as definitive truth. It is often said that to Rokugani appearance is everything, and if something seems to be true, it is. The distinction between these two different kinds of truth is best exemplified by the existence of two separate tenets of Bushido: Honesty (truth as it is) and Sincerity (truth as it appears).

Illusion magic stumbles into a strange territory between these different fields of truth in Rokugani thought. Illusions may appear to be true, yet the observers will often know they are not. This dichotomy blurs the line between the appearance of truth and the reality of both truth and lies, and average Rokugani samurai can find it difficult to reconcile this conflict. To them illusion magic often seems as nothing more than a dishonorable trick, unless it is used for frivolous and harmless purposes. However, there are also some more practical Rokugani who believe any tool should be used if it furthers the goals of honorable men. Since the kami will perform spells regardless of the honor of the spellcaster, the problem has no easy answer.

While there are Air shugenja all over the Empire, there are few groups who actually specialize in the use of illusion magic. Since many samurai see the use of illusion outside of a battlefield situation as either frivolous or the grossest form of deception, counter to the proper order of things, so there are only a few such groups in Rokugan. What these shugenja understand, however, is that Air spirits love to create illusions, doing so willingly and with gusto. Far from subverting the kami, the groups who use illusions do so with the full enthusiastic cooperation of the Air spirits themselves.

The Asahina Artisans

"A sunrise is both beautiful and fleeting. Are there any who would dispute that a sunrise is art crafted by the Sun herself? How then is my art any different? It is both beautiful and fleeting, but one need not get up so very early to see it."

– Asahina Hake, year 594

Where other groups (such as the Shiba Illusionists, described below) use the magic of illusions to entertain, the Asahina Artisans use it to create art. The group was founded in the late sixth century by Asahina Hake, a short and acerbic man who showed little skill in the normal paths of the Crane. He was generally considered to be hopeless in the courts, for all too often he would express his opinions openly and cause scenes or earn enemies. His only true talent was with Air magic, but he lacked the contemplative spirit to be part of the Asahina temples and lacked the stomach to serve with the Crane military. Hake seemed to be doomed to be a minor court shugenja of no distinction, sequestered in some remote corner of the Empire where he could not do any real damage to the clan.

However, Hake was not content to allow himself to be sent away and forgotten. He believed he was destined for greater things and desperately sought a way to be relevant and useful to his clan. Learning he would be sent to a remote corner of the Lion lands, he spent his final winter in the Crane lands in Kyuden Kakita, the heart of artistic expression in the Empire. While listening to a piece of music, he suddenly realized it was the same song he had heard a few days earlier, but subtly different from the previous performance. When he asked the musician about this, she replied that every musician puts a little of themselves into their music, and the same song is never played in exactly the same way. Each performance is a unique experience.

Hake knew that this revelation had some bearing on his own situation, but at first he could not quite see how. He watched dancers and actors, sometimes watching the same play two and three times in a row, asking the performers about their work. Why did a specific actor say a line one way in his first performance and another way in the second one?

Eventually, Hake developed the theory that all performance art had an element of temporality to it; each performance was unique, able to happen only for that specific performer at that specific time. He made the connection to his own skills on one of the last nights of the winter while watching a performance of *The Scorpion and the Frog* for the fourth time that week. Suddenly filled with enthusiasm, he hurried outside into the snow and began practicing with the spirits of the Air.

The next week the daimyo of the Kakita held a sculpture competition... and Asahina Hake entered. Where the other competitors holed themselves up in their studios for days on end, Hake spent his time in the palace gardens. When the day came to present their sculptures, Hake brought nothing with him except his scroll satchel. Each of his competitors had created a work of lasting beauty, worthy of a place of honor in a daimyo's castle. But when the Kakita daimyo and the other judges arrived before Hake they were surprised to find he had not even tried to create a sculpture. Instead, Asahina Hake bowed and unrolled a scroll. The daimyo's yojimbo stepped forward, but he forestalled them and allowed Hake to continue. The young shugenja crafted an illusory sculpture made of light and shadow, floating in mid-air, completely unsupported and different from every angle. Hake explained his sculpture was not permanent in the same way as those of his competitors; rather, it was like a song or a dance, beautiful when it existed but also transitory, living on only within the minds and imaginations of those who viewed it.

In most other courts, Hake would have been laughed out of the room and lost the competition. But in the palace of the Kakita, his innovative work earned praise and respect (although he still did not win the competition). He was invited to study at the Kakita Artisan Academy and learn about traditional Rokugani art so that he might become better at his new art form. In time, Hake became a decent sculptor, painter, and musician in his own right, but he remains best known for the ways he incorporated those skills into his own illusory sculptures. He traveled all over the Empire studying different art forms to enhance his sculptures. In his later years he also became known for crafting elaborate illusory recreations of ancient places and vanished castles, capturing their grandeur and essence through illusion and music.

In modern Rokugan there is a small dojo within the Kakita Artisan Academy where Asahina who are interested in learning to use magic to create art are trained in the techniques Asahina Hake developed all those years before.

The Shiba Illusionists

In the ninth century a child was born among the Shiba who was gifted at speaking with the spirits. Shiba Tsuna was a rarity, since very few children born to the Shiba family have the gifts needed to become shugenja. Usually, when a Shiba child is found to be gifted in the ways of the shugenja, he is fostered to the Isawa and often adopted directly into that family. However, Tsuna had the misfortune of being born during a time of interclan turmoil, with rivalries between the three Phoenix families at an all-time high. None of the Isawa wished to take a child of the Shiba under their wing, so Tsuna was brought up as a Shiba. Tsuno had a quick mind, but no talent or desire to learn martial skills; while his playmates were playing martial games and learning the rudiments of a bushi's life, Tsuna spent his time with the younger children and learned small tricks like sleight-of-hand and music. His parents came to rely on him to keep their younger children thoroughly entranced and out of the way.

Eventually, Tsuna's gifts with the kami drew notice and he was able to gain admission to the Isawa school. He showed a moderate talent with the magic of Air and eventually graduated in the middle of his class—an undistinguished shugenja who seemed destined for no great or notable achievements. Indeed, initially there was no place that wanted the young Shiba's services. The Isawa did not want a Shiba in their research libraries, and the Asako did not want a Shiba as a historian or a court shugenja. His own family could only use him in its military forces, where he would just be a nameless shugenja among scores of others.

It is said the answer to his dilemma came to him in his sleep. An Air spirit came to him in a dream and told him the laughter of children was the finest sound it had ever heard. It wanted Tsuna to bring more laughter to the children of Rokugan. The young Shiba happily agreed and soon gathered some of his other classmates who were skilled with Air, Water, and Fire magic. They formed a group of traveling entertainers, using illusions and other forms of magic to tell stories, create spectacles, and to entertain in every possible way. Eventually they petitioned Tsuna's daimyo for permission to travel across the whole of the Empire; although this was initially denied, the Clan Champion heard of the group and was amused by their presumption. He granted them permission and the



small group of shugenja performers began to travel across Rokugan, sharing their performances with children everywhere. Many who saw their performances, liberally laced with music, smoke, flames, and other displays of the joy of the spirits, left amazed and delighted. Most shugenja, however, saw what Tsuna and his followers did as tawdry and disrespectful to the spirits.

As recounted on page 168 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*, Tsuna's unconventional behavior eventually drew the wrath of a jealous Isawa and led to accusations of maho. For a time it seemed Tsuna would be condemned to death, but a shocking intervention by the Crab Clan Champion led to the Isawa's death; in the resulting political turmoil Tsuna's group were forgotten and the charges were eventually dropped.

Since then the Shiba Illusionists have remained a fairly small organization. They have only a single dojo and seldom train more than a dozen students at a time. Although the Illusionists do occasionally try to follow Tsuna's original path and travel around the Empire as a group, it is more common for them to serve as individual entertainers or to provide magical assistance to musicians or acting troupes. There are still debates at times as to whether it is appropriate for the Illusionists to use the spirits for such a frivolous purpose as entertainment, but most Illusionists simply smile and step away from such debates. After all, they know the spirits themselves love to entertain; even after centuries, there is nothing so sweet to an Air spirit as the laughter of a child.

The Mist Legion (Hurricane Initiates)

"Following a false light only leads you deeper into darkness."

– The Tao of Shinsei

Within the Hurricane Initiates, the wing of the Phoenix Elemental Guard dedicated to the use of Air magic, there is a small selective group of shugenja who specialize in using illusion magic on the battlefield. They are called the Mist Legion, and they can often be recognized by a small gray cloud worked into the school mon on their kimono.

The Mist Legion's primary responsibility is misleading and deceiving the enemy. Mist Legionnaires ensure the enemy cannot see what the Phoenix army is doing by shrouding it in illusion, whether invisibility, false terrain, or even actual mist if conditions allow. The Mist Legion also frequently fills the gaps in their army's lines with illusory soldiers, creating the impression of a stronger force to intimidate their enemies. The Mist Legion is also responsible for protecting army command staffs by concealing their position and diverting enemy soldiers from their location.

In times of open warfare, the Shiba Illusionists are sometimes called away from their other duties to serve as a part of the Mist Legion. While most of the Illusionists do not make good soldiers, their skills with illusion magic are without parallel and they can often do the work of two or three other members of the Legion.

The Soshi Deceivers

"Wherever there is light, there must be shadow."

– The Tao of Shinsei

The word *tejina* means "illusion," and sometimes the Shiba Illusionists have gone by that name. But long before Shiba Tsuna founded his small organization, there was another, far more secretive, group of shugenja in the Empire who called themselves Tejina: the Soshi Deceivers, who studied the power of the Lying Darkness, discovered the sinister Shadow Brands, and served as magical support to the Scorpion Clan's secretive order of shinobi.

The Soshi family was founded by Shosuro under a false name, and she taught her students to utilize a source other than the kami to create their spells, especially spells dealing with deception, illusion, and darkness. They called this strange power the Shadow, and used it alongside the power of the kami to enhance their magic beyond what other schools could attain. Over time, they also discovered how to bind some of the Shadow's power into their bodies in the form of mystical tattoos, the so-called *kage yakiin* or Shadowbrands. What the early Soshi did not truly realize, however, was that their use of Shadow magic was slowly granting the Lying Darkness more and more access to the world, often corrupting the Soshi themselves in the process. It will never be known how many of the Soshi were consumed by the Shadow in the centuries they used its power.



When the power of the Shadow was revealed to the Empire and it was defeated (at least temporarily) at the Battle of Oblivion's Gate, the Shosuro and Soshi daimyo rooted out everyone they could find who showed the slightest evidence of being corrupted by the Lying Darkness. However, the Deceivers did not come to an end. Their studies were continued, under careful supervision, as they sought new ways to tap into the power of Nothing on behalf of the Scorpion Clan without corrupting themselves as their predecessors had done. The rebuilt organization based itself in the Hidden Moon Dojo, a covert group in Soshi lands, and like their ancestors the new Deceivers used the power of Nothing to perform clandestine operations for the Scorpion Clan. Many of them convinced themselves that the powers they were using were not actually connected to the Nothing at all, but were merely the result of mental focus and physical discipline.

The Soshi Deceivers use a combination of Air magic and the power of Nothing to do their sinister deeds. They are notably adept at illusion magic, cloaking their actions in concealing shadows, rendering themselves invisible, or taking on the visages of others to deflect blame for their actions.

Notable Uses of Illusion Spells

Despite the moral quandaries associated with illusion magic, a significant number of illusion spells have been created through the many centuries humans have been speaking to the kami. Below is a listing of some of the more common illusion spells and discussion of how they are used and perceived within Rokugan.

Cloak of Night (Air 1)

This relatively minor illusion spell merely hides a single nonliving object from sight. Air shugenja of a more mischievious nature often use this spell to frustrate those who they believe deserve a mild comeuppance. Although this is considered ill mannered, it is not truly dishonorable, especially if it can be passed off as a joke. Other less honorable Air shugenja, however, sometimes use this spell to cover up crimes by making the hard evidence "vanish" into thin air.

Token of Memory (Air 1)

This spell is sometimes called "the artist's friend," since it can create an illusion of an object that does not yet actually exist. Many Air shugenja who are also artists use the spell to help them conceptualize the way a sculpture, ikebana, or other art project will look after it is finished. There have also been a few artists in Rokugani history whose art was the actual illusions created by Token of Memory. Some battle oriented Air shugenja use this spell to help their generals keep track of a battle while in the

field by replicating maps that would otherwise be back in a headquarters tent.

Way of Deception (Air 1)

This spell is sometimes insulted as the tool of a coward, since it can make the caster appear to be in danger when he is actually safe a short distance away. In battle, this spell is often used by groups of Air shugenja to draw enemy archer fire, fire that strikes the illusions instead of the actual shugenja. It is also used by pranksters to avoid the immediate ramifications of whatever prank they are performing.

However, this spell has also been used artistically. Air shugenja who specialize in the art of dance can use the spell to multiply themselves and present a more complex performance. Others have left multiple versions of themselves in various poses to create a sort of illusory tableau.

Hidden Visage (Air 2)

It is rare for those who are not trained in the art of Air magic to even know this spell exists—which, in truth, is probably for the best. If it was generally known that any random stranger might be a disguised Air shugenja, mistrust and paranoia would reign. Those who do use this spell are most likely engaged in dishonorable activities such as infiltrating a castle or escaping capture.

The Kami's Whisper (Air 2)

This spell can easily be used to deceive others into believing they have heard conversations or comments no one truly made, and can thus be used to influence both politics and personal relationships. Of course, such a use of the spell is frowned on by civilized Rokugani society as being dishonorable. On the other hand, entertainers use this spell to add sound and voice to their otherwise silent illusions, or to make a sculpture or painting seem even more real than it already does.

Mists of Illusion (Air 2)

Mists of Illusion is one of the more powerful illusion spells, able to create an illusion not only much larger than those crafted with Token of Memory but also in much greater variety, even replicating specific people or places. With Mists of Illusion, an Air shugenja can make the pins on a map look exactly like those they represent, show a magistrate exactly what a criminal looks like, or or place an exact image of a rival in an inconvenient place. This spell also has many battlefield uses; for example, a large illusory stone could cloak the presence of a few soldiers, or an illusory pool of water might make soldiers think twice before crossing a particular field. Finally, this spell is quite popular with artists and entertainers, especially the Shiba Illusionists, due to its tremendous flexibility.

Deception and Illusion on the Battlefield

"To charge your army into battle without foreknowledge of your opponent's capabilities and weaknesses, brings you no glory and brands you a coward. Your concern is the safety of the Emperor and that of your clan. Blind death is swift death. Instead, when facing the enemy, let him see what you want him to see. Show him your right hand, strike with your left. Hide all he does not need to see, for the sting of your slap will ease the pain of a sudden blade in his side."

—*Akodo's* Leadership

"All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near. Hold out baits to entice the enemy. Feign disorder, and crush him."

—The Book of Sun Tao

Blatant deception is generally frowned on in Rokugan; one must always be perceived as truthful, thus the importance of Sincerity. This is true everywhere...except on the battlefield. To a Rokugani general, deception on the battlefield is expected and their strategies and tactics must take it into consideration at all times.

Illusion magic can sometimes be used to make a general's deceptions even more effective than they would be otherwise. Almost every clan with a significant capability in illusion magic has been known to employ it on the battlefield, with the Scorpion, the Crane, and the Phoenix being especially noted for such tactics. Illusion magic can hide and ambush, mislead the foe with false terrain, or demoralize an enemy general with a vast host of imaginary soldiers.

It is important to note, however, that Rokugan sees a sharp distinction between the tactics which are acceptable on the battlefield and those acceptable in single combat between two samurai. In a personal combat, deception—including magical deception—is considered dishonorable, and woe betide the samurai who is caught practicing it.

Wolf's Proposal (Air 2)

The use of Wolf's Proposal is never considered to be honorable. Fortunately very few people know this spell actually exists. Most Rokugani believe that a person's honor is always discernable from their character and actions (a philosophy reflected mechanically by the ability to tell others' approximate Honor ranks). This spell allows someone to appear to be something that they are not, and does so in a way which is fundamentally anathema to the beliefs of most of the samurai of Rokugan. Unsurprisingly, the spell is extremely rare outside of the Scorpion Clan.

Famous and Infamous Uses of Netsuke of Wind

Asahina Yajinden is the most infamous craftsman in Rokugani history, but he was not always a man obsessed with darkness. For a time he was simply one of the greatest craftsmen of his generation. Asahina Tariki was one of his early apprentices, and shared his master's remarkable skills in the crafting of blades. Several years after being apprenticed to Yajinden, Tariki awoke in the night with a vision of a perfect tanto. He rose from his futon, took up his scroll satchel and cast Netsuke of Wind, crafting the illusion with more care than he had ever spent in crafting an actual blade. The illusion that resulted was just as he had seen and felt the blade in his dreams. The balance and heft were perfect, the coloration was a marvel. Tariki knew that henceforth it would be his life's work to craft a true version of that tanto. However, the sages are uncertain as to whether he was ever actually able to do so. Tariki's obsession led him to travel the length and breadth of the Empire in search of the perfect ore with which to craft his tanto. It is said that after a trip to the lands of the Dragon he did not return.

Some Rokugani folktales speak of an infamous assassin who killed his targets with a bow at great distance. What made this assassin unique was that after a short time his distinctive white arrows would vanish from existence. It is believed the assassin used Netsuke of Wind to craft his arrows, though the stories are unclear as to why he would have done so.

In the eighth century, an unscrupulous Crane samurai was forced by treaty to foster a child from the Lion Clan. The Crane samurai's family had been killed in a skirmish between the Lion and the Crane years earlier, and he harbored a lingering hatred for all Lion. He knew he could not just kill his charge, so he hired a travelling ronin Air shugenja to cast Netsuke of Wind for him, then sought out his charge. He invited the young Lion to join him in hunting down a bandit gang in a nearby village. The Crane proposed to honor his guest by allowing him to carry the Crane's family katana into battle with him—but in fact, the "family katana" had been crafted by Netsuke of Wind. The young Lion rode to battle alongside his host, but when he charged into battle, his blade suddenly vanished into a cloud of sparkling air. The bandits struck down the Lion, only to be slaughtered in turn by the Crane. However, the scheme did not ultimately remain secret, for the ronin shugenja was smitten with remorse for his involvement in such a dishonorable scheme and reported the truth to the Lion Clan. The result was another war between Lion and Crane, one more chapter in the thousand years of enmity between the two clans.

Mask of Wind (Air 3)

Many Air spells are two sided coins. On one side is a practical artistic use and on the other is a nefarious use that most samurai would consider nightmarishly dishonorable. Mask of Wind is just such a spell. On the good side, artists use the spell to craft amazing mobile sculptures that can be worn around a court. By clothing themselves or others in fantastical robes, kimono, or headresses which could never exist anywhere but in their imaginations, they create works of art which are truly spectacular and unique. Some Air shugenja also use the spell to allow fantastical creatures like naga or kenku to walk the stage during plays. However, dishonorable Air shugenja use this spell to infiltrate castles, pretending to be who they are not. They can also use it to frighten the populace by appearing as a large goblin, small oni, or any number of other terrifying things.

Your Heart's Enemy (Air 3)

Fear, Desire, and Regret are the three Rokugani sins and Your Heart's Enemy forces an enemy to face, and likely give in to, one of these sins. Forcing another to Sin is not generally considered to be the most honorable of endeavors, save perhaps on the battlefield where it is considered acceptable to try to terrify your foe into defeat. This spell is not meant for the battlefield, however, and it works by calling out the target's own fears and weaknesses. The subtlety of this deception makes the use of this spell appear dishonorable to most shugenja.

False Realm (Air 4)

False Realm is generally considered to be a spell that is used on the battlefield. The ability to make the terrain upon which you will be fighting appear to be another kind of terrain can be an extreme strategic advantage. Enemy troops can be made for fall into unseen ravines or to divert around nonexistent marshes, and troops can be screened by imaginary stands of bamboo or small copses of trees. False Realm is invaluable on the battlefield, but it has also been used by artistic masters of the Element of Air to create enormous works of landscape art, murals which people can walk around and through. Some of these works of art have even replicated ancient Rokugani wonders, long lost to the world, living again for a few short hours thanks to the vision of the Air shugenja.

Gift of Wind (Air 4)

Invisibility is every spy, thief, and shinobi's ultimate goal. They strive to remain unseen through physical prowess and misdirection, going about their dishonorable business without notice. An Air shugenja, however, can truly accomplish this feat with this spell. Unsurpisingly, there are very few honorable uses this spell can be put to, and all of them involve the battlefield. However, dishonorable shugenja gain great use from this spell, since it allows them to eavesdrop on conversations, acquire items that are heavily guarded, and plant evidence without being seen. For the playful Air spirits, of course, this spell is just another game like all the others.

Netsuke of Wind (Air 4)

This spell is sometimes called the Artisan's Friend. It allows artists to test-create their own works, complete with weight and feel, before they actually do so in physical reality. This can be especially helpful when an influential lord requests a specifically commissioned work: the artisan can use Netsuke of Wind to let the patron see the proposed artwork, test its weight, color, and balance, and otherwise make sure the final work will meet exact specifications.

Legion of the Moon (Air 5)

This is another spell which is normally only used on a battlefield. It is quite effective for getting small but important units into vital strategic positions unseen. It can also be used to cloak units of archers until the enemy is lured into range. There are many other uses for it on the battlefield, too numerous to be related here. On the other hand, unscrupulous Air shugenja have been known to use Legion of the Moon to sneak groups of assassins or thieves into secure castles or heavily guarded enemy camps, allowing them to carry out devastating surprise attacks. The Spider Clan's infamous wave of assassinations in the year 1170 made extensive use of this spell as well.

The False Legion (Air 6)

This powerful illusion spell can cause entire armies to quit the field before a battle even occurs. It can double the apparent size of an army, create illusory reinforcements to draw enemy forces away, or trick a foe into any number of tactical mistakes, making it an excellent—albeit rare—weapon for a general to have at his disposal. However, the spell has non-combat applications as well, for in many ways it is also the ultimate spell for Air shugenja artists. A few powerful Air shugenja have actually used The False Legion to enact an entire play without actors. Fortunes stepped forth to speak their lines, famous (or infamous) historic figures appeared on stage in all their grandeur, and disgraced heroes committed acts of glory or dishonor on battlefields of the imagination. The famous ronin poet Rezan is said to have claimed that having seen one of these magically presented plays that no other performance he would ever see would compare.

Ever-Changing Waves (Water 5)

Ever-Changing Waves is not actually a true illusion spell, in that it changes the actual physical form of the caster. However, this powerful Water spell can be used in concert with Air illusions to produce an extremely powerful compound effect. The combined effect produces a complete deception, as the caster feels, looks, sounds, and smells just like what he or she wants to be. It is said there are some shugenja who have used this technique so often that they have forgotten what their true form looks like, losing themselves in the false role they have adopted.

Communication Mystical Groups of the Air

Although illusion is one of the most well-known (and notorious) aspects of Air magic, the kami of the Air are also adept at communication, for Air is the medium through which sight and sound reach mortal senses. Much as with the ways of illusion, there are some shugenja in Rokugan who specialize in using Air for communication purposes, although only one named group truly focuses on it.

The Kitsu Spirit Legion

The Kitsu family, as a rule, is not known for extensive internal organization. There are the Sodan-Senzo, those with enough of the pure blood of the Kitsu in their veins to manifest the powers of their otherworldly spirit ancestors; they are certainly a somewhat distinct group from the larger body of Kitsu shugenja, standing aloof over the rest of the family and regarding the rest of the Kitsu with a certain degree of pity—after all, the rest of the family lacks their special connection to the noble beasts who founded their line. For most of history, the only other secondary organization within the overall Kitsu ranks was Bishamon's Chosen, a group viewed with a certain amount of skepticism by the family's traditionalists. Lion conservatism, at its strongest among the Kitsu, rarely permits much in the way of 'innovation' or variation in customs or teachings. After all, there is little need for secondary groups when duties can be fulfilled by doing things the same way they have always been done for a thousand years.

This traditionalism explains the controversy regarding the only other specialized group to emerge within the Kitsu family: the so-called "Spirit Legion." In contrast to the ancient order of Bishamon's Chosen, the Spirit Legion emerged in modern times when a group of twelve Kitsu priests who began displaying unexpected powers in the early twelfth century, during the years immediately prior to the Clan War. Even after the Second Day of Thunder, when their powers proved quite useful to the Lion Clan, the group remains almost infintesimally small, with never more than twenty members. This is due to both the sheer rarity of those who possess the gifts needed to join the ranks and to

The Spirit Legion in Earlier Times

In the official canon history of Rokugan, the Kitsu Spirit Legion does not emerge until the twelfth century. However, GMs who like the concept of the Spirit Legion should feel free to introduce them in other times. The spiritual incident which triggered their abilities could potentially have happened at almost any time in Rokugan's history, after all, and the frequency of war in Lion history means there would always be pressures to use such gifts on the battlefield. For that matter, it is entirely possible that these spiritual gifts manifested several times over the Empire's thousand year history, only to fade from view when new members stopped appearing.

the prevailing attitudes among the Kitsu toward any kind of innovation or change to their ancient methods.

The Spirit Legion began when a shugenja named Kitsu Koichi demonstrated an ability never before seen: drawing forth spirits from Toshigoku, even in areas where the boundaries between the spirit realms were stable. The very notion of doing such a thing shocked the family to its core. Fierce (if private) debates erupted among the Kitsu, discussing the integrity of the boundaries between the spirit realms and whether or not Koichi was a single anomaly or a sign of something larger. Soon after, one of the elite Sodan Senzo also displayed similar abilities, ending any speculation that the effect might be unique to Koichi. Ultimately a total of twelve shugenja were discovered among the Kitsu who could achieve the same effects.

Despite the obvious military applications of the ability, the Kitsu were exceedingly reluctant to suggest such usage to their lords, and cautioned against any use of the new powers at all until more research could be conducted. The source of the new abilities remained a mystery, but many Kitsu suggested it might have somehow emerged from an incident a few years earlier in which a Kitsu traitor had joined with a Scorpion instigator to unleash the spirits of Toshigoku on the city of Toshi Ranbo. Although their scheme produced only a minor incident and was dealt with swiftly, some Kitsu scholars speculated that it might have forged some sort of spiritual connection between the Kitsu family and the Realm of Slaughter.



Despite the Kitsu family's reluctance to use these new abilities for warfare, pressure to do so built up during the subsequent violence of the Clan War era. Some of the more pragmatic Lion commanders began to press for the Kitsu to bring their new skills to support the clan on the battlefield, and the members of Bishamon's Chosen also put their political weight behind such action. Eventually the Kitsu reluctantly agreed and the Spirit Legion, as it came to be called, took its place in the Lion armies.

By the time of the Spirit Wars, the Legion was a fully established organization within the clan military structure. The Kitsu remained divided about the Legion's continued existence, and debate continued to rage as to whether or not it was appropriate to make use of such powers. The most traditional members of the Kitsu leadership believed it verged on blasphemy to summon up and bind to one's will the spirits of Toshigoku. After all, such spirits had originally been mortal ancestors, even if their actions had resulted in condemnation to the Realm of Slaughter. Those who favored the Legion countered that there was no evidence of harm—the spirits returned to their proper place when slain or dismissed—and suggested the Legion might actually be offering an opportunity for kharmic repayment to these unfortunate souls. The debate remained unresolved, neither side able to gain a decisive advantage, and the Legion continued to serve the Lion armies.

The powers of the Legion are straightforward. They use the communicative power of Air at its most extreme, linking to the Spirit Realms and calling forth spirits, usually from Toshigoku (though a few have shown the capacity to summon spirits from other realms as well). The more skilled and experienced the Spirit Legionnaire, the more spirits he can call forth. The spirits initially obey all their summoner's orders to the letter, though there have been instances in which they become fractious or downright rebellious after staying in the mortal world for more than an hour or so.

The Spirit Legion do not have any sort of detailed organization or unit structure. After all, there are never more than twenty of them at a time, and only among all the shugenja groups in the Empire only the Isawa Ishiken form a lower pecentage of their family's numbers. And unlike the Ishiken, shugenja with the power to become part of the Spirit Legion only appear among those who have Kitsu blood, however dilute. Thus, while thje majority of Spirit Legionnaires are not Sodan-Senzo, none have appeared outside the bounds of the Kitsu family—not even among those who can trace an indirect connection to the family. Due to this extreme rarity, the Legion has no dojo as such, and each new recruit is taught collectively by all of the existing members. Moreover, although the Spirit Legion serves in the Lion armies, its members are taught never to unduly risk their lives. Though this principle cannot be followed universally due to the chaos of warfare, the Legionairres prefer to use their powers from a distance, dispatching their spirit minions to support their Lion kin. Usually they are assigned to command staffs, and their powers are unleashed only when a Lion general judges them needed. This ensures the protection of an extremely rare asset... and also gives the Kitsu family yet more time to debate the Legion's merits.

Notable Uses of Communicative Spells

The following section discusses some of the more notable uses of well-known Air spells that focus on communication. This is by no means an exhaustive discussion, but should give players and GMs some ideas on how these spells can be effectively used and how Rokugani culture views them.

Legacy of Kaze no Kami (Air 1)

One of the most basic communicative spells, Legacy of Kaze no Kami has seen wide use throughout the Empire's history. For those clans whose lands are extremely widespread, such as the Crane and (during much of the Empire's history) the Lion, the prayer is considered to be almost a requirement for any court shugenja. The Scorpion have also been known to utilize the spell for contacting their covert agents in the Empire. The chief advantage of the spell is that the message—up to a full minute of speech—is carried by the illusory form of a summoned bird instead of by a simple free-roaming Air kami. This makes it less likely the message will be noticed (and perhaps intercepted) by enemy shugenja, while also making it secure against enemy arrows—unlike a living bird.

While using this spell is unlikely to cause direct offense in most situations, a certain amount of care is still required to utilize it effectively. It is best cast out of doors and dispatched to someone who is likewise outdoors or in private—otherwise the Air kami, oblivious to normal social niceties, will create and fly the illusory bird right in the middle of an active court, an awkward moment to say the least. Skilled users of this spell typically set up specific times and places to deliver their messages, ensuring both dignity and privacy.

Nature's Touch (Air 1)

This spell was first developed by Iuchi at the dawn of the Empire, and most other clans have never considered it to be more than a curiosity. The occasions when it is considered useful and appropriate are few, and any information it garners directly is useful only as gossip—a Rokugani magistrate would consider the testimony of an animal even less admissible than the words of a kami. As a result, outside of the Unicorn (where the importance of the clan's horses makes the spell vitally useful) Nature's Touch is used only by those who spend a great time in the untamed parts of the Empire, or who serve in tandem with specialists in animal husbandry. Aside from the Unicorn, only the Kitsune family is known to use the spell frequently.

Nature's Touch is notorious for producing unexpected and sometimes indecipherable answers. The minds of animals are not human, and human shugenja have little frame of reference for comprehending an animal's view of the world. Phrasing questions to get useful information can be an exercise in frustration and futility for all but the most patient or experienced shugenja. Training in animal husbandry can be helpful in this regard, as well as a more general lifestyle that puts one in frequent contact with nature and animals. Experience with using the spell can make it easier to understand how animals perceive the world and thus how to actually question them. Regardless, questions must be kept simple and straightforward, linked to direct physical reality—to do otherwise will simply confuse the animal.

Call the Spirit (Air 4)

Arguably one of the most powerful prayers known to the shugenja trained in Air magic, Call the Spirit is also potentially incredibly dangerous. The ritual of Call the Spirit bestows a certain protection to the priest—the summoned spirit cannot attack unless attacked first—but what a spirit deems a threat or attack can be a very different than a mortal's perception. Manipulative spirits can also trick priests into doing something dangerous or foolish.

Call the Spirit gives a shugenja access to a prize of great value, a spirit that may know exactly what it is he needs to know. However, because of the specificity of the prayer, it is easy to conjure up the wrong spirit by accident. A wise shugenja will engage in careful pre-casting research and identify the desired spirit as accurately as possible. It is important to show respect and pious deference to even hostile and dangerous spirits in order to get good results; more than one shugenja has turned a difficulty situation into a dangerous one by showing anger at a hostile spirit. Extra care must be taken in any situation where these is even a remote possibility that the Taint is present, due to the possibility of summoning a yokai, kansen, or even an Oni. Although such malignant creatures will still be bound by the injunctions of the spell, they will try everything in their power to trick the caster into giving up valuable information or making a critical mistake. And even if all such pitfalls are avoided, a wise priest will be prepared to perform a service on the behalf of the summoned spirit in order to give proper thanks for its aid.

Echoes on the Breeze (Air 5)

The capacity to communicate with someone literally anywhere in the Empire is incredibly powerful. Echoes on the Breeze has been used by high-ranking priests for everything from sharing gossip to warning of invasions by enemy clans. In addition to virtually limitless range, the spell also is quite unobtrusive, making it easy to ensure no one recognizes or overhears the conversation. At extreme ranges, however, the spell can become something of a strain on both parties, especially if other shugenja are banishing or obstructing spirits in the area. There have also been instances in which this spell has been successfully overheard by rival or enemy shugenja who manage to subvert the Air kami involved. However, such interference is rare enough that the spell continues to be employed regularly by those powerful enough to use it.

Revelatory Mystical Groups of the Air

The third and perhaps least well-known aspect of Air magic is revalation. Air spirits travel almost everywhere, seeing and hearing everything; only the mystical oneness of the Void has greater knowledge of the world than the Air kami. Although most shugenja view this aspect of Air magic as merely a useful adjunct to its more popular functions, there are a few groups who focus more specifically on this use of Air.

The Sisters of Sacred Light

The Sisters of Sacred Light trace their history to movement founded during the fifth century by the second and third generations of the newly created Moshi family. Although often seen as purely a Moshi organization, the Sisters of the Sacred Light are actually willing to accept members from any priestly school that focuses on training in the way of Air, provided they have sufficient skill, are appropriately dedicated to the Sisters' philosophy and goals, and meet one rigidly enforced stipulation: all Sisters must, unavoidably, be women.

The Sisters were originally formed out of necessity. During the first generations after Azami, the Moshi encountered an unusual problem that was exacerbated by their relative isolation from the rest of the Empire. The more remote shrines in their isolated valley sometimes attracted trickster spirits, especially Mujina, who relished deceit and illusion. Because the tiny clan could only make infrequent visits to these shrines, it quickly became important for the priests tasked with that duty to be able to rid them of such unfortunate infestations and return them to their proper pure and serene condition.

The organization was initially led by a young shugenja-ko named Moshi Himiko. She focused their normal study and worship of Amaterasu on ways in which the goddess' pure light could see through illusions, as well as studying methods to soothe any kami who had been excited or disrupted by the trickster spirits. Such methods already existed, having been developed by the Isawa, but the Sisters refined them to a much higher level of power and skill. This led within a generation to a reliable technique that aided greatly in cleansing all the shrines of their infestations. The Mujina, finally bored of their game, sought other targets or returned to their own realm.

In the wake of her success, Moshi Himiko—by then a considerably older woman—presented her discoveries to the Emperor and his court. The Master of Fire, Isawa Akio, was impressed with her new technique and proposed that she teach it to him so that it might be studied and refined at the Isawa school. Akio clearly considered himself to be offering Himiko a great honor and compliment, but to the shock of all present, she refused. When the Emperor asked her to justify herself, she explained—with great passion and sincerity—that the techniques she and her fellow shugenja-ko had developed required a purity and ritual piety found only among women who had dedi-



cated themselves completely to the divine mother Amaterasu. Akio, incensed by what he considered an arrogant and pretentious minor clan samurai, named Himiko a liar and issued a challenge to a *Taryu-Jiai*, a duel of magical power. The Emperor, impressed by Himiko but unwilling to gainsay the Master of Fire, agreed.

When the two faced each other, however, the second and perhaps greater shock came: Akio was defeated and forced to apologize, begging forgiveness of the aging Centipede. In recognition of her achievements, the Emperor bestowed official recognition on the order she had founded, the Sisters of Sacred Light. Despite her victory, Moshi Himiko was merciful and generous in victory, and agreed that her new order would be open to women from other clans so long as those women proved themselves worthy of serving Amaterasu. In the centuries since then, women from many clans have studied and served in the ranks of the Sisters; most of these have come from the Asahina and Isawa families, but there have been a few students over the years from other clans and even an occasional ronin woman of honorable and devoted nature. The notable absence has been from the Scorpion, who generally find the group's pious attitudes a poor fit for their own philosophical outlook.

The Sisters adhere to a very strict code of conduct, akin to the monastic vows of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, so long as they remain within the organization. Membership is normally assumed to be lifelong, with strict adherence to the vows ensuring they maintain the spiritual purity required for their work, but individual women do leave the order when their lord requires their services elsewhere. The Sisters usually dress in the traditional garb of a temple priestess (a red hakama and white gi), bereft of all markings save for a single clan mon to indicate their ancestry. The first vow they take is one of celibacy, and one of the most common reasons for a Sister later departing the order is an order from her lord to marry. Members also swear to follow a particularly strict and rigid vision of Bushido, to use the gifts they learn solely for honorable purposes, and to live lives of ascetic poverty.

The temple which trains the Sisters' order is located on the southern side of the Beiden Mountains, well apart from the rest of the Moshi territory. Because of their oaths, Sisters do not generally participate in the military campaigns or rivalries of their respective clans, and their temple is considered neutral ground in any conflict. The Order has no internal ranks other than its eldest sensei, who is usually referred to as the Senior Mother. Aside from visiting to conduct training and meet with their sensei, most of the Sisters do not live in the temple, instead serving in various Fortunist shrines around the Empire, protecting them from malign spirits. A few Sisters roam the Empire more freely, seeking out forgotten shrines to cleanse, but this is the exception rather than the rule. Such wandering Sisters are often former ronin, and it is sometimes suggested that this was the reason ronin were allowed into the order at all. Regardless, the Sisters do not participate in politics and they seldom have any influence outside of their very limited spheres of responsibility.

Although there are no men who can claim to be Sisters of Sacred Light, this is not to say that no men have ever possessed their techniques. A few men of less honorable nature have deceived the Sisters in order to learn their techniques, and in a few cases the Sisters themselves have chosen to teach their methods to men whose purity and piety seemed worthy. These are both very rare exceptions, however, and number only a handful across the entire history of the organization.

Asahina Mappers of the Heart

The Asahina are a family of philosophers, teachers, and priests. Every time they perform their rites and rituals or advise the lords of the clan, it is a chance for them to impart wisdom on those they serve. The Mappers of the Heart are a uniquely practical aspect of their tradition. The Mappers of the Heart are to the monastic tendencies of the Asahina family what worldly monks are to the Brotherhood of Shinsei: they take the Asahina beliefs and teachings out into the world, sharing them with the rest of the clan and the Empire. They are frequently seen in the wings of many Crane courts and many of them serve as advisers to major lords.

The organization is quite old, having been founded only a generation after Isawa Asahina created the new Crane shugenja family by marrying the Doji heiress. Asahina Iwao, a student of Asahina himself, became fascinated by an artifact called the Mempo of Pure Thought. Through his research and communion with the kami that interacted with the Mempo, he became convinced it was possible for sufficiently experienced shugenja to study and map the human mind as air spirits traveled through it naturally. Iwao set out on a musha shugyo pilgrimage to study the ways of the human mind. Asahina Iwao was not seen inside Crane lands again for almost thirty years.

By the time Iwao finally returned, he was an old man nearing the age of retirement, and the new lord of the Asahina had no idea who he was—indeed, the family's records had been corrected with the assumption that Iwao had likely perished. Shocked by such an unprecedentedly long musha shugyo, the daimyo demanded an explanation and accounting from the old priest.

Asahina Iwao recounted his years of travel and study. He had sought out every court that would permit a ronin to enter, observing the people and, more importantly, observing the Air kami that already swirled around them. He painstakingly recorded the musings of the kami and the pathways they followed, looking for patterns and making inferences. After thirty years, he knew he would never be able to complete his studies, but he felt he must share what he had learned before age defeated him.

Iwao's daimyo was not impressed and suggested that the old man had wasted his years chasing a phantom.



However, as their conversation continued, the lord of the Asahina realized that Iwao was in fact sensing his thoughts quite accurately. Amazed, he commanded that all of Iwao's research should be preserved in Shinden Asahina and passed on to future generations. Asahina Iwao became the founder of the Mappers of the Heart, and served as its first sensei for his remaining few years before dying a peaceful death.

As its founder surmised, the task of the Mappers of the Heart is not complete and indeed may never be finished. Centuries of work have not been sufficient to fulfill the task which Asahina Iwao undertook. With each successive generation, more and more records and observations are brought to the dojo and library which the Mappers maintain; this has grown large enough to be housed in its own separate temple, located in the wooded hills just south of the Daidoji lands. The sensei of the Mappers pour over these observations, continuing the eternal work of their forebear, hoping someday to fully grasp the human mind. After so many centuries, some within the order are convinced there is no true finish to the task, but they refuse to despair—rather, they now believed the search itself is the true goal.

The Mappers of the Heart are considered something of an elite body within the Asahina family, due to their adept skills with the ways of both human emotion and, by association, with politics. Only the most studious and socially inclined among the family are deemed fit to join the Mappers, since only such a combination of talents will lend itself to the careful, focused study which the organization demands. Typically a Mapper will spend several years conducting research, after which he or she is sent off to serve in one or another court on behalf of the Crane, where the Mappers are always in demand. Crane lords who have access to the services of a Mapper of the Heart routinely come to rely on their almost uncanny grasp of human nature. Mappers are difficult to lie to and usually have an innate grasp of other peoples' feelings and motivations, making them invaluable assets in gauging potential rivals and allies. However, the Mappers seldom rise to positions of power themselves—such responsibilities limit their ability to observe and study people, so they prefer to stay in the roles of advisors and assistants.

All Mappers who pursue their studies diligently become quite gifted at using the Air kami to sense the thoughts and emotions of others. Since this requires intimate skill with the kami, only gifted students of Air are selected to join the Mappers, those who can not only speak with the spirits but who are able to hear them even when they are not calling on them with magic. They combine this imtimacy with the spirits with intense study of human emotions and of the ways that the Air kami view human thoughts. Given sufficient training, the process eventually produces an ability to instinctively watch and "read" the movements and responses of the kami—and thus to sense the thoughts to which the kami are reacting, all without ever actually speaking a prayer.

One of the principle concerns the Mappers must face is that most courts in Rokugan frown on the open use of magic. Consequently, all Mappers are thoroughly versed in proper etiquette and protocol, ensuring they can avoid giving offense as they practice their magical studies. Further, the Mappers must be wary of relying on their skills when issues of law or proof come into play, for the use of the kami in even this indirect way is not considered appropriate for determining truth or falsehood under the law. Wise Mappers know they must seek out corroborating testimony for anything they learn from the kami, lest their reputations suffer.

Notable Uses of Revalatory Spells

The following section discusses some of the more notable uses of well-known Air spells that focus on revalation, showing how the spells are commonly used in Rokugan.

By the Light of the Moon (Air 1)

Almost the perfect definition of a revelatory spell, By the Light of the Moon is one of the most common prayers in the repertoire of Air shugenja, especially those who perform any sort of work for magistrates. Although the testimony of the kami is not legally admissible, the use of the kami to discover physical evidence is perfectly acceptable, and an incriminating weapon or bottle of poison can be all it takes to make a criminal confess.

It is very easy to make the mistake of assuming that By the Light of the Moon exists solely for the purpose of investigation. However, the spell can be a valuable defense as well, such as by allowing one to know whether an opponent is concealing a weapon, or detecting an enemy ambush in dangerous territory. A ninja hiding in the ceiling or a bandit in the foliage will both be exposed by the spell. Of course, openly casting this spell can be insulting in many circumstances, and overuse of such magic can feed a sense of paranoia. This defensive usage can be dangerous, as it leads at times to a certain amount of paranoia, largely due to the lack of information about what is concealed. Still, it gives enough information that some threats can be anticipated more easily, a protection for magistrates and shugenja serving as scouts everywhere.

To Seek the Truth (Air 1)

A sometimes overlooked prayer, To Seek the Truth is particularly useful to those shugenja serving in advisory roles. On its own it is not a particularly powerful tool for direct revelation, but it becomes much more useful in the service of a magistrate, daimyo, or similar authority figure. This prayer allows a priest to ensure that his superior never shows any sign of weakness or mental faltering. More than a few loyal shugenja have had a lord with a penchant for drink and have used this spell (usually supplemented with prayers to Jurojin) to ensure their lord can save face and preserve dignity in front of strangers.

Magistrates with access to this spell find it particularly valuable. The less savory elements of the Empire are not above drugging or poisoning a magistrate, nor are ambushes or assaults entirely uncommon. Since the demands of their duties may not allow time for proper healing, this prayer permits them to continue to act at their full capacity—and, in the process, project an image of infallible capacity to the criminals they hunt. The more likely it is for a magistrate to operate in hostile environments, the more valuable it is to have a priest's support, and any magistrate with knowledge of the ways of the kami will try to make sure his priest has access to this spell.

Whispering Wind (Air 2)

Whispering Wind is a prayer that has struck fear in the heart of criminals throughout the Empire, and any magistrate with access to a shugenja is sure to seek out this spell for his use. Ironically, due to the Empire's strictures against magical evidence, the spell itself is almost useless in acquiring actual legal evidence of wrong-doing. However, knowing that someone has just lied to you can be a vital tool for any criminal investigation, and exceptionally clever magistrates can use that knowledge to force suspects into making mistakes or confessing the truth. In addition, the intimidation factor of a magistrate who has access to this spell cannot be denied.

The prayer does only one thing—detect the truth or falsity of the target's words—but this is more than enough to make it useful. However, it should be noted that in most circumstances the use of the spell is not a surprise unless one uses the spell subtly, without the target's knowledge—an approach which some would consider dishonorable. Those who are forewarned that the spell is in use can maneuver around it, shaping their answers in such a way that the kami do not detect actual falsehood. The kami's perception of truth is not humanity's, after all, so a wise magistrate will not rely on this spell too much. It is best used as another interrogation tool in the magistrate's arsenal, an aid in gauging who merits more direct and assertive investigation and who can be dismissed from suspicion.

It may be mentioned that the spell has considerable potential value in politics as well—a courtier who knows whether his negotiating partners are being truthful is at a considerable advantage. However, Rokugani etiquette greatly frowns on the use of magic in court, so it is typically only the more dishonorable or ruthlessly pragmatic shugenja—such as those of the Soshi family—who employ the spell in this manner.

Know the Mind (Air 4)

This spell is rare, and might be thought of as being quintessentially Scorpion, but in truth it is taught to advanced students in most schools of Air and has been for hundreds of years. Rumors of shugenja 'mind readers' abound among the less educated, and many ordinary samurai believe the eyes of a priest can see into one's innermost secrets. It is quite difficult to cast spells without being detected, however, and in any case most shugenja are far too honorable to use this spell improperly or for personal gain. Know the Mind is in many ways the perfect example of a spell that is difficult to use honorably, since if it is recognized that the spell is being used without permission or in an inappropriate manner it can result in very serious repercussions. The spell's accepted uses are primarily for investigations, such as interrogating a maho-tsukai to learn more about his co-conspirators. The more skillful of Scorpion shugenja do make use of Know the Mind in public settings or during social interactions, since they are usually trained in the art of casting spells covertly. Of course, the Scorpion never admit to such behavior, and they are no less intolerant of it among rival spellcasters than any other clan.

Draw Back the Shadow (Air 5)

The purpose of Draw Back the Shadow is simple: to defend against illusions perpetrated by those who use the Air kami less honorably. Its use in exposing a magically concealed ambush or exposing someone relying on magical stealth is obvious. However, casting this spell under the wrong circumstances can be quite dangerous. Its nature is widely known –experienced shugenja in most parts of the Empire are familiar with it—and using it without permission, or requesting its use without displaying the utmost respect and delicacy, can easily be construed as an accusation. Thus while the spell is extremely useful for defeating certain tricks of the kami, its use must be tempered with caution.

More than one shugenja has suffered from overconfidence due to reliance on this spell. It is easy to assume that the use of this spell, supplemented perhaps with By the Light of the Moon, is enough to verify whether or not all is as it should be. Of course, overreliance on magic is never a good idea, and is part of why the kami became inadmissible under Rokugani law. A wise shugenja will supplement these sorts of spells with diligent training in the more mundane methods of spotting hidden foes, ambushes, and concealed objects.

An obscure defensive use of the spell has developed among the Crane, where more than one prominent samurai is known to suffer from epilepsy. The condition is thought to be a sign of the touch of the kami and can be brought on by bright lights. On occasion, political rivals have used magical lights to trigger humiliating epilepsy attacks. Draw Back the Shadow can protect against such trickery.

Secrets on the Wind: The Nature of the Air Kami

The kami are strange, alien beings whose way of thinking is very different from that of human beings. They do not perceive the world in the same way as mortals, nor do they remember things in the same fashion. What may be of incredible importance to a person may seem inconsequential to a spirit, and vice versa. Conversing with the spirits is not merely a matter of a priest understanding their language, though that is certainly important; it is also dependent on the priest understanding the way in which the spirits move, think, and experience the world. Without that kind of understanding, communion is feeble at best.

This is seen all too commonly with the Air kami. For the spirits of Air the world is an open book—they can go almost anywhere. Clan borders mean no more to them than doorways, for in each case the spirit passes through with ease. However, their attention span is as brief as the presence of a spring breeze. They can hear the thoughts within a man's mind even if he is not consciously thinking them—indeed to them those thoughts are as loud as spoken words, and sometimes are more interesting than what is being said. But they are unlikely to remember those thoughts, and truth is not a concept they really understand. To them, a lie is merely an amusing disparity between the thoughts of a mortal's mind and the words the mortal speaks.

Air kami are by their nature mischievous and enjoy playing games, although their concept of a 'game' can be puzzling to mortals. When fully awakened they are often only marginally less troublesome than trickster spirits like Mujina, although they prefer tricks and deceptions to the often violent pranks of the denizens of Sakkaku. Perhaps this love of tricks is because the Air kami are always cognizant of the disparity between what samurai say, what they perceive, and what they think, and they see this disparity as immensely funny. They dance with glee to make false images or create false sounds, further confusing mortals and enhancing that delightful disparity, plunging mortal minds into a cacophony of confused thoughts and disjointed impulses. Unlike the Mujina, Air spirits do not enjoy actually physically hurting someone with their games, since in their view this ruins the fun. However, they do not really comprehend the damage that social interactions can cause, so while they refrain from actually harming mortals they are perfectly willing to share the most devastating secrets they overhear to those who know how to ask properly. To them this is just another game, a game shared with the priests who speak with them.

Of course, information garnered from the kami must always be carefully considered, and clues gleaned from Air spirits in particular must be taken with a grain of

Typical Air Spirit Gossip

The painted bird's heartstrings flutter so when the green lizard with the eyepatch comes. Why is it that his heartstrings return only the winter's chill instead of a hummingbird's wings?

The little fox smiles at everyone that she meets, but I hear what she says behind her teeth to the old man of stone when he comes by. She smiles to him even as she wishes he would drop dead on his wall.

Have you seen how pretty the one in red is, painted up with all my cousins of the water over her face? It's like a jester at feast day. Why can't she see it, instead of fretting every morning about getting old?

Oh, my cousins flew in from the north just the other day. They stopped by to blow over a nice man sleeping in his morning lunch. Said he had the most pleasant almondy smell. They were jealous.

It was so much fun to play with the nice person all in powder blue. She had a ribbon in her hair that I caught up and made dance around while she chased back and forth. Everyone else thought it was funny too.

I don't care how many times that man in gold shouts that all he thinks about is duty. Every time he says that, he says he needs a drink right afterwards.

Friends flew through on a fast breeze from the west. They said someone who kept calling himself a magistrate should be along soon. I wonder if anyone's told the lady in blue? She's been trying to avoid them for weeks.

That poor boy who wears blacks and reds doesn't understand. He keeps thinking the nice older lady wants to dance with him when all she keeps thinking about is how he looks just as old as her boy would have been.

How can you say you like someone and call them an idiot right afterwards? That one in the greens and golds seems to do that to everyone.

Have you spoken with the pretty girl under the cherry tree? She's always crying and pointing at the big man in the castle, but nobody ever seems to hear her. She doesn't have any feet either. Someone should cheer her up.

The ones in blue and white certainly do talk about fighting the gold ones a lot, but when it's just them, they keep hoping the others will back down.

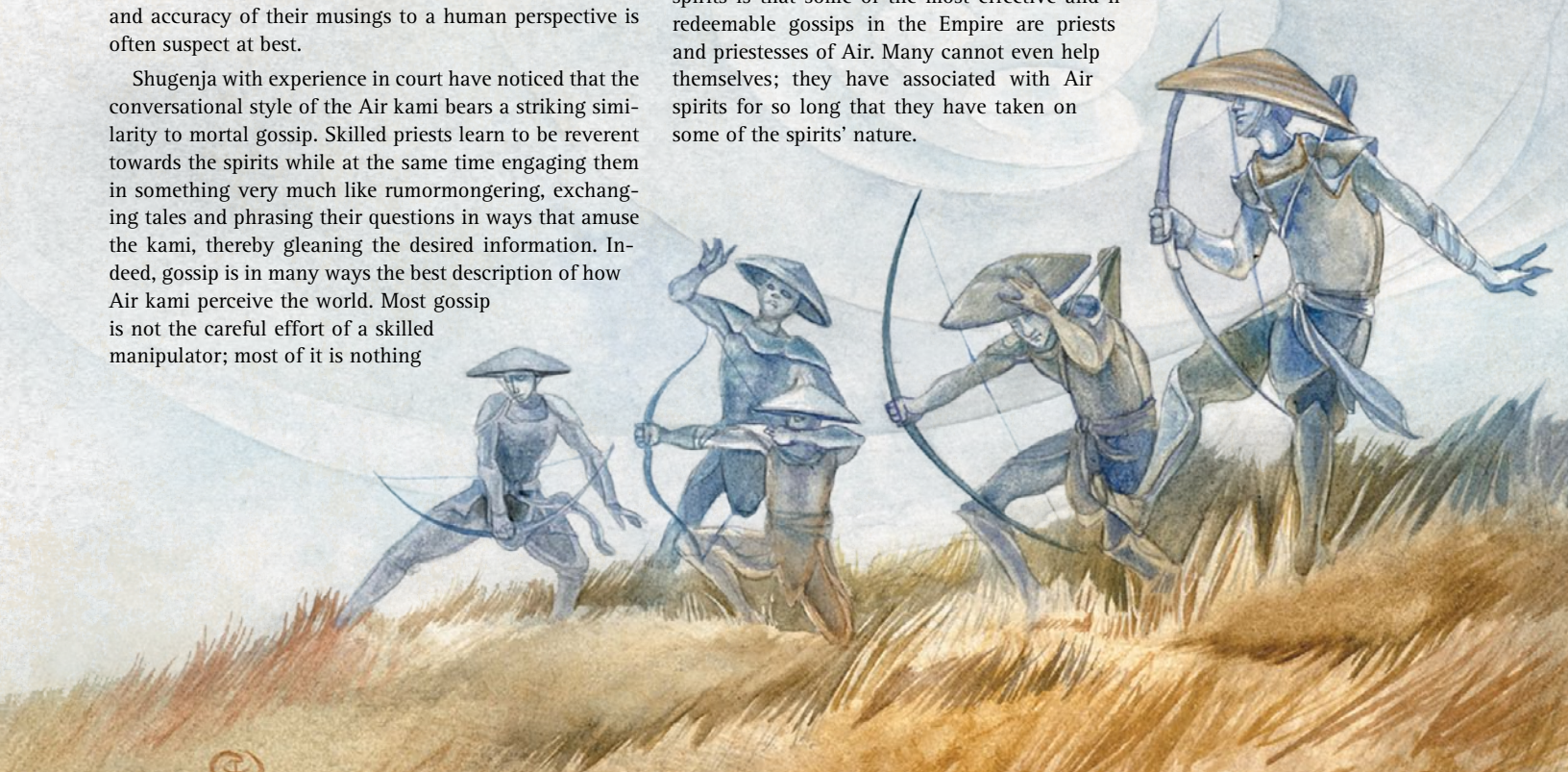
I know that one said he liked the painting, but as soon as nobody was looking he called it ugly and a waste of time.

Why is it the only people at weddings who aren't happy are the people getting married? The young boy kept looking over the girl's shoulder at someone else and he couldn't stop saying another name.

salt. Because the spirits do not truly understand human thoughts and emotions, the information they convey tends to be jumbled. They can sift through the perceptions and thoughts in the back of a person's mind in this instant and what they remember saying the day before with equal ease, and sometimes do so at the same time. They make no distinction based on status, rank, privilege, or political power. Thus while they never seek to deceive, the utility and accuracy of their musings to a human perspective is often suspect at best.

Shugenja with experience in court have noticed that the conversational style of the Air kami bears a striking similarity to mortal gossip. Skilled priests learn to be reverent towards the spirits while at the same time engaging them in something very much like rumormongering, exchanging tales and phrasing their questions in ways that amuse the kami, thereby gleaning the desired information. Indeed, gossip is in many ways the best description of how Air kami perceive the world. Most gossip is not the careful effort of a skilled manipulator; most of it is nothing more than idle chatter, the nattering of many voices during periods of boredom. Gossipers say what enters their minds, and most of what they say is not carefully thought out. They spread information indiscriminately, without regard for the consequences, and find entertainment in the reactions to their words.

An interesting side effect of the nature of Air spirits is that some of the most effective and irredeemable gossips in the Empire are priests and priestesses of Air. Many cannot even help themselves; they have associated with Air spirits for so long that they have taken on some of the spirits' nature.



Air and Elemental Imbalances

In every object and creature, a balance of the Elements exists. In most cases, this is not a perfect balance—one or more Elements will have a stronger or weaker influence on any particular creature. For example, a brutish Hida warrior probably has a much stronger Earth than a graceful Kakita duelist. This is true of inanimate objects as well; a shrub will have more Water and Earth than it will have Fire or Air. Thus, when scholars and shugenja refer to a "balance" of Elements in all things, they very rarely mean an equal measure of each Element. Balance is not the same thing as equality. Rather, they mean that the creature or object contains the proper proportions of each Element for its nature and type.

When someone or something's natural Elemental composition is upset or distorted, all manner of ill effects may occur. All animals, people, objects, and even locations have a natural arrangement of the Elements that can be disrupted. Even a creature with a naturally high Air can become disrupted if its Air overbalances its other Elements too much. Conversely, an absence of Air in a person or object can create entirely different problems. The following sections describe what happens when an unusual imbalance in Air occurs.



Air Imbalances in Creatures

When humans, animals, and other sentient beings suffer an imbalance of Air, this will usually express itself most obviously in their demeanor. A person's ability to perceive and understand emotions and social mores is dependent on Air, so in a socially rigid place like Rokugan a lack of Air becomes obvious quickly. Though Air is not the Element associated with patience and stoicism, it is the Element that allows humans (and animals) to relate effectively to others. Normally, even the most brutish Moto warrior or Hida berserker is usually able to pick up to some extent on basic social cues so he does not lose his face and humiliate himself in polite company, but a mortal with unnaturally weak Air is liable to become severely anti-social and to be wholly oblivious to others' feelings and attitudes. Overtly brash or sullen behavior becomes typical, as well as a general inability to relate to others emotionally. Even when forced into social interaction (by their own discipline or by the demands of others), they find it difficult to understand many basic social cues such as jokes, sarcasm, irony, compassion, or concern. They no longer care about others and thus do not maintain the normal expected social order, leading to offense and sometimes violent outbursts of frustration or anger. Animals with unnaturally low Air likewise become sullen and temperamental; if they are social beasts, such as herd animals, they may become withdrawn from their group or even be driven out.

Conversely, when Air overshadows the other Elements too strongly, humans become distracted or even outright flighty. They eschew serious concerns and become entranced by their own feelings and emotions, often to a blatantly rude degree. Thoughts enter and leave their minds in the span of only a few moments, and they move erratically from subject to subject, attempting to experience too much at once. This can also be expressed with an unseemly preoccupation for physical indulgence of all kinds; the accompanying emotional sensations become simply too powerful for the afflicted to resist. Animals react similarly, becoming erratic and distractible.

Physcially, a lack of Air tends to make someone sluggish and dull, much like being deeply fatigued or drunk. The body and physical reflexes simply do not respond as quickly as they should. A Lion bushi who once suffered a curse on his Air described it as though he were inhabiting a bulky suit of armor rather than his own body. His limbs would not obey his commands quickly, almost as if his mind was attempting to find the proper way to communicate with his muscles. In nature, such an affliction is effectively a death sentence: predators must rely on lightning fast reflexes to catch their prey, and the prey in turn relies on its Air to escape and stay alive. Similarly, a samurai's life and death—on the battlefield or in a duel—often relies on the ability to respond to a lethal incoming strike. The physical lack associated with a suppressed Air can also reinforce the mental effects, combining sluggishness with emotional withdrawel to intensify the victim's anger and frustration.

Just as excessive Air can cause one's feelings and emotions to become too active, the physical impact is likewise to overload the body, an effect often too much for a samurai to bear. The stillness and serenity of meditation, art, or the duelist's focus are impossible to attain, as the body is constantly itching to spring into action. Such afflicted persons and creatures quickly develop jittery movements or tics, appearing to be constantly nervous. In addition to disrupting physical activities, this can also lead to social repercussions among samurai, since the behavior can create the impression of someone in the throes of madness, drunken hysteria, or opium withdrawel.

Air Imbalances in Objects

Despite being an immaterial Element, Air is present in many physical objects. There are some, of course, which are completely lacking in Air—usually those composed mainly of Earth, such as stones, clay pots, and the like. But in most cases an object will contain at least a little Air. Wood contains Air which the tree has absorbed from around it, clothing is woven and thus contains Air intermixed with Earth, and so forth.

When an object with a natural balance of Air begins to suffer a lack of that Element, it will often whither and shrivel as the absence of Air causes it to become more dense. This is especially true of living or formerly living objects (such as plants, silk, or wood) which often contain large amounts of Air. Silk which loses its Air will become dull and dense, for instance.

An overabundance of Air in such objects, however, will have the opposite effect, weakening the structure by making it expand and become fragile or brittle. Too much Air in a weapon will make it feel light but also renders it weak and ineffective, easily dulled or broken. Clothes will get holes in odd places, as if they had been worn for too long, but not on the normal stress points such as elbows and hems. This can be especially acute if the Air in the object overshadows its Fire, since without Fire to give an item purpose and drive it will begin to lose its shape and fail to do what it was meant to. Scroll cases will offer little protection over the items within, bedding will constantly feel uncomfortable and lumpy, and so on.

Elemental imbalances can be especially problematic for awakened items (*nemuranai*)—the spirits within such artifacts are no longer passive and quiet, but aware and eager to enact their own will. Since the Element of Air is usually associated with emotions and trickster spirits, this can cause many serious problems for the item's owner or user. For example, an awakened weapon whose Air grows too strong may become so light that it will break simply from the force of being swung, or simply crumble overnight. It may also acquire a tendency to behave of its own will in an odd manner. A box will lock itself, weapons will seem like they are trying to strike in a different way than their weilder desires, and similar effects. In some cases, this willfulness will expand to the point where the object begins to resent the idea of being "owned" at all, and will attempt to bring ruin upon any who try to claim it. How this happens depends on the object itself—a weapon might attempt to spur a warrior into battles of blind pride that he cannot win, while a splendid kimono might fall open in the midst of court and a suit of armor might allow a weapon to slip through its cracks.

Specific Air Imbalances In Creatures

"The one weak in Air cannot loose himself of habits. He may check to see if the door is barred twenty times in a night, or cleanse himself hourly with baths and salt. The one too strong in Air cares too much for himself. 'Look at me!' he brags, like an actor on the stage, overplaying everything in the face of death."

– Kuni Mataemon's The Twists of False Madness

Though the behaviors and afflictions mentioned in this section occur when Air overtakes all other Elements, sometimes an imbalance may occur in a more limited manner—Air overpowering one other Element. In those cases the results tend to be more specific:

Air over Earth—Since these Elements are opposed, this problem usually happens when Air directly attacks Earth, causing a weakening of Earth rather than a strengthening of Air. Physical problems surface such as muscle weakness, brittle bones, and a lack of endurance. Mentally, the subject becomes unfocused, distracted, and fatigued, unable to deal with emotional stress. The negative stereotype of the weak, languid, and flighty courtier, plagued by ill health and uninterested in life—as if the world is too boring for him to really pay attention—is the perfect image of this imbalance.

Air over Fire—Fire generally keeps Air in balance by providing direction and purpose. When Air overtakes Fire, the victim becomes erratic and foolish, acting on whatever whims strike him and succumbing to even the most simple misdirection. Physically, actions become erratic and uncontrolled, and the victim will often strike wildly and react blindly to situations, stumbling over simple obstacles and flailing about when attempting to avoid or execute an attack.

Air over Water—Air and Water are often related harmoniously in nature, creating soothing breezes and serene places of meditation. When Air is no longer balanced by this influence, the victim becomes more easily sullen, angry, and vicious when provoked. Base desires and impulses run rampant over his better nature, causing him to see only what he wants rather than perceiving the world around him in full. In physical terms, he is able to move quickly but cannot focus his movements in an effective manner—he may easily strike a foe but his blows will have no weight. In general, the body simply lacks the true conviction of its actions.

The Air Kami

There are very few places in Rokugan that are not suffused with the pervasive kami of Air. Even in the deepest caverns this Element can be found, if in limited amounts. Places completely lacking in Air spirits are almost universally inhospitable to life, since nearly everything needs air to survive.

Communing with Air Kami

Shugenja who often commune with the playful Air spirits have grown accustomed to their somewhat frustrating nature, but even experienced priests can sometimes be taken off guard by the odd insights and random tricks of these kami. Air spirits prefer to communicate through emotional impressions and reactions rather than solid facts and details. If a shugenja were to ask what type of robe the spirit saw, for instance, it may mention the color and give the impression of a beautiful or ugly garment, commenting on how it was enjoyable or irritating to see, but will not mention a clan mon or similar details.

While this can be a problem for a shugenja that is looking for solid information, a clever line of questioning can eventually reveal the facts needed, or expose useful secrets the priest did not even realize the spirit knew. Some priests are also clever enough to specifically use the Air kami to seek our facts of a more emotional or subjective nature. Since the Air spirits are enraptured by social interplay, they can be extremely detailed about social interactions when questions are asked in the right manner. (GMs who wish to represent this mechanically can have the players call Raises to ask their questions more effectively.) The kami can even answer questions about emotional states those in the area were attempting to hide. Of all the Elemental spirits, only the Air spirits will answer with something like, "The man in blue was upset, but tried his best not to show it."

Physically, it is very difficult to hide something from an Air spirit, since Air surrounds and touches almost everything. So while it may be quite frustrating to attempt to question the Air kami, they are actually the most likely to have the information the shugenja seeks.



Enticing Air Kami

Air spirits generally are eager to respond to the call of a shugenja, since they have a greater affection for humans than is typically found among the other Elements. The Air kami dance and swirl unseen around humans constantly, and they are fascinated by the interactions they observe among mortals. Unfortunately for them, they lack the true range of emotional capacity that humans and other self-aware creatures possess, so they often make requests (or demands) or shugenja for some mental or emotional display they might experience and emulate. They can sense strong emotion and are able to share in the experience if a shugenja willingly opens himself up to share these things. This is often enough to entice an Air spirit into being very cooperative indeed.

Of course, this sort of emotional openness can be difficult for samurai; even the most dedicated of Air shugenja are trained to discipline themselves, maintain face, and suppress their emotions. An Air kami entreated by a shugenja who is stoic, placid, and unemotional is less likely to be cooperative and might even take offense, simply ignoring the plea entirely. Depending on how gruff the samurai are, the spirits might even play a trick or two to teach them a lesson. Air spirits believe those who can experience emotion but refuse to do so are wasting one of the greatest treasures of the universe.

Air kami are thus the least likely of the Elemental kami to demand a physical token of devotion or sacrifice, and are most affectionate towards shugenja who can share the deep and rich human experience with them. This is not to say they will reject all physical offerings, but they prefer items or gestures of significant personal worth to the shugenja, such as a fine kimono inherited from a family member, a Go board that was used constantly in games against a cherished friend, and similar.

Air Kami and Other Spirits

As previously described, the Air kami are the most likely of the kami to understand, observe, and emulate human emotion. Because of this, the other spirits tend to see them as somewhat alien. Though kami of different Elements do not frequently interact, it occurs often enough in nature that shugenja have noticed particular phenomena that result from harmonious or antagonistic relations between the two.

Air and Earth naturally oppose one another, but they are also the least likely to interact in a negative way. Air cannot be absorbed by the Earth, and Earth only rarely disperses in such a way as to become part of Air. The most balanced harmonious interactions between these two Elements occur on mountaintops, where the Earth reaches

Places of Power—Air

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

- Cliffs over the sea.
- Mountaintops.
- Storm-prone areas, such as tropical islands.
- Wind-swept plains.
- Temples dedicated to Air-aligned Fortunes or entities, such as Kaze-no-Kami or the the Air Dragon
- Places that have a very strong historical association with Air, such as the sanctum of the Phoenix Master of Air.

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



to the Air and the two coexist. In places where these two spirits do not exist in balance, dust storms or fallow land are the norm, as the Air chokes the life out of anything in the Earth.

Air and Fire normally exist in natural symbiosis, since most flames require a steady supply of air to continue. However, Fire kami are not found solely in mundane flames, but also in places of great heat such as volcanoes, as well as in the lightning of a storm. When the two Elements are at peace with one another, fires burn peacefully, thunderstorms do not cause great damage, and warm winds bring serenity on spring days. Out of balance with each other, though, Air and Fire can cause great destruction. Raging wildfires can be created by mundane actions, but as such a fire spreads out of control the Fire and Air kami battle for supremacy—Air blows and rages to glut the flames, while Fire consumes the other Element greedily. Thunderstorms that leave ruin and suffering in their wake are also frequently enhanced by such Elemental conflicts.

Air and Water are closely tied together as well, since Water evaporates into Air and then returns as rain (most Rokugani scholars are vaguely aware of this connection). Likewise simple peasants who cultivate fish know that stagnant water with no exposure to air will soon kill all life within it. It is thus uncommon for these two Elements to come into conflict, but when they do, the results can be disastrous. Tsunami are often created by the rage of the sea stretching into the sky, and whirlpools are the spirits of Air twisting and rending at their Water counterparts. Even in landlocked areas, a suffusing, energy-sapping humidity is often the sign of these two Elements clashing with each other.

Optional Game Mechanics: Appeasing the Air Kami

Most shugenja make a point of taking time to entice, appease, and otherwise propitiate the kami they rely on when casting their spells. This sort of thing is not normally depicted in L5R play, since it is assumed to take place during "downtime" between adventures, or to be subsumed into the general prayers and devotions which shugenja undertake every day. However, some GMs and players may wish to incorporate this sort of activity into their regular game-play, and if this sort of effort is undertaken the GM should be willing to reward it by making the kami more cooperative and helpful to the PC.

The easiest way to do this is through Free Raises. The GM may award a certain number of Free Raises per game session based on how much effort the shugenja PC puts into appeasing the kami, and how much success he attains in such efforts.

Each type of kami can be pleased in a different manner. Herewith a few suggestions for ways to entice and appease the Air kami, along with mechanical effects and suggested rewards for GMs to bestow on PCs who succeed:

Spend time amusing the Air kami with a performance, such as song or dance. This will require a Perform (or similar) Skill Roll, with a TN of at least 20 and probably 25 to impress the spirits. 1 Free Raise.

Impress the Air kami with an emotionally stirring tale of love, devotion, betrayal, or tragedy. This requires a suitable Perform Skill Roll (Storytelling and Oratory could both be appropriate Perform Skills for this) at a TN of at least 30. 2 Free Raises.

Share a tale of great emotional significance with the Air kami. This must be a significant and personal piece of information, one that could perhaps embarrass or disgrace the shugenja if it were known. Each such tale can only be used once with the Air kami, since they will recognize the information if it is shared again. (Air kami often speak with each other about such things, so another shugenja who casts Commune within a day of this action and who asks questions about the original shugenja will be able to learn this information.) Instead of such a tale, a physical item of personal importance could be sacrificed to the kami; this should be something like a fan given as a token of affection, something emotionally significant and impossible to replace. 3 Free Raises.

The shugenja not only shares a personal experience with the kami, but allows the spirits to take the emotions as their own. This sacrifice can only be made with a positive experience, something fun or delightful or heart-warming—the spirits do not like holding on to negative emotions such as hatred or sadness. If the emotion is associated with a Social Advantage such as Allies, Blissful Betrothal, Darling of the Court, Heart of Vengeance, or Sensation, the Advantage is lost (the shugenja no longer has the emotional connection required to enjoy the benefits of the Advantage). Whatever is given up is replaced by a dull and vacant sensation—the shugenja remembers the experience, but loses all emotional attachment and treats it rather like a story about someone else. Others affected by the Advantage (such as the spouse in a Blissful Betrothal) will likely be surprised and upset by the sudden change in the shugenja's behavior toward them. 3 Free Raises, plus a number of Free Raises equal to the point value of any lost Advantage.



Chapter Four

Winds of Enlightenment

Kaiu Harui stepped out into the open air of the garden, letting the cool wind of early winter embrace her. She had always enjoyed the cold season at the Wall, for reasons she had never quite understood until this year. Looking behind her at the interior of the Isawa estate, the Crab ambassador realized that at least when conducting difficult winter trade at the Wall she felt inside her element. Here, it was chaos—or at least an ebb and flow she did not quite understand.

"Refreshing, isn't it?" a gentle voice spoke from Harui's left. Instinct took over; the Crab woman's huge hands thrust out to fend off a sudden threat. She blinked and paused, finding herself clutching double handfuls of a monk's robes.

The old monk looked at her with a calm and slightly amused expression. "I have never met a Crab samurai before, my lady. Is this a traditional greeting?"

Harui snapped her hands back as if she had been burned. A moment later her face seemed to be burning in truth as she flushed deep red despite her effort to regain her face. "My apologies," she muttered quickly, taking a step back. She tried to think of something polite to say, something to break the tension of her own embarrassment, but she realized she had no idea what was a proper topic of conversation with a monk. She had never met a monk before, in fact, and was not sure what a monk would even be doing at a winter court. Finally she croaked, "The cool air is indeed refreshing."

Harui wondered if the whole season would be like this. Probably. Why couldn't they have let her stay at the Wall?

"I am Mio," the monk said, bowing his head slightly.

It took a moment before Harui realized the gesture was both a sign of respect and a prompt for her to introduce herself as well. "Harui," she blurted, then hurriedly added, "Of the Kaiu." Her embarrassment was quickly changing to irritation, both at the court for creating this situation and at herself for forgetting the most basic manners. Court was truly not her element at all.

Mio nodded and turned to regard the plants in the garden, which were clearly struggling against the winter cold. "I worry these won't last long, Harui-sama," he said. "The lady of this household is a friend of mine, but she refused my advice when I said she should not move these bushes from their place of origin. They are not meant to endure the winter like the ones native to these lands."

Harui looked at the bushes as well, relieved that the monk had offered a harmless topic of conversation. In fact, it was one she found congenial. Her father had been something of an agricultural scholar, assisting the Crab in farming the clan's more difficult lands, and he had passed much of this knowledge to her. She pointed at the lower part of the bush. "I recognize these, actually," she said. "They will wither, but they will endure, monk. They simply need time to grow deep roots." The Crab examined them for a moment and added, "It's hard for me to say if your friend

has allowed them enough time to do so, but there are a few ways to avoid a total loss even so."

"Ah," Mio nodded. He turned back to the entrance to the estate and made a casual waving motion with one wrinkled hand. Harui leaned forward to peer past him, wondering who he was beckoning over, then stiffened when none other than Isawa Kiko walked across the garden to join them.

"My lady." Mio bowed and Harui quickly followed suit. "My friend Harui-san believes she has a solution to the problem that has been troubling you."

"Oh?" The lady of the estate turned her warm smile on the young Crab maiden. "My husband and I would be most thankful to hear of it."

Mio took a step back to excuse himself, then walked away as Harui began to speak. He smiled to himself. She may yet have time, he thought, to grow roots and endure.

Air and the Monastic Traditions

The monks of the Brotherhood of Shinsei do not directly channel the power of the Elements in the way a shugenja does, but many monk orders nonetheless find themselves drawn to a particular Element, or will find their particular philosophy aligns naturally with one. In the case of the Element of Air, this association generally causes monks to become more attuned to the feelings of those around them, as well as more flexible and unpredictable in their approach to the martial arts. While different monastic Orders aligned with the same Element may have different goals, they tend to be similar both in how they seek them and the attitudes they take along the way.

The Order of the Wind (Kaze-no-kami)

Kaze-no-kami is one of the Primal Fortunes, those said to exist before even some of the more revered Greater Fortunes. Unlike many of its peers, Kaze-no-kami is not so much a self-aware Celestial being as it is a barely sentient primal force that Hantei Genji, the second Hantei Emperor, declared a Fortune. Kaze-no-kami is a being of unbridled and unrestrained winds, its power felt in the icy blasts of winter storms, the fierce gusts of windy days, and even the hurricanes that plague the coasts of Rokugan.

This Fortune is not only known for its power but also for its indifference toward mortals. Prayers to Kaze-no-kami usually go unnoticed, and temples to the Fortune are no less likely to be swept away by a tempest of wind as any other structure. This is not to say the Fortune is particularly spiteful or aggressive; it simply carries out a natural (and sometimes chaotic) cycle that it protects from interference from other beings. However, this means that just as it is impossible to appeal to Kaze-no-kami for mercy, the Fortune is also uncaring for blasphemies enacted against it. Its temples may be desecrated or its name slandered, but the wind continues however it wishes.

Not long after Kaze-no-kami was officially recognized as a Fortune, an organized order of monks sprang up in its name. While the Fortune's indifference sparked irritation and insult in many other holy men, these particular men and women found themselves drawn to the idea that a natural force could be so distant and uncaring. Though the Fortunes, Kami, Emperor, and the Heavens themselves were said to look over the mortal realms and protect those who did their part in the great Celestial Order, it was still hard to deny that on an individual scale the world was often an unfair and disorderly place. Eta, peasants, and samurai alike were subject to the whims, both good and bad, of things far beyond their control.

It was this concept that was at the core of the new monastic order's philosophy. The world around you can be indifferent, chaotic, and random, they taught, but a mortal must still persevere. Once the illusion of control is cast aside, the road to true enlightenment can begin. On the surface, this philosophy was greatly at odds with many other Orders within the Brotherhood, as well as many basic notions of Rokugani culture—did a noble lord have no control over his own men? Could an Emperor not command? Even the shugenja's art of communing and importuning the kami was at odds with this, since shugenja sought to change the natural state of the world all the time, even if by small degrees.

Shortly after the Order of the Wind was founded, the Emperor's advisor summoned the Order's senior monk, Mikaru, to defend accusations that his religious practices bordered on treason and sacrilege. Mikaru travelled alone to the Emperor's palace, where he was brought before Hantei Genji himself and required to explain his philosophy. The Shining Prince was a devout man and fascinated by the Tao, and found himself both repulsed by what this new Order might represent and intrigued by what new religious perspective they might be offering.

As Mikaru faced his Emperor, Genji asked the man to explain himself.

"I have come as you asked," the monk replied.

The Emperor repeated himself, wondering if the old man had become stricken with a simple mind in his advanced years.

"My Emperor, shining light of the Heavens, you ask me to explain the actions of my Order, and I have done so. You commanded me to appear. So I have. I am told that I am to be executed for heresy, or more likely to make a fool



of myself before your splendid Imperial Court. That is not for me to decide, so I have done what I can."

"You are not afraid?" asked the Imperial Advisor, wondering if the monk's indifference could be taken as an affront to the Emperor's power. "The Shining Prince could have you executed on the spot if he so wished. Does this not cause you to fear for the words you speak so casually?"

Mikaru looked at the Advisor and shrugged. "He might do the same to you," he replied. "Does that cause you to tremble? The Great City might fall into the sea if the land shakes hard enough. An inattentive cook might prepare food poorly and cause you to fall ill. You may even slip on the great steps of the Imperial Palace and fall headlong to your death. And yet you stand here, brave against all of these things." Mikaru turned back to the Emperor and concluded, "We believe it is a marvel that man can do such a thing. But is it bravery when a man remains simply ignorant of how little control he truly has?"

Though the monk and the Emperor held dialogue for a little while longer, it is this exchange which is remembered in most histories, passed down in stories from generation to generation. It is said the ambassadors of the Great Clans in attendance that day wrote back to their lords of what the monk had said, and supposedly this strongly influenced what many recognize as the proper selfless execution of duty in the Empire. While the Crane, Lion, Phoenix, and Scorpion may have found different lessons in that moment, they all are said to have taken those lessons to heart.

Although many were still not convinced that the Order was anything more than a group of madmen or blasphemers, the word of the Emperor settled all public discussion about the topic, and the Order of the Wind was officially recognized as acceptable. However, the perceived affront was not forgotten, and many powerful samurai lords did not like the message of powerlessness and fatalism which the Order spread. Consequently the monks of Kaze-no-Kami had great difficulty establishing temples in many parts of the Empire. In a few instances they were even driven out of provinces by force. The monks of the Order regarded the whole situation with their typical quiet amusement and acceptance, and with time they were able to establish some temples in the lands of those clans who were more accepting of their peculiar views.

Since those early days, the Order of Kaze-no-Kami has spread quietly to other parts of the Empire, although there are still many regions where they have little to no presence. Monks trained by the Order are taught to endure the changes the world brings and accept them with a pleasant calm. This is not the death-defying bravado of a samurai, but instead simply an understanding that what will be, will be, and a mortal can only laugh and accept it. Since there is no use mourning what could not happen, one can avoid regrets and simply adjust to the new circumstances as quickly as possible. Thus while it may not be difficult to surprise such a monk with a logical trap or a sudden ambush, they are able to respond quickly to such surprises, dealing with the situation calmly rather than panicking or becoming frustrated.

The Death of Kaze-no-Kami

Given the attitude of the Order of Wind, it should come as no surprise that the death of Kaze-no-Kami at the hands of Fu Leng in the year 1159 caused very little disruption. The monks did nothing more than spend a ceremonial day of meditation upon the matter. Since then the monks have carried on as before, believing the death of their icon nothing more than a perfect example of their philosophy.

Which, of course, is the final secret of the Order of the Wind—if the world changes but cannot change you, you have found all the control and power in the world.

The Temple of Kaze-no-Kami

Though the Fortune of Wind has several shrines and temples dedicated to his name, most are small and largely ignored by the population around them. In modern times the most well-known of these is commonly referred to simply as "the" Temple of Kaze-no-Kami, and was built by the Tsuruchi family of the Mantis Clan approximately ten years after the Clan War. The temple was constructed hastily, mainly because they needed an excuse for their daimyo, Tsuruchi himself, to retire into anonymity quickly due to a debilitating war wound. Though the stern, aggressive philosophies of the Tsuruchi do not align well with those of the Order of the Wind, the Tsuruchi have found that such a change is often exactly what a retired samurai should embrace.



The Four Temples Monks

The Four Temples monks are described briefly on page 231 of the L5R 4th Edition Core rulebook. Their sect is one of the oldest orders in the Brotherhood of Shinsei, and the one largely responsible for the image of the wise monk advisor who many believe is the typical member of the Brotherhood. After the First War against Fu Leng, the Tao of Shinsei spread through the Empire like wildfire and countless priests, scholars, and holy men began to gather together to study and emulate the Little Teacher's wisdom. While most Rokugani know it was Hantei's son Genji, the second Hantei Emperor, who officially proclaimed the Tao to be the core of Rokugan's religion and ordered the official formation of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, few realize it was the wise woman Seppun who helped influence the Shining Prince to take such a step.

Though countless Rokugani were fascinated by the Tao, few were so drawn to it as the Lady Seppun. By the end of the First War she was a very old woman, but remained as devoted to Emperor Hantei as she had been at the first moment she saw him fall from the Heavens. As Hantei slowly wasted away from the wound he had suffered in the First War, Seppun read to him from the Tao, recalling for him the night on which he had spoken to the Little Teacher, and spoke with him about what an impact Shinsei's wisdom would have on the Empire now that peace had come. Some believe that without these conversations Hantei might well have succumbed to despair over the state of his victorious but deeply ravaged land. Shortly before he died, the First Emperor beseeched Seppun to do for others as she had done for him. He did not command here, merely asked her to serve the Empire is this way, for he feared that many others would not be able to understand or apply Shinsei's wisdom without proper guidance.

Seppun readily agreed and ordered her followers to copy the parts of the Tao they believed dealt directly with Hantei's request—sections that spoke to everyday wisdom and the power in simple actions. Seppun's monks recorded these items and returned them for study in the temples that would eventually come to be known simply as The Four Temples. Since that time, the Seppun family and the Brotherhood of Shinsei have been inextricably linked. Though the social status of a monk quickly became very different than that of a samurai, it was the Four Temples Order that influenced the Empire's acceptance of monks as unofficial equals to samurai in many matters of custom and etiquette. Indeed, the Four Temples Order—the most visible and (at the time) organized sect of monks—were often confused in those early days with the Seppun family itself, or given the same respect as

The Ten Thousand Temples

Historically, the headquarters of the Four Temples is located around Kyuden Seppun, the seat of the Imperial family founded by Lady Seppun herself. They are described in Chapter Two of this book. In addition, the Four Temples Order traditionally maintained a major temple complex within the Imperial capital of Otosan Uchi.

However, in the twelfth century Otosan Uchi was largely destroyed in an attack by the Dark Lord Daigotsu. A new capital was established in Toshi Ranbo, which quickly grew from a small settlement to a sprawling metropolis. In response, Seppun Kiharu—the aging daimyo of the Seppun family and a senior member of the Four Temples Order—established a host of new temples and shrines in the new Imperial City. These innumerable temples quickly became an influential center for the Brotherhood in general and the Four Temples Order in particular, and after a few short years the Order officially recognized it as the new headquarters of the sect. Kiharu, who was a friend to then-Emperor Toturi III, was named the head of the Order, and the Ten Thousand Temples were recognized as the Emperor's personal temples for reflection and meditation. Due to the waning influence of the original Four Temples (whose location at Kyuden Seppun made them distant from the new capital), the Order renamed itself as the Order of the Ten Thousand Temples, but its nature and mission remained unchanged.

the Seppun out of deference for their association with the Imperial line. In truth, the Order is not actually part of the Seppun family, but it is often led by a current or former member of the Seppun and counts many of the family among its members.

Throughout the Empire's history, the members of the Four Temples Order have trained themselves to understand the often subtle interactions between people and how to shape such interactions for the betterment of the Empire as a whole. Monks of the Four Temples are more likely to be "worldly" in their approach, refusing to hold aloof or remove themselves from the social and political events of the Empire as many of the other sects do. Rather than merely waiting for souls in conflict or pain to come to them, the monks of the Four Temples actively seek out those who need their assistance. Thus if a lord has a monk advisor, or a troubled village finds itself visited by a traveling teacher, it is usually a member of this Order who fulfills such tasks.

The Great Clans have widely different reactions to the activities of the Four Temples monks, with some accepting their guidance while others resent what they perceive as interference. Due to its Imperial connections, the Order enjoys a certain amount of political protection which other sects lack, but this does not render it proof against all potential enemies. The Scorpion Clan in particular has an enmity for the Four Temples Order, but surprisingly enough the Crane can be almost as irritated by their activities, since the advice and help of the Order can sometimes disrupt the economic warfare which the Crane wage against their enemies. Militaristic clans like the Crab and Lion tend to have difficulties with the Four Temples Order as well, since their warriors' pride can bring them into conflict with these humble savants—only to discover they have powerful friends. While such monks usually do not go out of their way to exact reprisal on their own, their allies in the Seppun often do so either out of devotion or political opportunity. Conversely, the Dragon and Phoenix usually enjoy the company and presence of these monks, and the more contemplative and religious nature of these two clans usually keeps them from conflicting with the interests of the Order.

A Four Temples Monk is often compared to Shinsei himself—quiet, good-natured, wise...and not to be underestimated. Although the monks of this sect tend to be somewhat more pacifistic than their peers in other sects, but they do train in hand-to-hand combat and if they serve a samurai as an advisor they will often acquire martial skills to match their lord's interests.

The Order of the Wind's Grace

Archery is an ancient practice in Rokugan, predating the fall of the Kami themselves, but it was not until the days of the Clan War that an organized order of monks emerged which was devoted to the practice. The group known as the Taoist Archers, who sought enlightenment and harmony through the study of archery, had existed for centuries, but their numbers were few and the rest of the Brotherhood saw them as an eccentric offshoot (albeit one that did not verge into the errors of a False Path) rather than a calling worthy of deeper study.

However, the Clan Wars changed that. In the aftermath of a massive war that had brought great destruction on the temples of the Brotherhood, many monks found the stillness in their souls had forever been interrupted. Others found the conflict filled them with a sense of purpose and harmony they had never felt before, and sought ways to fulfill that new calling. While the Brotherhood as a whole attempted to return to the status quo after the Clan Wars, it found far too many members were now monks who, for whatever reason, simply could not return to quiet meditation and introspection as they had before. Their hands itched to hold a weapon again, and they sought out even the smallest conflicts to resolve—not necessarily through violence, to be sure, but violent incidents with monks showed a marked increase. These monks had been changed, and the Brotherhood's leaders recognized this change could cause great harm if it went unaddressed.

At first, it was assumed these men and women should simply be asked to become sohei and, if necessary, join more militant orders such as the Order of Osano-Wo. But it quickly became clear that this would not solve the problem, as the martial training seemed to have an opposite effect from what the monks had hoped. Barely-checked aggression was fed instead of released and soothed, causing even greater disruptions in the ranks of the orders that were more likely to meet violence with violence.

Takao, the newly-appointed head of the Brotherhood, found himself in a terrible position. He wished to reach out to help his brothers and sisters, but wondered if it might be better to simply dismiss all these troubled monks and thereby prevent further problems within the Brotherhood. The solution came almost by chance, though Takao later saw it as the inevitability of fate. Through his personal connections in the Phoenix Clan, the monk had long ago established friendly relations with the Asahina priests of the Crane. It was during one of his many conversations with one of the temple elders, Asahina Hideki, that he heard of a little-known kyujutsu dojo the Crane family maintained—the so-called Asahina Archers. The priest explained that studying the way of the bow was much different than other weapons. Kyujutsu could be a source of focus and serenity, similar to the art of iaijutsu, and only those who tempered their aggressive instincts could become truly great.

Intrigued, Takao returned to his brothers and wasted no time convincing them to lay the foundations for what would eventually become known as the Order of the Wind's Grace—an order of sohei who would meditate upon the arrow's flight. The Brotherhood was able to secure several sensei from the Asahina Archers to assist them in undertaking their new path, since the Asahina's nature and teachings worked well with what Takao and his monks were attempting to do. After several years, the Wind's Grace came into its own as a new sect within the Brotherhood, with friendly relations to the Crane but clearly possessing its own style of archery and its own philosophy.

Monks of the Wind's Grace Order are sohei, since they study the ways of combat, but they are not as eager to engage in battle as their peers in other orders. New members of the sect often share the same problems or troubled history as those the Order was founded to rehabilitate, and they believe the passion and violence of war will too easily unleash the mindless fury they attempt to keep in check. They prefer the calm stance of the archer, the smooth motion of the readied arrow and release, an almost religious act which seems to draw the anger out of them, leaving serenity in its wake. Even those of the Order who have no wild aggression to keep at bay still find that the calmness and focus of archery feels more pure to them than the chaotic and bestial nature of hand-to-hand combat preferred by the sohei of other sects.

This is by no means to say the Order of the Wind's Grace are cowards who flee from a fight. Rather, they simply believe that undesirable brute instinct and animal nature tend to dominate in hand-to-hand battle, whereas only a tempered and harmonious mind and soul can excel at the art of the bow. However, they do not wholly neglect the ways of the open hand, and the few times the Wind's Grace Order has had to fight, those who believed the monks were harmless without their bows were quickly proven wrong. The monks share basic proficiency of unarmed combat with all of their peers in the Brotherhood, but prefer whenever possible to use their skills to disarm or immobilize an enemy rather than simply beat them into senselessness. When they must take a life, they prefer to do it while in the serene state brought on by archery, when their soul will not be polluted with anger and battle-lust.

The Order of the Wind enjoys good relations with the Asahina Archers, with whom they share a preference to avoid bloodshed, as well as with the Dragon Clan's archery dojo—the latter due to the general close relations between the Brotherhood and the Dragon. The two groups often exchange ideas and send their sensei to teach in each others' dojo, which would be most unusual with other clans, even the Crane. The Tsuruchi family of the Mantis have also shown an interest in the Order's art, though they have concluded the monks follow a far too conservative approach to combat for their liking. The two groups respect one another's prowess with their signature weapon, but the Order has no interest in attempting to challenge the Tsuruchi for mastery, and the Tsuruchi understand the monks are not expected to think or behave like bushi.

Fukurokujin's Eyes

"The Fortune of Wisdom grants his blessings to all with the wit to see them."

– Seppun Kiharu, Abbot of the Thousand Temples

Before the fall of the Kami, the men and women in the land that would come to be known as Rokugan were divided into many tribes. The strongest and best-remembered of these were the tribes of Isawa and Seppun, and many modern Rokugani believe only those groups showed any hint of true civilization or culture before the Kami fell. However, this was not entirely the case. In the southern part of the land, near where Hida would one day take his followers and establish the Clan of the Crab, a tribe known as the Tribe of the Closed Eye lived in relative obscurity.

The Closed Eye were an insular people, vaguely known to other tribes but only interacting with them when the need for trade or mutual defense arose. It was common for the other tribes to not hear from them for generations. However, they were considered among the wisest and most learned of the tribes and were rumored to have great gifts of divination; those who sought guidance or wisdom knew to seek them out. More than one hero met with death trying in vain to seek out the advice of the elders of the Closed Eye. Those few who succeeded were just as often turned away as they were allowed to stay and have their questions answered. When someone returned to their own tribe after a meeting with these men and women, they were forever changed and often their new-found knowledge was critical in guiding their tribe through difficult times.

The sages and leaders of the Closed Eye believed they could perceive the most intricate patterns of the universe, and through this they could learn how to anticipate both great and subtle shifts in the lives of mortals. Their predictions could be uncannily accurate. When asked about this ability, tribal priests would usually respond with indirect

statements such as, "A farmer knows what color of clouds bring the rain."

Since the Tribe of the Closed Eye valued this perception above all else, the coming of the Kami was a disaster to them. Their observation of the world had never met with anything as cataclysmic as the fall of the children of Sun and Moon, and as the world changed rapidly around them they realized that not only were they unprepared for such a thing, they were actually losing their own place in the pattern of reality due to their ignorance. With their famous perceptions failing them, what purpose could they serve?

The First War was a further blow to their old way of life. The actions of Fu Leng and the unleashing of the Taint were far outside any of their prior knowledge and rendered their predictive powers all but useless. Thankfully, their small size and isolated location allowed them to avoid the ravages of the Fallen Kami's armies, which were far more intent on storming northward to confront and defeat the other Kami and their followers.

When Hida came to claim the southern lands of the Empire and build up their defenses after the First War, the leader of the Closed Eye was a woman named Iko. Hida sent Kaiu to govern that particular part of the lands granted him by Hantei, and the Kami's lieutenant was surprised to encounter the tribe already dwelling there. The Closed Eye were not surprised to find Kaiu approaching their valley, however, for he was a mortal and his actions were part of the pattern they understood. They invited Kaiu to sit and speak with Iko so that some kind of agreement could be reached. The tribe had no interest in joining the Clan of Hida, but they did not wish to be driven from their lands as so many others had been.

Kaiu returned to his master Hida to speak on the Closed Eye's behalf, bringing with him many gifts from the tribe—not only items of value but also maps of the land, explanations of the area's dangers, and even a few of their magical secrets. After some thought, Hida saw the worth of compromising with these men and women. The fact that the tribe was wise enough to anticipate Kaiu's arrival and practical enough to show deference with gifts (and a promise to pay proper taxes to Hida) made it clear this was the best choice.

Since they could no longer refer to themselves as a tribe once they accepted the rule of the Kami, the Closed Eye began to refer to themselves as the Order of Fukurokujin's Eyes—a blend of their old name with the name of the Fortune of Wisdom, whose worship by now was acceptable in Rokugan's new order. They adopted a monastic lifestyle and in many ways became the first monk order established in the Empire. Once the Brotherhood of Shinsei was officially organized, the Order of Fukurokujin's Eyes petitioned for membership and was accepted as an official part of Rokugan's religious structure. The first few generations after the founding of the Empire were difficult for the former tribe, as they strove to deal with the questions and problems that arose from their lack of vision. Over time, they gradually came to terms with the fact that their understanding could never be flawless in a world where the Kami had walked; from now on, such great upheavals would have to be endured when they arrived.

Unlike most of the Brotherhood's orders, Fukurokujin's Eyes is comprised of several bloodlines that have endured through the centuries, and members of the Order often marry and have children. However, they also take in new members in the usual manner, by recruiting from the peasant population and enrolling retired samurai. Although it is rare for Crab samurai to enroll in the Brotherhood, it is not unknown, and those who do retire frequently join this Order to as to remain close to their old homes. In fact, in the northern parts of Crab lands retirement is often referred to as "opening one's eyes."

The Order of Fukurokujin's Eyes has a strongly pacifistic nature, which may seem to make them an odd fit for the Crab lands. However, while the Crab do not agree with the Order's philosophies, they see them as a constant reminder of the sort of men and women they strive to protect—strong, proud men and women who seek knowledge and enlightenment, not sniveling cowards or pampered politicians.

Much like the ancient tribe from which they are descended, Fukurokujin's Eyes tend to hold themselves very much apart, avoiding conflict with others and studying the physical and spiritual patterns of the world. They will never be a large order, and their ancient roots in the Tribe of the Closed Eye means they prefer it that way. Students of the Order are taught the introspective arts—meditation, calligraphy, and so on—and their study of the universe often intersects with the interests of shugenja and the ways of Elemental magic. A student of the Order can often hold forth quite knowledgeably, even at a young age, on a variety of supernatural topics such as divination, the Spirit Realms, the Elements, and the Celestial Order.

As one might expect, the members of the Order shun combat, although they recognize it as sometimes being an unavoidable part of life. Much like a Phoenix, a Fukurokujin's Eyes monk will exhaust every possible honorable alternative before participating in violence. Even if forced to engage in battle, they will do their best to avoid needless suffering or bloodshed, trying to grapple or otherwise non-lethally disable their foes. This reservation is completely ignored, however, when they face foes they believe are an affront to the natural order—most obviously the creatures of the Shadowlands, but this can also include the more violent sort of criminals, not to mention the entities of the Lying Darkness.

Outside of the Crab lands, most Rokugani are barely aware of the existence of the monks of Fukurokujin's Eyes, although the rest of the Brotherhood knows about them and the Togashi tattooed men have been known to visit them as well. The Order, for its part, is intrigued by the Togashi, seeing them as a curious reflection of what they might have become if they had actually become a part of the Crab Clan.

The Keeper of Air

The L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire* discusses, on page 75, how the monk Rosoku—a descendent of Shinsei himself—issued a series of challenges to the Empire at large, challenges whose victors became the Keepers of the various Elements. The Keeper of Air was the first of these to be found. Mirumoto Masae had showed little interest in the young prophet's contest, for like many Dragon she believed enlightenment was not a prize to be won. She was more than a little frustrated when Togashi Satsu, the Champion of the Dragon Clan at the time, ordered her to join the quest to undertake Rosoku's challenges and find one of the Books.

A dutiful samurai, she put aside her feelings and did as she was told. However, it was not long before Masae realized she had no idea where to even begin. Rosoku's challenges seemed impossible; for example, the challenge of Air was to contain a thousand years of learning on a single scroll. Questions plagued the young Dragon's mind—did solving the riddles grant enlightenment, or was it an enlightened soul that could solve them? And did finding one of the books complete the challenge, or would the books somehow be awarded afterwards? Like many Mirumoto, Masae tempered the wonder of the divine with practicality, and so she decided she would return to the Dragon mountains and report her mission as a failure. This would serve both as a way to end the conflict in her mind and also effectively make her feelings known about the contest as a whole.



It was during her journey back that she came upon a conflict between a pair of shugenja, one from the Tamori family and one from the Isawa. The two priests had gathered sizable forces and were ready to go to war over who would remain steward of a Dark Oracle's covenant. Masae met the would-be generals on the battlefield and shamed both of them with the spirit of the treaty they had both exploited to gain an excuse for the conflict. By using the treaty, a single piece of paper, as an example of the past thousand years of the Empire's learning, the Dragon bushi had unwittingly fulfilled one of Rosoku's challenges. Immediately afterward, she found the Book of Air nearby.

Masae was the First of the six Keepers, and in many ways her achievement mirrored how the other Keepers would find their own places—not through direct attempts to gain enlightenment or fulfill the challenges, but rather from a combination of self-determination and the unseen hand of fate. Masae did not suddenly feel more enlightened or imbued with supernatural wisdom, she merely felt as if she had reached a natural next step in the progression in her life. Her earlier questions about the Book were simply moot now, and she journeyed to meet with Rosoku and discuss their future.

What the descendent of Shisei revealed to her did not surprise the now-enlightened Masae in the least. The contest Rosoku had announced was not truly a contest at all, but instead of a gentle way to coax out six men and women who most perfectly embodied mortal understanding of the Elements. These Keepers of the Elements were mortal reflections of elemental purity, given direction and form through the disciplined life of the samurai. Just as each generation produced its most skilled duelist or most inspiring leader, each also contained individuals who epitomized each of the Elements, and Masae best represented the instinctive wisdom, adaptive and unpredictable movement, and pervasive understanding of Air.

While the new Keeper did not really feel as though she had suddenly been granted supernatural power through her appointment, the simple act of finally understanding what she was did unlock potential within her she had not previously recognized. Masae found that when dealing with others she could easily see their motivations and emotions, even when speaking with the most disciplined and self-controlled master politicians. Though she had always had a knack for understanding such things, the newfound confidence that she was perceiving *correctly* allowed her to broker peace or root out dangerous plots with ease. When she first entered the courts in her new role as the Keeper of Air, opportunistic courtiers and lords often tried to take advantage of Masae, and they were stunned by how easily she saw through their manipulations. Her fellow Dragon often relied on her to keep them safe from political schemes and entrapments.

Additionally, Masae found that her new gifts allowed her to embrace a meditative state even in the midst of combat. In such a focused state, her foes seemed clumsy and slow, and she could easily avoid or negate attacks from even the most well-trained

warriors in Rokugan. In fact, later on it became something of a relaxing exercise between herself and Asahina Hira, the blind Keeper of the Void, to have the older man fire arrows at her that she batted out of the air with her swords. She often used these martial gifts in combination with her now nearly supernatural charisma to end conflicts without bloodshed—wearing down hostile opponents with her words while her incredible skills kept her unharmed.

Masae could also tune her perceptions to understand the subtle flow of the Elements in general, though naturally her connection to Air was strongest. She could now speak to the kami in a manner similar to a shugenja, although it was not as precise and she had little ability to actually command them. Instead, the air kami seemed to look upon her almost as kin, and she was able to understand when and why they were agitated—while for their part the kami would often come to her aid on their own, leading some observers to mistakenly believe she was casting spells. While her powers were never as precise or reliable as a true shugenja's abilities, they were far beyond what any normal person could attain.

Because Mirumoto Masae was both the first of the Keepers to be chosen and a student of Dragon philosophies, the other Keepers who appeared later tended to regard her as a sort of senior member of their order, if not necessarily a superior. It is not known whether this will be repeated among future generations of Keepers (if they appear at all), but it is clear that any future Keepers of Air would likely also be likeable and persuasive persons who earns respect easily wherever they go.

The Book of Air

"Power from a book? I fear you are misinformed, samurai-san. A book can only show the path. It is up to the mortal soul to follow."

—Asahina Hira, Keeper of Void

The books found by Masae and the other Keepers were not magical nemuranai, nor were they conduits to some divine power. However, their pages did hold tremendous wisdom. It has never been clear whether Rosoku himself wrote the Books or merely compiled the accumulated wisdom of himself and his ancestors, and Rosoku's death soon afterward means this question will never be answered. However, it is indisputable that Rosoku urged the Keepers to expand upon the Books and even to revise them. After all, as Keepers *they* were now the mortal embodiment of these Elements, so their insights would surely add a great deal to the works and offer a far clearer representation of their Element's perspective.

It is noteworthy that all six of the books are designed in style that is more like a gaijin's tome than a Rokugani collection of scrolls. They have numerous individual rectangular pages bound and held within covers of wood and heavy cloth. Within the Empire this style is used only for pillow-books and personal journals, not for works of scholarship or magical wisdom. Why Rosoku chose to present the books in this form is just one more mystery left unsolved by his death.

Passages from the Book of Air

"The wind does not erode the mountain, it does not burn the forest, it does not stand unmoving against time. It passes around that which it must, and surrounds it."

"That which is unseen has power. Men and women will forget it is there, and will never note its absence or closeness until it is gone."

"Gently the world speaks its secrets. It does not shout, for the universe has no need to share wisdom with those who do not listen. Do you hear it?"

"Try to grasp the wind. Try to cut it. Can you stop it? Yet, it has all the power to knock you from your feet and bend the trees. Strike as the Air, and you are invincible."

The Book of Air is the smallest of the six Books (the five Elemental books and the final Book of Five Rings), and those who have been able to read it are surprised by how much information is so clearly and concisely relayed on its pages. Masae meditated upon its wisdom daily, sometimes simply opening to a random page and looking over a few passages to gain new insights or remember old ones the words had previously inspired in her. The Dragon samurai took a few opportunities to amend the book as she saw fit—an action that originally struck her as potentially blasphemous, but felt appropriate once she completed the task.

Most of the Book's passages speak through analogies to air and wind, describing indirectly how conflicts can be resolved, new ideas found, and a variety of other actions taken. The overall tone of the book is generally peaceful and quiet, urging thoughtful consideration and gentle action. Those who read it often report that their own emotions are soothed and they feel more serene and at peace, even if they did not truly understand the passages they reviewed.

Although many believed (and in some cases continue to believe) that the Books granted great power simply by winning them, the truth was more complex. The six Books were meant to be found by mortals who already understood much of the wisdom they held. The insight and wisdom contained in their pages served to push those individuals the final step to true understanding and enlightenment.

In mechanical terms, the owner of the Book of Air gains a +1k1 bonus to all Air rolls, Awareness rolls, and Reflexes rolls, including Skill rolls that use the Awareness and Reflexes Traits. This bonus increases to +2k1 on Contested Social Skill rolls. However, if the owner is not able to read from the Book at least once every two days, the bonus is lost.

It should be noted that this bonus represents the effects of the Book of Air on an ordinary mortal. The Keeper of Air gains greater benefits from the Book of Air. For one thing, the bonus applies constantly regardless of whether the Keeper is able to review the Book regularly or not. In addition, the Keeper gains beneficial effects from the friendship of the Air kami—the exact nature of these benefits should be determined by the GM, but obvious examples would include the ability to Sense the Air kami and to perform the Commune spell as though a shugenja.


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Chapter Five

The World of Air

Onji smiles and hums to herself as she watches Jiro run his brush down the side of the kite. The thick red line adds the final touch to the kabuki mask that scowls from the center of the stretched rice paper oval. She takes the kite from the boy and lifts it, regarding it with lips pursed. "Very good, Jiro-kun."

Then her breath catches, and for a moment the kite shakes in her trembling hands.

"Hii-baba? Great-grandmother? Are you all right?"

She sets the kite down carefully. "I am fine, Jiro-kun. Come, let's go outside and see how your new kite flies."

They walk together through the halls of the monastery, tabi-clad feet soft and silent on the polished wooden floors. Jiro tugs on her hand, skipping, almost leaping in his eagerness to be outside. Onji has to scold him at the entrance when he almost forgets to put on his sandals.

They climb the grassy slope behind the monastery, the boy running ahead, laughing. Onji climbs slowly, pausing every few steps to catch her breath. Exercise has become difficult for her these last few years, and sometimes when she is out of breath she sees dark spots in front of her eyes. An imbalance of her Elements, the younger nuns say—her Earth has become weak, unable to hold Air properly.

Jiro looks back, laughing, his tiny topknot ruffling in the high spring breeze. "Hurry, great-grandmother! There's so much wind!"

Onji feels her breath catch again, for a different reason. She sinks down onto her heels, tears suddenly blinding her.

"Great-grandmother! What's wrong? Are you sick? Should I call the Abess?"

With an effort she lifts one trembling hand and wipes the tears from her seamed cheeks. "No, no, Jiro-kun," she wheezes. "I am all right. I just... I just remembered something. Something from long ago."

"Something bad?" The boy looks up at her anxiously, eyes wide.

She makes herself smile, ruffling his hair. "Good and bad together, Jiro-kun, like all things in life." It seems the hardest thing in the world, but she forces herself to stand. The black spots come, and she sways for a moment, but then her vision clears. "Come. Let us fly your kite."

The winds are warm and strong, the winds of spring. They catch the kite and it soars aloft, leaping for the heavens like a phoenix spirit rising from its grave. Jiro laughs delightedly, clutching the roll of twine as tightly as a life's treasure.

"It was a day like this," Onji says softly. "A day like this, oh, so many years ago."

Jiro still wants to watch the kite, but at her tone he turns his gaze to her briefly. "What, great-grandmother?"

"The day of the Iris Festival," Onji murmured. "My brother... goodness, he looked almost exactly like you, Jiro-kun. Takeo, that was his name. He was flying his kite, you see. I

had just passed my gempukku that year, so I was too old to display dolls, but he begged me to come with him while he flew his kite. It was a kabuki mask kite. Just like this one." Her hand rests gently on the taut kite-string. "The wind was so strong. My brother kept running along, laughing, and I ran after him... and then Takeo struck a man."

Jiro's eyes go wide. "A samurai?"

The old woman shakes her head. "We thought so at first. He wore a sword, and his clothes were all white, and he was very tall. With a long face and... yes, his eyes were very small, and very dark."

Jiro shivers. "He sounds like an oni!"

The old woman summons the energy to slap the top of the boy's head. "Jiro-kun! You know better than to say that! What would your mother say to hear you speak such things?" The effort of her scolding leaves her breathless; for a moment the dark spots well-up before her eyes again.

Jiro covers his head with one hand, clutching the ball of twine to his chest with the other. "I'm sorry, great-grandmother. I won't do it again."

"See that you don't." Onji draws a deep breath, fighting the tightness that has suddenly clutched her chest. She catches the kite's string and grips it as though it is life itself.

After a moment she finds her voice again. "We learned later... he was a tsuru. A crane spirit, proud and boastful. He was angry at Takeo for running into him, and he threatened to cut him down. I screamed, and... and Kotasu heard, and came running."

"Konatsu? Who was that?" When she says nothing, the boy looks up at her anxiously. "Great-grandmother? Who was Konastu?"

"He was... a guest at our house. Studying at the school, to learn the ways of the sword." Her voice is very soft, and Jiro leans toward her, his kite momentarily all but forgotten. "Oh, I had forgotten... forgotten how pretty his face was. We were... we were friends, Jiro-kun. And when he heard me scream, he came running as swift as the wind. He shouted that the tsuru was a coward for threatening a mere boy. And... and the tsuru laughed at him, and told him to prove his words with his blade."

She falls silent. Above them, the kite dips and turns in the wind.

"He beat the tsuru, right, great-grandmother? Konatsu won."

Onji smiles, and the tears burns her eyes again, slipping down cheeks that bear the wear of eighty summers. "No, Jiro-kun," she whispers. "Tsuru are greatly skilled with the blade, and Konatsu was... was young, and brave, and foolish. And he died."

Her hand tightens on the kite-string, squeezing all the color from her ancient skin.

"I screamed again, then. The castle guards were hunting for us, and they heard the second scream and came running. When the tsuru saw them it transformed into a bird, and it flew away." She feels her chest tighten again, and closes her eyes. "So long ago. I had almost forgotten... but now it seems... like yesterday."

She opens her eyes one last time, and through the swift-whirling darkness she sees the kite high overhead, soaring free in the spring winds.

The kite-string parts with a snap.

Air in the Natural World

The world is wind, immaterial and ever-changing.

—Isawa Uona, Master of Air

The Element of Air is characterized by two fundamental characteristics: it is dynamic and it is pervasive. Being dynamic means it is almost constantly in motion; when it is not, it becomes sullen, stagnant, perhaps even inimical to life. Being pervasive means Air encompasses all things and acts as the medium of connection between them. Only in those places specifically barred to it, such as deep beneath the water or within the depths of the earth, is Air not present. Even then, drain a body of water or dig a hole into the ground and Air immediately fills it. These dynamic and pervasive properties of Air are vital, because Air itself is vital; life is not possible without it.

As previous sections of this book have shown, Air is fundamental to certain aspects of war and magic in Rokugan, and is intimately tied to important components of the Empire's daily life, such as courts, politics, and the human interactions that are the basis of those politics. However, Air as an Element is important to other facets of Rokugan, including its land, its people, their lives, and their beliefs.

While Air as an element has a wide range of philosophical, social, cultural, and mystical implications to the Rokugani, the mundane aspects of Air are in some ways just as important, if not more so. As noted, Air is pervasive and dynamic, and nowhere is this more evident on a day-to-day basis than in the natural world.

Air as the 'Breath of Life'

A man has fallen in water and is drowning. Another, exploring a deep cave, has descended into a low place where he finds his torch won't remain lit and now is gasping and clutching at his throat. A third, sealed into a stone



chamber by vengeful enemies, is finding each breath less wholesome and fulfilling than the last. What each of these men has in common is that he is facing a sudden and potentially fatal lack of Air.

It is clear to Rokugani practitioners of medicine that Air is a vital Element for living things, perhaps the single most important Element. Water is also vital, but while a man can live many hours or even a few days without Water, a man can live only minutes without a supply of fresh Air. While the Rokugani do not fully understand what mechanism actually causes unconsciousness and eventual death as a result of a lack of Air, it is clear to them that the balance of vital Air within a living creature is essential for the maintenance of life.

Page 83 of the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook notes under the section on "Drowning" that a character can hold his breath for a number of minutes equal to his Stamina. After this, he begins drowning, taking 2k2 Wounds per Round. The same duration and damage can also be used for any other situation in which a character is deprived of Air and cannot resolve the problem by some means, whether mundane or magical. Such situations could include:

Being in a place containing a non-breathable atmosphere. Note that many underground excavations, caves, and similar places are quite dangerous because they can accumulate non-breathable gases over time. This is particularly true in low spots, as many of these gases are heavier than air. What makes this especially hazardous is that such gases are often invisible and odorless, announcing their presence only when breathing becomes difficult. Fortunately, there are ways to test for the presence of such gases; fires such as lanterns and torches will gutter and die, and some animals will succumb when exposed to much lower concentrations than are dangerous to humans. Rokugani miners will often bring a small caged bird into their mines with them, knowing that they will succumb to bad air first and thus give warning of danger. (Note that some gases are not merely unbreathable but also toxic, poisonous, or corrosive; such substances may have more dire effects than simply denying breathable air.)

Being sealed into an airtight space after the breathable air has run out. There are many factors that affect how long it takes the air in a sealed space to be used up, but for a rough guide, the GM can assume that the air in a typical large Rokugani room (roughly 12 feet by 12 feet and 8 feet high) will last one person for two and a half days while resting, or about six hours while exercising hard (such as attempting to break down walls or digging). After that time the breathable Air has been used up and the mechanical effects of Drowning begin.

Being in a smoke-filled space. While similar to being in a space filled with a non-breathable atmosphere, this situation has some significant differences. Smoke is visually obvious, unlike hidden gases, and it normally rises, so remaining low to the ground can obviate its negative effects. Otherwise, treat smoke inhalation as similar to the mechanical effects of Drowning.

Being in a location where the air is thin or absent. While exposure to true vacuum is not something that can happen in Rokugan's cosmology, the effects of magic could result in a character finding himself in an essentially airless space, or a character might find himself atop an extremely high mountain where the air is very thin. If the conditions are truly approaching a vacuum, treat this similarly to drowning, but reduce the time the character is able to hold his breath to one-half his Stamina, rounded down—it is much more difficult to hold air in one's lungs in areas of very low or no air pressure. Likewise the Wounds per Round should also be increased to 3k3 to reflect the additional damage done by exposure to vacuum conditions. In the much more likely conditions of very low air pressure, such as atop the highest elevations of the Great Wall of the North Mountains, there is no immediate danger of Drowning effects but all of the character's Traits should be reduced by 1 Rank (to a minimum of 1) to reflect the debilitating physical and mental effects of the thin Air. However, after a number of hours at this altitude equal to the character's base Stamina, he begins suffering 1k1 Wounds per hour.

Air as the Agent of Weather

The pervasive and dynamic nature of Air is nowhere more evident or more important than in its role as the primary agent of the weather that affects Rokugan and the climate defined by that weather.

As noted in Chapter One of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*, Rokugan is a predominantly temperate land, with only a few tropical areas in the extreme south

and the Mantis Isles. Away from its coastal regions, it has a typical "continental" climate, with hot summers and equally cold winters. Much of this climate is controlled by the day-to-day movement of Air above the Empire.

In the interior plains regions that lie both north and south of the Seikitsu Mountains, during the summer the main movement of Air is from the ocean to inland. This is because the land heats up more quickly than the water, causing Air over the interior to rise and resulting in onshore winds from the ocean. Rokugani scholars who have observed this phenomenon speculate that the kami of Air are repelled by the greater concentration and activity of Fire and Earth kami in the land, and so rise to escape them. New Air kami are drawn in to replace them, as are Water kami from the ocean. This warm moist Air meets and then rises over the Seikitsu Mountains. The Water kami, unwilling to be drawn so far away from their origins in the ocean, return to the land as rain. This ensures ample rainfall in the lands of the Unicorn, Lion, Scorpion, and Crane, resulting in those Clans' fertile territories. The Phoenix enjoy a similar effect from the Mountains of Regret to their south. The Dragon lands, by contrast, suffer from a combination of moisture-depleted winds, poor soil, and elevation.

This pattern of rain is the normal climate of Rokugan throughout most of its history. However, should conditions at sea result in a warmer-than-usual ocean, this onshore wind so vital to Rokugani crop production can be interrupted. The Air kami are drawn away from the land, instead of toward it, resulting in poor growing conditions and sometimes famine. The Rokugani believe this usually happens because one or another of the Fortunes has been offended and chooses to change the weather, directing the Air and Water kami away from where they are needed.

During the winter, the movement of air largely reverses as the Air over the land cools more quickly than the oceans. The Air kami are drawn ocean-ward, pulling cold winds off of the interior regions north and west of Rokugan and resulting in the famously icy Rokugani winters. Those Water kami remaining in the atmosphere are rendered sluggish by the cold, their moisture falling as thick snow across the Empire. Unusually cold conditions in the ocean east of Rokugan, however, can result in Air thick with moisture moving ashore, causing particularly harsh snowy winters.

In both seasons, when bad conditions occur the usual response includes prayers and propitiations to the Fortunes. Appeals to Jikoju and Komoku, the Fortunes of the East and West Winds respectively, are particularly common since the people of Rokugan are well aware of the correspondence between the direction of the prevailing winds and the weather that results.

Throughout the year the coastal regions of Rokugan tend to benefit from a somewhat more moderate climate, with damper summers, milder winters, and little snowfall. These effects are of course greatly magnified in the Islands of Silk and Spice, which are surrounded by warm ocean water and maintain a year-round tropical climate. Those of the Mantis who have sailed southward claim this effect increases further in those distant waters, with the ocean becoming progressively warmer and the excited Air and Water kami above it carrying more moisture landward. The Ivory Kingdoms, for example, see extremely intense rainfall during the fall as warm, wet onshore winds bring great quantities of Water to fall upon them.

An important side-effect of this moderate coastal weather is that the frequency of storms is greater in these regions than further inland. Thunderstorms, sometimes quite violent, are common in the summer along the coast of Rokugan, but inland these tend to give way to drenching rain. Spiritual imbalances or the wrath of a Fortune can cause these storms to expand into terrible hurricanes that can strike the coastal regions, resulting in severe damage and loss of life. During the storm season the people of these regions pay special reverence to Fortunes such as Osano-Wo (Fortune of Fire and Thunder), Kaze-no-Kami (Fortune of Wind), Isora (Fortune of the Seashore), and Suitengu (Fortune of the Sea) in hopes of avoiding or mitigating the wrath that beings such terrible storms.

A notable exception to this relatively predictable pattern of weather across Rokugan is the Shadowlands. The corrupt nature of this vile land affects even the patterns of weather. Winds that blow inland from the Sea of Shadows are Tainted by the presence of Air kansen, and they may be bone-dry or thick with dank moisture, searing hot or freezing cold, regardless of the time of year and the behavior of the normal Air kami in the surrounding regions. Because weather in the Shadowlands is governed by these malign spirits, it is virtually impossible to predict its behavior. Crab scouts have reported passing through blazing heat, torrential rain, and driving snow all in a single day, as well as rain with the properties of acid and winds driving razor-sharp shards of ice—not to mention far more unnatural horrors, such as "rains" of devouring beetles.

Environmental Effects of Weather

Extreme weather conditions can have a variety of effects on men and their endeavors. GMs who wish to add mechanical effects for such conditions may use the following section as guidelines:

Heat

Rokugan can get very hot and often quite humid during the summer; extremely hot and humid conditions persist in the Mantis Isles and the southernmost reaches of the Empire throughout spring, summer, and fall. Weather aside, a character may be exposed to high heat for long periods of time for a variety of reasons, such as exploring a volcanic cavern or riding across the Burning Sands. In general, as long as the heat isn't sufficient to inflict immediate physical damage, a character has access to adequate fresh water and rests periodically can travel and work indefinitely in such conditions. However, characters who lack adequate water or who engage in strenuous activity without breaks can face the deleterious effects of heat exhaustion.

In conditions the GM judges to be extremely hot, a character can endure the heat without water for a number of hours equal to his Stamina without ill effect. After that time the character becomes Fatigued. Moreover, for every hour that passes without water in this state, he will suffer 1 Wound; after a number of additional hours equal to his Stamina, this will increase to 1k1 Wounds per hour. He must also roll Stamina at TN 20 each hour or suffer heat stroke, at which point he is considered Stunned until he receives water and rest. Prior to becoming Stunned, one hour of rest and adequate fresh water (or a suitable spell, such as Rejuvenating Vapors) will end all further negative effects, but once the character becomes Stunned he will remain so until he gets abundant water and at least 8 hours of rest. (Spells may be able to mitigate these requirements, at the GM's judgment.)

Cold

In the winter the interior regions of Rokugan can become extremely cold, and higher elevations such as the upper reaches of the Seikitsu Mountains and the Great Wall of the North can remain cold through much or all of the year. Exposure to extreme cold will generally inflict harm more quickly than exposure to extreme heat. As a starting point, characters can resist the effects of cold for a number of hours equal to their Stamina; however, clothing can modify this. Wearing adequately protective clothing, such as layers of thick fabric, can extend this duration by several hours or even indefinitely if the clothing is sufficiently heavy (in general, Rokugani clothing is not heavy enough to provide indefinite protection—the exception being the furs worn by the Unicorn, which other Rokugani regard with distaste). Conversely, a lack of any heavy clothing will drastically reduce the amount of time a character can safely spend in the cold, down to as little as a few minutes (equal to Stamina) in severe winter conditions.

Once the duration is reached, characters take 1k1 Wounds per hour thereafter (1k1 Wounds per minute if they have no heavy clothing and the cold is extreme). Being brought into a warm environment for at least one hour will cause these effects to end, but will not restore lost Wounds, which must be healed as normal. GMs may wish to consider additional long-term effects of cold damage, which could include problems such as losing fingers and toes to frostbite, or facial disfigurement (loss of the tip of the nose or the earlobes, for examples). Some of these effects might produce long-term mechanical problems as well—for instance, losing toes might cause the character to become Lame, damage to the face might result in Disturbing Countenance, or losing fingers might result in penalties to Agility-based rolls.

Wind

Except in extreme cases, such as hurricane-force gales, wind by itself will rarely be more than an irritant to Rokugani characters. However, wind does affect activities such as archery. A GM seeking greater realism may opt to apply a penalty to Kyujutsu Rolls based on the presence of strong wind. As a guideline, consider a modifier of +5 TN for





moderate winds and +10 TN for strong winds; at long rangers (e.g. beyond the "base" range of the bow) these should increase to +10 TN for moderate winds and +15 TN for strong winds. A character with decent skill at archery might be able to adjust for the wind somewhat—as a guideline, consider letting any PC with at least 5 Ranks in Kyujutsu take a Simple Action to judge the wind and reduce the TN penalties 5.

When wind speed reaches extreme power—in excess of 60 miles per hour—it will become a significant obstacle to many activities, including simply moving. The GM may apply greater TN penalties, rule that certain actions are impossible, require PCs to take Complex Actions in order to move, call for Athletics / Strength rolls to avoid getting bowled over, and so forth. Note that siege weapon projectiles are usually not affected by even strong winds due to their great weight and power, and magical effects are of course wholly immune to wind.

Precipitation

Like wind, normal precipitation (rain, snow, hail) will usually be little more than an inconvenience to characters. Intense rain may cause localized flooding, of course, and thus confront the PCs with water obstacles to cross. It may also cause flash flooding in low-lying areas; this can be represented by duplicating the effects of the spell Strike of the Tsunami on page 190 of the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook. Ground saturated with rainwater can also become muddy and difficult to traverse; the GM may reduce the PCs' effective Water Ring for movement to simulate this, or in extreme conditions require Complex Actions to move at all. The same types of penalties should be applied to movement through deep snow.

Rain and snow can both obstruct vision, imposing penalties on ranged attack rolls (+5 to +10 depending on how heavy the precipitation is) and on Perception-based rolls to spot distant persons, detect ambushes, and so forth. Finally, hail can cause direct harm to unprotected characters; assume 1 Wound for average hail and 1k1 Wounds for large hail.

Storms

Storms are among the most intensely severe weather conditions, and can sometimes last for a considerable amount of time as well. During the summer, thunderstorms can result in high winds, intense rain, lightning, and hail; along the coasts, *taifun* (hurricanes) can devastate entire cities. The impact of such extreme storms can be represented by duplicating the effects of the spell Wrath of Kaze-no-Kami found on page 173 of the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook.

Being struck by lightning is extremely rare, enough so that it really is not meaningful to involve a die roll or other randomizing mechanic. This is especially true given that the Rokugani believe that lightning is sent by the Fortunes—especially Osano-Wo, Fortune of Fire and Thunder. A lightning strike should therefore be a momentous event, one full of spiritual significance. Mechanically, it should be represented by the spell Fury of Osano-Wo, found on page 181 of the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook.

During the winter, severe storms usually take the form of blizzards, resulting in high winds, extreme cold, and deep snow. The general effects of these conditions are described earlier, but a blizzard will also result in extremely bad visibility, with the characters often unable to see more than ten feet or so. This renders ranged attacks largely impossible and also makes it very easy to be ambushed, get lost, and so forth.

Fog

The main effect of fog is to reduce visibility. Natural fog occurs normally near large bodies of water when water and air temperature are significantly different, especially early in the morning or in the evening. Fog can also appear due to supernatural effects or the anger of a Fortune. The obscuring effect of fog is somewhat gradational, with a "close" zone in which vision is not obscured significantly, a "middle" zone in which there is an obscuring effect, and a "far" zone in which visibility fails completely. As a simple guideline, the GM should apply a +5 TN penalty to any rolls made in the "middle" zone that involve visibility (such as ranged attacks and Perception-based rolls). In the "far" zone all such actions will be impossible. The usual width of the "near" and "middle" zones will be fifty feet each, but a GM can vary this depending on how thick the fog is supposed to be.

Air as a Tool of Man

Intelligent men seek to understand the world around them, to live within it and adapt themselves to it as necessary. Air, being both pervasive and dynamic, is an obvious component of the world that men have studied and tried to understand since the earliest times, even before Shinsei granted mankind a proper understanding of the Elements. The earlier chapters of this book detail the various martial, magical, philosophical, and political purposes to which Air is put in Rokugan, both as an Element and in a more symbolic sense. This section deals with the use of Air in a more practical and mundane sense, as it is used and understood by ordinary folk in Rokugan.

Sailing

Given its dynamic nature, the most obvious use for Air is for movement. Shugenja and monks both make direct use of the Air kami to enhance their speed, fly through the air, and similar miraculous actions, but Air can also be used for more ordinary movement activity. Since Air is also the medium by which weather occurs in Rokugan, vast masses of it are always moving naturally across both the land and the water. Using wind to move across the rough topography of the land is problematic for ordinary mortals, but wind can be used quite effectively to propel ships at sea.

It isn't clear when sails were first used to move watercraft in Rokugan; basic fishing boats were already in use when the Kami fell to earth. Early sails were quite primitive, simply large pieces of fabric rigged to catch the wind and push a boat along. Over time, more sophisticated sail-rigs were developed, but the develop-

GM's Toolbox: Competitive Sailing

Some adventures may result in situations where the GM must determine if one ship can out-sail another. In some cases this can be resolved simply with an opposed Sailing / Intelligence roll by each ship's captain. However, if the GM wishes to take a more in-depth approach, the following option may be used.

In a competition between two (or more) ships, each ships starts with a basic value of 10. This is modified by the following factors:

The experience of the crew: +2 for a predominantly Mantis crew or one that is otherwise highly skilled, +1 for one that is predominantly Crab, Crane, or otherwise reasonably experience, 0 for all others.

The skill of the ship's captain: pilot + his Sailing Skill Rank.

Ship size/capability: -1 for a normal kobune, -2 for a fishing boat, +1 for a Mantis kobune, +2 for a Mantis deep-sea vessel.

Cargo weight: -1 for a light load, -2 for a moderate load, -3 (or higher) for heavier loads.

Damage to the ship from battle or lack of maintenance: -1 for light, -2 for moderate, -3 or higher for more severe.

Use of magic, such as spells or nemuranai: anywhere from +1 to +3 for assistance, or –1 to –3 for opposition, depending on the power of the spells involved.

GMs can apply additional modifiers as needed for unusual circumstances or special conditions (such as a ship of exceptional quality or a character inspiring the crew with a dramatic speech). Once the final modified total for each ship is determined, the values can be compared directly, with the ship with the highest total managing to out-sail the others. For a longer or more dramatic chase, the GM can run the calculation multiple times, changing the modifiers as the characters take action to improve their ship's performance or to disrupt their opponents. If the GM wishes to add some randomness to the competition, a die roll can be added to each ship's total; this method can also be used if the final result is a tie.



ment of such techniques was sharply curtailed by the Emperor's proclamation that the kobune represented the perfect form of ship. Kobune use large rectangular sails with a rigid construction; usually a ship will have only a single mast with one large sail, although some larger vessels have two or even three masts. The sail can only be turned slightly, so maneuverability by wind-power is limited and there is no capacity to sail "into the wind" as some gaijin vessels are rumored to do. This is why all Rokugani vessels maintain large banks of oars and large crews to use them, relying on those oars whenever the wind is weak or unfavorable.

Over the centuries, the Mantis Clan has experimented with developing vessels which employ more sophisticated designs while maintaining the outward general appearance of the kobune design. Some Mantis vessels use a style of propulsion called fore-and-aft rigging; this style, in which sails are placed parallel to the long axis of the ship's hull and are able to be swung back and forth at need, is quite popular among gaijin peoples—the ships of the Ivory Kingdoms favor this approach, and a modified form of it was also used by the Thrane and Merenae ships which visited Rokugan in the fifth century. Fore-and-aft rigged ships are more maneuverable than normal kobune and are also capable of sailing "into the wind," angling the sails to catch the wind and drive the ship forward at an angle to the prevailing winds. The large deep-ocean traveling Mantis ships that visit the Ivory Kingdoms also sometimes employ a style of rigging known as "square rigging" in which the sails are placed perpendicular to the axis of the ship so as to catch the greatest amount of wind—this is essentially a more sophisticated version of the kobune sail system, but designed to better catch the wind.

Of course, the Mantis are always careful to not display the full capabilities of their ships where more traditional Rokugani can see them, lest they be accused of violating the Emperor's decree.

Smelting and Forging

Another area of endeavor for which Air is an important component is metal-working. Virtually all Rokugani understand that fire requires air to burn; scholars point to an obvious interdependence between the kami of Fire and Air. However, early in the Empire's history, it became apparent that left to their own devices, the Fire and Air kami would only interact so much, meaning that a simple fire could only get so hot. While this resulted in temperatures sufficient to cause the Earth kami to release their grip on metals such as copper, tin, gold, and silver, releasing them from their natural ores, they were insufficient to allow the smelting of iron, which is the base metal for the best weapons and tools.

Fortunately, it was no secret that the Air kami could readily be made to excite those of Fire into producing hotter flames, such as by blowing on smoldering kindling—that is, forcing more Air kami to interact with the Fire. Rokugani artisans simply scaled this phenomenon up, using pumps or bellows to force air into a fire and cause it to burn hotter. This resulted in temperatures hot enough to extract iron from its ore, further refine it into steel and allow the steel to be worked into fine blades and other



implements. Some Rokugani craftsmen—most notably, the Kaiu of the Crab, and the smiths of the Tsi family—have refined this process to a great degree; by using carefully-constructed furnaces and forges, specific types of wood, or even certain varieties of flammable rock, as well as complex systems of pumps delivering continuous streams of air, they have been able to craft steel of surpassing strength, hardness, and flexibility.

From a game mechanics point of view, a GM can assume that only craftsmen with access to properly ventilated forges—forges equipped with bellows, air pumps, and so forth—are able to smelt, refine and work iron and steel. This level of work is considered the "baseline" for crafting weapons, armor, and other gear at the level of quality represented by their depiction in the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook. Without using a system of forced air to enhance a fire, it is not possible to smelt iron, let alone create or work steel.

Weapons and tools can be made using only a properly banked fire, but they can only be made from softer metals such as bronze (an alloy of copper and tin). Such weapons and tools are of inferior quality, probably suffering a –1k1 penalty to their damage rolls (if any), and if the crafter was of inferior skill (had less than 5 Ranks in the appropriate Craft skill, and is not trained in the Kaiu or Tsi schools) the item may break when used hard. The GM may rule that such an item will snap if the wielder rolls two or more 1's on the Skill Roll to utilize it. If the item is a weapon, it should also break on any successful Disarm maneuver by an opponent who is using a weapon of superior quality or material.

At the GM's discretion, more exotic materials such as crystal, obsidian, and jade may require even more specialized arrangements, such as forges that are designed and magically enhanced to work specifically with these substances.

Kites

In Rokugan, kites are built and flown by members of every social class. However, among the samurai, the construction and flying of kites is elevated to an art-form, like many other seemingly mundane activities. Kites can range from simple devices of two cross-ribs, a span of rice paper or silk, and a fabric tail, all the way up to elaborate constructions capable of quick, complex maneuvers in even the slightest breeze. All kites intended for display and performance are lavishly decorated; indeed, kites are one of the few areas of Rokugani art in which understatement and subtlety are spurned in favor of vibrant colors and showy patterns. This is because kites will normally be viewed from a great distance, where intricate and clever details will be invisible.

Kite Flying and Kite Fighting

Simply flying a kite should not require a Skill roll—it is, after all, something done by children. To fly a kite in a performance—that is, executing complex and exciting aerial maneuvers, usually for an audience—the recommended Skill would be Perform: Kite Flying or Games: Kite Flying, using the Reflexes Trait in either case. Much as with other performance-oriented Skills, the kite-flyer may be able to earn small amounts of Glory for a successful performance to an audience.

While the Rokugani appreciate fine art, they are by nature a fundamentally martial people, and many of them enjoy combative displays and competitions even more than those of other type. Kite Fighting developed as a popular game almost immediately after the first kites took to the air in Rokugan's early centuries. Fighting kites are normally designed specifically for the sport, and seek to

Mechanical Options: Kite Making

Kite Making is normally represented as a Sub-Skill of the Craft Macro-Skill, although decorative display kites could use it as an Artisan Sub-Skill instead. Regardless, kite-making is considered a respectable activity for samurai and is often taught to children of the samurai caste by their parents.

For simplicity, kites can be assigned to one of three categories: simple, complex, or elaborate. Simple kites are just as they sound, simple designs intended for entertainment and little else. They have the essential components to catch the wind and remain aloft, but little else. Complex kites are more involved, and often use box or tube shapes or multiple tails, and sometimes multiple strings as well. They tend to either be extremely sturdy and stable, or else deliberately cultivate a specific instability to enhance their maneuverability. Elaborate kites add independently moving surfaces that let them change their shape, and also integrate intricate ornamentation; they are beautiful, functional, and capable of excellent performance. Complex and elaborate kites are both very difficult to fly.

GMs using the optional Crafting rules in the L5R 4th Edition Core rulebook, kites are considered to be in the "Other" category. Simple kites have a value of 1-3 zeni, complex kites have a value of 1-2 bu, and elaborate kites are anywhere from 5 bu to a full 1 koku.

GMs who prefer a simpler system can simply have their players roll Artisan: Kite Making / Intelligence or Craft: Kite Making / Intelligence against a TN of 10 for a simple kite, 20 for a complex kite, or 30 for an elaborate kite. Kite crafters may call Raises to create kites of particular excellence, with bonuses to their performance (see "Kite Flying and Kite Fighting" for details of how this could be useful). Generally, it takes half a day to make a simple kite, two days to make a complex kite, and anywhere from three days to a week to make an elaborate kite.

combine sturdiness, maneuverability, and the ability to inflict damage; finding the right balance between these qualities challenges even the most skilled kite maker. They are also extremely difficult to fly. In game terms, a fighting kite is always an elaborate kite as defined in the "Kite Making" sidebar.

A kite-fighting competition begins with all competitors launching their kites. Due to the complexity of fighting kites, launching requires a roll of Games: Kite Flying / Reflexes against TN 20. A competitor who fails this roll is immediately out of the competition, since his kite is unable to join the others on their aerial "battlefield," and may lose a point of Glory at the GM's option. The remaining competitors now begin their battle. The GM may choose to resolve this as a simple Contested Roll of Games: Kite Flying / Reflexes, but if more detail is desired, the following system may be used:

Each competitor rolls Initiative.

In Initiative order, each competitor may perform one of two Actions: Attack or Avoid. If he chooses Attack, he selects another competitor, who is the Defender. Attacker and Defender make a Contested Roll of Games: Kite Flying / Reflexes. If the winner's roll exceeds the loser's by 5 or more, the loser takes 1 point of damage to his kite. If the difference between the rolls is less than 5, both competitors take 1 point of damage to their kite. Raises may be called; each such successful Raise inflicts an additional 1 point of damage on the target kite. Normally, battle kites can take 3 points of damage, after which they crash and their owner is eliminated from the competition. A GM and players wishing a more protracted contest may increase this damage amount.

If a player chooses to Avoid as his action, he initiates no attack that turn. The next time he is attacked, he receives a +5 bonus to his Contested Games: Kite Flying / Reflexes Roll. This bonus may only be applied once and is lost if it is not used by the player's next turn. Moreover, contestants are expected to be judicious in their use of Avoidance and to press home their attacks aggressively, so only two Avoid maneuvers are allowed per competition. If a contestant takes a third Avoid Action during a competition, he is immediately eliminated.

A kite of high quality may gain bonus effects on these Actions at the discretion of the GM. For example, an especially maneuverable kite might award a +1k0 bonus on the Contested Rolls, and an especially resilient kite might be able to take an extra point of damage.

Normally, the winner of the competition is the "last kite flying." Sometimes, a particular competition will place a limit on the number of rounds of battle—three is a popular choice—with the winner determined by who has the least damage to their kite, or who made the fewest attempts to avoid their opponents.

The winner of a kite battle will earn a modest Glory reward, typically 1 or 2 points, although a highly prominent competition (such as one held in a major settlement like Kyuden Doji) might earn as many as 3 points.

Kite battles are not only popular performance games at court, they are popular events among those inclined to gamble. Discreet wagers are often placed on the outcome of fights. Some kite-fighters become famous and attract devoted followings whose members will bet quite heavily on their wins.



Paper Constructs

The general artistic activity of paper constructs includes any crafting of paper intended to make use of the motions of air to create movement—banners and streamers that flutter, pinwheels that spin, paper spirals that rotate, and so forth. This is not to be confused with the art of origami, in which paper is folded into static sculptures. The art of paper constructs allows for paper to be not just folded, but also cut, punched, and glued, as well as painted and written upon. The types of paper constructs that can be made are limited only by the makers' imaginations, but the most common types are banners, streamers, pinwheels, and spirals. A skilled artisan can decorate an entire festival with these bright and lively devices, creating a display that is as much about movement as it is color or static aesthetic appeal. Indeed, the combination of motion among the various constructs is often a key part of the artistry.

Music: The Voice of the Air

A complete discussion of music in Rokugan could, itself, fill an entire chapter of a book. Suffice to say that music has a clear association with the Element of Air, and its sheer complexity can be seen in the number of different Skills which it involves: Craft (the construction of instruments), Artisan (composition of musical pieces), Perform (the execution of those pieces before an audience), and even Acting (to play music that accompanies theatrical performances). In general, the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook provides sufficient game mechanical information to allow a player to have his character perform music or craft musical instruments, although some additional information is presented in the sidebar in this section.

Types of Musical Instruments

Musical instruments in Rokugan can be divided into three broad categories: string, wind, and percussion. The lists below are not exhaustive, but they do cover the most common types of instruments in each of these categories. While most of these instruments are plain and unadorned, some craftsmen will embellish them with intricate patterns of lacquer or inlay of precious materials. Such elaborate instruments are valuable works of art in their own right. Many musical instruments are valuable family heirlooms, much like weapons or armor, which are handed down from generation to generation with great reverence and received with much honor.

Mechanical Options: Paper Constructs

If a player wishes to create a character who focuses on paper constructs (rather than origami), the GM may opt to introduce Paper Constructs as a new Sub-Skill of the Artisan Macro-Skill. Artisan Schools which target Artisan Skills may apply their Techniques to Paper Constructs just as they do to other Artisan Sub-Skills.

The Paper Constructs skill is found among all clans, but is most common among the Asahina of the Crane. A skilled Paper Constructs artisan is highly sought-after for many events, particularly in the courts of the Crane. An artisan who prepares an especially captivating display should be rewarded with a point or two of Glory, though as always the GM should be wary of allowing this reward too often lest players artificially inflate their Glory Rank with endless displays of artistry. Besides, a particular court is unlikely to respond favorably to an artisan's paper constructs display more than once or twice before it becomes "old" and they begin looking for the next big artistic sensation.

As in the case of Falconry later in this chapter, a good baseline is that PCs should not be able to do this more than once a month, and should not be able to gain more Glory from Paper Constructs once their Glory Rank reaches 6 or higher.

Stringed Instruments

Biwa

The biwa is a pear-shaped lute, most commonly with four strings, although some variants may have five. While it may be played alone, it often accompanies narrative storytelling, which relies on a nasal voice with a widely varying pitch. The biwa is one of the most common of Rokugani instruments, and is said to be the favored instrument of Benten, the Fortune of Romantic Love.

Ichigenkin

The ichigenkin is a zither, a stringed instrument in which the strings do not extend beyond the sound-box (a guitar without a neck is a good approximation). The ichigenkin has only a single string of silk; it is played with a pluck on the right hand and a slide on the left. It is capable of a limited range of tones, with the pitch being varied only by depressing the single string.

Junanagen and Koto

The junanagen is 17-stringed zither that is played with plucks attached to all of the player's fingers, while the koto is a smaller, earlier 13-stringed version of the same instrument. They are capable of a remarkable range of sound, although the junanagen tends to favor a more bass sound than the koto.

Shamisen

The shamisen is a banjo-like lute with three strings. It is popular in pleasure districts where geisha are common, as well as in kabuki theater performances, where its distinctive twanging rhythms are well-known. The shamisen is usually made from sandalwood and has strings made from twisted silk, which are plucked or struck with a tortoiseshell pick. It is in some ways the most popular stringed instrument in Rokugan, but due to its association with geisha and theater it is less likely to be used by samurai than the biwa.



Wind Instruments

Hocchiku and Shakuhachi

These are vertical bamboo flutes, held in manner similar to a Western clarinet, oriented directly away from the player's face. The shakuhachi is the more refined and sophisticated of the two, being tuned to standard musical scales and amenable to being played with other instruments. The more primitive hocchiku, which cannot be tuned to standard scales, is generally played alone.

Nohkan

A transverse (that is, held oriented across the player's face) flute, made from bamboo, and used primarily as a musical accompaniment for noh theater.

Ryuteki, Kagurabue, and Komabue

These are transverse bamboo flutes that are generally used together for *gagaku*, the traditional background music of a formal court. The komabue has the highest pitch, while the kagurabue has the lowest. The mid-tone ryuteki, together with the hichikiri flute (below), provides the melody for gagaku. The varied but harmonic sound of this musical ensemble is said to represent both the Celestial Dragons above and the people of Ningen-do, the mortal realm, below. In most courts this music is so ubiquitous that it goes almost unnoticed... unless it stops.

Hichiriki

The hichiriki is a double-reed flute. It is difficult to play, but masters of the hichikiri are revered, as it is considered a sacred instrument. It is used in virtually all forms of music aside from poetry recitation. Its haunting tones are often heard played at weddings, funerals, and other events with a notable spiritual aspect.

Shinobue and Nohkan

The shinobue and nohkan are both transverse bamboo flutes of simple design that produce high-pitched tones. The shinobue is the less sophisticated of the two, and is commonly used among heimin for the playing of folk music. The nohkan, a somewhat more sophisticated instrument, is used alongside the nohkan to accompany noh theater performances.

Tsuchibue

The tsuchibue is a globular flute made from clay, similar to an ocarina. It is an unconventional instrument, difficult to play, with a complex textured sound. True masters of the tsuchibue are rare.

Percussion Instruments

Kakko

The kakko is a small double-headed drum used in gagaku along with the flute ensemble described above. It is usually mounted on its side and both heads are played simultaneously with sticks called bachi.

Taiko

Taiko are among the better-known types of drums in Rokugan. Though they are similar in design to kakko, they are larger and use a different system for tensioning the head membrane. Most notably, taiko have head membranes that are stretched extremely taut, resulting in sharp high-pitched drumming sounds. Taiko come in many shapes and sizes, ranging from the small hand-held *shako* to the great *odaiko*, a massive drum with a diameter up to twice the height of a man. Such massive odaiko drums are rare and are usually permanently mounted in the great temples of Rokugan, such as those in Toshi Ranbo, or the Temple of Osano-Wo adjacent to the Shinomen Mori on the western edge of the Scorpion lands.

Otsuzumi, Tsuzumi, and *Ikko*

These are double-headed hourglass-shaped drums of varying size and tone. Many of them are tunable, meaning their pitch can be changed during a performance, resulting in a surprisingly rich range of sound from such deceptively simple instruments.

Playing Instruments

The playing of musical instruments of any type is of course a Sub-Skill of the Perform Macro-Skill. Much as with Crafting, it is recommended that for greater realism the GM enforce a division into three different Skills based on the three categories of musical instruments (Wind Instrument, Percussion Instrument, and Stringed Instrument), with Emphases based on specific instruments.

GMs who wish to add greater depth to the depiction of musical performances may opt to factor in elements like fame, instrument quality, and audience preference rather than a simple Perform / Awareness roll.

A famous performer can expect a stronger response from most audiences; the GM may represent this by letting the PC add his Glory Rank (or perhaps Glory x 2 for a more decisive impact) to the total of the roll. However, if the PC presents a bad performance (e.g. fails to hit his TN with his Perform roll), the audience will be correspondingly more disappointed; when the famous fall, they do so from greater heights. A suggestion is for the performer to lose a number of additional Glory Points equal to his Glory Rank if he fails the Perform Roll.

Using a high-quality instrument may convey a bonus, at the GM's discretion. A well-made instrument (such as one which benefitted from Raises during its construction) may confer a bonus to the total of the roll of up to +5, potentially even more if the instrument is truly of magnificent quality.

A performer who offers a style of music that fits the tastes of the audience may receive a bonus as well, up to +5 on the total of the roll. However, the performer will have to find out the audience's preferences ahead of time in order to benefit from this effect. Also, offering a performance that goes against the audience's tastes (whether on purpose or by accident) will result in a corresponding penalty to the performer's roll, as determined by the GM.

If an instrument is played as part of an ensemble or a larger performance, such as a nohkan flute player providing background music for the performance of a noh

Crafting Musical Instruments

The construction of musical instruments is a highly refined art form. For simplicity a GM may stipulate that Craft: Musical Instrument is sufficient to make any musical instrument. However, the construction of a taiko drum is very different from the construction of a shakuhachi flute. A GM who wishes more realism can define Craft: Wind Instrument, Craft: Stringed Instrument, and Craft: Percussion Instrument as separate Skills, with specific types of the various instruments being Emphases of each such Sub-Skill. In any case, it is suggested that any Skill used to construct musical instruments be considered a High Skill as well as a Merchant Skill. Alternatively, the GM may also allow the creation of musical instruments to be an Artisan Sub-Skill as well.

If the optional Crafting rules are in use, musical instruments are also considered to be under the "Other" category for materials, with a value ranging from 1 to 5 bu. Exceptionally high-quality instruments will be significantly more expensive, up to ten times that cost. It is recommended that an instrument maker should also have at least 1 Rank in the appropriate Perform Skill associated with that instrument in order to be able to make it properly.

If the GM wishes to use a simpler mechanic, he can simply have the player roll either Craft: (Instrument Category) / Intelligence Roll or Artisan: (Instrument Category) / Intelligence against a TN of 15 for a normal instrument or 25 for an instrument of exceptional instrument. The instrument maker may call Raises to attempt to further improve the quality of the instrument.

Regardless of which rules option is used, the time required to construct an instrument will be lengthy; a recommended estimate would be one week to make a normal quality instrument and two weeks to make an exceptional quality instrument. If the PC is making Raises to achieve greater quality or artistic embellishment, the time required could be even longer at the GM's discretion.



theatre troupe, the GM should use the second type of Co-operative Skill Roll described on page 81 of the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook. (In brief: each performer makes a normal Skill Roll for his instrument, with each receiving a bonus equal to the highest Rank in the Perform Skill among all the performers.)

Creatures and Otherworldly Beings of Air

Each of the Five Elements has a variety of beings, both mundane and supernatural, associated with it. With respect to Air, the premier being is of course the Elemental Dragon of Air. In a decreasing hierarchy beneath the Air Dragon, there are a variety of Fortunes, various spirit creatures, and progressively lesser beings. The most significant of these entities are discussed here.

Fortunes Associated with Air

Isora, Fortune of the Seashore

Isora represents the interface between the land and the sea, and is the object of appeals from those who live and work in this dynamic environment. Wind drives the action of waves that erode the land and threaten ships that sail close in-shore; in more extreme instances, the storm-surge from hurricanes can result in widespread flooding, property damage, and loss of life.

Jikoju, Komoku, Tamon, and Zocho, the Fortunes of the Four Winds

Each of the four winds associated with a cardinal direction has a corresponding Fortune—Jikoju for the East Wind, Komoku for the West Wind, Tamon for the North Wind and Zocho for the South Wind. These respective Fortunes each have a character similar to their associated wind. Jikoju, evocative of the summer winds that bring warm weather, rain, and fertility to the Rokugani plains, is generally benevolent and favored among farmers. Komoku, whose wind blows from the unknown wastes of the west, is enigmatic and stand-offish. Tamon is likewise forbidding and dour, associated with the north wind that blows from the rocky heights of the Great Wall of the North. Zocho of the south wind is seen with the greatest ambivalence among Rokugani; while the south wind may bring mild weather and light rains to the lands of the Phoenix and Crane, it also brings oppressive heat, especially to the Mantis islands. The Crab and to a lesser extent the Scorpion view Zocho with suspicion and even distrust, because strong winds from the south sometimes bring the evil stink of the Shadowlands.

Jotei, Fortune of Morning Dew

While the dew of morning is clearly a phenomenon of Water, the Rokugani understand that strong night winds will inhibit its accumulation. Since dew can be an important source of water for plants during dry periods, those who appeal to Jotei for an abundance of dew do so mindful of the need for still air overnight, and will usually entreat Jotei to intervene with Kaze-no-kami and the Fortunes of the Four Winds to convince them to remain calm.

Kaze-no-kami, Fortune of Wind

The prominent role of Kaze-no-kami with regard to the Element of Air is readily apparent from his name. The ancient and primal Fortune of Wind plays a central role in Rokugani belief, given his obvious involvement in both farming and maritime endeavors. As a result, it is common for the people of Rokugan to celebrate the Kaze Matsuri (Wind Festival) during the first three days of the Month of the Monkey, imploring Kaze-no-Kami and the other Wind Fortunes to not damage crops and property and allow for a bountiful autumn harvest.

Natsu-Togumara, Fortune of Travel and Experience

While Natsu-Togumara encompasses much that is outside the specific province of Air, he is often called upon for his blessing and protection by those who are passengers on ships. Such individuals will entreat Natsu-Togumara for calm seas and smooth passage. Those whose lives are spent at sea, however, are more likely to send their prayers to the Water-oriented Suitengu, Fortune of the Sea.

Osano-Wo, Fortune of Fire and Thunder

The tempestuous Osano-Wo is closely associated with storms and their associated phenomena; thunder, lightning, strong rains and hail, and storm winds. It is common for Rokugani to seek deliverance from major storms and hurricanes by praying to this Fortune. This is particularly true among the Crab and the Mantis, both of whom can claim a connection of blood lineage back to Osano-Wo's mortal life.

Suitengu, Fortune of the Sea

Again, Suitengu is only peripherally associated with the Element of Air. However, this powerful Fortune is frequently called upon for protection by those caught in storms at sea, as well as those who face the imminent threat of drowning.



Other Supernatural Beings Associated with Air

Ryu

Ryu are the dragon spirits who originate from Tengoku, and are described in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*, page 253-4. While their actions and motivations while in the mortal realm are generally inscrutable, it is believed they serve as emissaries of the Elemental Dragons. Much like the Elemental Dragons they resemble, Ryu are noble and powerful creatures. All of them can fly, undulating through the air without wings, and those Ryu associated with the Dragon of Air are also said to be able to turn as invisible and insubstantial as the Element with which their Celestial lord is associated.

Kenku

Kenku are one of the Five Races that originally inhabited the world before humanity ever came into being. Very few exist in contemporary Rokugan, although it is believed there are more inhabiting Sakkaku, the Realm of Tricksters. Kenku are described in detail in Chapter 9 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*. As a race of intelligent bird-like creatures, the Kenku have a strong association with the Element of Air, an association made even closer by their talent of shapeshifting and illusion and their affinity for the art of the duel. In fact, Rokugani scholars believe each of the Five Ancient Races was associated with a different Element—the Kenku with the Element of Air, the Ningyo with Water, the Trolls with Fire, the Zokujin with Earth, and the Kitsu with Void.

Nue

Nue are birdlike spirits which originate from Chikushudo. They rarely leave that realm, but they have known to cross into Ningen-do, either deliberately or accidentally, when the barriers between the realms are weakened by excessive use of magic. They normally appear as large, vibrantly-colored birds, but often have human-like faces and features. Like all spirits from Chikushudo, Nue are neither good nor evil; rather, they have the motivations of beasts, albeit supported by cunning intelligence which can make them extremely dangerous. Nue will normally attack prey they believe they can defeat, usually employing flight to strike by surprise (such as diving out of the sun). If there are several, they will usually work together to confuse and

weaken prey through lightning-fast aerial attacks, before closing in to kill and devour. Mechanics for Nue are presented in the Appendix of this book.

Koumori

Koumori are bat-spirits that originate in Chikushudo but spend much of their time in Meido, the Realm of the Waiting Dead. They are secretive spirits, frequently using shapeshifting magic to remain unnoticed as they move about among humans in Ningen-do. They perform an important service for the dead, guiding their souls to their proper place in the afterlife. In their natural form, they are great bats, and have all of the flying acumen of those creatures, including an uncanny ability to navigate through the darkest places. Koumori are described in more detail in Chapter 12 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*.

Tsuru

Tsuru are shapeshifting crane-spirits that dwell in Chikushudo. They are remarkably beautiful and elegant creatures, but are also vain and prideful, sometimes to the point of arrogance. When insulted by beings they consider inferior—which is essentially all mortals—they are quick to take offence and offer a challenge. This is not to be taken lightly as tsuru are usually masters of the iaijutsu art. See the Appendix for a mechanical description of a Tsuru.

Wyrms

The origins of the monstrous creatures known are wyrms are uncertain. Some Rokugani believe they are ryu spirits that have been trapped in the mortal realm and corrupted by the strange and alien sorceries of the Yobanjin, the savage gaijin tribes that inhabit the mountains and steppes north of Rokugan. However, it is also possible the wyrms are a native species of the northern mountain ranges, and that tales of enslavement of noble ryu by barbaric Yobanjin magic are merely just that—tales intended to confound the Rokugani. This is supported by the fact that many wyrms possess wings. In any case, wyrms are most often used by Yobanjin chieftains as flying mounts to carry them into battle. They are rarely seen outside the Great Wall of the North mountains. Mechanics for Wyrms are presented in the Appendix.

Oni

Fortunately for Rokugan, few of the monstrous and demonic oni that infest the Shadowlands are associated with the Element of Air. The Crab have identified only two oni that seem consistently capable of flight—the reptilian, bestial Nairu no Oni, and the smaller and more humanoid Sanru no Oni. While neither is numerous, both of these creatures are specially despised by the Crab because they are capable of flying over defenses, attacking the tops of watchtowers, and even crossing the Carpenter Wall itself. Crab archers and Kuni shugenja are trained to remain constantly vigilant for either of these creatures.

Ashura

The ashura are described in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Imperial Histories*, page 306. They are creatures of nightmare, found within the false realm created within Yume-do by the dreams of Fu Leng. They never walk upon the ground, instead flying through the air. Their moth-like wings that do not appear large enough to bear their weight, and it appears that they are so infused with dark kansen—especially kansen of Air—that the very earth repels them. Thankfully, these creatures appear in meaningful numbers only within the Fallen Kami's dream; however, in a few instances they have managed to cross over into the "real" Rokugan, most notably after Fu Leng's failed assault on Tengoku in the twelfth century.

Elemental Terrors of Air

The Greater and Lesser Elemental Terrors were created by the Dark Oracles in the early twelfth Century. The Terrors are powerful Elemental spirits infused with the Taint of Jigoku and given physical form by the will of the Dark Oracles; they normally dwell in the heart of a dead volcano near the Festering Pit of Fu Leng, deep in the Shadowlands, but sometimes come forth to threaten the Empire. Unlike lesser Elemental spirits, the Terrors are cunning and intelligent. They can be summoned (but not controlled) by those willing to invoke the required *maho* rituals; at best, they can be bargained with, or perhaps manipulated or coerced if the summoner is especially brave or foolhardy. Kaze no Oni, the Greater Elemental Terror of Air, resembles a huge dead bird whose lower body diffuses into thick vapor that does not touch the ground. Kaze no Oni is not inherently powerful, but is capable of absorbing Elemental magic used in its vicinity, then directing it back at targets of choice. This ability, together with its ruthless cunning and a penchant for lurking near the periphery of a battle, makes it an extremely subtle and dangerous opponent. The Lesser Elemental Terror of Air, Yosuchi no Oni, is even more indirect in its methods. A Yosuchi no Oni has no fixed form, appearing as a billowing cloud of vapor or even just a gusty wind. Through a combination of guile and corrupted magic, these entities sow dissension and lust for conflict among their opponents, then feed upon the hatred and pain that results.

Mundane Creatures of Air

There are a wide variety of flying animals in Rokugan, including countless species of birds and insects. However, from a Rokugani perspective, the most important varieties are those which have domestic uses.

Among Rokugani nobility, falconry—a generic term for the training and use of birds, normally raptors, to hunt prey and perform aerial displays and tricks—is a popular sport and entertainment. The birds used for falconry are broadly classified into three categories: broadwings, which include golden eagles; longwings, which include peregrine falcons; and shortwings, which include goshawks and kestrels. Some falconers also use owls, and a

few even use osprey to hunt fish rather than land prey. Kestrels are normally used by beginners, while falcons, eagles, and more unusual types like owls and osprey are considered more "advanced" birds.

In game terms, a kestrel can be trained for personal use at Rank 1 in the Animal Handling Skill, while other species of bird can be trained for personal use at Rank 2. The same birds can be trained for use by others at Skill Ranks 3 and 4 respectively. Training of any type of bird to hunt requires two weeks of intensive effort, after which a Skill Roll of Animal Handling (Falconry) / Awareness is made at TN 15. Success means the bird will hunt and return on command. Failure means the training must be repeated for another two weeks before another attempt may be made; repeated failures may result in that particular bird being untrainable.

Training any type of bird to perform aerial tricks and maneuvers for display requires three weeks of intensive training and an Animal Handling (Falconry) / Awareness Roll at TN 25. Again, failure means the training must be repeated before another attempt, and multiple failures may mean the bird cannot be taught such tricks.

It is possible for a skilled falconer to train a bird to engage in more esoteric types of behavior, such as scouting for enemies or stealing small items. This requires at least four weeks of intensive training followed by an Animal Handling (Falconry) / Awareness Skill Roll at TN 35. Success means that the bird is capable of the activity; failure means it cannot be taught to perform that specialized task. Note that some such training of a bird, such as spying or stealing items, might be considered a Low Skill.

In general, most birds can be trained to hunt and to engage in one other type of trained activity.

Gaining Glory from Falconry

Falconry is considered a high art among Rokugani nobility, and skilled falconers are highly sought after for performance at court (when the weather conditions allow it, of course). A falconer with birds that are properly trained can win considerable fame by having his birds perform in front of an audience.

As a shorthand approach, a falconer may roll Animal Handling (Falconry) / Awareness at TN 15 if he is putting on a display of hunting, or TN 25 if he is putting on a display of aerial tricks and maneuvers. (Note that untrained birds cannot be used.) Success gains the falconer 1 point of Glory for a hunting display, 2 points of Glory for a an aerial performance display. Using an unusual species of bird, such as an owl or osprey, can increase each gain by 1 point at the GM's discretion.

As a general rule, the GM should not allow a given falconer to benefit from these Glory gains more than once a month at the same location. Likewise, the GM should be wary of letting a character with extremely high Glory (Rank 6 or higher) gain additional Glory from continuing performances, since his reputation is already well established at that point.

Nemuranai of Air

Rokugan contains many *nemuranai*, legendary items whose kami have been awakened by the work of brilliant artisans or by long usage in the hands of great samurai. The following section discusses the most famous (and infamous) nemuranai which are especially associated with the Element of Air.

Yari of Air [Unique Item]

The Yari of Air was one of five treasures created in the early twelfth century by two mortal shugenja, Asako Shingon of the Phoenix Clan and Iuchi Yogosha of the Unicorn Clan. Although they did not initially realize it, they were guided to this creation by the power of the Elemental Oracles. The Oracles' purpose was to provide Rokugan with powerful items which would help offset the elemental imbalance caused by the Dark Oracles when they created and unleashed the Elemental Terrors.

The Yari of Air is a magnificent weapon, a spear with a shaft of silver-grey wood and a razor-sharp steel head engraved with intricate representations of wind, clouds, and lightning. However, the magic of the Yari is such that only its current owner can actually see it. To all others, it has the essential property: that of being invisible. At best, those who have a strong spiritual connection to the Elements can sense the presence of the Yari, but they still cannot see it. Only those strongly connected to Air (such as characters with the Advantages "Friend of the Elements: Air" or "Elemental Blessing: Air," or shugenja with Affinity for Air) can see the Yari, but even then only in a vague, misty outline.

The Yari of Air is a yari, but with a DR of 3k3 instead of the normal 2k2. Additionally, because it is invisible, it is extremely difficult to avoid. An opponent attacked by the Yari calculates his Armor TN as though his Reflexes were 2 Ranks lower (to a minimum of 1). Those who are strongly connected to the Element of Air, as described above, calculate their Reflexes as only 1 Rank lower. Because it as light as air, an attack with the Yari is a Simple Action, rather than a Complex Action, regardless of whether the wielder can normally attack with Spears as a Simple Action. Finally, the swirl of Air kami that surrounds the Yari offers a degree of protection to its wielder, causing a penalty of +10 TN to any ranged attacks targeting him.



Fan of Command [Unique Item]

The Fan of Command is a gunsen of exquisite quality, made of fine steel and painted with a deep red lacquer. The leaves of the fan are separated by fifteen ribs that resemble black spears. The only other ornamentation on the Fan is the kanji for the word "Forever" on one side. The origin of this remarkable item is unclear, although one story associated with the Fan claims its first wielder was none other than the Kami Akodo One-Eye. The Fan periodically appears in the Ikoma Histories, most recently in the early twelfth century when Toturi, leading the ronin war-band known as Toturi's Army, carried it for a time.

The Fan of Command gives its wielder 1 Rank in the War Fan Skill, or increases his effective Skill Rank by 1 if he already has this Skill. (It does not bestow Mastery Abilities.) It also bestows the Tactician Advantage on its wielder. If he already has that Advantage, it grants the Leadership Advantage. If the wielder already has both of these Advantages, it gives him the Great Destiny Advantage. These benefits are only available if the wielder is openly carrying the Fan in one hand and uses that hand for no other purpose.

Fan of the Grand Master [Unique Item]

The Fan of the Grand Master is extraordinary item that has been carried by only a handful of men in the history of Rokugan—the legendary shugenja who have risen to hold the title of Grand Master of the Elements and thereby been awarded the name of "Naka." Naka is not actually a family name; rather, it is an honorific bestowed by the Elemental Dragons themselves on those rare individuals who they find worthy to be named Grand Master of the Elements. The first such Grand Master was Naka Kaeteru, who lived in second century Rokugan. The names of most of the Grand Masters who succeeded Kaeteru are unknown, though in the twelfth century it is known to have passed to the shugenja Naka Kuro and from him to his student Naka Tokei. The absence of so many of the Grand Masters from the Empire's official histories is a remarkable oversight and may have a deeper significance than anyone knows (aside from the Elemental Dragons themselves).

The Fan of the Grand Master is made of ribs of rich dark wood. However, this is where its resemblance to mundane Rokugani fans ends. The leaves spanning the spaces between the ribs are made of a delicate, golden-white material that resembles silk but has no apparent substance to the touch, instead feeling like a cool mist. When the fan is opened and held, a fine golden mist wafts from it and strange kanji-like symbols flicker across its surface like drifting shadows.

Only a shugenja of at least Insight Rank 5 can benefit from the magic of the Fan. A number of times per day equal to his Glory Rank, such a shugenja may take a Simple Action to grant himself bonus Ranks equal to his Insight Rank to any one Skill in which he already has at least one Rank. This bonus lasts for a number of Rounds equal to his Void Ring. He must choose the Skill to which the bonus will apply when he activates this ability, and cannot change it until the current bonus has lapsed, at which point he can use the ability again. These benefits are only available if the wielder is openly carrying the Fan in one hand and uses that hand for no other purpose.

Kaede's Fan [Unique Item]

Isawa Kaede was an iconic figure in modern Rokugani history, holding the title of Master of the Void on the Phoenix Clan's Elemental Council of Masters before becoming the Oracle of Void. After her marriage to Emperor Toturi I, she became Empress Toturi Kaede and bore him three children. She also briefly held the position of Regent of Rokugan, which led to an imbalance in the Elements and the creation of the Dark Oracle of the Void. After her son Naseru became Toturi III, Kaede departed Ningen-do, but left her fan behind.

Kaede's Fan is made of slender ribs of dark oak, spanned by leaves of delicate golden-yellow rice paper. It is painted with enigmatic crimson symbols that resemble kanji, but actually have no known meaning. The Fan appears very delicate, even fragile, but it is actually quite sturdy and may even be incapable of being damaged.

Anyone who carries Kaede's Fan open in one hand gains a bonus to the total of all Courtier and Etiquette Skill Rolls equal to their Honor Rank. When they gain Honor for any reason, they gain 1 additional Point of Honor. These benefits are only available if the wielder is openly carrying the Fan in one hand and uses that hand for no other purpose.

The Imperial Standard [Unique Item]

The Imperial Standard is a legendary piece of Rokugan's history, having been borne aloft for the first time during the reign of the Kami Emperor, Hantei I. In fact, some believe the standard was actually made by the first Hantei, and others claim that a portion of the Emperor's essence remains within the standard to this day. In any case, it remains one of the most distinctive symbols of the Imperial line. Many flags and standards display the Chrysanthemum device of the Imperial families, but by ancient decree this is the only one permitted to do so in gold upon a field of pure white. The magic that imbues the silk of the standard preserves it, and it shows no fraying or stain of age, no dirt or damage, in spite of having been carried through rain and storm, through the swirl and smoke of countless battles. Its normal resting place is mounted behind the Imperial Throne itself, but it is borne at the head of the Imperial procession whenever the Emperor travels.

All samurai loyal to the Emperor gain a bonus of +1k0 to their Damage rolls as long as they are within 200' of the Imperial standard. They also double their normal Honor bonus when resisting any Fear effect while in this area of effect. Note that this loyalty to the Emperor must be genuine, for the power of the banner draws on true honor, not superficial deceit. In general, any normal samurai of Rokugan will benefit as long as they have not committed (or planned) any major crimes against the Emperor and are not harboring the Shadowlands Taint.

The general of an army that bears the Imperial Standard may add +10 to any Battle (Mass Combat) / Perception Roll made to determine the winner for a Battle Turn. He also gains +2k2 on any other use of the Battle Skill.

In order for any benefits of the Standard to be realized, it must be prominently displayed to the surrounding forces by a standard bearer, a prestigious, honorable, and dangerous appointment. The samurai chosen to bear the Imperial Standard in battle should receive a significant boost to Glory and Status (a suggested award would be 1 Rank of Glory and a half-Rank of Status). If the samurai has a low Honor (less than Rank 5), he might also gain Honor (5 to 10 points, depending on circumstances and current Honor Rank) for successfully carrying the Standard through a dangerous battle.

A samurai who loses the Imperial Standard to an enemy and survives can expect to have his Honor, Glory and Status all reduced by very substantial amounts—at least the same amounts as the bonuses listed above, and possibly more depending on the circumstances.

Because the Imperial Standard is extremely large and bulky, the standard bearer's Water Ring is considered 1 Rank lower for the purpose of movement. He may only fight with one hand and has a penalty of +5 to all physical TNs.

Ancestral Standards of the Great Clans

Each of the Great Clans of Rokugan has an Ancestral Standard, a flag or banner emblazoned with the clan's mon and other symbology evoking its history and philosophy. Like the Imperial Standard, the Ancestral Standards serve as rallying points in battle, providing inspiration to the clan's troops and allies and marking the location of the army's commander (typically the Clan Champion, though not always). As their name implies, the Ancestral Standards are generally quite old, in some cases going back to the founding of the Empire. The magic that imbues them tends to protect them from the wear of age, although none are as pristine as the Imperial Standard.

All of the Ancestral Clan Standards share some unique characteristics. All are generally banners mounted on T-shaped or inverted-L-shaped poles, allowing them to remain unfurled and visible at all times. The general of a clan army that bears the Clan Ancestral Standard may add +5 to any Battle (Mass Combat) / Perception Roll made to determine the winner for a Battle Turn. He also gains +1k1 on any other use of the Battle Skill. Much as with the Imperial Standard, an Ancestral Standard requires a specific standard bearer to hold and display it on the field; this is invariably a samurai from the Standard's clan, and it would be unusual in the extreme for a non-clan samurai to carry or event to touch a clan's Ancestral Standard. Much as with the Imperial Standard, this appointment is a prestigious one and will result in gains of Glory and Status (albeit not necessarily as much), as well as an Honor gain for a samurai of lower Honor Rank. Again, a samurai who loses his clan's Ancestral Standard to an enemy (and survives the failure) can expect to lose heavily in all three categories. Finally, the Clan Ancestral Standards are usually just as bulky as the Imperial Standard, and anyone carrying them is considered to have a Water Ring which is 1 Rank lower for purposes of movement, can only fight with one hand, and has a penalty of +5 to all physical TNs.

Specific properties of each Clan's Ancestral Standard are as follows:

Ancestral Standard of the Crab

Called Noroshi, the Crab Clan Standard has been carried into battle since the time of the Kami Hida himself. In fact, it is said Hida himself raised Noroshi for the first time during the First War against Fu Leng. It bears the Crab

Clan mon in steel-gray on a dark gray-blue background, beneath which is the mon of the Hida; in later years, the Hiruma and Kaiu family mon and the kanji for the Fortune Bishamon were added. The Crab Standard has been in losing armies but has never been captured or knocked down, a testament to the clan's indomitable spirit.

All Crab within 300' and with a clear line of sight to Noroshi gain Reduction 3 (if they already have a Reduction value, it is increased by 3) from the indomitable spirit which the standard inspires. They also gain +1k0 to all Weapon Skill Rolls while battling the enemies of the Crab; this bonus is increased to +1k1 when facing an opponent from the Shadowlands. However, Noroshi is huge, even for an Ancestral Standard. It requires two standard bearers, both of whom suffer a penalty of +10 to all physical TNs in addition to the other normal restraints of being a standard bearer. Alternatively, Noroshi has sometimes been mounted on a siege engine; in those cases the siege engine itself gains Reduction 10 and can be operated effectively by only three-quarters of the crew normally required.

Ancestral Standard of the Crane

Also known as the Banner of the Iron Crane, this Ancestral Standard is sky blue and bears the Crane Clan mon at the top, beneath which are the Daidoji family mon and kanji representing the Fortunes Bishamon and Fukurokujin, all in silver-grey. It is unclear when the standard was made and by whom, but it has been carried by Crane armies for centuries and has been raised on almost every Crane battlefield in modern times.

Any Crane-led army bearing the Ancestral Standard of the Crane receives an additional bonus of +5 to any Battle (Mass Combat) / Perception roll made to determine the winner for a Battle Turn, over and above the standard bonus awarded by all Ancestral Standards. In addition, any individual Crane samurai in the army receive a +2 bonus to any roll made on the Battle Table on page 240 of the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook. If the Crane-led army is outnumbered more than two to one by its foes, these bonuses increase to +10 and +5 respectively; the Standard has been at the center of numerous battles in which outnumbered Crane troops prevailed against more powerful foes.

Ancestral Standard of the Dragon

Unlike the Ancestral Standards of other clans, the Dragon Standard has seen relatively little battle since the early days of the Empire. Decades and in some cases centuries have passed without this standard appearing outside of the Dragon lands. It is colored a vivid green and is embroidered with the clan mon in gold, but is otherwise unadorned, a fitting choice for a clan known for ascetic philosophies.

If the Ancestral Standard of the Dragon is carried in a Dragon-led army, all Dragon samurai within 200' and with a line of sight to the Standard may choose to add or subtract their Insight Rank to the result of any roll on the Mass Battle Table (page 240 of the L5R Core Rulebook). They also gain a +1k0 bonus to their Attack Rolls. All Dragon monks and shugenja within 200' may also ignore any debilitating or damaging effects from any kiho they use.

Ancestral Standard of the Lion

For much of its history, the Lion Ancestral Standard was a simple rallying point for the Lion forces carrying it. That changed at the Battle of Sleeping River in the year 750, where it was carried to the decisive point of the battle against the massive forces of the Bloodspeaker Iuchiban. The unit at this point, a squadron of the Lion's Pride of the Matsu, had been given the honored duty of raising and carrying the Standard, and did so without wavering even when cut off and surrounded by the foul undead hordes of the Bloodspeaker. An Akodo legion finally broke through to the waving Standard, only to find it, still standing, clutched in the hands of a Matsu samurai-ko who had died hours before. This unknown woman was the ultimate example of the loyalty, courage, and devotion to duty that epitomized the Lion's Pride, and word of her sacrifice inspired not just the Lion forces but all of the clan forces on the field that day. The armies of Rokugan turned the tide and prevailed against their foe, and the Bloodspeaker went down to defeat for the second time.

Since that day, the Ancestral Standard of the Lion has been known as the Banner of the Roaring Tempest; when carried into battle, it reverberates with a sound like roaring lions amid a mounting storm. It is believed the spirit of the young samurai-ko who died holding the Standard has infused it, awakening it into a truly powerful nemuranai. No Lion army holding the standard has ever broken, though some have been slain to the last man.

Prior to the Battle of Sleeping River, the Standard's powers are modest; it simply grants all Lion samurai in a Lion-led army within 100' and with a clear line of sight to it a +1k0 bonus to all Skill rolls and Damage rolls. After the Battle of Sleeping River, however, the Standard also gives all foes of the Lion within 100' a -1k0 penalty to all Skill rolls and Damage rolls (and to Attack rolls if they are nonhuman). Moreover, such foes are subjected to a Fear 3 effect every time they advanced within 100' of the Standard, while all Lion with 100' are immune to all Fear effects.

In the year 1166, during the War of the Rich Frog, the Lion Ancestral Standard was captured from Lion by the Unicorn Clan. This was a source of bitter anger to the Lion and contributed to their steadfast enmity toward the Unicorn during that era. The Standard was finally returned to the Lion after the death of the Unicorn Khan, Moto Chagatai, in the year 1170, as part of a treaty of reconciliation between the two clans. During this period of shame, most of the Standard's powers are inactive, but a Lion army facing it is treated as its foes. Of course, if anyone managed to retrieve the Standard during this era, he would be a great hero to the Lion.

Battle Standard of the Mantis

Although it is not truly an Ancestral Standard in the same sense as those of the other Great Clans, the Battle Standard of the Mantis is nonetheless a potent nemuranai. It was originally the sashimono (back-banner) of the Mantis Champion Hotaka, who led the Mantis—then a Minor Clan—to assist the Crab during the great Shadowlands invasion led by the Oni Lord known as The Maw. Hotaka was lost during the Battle of the Cresting Wave in the year 716, but his back-banner survived. This gray banner, which bears three copies of the Mantis mon in green as well as the kanji for Osano-Wo, is normally kept in a locked chest, available only to the Mantis Champion. When it is brought forth, it is mounted on an inverted-L pole made of dark sugi wood from Tokigogachu in the Mantis islands, which is replaced annually during the New Year's festival there. The banner is only deployed when the Mantis fight ashore, or when more than half of the Mantis fleet is to fight at sea. Due to its origins as a sashimono, its bearer can wear it as a back-banner, allowing him to fight with both hands and avoid all penalty to his movement (although he still suffers a +5 penalty to all physical TNs due to weight on his back). It can also be mounted on the masthead of a ship, and in sea battles this is always done, placing the banner on the Mantis flagship. All Mantis samurai in a Mantis-led army within 200' of the Standard or a Mantis fleet within 1000' of it, and with a clear line of sight to it, gain a +1k0 bonus to their Kyujutsu and Kenjutsu Skill rolls; if they have no Ranks in those Skills, they are considered to have them at Rank 1 for the duration of the battle. They also gain a bonus equal to their Insight Rank to the total of all their Attack rolls.

Ancestral Standard of the Phoenix

This fiery orange and gold banner was created during the First War against Fu Leng and has been on almost continuous display since. It bears the mon of all the Phoenix families, and after the Agasha defection in the early twelfth century their mon appeared on the Standard as well, apparently without anyone physically adding it. The Standard is mounted on a T-shaped rosewood pole carved with slogans proclaiming the philosophies of the Phoenix, and is normally carried by the youngest Shiba samurai in a deployed Phoenix army. Outside of war it is kept at Shiro Shiba in the custody of the Captain of the Guard, and is prominently displayed to all of the guards there.

All Phoenix bushi in a Phoenix-led army within 200' of the Standard gain a bonus to the total of their Damage Rolls equal to their Insight Rank. In addition, any Phoenix shugenja within this area of effect gain a +1k0 bonus to all Spell Casting rolls, while all Phoenix monks within this area of effect may ignore any debilitating or damaging effects of using a kiho.

Ancestral Standard of the Scorpion

The Ancestral Standard of the Scorpion has been seen only a few times in the Empire's history, and is always carried on a T-shaped pole of dark mahogany. Its origins are unclear and many sinister rumors swirl around it, no doubt fueled by both its obscurity and its ominous color scheme: a dark red Scorpion mon on a black background. Several kanji are also displayed, but there is widespread disagreement about what they actually say. In the twelfth century it was only seen on the field once, during the War of Spirits at the Battle of Quiet Winds. The Scorpion themselves are apparently happy to allow the Standard to maintain its aura of enigmatic menace and respond to questions with blank stares and slight shakes of the head.

In point of fact, the Scorpion Standard's powers are relatively straightforward. It gives all Scorpion samurai in a Scorpion-led army within 200' of it and with a clear line of sight +1k0 to all Attack and Damage rolls. The Standard's dire reputation also inflicts a Fear 2 effect to any enemy of the Scorpion within this same 200' area of effect. (It should be noted that this Fear effect is not magical in nature, unlike many powers of the Ancestral Standards. Rather, it is purely due to the carefully-cultivated reputation of the Scorpion Standard.)

Ancestral Standard of the Unicorn

The Ancestral Standard of the Unicorn Clan is actually more correctly called the Ancestral Standard of the Ki-Rin, for it was created before the clan ever left Rokugan and was carried with them during their eight centuries outside the Empire, returning with them. It is a large purple sashimono (back-banner) designed to be carried by a rider, with a mon prominently displayed. This mon is somewhat different from the "modern" Unicorn



Clan mon, betraying its origins with the original Ki-Rin Clan at the dawn of the Empire. The Standard is always worn as a back-banner by its bearer, who rides at the right hand of the Clan Champion when the Champion takes the field of battle. Thus, much as with the Mantis Standard, the bearer can fight with two hands and suffers no movement penalty, although he still suffers the +5 TN penalty to all physical actions.

All Unicorn samurai within 200' of the Standard when it is deployed for battle gain a +1k0 bonus to Horsemanship Skill Rolls and a +1k0 bonus to all Attack Rolls and Damage Rolls. Additionally, as long as the standard bearer is mounted, all foes on foot within 200' of the Standard suffer a Fear 3 effect as the power of a thousand years of Ki-Rin and Unicorn ancestors bears down on their spirits.

Tapestry of Air

The Tapestry of Air is a particular type of nemuranai made occasionally by the magical artisans of the Asahina family of the Crane Clan. It is common for students studying in the Asahina Shugenja School to assist in the creation of Tapestries of Air, since the process is a means of gaining a deeper insight into the magic of the kami generally and of the Element of Air in particular. It also gives the students a chance to learn more about artisanship and helps them learn the basic techniques needed for creating fetishes. Tapestries of Air are often used to portray specific scenes, usually pastoral and serene in nature, but some are entirely abstract, capturing flowing shapes evocative of wind and clouds. Such Tapestries are not actually very rare, but are seldom found outside of Asahina homes and temples.

To evoke the Air-infused magic of a Tapestry, it must be prominently displayed in a subject's home or in a regular place of meditation and worship. For the next seven days, the subject must spend at least half of each day in the presence of the Tapestry, contemplating its imagery and the elemental and spiritual philosophy underlying it. The Tapestry's blessing will take effect at the end of that time, and continues to work as long as the subject spends at least one day per month meditating in the presence of the Tapestry. This is true regardless of the distance between the subject and the Tapestry as long as both are within Ningen-do. However, if the Tapestry is removed from where it is kept, its benefits are lost and the process above must be repeated to regain them.

The Tapestry of Air causes its subject's Air Ring to be considered 1 Rank higher for the purpose of casting Air Spells, though it does not change the number of Air "spell slots" he has. If the Tapestry is destroyed, the subject suffers a penalty of +5 on the TN of Spell Casting Rolls for Air Spells, for a number of days equal to his Fire Ring x 2.

Incense of Concentration

The Incense of Concentration is a specific blend of incense that uses various types of wood sawdust, dried herbs, and plant extracts. The concoction is infused with Air magic by those knowledgeable in its creation; when burned, the resulting smoke has beneficial properties for those who inhale it while mediating. The basic formula for the Incense has been known for centuries, but during the War of Spirits in the twelfth century, a Crane shugenja named Asahina Tsukiyoka adjusted both its ingredients and the rituals associated with it slightly. She was seeking a way of facilitating a complex Phoenix ritual designed to allow returned spirits in Rokugan to become mortal once again. Her success exceeded even her expectations, resulting in a significant improvement in the Incense's effects. The original basic Incense is available from the Asahina throughout the history Rokugan, but the improved form only becomes available after the War of Spirits, and is one of the more potent favors which the Asahina family can offer to those who win its favor. They guard the scrolls containing the details of its creation closely.

The basic effect of the Incense of Concentration is to aid one's meditation. A shugenja who burns and inhales the smoke of at least one dose of the Incense while meditating will recover all of his Void Points on the successful Meditation roll, rather than just one point.

The more powerful version of the Incense of Concentration created by Asahina Tsukiyoka grants a shugenja participating in a ritual (a spell involving multiple casters) a +1k1 bonus to any Spell Casting rolls required. Any number of shugenja in the ritual can benefit from the Incense, but each must have a personal dose of the incense in order to gain the benefits.

Meiwaku Fans

These remarkable nemuranai are named after Asahina Meiwaku, who was married to a Scorpion, Soshi Toraburu, in the tenth century. Meiwaku, seeking to prove her loyalty to her husband and his clan, created a fan into which she imbued powerful Air magic. She then asked her husband to gift this fan to her own father. When Meiwaku's father accepted the gift, Toraburu was astonished to find he could hear the elder Asahina's thoughts. Toraburu was so grateful that he arranged for his wife to undergo a second gempukku, inducting her fully into the Scorpion Clan. Meiwaku commemorated the occasion every year thereafter on that day by giving her husband a new fan with properties identical to the first.

It is believed that a total of seventeen Meiwaku Fans were created. Thirteen remain in the hands of the Scorpion but in the ensuing years four went astray and are now at large in Rokugan. All are beautiful, but not especially so; all are unique in their form and decoration. Each produces its effect when it is accepted as a gift. As long as the recipient is in view of the giver, the giver may spend a Void Point to read the recipient's thoughts for a number of minutes equal to his Air Ring; he may do this a number of times per day equal to his Air Ring. The power isn't entirely foolproof, however. Some magic, such as the Elemental Ward spell when attuned to Air, can block the link between giver and recipient, preventing the Fan's power from functioning.

A Gaijin Item of Air: The Flying Carpet

Flying Carpets are not truly a Rokugani creation. Rather, they are created by the strange gaijin magics practiced in the Burning Sands. Flying Carpets have been brought back to Rokugan several times, beginning with the return of the Unicorn Clan to the Empire in the early ninth century. Since then, travelers to the Burning Sands such as the exiled Scorpion Clan have brought back exotic artifacts, including Flying Carpets, to the Emerald Empire. The Kolat conspiracy has also gained access to Flying Carpets through its contacts with its gaijin counterpart, the Qolat.

A Flying Carpet is a large heavy piece of cloth, usually woven from the hair of animals. This alone makes it a questionable item to most Rokugani. Strange garish designs of great complexity are typically woven into the Carpets, even further reducing their aesthetic appeal in the Empire. However, when their magic is activated, their great power becomes clear—those standing or sitting upon the Carpet will find themselves borne aloft. Depending on the size of the Carpet, it can carry between two and four average-sized adults, or their equivalent in weight (although the Carpet always requires at least one living "pilot".) Activating the Carpet requires uttering a word of command (unique to that Carpet) while standing on it. This will normally be in the language known as Mekham, a tongue from the Burning Sands; it is not necessary for the speaker to understand the command, but they must speak it correctly. The Carpet will immediately rise about one foot into the air; thereafter it responds to the mental desires of whoever spoke the command word. In general, the Carpet can be caused to speed up, slow down, gain or lose altitude, turn in a particular direction, and land. As soon as it lands, the Carpet becomes inert and will not function again until the command word is spoken once more. Any given individual can only activate the Carpet once per day, and it cannot be activated more than three times per day total under any circumstances.

Some Flying Carpets are more powerful and can remain aloft indefinitely under the command of a particular individual. Others have more stringent limitations, such returning to the ground at particular times (noon and midnight or sunrise and sunset, or after a certain time in flight). No one is certain why such apparently arbitrary limitations have been built into some Carpets.

While it is flying, the Carpet moves as though it has a Water of 6. However, the magic of the Carpet prevents its passengers from experiencing any winds beyond a mild breeze, no matter how fast or high it is traveling. That said, the Carpet is not particular maneuverable, and can be readily out-flown by most flying creatures. The Carpet is tough, but not indestructible; if more than a tenth of it is cut or burned, the magic fails and it permanently ceases to function.

It should go without saying that most Rokugani will never use a strange and disturbing gaijin item like a Flying Carpet. In most cases, using such an item should entail an Honor loss, and possibly Glory loss as well if others are aware of the action.



Veil of Deception

Crafted by the Soshi, the Veil of Deception is a testament to that family's deep understanding of the Element of Air and the extent to which it can distort the senses of the unwary. The Soshi have expended great effort in developing complex illusions on both a large scale, to ward off unwanted visitors to their holdings in the Scorpion lands, and a small scale, to confuse and confound individuals about the smallest of details and obfuscate the most innocuous-seeming places and items. The Veil of Deception is definitely an example of the latter. Veils of Deception are closely-guarded by the Soshi to avoid having them fall into the wrong hands—which is to say, non-Scorpion hands.

The Veil of Deception appears to be nothing more than a simple cloth mask, normally dark red or black in color, unadorned except for several small kanji embroidered in silver along a single edge. The Veil is tied across the face, with the kanji upright and centered between the eyes. A number of times per day equal to his Air Ring, the wearer may activate the magic of the Veil by spending a Void Point. Once activated, the effect lasts a number of minutes equal to the wearer's Air Ring. During that time, he will appear to an observer as whatever person he most expects to see in that particular place. For example, a samurai entering his bedchamber and finding a Scorpion spy wearing the Veil while it is activated will instead see his wife, a servant, or some other person he would reasonably expect to find there. The wearer will instantly be aware of who the observer believes he sees. The magic of the Veil is powerful enough to avoid duplications—the Air kami imbued within it know that would "spoil the fun"—so in the example above, the samurai would not find two copies of the same servant, one real and one illusory. The Veil creates a full-scale illusion that affects all of the observer's senses, and it is almost invariably a believable illusion; "almost invariably" because it is still possible for specific situations to occur in which no person, regardless of identity, would reasonably be present in a location. The Veil does not confer invisibility, either, and thus the magic of the Veil is not perfect. However, a GM should allow for some latitude in what an observer would consider "reasonable."

The illusion created by the Veil generally fails if the wearer takes overtly hostile action against an observer, but it is rumored among the Scorpion that some versions of the Veil can even continue to function in this extreme case, making them powerful instruments for implicating innocent persons in heinous crimes. The illusion also survives the wearer's unconsciousness or death, but will always fade when the time duration has elapsed.

If there are multiple observers, the Air spirits in the Veil will choose one target among them as soon as the wearer comes into view; the "reasonable" person of the illusion will be determined by this individual's expectations and all others present will also see this person. In the above example, the samurai's retainers accompanying him into his bedchamber will also see either his wife or his servant, whichever he saw.

The Shakuhachi of Air [Unique Item]

The origins of the Shakuhachi of Air are unclear. This is likely not even its proper name, but during the course of time, this is the name by which it came to be known. It is claimed it was constructed very early in the history of the Empire, perhaps by one of the Kami themselves, as a means of inspiring the people of Rokugan during the dark days of the First War against Fu Leng. It is a powerful nemuranai in spite of its rather crude appearance: a flute made of coarse unfinished bamboo, engraved around its circumference in several locations with unreadable kanji. Its only other ornamentation is a red silken cord tied around it just below the mouthpiece. The Shakuhachi has passed through the hands of several different families and clans; in the twelfth century it is in the custody of the Lion Clan, specifically the Ikoma. They allow a select few performers to use the flute on rare occasions to heighten the effect of Ikoma orators.

Although the modern Rokugani prefer to restrict the Shakuhachi to the hands of the most skillful performers, but in fact the Air kami within the flute will confer a basic knowledge on anyone who tries



to play it—anyone using the flute gains +1 Rank in the Perform: Wind Instrument Skill.

When the Shakuhachi is played, all those within 50' will feel inspired and invigorated, their minds cleared and senses sharpened. Their Awareness Rank is treated as being 1 higher while the Shakuhachi is being played, and they do not suffer the effects of any Mental Disadvantages they might possess. These benefits last as long as the performer plays the Shakuhachi, which he may do for a maximum number of hours equal half of his Stamina Rank (rounded down). There is a detrimental effect when he stops, however. Those who were so strongly inspired by the Shakuhachi while it was playing are left feeling empty and somewhat forlorn when it falls silent. Their Awareness Rank is considered to be 1 lower for the next hour before this feeling of despondency fades way.

Any other Perform Skill used on people in the Shakuhachi's area of effect while it is playing will benefit from a +5 bonus to the total of its roll, as the instrument seamlessly blends itself into the performance.

Takehiko's Kite [Unique Item]

Akodo Takehiko was a renowned general of the Lion during the era of the Unicorn Clan's return to Rokugan (in the ninth century). Already known as a military innovator (some would say an eccentric), Takehiko saw the return of the Unicorn and their large cavalry armies as a reason to engage in even more experimentation, to be prepared to combat this new potential threat. While watching a display of kite-flying at the Imperial capital of Otosan Uchi, Takehiko was struck by how valuable such an airborne perspective would be in battle. When he returned to the Lion lands, he discussed the matter with a shugenja friend from the Kitsu family. He was intrigued, but unsure how to proceed in such an endeavor; fortunately, at the time a member of the Isawa was visiting the Kitsu family, and the Lion brought him into the discussion. Fascinated by the unusual idea which Takehiko proposed, the Phoenix shugenja set out to bring it into reality. The result was the kite that bears the Lion general's name.

Takehiko's Kite is of the complex type, but is sturdy and functional rather than ornamental—indeed it is almost completely unadorned. When it is flown, its flyer is able to see as though his eyes were at the Kite's point of perspective. He also benefits from additional sensory effects, described below. Because of its value as a military intelligence device, as well as its history, the Kite is kept well-protected by the Lion and only deployed onto the battlefield when it appears distinctly advantageous to do so.

Launching and flying Takehiko's Kite successfully requires a Skill Roll of Games: Kite Flying / Reflexes against a TN determined by the GM (in safe conditions the TN should be only 20, but winds or enemy activity can increase this substantially). While the Kite is aloft, the flyer sees from the Kite's airborne perspective, which is a major reason why the Skill Roll to fly the Kite is higher than normal. Because of his elevated point of view, the flyer has a +5 bonus to any roll to spot an ambush. Finally, for the purposes of Mass Battle, the general of an army in which Takehiko's Kite is deployed and aloft receives a +5 to the total of any roll to determine the winner of a Battle Turn. (It should be noted that the Kite does not bestow any special ability to see in darkness or through poor visibility, so in such conditions the Kite cannot bestow any bonuses to those using it.)

The Kite can only be used once per day, but the duration of that use is only limited by the flyer's ability to endure and keep the Kite airborne. While flying the Kite, the flyer is unable to perform any other actions. If he is attacked, he must release the Kite to defend himself. The Kite is surprisingly resilient and cannot be harmed by a fall to earth, although it could certainly be deliberately destroyed with blows, fire, and suchlike.

Aiko's Pinwheels

Asahina Aiko was a shugenja fascinated by the art of paper constructs. She became a master of the craft and her displays were widely sought for their cheery elegance. As she grew older, however, she began to realize that her ultimate duty was the betterment of the Empire; while her amazing shows of banners, streamers, and fluttering papercraft delighted audiences, she was determined to find a more enduring and practical legacy for her art. After considerable effort, she developed the devices that would come to be known as Aiko's Pinwheels.

The Pinwheels are fetishes, simple constructions of specialized purpose: paper cut and folded into spiral or bladed propeller shapes that catch breezes and spin. Aiko, however, developed a way of importuning Air kami to attach themselves to her constructs; they would not spin of their own accord, but would only react to the presence of the Shadowlands Taint. The kami, sensing the touch of Jigoku nearby, would spin the pinwheel, alerting anyone watching. Of course, the Pinwheels cannot identify where the Taint is located, so while they are a useful warning system they cannot reliably unearth Shadowlands infiltrators.

Mechanically, the Pinwheel will start spinning if any significant source of Taint (a person or creature with at least 1 full Rank of Shadowlands Taint, or a physical item with a comparable level of corruption) comes within 25'. It will spin for no other reason. After one minute of spinning, the kami are released and the device reverts to a normal paper pinwheel.

Aiko's Pinwheel may be created by an Asahina Fetishist who has the Spellcraft Skill at Rank 5 or higher and who has been told the secrets to the Pinwheel's creation. (Any sensei or other senior figure within the Asahina family will know these secrets.) Once created, an Aiko's Pinwheel will last until it is used or for a number of days equal to the creator's Air Ring, whichever comes first. A shugenja may not have more Aiko's Pinwheels in existence at a given time than his Air Ring.

Note that the Pinwheels are not otherwise magical, so they are easily destroyed.

Winds of Creation: Air and New Game Mechanics

"Innovation is its own reward."

—Naka Kuro, Grand Master of the Elements

Game Masters and players alike sometimes wish to introduce new "homebrew" game mechanics into their L5R campaign. This may be something relatively minor such as a shugenja developing new spells, or bushi perfecting new kata. It can also be more elaborate effects such as items awakening and becoming nemuranai, or a character managing to invent a new Technique, or even a character who founds an entire new School. Some guidelines to these sorts of developments have already been offered in the L5R 4th Edition supplement Emerald Empire (specifically in the "Way of the Daimyo" Appendix), but the following section offers additional guidance on developing new mechanics that are themed around the Element of Air.

Adding new mechanics to the game should not be considered lightly, since a poorly-thought-out mechanic has the potential to badly disrupt the game. Moreover, most of the existing mechanics in L5R have been perfected over hundreds of years of study—it should be quite unusual for the players to match such accomplishments. Thus any new mechanic should be approached from the viewpoint of both in-world flavor and game balance. With that in mind, here are some guidelines for building new Air-based mechanics.

Air Spells

Of all of the Elements, Air is the hardest to use in a physically threatening way. Though the whipping winds of the plains and the fury of a hurricane can bring buildings to ruin, those are far from the default state of Air. Instead, Air spells predominantly tend to deal with communication, emotional manipulation, and illusion.



Communication spells, such as Legacy of Kaze-no-Kami and The Kami's Whisper are considered the most basic and easiest uses of Air magic. They are not attempting to fool or alter anything, but instead simply entreat the spirits to deliver a message in some way—an act the Air kami are eager to perform. Clever daimyo often employ these spells to maintain a great advantage over rivals with no such resource at their disposal. Spells of this nature can be relatively powerful for their Rank, although the GM should be wary of magic that makes communication *too* easy—if sending messages across the Empire was a routine and reliable magical effect, Rokugan would be a far more "modern" society than it is.

Spells that deal with a person's emotions and mind can be difficult to use in game without causing play imbalances or making it too easy to solve problems, and this is likewise true of new spells that have this effect. Often, the tension in a game scenario revolves around what the player characters may or may not know for certain, since Rokugani are constantly guarding their real thoughts and feelings. When attempting to deal with spells of this nature, the goal should be spells that can aid in a shugenja's supernatural perceptions of others but won't constantly give away important plot secrets. In particular, the GM should be wary of spells that diminish the role of courtiers—after all, why would there be Courtier Schools if shugenja can do their job better? It should also be noted that even powerful spells such as Know the Mind can be foiled by a sufficiently disciplined samurai. Finally, shugenja designing such spells should consider the ramifications to their honor, since in almost all cases prying into another's thoughts and feelings is an extreme violation of Bushido.

Illusory spells can range from amusing tricks and minor deceits to staggeringly impressive alterations of perception. As a general rule, illusions should not be able to offer a direct way to harm a victim of the trick. Instead, they should cause mistakes, confusion, misdirection, and other such mental effects—such as the Fear effect from Your Heart's Enemy. Illusion spells can be used to trick someone's sense of hearing, smell, or sight, but it should be extremely difficult for these spells to hold up to a basic inspection by touch. Spells under this category can also be counter-illusions used to defeat other illusion magic, such as By the Light of the Moon and Draw Back the Shadow.

Air Nemuranai

Items imbued with the power of Air often perform small tricks, are animated some way, or enhance Air-based Skills, rolls, and Traits.

Common minor nemuranai tend to be moving items that will animate on their own, such as dancing boxes, fans that fold up, and so forth. These objects tend to be small, and the kami within them often awaken due to affection and care shown to the item over the course of

years or even generations. The spirits in awakened items like this will enjoy amusing and entertaining their owner, though they may be shy around others. Such items have little or no mechanical/game-play effect (though they may be very entertaining), so introducing new ones into the game can usually be done without any significant concerns.

Items that aid a character's Air-related rolls (such as Awareness rolls, Reflexes rolls, or Skills based on those traits) will often be in the form of something easily associated with the specific benefit. For example, a fan that makes the user feel more confident when it is held (thus enhancing Social Skill rolls), or a set of gauntlets passed down from one legendary Shinjo archer to his equally impressive sons contains an awakened Air spirit that aids the aim of the wearer. These sorts of items are potentially much more powerful and can be disruptive to the game, so the GM should be cautious about allowing new ones to appear. The GM should also make sure that there are always good story reasons for items to awaken—it should be a memorable occasion when an item first manifests a supernatural ability.

Air spirits tend to rarely awaken in weapons, but when they do, they generally enhance the speed of the user or make him harder to hit—granting bonuses such as Initiative adjustments or an improvement to Armor TN. Weapons in which Air spirits awaken are generally those which are Air-oriented in their nature, such as spears or bows, although it is also possible for Air spirits to awaken in other weapons such as swords. It is highly unlikely for Air spirits to awaken in heavy weapons or armor.

Air Kata

Air Kata are typically be developed by students of schools that have a Reflexes Trait bonus or that specialize in speed and avoidance. If a bushi character develops a new Air kata, the player and GM should keep in mind that the combat principles of Air do not focus on direct confrontation, endurance, or damage. Instead, these Kata help a bushi to strike first, increase his Armor TN through quick or unpredictable movements, or neutralize an opponent's advantages through speed. Air Kata that focus on specific weapons will typically center around swords, polearms, and spears.

Air Schools and Techniques

Air-oriented Schools and Techniques usually are schools that grant an Awareness or Reflex Trait bonus, the Techniques (and Alternate Paths) for such Schools, and shugenja schools with Affinity for Air.

- For new Bushi and Ninja schools that are Air-oriented, in general the Techniques should reward characters for striking fast and moving quickly in combat, and should not work well with heavy, slow attacks or heavy armor. It is recommended that such Techniques should focus on one or more of the following themes:
  - Enhancing Skills that involve Reflexes (such as Kyujutsu).
  - Attacks that disarm or hinder an opponent rather than damage them outright.
  - Attacks that gain an advantage against unaware or hindered/slower opponents.
  - Defending oneself or others through speed and reflexes.
  - Emphasizing speed over damage.
  - Dueling or ranged attacks.

Courtier Schools which are Air-oriented are Awareness based (as opposed to those social schools centered around other Elements, such as the Fire-oriented Asako and Ikoma schools, or the Water-oriented Kitsuki school). When considering new mechanics for Air-based Courtier schools, players and GMs should examine the basic principles differentiating Awareness from other mental Traits: Awareness is about understanding others, empathizing with them, and anticipating their actions and reactions. Thus, social Techniques based on Awareness should thrive in courtly settings but should also be able to charm (or con) their way to what they want in most types of social situations. Likewise, Artisan Techniques that focus on Reflexes or Awareness will usually be able to produce these effects through gifts and favors.

It should be noted that it can be very tempting to make Air-oriented social Techniques into "mind control" abilities. GMs should note that almost all of the really strong Air-oriented social Techniques in the L5R 4th Edition Core rulebook involve Contested Rolls using Social Skills, allowing opponents to resist the impact of the Techniques; they usually also include the caveat that the Technique cannot force someone to do something completely against their nature or principles. New mechanics should be similar in both design and constraint.

Shugenja schools typically focus on one of the three types of Air magic mentioned previously: communication, emotions, or illusion. They should emphasize that form of magic with their Technique. In general, new shugenja Techniques should either make the chosen method of magic more powerful or versatile, or allow the shugenja to expend spell slots to perform an ability similar to a spell of that nature. GMs should be wary of Techniques that bestow multiple abilities or that award Free Raises (which are more powerful than die-bumps).

Monk schools can vary wildly, depending on flavor and backstory. The best idea in this case is to examine the history and philosophy of the particular monastic Order and decide if it is slanted more towards combat, diplomacy, or mysticism, then apply one of the above concepts (Bushi, Courtier, or Shugenja) to their Technique. Since monks all gain Kiho as they go up in School Rank, GMs and players should be wary of letting them have a too powerful Technique.

Chapter Six



Ikoma Kazue sat on the low railing that overlooked one of the many small courtyards scattered around the twisting grounds of Kyuden Kurogane-Hana. A blank sheet of rice-paper lay on a small writing table before her, and her brush rested idle in her hand, ink drying on its bristles.

The courtyard had but a single occupant at present, a simple wave man named Hisao. He knelt in prayer by a small shrine.

The ronin's arrival a few days prior had caused something of a sensation, since he had come to attend the funeral of a departed fellow wave-man. There had been much discussion of the propriety of interring a mere ronin in such a sacred place. Some objected to such a thing, but generally did so a bit more quietly than they might protest other matters that irritated them. The monks of the temple did not respond particularly well to suggestions that anyone was unwelcome among those interred here. Personally, Kazue rather enjoyed the caution some of the more self-righteous among the attendants displayed in the face of potential censure by common monks. There was some manner of ironic justice in it. She should not take such pleasure in it, she knew that, but she could not help herself.

Fortunately, she was skilled at concealing such things.

"Good day, noble Kazue-sama!"

The young Lion samurai-ko turned and forced a pleasant smile onto her face. Suzume Hin was another newcomer to the castle, although he had been here somewhat longer than Hisao. "Good day to you, friend Hin-san. How does the day find you?" She winced inwardly at leaving the young man an invitation to go on at length; such things were reflex to her at this point.

"Oh, very well, very well," he said. "I really am most excited about that one, however," he added, indicating the wave man with a broad, sweeping gesture. "Do you know much about him? I have heard things, but mostly second-hand."

Kazue turned back to regard Hisao. The ronin was still in an attitude of prayer, apparently paying no attention to their conversation, assuming he could even hear them across the courtyard. "I have heard only a few things," she said slowly. "None of them directly from Hisao himself."

"Hisao!" the Sparrow samurai exclaimed. "Even the name sounds heroic, does it not? And the tale of his friendship with the departed is something that thrills the soul! Does it not thrill your soul, friend Kazue-sama?"

"Indeed," she muttered. Without conscious though she shuffled her brush between her fingers and across her knuckles. "Most inspiring."

"Most inspiring!" Hin repeated enthusiastically. "They say his friend was among the greatest swordsmen in the

Empire! Naturally the fact that he was ronin will keep his legend from being spoken on the lips of most. I find that most tragic. The glory of the Great Clans tends to overshadow the accomplishments of others, after all. I say that with no intended disrespect, noble Ikoma, but I suppose as a member of a Minor Clan it is an easier matter for me to see than others."

The man's prattling was almost more than Kazue could bear, but she had long ago learned to devote only a portion of her attention to such mind-numbing things. As if from a distance she heard herself making acknowledging noises and the occasional affirming comment, but she was no longer listening to Hin in any real way. Not that it seemed to make any difference to him, of course. Instead, she focused her attention on the ronin.

Hisao seemed an honorable man, a man possessed of quiet nobility and a true warrior's spirit. He was, as near as Kazue was able to tell, completely selfless. In the few days since his arrival he had not given any indication that he cared for his own reputation or comfort in any way. His only thought, his only purpose, seemed to be to properly oversee the funeral for his dead friend, one who had, as Hin said, been heralded as a swordsman of almost unparalleled skill. Kazue had not known the departed, or even heard of him, and she suspected that in death his skill had grown, as it so often did when warriors passed into the next world. And yet in Hisao she saw something that suggested the tales were not exaggerations, not in the least.

And as she watched the warrior's devotion to the memory of a friend now gone, she began to wonder if perhaps the tales were not overstated at all.

"Yes, indeed," Hin was saying. "I think a tale of the courage of this Hisao and his friend might be something of a sensation, if told properly. The very notion thrills me! I have so many ideas rattling around that I scarcely know how to put the brush to paper! Do you often find yourself in that position, Kazue-sama?"

That much, at least, Kazue heard, and heard perfectly. "I do often find myself in precisely that position, Hin-san," she said. "I apologize, but I have an appointment I must keep. You will fill me in later on the remainder of Hisao's ritual?"

Hin beamed. "Oh yes, certainly!" He glanced eagerly at her writing desk. "I cannot wait to read whatever you are inspired to write concerning this whole matter!"

Kozue smiled as she quickly swept up the sheets of ricepaper.

They were still blank.

A Setting for Adventure

This chapter presents a detailed setting for an Air-oriented game, built around themes of court intrigue and social interaction. The castle known as Kyuden Kurogane-Hana is deliberately set up as a uniquely unaligned stronghold that the GM can place into almost any clan territory or era of play, making it either a temporary destination or a focus for an entire campaign.

The history of the castle presents a detailed background and mythology behind its founding and development, but deliberately avoids mentioning family names, clan affiliation, or other such specific details. This allows the GM to set the castle in any clan's lands, or even (with a few small modifications) in Imperial or Minor Clan territory. Likewise the castle's history largely avoids any direct connections to major events in the larger Empire, allowing it to function equally well in the sixth century or the twelfth.

The selection of NPCs which follows later in the chapter covers the full spectrum of clans and factions. They can be used as-is in a modern campaign setting in which all of the factions are active, but if the GM is running a game in an era where not all of them are present (such as one set prior to the return of the Unicorn), the unneeded NPCs can be removed with no difficulty. They are designed to each stand on their own as interesting personalities who can add depth to a campaign, supplying assistance or opposition to the PCs as required.

Finally, the last part of the chapter presents an assortment of adventure seeds—some brief and simple, others more detailed—using the Challenge/Focus/Strike format. The GM can use these as written, or expand and change them to suit the needs of his campaign.

The History of Kyuden Kurogane-Hana

The true founding history of Kyuden Kurogane-Hana is as mysterious and intriguing as the castle itself, shrouded in mystery and obscured by time. Despite its modern prominence, it did not begin as a place of true importance, and its rise to fame did not begin until long after it was constructed. Thus there is no mention in either the official Imperial Histories or the Ikoma libraries of its founding. Any records kept by those who constructed the castle are long since lost, perhaps forever, in the catacombs below its foundations.



But as is so often true with such things, in the absence of a written history a legend has arisen in its place. It is a favorite tale of Kyuden Kurogane-Hana's lords, and they recall it often in the presence of guests. Some privately remark that the tale grows more elaborate with every telling, but of course in public they say the lord of Kurogane-Hana simply recalls new details he had forgotten in previous retellings.

According to the story, long before Kyuden Kurogane-Hana's walls were ever erected, a small shrine stood upon its future foundations. It was a simple shrine to Emma-O, the Fortune of Death, built upon a place sacred to the Fortune: the mouth of a steep valley, surrounded by forests, with a stream running through it and emptying into a shallow lake. In this serene place of natural life, secluded from the Empire at large, stood a shrine to the judge of death.

The founding of this shrine is the central part of the legend which the castle's lords are so fond of retelling. According to the tale, there was once a monk named Yama known for his kindness and patience, with a gentle yet stoic manner. Yama was the sort of man who could not be deterred once his mind was set to a task. His patience and dedication were far greater than most others of his age, and it is said that once, desiring a bite of strawberry, he planted a strawberry bush from a seed and simply waited until the first sprouting had yielded suitable fruit.

As the legend goes, one day Yama came to a lakeside to rest—the lake now known as Heaven's Mirror—when he spotted one of the half-mythical Kenku meditating on the farthest bank. Curious, he approached the strange bird-like being, but did not want to interrupt his thoughts, so he simply sat down in front of the creature and waited. In fact, he waited several days (or perhaps weeks, depending on the telling of the tale) before the Kenku finally opened his eyes. Then he waited for another day before the Kenku finally spoke to him.

The Kenku said this was his one hundred and eighth reincarnation, and claimed he had been meditating uninterrupted on this spot for exactly one hundred and eight days, one for every mortal temptation. On the one hundred and eighth day, the Kenku opened his eyes and become enlightened, comprehending the true nature of the Void. Because Yama had not interrupted his meditations, which would have foiled his achievement of understanding, the Kenku decided to share a great universal secret with him. The bird-man explained his own enlightenment was no special ability of its race; rather, any soul living its one hundred and eighth life could meditate the same number of days and achieve the same enlightenment.

The Origins of Emma-O?

Is there any validity of the myth of Yama and the supposed origins of the Fortune of Death? The Rokugani themselves disagree on the topic; an equal number of scholars and theologians condemn it as support it. It is certainly one of the very few tales in existence that offer an origin for the Fortune of Death.

However, most Rokugani theologians agree that Emma-O was already worshipped in the very early Empire, at a time when only a few such divinities—notably the original Seven Fortunes and a handful of Primal Fortunes—were recognized and worshipped. This suggests Emma-O may have been either a Primal Fortune, or an early ascended mortal who attained Fortunehood before the Kami ever fell.

While the tale of Yama may seem to fit with the idea that Emma-O emerged in the Celestial realm prior to the time of the Kami, there are nonetheless difficulties with such a theory. It is well-known that monks did not actually exist in Rokugan until after the founding of the Empire and specifically after the First War, when the peace and order imposed by the rule of the Kami allowed those who felt drawn to contemplation and worship to embrace that manner of life. It thus seems unlikely that Yama's tale is literally true, no matter how meaningful and compelling it may seem.

Regardless of the truth or falsehood of the story, however, there is no disputing that the original site of the shrine in the valley is sacred to the worship of the Fortune of Death.



Yama asked the Kenku spirit to tell him which life he himself was living. The creature replied that it was indeed Yama's one hundred and eighth life; their souls were of equal age, and if he meditated here for one hundred and eight days, he too would truly comprehend the Void. Having thus repaid the courtesy bestowed on him by the monk, the Kenku flew away, vanishing into the clouds above. The tale does not say what became of him afterward.

Yama now knew his patience was the key to achieving Enlightenment. He sought out a serene spot above the lake, sat down, and began to meditate, intending to emulate the Kenku and contemplate for one hundred and eight days.

Time passed and Yama continued his meditations uninterrupted, his body sustained by the Elements as he went without food or sleep. But on the one hundred and seventh night, mere hours before the sun would rise on the final day of his meditations, a group of bandits charged into the clearing, pursuing a deer. The commotion interrupted Yama's meditation, and all of the time and patience he had spent on the effort was instantly wasted. As Yama's eyes popped open, he saw the deer cut down by the bandits and felt the supreme understanding of the universe slip through his fingers as surely as life slipped from the body of the deer. Even a man with patience as deep as his could not sustain it in the face of such a loss.

The leader of the bandits saw Yama and responded as such cruel and violent men always respond: he stepped forward and severed Yama's head with a single sword-blow. It is said that the monk did not even blink, and as he died his face—for the first time in his long life—contorted into a bitter scowl.

Yama's anger at being cheated from his kharmic reward was so great that his spirit did not leave the mortal world. Instead, it rose from his body as a *goryo*—a vengeful ghost which tore the life from the bodies of the bandits in a single instant of fury. No longer the monk Yama, the spirit donned the ebony armor of one of the fallen bandits and bound their spirits in chains, dragging them all into the realm of Meido so he could be sure of their punishment. Thus he became Emma-O, the Final Judge, Fortune of Death.

According to this legend, the spot where the shrine stands is the very place where Yama transformed into the dreaded Judge of Meido. And at that very spot a willow tree grew, a twisted tree with one hundred and seven branches...not quite one hundred and eight.

Origins of a Palace: The Iron Flower Changes Its Shade

As time passed, the shrine in the remote valley attracted more and more monks and visitors, eventually requiring expansion. A temple of considerable size grew up around the shrine and the local fame of the site grew. The temple specialized in funerals and offered a place where the bodies (and later ashes) of revered ancestors could be interred with honor in a place of holy serenity. With time this led to an increase in the political importance of the site as well, as more and more prominent samurai's remains were placed there. As has been common throughout the Empire's history, this importance eventually made the temple a subject of conflict.

As it happened, the temple and its serene valley lay very close to the border between the lands of two lords who happened to be political and military rivals. For some time the two merely eyed the lands of the other, keeping their ambitions in check. The more powerful of the two was Lord Ieyasu, whose lands were considerably larger. The temple, however, lay just within the lands of his rival, Lord Seto. As this landmark in Lord Seto's lands grew in importance, Lord Ieyasu began to feel as though it should be his.

Lord Ieyasu did not launch a military attack to take the temple—not right away, at any rate. At the time it was forbidden for the servants of the Emperor to attack one another without proper justification, and in any case violence was distasteful on sacred ground. Instead, Lord Ieyasu sought other means to seize the temple. During the Winter Court season, Lord Seto's courtiers informed him that Lord Ieyasu was covertly seeking legal reasons to invade his lands, intent on taking the Temple to Emma-O. Lord Seto, however, refused to be intimidated by his rival's tactics. He ordered his courtiers to block and deter every attempt to gain approval to seize his lands, holding off the political offensive of Lord Ieyasu as long as possible. In the meantime, a castle would have to be constructed around the temple in order to defend it against any possible future assault.

Lord Seto resolved not only to build a great castle to defend the temple (and through its strategic position, the entire border) but also to make it one of the most formidable castles the land had ever seen. After all, one possible reason Ieyasu might be permitted to seize the temple would be if Lord Seto was shown to be incapable of properly defending it. Seto spared no expense, recruiting the finest Kaiu architects and engineers he could find, men with reputations for building castles that could withstand even the strongest sieges. Word of this did not escape the notice of the courts, of course, and soon many whispered rumors spread of both Lord Seto's castle project and of the slow accumulation of forces within Lord Ieyasu's lands.

As the seasons passed, the architects, engineers, and workers raced to complete the castle. All the while, Lord Ieyasu stationed more and more of his forces close to the border, preparing for the moment when he would have the condoning word of the law to support his invasion. Many believed war was all but inevitable, waiting only on a flimsy legal justification. But the efforts of Lord Seto kept him from gaining that final authority, and as seasons passed like the rushing of the river, the castle grew slowly stronger.

As the third winter arrived since the crisis began, Lord Seto's castle at last reached a point of being somewhat effective, though it was by no means complete. It would take another year before the innermost defensive walls were finished, and two years more to finish the outmost wall. Work on the moat had only just begun and only two of the five planned archer towers were finished. The main keep, however, was virtually completed, and if Lord Ieyasu launched his attack Lord Seto's forces would be able to protect the temple valiantly. Still, the current state of the defenses left much to be desired, and Lord Seto knew that a powerful and focused attack on his incomplete castle could not yet be repelled. Whispers began to run through the courts that despite all his efforts Lord Seto could not adequately protect the Temple to Emma-O, and some claimed his engineers were arguing over which aspects of the castle defenses should be given immediate priority. The temple monks themselves were largely unconcerned with this state of affairs, constantly reassuring Seto's followers that all would be well. But Lord Seto began to worry. His courtiers were having a harder and harder time withstanding Lord Ieyasu's efforts, and he suspected he had only this winter left before Lord Ieyasu would be able to make his move. As the winter court season began, Lord Seto visited the shrine of Emma-O every evening, praying these troubles would resolve in his favor.

Perhaps Emma-O, Fortune of Death, heard his prayers and answered. Regardless, early in that winter season the divine Son of Heaven passed away quietly in his sleep. Despite the obstructing snow of winter, heralds quickly spread word of the Emperor's death throughout the land. All corners of the Empire heard the news and grieved for their departed leader. Word even reached the workers of Lord Seto's castle, who were continuing their construction despite the winter cold. It was unexpected news, but not quite as unexpected as what happened next.

Lord Seto received word from his loyal courtiers mere days afterward. The courts had immediately forgotten about the feuding lords and turned to the matter of Imperial succession. The late Emperor's son had ascended the throne in a lavish ceremony, and amongst his first acts as the new Emperor was to arrange for his father's funeral. The body had already been cremated, the remains already blessed and the soul already begun on its journey to Tengoku, but the winter snows would halt any attempt for an appropriate funeral ceremony fit for the divine Son of Heaven. The funeral itself would have to wait until the thawing of the snows, and when that time came, the new Emperor declared his father would have his funeral in the greatest shrine to the Fortune of Death to exist within the Empire. According to Lord Seto's courtiers, who had spent the last three years singing the praises of the temple in their lord's lands and cultivating the friendship of the Emperor's son, the greatest shrine to Emma-O was certainly

his own. On the dawning of spring, the Imperial Funeral itself was to be held at the temple within Lord Seto's castle!

His courtiers had achieved a remarkable victory, and his castle was now an Imperially-sanctioned site. Lord Ieyasu would not dare seize the land now! In fact, no one loyal to the Imperial Throne would presume to so much as threaten it. Lord Seto's courtiers had done the impossible and nullified the need to defend the border. They had done their job so well, in fact, that there was no longer any need for a castle!

But now there was need for a palace, a place fit to house the Son of Heaven.

The realization filled Lord Seto with dread. The Imperial Court would be visiting his castle... his *incomplete, military-based castle*... with the spring thaw. He could not host the Imperial family within a mere military fortification, a castle built to withstand siege! He could not make the Emperor walk the long, walled, winding, maze-like path to the keep, a path integral to the defense of the castle! He could not offer his guests a mere soldiers' barracks in which to sleep, with only stone walls and hawk's-eye views of thick forest-tops to stare at for weeks on end! His courtiers had done *too* well, and now he had an even bigger problem: the risk of insulting the new Emperor.

But he could not tear down the castle's military aspects and start again. Work had advanced too far for that, and in any case there was simply no time for such an effort. The Emperor's court might, perhaps, forgive the incomplete state of the castle's outmost walls and certain other peripheral buildings, but Lord Seto had to offer a castle complete enough and splendid enough to honor the presence the Emperor and host a proper court. He had only a few short months to somehow convert his castle into a courtly palace worthy of being called a Kyuden.

When Lord Seto shared this change of plans with his engineers, most of them quit outright. They had proud Kaiu heritages and military principles guiding their thoughts and deeds, and were unwilling to change their carefully calculated plans. They wished Lord Seto the best and took themselves (and their construction plans) back to the lands of the Crab.

Despite this further setback, Lord Seto refused to give up. Through the swift mechanizations of his courtiers he recruited the aid of talented architects from elsewhere in the Empire. Their task was truly formidable, of course, and they made sure Lord Seto appreciated the extent and difficultly of what was asked of them. To them the layout of the castle was a nightmare. The path to the keep was multi-tiered and maze-like, with numerous dead ends designed to trap invading soldiers. The innermost area that held the keep itself was not placed in the center of the castle grounds, which would have been ideal for an efficient court, but instead stood at the very back adjacent to the castle walls. The vital Temple itself was walled off, only its uppermost level visible from the ground. The archer's towers were eyesores, disrupting the visual layout of the complex. The half-built moat blocked off the most efficient entry point.

Many of the architects reviewed the site and then declared they had absolutely nothing to work with. It was certainly an ideal layout for defending against a siege, that much they could not deny, but for a castle whose purpose was to host a court it was simply unusable even with an infinite amount of time to work, let alone the few months they had to bring it into state worthy of the Emperor. For a time it looked as though no one would be willing to undertake the commission and Lord Seto would be doomed by his courtiers' "victory" over Lord Ieyasu. But finally they found a few bold young artists and architects who were willing to take on the seemingly impossible task.



The new team worked through the entire winter season. Stone construction was abandoned in favor of wood and plaster, which could be worked with far more quickly. Ribbons of worked iron were cast aside in favor of silks and colorful paints. Lord Seto watched as his coffers dwindled, feeling more and more dread as the days passed and the architects did everything in their power to convert the cold, unfeeling stone walls of the castle into a place of beauty and serenity. There was nothing he could do but watch and pray.

By the time the spring thaw came, the architects and workers had done wonders. The moat was converted into a reflecting pool, trees planted around it to bear white blossoms with the new season. The two finished archer towers were converted into more courtly uses; one tower became a star observatory, while the other was made to an elevated tea room where one could have the tea ceremony while overlooking the compound. The walls surrounding the temple were left with their unfinished white plaster surface, the bleached-bone shade of death. The barracks were converted as much as possible into guest quarters and were fitted with colorful painted paper walls, tea rooms, and other amenities—though on the outside, they were still plain and looked better suited for soldiers. With no time to flatten the castle's tiers and break down the maze-like walls, a great wood-and-plaster ramp was constructed that bypassed the castle's entire defensive layout, extending from the entrance all the way up to the temple and keep—a less than ideal solution, but the only one that could be done in a short amount of time. Only a handful of the remaining buildings could be finished, so in the great open courtyard before the keep the servants of Lord Seto erected colorful tents and prayed the spring would be warm.

On the third day of spring, Lord Seto watched as the Imperial procession approached his castle. Everywhere he looked he saw only what had gone wrong. Part stone, part wood, half-Shiro, half-Kyuden, and cradling a monument to mortality at its center, his castle seemed to be in a state of disaster. The calm and reassuring words of the monks, who insisted everything would be all right, gave him no comfort. He could only maintain his face and walk out to greet the Emperor at the foot of his keep. In his private quarters he left a box with a white kimono beneath his daisho stand, fully expecting the day would end with his committing seppuku to atone for the Emperor's displeasure.

But then something remarkable happened. As Lord Seto bowed to the approaching Emperor, he noticed the Son of Heaven was smiling. The Emperor was awestruck by what he saw at the new castle; to him it seemed the most complex and compelling statement of life and death intermingled that he had ever seen. The Son of Heaven strolled past the reflecting pool, meditating on the fallen white petals that floated on the surface of the waters. Walking up the ramp, he looked over the side and marveled at the maze underneath his feet. He smiled at the novelty of taking tea suspended high above ground, or frosty nights spent gazing at the stars from the comfort of a tower observatory. The wall-obscured temple he took as an artistic statement on the nature of death; like death, it could only be seen in glimpses from the side of life, and none would know what it was truly like until they passed through the gates to what lay beyond. Everything the Emperor saw only served to further please him. Just as a samurai must balance the courtly and warrior aspects of his life, so did this castle combine military aspects with those of a courtly palace. The Son of Heaven praised Lord Seto for his boldness and vision, for the skill of his workers, and for the brilliance of his architects. Since the Emperor was impressed, naturally his entire court was impressed. Surely, they said, there was no castle within the Empire quite as unique as this one.

Of course, none were quite as surprised by this result as Lord Seto himself. Not only did he not have to commit seppuku, he actually became famous throughout the land for his unique vision, breathing new life into the art of architecture with his unconventional approach. Even Lord Ieyasu sent a bound scroll to Lord Seto, congratulating him on the excellence of his castle, admitting defeat in their struggle, and commending him on the brilliance of his courtiers. It is said Lord Ieyasu visited the castle from time to time thereafter, becoming friends with Lord Seto within the halls of the keep which his own ambitions had birthed.

When the Emperor compared the castle to a piece of raw iron re-worked into the shape of a blossom, Lord Seto decided to take that image for the castle's name. It became known as Kyuden Kurogane-Hana, the "Iron-Flower Castle."

Kyuden Kurogane-Hana Today

Iron-Flower Castle still stands at the base of the valley. There have been many improvements made on the keep since those first frantic years, but the lords who have inherited the land make sure to keep the overall look of the castle intact. It is a place of considerable political importance despite its relatively remote location, having hosted the funeral of an Emperor—something few castles can boast—and having a temple whose catacombs contain his ashes. It is frequently the site of important courts, and to this day its architecture remains a fascination for courtly visitors. The temple's monks are as smiling and reassuring as ever, descendants of those who have witnessed firsthand what the will of the Fortunes can bring.

Lord Seto himself has his ashes buried within the catacombs beneath the temple, and a small shrine to the castle's first lord stands in the temple gardens. On the stone marker one can find his final haiku, written on his deathbed in old age:

Where blossoms wither
Fallen leaves nourish seedlings
Beneath the valley

Notable Locations at Kyuden Kurogane-Hana

The following section describes the more noteworthy locations both inside and outside of Kyuden Kurogane-Hana, providing a variety of environments in which visiting PCs can interact with the inhabitants of the court and temple. We have avoided presenting a map of the castle and environs; since Kyuden Kurogane-Hana is intended as a "generic" castle that can appear in whatever part of the Empire the GM might require, every GM will have a different concept of exactly how it should be laid out.

Exterior

Although the greatest focus of any castle is its interior, there are a number of interesting locations outside the walls of Kyuden Kurogane-Hana. It is notable that there is not a major city outside of the castle, in contrast to many other Kyuden around the Empire; instead, there is only a modest village, Kagami no Tengoku Mura, named after the famous lake which lies in the valley below the castle. It is a simple rice-farming community that gains a little extra prosperity due to its proximity to the castle, but there is very little in the village of interest to samurai. Aside from the rice paddies and tea fields, it boasts only a brewery and a small teahouse. The peasant inhabitants are pleasant enough, but tend to their own business and avoid the castle with its samurai inhabitants.

The nearby lake is a freshwater basin fed by streams from the hills along with several springs. It is relatively free of fish but otherwise teems with surface life, such as amphibians and insects, and is a popular resting-place for migrating herons and cranes. It is not known how this lake came to earn its name of Kagami no Tengoku ("Heaven's Mirror Lake"), but some postulate this is a tribute to the serenity of the waters on summer nights. Legend says that one of the castle's architects was inspired to convert the incomplete moat into a reflecting pool by gazing upon this lake's waters.

GM's Option: Proximity to Civilization

The default depiction of Kyuden Kurogane-Hana places it a considerable distance from other settlements or major cities. This is designed to facilitate placing it easily into a "normal" depiction of Rokugan without disrupting the existing settlements and strongholds of Rokugan. However, there is no reason why an individual GM cannot relocate the castle into a much more central or populated region of the Empire, perhaps even replacing one of the major existing strongholds of the Empire. In this case it is likely that the castle will be adjacent to a much larger settlement or possibly even a small city rather than the humble village of Kagami no Tengoku Mura. Such a settlement will allow the GM to add many other types of environments and distractions for courtiers visiting the castle, including inns, geisha houses, and gambling dens. It will also make the castle's courts even more prominent and heavily-attended, allowing the GM to "up the ante" and add higher-ranking NPCs and more politically significant events in the court.

Seto no Mori

The forest flanking the castle is thick and lush. A mixed temperate forest dominated by maples, cypresses, and pines, it extends several hundred yards in all directions, eventually melding with the nearby old-growth forest that predates the castle's existence.

In point of fact, this forest was hand-planted at the command of the castle's first lord, Lord Seto. While the castle was still in its conception, Seto's engineers initially placed the castle well away from the valley's prevailing forest, which might have concealed an approaching enemy force. However, once it became necessary to convert the fortress into a palace, the absence of nearby shade became yet another flaw in the structure. Lord Seto's solution was simply to extend the forest to meet the castle. Great efforts were put into planting a new forest around the castle, using a combination of mass-transplanting and seeding.



The Caretakers of the Reflection Pool

The caretakers who look after the castle's famed reflection pool are a family of heimin servants sworn directly to the lord of the castle; they have fulfilled their duty to care for the reflection pool for many generations, and are regarded as honored retainers. They takes their tasks quite seriously, and while they are certainly not samurai, their positions as direct servants of the castle's lord lets them enjoy much higher status than the typical heimin and even a little bit of genuine authority within the pool's boundaries. The family has developed numerous techniques to keep the waters clean and pristine, the koi fish healthy, and the surrounding area attractive in all four seasons of the year.

The oldest member of the family is a gruff man with patience only for his work. He doesn't care too much for visitors. Muddying up his reflection pool, making noise from the pagoda, touching the flowers, feeding the fish, and in general any way of breaking the serenity of the pool draws his ire. (This is ironic, since without visitors to appreciate the pool and his family's work, his duties would be purposeless.) Of course, as a heimin he cannot actually criticize samurai or prevent them from visiting the pool, but he does make a point of expressing his displeasure with disappointed sighs and other subtle signals. He also makes a point of preventing any commoners from outside his family from visiting the pool.

It may be noted that there is no law preventing a samurai from punishing or killing the caretakers in retaliation for their modest gestures of displeasure. However, such an action will certainly draw the wrath of the castle's lords for harming such trusted and valuable heimin retainers.

Hundreds of years later, the small forest called Seto no Mori is the home of countless animals and the scene for many pleasant woodland strolls. It is a source of high-quality lumber, game, and sometimes fruit and nuts. The woods eventually give way to the much older surrounding forest, but this is only evident to those who notice how the trees become taller and older and the paths less-traveled.

Close to the castle itself, a few of the older and rarer cypress trees are singled out from the others by lengths of shimenawa rope and wooden fences. These are sacred trees that predate the planting of Seto's forest, marking the sites where forest spirits are believed to dwell. Disturbing or harming these trees is considered quite bad luck. The monks of the temple visit periodically to repair the sacred ropes and make sure the trees are properly revered.

Hora no Kaze: The Wind Cave

Not too far from Heaven's Mirror Lake is a small but deep cave in the hillside. In contrast to many such places, the cave is dry and maintains a moderate temperature all year long. This makes it an ideal place to store silkworms, and the local villagers frequently use it for this purpose. The cave's name is derived from a strange echoing sound that can be heard throughout the cave all year round, resembling a steady wind, despite the complete absence of even the slightest breeze within. The source of the sound is unknown, although some samurai who have investigated believed there may be an underground spring flowing beneath the cavern's floor. Regardless, it causes a fair amount of superstition, and the local silkworm farmers regularly visit the temple to request blessings and protective fetishes from the monks.

The Reflection Pool

Just outside the castle walls may be found a large and beautiful reflection pool. Originally, this was intended to serve as the castle's moat, sealing it off against external attack; however, the change to a palace led to its being redesigned into this more pleasant alternative. The reflection pool is said to have been the Emperor's favorite external feature of the castle (something the lords of Kurogane-Hana make sure to mention often), and great lengths are taken to ensure it remains both prominent and in good repair.

The pool is shallow (the architects filled in the lower depths of the intended moat) and its glittering clear water is inhabited by koi, frogs, dragonflies, and other such denizens, while the surface bears floating lily-pads and lotus blossoms, gifts from a rival lord ages ago. The pool is fed by the same stream that runs through the temple itself, and its edges of the pool are lined with hardy snowbell trees, lovingly transplanted from the nearby woods. The snowbells are resistant to pests and disease, and thanks to the studious work of the caretakers they remain beautiful year-round. In the spring, the trees show bright green leaves, but their true beauty comes in summer, when large clusters of white bellflowers shake in the valley's warm breezes. These flowers are a pristine pearl white—the color of death and impermanence, set amid the vibrant green of life and restoration. The juxtaposition of colors is often interpreted as a statement of life flourishing amid death, and the trees' distorted reflection in the serene pool is likewise usually said to be representative of human perception. First-time visitors are sometimes asked what color first catches their attention, with the answer offering insight into their character and philosophy: do they focus on the green of life, the white of death, or the colorless serenity of the pool itself?

The path to the castle crosses over this pool via a large flat wooden bridge, wide enough for three men to walk side-by-side; it stands only a few inches above the water's surface, and there is no guardrail. This lets the bridge offer visitors a view of their own reflections in the waters, although there have been a few instances of guests falling in (which usually invokes the ire of the caretakers).

In the midst of the reflecting pool is a small island with a gazebo, and a wooden walkway breaks off from the bridge to connect to this island. Large enough to accommodate a small gathering for a tea ceremony or a poetry party, the gazebo is also a popular destination for those seeking meditation, and there is a stone incense bowl set into the center of the floor. In the evenings it is also a popular meeting place for secret lovers, despite the caretakers' attempts to discourage the practice.

The Three Tiers

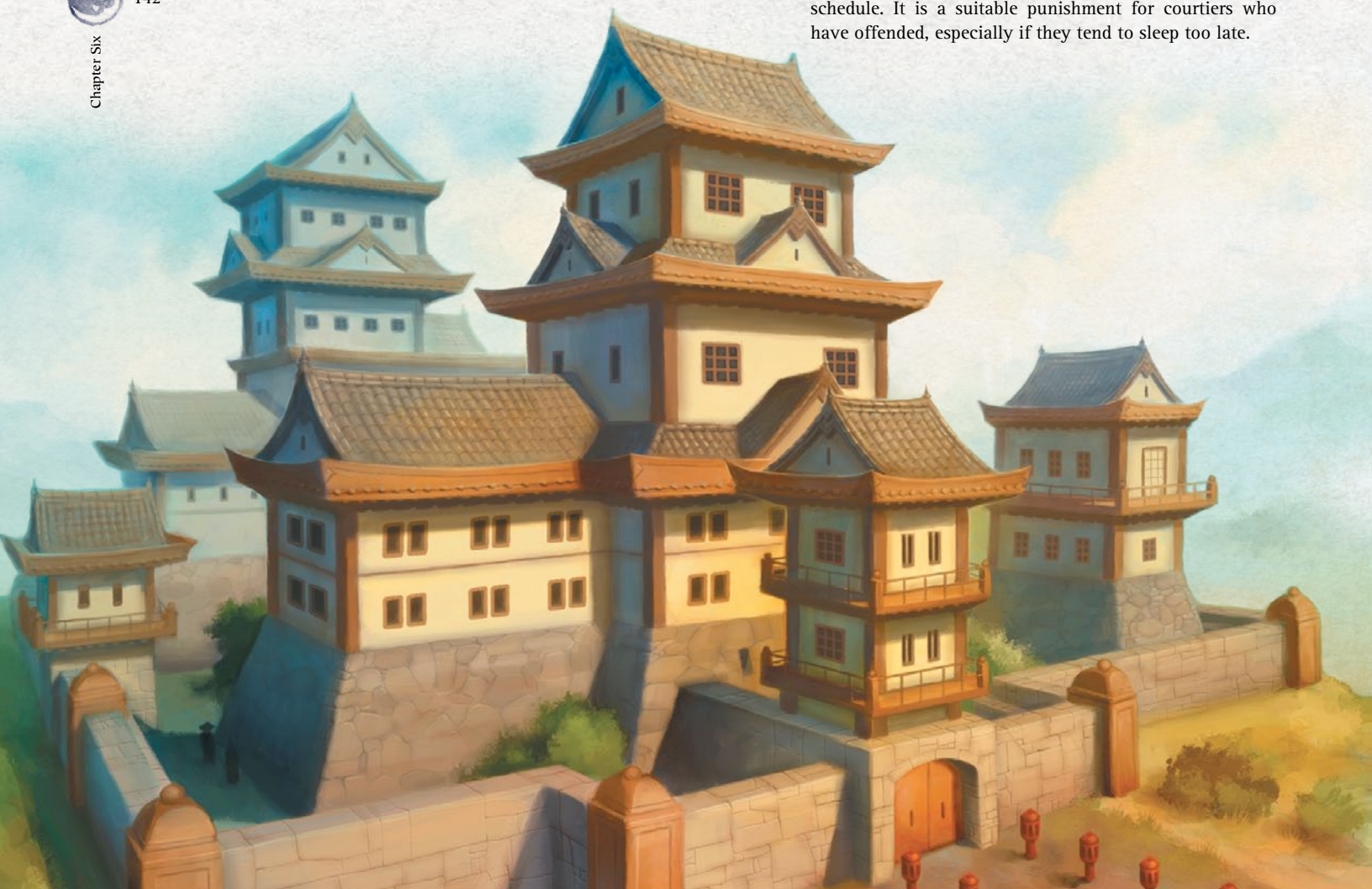
The castle grounds sit upon a tall stone base called a *Musha-Gaeshi*, and spread across approximately 10 acres in total. The stone base originally served to elevate the castle and thus make it more difficult to assault, although it also makes it more impressive looking. The entire complex is constructed in three tiers, with the palace at the topmost tier and the entrance at the bottom.

The bottommost and largest tier, known as the *sannomaru*, was built directly upon the Musha-Gaeshi. The border of this entire first tier (except for the entrance) is protected by sheer stone walls. The second tier, known as the *ninomaru*, is built up on top of the first and is surrounded by an inner moat. Finally the third tier, the *honmaru*, is elevated above the second tier and placed adjacent to the primary walls, and is separated from the other tiers by another gate and inner wall. Each winding path from one level to the next is a steady uphill climb, with abrupt ramps over small surrounding moats leading to the gates granting access to the next tier. This design is traditional for large military fortresses in Rokugan, and is known as the *Taikaku* layout; it is considered ideal for defending against outside attack.

It is not ideal, however, for a palace whose purpose is to entertain guests and host courts. The tiers were already laid out when the plans changed, so the architects added a single great ramp, the so-called Splendid Ramp, that began at the front gate, bypassed the first and second tiers entirely, and ended at the front gate of the honmaru tier.

In the castle's modern political role, these three stacked tiers serve social functions rather than military ones. When guests stay within the castle, the highest ranking samurai and their immediate servants stay within the innermost honmaru tier. The secondary ninomaru tier is home to the next-most ranking samurai and vassals, while the lowest-ranking visitors stay in the bottom tier and closest to the entrance. Only direct servants to visitors or the lords are permitted to live within the castle walls, and even then, only at the Servants Quarters specifically designed for them. Commoners are otherwise not permitted within the castle walls at all.

This arrangement also makes for a built-in disciplinary system, as vassals who displease their lords can be punished by moving them to quarters in the middle tier. Many take this to be an implicit warning of reduced status and thus are thankful they were not moved all the way to the bottom, where they would have to rub elbows with guests far more ordinary than they are. However, in some ways being moved to the middle tier is a more severe punishment; the bottom and top tiers both have easy access to the Splendid Ramp, whereas those staying in the ninomaru must work their way through the castle's maze-like network of paths and gates to get from one court or meeting-room to the next. Such a displacement can turn a five-minute walk into a half-hour excursion, requiring more preparation and effort to maintain an already tight schedule. It is a suitable punishment for courtiers who have offended, especially if they tend to sleep too late.



The Splendid Ramp

Originally constructed of sturdy oak and assembled in less than a month, the Splendid Ramp is later upgraded to a more permanent structure of stone and wood that required ten years to complete. It is wide enough for twelve men to walk side-by-side as they ascend to the gate of the Honmaru tier. The edges are lined with stone barriers that reach the waist, with continuous wooden handrails constructed over that. The handrails are capped at nine intervals with cast iron *giboshi* (bulb ornaments) carved with the faces of fantastic creatures, seen as guardians of the castle. In between these are poles which display paper lanterns corresponding with the seasons. During festivals, it is common to see the Splendid Ramp extensively decorated with lanterns and streamers, and the dragon dancers of the yearly Bon Festival always make a point to begin their march at the base of the ramp.

The Splendid Ramp earned its name due to the cleverness of Lord Seto's wife. By the time the ramp was completed, although the incline was steady, it still appeared to be a daunting climb to the topmost tier, and thus unsuitable for courtly guests. Lord Seto's wife suggested he call it a 'Splendid Ramp' and make it appealing to those who would have to climb it. Lord Seto set out to make the ramp as splendid as possible, painting it in brilliant colors and adding the lanterns and streamers which are now a traditional part of its decoration. By the time of the Emperor's arrival, the ramp was a glowing, colorful bridge to the palace, a magical walkway overlooking the entire compound. The Emperor was delighted by this unconventional entrance and the Splendid Ramp became one of the castle's most popular features.

The Kuruwa Pathways

"Kuruwa" is the term for the minor walls of the castle's layout, those innumerable barriers that divide the castle grounds into different minor sections. Originally as part of the castle's defensive layout the first two tiers were designed with many disorderly sections, winding stone paths, and obstructive interior walls. This complex system of walls, courtyards, raised walkways, and bottlenecking gates allowed defenders to anticipate the path of invaders (or even direct them) and inflict heavy losses as they struggled through to the upper tier. Of course, this became a hindrance when the purpose of the castle changed, but ripping out all of the kuruwa was simply impractical in the time available, so the Splendid Ramp served as the solution to the problem. Afterward the Emperor's successful visit, Lord Seto decided to respect the genius of the Kaiu engineers who designed the original layout of the tiers by leaving the kuruwa in place.

The winding pathways formed by the kuruwa now serve as a place for thoughtful courtiers to stroll and wander as their whims take them, whether killing time between appointments or simply seeking the inspiration of some time alone. Adventurous and curious guests can spend hours exploring the maze-like paths of the middle and lower tiers. Along they way they may come across many of the various lesser castle attractions, such as the five gardens situated in the lower tiers, the Temple to Emma-O itself in a defensive corner of the ninomaru, one of the two corner turrets overlooking the lands beyond, or one of the wide lantern-lit tunnels underneath the Splendid Ramp.

Sometimes, aspiring artists place their works on the pathways' walls, hoping that one of these wandering courtiers will take notice of their work. It has become a common practice for visitors with artistic skills to contribute something in this way, and some pieces remain on display for months or even years if someone in the castle's ruling family decides to fancy them.

During festivals, red lanterns are strung from the walls on the second tier, creating a maze of lights to thrill and excite the guests.

The Castle Gates

The gates of Kyuden Kurogane-Hana form bottleneck points that limit access to different parts of the complex. This is a feature common even with courtly palaces, so their presence is accepted. Security, after all, is still a concern even in castles built for court and pleasure.

Kyuden Kurogane-Hana possesses five major gates. The first is the entrance, the main gate of the castle, a massive structure that pierces the outer walls and leads directly to the base of the Splendid Ramp. With its two-tiered pagoda-style roof and grand wooden doors, it can be an imposing site to new visitors. Flanking the main gate are two huge stone statues of fu lions, the traditional guardians beasts placed at the entrances of palaces and temples. The main gate also has two guard stations set into its walls, and indeed this is standard practice throughout the castle to ensure the safety of all guests.

The second gate separates the second tier from the first, and is known as the Ninomaru Gate. Although it is identical in general appearance to the first gate, it is taller and narrower, and flanked by statues of sacred ki-rin spirits. While the first gate is set directly into the outer wall, this gate is set into an angled corner of the kuruwa passages. This makes it easy to overlook, and some have mistaken it from a distance as a dead end.

The third gate is also placed at a kurawa corner, but lies at the top of the Splendid Ramp, which faces it head on. This is the Honmaru Gate, which restricts access to the third and highest tier. It is the most splendid of the gates, painted in vibrant colors and possessing a three-tiered pagoda rooftop. Gold-plated statues of coiled celestial dragons flank this gate, their enigmatic gaze measuring the purity of each visitor.

The fourth gate is the gate to the temple, Shinden Emma-O. It is set into the sturdy lesser walls that surround the temple. The doors are made from massive oak beams, heavily lacquered and bearing elaborate and exquisite carvings. On one door, a representation of the peaceful monk Yama smiles at visitors, while on the other, an empty suit of samurai armor stares menacingly, threateningly brandishing a naginata. The gate is closed from sundown

to sunup, and the monks permit no visitors during that time.

The fifth gate's existence is not known to any visitors, nor to the majority of those who live at the Kyuden. It is a subterranean gateway that blocks passage into the hidden escape tunnels in the castle's catacombs. In the unlikely event that anyone should discover the escape passage and seek to use it as a way in, the gate stands as the primary obstacle. It is made of cast iron and displays a frowning mask representing the lost face of Emma-O. In hundreds of years, it has never been opened.

The Star Observatory

Originally the Kaiu engineers' plans called for six turrets to serve as watchtowers and archery stations (six being an especially lucky number). Two were to be placed side-by-side facing the border to Lord Seto's lands, while the others would be placed at each remaining corner of the palace walls. However, only two of these planned towers were ever erected. When the castle's plans changed, the new architects sought a more suitable use for the two archery towers that had already been built. The southernmost tower now serves as a star observatory. A hatch was built into the ceiling of the top room so that the sky could be exposed to the occupants. Further, the eastern and western walls were left largely as open spaces so the night air could flow freely through the room. The chamber is furnished with large cushions and a coal pit for warmth and to heat up snacks
and tea.

The Tea Room Tower

The second of the completed towers, which lay to the east, was converted into a tea room. Guests enter the room through a small trap door in the floor, arriving in a room with a single large window facing west, which keeps the chamber cool and dim until just before twilight. The window is a perfect circle, framing a view of the rest of the castle. Guests are fond of meeting here to hold private negotiations or poetry contests, and lovers also consider the Tea Room Tower an especially favorable place to meet late at night.

The Theatre and Gallery

The theater and art gallery of Kyuden Kurogane-Hana is located on the middle tier, but right at the edge of the upper tier and easily visible from the Splendid Ramp. It is a rather large building, built from maple and oak in the style of an ancient dojo. Inside, the theatre can accommodate many guests in both a large open seating area before the stage and two long balconies that extend to the length of the structure. Its design is best suited to kabuki theater, although noh plays are also performed. The theatre has all the amenities one would expect; a *hanamichi* walkway divides the audience section and provides a place for actors to travel away from the stage, while above, solid beams allow the *chunori* technique of lifting actors into the air with ropes and pulleys. A slight oddity is the absence of an Imperial seat reserved specifically for Imperial guests. This is because the first Emperor to visit the castle was fond of sitting near the front row during plays; due to his station, his eccentricity was not discouraged. Even so, during visits from powerful or high-ranking guests, one section of the balcony is usually adapted for this purpose.

When there are no performances, the theatre is open to the public and doubles as an art gallery. It is considered proper to place sculptures on the stage, not blocking the hanamichi, and to place paintings, poetry, and other such flat works on the walls of the balconies. Access to these displays is unrestricted, and any aspiring artist is welcome to hang his or her works.





The Five Gardens

Scattered throughout the three tiers of the castle grounds are five gardens. Two gardens are found on the first tier, two on the second, and the grandest one on the topmost tier.

The first-tier gardens include a rock garden near the base of the Splendid Ramp, which features small grassy paths around oblong bodies of raked sand and standing stones. Observant and knowledgeable visitors sometimes remark on the similarities between the exterior landscape and the placement of objects within the gardens; this is intentional, for the garden layout is actually representative of the surrounding countryside. This garden was a gift from a visiting lord, who commissioned its creation and supplied the artists and materials for it.

The second first-tier garden is the largest on the castle grounds and the one that receives the most visitors. It follows an autumn theme, with plants chosen specifically to represent that season year-round. It is a strolling garden and incorporates the inner moat, with a path that winds throughout and crosses the moat several times on small arched bridges. The path eventually leads to a small pavilion where the view of the whole garden can be appreciated.

On the second tier is another rock garden, this one lying within the walls of the Temple to Emma-O. Larger than the rock garden on the first tier, it is cared for by the monks and draws considerable attention from them; see the discussion of the Temple for more details.

Also on the second tier, adjacent to the Tea Room Tower, is a smaller garden intended for holding outdoor tea ceremonies. At its center lies a small pagoda, approached from the garden's three entrances by three different stone-step paths. The garden boasts bonsai plants, miniature green hills, and tiny ponds, and its layout is best appreciated from the central seat of the pagoda, the seat for the most honored guest of any gathering. It is the most popular garden for storytelling and poetry parties.

The last and grandest garden is adjacent to the palace on the third tier. It is a strolling garden designed to suit the tastes of the Imperial family. In the spring and summer it is a vibrant and green garden, designed as a miniature representation of the lands surrounding the old Imperial City of Otosan Uchi. However, the nature of the plantlife used in this garden is such that in winter, it is completely barren, with black-barked and empty trees and frozen ponds. After the Imperial City is destroyed by Daigotsu in the twelfth century, some visitors to Kyuden Kurogane-Hana suggest that Emma-O made this garden into a warning omen regarding the city it resembled.

The three gardens which contain plants all have fruit-bearing trees and edible vegetation growing somewhere within their grounds. Originally these were intended to provide food in case of siege. Now, however, they provide a pleasant source of treats for the castle's cooks, who are well-known for their skills at candying berries.

The groundskeeper families of the different gardens are known to be rivals to one-another, each one seeking to outdo the others and make their own garden the grandest within the castle walls. This rivalry is encouraged by the castle's lord, who believes he benefits from their constant competition. Unlike the caretakers of the reflecting pool, the gardeners welcome visitors to their respective gardens, since their efforts cannot be appreciated unless they have visitors.

The Dojo

The castle maintains only one simple bushi dojo on its first tier, near the barracks. It is maintained by an honored sensei of the ruling family, and serves primarily as a place of training for the castle's modest compliment of guards. During the day, any visitor may make use of the dojo's grounds and resources for their own training. Guests are permitted to observe the guards' classes, but may not participate or use the dojo themselves at those times. The grounds are closed and guarded after sunset.

The Barracks

There are three different barracks within the castle grounds, one on each tier, providing housing for the castle's garrison. The barracks are much smaller than originally intended by the Kaiu designers, since the conversion to a palace meant that much of the barracks space was converted into guest housing. Each barracks also has a

small stable attached, and these can be used to house the guests' horses as well as the limited number of mounts used by the castle's soldiers.

Although the barracks serve primarily to house the castle guards, they can serve other purposes when needed. Guests of minor importance are sometimes housed in the barracks when there is not room elsewhere, and the rooms may also be used to hold prisoners when such needs arise.

Bathhouses

There are three bathhouses within the castle grounds, one for each tier. The first is near the dojo on the first tier, the second is a long walk from the Temple on the second tier, and the third is built into a covered walkway connected to the palace on the top tier.

The Three Waraku-an (Guest Houses)

Guest houses are located on the first and second tiers, with a larger single house on the first tier and two smaller ones on the second. They are large pagoda-topped structures, almost miniature palaces, matching the external aesthetics of the main keep and turrets. Each guest house is divided into three sections: an entrance hall decorated with artistic carvings and paintings, an array of individual private living quarters for the guests (usually situated along several internal hallways), and small kitchen area with servants to tend to the needs of each guest. The lower-tier guest house also has an extended, two-story balcony area for lounging, while the two upper-tier guest houses feature private stables and a larger entrance hall that doubles as a reception area.

Storehouses

The castle's storehouses are numerous and spacious. Food, other supplies, and all manner of seasonal necessities are kept within as required. While the other lesser buildings of the castle have either wood or thick paper walls, the storehouses have walls made of thick plaster. This is to provide resistance to fires, always a danger in Rokugani castles and settlements.

The Tent Grounds

On the first tier is a vast open space intended for the placement of tents. This is mostly a vestigial feature leftover from the castle's early days of hosting courts, but the tent grounds nonetheless are occasionally used by guests in the spring and summer who prefer to enjoy the outdoor breezes. More often, however, the tent grounds are utilized as a communal space by the castle's denizens, and at any time one can find sculptors working on their pieces, artists brushing ink on paper, samurai practicing their kata, and groups of courtiers engaging in impromptu games of kemari.

The Inner Moat

A small moat surrounds the edge of the second tier, further separating it from the first. The most can only be crossed at the bridge by the Ninomaru Gate. Portions of the moat feed into the artificial ponds of the gardens, and sometimes koi and other animals can be found swimming in its murky waters.

The Main Keep, Seto Palace

Seto Palace is set on the highest tier, adjacent to the castle walls and thus the farthest structure from the main entrance. Its location is ideal for defensive oversight of the castle grounds. Despite the simplicity of its design, it is an exquisite palace containing a formidable array of audience halls, private chambers, offices, and residential quarters, as well as a grand hall on the ground floor suitable for hosting a formal court. It measures 115 feet tall and appears to have eight stories on the outside, though in fact the interior has only seven.

The palace was originally intended to be a great keep. The architects devised the tower to act not only as their daimyo's living quarters, but also as a lookout tower to watch for incoming forces. Thus, it was not placed in the center of the castle like in most designs, but instead on the back of the third tier, built into the main wall. It was designed to be a four-sided tower capped with several triangular fortress-tops, creating the illusion of "false floors" to befuddle enemies. Once it became a palace, many of these features survived in vestigial form, including an abundance of nightingale floors designed to squeak when walked upon, a security device intended to foil assassins.

The keep was supposed to have two wings extending from the sides, housing barracks for guards. Only one wing was completed before the purpose of the castle changed, and it was converted to servants' quarters; the space where the other wing was supposed to be placed is now the third tier gardens.Another building, this one only two stories tall, is connected to the palace via this wing. This building serves as an extension of the keep, and has a personal bathhouse and second residence for the daimyo.

The layout of the palace is as such:

First Floor

- **The Cypress Room**—A small reception room named for four different paintings of cypress trees, one on each wall.
- **Main Reception Room**—A wide room with a panoramic landscape painted onto the far wall. A thin

dais is situated before the painted wall. This room is for greeting guests and receiving gifts on behalf of the castle's lord.

- **The Quarters of the Imperial Herald**—Actually two rooms separated by a shoji door. One half features a small dais and is used to receive important messages from the Imperial Herald. The other half is a living chamber for the use of the Imperial Herald, catered specifically to his frequent need to leave at a moment's notice.
- **The Grand Hall**—A vast hall comprised of five large chambers interconnected by paper walls and sliding shoji doors. The largest chamber is used to host the main court, featuring a dais for the host and plenty of space for tables and other portable furniture. Small chambers are built into the walls with disguised shoji. These are places for yojimbo to wait until called upon, and are directly connected to escape passages that interlock all of the chambers.
- **Living Quarters for Honored Guests**—Each of the lesser residences within the palace are identical in their layout. A centralized tea room sits between four to eight personal rooms that are connected to the central room via shoji doorways. Each such guest residence presents a different ambiance through artwork, colors, and similar methods, and is extravagantly and comfortably furnished. The first floor features four clustered groups of guest quarters, which sometimes serves as clan embassies during Imperial Winter Courts.
- **Servant's Living Quarters**—An Imperial Court requires a large number of servants, and one entire wing of the castle is devoted to housing them.
- **Kitchen**—An extension of the servant's quarters, this is where the servants prepare food for their lord's honored guests.

Second Floor

- **Living Quarters for Honored Guests**—The same as the first floor rooms.
- **The Pine Room**—A small room named for the predominant theme of pines depicted on the wall paintings. It features access to a large balcony that faces the gardens. A popular place for meetings and tea parties.
- **Private Audience Chamber**—A secure room for the purpose of hosting truly private audiences. Access to this room is granted through one of two hidden shoji doors set in the hallway walls. It is located at the center of the level, with no natural source of light, and the walls of the room are thicker than usual to help obscure any words spoken within it.

Third Floor

- **Living Quarters for Honored Guests**—The same as the first floor rooms.
- The third floor also contains an array of other simple rooms suitable for multiple functions.

No Castle Floorplans?

We have deliberately refrained from presenting a hyper-detailed floorplan or an official map for Kyuden Kurogane-Hana. Since this is intended to be a "generic" setting which the GM can insert into any campaign, pinning the GM down to a specific detailed layout will diminish his ability to customize the castle for his own needs. Likewise, if the GM is planning some sort of chase or mystery within the palace itself, a detailed floorplan may be disadvantageous by disrupting the story he is planning to tell.

That being said, we know many players and GMs enjoy floorplans. Many of the published supplements in the early years of the L5R RPG, such as the Way of the Clans series of books, contained sample floorplans of notable castles within Rokugan. GMs who are interested are urged to acquire these books, which are still available on the secondary market or in PDF form from DriveThruRPG.com.

Fourth Floor

- **Living Quarters for Honored Guests**—The same as the first floor rooms.
- **The North Balcony**—A large public balcony facing north, overlooking the Temple grounds. This is another popular location for tea parties, private dinners, and similar functions.

Fifth Floor

- **Living Quarters of the Daimyo**—Virtually the entire fifth floor is devoted to personal living quarters of the castle's ruling family. The largest room on this floor is the master bedroom, which takes up one third of the space. Within the lord's personal quarters is the West Balcony, which overlooks the gardens.
- **Living Quarters of the House Guard**—A sixth of the space on this floor is devoted to the daimyo's personal guard. Behind their walls are passages that grant access to each of the rooms on this floor.

Sixth Floor

- **The Imperial Quarters**—The grandest of the palace's living quarters are found on the sixth floor, and are devoted to housing any Imperial visitors (other than the Imperial Herald). This is where the Emperor once stayed, and since then anyone staying here is considered to enjoy a great honor. Within these quarters is access to the East Balcony, facing the rising sun.

Seventh Floor

The small seventh floor is used primarily for storage, but also grants access to the castle's pagoda rooftops via a hidden hatch in the ceiling.

Emma-O no Shinden

The original purpose behind the castle's construction is the Temple to Emma-O, situated at the most secure corner of the castle grounds, sectioned off from the rest of the castle by great walls. Guests who approach these walls cannot see over the top to what lies beyond, a subtle statement as to the nature of death.

The Temple to Emma-O was once the site of an Emperor's funeral. As such, it enjoys much fame and prestige as a place specializing in funeral rites of the recently departed. It is considered a great honor to be cremated at the feet of the statue of Emma-O, and even greater to be entombed within its catacombs upon death, for then the ashes share proximity to those of an honored Son of Heaven. This is reserved only for the most deserving.



The Temple Walls

The walls of the temple form a great centralized courtyard where the shrines, gardens, and other sacred places reside. The walls themselves are thick stone, but painted and lacquered black to resemble the wood of ebony. The gate to the temple grants access only from the southern side and is flanked by statues of guardian dragons.

Usually, temple designs add a second gateway located in a straight line north of the southern gate to allow for a flow of positive energy. It is omitted for this temple, however; once one has passed through the gates of death, only the weight of karma can provide another way back.

The Shrine to Emma-O

At the center of the temple courtyard is the Shrine to Emma-O. Passing under the shrine's torii arches, one can reach the sacred willow where legend says the monk Yama became the Fortune of Death. Built around the willow is a representation of the entrance to Meido, complete with a statue of Emma-O staring impassively down at worshippers. Here is where visitors may make offerings to the Final Judge.

Just outside are the purification wells where visitors may rinse their arms and face before entering. Smaller shrines to the Fortunes are often erected within the courtyard as well, though none are given the same veneration as Emma-O.

The Gardens of Meido

The south-east corner of the complex contains a rock garden, a sea of raked sand beds and mounds, standing rocks, and pebble-sewn pathways. It is believed the garden depicts the landscape of Meido, and that if one is lost in the afterlife, recalling the layout of the garden will help one to find where one should be. The monks of the temple spend much of their time tending to the garden, sifting the sands in subtle ways, not only for the task itself but also for the meditative focus which such simple labor provides.

The Lecture Hall

The largest building within the Temple courtyard, the Lecture Hall also contains living quarters for the monks. Here is where the oldest monks instruct others as to the ways of Meido and the nature of their mysterious patron Fortune.

The Library

Adjacent to the Lecture Hall, the Library is a vast depository for scrolls of wisdom. It contains records of the castle's history, family genealogies for the daimyo's line, and a vast array of theological and philosophical texts. Works on the afterlife, Meido, and the Fortune of Death

are especially numerous. Unknown to many, the Library's lowest levels contains one of three entrances into the catacombs beneath the temple.

The So-Do

The So-Do is a hall dedicated to sitting meditation, a common feature in temples and monasteries. It is a long open hallway, somewhat resembling a dojo, where monks practice concentration and inner stillness in meditation. Students learn the proper meditative techniques from older monks, and through their meditation they come to accept the impermanence of all things and trust in the final judgment of their patron Fortune. The So-Do also has a hidden entrance to the catacombs.

The Catacombs and Secret Exit Chamber

Unknown to all but a select and honored few, beneath both the castle and the Temple is a subterranean network of tunnels and passages. Within sit countless tombs where the urns and ashes of many honorable samurai know their final rest.

The greatest of these secure tombs is that of the Emperor who had his funeral at this castle. Humble in appearance, it is nonetheless worthy of an Emperor, with mural-covered walls depicting his many glorious deeds in life. No visitors are permitted to enter the tomb of the Emperor, and considering that the iron doors are sealed shut, entering without permission would be difficult indeed.

Throughout the tombs are small shrines dedicated to the samurai buried there. The former lords of the castle all have their remains in the catacombs, and the current rulers visit them from time to time in order to pay their respects and pray for guidance. Sacred artifacts these lords carried in life, such as daisho, armor, or other personal effects, are kept in reverent display before their tombs. The lack of humidity and heat keeps them well preserved, and the secret nature of the catacombs ensures they are safe from any dishonorable souls who might disturb them.

The catacombs themselves are extensive and wind throughout the entire width and length of the castle grounds. Explorers who do not know the layout are likely to become lost. There are only three entrances (one from the castle, two from the temple) and one external exit. Aside from their religious function as a repository for funeral ashes, the catacombs also serve as an emergency escape route from the castle. This is one function from the original military design that Lord Seto decided to keep even after the conversion of his castle to one of courtly pleasure.

The external exit is a set of iron gates that require a specific key to unlock. Beyond is a passage to the outside, emerging into to Seto no Mori in a hidden grove near Heaven's Mirror Lake. From there, escapers can easily make their way to the nearby village, take refuge within the forests, or flee to a neighboring province.

Friends and Enemies: Inhabitants of Kyuden Kurogane-Hana

No campaign setting, especially a courtly one, is complete without an array of interesting, challenging, and entertaining NPCs to populate it. The following section of this chapter presents an array of such NPCs for the GM to use. We have deliberately tried to make the selection as "generic" as possible, in order to facilitate games set in a variety of eras. Nonetheless, some of the NPCs will only work in certain parts of Rokugan's history—Kitsuki Rinjin, for example, cannot exist in an era prior to the founding of the Kitsuki family, and Chuda Natsuko requires a setting in which the Spider Clan exists or a similar Shadowlands infiltration effort is underway.

All that being said, these NPCs are essentially tools for the GM to use as he sees fit, and a creative GM can freely mix-and-match clans, families, and backstories to fit the needs of his campaign.

Yasuki Jin

Charming Crab

Yasuki Jin is a small man by the standards of most Rokugani, and downright tiny by the measure of the Crab. Even so, he manages to stand out in a crowd. Jin's charm and energy quickly caught the eye of the Yasuki sensei, and he was groomed for a role in court from an early age. He stood out as an excellent student who quickly grasped both the intricacies of courtly negotiation and the more traditional Yasuki fields of commerce and mercantilism, making him a star student.

After his gempukku, Jin initially focused on making a name for himself as a merchant patron. He had a knack for finding good deals and—in some ways more important—for avoiding trouble. Although he made sure to always send plenty of profits back to the clan, he also saw to it that he personally improved his life through his success, particularly in the way of clothes and servants. By Yasuki standards Jin is downright stylish, and makes a point of always following the latest fashions and trends.

In light of Jin's success in the commercial realm, the clan has decided to give him a chance to prove that his talents can also serve the clan in more conventional diplomacy. His assignment at Kyuden Kurogane-Hana is his first chance to do so, and he approaches the negotiations here with the same mixture of enthusiasm, determination, and relentless charm he previously used in his mercantile efforts. Talking with Jin can be exhausting; he is relentless in both his good cheer and his pursuit of the deal, regardless of whether that deal involves favors or koku. From Jin's viewpoint, there's really no difference between the two; both are simply the currency of their respective markets.

Jin's principal goal in the court of Kyuden Kurogane-Hana is to build up a network of favors and allies he can rely on in the future. He deliberately cultivates friendships with everyone, regardless of clan or station, and is just as happy discussing clothing styles with Toku Irui as he is discussing the most morbid of topics with Kitsuki Rinjin. He is a talented go player and often relies on the game to break the ice with others; when he has nothing else to do, he can usually be found playing against his bodyguard.

Yasuki Jin, Charming Crab

Air: 2 Earth: 3 Fire: 2 Water: 2 Void: 2

Awareness: 4 Intelligence: 4 Perception: 4

Honor: 2.8 *Status: 2.0* *Glory: 2.1*

School/Rank: Yasuki Courtier 2

Skills: Animal Handling 1, Athletics 2, Commerce (Appraisal) 5, Courtier 3, Defense 2, Etiquette (Bureaucracy) 5, Games: Go 2, Intimidation 1, Kenjutsu 2, Lore: Heraldry 2, Lore: Law 4, Lore: Shadowlands 2, Sincerity (Deceit) 3, Stealth 2, Storytelling 3, Theology 2, Underworld 2

Advantages: Benten's Blessing, Wealthy (4)

Disadvantages: Small



Crab Attendants

Although the Crab contingent at Kyuden Kurogane-Hana is small—as is typical in most courts—Jin's leadership has given the Crab more weight and influence than might be expected. The Crab as a whole have only a minor interest in this place, although the Kaiu would like a chance to examine the castle and its environs more closely—perhaps moreso than its owners would perfer.

Primary among the attendants of the Crab is Yasuki Jin's friend and bodyguard, Hida Yohachi (Hida Bushi 2). Yohachi is surprisingly elegant for a Crab bushi, although no one would ever mistake him for a courtier like Jin. He spends most of his time either in the nearest dojo or at the go board with anyone who is willing to play him, most often Jin himself. Opponents will find him relatively competent at the game, but not skillful enough to make anyone take real note. Yohachi is a stalwart defender of his friend, whether the attack comes from a blade or a word, but he tends to defer to Jin most of the time, only speaking out when absolutely necessary or when Jin is unavailable to defend himself.

Doji Ronshouko

Frail Flower

Doji Ronshouku was born to a family of artisans, and for a long time she was expected to follow the path of the arts as well. She displayed signs early on of great artistic talent, especially in the field of poetry. Unfortunately, she also suffered from a frail constitution and, more disturbingly, albinism. Most Rokugani view albinism as the result of a curse or a Fortune's wrath, and Ronshouko's pale translucent skin, reddish eyes, and ghost-white hair often drew scorn and mockery from other children and uneasy avoidance from adults.

Despite these handicaps, Ronshouko's parents managed to arrange for her to attend the Kakita Artisan Academy. She studied there for a year and a half, slowly winning over her teachers with her artistic talents and charming personality. However, at the end of that time her poor health took a sudden turn for the worse; after some investigation, the sensei realized she was sensitive to ink. They were forced to conclude that she was ill-suited to a life among the artisans. Fortunately, they had also noticed she had a considerable aptitude with words, and through an exchange of favors a well-known sensei of the Doji Courtier School came to meet her. A few days later she was invited to attend that school instead. Her parents could hardly refuse, since the alternative was to give up any hope for their daughter being able to serve the clan effectively.

Doji Ronshouko has grown into an elegant young courtier who seeks to epitomize the Crane ethic of perfection, beauty, and nobility. She keeps to the shade and always carries a parasol, since her pallid skin easily sunburns. Although her albinism causes many to view her askance, she is nonetheless a quite attractive young woman—under normal circumstances, her beauty would earn her notice

in all but the most elite courts. Ronshouko has embraced her new role as a courtier with all of her heart, determined to overcome her weaknesses and bring honor to the Crane Clan. She believes the clan's goals can be achieved without the necessity of deceit, and that honesty and truth are what should set the Crane apart from their rivals, especially the devious Scorpion. She refuses to use lies to get what she wants or needs for the clan, and has thus eagerly embraced the training of the Doji Innocents.

Notwithstanding her delicate sensibilities, Ronshouko is extremely skilled in courtly maneuvers, and is often able to successfully circumnavigate the tricky hazards of diplomacy. She is equally skilled in both etiquette and sincerity, and this combined with her underlying artistic talent makes her a surprisingly powerful force in the courts, one many of her opponents find unexpectedly difficult to deal with.

Despite her many talents, Ronshouko has thus far been unable to attend a truly important court like Kyuden Doji or the Imperial City—her physical features simply make too many people uneasy for the clan to trust her in such vital locations. She is determined to prove them wrong, and she sees her assignment at Kyuden Kurogane-Hana as an opportunity to do just that.

Doji Ronshouko, Frail Flower

Air: 3	Earth: 2	Fire: 3	Water: 2	Void: 3

Awareness: 4

Honor: 6.4 *Status: 2.0* *Glory: 3.0*

School/Rank: Doji Courtier 3, Doji Innocent

Skills: Artisan: Origami 3, Artisan: Painting 3, Artisan: Poetry (Haiku) 5, Calligraphy 2, Courtier (Manipulation, Rhetoric) 4, Etiquette (Conversation, Courtesy) 4, Games: Letters 2, Games: Kemari 2, Investigation (Interrogation) 2, Lore; Heraldry 3, Perform: Oratory 3, Perform: Storytelling 3, Sincerity (Honesty) 4, Tea Ceremony 2, Theology 3

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Irreproachable, Soul of Artistry (Artisan)

Disadvantages: Bad Fortune (Albino), Bad Health (allergic to ink)

Daidoji Ninku

Emerald Magistrate

Daidoji Ninku is not a particularly attractive woman, especially for a Crane, but this rarely if ever bothers her. Rather, she has always thought of herself as a true "Iron Crane," and has earned a reputation as a serious, dedicated woman of strict morals and stern devotion to duty. She can trace her line back to Daidoji Masashigi himself, the daimyo whose heroic death at the Battle of the Tidal Landbridge first won the respect of the Crab for his family. As a child she always thought to follow closely in her ancestor's path, and from the moment she was old enough to train she dedicated herself to the way of the sword and to Bushido. After her gempukku she upheld tradition by spending a year on the Kaiu Wall, fighting the Shadowlands. There she learned a great deal about the art of battle—more, perhaps, than she might have wished—and in the process earned great respect from her Crab squad-mates.

Once she returned to Crane lands, Ninku's life seemed simple and uninspiring by contrast with her year alongside the Crab. She was given various guard duties around the Crane lands, duties which were honorable but seldom dangerous or exciting.

Ninku's days of mundane duty came to an end in an unexpected way. While standing guard at a diplomatic conference in the southern Crane lands, she realized one of the attendees was actually a Bog Hag. Her time with the Crab allowed her to spot the subtle clues that her comrades had missed, and at the critical moment she was able to unmask the creature before it could kill an ambassador from a neighboring clan. In recognition of her deeds, the Crane Clan arranged for her to be appointed as an Emerald Magistrate.

Kyuden Kurogane-Hana is Ninku's first official assignment as one of the Emerald Magistrates, and she is determined to do her duty well and bring glory to her family name. However, she is also uneasily aware that she has no real experience in either politics or law enforcement, both fields which are vital to her duties here. She knows enough about the Shadowlands to recognize that her fellow Crane Doji Ronshouko is not suffering from some supernatural



malady, so she has begun to cultivate the courtier maiden as an ally. After all, you never know when you might need someone with political skill to guard your back in court.

Daidoji Ninku, Emerald Magistrate

Air: 2 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 3
Reflexes: 3

Honor: 8.5 *Status: 4.5* *Glory: 3.0*

School/Rank: Daidoji Iron Warrior 3

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 2, Defense 4, Etiquette 3, Heavy Weapons (Masakari) 1, Horsemanship 2, Hunting (Tracking) 4, Iaijutsu 3, Investigation (Interrogation) 5, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Bushido 2, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: Law 3, Lore; Shadowlands 2, Spears (Yari) 5, Sincerity 2

Advantages: Social Position (Emerald Magistrate), Virtuous, Wary

Crane Attendants

The Crane have a modest interest in Kyuden Kurogane-Hana, since a court where every Great Clan is represented to at least some degree (along with even a few of the Minor Clans) cannot be ignored lest the Scorpion or some other faction gain an unseen advantage. Doji Ronshouko is the official leader of the Crane Clan contingent here, attended by her bodyguard Doji Koreda (Kakita Bushi 2). Several lesser courtiers are posted here as her aides and assistants, and young graduates from the Doji Courtier School are often sent here as an early assignment to season them for more prominent courts.

Daidoji Ninku is permanently housed in Kyuden Kurogane-Hana as its resident Emerald Magistrate. She is supported by a young clerk named Doji Ryuta (Doji Courtier 1) and a ronin yoriki named Kuro (Insight Rank 2), and can call on the castle garrison at need.



Kitsuki Rinjin

Macabre Scholar

While death is a common enough thing in the Empire, those who make a constant study of it are usually regarded as disturbed individuals, to be politely avoided at best. Kitsuki Rinjin, however, has managed to parley his natural charm and friendly nature into something of a defense against such prejudices.

Even as a child, Rinjin was fascinated with the concept of death—not in the spiritual sense, but the physical. How a living thing degrades and returns to the natural cycle is an endless mystery that he has spent his life attempting to unravel. To this end, burial rites, internment, the varied states of decay due to natural or unnatural death, and the marks of foul play are all endlessly fascinating to him. Many are put off by the macabre questions he asks, but few are able to deny the charming Kitsuki just a few more answers, and he is usually careful not to tread too hard on others' patience. Most scholars in Rinjin's field are usually dour, insensitive folk, but his friendly nature has allowed him to travel a great deal and track down many sources of information that are typically denied to the inquiries of his peers.

Naturally, Rinjin caught the attention of the Kuni, whose shugenja and scholars have often sought answers on these topics from other clans, only to be turned away in disgust. Several sensei in the Kuni family's school were quick to strike up a friendship with the young Kitsuki, and they have begun lending their authority to him in order to grant him free travel and access to important individuals he would otherwise be considered too insignificant to approach. Rinjin is all too happy to share his findings with his allies among the Crab. Recently, however, the Dragon scholar has begun to wonder at the motivations of two of the shugenja sensei he works with, and he has withheld certain pieces of information for fear of how they might be used in unscrupulous hands.

Despite his engaging nature, Rinjin's life is still one of relative obscurity. After all, a friendly smile can only go so far in dispelling the reputation his unpleasant subject gives him, coupled with the Empire's general dismissive attitude towards the small and unconventional Kitsuki family. Rinjin has accepted that the best he can hope for is that the work he leaves behind may be remembered even though he himself will be quickly forgotten. Where others might find this a cause for sadness, the Dragon

has embraced the inevitability of it, and those who know him sometimes describe him as "cheerfully fatalistic."

If Kitsuki Rinjin is at Kyuden Kurogane-Hana, he will of course spend most of his time at the Temple of Emma-O, a waypoint in his studies. Here he has found a fascinating nexus of information, as samurai from many clans come here to celebrate their recently departed ancestors. He is genuinely curious about other visitors and what he can possibly learn from them in regards to his primary study, but he is not single-minded in this purpose. Like most Kitsuki, the young scholar has a keen mind and can appreciate any topic that can be discussed (or dissected, as it were) on an intellectual level. He knows well enough not to discuss the crass or impolite details of what he studies with those who are not likewise interested, but it takes little to get him going once the subject is broached.

Kitsuki Rinjin, Macabre Scholar

Air: 3 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 3

Awareness: 4 Intelligence: 4 Perception: 4

Honor: 6.7 *Status: 2.1* *Glory: 1.5*

School/Rank: Kitsuki Investigator 3

Skills:Courtier 3, Calligraphy 3, Etiquette (Courtesy) 4, Investigation (Interrogation) 4, Kenjutsu 2, Lore: Anatomy 4, Medicine 3, Meditation 2, Sincerity 3

Advantages: Allies (Kuni School sensei, 4/2), Benten's Blessing

Disadvantages: Dark Fate

Dragon Attendants

Rinjin is the unofficial "leader" of several Dragon samurai who did not travel together to Kyuden Kurogane-Hana but who have struck up a working relationship with each other since their arrival. Because the Dragon as a clan have no particular interest in the area and are not seeking any particular political advantages here, each Dragon visitor is relatively free to pursue his or her own agenda; however, they are happy to support each other as needed.

Notable among the Dragon here are a Mirumoto bushi and a Tamori shugenja. The bushi, Mirumoto Sei (Mirumoto Bushi 3), is on a warrior's pilgrimage to visit the resting places of several great swordsmen so that he may pay his respects. Tamori Kyono (Tamori Shugenja 1) has found this place to be an excellent opportunity to establish contacts with the Mantis and Scorpion in order to obtain rare materials for his alchemy experiments.

Ikoma Kazue

Uninspired Storyteller

Since birth, Ikoma Kazue has been hailed as one of the great scions of the Ikoma house. Her mother and father were paragons of what it meant to be an Ikoma—confident, strong of voice and body, bold, honorable, and gifted in the arts of storytelling and oratory. With two such renowned figures as parents, many lesser samurai would have been overcome by the expectations set upon them. Instead, Kazue delighted in living up to such a standard, especially since she was in fact everything expected of her and far, far more.

Everything Kazue studied came easily. Where a lesser samurai would have become overconfident and lazy due to such talent, the young Ikoma simply saw it as a challenge to find where her boundaries truly were. It wasn't long before her studies began to take her from province to province in the Lion lands—from the hallowed halls of the Akodo Tactical School to the unforgiving fields of the Matsu Bushi Academy, and even a summer among the serene Kitsu. Because her parents were so beloved among the Lion, it was easy for the girl to gain access to these places to study for a time. She promised every sensei and student she met that her experiences would help her represent the Lion to themselves and the Empire in their full and true glory.

As Kazue matured, her reputation spread like wildfire among the dry northern plains. Every winter court wanted to have a copy of whatever new work the Ikoma maiden had produced that year, and Kazue had the honor of being invited to the Emperor's own Imperial Winter Court no less than three times. These visits only added to her growing legend, as her boisterous yet friendly demeanor caused quite a stir...indeed the Emperor himself was said to have laughed happily at her outspoken and joyful mannerisms.

Kazue always managed to walk a fine line between being a courtier and a warrior, a raucous drinker and an honorable samurai, a jovial woman or fearsome opponent. Whispers among the Lion began to insist she was in fact Ikoma himself reborn, and to suggest the Ikoma daimyo might name her as his successor.

Two years ago, inexplicably, she seemingly vanished in the midst of summer.

In fact, the hero of the Ikoma family has spent the last two years quietly among the monks and samurai of Kyuden Kurogane-Hana. Kazue took her leave from the spotlight honorably, petitioning the daimyo of her family to grant her travel papers so she might undertake an Artist's Pilgrimage and gather more information for her stories. While it was an odd request—Kazue had previously enjoyed traveling openly from one high profile location to the next—it was granted easily.

The true reason for the request was one she could not reveal. One day, Kazue had faced a sudden and devastating revelation: the tales she told, the poems she wrote, and the plays she put down on paper all felt the same. Having experienced so much life, it seemed almost impossible to think of anything that had not already been done or written about. The epiphany shocked her to her very core, and she has effectively fled from the public eye until she can find her inspiration once more. She hopes her time here, recording the tales of great men and women, might inspire her. But while her work here has earned her the gratitude of many families for her careful recording of their honored ancestors' deeds, it is has not restored her sense of inspira-

tion. Kazue now wonders if the great fire of her youthful talent has fled from her entirely.

Ikoma Kazue, Uninspired Storyteller

Air: 2 Earth: 3 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 3

Awareness: 4 Intelligence: 5

Honor: 7.1 *Status: 3.3* *Glory: 4.7*

School/Rank: Ikoma Bard 3

Skills: Battle 2, Courtier 5, Defense 3, Etiquette 5, Jiujutsu 3, Kenjutsu 3, Lore: History (Lion Clan) 5, Perform: Oratory 4, Perform: Song 4, Perform: Storytelling 6, Sincerity (Honesty) 4

Advantages: Crab Hands, Precise Memory, Sage, Sensation, Voice

Disadvantages: Cursed by the Realm (Meido)

Lion Attendants

Because of the significance this place has to the Lion and the presence of the famed Ikoma Kazue, there is an unusually large representation of Lion at the court of Kyuden Kurogane-Hana. Several lesser students of the Ikoma School have come to learn from Kazue—something the Ikoma woman refused initially, though she eventually agreed to take three students at a time if the family would suppress public knowledge of her whereabouts. The Akodo and Kitsu also take a great interest in the location, with Akodo Morito (Akodo Bushi 2) and his close friend Kitsu Anoru (Kitsu Shugenja 2) being the senior members of their respective family delegations here.

The Lion maintain a small standing force of bushi here as a gift to the masters of this place, currently commanded by Matsu Hotaru (Matsu Bushi 3). Though Kyuden Kurogane-Hana is not a Lion holding, the Clan of Akodo believes strongly in properly honoring the dead, and places such as this must be protected regardless of clan ownership. While the presence of armed Lion soldiers does sometimes cause tension, the Lion are not eager to start a conflict in this area if it can be avoided, and Hotaru defers to the lord of the castle in all matters. After all, he and his men are here to maintain the sanctity of Emma-O's temple, not disrupt it.

Yoritomo Gendou

Gruff Trader

Few would say Yoritomo Gendou has earned his position through manner of skill, determination, or hard work. Although he is one of the more powerful merchant lords of the Yoritomo family, he has earned a reputation as being something of an alcoholic brute, bullying his way through obstacles rather than attempting even the slightest veneer of social grace. Those who deal with Gendou on a regular basis dislike him greatly, and do what he wishes only out of fear of what might happen if they don't. Gendou has earned (and kept) a great many trade contracts and favors through sheer luck, stumbling onto the right opportunity at the right time just when it was clear he had no idea how to do what he had set out to do.

Or so it seems to most.

In truth, Gendou has carefully and thoughtfully constructed every trade negotiation, every political agreement, and every treaty around a false image. He makes it appear that in the end some last minute revelation or advantage falls into his lap, winning the day for him against all odds. In truth, the aging Yoritomo always holds his advantages from the start, expertly lulling his opponents into a false sense of superiority and inevitable victory. While this tactic might work several times but eventually draw others' notice, Gendou has one other factor in his favor—he has no qualms about just how these advantages are gained. Although he certainly makes sure to have more information than others and uses it cleverly, he has also been known to threaten to burn down a monk's temple, and has forced proud men to add their chop to a contract while he squeezed their throats. Afterward, few are willing to admit they were bested by such a repulsive man.

If Gendou were simply a skilled manipulator or a convincing bully, others would see the pattern and learn from it. However, the things that Gendou levies in his favor to achieve "lucky" last minute gains seem to come from nowhere and without fail. This adds to the anger of his rivals, and in later negotiations they practically jump at the



chance to finally put the upstart merchant in his place, usually making more mistakes in their eager rush.

Gendou is not a flawless planner, but he is a crafty man who sees no limits on what he is willing to do to achieve his goals. He often has to defend himself physically, and others are quite surprised that the large drunken lout is quick and capable in a fight...and never fights fairly.

Gendou came to Kyuden Kurogane-Hana during a visit with one of his contacts, and has since stayed for several months. The castle is like a constantly spinning wheel of opportunity, and for a man like Gendou such a thing is not easily walked away from. He will take any opportunity to advance both his own position and that of the Mantis. However, he is no fool and did not live as long as he has by chasing impossible goals or challenging unbeatable foes.

When given the opportunity, Gendou takes great pleasure in embarrassing those who others might consider "better" than him. This often means showing up Doji and Bayushi courtiers in court when he sees a good chance to do so, or besting a Yasuki in a trade negotiation (something he is happy to do despite the generally friendly relations between the Crab and Mantis).

Yoritomo Gendou, Gruff Trader

Air: 2	Earth: 4	Fire: 3	Water: 3	Void: 2
Reflexes: 4	Willpower: 5	Agility: 4		
Honor: 1.7	*Status: 3.5*	*Glory: 3.4*		

School/Rank: Yoritomo Courtier 3

Skills: Athletics 3,Commerce (Appraisal) 5, Courtier 3, Defense 4, Etiquette 2, Intimidation (Control) 7, Jiujutsu 5, Lore: Law 3, Sincerity 4, Knives 2, Kyujutsu 1, Sleight of Hand 5, Stealth 3

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Daredevil

Disadvantages: Compulsion: Sake (TN 15), Failure of Bushido: Courtesy.

Mantis Attendants

Before Gendou arrived at Kyuden Kurogane-Hana, the Mantis presence was relatively small, though useful to the clan. Yoritomo Harui (Yoritomo Coutier 1) had been assigned to the site in order to help establish a Mantis presence in the court's political nexus, as well as offering support for Mantis traders passing through. Gendou has not sought to directly cross Harui, but has quickly built up his own power base and drawn in several samurai who previously worked for Harui. Although there is not exactly hostility between the two Mantis "factions" here, the two groups do seem to serve different interests. Harui and his assistant Yoritomo Zou (Yoritomo Bushi 2) attempt to spread the influence of the Mantis in a somewhat diplomatic (and legal) manner, while Gendou simply seeks power and profit however he can. Due to Gendou's successes here, several minor merchants and courtiers from the clan have traveled to see what glory and power they can earn as well, though not all of them fall in quite so easily with Gendou's practices and thus prefer to work with Harui and Zou.

The two groups are careful not to cause each other any direct difficulty. Even a Mantis of Gendou's nonexistent ethics has a strong loyalty to the clan. Nonetheless, outside observers quickly realize the two factions are not working together in any meaningful way.

Asako Nishi

Frustrated Diplomat

To a Phoenix, death is not an end but simply another step on the great cycle of existence. To a Phoenix, rebirth is a vitally important concept, one that intertwines the end and the beginning together. To Asako Nishi, these are truths he tries desperately to cling to, though the dull ache in his soul makes it difficult.

Nishi was betrothed to a wonderful young woman, Shiba Moriko. It was unusual for an Asako to be wed to a graduate of the Shiba Bushi School, and the arrangement was political rather than personal. However, Nishi and his wife-to-be fell completely in love with one another at their first meeting, years after the betrothal had been arranged, and welcomed their impending nuptials with joy. For Nishi, it was a dream that few samurai were fortunate enough to have—true love in a marriage. It wasn't long before the young Asako was planning the names for their children and dreaming of how he would establish a modest but comfortable estate to pass down through his family. A peaceful, loving home that would leave a small corner of the world brighter for his children.

But only a few months later, Shiba Moriko's life was taken by war.

Miroko's death shattered Nishi's world, and he tried to comfort himself with the idea that she would be reborn. He swore he would wait for Miroko, no matter how long it took. If her soul was reborn, he would find her somehow and they would be in love again. Unfortunately for Nishi, after an appropriate amount of grieving time, he was promised to marry another woman—a relative of Miroko. Everything his previous engagement had been, this was not. Yuri was a stoic, cold woman who immediately saw her future husband as a soft weakling who allowed his emotions to overcome him far too easily.

Nishi has managed to reign in the worst of his depression, and has tried to dedicate himself to the ideal of peace. How many more households have been broken or never given a chance to come together by the plague of war? Struck by this inspiration, three years ago the young Asako requested an assignment to Kyuden Kurogane-Hana—after all, who would be more willing to hear the words of peace than those visiting the Temple of Emma-O, those who have recently suffered loss?

The time he has spent here has seen little success, however, and it has taken all of his resolve not to let his bitterness consume him. He has found far too many souls eager for vengeance, death, and more bloodshed to pile on top of the death that has already brought them to this place.

Every morning, he tries his best to see every opportunity to fulfill his quest, but he is slowly beginning to feel as if he is simply being crushed by the tragic cycle of war rather than overcoming it.

Asako Nishi, Frustrated Diplomat

Air: 3 Earth: 2 Fire: 2 Water: 2 Void: 4

Awareness: 4 Willpower: 3 Intelligence: 4 Perception: 4

Honor: 7.1 *Status: 2.7* *Glory: 2.1*

School/Rank: Asako Loremaster 2

Skills: Courtier 4, Etiquette (Courtesy) 5, Lore: History 4, Lore: Theology (Fortunes) 3, Meditation 4, Sincerity 5, Lore: Law 2, Tea Ceremony 2

Advantages: Inner Gift (Empathy), Sage

Disadvantages: Bitter Betrothal, Lost Love, Soft-Hearted



Shiba Akiko

Gentle Bushi

Shiba Akiko is a woman possessed of a nearly impenetrable optimism and good nature, which is fortunate for someone who already has known a great deal of disappointment through her short life. In her childhood Akiko dreamed of attending the Asako family's academy and studying scholarly knowledge and social etiquette. During particularly fanciful daydreams, she even wondered if her family might secure her an invitation to the clan's allies among the Doji family and let her attend their famous courtier academy. The young Shiba's family agreed she possessed a charming and outgoing demeanor, and she was easily beautiful enough to shine in the courts, seemingly making her perfect for someone who could represent the family as a diplomat. When she was old enough, Akiko was enrolled in the Asako Loremaster School.

As she undertook her studies, however, it became painfully clear that the idealism of youth had taken a firm and troublesome hold on Akiko's soul. When others would try to teach her to keep silent because it would be impolite or even potentially embarrassing to speak, she refused to learn, and insisted on speaking out whenever someone was not being entirely truthful or was failing to live up to the strictest standards of Bushido, Shinsei's Tao, Isawa, or any other ideal revered by the Phoenix Clan. Additionally, she held a particular passion for confronting those who attempted to hide behind manipulations and distortions of law and etiquette. While she was certainly not rude or violent when she did this, she was nonetheless unyielding in her confrontations. While the Asako never attempted to train her to bend or ignore the truth as a Bayushi or even Doji might have done, they knew it was still vitally important to be able to deal with such things appropriately (or sometimes not at all), and it was clear that Akiko would not listen to their guidance.

After one year of schooling with the Asako, Akiko was sent back to her family. The Asako were gracious, stating that Akiko showed great potential for more "traditional" Shiba training, and would perhaps be a better asset to the clan if she were instructed in the arts of combat. Akiko was bitterly disappointed, but true to her nature she took the comments about her potential seriously rather than as the polite excuse they were. It was her duty to serve the clan regardless of whatever dreams might reside in her heart, so she accepted this turn in her life without reservation.

Fortunately for her, Shiba blood ran strong in her veins and she was indeed talented with the martial arts, as well as possessing the keen mind and reflexes needed to become a yojimbo. However, in the time she had for herself, she still practiced her courtly arts—proper enunciation, manners, and the careful wording required to state the truth without giving offense.

Her sensei in the Shiba Bushi School did not overlook this facet of his student, so when the time came for Akiko to receive a posting, it was suggested she be assigned to a minor Asako diplomat as a bodyguard.

It did not take long for Akiko to fall in love with Asako Nishi, but she is determined to keep her emotions in check. The courtier is everything Akiko admired in the Asako—he is honorable, dedicated to his cause, and despite his own loss and grief he serves the clan with his whole heart. She is aware Nishi is married to a horrible and unworthy woman, but she never speaks an ill word of Nishi's wife, instead making it the sole topic she chooses to avoid speaking about at all. Akiko has been an invaluable aid to the Asako courtier, since he can trust her to deliver messages and handle minor court business on his behalf—effectively allowing him to be in two places at once (at least during those times Akiko can be convinced of his safety). Intellectually, Akiko knows Nishi will never love her in return, but her heart still dreams that he might do so, and she devotes herself to him and his mission with no constraint.

Shiba Akiko, Gentle Bushi

Air: 4 Earth: 3 Fire: 2 Water: 2 Void: 3
Willpower: 4 Agility: 4 Strength: 3

Honor: 8.2 *Status: 2.1* *Glory: 1.7*

School/Rank: Shiba Bushi 3

Skills: Courtier 1, Defense 5, Etiquette 3, Iaijutsu 4,Kenjutsu 4, Knives 4, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Shugenja 3, Meditation (Void Recovery) 2, Spears 3, Theology 2

Advantages: Irreproachable, Magic Resistance (+9 TN).

Disadvantages: Can't Lie, Idealistic, True Love

Phoenix Attendants

The Phoenix maintain only a small presence at Kyuden Kurogane-Hana, but this is mostly due to the fact that Nishi and Akiko work so efficiently there is little need for others. There are two minor Asako diplomats here, essentially functioning as students and assistants of Nishi, as well as a shugenja advisor, Isawa Riako (Isawa Shugenja 2). Riako and the assistants have little ambition or purpose of their own, instead completely devoting their time to making sure Nishi's campaign for peace encounters as few hurdles as possible. They are usually not seen in the court, though everyone is aware the Phoenix have a priest on hand who specializes in purification and divination magic. Requests for the Isawa's aid in certain matters have been a bargaining chip for the Phoenix delegation more than once.

When verbal conflict escalates in the courts, it is often one or more of the Phoenix that step in—whether invited or not—to blunt the anger of those involved. This activity has earned them few friends, and indeed often causes whichever diplomat intervened to become the new target of hostility. Of course, this ultimately serves Nishi's goals.

Shosuro Mieko

Scorpion Recruiter

Shosuro Mieko is a plain woman by Scorpion standards, and is more commonly recognized by her mask (an elaborate piece of lace that covers the entirety of her face) rather than by any distinguishing personal feature. Although she is the senior Scorpion representative courtier at Kyuden Kurogane-Hana, she will often defer to visiting Scorpion courtiers. This deference is rarely if ever understood by outsiders, who simply shrug and accept it as yet another inexplicable oddity of the Scorpion political machine.

To those within the Scorpion Clan, however, it makes perfect sense. This is because Mieko's purpose here is not actually a political one, although she is certainly not lacking in political skills. Rather, the Scorpion chose this location for her because its status: a moderately-sized court where new courtiers can practice their skills on a reasonably large stage, but still obscure enough that if those selfsame courtiers commit mistakes no permanent damage is done to the Scorpion Clan as a whole. Mieko's task is to watch the up-and-coming courtiers for those with real talent, and convey her judgments to her superiors. She also keeps specific watch for those young courtiers who could be potential candidates for the ranks of the Defilers, to which she herself belongs. She has a keen eye for those who can tell a lie convincingly and who are willing to put their own reputation on the line in the name of the clan.

Recently Mieko received word of a new potential recruit who would be arriving shortly. Unusually, this notice was accompanied by a warning that the newcomer should be watched and supervised closely, strongly suggesting that Mieko needed to take a more active role in the court than usual while her new candidate was present. It was also hinted at that if she did not find the young man to be suitable for further training, the consequences for him would be severe—perhaps fatal. Mieko was initially not quite sure what to make of such a warning, but once the new Scorpion arrived—a man named Bayushi Kyogi—she quickly saw exactly what her superiors meant.

For now, Mieko is playing the role of a courtier with more energy than she was formerly accustomed to, making sure the Scorpion Clan's interests are not damaged by her new comrade's inexperience.

Shosuro Mieko, Recruiter

Air: 3 Earth: 2 Fire: 3 Water: 3 Void: 3
Awareness: 4

Honor: 2.5 *Status: 2.5* *Glory: 3.0*

School/Rank: Bayushi Courtier 3, Shosuro Defiler

Skills: Calligraphy (Cipher) 2, Courtier (Gossip, Manipulation) 3, Defense 1, Etiquette 3, Games: Letters 2, Intimidation (Control) 3, Investigation (Interrogation) 2, Lore: Bushido 2, Lore: Heraldry 2, Lore: Law 1, Sincerity (Deceit) 5, Temptation 3

Advantages: Blackmail (Multiple)

Bayushi Kyogi

Compulsive Liar

Bayushi Kyogi believes he is a suave, debonair court gentleman who can sway even the most stalwart diplomat to his side on whatever topic might come up. He sees himself as something of a ladies' man—albeit never crudely or clumsily so—and a master of persuasion. He is certain his new assignment to Kyuden Kurogane-Hana is a reward for work well-done, and an opportunity for further inevitable advancement through the ranks of the Scorpion diplomatic corps.

Sadly, this vision exists only within Kyogi's own mind. In reality, he is a blowhard braggart and a compulsive liar, determined to advance himself in the world by his words alone. Moreover, he is not even very good at being a courtier. He might have been, had he chosen to pursue his talents with real determination, but instead he spends all his time inflating his reputation and waiting for the rest of the world to recognize his brilliance.

Kyogi is often quite oblivious to the fact that his lies do not always add up or even make sense to others. He seems to think everyone should and will believe anything he tells them, and seems honestly baffled when people do not respond to him as he expects. If his lies are called out, he never admits the truth, instead simply coming up with yet another lie that conveniently explains whatever problem might have been created by his previous words.

Most recently, Kyogi's time at another court was cut short when he was unceremoniously told to travel to Kyuden Kurogane-Hana. The order was not explained to him and he was given no time to learn why it had been issued. Accordingly, he convinced himself that his sudden reassignment was due to a pressing need for his unique talents at his new location. In fact, however, his dismissal was a joint effort by the other Scorpion at his previous court to get rid of him, as his lies were threatening to make the clan into a laughing stock and cause real harm to its goals. They breathed a deep sigh of relieve as he left, and sent a small prayer of condolence to whichever court he graced with his presence next.

Their superiors, meanwhile, decided it was time for Kyogi to either become an asset to the clan or cease to trouble it. They sent Bayushi Kyogi to this court to be assessed by Shosuro Mieko as a possible future candidate for the Bayushi Defilers. If Mieko determines he is not fit for this path, Kyogi's future prospects will be dim indeed.

Bayushi Kyogi, Compulsive Liar

Air: 2 Earth: 2 Fire: 2 Water: 2 Void: 2

Awareness: 3 Intelligence: 4

Honor: 2.5 Status: 1.0 Glory: 0.5 Infamy: 2.0

School/Rank: Bayushi Courtier 1

Skills: Calligraphy, Courtier (Gossip), Etiquette, Investigation, Sincerity (Deceit), Temptation, 1 high skill

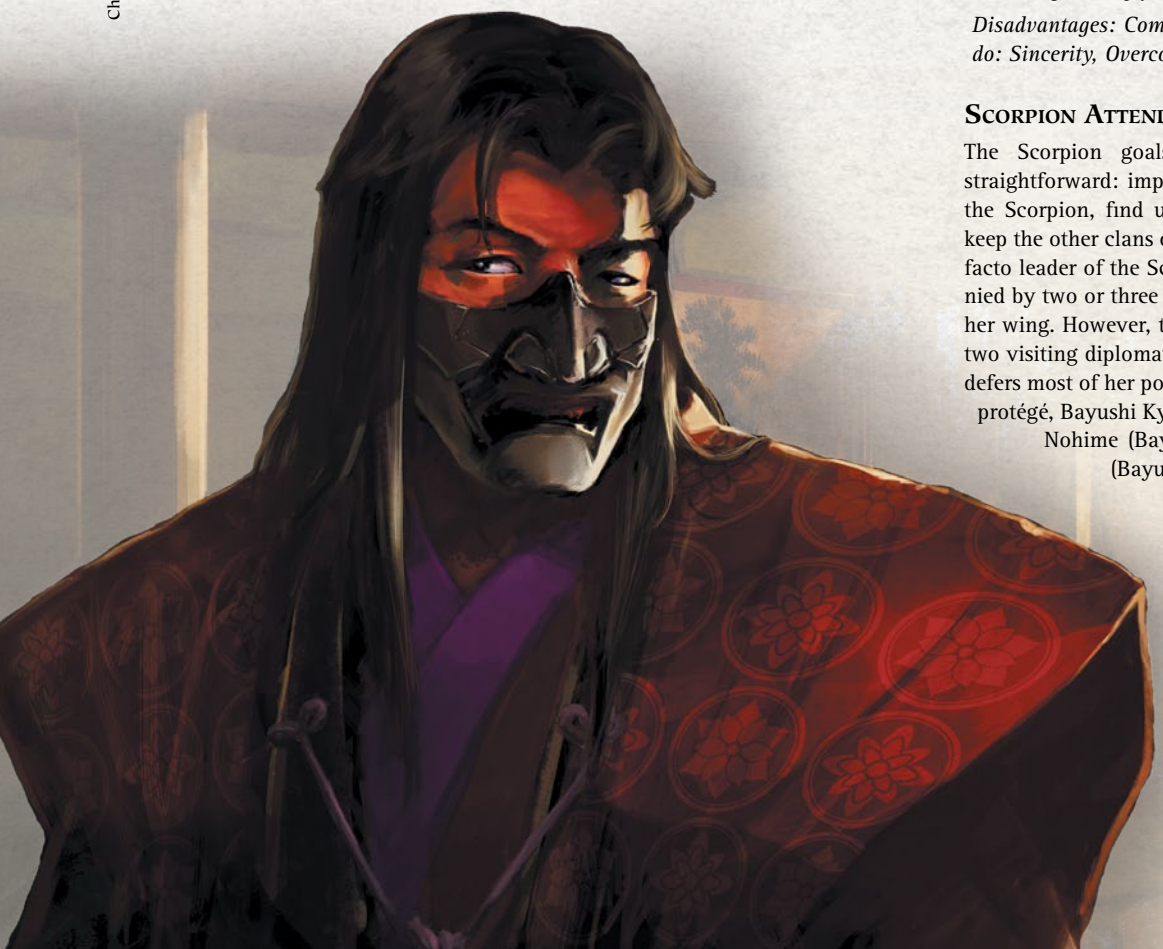
Advantages: Crafty, Touch of the Spirit Realms (Sakkaku)

Disadvantages: Compulsion (Tell Lies), Failure of Bushido: Sincerity, Overconfident

Scorpion Attendants

The Scorpion goals at Kyuden Kurogane-Hana are straightforward: improve the standing and reputation of the Scorpion, find useful information for the clan, and keep the other clans on their toes. Shosuro Mieko is the de facto leader of the Scorpion, and she is usually accompanied by two or three young courtiers who she takes under her wing. However, the clan also frequently sends one or two visiting diplomats of greater experience to whom she defers most of her power. At the moment she has only one protégé, Bayushi Kyogi. Current visitors include Bayushi Nohime (Bayushi Courtier 3) and Shosuro Ikagi (Bayushi Courtier 2).

Mieko and her guests also have bodyguards to see to their protection and to champion them in the event of a duel. Mieko's own guard is a silent and self-effacing man named Bayushi Kagama (Bayushi Bushi 2).





Ide Bujun

Compassionate Merchant

While most honorable samurai see commerce and money as necessary evils at best (and often as a corrupting influence), Ide Bujun has established quite the opposite relationship with such things. Despite what others attempt to tell themselves, Bujun knows the Empire does not simply get along on Honor alone. Even the most dutiful samurai must eat, and one does not need to be a selfish or dishonorable man to wish to increase one's estate and family holdings. In fact, he believes it is in the exchange of goods—whether coin or other things of value—where a person reveals their true intentions and worth.

Bujun's goal in life emerged from the aftermath of a minor skirmish between the Lion and Unicorn. As a successful merchant patron, Bujun was able to help re-build a destroyed village over a single season, returning peasants to their homes and allowing a samurai family to return to their newly rebuilt estate as well. When the question of repayment came up (in the usual indirect way), Bujun realized he honestly had never really needed the money he had spent. Where a Phoenix might have simply refused repayment or a Mantis might have taken the money anyway, the young Ide decided on a completely different course of action.

Remembering that a small city to the northeast had experienced a terrible drought that season, Bujun allowed his beneficiary a choice—either repay the actual koku to him, or deliver part of the harvest to the city in the northeast. Naturally, the option that involved giving the food to the city was cheaper than simply paying Bujun back, and thus the city was able to get through the winter without facing starvation.

Since then, the friendly Ide has traveled wherever he is able, turning trade routes and negotiations into exchanges of favors between those in need. While those he deals with think in terms of services and favors exchanged, Bujun quietly and carefully counts the value of the koku moving around, making sure those who can afford it are always asked for a little more. This extra Bujun takes and delivers to worthwhile endeavors, such as Miya's Blessing or temples that help take in the stricken and wounded.

Ide Bujun is a remarkable conversation partner. He knows a little bit about a wide range of topics due to his travels, and he finds nearly any subject fascinating. He will take any opportunity to spend time speaking one-on-one with someone he believes he can help or who might be able to aid his endeavors. He will try to learn of shared interests with anyone he wishes to speak to, and has learned many games and social entertainments such as Go and even Kemari to assist in this. Because Bujun has such a broad scope of interests and connections, it's often extremely difficult to turn the man away politely more than once or twice. And once he has someone's attention, he has an uncanny knack of learning how their goals and his can work together.

More recently, Bujun has been attempting to deliver material support to the Unicorn Clan's allies among the Crab, and is trying to turn the considerable resources of the Crane toward that end. If anyone can handle the impossible task of convincing the Crane to help fund the Crab Clan's ongoing war against the Shadowlands, it would be Bujun.

Ide Bujun, Compassionate Merchant

Air: 3 Earth: 4 Fire: 3 Water: 2 Void: 3

Awareness: 5 Intelligence: 4 Perception: 3

Honor: 6.4 *Status: 3.7* *Glory: 4.7*

School/Rank: Ide Emissary 3

Skills: Calligraphy 3, Commerce 7, Courtier 3, Divination 2, Etiquette (Conversation) 5, Games: Letters 3, Horsemanship 2, Knives 3, Lore: History 2, Lore: Crab Clan 2, Perform: Storytelling 3, Sincerity (Honesty) 4, Tea Ceremony 2.

Advantages: Benten's Blessing, Sage

Disadvantages: Small, Soft-Hearted

Unicorn Attendants

Bujun has established a focused, well-organized Unicorn presence in Kyuden Kurogane-Hana in order to handle his complicated goals as efficiently as possible. His primary assistant is a calculating and somewhat cold Ide named Hito (Ide Emissary 2), an older man who is in charge of coordinating the schedules and efforts of the Unicorn representatives here. Hito has several other functionaries who in turn assist him with his duties, so he rarely interacts directly with those the Unicorn have taken an interest in.

Since the Unicorn are travelers by nature, it is not uncommon for several to show up unannounced and stay at the castle for a short period; housing is usually arranged by Bujun or Hito. Ide Bujun always makes it clear to these visitors (in a firm but friendly manner) that they do not necessarily need to assist him in his goals, but will be expected not to bring hardship or shame on him or the

clan during their stay. Currently, a pair of Shinjo bushi are resting here: Kumari (Shinjo Bushi 1) and Shimoko (Shinjo Bushi 2). There is also an eccentric Iuchi, Sen (Iuchi Shugenja 2), who speaks little to others.

Chuda Natsuko

Corrupting Infiltrator

Chuda Natsuko considers herself something of an intellectual. Everything can be rationalized if it is truly worthwhile, and that which defies reasonable explanation is stupidity or possibly insanity. The young infiltrator understands she has a somewhat black-and-white view in that regard, but it has served her surprisingly well. Part of this philosophy revolves around the idea of power: who has it and how it can be taken or created. Natsuko has spent a great deal of her life making decisions based on how they might increase her power, using her keen mind to discard empty promises and pursue real opportunities.

Natsuko was not born into the Chuda family, but perhaps she was destined to become one of them. Her parents were both ronin shugenja, but the young girl had no talent for speaking with the spirits. Not only did she seem unable to hear or communicate with them, but she often felt the elemental spirits actually disliked her. Of course, her parents thought this was just their daughter equating the silence of the kami with hostility, and while they were sorry that she had not inherited their gifts, they did not overly concern themselves with it. The lives of ronin were hard and such losses were to be expected.

By the time she was of age to begin any real training, however, her parents had been killed in a skirmish with bandits. She was taken in by monks. The sense of failure she carried for not being able to be a shugenja had amplified itself tenfold after she saw her parents die, leaving her to weep helplessly over their bodies. She was so inconsequential the bandits had not even considered her a threat.

The monks spent many years attempting to console the young girl and redirect her rage and sorrow, but to no avail: she would politely listen and let the words pass through her mind without true consideration. Natsuko saw her teachers' koans and philosophies as little more than amusing mind games with no true purpose. As she grew older she began to contemplate running away from the monastery and seeking her own way in life. However, one day she was approached by a new teacher whose ideals would appeal to her far more strongly: a member of the secret Chuda family.

At first, Natsuko did not trust this new teacher whose ideals were so obviously more in line with her personal beliefs. She worried she was being tested in some fashion. In a way, she was correct; the Chuda were interested in her, but were unsure how deeply her convictions were rooted. When they finally decided she was worthy, Natsuko and her sensei vanished one night to continue her training at a hidden stronghold of the covert family.

Strangely, Natsuko had no real interest in the power of maho, though the Chuda were ready to teach her. She found blood magic too costly and understood the hidden dangers much more quickly than many maho-tsukai, including some of her teachers. Instead, she was drawn to those of the Chuda who served as infiltrators, like the ones who had found her. It pleased her greatly to think of recruiting others to the Chuda cause right under the nose of traditional samurai authority. That was true and lasting power: not coaxed or borrowed from dark spirits, but wrested from the minds and hearts of others.

Currently, Natsuko is at Kyuden Kurogane-Hana as part of a plan she and her masters devised several months ago. One of the most infuriating limits to the power of the Chuda is a frequent lack of dead bodies to animate with the kansen. If the Great Clans could be convinced that cremation was an antiquated practice, no longer necessary, this would go a long way towards increasing the potential power of the Chuda family. While Natsuko believes such a deeply ingrained tradition will never end in her own lifetime, she finds it an interesting challenge to slowly chip away at such customs.



Chuda Natsuko, Corrupting Infiltrator

Air: 3	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 3	Void: 2
Awareness: 4		Intelligence: 4		
Honor: 0.7		*Status: 0.0*		*Glory: 0.0*

School/Rank: Daigotsu Courtier 3

Skills: Acting 4, Courtier (Manipulation) 5, Defense 3, Etiquette 5, Games: Letters 2, Intimidation 3, Knives 3, Meditation 2, Perform: Oratory 3,Sincerity (Deceit) 5, Stealth 4, Temptation 2.

Advantages: Bland, Dark Paragon (Insight)

Disadvantages: Wrath of the Kami (Earth)

Spider/Shadowlands Attendants

Natsuko is visiting Kyuden Kurogane-Hana in the guise of a simple traveling ronin scholar, so she only has one attendant with her. The young man named Kori (Chuda Shugenja 2) is her ever-present silent companion. Allegedly Kori is a specialist in portents and signs...or so they allow everyone to believe. He claims to see the patterns of the heavens and hear the whispers of the ancestors, but is real role is simply to help give Natsuko's words leverage and weight. He is a competent maho-tsukai and has more than once quietly struck a visitor with a curse or disease after "warning" them of their dire fate written in the stars. This has given credence to Natsuko's words, at least in the eyes of some; the two Chuda are careful not to overplay this trick lest they draw suspicion.

Kori is also there to assist Natsuko in her covert efforts to directly interfere in the handling of the dead. Through subterfuge and stealth, the pair have managed to divert just under a dozen corpses to their masters. Typically, this involves forging records and replacing a body with an urn full of ashes, thereby convincing the right people that the cremation was performed properly.

Suzume Hin

Fascinated Storyteller

Suzume Hin represents a problem that occurs within the ranks of the Sparrow from time to time—a young noble with great talents for public speaking and courtly behavior, but talents that blossom later than her peers.

The Sparrow Clan is traditionally unapologetic about its less "proper" attitudes toward interacting with peasants and doing manual labor, but the clan leadership is pragmatic enough to realize they should do what they can to show a more refined face to the rest of the Empire. To that end, young samurai whose talents suit them to representing the Sparrow in the courts of other clans are often separated from their kin and excused from the menial labor and other physical tasks that most Sparrow samurai routinely perform. This ensures the future courtier does not carry the telltale mark of calloused hands, over-familiar attitudes towards peasants, and general rough demeanor that would otherwise put them at a severe disadvantage in most courts.

It does happen from time to time, however, that samurai with courtly talents are not recognized until after they have already spent several years serving the clan in the more traditional manner. Hin is one such samurai, a young woman who was tested for her aptitude with a blade before anything else. Given the fervor and joy she took from combat training, the lords of the Suzume family believed she was destined to become a talented bushi and nothing more, and she served in the fields during planting and harvest like every other Sparrow soldier.

It was several years later that the Sparrow sensei took note of how Hin enjoyed all aspects of life—including conversation—with equally unabashed passion and joy. Her teachers might ask her to separate a bushel of rice into a hundred perfectly even piles and she would make a game of it, smiling to herself the whole time. The young Sparrow woman was genuinely interested in every possible topic and her sensei realized this could be a very effective trait in court; after all, nearly anyone can easily be convinced to talk about themselves at length, and if Rin has a limit on her patience for listening, they could not find it. Those who dealt with her always enjoyed her company greatly, for she listened earnestly to their problems, their small talk, or whatever else might be on their minds.

In light of Rin's gifts, the Sparrow arranged for her to receive additional training from the Doji, taking advantage of the traditional connections between the two clans. The Doji taught her the essentials of court etiquette and social maneuvering. Sadly, the Sparrow had only a few minor favors to cash in for her education, so within a year she found herself back in Sparrow lands. However, her brief sojourn outside had left her with a burning desire to see more of the Empire. The lords of the Sparrow deemed she was indeed ready to serve them outside their lands, and sent her to Kyuden Kurogane-Hana to represent the interests of the Sparrow. The Minor Clan had never previously established a presence there, though they had heard it was a minor nexus of political interplay.

Since her arrival Rin has made a great many friends, taking every opportunity to meet new people, learn their stories, and write about it in her journals. She believes she is starting a great work that will show the attitudes and lives of several different clan samurai from across Rokugan. Through this work she hopes to bring better understanding of the wider Empire to those who are not as fortunate as her.

Suzume Hin, Fascinated Storyteller

Air: 3	Earth: 2	Fire: 3	Water: 2	Void: 2
		Agility: 4	Strength: 3	

Honor: 6.7 *Status: 2.3* *Glory: 2.1*

School/Rank: Suzume Bushi 2

Skills: Athletics 2, Calligraphy 2, Courtier 3, Defense 1, Etiquette (Conversation) 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 4, Lore: History 3, Lore: Theology 2, Perform: Storytelling 4, Perform: Oratory 2, Sincerity 3.

Advantages: Benten's Blessing

Disadvantages: Disturbing Countenance (workman's hands), Small

Sparrow Attendants

The Sparrow have no particular political agenda at Kyuden Kurogane-Hana outside of whatever opportunities Rin can find and deem worth pursuing. Because of this, she is often the only representative of her clan here. She can, as necessary, call upon her clan to have a minor functionary or two sent to assist her.

For the most part, Rin and any of her assistants will focus on working their way into the good graces of the Great Clans and establishing friendly, mutually beneficial relationships. The major barrier to such efforts, of course, is the extremely limited resources and power of her clan.

Thus far her most effective tactic is to refrain from presenting the Sparrow as some valuable ally, instead using her friendly relations with the entire court to broker partnerships and trade between parties who would have otherwise never have communicated. This has earned her several minor favors, which she believes is a fine start to her diplomatic efforts.

Toku Irui

Vapid Clotheshorse

Toku Irui is a Monkey Clan courtier, but her status as a courtier is mostly by virtue of being less-than-stellar at anything else. From an early age, Irui was far more interested in the latest gossip and court fashions than anything that might be considered useful by the majority of her clan. Her sensei described her as a mediocre student when they were feeling generous, but more often they said "atrocious, simply atrocious." Her career as a bushi was doomed from the very beginning, and had she not shown some minor aptitude for diplomacy she would at best have been married off to some unfortunate husband. As it was, her combat training ended and she was given some modest instruction on the ways of court—at which she showed somewhat better results, though still not stellar by any means.

Once she (finally) passed her gempukku, Irui was sent as an attendant to a nearby Mantis court, mostly because her superiors could not think of anything better for her to do that would not in some way bring harm to the clan. There she dove greedily into the court scene, devouring rumors and gossip as if starving. Her most basic interest was unchanging throughout her stay—fashion, and all its accoutrements. After the rather bland styles and simple life of the Monkey lands, the extravagant fashions and ever-changing styles of the Mantis court were enthralling and addicting.

Even so, her clan saw that the courts were the most useful place for Irui, and certainly suited her tastes far better than life as a bushi ever would. She would do the clan no harm and might even be able to build up a few connections or alliances, or perhaps make a useful cross-clan marriage. Regardless, it was clearly better than bringing her back to the remote Monkey lands.

Irui spent the next few years serving her clan in various minor courts. Her goals were always kept simple, and she never made much headway into gaining access to the larger courts, although she would have dearly loved to have done so—after all, there she could finally be on the cutting edge of fashion instead of behind by a half a year.

Very little about Irui has changed since that time, although her entourage has increased in size to deal with her huge and ever-growing collection of clothing. She is always dressed in the latest style and cannot stand to be out of fashion in any way; she can spend endless hours in court discussing the latest trends in kimono designs or embroidery techniques, waxing lyrical on the talents of the newest seamstresses, the trends in obi-tying, what the "in" courtiers were wearing at the last Imperial Winter Court, and so forth. Sadly, she lacks the courtly skills to earn the kind of acclaim that would get her an invitation to such prestigious courts. Her appointment to Kyuden Kurogane-Hana is her most notable achievement in her career so far, and took her several years to attain. At her current pace, she might get an invitation to Kyuden Doji when she is ready to retire.

Toku Irui, Vapid Clotheshorse

Air: 2 **Earth: 3** **Fire: 3** **Water: 2** **Void: 2**

Honor: 4.5 *Status: 1.0* *Glory: 2.3*

School/Rank: Toku Bushi 1 (Insight Rank 2)

Skills: Athletics 1, Calligraphy 2, Courtier (Gossip) 3, Defense 1, Etiquette 3, Hunting 1, Investigation (Search) 1, Kenjutsu 1, Lore: Fashion 5, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: History 1, Lore: Theology 1, Sincerity 2, Tea Ceremony 1

Advantages: Servant (Multiple)

Disadvantages: Fascination (Fashion), Rumormonger, Insensitive

Monkey Attendants

The only real presence that the Monkey have at Kyuden Kurogane-Hana is Irui and her small army of servants. As such, very little diplomatic progress is made on behalf of the Monkey Clan. This is not a particular problem, however, since the Monkey Clan's only real goal is simply to be noticed and remembered by the Great Clans.

Otomo Hiroshi

Imperial Historian

Hiroshi is a friendly and inquisitive young man who wears a formal samurai topknot and a neatly-trimmed goatee. He has spent most of his life up until now in the secluded world of the Otomo family estates, studying and preparing to make his mark on the world. However, his scholarly temperament made him ill-suited to the ruthless world of politics. The family recognized early on that sending Hiroshi into the snake-pit of politics would only make them look inept, and chose to encourage his intellectual side instead. His particular knack for remembering dates and places eventually led them to arrange an appointment as an official Imperial historian.

Hiroshi views his assignment at Kyuden Kurogane-Hana as a great opportunity. He believes the official histories of the Empire have under-valued the significance of this castle, and his intention is to rectify this oversight as dramatically as possible. Consequently, he is constantly poking into every corner of the castle and questioning every resident, trying to uncover hidden tales and ancient secrets that will prove the castle's significance. His bodyguard, Seppun Tokari (Seppun Bodyguard 1), finds Hiroshi a trying charge, since he has a tendency to run off on his

own and to ask less-than-politic questions of important people.

Hiroshi is unmarried and is on the lookout for a suitable wife to run his household and carry on his family line.

Otomo Hiroshi, Imperial Historian

Air: 3	Earth: 2	Fire: 3	Water: 2	Void: 3
			Perception: 4	

Honor: 7.0 *Status: 3.0* *Glory: 3.0*

School/Rank: Otomo Courtier 2

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Courtier (Manipulation) 3, Defense 1, Etiquette (Bureaucracy) 4, Intimidation (Control) 2, Horsemanship 2, Investigation 1, Lore: History 4, Lore: Heraldry 3, Lore: Law 2, Medicine 1, Meditation 2, Sincerity 2, Storytelling 2, Theology 2

Advantages: Precise Memory, Social Position (Imperial Historian)

Disadvantages: Fascination (Secrets)

Hisao

Wandering Ronin

The Empire is full of stories of brave men and women who were born ronin but nonetheless became celebrated heroes through valorous and honorable deeds. While some Rokugani hold up these heroes as examples of how nobility is a hallmark of the samurai caste no matter the person, others point out that for each admirable ronin there are dozens of despicable wave-men who trade their ideals and honor for something to eat. Few understand both halves of this truth more than Hisao.

Hisao was born ronin, to ronin parents who in turn were born ronin themselves. He can trace his lineage back three generations—all of them masterless samurai who struggled to maintain their honor while dealing with the practical needs of survival. His grandfather was a skilled combatant and swordsman who was honored to serve in one of the Emperor's own legions before he died in battle. His father fought in a major war and earned glory and respect before he, too, died in battle. But ultimately neither of them left behind much legacy beyond respectful memories among the daimyo and officers they served for a short while.

Though his lineage does not have the depth of a Great Clan samurai, Hisao has done what he can to live up to it. He has studied the blade with great fervor, intertwining it with his personal interests in such subjects as history, the Tao, and religious philosophy. His broad range of martial and scholarly knowledge has at times made others wonder if he was cast out of the Dragon, Crane, Lion, or Phoenix, all of which he politely denies. Inwardly, however, it chafes Hisao that clan samurai cannot imagine a man born a ronin could be as intelligent and well-studied as he is.

The place of ronin in society is a subject that consumes Hisao's thoughts even more so than is typical for wave-men. Despite his frustrations, Hisao does not burn and rage at the perceived inequity of the universe, but rather patiently examines and dissects his situation. Though he is a proud man who never stoops to dishonorable or shameful actions, he never lets his pride get the better of him when others disregard or disparage him for his station. Instead, he steadfastly serves as an example of how great a ronin can become, realizing that verbal arguments and insults are as nothing in the face of action.

For a time, Hisao believed he was doomed to follow in the honorable but obscure footsteps of his ancestors. This bothered him, for he believed that it was his duty to surpass the deeds of his father and grandfather, hopefully earning a position or duty to pass on to his own heirs. Fortunately, fate at last gave him the exact opportunity he craved—while serving the Lion in a small border conflict, he rescued the son of the man his father had died protecting. The samurai, Matsu Daro, was impressed by Hisao's skill and unwavering courage; where other wave men had fled when a tactical retreat had been sounded, Hisao retreated with skill and discipline equal to any Lion samurai, helping Daro dispatch four



attackers when they might have overwhelmed him. After some conversation, the two recognized each other from the stories they had heard from their respective fathers.

Hisao was given a position as Daro's assistant, and managed to serve honorably for several years until the Lion died in another minor skirmish, this one with the Scorpion. Hisao ruthlessly killed the Scorpion bushi that struck down his friend and master, then delivered Daro's swords to the Lion.

It was at this moment Hisao realized the past few years had made him forget how precarious his position was. No other Lion officers at the battle knew Hisao personally, and when the ronin presented his master's swords, he was immediately accused of being Daro's killer, trying to claim a reward as some kind of trick. It was only Hisao's calm and disciplined demeanor that made the Lion commander hesitate from simply executing him on the spot. Although the confusion was eventually cleared up when Daro's wife confirmed Hisao's identity, the days he spent as a prisoner awaiting a potential unjust execution made him realize that while he might believe he had been bettering himself, his life and reputation were wholly dependent on another's word rather than his own deeds.

Since that time, Hisao has wandered across Rokugan, visiting the shrines and resting places of great heroes of the Empire, hoping to glean some hint of how to rise above his place. He is visiting Kyuden Kurogane-Hana for a short while before continuing his journey, though he is unsure how soon he will return to the road.

Hisao, Wandering Ronin

Air: 2 Earth: 3 Fire: 4 Water: 3 Void: 3
Reflexes: 4 Willpower: 4

Honor: 7.1 *Status: 0.0* *Glory: 2.8*

School/Rank: Disciples of Sun Tao 1 (Insight Rank 4)

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 3, Defense 4, Etiquette 3, Heavy Weapons 2, Horsemanship 4, Hunting 4, Iaijutsu 5, Kenjutsu 7, Kyujutsu 5, Lore: History 2, Lore: Tao 4, Meditation 3, Spears 2

Advantages: Allies (Lion Clan, 2/1), Virtuous

Disadvantages: Social Disadvantage (Ronin)

Ronin "Attendants"

There are a small handful of ronin at any given time at Kyuden Kurogane-Hana, but it is rare for them to have any particular connection to one another. Their goals are as varied as they themselves can be.

The final part of this chapter offers a variety of campaign ideas and adventure outlines which aspiring GMs can use to depict Air-themed adventures in and around courtly castles. All of these adventures will fit nicely into Kyuden Kurogane-Hana, but we have kept them "neutral" enough in their content to allow GMs to relocate them to other courtly environments with only minor changes. The GM should also feel free to change the clans or factions involved in each possible adventure, as well as the nature and identity of specific NPCs, to suit the needs of his own game and player group.

Both the longer campaign seeds and the shorter adventure seeds presented here follow the traditional L5R "Challenge–Focus–Strike" format, in which the "Challenge" section introduces the basic situation, the "Focus" adds details or an unexpected twist, and the "Strike" section discusses ways in which the situation can resolve.

Campaign Seed: Strings Attached

Challenge

Late at night, a commotion in the main court chamber is overheard by a patrol of castle guards. They enter the chamber and come across a brutal murder scene—two Crane courtiers dead, killed where they stand by a familiar man in Unicorn colors. The Unicorn flees as the guards arrive; they pursue him, but he evades escape in the castle's maze-like lower tiers. The daimyo locks down the entire castle complex until the nature of the murder can be assessed, and orders go out to find the Unicorn and bring him back to be punished.

Focus

PCs and other trusted guests will be more-or-less free to assist in the hunt for the missing Unicorn, although the actual murder investigation is handled by the daimyo and his castle guards. If the GM wishes to motivate them further, their own superiors can point out the favor and influence they can gain by helping to resolve the investigation. Unicorn PCs, obviously, will have motives of their own—retrieving their dishonorable kinsman will help protect the reputation of their clan and ensure that he alone bears the blame for his actions. Conversely, a failure to take the situation seriously or to pitch in on the search may be taken poorly by the Crane, potentially earning long-term enmity for the PCs.

The Unicorn is hiding in a nearby village, nursing a broken leg suffered while leaping from the castle walls.



If the PCs track him down, he will claim innocence and insists he was framed by a Scorpion, an artisan who performs puppet shows for the court. The Unicorn claims to have information proving the Scorpion is in charge of a local criminal gang. He will describe the Scorpion luring him into the court chambers late at night, only to find two dead Crane, a bloody sword from his own chambers, and guards arriving behind him. The Unicorn will insist he was set up; if the PCs ask about the Scorpion's motives, he will claim one of his ancestors was involved in the execution of a Scorpion generations ago; he suggests he is a victim of one of the infamous long-term Scorpion revenge plots.

Strike

The real truth is that the Unicorn is a member of the secret Kolat conspiracy, and the Scorpion discovered documents in the Unicorn's possession to confirm this information. The two Crane were being blackmailed and pressured by the Unicorn in order to cripple the Scorpion's power in the court. The Scorpion discovered their involvement and decided to kill the Crane, frame the Unicorn, and thereby solve two problems at once, in the process delivering a blow against a conspiracy that threatens the Empire (and the Scorpion Clan).

If the PCs question the Scorpion, his default position will be to deny everything, but if the PCs win his trust (or some of them are Scorpion themselves) he will reveal the truth and claim he was forced to protect himself and the Empire by destroying the Unicorn. This leaves the PCs in a curious position: the Scorpion is a murderer who killed two innocent samurai, but he is striking a blow against a conspiracy that is seeking to undermine the entire Celestial Order. The Unicorn is innocent but is a Kolat and thus by definition an enemy of the Empire. If the PCs save the Unicorn, the Kolat will attempt to recruit them into its future operations, whereas if they cooperate with the Scorpion and send the Unicorn to his execution, the Kolat conspiracy will mark them out as enemies and dog their future steps. Truly ruthless PCs might try to play both groups against each other, a hazardous undertaking indeed.

Campaign Seed: For The People

Challenge

The court is conducting business as usual when the proceedings are interrupted by a Miya Emerald Magistrate who claims to have important documentation for the daimyo. The message proclaims that by Imperial authority the Miya is now in charge of this area, and the previous daimyo and his retainers, servants, and samurai are to clear out as quickly as possible. No reason is given for this abrupt and shocking command. The daimyo, humiliated and furious, tells the Miya he will need "a little time" to gather up his followers and belongings. Granted a few days, he hurriedly calls in any favors he has to enlist samurai to investigate what is going on.

Focus

The daimyo has been having problems with the Miya ever since he was appointed as the local Emerald Magistrate, but is shocked and bewildered that the Miya could arrange such a drastic action. If the PCs ask about the nature of the conflict between the two, they can learn that the daimyo is known for being rather harsh on the local peasants, while the Miya is equally notorious for his spirited defense of the lower castes. In fact, there are rising tensions among the villagers and if something is not done soon, there is a significant likelihood of a peasant rebellion.

The Miya insists he is merely carrying out the orders of his superiors, and denies any motive involving the peasantry. If the PCs review the Miya's documents, they appear to be legitimate, and are signed by a high-ranking Imperial bureaucrat man named Miya Sukodachi. However, if the PCs inquire as to where Sukodachi is or where they can find him, the Miya will be vague and elusive. In fact, "Miya Sukodachi" does not exist—the name was made up by the Emerald Magistrate. He forged the documents in hope of ousting the daimyo and then easing the burden in the local peasants, averting a revolt. He has convinced himself the daimyo is not influential enough to uncover his trickery.

Strike

If the PCs ascertain the truth and accuse the Miya, he will try to get them to go along with his deception, revealing that he is a fairly close relative to the current Miya family daimyo and could provide all manner of future politi-

cal favors in return for their backing his dishonest ploy. In this situation, the Miya will ease the burdens on the peasants and avert the revolt, but the PCs will find themselves tied to him politically thereafter, while the displaced daimyo will swear enmity against them and do everything in his power to destroy them. If he learns the truth about "Miya Sukodachi" the PCs may find themselves in very deep trouble.

Conversely, if the PCs reveal the truth to the daimyo, he will reward them for their loyalty and will have the Miya arrested and executed... but a peasant revolt will take place in the near future, potentially a very large-scale and violent one. The PCs will be associated with the daimyo in the public mind and may share the public embarrassment of the revolt and acquire sworn enemies among the rebels. The Miya's family and friends may also assert enmity against the PCs, potentially leading to blood feuds and other long-term difficulties.

Campaign Seed: Who's Who?

Challenge

The PCs are attending the celebration of the daimyo's son's impending marriage, while also mourning the recent death of the daimyo's brother, a man who married into the Scorpion clan and was highly respected. To this end, the daimyo declares the whole length of the two week celebration will take place in masks—all attendants, even servants, must wear some form of mask to memorialize the daimyo's brother and to enhance the festivities leading up to the marriage, which will take place at the end of that two weeks.

The celebrations are somewhat muted by reports of a grisly murder in a nearby copper mine. Almost twenty commoner workers and four samurai guards have been slain, their bodies apparently torn apart, inside the mine. Inquiries (or a visit) ascertain that the bodies were found in the presence of a piece of shattered pottery of ancient design, apparently unearthed by the workers before they died. If a PC actually visits and examines the pottery, it is covered in extremely ancient and crude kanji, probably dating to the time of the Kami's fall; a few of them can be roughly translated as 'like unto others'.

Focus

The workers unwittingly released an ancient and powerful Pennaggolan called Kasaraki, imprisoned with the pottery jar at the Dawn of the Empire. Kasaraki has the ability to claim the bodies of those he has slain, making him more dangerous than a normal pennaggolan. PCs who think to actually inquire about the total number of bodies at the site can learn that one of the peasant workers cannot be identified among the dead. Of course, the daimyo and his guards are unlikely to believe any fanciful tales about possessing spirits or animated bodies, so initially it will be up to the PCs to try to watch for the creature. Needless to say, with everyone wearing masks this will be extremely difficult.

However, as the days pass toward the wedding, people within the court will begin to disappear, the bodies showing up later in different parts of the castle. The daimyo will



be deeply concerned, since such incidents cast a pall over the celebration and upcoming wedding. Even worse, clues will be left at the various crime scenes that spread blame across the guests and possibly the PCs as well. The daimyo will become increasingly angry and frustrated as the situation grows worse, and may even go so far as to accuse the PCs of being spies trying to ruin his family's future.

Strike

Kasaraki has actually taken the body of one of the daimyo's advisors, using the masks to aid its deception. The murders are distractions to throw the court into chaos while the creature waits for the chance to murder the daimyo himself and take his place. The body of the peasant which Kasaraki used to reach the castle is concealed somewhere on the castle grounds, and uncovering it may offer the PCs vital clues to the creature's true identity. However, since the advisor holds a higher-status position, the PCs will be hard-pressed to make an accusation stick unless they have very strong evidence.

If the PCs do not unmask Kasaraki before the end of the festival, the monster will eventually kill and replace the daimyo himself, becoming a demoniac false lord who institutes a reign of terror over the castle and the whole region. Rumors of conflict between the daimyo, his son, and his son's new bride may offer clues to what has happened, as well as the more general change in the daimyo's character and demeanor. Of course, exposing a high-status daimyo as an undead Shadowlands creature will be even harder than exposing an advisor. If the PCs fail, they will have to deal with the consequences: a major castle ruled by a monster. On the other hand, saving the daimyo and his family would greatly increase their fame and likely lead to their replacing the advisor, thus taking a hand in the future governance of the castle and surrounding lands.

Adventure Seed: The True Meaning of Valor

Challenge

The current court season revolves around the upcoming performance of a prominent playwright's newest offering. The playwright is much admired by patrons of the art, particularly those of the Crane and Lion clans, who admire his many fine moralist plays. The new work, "Valor," is expected to detail the life of a recently retired general in the Imperial Legions and his greatest life triumph. The PCs are of course among those invited to attend the opening night of the play.

Focus

The event is fraught with scandal, and the first performance is received with rage by the former general's family, for the retiree is displayed in a very unflattering light. It is his second in command, a samurai of far lesser fame and stature, who is depicted as the true pinnacle of valor. Accusations fly and the playwright is challenged to a duel for the honor and reputation of the supposedly maligned general.

Strike

The playwright, unable to find other allies, asks one of the PCs to serve as his champion or at least to help him find someone willing to undertake that duty. While the PCs consider the prospect of a prominent artisan owing them a major favor, not to mention the political implications of possibly aiding him, they must also come to grips with the play's repercussions: rather than allow his former commander be thought less honorable, the former second in command commits an unauthorized seppuku, thereby effectively proving the play's accusations true and calling into question the meaning of valor to all involved.

Adventure Seed: Desperate Gambits

Challenge

In the midst of the summer season, rumors begin to fly about one of the newest members of the court. Beautiful and courteous, the young maiden has drawn considerable attention and many speak quite highly of her. Numerous suitors seek her out, vying both for her personal attention and for a connection to her family through marriage.

Focus

The courtier privately seeks out the most likely candidate among the PCs and attempts to seduce him; whether or not she is successful, she allows herself to be seen in the company of that PC or of a similar figure within the court. This erupts into a major scandal when rumors spread that she is with child. A hasty marriage negotiation is initiated to save face, but the likelihood that she will be shunted off to a nunnery seems very high. Needless to say, if the courtier did succeed in seducing a PC, that worthy will now find himself accused of being the father, with disgrace and duels in the offing.

Strike

If the characters choose to investigate further, they can potentially learn the courtier is actually deeply in love with her yojimbo. The child is his, and she has created the false relationships with others to protect him from the consequences of their foolish passions. What, if anything, the PCs choose to do with this information is up to them, and the stakes may include not only the potential for a politically useful (albeit loveless and emotionally tainted) marriage, but also perhaps their own reputation and status.



Adventure Seed: The Frigid Flower of Winter

Challenge

The Game of Letters, a popular game among the courtiers of the Empire, is particularly heated during this year's winter court. Whether participating or not, the characters are privy to an increasingly cold exchange between two resolutely anonymous figures, the "White Orchid" and the "Emerald Hummingbird." The general consensus is that the two have demonstrated considerable skill in the performance of the game, but there are increasing concerns about the bitter tone with which they address each other as the winter proceeds.

Focus

As the winter reaches its zenith, the Hummingbird's commentary makes veiled accusations regarding the supposed purity of the chill Orchid. Their back-and-forth correspondence suddenly falls silent after a particularly scathing rebuttal by the Orchid. Rumors begin to hint at their identity, focusing on a clever male courtier from one clan and a young female duelist, known to be under a vow of chastity, from a rival clan. Rumors spread that the samurai-ko will seek a duel against the one who has insulted her.

Strike

The "Hummingbird" has bitten off more than he can chew; hoping to mire a political rival in a minor scandal, he finds himself instead facing the possibility of a duel over her offended honor. He will risk the revelation of his participation in the now scandalous conversations and approach the PCs in an effort to see the conflict mediated rather than escalated into a much nastier (and probably more lethal) incident. However, such mediation will be difficult indeed due to the seriousness of the insults exchanged and the stubborn egos involved.

Adventure Seed: An Inconvenient Guest

Challenge

While the presence of a ronin at a court is not an unheard-of occurrence, the most recent arrival has been met with considerable gossip and rumor. He seems to be more boorish than the average such guest, barely avoiding a major incident on several occasions. Despite his improper behavior, he is given a wide latitude by the castle guards and allowed a certain degree of freedom within the court by the daimyo and his assistants. Rumors abound that the ronin is owed some sort of significant favor by the daimyo.

Focus

With every passing day and every increasingly obvious incident, the courtiers whisper more and more about what the ronin might have done to gain entry into the court. The gossip truly runs out of control after a drunken incident in the nearby village is quelled by the local doshin, and the daimyo himself steps in to mediate the dispute.

Strike

The reality is not that the ronin has something on the daimyo, but that the ronin himself is the daimyo's dark secret: he is the result of a long-ago tryst with a heimin woman. The daimyo has circumspectly aided him on several occasions out of respect for his long-lost forbidden love. Unfortunately, the old tryst was discovered this year by a political rival, who has invited the ronin to court as a guest in order to shame the daimyo with the man's boorish antics and the daimyo's apparent unwillingness to deal with the situation properly. If the PCs uncover the rival's actions, the daimyo will owe them a considerable favor.

Adventure Seed: An Unusual Request

Challenge

In each winter season, displays of profound artistic beauty are frequent. In this particular season, a young painter of particular renown has been invited to join the guests in the hope that he will be inspired to new heights of greatness. Colorful and witty, he is quick to make friends and seems to be garnering considerable attention, but while he manages a couple of passable works, nothing he offers so far seems to merit his invitation.

Focus

As the winter drags on, the painter comes under increasing scrutiny as he continue to offer works lacking in true excellence. Although his skills seem undiminished, his works are nothing to draw more than passing attention, and some wonder if perhaps his reputation has been overrated significantly. Eventually, the artisan covertly approaches one or more PCs, seeking assistance in helping him find the 'real inspiration' he requires.

Strike

The painter reveals that the inspiration for his finest works has come from occasions in which his life was in dire peril. Without the excitement and terror of life-threatening action, he is unable to truly achieve the height of mastery expected of him. He wants the PCs to lead him into some kind of legitimately dangerous scenario in the midst of the serene winter court season... without actually getting him killed, of course. Still, if they succeed, the PCs will have the gratitude of one of the Empire's prominent and famous artisans.

Adventure Seed: The Perfect Gift

Challenge

The talk of the summer court season is the arrival of the host's principle political rival. While courtesy demanded he be invited, few actually expected him to attend. Of particular note is the gift he brings: an exceedingly exquisite haori made of the finest silks. The fine gift draws the lord's attention, and the two begin speaking and even patching up their differences.

Focus

As the summer goes on, the daimyo is seen less and less. Rumors begin to hint that he has taken ill with a fever, and out of deference to his guests' health has taken to leaving the court in the hands of his advisors. The only person he seems to spend any length of time with is his former rival. As the sickness deepens, whispers of poison begin to circulate. Sure enough, investigation reveals traces of poison on the beautiful gifted haori.

Strike

The real culprit is one of the lord's advisors. An ambitious young soul, he hopes to use the chaos of his lord's death—and the exposure of the rival as the putatively responsible party—as a means to take the daimyo's position after his death. Only careful investigation and swift action can save the daimyo from an ignominious death at his own vassal's hands.

Adventure Seed: Surely You Jest

Challenge

A Kakita Jester known for his infamously scathing wit has long held the personal ear and protective favor of a family daimyo from one of the Great Clans. This status as a favored entertainer has gained him considerable status compared to the typical jester, and with the security of such a great lord's protection his acerbic wit has only become more vicious over the years, earning him many enemies. This leads to considerable tension when he is one of the guests at the local winter court.

Focus

It comes as little surprise when the jester is found dead in his room one evening. Accusations of poisoning and murder are not immediately brought forward, but suspicions are high, since two or three prominent members of the court have recently lost considerable face due to the entertainer's depredations. As suspicions grow, the local magistrate openly considers bringing one or more of them in for questioning and possibly even torture.

Strike

The reality is that the jester's death is completely accidental. Possessing a slew of bad personal habits, not the least of which is a heavy opium addiction, the man has now paid the price for a disordered and self-indulgent life. However, political rivalries within the court mean that many samurai are eager to blame his death on rivals, while the jester's patron will not willingly hear such shameful claims about the deceased favorite. Only through careful investigation and even more careful presentation of the reality of the situation may the PCs avert false accusations while also protecting the name of the jester's powerful patron.

Adventure Seed: You Will Not Have Him

Challenge

Negotiations are in full swing for a marriage between a scion of the local lord and a maiden from one of the Imperial houses. The discussions are among the business of the day at the lord's court, and while both of the participants seem to have a fairly public dislike for each other, they are also both willing to adhere to honor's dictates and marry at the behest of their families.

Focus

Scandal rocks the guests when implications are made of infidelity on the part of the Imperial maiden. She and her supposed lover both resolutely and aggressively defend their purity on the matter. However, there are alleged to be witnesses who can give testimony to the putative couple being alone together in the depths of night on three separate occasions.

Strike

The stories about the Imperial maiden are being spread by a jilted lover afflicted by the notorious Yogo Curse. Determined that if he could not have her he would destroy her, the former lover turned to dark magic and used the *maho* spell "Sinful Dreams" to lure the maiden and her lover into their shameful affair. If the PCs can uncover the *maho-tsukai*, the whole thing can be hushed up and the PCs will earn allies on both sides of the marriage alliance. If they do not learn the truth, however, the honor of two households will be besmirched and a dangerous *maho-tsukai* will escape justice.

Adventure Seed: Unforeseen Consequences

Challenge

Nearing the end of his life, a courtier of considerable note disappears into seclusion during the fall season. He reemerges in court that winter, clearly in decline and near death, to give his final will on the dispensation of those lands the Emperor has seen fit to place in the care of his family. The night after this is concluded, he passes quietly in his sleep.

Focus

Shockingly, in his final pronouncements the courtier acknowledges a ronin to be his legitimate son, and indicates that a portion of the family lands and estates are to be distributed to him, along with full acknowledgment and admission to the family.

Strike

Unfortunately, by succumbing to the Sin of Regret the dying courtier has created a crisis far larger than he might have guessed. His illegitimate is no longer a ronin; the young man became a member of the Crab Clan during a recent Twenty Goblin Winter. Needless the say, the rest of the family has no interest in seeing their lands divided at all, much less shared with a former wave-man who is now a member of the crude and thuggish Crab Clan. Such a complex scenario will require delicate negotiations during the winter if outright war is to be avoided.

Adventure Seed: Rumors

Challenge

Arriving at court without an invitation, an Ise Zume is nevertheless granted admittance. The unusual figure is treated as something of a curiosity, not only for being one of the famous Dragon tattooed warriors but also due to being a woman. She maintains decorum reasonably well, but her oddities are certainly the talk of the court, and with every passing week there is more speculation as to why she has come.

Focus

The rumors grow more flagrant as time goes on, though none of them ever seem to stick, and nobody seems willing to directly inquire the young woman's motives. Her associations are inspected with the utmost curiosity, and increasing numbers of courtiers make it a game to ferret out the secret of why she was accepted.

Strike

The reality is far simpler than most realize. Before she joined the Tattooed Order, the young woman was once a member of this clan, and she is visiting to check on her elder sister's family. She would be happy to tell anyone this simple fact were people not so intent on searching for clues to stories they invent for her. She finds the courtiers' games far too amusing to go out of her way to rectify their misunderstanding. Of course, if the rumors continue long enough, real consequences or perhaps even political impact may occur.

New Mechanics

The six chapters of this book include information on a variety of clan organizations, magical traditions, monastic orders, and even a few creatures not previously seen in the L5R 4th Edition role-playing game. New material mean new game mechanics, and for the convenience of players and GMs alike we have gathered all of the new mechanics into this part of the book to make them easier to find.

Chapter One: Winds of War

The mechanics derived from this chapter are focused primarily on archery and dueling, with a side-theme in martial arts.

Crane Clan

The Asahina Archers

The Asahina Archer technique emerged from a partnership between those few Asahina who chose to follow the path of the bushi and the Daidoji family, which enlisted them and encouraged them to pursue the ways of archery. The organization has existed for centuries, although its relative obscurity means that most samurai in other clans are unaware of its existence.

New Alternate Path: Asahina Archer [Bushi]

- **Rank:** 4
- **Replaces:** Daidoji Iron Warrior 4, Doji Magistrate 4
- **Requirements:** Air 3, Kyujutsu 5, and must be a member of the Asahina or Daidoji family

Technique: No Regrets

Asahina Archers are taught to minimize the influence of their family's traditional pacifism and focus on defeating their enemies swiftly so that wars may be ended equally swiftly. Their technique allows them to call on their own inherent Air, delivering precisely accurate shots. When making an archery attack, you may make Called Shots for one less Raise (to a minimum of 1) and add half your Air (rounded down) in unkept dice to your attack rolls.

Crab Clan

Crab Defenders

The limited Crab dueling tradition is maintained in the Unbreakable Blade Dojo. It emphasizes endurance rather than speed, teachings its students to endure their opponents' first blow in order to survive to deliver their own. Due to the Crab Clan's martial and pragmatic nature, the sensei of the Unbreakable Blade focus their training on lethal duels (both on the battlefield and in court) rather than on the duels to first blood that are more common in other clans.



New Alternate Path: Crab Defender [Bushi]

- **Rank:** 2
- **Replaces:** Hida Bushi 2, Hiruma Bushi 2
- **Requires:** Awareness 3, Agility 3, Iaijutsu 4

Technique: Warrior of Earth

The Defenders are taught there is more than one way to win a duel. Rather than try to strike faster than their opponents, Defenders learn to call on their own Earth to endure the foe's first strike, allowing them to defeat their enemy in a longer fight. During the Strike step of an iaijutsu duel, you are considered to have additional Reduction equal to your Earth x3.

The Hiruma Snipers

The Snipers are an outgrowth of the fall of Hiruma lands in the eighth century, and the Path does not exist prior to that era. They are trained to stay calm and shoot accurately even when assailed by terrifying monsters, targeting their foes' weak points.



New Alternate Path: Hiruma Snipers [Bushi]

- **Rank:** 4
- **Replaces:** Hiruma Scout 4 or Hiruma Bushi 4
- **Requirements:** Kyujutsu 5, Reflexes 4

Technique: The Crab's Eye

The Hiruma Snipers are trained to strike at specific weak points in their targets, getting their arrows past both mortal armor and monstrous shells and carapaces. You may attack with a yumi as a simple action. When making a ranged attack with a yumi, you may ignore all of the target's natural Reduction (e.g. Reduction from armor or natural protection) and half that much Reduction from magical effects.

Crab Clan/Falcon Clan

The Falcon's Strike

A tiny off-shoot of the Falcon Clan's bushi traditions, the Falcon's Strike Dojo becomes much larger and more influential after the Falcon are absorbed into the Crab Clan in the early twelfth century. The dojo selects its students for keen vision and sharp senses, and they learn to rely on focused senses rather than the mechanics of drawing and firing to hit their targets.

New Alternate Path: The Falcon's Strike [Bushi]

- **Rank:** 2
- **Replaces:** Toritaka Bushi 2. After the Falcon join the Crab, this Path may also replace Hiruma Scout 2 or Hiruma Bushi 2.
- **Requirements:** Kyujutsu (Yumi) 3

Technique: *Spotting the Prey*

The Falcon's Strike is taught to use the bushi's deep awareness of their surroundings to strike the target regardless of concealment. When making a ranged attack with a bow, you may use your Perception in place of your Reflexes for attack rolls. When using a yumi, you may also use your Perception in place of the bow's Strength for damage rolls.

Mantis Clan

Tsuruchi Master Bowmen

Tsuruchi never gave up trying to perfect his skills as an archer, and he perfected this final technique shortly before he was critically wounded at the Battle of Oblivion's Gate. He taught it to only a bare handful of his most trusted followers. Since then, only the most worthy and elite of the Tsuruchi family have been trusted to learn its secrets.

New Alternate Path: Tsuruchi Master Bowman [Bushi]

- **Rank:** 6
- **Replaces:** N/A
- **Requirements:** Kyujutsu 7. Must have School Rank 5 in either the Tsuruchi Archer or Tsuruchi Bounty Hunter School, and be selected by the Tsuruchi sensei to learn this Technique.

Technique: The Way of the Archer

Tsuruchi was perhaps the greatest archer in the history of Rokugan, and his final technique pushes the limits of what can be achieved with the bow. When using a bow, your range is increased by 150' (this is applied before applying the 50% range bonus for Kyujutsu Rank 5). Your Raises with a bow are no longer limited by your Void Ring (or Skill Rank if you have Great Potential), and you may perform Called Shots for half the normal number of Raises (rounded up).

Scorpion Clan

Saigo's Blades

The iaijutsu duel is a sacred tradition in Rokugan and a lynchpin of the Empire's legal system. Given the history the Scorpion Clan has in the creation of that system, it comes as no surprise that a small but effective branch of the clan's primary bushi school is devoted to the art of iaijutsu. Through much of the Empire's history the group did not have an official name, but during the years immediately prior to the Clan War it drew attention for the deeds of Bayushi Saigo, one of the finest graduates of its training program. Saigo's victories over other clans' duelists were so notable that the graduates of the dojo became known—first informally, then later formally—as Saigo's Blades.

New Alternate Path: Saigo's Blades [Bushi]

- **Technique Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Bayushi Bushi 3
- **Requirements:** Iaijutsu 3



Technique: Saigo's Technique

A true Scorpion duelist knows that intimidation and deception are the keys to victory. When dueling any opponent that you have previously used the Intimidation Skill upon successfully, you gain a bonus of +5 to the total of your roll during the Assessment Phase of the duel. Additionally, by spending a Void Point, you may report one statistic of your choice as being one rank higher during the Assessment Phase.

Unicorn Clan

Unicorn Yomanri Archer

Although the majority of Unicorn continued to practice Rokugani archery during their travel through the gaijin lands, a significant minority learned the gaijin style of archery which the clan calls A archer draws his arrow to his cheek and sights down the shaft, then releases it once he is confident in his aim.

New Alternate Path: Unicorn Yomanri Archer [Bushi]

- **Rank:** 4
- **Replaces:** Shinjo Bushi 4, Moto Bushi 4, Moto Vindicator 4, Utaku Battle Maiden 4
- **Requirements:** Agility 4, Kyujutsu 5

Technique: The Way of Yomanri

Yomanri practitioners use a distinctive form of archery which relies on careful aiming rather than swift instinctive shooting. When using a yumi or dai-kyu, you may choose to spend one or more consecutive Simple Actions aiming your shot before you fire the arrow. Each such Simple Ac-



tion awards either a +1k1 bonus to your attack roll or a +1k0 bonus to your damage roll (your choice). The maximum number of Simple Actions spent aiming cannot exceed your Agility Rank; moreover, if you are interrupted all benefits from the aiming are lost.

This technique cannot be used while you are in the Center Stance.

Brotherhood of Shinsei/Ronin

The Taoist Archers

The Taoist Archers seek perfect harmony through the study of kyujutsu and have existed within the Brotherhood of Shinsei for centuries. In the Pre-Coup era a ronin named Gahei learns the Technique and begins to teach a selected students, and thereafter this Path is also available to ronin characters (assuming they can find someone who knows it and is willing to teach them).

New Alternate Path: Taoist Archer

- **Rank:** 5
- **Replaces:** Any Brotherhood Monk or Ronin 5.
- **Requirements:** Void 4, Kyujutsu (Yumi) 5, Lore: Theology 3, Meditation 4

Technique: Flight of Innocence

The Taoist Archers practice their art blindfolded. When making archery attacks, you ignore all TN and dice penalties for being Blind, for having a Missing Eye, or for the target being concealed by darkness, magical illusion, camouflage, and similar visual obstructions. Penalties for physical obstacles and obstructive conditions (such as the target being Prone, a normal or magical wind, etc.) are applied normally.

In addition, when wielding a bow you may spend a Void Point for a +1k1 bonus on damage.

Kaze-do Fighter

The ancient techniques of Togashi Kaze, which formed the basis for almost all modern Rokugani martial arts, still survive in a somewhat abbreviated form among the peasants of Rokugan and the monks of the Brotherhood of Shinsei. The technique is rare and those who know it usually pass it down privately to a few select students, preserving its secrets from the samurai who Kaze opposed.

New Alternate Path: Kaze-do Fighter

- **Rank:** 2
- **Replaces:** Any Rank 2 for a character who qualifies.
- **Requirements:** Jiujutsu (Kaze-do) 3

Gaijin, the Naga, and Yomanri

The archery form represented by *yomanri* is the standard form of archery employed by many gaijin cultures, as well as by the archers of the Naga race. GMs who wish to add depth to their depiction of the Naga, or of distant foreign cultures such as the Senpet Empire and the Ivory Kingdoms, may wish to make the Way of *Yomanri* technique available to them. In fact, given how intrinsic aiming is to most of these cultures, the GM may wish to simply allow this ability to any foreign archer who has high Ranks in the Kyujutsu/Archery skill. This latter option is especially appropriate for the Naga, who are known and feared as masters of archery.



- **Special Limitation:** Normally, only peasants and monks of the Brotherhood may learn this Path, which represents those portions of Togashi Kaze's teachings which survive among the common people of Rokugan. At the GM's option, a ronin or a Tattooed Man might also be able to learn this Path if he is able to befriend a suitable teacher among those groups, but this should be an extraordinarily rare occurrence.

Technique: The Way of Air

The students of Kaze's ancient techniques learn how to use the speed of their opponents against them while evading enemy weapons. When you are fighting unarmed, any opponent attacking you with a melee weapon suffers a penalty of –Xk0 to his attacking Skill Roll, where X equals his Air Ring. This penalty cannot apply to more opponents within the same Round than your Insight Rank.

New Air Kata

New Kata: North Wind Style

The Fortune Tamon, Fortune of the North Wind, is feared by the lesser castes of Rokugan, for his wind brings the winter that ends the growing season. Those who practice the North Wind Style are generally regarded as malevolent and fearsome, and those who do not understand the way of the warrior give them a wide berth.

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 4
- **Schools:** Any bushi School
- **Effect:** You may add your Air Ring to the total of any attack roll made while attempting the Increased Damage Maneuver.

Yomanri Mechanics: Interrupting an Aiming Bushi

The definition of an "interruption" is by its nature somewhat open-ended, and there are many unusual circumstances in which the GM will have to judge whether an archer's aim has actually been interrupted. For example, what if a violent spell such as The Fires From Within goes off nearby? The GM should be prepared to make rulings as necessary. In some circumstances, the archer might be able to make Willpower rolls to keep his focus and maintain his aim.

As a guideline, the following events are probably interruptions in most circumstances:

Voluntarily taking any other Simple or Complex Action in between an Aiming action and your archery Attack action.

A mounted archer whose mount takes a Simple Move Action while he is aiming.

Taking more than 5 Wounds in damage while aiming (although the GM can allow a Willpower roll to keep aiming when injured).

Assuming the Center, Full Attack, or Full Defense stance while aiming.



New Kata: South Wind Style

The southern wind is the province of Zocho, the Fortune of the South Wind. The southern wind is regarded as welcome, since it brings with it summer and harvest time, but also feared, for it brings storms. Those who practice the South Wind Style are welcomed as brave and fearless warriors, but are regarded with a tinge of fear for the power of their swords.

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 4
- **Schools:** Any bushi School
- **Effect:** You may add your Air Ring to the total of any attack roll made while attempting the Called Shot or Knockdown Maneuvers.

New Rules Options: Called Shots in Archery

Skilled archers in Asian literature and legend (as well as in modern film) are often depicted as engaging in brilliant feats of archery, such as shooting down foes from improbable distances, launching multiple arrows at once, etc. Western legend and mythology also contains similar stories, most famously in the tales of Robin Hood. GMs who wish to emphasize the role of archery in their cam-

paigns may wish to explore options for adding various sorts of "trick shots" and similar maneuvers for archery attacks. Here we offer some basic mechanical guidelines for introducing these ideas into your campaign.

In general, the primary method for introducing trick shots into the game is the Called Shot maneuver. Called Shots are often undervalued by players because they do not award intrinsic mechanical benefits in the same way as maneuvers like Extra Damage, Disarm, or Knockdown. However, the lack of specifics also makes Called Shots extremely flexible, and a good GM will encourage players to find creative uses for the maneuver. The following ideas should provide a starting point:

- **2 Raises:** Shoot an arrow with a rope attached (such as when trying to get out of a pit, for example).
- **3 Raises:** Pin an opponent's extremity (hand or foot) in place, either to the floor or to a convenient wall, table, or pillar. The opponent takes normal damage but is pinned in place until pulling himself loose (which would probably inflict a small amount of additional damage, such as 1k1). The GM could also rule that the wounded extremity cannot be used effectively, such as by penalizing a character hit in the hand when he uses two-handed weapons, or inflicting the Lame Disadvantage on a character hit in the foot.
- **3 Raises:** Shoot someone's helmet off his head. This might result in a 1-point reduction in Reduction from armor.
- **3 Raises:** Shoot an object in order to knock it away (e.g. shooting a sword off the table before a ronin can grab it up, for example).
- **4 raises:** Pin an opponent's extremity without hitting flesh, such as pinning his sandal to the ground or pinning his kimono sleeve to the wall. If the opponent is wearing Heavy Armor, this trick shot might require an additional Raise unless the character is shooting an armor-piercing arrow.
- **4 Raises:** Pierce another arrow in an existing target (the classic Robin Hood shot).
- **4 Raises:** Cut a foe's forehead so blood gets in his eyes, rendering him Blind until he takes a Simple Action to wipe the blood away. This trick shot would probably require a fleshcutter arrow to be properly effective.
- **5 Raises:** Shoot a small or medium weapon out of an opponent's hand. This is different from the melee Disarm maneuver, which requires a Contested Strength roll and thus clearly cannot be performed with a ranged attack. However, allowing an archer to "auto-disarm" a foe with 5 Raises may be too strong, so a possible alternative is to require the foe to make a Strength roll at, say, TN 20 to hold on to the weapon. This option also allows the archer to call additional Raises to make it harder for the foe to hold on to the weapon.
- **5 Raises:** Sever an enemy's bowstring.
- **5 Raises:** Cut the ties on a foe's armor, causing it to partially fall off. This could reduce an opponent's Armor TN and/or Reduction from armor by 1 or 2 points—possibly even reducing Heavy Armor to Light Armor for an extra Raise.
- **6 Raises:** Shoot an enemy arrow or missile out of the air. This sort of action transcends the normal restrictions of the L5R game mechanics, since there is no "flight time" rule for missile weapons. However, a GM who wishes to encourage a more cinematic approach to archery could allow an archer who is holding/delaying his action for the Round to react to an enemy missile attack by immediately taking his own attack and trying to shoot it out of the air.

It should be noted that introducing these options to the game will increase the power of archery Schools and Paths which provide bonuses to Called Shots (the Tsuruchi Archers, Tsuruchi Master Bowmen, and the Asahina Archers). Also, the various ideas presented above are suggestions, not hard-and-fast rules, and the GM should feel free to modify or ignore them as desired to suit the style of his own game.



Chapter Two: Winds of Court

This chapter focuses on the social aspects of Air, and the mechanics here are based on the various social organizations presented in the chapter.

Crane Clan

The Doji Innocents

The tradition of the Innocents focuses on upholding Honesty even in the nasty world of politics, avoiding falsehood at all costs and calling on the strength of their honor to lend their words weight.

New Alternate Path: Doji Innocents [Courtier]

- **Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Doji Courtier 3
- **Requires:** Honor Rank 5.0 or better, Sincerity (Honesty) 4

Technique: The Power of Innocence

The Innocents forgo the traditional Crane method of building favor networks through gifts and favors. Instead, they win allies by speaking the truth in all cases. In any situation in which the Crane could gain advantage or protect their interests by lying or concealing the truth from a specific person, the Innocent may choose instead to tell that person the truth, then roll Sincerity (Honesty) / Awareness against the target's Investigation (Interrogation) / Perception. With a success, the target realizes what the Crane has just done and is deeply impressed by the Innocent's devotion to honor and truth. With the GM's permission, the Innocent gains the target as an Ally with 1 point of Devotion.

This Technique may be used multiple times on the same target, with each success increasing Devotion by 1 point (to a maximum of 4 points); however, it cannot target the same person more than once per month.

Any time an Innocent knowingly tells a lie, he loses 2 points of Honor (over and above any other circumstantial Honor loss that might apply) and is unable to use his Technique for a period of one month.

The Daidoji Trading Council

The Trading Council handles the commercial side of the Crane Clan's interests. This is considered a somewhat embarrassing and unpleasant duty, but the Trading Council accepts this task just as the rest of the Daidoji accept the duty of protecting their Doji and Kakita cousins—even at the cost of their own honor. The Trading Council watches their fellow Daidoji carefully and recruits those with the appropriate skills and mindset.

New Alternate Path: Daidoji Trading Council [Courtier]

- **Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Doji Courtier 3, Doji Magistrate 3, Daidoji Iron Warrior 3, or Daidoji Scout 3
- **Requires:** Commerce (Merchant) 3, and either Gentry or Wealthy. The Advantage requirement can be waived if the individual has distinguished himself as a merchant in other ways (GM's discretion).

Technique: The Golden Path

The members of the Trading Council are taught to detect and exploit any possible opportunity for commercial gain, to manipulate markets to their advantage, and to crush mercantile rivals from other clans. Once per month you may wage commercial warfare against a rival merchant by making a Contested Roll of Commerce (Merchant) / Awareness against the rival merchant patron. If you succeed, you inflict a loss on that merchant, a number of koku equal to the amount by which your roll exceeded theirs. If you lose the Contested Roll, you lose half that amount of koku.

If the GM allows you to purchase additional Advantages (or Ranks in existing Advantages) after character creation, you may purchase Gentry, Wealthy, and Servants for 1 less Experience Point (to a minimum of 1).

Rules Option: Commercial Warfare

GMs who wish to expand the concept of commercial warfare between rival merchant patrons can adopt the Trading Council technique as a simple, general representation of such conflict. Any time two (or more) merchants are clashing in a particular market, the GM can call for Contested Rolls of Commerce (Merchant) / Awareness, with the winning merchant inflicting a koku loss equal to the difference between the rolls on the losing rival. If multiple merchants are rolling against each other, the GM may add more options, such as allowing the winner to divide the losses between the losers, or letting the "middle" roll inflict a halved loss on those below.

If this option for commercial warfare is used, the Daidoji Trading Council technique should be changed to award a +2k1 bonus to any Commerce rolls made when performing commercial warfare.

If the GM is using the optional rules for Merchant Patrons from the Way of the Daimyo Appendix in *Emerald Empire* (page 288-290), you gain 3 Station points for taking this Path, and 1 additional Station point every six months.

The Scorpion Clan

The Shosuro Defilers

The Defilers are an elite group within the Scorpion who specialize in the destruction of reputations, skillfully spreading lies and calumnies against their opponents, often lies backed with just enough truth to make them effective. They tend to be prominent figures whose vicious tongues earn them many enemies, and their tactics can sometimes rebound back on them—especially if the target of their words has a better dueling champion than they do. However, a true Defiler is more than ready to give his life in return for shattering the name, honor, and repute of an enemy of the Scorpion.

New Alternate Path: Shosuro Defilers [Courtier]

- **Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Bayushi Courtier 3 or Shosuro Actor 3
- **Requires:** Sincerity (Deceit) 3, Glory Rank 3.0 or better

Technique: Shameless Slander

The Defilers forsake blackmail and manipulation in favor of smearing and destroying their foes. If you slander someone in court, either directly or indirectly, you may roll Sincerity (Deceit) / Awareness against their Etiquette (Courtesy) / Willpower; if you are able to base your slander on a real secret or disgrace involving the target, you gain a +1k1 bonus to the roll (GM's discretion). If you succeed in the roll, the target is humiliated and disgraced, losing a number of points of Honor and gaining a number of points of Infamy equal to your current Glory Rank. If he does not promptly and effectively answer your slander (GM's discretion, but in general the victim should have to make a concerted effort within the first week after he has been targeted), he also loses 1 Rank of Devotion from all of his Allies.

The Defiler's attacks are not without risk. If you lose the Contested Roll, your blatant insults degrade your own reputation, lowering your Glory by 3 points. This technique cannot target the same person more than once per month.

The Unicorn Clan

The Hand of Peace

The Hand of Peace follows Ide's peaceful dictums to their logical conclusion, becoming dedicated pacifists—often of a rather ascetic nature. Although they still carry the samurai weapons which are their legacy as members of the Unicorn Clan, they refuse to ever use them. They serve as good diplomats when dealing with the more peaceful and/or idealistic clans, such as the Crane and especially the Phoenix.

New Alternate Path: The Hand of Peace [Courtier]

- **Rank:** 4
- **Replaces:** Ide Emissary 4
- **Requires:** Honor 5.0 or better

Technique: Ide's Ideal

The followers of the Hand of Peace are able to overawe their rivals by the purity of their devotion to peace. Any time you are able to propose a peaceful solution to a diplomatic problem or negotiation, you may cite the benefits of peace and roll Courtier (Rhetoric) / Awareness against your opponent's Etiquette (Courtesy) / Willpower. With a success, the opponent is forced to make a meaningful concession to your position (the exact nature of the concession is of course chosen by the GM, but it will always be significant). This technique may be used a maximum of twice per encounter.

If you commit an act of violence (even in self-defense) that inflicts damage on a fellow Rokugani (even a ronin or bandit), your sense of moral serenity is shattered and you lose the benefits of this technique for one month.

Shadowlands/Spider Clan

The Dark Whisper

Dark Whisper courtiers use the power of a bound Air kansen to dig out the secrets and sins of their foes, allowing them to subtly inflict chaos on the courts they attend. Because of the danger that their supernatural nature might be uncovered, they are deployed selectively, preferably in courts where their kansen ally is unlikely to be uncovered.

New Alternate Path: The Dark Whisper [Courtier]

- **Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Daigotsu Courtier 3
- **Requires:** You must have an Air kansen bound into your body by a special Chuda ritual. This does not directly Taint you, but the presence of the evil spir-



it can be sensed by those with the ability to detect spirits, and it will trigger the spell Ward of Purity.

Technique: Voice of the Kansen

You may call on the power of your kansen to ferret out dark secrets within the minds and hearts of those around you. As a Simple Action you may attempt to sense the secrets of any one person within 100 feet, making a Contested Air Roll against them. The target will be aware of a vague sense of unease but there will be no other outward sign of your action. If the roll succeeds, you learn one meaningful secret about the target (chosen by the GM, but it will always be something useful and, if possible, will be related to sinful or dishonorable behavior).

You may attempt this Technique against an individual person once per day, but once you successfully learn a secret, you cannot target that person again for one month.

Ronin/Unaligned

The Silken Promises Geisha

The Silken Promises are a secretive organization of geisha who use their acting and performance skills to develop influence with their important customers. The Promises work primarily to protect their own interests, but often act in alliance with other groups who are aware of them and value their ability to exert covert political influence—most notably the Scorpion Clan, who are the official sponsors of the Silken Promises. However, the Promises have also been known to work with the Kolat, as well as the Spider Clan in eras when that group is active.

New Ronin Path: The Silken Promises [Courtier]

- **Rank:** 3
- **Requires:** Must be a geisha who has been admitted to the ranks of the Silken Promise and who has Acting 3 and at least three Perform skills at Rank 3.

Technique: Dance of Silk

The geisha of the Silken Promises use their entertainment skills to subtly guide their clients into the policies and attitudes they prefer. You may attempt to shift someone's attitudes by offering a suitable artistic performance (typically dance or music) and making a Contested Roll of your Perform / Awareness (or Acting / Awareness if more appropriate) against their Etiquette (Courtesy) / Willpower. With a success, you lure them into the attitude or a choice you would prefer. At the GM's option, you may also take them as an Ally with 1-point Devotion.

The effects of the Silken Promise technique are not "mind control" and cannot force someone to make a decision that goes directly against his character or his true

loyalties. Subject to such caveats, however, the technique can exert considerable influence, since the target is unaware that he is being manipulated and may well believe his new decision is entirely his own. Ultimately, the GM has the final say on how much impact the Silken Promise Technique can exert.

You may not target the same character with this Technique more than once per month.

The Master of Games

This Technique represents the skills taught to the diplomats of Nanashi Mura in the twelfth century, but can also be used to represent the training of any long-lived and powerful ronin group that has the resources to teach diplomats—the Kaeru family of the City of the Rich Frog are an obvious example.

New Ronin Path: Master of Games [Courtier]

- **Rank:** 2
- **Requires:** Courtier 3, Etiquette 3. Must be a resident of Nanashi Mura (in the twelfth century) or belong to a ronin group with similar resources (in other eras).

Technique: Forge Your Own Fate

The Master of Games is adept at turning his own lowly ronin status to his advantage, luring others into treating him with complacency. When making a Social Skill Roll against someone of higher Status, you gain a +2k1 bonus so long as you maintain a modest and subservient manner and tone.

Chapter Three: Winds of Magic

This chapter addresses those groups who excel at using magic for illusion, communication (whether between mortals or across spirit realms), mental influence, art, or social interaction.

New Shugenja Paths

The Asahina Artisans

Founded in the sixth century by Asahina Hake, the Asahina Artisans use magic to create artwork that is transitory and unique, yet supremely memorable. They rely heavily on illusion magic, often using it to either enhance or replace the material components of their art.

New Crane Alternate Path: The Asahina Artisans

- **Technique Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Asahina Shugenja 3

Technique: Hake's Lesson

The artisans of the Asahina family specialize in infusing magic into their craft in order to give it an otherworldly sense of serenity and beauty. When making an Artisan Skill Roll, you may expend a spell slot to add +2 per slot expended to the total of your roll. You may expend a number of slots equal to twice your Insight Rank in this manner. Air spell slots spent in this manner add +3 instead of +2.

The Kitsu Spirit Legion

Formed during the twelfth century, the Spirit Legion is comprised of a handful of Kitsu shugenja with the ability to reach across the boundaries of the Spirit Realms and summon the spirits of those realms to serve them. The ability cannot be taught—one must be born to it—and those with the gift are quite rare.

New Lion Alternate Path: Kitsu Spirit Legion [Shugenja]

- **Technique Rank:** 4
- **Replaces:** Kitsu Shugenja 4
- **Requires:** Must be born with the spiritual gifts required to serve in the Spirit Legion. This is essentially a character-development/role-play constraint which should be discussed between player and GM.

Technique: The Legions of the Dead

The handful of Spirit Legionnaires are able to pull aside the veil to the Spirit Realms and call forth the spirits themselves to defend their family. You may conduct a ritual that opens a portal and summons forth a spirit to fight in your place. This is a Complex Action that requires you to expend two spell slots associated with one Element of your choice and spend a Void Point. The spirit appears as an armored warrior with the Spirit trait and with all Rings at 2 except for the Ring whose slots you sacrificed; that Ring begins at 3. The spirit is considered to have Kenjutsu 3 and Defense 2, and is equipped with a spectral daisho and light armor. These spirits remain in the mortal realm for a number of hours equal to your Kitsu Shugenja School Rank, or until dismissed by you.

The Mist Legion

The Phoenix Clan is home to the Elemental Guard, a set of four elite military units staffed by shugenja specializing in



those Elements. Within the Hurricane Initiates, the Legion focused on Air, is a secretive group called the Mist Legion which focuses on using illusions on the battlefield. Although their existence is seldom officially acknowledged, they can be recognized by a small gray cloud worked into the school mon on their kimono. Although they are trained for the battlefield, these shugenja are not solely warriors, and in non-battle situations many of them use their abilities to create massive temporary works of art.

New Phoenix Alternate Path: Mist Legion [Shugenja]

- **Technique Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Isawa Shugenja 3 (Air Affinity)

Technique: The World Is A Canvas

The members of the Mist Legion assist the Elemental Guard and the Elemental Legions by manipulating the battlefield to the advantage of the Phoenix Clan. A number of times per day equal to your Insight Rank, you may spend a Void Point to cast the spell Summon Fog or False Realm as a Simple Action.

The Shiba Illusionists

Founded by the unconventional shugenja Shiba Tsuna, the Illusionists use Air magic to delight and entertain, following their founder's dictum that there is no sound the Air kami like more than the laughter of children. They are regarded with some hostility by the Isawa, who believe their use of the kami is frivolous, but after the disgrace of Tsuna's rival the Isawa have avoided any direct attack on the organization, preferring to simply ignore it as much as possible.

New Phoenix Alternate Path: Shiba Illusionist [Artisan] [Shugenja]

- **Technique Rank:** 1
- **Replaces:** Isawa Shugenja 1 or Shiba Artisan 1.
- **Special:** Illusionists use the Trait benefit, Skills, Honor, and outfit of whichever School they are attending in addition to the Technique of this Path. Illusionists are always presumed to have an Affinity for Air and gain 3 Air, 2 Water, and 1 Earth spell if this Path is their first Shugenja Technique.

Technique: The Tejina's Art

The path of the illusionist is one that specializes in crafting false images. You gain a number of additional spell slots per day equal to your School Rank. You may only use these slots to cast the spells Token of Memory, Flight of Doves, or Mists of Illusion.

The Soshi Deceivers

For centuries the Soshi Deceivers are the darkest secret of the Soshi family: a secret group who combine Air magic and the power of Nothing to produce a host of sinister effects. They are notably adept at illusion magic, cloaking their actions in concealing shadows, rendering themselves invisible, or taking on the visages of others to deflect blame for their actions. After the exposure and apparent defeat of the Lying Darkness, the original Deceivers are purged from the clan, but the organization is later re-started in the belief that its powers can be replicated without relying on the dangerous influence of the Shadow. Whether this effort is truly successful, or the Soshi are merely deceiving themselves, remains to be seen.

New Scorpion Alternate Path: Soshi Deceiver [Shugenja]

- **Technique Rank:** 3
- **Replaces:** Soshi Shugenja 3

Technique: Way of the Shadow

A master of Shadow gains many powerful abilities. You may sacrifice a spell slot of any Element to gain perfect vision when in absolute darkness. Alternately, you may spend an Air or Void spell slot to gain a bonus of +1k1 to the total of any Stealth, Sleight of Hand, or Sincerity (Deceit) Skill Roll. You may not spend more spell slots than your Insight Rank in this manner on any one Skill Roll.

The Sisters of the Sacred Light

Founded in the years immediately after the creation of the Centipede Clan, the Sisters of the Sacred Light were originally created to deal with infestations of mischievous spirits. Although founded by the Centipede, they recruit women from several clans, and those women are expected to forsake their former loyalties in order to follow the path of purity and wisdom which the Sisters teach. They dress in the traditional garb of a temple priestess (a red hakama and white gi), bereft of all markings save for a single clan mon to indicate their ancestry.

New Unaligned Alternate Path: Sisters of the Sacred Light [Shugenja]

- **Technique Rank:** 2
- **Replaces:** Asahina Shugenja 2, Isawa Shugenja (Air) 2, Moshi Shugenja 2

Technique: Light Banishes Lies

The Sisters of the Sacred Light specialize in exposing illusions as the falsehoods they are. When attempting to Banish the kami of Air, who are of course responsible for the vast majority of illusion effects, you require only two Raises on the Sense spell (rather than the normal three) and only three Raises on the Commune spell (rather than the normal five).

New Air Spells

Air Kami's Blessing

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 3
- **Range:** Personal
- **Area of Effect:** Caster
- **Duration:** 8 hours
- **Raises:** Special (double the bonus for four Raises)

A unique prayer that is as much a meditation as anything else, this spell is only taught in shugenja Schools which have Air as an Affinity. It causes the Air kami within the soul of the caster to become more properly aligned, giving the caster a far greater grasp on the hearts and souls of other men, along with a certain quickness of reaction. While the blessing lasts, the shugenja may add his Air Ring to the total of all Awareness-based rolls, as well as to his Armor TN. Typically, those who know this spell perform the Blessing each morning during their daily meditations.

The effects of this spell cannot be stacked.

Arrow's Flight

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 1 [Battle]
- **Range:** Touch
- **Area of Effect:** One arrow
- **Duration:** 3 Rounds
- **Raises:** Duration (+1 Round per Raise), Special (one additional arrow per Raise)

A prayer used by shugenja to aid bushi when an arrow absolutely must hit its target. The shugenja entreats the Air kami to play a game by guiding a single arrow to its target. The prayer imbues these kami into an arrow, and if the arrow is fired within the duration of the spell, it will unerringly strike its target. (It must still be fired by someone with a minimal understanding of archery—at least one Rank of Kyujutsu.) However, because it is the kami who ultimately ensure the arrow will hit, the shot cannot benefit from the effects of Raises or Techniques.



Castle of Air

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 4 [Defense, Illusion]
- **Range:** Self
- **Area of Effect:** 20' radius around the caster
- **Duration:** 10 rounds
- **Raises:** Duration (+2 Rounds per Raise), Special

The prayer commonly known as Castle of Water protects the caster by creating a physical barrier of water kami to obstruct attackers. The Castle of Air, by contrast, protects the caster by creating a cunning illusion that confuses and bewilders attackers. The Air kami create a circular barrier of false sounds and images, making it incredibly difficult for attackers to actually perceive the correct location of anyone within the bounds of the Castle of Air. An attacker may believe he is striking at the caster when he is actually swinging at empty space.

The circular barrier of illusions is centered on the caster. Once cast, it remains in place regardless of whether or where the caster moves. The illusions can only be fully perceived by those who were outside of the Castle of Air when it was cast; those within the Castle when it appears can easily perceive the shadowy, insubstantial nature of the illusions. If foes from outside the Castle attempt to attack those within it, the illusions will try to misdirect or fool them. Mechanically, such attackers must make a Contested Roll of their Perception against the caster's Air each time they try to attack someone within the Castle. A success means they manage to briefly see through the illusion and may attack normally for that Round (only). A failure means the illusion tricks them and they suffer a -5k0 penalty to their attack rolls that Round.

The illusions cannot affect enemy spells, since the Air kami cannot fool other kami.

Defender from Beyond

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 5 [Battle]
- **Range:** 30'
- **Area of Effect:** One summoned spirit
- **Duration:** 5 minutes
- **Raises:** Duration (+1 minute per Raise)

Among the innermost circles of the Kitsu family are the , the ancestral shugenja who carry the bloodlines of the first kitsu spirits. These secretive shugenja have discovered rituals which can persuade the Air kami to carry a message to Yomi itself, calling for the aid of an ancestral shiryo. Only Kitsu Shugenja may learn this spell, which is a secret of the sodan-senzo order.

When the spell is cast, the shugenja beseeches the ancestral spirits of Yomi to send aid. If the Spell Casting Roll succeeds, a shiryo—a spirit from Yomi—will arrive on the scene in five Rounds. Once it arrives, the spirit reclaims its mortal form, but its spiritual nature is easily sensed from the celestial glow which surrounds it. It will offer whatever aid it can to the caster, whether that be advice, knowledge, or combat, but it will not do anything dishonorable. Mechanically, a typical shiryo will have the creature trait of Spirit, and will possess a Rank of 3 in all of its Rings and Traits and a Rank of 4 in any useful Skills.

Once the spell's duration expires, the shiryo immediately returns to Yomi. It also leaves for Yomi if its physical body is destroyed (e.g. it is reduced to zero Wounds).

Although this spell normally calls a "generic" shiryo, the GM may opt to allow the shugenja to summon a specific named ancestral spirit with additional Raises. The GM may also choose to have a more powerful or famous shiryo answer the spell if the specific circumstances seem to warrant it. More powerful shiryo will possess a School as appropriate for their ancestral clan, typically with a School Rank between 3 and 5.

Elemental Cipher

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 2 [Illusion]
- **Range:** Touch
- **Area of Effect:** One written page
- **Duration:** One month
- **Raises:** Duration (1 additional week per Raise), Area of Effect (1 additional page per Raise)

Understanding the ways of the Air reveals the indistinct line that exists between language and cipher. A shugenja can cause a piece of writing to be placed under an elemental cipher, enticing the kami to play a small game with those who read the text. The block of text becomes completely unintelligible unless read by the original author or the intended recipient, whose name is whispered as the spell is cast. Normally, an Elemental Cipher is not breakable by traditional decrypting and the kami will only reveal the true text to the intended recipient. However, other shugenja can decipher the kami's game and read the text by making a Spellcraft / Intelligence roll with a TN equal to the total of the original spell-casting roll.

This spell is known only to the Imperial families, and is a favored spell of the Seppun shugenja (whose School Technique benefits from it).

Flight of Doves

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 2 [Illusion]
- **Range:** 25'
- **Area of Effect:** Story told by one target person
- **Duration:** 10 minutes
- **Raises:** Range (+5 feet per Raise), Duration (5 minutes per Raise)



This spell was originally devised by the Shiba Illusionists, and is one of their few significant contributions to the ways of magic in Rokugan. In keeping with the traditions of the Shiba Illusionists, this spell is intended primarily for entertainment, but it can sometimes have more practical applications (such as helping a courier describe his experiences to his lord).

The spell invokes the Air kami to "illustrate" a story being recounted by another individual (designated by the caster). The spirits will supply a visual and auditory illusion to accompany the story, drawing the sounds and images from the mind of the storyteller. The resulting blend of story, sound, and imagery can be quite compelling, and Kakita storytellers have been known to seek out masters of this spell to assist their art.

Freedom of the Air

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 2 [Wards]
- **Range:** 50'
- **Area of Effect:** One house or other residential building
- **Duration:** Hours equal to caster's Air
- **Raises:** Area of Effect (3 Raises to affect a building as large as an inn, 6 Raises to affect a castle)

A cleansing ritual used by shugenja when preparing a house or other building for an important even such as a wedding or a festival. The spell entreats the Air kami to raise a soft but carefully controlled wind which sweeps all the dirt, insects, and other filth out of the building. The spell also has a spiritually purifying effect, making evil or malignant spirits reluctant to remain within the dwelling—any kansen, ghosts, or other hostile disembodied spirits within the building will leave for a number of hours equal to the caster's Air. (Evil spirits which are exceptionally strong or which have an extremely strong attachment to the building cannot be banished by this basic spell, however—it is the GM's discretion whether a spirit is strong enough to resist Freedom of the Air.)

This spell was originally devised by the Seppun shugenja, but due to its great usefulness it later spread across the Empire. The Seppun Shugenja School technique may be applied to this spell.

Funeral Rites

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 4
- **Range:** N/A
- **Area of Effect:** N/A
- **Duration:** 5 minutes

This ritual was originally devised by the Kitsu sodan-senzo, but due to its widespread applicability it quickly spread to other shugenja families and schools. The Kitsu wished all Rokugani to properly venerate the ancestors, and thus had no difficulty sharing their discovery with the Isawa and the other clans as well. For those who do not

have Kitsu blood, this spell is one of the very few ways in which shugenja can actually communicate with the ancestors while in Ningen-Do.

The spell is actually an hour-long ritual prayer which can only be performed in the company of a recently deceased individual's relative within twenty four hours of the funeral (which both the shugenja and relative must have participated in properly). Other shugenja may assist in the ritual if they also know the spell; they do not need to make Spellcasting rolls, but are still considered to use up a spell slot. Once the prayer is properly completed (a successful Spellcasting Roll by the lead shugenja), the caster and the relative may both converse for a few minutes with the spirit of the recently departed. (If extra shugenja assist in the ritual, each assisting shugenja adds +1 minutes to the duration of the spell.)

Typically, this ritual is only used in situations where the living relatives want to make quite sure they are properly remembering and honoring their newly-departed ancestor. The exact results of communing with a departed relative are at the discretion of the GM, but could include learning important information, receiving advice and guidance, or taking up a task which the dead samurai left incomplete.

Facing Your Devils

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 5
- **Range:** 30'
- **Area of Effect:** One target person or creature
- **Duration:** 10 Rounds
- **Raises:** Range (+10' per Raise), Duration (+2 Rounds per Raise)

This is a dangerous and powerful spell which had appeared among ronin shugenja from time to time for almost a thousand years of Rokugani history. The spell is often regarded as wicked by clan shugenja, so those ronin who learn it guard its secrets carefully and only pass it on to their most trusted students. Typically no more than one or two shugenja in a generation will learn it. In the time of the Clan Wars, the spell's most famous user was the ronin Heichi Chokei, who claimed to be a descendent of the long-lost Boar Clan. When he was asked about the purpose of the spell, Chokei replied with a smile: "It is for whoever is brave enough to use it." In later years it also gained fame as a favored spell of Naka Kuro, the so-called Grandmaster of the Elements, and his student and successor Naka Tokei.

Facing Your Devils appears to call on the Air kami to test the kharmic and elemental balance of a soul by deliberately misaligning the target's Elements. The spell switches the highest and lowest Traits of the target for the duration. This may well result in changes to the target's Ring Ranks, with potentially severe consequences (e.g. a dropping Earth Ring reducing available Wounds, for example). The caster may choose the affected Traits in case of a tie.

Those who use Facing Your Devils see it as a means to teach others the importance of balance in all things, but much more nefarious and cruel uses are certainly possible and have been employed more than once, lending the spell a sinister repute. The Air spirits seem to find the spell amusing, since they do not always recognize the harm it can cause.

Gathering Swirl

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 1
- **Range:** Centered on caster
- **Area of Effect:** 20' radius from caster
- **Duration:** 1 Round
- **Raises:** Area of Effect (+5' radius per two Raises)

This spell, most often found in the scroll-satchels of magistrates and their assistants, seems to be a simpler version of the same prayer used for Freedom of the Air. It causes the Air kami to blow furiously through the area of effect, and while initially this seems to produce nothing but chaos, within a few moments the winds gather several unattended items and deposit them in a neat stack (though not an organized one) at whatever location within the area the caster might desire, including in someone's hands if that is preferable. The caster must name the items to be collected when the spell is cast, and only those items will be collected—a convenient way to gather scattered papers, find a note buried under a pile, or otherwise retrieve something important with a minimum of effort. It can also be used, more cleverly, to retrieve a concealed or hidden item, a use which magistrates find quite valuable. However, it cannot be used to snatch items from someone else's grasp or person—the Air spirits consider that to spoil the fun.

Garbled Tongue

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 3 [Illusion]
- **Range:** 30'
- **Area of Effect:** Two conversing persons (one may be the caster)
- **Duration:** 5 minutes
- **Raises:** Area of Effect (+1 person per two Raises), Duration (+1 minute per Raise)

Originally developed by Asahina shugenja, this spell found its way into the hands of the Soshi and a few other orders after several minor incidents in court. It is sometimes considered to be a dishonorable spell, but in fact its uses need not be for subterfuge. Rather, much like the Crane courtiers' technique of Cadence, the spell allows discretion in communication in situations where this would not normally be possible. It relies on the playfulness of the Air kami and the subtleties of language.

The spell causes the kami to obscure a conversation between two (or more) persons. The Air spirits create a second layer of speech, one heard by everyone except those actually participating in the conversation (who may include the caster). Though the speakers are aware of this false layer of speech, they will clearly hear the actual conversation taking place. The illusion cannot normally be penetrated except by reading lips (since they will not



match the false conversation), although a shugenja can pierce the deception by winning a Contested School Rank/Air roll against the caster.

Howl of Isora

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 4 [Thunder]
- **Range:** 100'
- **Area of Effect:** 40' diameter
- **Duration:** Instantaneous
- **Raises:** Range (+20' per Raise), Area of Effect (add 5' to diameter for 2 Raises), Special (+1k0 damage per Raise)

This spell calls on the power of Isora, the Fortune of the Seashore, to unleash a blast of storm-wracked air and lightning than smites an area within range. The sudden roaring onslaught of wind, rain, and lightning inflicts 3k2 damage on everyone within the area of effect, and they must roll their Earth at TN 30 or be Fatigued by Isora's howl. The spell also damages weak or vulnerable physical objects—paper walls will be blown out, scrolls soaked with water, etc.

Those who are fortunate enough to be blessed with the Blood of Osano-Wo are immune to the effects of this spell.

Look into the Soul

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 4 [Divination]
- **Range:** 50'
- **Area of Effect:** One target person or creature
- **Duration:** 1 Round
- **Raises:** Area of Effect (one additional target per two Raises), Special (learn additional Ring per Raise)

When a priest invokes this incantation, the Air kami gather together and form a mystical lens through which the shugenja may see the world as the spirits themselves perceive it. The lens lasts only a few moments and the caster can normally only use it to observe one person or creature. That brief moment of observation, however, allows the caster to learn the target's two lowest Rings and the values of their constituent Traits, in effect showing part of the person's Elemental composition. Additional Rings may be learned with Raises. (If the character's Rings are all equally balanced, the spell reveals them randomly.) However, the spell cannot and will not reveal the target's Void, for that level of understanding and perception is only possible through mastery of Ishiken-do.

Piercing the Heavens

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 6
- **Range:** N/A
- **Area of Effect:** N/A
- **Duration:** 5 Rounds
- **Raises:** Duration (+1 Round per 3 Raises)

Known only to true masters of magic, this spell is a secret of the Phoenix and has never been intentionally shared with any other shugenja school, not even the Imperial one. It is considered a sacred trust among the most high-ranking of Phoenix priests, and not even all of the Elemental Masters have been considered worthy of its power... for to abuse this prayer is to call down the very wrath of Heaven.

This prayer calls for the direct attention of a Fortune named by the shugenja. It may only be performed within a temple or shrine specifically devoted to that Fortune, and may never be cast more than once a month lest it anger the entirety of Tengoku. If the spell is successfully cast, a mote of the Fortune's essence will manifest within the shrine's sacred icon and the shugenja will be permitted to briefly commune with the divine being. The Fortune is neither compelled to answer questions asked nor to fulfill boons requested, and the utmost reverence must be maintained lest its immediate and terrible wrath be unleashed. However, if true reverence is offered and the cause is worthy, the Fortune may offer help available nowhere else.

Quiescence of Air

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 2 [Wards]
- **Range:** Caster
- **Area of Effect:** 30 foot diameter sphere
- **Duration:** 10 Rounds
- **Raises:** Range (change to 50' for 2 Raises), Duration (+3 Rounds per Raise)

Security in communication is of paramount importance in many situations, and shugenja often find themselves in situations where a conversation is intended to be completely private, or when they cannot allow themselves to be interrupted by extraneous sounds. By placating the spirits of the Air, a shugenja can convince them to create a barrier against sounds, a bubble of silence through which sound will not pass. The spherical sound-barrier is normally centered around the caster, although with greater effort it can also be centered on a physical object up to fifty feet away. Once this spell is cast, the kami will not allow any sound to enter or leave this bubble, creating absolute privacy for anyone inside of the space. Once created, the bubble of silence will not move, even if the caster (or the target object) relocates.

Characters on one side of a Quiescence of Air spell's barrier gain two Free Raises on Stealth rolls made against characters on the other side.

Ninube shugenja may cast Quiescence of Air as a Nothing spell.

Request to Hato-no-Kami

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 2 [Travel]
- **Range:** 150'
- **Area of Effect:** One bird
- **Duration:** 1 hour
- **Raises:** Range (+50' per Raise), Duration (+1 hour per Raise)

A specialized variation of Nature's Touch, this spell is a prayer to the Fortunes that is carried by air kami to the ears of a random bird within the spell's range. (If no bird is available, the spell has no effect.) The bird flies down and lands on the caster's hand, and the caster may instruct it to perform a simple task (such as carrying a message or distracting an enemy) for the duration of the spell.

With a successful Animal Handling/Awareness roll at TN 20, the caster may persuade the bird to perform a more complex task, such as searching the area for potential enemies and reporting back. This sort of task is subject to the GM's judgment, since if the task is too complex the bird will not be able to comprehend it.

In either case, the bird will not take suicidal actions (such as flying into a fire) and will immediately break off and flee if it is injured.

Seeking the Way

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 4 [Illusion]
- **Range:** Touch
- **Area of Effect:** Caster's trail for one-half mile
- **Duration:** 3 hours
- **Raises:** Duration (+1 hour per Raise), Area of Effect (one additional person's trail per Raise), Special (additional one-quarter mile of trail per Raise)

This spell is a subtle illusion used to conceal a shugenja's trail from pursuers. The spell convinces mischievous Air kami to hide the tracks of the shugenja (and his mount, if any), along with any other evidence of his passage (such as broken branches). In their place it create a false trail of similar evidence leading in a completely different direction for the same distance. The illusionary trail will follow a reasonable route (e.g. it will not go straight up cliffs or directly into a lake, for example) and will normally be flawless to others' perception; however, someone tracking by scent will be able to sense the original trail, and skilled trackers can potentially see through the illusion by rolling Hunting / Perception against the caster's Spellcraft / Air.

Powerful shugenja can persuade the kami to conceal the trails of their companions (and mounts) as well as themselves, as well as lengthening the amount of trail which is concealed and replaced.

Soul of Kaze-no-Kami

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 3
- **Range:** 20'
- **Area of Effect:** One target person (may be the caster)
- **Duration:** 10 minutes
- **Raises:** Duration (+2 minutes per Raise)

This spell calls on the Fortune of Wind to infuse the target's soul with the cooling serenity of an icy northern breeze, rendering him or her resistant to the pressures of emotion and stress. The target seems impervious to any sort of emotional manipulation or psychological pressure; in reality, he does feel normal emotions, but the presence of the Air kami mute their impact, so the target can perceive his own emotions as something distant and abstract.

The target of this spell gains a bonus of +2k2 to resist the effects of any Social Skill Roll or Fear effect. However, the same icy serenity which makes him resistant to others' manipulation also makes it difficult for him to perceive the emotions of others; he suffers a -2k0 penalty to any Awareness-based Social rolls.

Tenjin's Ear

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 4 [Travel]
- **Range:** Caster
- **Area of Effect:** 30' radius around caster
- **Duration:** 5 minutes
- **Raises:** Range (change to Touch for 3 Raises), Area of Effect (+5' radius per Raise), Duration (+1 minute per Raise)

Named after the Fortune of Scribes, this powerful invocation was originally created by the Unicorn and derived from their secret Meishodo magic. So far as anyone knows, the spell has never been taught to anyone outside of the Unicorn Clan. The spell persuades the Air kami to carry the true meaning of words to the caster's ear, allowing him to perceive the tongue of foreigners. For the duration of the spell, all audible human speech within the area of effect is made intelligible to the caster, regardless of what language is used. The spell does not grant any enhanced hearing (so whispers still cannot be heard), nor does it bestow any capacity to speak in return.

Touch of Air's Grace

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 3 [Illusion]
- **Range:** Touch
- **Area of Effect:** One target person (may be the caster)
- **Duration:** 1 hour
- **Raises:** Duration (+10 minutes per Raise)

This illusion was originally devised by the Soshi family, but similar prayers have since been developed among other clans who spend time in the halls and gardens of Rokugan's courtly palaces. The spell entices the Air kami to subtly enhance the target's physical attractiveness, emphasizing his or her best features and smoothing away any imperfections. The Air kami find this a delightful game and will often be quite creative in the tiny tricks they play to improve the target's appeal.

Mechanically, the spell negates the effects of the Disturbing Countenance and Benten's Curse Disadvantages for its duration. If the target does not possess one or both of those Disadvantages, he or she instead gains the benefits of the corresponding Advantages (Dangerous Beauty and Benten's Blessing). If the target already possesses both of those Advantages, the spell does not award any additional benefit (the Air kami find it boring to try to improve someone who is already so attractive).

Voice of the Wind

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 1
- **Range:** Touch
- **Area of Effect:** One target person (may be the caster)
- **Duration:** 10 minutes
- **Raises:** Range (change to 20' for 2 Raises), Duration (+2 minutes per Raise)

The kami of Air are fond of sounds, which are carried through their Element, and can lend their power to strengthen the beauty, passion, and conviction of the human voice. The recipient of this spell finds his or her voice gains timbre, depth, and resonance, becoming in every way more impressive. For the duration of the spell, the target benefits from the Voice Advantage (if he already has Voice, the benefits stack) and also gains a +1k0 bonus to any Social Skill Rolls that involve speech.

Whispers of the Forgotten

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 4
- **Range:** 50'
- **Area of Effect:** One target person (may be the caster)
- **Duration:** 5 minutes
- **Raises:** Range (+25' per Raise), Duration (+1 minute per Raise)

Men's memories are shaky, distant things, lodged deep within their minds, and nearly all mortals possess some past sin, some shame they would rather have forgotten. This spell, a favorite of the Scorpion, causes Air kami to evoke the memories of those sins, plaguing the target with bitter memories and visions of past crimes. The constant painful memories distract and distress the victim of the spell, making it difficult for him to accomplish anything. For the duration of the spell, he must call one Raise for no effect on any Skill rolls or Spellcasting rolls which he makes. If he has 3 or more points in Mental or Social Disadvantages, he must call two Raises instead.



It may be noted that there are a handful of stalwart souls in Rokugan who truly do not have any sins haunting their past. Such rare persons are immune to the effects of this spell; it is left to the GM's discretion whether a particular target is truly noble enough to shrug off the Whispers of the Forgotten.

Some priests of a more ascetic nature have also been known to cast this spell on themselves in order to remind themselves of their past failings and the need for humility in the face of their human frailties.

Wind of the Moon

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 6
- **Range:** 50'
- **Area of Effect:** One target person
- **Duration:** 1 minute
- **Raises:** Duration (+1 minute per 2 Raises), Special (+1k1 on the Contested Air roll for 3 Raises)

Air acolytes of some potency realize it is possible to read the minds of others, but a few shugenja have looked at this as only the beginning of what can be done with Air. Through extremely advanced and powerful invocations of the Air kami, it is possible for a shugenja to not only read the surface thoughts of another but to transmit his own thoughts into the mind of that person. This is considered a highly questionable act, and the Phoenix Clan considers this spell to border on blasphemy. However, the immense advantages that can be gained from such total manipulation of another means the spell continues to circulate covertly through the Empire.

In order for this prayer to succeed, the caster must know the name of the target and must be able to see him or her clearly. Without the visual connection, the thoughts of the target will be too garbled to be decipherable, resulting only in a painful headache to both caster and target. If the name which the caster knows is false (e.g. the target is using an alias) the Spellcasting Roll suffers a +10 TN penalty as the false name confuses the spirits. Furthermore, in order to successfully impose his thoughts on the target's mind, the caster must succeed in a Contested Air Roll against the target; failure means contact is broken and both sides suffer a severe headache as above. However, if the Air roll is successful, the target will be unaware of the mental contact and for the duration of the spell will believe the thoughts springing into his mind are entirely his own. The caster must maintain partial concentration for the duration of the spell—if this is disrupted, the spell ends immediately.

A peculiar side effect of this spell is that for an hour after it ends, the caster and target will find it difficult to lie convincingly to each other, inflicting a +10 TN penalty to any Sincerity (Deceit) rolls they make against each other.

Wind-Born Slumbers

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 2
- **Range:** 50'
- **Area of Effect:** One target person
- **Duration:** 5 minutes
- **Raises:** Range (+10' per Raise), Area of Effect (+1 person per 2 Raises), Duration (+1 minute per Raise)

This spell causes the Air kami to subtly insinuate themselves into the target's body, urging him toward weariness and sleep. A target who is physically and mentally inactive (such as a guard standing post at night, or a samurai meditating in his dojo) will automatically fall asleep when targeted with this spell. (The target will awaken normally if he is touched or hears a loud noise, but otherwise sleeps until the spell's duration expires.) If the target is physically or mentally active, the spell will not put him to sleep, but he will suffer the effects of being Fatigued for the duration of the spell. (If the target is already Fatigued, his Fatigue penalties increase as though he had gone another day without rest.)

Wisdom of the Kami

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 4
- **Range:** Touch
- **Area of Effect:** Caster
- **Duration:** 1 minute
- **Raises:** Duration (+1 minute per Raise), Special (+1 additional Skill Rank, once, for 3 Raises)

This prayer invites the kami of the Air into the mind of the shugenja himself, enhancing the shugenja's mind and thoughts, causing him to be able to make better use of his skills and knowledge. For the duration of the spell, the caster gains 1 Rank in all Skills he normally possesses, and may benefit from any Mastery Abilities that this would award. This can only grant ranks in Skills the shugenja already possesses—the Air kami cannot evoke knowledge the caster does not possess. When the duration of the spell expires all benefits are lost and any memories of knowledge or insight which the shugenja gained during the spell's duration are at best fuzzy; no precise or detailed account can ever be given, and severe headaches are known to plague those who try too hard.

The benefits for this spell only apply to Skills which the caster actually knows—it cannot increase the Rank of Skills which the caster has temporarily acquired through magic, nor can it combine with Advantages such as Crafty.

Chapter Four: Winds of Elightenment

This chapter discusses various monastic orders with connections to the ways of Air, as well as the usage and ramifications of the various Air Kiho.

New Internal Air Kiho

New Kiho: Eye of the Eagle

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 5
- **Type:** Internal

The power of the wind can carry messages and information well beyond the boundaries of human weakness. Some natural creatures with an affinity for Air already possess remarkable abilities that go unnoticed and unappreciated, and certain monks can mimic these abilities. While this Kiho is active, you may as a Complex Action focus your chi by remaining utterly still and unmoving. Once this is done, so long as you maintain concentration and do not move from your current position, you can see a number of miles equal to your School Rank. The level of detail is sufficient to notice things like the physical characteristics of individuals, but not so acute as to allow for extremely fine detail, such as reading.

New Kiho: The Wind's Vision

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 4
- **Type:** Internal

This Kiho was developed early on by the more martial sects of the Brotherhood, but was rarely learned or used until the Wind's Grace Order adopted it for use in its training. By focusing on the omnipresence of Air and letting go of mundane perception, you are able to fire an arrow at a target that is out of sight but may be in range. The arrow must still be able to travel in a straight line to the target—it will not suddenly pierce stone or turn corners, for example, but firing through a paper screen, amid total darkness, or through heavy smoke are all possible. You must know the target exists and its approximate location within 30 feet of its actual location.



New Martial Air Kiho

New Kiho: Calling the East Wind

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 5
- **Type:** Martial

The East Wind is generally considered exotic and fraught with mystery, most likely because it blows from the sea and the strange lands that exist somewhere far across its waters. This Kiho calls on that same wind to buoy the monk into the air and carry him to his opponent, delivering not an exotic or mysterious magical effect but rather simply a violent attack.

When this Kiho is activated, you make a single unarmed kick attack. As part of this attack, you may leap through the air a significant distance, up to a maximum equal to your Air Ring x 10 feet. The power of this sudden movement adds an additional +1k0 damage to any successful attack landed as a result of this Kiho, and you gain one Free Raise toward use of the Knockdown Maneuver on this attack.

New Kiho: Censure of Thunder

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 7 (Atemi)
- **Type:** Martial

The power of Thunder is not something that can be dismissed by any adherent of the Brotherhood, even those who favor the teachings of the Tao over the precepts of Fortunism. The Thunder Dragon, regardless of its dispensation, favors the bold and the heroic in all things, and those brothers who choose to face armed opponents with an empty hand are well within their rights to call upon its favor with this powerful Kiho. If you deliver a successful unarmed atemi strike while using this Kiho, your target immediately suffers 1k1 Wounds from the minor electrical shock that accompanies your touch. He also automatically drops his weapon as if suffering from a successful Disarm Maneuver, as your strike interrupts the flow of chi through his body. The target may spend two Void Points to negate the Disarm, but if he does so he suffers an additional 2k2 Wounds from the more severe electrical shock.

The damage caused by this Kiho bypasses Reduction conferred by armor.



New Kiho: Hurricane Palm

- Ring/Mastery: Air 7
- **Type:** Martial

The raging force of a hurricane is nothing compared to the strength of a properly prepared spirit, or so the Tao of Shinsei says. Certainly there are many among the Brotherhood who seem able to prove such a point true. By externalizing their chi, certain monks are able to hurl away their foes, even those prepared for such an impact.

After making a successful unarmed strike, you spend one Void Point. Your strike inflicts only half normal damage (rounded down), but it knocks your opponent back a number of feet equal to twice your Air Ring, after which he falls Prone. Any opponent successfully struck by this attack is moved by the Kiho's effect, even if they do not suffer any Wounds from the blow.

New Kiho: Touch of the Storm

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 6 (Atemi)
- **Type:** Martial

By drawing on the essence of the Elements themselves, a Brotherhood monk is capable of pulling the fury of the air from his surroundings and unleashing it upon an opponent. This Kiho requires a successful atemi strike. When such an attack is landed successfully, you make a Contested Air Roll against your opponent. If you are successful, your opponent suffers damage (with a DR equal to your Air Ring) in the form of a violent electrical discharge from the air around him. The damage from this Kiho ignores all forms of Reduction unless it specifically mentions electrical damage.

New Mystical Air Kiho

New Kiho: Inari's Wrath

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 8
- **Type:** Mystical

It is in the Air that the essence of the seasons is contained. The warm humid air is what most people remember about summer, and the biting frigid wind is the most severe memory of winter. A true master of the paths of Air can draw it into his own body and use his chi to cool it, then exhale it and strike with all the wrath of Inari, the Fortune of Rice, whose wrathful aspect is the Frost Dragon.

You must spend a Void Point as a Free Action to activate this Kiho, then as a Complex Action you take a deep breath and hold it. You unleash the breath on the following Round as a Complex Action. It creates a cone of freezing air extending a number of feet equal to your School Rank x 5, as broad at the end as your School Rank x 2 in feet. Any living creature caught within the area of effect suffers cold damage with a DR equal to your Air Ring. At the GM's discretion, certain physical materials may suffer damage as well.

New Kiho: Strike through the Wind

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 5
- **Type:** Mystical

Most mortal souls never give a moment's consideration to the air they breathe and move through almost every second of their physical existence. The notion that Air can contain force or become as hard as steel is something they never even consider. Some monks, however, are able to transmit force through the Air as if it were an extension of their body.

You channel the force of your blows through the air, striking targets at range as if they were at arm's length. You must spend a Void Point as a Free Action to activate this Kiho. While this Kiho is active, you make unarmed melee attacks as a Complex Action, and your melee attacks may target opponents as far away as your School Rank x 25 feet.

New Kiho: Thunder's Word

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 6
- **Type:** Mystical

This strange Kiho was allegedly developed by the monks who adhere to teachings inspired by the founder of the Mantis Clan, Kaimetsu-Uo. The sect's name causes an obvious association with the Mantis Clan, which in turn leads many samurai to misinterpret its philosophies; in truth, the monks of Kaimetsu-Uo are generally rather introspective and are devoted primarily to the Fortunes. Which, truthfully, makes their development of this Kiho even stranger than its effect.

This Kiho invokes the power of the Thunder Dragon, a patron of the Mantis Clan, and fills the lungs with the power of Thunder. As a Complex Action you draw a deep breath and shout a single word of power, a command filled with the essence of the Thunder Dragon itself. All living beings capable of hearing your shout must make a Contested Air Roll against you (each of them rolls separately and compares to a single roll by you). Those who fail the roll are Dazed for a number of rounds equal to your Air Ring.

New Monk Schools

New School: Order of the Wind [Monk]

There are many divisions within the Order of the Wind, but while the core tenets vary wildly from one group to the next, the core beliefs are the same throughout the Order. The essential beliefs of the Brothers of Wind are that the world is a naturally chaotic and unpredictable place, and this cannot be changed. Rather than struggle against this, a Brother of Wind simply accepts it and remains resolute in the face of uncertainty. This belief grants them control over themselves and, in a limited way, over the world around them. This latter portion of their belief system is not generally discussed outside the ranks of the Order, naturally.

New School: Order of the Wind [Monk]

- **Devotion:** Fortunism
- **Benefit:** +1 Reflexes
- **Honor:** 4.5
- **Skills:** Athletics, Defense, Jiujutsu, Lore: Theology, Meditation, Staves, any one Skill

Technique: Essence of the Wind

A true Brother of the Wind allows the world to move around him like a breeze, remaining centered and assured throughout the chaos of existence. Any effect that targets you and attempts to influence your behavior, whether it be a spell, a courtier Technique, a social Skill or Advantage, or any other mechanic, requires an additional Void Point to take effect. (However, this can bypass the normal limit on spending one Void Point per Round for enhancement effects.)



New School: Wind's Grace Order [Monk]

Created in the aftermath of the Clan War, the Wind's Grace Order was home to a great number of formerly serene monks who answered the call to defend the Brotherhood's temples during that extensive conflict, but who could not regain their former peace and serenity afterward. The Brotherhood seized upon the practice of archery as a way for these unfortunates to find both spiritual focus and purpose, leading to the creation of the Wind's Grace Order, a new sect with strong ties to the Asahina family and to other prominent archery traditions throughout the Empire, including both the Dragon and the Mantis. Through focus and proper contemplation, the once-lost brothers managed to recover from the horrors of the Clan War and resume the long path toward enlightenment.

New School: Wind's Grace Order [Monk]

- **Devotion:** Shintao
- **Benefit:** +1 Reflexes
- **Honor:** 6.5
- **Skills:** Calligraphy, Jiujutsu, Kyujutsu, Lore: Theology (Shintao), Meditation, any two Skills
- **Special:** Members of the Asahina family may potentially attend this school. See sidebar for details.

Technique: Pillars of the Mind's Eye

By clearing the mind and embracing absolute serenity and focus, a brother of the Wind's Grace can grasp the simple truth: the arrow and the target are already one. You make an archery attack as a Complex Action; for every Kiho you have that is presently active, you gain a bonus of +1k0 to the total of that roll. Active Kiho may not have any other effects during a Round in which you employ this Technique, and only one Martial Kiho can confer this benefit. However, any time you use this Technique to make an attack that directly results in the death of an intelligent being, you lose 3 points of Honor.

The Wind's Grace and the Asahina Family

Astute readers will note this book contains two separate archery mechanics that are potentially available to the Asahina family—the Asahina Archer Path and the Wind's Grace monastic order. However, some GMs and players may see it as unrealistic or mechanically unbalancing for the Asahina to have so many archery options, given the family's essentially non-martial nature. It should be remembered that all new mechanics presented in expansion books for the L5R 4th Edition role-playing game are *optional*, and the GM is under no obligation to allow them if they conflict with his vision of Rokugan.

In terms of the setting, the Asahina Archer Path represents the more martial, samurai-like aspect of the family's archery tradition, developed and maintained in conjunction with the Daidoji family. The access to the Wind's Grace Order represents the family's monastic traditions and traditional close ties with the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

Members of the Asahina family who attend the Wind's Grace School are still considered to be members of the samurai caste, but are samurai who adhere to a monastic tradition, much like the Henshin order of the Phoenix Clan and the Tattooed Men of the Dragon Clan. Asahina who attend this School still gain the normal Trait Benefit associated with their family; their Outfit consists of Simple Clothing, a Straw Hat, a Yumi, a Traveling Pack, and 3 koku.

New School: Fukurokujin's Eyes [Monk]

The Order of Fukurokujin's Eyes is an order unlike any other among the myriad sects that exist within the Brotherhood of Shinsei. It is a hereditary order, comprised almost exclusively of a small number of bloodlines found only within its ranks. Parents bring their children into the fold at a young age and propagate the order's philosophies through the generations without any need for external recruitment. The Order is descended from a pre-Kami tribe that chose to remain apart from outsiders, only becoming part of a greater community when facing the option to join with Hida or to be forced from their lands in the face of Crab Clan settlement. Hida was content to make the proper arrangements in order to benefit from the unique gifts the tribe offered, namely assessment and prediction so accurate that it bordered on the preternatural.

New School: Fukurokujin's Eyes [Monk]

- **Devotion:** Fortunism
- **Benefit:** +1 Perception
- **Honor:** 4.5
- **Skills:** Calligraphy, Divination, Etiquette, Investigation, Lore: History, Lore: Theology, any one non-Bugei Skill

Technique: Way of the Closed Eye

By observing and anticipating, monks of Fukurokujin's Eyes can accurately predict the actions of others and take advantage of this foreknowledge in a variety of ways. You may not be surprised by ambushes. Further, at the start of a skirmish prior to rolling Initiative, you may spend a Void Point and make a Perception Trait Roll at TN 20. If the roll succeeds, you may increase your subsequent Initiative Score by 20. However, this bonus is lost instantly if you make an attack of any kind.

New Air-Themed Ise Zumi Tattoos

The Tattooed Men of the Dragon Clan are a pseudo-monastic order which is also a part of the Dragon Clan, making them a strange bled of monk and samurai. Their mystical tattoos are their main source of power, and this section offers two new tattoos built around different aspects of Air.

New Tattoo: Cloud

You can call upon the essence of the wind and the sky, granting you the same ethereal qualities as they possess. While this tattoo is active, any melee attack that successfully strikes you must immediately make a second attack roll. If the second attack roll fails, the strike misses. However, while this tattoo is active you may not make attacks of any kind.

New Tattoo: Whisper

This very rare tattoo usually takes the form of a person turned aside, hand held to the mouth as if silencing someone or masking something being said. When invoked, the tattoo allows those who bear it to send brief silent messages over long distances. When this tattoo is active, as a Complex Action you may send a whispered message to anyone within a number of miles equal to 10x your School Rank. You cannot receive messages from the target unless they share the same tattoo or have some other means of transmitting such information.

Mechanical Option: Merged Tattoos

Every once in a while, the tattoos that appear on the flesh of a member of the Ise Zumi order (or its offshoots, the Kikage Zumi and the Tsurui Zumi) undergo a strange transformation. A brother who might have expected to receive a new tattoo occasionally finds instead that two of his existing tattoos have merged together to create something altogether new. This sometimes involves existing tattoos moving from one place to another on the monk's body, a feat that not even the Togashi family's sacred tattoo artists can explain. These new tattoos are invariably powerful, but they do limit the versatility of the monks who possess them.



A player who chooses for his character to receive a merged tattoo forgoes a new tattoo that his character would normally receive due to increasing in School Rank. Instead, two of the character's existing tattoos are replaced by a single merged tattoo that represents both. Fire and Mountain might be replaced with Volcano, or perhaps Wind and Storm might be replaced with Hurricane. Regardless, the new tattoo is very powerful, for it allows the mechanical benefits of both tattoos to be active simultaneously. There are costs associated with it, however, as neither tattoo can be activated without the other, and any tattoo activation for the merged tattoo now costs one Void Point (although it is still a Free Action).

The GM may choose not to allow Merged Tattoos if they seem overly powerful for the style of game he is running.

Chapter Five: The World of Air

Although this chapter covers a wide variety of topics, from a mechanical standpoint its most notable feature is the introduction of several nonhuman creatures which have not been depicted in previous L5R 4th Edition supplements.

Greater Elemental Terror of Air: Kaze no Oni

Kaze no Oni are created by the Dark Oracles at the start of the twelfth century; there are no records of their appearance prior to that time, although GMs may always choose to rule that the Oracles took action earlier in the Empire's history. They resemble the giant swollen corpses of infant birds, standing high atop long legs that trail away into insubstantiality. Their affinity to the Air kansen gives them an unnatural ability to absorb spells and hurl them back at their enemies, making them a particular threat to shugenja.

Air: 6	Earth: 3	Fire: 3	Water: 2
–	–	Agility: 4	–

Initiative: *8k6* — Armor TN: *35*

Damage: *4k2 (Bite)* — Attack: *6k4 Bite (Simple)*

Reduction: *5 (bypassed by jade, crystal, or obsidian)* — Wounds: *30: +5; 60 +10; 90: Dead*

Taint Rank: 6

Skills: Spellcraft 5

Special Abilities:

- *Fear*
- *Huge*
- *Invulnerable*
- *Magic Resistance: Spell-Filching*

Lesser Elemental Terror of Air: Yosuchi no Oni

"Take soul, breath, and leave only dust behind...."

The Yosuchi no Oni are shadowy, insubstantial demons who float through the air, resembling nothing so much as a tangle of tattered semi-incorporeal silk with a vaguely-defined head. Like their larger cousins, the Kaze no Oni, they are creations of the Dark Oracle of Air and are first seen around the start of the twelfth century.

The Yosuchi no Oni is almost as insubstantial as the Element from which it was created, and is thus both difficult to fight and dangerous to those it attacks. It drains the life-essence of its prey directly, drawing it out through its vaporous appendages. Only magic and weapons of sacred substances like jade can affect it. Fortunately, it is quite vulnerable to attacks from those sources.

Air: 4	Earth: 1	Fire: 3	Water: 1
Reflexes: 6	Willpower: 3	–	Perception: 3

Initiative: *7k6* — Armor TN: *35*

Damage: *1k1, plus Life Drain (see Special Abilities)* — Attack: *Appendage 7k3 (Complex)*

Reduction: *None* — Wounds: *25: +5; 50: Dead*

Shadowlands Taint: 6

Skills: Stealth 5

Special Abilities:

- *Fear*
- *Insubstantial*
- *Life Drain*
- *Magic Resistance*
- *Superior Invulnerability*
- *Swift*

Nue

Nue are large bird-spirits from Chikushudo; they resemble a predatory bird roughly the size of a dog, but with an oddly human head and face. They possess a human-like cunning but the mentality of aggressive animals, and will attack any prey they think they can kill. They are known for carrying out flying ambushes, such as by flying between their prey and the sun, or flying behind clouds.

Air: 2	Earth: 2	Fire: 2	Water: 2
Reflexes: 5	–	Agility: 4	Perception: 3

Initiative: *6k5* — Armor TN: *30*

Damage: *4k2* — Attack: *Claw/Beak 6k4 (Simple)*

Reduction: *3* — Wounds: *15: +5; 30: Dead.*

Skills: Hunting 3, Investigation 3, Stealth 3

Special Abilities:

- *Diving Attack: Spirit*
- *Swift*

Tsuru, Spirit of Chikushudo

Tsuru are shapeshifting spirits similar to kitsune, komouri, and tanuki. In their natural form they appear to be very large and elegant cranes, but they can shapeshift into a beautiful human body with somewhat elongated facial features, or into a human-crane hybrid that somewhat resembles a kenku. On some occasions they have been mistaken for kenku, especially since in their bipedal forms they are fond of carrying swords and engaging in duels. They are proud creatures and easily insulted, insults which they prefer to answer with duels.

Air: 4	Earth: 2	Fire: 2	Water: 1
–	–	Agility: 3	Perception: 4

Initiative: *5k4* — Armor TN: *25*

Damage: *4k2 (sword) or 1k1 (beak)* — Attack: *Sword 7k3 (Complex) or Beak 3k3 (Complex)*

Reduction: *3* — Wounds: *15: +5; 30: +10; 45: +15; 60: Dead.*

Skills: Defense 3, Etiquette 3, Iaijutsu 5, Kenjutsu 4

Special Abilities:

- *Shapeshifting*
- *Spirit*
- *Swift*

Wyrms

"These deadly Yobanjin warriors bring their fearsome steeds into the middle of combat, where man and beast fight as one. Gruesome, and effective."

– Mirumoto Kei, twelfth century

Wyrms are huge warm-blooded reptilian serpents, often as much as thirty or forty feet in length, who dwell in the steppes beyond the Great Wall of the North mountains. Some of them have wings and are able to fly, but even the land-bound versions move extremely quickly and can often create the illusion of flight as they race across the ground. They are aggressive and dangerous predators on their own, but the Yobanjin barbarians of the north have been known to partially tame the creatures and ride them into battle, greatly increasing the strength of their warbands.

Many Rokugani believe the Wyrms to be supernatural or perhaps even demonic, but the few scholars who have studied them closely are convinced they are merely unusual natural creatures.

Air: 3	Earth: 4	Fire: 1	Water: 3
Reflexes: 5	–	Agility: 4	Strength: 5

Initiative: *5k5* — Armor TN: *35*

Damage: *7k2 (bite) or 5k5 (constrict)* — Attack: *Bite 6k4 (Simple) or Constrict 6k4 (Complex)*

Reduction: *6* — Wounds: *32: +5; 64: +10; 96: Dead*

Skills: Jiujutsu 2

Special Abilities:

- *Constriction Attack*
- *Fear*
- *Huge*
- *Swift*

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"The essence of Air is the essence of speed and awareness. It is oneness with the world, both physical and spiritual."

- The Tao of Shinsei

Air is the most mercurial of elements, from the cool breeze that comforts a dying soldier to the cutting wind that slices away at the rock, carving canyons and spires from the mighty mountains. The essence of Air is within all things, giving life to the honeyed words of the courtier, lending speed to the brilliant steel of the duelist, carrying the arrow of the archer, and delivering the hurricane force of a devout priest. Some believe that Air is the least powerful of the elements. Those who believe so are fools.

The Book of Air is the first in a new series of sourcebooks for the Legend of the Five Rings Role-playing Game, the Elemental Series, each of which focuses on one of the five iconic rings that give the game its name. The Book of Air explores the many different aspects of Air in the setting, including the many activities and endeavors samurai attempt that are tied to the Air ring. Among the various topics in this book you will discover:

- More information on the iaijutsu dueling system of Rokugan, one of the most iconic elements of the samurai story in Legend of the Five Rings.
- An in-depth examination of archery, it's history and opinion of those in the Empire, including new Paths.
- The power of Air magic via the Air kami, including illusion, illumination, and communication.
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