

THE BOOK OF FIRE



Legend of the Five Rings





THE BOOK OF FIRE

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CREDITS



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INTRODUCTION



It was a month after the harvest season and the grass was brittle and crisp. The fire took to it voraciously and the whole camp was alight in what seemed like moments.

Time is an odd thing when one stands in the heat of battle, when steel is in hand and the blood boils with battle rage. The mind loses the ability to comprehend time, as though the fires of action destroy the capacity for thought.

A Crab soldier, one of many, lay amidst the flames and grasped at the wound in his side. Even over the scent of burning grass all around him he could still smell the metallic tang of his own blood as it flowed between his fingers. Nearby a tent post collapsed, its fabric fluttering in the wind as it dissolved into ashes carried away by the breeze. So bright were the flames that the feeble light of the moon could not convince him it was night. The Crab supposed a campfire had been scattered in the raid and set the fields aflame, quickly eclipsing the invader's own destructive capacity.

As he lay dying time seemed to grow long and slow, in contrast to the blur of combat. He felt almost at leisure to contemplate the beauty of the fire that danced around him... and to consider the fire of life that dimmed within him. Bushido allowed no regrets, and he had none. He had been given the chance to serve the Jade Throne and he had been up to the task. Ten men had fallen to his blade. If every samurai was capable of the same feat, the Empire should never know fear. Surely his ancestors awaited him with open arms. As the light before his eyes dimmed at last, he wondered briefly what had become of his commander.

Hida Kaike, Chui of the Crab Reserve Army, rode through the night, the fear of dishonor hanging over him like a ghost. He had expected the bandits to be nothing more than thugs, but instead they had ambushed his men and inflicted a massacre. Now he fled ignominiously, riding under the cloak of night toward Maisuna Shiro. If he could reach it alive, perhaps his men would not have died in vain. The raiders had shown their hand, and the deadly tactics they displayed identified their disgraced leader.

Kaike's horse crested a hill and he wheeled it around to look back at the fire that lit up the night. Good men had died this night, died in futility. He was as culpable as the raiders who cut them down in the dark.

"There will be justice. My life belongs to you who await vengeance in Meido."

All the way to Maisuna Shiro, the fire shone like a sun that would not set.



What Is This Book?

This book, like its predecessors *The Book of Air* and *The Book of Earth*, views the Empire through the prism of a specific Element – in this case, the Element of Fire, 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: THE FIRES OF WAR

This chapter deals with the aspects of war and combat that are associated with Fire and the principle martial and military themes of Fire – primarily swordsmanship, which is discussed in-depth, as well as the world of knife-oriented combat and the aggressive martial traditions associated with it. There is also an extensive examination of the life of the front-line warrior in Rokugani armies. Finally, the chapter contains a discussion of Hitsu-do, the martial art most closely associated with Fire.

CHAPTER TWO: THE FIRES OF MAGIC

This chapter discusses those groups of shugenja in Rokugan who pay special attention to the Element of Fire. Rokugani magic is intimately connected to the Elements and their divergent natures, and this chapter considers the Fire aspects of the magical arts. It also includes an extensive review of the use and value of the major Fire spells and a detailed discussion of the Fire kami themselves, their nature and behavior, and their interactions with the other Elements. Finally, the chapter includes a discussion of *taryu-jiai*, the shugenja's way of magical dueling, an act whose aggression and fury are deeply evocative of the Element of Fire.

CHAPTER THREE: THE FIRES OF PEACE

This chapter examines the world of court and politics through the lens of Fire. Politics can often be driven by careful intellectual study and clever plotting – behaviors centered on the Rokugani understanding of Fire. Also, Fire is the Element of scholarship, artistic creativity, and intensive (or even obsessive) study, all of which are associated with the world of court and politics. This chapter discusses the Fire-based courtly and scholarly methods of the Lion, the Phoenix, and the Otomo, among others. It also offers descriptions of several prominent castles in the Empire whose courts are Fire-dominated and of the Empire's most prominent libraries.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FIRES WITHIN

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

CHAPTER FIVE: A WORLD OF FIRE

This chapter deals with a host of different aspects of Fire, both mundane and supernatural, in the lives of the Rokugani. Topics include the volcanoes of Rokugan, natural disasters associated with Fire, Fire-oriented arts and crafts such as poetry, swordsmithing, and glassblowing, natural and otherworldly beings connected to this Element, and the major nemuranai (awakened magical artifacts) associated with both the Element of Fire and the arts that are most closely related to it.

CHAPTER SIX: THE HUNDRED STANCES DOJO

The final chapter in this book offers a complete campaign setting, a remote dojo dedicated to the study of the ways of swordsmanship above all else. Like the other campaigns presented in earlier books of the Elemental series, the Dojo is designed as a “semi-generic” setting that can easily be located to whatever part of the Empire the GM might desire. The chapter also includes several story hooks and an outline for a large-scale adventure set within the Dojo.

APPENDIX: NEW MECHANICS

The Appendix includes a variety of new game mechanics for the L5R 4th Edition RPG, including many new Paths, two new Monk Orders, an array of new Fire spells and Fire Kiho, and stats for several new Fire-oriented creatures.

Symbolism of Fire

Rokugani philosophy is full of duality, finding deep meaning within things that appear simple on the surface. The Fortunes each have their wrathful and benevolent aspects, and poets have written volumes on the hidden wisdom in things as basic as grass waving in the wind. These viewpoints are found strongly expressed in how the Empire sees the Element of Fire. It is destructive, but grants life-sustaining heat. It is singular and mindless at first glance, but the hidden depths and movements of Fire and their countless applications do not escape the notice of the wise. In fact, while destruction is the most obvious aspect of Fire, the Element also represents the ideas of change, energy, motion, and illumination.

CHANGE

“Through fire comes death, and through fire comes rebirth.”

– Isawa Hochiu, Master of Fire

Fire destroys, but it is rarely something final. Death and destruction are all part of the great cycle, after all, and the Celestial Order ushers in something new to take the place of what has been removed. This does not mean nature simply grows back unchanged – mortal will is a part of the cycle, and it is accepted that sometimes destruction



must be used purposefully to ready the path for something new. The symbol of the Clan of the Phoenix embodies this aspect of ordered change perfectly, for the phoenix is repeatedly born anew as part of its cycle, shedding that which is old and decaying in place of something young and fresh. In the tradition-bound society of Rokugan, this philosophy is often forgotten... but not by the truly pious and wise.

This aspect of Elemental Fire also shows there is order to life even when the universe may seem like nothing but uncaring chaos. A great wildfire may burn down a forest, but this leaves the ground fertile for stronger trees and renewed growth. Those who understand well the lesson of change know how to look for harmony in chaos, opportunity in loss. They learn one of the greatest lessons of all: everything within the great Kharmic Wheel must move and become new. Most Rokugani understand that material attachments cannot last forever, but this lesson extends to the immaterial as well.

ENERGY

"Fire represents power, violence, and inspiration. I will burn briefly, but brightly, leaving light long after I am gone."

– Isawa Sawao

Life and structure are important, but useless without the will to do something. Fire represents the surging force that drives life in all its myriad forms. However, this energy is not infinite; the Element of Fire teaches us that a wild raging fire may burn brightly, but only for a few moments. Thus, somewhat ironically, the nature of Fire can teach the wisdom of patience and a conservative approach. Much like Fire itself, an individual's energy can be applied carefully or recklessly depending on the situation. But without carefully tending the source of this energy, a mortal's actions and plans can fall short from exhaustion, or worse, run rampant and uncontrolled.

This aspect of Elemental Fire teaches that one must be mindful of resources and limitations. This is a valuable lesson when working with Fire itself, as one must apply the correct sort of fuel and the correct amount of Air to use it properly. A cook would destroy his work in the heat of a smith's forge, and a smith would see a cook's fire as a mere inadequate pittance. So, too, must one understand the time and place when one should expend limited energy, and how much to apply.

DESTRUCTION

"Witness the unparalleled purity of fire. All that is corrupt is consumed in its embrace. Let me share it with you."

– Isawa Ochiai, Master of Fire

The most obvious application of Fire is also the most feared and misunderstood. As noted above, destruction is not always pointless and mindless... but it certainly can be. Destruction itself is a neutral thing, and like many forces of nature it is uncaring and without an agenda. In this way, Elemental Fire's destruction is much like a dispassionate magistrate or unbiased historian, caring only for duty, function, and little (if anything) else. Such single-minded devotion to a cause is not always a good thing, though. Samurai overcome by obsessions, by a thirst for vengeance or a lust for coin, may compromise their Honor and their place in the Celestial Order.

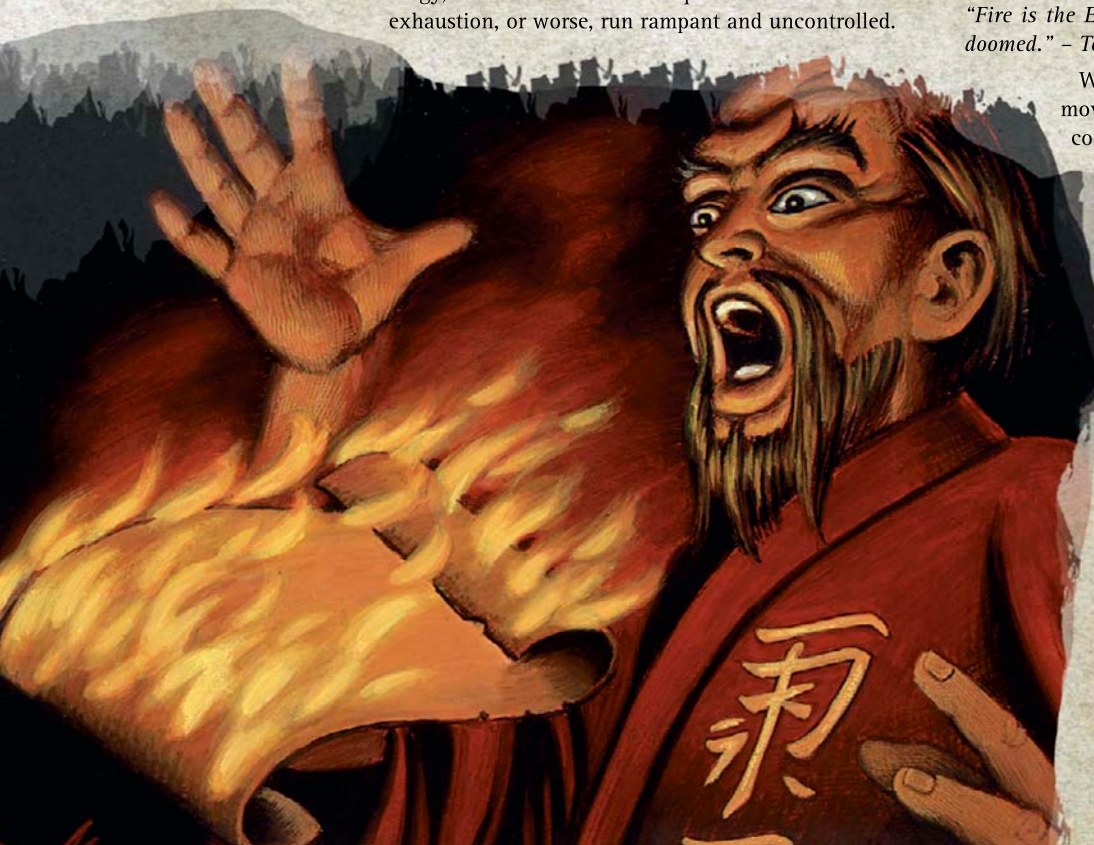
This aspect of Elemental Fire also reminds one that sometimes, things really are as simple as they appear. The destruction Fire leaves in its wake is not selective and it has no particular plan in mind. Though the world is a complex place full of hidden mysteries and riddles, sometimes it is just as well to accept something for its basic nature and act accordingly.

MOTION

"Fire is the Element of laughter; forget that and you are doomed." – Togashi Shintao

Water is the Element of movement, but movement is different from simple motion. The concept of motion in relation to the Element of Fire is not a serene or guided movement, but rather the feeling that something cannot remain settled and steady. For good or for ill, Fire cannot simply exist. It must burn, consuming further and further into its source of fuel, all the while dancing and flickering. In its raw uncontrolled form, Fire can be pure chaos, moving in patterns none can define or comprehend. While this idea of chaos is antithetical to most Rokugani thinking, it is important to understand it as a force in the universe.

This aspect of Elemental Fire is not always negative, however. Motivation and purpose often require one to constantly pursue a goal or move toward some ultimate end. Sometimes, a samurai must embrace this concept of motion rather than remaining still and allowing the world to close in on



him. While stillness and serenity are to be appreciated, samurai always recognize they are also people of action and active thought.

ILLUMINATION

"Fire speaks to me. What will it say to you?"

– Isawa Koiso, Master of Fire

The idea of illumination through Fire is both metaphorical and literal. The Element of Fire inspires scholarship and understanding, but it also gives off literal light to pierce darkness. Metaphorically, Fire's illumination emphasizes learning something previously hidden or finding inspiration in a new way of thinking never previously recognized. The rush of mental energies as one finds and embraces new knowledge, or when inspiration leaps almost unbidden into the mind, can be seen as the power of Fire burning away the darkness of ignorance, lighting a path where one could not be seen before.

This aspect of Elemental Fire teaches that the purpose of knowledge is to dispel ignorance and untruth, just as a flame's light dispels the shadows. Impure thoughts, incomplete understanding, or blind stumbling towards unknown goals using unknown means all speak of someone who has a poor understanding of the Element of Fire. When a single candle is lit in the darkness, it seems much brighter than if it had been lit on a clear summer's day – so too is it with a mind which has lain in ignorance and then suddenly grasps upon some truth or enlightenment.

Fire & Skills

The Element of Fire controls a person's physical and mental dexterity, and is thus tied to a great many useful Skills to all walks of life. Courtiers, generals, scholars, and those who pursue the arts of entertainment must all draw on a deep intellectual understanding of their various crafts. Naturally, a lack of physical coordination can cause a great deal of shame and hardship not just for warriors but for any who wish to appear graceful and composed.

High Skills

Fire plays a major role in many different arts and high-minded pursuits in Rokugan. As the Element that drives intelligence, inspiration, and grace, it embodies much of what noble samurai society holds in high esteem. A samurai with a high Fire will often be seen as witty and elegant, both in the courts and to his enemies – making him a formidable foe or worthy ally by reputation alone.

Calligraphy: Like many things in Rokugan, the art of calligraphy can be understood on more than just one level. On its surface, the ability to create written communication in a skilled way is simply evidence of excellent education and background. Just like a bushi with poor form in his strike will be seen as pitiable at best, a samurai who uses



sloppy and uncontrolled movements with a brush will not make a good impression on others. While few schools place great emphasis on the art of calligraphy, nearly all appreciate it is something that will reflect on a samurai and thus, by extension, on his family and ancestral teaching.

On another level, however, the skill is used to convey subtle meaning that is lost on the uninitiated. The number of characters per line, particular variations of certain strokes, spacing between kanji, and the like – all of these can show an emphasis, insult, or a poetic expression that transcends the simple idea of kanji as characters to indicate ideas or objects. The writing of a true master of calligraphy is often considered a treasure to be preserved for posterity, or passed as gifts to others.

Divination: Though magical phenomena are often the province of shugenja and monks, the universe moves in patterns and gives signals that can be read and understood by those who are trained. Much like how a cloud's pattern can indicate rain or wind, the arrangement of the stars or the patterns of specially prepared coins or sticks can detect these patterns in life. The mortal world is affected in ways both subtle and obvious by the various Spirit Realms, their inhabitants, and even the actions of mortals themselves. These attentions and actions create energies that in turn can affect the positions of the stars or the movements of kawaru coins and similar items.

It is important to note that despite this, divination is not a science. The wheels of fate and opportunity are constantly in motion, symbols can be read incorrectly or obscured, and understanding can be limited by the bounds of mortal comprehension. For all of these reasons, only a few samurai are willing to bring great attention to their scholarly pursuit of divination. While the art is considered noble and spiritual, those who have their interpretations disproven often suffer a negative reputation, either as a charlatan or as one the Heavens have chosen to ignore.

Games: Not all games rely on mental acumen, and for that matter not all clans and families put much stock in the pursuit of the game of letters. Likewise many believe sadane is a despicable thing to engage in, and as for gambling games such as Fortunes and Winds... well, not everyone is a Crab or Mantis. However, games of strategy and foresight – primarily Go and Shogi – are considered to be demonstrations of a keen mind, and are the favored pas-





times of generals and other leaders. Many fictional tales in Rokugan are accentuated through the symbolic undertone of an ongoing game of Go. Those who are masters of such games are seen as brilliant, not to be trifled with.

On the other side of the Fire spectrum, kemari is a game typically associated with those of great dexterity and agility. Most popular among the Unicorn and Mantis, kemari's popularity grows and ebbs with each political season. In certain courts kemari can even become a way to show off one's physical prowess without causing a fight or seeming to brag.

Lore: Though Rokugan is an Empire dominated by conflicts of all kinds, few are willing to discount the worth of a well-studied sage. Even clans who are focused on military conquest value the pursuit of knowledge in many forms. The Lion Clan, the pinnacle of the Empire's organized military structure, takes great pains to ensure each generation gains the knowledge of all who came before. Even the most brutish Crab puts his faith in the knowledge of the past – information that might save his life when he is faced with the alien threats of the Shadowlands.

Of course, certain subjects are more highly prized than others. A well-known expert on military tactics or law has obvious and great worth, whereas an expert on gardening will be far less revered. This is not to say, however, that obscure topics and less-prized information cannot be used to great advantage. Many court settings or negotiations have been turned on their head by an unexpected comment from a well-read samurai which none could answer. A samurai owns every word he speaks, after all, so all must be careful not to appear foolish or ignorant. For this reason among others, the study of knowledge is considered honorable on its own, and becoming a renowned authority on a particular topic can often lead to great prestige and honor.

Medicine: Samurai are devoted to the concept of cleanliness and purity, so it is no wonder that the art of medicine is regarded highly throughout Rokugan. While shugenja are able to dispel both supernatural and mundane afflictions through their prayers and rituals, they are also rare. Thus those with the intelligence to grasp the advanced concepts of medicine are greatly prized. Most samurai warriors have a rudimentary understanding of how to bind wounds and avoid obvious sources of infection, but few know the deeper secrets of this art.

Understanding the difference between a mundane disease and a mystical affliction is also prized knowledge. While not many who understand the healing arts spend a great deal of time learning to discern between the two, someone who actually knows how to treat a normal fever will at least understand when there is something unnatural at work. Without this distinction, peasants and ignorant samurai often ascribe divine motives to the most simple of illnesses, resorting to prayers or rituals to banish a supposed evil influence that is not even there.

Perform: Nearly anyone can be taught how to pick up a musical instrument or take the basic steps of a dance. However, the skill and coordination required to truly master these arts is possessed by only a few. In

Rokugan, instrumental performance is not simply a matter of playing a song, but also of moving one's arms and hands in highly ritualized ways while manipulating the instrument. Much as with Calligraphy, described above, the slightest difference in movement or tonal emphasis can deliver a message, subtle or obvious, to the audience. Conversely, a poorly-executed sweep of the arm or the inability to maintain the proper movements is the sign of a poor student.

It is worth noting that the performance arts maintain an unusual place in the social order of Rokugan. Dance and instrumental arts are learned by the lower castes as well as samurai, and these two groups must be careful to maintain the regular social order regardless of the actual difference in their skills. Extremely talented and skilled geisha performers, for example, will often be much better with flute, samisen, or dance than most samurai. However, it is understood that it is the geisha's place to excel at these arts... unless a samurai wishes to assert superiority. In this case, if the samurai is not in fact superior, the geisha may be expected to make excuses for the samurai. ("The echo in my shabby entertaining hall must be distorting your performance.") However, the samurai may be judged harshly by his peers for attempting to show off and being upstaged.

Spellcraft: Though shugenja have no personal power – they are simply beseeching the elemental kami to act on their behalf – some of a shugenja's power stems from several inborn traits: the stamina to commune with the kami and conduct prayers, the clarity of mind and soul needed to speak to the spirits, and the keen mind it takes to truly understand them. While a samurai born with the shugenja's talent of speaking with the spirits does not need to be exceptionally bright to use such a gift, nearly all of the notable shugenja in the Empire's history have been not merely powerful but also intelligent and clever. In fact, a shugenja's power is almost directly tied to his ability to beseech the kami in clever and proper ways.

Shugenja prayers are usually taught to them in a very formal manner, rigidly repeated exactly the same way each time in order to reliably produce the desired effect. Shugenja who wish to alter their prayers and invoke different methods of aid from the kami are playing with forces that do not fully understand human concepts of communication and intent. Thus a brilliant mind is generally required to create new prayers or to invoke the kami without already knowing the proper way to beseech their intervention. Failing to entreat the spirits correctly can lead to indifference or immaterial effects... at best. Truly botched efforts may cause the confused spirits to aid in ways the shugenja did not envision, or anger them into retribution against the shugenja.

Bugei Skills

Though some schools of combat emphasize pure destructive power over agility and balanced movement, all bushi strive to make accurate and clean strikes with their weapons. A bushi with a great deal of agility becomes a terror on the battlefield, making fast attacks with practiced movements that have a precision and grace which can both awe and intimidate onlookers.



Horsemanship: Access to horses for travel and war is one of the defining traits of the noble caste. Though horses are not as important as one's swords, the proper care and use of a horse is said to show a great deal about a samurai to those who care to notice. Since samurai are expected to be the best and brightest of all mortal men and women, looking clumsy or unskilled when riding can lead to many social problems. Although any unskilled samurai can usually manage to mount and ride a horse, the lack of expertise becomes evident immediately and painfully.

Although fighting from horseback is an important aspect of this skill, it is certainly not its sole application. Even the best-trained horses still require a competent rider to issue commands for every sort of activity. A samurai uses this skill to make his horse trot, parade, halt, or gallop on command, whether for his own use or for the viewing of others. A GM may also use a roll with Horsemanship to impress others with how well a samurai comports himself while riding.

Jiujutsu: Practical warriors from many different backgrounds appreciate that one's hands and feet are the only weapons truly available at all times. A well-developed sense of coordination lends itself well to this martial art, which takes advantage of a wider range of movements and potential attack opportunities when compared to many conventional weapon skills.

The actual application of jiu-jutsu is as varied as its practitioners. The different Emphases of the skill reveal something about the combatant themselves – some study for the ability to destroy their enemies with their bare hands, while others see a sensible option for subduing opponents without mortally wounding them. A samurai who wishes to study an Emphasis of Jiu-jutsu that does not conform to the philosophy of his clan or school will need to justify such a course of action.

Weapons: The ability to use a weapon effectively is one of the most basic responsibilities of a samurai. Even courtiers and shugenja are expected to know how to properly hold a wakizashi, the symbol of their Honor. Different weapons take on various kinds of symbolism in the highly ritualistic society of Rokugan, and great (or little skill) in certain weapons is said to reflect on the person in question. Even for warrior traditions that emphasize power over accuracy – such as in the Moto and Hida families – learning the various techniques required to deliver forceful blows demands a certain level of physical grace.

Combatants with a high Agility will, of course, do better with unfamiliar weapons than those with a lower Agility. However, the lack of training in the weapon's use will still be clearly evident. Additionally, familiarity with using a weapon often involves learning how it is constructed and how to tell the difference between a quality weapon and shoddy workmanship. Though this is not the same as being able to truly appraise an item through the Commerce skill, such basic knowledge can still recognize a finely folded blade or a well-balanced tetsubo.

Merchant Skills

Applying a bright mind to skills usually left to the merchants among the lower castes can be something of a gamble for many samurai. However, one thing is clear to any who have the slightest understanding of these subjects: they are not for the slow-witted. Mishandling money or making mistakes in trade can cause great problems for one's clan as well as oneself.

Commerce: Knowledge of commerce and trade is something the vast majority of samurai avoid, preferring to let such coarse activity be handled by their lower caste servants. However, like many things in the Empire, a samurai can turn distasteful (but not dishonorable) behavior into a laudable reputation when applied correctly. Although the ebb and flow of trade is in many ways associated with Water, the quick wit and complex calculations required to truly master the ways of Commerce are very much within the domain of Fire. Although a samurai who displays such mastery is generally considered to be somewhat morally questionable, if that samurai is able to turn his pursuit to the advantage of his lord and clan he will suddenly be recognized as a great asset. Even the extremely traditional Lion know an army can only go so far without supplies.

Because so few samurai engage in matters of trade, it is relatively easy to set oneself up as an authority in the field, for good or ill. Having a reputation for being able to manage finances, whether one's own or one's daimyo's, will earn the envy of many... and possibly even their interest. Moreover, effective use of commerce includes the higher concepts of mathematics, which have little impact on the day-to-day lives of the nobility but are considered to be the province of a bright mind. Scholarly families such as the Asako and Kitsuki find such topics fascinating, regardless of their perhaps unsavory applications.





Engineering: Though most artisanal and commercial pursuits can arguably be seen as either honorable or distasteful depending on their application, Engineering is universally appreciated by all samurai. Castles, palaces, fortresses, towers, and other buildings and fortifications are the largest and most obvious signs of true civilization, something the samurai pride themselves on creating and maintaining. A lord with a poorly-constructed stronghold or inhabiting a palace that seems badly built will be viewed as a samurai with low standards.

Of course, learning to build sturdy and beautiful structures is no simple task. Understanding the concepts of weight distribution, material strengths, construction, and even simply drawing up the plans are all things beyond the vast majority of Rokugani. Indeed, this is one of the few pursuits where a samurai will openly admit a lack of expertise without embarrassment, since no lord wants to make a truly gifted engineer think his skills are not required. And while Engineering is not a useful skill in many situations, a trained engineer is able to gain many favors in exchange for his knowledge.

Sailing: Like Commerce, Sailing is associated with both Water – the Element of movement – and Fire – the Element of knowledge. Also like Commerce, Sailing has a somewhat mixed reputation in Rokugan, one that often precludes honorable samurai from attempting to study it. The vast majority of samurai live in land-locked areas and have no need to understand the relatively complex arts of navigating and piloting a boat. On top of that, sailing is most frequently highlighted in stories of pirate raiders or the Mantis Clan – a clan that has something of a sullied reputation when it comes to “proper” behavior. For these reasons, many simply avoid discussion or study of the subject at all.

Naturally, this leads most samurai to underestimate both the intelligence and physical coordination it takes to handle a boat. Many overconfident Phoenix, Crab, and Crane samurai have been lost at sea for thinking it is a simple enough matter to point one’s boat in a particular direction and keep moving. Sailing is, of course, not inherently dishonorable or underhanded, and a samurai who is a competent sailor and has a strong reputation as a man of honor can become a treasure to his clan.

Low Skills

A keen mind is seen as a gift by the Fortunes, so turning such a blessing towards dishonorable behavior is the mark of a worthless soul in the eyes of samurai. Despite that, there are many who will employ any advantage to further their own goals or those of their lords. It cannot be denied that for those who possess grace or intellect, the arts of lying, misdirection, and subterfuge come naturally.

Forgery: Since Rokugan tends to view documentation as effectively the same as testimony, falsifying such things is extremely dishonorable... but can achieve great advantages when done correctly. The primary difficulties of forging documents come from both familiarity with the

items in question and the steady hand required to copy accurately. Though false travel papers may stand up to passing scrutiny from those not particularly familiar with the daimyo or functionary who granted them, botching the style or form of the writing can easily betray its falsity.

It is worth noting that forgery is not limited to official papers and decrees. Being able to pass off your own work as a piece by a famous artist can give great advantages in court or when trying to win favors with a particular samurai. Forging personal seals can be quite useful as well, but is much more complicated than forging a document, since one needs a copy of the seal itself for best effect – seeing only the seal’s print or stamp can lead to an incomplete idea of what the actual face of the seal looks like, drawing the attention of those who know better.

Sleight of Hand: Agile hands are not useful solely for combat. Subtle and swift movements of the fingers and hands can perform small actions that go unnoticed to all but the most dedicated observers. Obviously, the most direct application of this skill is theft and concealment (often in tandem), which requires a light deft touch to avoid drawing attention. Clumsy attempts at this may gain the person his goal (such as snatching an item), but the movements will betray that something is going on.

Sleight of hand, strangely enough, can also be used for less dishonorable purposes. The entertaining tricks of prestidigitation, or simply showing off the agility of one’s fingers, can make for interesting displays of skill or amusing forms of light art. Also, concealing an item need not always be wrong – for example, hiding an important missive from a commander is an understandable part of a samurai’s duty. Likewise, a shugenja or courtier escaping from enemy capture is another use of this skill that is not directly dishonorable, though the strict social rules of a captive’s behavior might create problems of honor.

Stealth: Though Rokugan is dominated by concepts of honor, fair play, and direct conflict, in reality stealth and concealment have their place in all levels of samurai life. A scout or messenger is required to move swiftly and often undetected. Guards investigating disturbances try to draw as little attention to themselves as possible. Thus like most things in the Empire, the judgment of the act itself is often strongly influenced by the situation surrounding it. Samurai who are able to tell the difference between these situations and make the most of their skills while not crossing the line into dishonorable behavior are dangerous and effective men and women.

Of course, the majority of those who employ this skill do so for reasons honorable samurai would never consider. Ambushing an unaware opponent away from the battlefield is considered a direct violation of many aspects of Bushido. Similarly, in the courts being able to sneak around a corner and listen in on rivals can grant advantages for those who have little concern for their honor. A shugenja can even take advantage of a dextrous and agile nature to beseech the spirits quietly and subtly – melding dishonorable subterfuge with their holy gift. For many, this sort of dishonorable activity is judged even more harshly than an assassin moving in the night.

Fire Advantages & Disadvantages

A person's Elemental Fire dictates his drive, mental clarity, and physical coordination. As such, an imbalanced, strong, or weak Fire has a pronounced effect on many activities. Those born with an unusual Fire (either good or bad) are immediately recognizable in most situations.

Advantages

Blood of Osano-Wo: The Fortune of Fire and Thunder was himself a hardy individual before his ascension from mortal life. Though the Element of Earth is the one that determines an individual's ability to withstand pain and suffering, a strong Fire can also help repel the effects of heat, cold, and the weather. Those blessed with such a strong connection to the Thunderer are not just resistant to these things but actually find themselves comfortable in all but the harshest conditions. They also tend to be extremely warm-blooded, preferring to wear few layers of clothing – much like Osano-Wo himself.

Clear Thinker: Confusion and distraction are the signs of a mind that has been pushed out of order in some fashion, whereas someone with a strong Fire has a mind difficult to affect in this manner. Fire's focused nature is reflected in this Advantage, which may be seen as a positive counterpart to the Driven Disadvantage; the character is able to keep himself moving towards a specific goal or staying on one train of thought, but without being overridden by obsessive behavior.

Crafty: An agile mind unfettered by the constraints of Honor is a tool with many uses. Crafty characters not only have a pronounced mental Fire but also tend to see the weaknesses in logic, observation, and security which others might miss. In this way, Crafty individuals are not necessarily dishonorable – they can turn their expertise towards displaying to others how a true enemy might exploit such weaknesses.

Forbidden Knowledge: There are two reasons why information is considered forbidden in the Empire: it is either dishonorable to possess it at all, or it is potentially damaging in the wrong hands. Often there is a combination of both factors. In all cases, though, such knowledge tends to be difficult to comprehend and nearly impossible to keep to oneself once discovered. A sharp mind assists in both accumulating this information and ensuring that one does not reveal it needlessly. Characters with this Advantage and a high Intelligence are often able to discern ways to use such information without causing trouble to themselves.

Great Potential: A pronounced Fire in an individual can manifest itself as a general urge for them to aspire to greater things, or it can be more focused and inspire them in a particular pursuit. In the case of Great Potential, the character's inner Fire harmonizes with a chosen Skill, and the mind and body move more easily when executing it. It should be noted this represents a great potential and not

necessarily great training. The Skill is simply more natural to them, more easily understood, which can express itself in numerous ways. Sensei or shrewd practitioners of the art will immediately recognize the character's gift and react appropriately.

Higher Purpose: Rokugan is full of tales regarding samurai who are so fully dedicated to some ideal or purpose that their entire life becomes a parable – good or bad – about the result of such fervor. Like the fire seeking more fuel, the character's soul metaphysically burns to pursue some particular goal, growing brighter and stronger when it does so. However, when such a person is not working toward his Higher Purpose, he is noticeably less motivated, and if he is forced to choose a course of action over moving toward his goal, he will likely become concerned or out-of-sorts until he is able to return to his proper course. This is not to say the character will sulk or become obsessed, but he will be in a lesser state of spiritual harmony when not pursuing the thing he feels he was born to do.

Languages: Due to the xenophobic nature of Rokugan, the rare person who has a mindset for learning multiple languages often lives with this potential unfulfilled. Even those who are able to find a way to study different languages usually see it as a scholarly pursuit, an act of curiosity, rather than having practical value. However, at certain times during the Empire's history – the period before the Battle of White Stag, or the Empire's colonization of the Ivory Kingdoms, for example – this gift becomes invaluable. Even intelligent scholars or diplomats often do not possess the specific type of mind required to both learn multiple languages and keep them straight in their heads.

Paragon: Ideally, the true samurai lives up to all the tenets of Bushido equally. However, the reality is that most individuals tend to find certain parts of the philosophy more appealing, though not necessarily seeing the other tenets as useless. A paragon of Bushido is focused in a way that exemplifies the greater qualities of Fire, motivated toward greater and greater heights through intensely following one or more aspects of the samurai philosophy.





Precise Memory: Possibly one of the purest expressions of a well-harnessed inner Fire, a person with precise memory is not necessarily brilliant, but his mind is rarely clouded or confused. Someone who has such excellent recall is likely to be of great use to his allies and lord, as a samurai's testimony is worth a great deal. After all, those who cannot recall specific details often decline to make definitive statements. When a samurai is able to claim such near-flawless mental faculties and put them to good use, his often becomes quite renowned.

Prodigy: Fire is the Element of inspiration and talent; this Advantage expresses this in a way that may seem outwardly similar to Great Potential but is actually markedly different. Where Great Potential marks a character who has bursts of greatness or moments of amazing inspiration, Prodigy denotes a character who is consistently remarkable. However, in both cases the unusually high expertise is obvious to any who witness the character's displays, and such notable samurai are often expected to act as champions of their school or field of study. Equally important, those who do not live up to such a reputation will likely be treated harshly.

Sage: Much as a skilled samisen player is able to pluck strings in dazzling and incomprehensible combinations and speeds, this character's mind races as quickly as the energy of Elemental Fire allows, retaining tremendous amounts of information and recounting it with surprising accuracy. Shugenja or those attuned in some way to the Element of Fire will immediately sense the strength of that Element in characters with this Advantage.

Soul of Artistry: The unnamed feeling that tugs at someone's soul when they view an inspiring piece of art is connected to both their Void and their Elemental Fire. Some artists are simply more attuned to their own Fire, and their artwork more easily speaks to any who encounter it. This does not make them necessarily more skilled than a well-trained artist, but they have an instinctual understanding of what others will enjoy and react to.

Disadvantages

Brash: Fire must be tempered by the other Elements, but when there is a failure of Elemental Earth to balance it, a character becomes short of temper and easy to rouse to anger. Brash characters are not automatically stupid or short-sighted, but instead often believe there is only one way to answer others' challenges. It should be noted that Brash does not mean "mindless" and the GM and player should agree upon reasonable circumstances where a character with Brash will be moved to fight. Obviously a character who is insulted in the presence of the Emperor is not going to draw his sword (or attack barehanded) and dishonor himself so utterly... unless that would also be in his character.

Can't Lie: Dedication to truth and honor are fine things, but the Code of Bushido and the social tenets of Rokugan have lived in an uneasy peace for centuries, circling around the notion that certain equivocations or twists of

the truth are not the same as "lying." When a character's Elemental Fire is not tempered by Elemental Air, he simply cannot discern when those times occur – or flatly refuses to believe such times exist at all. Of course, some samurai with this Disadvantage know it can be acceptable to just hold one's tongue, but that can often be difficult in itself.

Compulsion: Fire motivates and drives the mortal mind. In the cases of some, however, this motivation becomes too strong, to the point where their inner Fire is always pushing them toward a particular act or behavior. If the Compulsion is some manner of substance addiction, it may be that the character's Elements feel out of balance without that substance. If it is a different kind of behavior – such as needing a constantly wrinkle-free kimono – it can indicate a mental condition resulting from an Elemental imbalance.

Consumed: The dark cousin of the Fascination Disadvantage, Consumed represents a situation where a samurai's Elemental Fire pushes him beyond the realm of honor and Bushido and into the twisted philosophy of Shourido. This could be due to a naturally imbalanced Elemental Fire driving them onward past their own good sense, or it could be a shift in the character's inner Elements after a particularly tragic or life-altering experience. As with many Disadvantages, the reason why the character is so Consumed becomes key to expressing the condition.

Contrary: This is an instance of a character's Elemental Fire overbalancing his Water; the mind of a Contrary character simply cannot remain neutral and observe things. Information must be dissected and judged immediately, and once it is judged the character's mind races to the next step, which is to burn away any and all opposing thought – thought which is clearly incorrect. Contrary characters are not always rude, but they are always persistent and difficult to silence if there is not someone of clearly higher station around to do it.

Driven: When a samurai's Elemental Fire has overtaken all of his other Elements in some way, this is often expressed in either an uncontrolled mindless rage or in the other extreme: a singular, sharply-focused march toward one goal. But where some manage their fixations or mitigate them in some way, the character in this instance has embraced it fully. Unlike minor fascinations or even obsessions, this Disadvantage denotes the character will do anything that moves him closer to the goal. This behavior does not have to be hasty or intrinsically self-defeating, however. After all, murdering someone and then getting caught will certainly put an end to any plans.

Epilepsy: Uncontrolled moments where someone's Elemental Fire overtakes his other Elements in a physical way often result in Epilepsy. In truth, any character's Fire is constantly seeking dominance over the body's movement, but the character keeps it in check either willfully or unconsciously. In an epileptic, this control is lost when distracted by bright lights, stress, or other such effects. Spasms indicate times when control has been lost completely, while more rigid states show a character who is locked in combat with himself, struggling to regain control.

Fascination: This is a lower-impact version of the same imbalance that produces Consumed and Driven. Here it is less severe, and for the most part the character has his somewhat errant Elemental Fire under control. In fact, a fascination can almost come off as a child's wonder and interest in a subject – in its own way denoting the character's somewhat malformed Fire. Fascination does not always have to be expressed this way, and the character can certainly attempt to pursue it without seeming unusual.

Frail Mind: A basic condition where someone's Elemental Fire is not overtaken by another Element but is simply weak in the area of the mind. The character's attention and thoughts wander and jump from thing to thing like a small flame caught in a wind. This means that even when paying close attention, the character is simply not used to having to focus, and too much of his energy is spent staving off distractions.

Overconfident: Similar to Brash in that a character's Fire has overcome his Earth, but in this case it has less to do with a quick temper and more to do with a disconnect between reality and self-image. In addition to feeling more confidence in their abilities than they should, Overconfident characters will use their heightened Fire – and the energy it brings to the mind – to explain away incidents that should tip them off to the reality of their situation. Rationalization becomes second nature to these individuals, a trait which can be infuriating to others.

The Full Attack Stance

The Stance of Fire is nearly as limited as the Full Defense stance, but serves the opposite purpose. Fire itself is seen as an Element with a singular burning purpose, and a combatant who has taken on the philosophy of Fire in his attacks has dedicated himself selflessly (one might say *recklessly*) to the goal of wiping out everyone in his path. Like Fire itself, the Full Attack Stance cares little for survival through careful planning or defense, but instead leaps from target to target, trying to destroy everything it touches.

The main benefit of this stance is clear: by abandoning all but the most basic attempts to stay alive, the combatant overcomes enemies through sheer fury. Many warriors are prepared to deal with the strikes and advances of enemies who are attempting to preserve their own lives while cutting down others, so an unwary combatant can easily be caught off guard by sudden aggression and daring strikes. So long as the person in the Fire Stance has opponents to advance against and attack, he can continue to burn them away with surprising and often terrifying speed.

Of course, this sort of advantage comes with a cost. Opponents who have not been overcome by the attacker's raw fury will be in an excellent position to counterattack and deliver retribution. If the attacker does not severely wound or kill his opponents, he will often have left himself open for a more patient opponent or a precise attack that will be his undoing. Additionally, advancing with singular purpose leaves one unable to assist one's comrades appropriately or to retreat if such an order is given. For this reason, even the most aggressive schools of com-

bat, such as the Matsu Berserker School, teach their students that this style of attack is not always appropriate.

The primary benefit of this Stance is, of course, when the destruction of enemies is paramount over the survival of the attacker. In the culture of Rokugan, the philosophy of hurling oneself wildly into the enemy is actually viewed with mixed opinions depending on circumstances. After all, a samurai is expected to serve his lord well, not foolishly, so the accepted view is that one should only give up one's life when the goal reached by doing so is more valuable than one's continued service. For example, recklessly attacking a general's vanguard can be suicidal, but the disruption to enemy plans could be enough to turn the tide of battle. (Of course, it is a better outcome for such selfless behavior to yield both the goal and the continued survival of the samurai in question, but such is not always possible.) It is this sort of action that is most likely to lead samurai to adopt the Stance of Fire and charge into action without heeding their own lives. Likewise, in some situations a samurai may face a situation in which there is literally no chance of survival, and will use the Stance of Fire to try to take as many of his foes with him into Meido as he can.

It may also be noted that failure is not tolerated at all in Rokugan. A daring and fearless samurai who places crushing his enemies over his own survival plays a dangerous game. Enemies and allies both will scorn samurai who die for seemingly nothing, abandoning their duty to their lord in favor of mindless brute aggression. Many samurai of poor intellect or failed planning have attempted to claim glory through a foolish attack, only to become another in a long list of names that are at best simply ignored, at worst reviled and used as an example of improper and wasteful behavior.

With all of this in mind, it is easy to forget that the Full Attack Stance does not preclude a calculated, controlled strike or a calm mind. Intelligent warriors know how to take advantage of their speed or of an unaware opponent, striking quickly and ignoring their own defense when they are certain an opponent will have no chance to strike back. The Stance of Fire is not always one of the raging, rampaging berserker – it can also be a tool, one of many employed by a competent warrior who knows when the time is right to use each of them.



Fire-Based L5R Campaigns

In the previous two books of this series we have discussed ways in which the Elemental philosophy of each book could influence the type of campaign and the GM'ing style of L5R games. An improvisational and flexible style is associated with Air, while a more extensively planned-out style with an emphasis on detail is associated with Earth. But even with these two approaches, sometimes an adventure needs an injection of excitement, something to get the blood pumping. Something spontaneous.

Most role-playing games seek to convey at least some moments of fast action and high drama, but building one's entire campaign around the concept of a fast-paced aggressive game, focusing on emotional highs and dramatic intensity over nuance and mechanics, can bring these exciting aspects to the forefront. This methodology is in tune with the Elemental aspect of Fire.

Fire-based games are inspired by the Japanese narrative structure known as *Jo-ha-kyu*. As noted in Chapter Five's discussion of poetry, this is a concept meaning "beginning, breaking, rapid end," describing what they believed was the ideal "tempo" for any storytelling or performance medium. Historically, the concept originated in Noh theater but eventually influenced almost every performing or literary art in their culture (even martial arts). The idea is that in any form of expression, the tempo should begin slowly, speed up gradually through the entire performance, and then end abruptly. In Noh theater, this referred to three specific stages of the performance medium:

- The *Jo*, or beginning, introduced the characters and the setting, taking an easy pace.
- The *Ha*, sometimes referred to as the "scattering," introduced the story's main complication and the character interactions. Plot elements were brought up abruptly but naturally, as a consequence of each character's differences and choices.
- The *Kyu*, or rapid end, was where all the story elements came together and concluded urgently, ending at the apex of the story and the height of all the drama. The surprisingly sudden ending would echo in the minds of the observers.

GM'ing in the manner of Fire seeks to emulate this style of narrative storytelling. It is as much a style as it is a GM philosophy, one that rewards players for quick decisions and incorporates spontaneous introduction of story elements. It relies on building tempo; the game begins slow, setting the stage for the adventure to come. Then comes the catalyst that lights the flame, the adventure hook. From this point, the pace of the game increases, with elements that would normally slow down the story being cast aside in favor of rising tension and excitement. Spontaneous elements and revelations bring the players to the finale, where the final confrontation or decision leaves an abrupt – but hopefully satisfying – conclusion.

At the heart of this approach are two aspects: the tempo, which we will explain in a moment, and spontaneity, which keeps the plot unpredictable and the players guessing.

Spontaneity in gaming can take the form of plot twists, unexpected turns in the direction of the narrative that complicate the plot. They can be almost anything: a piece of new information that changes the character's goals or provides a revelation, a sudden reversal of fortune (a samurai's actions often have unforeseen consequences), or the introduction of an entirely new plot element.

One should be careful not to confuse being spontaneous with merely improvising. Improvising an entire session is much closer to the realm of Air than it is Fire. Spontaneity, on the other hand, refers to the abrupt introduction of plot elements or complications. For example, suppose the PCs have been selected to lead an army against their clan's enemies. For days they have organized their approach, and now they stand at their enemies' gates, two forces opposing one another. Suddenly a herald arrives from the Imperial Capital, carrying a declaration from the Emperor that all fighting cease at once.



A less extreme example is the abrupt introduction of a new character, perhaps one who directly conflicts with the PC's goals. One can plan for such things or even foreshadow them long before they come about; what is important is that the new element is introduced abruptly, provides a revelation, and impacts the story immediately.

The key to making this approach work organically, as opposed to seeming like a practice in randomness, is giving the "Fire" plenty of fuel with which to burn. Set a strong foundation for your game and opportunities for spontaneous action will often provide themselves. Understand where your game is set, who is there, what kind of people they are, and what their motivations are. This is easier if you keep the scope narrow, like one castle or one village, and take the time to really flesh out the NPCs to the players. Let them explore the setting in detail. Once you have really set the stage, once you have thoroughly gathered your kindling, then you can start playing with Fire.

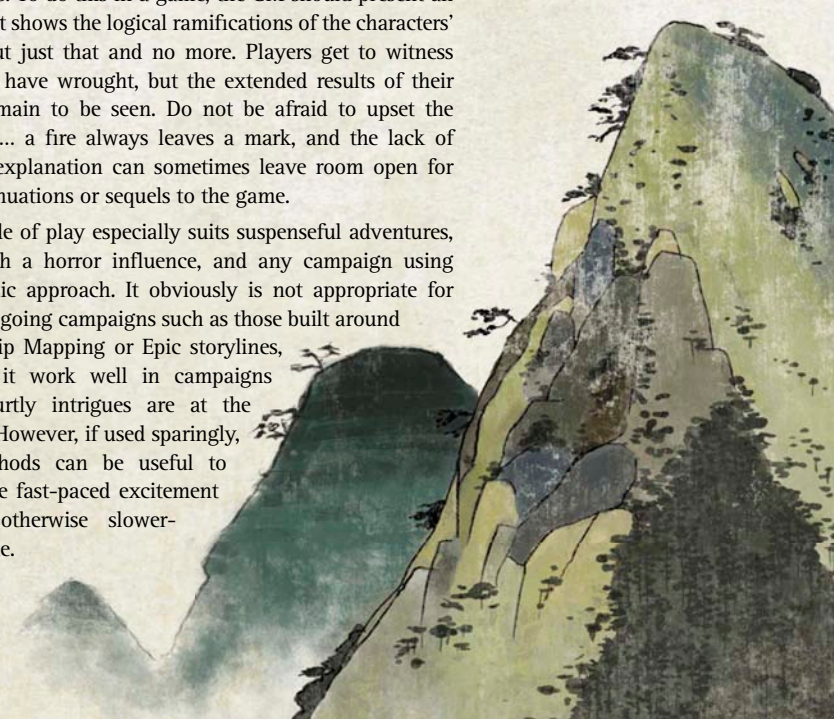
It is important to prevent letting a spontaneous introduction seem too random. If you have established that such a thing is possible through your earlier set-up, players will be able to suspend their disbelief when a surprise actually happens. Suddenly encountering a gaki in the hallways of an Imperial court is simply a random freak occurrence; imply long beforehand that a man died terribly in this hall, and the appearance seems less random – but just as abrupt. It can be a challenge to surprise players organically within the confines of the narrative, but the results are rewarding and worth the effort. In the words of Musashi, you should investigate this thoroughly.

Another consideration is the tempo of the game. To make this style work most effectively, once the plot is established the GM must keep things moving quickly. Keep dice rolling to a minimum; it breaks the tempo to have to pause for any reason. Combat should be quick, short, intense, and deadly. Avoid big confrontations that bog the session down. Instead, pepper the session with small, brutal, fast-paced conflicts. Keep the stakes high. Let yourself be drawn into the narrative as it picks up and watch as it rubs off on your players.

This approach also requires player cooperation, particularly a willingness to set aside carefully planning and tactical nuance in favor of allowing themselves to get caught up in the moment, to cast aside strategies and schemes and just play from their gut. "Play fast and make mistakes" should be the motto. Before each session begins, remind the players that samurai trust their *haragei*, their gut instincts, and even a moment's hesitation can separate them from victory.

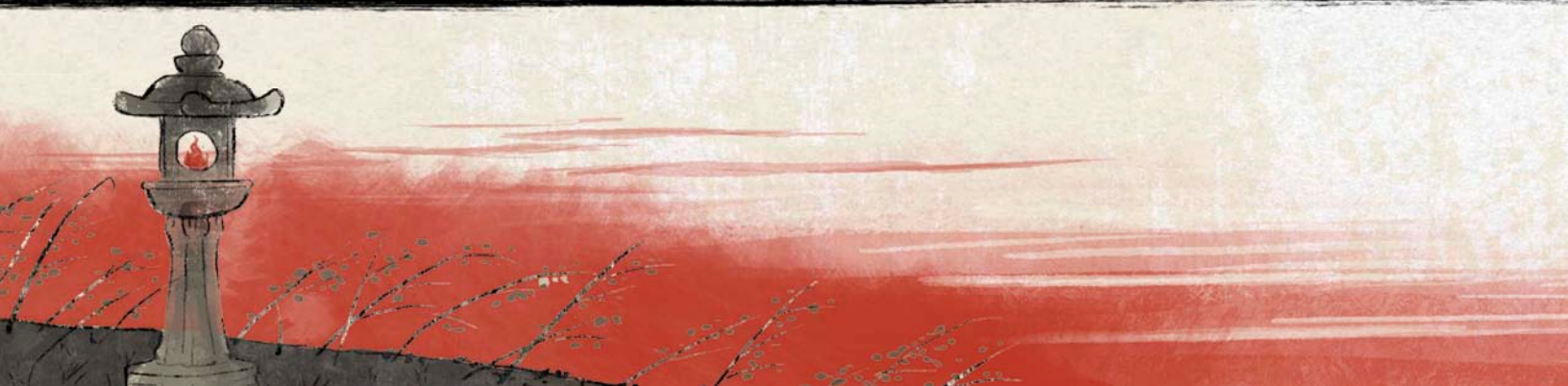
Some final consideration should be paid to the ending of the game. In this style of play, the "Fire" is extinguished quickly in a sudden conclusion. Note that "sudden" does not mean "without resolution," rather that the resolution should come about swiftly. Examples of this are plentiful in samurai cinema. Akira Kurosawa's famous movie *Seven Samurai* (1954) spends very little time on its ending compared to its long build-up. Similarly, his movie *Yojimbo* (1961) presents its violent conclusion in a single one-minute shot. Masaki Kobayashi's *Hara-Kiri* (1962) likewise ends abruptly and without showing the aftermath of the movie's events; even so, it ends with a nearly identical shot as the one at the beginning. The idea is that the ending should make sense in spite of its abruptness, and be satisfying despite its suddenness. To do this in a game, the GM should present an ending that shows the logical ramifications of the characters' actions, but just that and no more. Players get to witness what they have wrought, but the extended results of their actions remain to be seen. Do not be afraid to upset the status quo... a fire always leaves a mark, and the lack of extended explanation can sometimes leave room open for later continuations or sequels to the game.

This style of play especially suits suspenseful adventures, games with a horror influence, and any campaign using the Episodic approach. It obviously is not appropriate for lengthy ongoing campaigns such as those built around Relationship Mapping or Epic storylines, nor does it work well in campaigns where courtly intrigues are at the forefront. However, if used sparingly, these methods can be useful to inject some fast-paced excitement into an otherwise slower-paced game.





Chapter One THE FIRES OF WAR





THE FIRES OF WAR



"This is narrow alley for one of your stature."

"Ujina-san, I grow tired of you hounding my steps," Daidoji Hideaki snapped. His hair was loose and shone as white as the accents on his kimono. It was an elegant fabric, flowing around his body more like liquid than cloth. He towered over the Hare bushi, his stature and broad physique intimidating in the confines of the side-street. "We will have plenty of time in the court tomorrow to discuss the Hare Clan's petty trade disputes. What is your business with me here?"

"I would be remiss not to offer my services as an escort through these narrow streets, Daidoji Hideaki-san. Rumors have it that opium dealers populate this district," Ujina Goro said with a smile. He was slim and of modest height; in most circumstances few would find him threatening, or indeed notice him at all. The sort of man easily overlooked in a crowded street.

The Crane's face twisted into a snarl. "Speak plainly if you are making an accusation."

"It is not my place to comment on your habits, Crane." Goro's voice was still as calm as a cloudless sky, but he looked pointedly at the angry trembling of Hideaki's hands. "Though I am sure others would not be so charitable as I."

Hideaki's face tightened with the rage of a trapped rat. "I will suffer no such insult from a man of the minor clans, Hare. Your blood or your apology." The Crane's hand went to the hilt of his katana, but then seemed to hesitate for a moment, as though groping for the weapon.


"Do you need another draught of Liquid Void before you can draw?" Goro's calm changed to mockery, showing his teeth in a self-satisfied grin.

Hideaki's eyes went wide and he ripped his sword free in the single strike of iaijutsu for which the Crane were so praised. In the clutter of the narrow alley, the tip of his saya knocked against a pile of baskets and sent them sprawling across the ground. Like a stone dropped into a placid lake, his moment of grace was interrupted and his focus lost.

Ujina Goro leaped into the gap in the Crane's moment. His knife came free of his sleeve and he slashed at Hideaki's sword-hand, nearly severing the thumb. The Crane uttered a strangled cry as his half-completed draw turned ugly and useless. Goro's knife struck again, severing the tendon in Hideaki's bicep. The muscle constricted into a tight ball beneath the skin, leaving the larger man hunched over in useless pain. His katana clattered as it landed on the floor of the alleyway.

Hideaki dropped to his knees, clutching his crippled right arm with his left hand. In his staring eyes, the glaze of Liquid Void was giving way to shock and realization. Ujina Goro smiled at the man and wiped his knife on the shoulder of his perfect blue-and-white kimono. Bloodstains were so hard to get out of such expensive fabric.

He walked down the alley, calling over his shoulder, "I will enjoy hearing you explain your injury in court tomorrow, Hidaeki-san."



The History of Kenjutsu

Kenjutsu is a general term that encompasses all techniques used to fight with the sword, and is not specifically relegated to one school or one clan, nor is it dominated by one particular approach in the manner that the Crane dominate the iaijutsu art. Consequently, it is difficult to provide a definitive history of swordsmanship in Rokugan. All of the clans and families have their own styles, honed over the centuries since the dawn of the Empire. Indeed, in modern times almost every samurai learns the rudimentary basics of kenjutsu; only the most pacifistic of shugenja and courtiers refrain from studying this fundamental fighting art.

The people who became the Rokugani were already fighting with swords before the Kami fell, and indeed had been doing so for as long as swords had ever existed. Although the early swords were often clumsy or crude in their design, and were more likely to be made from bronze or iron than from steel, some of the tribes had already begun to develop basic sword-fighting techniques. Little is known about most of these, since in many cases the tribes were wiped out or their fighting practices were replaced by those of the Kami. Since there were almost no written records at the time, it is impossible to know what most of these techniques were like. However, at least some of them eventually made their way into the Empire as the foundational training of certain family schools, such as the Matsu and, of course, the Kakita and Mirumoto.

When the Kami fell to earth and began organizing their followers into clans, they brought with them their own swords and their unique styles of combat. They taught these styles to their followers and in this way formed many of the original bushi schools of the Empire. Each school was, of course, a reflection of its founder. Akodo taught his people a style based on precision and immense but controlled power, Shiba taught a defensive style that called on inner harmony, Bayushi taught a style based on deception and trickery (such as standing with the left foot forward to conceal the hands), and so forth. These styles, and the handful of others developed by the greatest mortal followers of the Kami, became the foundations of kenjutsu as it exists in the Empire today. Over time, they evolved and adapted to new learning and new enemies, and later generations of warriors developed their own schools of fighting. Founders of Minor Clans often went to great efforts to create their own schools and set themselves apart from their clan of origin, and sometimes a proud samurai would create a new fighting style solely in order to distinguish himself. But all of them trace their origins back to the foundational kenjutsu teachings of the dawn of the Empire.

One cannot talk about the early history of kenjutsu without mentioning the two treatises on swordsmanship which originated in that era: Kakita's *The Sword* and Mirumoto's *Niten* (the latter actually completed by Mirumoto's adopted son, Mirumoto Hojatsu). Interestingly, both of these works were written by mortals rather than by the Kami. Both discuss kenjutsu, presenting their author's views (both philosophical and practical) on how the sword

Fire and the Way of Kenjutsu

“When the decision to attack has been made, embrace the fire and strike from it. In this way you shall unbalance your enemy. You can seem strong and keep the fire in reserve, overwhelming him at the moment of striking. Or you can overwhelm your opponent from beginning to end while embracing the fire. Your enemy will know defeat before the first blow is struck.”
– Niten

The Element of Fire embodies both destruction and creation, and this is also the essence of the art of kenjutsu, the premier fighting form of Rokugan. Unlike iaijutsu, which begins and ends in an instant of speed and violence, kenjutsu often begins small and builds until the practitioner is an unstoppable force of destruction. Unlike an iaijutsu artist, who is a marvel to behold but only for the brief moment he is in action, a kenjutsu master can sustain his art over the course of an entire battle so long as he has fuel to burn – his own energy and a sufficiency of opponents to face. But while it deals death, kenjutsu is also an art of creation; it is justly said the katana is the weapon that built the Empire. It was the use of superior swords and swordsmanship that allowed the early Rokugani to defeat those tribes who did not wish to join the nascent Empire. The katana and the study of kenjutsu also allowed members of the original tribes of the Empire to have a common martial “vocabulary,” helping to draw them together into a single people. Samurai wore katana to show they were samurai. Kenjutsu became one of the cornerstones on which Rokugan built its sense of unity and identity.

While the iaijutsu duel is officially considered the correct way to settle a clash of honor between samurai, far more conflicts are actually decided by a clash of blades than by a swift draw in a formal dueling ring. Iaijutsu is strict and ritualized, while kenjutsu is the true free-form fighting of the battlefield; small wonder the Lion often prefer to resolve their own rivalries with kenjutsu fights.



should be used and how swordsmanship should be taught. Kakita's *The Sword* focuses primarily on his philosophy of "one sword, one strike" and the dueling technique of *iaijutsu* based on that philosophy. Niten focuses almost exclusively on *kenjutsu*, largely on the *nitēn* "two sword" style, but also includes more general musings on philosophy and the nature of combat. Together, these two works encapsulate the two most influential approaches to *kenjutsu* from the Empire's early days, and embody the Crane-Dragon rivalry in swordsmanship and dueling which has continued into modern times.

Kenjutsu Training

Six-year-old Ichiro followed his father across the sand-covered courtyard. They stopped before a building and Ichiro's father said, "Wait here, and do not touch anything." Ichiro bowed as his father entered the building, sliding the door shut behind him.

The boy waited for almost five minutes before he gave in to the urge to explore. As he crossed the courtyard, he came to a line of twelve young men and women, all holding wooden swords. They were going through the same movements in unison, over and over again. Ichiro watched for a time, but eventually he became bored and wandered off in search of something more interesting.

When he and his father left, Ichiro asked a question. "Why were those students doing the same thing over and over? That's not how you swordfight."

His father chuckled. "No, little one, that is not how you fight. That is how you learn to fight."

Ichiro frowned. "It seems pretty boring."

His father's chuckle turned to an outright laugh. "Does it? We shall see. And now, why were you looking at the students instead of waiting where I asked?"

Mirumoto Ichiro slipped and almost lost his footing in the blood-soaked mud. He recovered with frantic haste, moving forward into the thick of the fighting. The battle had been going on for hours, and Crane had nearly broken through the Dragon lines several times, but each time they had been thrown back. Now rumors were spreading

WHY KENJUTSU?

Why would a warrior culture focus on a single short-range weapon the way the Rokugani do? What is it about the katana that makes it both the primary tool for dueling and the primary tool for battlefield combat? There are many other weapons which might make more sense as the primary weapons of the battlefield: spears and polearms offer a reach advantage over katana, while archery allows a warrior to kill his foe before he comes into arm's reach. So why do the Rokugani so venerate the art of *kenjutsu*?

The answer may lie in the fact that the Kami themselves used swords when they first came to the earth. They fought with them, settled their disputes with them (including the dispute over who would rule the Empire itself), and soon enough they taught their followers to use them as well. Since that time, an almost cult-like dedication to the art of *kenjutsu* has taken root within the Empire. The katana has become the symbol of a samurai's place within the Celestial Wheel, and swords are revered and passed down from generation to generation. *Kenjutsu* has such a following that samurai write books praising the importance of the sword and deliberately discounting the value of other weapons in favor of the katana. This "Cult of the Sword" is not a phenomenon based on the practical value of the sword relative to other weapons, but rather is based – like so much of Rokugani culture – on unquestioning adherence to tradition.



through the lines: the Crane were sending their kenshinzen out into the battlefield to challenge the Dragon officers and destroy their army's order.

Ichiro looked down at his own rank insignia, shook his head, and moved forward.

A single Crane broke through the lines, his katana wet with the blood of Dragon samurai. He caught Ichiro's gaze and grinned, waving his blade toward the open ground in front of him. Ichiro did not hesitate; he stepped forward as the Crane shook the blood off his katana and then sheathed





the blade. The two samurai fell into their stances, the battle around them raging undiminished yet leaving the duel unmolested.

A moment passed, then the Crane tried to draw his katana. His saya was fouled with blood and his hand slipped on the hilt.

A decade before, Ichiro had watched a dozen children perform the same basic kata over and over again. Now he performed it without thought, and the Crane fell into the mud, his blood mixing with the blood of hundreds of other dead.

Virtually every samurai in the Empire has had some form of kenjutsu training. Most Rokugani children – even most peasant children – play at swordfighting with sticks as soon as they can walk, and in some families they are gifted with small practice blades once they are strong enough to carry them. Samurai children grow up dreaming of being famous duelists or battlefield generals who can cut down their enemies with single swing of their katana. This childhood practicing rarely has much practical value, but it does keep the cult of the sword alive in the hearts of every generation of Rokugani.

Kenjutsu training takes many years. A katana requires special skills and a certain amount of finesse to use without hurting oneself and to wield in a way that will not get one killed in the very first battle. More than most weapons, katana can be just as dangerous to their wielder as they are to his enemies.

EARLY TRAINING

Kenjutsu is taught to beginners using a series of traditional forms or *kata*, each focusing on a different movement of the katana that might be used in battle. Each *kata* has been passed down from instructor to student for generations immemorial, and occasionally new *kata* are devised; each bushi school has *kata* unique to its training, since each school focuses upon different movements and different ways of using the katana in battle. For example, the Crane tend to build their *kata* around the *iaijutsu* strike which is at the heart of their combat approach, while the Matsu focus almost exclusively on aggressive attack moves and teach their *kata* accordingly.

There are a number of basic *kata*, however, which every student learns in every school. They help the student to develop confidence while swinging a katana and also form the muscle memory that allows a trained samurai to fight without thought and react instantly to his foes. These basic *kata* are the foundation of all other advanced forms, and teach the students to do things like draw a katana safely (which is harder than it sounds) and make the basic motions of striking and deflecting blows.

Kenjutsu is founded on six basic techniques, drawing, footwork, cutting, thrusting, feigning, and deflecting. The basic *kata* each student learns are designed to condition the body and mind to perform each of these actions reliably and without thought.

Drawing *kata* focus on freeing the sword from its saya in a swift and decisive motion, while sheathing *kata* teach the student to return the blade to its home without missing the saya or cutting his hand. (Typically, the student uses his thumb against the back of the blade to guide the sword into the saya.) These *kata* are quite simple, but also extremely important (especially in the Crane Clan), since they form the basis of the advanced *kata* which are later introduced when the student begins to study *iaijutsu*.

Footwork *kata* are often exaggerated and broad. The movements which students make in these *kata* are much larger than would be in actual usage, and serve to teach the students how to place their feet so as to maintain their balance and improve their flexibility. Because a stable posture is needed to swing a katana effectively, it is vital to teach the student how to be secure in his footing regardless of circumstance. A key aspect of kenjutsu footing is to keep the feet close to the ground, often resulting in a “shuffling” gait that can look humorous to an outside observer – until the bushi shuffles up to him in battle, sword at the ready. Basic footwork *kata* are taught before any of the major attack *kata*, since the student must learn to place his feet properly before he can be balanced enough to place his sword where it is needed.

The basic attack *kata* teach students to use the entirety of the sword to harm their opponent. The primary method of attack with a katana is the cut, and there are three main forms of cutting attacks taught. The basic overhead cut, the most fundamental of all attack forms, starts with the katana in an overhead position with the sword perfectly horizontal and its blade-edge pointed up. The student swings the blade out, almost like casting a fishing rod, by pulling with the left hand at the bottom of the hilt and guiding the strike with the right hand near the top of the hilt. Ideally, the blade makes contact with the head or shoulder of the opponent and then simply drops down, cutting as it goes, until it stops at a waist-height horizontal position. (A common mistake among beginning students is to use too much force with the right hand, which is supposed to simply guide the blade.)

The second attack form is the *yoko giri* or “side cut.” This form starts with the blade facing out horizontally to the right and behind the student’s body. The blade is swung forward horizontally across the body, again levered by the left hand and guided by the right, until it makes contact with the target and cuts through to the other side.

The third and most advanced of the basic attack forms is the *kesa giri* or “shoulder cut.” This is a vertical cut to the right side of the shoulder; it begins in the same position as the basic overhead cut, but swings on a slightly diagonal path and makes contact with the target at the moment of full extension of both arms, allowing it to cut at an angle through the target’s torso. The swing is halted by the student’s elbows touching his body, and the blade finishes in a position below the horizontal.

Although these three cutting forms are the most important and widely taught attack *kata*, students are also taught thrusting *kata* that drive the point of the blade into the body, both short jabs that seek to wound an opponent and full thrusts that drive through the torso. Although the

katana is primarily a cutting blade, the chisel-point of the sword can be used effectively to stab, and learning these techniques helps students to fight in situations where there is not room to properly swing.

Feinting *kata* are relatively few in number, but no school neglects to teach them, not even those of the most honorable clans. Although kenjutsu is seen as an intrinsically honorable form of combat, it does make use of deception tactics. After all, since everyone learns the same basic *kata*, fights could potentially become endless stalemates if everyone fought in the same straight-forward way. Thus kenjutsu students are taught basic feints, feigning that they are cutting or thrusting when they are not so as to throw their opponents off guard. (It is interesting to note that because most kenjutsu training makes significant use of feigning strikes, those schools which focus purely on direct attack – such as the Matsu Berserkers – can sometimes beat their opponents by mounting attacks which would be feints from other swordsmen but in their case are direct strikes.)

Deflection *kata* teach students to turn away the blows of their opponents. Parrying edge-to-edge is very unwise with katana, since the stresses of such blows tend to chip or even shatter the blades; thus, defensive *kata* instead focus on deflecting blows to the side. The preferred move is to hold the sword with the hilt raised above the head and the blade slanted down across the body, allowing enemy overhead blows to be “shed” off to the side. Advanced versions of these *kata* also teach students how to deflect side cuts and how to follow up a deflection with a counterattack.

TRAINING TOOLS

Students usually practice their attack *kata* against targets made from rolled bamboo mats that have been soaked with water to make them springy; they may also practice against bamboo poles. Initially, a student will train primarily with a wooden practice sword called a *bokken*, or a bundle of bound bamboo slats called a *shinai*. The *bokken* approximates the weight of a katana and is thus a better choice for learning *kata*, but a *shinai* can strike someone safely while also inflicting a sharp pain, allowing students to feel the cost of their mistakes without suffering serious injury.

Advanced kenjutsu students are often issued unsharpened steel blades called *iaito* to use in practice, gradually moving from those to fully-sharpened katana as their skills improve. Because there is always a chance someone will get hurt when using live steel, samurai often continue to use *bokken* or *shinai* when performing two-man *kata* or sparring, even later on in their lives after they have departed their dojo.





MY GRANDFATHER'S SWORD

A katana is more than just a tool of war for a samurai; it is also a symbolic representation of his soul. Even the simplest katana is extremely well crafted (and extremely expensive). The best katana can be used for generations without deteriorating, and even the worst blades will last for years or even decades. Because they are so valuable, katana are passed down from generation to generation, and the samurai of each subsequent generation are said to be carrying the soul and honor of the family when they pick up their family's katana.

There is a problem with this tradition, however: most samurai families have multiple children, and one cannot pass down a single sword to different people. In addition, with steady use even the finest and most carefully maintained swords will eventually become too fragile to be used in battle (unless their spirits awaken and they become *nemuranai*). As result of these realities, the passing down of the "family sword" has become more symbolic than real for many of Rokugan's samurai. Most samurai who complete their gempukku are given a newly forged blade; they are told that through this blade, their "grandfather's sword," they carry the honor and soul of their family. Only the eldest in each family inherits the family's true ancestral sword. Thus, in most cases it is not the blade itself that is each samurai's "grandfather's sword," but rather the traditions and burdens the blade carries with it.



BOKKEN

A bokken resembles a katana in size and weight, but is carved from solid wood, allowing it to only deliver bludgeoning attacks. Bokken are normally used only for training, but they are solid enough to genuinely hurt opponents, and there are a few legends of samurai who have dueled with wooden swords or used them on the battlefield.

- 🌀 **Keyword:** Samurai
- 🌀 **DR:** 0k2
- 🌀 **Special:** Reduction from armor is doubled against a bokken.

SHINAI

A shinai is a bundle of bamboo slats tied together at several points along its length, allowing it to loosely model the size and shape of a sword. Shinai are light and fast, but inflict only a superficial bruise when they strike.

- 🌀 **Keyword:** Samurai
- 🌀 **DR:** 0k1
- 🌀 **Special:** A shinai's damage dice cannot explode.

Kenjutsu Schools

A samurai's training often begins before he is admitted into his clan's school. Many samurai parents teach their children when they are younger in order to help them prepare for entering the clan's schools for formal training. Others do not have the time to train their own children but enlist private sensei to teach them the rudiments of kenjutsu. In every city there are a few private schools, often run by retired clan samurai or skilled ronin. These schools generally only teach their students the basics, enough to give them a leg up in the far more prestigious clan schools, but on occasion some of these basic kenjutsu schools gains their own prestige and notoriety and are able to enroll more advanced students.

Each clan has its own schools of kenjutsu and each school has its own traditions and methods. For some, kenjutsu is purely a matter of practicality, while for other clans it is focused more on pride and tradition.

The Crab Clan

The Crab Clan is well known for its reliance on heavy weapons, especially when battling against the creatures of the Shadowlands. Much of the Empire believes this is because the Crab do not want to sully the honor of their katana when fighting against the unnatural creatures offered up by the Shadowlands. The truth is a little more pragmatic: heavy weapons just work better than katana for killing Shadowlands monsters.

The Crab do, however, train extensively in kenjutsu. Some of them do so to be better with the mighty no-dachi, others because they believe it would be inappropriate to use heavy weapons when fighting with human foes. More generally, all Crab believe they must be prepared to kill their foes with whatever weapon comes to hand, and since every bushi carries swords it is obviously useful to know how to use them. On the relatively rare occasions when the Crab Clan has waged war within the Empire itself, its warriors have shown they understand kenjutsu as well as any other bushi in Rokugan.

The Hida family favors a kenjutsu style that is not dissimilar from that of the Lion Clan's Matsu Berserkers. They prefer strength over finesse and try to overwhelm their opponents with brutal attacks and intimidating force of will, relying on their armor to protect them rather than bothering to deflect enemy blows. The Hiruma family, on the other hand, tends to favor speed over force and prefers to employ a swift and balanced form of kenjutsu, wearing down their foes until they can finish them off. Finally, the Yasuki and Kaiu usually practice very traditional forms of kenjutsu that would not be out of place in most of the Empire.



The Crane Clan

“Men will lie to you. Your eyes will deceive you. Steel never lies, nor deceives, nor hides bitter reality. In the sword, you can find truth.” – Kakita’s The Sword

The Crane are the undisputed masters of iaijutsu, but they do not neglect more conventional kenjutsu training within their clan. While the Kakita focus their regimen very heavily on the perfection of iaijutsu’s single strike, spending the majority of their training time practicing it, they do study the other forms of swordfighting as well. After all, not every duel ends with the initial strike, and on the battlefield there is not always time or opportunity to observe the forms of dueling. Naturally, the Kakita learn a style of kenjutsu that relies upon their superior speed to defeat their foe.

The Daidoji family, on the other hand, focuses itself on kenjutsu and treats iaijutsu as a secondary pursuit at best, recognizing that all too many battles cannot be won with a single strike. The Daidoji are more than just yojimbo who follow the Doji through the palaces of the Empire; they are also the primary martial arm of the Crane Clan. Indeed, there are more Daidoji in the armies of the Crane than there are samurai of any other Crane family... and on the battlefield, kenjutsu is king.

The Daidoji learn two different styles of kenjutsu depending upon their particular duty to their family. Those who train as rank-and-file soldiers learn traditional kenjutsu with an emphasis on techniques which allow them to coordinate their efforts with multiple allies. Those Daidoji who train as yojimbo, however, learn a more defensive form of kenjutsu. They are taught to delay their opponents and draw out battles so as to let their charges escape. Thus, where the Kakita’s kenjutsu is like a swift-burning brush fire, the Daidoji’s is the smoldering coals at the end of a night; they may not seem so dangerous, but they are hotter than the fire which spawned them.

The Dragon Clan

“When fighting one against many, draw both swords and meet first those who would attack first.” – Niten

The warriors of the Dragon Clan study kenjutsu obsessively. To the Dragon, kenjutsu is more than just the techniques used to fight with a katana, it is a source of identity and a deep point of pride. They are very conscious of the fact that their Mirumoto Bushi School is one of only three schools of mortal swordsmanship which can trace its origins to the time before the Kami (the other two being the Matsu and Kakita forms). And they are extremely proud of the fact that out of all the schools of swordsmanship in the Empire, only their *niten* style can stand alongside the Kakita school as pre-eminent in dueling.

The Mirumoto family is the largest group of samurai in the clan and its kenjutsu studies rely very heavily on the ancient *niten* style and its variants, although over the centuries a small number of Mirumoto have chosen to focus instead on the quest for enlightenment through swordsmanship (the so-called Taoist Swordsmen). The



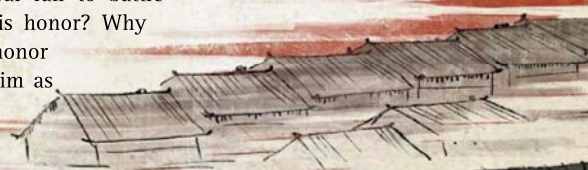
Kitsuki tend to practice a style of kenjutsu that combines traditional forms with the mindset of *niten*, allowing them to perform their duties while holding on to something which makes them distinctly Dragon. Both the Agasha and the later Tamori family have often trained martial shugenja who fight alongside the Mirumoto and thus learn the ways of kenjutsu; however, since they must be able to cast spells on the battlefield, they generally focus on a simpler and more traditional form of kenjutsu rather than learning the two-bladed *niten* style.

NITEN: THE WAY OF TWO-SWORDS KENJUTSU

“A samurai’s duty is to protect his lord. Are they so simple-minded that they cannot see that two swords serve their lord better than one?” – Mirumoto

At the Dawn of the Empire, when Kakita established iaijutsu as the way true samurai should settle their differences, there were still a few men and women who believed their own way of fighting was superior to his. One of those few was Mirumoto Hojatsu, the adopted son of Mirumoto himself. After Kakita published *The Sword*, his famous treatise on swordsmanship and the art of iaijutsu, Hojatsu replied some years later with his own treatise, an expansion of his father’s writings entitled *Niten* (“two heavens” or “two swords fall from heaven”). These two very different philosophies about the art of swordplay made these men lifelong (albeit ultimately respectful) rivals, and eventually resulted in their killing one another in an inconclusive duel to determine which style was superior.

Hojatsu’s style of fighting was a refinement of the basic forms which Mirumoto had developed prior to the First War. It relied upon the samurai using his katana and his wakizashi together, both in battle and in duels. Symbolically, why would a samurai fail to battle his foes with both his soul and his honor? Why fight with only his soul, when his honor could act as a shield and defend him as





NITEN AND DUELING

"I do not believe I can win, I know I will." – Niten

The *niten* style's approach to dueling is very different from that of the Kakita and the other schools which imitate the Kakita style. The Mirumoto believe that relying solely on the speed of the first strike is limiting rather than superior. They will concede that a Crane can probably strike faster than they can, but believe the speed of a single strike is irrelevant to a superior swordsman. A duel is settled by who survives, not by who struck more quickly. As Mirumoto himself wrote: "Proof is in the killing."

Crane iaijutsu is essentially an internal art. The duelist must master himself and his reactions in order to perform the perfect strike. A *niten* practitioner, by contrast, believes he must master not just himself but also his opponent in order to win. Mirumoto Hojatsu perfected this approach in the final years of his life, in preparation for his famous duel with Kakita, and his insights have been passed down to modern generations. A true student of Hojatsu's legacy will use his own mind and aggression – his Fire, both mental and physical – to dominate his opponent, striking before his foe imagines he could be ready. As Hojatsu wrote: "Watch your opponent carefully. If you watch he will reveal his timing to you. Strike when his timing does not allow him to act. Strike when your opponent believes you cannot." And when the *niten* duelist strikes, he does so not with the swiftness of Air but with the violence and ferocity of Fire.

The Lion Clan

"To defend is to be hopeful. To attack is to be victorious." – Akodo's Leadership

The Lion Clan studies and relies upon traditional kenjutsu more than almost any other clan. When the rest of the Empire wishes to learn about the fundamental truths of kenjutsu, they look to the Lion for guidance. However, even within the traditional Lion there are two approaches to the way of swordsmanship. The Akodo teach a very controlled, precise, and strictly traditional style of kenjutsu pioneered by the clan's founding Kami. It is based on rigid forms, relentless practice, and precisely accurate strikes. The Matsu, on the other hand, teach their own founder's form of kenjutsu, which is based around raw aggression and overcoming foes with sheer violence.

The Akodo family study kenjutsu in much the same way they study battlefield tactics: exhaustively. They practice more than any other school, and teach their students to perform their kata so flawlessly that their minds are free to observe their opponents. Akodo like to gauge their foes before a fight begins, so as to ascertain the best combination of kata and maneuvers to use against them. Once engaged in a skirmish, an Akodo will often be planning two or three maneuvers ahead of his foes, setting up the precise moment to deliver the decisive blow. Akodo kenjutsu can be described as a slow burning flame that waits until the right moment, then explodes and instantly engulfs the foe.

well? Hojatsu's book was swiftly embraced by all of his followers, and *niten* became the exclusive fighting style of the Dragon Clan for many years (it would be many centuries before the Taoist Swordsmen would emerge as a secondary tradition within the Mirumoto family).

The rest of the Empire did not initially react well to *Niten* or the methods it espoused. Mirumoto himself in his younger days had earned something of a reputation as a bully and a braggart, and while Hojatsu was more refined than his adoptive father he was no less proud or aggressive. Kakita and his followers were initially disgusted by the *niten* style and dubbed it the "Coward's Way"; they believed only a coward would need to shield himself with a second sword, whereas a truly skilled swordsman could defeat a foe with a single strike. However, Kakita himself came to personally respect Hojatsu before their mutual death, and as the centuries passed and the Dragon proved themselves time and again to be honorable and courageous warriors, the stigma surrounding *niten* gradually lessened. In the modern Empire, while the rivalry between the Kakita and Mirumoto styles remains as fervent as ever, *niten* is no longer considered scandalous – it is simply another example of the odd way the Dragon do things.

Niten is taught in a manner similar to the way other styles of kenjutsu are taught: the students learn basic kata and then move on to advanced techniques. However, they are taught from the very beginning to fight with both swords instead of a single katana. Contrary to popular opinion, the *niten* style is not focused on defense. Though the use of the wakizashi allows the student to deflect his opponents' weapons more easily, the second blade is used to attack as well as to defend. *Niten* is actually an aggressive style, focused on a mixture of anticipation and furious movement, and more than most kenjutsu forms it exemplifies the way of Fire in its inspiration and aggressiveness. Mirumoto Hojatsu himself exemplified this attitude in one of *Niten's* most famous passages: "When you engage the enemy, there are three alternatives. If he attacks first, kill him. If you attack first, kill him. If you both attack at once, kill him."



A Matsu bushi, on the other hand, might take a brief moment to look at his foe for a weak spot, then attack that spot with every fiber of his being. A Matsu in battle is a raging forest fire, a cyclone of violence and destruction. The Matsu give almost no heed to defense, and their kenjutsu training teaches only the most basic of deflection moves. After all, what need is there to defend when your opponent is already dead?

THE SWORD-SAINTS

There is an order of warriors within the Lion Clan who focus all of their energy on mastering the art of kenjutsu. These are the Kensai, the so-called “Sword-Saints” of the Akodo, known throughout the Empire for their perfect mastery of kenjutsu’s forms and stances.

Those Lion who earn an invitation to join the Kensai dojo are often shocked to discover they are still truly only novices when it comes to the art of kenjutsu. The true Sword-Saints are one with their katana, moving as though their sword is simply an extension of their arms. They study kata with an almost religious devotion, to the exclusion of all else, and when it comes time for them to fight they make the defeat of their foes seem effortless. Only the inhuman Kenku swordmasters exceed the kenjutsu skills of a Kensai, and indeed some Lion have claimed that the first Kensai sensei was trained by one of that ancient race.

The Mantis Clan

The Mantis Clan has a limited and sporadic tradition of training in kenjutsu. When the clan was founded, Kaimetsu-Uo insisted his followers continue their studies of kenjutsu as they had done when they were Crab, but in time this went by the wayside. The new Mantis Clan was a clan of sailors and mercenaries, and kenjutsu was often impractical for such men. There is not enough space on the deck of a ship for everyone to wear a long blade, let alone for everyone to swing such blades in combat. Although the Mantis still presented swords to their children at gempukku, the actual practice of training with such blades was often skipped, and most Mantis bushi left their katana on a decorative sword-rack at home. Occasionally, a Mantis daimyo would insist his samurai resume their studies of kenjutsu, but these efforts rarely outlived such daimyo’s reign.

When the Mantis Clan gained Great Clan status and absorbed the Centipede and Wasp Clans, there was a push to restore at least some focus on kenjutsu in order to prove the Mantis’ worthiness to stand alongside the other clans. Yoritomo bushi began to once again train with their katana and sometimes even to carry them, especially on land or in court (at sea, they still avoided carrying the swords, or stored them below decks). The small number of bushi in the Centipede Clan had studied a very traditional form of kenjutsu for centuries, and some of them helped to train the first generation of Yoritomo after the clans unified. The Tsuruchi also lifted their traditional ban on carrying and using the katana and even began to develop their own approach to swordsmanship, although it remained very much a minor note in their family’s training. When the

Fox Clan was absorbed into the Mantis a few decades later, the Mantis gained yet another style of kenjutsu, albeit a very basic and simple one which had never evolved into a full school.

The Phoenix Clan

Among the samurai of the Phoenix Clan it is primarily the Shiba who practice kenjutsu, although there are a handful among the Isawa and Asako who study the way of the sword as well (notably certain of the more militant Isawa Fire shugenja). Shiba kenjutsu is an extremely traditional style that has changed very little from when Shiba himself taught it to the clan at the dawn of the Empire. This is not really surprising, since the Soul of Shiba has watched over the clan throughout the centuries and personally advises every Clan Champion. The style he designed is focused on defense and tactical positioning. Shiba bushi learn more about footwork than other students of kenjutsu so as to enhance their skill as yojimbo; a Shiba bodyguard will almost always be correctly positioned to maximize his defense of his charge.

The Scorpion Clan

At the beginning of their training, Scorpion samurai are taught a very traditional form of kenjutsu. They learn the normal kata and basic strikes and deflections which every other samurai in the Empire is taught... but they learn them for different reasons, both philosophical and practical.

At the philosophical level, the Scorpion must always be outsiders, doing what the rest of the Empire cannot do, but they cannot afford to altogether lose touch with the rest of Rokugan. Teaching young Scorpions the traditional kenjutsu kata, the kata that every samurai has ever learned, the kata that Hantei and Akodo taught to their first followers, gives them a connection to the rest of Rokugan, to every other bushi in the Empire. Through that connection they gain a sense of loyalty and obligation to not only their own clan but to the Empire as well.





At the practical level, however, the Scorpion also learn the standard forms because they must know how to feign weakness and how to exploit the weaknesses of others. When the Scorpion begin their advanced training, they learn sophisticated feigning techniques – including how to make it appear that basic kata are all they know how to do. All too many bushi have imagined they were facing an unimaginative and inflexible Scorpion opponent, only to be undone at the critical moment.

Advanced Scorpion fighting techniques demonstrate the flexibility and agility of Fire over its raw aggressive aspects. Just as Fire dances and moves in response to wind and fuel, so the Scorpion learn to dance around their opponents and lead them into unwise attacks. The true Scorpion style is deliberately deceptive in almost every way, even down to such basic tricks as leading with their left foot in order to conceal their katana's hilt behind their bodies, denying their opponent the hint he might gain from seeing the position of the Scorpion's hands on that hilt. The Scorpion are also not above feigning weakness in more overt ways, such as allowing themselves to be disarmed in order to lull an opponent into a careless attack which they then defeat with a knife or a wakizashi. Similarly, a Scorpion will sometimes allow himself to be hit in a non-vital area in order to create an opening to deliver a deadlier return blow.

The Shosuro do not have a bushi school of their own, but their schools do teach a specialized form of kenjutsu to their infiltrators and assassins. They learn kata and forms which superficially resemble those of other schools, allowing them to deceive others more easily. Within the Shosuro dojo it is rumored their senior sensei can accurately replicate the kata of over a dozen other schools. The Shosuro also learn how to use katana in tight spaces, studying stabs and thrusts more than the traditional cutting strikes, and practicing alternate ways to draw their katana without the sweeping motion required by traditional forms.

The Spider Clan

Kenjutsu training within the Spider Clan is a peculiar thing. When the Spider were created they had no unified form of kenjutsu training. Lost bushi would teach other Lost to fight, different dojo competed with each other (often in the most vicious and bloodthirsty way), and the clan recruited numerous ronin who had their own individual fighting styles. It was probably only a slight exaggeration to say there were as many different fighting styles among the Spider as there were bushi.

However, after the Spider were accepted as a clan by the Empress, they began making a stronger effort to unify and standardize their martial training program. By the end of the Age of Exploration, the Spider Clan had refined its kenjutsu techniques and had a fairly uniform training program for young bushi.

Spider bushi are taught a style of kenjutsu that is violent and brutal, but less focused on pure offense than the Matsu style. Spider students are taught to believe in their ability to defeat their foe, drawing on their own inner strength to win. For some of the students, that inner force is of course the Shadowlands Taint, but for those free of Jigoku's mark the techniques can also work by drawing on each bushi's aggression and physical power.

The Unicorn Clan

Much like the Lion, the Unicorn encompass multiple types of kenjutsu within their clan, but all of their approaches are markedly different from those found in the rest of Rokugan. Oddly, in some ways Unicorn kenjutsu is more traditional than that of many other schools in the Empire, since the Unicorn still use basic kata and forms from the dawn of the Empire that have long since given way to more refined approaches in the rest of Rokugan. At the same time, however, Unicorn kenjutsu is the least traditional in the Empire, having incorporated numerous foreign styles and approaches during the eight centuries in which the clan roamed the gaijin lands. In fact, the Unicorn do not even always use katana in the swordsmanship; many of them prefer to employ the heavy scimitars of the desert peoples, which are slower but also more powerful than Rokugani swords.

The three primary kenjutsu styles of the Unicorn Clan correspond to their three warrior families: the Shinjo, the Moto, and the Utaku. The Shinjo style is the most traditional of the three, being based on the fighting style of the clan founder, but incorporates gaijin elements into its more advanced techniques. It is a very defensive style, centered around the mysterious "parry" which differs radically from conventional Rokugani deflection maneuvers. The Moto, by contrast, follow a heavily gaijin-derived style that verges on heretical, closer to the swordplay of desert nomads than to anything recognizable from within the Empire. It emphasizes broad cuts and powering through enemy defenses, and is as well-suited to fighting on horseback as to fighting on the ground. The differing styles reflect the two families' differing roles in the Unicorn armies, where the Moto form the offensive striking force while the Shinjo are employed more flexibly. Finally, the Utaku style is in some ways even more traditional than the Shinjo, but is focused very tightly on fighting from horseback – a relatively rare activity outside of the Unicorn Clan – and thus is seen by the rest of the Empire as being just as odd as the other two.

The Imperial Families

Among the Imperial families it is believed the Seppun style of kenjutsu is the most traditional and "pure" in the entire Empire, and certainly it is true that the basics of the style have not changed since the school was founded. However, the more advanced elements of the Seppun school have adapted through the centuries to better fit their role. The school has slowly developed new kata focused tightly on defense, both the defense of others and the defense of the bushi himself.



Perhaps surprisingly, the Miya have their own style of kenjutsu, a simple style that focuses on movement and the ability to disengage from a fight at a moment's notice. As the Imperial heralds, the Miya prefer simply to fight well enough to keep themselves alive and no more than that. Most of the time when a Miya finds himself in battle, his only goal will be to stay alive long enough to escape and carry on with his proper duties.

The Minor Clans

Although not all of the Minor Clans have an actual kenjutsu school, they all have at least a basic style of kenjutsu instruction. These often show subtle signs of influence from the Great Clan which supplied the Minor Clan's founding members, but there is usually a significant divergence over time, especially since most Minor Clans feel the need to develop their own identity separate from their origins. Thus, the Ox Clan (founded in the twelfth century by a group of exiles from the Unicorn) has a kenjutsu school which bears at least some resemblance to that of the Shinjo, but the far older Badger Clan shows much less lingering influence from the Crab Clan.

Although most Minor Clan kenjutsu traditions are not especially different or noteworthy, two are worth considering in more detail: the Hare and the Sparrow.

Hare Clan: The Hare Clan's form of kenjutsu is worth noting since, unlike most other Minor Clan schools, it is descended from a single ronin's technique. Hare forms emphasize quick footwork and sudden movement, relying on improbable acrobatic tricks to outmaneuver their opponents' defense and thwart their attacks. More than any other style in the Empire, it emphasizes the idea that an opponent cannot harm you if you are not where he strikes.

Sparrow Clan: The Sparrow Clan takes the unusual approach of grounding its kenjutsu training in stories. Each of their training kata has a story associated with it, and the student must be able to recite the story as he is performing the kata. When they fight, the Sparrow remember the lessons inherent in their kata and react accordingly.

Nonhuman & Gaijin Kenjutsu

For the most part, the Rokugani do not recognize the fighting styles of nonhuman races or foreign cultures as anything which they would consider "kenjutsu," and tend to dismiss such schools as lacking in any real skill. The gaijin influence on the Unicorn fighting styles is thus something of a conundrum for Rokugan, and it is common for samurai from other clans to denigrate and dismiss Unicorn kenjutsu for its "barbaric" elements. Likewise, the Rokugani have difficulty recognizing the true level of skill displayed by naga swordsmen, whose sinuous and graceful fighting style is simply incomprehensible to a samurai's eyes.

The notable exception to these tendencies, of course, is the ancient race of kenku, who the Rokugani revere both

for their association with Shinsei and for their mastery of the sword. Several of the Empire's most famous swordsmen have trained with kenku sensei, and the Crane have long claimed that Kakita learned his fighting techniques from one of that ancient race. (Whether there is any truth to this is impossible to say.) The kenku have been around for millennia longer than human beings, and since they are immortal, they have all the time they need to perfect their sword-fighting skills. Almost every experienced Kenku can be considered a swordmaster by Rokugani standards, and their style is known for being both beautiful and supremely deadly.

Fire and the Way of the Knife

Nayoko rolled her wrists, flipping both kama around her arms, showing her eagerness for battle to her crew. They stood with her at the edge of the ship, waiting for it to make contact with the opposing vessel. They had the faster ship, no surprise with a Mantis design, and within a matter of seconds they would be within boarding range. The two vessels had traded arrows earlier, but now the archers had put away their bows for weapons better suited to the desperate struggle to come.

As the prow of her ship passed before that of their prey, Nayoko hopped onto the railing and then leaped across the narrow expanse of water to land on the hostile deck. At once two men were before her, swords drawn. One chopped down at her, but the curved blade of her left-hand kama deflected the blow and she spun to the side, dancing between the two men. The second man's strike missed her and hit his comrade instead. She moved past them toward the center of their ship, opening room for the rest of her crew to board.

Nayoko was a few feet from the mast when another samurai charged her with a wordless scream of rage. She knocked the blow aside with one of her kama, but the strength of it numbed her arm and shoulder. She jumped away, dodging his second blow, retreating toward the far railing. The samurai followed, slashing at her in a rage. Then, as he raised his blade for an overhead strike to split her skull, his sword tangled in the ship's rigging.

Nayoko slid past him, slicing at the back of his legs as she moved. As he fell backwards she brought her second kama across his throat, spilling his life-blood onto the deck. Child's play, she thought. These samurai only know how to fight against other swords.

In Rokugan the sword is the dominant weapon in melee combat, and when a school chooses to emphasize another weapon it is usually something with more heft or reach than a sword, such as a spear or a





tetsubo. Consequently, most Rokugani underestimate the value of fighting with knives and other smaller blades. However, these weapons do have their place, especially in cramped situations where a larger or longer weapon can be unmanageable... such as on a ship. Unsurprisingly, the Mantis Clan is known as the main advocate of fighting with smaller blades, especially the kama which is practically iconic for Mantis warriors.

The Mantis usually fight with two kama rather than one, and a similar two-weapon style has been embraced by some of the other groups which use smaller blades, such as the Ujina. Unlike with the *niten* style of combat taught by the Dragon Clan, there is no raging debate over whether it is better to fight with one knife or two – partly because there are relatively few practitioners of such combat, and partly because the sort of samurai who fight with knives are not the types to get bogged down in philosophical debates over fighting styles.

The Art of Small-Bladed Combat

The chief disadvantage of small blades is their lack of reach. A samurai wielding a katana can usually strike his opponent before a samurai with a tanto can reach him. Larger weapons also can strike with more power, cutting or stabbing more deeply and thus bringing down an opponent more easily. However, what a knife lacks in size and power it can make up in speed and precision. A smaller blade is not only faster but also more maneuverable, and samurai who fight with such weapons are frequently a blur of activity that can barely be followed.

How does a samurai who wields a knife manage to be victorious over a samurai with a katana? Among

the Mantis, the most frequent term used is to “invade the circle.” Most weapons are at their most dangerous at the outer end of their swinging arc, where the weapons are moving fastest and most easily controlled. If a samurai can pass through this area and get within arm’s reach of his opponent, a katana becomes far less effective, and polearms and heavy weapons become almost useless. At this close range, a knife is by far the superior weapon since it can be maneuvered in very tight quarters and easily deliver a killing blow. Conversely, a samurai using a larger weapon must try to maintain his distance from his enemies, keeping them at bay and using his reach and power to his advantage.

There are differing advantages to using either a single small blade in one hand, or two blades in both hands. Crab samurai train with tanto as a back-up for when they lose their other weapons, and they prefer to fight with a single blade in order to leave the other hand free for different actions. As one Crab told his student, “Both hands are dangerous. The knife kills, but the free hand pulls you into the knife.” Shosuro assassins also favor the use of a single knife, partly because it is easier to conceal and partly because their preferred method is to kill with a single surprise strike. Conversely, the Mantis and the Ujina both prefer to fight with two blades. Yoritomo himself explained the Mantis style to some of his friends from other clans: “Swords are large and clumsy, and when using one you must be constantly aware of where it is. But the kama are like a simple extension of your own hands, and you can use them unthinking in the same manner as your hands. They can act in unison or separately without impeding each other.” Yoritomo believed a samurai with a sword spent as much time fighting himself as he did fighting his opponents. With smaller weapons, a warrior is far less concerned with injuring himself and can focus all his energy and attacks on his opponent. In this view, fighting with two small blades is actually superior to any samurai fighting with swords.

All sensei of small-weapon fighting, regardless of clan, teach their students to think as Yoritomo did: not of blades, but of their own hands. Since such blades do not extend far beyond a samurai’s hand, knowing where the hands are is all that is required. Where the hands go, the blades follow. Eventually the student no longer needs to think of the blades at all and just flows into the dance of combat.



Practitioners of Small-Blade Styles

The most obvious practitioners of small-blade combat are the warriors of the Mantis Clan, but there are several other groups who also focus strongly on combat with small blades or who pursue a significant secondary line of study in such weapons.

THE YORITOMO FAMILY OF THE MANTIS CLAN

“The katana is slow and has but a single edge.” – Yoritomo

The Mantis are the pre-eminent advocates of fighting with small blades, primarily the hooked kama which is their signature weapon. This style evolved both because it was more effective when fighting on a ship's cramped deck and because the kama was a cheap and disposable weapon, meaning there would be no great shame in losing one overboard.

The Mantis Clan and its ruling family, the Yoritomo, are often thought of as the founders of the art of fighting with two small bladed weapons. This is not strictly true – the Ujina developed their own fighting style wholly independently of the Mantis – but there is no question the Mantis were the first to develop such a style and remain the best-known practitioners of it. Indeed, the Mantis style long pre-dates the Yoritomo family name with which it is associated in modern times. The basic techniques of the school are credited to Kaimetsu-Uo himself.

The warrior Yoritomo, who won Great Clan status for the Mantis Clan, is credited with perfecting the final technique of his school and also with developing a powerful variation of the Mantis fighting style, the so-called Whirlwind Fighting style. This form relies on a mixture of relentless motion and relentless attacks to both obstruct enemy blows and overwhelm the foe with rapid strikes. The style is quite popular among the Yoritomo, to the point that it is often the preferred fighting form to use in duels within the clan; a few Mantis have even taken to calling the masters of this style “Whirlwind Duelists.”

THE CRAB CLAN

The Crab have always taught that a samurai must be ready to fight with any weapon at any time; more than any other clan, they reject the Empire's traditional emphasis on fighting with the katana before all else. Although their favored method is to fight with heavy weapons such as the tetsubo, the Crab do not neglect the value of the simple knife, and there is more than one account of a Hida bushi taking down a monstrous foe with a tanto after all his larger weapons were lost or destroyed.

Although nearly all Crab train to fight with knives as well as with all their other weapons, the number of Crab samurai who specifically study knife-fighting in depth is much fewer. This is not surprising given the limits of time and effort and the greater return on training with larger and heavier weaponry. Nonetheless, enough Crab

have specialized in knife-fighting over the years for the clan to maintain a few sensei who teach advanced knife techniques. Many of these are sailors, especially Yasuki, whose experience on the Crab Clan's merchant fleets lead them to embrace a fighting style which uses small, cheap weapons in an environment where speed and mobility are more important than reach and power.

THE UJINA FAMILY OF THE HARE CLAN

The Hare Clan as a whole has traditionally focused on a highly athletic and unpredictable school of kenjutsu. However, the Ujina family – founded by a ronin who swore fealty to the Hare after they were reinstated as a clan – has always preferred to fight with knives. After joining the clan, the founder of the Ujina established his own dojo to teach his two-knife fighting style to other Hare samurai. Although the so-called Ujina Skirmishers have never advanced their style enough for it to become a school of its own, they are a significant asset to their clan nonetheless.

THE SHOSURO ASSASSINS OF THE SCORPION CLAN

The Shosuro family is very secretive about its activities even within its own clan (let alone in the rest of the Empire), but most Scorpion are at least aware that their clan's second family trains infiltrators, spies, and killers. Among the most elite orders within the family are the small group of specialized agents known simply as the Assassins. Recruited from the very top ranks of the family's shinobi and Butei, the Assassins are the venomous sting of the Scorpion, able to guarantee their target will never see another sunrise. Their activities are one of the greatest sources of paranoia in all Rokugan.

Since they are trained to dispatch all manner of targets in every sort of circumstance, these samurai must be able to kill with a small, easily concealed weapon. Tanto are weapons which seldom arouse much notice or suspicion when carried in the open, and are easily concealed for infiltration work. Although knives are not terribly lethal in a skirmish, they are quite deadly when used against an unsuspecting opponent, and Shosuro Assassins learn to employ precise cuts and stabs that slay their targets in a matter of seconds with a minimum of noise and commotion.





but while he left his previous identity behind, he did not leave behind the fires of vengeance burning in his heart.

Hitsu threw himself into his studies with the Brotherhood, honing his body into a flawless physical instrument. His brothers and teachers among the monastery urged him to seek perfection of the spirit as well, but Hitsu merely nodded and smiled, ignoring their cautions in order to better prepare himself for what he considered his inevitable revenge against the dishonorable cur who caused his shame and disgrace. He became a master of jujutsu and several of its sub-styles, instructing younger monks in the ways of unarmed combat, all the while honing his own variant of unarmed combat – one driven by the burning hatred within him. He believed with absolute certainty that he could harness his own Fire chi if he realized his true potential. As the years turned into a decade, he slowly realized

he would not achieve that potential until the moment of his vengeance, the moment when he restored his honor. It was in this realization that the final seeds of his fate were sown.

On a seldom-used road in the lands between what now make up the Lion and Unicorn provinces, Hitsu found the man he wanted. The Ikoma was older, more seasoned, a decorated veteran of the Lion armies. When Hitsu sprang upon him, he did not hesitate to defend himself, and their battle was tremendous. As the two men wore each other down, each struggling to emerge victorious, Hitsu finally gained the advantage and unleashed all his energy into an open palm strike on his enemy's chest. The flames of hatred Hitsu had harbored for almost half of his life leapt forward and consumed his opponent. In that moment, with his hatred at last expended, he realized how much of a fool he had been. It was his mistake, not the Ikoma's, that had led to his defeat. There was no conspiracy against him. He had allowed hatred to consume him, and he had been so desperate to ignore his own failings that he had allowed a lie to grow in his soul. As the man he had thought to be his enemy died, so too did everything Hitsu had believed he had known about himself.

When Hitsu returned to the Brotherhood, he was a completely different person. The change was not lost upon those who had known him, and some suspected a horrible tragedy had befallen him. Regardless, all the advice and cautions Hitsu had once ignored were now embraced. His teaching changed dramatically, and suddenly the ability to reach his Fire chi that had once been so difficult for him became much simpler. Some among his students were able to achieve the same feats he was, but others were unable to do so right away, and Hitsu recognized at once that they held on to the same hatred and rage he once had embraced. Only when they worked through it, as he had, would they accomplish the same feats he could now perform.

Hitsu-do: The Martial Art of Fire

There are numerous martial arts in Rokugan, most of them variant forms of jujutsu, the base unarmed combat form developed from the work of Togashi Kaze in the Empire's early centuries. *Hitsu-do* is one of the more obscure of such arts, owing both to its violent nature and the fact that it is practiced by only a handful of Brotherhood sects and a few small groups within the samurai families. Those who are aware of the art have different accounts of its beginning, and there is no common consensus on how it was developed. The most prevalent theory among its practitioners, however, ascribes its creation to a member of the Brotherhood of Shinsei who had once been known by the name Matsu Okibi. (It is worth noting that the Matsu family has no record of this individual, but the nature of the story lends credence to that as well.)

According to the story, Matsu Okibi was an officer in the Fourth Lion Army, known for his bold, brash tactics. However, in one battle against an enemy of the clan (the identity of the enemy changes with each retelling, it seems) Okibi was soundly and unexpectedly defeated. One of his subordinates, an Ikoma, failed to implement Okibi's orders correctly, and as a result the Lion lost the battle. To cover his shame, the Ikoma convinced the other officers serving Okibi to place the blame upon their general – which Lion tradition supported in any case. Okibi was disgraced before the clan. To cleanse his shame and spare his family, he retired a decade earlier than intended and joined the Brotherhood of Shinsei. When he was admitted to the monastery, he took the name Hitsu ("flame-stealer"),



If this story is true, in whole or in part, it does not explain how the art now known as *hitsu-do* progressed from a lesser-known variant of jiu-jutsu among the Brotherhood to an art that is practiced by a select few monastic and mystical shugenja in samurai families scattered around the Empire. Presumably its effectiveness was recognized by some among the samurai caste, especially those who already possessed the gift of the spirits, and they took steps to secure the services of sensei from the Brotherhood. However, due to its spiritual nature the art has never been popular among bushi, and its practitioners remain chiefly shugenja and the members of certain mystic orders such as the Witch-Hunters and the Asako Henshin.

Hitsu-do: Rituals and Practices

Hitsu-do is an extremely offensive martial art, with very little in the way of defensive maneuvers, stances, or even philosophies. The art focuses on speed and power, striking with punches and kicks that commit all of the practitioner's strength and hold nothing back, infusing them with the power of Fire. The philosophy behind *hitsu-do* calls for strikes that will disable or incapacitate, if not outright kill. There is no consideration given to sparing an opponent injury or death; final victory is the only concern. It is said that when two practitioners of *hitsu-do* face one another in combat, the match is only decided when one of them can no longer fight. In a sparring match, unconsciousness is typically the result (save among the more peaceful sects of the Brotherhood, who fight only until one participant yields), whereas in actual combat a match is almost always to the death.

Among the Brotherhood, *hitsu-do* is one of a handful of paths that can dependably prepare a practitioner's body and spirit for certain combat-oriented Kiho. In particular, some Kiho aligned with the Ring of Fire tend to be easier to achieve for those who practice *hitsu-do* than for many of their comrades. The reasons for this are not entirely understood by the Brotherhood, but it is a phenomenon the elders of the order are keenly interested in deciphering.

Hitsu-do Tournaments

In contrast to the widely practiced and "sport" martial arts such as *mizu-do* or *sumai*, tournaments among those who practice *hitsu-do* are somewhat rare. (Informal sparring competitions within dojo that teach the *hitsu-do* forms are of course relatively commonplace.) Within groups with at least some *hitsu-do* tradition, such as the Kuni family or the Brotherhood itself, multiple dojo do sometimes gather together to test their skills against one another – typically once per year or at most once per season. These affairs are usually very private, due both to the obscurity of the art and its violent nature; the greater Brotherhood does not appreciate such events, to be sure, and many Great Clans look upon them with at least a questioning eye.

Groups with Hitsu-do Traditions

THE BROTHERHOOD OF SHINSEI

As noted above, *hitsu-do* is not used extensively within the Brotherhood due to its extremely aggressive and violent nature. At best, the elders of the Brotherhood regard it as a means by which they can reach those younger monks who are on difficult or dangerous paths. The hope is that those who desperately need to find a way to excise the anger and hate within them will be able to do so while honing their body in preparation for a spiritual awakening that will hopefully follow. However, some consider this an extremely dangerous practice, fearing that equipping those who have anger with the means to enact that anger is a foolish risk at best.

Due to these concerns, the art of *hitsu-do* tends to be limited to the most militant and aggressive sohei orders, as well as a few remote monasteries whose members embrace the style for their own reasons.

THE CRAB CLAN

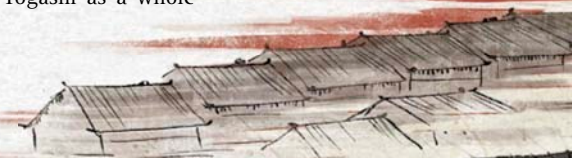
While the Crab are devoted to all things related to combat (and some might say toward all things offensive, both literally and figuratively), *hitsu-do* has a very limited presence among their ranks. Crab warriors prefer their own martial art, *kobo ichi-kai*, which accords well with both their physiques and their clan's pragmatic traditions. Those of a more artistic nature gravitate to *sumai*, the wrestling sport which their clan traditionally dominates. However, the Kuni family has found *hitsu-do* to be a useful supplement to their own techniques, especially among the more personally militant in their ranks. Both Kuni shugenja and Kuni Witch-Hunters have occasionally pursued *hitsu-do* as a supplement to their own techniques, and the family maintains a few dojo to teach the style.

THE CRANE CLAN

The Crane Clan as a whole completely ignores *hitsu-do*, a form they find distasteful at best. Their own martial art, *mizu-do*, is both peaceful and artistic, a perfect complement to their nature. However, within the Asahina family there are occasional shugenja who exhibit the aggressive and Fire-oriented character of the family founder. Such individuals sometimes find *hitsu-do* to be a good fit for their character.

THE DRAGON CLAN

It would be a fair assessment to say the samurai of the Dragon Clan have a stronger tradition of studying unarmed combat than those of perhaps any other clan, not least due to the presence of the monastic Togashi tattooed order and its mastery of *kaze-do*, evolved from the very first forms of jiu-jutsu. The Togashi as a whole



The Life of the Swordsman at War

do not practice the violent ferocity of *hitsu-do*, but the aggressive sub-sect of their order known as the Kikage Zumi do sometimes embrace this martial art, finding it a better fit to their nature than the more peaceful ways of *kaze-do*. Occasionally, a few Mirumoto and Tamori (and in earlier eras, Agasha) also find the philosophy and style of *hitsu-do* more appealing than *kaze-do*, and the Mirumoto are known to maintain a single remote dojo of this art in their northernmost province.

THE LION CLAN

Lending some credence to the theory that a former Lion samurai created the art, there is a significant group of *hitsu-do* devotees in the Matsu family. Known for their zeal and angry natures, the Matsu find the fiery aggressive style of *hitsu-do* to be well suited to their own natures. While the total number of *hitsu-do* warriors in the Empire is small, among that group are a considerable number of the Matsu blood. By contrast, the clan's Kitsu shugenja reject *hitsu-do* completely.

THE MANTIS CLAN

For some reason the samurai of the Mantis tend to engage in more martial arts than those from many other Great Clans, perhaps as a side-effect of their clan's general tendency toward unconventional fighting styles. However, this practice is largely limited to the Yoritomo family, with an occasional convert from the Tsuruchi, while the Moshi (and more recently the Kitsune) are largely free of this interest. Most Mantis *hitsu-do* practitioners are drawn from the Yoritomo shugenja, whose orientation toward Thunder makes them well-suited to its technique. On those rare occasions when *hitsu-do* practitioners gather for a tournament or competition, as often as not it is on some small island in the Mantis territories that the contest is held; doing so affords superior privacy and avoids distractions, which most competitors appreciate.

THE PHOENIX CLAN

The Phoenix as a whole are an intensely peaceful clan and thus one which rejects the philosophical approach of *hitsu-do*. However, there are some in the clan, particularly among the Isawa Fire shugenja and the secretive Asako henshin order, who embrace a more aggressive perspective on the world. These individuals sometimes find the way of *hitsu-do* to be congenial, forming a small community of aggressive martial artists within an otherwise pacifistic clan.

Rokugan is a warrior's culture, dominated by the swordsmen of the samurai caste. War and the military campaigns it breeds play a large role in the lives of a great many samurai. Although none of the Great Clans enroll their entire population into their armies, all of them require a significant percentage of their samurai to serve in the ranks, and among the Crab, Lion, and Unicorn, exemption from martial service is very much the exception rather than the rule. More generally, whether they actually serve or not, the vast majority of samurai dream of serving in war as the true way to demonstrate their bravery, skill, and honor.

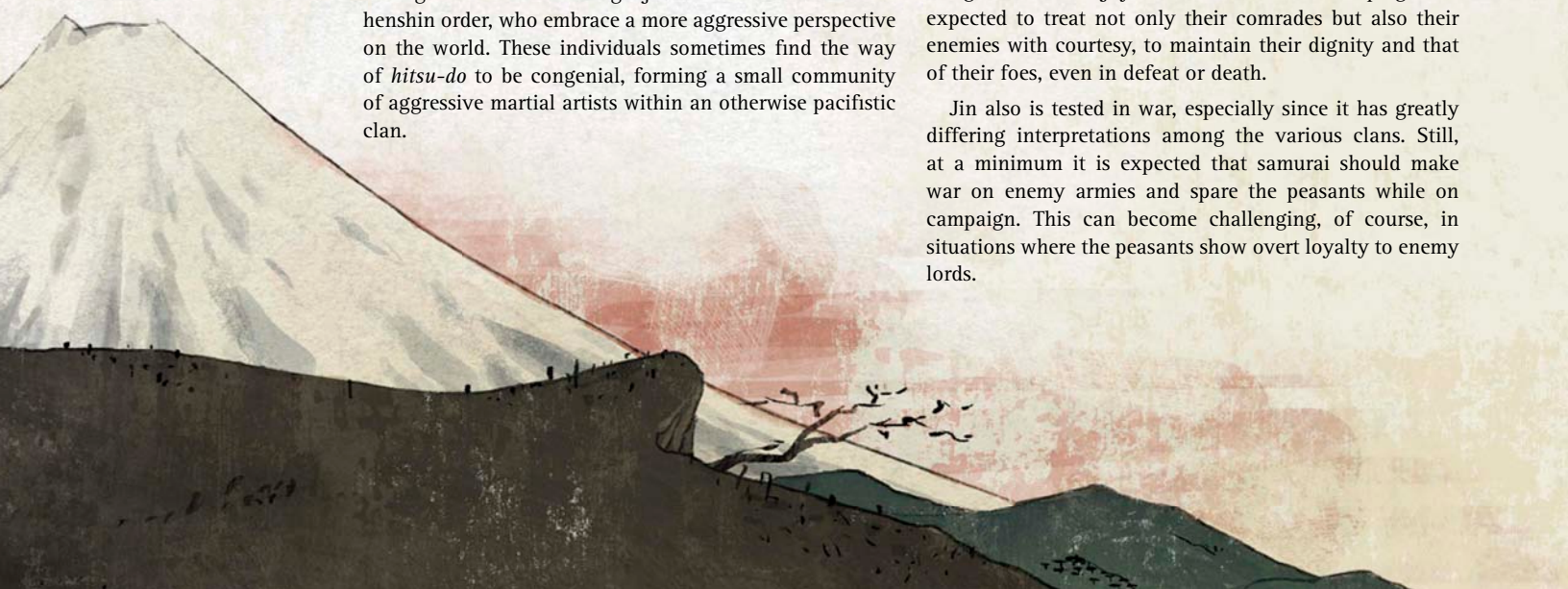
Samurai on military campaign face many challenges they do not encounter elsewhere in life. In particular, four tenets of the Code of Bushido dominate the actions and thinking of most samurai who are serving in wartime. In order of importance, these are Chugo (Duty and Loyalty), Yu (Courage), Rei (Courtesy), and Jin (Compassion).

Chugo compels samurai to answer their daimyo's call for war and to obey the commands of their officers. Samurai soldiers are expected to follow orders without question and to give their lives gladly if commanded to do so. Although every samurai soldier dreams of pursuing fame and glory, duty is supposed to override any such selfish goal.

Yu is also very important, since a samurai must always show courage on the battlefield, regardless of numbers or advantage. Indeed, it is when a samurai is outnumbered and the fight is hopeless that courage is truly tested. It is easy to be brave when surrounded by fellow samurai and with the odds in one's favor. It is another matter to be brave when fighting a last-ditch defense or launching a forlorn hope counterattack. It is with good reason that samurai say, "the truest test of Courage is the last one."

Rei, by contrast, places subtler limits on a samurai's behavior during a military campaign. Samurai are not mere ashigaru or ronin, nor are they brutish killers who slaughter for the joy of it. Samurai on campaign are expected to treat not only their comrades but also their enemies with courtesy, to maintain their dignity and that of their foes, even in defeat or death.

Jin also is tested in war, especially since it has greatly differing interpretations among the various clans. Still, at a minimum it is expected that samurai should make war on enemy armies and spare the peasants while on campaign. This can become challenging, of course, in situations where the peasants show overt loyalty to enemy lords.



Caste on the Front Lines

All of Rokugan is governed by the Celestial Order, even on the battlefield. Regardless of clan, when samurai gather into armies, they instinctively fill a role determined by their caste. Army commanders are traditionally high-ranking samurai such as regional governors, family daimyo, or even the Clan Champion. Naturally, these commanders have the best possible resources available to them. Their tents are large and well made, they get the best food (and rarely are forced to go without even when rations are scarce), and they occupy the best ground when the army makes camp. A commander has numerous *ji*-samurai waiting upon him, holding his weapons and banners, delivering his messages, grooming his horses, carrying his arrows, even a dedicated sandal-bearer. These positions are considered very prestigious posts for lesser-ranking samurai, given as rewards for good service or glorious deeds. Being the commander's standard bearer on the battlefield is considered the greatest honor – and the most dangerous. Survival all but ensures promotion, because survival is highly unlikely.

Below the commanders and other senior officers are the rank-and-file samurai who provide the backbone of every Rokugani army. They compose the elite combat units and also serve as officers for the ashigaru squadrons. Most samurai are well-supplied by their lords and clan, and live relatively well on campaign; many of them have their own *heimin* servants and ashigaru attendants to assist them with mundane tasks such as cooking, bathing, and putting on clothes and armor. However, typically several of these samurai will share a tent rather than having one to themselves, and they are expected to put up with short rations and other privations when an army is moving fast or has supply problems.

Ronin are technically part of the samurai caste, but in military campaigns they hold a position well below that of clan samurai. Most clan soldiers look down on wave men as unreliable, and the reputation is not entirely undeserved. For one thing, many ronin are eager to collect heads and win glory, and this desire for fame can overwhelm their obedience to orders from their commanders, causing them to run wild on the battlefield. (Some peasants might think the same of clan samurai, though they usually have the sense to keep such opinions to themselves.) Conversely, since ronin have no fealty to their commanders, they can also succumb to cowardly self-preservation when a battle goes poorly. There are few stories of ronin waging suicide attacks or stubborn last stands. Regardless, ronin soldiers receive only the most basic and minimal supplies from their employers, and are often expected to look after their own needs entirely. Needless to say, almost none of them have servants or retainers to help them.

At the bottom of the army's hierarchy are the ashigaru peasant soldiers. The word ashigaru literally means "light foot," but these peasant warriors actually fill many different roles in the army, and typically comprise at least fifty percent of a Rokugani army's total numbers. (The proportion varies between clans, of course – the Crab and

SUMMONING THE ASHIGARU

The Lion Clan maintains standing forces of ashigaru in its armies, but most clans do not follow this practice and instead recruit peasant soldiers when the time comes for war. Most ashigaru are farmers, and indeed without their agricultural labor for the planting and harvest many clans would be unable to feed themselves. This is one of the reasons why summer, when there is little farm work needed, is the "season of war" when ashigaru can swell the ranks of the clan armies.

Typically there are always plenty of peasants willing to join the ranks of the ashigaru. The excitement of war and travel, the remote but still real prospect of promotion, and the general appeal of a break from the dull routine of peasant life make such service an inviting prospect, especially to young men. Even before a daimyo sends out an official summons to war, rumors will begin spreading and the more eager young peasants will begin talking of the possibilities – while their parents do their best to discourage them. Eventually, couriers arrive to inform the local headmen that a levy of ashigaru will be needed in a few days' time. If there are not enough volunteers, the headman will choose additional recruits to fill out the levy – an unpopular task, and one which can lead to considerable anger and heartbreak within the community.

It is customary for ashigaru leaving for campaign to dress in their finest clothes and eat what may be a final formal meal with their family. This is usually a somber occasion marked more by grief than by pride, since most peasants are well aware that ashigaru are far more likely to die than they are to win fame or promotion.

Once they arrive at their lord's chosen assembly site, each ashigaru makes an ink print of his index finger to confirm his presence. (Failure to report for duty is treason, subject to execution, although that does not stop some desperate recruits from fleeing or hiding... or desperate parents from hiding them.) The new-minted ashigaru are issued a simple suit of armor stenciled with their lord's mon, and are also issued their weapons, usually a spear or bow. Wealthier daimyo may provide their ashigaru with *jingasa* (simple iron helmets) and *sashimono* (back-banners). Conversely, if a daimyo cannot afford to issue armor to his peasant soldiers, he will usually at least provide them a *jingasa* for some minimal protection. Also, in poorer clans (such as the Sparrow) the *jingasa* doubles as a cooking pot.





Unicorn use far fewer ashigaru in their ranks, while the Crane and Phoenix use more.) They act as spearmen and archers for the frontlines, but also as labor, engineers, and even artilleryists. They carry most of the army's military gear on campaign, manage its supply trains, and do most of the labor of caring for horses and other animals. Samurai deem the ashigaru a necessary evil of war, tolerating their presence so long as the peasant soldiers do not overstep their bounds or insult their superiors. Ashigaru are provided with armor and weapons by their lords, and are not permitted to have such gear outside of their time of service. Naturally, they do not have servants and tend to be given the last priority for food and water. They usually do not have tents either, and are expected to sleep under the stars regardless of weather; many ashigaru carry a woven straw mat to use as a blanket.

Below the ashigaru, the armed peasants, are the heimin – the unarmed labor force. These are the servants and workers who do most of the basic menial tasks in the army, such as setting up and taking down tents, carrying and preparing food, cleaning everyone's clothing and gear, feeding the animals, and of course personally assisting the samurai soldiers. Most of them are assigned to one specific samurai and follow him into the army, but there is usually also a general pool of heimin used for labor and supply. Unlike ashigaru, who can hope for promotion and reward if they serve well, the servants only wish to survive the campaign with their lives and limbs. Because they are part of the army, many samurai consider them legitimate military targets – unlike commoner civilians – and thus if their army is defeated they can expect a cruel slaughter from enemy soldiers.

In the army, like in the rest of the Empire, the hinin sit at the very bottom of the social structure. Every army brings along a small force of eta to prepare latrines, dispose of bodies, and perform other such unclean activities that cannot be avoided in a military campaign. However, some armies also bring along their own actors, dancers, and other entertainers to help keep the troops amused when they are not in battle. Especially wealthy and self-indulgent samurai sometimes bring geisha concubines to

the field with their other attendants, but this is extremely rare and is generally looked down on as shallow and selfish.

Life on the Front Lines

War is a very common occurrence in Rokugan. Rarely does a year pass when the sound of martial drums does not echo across some part of the Emerald Empire. Even when the clans as a whole are at peace, it is common for provincial daimyo to take to the field against rivals on the other side of the border. Nor is fighting between Rokugani the only form of conflict. To the north, the Rokugani fight the barbarian tribes of the Yobanjin; to the west, the Unicorn fight desert raiders; in the south, the Crab fight the brutal and eternal conflict with the Shadowlands, a war which truly has no ending. And even when none of the clans are at war, the Clan Champions sometimes muster their armies for massive maneuvers to practice their tactics and logistics in the field.

MUSTERING

Preparations for war usually begin in the spring as soon as the snows melt and the roads become passable. This gives the southern clans an advantage over the northern ones, since they can muster earlier, but since the most militant clan in the south is the Crab – most of whose strength is tied down at the border of the Shadowlands – this edge is not always exploited.

The first several weeks of the campaign year are dedicated to mustering the armies and gathering supplies. Samurai and ashigaru are called to assembly points where they are formed into squadrons and attached to the daimyo's existing forces. This assembly process can take anywhere from a few days to several weeks, depending on the size of the forces involved. Eventually, the forces are consolidated at a central location, typically the castle of the army's commander.

TRAINING

While most samurai are trained from a young age in the ways of war, the ashigaru who muster in the spring are often lacking experience. Even if they have served previously, the lack of constant training means their skills will have become rusty in the meantime. Thus the samurai typically spend a few weeks training the ashigaru to stand in formation, use their weapons in basic maneuvers, and respond to commands from drums, flags, and other signaling devices. (The Unicorn, for example, often use horns to convey battlefield orders.) Samurai who have not served in an army before also undergo some training at this time, mostly focused on recognizing orders and moving in formation. Training in the various battlefield formations is important for both peasant soldiers and samurai, since they must be able to assume and change these formations quickly while in battle.



MARCHING AND FORAGING

Rokugan is a vast Empire, and wars between clans usually require armies to cover significant distances. (When dealing with enemies from outside the Empire, of course, the distances can be even longer.) Discipline on the march and in camp is usually extremely tight. Every unit is given flags to assign its place in the marching order, and each wagon in the baggage train likewise has a flag identifying its position and contents. Units march in this fixed order for maximum efficiency (as well as to hopefully prevent ambushes), and an officer who fumbles this assignment will suffer a severe loss of face – possibly even seppuku. Since most campaigns happen in summer, marching soldiers often suffer greatly from heat, dust, and thirst; as samurai, they are expected to refrain from complaint and endure their privations with honor. Likewise, foot injuries due to bad sandals may turn a soldier's march into agonizing torture, but he is expected to keep up his pace and refrain from showing pain. Ashigaru are not expected to be silent or stoic on the march, but they are expected to maintain their pace and stay in formation no matter how miserable or exhausted they become; a peasant soldier who drops out of ranks to rest his feet or look for a drink of water is considered a deserter and will be punished accordingly.

Rokugani armies have difficulty carrying enough food, water, and supplies for long marches – typically they can only bring enough food for ten days – and thus are usually required to forage as they move. While daimyo do try to send additional resources to their forces via caravans, the vagaries of weather and enemy action can limit such re-supply efforts. Foraging is generally very effective due to the inability of peasants to defend themselves, but this can also raise issues involving violations of Compassion, and some samurai find foraging duty to be far more emotionally troubling than battle itself. After all, a samurai is trained to fight and kill, but not to take rice from a weeping peasant woman. Even the most stoic Lion or Crab can sometimes be troubled by such spectacles (though both clans, as a matter of policy, make a point of relying heavily on foraging when waging war against the Crane). Consequently, many samurai prefer to assign foraging to the ashigaru, especially since veteran ashigaru are experts in rooting out the hiding places where the peasants keep their supplies. A common tactic is to search a village in the early morning, since the morning frost disappears first over ground where things have been freshly buried.

Foraging is not without its dangers; foraging parties make easy ambush targets, since they are small groups spread out over a wide area. More than one samurai who went to war expecting glory on the battlefield has ended his life alone in a remote field on a mission to collect rice. Furthermore, enemy troops or vengeful peasants may purposefully contaminate water or food in order to spread illness through the invaders. Veteran samurai and ashigaru know from hard experience to never drink from wells in enemy territory. While the Scorpion and Crane Clans are particularly notorious for these sorts of tactics, all clans engage in at least some of this activity if invading armies are in their provinces.



SICKNESS

Illness can bring an army to its knees faster than any pitched battle, and Rokugani army commanders strive to be vigilant on preventing the spread of disease through their ranks. Sick samurai and ashigaru are usually quarantined from the rest of the army. If shugenja are available, their assistance will be sought to treat the ill, but most armies contain very few shugenja and their services are prioritized to the most important individuals (e.g. officers and commanders). Thus, most stricken warriors must make do with little more than occasional herbal remedies. Moreover, sick soldiers are still expected to march, fight, and otherwise fulfill their duties to their army. It is assumed that a samurai's sense of duty and honor will overcome his physical weakness; only the most crippling illness can keep a true samurai from joining battle, even if his poor health does mean a greater likelihood of death. It is sadly not uncommon for a battlefield to be littered with the corpses of samurai and ashigaru whose illness left them too weak to lift their weapons.

SUPERSTITIONS

Rokugani are deeply superstitious and put great store in omens. Many daimyo will try to have at least one diviner or shugenja with their army to determine if the omens are favorable for their planned actions. Commanders have been known to refuse to engage an enemy, risk a river crossing, or attack from a particular direction if the omens predict misfortune. This reliance on omens to help determine major campaign decisions can sometimes cause peculiar strategic results, but to the Rokugani such things are normal and expected. After all, to flaunt the Fortunes by disregarding their omens is to court disaster.

Rituals of good luck are a significant part of pre-battle activity for both samurai and ashigaru. Samurai customarily eat three lucky dishes before going into battle – awabi (abalone), kombu (kelp), and chestnuts – all served with sake. Many samurai also write death poems before entering battle, and in fact not doing so is viewed as challenging the Fortunes, resulting in ill luck on the battlefield.





LOVE AND DESIRE

The influence of Benten can be felt anywhere in Rokugan, and an army on campaign is not an exception. With so many samurai and samurai-ko together for months on end in trying times, it is only natural for some to develop romantic feelings for each other despite the general social pressure to resist such distractions from duty. Of course, love on the front lines is ripe for tragedy, not only due to the constant threat of death but also because such emotions can play havoc with the reliable performance of their duties. Commanders who learn that two of their bushi are in love will immediately command an end to the affair, and failure to do so is treated as shameful disobedience to be punished accordingly. Given these hazards, most samurai in military service try to avoid falling in love, but Benten is a Fortune who seldom listens to such intentions.

Among the ashigaru, romantic relationships carry much less in the way of dangerous ramifications, but they are also much rarer due to the simple fact that ashigaru troops are typically completely male. Samurai do not consider female peasants to be hardy enough to serve in battle, and in any case the proper place for such peasants is at home giving birth to more peasants. However, female peasants do occasionally sneak into the ranks under false premises, either due to affection for another ashigaru or due to a personal desire for adventure. Of course,

such women must be very cautious of revealing their true nature, so any romance which might bloom between them and a fellow ashigaru is usually quite covert. More commonly, male ashigaru will seek romantic attentions from the local female peasant population.

DUELS

In the high-stress environment of a military campaign, duels are commonplace. Armies are full of heavily armed warriors in a state of intense excitement and eagerly seeking for glory; it does not take much to slight the honor of such a high-strung warrior. Indeed, selfish samurai often consider dueling their fellow warriors as an excellent way to gain repute, and actively seek out duels with their putative comrades. Army commanders frown upon such behavior, since it weakens discipline and may result in the loss of valuable bushi prior to battle; however, if an offense is particularly grave even a general cannot deny his warriors' right to satisfaction. More often, duels are fought informally or without permission; the strictures against illegal dueling are far weaker in a military campaign than they are during peacetime. Of course, dueling someone of higher station is never permitted, since this would undermine the army's command structure, and a samurai seeking such a duel is liable to be punished or even executed for violating his duty to his lord.

LOOTING

While foraging is a distasteful but accepted necessity of military campaigns, looting by Rokugani armies represents a serious violation of Bushido and a failure of command by the army's leaders. Commanders who cannot control their own troops have shamed themselves and their ancestors. Likewise, samurai who partake in looting have given in to the Sin of Desire and violated their duty, since it is up to the army's commander to determine who receives any prizes captured on campaign. However, under the stress of battle and intense violence even the most honorable samurai can feel the temptation to enjoy the fruits of victory, especially in the wake of heavy losses or when capturing a rich town or a wealthy daimyo's castle. The longer and bloodier a campaign, the harder the victory, the more likely that looting will occur.



Opportunistic ronin and ashigaru, on the other hand, have little compunction about looting as long as nobody stops them; indeed, some ronin will join a marching army purely for the chance to seize booty. Such activities sully the reputation of all ronin, and can sometimes lead to bitter recriminations and violence between different groups. Even worse, bandits and other such criminals often prowl around the extremities of a battle, killing off wounded samurai and ashigaru in order to steal their weapons and armor. Indeed, during times of serious strife within the Empire even the peasants will succumb to this behavior, scouring battlefields in search of weapons and other items they can sell later. In a few instances, peasants have also stolen daisho sets from fallen samurai in order to build a new life as false ronin.

CASUALTIES

The Rokugani rarely abandon their wounded or dead on the battlefield. Wounded samurai who can still walk are expected to see to their own survival, and after a battle they will seek treatment from those with skill at binding wounds, sewing up cuts, and setting broken bones. More seriously wounded samurai must wait for comrades to retrieve them from the field, which usually cannot take place until a battle is over. If they are on the losing side, they will often commit suicide rather than risk being taken prisoner.

After a battle is over, the eta who accompany an army will gather the dead for proper cremation. In fact, if one side is forced to retreat without burning its dead, the victorious will usually burn the bodies for both sides. Since the first rise of Iuchiban in the sixth century, Imperial edict requires all bodies be cremated as soon as possible, and no Rokugani army would violate such a command. The Crab, of course, are particularly fervent in ensuring all bodies are gathered and burned, since the presence of the Taint can re-animate corpses even without the intervention of a maho-tsukai.

When dealing with non-Rokugani foes, the deposition of the dead is somewhat trickier. If the samurai of the Empire are victorious, they burn all foreign or inhuman dead, albeit without any of the rituals and without any attempt to save the ashes. If the Rokugani are forced to retreat, they will often make significant efforts to bring their dead with them, lest the bodies of honorable samurai be used in blasphemous acts; if this is not possible, they will at least try to make sure all corpses are beheaded, for the same reason.





RETREAT AND SURRENDER

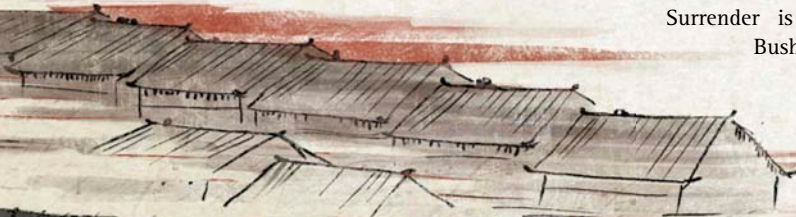
As a general rule, samurai would rather die than retreat, even in the face of near-certain defeat. In fact, certain defeat makes samurai even more stubborn and less likely to retreat. After all, they are raised on the tales of heroic death and many of them yearn for the opportunity to gain a similar fate. However, army commanders do not have such luxuries, and are often forced to order a retreat in order to preserve their forces for later campaigns. (Certain clans also take a more practical attitude toward retreat – notably the Crab and the Mantis.) When an army does undertake a retreat, obedience to duty will usually compel its bushi to obey and withdraw, but the samurai will vie for the honor of being the army's sacrificial rear guard. Ashigaru and ronin are of course much more willing to retreat than clan samurai, but must be careful not to retreat too readily or eagerly lest they be accused of cowardice and punished accordingly.

The Rokugani do not seek quarter on the battlefield, nor do they give it.

Surrender is contrary to Bushido, and samurai

who do not retreat are expected to fight to the death. To beg for mercy is to violate the way of the warrior at every level, and such pleas are usually met with primal fury by opposing samurai who butcher such unworthy cowards. Fleeing from battle is even more disastrous. Not only is there a tremendous loss of Honor and repute for such a betrayal of duty, but a victorious army will ride down fleeing warriors without mercy.

There are exceptions to these rules. Shugenja, due to their rarity and high spiritual value, are often permitted to surrender and are treated as honored guests while they remain prisoners. Noncombatant courtiers and artisans, as well as high-ranking nobles, may also sometimes be taken prisoner, although they are often given the chance to commit seppuku to spare themselves the shame of captivity. Finally, a severely wounded, unconscious, or otherwise helpless samurai may sometimes be taken as a prisoner after a battle; it is considered a deep and abiding shame to suffer such a fate, and most of these samurai will commit seppuku at the first available opportunity rather than live with such humiliation.



Swords on the Battlefield: The Pursuit of Glory

Aside from service to their lords, the pursuit of glory is the driving motivator for almost all the samurai who fill the armies of Rokugan. Samurai are raised on tales of their renowned ancestors, on stories of epic battles and glorious deeds, and they yearn to create their own tales of glory to pass on to their descendents. In fact, wealthier or more prominent samurai sometimes bring chroniclers with them on campaign to record their actions. Samurai of lesser means rely on having their deeds noticed by their lords and their fellow bushi. In the Lion armies, the Ikoma bards traverse the battlefield to record the stories and deeds of all the warriors there.

On the battlefield, glory is a deadly serious affair. The vanguard of an army is the most glorious position, reserved for the daimyo's most loyal and skilled samurai, but it is also the deadliest. Samurai put great store in who is first into battle, bravely charging the enemy lines in a race to see who can strike the first blow. Of course, this sort of thing can also be disruptive to an effective battle plan: officers of different units will vie for the glory of being first into battle and thus fail to coordinate their attacks, and individual samurai will attack too soon and ruin the element of surprise. It is notable that the Lion Clan, so traditional in many respects, often takes a dim view of this sort of excessive glory-seeking, regarding it as a violation of the military principles set out in Akodo's Leadership.

Once battle is joined, of course, samurai are expected to choose their own opponents and wage individual combats in which superior skill prevails. Many bushi deliberately choose the most dangerous and important-looking enemy samurai as their opponents, since victory against such foes brings the most glory. In some cases they will even seek iaijutsu duels with their chosen enemies, although this is rare outside of the Crane armies. Also, especially glory-conscious samurai may actually become enraged if they receive help from their comrades, since a combined victory is less glorious than an individual triumph.

The most common way of proving one's battlefield exploits is to collect battle trophies, including enemy heads. Capturing an opposing standard is worth great glory, as is cutting down prominent enemy champions or, best of all, the enemy general. The practice of collecting heads as battle trophies is widespread in Rokugan – even the more peaceful or pragmatic clans do it regularly – and it represents a partial exception to the normal aversion to touching dead flesh. Of course, once a head is taken it is expected to be handed over to an eta as soon as practicable. Trophy heads are washed and groomed

by the eta, then mounted on a wooden board and carried (usually by an ashigaru) to inspection by the army commander. A label is attached to the head's pigtail to identify the samurai who took the trophy. So strong is the head-taking tradition that many Rokugani armies actually have scholars or courtiers who accompany them for the sole purpose of counting heads and determining their identity, and some samurai will style and perfume their hair before battle so their head can make a more pleasant trophy if they are slain.

Of course, this serves as a reminder that the most reliable way for a swordsman to find glory in battle is through death. The plays and songs of Rokugan are filled with examples of samurai who give their lives for clan, Empire, and Emperor, and some of Rokugan's most famous duels end with both combatants dying at each other's hand. It is fair to say that most samurai will trade their life for a glorious death in an instant and think themselves better for the exchange. There are always partial exceptions, of course – the Crab and the Scorpion tend to be somewhat more practical about such matters than the rest of the Empire. But even they will not hesitate to volunteer for suicide missions, for the doomed rearguard to cover retreats, or for hopeless assaults on powerful fortifications. Every samurai dreams of glory, and every samurai prays for a glorious death.





THE FIRES OF MAGIC

"There are more things beneath the sun and the moon than we can ever know," the old man murmured to himself.

He squinted at the light of the rising Sun as it gleamed on the snow-capped Great Northern Wall Mountains. After a moment he shook his head and resettled his backpack before resuming his climb up the thinly-forested slope.

In the small settlement below him, the scholar was known as a hermit called Shin-Shin, named for his apparent great interest in the snow that fell on these peaks. The men in the Dragon village did not know why Shin-Shin had come to this place or why he shunned all but the most necessary contact with the rest of humanity. Since they did not know, they told stories. Some said he was a disgraced samurai who had fled his clan in shame, too cowardly to commit seppuku. More of them said he was simply mad, cursed by the Moon, and had come here to spare the world from his violent lapses. Still others maintained some sort of darkness had touched him... and certainly his gaze could be quite unsettling, everyone agreed.

Still, Shin-Shin was a peaceful man who never caused anyone harm, and the villagers were happy enough to accept his coin in exchange for food and supplies. They let him be, watching from a distance as he crossed the high mountain slopes with his pail and his pick, gathering snow and ice from the ground.

Shin-Shin unloaded his supplies in his hut, then collected his tools and set out to collect more ice. He chipped away at one outcrop and then another, finally lifting a large shard above his head. The morning light shone through it, fracturing the sun's rays into a rainbow

of colors. He closed one eye and gazed into the center of the thing, as if he were a merchant appraising the value of a gem. Finally he grunted and nodded to himself.

His cottage smelled of herbs and burning incense. The single room was littered with scrolls and other accouterments of a scholar. With a sweep of his arm he cleared a space on his worktable and placed the large ice crystal in a stone pestle.

He moved quickly but carefully, unstopping several bamboo vials and pouring their fragrant contents into a metal pot over a charcoal fire. He knew he would have to work quickly, lest the warmth of the fire melt the ice before he was ready. Infused with heat, the alchemical unguents reacted with each other and produced a plume of purple smoke. Shin-Shin unrolled a scroll; he could barely read through the smoke, but managed to cough out his prayer, entreating the kami of both Water and Fire to set aside their differences and imbue this ice with their merged clarity. Finally, the spell complete, he plunged the ice crystal into the iron vessel.

The ice did not melt. Instead the clear crystal filled with the radiant light of Fire. It was this attribute of Fire he required, its ability to burn away impurities and push back the darkness with its light. Shin-Shin leaned in, stirring the concoction in the bottom of the pestle. He could feel the spirits churning the air around him, could feel their energy in the hairs standing out on the nape of his neck. With a small knife he cut the tip of his finger and let a single drop of blood fall upon the crystal.



Immediately a light shone from the crystal, a light of brilliant clarity responding to the dark Taint in the blood.

"It worked..." Shin-Shin said in a whisper.

His work was done, his legacy secure. Now the Empire would not remember him for the Taint that flowed within him. It would remember him for the spell he had cast this day, the new alchemical discovery he had made. He carefully collected his notes, his brush scrabbling across the scrolls and he added the final results. Then he looked to his side, at the small box where his wakizashi awaited him.

"I need neglect you no longer," Agasha Shin whispered.

The Nature of Fire

"Living or dead, nothing can deny Fire."

– Isawa Tsuke, Master of Fire

The Element of Fire is characterized by a fundamental and seemingly paradoxical dual nature: it is a force of destruction, but also a force of creation. As noted in Chapter Five of this book, Fire is the primary means by which many things of value and utility are created in Rokugan. Without Fire, it would not be possible to extract metals from their ores, to refine those metals into purer forms, or to forge them into implements and weapons. The heat from Fire makes it possible to glaze pottery, to cook food, and to provide warmth against cold weather. Firelight dispels the darkness and can be used for signaling across distances. Even the residue of Fire is useful – smoke can be used to preserve food, while charcoal is itself a source of fuel.

However, Fire is also the most immediately destructive of the Elements. Damaging winds can wreck structures and ships, water can rise in floods, and earthquakes and landslides can cause great ruin, but such calamities are thankfully rare. Fire, on the other hand, can all too quickly change from a useful servant to a catastrophic enemy. In Rokugan, where many buildings are constructed from wood and paper, fires can spread through a settlement with stunning speed, leaving utter destruction in its wake. The Rokugani therefore view Fire with great respect but also great wariness. It is an unpredictable Element, deceptive, mercurial, and savage. More than anything else, Fire is the Element of change (both good and bad change), and this is true both in its mundane form and its supernatural nature.

Elemental Fire

In our own world we know that Fire is the product of a chemical reaction. When a material is quickly combined with oxygen, it produces heat, light, and residues such as smoke and ash. Rokugani fire in its "mundane" form is no different. It conforms to the "fire triangle" – it requires a source of fuel, a source of heat, and a supply of oxygen (air). Remove one or more of these corners of the "triangle" and a fire ceases to burn.

But in Rokugan, Fire – like the other Elements – also has a supernatural aspect. Rokugani may not fully understand the chemistry of the "fire triangle," but they do know that smothering a fire, whether with earth or water, will douse it. Their understanding of why this is so is shaped by their view of how the Elemental world works. Fire burns because the Fire kami have become agitated to the point where they predominate over the other Elemental kami in the burning material. If they can be pacified – for instance, overwhelmed by kami of Water, whose nature is inimical to Fire – they will be calmed and rendered quiescent. For example, a piece of wood is inhabited by kami of all of the Elements – Earth in its essential substance, while Water and Air are present in varying proportions depending on how wet or dry the wood may be. There are Fire kami in the wood as well, but they are normally dormant, slumbering among the kami of the other Elements. If the wood is exposed to already-agitated Fire kami (such as in a lit torch), their cousins in the wood will be roused and exert their influence over the kami of the other Elements, overwhelming them and causing the wood to burst into flame. The same is true for any flammable substance. The balance of the Elements, therefore, determines the current nature of the material in question. This is particularly important regarding the Fire kami because of the rapid and extreme changes wrought by them on other materials. Understanding this balance – or in some cases imbalance – among the Elemental kami is fundamental to understanding the role of all of the Elements, and Fire in particular, in the Rokugani world-view.

The Devotees of Fire Magic

Shugenja, the practitioners of magic in Rokugan, best understand the Elements and the importance of their relative balance in all things. This is because they have an innate connection to the Elemental kami, able to hear and answer their words. Only a few other adepts of Elemental Fire, such as certain monks and duelists, come close to this deep spiritual connection to the Fire kami. Even among shugenja, however, resonance with the various Elemental kami is not equal. Most shugenja tend to have stronger connections to



a particular Element; rarely, a shugenja may be attuned to several. These favored connections tend to cluster in certain families in particular clans, probably as a result of bloodlines that extend back to (and even predate) the dawn of the Empire. Families with a particular affinity for Fire include all of the Phoenix families to varying degrees (the Agasha and some branches of the Isawa in particular, but some Asako and even some among the Shiba are also attuned to Fire) as well as smaller sects within the Sun-worshipping Moshi family of the Mantis and the alchemical masters of the Dragon Clan's Tamori family. Surprisingly, Fire shugenja are occasionally also found among the pacifistic Asahina family of the Crane. Finally, an enigmatic affinity for Fire exists among the equally enigmatic monks of the Togashi in the Dragon Clan. All of these groups understand and interact with Elemental Fire in different ways that generally match their underlying philosophies.

The Asahina of the Crane Clan

For a family as famously pacifistic as the Asahina, the pursuit of Fire magic may seem at odds with philosophies of peace and forbearance. However, the family's founder, Isawa Asahina, was a powerful shugenja given to violent and destructive impulses, culminating in his vengeful rampage through the Crane lands in response to that clan's intervention in a war between the Phoenix and the Lion. Although Asahina was the Phoenix Elemental Master of Air and thus might have been expected to be attuned to that more peaceful Element, his underlying nature had as much to do with Fire as with Air. After a young Crane samurai-ko named Doji Kiriko offered to sacrifice her own life to stop Asahina's rampage, he saw the error of his prideful and destructive ways, married Kiriko, and founded the Asahina family of the Crane on the Air-oriented principles of non-violence and harmony.

The Asahina themselves do not fully understand why some of their number continue to develop an affinity for Fire; after all, Fire is an Element of both rapid change and great destruction. On the face of it, Fire's tempestuous nature would seem to be incompatible with the measured, reasoned, and peaceful world-view embraced by the Asahina. It may be that the periodic re-occurrence of Fire shugenja in the family is an

echo of its turbulent founder; his proclivity for violence, suppressed after his confrontation with Doji Kiriko, may still lurk deep in the Asahina bloodline. Alternatively, the Asahina focus on magical creation – expressed most strongly in the artisans who create their famous Fetishes – may itself represent a more peaceful application of the Fire traditions of their founder, thus enabling the ancient connection to Fire to occasionally manifest in their shugenja.

One should not presume that Fire shugenja are shunned or treated poorly among the Asahina. The family's focus on efforts of magical creation do clearly benefit from a close connection to Fire, after all. Many creative works rely on controlled use of heat and fire, particularly those involving the working of metal and ceramics. However, the Asahina do exhibit a particular vigilance regarding their Fire-focused brethren; after all, there are intense passions involved in artistic creation, and sometimes the step from creation to destruction is a short one. The dark history of the traitor Asahina Yajinden, architect of some of the most evil and destructive artifacts ever to plague the Empire, is a cautionary tale all Asahina have taken to heart.

Perhaps the most famous modern Asahina to show an affinity for Fire magic is Asahina Sekawa, who became both the Jade Champion and the Master of the Five Rings during the reign of Toturi III. Sekawa proved quite adept at using the power of Fire against those who served Jigoku; later, as a result of his study of Rosoku's Book of Five Rings, he became imbued with an innate understanding of all five of the Elements. Several other notable twelfth-century Asahina shugenja also displayed intimate connections to Fire, such as Asahina Nizomi and Asahina Kasai.





The Moshi of the Mantis Clan

As mentioned in the previous L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Air*, the Moshi are predominantly a family focused on Elemental Air. This is partly due to the family's close spiritual connection to the Sun, whether as Amaterasu (the original Lady Sun), the Lord Yakamo who replaced her, or the Jade Dragon who ascended to become the Sun in the late twelfth century. Being elevated about the earth's surface, whether atop mountains or mystically borne aloft by the Air kami, brings the Moshi closer to the object of their reverence and is therefore a profoundly holy act. This makes Air magic a key aspect of their worship of the Sun. However, like the Asahina, there are some shugenja among the Moshi whose affinity is tilted instead toward Elemental Fire. This is likely because the Sun itself is clearly associated with Fire, being the world's predominant source of heat and light. The Moshi generally view Fire as a spiritual echo of the Sun, albeit a weak one; thus Fire plays an important part in Moshi ceremonies and celebrations intended to revere the Sun. Actually being closely connected to Elemental Fire, however, is something most traditional Moshi view with caution, since it could be seen – particularly among the more conservative members of the family – as being overly presumptuous, perhaps even bordering on blasphemous. That said, like the Fire shugenja of the Asahina, those of the Moshi are not ostracized; they are, however, watched carefully, with decidedly mixed feelings among the watchers. Moshi Kasai, a Fire shugenja who lived during the time of the War of Fire and Thunder against the Phoenix Clan, was viewed by some as being inspired by and infused with the righteous and holy power of the Sun; others, however, saw her as an opportunist too easily swayed by her passions.

The most famous Fire shugenja of the Moshi was also one of its most influential members. Moshi Amika, adept of Fire, served as the family's daimyo during some of its most turbulent history and made sweeping changes to the path the Moshi family followed in the Empire. It was Amika who decided after the fall of Amaterasu that the Moshi had been too complacent and must take a more proactive role in shaping the future of the Empire... ultimately leading to their joining the Mantis Clan.

The Families of the Phoenix Clan

The Phoenix are Rokugan's undisputed masters of Elemental Fire. No other clan has as many Fire shugenja, nor can other clans boast shugenja as intimately connected to Fire as those in the Isawa and Agasha.

THE ISAWA FAMILY

The Isawa are in many ways an enigma. Like the Asahina, at their philosophical core they are pacifists who eschew conflict and seek to forestall violence whenever possible. However, the Isawa are also willing to put aside their pacifism and engage in sweeping acts of violence and destruction if they believe the results will serve a greater good. This duality of nature (which the Isawa themselves do not see as paradoxical) reflects the nature of Fire itself in a fundamental way. Fire can be creative and nurturing, but it can all too quickly change to an agent of violent destruction. This similarity may be why so many Isawa choose to focus on Fire in spite of their ability to be attuned to any or even all of the Elements. Isawa shugenja who focus tightly on a single Element are known as *Tensai*, and the Fire Tensai of the Isawa are not only acknowledged as the most powerful Fire shugenja in Rokugan, they are widely considered some of the most powerful shugenja in the Empire of any Element.

A prime example of the raw Elemental power unleashed by the Phoenix in times of strife is its four Elemental Legions which collectively form the Phoenix Elemental Guard. Each Legion is devoted to a single Element; in the case of Fire, this is the Firestorm Legion. This formation scours the battlefield with blasts of searing flame, often causing the most well-disciplined samurai troops to break and run from such overwhelming destructive power. The Firestorm Legion is usually supported by the Legion of Flame, a unit from the Shiba family specifically formed and trained to interact with the Firestorm Legion on the battlefield. Together they are a tremendously potent force in battle, and few can stand against them.

Not all Fire shugenja among the Isawa belong to the Firestorm Legion, however, and in fact the Legion draws some of its members from the Agasha and Asako families.

Many Isawa Fire shugenja, *Tensai* or otherwise, choose to follow their own path, and there are also many who serve in the Firestorm Legion for a time and then move on to other duties or pursuits.

Some of the most famous shugenja in the Empire's history are Fire shugenja from the Isawa. These include the mad traitor Isawa Tsuke, who fell to the Taint during the Second Day of Thunder; the valiant but flawed Isawa Hochiu, who helped defeat the Lying Darkness at the Battle of Oblivion's Gate but later succumbed to misguided ideals; and Isawa Ochiai, the Elemental Master of Fire during the Destroyer War.

THE ASAKO FAMILY

Strictly speaking the Asako are not a shugenja family. Most of them are scholars and loremasters, studying and cataloguing the vast knowledge stored in the libraries of the Phoenix Clan. Others travel the Empire, learning about the land's history, geography, customs, ceremonies, and celebrations – indeed about everything that can be recorded and studied, from the miraculous to the mundane. The family also maintains the secretive mystical order known as the *henshin*, who outwardly appear to be simple and reclusive monks but are actually devoted to seeking human immortality and manipulating the Elements in strange and unconventional ways.

Those Asako who become shugenja are rare but not unheard of. Lady Asako's husband, Yogo, was a powerful Fire shugenja before he left the clan to found the Yogo family of the Scorpion. Asako bore several children by Yogo and his bloodline still runs in the Asako family (and indeed on a few rare occasions the curse attached to his bloodline has manifested among the Phoenix). While Asako shugenja are rarely as powerful as their counterparts in the Isawa or Agasha, they have a definite affinity for Fire.

THE AGASHA FAMILY

The Agasha family were part of the Dragon Clan for most of their history, but fled to join the Phoenix Clan during the Hidden Emperor era, when the Dragon came under the mad rule of Hitomi and the sinister influence of the Lying Darkness. Agasha Gennai led the large majority who left the clan, and the Phoenix eagerly accepted them and even named Gennai as Master of Air; their own ranks had been ravaged during the Clan Wars and they were delighted to gain the power and numbers of the Agasha. This defection remained a point of some contention between the two clans for many years afterward.

Following their incorporation into the Phoenix, the Agasha tried to put aside the more militant nature that had sometimes characterized their role in the Dragon. However, their new home and the passage of generations did not change their overall mindset. As Phoenix they still tend to be contemplative and analytical, just as they were in the Dragon Clan, approaching most matters – including Elemental magic – in a methodical and almost “scientific” way. This has allowed them to discern, study, and use subtle links among the Elements that are not

perceived by others. Accordingly, while Agasha shugenja are in general inherently attuned to Fire, they have developed forms of multi-Elemental magic that others in the Empire view with at best intrigued skepticism.

While they were still in the Dragon Clan, the Agasha pioneered ways of incorporating magical effects into physical objects and substances, notably *mitsugusuri* (potions) and *kagaku* (other physical objects and substances). This practice, known as alchemy, was developed from Lady Agasha's own writings and its practitioners are known as *ikakeya*. Alchemy is also practiced by the Agasha family's successors in the Dragon Clan, the Tamori family, but is viewed with unease and often outright distrust by many other Rokugani shugenja. To the Isawa in particular, it simply does not seem appropriate to somehow create magical effects from liquids, powders, and the like without any need for prayers. (Although the Asahina fetishes also embody magical powers in physical objects, the Crane shugenja show a far more religious and less disturbingly “practical” approach to their magical researches.) Indeed, to some shugenja the practice of alchemy borders on a blasphemous exploitation of the kami, who should be properly revered and not simply treated as a means of producing useful effects whenever required. For this very reason, the Agasha long hid their alchemical practices behind a symbolic language called *bubun*.

The Agasha family's introspective nature and tendency to dabble in unusual Elemental practices has always caused the rest of the Empire to consider them strange, and their perhaps-treasonous defection from Dragon to Phoenix only intensified this view. As a result, in modern times the Phoenix Agasha *ikakeya* have put aside much of their former research in order to better fit in with their new clan.





THE SHIBA FAMILY

The Shiba are the exception among the Phoenix – a family of warriors in a clan dominated and largely run by pacifistic shugenja. Shugenja of Shiba birth are extraordinarily rare, even rarer than Asako shugenja, and are usually adopted into the Isawa family in order to better develop their talents. Shugenja who remain within the Shiba family are thus even rarer, although a few have come to the attention of the Imperial histories – men such as Shiba Tsuna, who founded the tiny order of so-called “Shiba Illusionists,” and Shiba Ningen, the Master of Void during the latter half of the twelfth century.

Aside from such exceptional individuals, the samurai of the Shiba family associated with Elemental Fire are most commonly skilled duelists and yojimbo, deployed with the Legion of Flame in support of the Firestorm Legion. Strictly speaking, these are not practitioners of Elemental Fire magic at all. However, their close association and training with the Firestorm Legion combined with their skill in dueling (reinforced, perhaps, by underlying connections to the Element of Fire) cause these individuals to be seen as symbolic “beacons” of Fire. They form bonds with their Fire Tensai cousins in the Firestorm Legion so deep and strong that each is almost instinctively able to anticipate and accommodate the actions of the other.

The Tamori of the Dragon Clan

The Tamori family was formed from the remnant of the Agasha family that remained loyal to the Dragon Clan, and initially retained its original orientation toward Fire. Unfortunately, its leader and founder Agasha Tamori, embittered by the loss of so many of his followers, indulged in forbidden magics and succumbed to the Shadowlands Taint, eventually becoming the Dark Oracle of Fire. It was not until Tamori’s daughter Shaitung managed to stymie the entire Phoenix Elemental Council during the War of Fire and Snow that the Tamori family was finally accepted in Rokugan, and Shaitung is now generally recognized as the family’s founder while her treacherous father is forgotten as much as possible. Shaitung was an Earth shugenja, and under her tutelage the family re-oriented itself toward that Element. Nonetheless, many Tamori shugenja still show affinity to Fire, perhaps reflecting the family’s original bloodline.

The Tamori, like the Agasha before them, have a long martial history, often fighting in the front ranks of the Dragon armies alongside their Mirumoto cousins; their ongoing affinity for Fire thus also reflects the family’s turbulent and somewhat war-like nature. Like their Agasha counterparts, Tamori *ikakeya* (alchemists) are well-known for crafting *mitsugusuri* and *kagaku*, an activity reflective of the creative aspect of Fire. However, while the Agasha have settled into a more passive and introspective role

in the Phoenix Clan and have allowed much of their alchemical research to lapse, the Tamori are still avid practitioners. The Tamori militant shugenja known as *yamabushi* are often found in the front lines of Dragon armies, hurling destructive concoctions and discharging strange devices at their foes.

The Togashi of the Dragon

The Togashi may be the most unconventional family to embrace practices of Elemental Fire. Indeed, they are not truly a family in any conventional sense, but rather a spiritual brotherhood taking the same name as they come together in a quest for greater understanding of the world. The *ise zumi* or “tattooed men” rarely leave the Dragon lands, and when they do it is often to pursue inscrutable purposes of their own.

While the Togashi are not directly bound to or focused on Elemental Fire, it is the Element most commonly linked to them. Like the Asako *henshin* or the Agasha and Tamori alchemists, the Togashi do not achieve their often spectacular Fire-based effects through supplication and reverence of the Elemental kami. Rather, they draw on their mystical tattoos (connecting them to the power of their founder) as well as their own mental, physical, and spiritual discipline to manipulate their own inner life-force, their chi, and thereby create Fire. Indeed, one of the iconic images of the Togashi is of a tattooed man breathing fire on his foes. They are also often able to call on their tattoos resist the effects of fire and heat, sometimes for prolonged periods of time.

Types of Fire Magic

Although Fire is often regarded as little more than a force of destruction, a skilled Fire shugenja can produce a wide range of effects based on the Element – anything from searing blasts to subtle, finely-tuned enhancements to armor and blades. In general, Fire magic can be divided into three broad categories that reflect the fundamental nature of the Element: spells focused on Destruction, spells focused on Creation, and spells focused on Change.

Fires of Destruction

Destruction is the most immediately obvious aspect of Fire, the most dramatic and the most feared. Indeed, Rokugani have an ambivalent relationship with Fire; they understand and accept it is necessary and useful, but still view it warily. After all, even the smallest flame is a catastrophe waiting to happen if it is not properly tended and handled. This is particularly true when it comes to Rokugani dwellings, which are made almost entirely of readily flammable materials such as wood and paper, so every town and village maintains a makeshift fire-fighting

crew, with neighbors quickly rushing to help extinguish a fire in a home or business. Larger towns and major cities often have permanent fire-fighting forces, called “fireman gangs,” since uncontrolled fires among packed structures can quickly become a major disaster. The Fireman Gangs of Ryoko Owari are probably the most well-known example, although they are also notorious for degenerating into criminal gangs; still, when it comes to a fire in the city, they are very much fire-fighters above all else.

Rokugani magic incorporates this ambivalence in its approach to destructive Fire spells. Coaxing the Fire kami into a destructive rage is seen as a distasteful necessity at best, usually reserved for battle or when fighting an opponent truly bent on nothing but destruction himself. At worst, it is a horrific exploitation of the turbulent nature of the Fire kami to inflict massive harm on others, on property, or even on the landscape of Rokugan itself. Many shugenja believe there are other, more “noble” ways of bringing an enemy to heel rather than relying on destructive Fire. Particularly idealistic samurai sometimes even see the use of Fire magic to destroy one’s enemies as dishonorable, since it allows for none of the courtesies normally offered to opponents under the Code of Bushido. Even this is not absolute, however; enemies not subject to Bushido, such as gaijin or Shadowlands monstrosities, deserve nothing less than the cleansing scour of Fire.

In spite of this ambivalence, Rokugani shugenja who must face enemies in combat almost always incorporate some destructive Fire magic into their repertoire; Fire magic is unparalleled in the sheer amount of damage it can inflict. However, few shugenja, even militant ones, focus exclusively on the destructive potential of Fire.

THE INFERNO GUARD (FIRESTORM LEGION)

The Firestorm Legion of the Phoenix Elemental Guard is devoted to the use of Elemental Fire in battle. As such, it is by far the most overtly destructive of the four Elemental Legions, using Fire and its derivatives – heat, smoke, and even light – to disrupt or destroy enemy formations, deny the enemy access to key parts of the battlefield, and obscure friendly intentions and maneuvers. There is generally very little subtlety to the Firestorm Legion’s actions, and this is particularly true of its most famous sub-unit, the Inferno Guard.

The role of the Inferno Guard is to use Elemental Fire not as a proactively destructive force (sending flame into the enemy ranks) but rather to use Fire in more static ways. This does not mean the Inferno Guard is a primarily defensive force, although it excels at defensive tasks; rather, the Guard specializes in using the threat of Fire and its horrifying destructive properties to influence enemy actions. The Guard may, for example, cause a roaring wall of Fire to erupt across the path of an enemy advance, halting it, or shifting the advance to a different and more desirable direction. It may invoke the Fire kami to cause the arrows fired by enemy archers to flare into ash in mid-flight, nullifying their attacks.



Or it may cause enemy weapons to suddenly become far too hot to hold, prompting their wielders to drop them. In this way, the Inferno Guard furthers the Isawa philosophy of seeking peaceful resolution to conflict if at all possible, wielding the destructive power of Fire as a threat as much as an active force, promising worse if the enemy continues in its current course of action. Of course, sometimes threats are insufficient, and the Inferno Guard is quite capable of taking direct offensive action as part of the greater Firestorm Legion. Still, this is not its primary purpose and many Guardsmen consider themselves to have failed if they are forced to attack their opponents directly.

The Inferno Guard rarely numbers more than a few dozen shugenja, and the methods taught to its members are carefully guarded secrets. This is not so much out of fear that other parties might steal the technique and use it against the clan, but rather because of the danger that others might not be able to use the technique safely. The Inferno Guard’s methods involve invoking the Fire kami to destructive ends but then immediately restraining them and carefully controlling their actions. As any shugenja knows, once the Fire kami are unleashed they are quite difficult to constrain; without the force of will and deep understanding of Elemental Fire taught in the Guard’s dojo, this can lead to disastrous releases of destructive Fire. Accordingly, only a handful of non-Phoenix shugenja have ever been accepted into the Inferno Guard dojo, and even then it involved extraordinary circumstances sanctioned by the Council of Elemental Masters itself.





Fires of Creation

While Fire can be extremely destructive, Rokugani also recognize that without its beneficial effects civilized life in the Empire would be impossible. Fire provides heat and light, cooks food, smelts and refines metal, and so forth. Moreover, Fire is seen as the Element of intellect and inspiration as well as of destruction. Accordingly, many shugenja attempt to harness and enhance the more creative aspect of fire, and numerous spells have been developed to this end. Some of these applications are extremely specialized, tied to complex enchantments or artistic endeavors. For example, some of the forges of the Crab Clan's Kaiu family are enchanted to produce flames that are particularly hot or which do not vary outside a given temperature range, allowing for the efficient production of specific types of metals and items. Less spectacularly, mundane devices such as hearths, ovens, and lanterns are sometimes enchanted, even temporarily, to prevent food being burned, to keep lights from being extinguished, or to avoid uncontrolled fires. It is said the great hearth in the main hall of Kyuden Isawa benefits from such enchantments, always providing a uniform heat and light and never going out so long as the Fire kami are periodically renewed (usually by young Fire initiates assigned the task as part of their training).

Given the potential for great destruction from fire, it is not surprising shugenja have also found ways to quickly control or extinguish uncontrolled flames, something which they also consider to fall under the rubric of "creative" use of Fire magic.

Important structures in Rokugan, such

as the Imperial Palace, are often protected by permanent wards designed to control and prevent fires. Such wards are difficult and time-consuming to create, and must undergo frequent maintenance by knowledgeable shugenja, so they are normally confined to only the most important of structures. Temporary wards may be erected elsewhere, if circumstances demand; for example, the wooden walkways of a castle might be made fire-resistant during a siege.

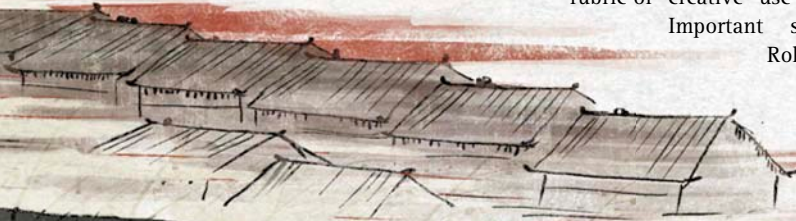
Another creative use of Elemental Fire is that of using it protectively. Fire can form an intimidating barrier to passage, but in less intimidating forms it can be a useful way of protecting an area from intrusion or guarding people and property from harm. Even a single Fire kami delivering a minor burn may be sufficient to warn would-be transgressors away lest more harmful effects be triggered if they continue.

The various shugenja who make a practice of crafting minor magical or alchemical items, such as the Asahina Fetishists and the Agasha/Tamori *Ikakeya*, are not always explicitly using Fire magic in their creations but are certainly employing the intellectual and creative methods which are iconic for the Element's more positive aspects. This type of Fire-influenced creativity can even extend to the use of magic in the arts. For example, the Asahina, in an effort to guide those shugenja in their family with an affinity for Elemental Fire into peaceful and creative works, have developed the Asahina Fire Sculptors, who use Fire as a medium of artistic expression.

THE ASAHINA FETISHISTS

The Asahina family's association with the Crane Clan has always biased them toward artistic and creative uses of magic, and for those of the family whose Fire remains strong this can be a very effective way of channeling their intellectual energies. In contrast to the Dragon (and later Phoenix) *Ikakeya*, whose creations are clan secrets and often of a rather dangerous or destructive nature, the Asahina fetishes are seen as items of beauty to be shared with all; fetishes (or *tsangusuri*) are intended to be used by anyone, not just shugenja. The rest of the clan naturally benefits from this, since a gift of an Asahina Fetish is greatly prized.

Tsangusuri are created by coupling the prayers to the various kami with artistic and crafting skills, often supplemented with the use of unusual materials – rare minerals, specific plants, and so forth. Each fetish is unique, a composition of natural elements reinforced by calligraphy, sculpture, or *ikebana* as well as the prayers of the shugenja who creates it. Although the most basic and common fetishes replicate "standard" spell effects, there are countless different designs and types of even the most basic fetish, as well as many unusual and unique types which produce special effects. Regardless, each fetish's benediction can be stored forever but only used once. The Asahina believe this imparts a sense of pious responsibility on the user, only proper given the holy nature of the kami.



THE ASAHINA FIRE SCULPTORS

The egregiously destructive nature of Fire makes it an uneasy association for the pacifistic Asahina family, and most Asahina have an affinity for Elemental Air. They are known for being able to call on the Air kami to assist them in creating magnificent (if generally ephemeral) works of art. However, some Asahina who are born into a natural affinity for Fire magic also seek to follow the ways of the artist. True to its nature, the family long ago developed ways to encourage and channel this fiery artisanship in creative and non-violent ways. The result is the Asahina Fire Sculptors.

On its surface, the use of Fire as an artistic medium is not all that strange a concept for the artisan-shugenja of the Asahina. Rendering deliberate shapes in media as fluid as mist, water, sand, and ice has long been a practice in the family; it would seem only logical that Fire be included in such pursuits. However, the Air kami are sensitive to the emotions of humans, and respond positively to the satisfaction and delight of those who work and view sculptures that include them. Even the Water and Earth kami will comply, albeit with more effort. Fire kami, however, are impatient and fickle, so convincing them to cooperate in adopting and maintaining specific forms is a very difficult and taxing endeavor. Even fleeting success requires a deep understanding of the Fire kami, intense concentration, and the willingness to invest a great deal of time and patience. Indeed, the long study and immersion in the craft serves its own purpose, keeping its practitioners engaged in a practice that may take a lifetime to master; meanwhile, they are not turning their skills and knowledge to more destructive pursuits. However, while it is true that most Fire Sculptors achieve only the most basic of results, a few have become masters of their craft, able to create intricate breathtaking images rendered in nothing but fire, smoke, and the shimmer of heat.

While Fire sculpting is difficult (and potentially dangerous in the hands of an inexperienced or inattentive shugenja), the results can be truly amazing. Skilled practitioners have been able to produce complicated three-dimensional works, with details picked out in flames of varying size and color, lasting as long as the sculptor is able to maintain his concentration. The best Fire Sculptors are highly sought-after for attendance at courts and festivals, their efforts bringing both glory and honor to themselves, their family, and their clan. The Asahina, ever mindful of opportunities to cultivate pacifism beyond their own family, will consider any applicant to the Sculptors, but few end up being chosen. A few calamities caused by careless Fire Sculptors in the past, resulting in injuries, serious property damage, and even a few deaths, have made the sensei wary of accepting any applicants save those with the greatest discipline and mental fortitude. However (although none would ever admit it) this potential danger is actually a subtle part of the Fire Sculptors' artistic repertoire. It is said the most masterful Sculptors will incorporate hints of such danger in their presentations, suggestions that the Fire kami are close to coming unbound and are only just being held in check, when in fact the Sculptor is entirely in control the whole time.

TYPES OF *Tsangusuri*

The Asahina Festshest Path from the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook (page 252) allows the creation of basic fetishes which award a simple bonus to their recipient. However, it is also possible to create more advanced fetishes which grant more potent blessings. The GM may represent this by allowing the shugenja to call Raises on the Craft or Artisan Skill Roll associated with making the fetish, or having the shugenja expend more spell slots in its creation.

Listed below are some of the more well-known types of "normal" fetishes with examples for more powerful enchantments which could be added to them. GMs and players can use these for inspiration in developing their own ideas for fetishes.

BROOCH OF PLENTY: This small brooch made of coral, carefully carved into the shape of a lotus blossom, helps its bearer ignore the effects of thirst and hunger. In its basic form it awards a bonus to Meditation (Fasting) rolls. A more advanced version can allow the bearer to actually ignore all effects of going without food and water for 24 hours.

MAKEUP KIT: The cosmetics in this makeup kit bear a simple prayer to the kami of Air, allowing them to subtly enhance the charm of an actor. The normal version awards a bonus to Acting Skill rolls. A more advanced version allows the user to pass as someone else for one hour.

FEATHER OF THE CRANE: Crafted from a feather obtained when it fell naturally from a crane in flight, this fetish makes its bearer feel lighter, allowing for greater grace and speed. The basic version awards a bonus to Perform: Dancing rolls. Advanced versions are said to be able to allow flight through the air for a short distance (fifty feet or so).

ACORN OF VISION: Carved with intricate calligraphy despite its tiny surface, this fetish must be swallowed to activate it. It allows a brief moment of insight into the future. The basic version enhances Divination rolls, but the advanced version may actually bestow a specific vision of the GM's choice.

WHITE SHEAF OF GRAIN: This fetish, made from surprisingly humble materials, represents the sustaining power of rice and can help an injured person recover. The basic version enhances Medicine skill rolls, while advanced versions may actually be able to heal 1k1 Wounds.

BLACK FAN: Somewhat more sinister than most other fetishes, this item enhances the bearer's charisma, but it tends to evoke more fear than respect. The basic item enhances Courtier (Manipulation) rolls, but a more advanced version might also enhance Intimidation or Seduction, depending on the specific design.

BLUE FAN: A lighter and more pleasant counterpart to the Black Fan, the blessing on this item makes the owner come across as more pleasant and charming. The basic version enhances Etiquette rolls, but more advanced types might also award a temporary Advantage such as Benten's Blessing.

CROW FEATHER: Crafted from a feather which fell onto a temple or other sacred sight, this item invokes the wisdom of the Tao. The basic form enhances Lore: Theology (Shintao) rolls, but an advanced type might actually restore a lost Void Point.

INCENSE OF CONCENTRATION: Made of a secret mix of five substances designed to evoke the memory of the five Elements, the odor of this incense calms the mind and allows more effective meditation. The basic version enhances Meditation rolls, while more advanced types can purge Fatigue, restore Void Points, or even restore a shugenja's spell slots.



TYPES OF *Kagaku*

The L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook includes options for Tamori shugenja to practice the most basic form of alchemy, that of placing spells into potions for later use. However, the *Ikakeya* are known for creating many other items than potions, some of them quite exotic. GMs who wish to offer more options for alchemically-inclined Tamori and Agasha characters may choose to let them create other items than merely potions, spending spell slots and making Craft: Alchemy / Intelligence rolls as appropriate. The following is a list of the best-known and most widely-used *Kagaku* items and potions from the Dragon Clan; GMs and players may also use it as inspiration for creating their own items.

FLASH PAPER (*Moeagaru*) – This is a type of thin paper which is treated with special alchemical solutions. It catches on fire from any friction (such as a shugenja rubbing his fingers along it), burning up in a bright instantaneous flame. Flash paper is sometimes used to write messages which might need to be destroyed, but its favored usage is to ignite it in front of an opponent's eyes, momentarily blinding him. The target must roll Reflexes at TN 20 or be considered Blind until the Reactions stage of the next Round.

KITSUKI POWDER – Developed by the Agasha to assist their Kitsuki cousins, this soft gray powder has a peculiar affinity for both human footprints and human blood. If it is scattered over an area, it will adhere to any footprints or bloodstains made in the last 24 hours, even if they were wiped up or otherwise obscured.

LIQUID SMOKE (*Ekitai Kemuri*) – This is a gummy liquid that can be set on fire. It emits a thick black smoke that burns the eyes and throat; victims are considered to be Dazed, but can make the normal Earth roll to shake it off. Liquid Smoke burns for ten minutes per dose.

SLEEPING FIRE (*Hinemuri*) – A thin clear liquid that is highly sensitive to changes in temperature and ignites when exposed to such changes (such as a warm foot stepping in it). Sleeping Fire burns quickly and thus generally causes only mild injuries (1k1 damage), but the sudden burst of heat can easily set a building alight.

THE AGASHA/TAMORI IKAKEYA

The Ikakeya are a small and (many would say) eccentric group of shugenja who focus their efforts on incorporating magic into material substances, primarily potions (*mitsugusuri*) and physical items (*kagaku*). They have been a significant aspect of the Dragon Clan's magical practices ever since Agasha Daikoku deciphered the bubun symbolic language in Lady Agasha's writings and founded the practice of alchemy (see the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*, page 84). In modern times, the Agasha have greatly de-emphasized their alchemical practices to better conform to the expectations of their new home in the Phoenix Clan, but a few of them still follow the path of the *Ikakeya*. The Tamori, of course, have continued their alchemical studies without abatement, notwithstanding (or perhaps even in spite of) the dim view of them by most other shugenja in Rokugan – including those of the Phoenix. Many traditional shugenja did not see the *Ikakeya*'s methods as appropriate, because they reduce the kami, properly the objects of reverence, to little more than tools.

Fires of Change

The other important aspect of Elemental Fire is that of change, both literal and figurative. Literal change is reflected in the way Fire causes wood to become ash, turns a cold place warm, or replaces darkness with light. Figurative change is a more subtle and nuanced thing. Philosophically, the concept of undergoing personal change is often described in terms related to Fire. A warrior is said to be tempered and hardened in the fires of battle, for example, a metaphor that draws on the literal fires of the forge. Fire is also seen as a way of purifying the impure; it is said to "cleanse," so a holy place that has been defiled is often smudged with incense as part of its re-consecration or even ritually burned down so a new shrine or temple can be constructed in its place. The legend of the phoenix, the mystical bird which dies in a conflagration and is then resurrected from its own ashes, encapsulates the concept of change through Fire, as well as the spiritual rebirth so important to the Rokugani vision of the cycle of life and death.

This concept of change through Fire figures prominently in many of the spells created by shugenja throughout the Empire's history, drawing on Elemental Fire as an agent for affecting the world. Some of the effects developed are focused on imbuing existing objects or materials with new properties, while others alter the way in which subjects interact with one another or with the world around them. In all cases, this involves changing the balance of Elements within the target, usually by making Fire more active or causing Fire's relationship with the other Elements to be reconfigured in some way. The Fire of change can therefore be potentially very subtle, not immediately evident to others.

The Fires of Change are exemplified in a number of organizations within Rokugan, such as the Transcendent Brotherhood (a small sect of Togashi monks who see fire as a means to purify the soul) and the College of Clarity (an organization of the Moshi family).



THE TOGASHI TRANSCENDENT BROTHERHOOD

The Transcendent Brotherhood owes its origins to an eighth century Brotherhood monk whose name is only recorded as Ohan. Ohan was a noted healer and holy man whose passion was offering succor to those injured in battle – an all-too-familiar state for many Rokugani samurai. He would appear in the immediate aftermath of battles, typically unannounced, and walk the battlefield to seek out and treat the wounded. His purpose was to save lives, but more often than not all he could do was try to comfort those whose wounds were too grievous for survival. During such times, Ohan began to reflect on the nature of pain, the unwanted but ubiquitous companion of the dying. It struck him that pain normally served a necessary purpose, warning of harm to those it afflicted, thereby perhaps allowing them to escape or withdraw before further hurt occurred. However, those suffering from critical wounds or other hopeless afflictions also experienced intense and often prolonged pain. Some records claim Ohan's faith in the Fortunes was shaken by this reality; after all, other than causing great suffering in the face of impending death, what purpose could such pain serve? How could it be reconciled with the Celestial Wheel?

Whether he felt doubts or not, all records agree Ohan did not stop his quest for insight. The monk came to believe all pain must serve some greater purpose; perhaps, he reasoned, it prepared one for transition to the next existence. It could be that pain was a means of purifying the mind and spirit for an apotheosis. If this was the case, perhaps pain could have a greater purpose, assisting a mortal in becoming closer to a state of Enlightenment. It was from this presumption that the Brotherhood of Transcendence was eventually born.

Initially, Ohan experimented with a variety of ways of inflicting pain without causing lasting harm to himself. One story recounts that while preparing a meal the monk burned his hand, and the searing pain that resulted exceeded anything he had thus far achieved. Supposedly, in that moment Ohan experienced a flicker of transcendence, a brief moment of nearly divine confluence of mind, body, and spirit. Accordingly, he turned to Fire as a source of "pure and undiluted pain." Immediately, however, he encountered an obvious problem: Fire sufficient to cause intense pain usually also resulted in serious injury. Over the ensuing years, the monk experimented with various ways of experiencing the agony of burning without the physical harm. By this time he had cast out from the Brotherhood as a potentially dangerous eccentric; however, he had also attracted a small following of those fascinated by his ideas. Eventually, Ohan and his followers discovered a means of fortifying the flesh against the physical harm of



heat and fire, using deep meditation and manipulation of internal chi, thereby allowing them to experience the full spectrum of resulting pain.

This strange little sect ultimately found a home in the Togashi family of the Dragon Clan. It is said Togashi himself interceded on behalf of Ohan and his followers, saying it was wrong to gainsay a possible path to Enlightenment simply because it was so bizarre to others. Whether this is true or not, after Ohan's death the sect, now known (somewhat euphemistically) as the Transcendent Brotherhood, continued to explore the extent to which the experience of pain could provide insight into the nature of existence.

Although it has faded into relative obscurity, the Transcendent Brotherhood still maintains a handful of adherents in modern times. It is said the adepts of this sect can draw upon their chi, hardening their flesh so that for short periods of time they can endure terrific heat and even touch open fire without suffering actual harm. They do, of course, experience the attendant pain and claim that while in the throes of such suffering they gain greater understanding of themselves and the world around them. This tends to be a reclusive pursuit, with its practitioners rarely leaving the sect's small monastery in a remote valley of the Dragon mountains.

In the late twelfth century the Transcendent Brotherhood did briefly emerge from obscurity to play a small but important role in the War of Dark Fire. Since they could fortify themselves against the physical effects of fire and were already accustomed to the pain associated with being burnt, the members of the Transcendent Brotherhood were able to launch strategic strikes against the shamans and commanders of the Army of Dark Fire. Several battles turned when the warriors of Dark Fire found themselves suddenly leaderless or lacking magical support because their leaders had been struck down by Transcendent Brothers.





THE COLLEGE OF CLARITY

The College of Clarity can be traced to the Moshi family's pre-Mantis days as an independent Minor Clan, the Centipede. Early in the ninth century, a Centipede named Moshi Takumi struggled under a double burden: firstly, he was a male shugenja in a clan whose training in the ways of the kami was traditionally restricted to women, and secondly, he was not a very good shugenja.

When the leaders of the Centipede learned the male child named Takumi had a facility for communing with the kami, there was both considerable interest and some controversy. Male shugenja were unknown in the clan at that time, and the traditional leaders of the family looked at this "aberration" with some degree of alarm. As it turned out, however, their concerns were hardly justified. As soon as Takumi began his most basic training with the Centipede sensei, the limits of his talents became apparent. He could perceive the kami and communicate with them, but try as he might he could barely influence the behavior of the Elemental spirits. The kami would either ignore his attempts to importune them or would manifest in unexpected ways. The dispirited Takumi soon fell into obscurity, and his sensei began discussing other paths the young man could follow. He might have ended up a thoroughly unremarkable samurai, one among many, had he not been doggedly determined to succeed as a priest of the kami.

On his own time and initiative Moshi Takumi sought a solution to his problems with importuning the kami. He consulted old texts and spoke to many shugenja, but nothing in the scope of conventional magical understanding seemed to work. Finally, in desperation, Takumi cast a wider net, consulting works on subjects only vaguely related to the kami and spellcasting. He finally found a possible answer in an esoteric scroll written by a Kakita kenshinzen, musing over the role one's inner Fire could play in iaijutsu dueling. While the discussion of dueling itself held little interest for Takumi, the technique of drawing on one's Fire to promote clear and focused thinking intrigued him. Could it be possible, he wondered, to use this technique to better focus his own mind on the engagement of the kami? After many years, Takumi developing enhanced forms of meditation and focused thought that did result in his gaining some improved measure of control over his interaction with the kami. Unfortunately, his techniques were not sufficient to allow him any real mastery of the Elemental arts, and he never amounted to more than a mediocre shugenja. Had this been the extent of his contributions to his clan, it is likely Moshi Takumi's name would have passed into the obscuring mists of history.

It is often the case that great achievements are recognized long after their creator's passing. Moshi Takumi made careful records documenting his findings and detailing his techniques. After the incorporation of the Centipede into the Mantis Clan in the early twelfth century, his writings were rediscovered by Moshi scholars. While the impetus for studying them was actually to improve the techniques of Mantis duelists – thereby closing the circle of knowledge back to its original Kakita source material – scholars soon realized the approach of drawing on one's

innate Fire to promote clear, rational, and precise thinking could be applied to many pursuits. The Seekers of Clarity, a loosely-organized group of devotees to Takumi's methods, soon began using his approach to further pursuits as diverse as navigation, ship design, poetry, engineering, and music. Eventually, senior members of the Moshi family recognized the benefits of the Seekers' endeavors and formally established a college within the Moshi dojo to further develop and teach their methods. By then, even a few members of other clans had been introduced to the techniques, so the Mantis chose to make positions within the so-called College of Clarity available to any clan in the Empire... in return for appropriate considerations, of course. In modern times many diplomats and courtiers have sought to attend the College, hoping to gain an edge in the complex realm of Rokugani politics. After all, quick, focused, and incisive thinking can be just as powerful in the courts as in the realm of magic.

Notable Uses of Destructive Fire Spells

In spite of the ambivalence surrounding destructive Fire magic, there has been no lack of shugenja throughout the Empire's history who have sought to unleash ever more powerful expressions of Elemental Fire. As a result, there are numerous destructive Fire spells, many of which are simply enhanced versions of earlier less powerful prayers. The most common such spells and their uses are listed below.

ENVIOUS FLAMES

This is a relatively minor Fire spell with little destructive power. Since it causes only a single Fire kami to attack the target, it is usually used to distract opponents – particularly other shugenja who are in the midst of casting or maintaining spells of their own. However, it also is useful for disrupting those engaged in any non-magical activity requiring concentration, such as those who are in the Center Stance or who are involved in mentally demanding activities such as climbing or stringing a bow. Since it does relatively little damage and is of such short duration, Envious Flames does not tend to attract the same notice and unease as more destructive Fire spells.

THE FIRES THAT CLEANSE / ENTICING DANCE OF THE FLAME

Unlike Envious Flames, which is relatively focused and limits its harm to a particular target, these spells are indiscriminate, rousing all of the Fire kami within a given distance of the caster. Even the caster may not be immune to the ire of the kami. For this reason, some shugenja denigrate these spells as crude and uncouth, comparing them to the blunt violence of a tetsubo in contrast to the refined elegance of a katana. Certainly, these spells tend



to be suited to desperate circumstances, such as when the shugenja is surrounded by many enemies. However, one of the more sinister uses of these spells is to start large uncontrolled fires. Enraging all of the Fire kami in a large area can set numerous simultaneous fires, causing great damage for a relatively small investment of magical effort. Using these spells in such a way, or even simply using them in an area where they have the potential of causing major harm (e.g. within the confines of a city or town, for example), should probably induce a significant loss of Honor and/or Glory (3 or more points) for any shugenja who tries to follow Bushido. It may also be considered a criminal act, depending on the views of the local authorities. (Of course, in some circumstances such things may be unavoidable, or necessitated by the greater good.)

FURY OF OSANO-WO

Although considered a Fire spell, this prayer to the Fortune of Fire and Thunder draws on the aspect of that Fortune devoted to storms. Rokugani scholars recognize lightning is subtly different from normal fire, but since they lack a clear understanding of electrical phenomena they have concluded it is a specific form of Fire related to Osano-Wo. Interestingly, while destructive Fire effects are viewed with mixed feelings by many samurai, particularly those of idealistic nature, the death and destruction caused by the Fury of Osano-Wo is generally treated differently. Clearly, if a Fortune has answered the shugenja's call, this is a righteous and honorable. This speaks also to the fact that Fire is a relatively common phenomenon, easily understood by samurai as the product of the easily-enraged Fire kami, while lightning is a strange and mysterious thing which derives directly from the Fortune himself. Accordingly, even significant destruction resulting from this spell should probably not induce Honor or Glory penalties or draw accusations of law-breaking.

The GM should consider that since this spell is a prayer to Osano-Wo, there may be circumstances under which the Fortune refuses to answer. If the shugenja's purpose is trivial, or would clearly conflict with Osano-Wo's interests, the spell may not work regardless of the Spell Casting roll. Indeed, an enraged Osano-Wo might even choose to visit his wrath on the would-be caster.

THE FIRES FROM WITHIN

This is in many ways the archetypical destructive Fire spell, hurling a bolt of searing flame at a chosen target. It can be extremely damaging, particularly in the hands of a highly experienced Fire shugenja, but much of its effect also derives from its spectacular nature. A single use of The Fires From Within can quickly spread confusion, fear, and even panic among unprepared or weak-willed enemies. Shugenja of a more pacifistic nature, such as the Isawa and Asahina, who are forced into violence will often use The Fires From Within as their first spell in hopes of driving their opponents into surrender or retreat, avoiding further bloodshed.

TAIL OF THE FIRE DRAGON

This is an unusual spell, creating a whip of fire with which the shugenja can strike his foes at a distance. Traditional samurai look very much askance at this spell, since it arms the shugenja with a decidedly non-traditional weapon and allows strikes from far beyond an opponent's ability to reply. Using this spell against an honorable opponent is often considered to be highly questionable, perhaps even outright shameful. The GM may wish to consider a small Honor and/or Glory loss (typically 1-2 points) for its use against such targets. Foes lacking Honor, of course, can be struck down without such distaste.

BREATH OF THE DRAGON

This is another visually spectacular spell which can potentially convince would-be enemies to surrender or flee, even if none of them are caught in the area of effect. Again, pacifistic shugenja may choose to use this spell as a demonstration of what awaits their foes. Even the most well-intentioned shugenja needs to be wary of this spell's potential for collateral damage and uncontrolled fires.

FIERY WRATH

As noted in this spell's description (page 183 of the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook), it has potentially useful effects through focused destruction, such as clearing a field for crops or starting bonfires, but is largely useless as a form of attack. This is probably the only Fire spell whose destruction is so focused that it cannot cause collateral or unintended damage. Nonetheless, a shugenja intending to employ this spell in a built-up area is well-advised to inform neighbors and the local authorities beforehand, since common folk are unlikely to immediately distinguish between a fire that will spread out of control and a fire that cannot. There have been one or two instances where this spell triggered a riot in which the shugenja lost his life before he could explain what he was doing. That said, this spell is a favorite of pacifistic shugenja for intimidating a potential foe, since it has a terrifying aspect of fiery immolation without the chance of causing any actual harm.



THE FIST OF OSANO-WO

As noted in its description (page 184 of the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook), the use of this spell in a populated area is considered a criminal offence; in truth, in that sense it is little different from other spells such as The Fires That Cleanse, but its more spectacular nature has drawn greater attention from the authorities. Again, the GM may choose to consider that the source of this spell's effect is the Fortune of Fire and Thunder. Osano-Wo may choose to not even grant the blessing of his wrath in the first place if there is the possibility of improper harm (such as setting a city on fire). Indeed, he might even punish the reckless shugenja with a wrathful lightning bolt.

RAVENOUS SWARMS

This spell may be considered much like The Fires That Cleanse or Enticing Dance of the Flame, with the added issue that its extended duration means that there is a much greater chance of spreading the damage. However, unless the GM chooses to allow it, the Fire kami that have encircled the target will not attack other individuals, preventing this spell from being used as a make-shift form of attack by its target. Also, the GM should decide if the Fire kami will only attack a shugenja attempting to cast a Fire spell or if they will also attack those attempting to create or use other Fire-based effects. For example, the

GM could rule that the Fire kami attack someone wielding a weapon enhanced by Biting Steel or Hungry Blade, or someone using a Fire kiho. Needless to say, a Fire shugenja targeted by this spell will be furious at having the kami of his own Element turned against him.

DESTRUCTIVE WAVE / FOLLOW THE FLAME / BEAM OF THE INFERNO

These extremely destructive spells are essentially much more powerful versions of The Fires From Within, and are subject to the same considerations but even more so given the massive energies they release. Most shugenja only employ such powerful prayers when absolutely required, given both the exertion required and the potential for widespread harm. However, using such truly spectacular spells can also a battle very quickly, even a major battle with large numbers of troops.

The flip side of this, of course, is that using such powerful magic will make the shugenja a high-priority target for his enemies, both mundane and magical. Accordingly, a Fire shugenja calling upon such terrifying powers should always be sure he has plenty of protection or a means of quick escape. A GM may also wish to consider the effect that such an egregious invocation of the kami may have on the supernatural surroundings. For example, after employing a spell such as Destructive Wave, it may



be impossible for a time to importune the Fire kami to produce other effects, which means future Fire spells in the same area may be weakened, have unpredictable effects, or even fail altogether.

Notable Uses of Creative Fire Spells

Many shugenja throughout the Empire's history have sought to harness and enhance the creative aspect of Elemental Fire. The most common of those spells are listed below, along with how they are used and how they are perceived by others.

EXTINGUISH

This is one of the most basic Fire spells, and few Fire shugenja will not know it. Moreover, it is a spell that even the most secretive of shugenja will readily teach to others. All Fire shugenja recognize that having the means to quickly snuff out a fire (whether or not it is one they inadvertently started) is a good idea. Accordingly, the GM should allow any shugenja who wishes to obtain this spell to be able to acquire it easily and readily. Even the Isawa, normally very reluctant to open their libraries even to close associates, will readily teach Extinguish to almost any shugenja who asks.

FIRES OF PURITY

This is the most basic of protective spells, importuning the Fire kami to protect the target without burning him or his possessions. Unfortunately, the kami resent being held on such a short leash, so they may not be so discrete when it comes to other materials; accordingly, there is the potential for errant fires started by this spell. Pacifistic shugenja, or those only interested in showing their power to others, will often cast this spell on themselves or an associate, allowing for an impressive but largely harmless demonstration. Note, however, that too frequent use of this spell may anger the frustrated Fire kami to the point where they refuse to enact the spell or even inflict minor harm on the caster (the classic "hot foot" is a favorite of the kami).

KATANA OF FIRE

This is one of the best-known of all Fire spells, creating a blade of Fire in the caster's hands (or the hands of an ally). Although the spell summons a transient rendition in Fire of the blade that is often called the "soul of the samurai," it is nonetheless viewed with acceptance by even the most traditional samurai; after all, the Fire kami are themselves a subject of reverence and they are creating an honorable weapon. Of course, if the Katana of Fire is subsequently used in a dishonorable manner (such as to perpetrate a murder) the consequences will be no different than if an actual steel blade had been used. Also, creating a Katana of Fire for the use of someone not of

the samurai caste (such as a heimin or a monk) is just as deeply dishonorable as such a transgression involving an actual katana; the caster would be considered complicit in the crime and subject to suitable penalties.

Note that employing a Katana of Fire does not constitute "carrying a katana" in the social sense, nor is the weapon created with this spell considered acceptable for use in iaijutsu dueling (although it might be accepted for a *taryu-jiai* duel between shugenja).

NEVER ALONE

A very subtle use of Fire magic, this is one of the few spells that draws on Fire as the Element of knowledge and understanding. The spell allows the recipient to see and understand the courage of his ancestors and draw from that knowledge to aid him in dire circumstances. Beyond its specific mechanical bonuses, the GM may allow it to have a more specific or nuanced effect. For example, since the spell bestows a bonus equal to the caster's Fire Ring to Trait Rolls, the recipient receives the bonus to rolls to resist Fear effects. However, the GM could also let this spell permit a recipient already suffering from a Fear effect to re-roll his resistance with the bonus and potentially "shake off" the effect of the Fear, as he is inspired by the bravery of those who came before him.

THE RAGING FORGE

This spell is a clear example of Fire's creative powers, but shugenja should nonetheless be wary about the application of this spell to items such as weapons and armor. Some bushi consider a specific nick in the blade of their katana, or a gouge across the breastplate of their armor from a weapon-strike, to be a badge of honor or a memorial to a specific opponent. Obliterating such marks without the permission of the owner of the item in question could be taken as a deep insult, no matter how well-intentioned the action.

WARD OF PURITY

Although this spell is intended primarily to defend against the powers of Jigoku, it is also mentioned as being effective against persons or creatures "under the control of the Lying Darkness." The GM may consider this to encompass anyone with at least 1 Rank of Shadow corruption (as described in Chapter Seven of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*) or any of the Shadowspawn creatures (described in that same chapter and in the Spider Clan Appendix of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*). If the GM is allowing the optional Goju and Ninube Schools from *The Great Clans*, anyone trained in those Schools is also affected by this spell.

Notwithstanding its purpose, however, the Ward of Purity is unreliable in the Shadowlands proper (or in close proximity to the Second Festering Pit in the Scorpion lands after the Destroyer War) because of the influence of the corrupted Elemental spirits called *kansen*. In such locations (or any other place suffused with the Taint) the Ward may not function, might have a reduced effect, or might even attack its caster due to *kansen* supplanting the normal Fire kami.





THE MENDING FORGE

While this is a powerful creative spell, the Fire kami have their limits. Powerful *nemuranai* are beyond their ability to repair, for example. Just as such powerful *nemuranai* can often only be destroyed in a particular unique way, their restoration is also subject to very specific circumstances. For lesser items, however, this spell is extremely useful. Restoring a katana that is the ancestral heirloom of a family, for example, can earn considerable gratitude from the family, as well as suitable rewards in Honor and/or Glory. Of course, such rewards are at the discretion of the GM – the players should not be allowed to turn the spell into a source of “easy” Honor and Glory awards.

SYMBOL OF FIRE

All of the Symbol spells require caution in their usage since they are indiscriminate in who they affect. Careless placement that results in harm to innocent parties could be considered a crime and certainly a shameful incident. The GM may assume the caster can choose to make himself be unaffected by the Symbol; the GM may also allow the shugenja to name a number of allies or associates (perhaps a number up to his relevant Ring, in this case Fire) who can also pass through the area warded by the Symbol without harm. This makes the Symbol useful for protecting a shugenja’s private study, for example, without rendering it unusable.

WALL OF FIRE

This powerful barrier is intended to block passage by any being who is not prepared to suffer the wrath of the Fire kami. Here as elsewhere, this spell is popular among

more pacifistic shugenja, such as Isawa and Asahina, since it can prevent or at least discourage open conflict. The GM may wish to allow the casting shugenja some flexibility in the use of this spell, for instance by calling Raises to allow himself or others to pass through without harm. Assume each successful Raise allows one individual, designated by the caster at the time of casting, to pass through the barrier without harm – once. (Passing through twice would require the same individual to be named twice, for two Raises.) As always, it is possible for flammable materials that come in contact with the Wall to catch fire, so its use is not without hazard.

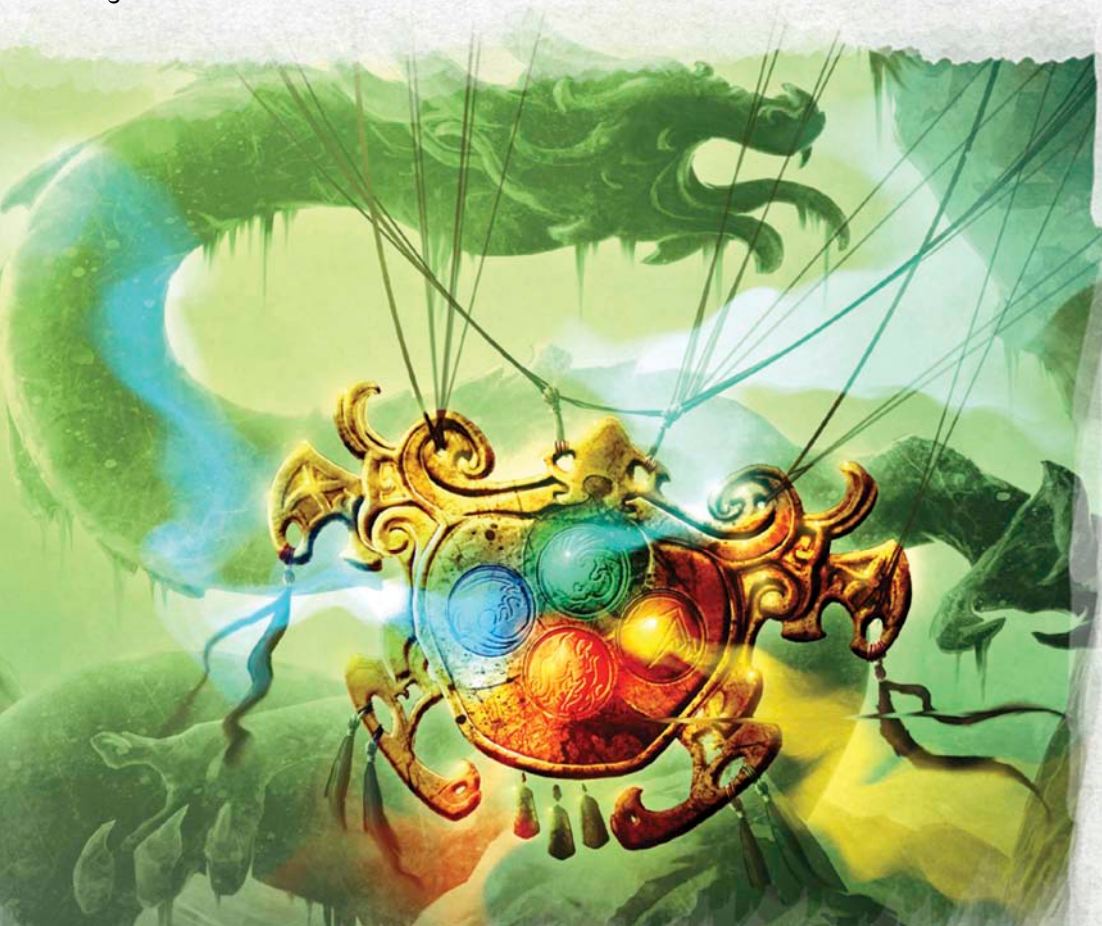
LIGHT OF THE SUN

This powerful invocation does not importune the normal Fire kami but rather appeals to the Sun directly for its effects. Therefore, much like the spells whose effects derive from Osano-Wo, there may be circumstances when the Sun will deny this spell to the shugenja or even punish him for being unrighteous. Unless circumstances make it appropriate, the GM may wish to assume a shugenja with an Honor Rank below 4.0, or who is afflicted by the Shadowlands Taint or the corruption of the Nothing, will either be unable to cast this spell or will be targeted by it instead of (or along with) his intended targets. Alternatively, the GM may decide successfully casting this spell means the Sun has discerned some potential for redemption in the caster, resulting in a small Honor award or perhaps even some relief from the effects of Taint or Shadow corruption. Of course, if this act of Celestial mercy does not change the caster’s behavior, future attention from the Sun is likely to be much less forgiving.

As a side note, this spell targets beings “controlled by the Lying Darkness” in the same manner as Ward of Purity, as described above.

WINGS OF THE PHOENIX

The unusual degree of control required to persuade the Fire kami to remain focused on the purpose of this spell means too-frequent attempts to use it earns their disfavor. As a result, shugenja find that using this spell more than twice in a single day can make the casting of other Fire spells more difficult. The GM can represent this by treating all Fire spells as one Mastery Rank higher for casting purposes for the next 24 hours. (This also makes this spell unsuitable for long-distance travel.) Of course, a caster may mitigate the ire of the kami in a variety of ways, such as by offering them a suitable sacrifice of a valuable flammable item. The more significant the sacrifice, the more the kami will be appeased.



Notable Uses of Change Fire Spells

There are a surprising number of Fire spells which harness the transformative aspect of Elemental Fire. The most common of those, and how they are used and perceived, are listed below.

BITING STEEL / BURNING KISS OF STEEL / HUNGRY BLADE / THE SOUL'S BLADE

All four of these spells act in a similar manner, calling on the power of Fire to enhance a material weapon – making it sharper and more damaging, giving it additional effects when it hits, and so forth. The most noteworthy point about such spells is that while they are considered acceptable for use in most battles (although a very traditional bushi may consider them less than honorable, representing an artificial advantage) under no circumstances are such enhanced weapons considered honorable for use in a duel. Even if the spell involves no outward change to the weapon – Biting Steel, for example – a shugenja with an Affinity for Fire will be able to detect the alteration upon inspection, and other shugenja may also be able to do so by using Spellcraft / Perception or casting the Sense (Fire) Spell. Of course, deliberately undertaking such measures before a duel would be considered a great insult to the duelist in question, but shugenja are sometimes retained to undertake such examinations surreptitiously when there may be doubts about the Honor of one of the participants.

DISRUPT THE AURA

Many shugenja consider deliberately causing an Elemental imbalance in another individual to be an extremely personal violation, since Elemental harmony is the ideal state for all those governed by the Celestial Order. The particularly egregious aspect of this spell is that it does not inflict damage, so it is of limited use in most combat situations. Rather, it prevents physical injuries from being healed by magical means. Many Rokugani shugenja consider the only “proper” use of this spell to be neutralizing the regenerative powers displayed by some Shadowlands creatures, and maintain this was the spell’s original purpose. Any other use, particularly against another samurai, borders on inflicting a curse, an act abhorrent to most shugenja. Accordingly, the GM may wish to penalize any use of this spell on targets who are part of the Celestial Order with a loss of Honor unless there are extenuating circumstances involved. For example, using the spell to prevent a dangerous criminal from being healed so he can be more readily subdued and brought to justice would likely be acceptable. However, simply using it to cause a hated rival to suffer the effects of wounds for a longer time would not.

HURRIED STEPS

Although Hurried Steps does nothing in itself except reduce the casting time of a subsequent spell, it can produce a backlash from the temperamental Fire kami in a manner similar to many other spells. Some shugenja have observed that repeated uses of Hurried Steps has a paradoxical effect, actually causing the Fire kami to work against the shugenja and slow down his use of later spells. The GM may wish to cause a shugenja who uses this spell more than twice during the same encounter or “scene” to suffer such a backlash effect: it seems to work, but actually causes the subsequent spell to take an additional Complex Action to cast. As in other cases, the Fire kami can be placated by a sacrifice, allowing them to burn something of at least modest value to the caster.

MENTAL QUICKNESS

This spell is a remarkably effective and versatile one, drawing on Fire’s nature as the Element of thought and knowledge. Its effects are subtle, but one must nonetheless be wary – while the Intelligence gained from the spell can certainly allow for greater insight, revealing connections and relationships that would otherwise be obscured, it cannot create knowledge that does not already exist. If the PC simply does not know the abilities of an oni he has never before encountered, Mental Quickness will not cause him to suddenly gain this knowledge no matter how successful his Lore: Shadowlands / Intelligence Roll may be. What the spell could do, however, is allow him to extrapolate from what is known about other creatures in ways he normally would not be able to do, thereby gaining some clues about the abilities of the creature in question. The GM is the final arbiter of what the PC could know and could reasonably surmise.

RELENTLESS HEAT / SHINING LIGHT / DEFENSE OF THE FIRESTORM

Although these three spells could also be considered Creation spells (since they create protective barriers for a bushi), they are more properly Change spells since they transform the nature of the bushi’s armor by infusing it with Fire kami. The use of spells like these by bushi facing honorable opponents is sometimes considered a somewhat cowardly act by those of idealistic nature. After all, the bushi is using magical enhancements to assist in his own protection rather than relying on his skills as a warrior. A small Honor or Glory loss may be appropriate for samurai with high Honor Rank or idealistic temperament if they agree to accept the aid of such spells while fighting honorable opponents (such as other samurai).





HAZE OF BATTLE

Fire is the element of rational thought, and its enhancement can cause an individual to think clearly and decisively. This spell acts in the opposite manner, clouding an individual's judgment with the volatile temperament of the Fire kami. Ironically, use of this spell in battle is rarely considered inappropriate or dishonorable, since it serves to drive a warrior to frenzied heights of rage of the sort which many samurai embrace anyway in their passionate commitment to victory over their foes. However, the use of this spell in non-combat situations (such as to disrupt a samurai's behavior in court) is considered a craven and dishonorable act by many. There have of course been more than a few instances in Rokugan's courts in which otherwise stoic samurai have suddenly erupted into bursts of angry outrage. Whether this is the result of inflamed and unchecked passions, drink, illness, or the surreptitious use of a spell such as Haze of Battle is seldom known with certainty. A shugenja caught attempting to manipulate a social or political opponent in this way would face serious repercussions; exile from court would be the least that could be expected, and a duel could easily result.

DEATH OF FLAME

This is another spell that creates a deliberate Elemental imbalance in its target; however, unlike the more sinister *Disrupt the Aura*, *Death of Flame* simply makes an opponent less capable in combat. This may be seen as a craven act by honorable samurai, but the distinction in this case is that making a potential foe less effective may deter that person from violence in the first place. Accordingly, shugenja of a peaceful nature favor spells such as *Death of Flame* over those that do more permanent harm, justifying their actions on their dedication to preserving life.

Alternatively, Fire shugenja who are facing a life-or-death situation such as an assassination attempt will readily use spells such as *Death of Flame* to protect themselves or to assist their yojimbo. Likewise, magistrates see nothing dishonorable in using this sort of spell to subdue criminals for later interrogation and trial.

WARD OF THUNDER

Another spell which is actually a prayer to Osano-Wo, the Fortune of Fire and Thunder, *Ward of Thunder* functions similarly to spells such as *Relentless Heat* by imbuing a suit of armor with protective properties. Unlike those spells, however, there is no potential dishonor in receiving the protection of a Fortune, since one can

assume it would not be granted if the recipient were not worthy of it. Conversely, like other spells whose effects are granted by the tempestuous Fortune, the GM may want to consider if the casting shugenja is truly worthy of Osano-Wo's blessing. For example, if the shugenja has recently behaved dishonorably, failed to show proper respect to the Fortunes, or engaged in blasphemies, the Fortune may withhold his blessings or even punish the miscreant to encourage him to mend his ways.

EVERBURNING RAGE

This spell's use is quite controversial among shugenja (as noted in the spell description on page 186 of the L5R 4th Edition Core Rulebook) since it causes the Fire kami to inflict debilitating pain on a target. Some shugenja consider this little better than a maho curse, while others argue that incapacitating an enemy without actually doing physical harm is a more merciful act than wounding or killing him. Like *Death of Flame*, this spell has been used by peaceful shugenja and magistrates to subdue opponents so they can be taken into custody without bloodshed. Unfortunately, there have also been cases of shugenja using *Everburning Rage* as an expedient form of torture if a *hinin* torturer is not available. Since there is no physical contact with the victim and no shedding of blood, pragmatic shugenja can argue they are not committing an unclean act, while still gaining important information in a timely manner. There are rumors that Phoenix Inquisitors sometimes make use of the spell this way to quickly root out *maho-tsukai* and other Tainted criminals. It is up to the GM if Honor or Glory penalties should be applied to the use of this spell, depending on the particular circumstances.

GLOBE OF THE EVERLASTING SUN

This powerful spells makes the Fire kami quiescent in an area of 500' radius, causing fires and Fire magic to burn, spread, and function much less effectively. Incorporation of this spell into a permanent ward is the ideal use of it, and it is indeed suggested that such defenses have been erected in key locations in the Empire, such as the throne room of the Imperial Palace. However, compelling the Fire kami to act so fundamentally against their nature for extended periods of time is not without its own cost. After the spell's duration has expired, the Fire kami may behave even more unpredictably than usual, either remaining sluggish and unresponsive or erupting into a frenzy, eager to burn and destroy. In this latter case, the GM can rule that even ordinary fires will burn hotter, be harder to extinguish, and spread more quickly. Alternatively, the upset kami can be mollified with a sacrifice, such as a large bonfire on which they can vent their frustration, or by being offered flammable items of personal value to the caster (GM's discretion as to how effective a particular sacrifice is). In the case of a permanent ward, it is hinted that ongoing sacrifices to the Fire kami are required. The truth of this is a closely guarded secret among the shugenja who maintain such wards, to prevent enemies from learning how to disrupt or circumvent them, so the GM has free reign to decide what sort of efforts might be required.



Spirits of Flame: The Nature of the Fire Kami

Like the kami of the other Elements, the Fire kami are inhuman and in many ways alien beings whose interaction with the world is defined strictly by their nature. They may be immortal; they certainly are incorporeal and, like other kami, move through the substance of the world according to their own enigmatic agenda. Unlike other kami, however, the place of the Fire kami in the world is often difficult to define at any given time or location. The Air kami move with the wind (or cause the winds to move, or some combination of the two); the Water kami flow along the surface in rivers or streams, or beneath the ground in subterranean aquifers and watercourses; the Earth kami, of course, move very little at all, changing position and location only very slowly – or all at once and dramatically in landslides, earthquakes, and avalanches.

The Fire kami are apparently invisible, unless they have been agitated to the point of openly expressing themselves as flames, heat, or more unusual phenomena such as volcanic eruptions or bolts of lightning. Thus it is not clear if the Fire kami move freely through the stuff of the world like the Air and Water kami, or if they are more static like the kami of Earth. This remains a source of considerable debate among shugenja and scholars. Unfortunately, spells such as Sense and Commune offer only brief glimpses into the activities of the Fire kami, generally over small areas, so no satisfactory answer has yet been obtained. A few scholars speculate that far beneath the earth's surface Fire kami may be more prevalent and thus may freely move along deep subterranean courses from place to place. They base this on reports that in deep mines the rock walls become unaccountably warm, as well as the fact that volcanoes appear to spew molten lava from somewhere far below. Many other shugenja consider the idea of a hellish realm dominated by Fire kami somewhere far below the Empire to be nonsense, so the debate rages on.

What is clear is that much as with the other kami, simply being able to speak with the Fire spirits is not sufficient; in order to properly communicate with them, it is essential to understand them and their particular way of viewing the world. To the Fire kami, the world is a literal place. They are impatient and rather irritable spirits with little interest in the nuances or niceties of reality; the Fire kami tend to see things as they are, no more, no less. Unlike the Air kami, who are fascinated by human emotions, the Fire kami have no interest in feelings or motivations; they are unimpressed by dissembling and have no time at all for lies. This literalism and directness is a reflection of the nature of Fire itself. Fire does not care what it encounters, only whether it is something that will burn or something that will not. If it is flammable, the Fire kami wish to see it in flames. If it is not and can only be scorched, they quickly

lose interest and move on. To put in bluntly, there are no other states of being that interest these turbulent and mercurial spirits.

The Spirit of Fire: Taryu-Jiai Dueling

When one considers dueling in Rokugan it is natural to think of the formal and stylized clash of steel between two sword-wielding opponents – the art of iaijutsu, pre-eminent among all forms of conflict in the Empire. Of course, those in a conflict of honor may choose to settle their disputes with other forms of dueling, and strictly speaking almost any dispute in which one samurai attempts to prove himself the more adept and powerful could be considered a “duel,” regardless of whether it involves sword-play, oratory, unarmed combat, or haiku. The point is normally to establish a victor, whose triumph proves him to be the more skillful. In cases of simple display of talent, this may be the whole of the outcome and the entire affair might be simply a matter of entertainment. However, the further point is often to demonstrate that the winner is also in the right regarding some dispute of honor between the two duelists. It is this settling of “rightness” that makes dueling such a fundamental component of Rokugani culture, and in this regard the iaijutsu duel is by far the favored method and indeed the default one if the combatants cannot agree on some other way to settle their rivalry. This is hardly surprising in a culture so steeped in the “cult of the blade” as the Emerald Empire.

However, not all samurai in Rokugan are bushi or carry a katana. While carrying a wakizashi simply denotes one as a member of the samurai caste, openly carrying the katana implies one is not only skilled in its use but is fully prepared to use it should circumstances demand. Those samurai who are trained as shugenja rarely have sufficient skill in wielding the katana to employ it in an iaijutsu duel. In fact, it could be considered insulting for one lacking such skill





to even attempt to enter a duel of steel, since this would dishonor him, his would-be opponent, and the very institution of iaijutsu dueling. As a result, most shugenja will not carry katana, preferring to leave them in a place of honorable display in their homes. Nonetheless, shugenja are samurai, subject to the same potential for disputes of honor as their more martial sword-wielding cousins. One means of addressing this is for a shugenja to call upon a bushi (usually his yojimbo) to be his champion, standing in for him in an iaijutsu duel. But if two shugenja are involved in a dispute directly, another way of settling the matter is to call on their skills with the kami for a duel of magic, the so-called taryu-jiai. Fire shugenja, whose spirit is often suffused with the aggressive nature of their chosen Element, are particularly fond of settling their disputes in this manner.

The origins of taryu-jiai are murky at best. It is well established that at the dawn of the Empire the swordsman Kakita taught the methods of iaijutsu dueling and documented them along with his general philosophy of combat in his treatise *The Sword*. Somewhat more obscurely, some records claim that Isawa Ujikki, a Phoenix Elemental Master, sought Kakita's wisdom regarding how to conduct honorable dueling between those who were not devoted to the sword, particularly shugenja. The two men are said to have deliberated for some time before recording their thoughts in a scroll entitled "Shugenja Taryu-Jiai."

There are suggestions, however, that the matter may have been somewhat more complex. At the time, the social organization of "schools" and the order they would eventually bring to samurai life in Rokugan – particularly to Elemental magic – was still in its infancy. Some scrolls from the period suggest the actual methods of taryu-jiai may have originated among the new Kitsu family of the Lion Clan to give them something similar to the more martial

contests

used by their Akodo, Matsu, and Ikoma brethren. Other records point to a much later time, after the founding of the Asahina of the Crane, who supposedly codified taryu-jiai to allow for non-lethal competitions of magical prowess. The truth, however, is probably darker. Scrolls kept carefully locked away by the Isawa describe epic and in some cases catastrophic confrontations between shugenja in the early Empire. Caught up in disputes arising from the new social order instituted by the Kami, these men and women lacked any formal structure for the use of their awesome powers in matters of honor. As a result, vast Elemental forces were unleashed as impassioned shugenja sought to overcome their opponents. One fragment of an ancient scroll describes an entire village and all its inhabitants being eradicated by unchecked magical power when two shugenja duelled for satisfaction over some perceived slight. Clearly far more control and order was required if such duels were allowed to proceed, and this was probably the true motivation behind Isawa Ujikki's appeal to Kakita.

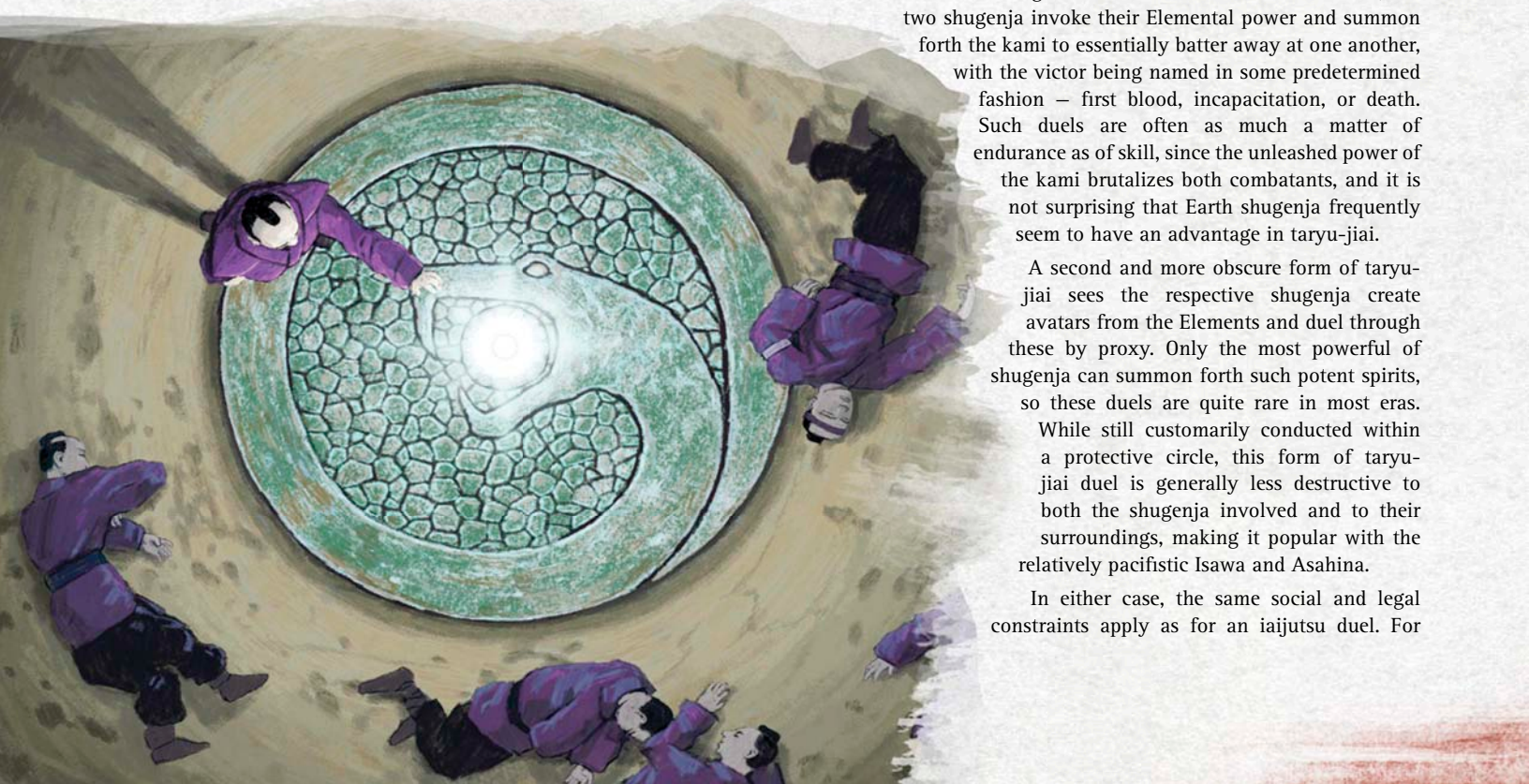
Whatever the truth may be, it is undeniable that the formal strictures of taryu-jiai were eventually given Imperial blessing in the same manner as iaijutsu, providing a proper social and legal structure for shugenja to confront each other without unleashing magical disasters. In modern times, taryu-jiai are afforded considerable recognition as the preferred form of competition in shugenja tournaments (such as the Tournament of the Jade Champion).

There are two accepted forms of taryu-jiai dueling in the Empire. The first method, generally seen as the original form and certainly the more common, has two shugenja enter a specially prepared ritual circle, usually following a period of meditation and preparation. The circle is quite large and indeed may be hundreds of feet in diameter; its blessings are designed to contain the magical forces released during the duel. Once the duel commences, the two shugenja invoke their Elemental power and summon forth the kami to essentially batter away at one another, with the victor being named in some predetermined fashion – first blood, incapacitation, or death. Such duels are often as much a matter of endurance as of skill, since the unleashed power of the kami brutalizes both combatants, and it is not surprising that Earth shugenja frequently seem to have an advantage in taryu-jiai.

A second and more obscure form of taryu-jiai sees the respective shugenja create avatars from the Elements and duel through these by proxy. Only the most powerful of shugenja can summon forth such potent spirits, so these duels are quite rare in most eras.

While still customarily conducted within a protective circle, this form of taryu-jiai duel is generally less destructive to both the shugenja involved and to their surroundings, making it popular with the relatively pacifistic Isawa and Asahina.

In either case, the same social and legal constraints apply as for an iaijutsu duel. For



example, the permission of both samurai's lords is normally required for a lethal contest. This is not to say that impromptu taryu-ji'ai duels do not happen, just as do impromptu iaijutsu duels, but given the potential for widespread harm from unrestrained powers, the shugenja who engage in such impulsive contests come in for considerably stronger social and legal penalties than those reserved for unsanctioned iaijutsu dueling.

Communing with Fire Kami

In order to commune with the Fire kami and obtain useful information from them, a shugenja must be prepared to deal with them quickly and decisively. If he does not he will soon lose their attention. In such a case the shugenja is well-advised to simply let the spirits be on their way. Attempting to coerce the Fire kami, to command them by sheer force of will, is something that should be attempted only by the most powerful and willful of shugenja. The Fire kami take an extremely dim view of those who would dominate them, and they have many ways to make their displeasure clear. If the shugenja is lucky, he will escape the situation with only minor burns to remind him of his poor judgment. However, a tale told among young students of the Isawa recounts how a brash initiate sought to bring the Fire kami to heel. Determined not to allow the spirits to deny him, he tried to use clever magical incantations and what he believed to be his own indomitable will to make them obey his strictures. The Fire spirits left him alive, but not out of kindness – his hands, feet, eyes, and tongue were all reduced to ash.

That being said, if a shugenja is able to successfully commune with the Fire kami they can be an excellent source of information. Unlike the Air kami, who are pervasive but easily distracted, or the Earth kami, who are simply uninterested in much of what happens around them, the Fire kami observe and remember things they encounter with stark clarity. They will provide intricate descriptions full of detail – sometimes too much detail to be useful – and will recount words, the tone used to speak them, and even the body language and facial expressions of the speakers. However, their descriptions are strictly literal. Body language, intonation, and facial expressions mean nothing to them because they do not understand and do not care about things like emotions. Thus, being told that an individual responded to a statement from someone else by “opening his mouth, drawing his lips back, and baring his teeth” could be interpreted in a number of ways. The Fire kami can offer no insight regarding whether this meant a wide happy grin or a fiercely angry scowl. They may, however, be able to provide further description of the surrounding context which a communing shugenja could use to infer the individual's state of mind. The key point to remember is that the Commune spell allows for only two questions (plus additional questions derived from Raises to the Spell Casting Roll), so a shugenja choosing to commune with the Fire kami is well-advised to construct his questions beforehand with care. Asking questions which the Fire kami consider trivial or repetitive may irritate them – and they are always easily irritated!



One means of making the Fire kami more cooperative is offering them sacrifices. Far more so than the kami of other Elements, those of Fire take immediate delight in destruction and have a great hunger for it. Accordingly, offering things to be sacrificed through burning can be very helpful to dealing with them. To be worthwhile, a sacrifice must be something of value to the shugenja offering it; while the Fire kami take little interest in human emotion, they will notice and take offense if a shugenja is offering only a token sacrifice or worse, a meaningless one. Indeed, this can be much worse than offering no sacrifice at all. The only worse insult would be offering something that cannot burn. Such antics anger the Fire kami quickly and generally result in an attack against the shugenja in question, of a severity in keeping with the insult (GM's discretion). On the other hand, if a worthy sacrifice is made, the opposite is true: a sacrifice of something meaningful, such as a favorite poem or ink-drawing, will gain the favor (albeit fleetingly) of the kami. The GM may consider this as being equivalent to a Free Raise in casting the Commune spell. A sacrifice of something truly special to the shugenja, such as a letter professing true love or a bamboo flute that belonged to an honored ancestor, will gain correspondingly more favor – in this case, the GM could allow for more than one Free Raise, although it is strongly recommended the GM never award more than three Free Raises this way. In any case the Fire kami will, of course, utterly destroy the item offered for sacrifice.

Fire Kami and Other Spirits

The Fire kami are among the more alien of Elemental spirits to human sensibilities. They have virtually no interest in human emotion and instead focus on aspects of their own fundamental nature – specifically, creation, destruction, and the change implied by a transition from one state to the other. They are literal and factual, do not dissemble or “play about” like their Air cousins, and are temperamental in the extreme. They do not frequently interact with other Elemental spirits, but when they do, the effects tend to be dramatic.





OPTIONAL GAME MECHANICS: APPEASING THE FIRE KAMI

The L5R RPG 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Air* introduced (on page 93) alternate mechanics to reflect the efforts of shugenja to entice, appease, and otherwise make amenable the various Elemental spirits used in the casting of Spells. The rationale is that the various devotions and prayers routinely conducted by shugenja — who are, after all, priests of the kami and are expected to pay reverence to the Elemental spirits — are normally only present in the background of the game. Most GMs and players do not roleplay the myriad prayers and observances performed by shugenja, aside from occasional reminders such as a player saying, “when I wake up, the first thing I will do is pray to the kami” or “I will spend some time in the local shrine performing devotions to the ancestors.” The new options in *The Book of Air* were designed to encourage more active role-play of these aspects of a shugenja’s life, rewarding such play with Free Raises to Spell Casting Rolls.

Below are some suggested devotions (and their associated Free Raise rewards) for use with Fire spells. It is up to the GM if the bonus applies to the very next Fire Spell cast or if the Free Raise is available for some period of time, such as for the next day or while in a specific location. The GM should also determine if multiple Free Raises can be used separately or if they must be used together.

- ☉ Meditate, with specific focus on relating to the Fire kami, attempting to impress them with clarity of thought and purpose. This requires a successful Meditation / Fire Skill Roll against a TN of 25, although this could be reduced to 20 if performed in a Place of Power related to Fire (see sidebar). Success grants 1 Free Raise.
- ☉ Offer the Fire kami a minor sacrifice, such as by burning incense in their honor or burning a poem or haiku specifically written for the purpose. This may require a Fire Ring Roll against a TN of 20 if not performed in a Place of Power related to Fire. Success grants 1 Free Raise.
- ☉ Offer the Fire kami a major sacrifice, such as by burning a letter from one’s true love. This may require a Fire Ring Roll against a TN of 30, or a TN of 25 if performed in a Place of Power related to Fire. Alternatively, the major sacrifice conducted in conjunction with a period of deep Meditation (roll Meditation / Fire against a TN of 25, or 20 if performed in a Place of Power related to Fire) may suffice, but will require more time. Success grants 2 Free Raises.



Fire and Earth interact rarely, simply because Earth tends to be so resistant to fire. Fires are typically built on surfaces of stone or sand because the Earth kami so readily shrug off the effects of Fire. However, when the Fire kami are sufficiently roused, they can combine with Earth kami to produce spectacular, dangerous, and often extremely damaging effects. The most obvious is a volcanic eruption, examples of which are fortunately rare in Rokugan. Shugenja and scholars speculate and debate the origin of these cataclysms, which clearly involve powerful interaction between the kami of Fire and Earth somewhere deep beneath the land’s surface. The Earth kami appear to be temporarily subsumed by those of Fire, causing rock to flow like water while radiating intense heat. Sometimes the interaction is particularly violent, resulting in explosive eruptions that throw incandescent material and clouds of rocky debris high into the air. As noted earlier, some shugenja believe the Fire kami exist in great abundance and a state of extreme agitation beneath the ground, where they sometimes clash with the Earth kami in a largely unseen “spirit war” over dominance of this deep subterranean realm (perhaps even a separate and poorly understood Spirit Realm). Only when this titanic struggle comes close to the surface does it express itself in violent eruptions of lava. It would seem, however, that the Fire kami either ultimately cannot overcome the patience of Earth or they simply lose interest in doing so, because the glowing liquid rock inevitably cools into its more familiar obdurate solidity.

A more unusual expression of the violent interaction of Fire and Earth occurs when lightning strikes soil or sand. The result is often a glassy solid material, as though the Fire kami caused those of Earth to briefly adopt a strange liquid form before solidifying again. Shugenja prize such rare examples of the clash of Fire and Earth, as they literally crystallize the aspect of change in a way the few other natural materials do.

By contrast, Fire and Air appear to normally exist in a state of relative harmony. Fire requires Air to burn; smothering a fire and cutting it off from Air causes it to go out. This close connection between Fire and Air is clear and well-known to Rokugani, learned and unlearned alike. However, the symbiosis between Fire and Air also appears to be synergistic. Fire responds to an increase in Air by burning hotter and faster; this fundamental relationship between the two Elements is what allows forges to smelt iron and produce steel. Taken to an extreme, however, the kami of the two Elements appear to be able to excite one another to terrific acts of destruction. Strong winds will fan a small brushfire to a raging conflagration or turn forest fires into uncontrollable walls of flame lunging from tree to tree faster than a man can run. Eventually, it appears the kami of the two Elements will battle for supremacy, with Air trying to blow the flames out while Fire consumes the Air as quickly as possible.



The ultimate expression of Fire and Air must, however, be the thunderstorm. Flame in its guise as lightning leaps from cloud to cloud or cloud to ground, incinerating whatever it touches while the storm rages above. Accordingly, while Thunder is considered by some in Rokugan to be a discrete form of magic, most shugenja agree it is in fact a peculiar combination of Fire and Air, derived most often from Osano-Wo, Fortune of Fire and Thunder.

In contrast to Fire and Air, Fire and Water naturally oppose one another. In most cases it would appear that Water reigns supreme over Fire. Fire may boil Water and turn it to steam and vapor, but ultimately if the two come into contact Fire is inevitably suppressed and quenched. It is not clear why this would be so, since it is unusual for one Element to be so clearly dominant over another. This may lend credence to the idea that a "realm" of Fire exists somewhere beneath the surface of the earth, a place where the Water kami do not go, in the same way that Fire kami so rarely appear in contact with the seas, lakes, and rivers. When they do, it seems only to be in concert with Earth, as the supposed deep realm of Fire expresses itself on the land's surface. Volcanoes have occasionally emerged from beneath the waves (particularly near the Mantis Isles), building up new land as rugged volcanic islands.

Fire and Elemental Imbalances

The Five Elements exist in every creature and object, in relative proportions that are normally in balance. This does not mean there is the same proportion of each Element, of course; a rock clearly contains much more Earth than, say, a cloud, while a tree contains more Earth and Water than Fire. This is also true for creatures and beings, although in their case the relative proportions of Elements tend to affect behavior more than outward appearance. So a sturdy bear contains more Earth than a delicate songbird, which contains more Air. Likewise, Fire would be stronger in a lithe Kakita duelist, while Earth would predominate in a stolid Hida bushi.

Elemental balance refers to the correct proportions of Elements in an object or being, such that it exists and behaves in a manner appropriate to it. Balance does not mean proportions are necessarily equal. However, when the correct balance is upset and the relative proportions of Elements become incorrect, an object will develop uncharacteristic and often damaging properties, while a creature will suffer ill effects and may behave erratically and out-of-character. The following sections describe what generally happens when Fire becomes out of its natural balance within a creature or object.

APPEASING THE FIRE KAMI (Continued...)

- ❶ Offer the Fire kami an epic sacrifice, such as by writing a clear and well-reasoned treatise on some subject the shugenja knows well (perhaps requiring a Lore / Intelligence Roll against a TN of at least 25) and then burning it, or burning something of intimate value to the shugenja that cannot be replaced (for example, the final letter from one's lost love). Again, this may require a Fire Ring Roll against a TN of 30 (TN 25 if performed in a Place of Power related to Fire) and deep Meditation may be substituted for the Fire Ring Roll. The reward is 3 Free Raises.
- ❷ The shugenja permanently sacrifices knowledge to the Fire kami, represented by giving up one or more Ranks in a Lore Skill, some other Skill related to intellect and knowledge, or even an Advantage. Such Advantages could include Absolute Direction, Clear Thinker, Forbidden Knowledge, Languages, Precise Memory, Prodigy, Read Lips, Sage, and Tactician. The shugenja enters deep meditation (roll Meditation / Fire against a TN of at least 25) and allows the Fire kami to remove the knowledge he has offered to them. The knowledge is simply gone, burned away by the kami (which could be a painful experience). The shugenja will remember that he sacrificed what he knew, but the knowledge itself is gone... although Lore Skill Ranks lost this way could eventually be regained through study and the expenditure of Experience Points in the normal way. The reward is 3 Free Raises, plus an additional Raise for each additional Skill Rank sacrificed beyond the first. If an Advantage is sacrificed, gain an additional number of Free Raises equal to the point value of the Advantage.





FIRE IMBALANCES IN CREATURES

“The one weak in Fire becomes as one dead or deep in mourning. He cannot care for his family, his comrades, or even his lord. He does not move or eat and barely breathes.”

“The one too strong in Fire is extremely rare: he outsmarts himself, sunders his being like the Phoenix and becomes many people at once.”

–The Twists of False Madness, by Kuni Mataemon

An imbalance in Fire in creatures will manifest in several obvious ways. Since Fire is the Element of rational thought and purpose, a lack of Fire will first and foremost result in a person becoming “scatter-brained,” unable to maintain his focus on tasks aside from those of immediate concern. For instance, such a person will eat and sleep, but will find longer-term planning and commitment to more far-reaching endeavors difficult. He may also have difficulty understanding what should be relatively simple concepts, or figuring out activities that are even moderately complex. This can be particularly harmful to samurai, who are expected to remain committed to the tasks their lord has set for them. In extreme cases of a lack of Fire, people may become “fools,” wandering aimlessly through life unable to understand what is happening around them, or even be reduced to a catatonic state. A variety of other mental conditions can be attributed to a serious lack of Fire, such as a deficient attention span or an inability to learn and retain new things. In court such individuals are particularly vulnerable since they find it troublesome concentrating on and understanding conversations, or even maintaining their On. Animals with low Fire likewise become unfocused and inattentive, making them extremely vulnerable to predators, or conversely unable to remain intent on finding, tracking, and bringing down prey.

The opposite affliction – too much Fire – has a correspondingly opposite effect on creatures. They become unduly focused on specific tasks, perhaps to the exclusion of other activities. Those affected by too much Fire may become obsessive, repeating a set of actions over and over in an attempt to get them “right.” The Driven and Fascination Disadvantages reflect individuals who probably have an excess of Fire. Excessive Fire may also push people to become overly methodical, routinely overthinking even the most simple problems. A samurai with an Elemental unbalance favoring Fire may, for example, immerse himself in sharpening his sword, spending hours with whetstones and polishing grit in an attempt to smooth away the most minor blemishes and imperfections. Constantly revisiting and revising things such as battle plans, refusing to recognize something as “good enough” for the purposes at hand, is another manifestation of overly abundant Fire. At its most extreme, excessive Fire causes the personality itself to break down, fragmenting into different “people” who can each focus on one obsessive topic.

An imbalance in Fire can also have physical symptoms. A lack of Fire leads to a lack of purpose in actions, causing those so afflicted to find themselves prone to wandering, entering places and then forgetting why, or unable to strike decisive blows as they second-guess and pull their attacks. Taken to an extreme, deficient Fire can lead to spastic, uncontrolled movements, as the individual parts of the body seek a purpose not provided by the whole. Too much Fire, on the other hand, can cause ritualistic behavior, such as repeatedly closing a door or mounting a horse until it is done “correctly.” It can also result in fever, sometimes severe enough to be fatal.

FIRE IMBALANCES IN OBJECTS

It may seem strange to consider Fire as a typical component in many objects, since it is not actually apparent unless the object becomes hot, producing light or even burning. However, almost all objects do contain Fire kami, most obviously because almost all objects are at least to some extent warm. A thick blanket contains sufficient Elemental Fire to warm the person beneath it, while simple wood – even if brought in from a cold place – soon warms to the touch. The Elemental Fire in metal, on the other hand, is far less in spite of their typically originating from heat-intensive activities such as smelting and forging. Shugenja speculate that metal’s hardness, rather than its temperature, is a reflection of its internal Fire; since Fire is the Element of purpose, the Fire kami in a sword are engaged mainly in maintaining the strength of the blade and the sharpness of its edge, leaving it apparently cold to the touch unless heated by some outside source.

When an object begins to suffer a loss of Fire, it will typically become brittle and easily broken as it becomes more and more discordant with its intended purpose. Swords that have lost their internal Fire – or were never infused with it properly or sufficiently to begin with – will fail to keep an edge or even crack and shatter. Even mundane items such as clothing or household tools will fail in their purpose; items of clothing become stretched or shrunken, no longer fitting properly, tools will break or not work properly, containers will leak, and so on.

Too much Fire in an object is just as harmful as too little, and sometimes more so. In extreme cases, the object may simply burst into flames, as has been noted to occur spontaneously in piles of wood, paper and refuse. Even if such dramatic effects do not occur, objects with too much Fire may age prematurely, so iron and steel will rust, wood will suffer from dry-rot, and paper will become discolored and brittle. A sword infused with too much Fire during its creation may prove difficult to sharpen, or may be cumbersome to use if not wielded in a particular way. Other objects may malfunction in other ways; locks, too focused on their purpose, may stick or jam, while containers may be hard to open, nails and other fasteners difficult to remove, rope and cloth hard to cut, and so on.

SPECIFIC FIRE IMBALANCES IN CREATURES

This section describes imbalances in which Fire predominates over all other Elements. Occasionally, however, Elemental imbalances are more limited than this, such as when Fire is unbalanced relative to only one other Element.

FIRE OVER EARTH – Fire and Earth are relatively isolated from one another, as Earth resists Fire but Fire is generally independent of Earth. When Fire becomes predominant, an individual may be given to rash purpose, placing himself in danger needlessly. Those so afflicted will become absorbed by a goal or purpose to exclusion of resting, eating properly, sleeping, or caring about sickness and wounds. Physically, muscles are strained and bones may be damaged, even broken, but even injuries will not turn aside the need to achieve whatever objective the individual has named for himself, even if it is an irrational one.

FIRE OVER AIR – Fire and Air are of course symbiotic and are usually the two Elements most readily kept in balance by their own nature relative to each other. However, if Fire becomes predominant, the key role of Air in the emotional makeup of an individual is suppressed. The afflicted may grow aloof and distant, lacking empathy and uncaring of the needs and desires of others. Actions become extremely focused, every movement being considered, analyzed, and then executed with great care. It may appear as if the afflicted individual is locked in a perpetual sort of kata, ritualized and deliberate movements and attitudes that ignore the world around him.

FIRE OVER WATER – Since they are opposed, the predominance of Fire over Water occurs when the former attacks the latter directly. The result is a deficiency of Water, leaving the afflicted person disconnected from the world around him. He will tend not to notice even obvious things around him, becoming easily distracted and focusing on inconsequential things. Physically, he will become weaker, his muscles atrophying, but he will still tend to believe himself as strong as he ever was. He will overestimate his ability to perform physically-demanding tasks due to the combined effects of being less perceptive about those tasks and their requirements and being less strong than he thinks he is.



PLACES OF POWER – FIRE

Some locations are particularly attuned to, or associated with, a particular Element. As a result, there will be more kami of that type, and more powerful ones, in such a location. When it comes to Fire, the following locations are especially powerful:

- ⑤ Active volcanoes, or places associated with active volcanoes – recent lava flows, fumaroles, hot springs, etc.
- ⑤ Forges, kilns and furnaces that have been operating for a lengthy period of time. Assume it takes a generation — about 25 years — for the Fire kami to become so attuned to such a location that it becomes a Place of Power for Fire.
- ⑤ Places where lightning strikes are common, such as high terrain features in storm-prone areas, or even the peaks of tall buildings that have been struck by lightning.
- ⑤ Areas where wildfires have recently burned, such as forests and grasslands. Note, however, that the Fire kami soon lose interest in such areas, so these are Places of Power only until the last “hot spots” have been extinguished and the final smoke has cleared.
- ⑤ Temples dedicated to Fire-aligned Fortunes or entities, such as Osano-Wo or the Fire Dragon.
- ⑤ Places that have a strong tradition of being associated with Fire, such as a sanctum used by a powerful Fire Tensai like Agasha Tamori or Isawa Hochiu.

A GM wishing to enhance the flavor of magic in his campaign may wish to make it easier to cast Fire spells in such locations, reducing the TN of the Spell Casting Roll by 5 – or even more in the case of places that are particularly powerful in Fire.





THE FIRES OF PEACE

Asako Marumi looked up at the night sky and sighed to herself, shaking her head. Her breath misted in the chill of the winter night as she reflected on yet another almost tedious lecture from her sensei that she had somehow managed to get through without falling asleep. He would expect to hear her thoughts on the evening sky on the morrow, and if she was lax, she would regret it for the week to come. His punishments were as creative as they were cruel. She understood he was supposedly a masterful teacher, and many respected his word... but Otomo Kotarou was such a difficult man to deal with sometimes.

There was a soft crunch in the snow, and Marumi stiffened. She was still able to turn and bow properly at the approach of her sensei, but she with a sinking feeling that she had only been 'informed' of Kotarou's presence because he chose to let her hear his tread. He would never stoop to sneaking about like some filthy ninja, of course, but the aged man had a light step that seemed to almost miraculously keep him from notice until the precise moment he wished to be heard.

This meant he had heard her sigh.

The old man returned her bow, a thin smile on his face as he stepped to a fitting distance – close but not too close for propriety – and looked up toward the night sky. “Tell me, child,” he said in a cool tone, motioning upwards with his fan. “Why were you looking in that direction in a season like this? There are no key constellations who rise to that height of the sky in winter.”

She began to stammer out an answer, trying to control the blush that threatened to turn her face a shade of color as bright as her own robes. “I... I was looking for the star

of Otaku, sensei!” It was at least plausible. Otaku's star was high in the sky, near where she had been looking, so perhaps he would believe her despite her lack of sincerity. After all, he was well aware how intimidating he could be to his students.

“Clever, little Asako,” he chuckled, drawing a wince from the girl as though she was already feeling the additional studies she could expect tomorrow. “However, I do not think that is the case. I wonder if you truly do have the eyes that I think you do.”

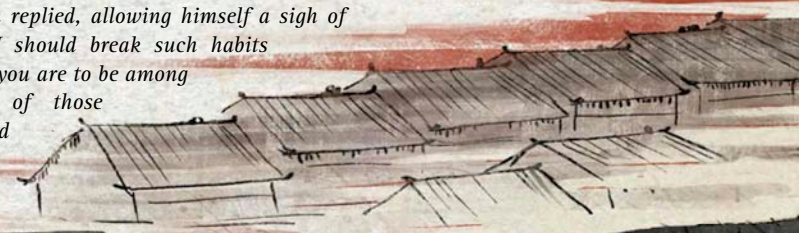
She blinked and looked at him in confusion. “Sensei?”

He motioned again, this time with his finger, and her eyes followed. She could see amid the sea of stars a tiny red dot that was not always there. Her eyebrows lifted. How had she not noticed she had been staring at the anomaly the whole time?

“Your eyes, they see patterns,” he said softly. “There are too many among my students who are gifted at being able to follow what is within their text, gifted at manipulation, gifted at persuasion. However, yours is an eye that sees beyond what is written. You see the order that should be, and you see what does not belong.”

She felt herself blushing again. “Sensei, I think that you do me far too much credit.”

“And that is the Asako blood in your veins, child,” the old man replied, allowing himself a sigh of his own. “I should break such habits from you if you are to be among the ranks of those permitted



in our order... but I think it might remove some of your charm, which drives others to trust your words when you are not caught in a moment of sloth."

Before she could reply he made a forestalling motion with his hand, chuckling thinly. "You do see these things. A little star rarely seen so bright. An ill omen, to be sure, but its presence more an oddity, a shift in the pattern of the night's sky. Your eye picks out the details in the midst of the whole. It is not because you have a keen vision, but because you detect the patterns themselves, what should be there, what should not. Everything in this world behaves according to a pattern, little Asako. All things are compelled to remain within their patterns, to maintain the eternal dance they obey. When things do not match these patterns, their anomalies stand out... but only to those who can see the patterns. Despite your occasional sloth, girl, you have a gift for the study of the patterns of the universe around you, and for noticing what does not belong."

"And... you believe this to be a thing worthy of note?"

"Child, the day you come to understand this is a gift beyond peer within the courts is the day you will become one of the more fearsome and terrifying souls in those courts," he said, allowing himself another chuckle. He could see the scarlet on her face deepening. "But you must never allow yourself to rest upon your laurels. Merely seeing the patterns is not enough. You must know them so deeply you never doubt why these things matter, never miss why the subtle shifts have meaning."

"Do you truly believe I can, sensei?" she whispered.

"Yes, though I had best hear something more erudite from you tomorrow than prattle about Otaku and a red star. Otherwise, I will see to it that the next month teaches you the wisdom of paying heed to your elders." He gave her another thin-lipped smile that made her wince. As he lapsed into silence, he wondered if the girl truly realized how well he thought of her. She really did have quite a bit of potential.



The Courty Philosophy of Fire

"A well-crafted phrase or a well-crafted blade – wielded by a master, the results are alike." – Ikoma Hodota

Fire is an Element frequently associated with aggressive actions and fierce responses and thus is not usually closely associated with the work of the courts. It is one of the two Elements most frequently seen as the realm of the warrior, the stalwart samurai armed only with his father's blade and the honor with he has carried throughout his life. Fire is seen as the tool of purity, to purge the enemies of one's clan, family, and Empire, and not as an agent of diplomacy. However, those who dismiss Fire in courtly matters are oftentimes taken by surprise at the influence of the Element in the methods of several clans and families. Despite what some might believe, Fire's presence within the courts is a very real thing, and ignoring it has proven the downfall of many careless courtiers over the generations.

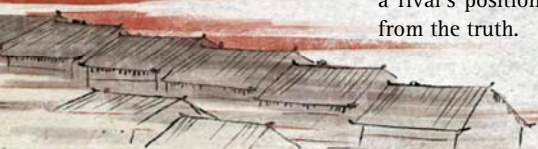
Disciples of other Elements often assume that anyone bold enough to claim to be from a school focused on the Element of Fire must by default be inherently aggressive. The shock of discovering this is not the case – of encountering those from the Asako and Ikoma librarians who are neither aggressive nor even truly visible within the active parts of the court – can be quite jarring, and many such courtiers then convince themselves these individuals must not be particularly astute in the duties of diplomacy. They are merely scholars, nothing to threaten a rival's position in the courts. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Much as with Earth, the best way to understand Fire within the courts is to relinquish the assumption that the Element must be considered in its martial capacity. In the martial realm Fire is the Element of attack, the tool by which the force of one's purity goes forth and strikes down the impure and dishonorable. Likewise within the sphere of magic it is best known as the agent of purification and of raw destruction. Within the courts, however, it instead takes on a very different meaning, one more related to the secondary uses of Fire by many shugenja, priests, and monks: Fire as the agent of intellect and creation, the refining Fire of craftsmen, scholars, and artists.

Students of Fire in the courtly arts are often taken during their earliest lessons to observe a forge at work. The students to sit in the presence of the forge's blazing heat and observe the work of a master craftsmen in the art of sword-making. The sensei rarely say anything to their students throughout this lesson, simply awaiting their thoughts. The goal is to cause the students to embrace the whole vision of Fire's use, to conceive of themselves and their training in a very different sense than they have before.

Fire does not always destroy, and no shugenja who specializes in speaking to Fire spirits would ever allow anyone to blaspheme by saying such a thing in their presence. Fire also forges. It creates, it inspires, it tempers. The fires of a forge purge imperfections and impurities, allowing metal to become stronger and more powerful. They melt and heat it until it can be remolded into the shape and form desired. They strengthen and temper it to withstand the dangers that will come. So too with those who follow the ways of Fire in the courts.

Indeed, Fire in a courtly setting is inherently non-aggressive. It is the Element of the calculating, the careful, the meticulous, and the perfectionist.



Air dances to the song of the world. It hears all that is around it and flows through the court like a sakura petal borne upon the spring's winds. Earth is stability, the rock upon which the misguided and disingenuous break themselves, and which holds the courts upright and stable in the most difficult of times. The masters of Fire, however, will tell you that nothing in the courts could exist without their arts.

Practitioners of the Way of Fire

Although the Otomo are known chiefly for employing the methods of Earth in the courts – symbolized by the solidity and unyielding nature of the Imperial bureaucracy – but without the energy of Fire, the courts could never be shaped into the foundations for the whole of society. Thus it should not be a great little surprise that for all that they are known chiefly as a school of Earth, the Otomo also focus on Fire. Indeed, while the two Elements may both seem oddly matched with the courtly arts, the Otomo pursue both with absolute adherence. The two Elements together symbolize to the Otomo the creation and maintenance of the courts themselves, a social foundation shaped and molded in the Emperor's name and to his needs. The purest use of Fire among the Otomo is seen among the Matchmakers, a small offshoot of their traditional school that focuses upon the arrangement of marriages to the advantage of Imperial goals. Through their seemingly benign negotiations they help mold the future leaders of the Empire according to their preferences. By grooming such individuals the Otomo not only ensure their continued favor in the Great Clans but also ensure the courts continue to reflect their goals.

All that said, the Otomo are far from the masters of Fire within the courts. They are unquestioned in their ability to shape the courts themselves, but they also demonstrate one of the greatest limitations of the paths of Fire: Fire is focused. Like the forge which so many students observe, Fire bestows its attentions on a single target, something to be forged and created, and it focuses all effort on perfecting that thing, on observing it from all angles, on understanding it from all perspectives. This is the way of lore-mastery, of patient and thorough planning. The Otomo are only masters of those arts which are the traditional realms of their family's operations. Indeed, all other Fire-influenced schools save one demonstrate this same sort of intense focus.

The only courtly school that truly displays an absolute mastery of Fire in its purest form is the Asako. This can be surprising since the main Asako courts are widely known as courts of Water – peaceful, flexible, and clear – and most from outside the Phoenix Clan generally associate the Asako school's techniques with the Element of Water. After all, they are widely known as a peaceful and adaptive group, if not so notable in that way as the Ide.



The truth, however, is that the Asako – like all Phoenix – are obsessed with knowledge. They consume lore like the ravenous fires of a greedy furnace, scouring the Empire for all texts and secrets that they can find. Unlike the Scorpion, they do not do so out of any ulterior motive. It is the sheer craving for knowledge that drives them. Their clan's founding Kami was a master of lore and by far the most educated of his brethren, not to mention the scribe of the Tao itself. His followers included the greatest loresmith and the most powerful shugenja in history. For the Asako it is literally a divine calling to focus themselves in on individual fields of mastery and to perfect their knowledge of them. It is this obsession which gives the family its mastery of Fire within the courts, and it is also this obsession which gives the school as a whole the surface appearance of adaptability – for no matter what the topic, an Asako somewhere has studied it.

The Asako expect all of their students to find specific focuses, fields of knowledge they will perfect over the course of their lives. In effect, each of them finds an intellectual 'sword' which he can focus upon, study to the fullest extent, and then disseminate to the broader Empire. The school prides itself on maintaining not simply one but multiple master scholars in almost every field of intellectual study known to the Empire. With the combined understanding that flows from their scholarship, it is rare to meet an Asako who is not at least partially prepared for almost any individual situation within the courts. And whenever there is an obscure question on almost any topic, the Asako will be called upon with a favor in order to answer it. If the knowledge exists within the Empire, there is an excellent chance an Asako somewhere has chronicled it and stored it away in the family's libraries. In a sense, the Asako recognize the limitation of Fire's obsessive focus and embrace it, employing entire legions of scholars to ensure every possible focus is maintained and none are overlooked.

Although the Asako truly master the courtly ways of Fire as no other, there are other groups and schools which also follow the path of this Element. The Ikoma, the historians and scholars of the Lion Clan, are much like





the Asako in their nearly single-minded pursuit of lore, but focus solely on history rather than embracing all of knowledge. The Dragon, especially the Kitsuki, dedicate themselves to the absolute focus of Fire in combination with another Element, that of Water. This seemingly incomprehensible Elemental union is found in their arts of investigation, which rely as much on logical deduction as they do on the senses. Senses can be deceived, after all, but a highly trained and focused mind greatly reduces the odds of being mistaken. Certain elements within the Ise Zumi also become engrossed in the intellectual and creative aspects of Fire.

The Ikoma, Asako, Kitsuki, and Otomo each epitomize the nature of Fire when it is employed in the courts. Each of these families displays a focus that borders upon the obsessive. All of them are agents of creation who wield their skills and their intellects for the purposes of both studying the past and developing future plans. Within their arts one can see the essential nature of Fire in the courts. It is the way of planning, the way of the intense and focused intellect. It prepares and plans ahead for any and all possibilities, structuring and shaping its world to its wishes.

The Path of Fire is one of action, but in court it is not one of aggression. Of course, almost no courtly path is truly a path of aggression. The duties of the courtier are known collectively as the “Way of Peace” because they

inhabit the world where words, not blades, are banded and wielded. Even Fire, the most aggressive of Elements, is part of this peaceful world, and indeed can be a tempering agent within the courts. The intellect is what is focused upon as its agent and tool, and its activity is not found in open manipulations. Instead, the master of Fire is rarely seen until the moment he is needed. His activity in the courts is the labor of a lifetime, a work of quiet passion never seen among the adherents of other paths.

The Phoenix Clan

“Understanding the dance of the Elements is trivial. Understanding the dance of the Imperial Court... now there is the study of a lifetime.” —Asako Nagami

The attitudes of outsiders aside, the Phoenix are the predominant clan one thinks of when considering the attitudes of the Courts of Fire. Thematically, the Phoenix Clan is often associated with the Element, but their connection to Fire is far deeper than a mere visual symbol. The Phoenix are a clan of scholars first and foremost. Their founders included Shiba and Isawa, two of the most famous scholars in the history of the Empire. Isawa was possibly the most powerful shugenja of all time, but he was also a pre-eminent scholar when it came to the subjects of magic, of prayers to the Fortunes, and indeed of any form of mystical research. His breadth of knowledge was



unrivaled in his time and his mastery of the ways of magic has never been questioned in the centuries since. Similarly, Shiba was far more than simply a warrior of the highest order; he was almost as scholastically inclined as Isawa, and it was he who penned the Tao, recording the conversation between Hantei and Shinsei. Scholarly devotion is considered a necessity for all Phoenix, whether bushi, courtier, shugenja, or monk. Rare is the samurai of the Phoenix Clan who has not at least made a passing study of some sort of lore, and all their soldiers have a reputation as warrior-scholars.

Within the courtly arts, the Phoenix do not rely upon any one resource; they seek to develop as many different specializations and options as possible to combat the limitations a focused intellect can occasionally impose. Their key assets in this effort are their people and their libraries.

From the earliest of ages, Phoenix children are ingrained with the belief that knowledge is power and the pursuit and perfection of knowledge is a sacred thing. Very few students are ever permitted to proceed to any level of capacity within the ranks of the Phoenix without first proving themselves more than 'merely a courtier' or 'merely a soldier.' A Phoenix samurai is expected to be more than that, and thus Phoenix children begin their lives studying the lore of the Empire. For bushi this frequently means either a focus on the lore of the religious faiths of Rokugan or studying the work of the shugenja within their ranks, so as to better equip them to serve as bodyguards and aides. This is not universally true, but it is very frequent, along with pursuit of 'traditional' studies such as heraldry and Bushido. Courtiers and shugenja, on the other hand, frequently develop extremely varied fields of study, spanning a dizzying array of subjects and including topics the rest of the Empire might not even consider useful or pertinent.

These intensive studies are by access to one of the largest library systems in the whole of Rokugan. The Asako libraries contain massive records on every sort of scholarly topic, while the Isawa Library is a massive sprawling complex housing copies of nearly every spell ever created in the Empire – including many which can be found nowhere else. Only a very few closely-held clan secrets cannot be found within one or another of these libraries. Access to both mundane and arcane lore on this scale allows the courtiers of the Phoenix Clan to always be ready to answer nearly any question that may possibly come up. Even the most seemingly inconsequential questions may be answered without a second thought.

The Phoenix have persisted in this practice for over a thousand years partially as a matter of simple pride. They are the masters of magic, and it is they who were named by the Emperors of old as the guides of the Empire's religious life. They believe they must never allow themselves to be less than what is required of them in all things related to these sacred tasks. It is simply a matter of course to them to conduct the utmost fulfillment of their duties... thus helping to ensure their continued place.

Underlying this reason, however, is a more practical one. The Phoenix are jealous of their position because they



dare not lose it. Admittedly, their position as a Great Clan has only once been questioned (and in such a fashion that it was largely laughed out of the courts), but the Phoenix are well aware they have always been one of the smallest of the Great Clans. Their lands are verdant but not pronounced in wealth, boasting exotic materials but ones needed only in very specific roles – such as scroll papers. They do not have many wealthy holdings, and their coastlines are only able to provide sustenance rather than the overwhelming bounty of the sea seen in Mantis and Crane coastal holdings. Their armies are secondary in strength to those of all of their neighbors, even the Dragon. Were any two clans to join together in waging war upon them, the Phoenix would be in grave peril, even with the mighty power of the Elemental Masters. Protracted wars have always taken heavy tolls on Phoenix resources. Thus, the Phoenix cling to their religious authority and scholastic mastery with an almost desperate grip; they maintain their vast libraries as much for their own protection as anything else. Likewise any tradition that upholds their right to meddle in the affairs of others is pushed to its limit and often abused, to an extent that gives the Phoenix a reputation as being extremely nosy and intrusive about others' affairs. To be sure, the Phoenix know they have few real enemies within the Empire and many friends, but they know this circumstance could change. And if it does, anything which gives them the appearance of having ongoing value, value that cannot simply be replaced by moving a library or renaming a few positions of authority, must be maintained at all costs.

The greatest political asset the Phoenix have is not the Elemental Masters or their immense power, although most clans believe it is the Masters and their authority over all things magical and religious that renders the Phoenix unassailable. However, in reality the clan's greatest asset is patience. They are the only clan of courtly Fire that demonstrates sufficient self-control to burn slowly, to plan for the inevitability





of future strife or future need. They store up knowledge for themselves, assembling an insurmountable pool of intellectual resources, so when they are called upon they are never unprepared for the task at hand.

These attitudes within the Phoenix gain them a fairly solid and consistent position within the courts of Rokugan. They do not hold pride of position in anything, but neither are they considered trivial or expendable by the more politically powerful clans. Other Great Clans frequently defer to their wisdom even if they personally despise the Phoenix. It would be far too much exertion, to exhausting of precious resources, to ever replace the Phoenix, so they have guaranteed they will always be where they are, even if they may have difficulties ascending beyond the position of “mere scholars” they have cultivated so assiduously.

THE ASAKO SCHOLARS

There are Asako librarians, and then there are Asako librarians. In every generation there are always a few members of the Asako school who display a unique and impressive gift for retaining information – what the Isawa refer to as “Minds of Fire.” They exhibit tremendous natural gifts of memory, capable of recalling events from as far back as their early childhoods, but this alone does not set them apart. They are also gifted with the ability to transcend mere memorization of information, instead displaying a powerful grasp of how to apply connections between different fields of study in ways nobody else could have imagined.

Ever since the earliest days of the Asako school these individuals have been easily identifiable by their sensei. The Phoenix have always valued scholarship, but these particular gifts are considered especially prized within the ranks of the clan. The Scholars’ dojo is not anywhere close to the largest of such dojo; on the contrary, it seldom has more than a couple of dozen students at a time, due to the rarity of people with this gift. However, it carries with it considerable prestige within the ranks of the Phoenix, enough so that the obvious respect awarded to its students is visible to members of other clans. The Scholars are frequently approached by others on matters of esoteric or difficult lore.

Membership in the Scholars is drawn primarily from the best and brightest of those who study in the Asako court techniques, although a few have also been recruited from the ranks of the Henshin on occasion. Rare exceptions are sometimes made for non-Phoenix samurai, since the actual path of study is not one focused on political action and is not dependent on courtly training; the order of Scholars is at least in theory open to all, but it is rare to find anyone outside of the Phoenix with the aptitude for it.

The majority of the Scholars serve under the auspices of the Asako Libraries. There is no better location for them to have access to the wealth of information they can use to broaden their knowledge and horizons further than they

already are. Furthermore, this ensures the Phoenix are always aware of where their finest scholars can be found.

As a rule, the Scholars are not the most politically minded of samurai, even by the standards of the Asako. They are so deep within their studies that they often seem largely unaware of the world around them. The speed with which they can apply a wide variety of topics to a given situation, however, marks them as extremely useful and flexible assets within the courts, and the Phoenix usually try to make sure a Scholar is assigned to accompany any important diplomat (such as the various Elemental Masters during their appearances at court). The hallmark and the true skill of the Asako Scholars is their ability through the study of multiple topics to decipher the connections between all fields of study. For them, the power of their intellect all but erases the usual limitation of focused scholarship found in the paths of Fire.

The Ikoma Family

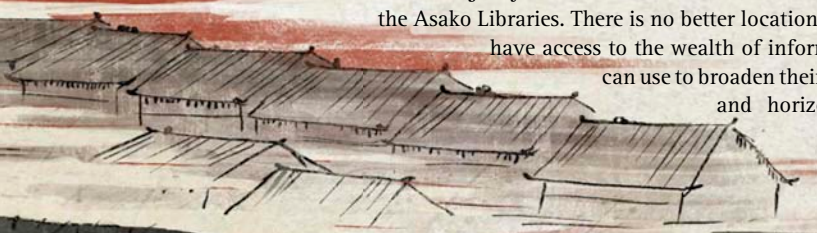
“The Ikoma are the voice of the Lion, but they also serve as its memory.” – Akodo Tsudoken

On the surface, the Ikoma Omoidasu do not appear to be one of the stronger matches for a Fire-oriented school of thought. Air does not dominate them, other than the most basic awareness of the attitudes of their listeners, and in many ways they are among the most “general” of courtier schools, seemingly not tied to any specific Elemental approach to the courts. Indeed, some among the other clans do not truly consider the Omoidasu to be courtiers at all, but merely a ‘lesser’ school focusing solely on supporting the passions of their clan’s innumerable warriors.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Ikoma are perhaps one of the truest masters of the courtly art of Fire, a family that embraces the deepest nature of Fire without any effort to escape what some consider its pitfalls. To the Ikoma (and in truth to the Lion at large), over-focus and occasional borderline obsession is not considered undesirable, whether in war or in the work of the courts. Indeed, the obsessive and focused study of history itself is considered to be one of the highest callings within the Lion Clan and especially within the Ikoma family. Virtually no one who graduates from the ranks of a Lion institution is not at least minimally familiar with the Empire’s history and the great and glorious deeds of the Lion Clan. Most Lion are expected to be able to recite at least seven generations of their family line, and it is not uncommon for them to be able to recite their entire lineage back to the clan’s progenitors, and to know at least one noteworthy deed of each such ancestor.

This devotion reaches an almost absurd level within the ranks of the Omoidasu. To the Lion, there is nothing under the sun that is truly new, nothing strange worthy of adding to the Empire. While practical reality does break this attitude on occasion, as a rule the Lion uphold it with the most staunch traditionalism and rigidity; in the ranks of the Omoidasu in particular, this devotion takes on a nearly religious level. The Omoidasu believe all within the Empire can benefit from a proper understanding of history,





for it one understands all that has been done by one's ancestors before, one is always prepared for whatever challenges may come in one's current and future life. Standing on the honor and history of generations of noble and worthy ancestors is considered to be not only the duty of a samurai but also a privilege. In an Omoidasu's mind there is no reason not to study everything that has come before amongst the Lion, for their ancestors have already found the answers to every question, drawing from the teachings of the Kami Akodo, the Thunder Matsu, and the other clan founders from so long ago. In addition, the pride of the Lion is stoked by their study of the history of the Empire and the many great deeds and victories of their clan, particularly during Rokugan's first eight centuries when the Lion Clan enjoyed a great dominance of the Empire's military affairs. The Omoidasu also believe that history shows the Lion to have been in the right in every conflict, whether martial or political, and call on their studies to reinforce this conviction.

On its surface this all sounds like little more than Lion Clan bluster and bravado, but there is a powerful element of truth in it which other clans do not always recognize. Because much of the history of the Empire has been recorded by the Ikoma family, there has always been a certain 'coloring' of the texts. While the Ikoma family (outside of its small order known as the Lion's Shadow) would never dream of overtly manipulating the study of history in favor of the Lion, and indeed would bridle at the very suggestion of such a thing, the fact remains that the Ikoma have written nine-tenths of all history texts in Rokugan. Honest and sincere Lion will always admit the errors of their clan – indeed the Akodo War College makes a point of studying their clan's defeats – nonetheless the Empire's histories often grant the Lion the best possible construction of any particular event. The Lion Clan's villains are visible in the histories, but so are all possible examples of extenuating circumstances and the honor of loyal followers and subordinates. The failures of the Lion are not avoided, but the official histories tend to record them in far more brief a fashion than the Akodo military records (or the personal histories of other clans). Small slights and mistakes, personal quirks that might be considered offensive, all have a way of being brushed over, ignored, or simply not mentioned whenever Lion and Imperial figures are brought to the forefront of the chronicles.

The result of this is that if one reads the official histories of the Empire in detail, very frequently it does appear that the Lion are the clan always in the right. They have their share of failures, but their claims to land and honor are always upheld, and their revenge of slights are always praised. Thus anyone making their case in the courts based on the Empire's history can almost always find the Lion's point of view and justification far more easily than the justifications and viewpoints of those who oppose the Lion. Thus, those facing the Lion in the courts encounter a two-fold challenge that makes opposing the Omoidasu surprisingly dangerous. On the one hand, they are some of the most indomitable historians in the empire, obsessively studying not only the history of the Lion Clan but that of

the entire Empire with a rabidity that would make even the Asako pause on occasion. On the other hand, the histories have already been written – with what might be argued to be a slight "home-court advantage" – and their accounts are singularly well-suited to exposition by the Lion Clan's bards. As a result, once the judgment of history is invoked, most of the clans choose to concede the field, politely deferring to the Ikoma's opinions, rather than wade into the morass of attempting to counter scholars who are backed by the Emperor's own word.

Without really intending to, the Ikoma demonstrate the true power that is present within the courtly paths of Fire. Because of the worship of the ancestors present throughout the Empire and the authority of the Ikoma family in dictating what is recorded in the records, history is a topic of key importance in the ways of politics. Without the histories to present the testimonies that are so pivotal to Rokugani law and tradition, the word of the ancestors is not available, so history is a vital and unavoidable topic in almost any negotiation. Focusing their energies with such fervor on this one art has granted a relatively small school a place within the courts much more important than it may outwardly appear at first. Anyone who would doubt their capabilities because of the narrow nature of their focus does so at his own peril.

THE IKOMA HISTORIANS

"A well-crafted phrase or a well-crafted blade – wielded by a master, the results are alike." –Ikoma Hodota

The Ikoma Historians are a subset of the Ikoma courtly schools, and recruit from the ranks of both the Omoidasu and the more secretive Lion's Shadow. The former are, of course, the traditional source of its ranks and make up the majority of its numbers. The latter, however, do form a small and noteworthy percentage, although they usually maintain the public impression that they too are traditionally-trained Omoidasu. These shadow historians frequently make use of their access to the secrets of the Empire's history to protect both Imperial and Lion interests, and most of the members of the Ikoma-Shosuro alliance are drawn from their ranks.

The Historians are an elite group within the family, and it is considered not only an honor to be counted among their ranks but indeed a sacred trust placed on each and every one of them. To them this duty is akin to a religious one, and while they would never openly refer to themselves as priests they treat their duties with the same devotion as the Kitsuo Sodan-Senzo. It is their sacred trust to ensure the accurate and careful chronicling of the Imperial histories, and the transmission of those Histories to future generations. In some ways this causes the Ikoma Historians to have a considerably broader view of their duties than almost anyone else in the Lion Clan. While the Lion consider themselves servants of the Emperor, and thus of the Empire at large, the Right Hand always prefers to serve unilaterally through their obedience to their Clan Champion. They consider their service to the Lion Clan and its cause to be the same as service to the Empire itself. The Historians, however, take a different view. Though

THE SHOSURO-IKOMA-OTOMO ALLIANCE

Although the Ikoma historians approach their scholarly duties with a great sense of honor and dedication, a few specialized individuals within their ranks have a rather unusual view of their duty. These historians operate in a covert alliance with the leaders of the Otomo family and certain scholars of the Shosuro family from the Scorpion Clan, and their role is not to record history but to control it. The roots of this movement originated in the fifth century after the fall of the Gozoku and the Battle of White Stag. The two families joined with the Otomo in an informal alliance to protect public perceptions of the dignity and authority of the Emperor – an important thing to accomplish after the time of the Gozoku. Bayushi Rikoji, the new Champion of the Scorpion, was particularly eager to protect the sanctity of the Hantei Dynasty in order to correct the grievous errors of his Gozoku predecessors. The two families' quiet alliance of historical revisionism was greatly strengthened after the appearance of Iuchiban at the Battle of Stolen Graves a few generations later. Both Rokugan's religious beliefs and its social order would have been gravely undermined by the realization that the Emperor's brother had fallen to the lure of dark magic and become one of the greatest villains in the Empire's history. After Iuchiban was defeated and captured, the Son of Heaven called the daimyo of the Bayushi and Ikoma families together and officially ordered them to alter the Empire's history to conceal the blasphemous true identity of the Bloodspeaker.

In the centuries since then, a small number within the Ikoma family have continued to work with the Otomo and Shosuro to loyally protect the Imperial line by erasing shocking, blasphemous, or socially disruptive events from the official records. Both this activity and the alliance are informal and incredibly secret, and indeed not all daimyo of the families have been aware of it. At times whole generations have gone by where only one of the three participating families (the Otomo, Ikoma, and Shosuro) have been involved in the effort. Of the three, the Otomo are the least active, and generally only step in when a particularly active scholar or daimyo notices changes in the histories and demands explanations. Such individuals usually quickly cease their questioning once the Otomo approach them and invoke the authority of the Emperor. The Shosuro and especially the Ikoma are the "active" parties in the alliance, typically under the leadership of either their family daimyo or of key figures within the Ikoma Library and the Shosuro spy networks. The alliance has seen shaky periods during wars between the clans, but never once have the various sides abandoned their devotion to protecting Rokugan and the Emperor from dangerous truths. Indeed, the alliance has resulted in a sort of grudging respect between those who participate, and a general attitude of leaving conflicts between their clans to other families whenever possible.

Although the alliance works to eliminate unfortunate knowledge from the official records, its leaders also recognize there may come a time when such knowledge is needed. Moreover, the Ikoma believe they have a duty to record the truth somewhere, even if it does not make its way into the normal archives. As a result, the two families jointly maintain a secret library where all the suppressed truths of Rokugan's history are kept. See "The Ikoma-Shosuro Library" later in this chapter for details.

no Historian would ever be disloyal to his lord, they are frequently very willing to share the use of their gifts with other clans, and quite liberal in their interpretations of what is permissible to share with the rest of the Empire. This same liberality, however, does not encompass the private sections of the Ikoma Libraries, and the family jealously guards the treasured first-hand accounts and unique scrolls it has collected for posterity. They are far too proud of their own skills in handling these documents to allow someone untrained to have access to them; to do so would almost be sacrilegious.

Despite their modest numbers, the Historians are more frequently encountered than one might imagine. They do not really "pose" as regular Omoidasu, but they travel alongside their brethren from the main Ikoma school and make no effort to distinguish their own separate organization. They frequently serve as assistants to senior Bards present at any major gathering, and can be seen transcribing and recording events, inquiring of others about various incidents, and memorizing the final tales of dying samurai at battles or duels. Even in the most mundane and peaceful of courtly settings, the Historians are always at work, and what looks on the surface to be nothing more than polite curiosity about the lives and times of other samurai is actually a systematic recording of as much history as possible at all times.

Ikoma Historians are taught to memorize and recall notable events for later write transcribing, to maintain precise written accounts of the history they witnessed, and to always be on the alert for new events which must be properly recorded. There have been numerous times throughout Rokugan's history when the only reason a major event was properly recorded is because someone happened to be there to witness and remember it. Ikoma was never a man who trusted in the fickle whims of fate, and his Historians are not either; they are trained to be ever vigilant for anything worthy of recording. On battlefields, for example, Ikoma Historians are often the ones responsible for listening to the final accounts of dying samurai, transmitting those words to their families and also writing them down for inclusion in the Histories.

Those of other clans who do become aware of the distinction between the Historians and the traditional Omoidasu usually do so because they find the Historians to be rather pushy and nosy. They are tolerated in the courts because of their invaluable role in both recording history and bringing its weight to bear on any discussion of importance. However, the fact that they are almost always recording, remembering, studying, and adding to their store of information tends to make them somewhat tiresome guests, especially in any court where there might be something to hide. And while they claim to be unbiased, it is nearly impossible for anyone from the other clans to see them as other than an agent of Lion Clan interests.



The Dragon Clan

While some might wish to associate the Dragon Clan with the Element of Water due to the attitude and activity of their Kitsuki family, in reality their courtly activity through the history of the Empire has been more like that of their neighbors in the Phoenix than any other clan. And while the Kitsuki family itself has a pronounced devotion to certain aspects of the Path of Water, the clan as a whole has always maintained a court attitude more in line with Fire than any other Element.

Part of the reason behind this is a practical reality: while the Phoenix make patience and the slow development of power structures an artform, to the Dragon it is a necessity and a way of life. The Dragon are the most geographically and culturally isolated of the original Great Clans, and even after the advent of the Mantis (and later, the Spider) as Great Clans the Dragon remain the clan most isolated from contact with the rest of the Empire. The Mantis, despite their isolated location on off-shore islands, are a trading clan which goes out of its way to remain in contact with the rest of Rokugan, while Spider of necessity are kept within eyesight of the entire Empire and every effort is made to keep them visible. The Dragon, on the other hand, have been all but completely separated from their neighbors since the very dawn of the Empire by the difficult terrain of their core mountain holdings. In later centuries, contact with the Dragon has been run largely through the Dragonfly Clan, making them even more isolated from the Empire as a whole. And due to their isolated existence and the large amount of extra time it affords, the Dragon have always led contemplative and scholarly lives. Like the Phoenix, the Dragon display a marked tendency towards warrior-scholars in their ranks. This attitude, however, takes on an almost idealized perspective within the Dragon, and the focuses of study are much more limited, with a particular focus on the Tao and the quest for enlightenment. Many Dragon bushi and courtiers are ascetics, raised and trained in an almost monastic lifestyle. Indeed, the Mirumoto have an entire secondary school of combat centered around a monastic quest for enlightenment through the perfection of swordplay.

Where the Dragon differ most strongly in practice from the Phoenix Clan is in the fact that the Dragon Clan does not actually utilize its focused nature in politics in the way the Asako do. The Dragon are not known for presenting themselves as scholars or for using their knowledge and study to try to garner political favors, nor do they wield their specialized knowledge in the brute-force fashion favored by the Ikoma on many occasions. The Dragon do not uphold the notion of a warrior-scholar for the sake of bettering their position or ensuring their courtiers are capable of defending themselves in case of duels, nor do they use martial studies to prepare themselves for the courts. Rather, these studies are part of the clan's focus on the personal quest for enlightenment and understanding. They seek to emulate the principles of their original founders, figures like Mirumoto, his adopted son Mirumoto Hojatsu,

THE SHOSURO-IKOMA-OTOMO ALLIANCE (Continued)

GMs and players who have read previous books in the L5R 4th Edition line – especially the two *Imperial Histories* supplements – may have already noticed the references to certain incidents being deleted from the official records. Aside from the true story of Iuchiban himself, other secrets large and small which have been “erased” from the records include the following:

- ❶ There is no mention in the histories of the Emperor inviting the gaijin to the Imperial palace during their extended stay prior to the Battle of White Stag, nor is any mention of the Mantis' involvement recorded anywhere.
- ❷ The slaughters and crimes of Hantei XVI's reign are absent from the official records, as is the terrible scourge of the Great Famine during the reign of Hantei XX.
- ❸ The Heresy of the Five Rings, and the narrow margin by which the Emperor was diverted from ordering the merging of the Scorpion and Crane Clans, is downplayed to the point of absence.
- ❹ While the histories speak freely of Hantei XVII's love for sumai wrestling, there is no mention of his insatiable lust for young samurai-ko, including the incident involving the raising of a hand by a slighted Crab maiden that nearly spawned a war between her clan and the Lion.
- ❺ Hantei XIX's curious nocturnal habits are unknown to the Empire, as is Hantei XXIII's refusal to ever bathe.
- ❻ Hantei XXV's malicious political meddling, which almost led to a Lion-Phoenix war, is politely absent from history.





the priestess Agasha, and of course Togashi himself. So long as their duties are being fulfilled in the process, their leaders have no objection, and indeed the Dragon Clan has always considered the quest for understanding and betterment among its samurai to be a paramount aspect of their role and duty.

What this translates to is an almost schizophrenic lack of overall focus within the clan, as each samurai's personal focused pursuit of study becomes a separate path of Fire, sending him in a different direction. The Dragon Clan as a whole does not so much follow the path of Fire in the courts as blunder along the path almost by accident through its natural inclinations. Its members are scholars not because scholarship is upheld as a tradition but because this is their path and each Dragon follows his own path without fail. Dragon samurai are given considerably greater freedom than those of other clans in the development of their training and the use of their free time, causing many to take a casual, distant, or even flighty attitude towards the courts; they are like small flames, flickering and dancing upon whatever fuel best suits their hunger for knowledge. This means one who encounters a diplomat of the Dragon Clan can never be sure what to expect, other than that there is almost always something more to a Dragon than what is apparent on the surface. Dragon courtiers have a decidedly unpredictable quality, one that in its own way is also associated with the paths of Fire. Everything is personalized and focused for them, everything is intensely personal and individual. The more shrewd Mirumoto and Kitsuki daimyo, when tasked with the placement of key diplomats, select locations where men and women of a particular focus may be useful, but they do not pigeonhole their samurai in the manner of the Phoenix. The Dragon Clan leadership generally believes their samurai's individual creativity and unpredictability are assets that can turn to the clan's advantage in the courts.

This sort of tendency can reach true extremes where the Ise Zumi are involved. These strange individuals rarely visit a court under the orders of a superior, but they frequently travel when and where they please. Because of their semi-monastic status, they tend to be permitted to travel in

other clans' lands with little impediment, and frequently are invited to the local courts out of curiosity. Not all of these individuals are without a certain savvy in the courts, since the conduct of the political arts may sometimes hold as much fascination for them as any other esoteric topic they might embrace on their path of enlightenment. Their unpredictability, however, can make them unsettling to others, and only the most inexperienced of courtiers truly welcome their presence without knowing their personal nature. Many a courtier has found his rank and prestige diminished because of the error of hastily inviting a Togashi 'curiosity' to the court in the hope of garnering favor, only to have the monk's strange behavior causing a distasteful scandal. Most court veterans recognize that the Ise Zumi are like a raging bonfire on the plains, easily going beyond control and causing disproportionate harm.

THE ORDER OF EISAI

The name for this enigmatic twelfth-century order within the ranks of the tattooed men is something of a misunderstanding. The group itself actually claims no name and desires no sort of designation. Its ranks are drawn mostly from the Tsurui Zumi, although the Ise Zumi also sometimes follow their path (the violent Kikage Zumi have never found this group congenial). The name "Order of Eisai" is not found in any of the records of the Togashi family, nor will they acknowledge the name if it is referenced; indeed, some take mild offense at the term, while the rest view it with a sort of mild curiosity and amusement. The term "Order of Eisai" originated with a minor Mirumoto courtier who was dealing with a visiting dignitary from the Crane, attempting to explain the seemingly incongruous behavior of several like-minded Togashi monks who were present at the same court. The hastily-chosen phrase stuck.

The source of the name choice has to do with the peculiar nature of the "Order." All of its members take a vow of silence, only permitting themselves to speak during the new moon of every year during the time when no moonlight shines upon the land of Rokugan. At those times they can be outright chatty, as if making up for lost time. None, however, ever bother to explain the vow they have taken, seeming to deem this an unimportant question when they have perhaps only an hour to speak before their mouths are shut once more. It is thought by others members that the order derives its inspiration from the life and actions of Hoshi Eisai, wife to Togashi Hoshi, the half-dragon son of Togashi who founded the Hoshi family and herself took up a vow of silence through the majority of her adult life.

Whether or not the Order actually follows in the footsteps of Eisai is unknown and ultimately immaterial, since nobody with sufficient rank and status has ever demanded an answer from the monks. The whole thing seems, to those of the Togashi family that are not offended by it, to be something of a private in-joke.

The monks of the Order are universally scholars, taking a path toward enlightenment through regular and intensive study of esoteric subjects. Most of their membership is



found on pilgrimages to the shrines of Fukurokujin or Tengen, within the libraries of the Dragon Clan, or in the midst of research projects of one variety or another. They rarely communicate in any fashion; even writing is infrequent and always laced with cryptic remarks of some sort, rarely offering any sort of detail on the subjects they are researching.

As a rule, most outside of the clan are unaware of the existence of the Order. All others save the Kitsuki view them as curiosities, oddities barely worth noting outside of being yet another example of the general strangeness of the tattooed men. The Kitsuki, however, have noticed that each the Order is a fascinating treasure trove of information. Their collected documents appear at the surface to be largely on topics that hold no immediate value, in either the courts or to the Empire at large, typically demonstrating a near-obsessive focus on some extremely minor element of historical lore or clan trivia. However, in their written musings and brief periods of speech these individuals display a sort of rare and almost prescient grasp of the world around them, particularly the behavior patterns of those who they study. It is almost as if in seeking enlightenment through studying the smallest of minutiae they are blessed with a special gift for grasping others' natures. As a result, the Kitsuki have taken to placing the members of the Order under their wing whenever possible, frequently inviting them to attend courts (especially courts taking place during the new moon). When the monks of the Order do speak, there is usually a Kitsuki around to record their chatter in hopes of encountering some new revelation. Frequently this nets nothing, but gems of wisdom have sometimes been found.

The only other group in the Empire to take particular notice of the Order of Eisai are the Scorpion. A few very small elements within the highest ranks of the Scorpion Clan recall the behavior of Eisai's husband Hoshi. He inherited his Scorpion mother's love of secrets, and through the centuries he displayed an unnerving access to secrets of all sorts, including many nobody should have been privy to at all. There is suspicion in the highest ranks of the Scorpion that this small group of scholars is not blessed by Eisai but rather by her husband, Hoshi himself, with the ability to find secrets and knowledge in places nobody would have expected. Thus, they watch these monks with great care.

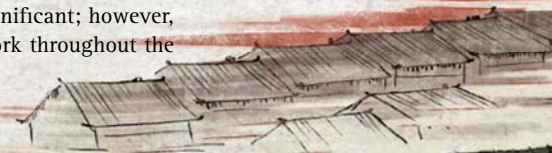
The Otomo: The Imperial Matchmakers

The Imperial Matchmakers are a small but very well-connected element of the Otomo family's hierarchy. They garner their popularity and their extensive allies and favors not only through their dominance of this niche in the Empire's social order, but also through the nature of that niche itself. In many ways the Matchmakers further clarify how it is that the Otomo family so typifies Earth, even in the ways it embraces and manipulates the ways of Fire. They are a seamless fusion of both schools of thought, albeit with the emotional tendencies of the Earth.

Imperial Matchmakers are perfectionists, masters of the field of marital negotiation. Few in any of the clans, even in the Crane (who excel at all things related to marriage and the negotiations associated with it), can come close to the level of mastery the Imperial Matchmakers display. Their ranks are highly selective, and only those with a proper mastery of all details of both etiquette and politics, as well as an understanding of noble bloodlines back to the Empire's earliest days, are considered to join them. On the surface, this elitism has always been phrased as a careful policy to ensure the future prospects of the Empire's noble families are put under appropriate supervision for the good of all. The reality, however, is that Matchmakers are ultimately recruited for their cold, calculating, and politically gifted natures, in combination with a knack for memorizing family trees.

The Imperial Matchmakers are actually among the most impressive manipulators of the courts in existence, though speaking to them seldom reveals this fact. Part of this is because students of their dojo are not actually particularly gifted in courtly debate or rhetoric, though they are certainly able to hold their own in conversations with the more experienced courtiers of the Empire. However, they do not stand out as particularly eloquent or masterful. This is because they do not seek control through the direct manipulation favored by other groups. Rather, they represent a powerful background tool the Otomo family uses, often completely behind the scenes, to ensure everything in the Empire moves as they wish. The Otomo do this by controlling access to the Matchmakers' favor and talents, as well as through their near complete stranglehold on the Empire's birth records. While individual clans do maintain records, and the Ikoma make at least some effort to keep records of the principle family lines in other clans, the Otomo maintain birth records on a huge proportion of the Empire's samurai population. These records, along with the broader Empire's general embrace of arranged marriages as the proper way to continue their family lines, have allowed the Matchmakers to build up a reputation as noble and worthy negotiators, widely respected for their ability to answer any sort of question and resolve any sort of problem regarding betrothals and family alliances. Admittedly, with lower-status families their efforts are often little more than routine and formulaic if they are available at all. Nonetheless, over the centuries the Matchmakers have built up vast amounts of favor throughout the Empire – especially within the noble families, where they are careful to always offer the most dedicated and personalized of services.

Beyond such basic manipulation, the Matchmakers also control the courts through careful placement of assets. To the Matchmakers everyone is an asset of some sort, including every member of their own ranks. While they are very devoted to their duty, and few would actually offer a bad match to the families seeking their aid, nonetheless they always make sure each marriage is one that places desirable families into high court positions in coming years. In the course of a single generation this sort of control is not necessarily all that significant; however, after generation upon generation of work throughout the





Empire, the Matchmakers have constructed a political and social environment that greatly favors their brothers and sisters in the Otomo. They keep the Empire's political society in tune with the Otomo world-view, yet do so in a fashion the rest of Rokugan does not even recognize as a manipulation. Knowing in advance the direction that various families are being moved throughout the Empire allows the Otomo to better predict broader movements in the courts, an ability that allows them to place their other assets in exactly the place they need to be. All of this serves to enhance the omnipresent image the relatively small family strives to maintain in the clans.

The Courts of Fire

Though there are relatively few courts which can be truly said to be oriented toward the Element of Fire, they are not quite so rare as might be imagined. With two prominent courtly families, Asako and Ikoma, oriented toward the Fire Element it is to be expected that their courts would be known as places of Fire. Moreover, while the Crane are known chiefly for their Air courts, the aspects of inspiration and creativity in Fire (as well as the Element's connection to swordsmanship) is epitomized by the Crane courts of the Kakita.

Morning Glory Castle

Originally known as the Castle of the White Phoenix, Kyuden Asako is situated along the eastern edge of the Isawa Mori, deep in the heart of some of the most peaceful lands in all of the Phoenix holdings. It is far less sizable than Kyuden Isawa or Shiro Shiba, but at the same time is one of the most easily defended locations in all the Phoenix provinces. During the ninth century, efforts were made to further upgrade the fortresses' foundations and the defensibility of its position atop a jagged and high mountain. The resulting fortress is a formidable affair while still appearing to be far more focused upon the aesthetic beauty of the mountains. Few who visit the castle are ever struck by its military functions, instead assuming that some sort of aesthetic sensibility is behind the design, perhaps a meditative focus on the mountains. This impression is enhanced by the way it is said the castle's walls are lit by the morning sun each day regardless of the season.

This seeming deception is entirely unintentional on the part of the Asako family. They have simply never made a habit of revealing the castle's military aspects. Normally, the Asako handle political functions in the less remote and more easily accessible Pale Oak Castle (described in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Air*). Although Morning Glory Castle is used far less often, those who visit it are always stunned by its architectural wonder. Its massive sun-brightened walls overlook a sprawling and almost maze-like set of pathways on the side of the mountain, leading up to the castle between numerous

smaller gate structures. Along these pathways are frequent small shrines where visitors can perform various religious devotions, and many who come to Kyuden Asako take it upon themselves to establish 'pilgrim routes' through the myriad pathways, believing a religious focus is the appropriate mindset for guests of the Phoenix. The Asako have never been ones to disagree with this sort of habit.

Despite the fact that in all reality Morning Glory Castle is mostly a military installation, positioned in such a way to have the widest view possible of the broad Asako Plains to the south and west, it still sees occasional use as a key court in the Empire. During times of political strife there have been several Emperors who have found the beautiful walls and isolated location of the Asako castle to be conducive toward negotiations. To be sure, these courts have not always been peaceful (such as the tense courts in the waning years of Hantei XXXIX's reign), and the real appeal of this castle to most visitors is its library and wealth of religious installations.

By most standards Kyuden Asako is one of the more spartan locations ever to host an Imperial Winter Court, though it is still considerably more elegant than Lion or Crab castles. What it may lack in the elaborate accouterments of high society it makes up for in its formidable scholarly resources and beautiful setting. The unique aesthetics and the gorgeous view of the clan's lands create a sense of quiet mystery, helping to restrain violence on those rare occasions it is chosen for major events by the clan or the Emperor.

THE SHRINE OF BISHAMON'S GIFT

This one of the more unusual locations amongst the myriad of small shrines found in Kyuden Asako. It was established during the reign of Hantei XXXIII by a man named Asako Hidehira. The structure is small and unassuming; standing within the sacred housing of the shrine is a broken spear of exquisite quality, said to have belonged to Hidehira's grandfather, wielded in a battle against the Lion in the same year as the shrine's founding. The battle, known in Phoenix records as the battle of Bishamon's Favor (and referenced without title in most Lion chronicles) was a victory for the Phoenix, fought near the very steps of Kyuden Asako itself. The Lion general proved to have been arrogant, allowing his supply chain to become thin, and sought to besiege the castle with far too few men. On the third day of the siege, Asako Hidahira sought a duel of yarijutsu with the Lion commander in hopes of lessening the bloodshed that would occur if the Lion tried to storm the fortress. The Lion agreed and was badly wounded in the ensuing match by the very spear which now rests in the shrine. The Lion subsequently withdrew their army, proclaiming the minor slight that led to

the small conflict to have been properly addressed. Lion records show the defeated commander was stripped of his rank and enrolled in the Deathseekers.

Some Phoenix samurai do visit the shrine, as well as the occasional Lion. Interestingly, the Lion seldom seem to show offense at it, and there are no aspects of its design which suggest an insult is intended toward their clan. Indeed, the implication that the Phoenix won through the blessing of the Fortune rather than through greater skill pays an implied honor to the Akodo family's fame as tacticians. Thus, occasional Lion guests make pilgrimages to the shrine, usually descendants of those who fought in the battle, paying homage to their ancestors. The Asako always show such guests the highest of respect and never deny them access to Phoenix lands, even in times of war, so long as their intentions are clear.

Kyuden Ikoma

Sacred Watch Palace is considered the traditional host for courts held in the Lion lands, which says a great many things about the Lion Clan's general attitude toward matters of politics. Until the return of the Ki-Rin in the ninth century, Kyuden Ikoma was one of the farthest western outposts of the settled Empire. While the Lion did oversee the lands once held by the Ki-Rin and reaped the benefits of their wealth and plenty for almost eight centuries, they created almost no major





castles or installations within those lands. Patrols were lighter due to the sheer demand of the vast Lion territory, so Kyuden Ikoma served as a major command post and key point of defense for the western Empire in those early centuries. Situated at the base of the Mountain of the Seven Thunders, it holds a commanding view of the wide plains that lead along the river boundaries between Unicorn and Lion lands. By the standards of a court location, however, Kyuden Ikoma is considerably more remote than most would consider convenient or appropriate. While it is certainly easily accessible, with well-patrolled roads leading to all major points in the Lion Clan's holdings, the journey is quite lengthy for anyone not coming from the Dragon or Unicorn lands. In a sense, the location serves as a reminder to the Empire that the Lion are the Right Hand of the Emperor, not the Left.

Because of its remote location, the castle has generally been known for its peaceful status. Only after the return of the Unicorn does it become a place subject to military threat, and even then it is rarely attacked given that clan's propensity to avoid siege warfare. On the other hand, this remote location has made the location perfect for both informal meetings and strategic conferences amongst the daimyo of the Lion.

The castle is probably one of the most relaxed in atmosphere of any Lion holding. Admittedly, for the Lion to describe it in this way means something very different than it might to anyone of the other clans. The holding is still staid and traditional in almost all ways, its residents the picture of propriety, honor, and the samurai aesthetic.

However, they do make an effort to maintain resources for the entertainment of guests, both those attending court and those seeking access to the Ikoma Libraries. This allows the castle to host the occasional Imperial Winter Court for those Emperors more inclined to Lion ways of thought, such as Hantei Yugo-zohime, along with more frequent regional courts inviting guests from the nearby Unicorn and Dragon Clans. Guests, even those from clans with whom the Lion are hostile, are always treated with absolute respect and propriety – to do otherwise would dishonor the Lion Clan. The Ikoma would never permit it to be said they are less than the most gracious and courteous of hosts, and spare no expense making efforts to impress upon their guests both the Lion Clan's power and its honor. Crane guests frequently find the effort humorous, although they are careful not to say so in their hosts' hearing.

THE CAVE OF THUNDER

The location of the Shrine of the Seven Thunders is within sight of the upper walls of Kyuden Ikoma. Rare is the guest to a Lion Winter Court who does not either begin or end their stay with a short pilgrimage to this shrine. Carved into the side of the mountain and boasting seven statues representing the original seven Thunders, the shrine is said to be guarded by the ancestral spirits of several of those same Thunders. Monks from the Order of the Seven Thunders have tended to the location for generations upon generations.

The cave behind the shrine contains seven golden tables, each dedicated to one of the Thunders. Through most of history these have stood empty, although it is said that Shosuro's table bore her cloak until the twelfth century. The cave is a somber and quiet place, the only sounds the faint chanting from the monks who tend to it. Most samurai who visit claim to feel the eyes of the Thunders upon them, both weighing their worth and bolstering their sense of duty.

Shiro Sano Kakita

For a clan that is generally considered to be so close to the Element of Air as the Crane, it is something of a surprise that a focus on Fire may be found so strongly within its ranks. However, when one considers how closely the Kakita family is connected to both swordsmanship and artistic inspiration, and how obsessively its members pursue their arts (whether martial or aesthetic), this becomes less strange.

Shiro Sano Kakita is widely known as one of the foremost institutions of higher learning within the entire Empire. Without it, centuries of mastery of both the way of the sword and the way of fine arts would long since have vanished into the mists of time. It is true that many clans support outstanding artisans in every generation, and it is without question there have been individual masters of both art and swordsmanship who have at different times bested the masters of the Kakita. However, even in



eras when such singular and unique individuals exist, the Kakita always have a large number of men and women whose mastery is nearly at such perfection, a veritable armada of superior skill. No matter how great the individual masters from other clans, none have ever diminished the reputation of the Kakita. In fact, these individual masters' rarity actually makes clearer the perfection of the Kakita's art, and this the very reason most would-be masters from other clans receive their training in the Kakita family's two schools – often at considerable political cost to their own families.

In addition to its famous school, Shiro Sano Kakita is also home to a court par excellence. No Crane city housing the central seat of any of its families would dare to be less than absolute perfection. Indeed, the seat of the Kakita competes with Kyuden Doji at times, a friendly and unspoken rivalry that has continued over centuries as the two castles vie for the favor of various Emperors in hosting more of the Imperial Winter Courts. Over the history of Rokugan a staggering number of these Winter Courts have occurred within these two sets of halls. Admittedly, Kyuden Doji does hold the greater number, but it is not by so significant margin as you might expect.

What Shiro Sano Kakita lacks in the way of palatial accouterments and fine amenities, it makes up for in the presence of the most valuable holding in the castle, the Academy itself. The presence of the Academy gives this castle access to prestige and assets no other court can even dream about. It goes without saying that Kakita-trained artisans are present in every Winter Court in the Empire, and present in vast abundance in any court hosted by the Crane themselves. However, when one stands within sight of the Kakita Academy itself, the entire court is suffused with the best-trained and most famous artisans in the entire Empire.

The castle is designed and maintained in a more pristine and sedate fashion than many other courts that host the Emperor. It is a clean, pure, precise, almost manicured complex, and while all its amenities are of the highest order there is never so much as an ounce of garishness anywhere to be seen. Not a single room is out of place, nor is a single one of the entertainments of the winter's season inappropriate; decorum is absolutely paramount. The opulence that characterizes Kyuden Doji is here kept carefully sedate, so guests are never embarrassed by being confronted with wealth beyond their reach. Indeed, the Kakita take pride that none of their clan guests are ever allowed to feel the slightest bit of discomfort or embarrassment within these halls.

The word “manicured” is probably the best way to describe life within Shiro Sano Kakita. Everything in this place is tailored and perfectly presented, and anything less than perfection is not tolerated. The artisans work tirelessly to ensure that every hall, every nook, every cranny in the entirety of the complex is always absolutely perfect in every way. Guests have sometimes commented that perhaps the only thing that has ever made them uncomfortable was their own boorish presence within the halls, the fear that they might somehow damage the pristine nature of the castle.

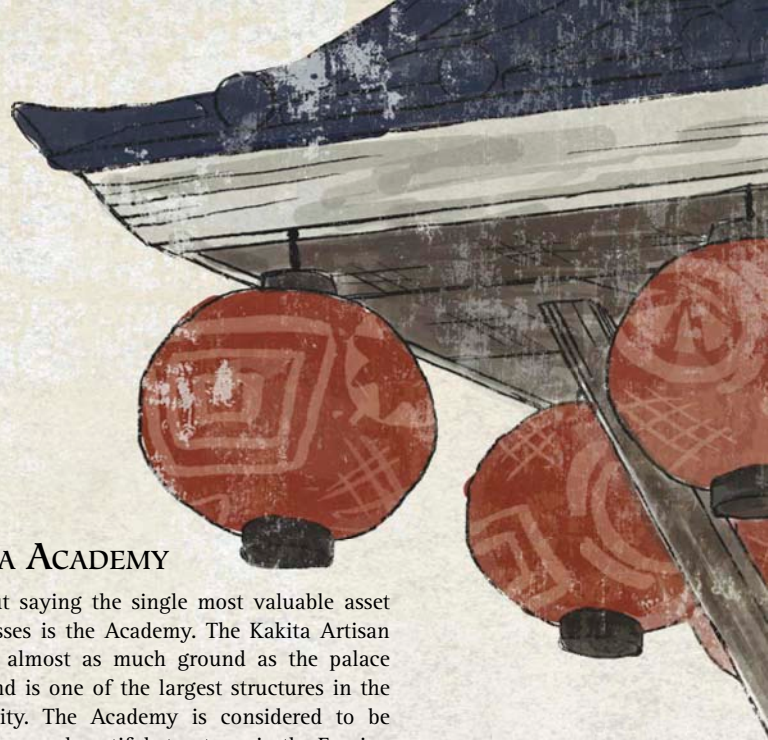
THE KAKITA ACADEMY

It goes without saying the single most valuable asset this castle possesses is the Academy. The Kakita Artisan Academy covers almost as much ground as the palace complex itself and is one of the largest structures in the entire broader city. The Academy is considered to be among one of the more beautiful structures in the Empire, and court functions that occur while Shiro Sano Kakita hosts the Imperial Winter Court often include excursions to the Academy.

Each structure of the Academy is different from the others, since each is built to house the materials and study areas for one of the many different fields of expertise covered by the Kakita Artisans. The most dominant of these structures, naturally, is the Kakita Bushi Dojo, the principle dojo of the Empire's most famous school of swordsmanship. It is no accident that this dojo is attached to the larger academy of art and creative work; the Kakita view the art of the duel and the way of swordplay in general to be merely another form of mastery of the fine arts. Kakita Duelists are simply artisans of another variety, artists pivotal for the defense of Crane lands and honor.

Other facilities offer the training and materials for any form of artistic expression sanctioned by the Emperor and the Imperial families. All of the traditional art forms originally developed by the Kami Doji are present within these halls, of course, and it is considered proof of one's mastery in any craft to be afforded the title of a sensei here.

The Academy is a remarkably austere location. Though the artwork prepared here is beyond compare, it is among the only amenities in a place that promotes an almost monastic devotion to the ways of the artist. Those seeking the pleasures of courtly life go to the castle, not here. To be sure, the Academy is a fine place in comparison to most of the Empire, but only when guests are present are the grounds given true grandeur. Otherwise, the sensei expect their students to take on an almost ascetic attitude (at least by Crane standards) toward their studies and crafts, seeking only to perfect themselves and their work while they are here. Even graduates who return for advanced studies receive the same treatment, because in the Crane view there is no true end to the process of learning, no matter how high one might rise in the ranks.



Libraries of the Empire

Although there are only a few courts which embrace the ways of Fire, every great library in Rokugan evokes the creative and scholarly aspects of the Element. No discussion of the social and intellectual aspects of Fire can be complete without reviewing the great libraries of the Empire.

The Asako Libraries

There is no question that when one considers the libraries of Rokugan, the first which comes to mind is the Asako family's holdings. The Asako librarians have made it their life's mission for more than a thousand years to collect, catalogue, and store the entire Empire's knowledge. They approach their duties with the same seriousness and devotion one might expect in a dedicated monk or shugenja. Within the halls of the Asako may be found lore pertaining to nearly every subject that has ever been discussed within Rokugan at any point. Despite several occasions in which grave damage has been done to these libraries (and to the records of the Isawa as well), they have always been rebuilt with the most assiduous of care.

The moment one enters the main halls of the Asako libraries, one can see the drive (or perhaps obsession) to achieve and collect an absolute comprehension of all knowledge throughout the Empire. Adjoining the entry chambers is one of the single largest shrines to Tenjin, the Fortune of Writing and Literature, in all of Rokugan. While it is not the official principle shrine of the Fortune, it is rumored to have been personally blessed by the Fortune due to the devotion of the Asako family to his sacred task. The structure adjoins the library proper and is maintained by a dedicated group of monks who frequently also serve as assistants to the librarians. In fact, many of their number are retired scholars and librarians from both the Phoenix and other clans; it is seen as a high honor among samurai for a monk to be granted leave to serve here in retirement. To the monks, of course, it is simply their sacred task.

The Asako libraries are not known for specialization; all types of knowledge are collected within their walls. While the Asako would love to claim all knowledge in the Empire is present in their libraries, the truth is that this goal may never be truly achieved. Clan secrets are guarded zealously, and no matter how much effort is put into searching for new research on any topic there are always documents that slip through the cracks or end up only in other libraries. Nonetheless, while the Asako Libraries may not be "complete" they are by far the largest in the entire Empire, and scrolls on all conceivable subjects may be found within their halls.

Navigating the libraries on one's own is an exercise in mystery and enigma, a near-hopeless frustration to those bold enough or foolish enough to attempt the task without the personal assistance of one of the veteran librarians. Part of the way the Asako protect their political clout within the Phoenix (and the Empire at large) is through controlling access to these veteran librarians, whose methods of categorizing, shelving, storing, and organizing the immense number of scrolls within the library is arcane on the border of being outright madness. This is not so much deliberate intention as it is a side effect of the sheer number of different texts, which make it impossible for the Phoenix to create an organizational system easily understood by anyone else. Regardless, it is considered a favor of no small value to be granted the assistance of a senior librarian when accessing these stacks.

One of the curious elements of the Asako libraries is that they are arguably the only libraries specifically devoted to maintaining a collection of original manuscripts. Admittedly, such documents can be found in any of the chief libraries around Rokugan, but the Asako librarians have expended vast resources for centuries in order to collect original documents from every great writer and every 'intriguing' period of history. These texts are kept in separate and specially cleaned portions of the library, cared for by only the most dedicated and trusted members of the family. They represent what may be the only example in Rokugan of the practice of "historiography," or the study of the process of chronicling history itself.



The Izaku Library

"The oldest texts in the Izaku Library make reference to other, still older works. If the Masters know of these ancient texts, they do not speak of them to us." – Asako Itaru

The Izaku libraries are a personal labor of love by a family which began as vassals of the Dragon and later moved to the Phoenix. The Izaku were formed in the aftermath of the Clan Wars, with the duty of reconstructing knowledge lost during the rampages of the Shadowlands forces in that conflict. Although they were originally part of the Dragon Clan's Agasha family, the Izaku shared duties and friendship with the Asako family as well. When the Agasha defected to the Phoenix during the reign of Hitomi, most of the Izaku went with them, but after the end of that conflict allowed a certain degree of reconciliation between the two clans the different branches of the Izaku resumed their duties. Regardless of clan dominion over the vassal family, the library which bears its name remains secure and protected; indeed, it is one of the most secretive and zealously guarded libraries in the entirety of Rokugan.

Access to the Izaku libraries is strictly and rigidly controlled by the family; any questions or objections are always directed to their highest superiors in both the Phoenix and the Dragon Clans, and both the Agasha and (more recently) the Tamori family daimyo have supported the Izaku to the hilt. While some have attempted to question this in the courts, such efforts have failed to gain any traction since Emperor Toturi I himself blessed the decision to create the Izaku library and his decisions has been upheld firmly by all his successors. Thus, while some from other families hold reservations about the zeal with which the Izaku librarians protect and conceal their knowledge, there is very little they can actually do about it.

Much of this paranoid intensity derives from the Izaku Library's origin as an effort to reconstruct knowledge lost when the forces of the Shadowlands sacked so many temples and monasteries, both in Dragon and Phoenix lands and from the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Much of this ancient wisdom was considered controversial to the larger Empire, and of course the librarians always feared their collections might draw renewed attacks from the forces of darkness. However, in the years since its founding the Izaku Library has expanded its holdings considerably, to the point where most of its treasure trove of information and ancient scrolls is neither inappropriate nor dangerous. (There are, however, a few notable exceptions.) The majority of the texts focus upon magical or spiritual matters, including copies of hundreds of different spells from throughout the Empire, even including traditional prayers and rituals of the peasantry and samurai alike. There are also limited references to the blasphemies of non-Rokugani, predominately the Yobajin tribes, but the Izaku Library is predominantly a repository for Imperial religious lore and magical knowledge, and pays little attention to the blasphemies of gaijin.



However, the few exceptions to this library's generally benign nature are profound. The Izaku Library contains some of the only organized information concerning the Lying Darkness to be found in Rokugan; this information was collected after the War Against the Darkness, as a precaution lest the Shadow threaten the Empire once more. The research is not catalogued, and is stored in a vault deep beneath the castle of the adjacent town of Heibeisu. Nobody is permitted to enter without the express permission of the Izaku daimyo, presented in writing and verified by witnesses. Generally, the chamber is only opened when additional scrolls need to be added to its collection, and thus everything within is covered in a fine layer of dust.

Some of the Tamori family's research into the subject of nemuranai and their nature has also found its way into the Izaku Library in well-secured shelves. While the Phoenix themselves have also studied this topic, the Tamori have made the only really detailed effort, and since they are concerned about Phoenix interpretations of their research they are understandably reticent with the information.



The Otomo Library

The Otomo Library is not the largest in the Empire by any stretch of the imagination. It is, however, one of three libraries (two of them known, the third a well-kept secret) considered to be of the most paramount importance to Rokugan. This is because the Otomo and Ikoma together are the historical chroniclers of the Empire, and it is the Otomo family's library which claim to contain the most thorough birth-records in the entirety of the land. This is actually a point of considerable contention between the Ikoma and Otomo, leading to numerous disputes when there is a discrepancy between the information recorded here and that in the Ikoma archives, particularly since such issues often involve the testimonies of men whose honor is above question. One does not speak ill of the honorable dead.

Despite these contentions, there is a understanding in most courts of the Empire that when one needs an accurate delineation of a family tree, or a secondary source to verify records concerning birth order or official dispensation of

a will, or above all when one requires clear demarcation of whose clan or family holds sway in specific regions, it is the Otomo Library which holds the answers. The Otomo bureaucracy has presided over marriage negotiations and inter-clan treaties throughout the Empire's history, and while most of the time this is more of a ceremonial observation than anything else, they have nonetheless kept close tabs on everything they learn.

When the Imperial Winter Court is held at Kyuden Otomo, the Otomo Library takes on a very special significance. On these occasions, marriage negotiations, property transfers, and every sort of diplomatic agreement can be reached with absolute speed and efficiency... provided one has the favor of the Otomo family. Maintaining such favor, particularly for clans and families seeking politically beneficial marriages or the resolution of land disputes without bloodshed, thus becomes an absolute necessity during courts held within Kyuden Otomo's walls. The family is well aware of its advantage and has developed a long-standing tradition of timing the filing of paperwork and retrieval of records based on the willingness of the supplicants to curry favor with them. For those out of disfavor, such paperwork is all too often lost in perpetuity.



Although this library is one of the seats of Otomo power, it is not staffed by any large number of the family's samurai. The Otomo are almost as jealous in guarding its integrity as the Izaku are of their own library. Unlike the Izaku, however, the Otomo will readily share the information they have – at an appropriate pace, and provided the supplicant has proper reason to make their inquiry and has received the proper authorizations. Guests are never permitted to actually enter the library itself, with only a few exceedingly rare exceptions. Only those trusted implicitly by the daimyo of the Otomo family ever serve within the library, and armed guards are always present to ensure no unauthorized intrusions. The Otomo pride themselves on maintaining the security of their library, and show no quarter to anyone caught attempting to enter without permission. This is also a matter of practical value, since the Otomo cannot risk anyone managing to somehow alter the information they have accumulated; accurate records are a vital tool in maintaining dizzying structure of influence, alliance, and control. If the library were ever compromised, repairing the damage to the family's efforts could take generations.

The Ikoma Library

What the Otomo Library is to property law and birth records, the Ikoma Library is to the history of the Empire itself. Basic documentation of all events recorded by the Ikoma family are sent to every library throughout the Empire, of course, but the original accounts and scrolls are almost always kept within the Ikoma Library itself. The family has held the duty of chronicling the nation's history since the days of Hantei Genji, who was so impressed by Ikoma Noritobe's epic tale "The Prince of Heavens" that he proclaimed the Ikoma family would always have the honor of recording the history of the Empire. Noritobe himself was the first master of the Ikoma Library, dying shortly after the building was completed, and his remains are buried beneath the scroll racks which contain the history of the Empire's first century. The modern Ikoma librarians continue his duty with as much religious sincerity as any priest worships the Fortunes.

Access to the Ikoma Library is not nearly so restricted as to the Izaku or Otomo libraries. The Ikoma firmly believe the study of history is a thing that should be promoted throughout the Empire, and believe this information should not be held in secret but instead proclaimed from the highest mountaintops. Some in other clans argue the official histories always seem a little slanted toward the Lion themselves, though the Omoidasu balk at the suggestion their chronicles are anything but the most objective. All are servants of the Empire, and the glories of every line of ancestors are worthy of praise; if the Lion are a shade more glorious than all others, that is simply a reality the other clans must accept.

THE SHOSURO-IKOMA LIBRARY

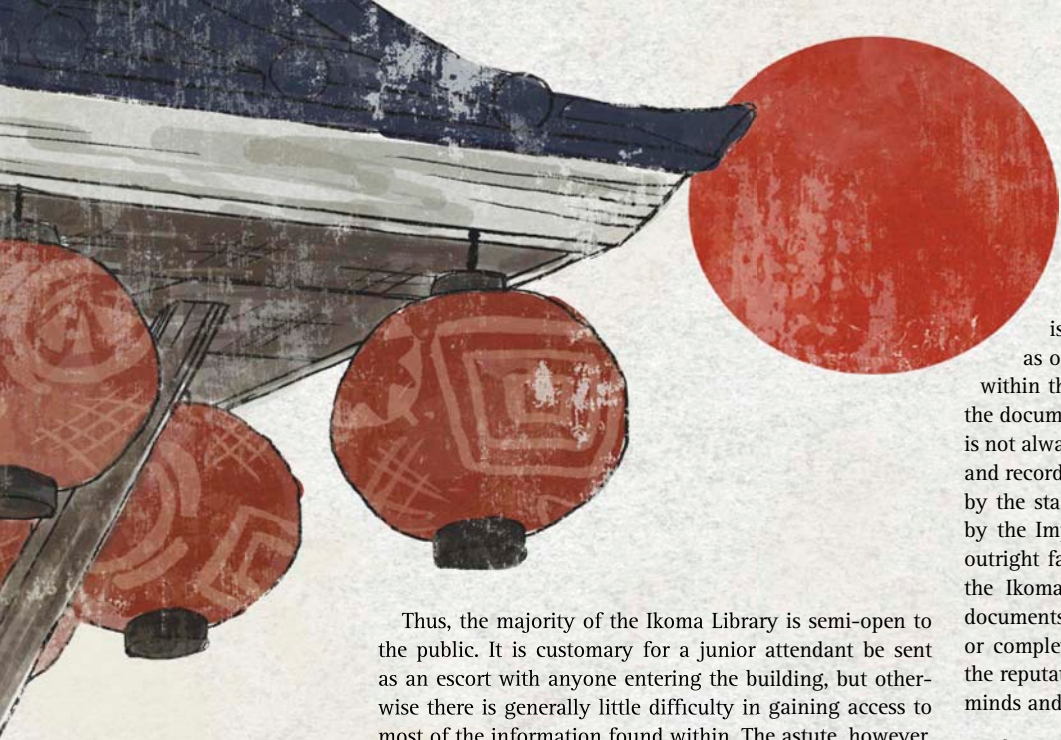
While the well-known Ikoma Library is the repository of the Empire's "official" history, the secret Shosuro-Ikoma Library is home to the actual truthful history of Rokugan. This building exists because of the pact between the Ikoma, Shosuro, and Otomo families dating back to the days of Iuchiban. Although the families agreed at that time to systematically conceal such dreadful secrets – not just the reality that the Bloodspeaker was the Emperor's brother, but also many earlier events which were judged problematic – they also recognized there might need to retain documentation of the true events somewhere. After all, one day it might be necessary to lift the veil of secrecy for the sake of some greater good. Thus the Shosuro-Ikoma Library was born.

It is a small structure, and in fact naming it as a library is probably more than a little inaccurate. Indeed, even directly associating it with either of the two families is nearly impossible. The stone building is located in the Spine of the World Mountains, at the top of a small and nearly inaccessible pass in the territory adjacent to the Shosuro and Yogo lands. The pass itself can only be traversed by single file and is in a region prone to heavy snowfall during the winter months, making it only accessible for about six months of the year. It appears on no maps, and Shosuro and Yogo patrols are ordered to leave it alone due to its dangerous conditions. Those who defy these orders have a way of simply disappearing.

The building is defensible, built more like a small fortress than anything else, with its own water supply and enough food stored inside to resist a siege for several months – not that such a siege is ever likely to come. Its residents, perhaps twenty at any time, are carefully selected Ikoma and Shosuro samurai considered to be of the utmost trustworthiness and loyalty. All remove their family mon upon joining the staff at the fortress, living as though they are ronin. Whether shugenja or soldier, all are trained in the librarian's duties and arts, and they maintain the library's small number of scrolls with absolute care.

Most daimyo of the Shosuro and Ikoma go their entire lives without ever setting foot inside this place, and indeed there are some daimyo who never even learn of its existence. Only when there is been a perceived need and an agreement between the two daimyo do their representatives come to the small castle to gain access to its records. Otherwise, the only visitors are supply caravans and the occasional new recruit to the staff. No questions are asked, and none are answered. Anyone else is to be killed on sight.





Thus, the majority of the Ikoma Library is semi-open to the public. It is customary for a junior attendant be sent as an escort with anyone entering the building, but otherwise there is generally little difficulty in gaining access to most of the information found within. The astute, however, will notice that the readily accessible texts contain only the most general of information. Names, dates, and famous battles are always included in these scrolls, but full details are rarely found. These are synopses, the sorts of texts used to train children and young samurai in the story of the Empire.

The more detailed and comprehensive stacks are kept secured, 'to preserve the integrity of the documents from wear and tear.' The Ikoma are careful when dealing with such vital documentation – reports of key battles, records of the words of great leaders, and other similar scrolls – not to simply allow anyone to wander in and read or sort them. The risk that uncontrolled visitors might indulge in some sort of forgery or manipulation is far too great to allow these stacks to go unguarded.

Gaining access to the “reserved” portions of the library requires one to know they exist. While the Ikoma will never lie about the presence of these detailed documents, or directly conceal them, the family also does not advertise their existence. Generally such things are known only to those of high rank and status, or to members of organizations like the Emerald Magistrates, the Inquisitors, and the various clan magistrate organizations. Permission to review these materials is not necessarily all that difficult to come by, and the Ikoma make a point of not playing unnecessary political games when matters of the history and law of the Empire are involved. However, a visitor must have the authority to ask for access to these things, and the process can be time-consuming; the Ikoma are generally quite assiduous in double- and triple-checking any authorizing documentation that does not originate from their own clan or the Imperial families. This additional time can sometimes cause frustration in scholars from other clans, but is generally not a source of serious contention. Certainly the Ikoma do not intentionally seek to slight anyone in the process.

Although the Ikoma Library is universally respected as the Empire’s most accurate and complete historical resource, this reputation is actually a lie. The truth about the Ikoma histories is one of the greatest secrets in the Empire as well as one of its most ironic, known only to a select few within the Ikoma, Shosuro, and Otomo families. Bluntly, the documented official history inside of the Ikoma Library is not always correct. In fact, many of the documents stored and recorded as the “true history” of the Empire, attested to by the stamp of the Emperor’s own chop and proclaimed by the Imperial Herald before the whole of the land, are outright fabrications. As noted earlier in the discussion of the Ikoma-Shosuro-Otomo alliance, the contents of the documents within the Ikoma Library is frequently altered or completely rewritten, for the sole purpose of ensuring the reputation of the Hantei Dynasty is never sullied in the minds and hearts of the Empire at large.


The Kuni Library

To call the records of the Kuni family a “library” is something of a misnomer. In fact, the very notion of holding a great court or a conclave of scholars at Shiro Kuni would be considered bizarre and probably scandalous in the extreme, especially since the time of the Maw and the building of the Kaiu Wall. No Winter Court, Imperial or otherwise, has ever graced the halls of Shiro Kuni, a fortress whose chief role is as a command station for the Wall.

Despite these realities, Shiro Kuni houses one of the central assemblies of learning in the Empire, a striking example of the scholarly art of Fire – albeit in a field that is generally considered taboo in all the rest of Rokugan. No other library in all of the Empire, regardless of size, contains more than a tiny fraction of Shiro Kuni’s records on the Shadowlands, the nature of oni and evil spirits, and the sinister secrets of maho. Samurai from any other clan will readily defer to the expertise of the Kuni on such topics, and even the Elemental Masters of the Phoenix come to Shiro Kuni when they decide their duty requires them to pursue this unpleasant field of study.

The Kuni library is worth mentioning not only for the perfect Fire-like obsessive focus it displays in pursuing and recording its chosen field, but also for its unorthodox nature and structure. It has no librarians, and indeed is not organized solely within Shiro Kuni. The castle contains only a modest records chamber, housing scrolls of the most general value and importance, and is not considered the “family library” as such. The lore which the Kuni have assembled over the centuries is instead found beyond its walls, distributed through a hundred small huts scattered across the Kuni Wastes.

Since the days of the Maw, most senior Kuni shugenja live in isolated dwellings within the Kuni Wastes. Not all do this, of course – some are needed on the Wall to aid in the Empire’s defense, and others go to the courts or join the ranks of the Witch-Hunters. Nonetheless, it is probably accurate to say that a majority of the most skilled and



experienced Kuni shugenja inhabit these scattered yashiki, often little more than glorified shacks, where they train their apprentices, conduct their scholarship, and perform their controversial research. It is these individual Kuni shugenja, spread far and wide through their lands, who are the custodians of the “Kuni Library.”

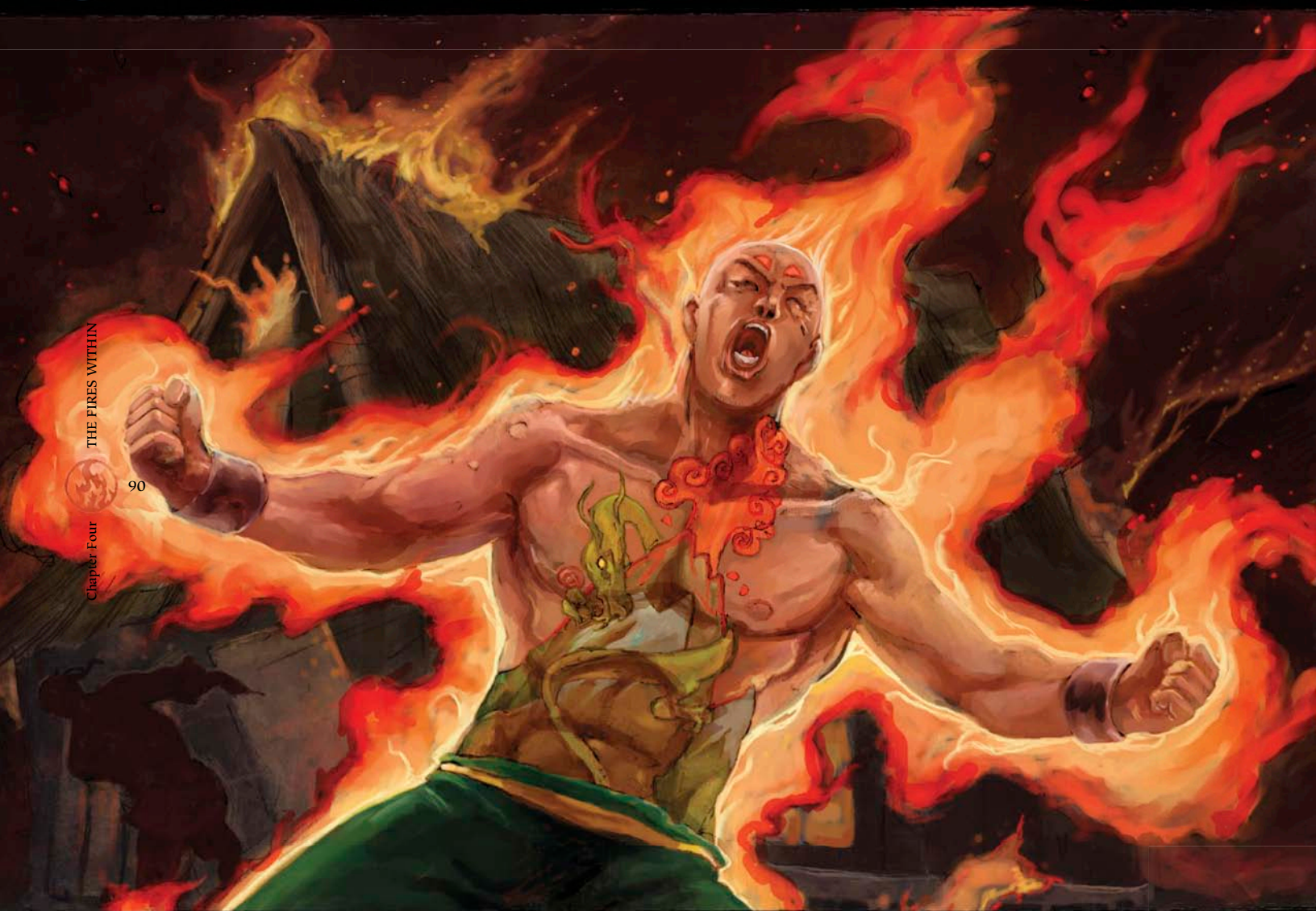
The “Library” is the collective knowledge of the Kuni: personal recollections, research projects, notes and historical references, and so forth, all carefully copied and shared between the family’s members. Almost none of these documents are actually spells, but rather the collected personal lore of the various priests who have watched, studied, and fought the Shadowlands from the dawn of the Empire.

Gaining access to the “Library” is a struggle on par with gaining access to the Izaku libraries. Because almost all of the Kuni lore can be considered blasphemous to at least some extent (but still technically permitted for the Kuni family’s sworn duties), one does not have the ability to simply ask to see it, not without an Imperial writ. Questioning the legitimacy of a Kuni’s right to keep this knowledge from the general public will receive little more than a snort and a laugh at best – or more likely, an investigation on suspicion of Taint or maho use. Likewise, any attempt to claim favoritism or other improper withholding of information

will be laughed out of court by the Kuni daimyo and the Crab Clan Champion. Indeed, by general etiquette the Kuni daimyo’s permission is considered necessary to permit someone to even contact the individual priests who oversee the lore.

In practice, access to the lore of the Kuni is usually only possible by making a personal plea to whoever is overseeing it. Knowing which shugenja oversees the particular information one might need is often a matter of luck unless one is well-acquainted with the Kuni family or has sufficient political clout to gain their cooperation. This scattering of knowledge is not an act of pride or intransigence on the part of the Kuni; rather, it is precautionary, ensuring that any Kuni who falls to the Taint cannot betray too much and any Shadowlands attack can never destroy everything they have learned at such cost. And few, even among the proud Isawa, have the nerve to question the Kuni methods openly.





THE FIRES WITHIN

90

Chapter Four





THE FIRES WITHIN

"Light the brazier and turn to face me."

The young monk used the flickering candle he held sheltered in his hands to transfer a flame into the brazier. The fire spread slowly, crawling across the coals, slowly growing into a light strong enough to illuminate the whole chamber. It was a vault, holding a collection of opened scrolls. Each scroll was affixed to a plank of polished teak and hung from the wall. By the light of the fire the young monk could see the astonishing artisanship of the scrolls' calligraphy. They were retelling the Battle of White Stag, and the artist was communicating the tale as much with the motions of his brush as with the characters he had chosen. Even if he had not been able to read the scrolls, the emotion invested in their creation would still have moved him deeply. The tale used the gaijin cannons as a metaphor for the dangers of heedlessness. They represented a fire barely held at bay by the vigilance of dutiful citizens.

"Eyes to front."

The young monk gulped. "Yes, Master," he blurted, quickly kneeling before his elder.

"Always be vigilant, that is the lesson of this room. There is danger in all places. When you enter a room, stand with your back to the light. The room and its occupants will be lit and you will be a silhouette as you observe them." Although his words seemed harsh, the older monk's voice was as gentle as the light that flickered about the chamber. "What does Fire tell us about ourselves, young monk?"

It took several minutes of contemplation before the young monk brought himself to respond. "It shows... master, it shows we are desperate to cling to life and will consume whatever is necessary to sustain us. We make no distinction in friend or foe when survival is at stake."

"Oh?" The older monk smiled. "You speak only of the capacity of Fire to destroy. But is it not essential for creation as well?" He stepped to the side and revealed a statue that stood behind him. It was an image of Empress Hantei Yugo-zohime dispensing her edict to the gaijin traders. After a moment the young monk realized the statue was made of clay; it had doubtless been fired in one of the kilns the monastery maintained.

"And it is the flame that purges steel of its impurities, is it not?" continued the elder. "The cold-forged blade is brittle and will snap. It is not a loyal companion. The blade that knows the flame, however, is a loyal ally in any conflict."

"So we must be like the flame, Master, in its capacity to destroy and to create?"

"The swordsmith tempers the flame with water. Like him, we must take in all the virtues of the Elements. It is when all five Elements are in harmony within us that we are in harmony with the world. When Fire dominates, we are like the accursed gaijin; crude, loud, barbaric, inelegant. When it is in balance with the other Elements; we are like the samurai's blade: graceful, pure, and precise." The monk turned to exit the vault. "I will leave you now, young monk. Meditate in this chamber and contemplate these truths. When you have fully comprehended them, you will be ready to join the Temple of Heavenly Wisdom."



Monastic Orders of Fire

While monks do not directly channel the power of the Elements as a shugenja does, many orders of the Brotherhood of Shinsei find themselves drawn toward a particular Element, or discover their philosophy aligns naturally with one. In the case of the Element of Fire, this association – whether purposefully or coincidentally – causes monks to become masters of mental and physical drive, determination, and discovery. Monks who stretch mortal man's mind and body to its limits are often from orders oriented toward Fire. And while different Fire orders can have very different goals, how they attain them and the attitudes they take along the way tend to be quite similar.

The Temples of the Thousand Fortunes

"A wise man does not seek wisdom in the world. He finds it within himself." – The Tao of Shinsei

What Rokugan recognizes as the Temples of the Thousand Fortunes are one of the last enduring remnants of the society which existed before the Empire. Worship of the Fortunes pre-dates the fall of the Kami by a long time (no one knows exactly how long), and the various scattered tribes and villages created many different ways of showing their reverence. There was little communication between these early groups, however, so there was not much consistency in worship between one place and another. This led to a great deal of trial and error, and early worshippers were sometimes as likely to bring down the wrath of the Fortunes as to win their blessings or indifference.

Eventually, many tribes adopted unwritten rules that only the oldest and wisest among them could attempt to worship the Fortunes or seek their aid. This led to hard-won theological secrets, passed carefully from master to disciple so their sacred worth could be maintained. Maintaining secrecy was important as well; after all, a tribe that had finally learned the proper way to appease Bishamon and invoke a prayer for his strength and guidance held a great advantage over those who had not.

With the myriad Fortunes humankind recognized even in those early days, typically only a handful of people across the entire land knew the proper rituals for praying to a particular Fortune. What was common among all of these practices was that those of keen mind and moral purity were required to make the devotions or lead others in them. Still, with different Fortunes requiring different mindsets or drawing particular adherents to their worship, these early priests were much more diverse in their attitudes and philosophies.

When the Kami arrived and traveled among humanity, forming the many tribes and wanderers into the beginnings of the Great Clans, these early worshippers were finally pressed together in service for a common cause. This sudden integration of philosophies and secrets was both tumultuous and ultimately beneficial, but many of these pre-Rokugan monks remained apart from this unification process. Instead they maintained their own temples to their various Fortunes and involved themselves only infrequently in the matters of the fledgling Empire. It is from these beginnings the Brotherhood of Shinsei would eventually be born, as the holy men and women's behavior would later be emulated by those who began to devote their lives to the teachings of Shinsei.

By the time Hantei Genji officially combined worship of the Fortunes with Shinseism, the members of these existing temples had already formed a loose network of communication and exchange. They called themselves simply the Temples of the Thousand Fortunes, and they served as the backbone to half of the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

Many members of the Temples had difficulty integrating into the new social order of the Empire. They realized the worth of Shinsei's lessons and understood the divine right of the Emperor's rule, but their own place as monks was troublingly undefined. Added to this was the inherently individualistic nature of the Temples of the Thousand Fortunes, which made forming the greater Brotherhood seem like an impossible task. Eventually, the problem was solved in an almost obvious way: the monks of the Temples of the Thousand Fortunes were simply allowed to proceed as they always had. Their myriad rituals, customs, and philosophies were already conveniently divided up according to which Temple was dedicated to which Fortune (or Fortunes). Much in the way the evolving Great Clans represented different ways for samurai to serve the Empire, the various Temples represented different strengths and aspects of what the Brotherhood could do to aid others in their quest for enlightenment.





It was from this attitude that the true focus of the Temples of the Thousand Fortunes was eventually given form: the pursuit of enlightenment. Though other Orders and disciples of Shinsei's teachings would talk in riddles about the mercurial nature of enlightenment, the monks of the Temples realized they were in a unique position to truly seek it by following many different paths. They firmly believed the way to enlightenment would be different for all, but unlike other Orders, they did not attempt to place one unified philosophy over all their members.

Since that time, the structure, organization, and teachings of the Temples of the Thousand Fortunes has been unsurprisingly difficult to categorize. Individual monks tend to take on qualities from the Fortunes they venerate foremost at their particular shrine or temple. To the extent that there is a common trait among all of them, however, it is that these monks seek to push their limits in both the physical and spiritual sense. Though this can often lead to notorious acts such as standing for hours under freezing waterfalls, walking through coals, or memorizing endless passages of the Tao, it can also mean sitting in quiet meditation for days or breathing so slowly the monk is indistinguishable from a corpse.

This honing of both body and soul coupled with the metaphysical nature of the Fortunes themselves has enabled the monks of the Temples of the Thousand Fortunes to unlock the mystical power of kiho far more easily than other orders. Monks of this sect are capable of a dizzying array of supernatural feats, and because of the order's philosophy of helping others on their path to enlightenment, they also tend to be much more overt in displays of their power. This is not from an unseemly need to impress others or abuse the techniques they have mastered, but rather is a natural extension of their philosophy. After all, they believe life offers a great many ways for mortals to reach enlightenment or at least to attain some harmony between one's self and the universe. Part of that belief is that everyone should embrace their talents, power, and skills fully rather than hide their abilities or leave them unused.

Order of Rebirth

A relatively young order, the Order of Rebirth was not established until the year 1158. It is dedicated to the worship of the Fortune of Rebirth, Tsukune, and to understanding the ever-changing nature of souls as they travel through the great kharmic wheel. Though the Order of Rebirth is a dedicated and honorable sect of monks, it has been at the center of controversy since its inception. This is because monks of the order seek out change and rebirth in an Empire dominated by social and religious tradition and stability.

The ascension of Shiba Tsukune to Fortune of Rebirth was an unusual occurrence, even compared to the other rare instances of a mortal directly becoming a Fortune. Although she held a part of the Soul of Shiba within her, the Soul was not bound to the Realm of Mortals by its union with the Champion but rather by the Ancestral Sword of the Phoenix, Ofushikai. Since the sword had been taken to the Heavens at the end of the War Against the Shadow,

the death of Tsukune would lead to the permanent loss of the Soul of Shiba to the mortal realm. From the Celestial Heavens, the Fortune Osano-Wo decided to take action. The disposition of the Soul of Shiba was unique, and not even the Fortunes fully understood what would happen to Shiba's spirit if this part of him perished with Tsukune. As a servant of the Sun and Moon, Osano-Wo saw it as his duty to prevent the potential loss of a Kami, but he was uncertain how to proceed. It would be a simple enough matter to invite Tsukune into the Celestial Heavens – she was, after all, bonded to a fragment of divinity – but Osano-Wo was not certain even a spirit as virtuous as hers was worthy to tread the paths of Tengoku.

On a night that would later be called the Night of Thunder's Kiss, the Fortune of Fire and Thunder appeared to the Phoenix Champion and explained the impending crisis to her. In order to test her spirit and honor, he also shared a prophecy with her: Tsukune's son, Shiba Aikune, would become embroiled in a great tragedy that could have dire ramifications for the entire Phoenix Clan. Tsukune had to choose: preserve the Soul of Shiba, or remain in Ningen-Do to aid her son and clan... but allow the Soul to die with her.

Tsukune was a woman who had endured much but never wavered in her duty. She chose to protect Shiba at any cost. In that instant, the Phoenix Champion thought about her life. She had once been a promising young bushi with a twin sibling, but that twin perished. Her life changed and she moved on. She had been in love with the Master of Earth, Isawa Tadaka, and she saw him die at the Day of Thunder. Her life changed and she moved on. Now, she would have to leave behind her own son and the clan she was sworn to protect, but once again things had changed – her obligation to Shiba himself was greater than any other.

Her life changed and she moved on.

With a touch of lightning from the Thunderer, her mortal form was destroyed, and the new Fortune of Rebirth delivered Shiba's soul to the Celestial Heavens.

The original members of the Order of Rebirth – a small group of monks known as the Brothers of Rebirth – had been sohei devoted to the Fortune of Fire and Thunder. The Thunderer appeared to them in a vision and commanded them to begin their lives anew in devotion to this new Fortune. They obeyed with no more hesitation than Tsukune herself had shown. The monks traveled to the lands of the Phoenix, guided by further visions, and soon a larger group of devotees began to follow them, including samurai and shugenja of the Phoenix Clan. They believed it was their sacred duty to honor the former Phoenix Champion in her new life.

A large temple devoted to Tsukune was soon established in Phoenix lands, a few miles south of the City of Remembrance. The Brothers of Rebirth believed the city itself – which had once been a place cursed with dark prophecy, ill fortune, and near destruction – served as a symbol of the new Fortune. The city had risen above its past to become a great center of trade and learning for the



Phoenix Clan, and the monks believed this drew the favor of the new Fortune.

Despite the Order's honorable beginnings and the support of Osano-Wo himself, the philosophies of the Order of Rebirth have drawn a great deal of criticism and concern since its founding. The monks of the Order believe mindless devotion to habits and needless repetition of empty ritual chip away at the soul; they encourage others to find ways to renew themselves daily. While the Order teaches others how to realize the difference between proper routine duty and harmful thoughtless repeated actions, those outside the Order often believe the monks are teaching others to break routine simply for the sake of destroying tradition.

Both their own philosophies and the necessity of dealing with these endless accusations of heresy and dishonorable conduct have led the monks of the Order of Rebirth to develop keen minds and razor-sharp logic. Monks of the Order are constantly examining their lives and the lives of others, attempting to perceive the fine line between honorable devotion and pointless routine. They are often consulted when a samurai or daimyo believes he has reached a dead end in some endeavor, or when a samurai believes he must simply find a new path to walk. Monks of the Order are surprisingly well-trained in combat, in part due to their roots with the Order of Osano-Wo. Members of the Order believe it serves them well to understand a great variety of topics, both scholarly and martial, in order to see things from a fresh perspective at all times. The monks take to new information and facts like a parched man to water, and have been known to completely reverse their opinions on a subject the instant they are presented with new facts.

Those not familiar with the Order are often put off by the nature of its monks. Unlike many holy men who devote themselves to endless ritual and speak only of wisdom passed down through ages, monks of the Order of Rebirth are quick to share untested or newly-discovered theories – whether on combat, religion, spellcraft, or any other complex topic. They also cheerfully admit they have no certain idea of how reliable their information is, even though they feel that it is their duty to always embrace it.

Someone has to be the first on a new path, after all.

Tengoku's Fist

"Only a single monk to guard the shrine?" The ronin chuckled with a sneer.

"A single monk," said the smiling old man, "and eight million spirits."

The sect of the Brotherhood of Shinsei known as Tengoku's Fist has had a rocky history since its inception in the year 718. It was formed by several temples who broke away from the Shrine of the Seven Thunders after a fierce debate regarding the philosophy of violence and retribution. These temples were located in the lands north of the Crab provinces, between the Scorpion lands and the Shinomen Forest, and were heavily populated by former Hiruma as well as other samurai and peasants who had been displaced by the attack of the Maw's army two years earlier.

Many of the Hiruma survivors found the shame of losing their lands to be too unbearable to continue in service to the Crab Clan, and retired early. While it was an unusual gesture for members of the Crab, the Hida recognized the





truth: their vassals felt they had failed utterly but did not wish the Maw to claim their lives, even indirectly through seppuku. Their requests for retirement were granted. Likewise, many peasants who had fled the Hiruma lands found there was nowhere else for them to go but to the temples of the Brotherhood.

Two large temples belonging to the Shrine of the Seven Thunders were located near the lands of the Crab, and several hundred refugees and Hiruma thus found themselves living among the Brotherhood monks there. At first, the arrangement worked well enough. The former samurai committed themselves fully to their new lives, and the peasants were of course already used to lives of menial labor, now pleasantly accompanied by education and contemplation. However, within a couple of years the former Crab samurai became more and more vocal about their new role as monks in the Empire. As they began to learn the quasi-mystical ways of kiho and gained a deeper understanding of both spiritual and moral purity and corruption, they began to take issue with the Shrine's passive and cloistered philosophies. The masters of the temples warned the acolytes they were merely clinging to their previous lives, seeing things through the eyes of a Crab samurai instead of a monk. However, after months and months of discussion, they began to see the new brothers were actually speaking as truly impassioned monks seeking to aid their fellow men. Positioned as these temples were – between the Crab lands and the Scorpion – they were constantly exposed to tales of corruption and crime, as well as witnesses to such things all too often.

Soon, the monks at the two temples began to work together to push their fellow abbots into using their resources to root out corruption and vice. For example, they sought appointments as advisors and teachers to the samurai so they could actively oppose evil actions. These activities led to further conflicts with higher ranking members of the order, and finally the two temples declared themselves independent. The split was not hostile, for the Brotherhood did not consider the two temples to be following a False Path. For their part, the monks of the two temples argued the world already had quite enough men and women willing to contemplate the mysteries of the universe, but probably needed more monks who would confront the problems of the world around them.

The split was almost immediately followed by dozens of tales of heroic sohei appearing out of nowhere to defeat bandit gangs, beat criminals senseless, aid the Yogo and Kuni against maho-tsukai, and even help quell restive peasants who had grown lax or insubordinate. Both the Crab and Scorpion immediately demanded the Brotherhood reign in their brothers and sisters – for all the good they might be doing, the sohei were interfering in the business of the samurai caste.

The temples, who now styled themselves Tengoku's Fist, responded in a puzzling manner. They began to proactively petition the neighboring clans to allow them to assist in such problems. Sohei of the temples went to cities, castles, and villages and put themselves at the disposal of local magistrates, shugenja, and daimyo without an invitation. At first the monks were largely turned away, but it

was soon made clear that if they were ignored they would simply go back to attacking those they deemed corrupt or unlawful. This put the samurai in a difficult position, since the monks had technically done nothing wrong (they were careful not to attack samurai, and always delivered punishments consistent with the law). While punishing crime was officially the role of samurai and especially wardens and magistrates, the monks could viably argue that they too were responsible for the well-being of the Empire.

In the years since, the monks of Tengoku's Fist have continued to have difficult relations with samurai, but their methods have never proven ineffective. The Order expertly merges Crab practicality with the wisdom of the Brotherhood to find those who have broken laws or dabbled in corruption and punish them. While Tengoku's Fist is still most active in the region between the Crab and Scorpion, wandering sohei of the order have been seen as far away as the lands of the Phoenix and Dragon. The monks have considerable philosophical differences with the Togashi and Asako, but they are surprisingly good at defending their position and can sometimes even best the masters of the Phoenix and Dragon orders in intellectual debate.

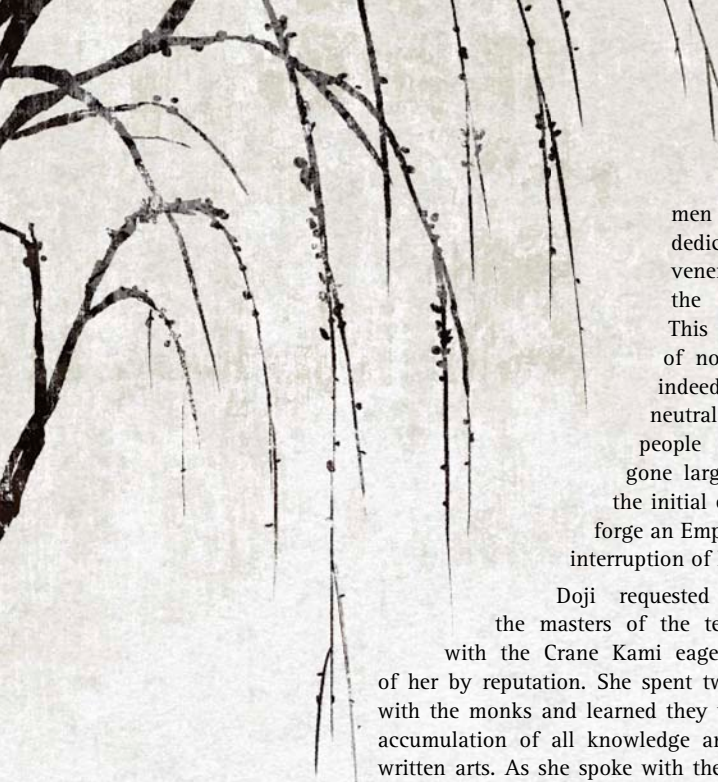
Members of Tengoku's Fist have a singular driving goal: the eradication of anything that defies the Celestial Order. They believe that while their understanding of the Celestial Order may not be as deep as other monks', they do a great deal more to actually maintain it. After all, those who work against the Celestial Order are disrupting not only their own harmony with the universe but the harmony of anyone they interact with. Such blasphemies and blemishes must be eradicated in the most swift and efficient way possible.

This is not to say sohei of Tengoku's Fist confront every problem solely with their mastery of single combat. They understand that often a wayward soul needs only inspiration or education to put it back on the right path. To that end, the monks are also capable teachers, able to discuss the nuances of the Tao and the Celestial Order with any who will listen. They are careful to never overstep their proper place, but often irritate those who hold to stricter attitudes. After all, the monks of Tengoku's Fist are dedicated to the Celestial Order above all else, and will never suffer one of their own to disrupt it.

The Temple of Heavenly Wisdom

"You came here seeking wisdom?" The monk smiled. "I am sorry to disappoint you. We keep no wisdom here, only scrolls."

Shortly after the fledgling Empire beat back the forces of Fu Leng in the First War, Hantei's sister Doji resumed and indeed redoubled her efforts to bring culture and art to all corners of Rokugan. One of her greatest successes in this cause occurred when she made contact with a remote temple in the plains north of the lands the Emperor had granted her clan. It was already an ancient temple, crudely constructed from stone, and it housed many holy



men and women who had dedicated their lives to the veneration of Fukurokujin, the Fortune of Wisdom. This temple had been part of no particular tribe and indeed was considered neutral holy ground by the people in the area. It had gone largely unnoticed during the initial efforts of the Kami to forge an Empire, mainly due to the interruption of Fu Leng's attack.

Doji requested an audience with the masters of the temple, and they met with the Crane Kami eagerly, already knowing of her by reputation. She spent two days in discussion with the monks and learned they were dedicated to the accumulation of all knowledge and the furthering the written arts. As she spoke with them, her initial plan to annex their temple into the lands of the Crane instead became a desire to preserve both the practice and spirit of their religious order. She believed in Hantei Genji's drive to expand the religious and spiritual lessons of Shinsei and the worship of the Fortunes, and believed she could contribute to the desires of the Shining Prince as well as advancing her own plans.

The monastery was proclaimed the Temple of Heavenly Wisdom, and it became the first major temple the Crane Clan sponsored. While the Dragon and Phoenix would soon become involved with the Brotherhood on a broad scale, leaders of Doji's family began the practice of supporting specific shrines, temples, or smaller religious orders by following this early example. Most of these sponsorships would follow in the footsteps of Doji by focusing on sites that devoted themselves to the written word or to some manner of art.

With the support of the Crane Kami behind it, the Temple of Heavenly Wisdom quickly became one of the most splendid structures in the region. Members of the Temple gained a great deal of influence due to their reputation as calligraphers and historians admired by Doji herself. It was not long before young samurai from the area were being sent to study at the Temple before their gempukku. These were only the sons and daughters of the Crane at first, but eventually the Phoenix and even the Lion saw the value of the lessons the monks were willing to impart to the next generation. Many Phoenix are known for their calligraphy or writing style, and many Lion historians renowned for their ability to evoke imagery both with their stories and with the very kanji they wrote, first studied at this Temple.

Naturally, all of this brought a great deal of attention and political clout to a small group of monks, which was most unusual. The masters of the Temple were usually skilled enough (and humble enough) to avoid any conflicts of interest or political scandals, but remaining completely unaffected by larger events proved all but impossible. Early in the second century, the Crane attempted to use the Temple's sacrosanct nature to make it into a meeting place

for peace talks after the latest conflict between the Kakita and Matsu families. The abbot of the temple hesitantly agreed, hoping this would stem the tide of death. However, the Lion used the meeting to keep one of the Crane's key generals occupied while they made another strike against the Crane Clan's western holdings. The Crane had prepared for this possibility, and they beseeched the Temple and the larger Brotherhood to denounce the Lion for abusing the trust of the Temple of Heavenly Wisdom in such a way. The monks realized they were already involved in the conflict and it would be a violation of their principles to simply stay silent, so they reluctantly allowed the Crane to draw them into the political conflict that accompanied the physical one. They feared retribution from the Lion Clan, but the Matsu merely shrugged off the condemnation of the monks while privately acknowledging to themselves that the monks were brave for adhering to their principles. Thus the Temple managed to escape the incident without great harm and with the respect of both Great Clans.

Over the later history of the Empire, the Temple of Heavenly Wisdom shone like a beacon to those involved in the scholarly arts of calligraphy, history, research, and learning. As the Temple's reputation spread, sponsorships from other noble families and even whole clans came and went, but the involvement of the Crane, Lion, and Phoenix remained constant. None of the clans have ever made a direct assault on the Temple, but it has been the site of many peace talks and negotiations between two or all three of these clans. By the time of the Clan War, even the Lion saw the Temple of Heavenly Wisdom as "theirs" and avoided it completely when they invaded the Crane lands.

Monks of the Temple of Heavenly Wisdom are taught that the expression of ideas and understanding of logical concepts are the highest actions of the human mind. Art, war, politics, and magic are all simple concepts at their core, made complex and interesting by human minds attempting to find new and clever variations on them. By studying both the past and present, all such concepts can be not only understood but improved upon. Thus while a warrior only studies war, the enlightened soul studies how to properly study war.

The monks are also some of the most celebrated calligraphers in the Empire, and members of the Great Clans and even the Imperial houses will often commission the monks to write up formal declarations, treaties, and other such documents.

While the monks do not make physical combat part of their regular regimen, all acolytes and masters of the Temple are allowed to pursue elective studies as they see fit. Naturally, some choose to understand the martial arts and study together to understand the myriad ways of war and personal combat. Monks who study these things are often well-versed in both the theory and history of the martial arts, and can discuss the different methods of breaking someone's arm with the same detail and attention as other monks might discuss the Tao... although they can also be roused to actually demonstrate their knowledge when it is absolutely needed.



The Kiho of Fire

Fire represents an individual's vitality and drive, both mental and physical. Thus Fire Kiho are some of the easiest to learn and master for novice monks who focus on the martial arts. Being able to channel and direct one's inner Fire is both a useful and easily-grasped lesson for the initiate. However, true mastery of Fire Kiho is by no means simple, as learning to truly direct and control one's Fire in subtle and disciplined ways is something that can take a lifetime.

INTERNAL KIHU

The Element of Fire does not lend itself well to the creation of Internal Kiho. Summoning the energies of one's inner Fire and keeping them contained is difficult if not impossible, even for masters of the art. Usually, Internal Fire Kiho focus on strengthening one's own Fire in a way that protects and sustains the life force of the monk, rather than evoking destructive potential. Maintaining such a Kiho could literally burn the monk from the inside out.

CHANNEL THE FIRE DRAGON

Though resisting the Elements and protecting oneself are usually the domain of Earth Kiho, one's natural Fire energies can also be brought to bear to resist heat and cold. The effects of cold weather are dulled by this Kiho, and the monk feels naturally aligned to hotter temperatures, barely noticing even the most sweltering heat.

This Kiho is usually learned by those monks who spend a great deal of time meditating on the more peaceful arts, something which is unusual for those Orders who focus on Fire. Learning to shift one's chi to emulate the resilient and sustainable heat and endurance of burning coals is difficult for even experienced monks, and those who show mastery of this often practice it in ways associated with legends and stories – standing under cold waterfalls, practicing kata in the snow, or walking over coals.

KHARMIC KIHU

Kharmic Fire Kiho are as rare as Internal ones, again due to the very nature of Elemental Fire. Learning to harmonize one's Fire in a non-violent way with the Fire of someone or something else is not only difficult in practice but hard to understand even in theory. Such Kiho focus on drawing together one's Fire with that of another, or aligning one's Fire in an outward way with the ebb and flow of the surrounding Elements.

FIRE'S FLEETING SPEED

Philosophically and supernaturally, the element of Water often dictates concepts of movement and speed, but Fire can also be invoked for similar results. By releasing his chi in controlled bursts like a sputtering flame, a monk can increase his speed and movement.

The monks using this Kiho do not simply channel their own Fire, but use it as a way to "pull" themselves along through the woven fabric of reality. This Kiho teaches the monk a great deal about the balance and harmony of the Elements, since he learns to effectively "burn" his way through the material world quickly yet without causing direct harm.

MARTIAL KIHU

Unsurprisingly, Fire Kiho lend themselves most easily to martial applications than to any others. Focusing one's Fire in ways that heighten agility, speed, and damage potential is a relatively straightforward way to control inner energies. In addition to improving their own physical capabilities, monks learn to unleash their Elemental Fire in ways that border on the mystical but remain subtle – causing heat and fire to come to their aid against their opponents. While such uses of a monk's chi and focus might seem simple, the ability to summon physical fire from one's spirit and remain unscathed requires a considerable amount of training and discipline.

THE BODY IS AN ANVIL

One of the more simple Martial Fire Kiho, The Body is an Anvil is learned by many sohei early in their training due to its obvious combat application. Fire makes for both a good defense and a good offense, as the monk's inner Fire surrounds him and adds to his strikes. The use of this Kiho is actually rather



versatile – while it helps the monk bring down foes faster, it also discourages attackers as they are burned time and again by attempting to touch the monk.

It is worth noting that while this Kiho is active the monk's outer temperature is enough to cause searing burns with even brief touches. The monk has to concentrate in order to avoid burning everything touching his person, such as his clothes or anything underfoot. Without this concentration, the monk can easily find himself starting fires with a mere touch, a serious problem in many parts of Rokugan.

BREAKING BLOW

Fire is not simply the Element of burning but of pure destruction. While mundane flames can burn objects susceptible to catching fire, true knowledge of Elemental Fire shows a monk how its energies can be harnessed to cause damage to anything, even stone. By aligning his inner Fire with his strikes, a monk can actually break apart the different Elements holding an object together.

Metal is more difficult to damage, since it is itself a combination of several Elements including Fire, and

thus absorbs the heat and destructive power of Fire more easily than other materials. Sufficiently thin metal (or low quantities of metal in a mixture of other materials) will not grant protection against this Kiho, but such details are best left to the GM's discretion.

DANCE OF THE FLAMES

A monk employing this Kiho focuses his chi into his limbs, allowing them to deliver quick strikes like the moving, licking flames of a fire. This is unlike the Kharmic Kiho, Fire's Fleeting Speed, in that the monk is not aligning his Fire with the universe but instead creating barely controlled bursts of Fire that seek out destruction. In effect, he is allowing the Element of Fire to guide his strikes, making them not only faster but almost erratic.

Monks under the effect of this Kiho find it difficult to remain still once they begin moving, although they are not actually jittery or nervous. They must simply keep moving to allow the Elemental Fire in their body to perpetuate itself; otherwise it will die out like a flame without air. Like Fire itself, the Kiho's power feeds off of the destruction it causes.



DESTINY'S STRIKE

One of the basic lessons of Fire is that it is a simple force that burns all that it touches. Fire is feared by the Rokugani because even attempting to fight it often causes damage and even death, even to those who are prepared for it. By focusing on this singular aspect of pure retributive damage, the monk is able to channel his own Fire to strike out at everything that attacks him.

This Kiho is not common outside of dedicated sohei orders, since learning and mastering it requires brutal sessions of being beaten repeatedly by other members of the order. Few temples are willing to subject their monks to such savagery, and many martial artists prefer to learn ways to avoid damage rather than retaliate against it. Masters of this Kiho are often surprising to their enemies, since they simply accept attacks coming at them, then respond instantly with a savage blow the enemy did not expect.

FALLING STAR STRIKE

This Kiho is one of the rare instances where the somewhat dramatic name aligns almost perfectly with the visual and visceral impact of the Kiho's use. Few monks have mastered this Kiho, and fewer still have had need to make use of it in sight of others. A monk invoking the Falling Star Strike exhibits burning eyes and fists, making a strike that echoes with the sound of a blossoming fireball and releases a heat wave easily felt by those many feet away. Because of the overtly magical appearance of this Kiho, it creates confusion in the minds of many Rokugani over the differences (or lack thereof) between spells and Kiho.

The focus and training required to learn and master this Kiho often instills the monk with a very keen sense of the responsibility such power brings. The Falling Star Strike is most often used by monks wishing to end a fight decisively; inflicting a severe blow and blinding the opponent is usually enough to bring an end to a foe's resistance. However, not all monks learn this Kiho for its ability to bring a relatively quick end to a conflict; some sohei believe crippling an opponent in this manner is only the beginning of their defeat and humiliation. Monk orders interested in a more peaceful way of life tend to avoid teaching this Kiho, since once someone has mastered it they are far more likely to use violence against their foes.

FLAME FIST

At once simple and complex in its concept, this Kiho uses one's own inner Fire to assault the Fire in an opponent. Many novice monks are taught this Kiho first, since it shows how a basic lesson can be both difficult to grasp and more potent when fully mastered.

Typically, this Kiho is used by monks who wish to disable an opponent rather than beat them senseless. After a few strikes against an enemy's inner Fire they become sluggish, unfocused, and completely useless in combat, allowing the battle to end without needless bloodshed.

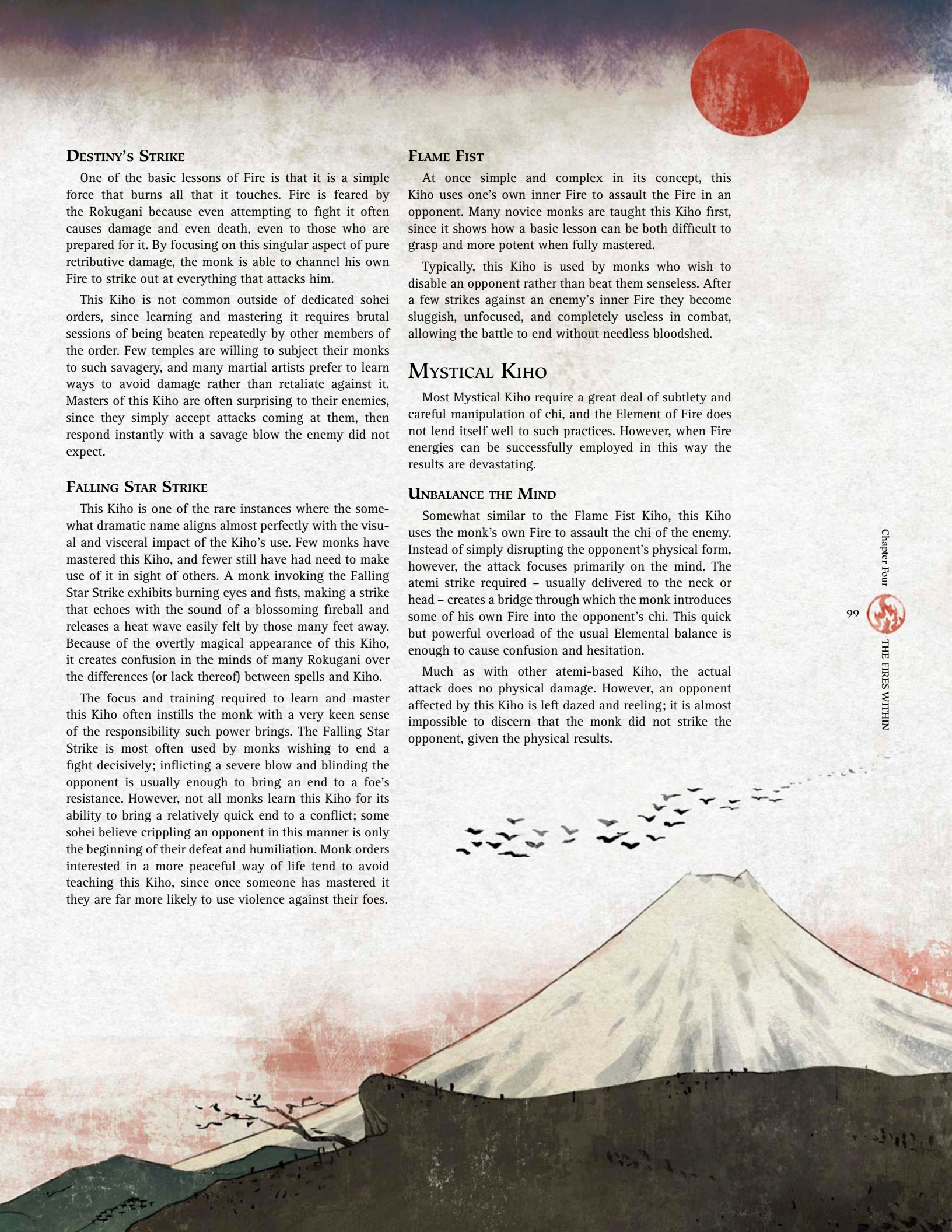
MYSTICAL KIHU

Most Mystical Kiho require a great deal of subtlety and careful manipulation of chi, and the Element of Fire does not lend itself well to such practices. However, when Fire energies can be successfully employed in this way the results are devastating.

UNBALANCE THE MIND

Somewhat similar to the Flame Fist Kiho, this Kiho uses the monk's own Fire to assault the chi of the enemy. Instead of simply disrupting the opponent's physical form, however, the attack focuses primarily on the mind. The atemi strike required – usually delivered to the neck or head – creates a bridge through which the monk introduces some of his own Fire into the opponent's chi. This quick but powerful overload of the usual Elemental balance is enough to cause confusion and hesitation.

Much as with other atemi-based Kiho, the actual attack does no physical damage. However, an opponent affected by this Kiho is left dazed and reeling; it is almost impossible to discern that the monk did not strike the opponent, given the physical results.



The Keeper of Fire

"Tsuken is brash and bold, quick of wit and full of passion. Who better for his role?"

– Doji Jun'ai, Keeper of Water

During the twelfth century, the monk called Rosoku, the descendent of Shinsei, emerged from hiding and issued six mystical challenges to the Empire. Those who completed these challenges became the first Elemental Keepers, tasked with spreading enlightenment and the wisdom of the Elements to the people of Rokugan. More details about these famous challenges can be found in the L5R RPG 4th Edition supplement *Emerald Empire*, page 75. The first five challenges Rosoku issued were tied to specific Elements, and each winner received a mysterious book – written by Rosoku himself – containing the wisdom of that Element. The first Keeper of Fire was a Crane samurai named Kakita Tsuken.

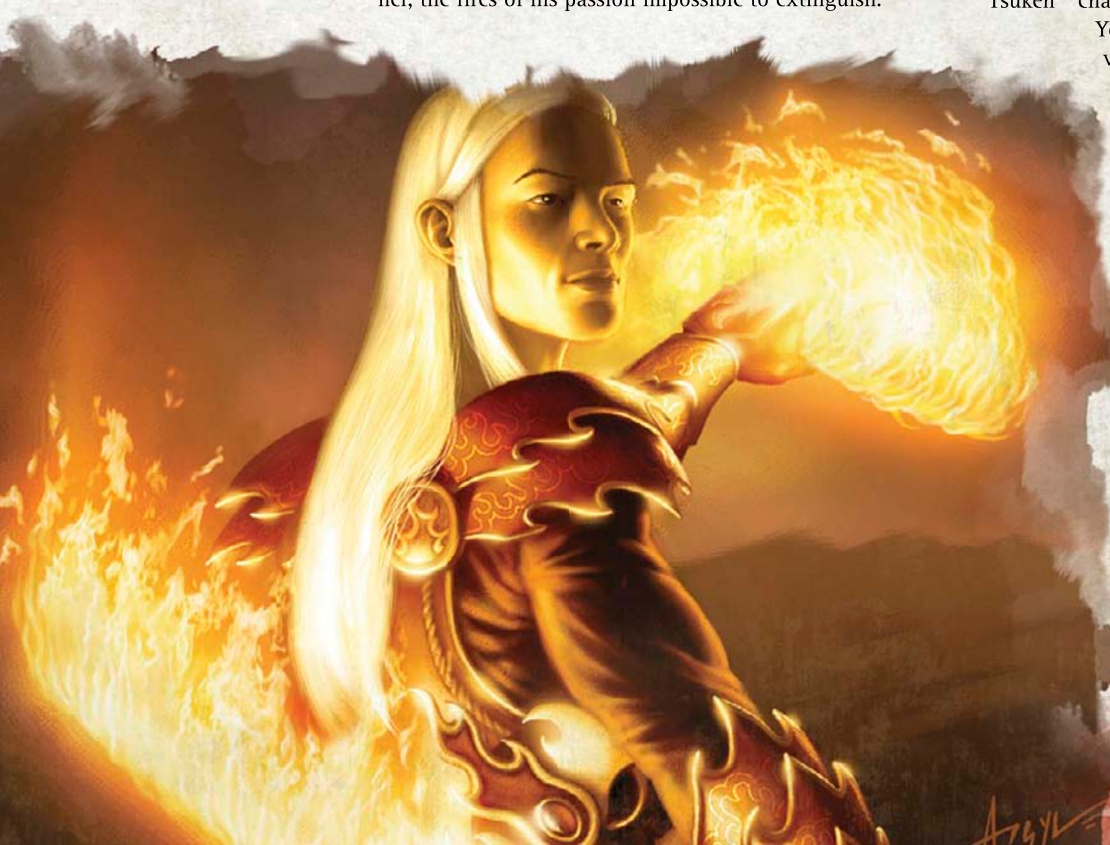
Tsuken was a man of great passion, a sort often found within the Kakita family. Trained as a duelist, he served the Crane both in the courts and on the battlefield, seeking to make a name for himself. His intense personality and strong sense of honor attracted the attention of Doji Jun'ai, a Crane military officer, and the two soon began a covert romantic affair. Jun'ai used her influence to have Tsuken assigned to serve under her orders, but soon a sense of remorse overcame her as she began to feel torn between her duty and her love. For Tsuken, duty and love were one and the same, and while he reluctantly accepted her wish to end their dalliance, he remained devoted to her, the fires of his passion impossible to extinguish.

Tsuken did not pay much attention to Rosoku's challenges. The Challenge of Fire proclaimed, "The warrior who can defeat a thousand enemies in a single stroke shall keep the Book of Fire." If Tsuken had thought about such a thing at all, he would have found it laughable that a passionate, brash, impetuous man such as himself could ever achieve enlightenment. Thus, while many other samurai eagerly tried to achieve Rosoku's challenges, Tsuken continued to focus on accomplishing his duties and following his orders. As it happened, those orders included escorting a Crane courtier named Doji Jurian to establish trade relations in a remote Phoenix village. Tsuken found his charge to be an uninteresting and arrogant man with little resemblance to a true samurai, but he did his best to maintain respect and stay focused on his duties.

Tsuken's instincts served him well when both his master and the Phoenix diplomats were ambushed by troops from the Mantis Clan. This was part of a larger conflict between the Phoenix and the Mantis known as the War of Fire and Thunder. Doji Jurian was wounded by an arrow, and the local Phoenix lord commanded Tsuken to carry the injured diplomat away while the Phoenix troops delayed the Mantis. Tsuken reluctantly obeyed, but Jurian's wound was more severe than first thought and he perished during the retreat. In his death he showed more honor than Tsuken had thought him capable of, and the Crane warrior was determined to both avenge his charge and protect the Phoenix village. He sought reinforcements from the Crane, but Doji Jun'ai was forced to refuse; the Crane were there as an honor guard and could not involve themselves in another clan's war. Disgusted by the unfortunate political realities of the situation, Tsuken decided to do what he could regardless and went back to the Phoenix village alone. There he stood amid the bodies of dead Phoenix samurai, facing the Mantis army.

Tsuken challenged the Mantis leader, Yoritomo Yorikane, to a duel for the fate of the village. The Mantis officer accepted, for he had himself trained with the Kakita and believed he was more than capable of winning. Tsuken prevailed in the duel, but not without suffering a grievous wound. The Mantis respected their word and departed the village, leaving Tsuken there to die. Tsuken managed to drag himself to a nearby cave... where he discovered the Book of Fire.

The Crane warrior found the prize to be of little comfort at first, since he fully expected the Mantis to eventually return and finish off the small village. When he reported to the Crane Clan Champion, he found himself commended him on his victory and his new-found status as the Keeper of Fire. Tsuken did not feel enlightened or at peace and wondered why he had



PASSAGES FROM THE BOOK OF FIRE

“Fire burns. Fire lights. Fire consumes. Fire warms. Everything in the universe has a beneficial and a detrimental side. Learn to balance between both in all things, and you will know the truth of fire.”

“Only a fool is burned twice by the same Fire. Similarly, remember every lesson you encounter.”

“The flame does not pretend to be the wind. Neither should you pretend to be someone else. If you need to laugh, laugh. If you wish to cry, cry. How could you ever wish to understand yourself if you cannot even show the world what you truly experience?”

“Do not seek to capture what is meant to be free.”

“Each man and woman carries a Fire inside. It burns dimly through most of their life, carrying them through their daily actions. And yet at times of strife it can lead one to incredible feats. Learn to control that power and anything is possible. Walk as if the fate of the Empire and your soul depended on your every step, and you shall never fall again.”

found the Book at all. That changed, however, when he met Rosoku himself, accompanied by Doji Jun'ai. She had emulated Tsuken and led the forces of several clans in defense of the village Tsuken had sought to protect. The show of strength had been enough to ward off the Mantis, and Jun'ai had subsequently been chosen as the Keeper of Water. When he learned this, for the first time in many days Tsuken's warm smile returned to his face. He finally accepted his new role and his new fate.

Like the other Keepers of the Elements, Kakita Tsuken was not so much a mystical or enlightened man as he was an embodiment of an Element's basic principles. Impetuous, passionate, intense, and righteous, Tsuken had always been like the Fire he now represented. Isawa Ochiai, the Master of Fire, gifted him with a flaming blade in congratulation for his new position (and to ensure the Phoenix had links to the Keepers). Tsuken never hesitated to unsheathe the weapon when faced with dishonorable enemies of the Empire.

Of all the Keepers, Tsuken was the one who had the least in common with the monks in the Brotherhood of Shinsei, yet this difference was also his strength. His intense sense of honor, his will to sacrifice himself for the greater good, and his lack of compromise found an echo with many other warriors who came to realize the ways of Shinsei and Bushido were not opposed. Tsuken kept living as he always had, laughing, charming, and fighting along the way, knowing that denying his own nature was the only real sin.

The Book of Fire

When Tsuken received the Book of Fire, he realized it was just that: a book. No artifact of magical prowess, no answer to all the questions of life – just a book. In fact, the Book of Fire asked more questions than it answered, leading its reader to search for answers everywhere, acknowledging that the paths to wisdom are both multiple and infinite. Like the other Keepers, Tsuken frequently added to his book, recounting the stories and adventures of the Keepers. Knowledge was its own reward, the Book said, and Tsuken always tried to share his knowledge with others.

The Book of Fire teaches balance between a man's heart and the world around him. Fire is essential to uphold a virtuous soul and spread values and wisdom, yet it must be carefully directed lest a man lose himself in foolish endeavors or destroy the balance of his environment. To “be as Fire” is to stand for one's principles and for purity, without closing avenues for more wisdom from unconventional sources. It is the very process of enlightening others and letting them enlighten you, an exchange of energies which benefits all.

The Book of Fire is one of the most extensive of the Books of the Elements, for it addresses a great variety of topics – usually through grandiose stories of courage and honor, letting the reader naturally reach conclusions rather than directly addressing the point. Although many of the tales deal with violence and conflict, if one pays close attention there is always an underlying expression of wisdom and inner peace. Those who have read the Book have found it incredibly invigorating, leading them to certainty of purpose and a total absence of fear.

The Book of Fire does not grant its reader any supernatural powers. Rather, it conveys a specific philosophy which can help those who understand it to free their minds from doubt and stagnation, attaining their true potential.

In game-mechanic terms, the owner of the Book of Fire gains a +1k1 bonus to all Fire rolls, Agility rolls, and Intelligence rolls, including Skill rolls that use the Agility and Intelligence Traits. This bonus increases to +2k1 while Contesting any roll using Agility or Intelligence. However, these bonuses are lost if the Book of Fire is not consulted and meditated upon at least once every two days.

The Keeper of Fire receives the above bonus at all times, regardless of how often he or she consults the text. In addition, the Keeper receives beneficial effects from the respect and admiration of the Fire kami. The manifestations of this favor are not specifically defined and should be determined by the GM. One obvious possibility is the ability to Commune with the Fire kami (as per the spell).



THE WORLD OF FIRE

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Chapter Five



THE WORLD OF FIRE

The game was not one Asako Aeshi had ever heard of, but it was a hot day, and she had little to occupy her besides drinking and playing games in taverns until the Scorpion arrived.

"Your goal," the slender man seated across from her said, "is to snatch as many rice grains from the table as you can." He gestured at the dry rice scattered between them.

"Simple enough," Aeshi said.

He heard her skepticism and smiled. "But you must snatch the grains before the object I throw into the air strikes the table. You, of course, will do the same for me."

Now the challenge of the game became clear. "And whoever gathers the most grains wins?"

"Eventually. The game continues until all the grains have been taken. And the object we will be throwing is this knife."

Aeshi picked up the weapon and found it badly balanced; the hilt was far too light. The knife would invariably fall point-first. "I see."

"And before your turn, you must drink from this." He lifted the bottle he carried, its sides marked with strange figures. "I, of course, will do the same."

"Will you permit me to add one final rule?" He nodded with a smile. "For every ten grains each of us gathers, we may ask one question, which must be answered honestly."

He agreed, and the game began.

She could not begin to equal the precise movements of his fingers, plucking grains from the table before the knife

struck. Nor did she try to imitate the subtle twist by which he discarded most of his cup's contents before drinking. As for the liquid, it burned her throat with every sip, and sent fire through her veins. In the end, she gathered only enough rice for three questions.

"My part will take far longer," he said when they were done, and a pile of seventy grains sat before him. "You should go first."

Aeshi bowed and thanked him. "I will keep my questions simple. To begin with, I must ask: how many times have you changed the place you call home?"

The stranger was clearly puzzled, but he said, "Twice."

"Thank you. Next, please tell me the name of the drink that is making me slur my speech most shamefully."

"Suishitsu," the stranger said, grinning.

Aeshi had to repeat this several times before her tongue would render the syllables correctly. When she finally had it, she said, "Thank you. And for my third question: does it not hurt to kneel on your tail for so long?"

The stranger gaped at her.

Drunk she might be, but Asako Aeshi could still spin a blade around her fingers. "The wood of this hilt comes from Chikushudo, from whence you moved to Sakkaku, and then to Ningen-do. The markings on that bottle are kenku script. And if you spill rice before a monkey spirit, he cannot leave until every grain has been picked up. You are a saru, and I thank you again, because you have given me more entertainment today than I have had for many a year."



The Natural World of Fire

Fire is the most destructive of the Elements, and in its raw expression it is rare in the natural world – but awe-inspiring when it occurs. In the aftermath of a wildfire or a volcanic eruption, even Miya's Blessing may not be enough to rebuild what has been lost. These events can permanently change the face of a region.

Yet the wise teach that Fire is an Element of both destruction and inspiration. Even the most cataclysmic manifestations of Fire serve a creative purpose in the world. Rokugani may pray to the kami and the Fortunes to be spared the wrath of Fire, but without it, the world would be a poorer place.

Volcanoes

Volcanoes are the devastating result of Fire overpowering Earth, infusing the strength of the latter with the volatility of the former. More than any other expression of Fire in nature, volcanoes exemplify both the destructive and creative aspects of that Element: although volcanic activity annihilates everything in its path, it also lays the foundation for new things to follow after. Volcanic soil is fertile, spurring rapid growth, and an eruption can even make new land where none existed before.

Few Rokugani, however, show much gratitude for the positive consequences of a volcanic eruption. Understandably, they tend to focus on the immense

damage a volcano inflicts: villages buried or burned, ground sunken or buried or raised up. Volcanic activity on a large scale is not common, but when it occurs, the memories endure for generations.

An eruption can take many forms. The most iconic is lava: molten rock flowing down the sides of a mountain or even, in a powerful enough eruption, hurled into the air. This, however, is as rare as it is impressive. Volcanoes more commonly expel clouds of ash and small pebbles of volcanic stone. In some cases the ground in a volcanic region may vent clouds of boiling steam, or – even more dangerous – poisonous air invisible to the ordinary eye. When an eruption combines with snow or nearby bodies of water, it can cause a catastrophic flood or mudslide, flattening entire towns.

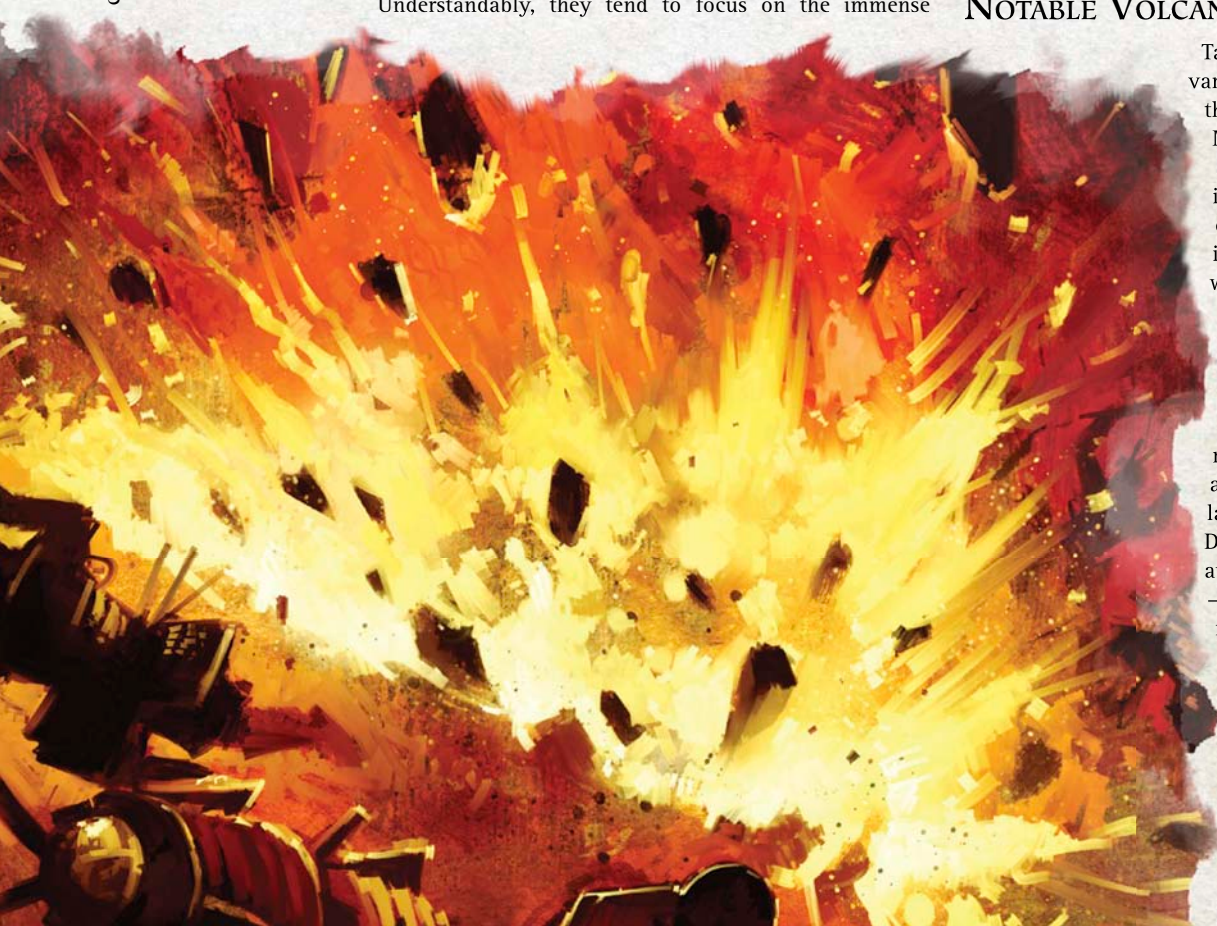
To avert such calamities, Rokugani who dwell in areas of volcanic activity do their best to appease the Fire and Earth kami lest their displeasure bring destruction. If the locals have been mining in the area, they may move the mines to a new location or cease work entirely. Alternatively, the miners may bring in shugenja to perform ceremonies in their tunnels, hoping to make amends for whatever offense they have given. Shrines to Kyufoki (the Fortune of Earthquakes) and Yama-no-Kami (the Fortune of Stone) are found at the entrance to nearly every mine in volcanic areas, and heimin pay their respects when entering and leaving.

Of course, not all volcanic eruptions are due to the wrath of the kami. The Fortunes can cause volcanic eruptions to express their anger, and more sinister entities such as the Dark Oracle of Fire have sometimes awakened volcanoes as well.

NOTABLE VOLCANOES IN THE EMPIRE

Tamori's Furnace: The mountain variously known as Wrath of the Kami, Sleeping Thunder Mountain, and Tamori's Furnace has a tragic history in modern times. Looming over the Kinenkan Province in Dragon lands, the volcano was dormant until the year 1158, when the Dark Oracle of Fire, Agasha Tamori, sparked a violent eruption. This ultimately provoked the Dragon-Phoenix War, as refugees fleeing the province attempted to settle in Phoenix lands. During the later War of Dark Fire, two Tamori shugenja awakened the volcano again – this time as a defensive measure to bury the Yobanjin army which had captured Shiro Tamori.

Prior to these events, the mountain was largely





inactive and the Dragon's Heart Dojo stood near its peak. This was the home for the shugenja smiths of the Dragon Clan and sometimes hosted visiting Kaiu students. After the eruptions, it relocated to the Wrath of the Kami Shrine farther down the mountain's slope. The Nemuranai Seekers of the Dragon Clan brought dangerous artifacts to the Wrath of the Kami Shrine to be destroyed; the Tamori carried them down into a magma chamber within the mountain, the very Furnace itself. Because of this activity, the kami in the area became highly awakened and somewhat unpredictable, and shugenja in the shrine must exercise care in their prayers.

Earthquake Fish Bay: The huge bay between the Crab and Crane does not at first glance appear to be volcanic in any way. There are no mountains, no obvious plumes of ash or smoke. The volcanoes lie hidden beneath the waters, and their heat gives the bay its other name, Warm Springs Bay.

Eruptions here are uncommon, having occurred only three times in Rokugan's history. Each time, the boiling waters send vast tides of dead fish onto the shores. The heimin and samurai of the region recognize this as a dreadful omen and never eat the fish, even though famine usually follows since the normally-fertile waters of the bay do not quickly recover.

It is possible that someday the volcanic activity in Earthquake Fish Bay might someday result in new islands arising from the waters. If this happens, the Crab and Crane are sure to renew their age-old conflict, this time to see who can claim the islands for their own use.

The Islands of Silk and Spice: The archipelago of the Mantis Clan is volcanic in origin, and although the peaks there rarely erupt in a destructive fashion many of them are still active. Hot springs and steam vents are fairly common, and the black sands of the islands are testaments to previous volcanic activity. Prudent Mantis understand their safety depends on always placating the Fire and Earth kami, preventing not only damage to their own settlements but also to coastal villages on the mainland, which are vulnerable to volcanic-triggered tsunamis.

In the twelfth century one volcanic island near the main archipelago is claimed by the Lion Clan. Shima no Quehao appears to be a dormant volcano that once served as a home to the Kitsu race; an ancient library of the Kitsu is found in the ruins there. At present the island's volcano is wholly inactive, and Kitsu shugenja frequently placate the kami to ensure it remain so.

The Fire Fountains: This volcanic field lies at the western end of Kaigen's Island, a new feature on Rokugani maps. The island itself was formed in the year 1167 at the end of the War of Fire and Thunder, when Isawa Sachi and Yoritomo Kaigen joined forces in the midst of battle to defeat the Dark Wave fleet. A later earthquake opened rifts on the island that continually seep lava and periodically spew arcs of molten rock into the air. As a result, Kaigen's Island is slowly but steadily growing in size. (For more information on the island and its volcanic activity, see the chapter "Broken Wave City" from the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Strongholds of the Empire*.)

NOTABLE VOLCANOES OUTSIDE ROKUGAN

The coast of the Shadowlands boasts several active volcanoes which spew Tainted lava into the sea, throwing up vast clouds of steam that obscure navigation. Within the Shadowlands themselves, a dormant volcano called the Womb of Terror lies near the Festering Pit of Fu Leng. It is said to be a place of perfect balance between the five Elements and the Shadowlands Taint, and serves as the home for the Elemental Terrors after their creation by the Dark Oracles in the year 1126. The Kuni believe the Womb of Terror is a dead volcano, beyond the possibility of eruption, but where the Taint is involved one can never be truly sure.

By contrast, the fissure known as Amaterasu's Furnace is very active. The Furnace also lies within the Shadowlands, but this miles-deep volcanic rift was blessed by Amaterasu herself after the death of Hida and is untouched by the Taint. It contains an entrance to the realm of Gaki-do, but few can survive the heat and boiling steam to reach it.

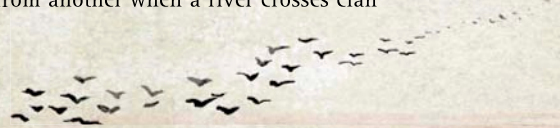
It is said a few volcanoes even exist outside Ningen-do itself. Of these, one of the most famous is Kurokazan, a dormant peak in the Realm of Animals, Chikushudo. According to Fortunist theology, Inari (the Fortune of Rice and Foxes) lives on the mountain's snow-capped peak.

Drought

Sometimes Fire expresses itself more subtly, not in open flame or molten rock, but in desiccating heat that denies life-giving water.

Drought is an insidious threat, in part because it takes so long to manifest. A single day without rain may be taken as a blessing. A month is dangerous. An entire season with insufficient rain can lead to famine and unrest, even to rebellion. A good samurai lord pays heed to the weather and provides aid before the problem grows too severe. In areas dependant on rain, divination can give warnings that a summer will be dry. In other regions, the wise keep a close eye on the winter's snowfall to estimate how much water the spring thaw will bring to their rivers and streams.

Rice, that staple of the Rokugani diet, is one of the first crops to suffer during periods of drought. Rice farming is a water-intensive process, and if the ground in which the plants grow is permitted to dry out they will quickly die. The necessity of controlling the water supply has led to the development of a number of irrigation techniques, but even irrigation cannot conjure water from nowhere: it must come from ponds and lakes and streams, and if one farmer or one village draws too much, it will leave too little for those around them. The resulting strife can divide one family from another, one village from another, or even one clan from another when a river crosses clan boundaries.





Problems with the water supply can also exacerbate tensions within the Celestial Order. Other grains, such as barley and millet, require less irrigation than rice. In times of drought, it is often sensible to shift the focus of cultivation to these dry-soil crops. Sensibility, however, does not always rule the day. Samurai often object to eating what they consider peasant fare (or worse, feed for livestock). Requiring their heimin to devote precious water to keeping the rice crop alive, though, may very well leave less food for those heimin, and in times of starvation the peasants have been known to forget the deference due their betters.

Because of this, an issue as seemingly simple as the level of water in some rural paddy can become a political problem at the highest levels of the Imperial bureaucracy. It is rare for drought to afflict the entire Empire at once; more often, food shortages are localized to the lands of one or more Great Clans. These clans must then trade with their more fortunate neighbors for whatever surplus can be spared. Sometimes their neighbors give generously – the pacifistic Phoenix are rarely willing to hold other people’s survival hostage for their own benefit, for example – but more often the diplomats of the richer clan leverage the opportunity as much as they can. Territory has been known to change hands because of a shortage of rain on one side of the border. A particularly ruthless daimyo or Clan Champion may even take advantage of his enemy’s weakness, attacking while the starving ashigaru are too weak to defend themselves.

To avoid these kinds of risks, samurai and heimin do what they can to prevent drought before it occurs. They make offerings not only to Inari, the beloved Fortune of Rice, but also to a host of other entities: Kuroshin, the Fortune of Agriculture; Toyoyuke-omikama, the Fortune of Grain; Kenro-ji-jin, the Fortune of Soil; Zocho, the Fortune of the South Wind (associated with summer and the harvest); even Jotei, the minor Fortune of Morning Dew. If drought begins, shrines to Jizo (the Fortune of Mercy), Sudaro (the Fortune of Perseverance), and of course Ebisu (the Fortune of Honest Work) will often see a rise in visitors. Many heimin will also make offerings to avert the wrath of Fortunes such as Emma-O (Death) and Ekibyogami (Plague and Pestilence), whose power grows in the world when drought becomes severe.

Wildfires

In some parts of Rokugan, wildfires are the most common threat the Element of Fire can present. On the plains of Unicorn and Lion lands, none fear destruction from the mountains, but a single spark can reduce vast swathes of fertile land to ash. In forested areas fires can burn for months, beyond the power of any shugenja to extinguish.

Wildfires may be both natural and manmade. Incendiary material from a volcanic eruption can set the surrounding vegetation alight, often along a broad front making the disaster even more difficult to combat. More often, especially in the plains, a lightning strike is the instigating factor; many villages keep watch for such events, and pray to Osano-Wo, the Fortune of Fire and Thunder, to avert his wrath.

Such things are the will of Heaven, but human error also causes many wildfires. In some grassy or forested areas, a simple house fire can spread destruction for miles as the wind carries the sparks onward. A carelessly-built campfire can do the same. Any samurai or peasant can unwittingly be the source of a conflagration if he fails to take precautions with his candle or lantern, or deploys hanabi under the wrong conditions (more than one wildfire has been started by festival fireworks during dry weather). Even hay can blaze up of its own accord if it is stacked or baled before drying out sufficiently – a rare instance of Water compounding the problem rather than mitigating it. Ordinarily, of course, lack of water is by far the more serious problem. More than a few village leaders and samurai lords impose strict orders against unnecessary fires in times of drought lest one disaster lead to another.

Once a wildfire begins, the tactics for fighting it are the same regardless of whether they are effected through prayers to the kami or the brute effort of many hands. Water, often used to put out localized fires, is usually insufficient to drown a larger threat, though it may protect areas that have not yet burned. Work crews instead use soil, shoveling it over the leading edge of the blaze, burying flammable material in unburned areas, or building embankments to block the fire’s progress. In some cases, peasant fire crews may even set their own smaller fires, directing them toward the main blaze, so as to burn up the available fuel and create a break over which sparks cannot leap. Where possible, they will anchor their defense to some landmark such as a lake, a road, or rocky terrain where the fire can find little to burn.

All of these efforts, of course, are perilous for those brave souls who pit themselves against the Elements. Wildfires can move with incredible speed, overtaking a running man, and they can change direction with little to no warning. Those who fight them risk not only burns but smoke inhalation, dehydration, and injury from the heavy labor of their efforts.

For all this destruction, however, wildfires do have a productive side. They clear out deadwood and choking underbrush, keeping forest areas healthy and allowing different plants and animals to thrive. The balance of Elements in some plants is such that they actually require such fires from time to time; for example, certain evergreens only open their seed-cones in the presence of extreme heat. What is damaging to human settlements may prove, in the long run, to be beneficial for the natural world.

The Crafts of Fire: Swordsmithing

To the samurai class, to toil with one's hands is generally considered distasteful. After all, samurai aspire to create greater things than what can be made with the labor of heimin; a samurai makes art, he does not craft goods. A notable exception, however, is the work of the swordsmith. While the crafting of other weapons or armor is a task which may be delegated to heimin vassals at need, it is strictly forbidden for heimin to create any manner of sword. The forging a new blade is an art that is reserved only for samurai.

THE SWORDSMITH

Swordsmithing is one of the highest-regarded arts in the Empire. It is a sacred tradition, its practitioners treated with much the same respect and reverence as priests and sensei. The origins of the art are lost in the murky waters of legend; some say the first true katana was forged by Doji Yasurugi, who was taught the art of folding metal by a kenku spirit. Others insist the art is even older than that, and say Kakita himself used a katana at the first Emerald Tournament. Still others attribute the first katana to Kaiu, saying the blade Chikara, the sword that slew Hatsu Suru no Oni, was the first katana. These many different legends may forever conceal the origins of the art. Regardless, although swordsmithing has gradually improved with the Empire's forging and smelting technology, the basic techniques have remained relatively unchanged for over a thousand years.

A swordsmith or any related crafter of weapons begins his path as a mere student of the art. He is taken as an apprentice to a master craftsman who acts as his sensei and teaches him the ways of forging. The apprentice usually begins his training by tending to minor tasks required to keep the forge running: the preparation of cleansing waters, the heating of the crucible itself, cleaning and maintaining the blacksmithing tools, and so forth. Such menial work is undertaken for a year or more before he is even permitted to so much as glimpse the sword-making process itself. This can be discouraging for some, but familiarity with these tasks eventually grants insight into the crafting process when the apprentice begins his true learning. And it is in many ways a test, for only the extremely patient can create a blade worthy of samurai.

Equally important is combat practice with the sword. In order to forge a sword correctly, one must know how the sword is properly used. Thus a swordsmith can only be a samurai, since only samurai are permitted to wield the sword. Some smiths are deadly adversaries, so intimate is their understanding of the blade and its mysteries. And legends like Kaiu, Togashi Nyoko, and Doji Yasurugi were known to spurn any sword they did not themselves forge.

THE FORGING OF THE EMERALD CHAMPION'S BLADE

Although Kakita is traditionally seen as the first Emerald Champion, the post was not officially created until the year 150 in the reign of the Shining Prince, Hantei Genji. The winner of the Emerald Tournament that year was a man named Doji Hatsuo, who was both the Champion of the Crane and a close friend of Emperor Genji. After he became the Emperor's personal champion, Genji assigned him the task of organizing the Empire's laws (along with the famed Scorpion judge Soshi Saibankan). Hatsuo stepped down as Crane Clan Champion and gave the Ancestral Sword of the Crane to his younger brother, who assumed the rule of the Crane.

In these times, samurai were rarely outfitted by their lords. A bushi was expected to be wealthy enough or influential enough to equip himself. As such, Hatsuo found himself in need of a new sword, a sword that would become the blade of the Emerald Champion. He proclaimed he would bestow his favor on the swordsmith who could supply him with the greatest sword mortal hands could forge. In reply to his challenge, three of the Empire's greatest blacksmiths retreated to their forges, each spending an entire year crafting a perfect blade, a sword befitting the personal champion of the Emperor. All three finished their swords and presented them to Hatsuo during the Winter Court of that year.

At first, it seemed impossible to choose a winner. At last the champion commanded, "Please demonstrate why your sword is best."

The first smith took his sword to the rock gardens and found a huge boulder. Before the entire crowd, he used his sword to split the rock in two. None could deny that the sword was very strong.

The second laid his sword edge-up on a daisho stand in the gardens, plucked a petal from a nearby lily, and dropped it on the blade. The petal was sliced in two; the blade was so sharp, only the gentle force of the fall was required to cut it. None could deny his sword was stronger.

The last, a cunning young woman named Ashidaka, simply held her sword blade-up beneath a cherry tree. She shook the tree with a kick, showering her with falling leaves. None of the leaves fell on the blade, although they peppered the ground around her.

Doji Hatsuo chose the third sword. Its spirit was so strong, he said, even the leaves knew to avoid the blade.





Eventually, gradually, the apprentice is introduced to the art, and as time passes more and more secrets are unveiled to him. He is entrusted with more and more tasks and eventually with actual crafting projects, small ones at first but gradually increasing in importance. When the master is convinced the student is ready, he is allowed to undertake the forging of a blade. The creation of a new katana is an extremely time-intensive, testing, and unforgiving process, effectively the student's trial-by-fire. It is only after the master has inspected a final work and determined it is to his satisfaction that the student is permitted to design his own *horimono*, a unique signature on the sword's tang that will forever identify his work. From that moment on, he is no longer be considered a student; he is a true swordsmith. Even this, however, is not the end of his journey. It will take decades of dedication to his art before he can be considered a true master.

THE MATERIALS

At the dawn of the Empire, the most militarily powerful of the scattered human tribes already had access to steel weaponry, but it was rare and very labor-intensive to make. It was not until Kaiu refined the process of forging steel that it became the preferred and standard material for swords, armor, and other such gear. Likewise, most

of the pre-Rokugani tribes were making swords with simple straight blades, but a few already knew the secret value of blades that were slightly curved. After the fall of the Kami, the victory of Hantei over Akodo, and the appearance of Kakita, curved single-edged blades became the norm. But these swords were not true katana or wakizashi; they were called either "*tachi*" if designed for cavalry, or "*uchigatana*" if they were infantry blades.

The katana did not come into being until craftsmen discovered the secret of folding metal to make the blade stronger, sharper, and more flexible. Many sources conflict as to how the secret was uncovered, but the most predominant belief is that samurai learned the process from a benevolent kenku. Folded steel, known as *tamahagane*, is used almost exclusively for three weapons: the katana, the wakizashi, and the naginata. To many, a weapon cannot be called by these names if a different material is used.

The creation of this special type of blade takes many days of careful work. It is not an efficient process, and mass production of *tamahagane* is almost impossible. Small batches of steel with varying carbon contents and properties are produced by hand; each batch of steel is stamped and labeled by a master smith to indicate its carbon content (and thus its relative hardness and flexibility). Since the forging of folded-steel blades



involves the use of multiple classes of steel, the quality every piece must be carefully recorded. The folding of the metal, the most time-intensive aspect of the process, removes impurities from the metal and strengthens it, making it much stronger than it would otherwise be.

Other materials required to make a sword are more common, and vary from clan to clan. Manta-ray skin is sometimes used to wrap the hilt, but more commonly a hilt will be wrapped in woven cloth. The *tsuba*, or hand-guard, is most often molded cast-iron, but for a decorative sword other materials such as gold or copper alloys can be used. Sometimes the *tsuba* is even silver-plated, a common practice in Phoenix lands. All manner of adornments can be used, but most swordsmiths prefer to keep the designs simple and pure.

THE FORGING

The forging of one sword can take weeks, perhaps even months to complete. It requires patience and attention to detail, great skill, and intimacy with the materials. If one aspect of the process is overlooked or rushed, the integrity of the entire blade is risked. It is a sacred ritual, practiced with the same reverence as giving offerings to a Fortune. A true swordsmith does not compromise on time, materials, or the ritualistic aspects of the art. To do any less is to dishonor the sword, the samurai, and the very art of sword crafting itself.

A blade is actually made up of several different kinds of steel which are folded and forged together. The core is formed from a low-carbon steel which is softer and more malleable. The outer layers are formed from harder, less-malleable steels with higher carbon contents. To do this, the smith will forge the core separately and then encase it in the harder steels before hammering them together, forming a hard “shell” of steel around the softer core. The forger will make a flux of wet clay and ashes to coat the blade between each of the multiple heatings and forgings.

The cooling of the steel must be carefully controlled. If allowed to cool normally, the steel loses its edge, but if it cools too quickly, it becomes brittle. Furthermore, if the inner core of the sword cools at the same rate as the outside, the blade will be impossible to curve. The smith must carefully monitor the steel’s temperature and control its cooling after each re-heating; this is usually accomplished with the wet clay coating described above. When the time comes for the final cooling, the forger will choose a name for the blade, whispering it as in prayer before plunging the sword into water, causing it to cool rapidly and form its final hard shell. This act is said to seal the name into the blade, awakening the spirits and creating the sword’s unique identity.

The differing layers of steel grant the blade several unique properties. It retains an edge extremely well, but because the core is flexible, the sword itself is not brittle.

This gives such blades the same strength as a conventional steel sword but a far superior resilience. Most Rokugani swords contain three layers; a soft core, medium flanks, and a very hard edge. However, the most legendary swords will have many more layers than this. The blades of the famed ancient swordsmith Doji Yasurugi have five layers, and in modern times the superior swords created by the Tsi family boast an unprecedented seven layers.

The penultimate phase of the smithing is the polishing. Often the swordsmith will do this himself, but in some larger smithies there are dedicated sword polishers. This part of the process is just as important as the actual forging, and can take up to twice as long. It involves grinding the surface of the blade to form the desired shape. Any grooves for blood are added during this phase. The blade is then painstakingly sanded into a tempered edge through the use of increasingly finer waterstones, gradually exposing the unique pattern of the folded metal, patterns as individual as a fingerprint. This pattern is called the *hamon*. The final polish delivers a shining, mirrored appearance to the blade. Now it is ready for the last step, the fitting.

The fitting is twofold: inserting the blade into its handle and affixing it there, and ensuring the scabbard (*saya*) is adequate for the blade. To affix the handle, which is usually made separately, the tang of the blade is inserted into a skillfully carved passage and gently worked in until the sword is firmly affixed. The tang is usually flat and extends all the way to the back of the handle; it is held there by a wooden or metal peg that is driven into the handle and through the drilled peg-hole of the tang. Affixed by the back end, it is then attached to the front of the handle by the *tsuba* and an additional collar of metal. Thus in later years the blade can be removed from the hilt for polishing or reforging by removing the collar, *tsuba*, and peg holding the tang in place.





Making a sword requires considerable skill and patience. Due to the time, cost, and rarity of the materials, forging a new blade is always a momentous occasion. This has encouraged the cultural practice of passing down one's blade to one's descendants and holding such weapons in supreme reverence. A samurai's sword could be hundreds of years old, but it will still be as deadly as the day it was forged.

TESTING THE BLADE

The quality of a sword is extremely important to samurai, just as important as their own abilities. Indeed, a Rokugani samurai who tries to fight with a inferior sword, be it one of the ancient straight blades, a katana made by an inferior smith, or even just a practice *bokken*, will find himself unable to perform the more advanced techniques of his school. This is because the bushi Techniques of the Great Clans developed alongside the technology of sword-forging. A sword that is too heavy, or too weak, or improperly balanced, will not allow the samurai to perform the subtle maneuvers required by his school. Even a fraction of a second can cost a Kakita his strike, a Lion his aim, or a Shinjo his parry. For this reason, it is considered very unlucky to carry an untested blade. It is no insult to the swordsmith to conduct tests to prove a sword's quality and worth.

There are many traditions for testing a blade, and every clan does this differently. The oldest practice is to test the blade on an eta or heimin, but this custom has been largely abandoned in modern times. In the Lion, the Unicorn, and among the Kitsuki family of the Dragon, the most common practice is to test the blades on criminals who are awaiting execution. A sword must be able to sever a limb or head to be considered adequate, with an acceptable blade accomplishing this with just one blow. Better swords will cut through multiple targets with a single strike. The record for this is held by Akodo Mayuko, who cut through eight criminals with a single strike in the year 643.

While this method is only way to be absolutely sure a blade is adequate, the other clans tend to shy away from testing their blades on live subjects. The Kaiu test their swords against the only thing they consider

appropriate: a helmet made by their own design. If the sword splits the helm, it is worthy of a Crab warrior. The Crane conduct their tests against bamboo rods of varying strengths, but a Kakita Blade must be tested against one of the large stones surrounding Kyuden Doji. If the blade splits the stone, it is considered adequate. The Phoenix rely on tameshiri cutting to test their blades: the practice of slicing through rolled tatami mats. The Shiba conduct regular competitions where such cuttings take place.

However, a true swordsmith or weapons master will know the quality of a blade simply by holding it, drawing it from the saya, or a with a single practice strike. A master knows how a sword should be balanced; the blade should feel as though it is drawn through by invisible strings, yet effortlessly brought to a stop. It should be the exact match of the samurai's skill. Some can tell just by listening to the swing of the blade. When a katana of excellent quality is swung, it makes a whistling sound and casts a small breeze (this even has a name, *tachikaze*). This whistling is caused by the grooves in the katana's blade and the cutting edge. The sword's whistle directly corresponds to the quality of the sword; the louder the sound, the better the sword. Inferior swords do not make any such sound, since there is some flaw in their alignment or balance that prevents the tachikaze. If a sword's tachikaze reaches the same pitch as three voices whistling in unison, the forger of the sword can be considered a true master. Swords of this quality are exceptionally rare, even for Ancestral Blades.

In some cases a swordsmith will test his own blades by one of the above methods. It is a generally accepted practice among the Empire's swordsmiths to mark blades according to their own testing, using a system of notches on the pommel. These were originally meant to signify how many whistles the sword could make, and now represent a scale of quality. Usually there will also be a kanji representing the method by which the sword was tested. Of course, if a samurai is presented a new sword that was tested by its creator, he may still choose to test the blade himself. This is no insult to the smith, since a samurai is expected to become acquainted with the blade which will represent his soul or his honor.

Prominent Swordsmithing Families

THE KAIU MASTER SMITHS

Carrying the legacy of the First Smith, the Kaiu devote their lives to inventing the most powerful and ingenious weapons to be utilized against the Shadowlands. In many cases this includes the forging of highly impressive swords. Although crushing weaponry is preferred when fighting against thick-skinned Shadowlands monsters, even the Crab know the value of a well-made blade. Kaiu himself was the one who forged Chikara, the legendary katana used by Hiruma to slay the Hatsu Suru no Oni. The Kaiu family insist that all of the Empire's sword-making practices originated with the pragmatic, eager-to-instruct Kaiu. Although the other clans dispute this, everyone acknowledges Kaiu's genius.





Kaiu swordsmiths are not known for the elegance of their blades, but rather for the ingenuity of their crafting techniques. The Kaiu have an acute understanding of smelting and metallurgy, and this allows them to create unique weapons that lesser smiths would deem impossible. Among other things, the Kaiu have developed methods for folding hints of jade into the steel of their swords, granting a taint-warding bite to the blade's razor edge. They are also one of the few families able to craft the no-dachi, a sword similar to a katana but of massive size. No-dachi are extremely difficult to make, requiring more materials and far more control than most swordsmiths can muster. The Kaiu proudly stamp their family mon on the hilt of every no-dachi that leaves their forge.

THE ASHIDAKA

The Ashidaka are a vassal family of the Kakita, known for forging the Crane Clan's unique Kakita Blades. They insist it was Kakita's son Doji Yasurugi who learned the secret of folding metal at the feet of a kenku sensei. They guard and champion the techniques of their ancient patron, but are also always seeking innovative new methods for creating excellent blades. While they frequently forge lesser blades and naginata, according to tradition the Ashidaka may only forge a true Kakita Blade under the explicit orders of a Crane daimyo. A single Ashidaka smith will toil over such a blade from start to finish, entrusting no step of the process to anyone else until the sword is done. This increases the required time almost fivefold, but the resulting blades are rare marvels of beauty and function, prized throughout the Empire.

For all their methodical ways, the Ashidaka are also quite philosophical. They embrace all aspects of weapon creation as high art, often classifying a weapon by its forging rather than its function. One of their lesser-known practices is the collection of "soul shards." Each time an Ashidaka folds his steel, he sets aside a small piece of the metal which represents the state of the sword (and the sword-smith) at that moment of the forging. Over the lifetime of the smith, he will collect many of these shards, each one holding a special significance to him, each symbolizing a piece of the smith's very soul. Upon his death, his greatest apprentice takes up all of the shards from his lifetime and forges them into a single blade. That blade is said to house the timeless spirit of his master, representing a lifetime devoted to the sword-making art. Some only gather enough shards over their lifetime to forge wakizashi or other such short blades (although these are always given reverence). But the oldest, most experienced, and greatest of their smiths gather enough shards to make a true Kakita Blade. Such weapons are the very stuff of legends.

THE AGASHA AND TAMORI

Outsiders are often surprised to learn it is the priests of the Dragon Clan who have the strongest weapon-crafting traditions. Even more surprising, those traditions began with a monk. Togashi Nyoko was a prodigy in the Dragon Clan, a monk and shugenja of great skill,

a duelist, and a smith of almost unmatched talent. She devoted much of her life to the teachings of Kaiu and her life's work was to marry the physical swordsmithing arts to the invocations of the kami. She would call the kami to her as she forged and their influence would touch the resulting blades. Her esoteric and mystical methods made it possible to create swords of feather-lightness and grace, blades somehow more attuned to the spirits than those crafted by other clans. When Nyoko passed into legend, the Agasha inherited her legacy. Their detailed alchemical understanding of the Elements elevated Nyoko's philosophies into the realm of sacred art. The Agasha used their alchemically-created metal ores to maximize the strength of their blades, and whispered prayers throughout the entire forging process. This resulted in blades with otherworldly mystical properties and, in some cases, a degree of self-awareness.

The Agasha kept their processes secret for many generations, not even risking their unique Agasha Steel as gifts for political favors. Eventually, however, their secrets escaped and some clans have adopted their own versions of the Agasha method of forging. Although the Bayushi, Asahina, and Moshi families have been known to make weapons that marry the shugenja's invocations and the art of the forge, none have exactly replicated the Agasha methods.

When the bulk of the Agasha left the Dragon to join the Phoenix, they took their forging methods with them. The family's new access to Phoenix resources and knowledge gave them new insights into their own art, refining it as never before. Yet the Dragon did not truly lose the ways of Togashi Nyoko; the Tamori largely inherited the role the Agasha fulfilled, and they outfit the Dragon with mystical blades forged in the heat and fires of a volcano. While the Tamori Weaponsmiths cannot exactly replicate the former methods of the Agasha, their martial practices and understanding of kenjutsu grant them insights of a different sort, and the swords they produce are a fair compromise between the mystic arts of the Agasha and the more practical philosophy of function over form.

THE TSI FAMILY / THE ORIOLE CLAN

Of all the smithing families in the Empire, perhaps none have skill held in such reverence as the Tsi. Originally a ronin family, the Tsi were granted a family name by Hantei Genji and held it for many centuries, eventually winning status as the Hantei Emperors' personal swordsmiths and finally ascending to become a Minor Clan during the reign of Toturi III. Moreover, one of their number, Tsi Xing Guo, was elevated to become the Fortune of Steel, forging the Celestial Swords which are carried in modern times by every Great Clan's Champion. No other family in the Empire has ever earned so much through their work at the forge... but then, no other family can craft weapons quite so unrivaled as those of the Tsi.

The Crafts of Fire: Charcoal

While virtually all samurai in the Empire consider the work of a swordsmith to be a sacred art, ultimately all smiths acknowledge they are making implements of war to be used by warriors. It is an ironic note, then, that perhaps the greatest smithing family in the Empire cringes to think its swords are used in this way. Every sword the Tsi craft is purely ceremonial, meant only to be admired for its quality, no matter how perfectly balanced or honed for battle it may be. To the Tsi, the ultimate proof of power is abstaining from its use. Sometimes they will even stipulate to their clients that a sword never be drawn against an enemy. The only exception the Tsi are willing to make on this is in exhibitions of skill. It is a great privilege to be given a Tsi blade for demonstrating kata; only a handful of samurai in the Empire have ever been so honored.

Even a minor blade forged by the Tsi is a prized treasure in the hands of any clan. So renowned is their reputation that even blades made by Tsi apprentices are actively sought out. The skill of the Tsi allows them to forge superior steel from inferior ores; sometimes their steel is folded over twenty times without diluting or over-distributing the carbon content. Tsi blades also contain seven distinct layers in the blade, whereas most Rokugani swords contain only three. No other family has ever accomplished this. It is an aspect of their art that is best appreciated by other swordsmiths; the average samurai cannot tell the difference until he actually draws the blade. Swords of the Tsi seem almost to guide themselves to their targets, and even a beginning student of kenjutsu can maintain superior control over his blade when it came from the forges of the Oriole. Since the time of Emperor Hantei XXX, every Rokugani Emperor has possessed a Tsi blade of his own.

Charcoal is one of the most frequently used fuels in Rokugan, and like most of the Empire's resources it is regarded with respect and reverence. While the Rokugani have access to other fuels, such as wood, various oils, and even coal, charcoal is the most preferred source for heating, cooking, and crafting. In a pre-industrial society like the Emerald Empire, the value of a relatively cheap fuel that burns cleanly and for a long time cannot be understated.

Charcoal is essentially the dry solid remains of burned organic substances, most commonly wood or animal bones, and comprised mainly of carbon and ashes. While there are many different sources of charcoal throughout the Empire, the preferred variety is called "*bincho-zumi*," which is produced almost exclusively in Phoenix lands. *Bincho-zumi* differs from other charcoals in that it is made from a specific kind of oak, burned without exposure to the air and then steamed in a secretive process. This type of charcoal has specific characteristics that make it more desirable to the Rokugani, and it is instantly recognizable due to its white color (most other charcoals are gray or black). While burning, *bincho-zumi*'s whiteness intensifies, resembling bleached bones as it slowly reduces to cinders.

The preference for *bincho-zumi* is ultimately due to its purity. Made from the blessed oaks of the Phoenix forests, it contains very little ash, and thus burns very cleanly with little or no smoke. Many of Rokugan's fuels exude a distinct or unpleasant odor when burned; lamp oil in particular burns with the smell of the pier, since it is normally derived from fish oil. However, *bincho-zumi* gives off no scent while burning, making it ideal for cooking and for indoor heat. Finally, because it is relatively dense, it is considerably harder than more mundane charcoals and thus more likely to survive travel.

Due to the demand for this high-quality charcoal, it is a significant source of wealth for the Phoenix Clan. However, the Phoenix do not exploit this resource to its fullest lest they run out of the unique oak trees required for its production. Thus while *bincho-zumi* is not truly a rare commodity in the same sense as something like jade, it is still rather expensive and always in demand. Other



clans produce similar charcoals in an effort to compete, with the most notable attempt to reproduce it being made by the Scorpion Clan. While these other charcoals are adequate substitutes, the forests of the other clans simply do not have the spiritual properties of the oaks from the Isawa Mori, and thus *bincho-zumi* remains unmatched in quality for now.

USES FOR CHARCOAL: FUEL

The Rokugani use charcoal primarily for heat, usually in braziers or indoor fire-pits. *Bincho-zumi* is of course preferred for such uses, and a small supply is usually distributed through every room of a castle in the winter months. For localized heat the Rokugani also use *hibachi* or “fire bowls,” small ceramic bowls or dishes, which hold sand and burning charcoal. A small amount of good-quality charcoal set to burn in a *hibachi* can generate heat for several hours.

Charcoal is also used for cooking, usually in a fire-pit below cookware or in special grills called *shichirin*. In markets, Rokugani peddlers will often sell freshly-grilled skewered fish, and most such peddlers prefer high quality charcoals that burn cleanly. Certain dishes with especially delicate flavors are only possible through the use of *bincho-zumi*, since the odors of lesser charcoals disrupt the flavor of the food.

Charcoal is also the most ideal fuel for smith’s forges, since its temperature can be better controlled than other sources and it burns for a long time. Most smiths consider it essential to their craft and keep a large supply at all times. The Kaiu in particular spend a great deal of effort obtaining vast amounts of charcoal for their forges. Of course, smiths care more about heat than about odors, so they are far less picky than those choosing charcoal for personal use.

USES FOR CHARCOAL: MEDICINE

To the Rokugani charcoal is not just for fuel; it is also said to have medicinal properties. They believe that burning pure charcoal (such as *bincho-zumi*) purifies the air and keeps away illnesses. It is often mixed with herbs for this purpose. Burning charcoal is also believed to absorb odors, and thus a supply is kept in places known for unpleasant smells (such as bath houses).

The Rokugani also believe that charcoal powder – if it is a pure, high quality charcoal with little or no ash – can settle an upset stomach when consumed in small doses.

Lastly, some geisha will use charcoal to blacken their teeth (a practice known as *ohaguro*) when the preferred black teeth lacquer is not immediately available.

USES FOR CHARCOAL: SAKE BREWING

Many sake breweries use charcoal as a carbon filter to finish their sake, separating the alcohol from the rice mash. This is an important step, since without it one is left with a cloudy liquid called *nigori-sake*, an “unfinished” sake fit only for the poorest customers.

HIBACHI: NOT WHAT YOU THINK IT IS

In many English-speaking countries we associate the word “*Hibachi*” with the large cast-iron griddles found in many Japanese restaurants. The term is also associated with the “teppanyaki” style of cooking which originated in Hawaii, where guests are seated around the iron griddle and food is seared in front of them, quickly and with artistry.

However, these terms are all modern ones with no application to Rokugan or to its historical inspiration in ancient Japan. While the image of a Rokugani samurai skillfully cooking food with great flair may be amusing, it is not the intended usage of the word here. In both historical Japan and in Rokugan, a *hibachi* (literally a “fire bowl”) is a traditional personal heating device. Indeed, in Japan the *hibachi* dates to before the Heian period, as early as 750 AD.



The traditional method of sake filtration is to line the inside of burlap bags with charcoal, fill the bags with the sake mash, and then hang the bags from ropes, allowing the sake to drip out slowly and gently over the course of hours. Only the highest quality charcoal, preferably *bincho-zumi*, will do for this purpose. Sake made in this way is known as “*Shizuka-Sake*” and is the preferred drink of the samurai caste.

USES FOR CHARCOAL: FARMING

Early in the Empire’s history, farmers discovered that incorporating charcoal ash into poor-quality or infertile dirt could result in productive soil. Through this discovery, vast fields previously believed incapable of producing crops were converted into useful farms. Many lands owe their harvests to this farming secret.

Indeed, had Doji Masako not known of this application for charcoal, the fledgling Sparrow Clan would never have been able to survive in its poor-quality lands. In modern times, the Sparrow produce a significant amount of charcoal from animal bones and swamp wood so as to ensure the meager productiveness of their otherwise worthless soil. This is a task normally left to *heimin* or *eta*, for even the lowly samurai of the Sparrow are hesitant to disturb the bones of dead animals.

USES FOR CHARCOAL: ART

When produced correctly, charcoal can be made into thin spindles ideal for drawing and other such artistic applications. While charcoal drawing can be a messy process, charcoal is ideal for quick sketches and also allows for surprisingly subtle shading and toning. Charcoal drawings are not a major form of art in Rokugan, but are used very extensively for drafting,



planning, and similar work. Scouts make use of charcoal to sketch enemy forces and positions, and the Kuni are known for using it to take notes and sketch Shadowlands creatures during their expeditions into the Tainted lands.

USES FOR CHARCOAL: KAMI-OFFERINGS

Many shugenja carry small bags of charcoal to use as offerings when communing or invoking prayers from Fire kami. Such charcoal pieces are usually blessed by the shugenja before they are burned to attract the attention of the kami. Charcoal can also be useful for lighting fires for divination, and some shugenja use it for this purpose.

The Crafts of Fire: Glass

Glass is a rarely-encountered thing in Rokugan, although the artisans who can create and work with the material are often held in high esteem. Due to the Empire's way of life and the tastes of its people, glass is generally considered an oddity with very limited practical applications, and it is only occasionally used. Even so, there are a few established roles for glass, and glass artists or "*gurasuka*" are considered the equal of any other artisans.

FRAGILE... OR NOT?

One concern PCs may have for glass containers is how fragile glass is. This is a valid worry; during the chaos of combat, it is easy to drop a vial or bottle. Broken glass is dangerous, and a wise lord will not wish to furnish his home with objects that could be easily turned into weapons.

However, such assumptions are based on modern glass-making techniques, which are cheap but result in weak glass objects. Older glass-making techniques resulted in glass that was much denser and thicker. In fact, glass bottles predating the 20th century were made so thick that they could often be dropped from shoulder height without breaking. Glass artifacts discovered in Han Dynasty tombs from 128 BC did not break even from a wall caving in!

It can be assumed Rokugani glass would be of equivalent hardness, since it is not created using modern materials or processes. However this also means glass objects are heavier. And of course such objects are not immune to breakage, merely harder to break than comparable modern glass.



GLASS AS AN ARTISTIC MEDIUM

Glass was used by the ancient Rokugani in the form of obsidian and other molten crystals; they employed it for both ordainments and weaponry. The ability to produce glass was developed by several tribes before the dawning of the Empire, including the Tribe of Isawa, as a side-effect of learning how to create glazed pottery. However, the actual use of glass-making for practical purposes did not come to the Empire until the ninth century and the return of the Unicorn.

The Ki-Rin had encountered glass-blowers among the gajjin during their travels, and the art fascinated them like few other things they saw. When they returned to the Empire in the year 815, they brought the knowledge of glass-creation with them, introducing it to the Imperial Court and the Great Clans as a gesture of goodwill. Although the more traditional clans rejected it as a useless foreign practice, many others recognized it was simply a different application of existing knowledge. In the modern Empire, every Great Clan has at least some measure of glass production, and a few have prominent *gurasuka* among their nobility.

Using glass for practical application is considered a "craft" and is something associated with heimin, not samurai. Glasswork made by samurai is appreciated on an aesthetic level, not for its usefulness. In spite of this, to be a true *gurasuka* one must know how to create glass as well as how to work it into delicate examples of fine art. In Rokugan, glass is made from sand, lake salt, sodium oxide (in the form of soda), and lime. Other ingredients are added during manufacture to produce various colors and properties. Most Rokugani glass contains baryte crystals and lead, which makes the resulting glass look more brilliant. (In fact, most Rokugani glass will slowly turn purple as it ages due to the lead content.) The ingredients are heated in a crucible until molten, then cooled slightly and prepared for working via one of the three main methods: blowing, casting, or sculpting.

GLASSBLOWING

Among the oldest and most well-known methods for working glass, glassblowing is an art extensively practiced and mastered by the Unicorn Clan. In this process, blobs of molten glass are gathered on the ends of hollow metallic rods. Air is blown into the rod to fill the glass blob with air and expand it. The glass hardens as it cools, resulting in a hollow shape. The glass blower uses many tools and a marble table to shape the glass as it is blown, cut the resulting bulb from the tube, and sculpt the mouth of the vessel to the desired shape. It is a difficult and time-consuming process that requires much effort to master. The glass must be blown in a specific way in order to encourage elasticity; an untrained person attempting to blow glass is likely to injure himself or others.

Glass made for blowing is prepared differently than glass made for casting and sculpting. The mixture must have a different balance of ingredients or the



resulting molten glass will not be hardy enough to withstand blowing. Blowing must be done between 1400 and 1800 degrees Fahrenheit, and often the object must be returned to the furnace in order to reheat it to the desired temperature. Furthermore, the glass must be cooled slowly over the course of days in a separate furnace, or it will crack as it cools.

Due to the great skill, time, and resources required to make blown-glass vessels, families that make use of such items often import them from the Unicorn. The Dragon, Phoenix, Mantis, and Crane also have a few native glassblowers, but even so they prefer to import Unicorn glass whenever possible. Thus glassblowing has become a source of wealth for the Unicorn in modern times.

GLASS CASTING

Casting is a process in which a mold is filled with molten glass and then slowly cooled over the course of days. The poured glass takes the form of the vessel in the same way as cast iron. While seemingly simpler than glassblowing, glass casting is actually a more complex process; the subsequent clipping and sanding process is very time consuming, and requires a steady hand. Thus, casting is normally reserved for larger pieces and cast glass is very rare.

Exceptions to this are the cast-glass objects made by the Agasha family. The Agasha and later the Tamori (albeit to a lesser extent) use the poured-glass method for all manner of containers and vessels. This is due to the appeal of using glass bottles for their alchemy work; such vials are far less reactive than metal and thus ideal for alchemical experiments.

Glass casting is also an alternative for artistic purposes. The Unicorn especially will make statues in this way, and many icons for Unicorn shrines are made of cast glass. The process of casting glass usually destroys the mold, which is made of sand or fine silt, but as long as an original exists for a model one can always make another mold.

GLASS SCULPTING

Sculpting glass is perhaps the most challenging application of all, if only because it is the most hands-on method of making glass art... and glass can be a very fickle material. Through this method, rods and pieces of glass are flame-worked in manner similar to metal, using a kiln, fire pit, and sculpting tools at a marble bench. Sections of the glass rods are heated until malleable, then carefully worked and shaped by the artist's tools.

The resulting sculptures can achieve a level of detail unrivaled by other methods. While such artwork is rarely larger than palm-sized, the delicate crystalline forms are considered the purest demonstration of a gurasuka's skill. Due to the extreme patience and intimate knowledge of glass-working required to make these sculptures, examples are very rare... and highly valued.



On the opposite end of the spectrum, glass beadmaking is perhaps the most common glass sculpting in the Empire. Most prayer beads are made from wood, stone, or precious gems. However, the prayer beads of the Moto are most commonly made of glass (when they are not made of bone), and glass beads very briefly came into general fashion around the tenth century. Such beads are still popular among the modern Mantis, although they usually import unworked glass fragments to work into beads instead of fabricating the glass from scratch themselves.

Drawing glass beads, which involves forming a ball of glass around a tiny metal tube and then rolling the ball in sand to achieve a round shape, is one of the first skills gurasuka must learn. Glass prayer beads must be made in a specific, ritualistic way and then blessed in order to maintain their sacred nature.

The Fires of Inspiration: Poetry

The Rokugani as a people value balance, order, and structure in their lives and society. This is reflected in their poetry preferences. Rokugani poetry attempts to express that which cannot be easily conveyed in words, but also while adhering to specific and very strict literary conventions. Innovation and cleverness demonstrated within strict guidelines is valued in poetry, along with vividness of imagery combined with (and often in spite of) restraint and subtlety.

There are many different styles of poetry accepted in Rokugan, most of which follow such strict rules for composition. The most basic and well-known styles were discussed briefly in the L5R 4th Edition supplement





Emerald Empire (page 117); here we present a more complete account of Rokugani poetry in all its forms. Despite the tight rules of each poetry style there is a great deal of variance between them, and the ability to compose a poem spontaneously and with earnest emotion is actually supported by the conventions of the art. In the forms that most encourage this can be found the essence of Fire's positive, creative aspect: intelligence and cleverness wreathed in the embers of creation.

TANKA (SHORT POEMS)

The convention of *tanka* is one of the oldest forms of poetry in the Empire. It is often considered the mother of all poetry forms, not only for its age but because it spawned the later conventions of *haiku* and *renga*. The richness of *tanka* could be explored for entire volumes; the most basic and literal understandings of the form are expressed here.

The *tanka* is a deceptively simple poem with a striking or complex meaning. It consists of five "units," each represented on a separate line on paper. The first three units are the "upper half" and the last two are the "completion" or "lower half." Each unit is a complete or partial statement, consisting of a specific number of total syllables (more accurately, *mora*) on each line. In addition, the number of syllables/*mora* on each line must match the number of symbols to represent them; this makes writing valid *tanka* in standard Rokugani kanji especially challenging. Certain Clan ciphers, such as those of the Crane, Phoenix, or Scorpion, naturally lend themselves towards *tanka* because their words are explicitly divided into *mora*, making the writing of such poetry easier. However, masters of the art form write almost exclusively in standard kanji.

The first line of a *tanka* consists of five *mora*. The second consists of seven. The third consists of five again, and the last two both consist of seven each. Thus the form is rendered in shorthand as 5-7-5-7-7. In addition to this, *tanka* must also follow other specific conventions. A *tanka* must divide its statement in the first and second halves; the first half should conjure a specific metaphor or image, and the couplet should either complete the metaphor or make a statement about the point of the first half. In some conventions, the couplet may explicitly contradict the metaphor to make the opposite point; this is a well-known aspect of Scorpion poetry in particular.

In spite of these strict guidelines, *tanka* can be surprisingly varied and rich. Additional conventions of the form vary from province to province, constantly evolving and influencing one another as preferences and language organically change to suit the times. New conventions for *tanka* often sprout during courtly seasons and poetry competitions, and the form is often considered to be the answer to the ancient riddle: "What flowers in winter?"

One convention of *tanka* is the incorporation of *makurakotoba*, or "pillow-words." Pillow-words are essentially epithets used at the start of the poem to set a tone and "introduce" the subject of the poem. Often taking the form of a pun or a succinct metaphor, these pillow-words grant some insight into the true nature of the subject through calling it by a different name. In some conventions, the actual subject of the *tanka* is never objectively revealed. Instead, it is described exclusively by *makurakotoba*, requiring the reader or audience to guess what the subject is. This is a common Phoenix and Crane convention, and guessing the subject of such "riddles" forms an amusing courtly game. It is also a common Scorpion convention, although for different reasons.

Another famous convention is the incorporation of the *honkadori*, which is a specific type of allusion. Simply put, the *honkadori* is a phrase alluding to or directly quoting an existing older poem. The intention is threefold: to re-interpret a famous or poetic line by casting it in a different light, to demonstrate knowledge and intimacy with literature, and to honor authors or ancestors who inspire the poet. In some cases, the *honkadori* can be a famous quote from an ancestor or a line taken from a death poem, as is common among Lion. New or less-educated readers of the *tanka* likely do not recognize the *honkadori*, believing it to be an original line, while worldly or better-educated readers can identify the line's origin, winning esteem and the admiration of the poet.

In the early centuries of the Empire, the *tanka* dominated as the primary poetic form. In later centuries, it was supplanted in popularity by more spontaneous poetry conventions, such as *haiku*. However, the *tanka*



is still very common in modern times. For example, it is customary for courtiers to exchange letters written in poetry instead of prose, and the *tanka* is the traditional and preferred method for this. It is especially useful to incorporate the *makurakotoba* convention into these exchanges so as to obscure the letter's meaning in case it is intercepted. This is often the case with letters between lovers, which can appear as simple and harmless poetry when one does not suspect the passionate double-meanings.

Tanka are also commonly encountered on ancient grave markers. Before the Imperial decree dictating cremation of all bodies, it was common to lay the dead to rest in tombs marked by such stones. As time passed, simple stone markers denoting where a samurai had fallen came into favor. A *tanka* elevating the dead would be inscribed on this marker, usually describing what the fallen samurai had accomplished in his life. Sometimes the marker would display his death poem. After cremation became Imperial Law, these grave markers became less common, but the convention to mark the place of a samurai's death still endures, and so too do these *tanka no haka*, memorializing samurai lives.

RENGA (LINKED VERSES)

Growing from the *tanka* style, *renga* are collaborative poems created by two or more poets. They can vary in length from a single stanza to a string of "linked verses" and usually either revolve around a single subject or tell a simple story.

Renga stanzas are essentially the same as *tanka* except for being crafted by two poets rather than one. The *tanka* stanza is divided into upper and lower halves, with one poet beginning the stanza with the creation of the top half (5-7-5) and the other poet completing the poem with the bottom half (7-7). In fact, it was the practice of *renga* that gave birth to the *haiku* convention, as poets would publish the start of a *renga* and purposefully leave it incomplete, waiting for another poet to finish it.

Because of these similarities, *renga* and *tanka* also share similar conventions. However, the nature of *renga* lends itself to more elaborate expression and thus to many unique aspects not found in other forms of poetry. For one, *renga* are often longer. A *renga* can be a string of two or sometimes many more *tanka*, all centered around the same subject. Entire books are sometimes written in this way, each page forming a single *renga*. Many *renga*, however, consist of just one stanza. These are essentially identical to *tanka* except to those who know how to spot the subtle difference in tone denoting two authors.

The defining convention of the *renga* is called "*tsukeai*," or "linking." It is the practice of connecting one string of verse to another to form a cohesive poem. However, the goal is not simply to continue the passage or elaborate on the prior section. Rather, it is to continue the image in unexpected, creative, and often surreal ways. The second poet may choose to "link" his stanza to a minor aspect of the previous part, sometimes literally by repeating the image, sometimes metaphorically by

GAMING VERSUS REALITY: SYLLABLES AND MORA

Common belief is that lines of *haiku* and *tanka* must conform to a set number of syllables or mora. This is a simplification for the sake of writing such poetry in other languages where a mora is equivalent to a syllable. However, true *haiku* conform to a set number of mora per line, not syllables as such. Thus a real Japanese *haiku* may not seem to conform to the "rules" of *haiku* poetry. Players who are not skilled at improvising poetry but who are playing characters who are so skilled can take advantage of this fact by "pretending" their poetry conforms to Rokugani standards... even if it technically does not.

shifting the subject to something similar. The first half could feature the stillness of a pond with a leaf floating on its surface, while the second half could shift focus to the leaf instead of the pond. The third part might speak of the reflection of the leaf, mentioning the word "ripples," which the next stanza might repeat into an altogether different image like the rippling of wind-tossed branches. Often, a completed *renga* may seem like a slightly bizarre stream-of-consciousness work, with the literal subject seemingly changing from one stanza to the next, rotating between sensations and senses, yet ultimately revolving around a single theme. The ability to create such links organically and spontaneously,





JO-HA-KYU

One aspect of Fire in Rokugani poetry and prose is exemplified in the concept of “literary movement” or tempo. The idea is that in music, theatre, storytelling, dance, and all other expressive forms of art, the action, movement, and tempo should begin slowly, speed up, and then end abruptly. This style is expressed in the phrase “*jo-ha-kyu*,” which means, “beginning, rapid, break.”

This concept is applied to virtually every art where movement or pace is involved. In music, songs will begin softly and slowly, with a gradually increasing tempo cumulating in urgency until they abruptly stop. Storytelling incorporating this concept will begin slowly, creating a specific atmosphere, with the action picking up throughout the second half and culminating in an abrupt but satisfying ending.

Some believe there is no art form where *jo-ha-kyu*, the natural heartbeat of the universe, cannot be incorporated. It is even inherent in the art of *iaijutsu*, with its still beginning, the two duelists staring one another down, then the gradual ramp of tempo as they focus and look for openings, culminating in the violent spring forward and the abrupt end: the sword’s flash and the fallen opponent. Just as a gentle ember grows into a vast all-consuming pyre and then is abruptly extinguished, so is the proper way of human expression as understood by *jo-ha-kyu*.



while maintaining a consistent atmosphere and sense of meaning, is the mark of an exceptionally skilled poet. It is said one must comprehend the inherent links between all things in order to master this art.

SHIKIMOKU (RENGA CONTESTS)

Normally, *renga* are composed collaboratively by like-minded poets, or as a game in an exchange of letters. However, the impromptu nature of the *renga* also lends itself to courtly contests, known as *shikimoku*. The purpose of such contests is not to create a coherent poem (in fact, the resulting stanzas rarely make narrative sense), but rather to determine which poet is the better wordsmith. The winner is judged on who creates more vivid imagery, improvises more fluidly, and creates superior links from one stanza to the next.

In such contests, the chosen judge begins by choosing a theme for the opening stanza. The resulting poem is expected to at least relate to this theme in some way, but this expectation is generally relaxed after the first two stanzas. The first poet to act is usually the younger and less experienced of the competitors, and his first stanza is composed of three lines that must conform to the *haiku* style and conventions. The second stanza is then taken on by the older or more accomplished poet; it is a position of honor to compose this section, which

converts the opening *haiku* into a *tanka* by adding two seven-mora lines. If there is a third competitor, he composes a third stanza which takes the form of another *haiku*. Otherwise, the challenger takes this role again. The contest continues alternating between poets in this way until the poem reaches the desired length, typically 36 total stanzas (18 total links), with the final stanza expected to relate somehow to the opening *haiku*.

There are two additional rules to this contest that increase the challenge: no participant may re-use a specific image in their contribution (thus leading to creative metaphors referring to earlier images), and no participant may use a pre-prepared stanza. Another common convention is the practice of *wakiokori*, in which the first stanza of the *renga* is a well-known *haiku* by a famous poet, chosen by the judge or host. The honored contestant then makes an original link to the famous poem by completing it with a couplet, and the contest continues from there as normal. There are many other such variants on *shikimoku*, and additional rules are usually added by the hosts of the courts where they contests take place. At the Imperial Winter Court, the theme of the opening stanza is traditionally chosen by the Imperial spouse, and the contest includes up to three contestants from each clan.

HAIKU

*“Eyes are truly hands
The cherry blossom scatters
When you stare at me”*

-Suzume Heijiko

The most common, famous, and celebrated of Rokugan’s poetry forms is the *haiku*, praised as the purest demonstration of a poet’s ability. The simple structure of a *haiku* can contain extremely complex ideas and notions, expressing all manner of emotion and inherent truths. Like the *tanka*, the *haiku* could easily be the subject of an entire dissertation; this section attempts to present only the basics, and thus merely scratches the surface of this deceptively difficult art form.

The *haiku* has its origins in both the *tanka* and the *renga*. Early in the Empire’s history, it became a common game for one poet to begin a *tanka* and for another to complete it. The first three lines of the *tanka*, known as the *hokku*, were seen as extremely important, because they contained the original imagery and set the tone for the entire poem. The game became so popular that poets began to compose prepared *hokku* specifically for such games, offering the same three lines to different people to complete. Poetry sensei took up this practice as well, offering the *hokku* for students to complete. With time, the composition of *hokku* became venerated as an art into itself.

However, it was not until several centuries had passed that *hokku* and other poems shorter than five lines became appreciated as anything other than frivolous verse or practice. During an era in which poetry was especially popular, it became common for poets to

publish entire collections of *hokku* for other aspiring poets and authors to complete. Due to the skill and elegance of the lines presented, critics and laymen alike could appreciate these *hokku* as they were without the need for completion. It was in this climate that some poets began to compose *hokku* without the intention of their ever being completed. This new style of poetry shook the foundations of the art and challenged the conventions adhered to by classical poets. (Some accounts credit this new style to the legendary ronin poet Rezan, but in reality the emergence of *haiku* occurred long before he was born.) The new poets named their style by simply altering the existing term for “incomplete” three-line verses. Thus these “complete” *hokku* became known as *haiku*. This soon became the predominant style, developing into a form independent from the conventions of *hokku*, with its own set of rules and nuances.

The *haiku* is essentially composed solely of the opening three lines of the *tanka*. The first line consists of five mora, the second consists of seven, and the final line consists of five mora once again. (5-7-5.) Within this simple composition lies a great deal of deceptive complexity and richness, partially due to other conventions expected of the form.

One particular convention is that a *haiku* is expected to contain what is known as a “cutting” element. This is called the *kiru*, and in many ways it can be compared to the ironic “twist” at the end of a sonnet. The *kiru* presents two images or ideas that seemingly contradict one another, which are contrasted or sometimes ironically linked by the author. It can be presented in one line and then elaborated in the following two, or presented over the course of the entire poem. How these images are juxtaposed is one of the more creative and interesting aspects of the *haiku* style.

Usually, the images are separated by a “cutting word,” known as a *kireji*. Though difficult to define, *kireji* are words used as exclamations or, more commonly, as an emphasis accomplished through the abrupt pronunciation of the word. A *haiku* is not considered to be a true *haiku* unless it contains one of these cutting words, either separating the contrasting images that make up the *kiru*, or as the final word of the poem itself, lending a sense of abrupt closure.

A *haiku* must also contain a *kigo*, or “seasonal word,” which relates it to one of the four seasons. The relation of the poem to the season need not be obvious; indeed, the incorporation of subtlety in the *kigo* is often praised. Incorporation of such seasonal words can be tricky business for composers of *haiku*, often depending on which courts they are attending. For instance, in the lands of the Crane, the wisteria flower is associated with summer, and as such, the use of the flower in a *haiku* would fit the role of the *kigo* in the poem. However, on the Mantis isles, wisterias bloom year-round; thus they are not associated with any particular season and would not be suitable as a seasonal word. Many *haiku*, there-



fore, have regional barriers. A wise courtier will temper his impromptu poetry to suit how the seasons manifest themselves in whichever region he currently resides.

The *kigo* can also take a more personal form, as it frequently does in love poetry. Just as seasonal associations vary between provinces, so too do they vary between individuals. A skilled poet may choose to conceal the *kigo* as a word that only invokes the seasons to a specific reader, leaving all other readers to guess what the *kigo* is and who the poem is intended for.

As a token of respect to the Emerald Throne, most *haiku* collections published before the twelfth century base their *kigo* on the seasons as they are perceived at Otosan Uchi, the Imperial City. Books containing standardized *kigo* were commonly sold there until the city fell in 1159.

UNICORN TRAVEL POETRY

*“Better to have wisdom
Best to have weight,
In the desolate desert,
A poor, strong man
A prosperous, sickly man,
Under the heat and fire, how do they fare?”*

-Weight and Wisdom, Ide Ludan

One of the most unique styles of poetry within the Empire is also considered one of the most uncouth, but only due to the perceived strangeness of the form when compared to more traditional conventions. Known as “travel poetry” and practiced almost exclusively by the Unicorn, the style is a vast departure from the norms of the greater Empire, even as certain aspects of other Rokugani poetry find their ways into it. Many poets who study the Unicorn Clan’s travel poetry find it to be unexpectedly accessible, yet it is rarely viewed with the same esteem as other styles.

Travel poetry is the result of a constantly evolving creative culture, the culmination of the Ki-Rin Clan’s time as nomads wandering the lands beyond the Empire.



IKI

An aesthetic ideal that can be linked to Fire is the concept of “*Iki*,” one of the most important and valued aspects of Rokugani art. Many believe that without the incorporation of *Iki*, an object or mode of expression cannot qualify as art in the first place. *Iki* is the difference between crafting and art, the thing that separates the scribe from the calligrapher, testimony from storytelling, the work of the common blacksmith from the brilliance of the samurai sword-artisan. It is the thing not found in nature, the ephemeral value of aesthetic form over function. *Iki* is the spontaneous, the simple, the emotional, the honest. It is the injection of humanity into art.

Scholars argue over specifics of the concept, and the full essence of the *Iki* concept could fill a book on its own. For the simplest purposes, *Iki* is an expression that is both spontaneous, unaware, and in most cases unabashed. It expresses the belief that true art comes from spontaneous creation; overly-planned, calculated, and deliberate efforts cannot encapsulate the human condition or honest expression. Art cannot come from trying; one must simply be, in that moment, and express without social or conscious filters. True glimpses into human nature can only be found in the spark, the very moment of inspiration and action, with no hesitation between them. This is human insight in its most unabashed and purest form. Those who champion *Iki* are always sure to incorporate some spontaneous aspect into their art, be it a sudden flourish to their calligraphy, a spontaneously created metaphor in their poetry, or even an original, unpracticed pattern worked into the hilt of their blade.

Not all Rokugani embrace the *Iki* philosophy. Practical-minded samurai, especially those who live away from cities, criticize *Iki*-based art as lazy. In a culture where imitating the ways of one’s ancestors is exalted, the stoic adherence to existing conventions (more in line with the “Earth” aspect of art) is often prized above anything too original or personal. Samurai, and especially courtiers, are taught to be self-conscious at all times and thus many reject the notion of *Iki* in favor of art that is more deliberate and practiced (more in line with the element of Air.) Even those who prefer the aesthetic of *wabi-sabi*, or aesthetic imperfection, may eschew *Iki* as too materially concerned and overly simplistic (*wabi-sabi* being a more Water-attuned art style). Even so, *Iki* aesthetics are still studied by many art students, and more than one poet has exalted the concept. Whenever a samurai gives a spontaneous *haiku*, expressing by metaphor what cannot be plainly stated, he is in some measure exemplifying *Iki*.

The tone of such poetry is light and often humorous, but always with the undercurrent of a deeper observation or poignant lesson. The poetry is more relaxed than other forms, not caring about syllables, mora, rhythm, or even the number of lines in a verse (although six total lines is usually preferred).

Instead, the style focuses on alliteration. The first two lines of the poem contain alliterations between them, typically between each word. The third line alliterates within itself. This pattern repeats for the final three lines of the poem. The topic is the subject of the first five lines, with the final line summarizing the entire poem. Within these simple guidelines, spontaneous composition and memorization is encouraged by the repeating sounds of the alliterative words.

However, there are a few conventions borrowed from more common poetry. Like other Rokugani forms, travel poetry incorporates *kigo*, although with a generally more relaxed implementation, stipulating the inclusion of nature imagery as opposed to that connected to the seasons. There is also the use of “cutting words,” usually reserved for the final line. In some variants, the poem will contain a *kiru* in the final line that contradicts the first five lines of the poem or offers an unexpected and ironic insight, often for comedic effect.

There are also distinct styles within travel poetry, testifying to the versatility of the art form. The most well-known of these is the “death poem.” In this style, the final line contains no alliteration and ends abruptly, simulating the unexpected nature of death itself.

JISEI (DEATH POETRY)

“*Had I not known
that I was dead
already
I would have mourned
the loss of my life*”
-Akodo Dokan

It is customary in Rokugan for a samurai facing death to record his final thoughts in the form of a poem. Normally composed either on one’s deathbed or just before *seppuku*, the “*jisei*” records the emotional state of the samurai just before he leaves the mortal world. It is the last thing a samurai can express before he is silenced altogether. This glimpse of insight into the mind of the condemned or dying is one of the most profound art forms in the Empire. A samurai’s *jisei* is always highly valued and respected.

The forms of *jisei* are as varied as the samurai of Rokugan. The norm is to compose a *tanka*, but this is not a uniform tradition. Some choose to compose only four lines, four being a number associated with death, signifying the author has accepted his fate. *Haiku* are occasionally used for especially deep and emotional confessions. In ancient times, a dying samurai would signify he wished to be avenged by composing a *hokku* instead of a finished poem; the implication being that his life, like his death poem, was left unfinished.

Since the creation of one's death poem can only be done once in a lifetime, it is considered a sacred and deeply significant event to a samurai. Even hated enemies are granted the opportunity to share their final thoughts in the spontaneous creation of poetry. Some samurai prepare for the event their entire lives, consulting their sensei for years and keeping records of their deeper thoughts to draw upon when the time comes. It is not unheard of for samurai to practice writing *jisei* by composing an impromptu *tanka* after a long period of meditation, when they are most aware and centered. In some cases, samurai may even compose their *jisei* ahead of battles in case they are killed in combat, so their poems can be discovered on their bodies. The Lion, however, reject this practice, believing that to compose a death poem in advance is to assure one's own defeat.

Even death poems are still subject to artistic conventions. It is more acceptable for a death poem to take a quiet, unemotional, and honest tone, speaking in metaphors for emotional states or observations that are not easily explained. It is distasteful to explicitly mention death or the act of dying in such poems, but death can be alluded to with clever imagery. The content of the poem should be whatever is on the samurai's mind at the time it is composed. Many feel the sin of Regret at the end of their lives, and as such their poetry may attempt to atone for a mistake or will allude to some confession of wrongdoing. However, most simply reflect on the consequences of their own lives, and the resulting poetry may contain an illumination that can only be seen by one who is about to die.

Creatures and Otherworldly Beings of Fire

There are a variety of creatures, both mundane and otherworldly, associated with each of the Elements. However, other than Void, Fire is the Element with the fewest such creatures associated with it. Beings of intelligence, passion, and power are seen as connected to Fire, as well as those creatures whose Elemental balances are overwhelmingly comprised of that Element. The most significant of those entities are discussed here.

Fortunes and Celestial Beings Associated with Fire

AMATERASU

The mother of the first Emperor, the other Kami, and indirectly of all humankind, Amaterasu is the Sun itself; her name means "shining in Heaven." For the first thousand years of the Empire's history, Amaterasu is venerated and worshipped everywhere as the goddess of the Sun and the greatest of the Thousand Fortunes (this finally ended with her death and replacement in the year 1132). It is easy to see why the Sun would be associated with Fire; its warmth and light make it possible for the lands to flourish and provide a weapon against darkness. Amaterasu is seen as a life-giving and merciful goddess, but she is also powerful, capable of taking life away in a blast of purifying fire.





THE JADE DRAGON

Originally more associated with Earth rather than Fire, the Jade Dragon became the new Sun in the year 1170. Known as the Jade Sun, she is a Fortune of purity, righteousness, and law, the embodiment of both the old Amaterasu's light and the moral and spiritual force of Jade.

HOFUKUSHU, FORTUNE OF VENGEANCE

The eldest of Rokugan's two Fortunes of Vengeance, Hofukushu represents the darkest and most wrathful aspects of personal vengeance and punishment. One does not pray to Hofukushu asking for retribution for a slight; one prays to him asking for revenge. His is not the cold, unrelenting vengeance of law represented by Yoza, but rather the searing heat of rage in a man's eyes as he draws his sword against a sworn foe. Although he is an obscure and minor Fortune, Hofukushu is powerful, for vengeance is itself a powerful force, strong enough to overcome even the calling of death. There are many in the Empire who burn incense to this Fortune, seeking vengeance against those who have wronged them, but few dare to even whisper his name. After all, who can claim to be completely innocent?

FUKUROKUJIN, FORTUNE OF WISDOM AND MERCY

Although clarity and mercy are associated with Water, intelligence and insight are associated with Fire. Thus, the Fortune of Wisdom and Mercy is associated with Fire as well as with Water. The wisdom of Fukurokujin is often likened to the flames within a lantern, casting light on all objects around it. Offerings to the Fortune of Wisdom are often placed within a paper lantern and fed to its candle-flame. That the Fortune is understood to be of warm disposition may be no coincidence.

OSANO-WO, FORTUNE OF FIRE AND THUNDER

The second son of the Kami Hida is sometimes associated with Air, due to his connections to storms and thunder. However, as a Fortune of fire, lightning, and Heavenly justice he is more strongly associated with Fire. In fact, lightning is commonly referred to as "Heavenly Fire" by the heimin, and the purity of *rakurai* ("falling lightning") is said to burn away that which is impure, leaving only ashes.

TENJIN, FORTUNE OF WRITING, STORIES, AND SECRETS

Few commoners understand why the Fortune of Writing and Stories would be associated with the Element of Fire, but for shugenja and others who understand the ways of Heaven, it is obvious: Fire is the Element of intellect and inspiration as well as destruction, and these gifts are always needed by storytellers, writers, and poets. Tenjin's connection to the Fire Element also explains an unusual aspect of his worship; for an offering to Tenjin, one is traditionally required to write down a secret and then burn it before the icon of his shrine.

TSUKUNE, FORTUNE OF REBIRTH

Fire is an element closely associated with the mystical Phoenix and its Celestial principle of reincarnation. While many fixate on the destructive properties of Fire, there are healing properties there as well, and without destruction there can be no creation. Iron is reborn in the flames of the forge, and fire burns away dead leaves to make room for new growth. In light of this, it is hardly surprising that the Fortune of Rebirth, a former Phoenix Champion, is commonly associated with Fire.

UZUME, FORTUNE OF DANCING

While open displays of passion are unbecoming of samurai, there are situations where it can be acceptable to move and be moved by what is seen. Fire is an element of passion, the heat of raw emotion, and such is often realized by dance. Even the most calculating orderly dances of the courts contain the Element of Fire; while its power can be controlled, it cannot be suppressed. The Fortune Uzume encompasses this association, and at peasant revels he is called upon to invoke the true frenzy of the flame.

THE DRAGON OF FIRE

A symbol of change and power, of rebirth and destruction, the Elemental Dragon of Fire is by far the most frequently-depicted of the Elemental Dragons. Drawn to Ningen-do by its state of constant shift and change, the Fire Dragon watches over the sights of great battles, watches duels between legendary warriors, and is always present where destruction and fury shapes the face of the land. Usually invisible to human eyes, its visual appearance is said to herald a time of transition and a shifting of the age.

RYU OF FIRE

Ryu are the dragon spirits of Tengoku, described in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*, pages 253-254. The Ryu of Fire serve the Fire Dragon specifically and inherit much of his fiery nature. Besides being able to fly and change shape at will, Ryu of Fire can command the movement and strength of nearby flames, and can even breathe flame through their nostrils.

Supernatural Beings Associated with Fire

BAKENEKO

Bakeneko, discussed in *Enemies of the Empire* on page 250, are shapeshifting spirits connected to both Sakkaku and Chikushudo. They outwardly resemble ordinary cats, and indeed many began their lives as such. A house cat that lives beyond its normal lifespan will gain an intelligent, amused gleam in his eye, and if his age surpasses 100 years his tail will grow long, sometimes even forking in two. The cat will observe human behavior with great amusement, often playing tricks on mortals to see what

they do. Rarely malicious, Bakeneko nevertheless tend to torment mortals, hiding behind the guise of an ordinary house cat. Highly attuned to Fire, Bakeneko are agile, intelligent, cunning, and can even summon ghostly balls of flame when threatened. They are also known to drink lamp oil, and it is said this is a certain giveaway that an ordinary cat is actually a shapeshifting animal spirit. Interestingly, although mundane cats can potentially become Bakeneko under the right circumstances, they are associated with Water, not Fire.

BASAN

The Basan are odd denizens of Chikushudo, sometimes referred to as “mountain roosters” since they live primarily in mountainous regions, or as *Basa-basa*, an onomatopoeic name mimicking their distinct call. Basan resemble little more than oversized roosters, except their plumage is especially vibrant, able to glow like a sunset or darken to pitch black. Standing almost three feet tall, the creatures are known to breathe blue or green flames, but these flames do not burn unless the creature is angered or frightened. Purely nocturnal, the Basan are notorious for keeping entire villages awake with their noise, but because they are so quick and can darken their plumage at will, they are rarely actually seen. Basan are believed to be semi-intelligent, and some think they are actually lonely creatures, their calls echoing through mountains and forests in search of someone who will not be angered by their appearance.

ELEMENTAL TERROR OF FIRE, GREATER (TAKI-BI NO ONI)

The Taki-bi no Oni resembles a woman of otherworldly beauty whose body is made entirely of intense green fire. A powerful and straightforward demon, the Greater Elemental Terror of Fire can fly, hurls balls of flame, and controls the path and intensity of mundane flames around it. It burns so hot that those who merely approach suffer burns and heat stroke. The demon takes special delight in inflicting burns on mortals, as well as in incinerating temples and burning important documents. Unlike the other Elemental Terrors, the Taki-bi no Oni rarely focuses its own attacks or remains for long in any one place; instead, it simply unleashes its power and then moves on, leaving behind a vast flaming wasteland of destruction.

ELEMENTAL TERROR OF FIRE, LESSER (MOETECHI NO ONI)

The Moetechi no Oni are less powerful than their Greater Terror counterparts, but still quite deadly. Appearing as small wisps of flame that retain a vaguely humanoid shape, they are incorporeal and can pass through solid barriers easily. Their flames, however, are very real, and everything they pass through is afflicted with intense heat and fire. Malicious and lacking any hesitation or remorse, they revel in pure destruction, with no method or purpose to the chaos they inflict.

FURARIBI

The Rokugani believe the human soul can be perceived as a small ball of flame that sits in the belly. Some claim to have seen this otherworldly spark leave the body when someone dies of sickness or age; this has led to the practice of keeping the windows open in a house where someone is close to death, so the soul does not get accidentally trapped in the house. However, it is possible for these souls to become trapped in the mortal world by other means, such as being accidentally blocked by spirit wards; when this happens, they become known as Furaribi, their name literally meaning “aimless flame.” They appear as floating balls of purple fire that drag long tails of light as they move. They tend to linger in places where their bodies died, retaining some residual spark of the personalities they had in life. Some are said to play pranks on travelers; if they were the victim of poison or murder, they may attempt to lure others to their deaths. If one touches a Furaribi, the fires do not burn the body, but they do burn the spirit. The victim will gradually waste away and die of illness, his own soul drawn to the Furaribi that touched it. Some say a Furaribi grows larger and stronger with each soul it touches, but sightings of these beings are so rare it is difficult to say what is true and what is only rumor. Most shugenja believe the Furaribi is not truly the soul of a dead person, but merely a sort of lingering after-image of that soul, a fragment occasionally left behind when the true soul travels on to Meido.

FUSHICHO (PHOENIX)

The Fushicho, massive birds formed of pure fire, are described in detail in *Enemies of the Empire*, page 254. They are a rare sight outside of the Celestial Heavens, but are frequently depicted in tapestries, paintings, and sculpture since they are said to represent virtue, impetuosity, and grace. Their depictions grace the rooftops of temples and are also associated with weddings. Their fiery bodies and graceful flight also give them associations with shooting stars, and it is believed that any especially bright comet in the night sky is a Fushicho in flight.





HANNYA

Hannya, discussed in *Enemies of the Empire* on page 248, are insidious denizens of Jigoku that blend in with normal humans, appearing like them in almost every way. They are obsessed with games and competitions of art and performance, and do everything they can to outperform all others in dance, dueling, storytelling, or any other kind of art. When they are defeated or bested, the demonic nature of the Hannya is revealed, their searing-hot anger transforming them into a crimson, metallic, otherworldly form which destroys anything in its path.

KITSUNE SPIRITS

The famous Kitsune, shapeshifting fox spirits from the realm of Chikushudo, are described in detail in *Enemies of the Empire* on page 246. Mischievous, curious, quicksilver fast, and highly intelligent, Kitsune are in many ways attuned to the Element of Fire. In addition, Rokugani associate them with Fire because of Kitsune-bi, small balls of “foxfire” they can summon at will. Of all the animal spirits, the Kitsune are perhaps the most interested with human beings, often posing as humans, living among them, and even falling in love with them. However, no matter what shape they take, they cannot hide their tails; one who watches especially closely may catch a glimpse of the fox’s tail peeking out from under a kimono or hakama. Much like with bakeneko, it is believed a mundane fox can become a Kitsune spirit if it lives beyond its normal span, and at 100 years old a fox will grow a second tail, becoming a fox spirit.

WANYUDO

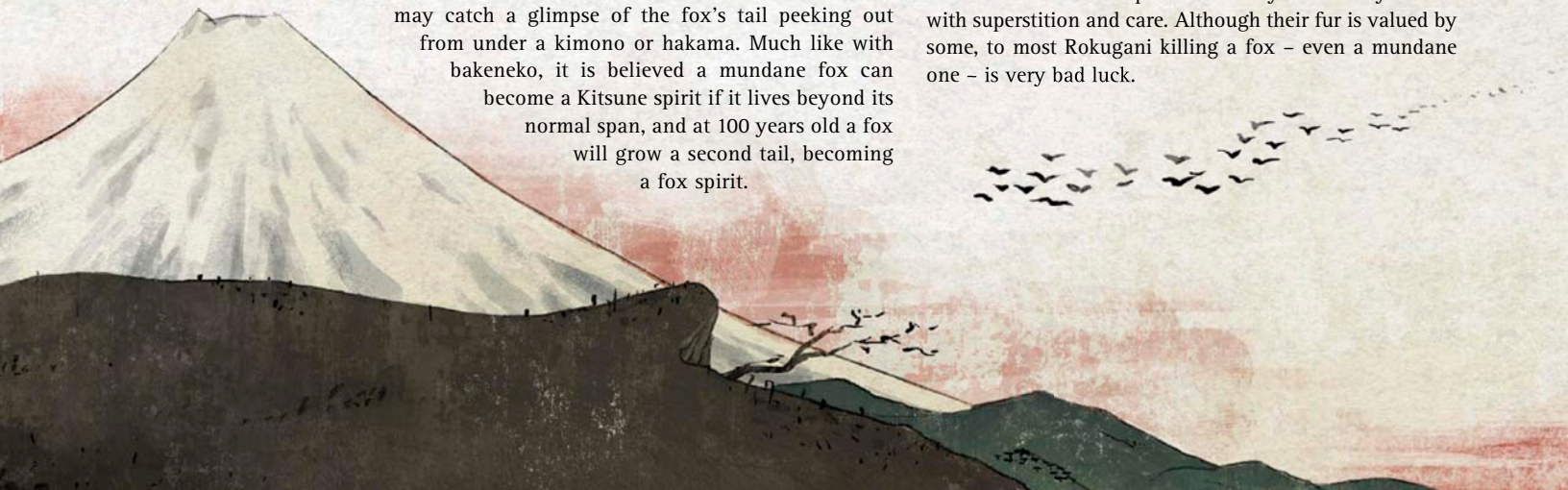
One of the stranger and more terrible of Jigoku’s denizens, the Wanyudo is the re-embodied form of a specific corrupted mortal soul – either a monk who disregarded his oaths, or a daimyo who treated his heimin subjects with especial cruelty. It takes the appearance of a decapitated head affixed to the hub of an oxcart-wheel, set ablaze with otherworldly fire. The eyes are burning and tormented, the face forever twisted into a terrifying grimace of pain and anguish.

Capable of flight, the Wanyudo turns on its axle as it moves and leaves trails of flame behind it. The face is not capable of speech, although it can emit a horrifying scream. Wanyudo are tormented by their state, but their hatred of the virtuous is even greater. If they so much as see a virtuous mortal, they hurl themselves wantonly at their foe, intent on crushing and burning them and continuing long after the victim has died and the body is nothing more than a heap of charred bones and ashes.

Mundane Creatures of Fire

Fox

Just as the Kitsune spirit is associated with Fire, so too is the mundane fox. Indeed, many Rokugani do not really differentiate between the two. All foxes, mundane or otherwise, are known to be the servants of Inari, Fortune of Rice. Some shugenja will even put food into letters to Inari and hang them from trees so foxes will snatch them and carry them back to their master. Foxes often live in close proximity to humans, but due to their associations with the spirit world they are usually treated with superstition and care. Although their fur is valued by some, to most Rokugani killing a fox – even a mundane one – is very bad luck.



NIGHT HERON

A nocturnal bird with black, brown, and white plumage, the night heron is a common bird in the forests of the Phoenix, Crane, and Unicorn lands. It prefers damp areas and is sometimes seen in swamps; the nights of the Shinomen Forest echo with its crow-like calls. Night herons are notorious for eating anything, and their diet includes insects, fish, frogs, crustaceans, and even rats and moles. They are associated with Fire due to a phenomenon known as *Aosaginohi* or "Blue-Heron Fire": it is said that in the light of a full moon, the night heron will glow a pale blue. In truth, this is not due to the heron itself, but rather the phosphorescent spores that adhere to its plumage while it is fishing. Even so, the cleverness of the bird and its swift flight attune it well with the Fire Element.

ROOSTER

In the first ten centuries of Rokugan's history, the rooster is considered to be a sacred animal; it is associated with Amaterasu, for it greets the sun at the dawning of every day with its cry, and with Fire for its fierceness when threatened. Some peasants believe the crowing of a rooster can banish *gaki* and other unsavory spirits. Shinseist monks consider roosters to be good luck and they are allowed to walk freely through temples and shrines. Indeed, some remote temples are virtually overrun with the animals, raised by the monks who live there.

Fire Awakened: Nemuranai of Fire

There are countless *nemuranai* (awakened artifacts) associated with the Element of Fire, but swords are among the most famous and prominent of them. The ancient Ancestral Swords of the seven original Great Clans are depicted in the individual clan chapters of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*, but there are many other famous swords, a selection of which are presented here. Naturally, there are also many other artifacts associated with Fire, usually because they are powerfully infused with the Fire kami or evoke the power of those kami in some way.

THE BLADE OF SECRETS

The Blade of Secrets is one of two legendary blades crafted by the swordsmith Kaiu Haru when his village came under attack from the forces of the Maw. (The other blade is the Blade of Truths.) Haru hoped to create blades which could defeat the demons of the Maw's army, but he died wielding the two swords and they were lost and forgotten. The Blade of Secrets was finally recovered by a Crane named Daidoji Anitano, who discovered it hidden in a patch of moss during a border skirmish with the Crab. From him it passed through many other hands, eventually finding its way to the Asahina for study.

The Blade of Secrets outwardly appears to be a normal (if fine quality) katana. The hilt and tsuba have the appearance of being made out of pure gold, and the hilt is ornately carved into the form of a duck. The Blade is an awakened *nemuranai* and thus has the ability to harm Invulnerable creatures, but the wielder pays an unknowing price for its power – the sword draws on its wielder's essence to strengthen itself. The bearer of the Blade of Secrets may call Raises and gain the benefits of those Raises without actually increasing the TN of his attack roll. However, each time he does this, the sword drains a Void Point from him. If he is out of Void Points, the sword drains a Rank of Earth instead. (The bearer will not realize his Void and Earth are being drained until he actually feels the effects.) Continued long enough this will, of course, result in the death of the wielder. However, the sword exerts a subtle influence on the mind, making its wielder extremely reluctant to give it up voluntarily – doing so requires a Willpower roll at TN 30.

THE BLADE OF TRUTHS

The companion to the Blade of Secrets is far more obscure, for those who bear it seldom live for long. Like the Blade of Secrets, the Blade of Truths was lost during the battle against the Maw's army, but has occasionally resurfaced since then, bringing ruin to whoever uses it.

The Blade of Truths has a gold-tipped hilt and its *tsuba* is of a most unusual design, forming intricate patterns around the steel of the blade. The *saya* is made of bronze, gold, and lacquered wood, decorated with strange and intricate patterns like no others found in the Empire.

Like its sister blade, the Blade of Truths is an awakened *nemuranai* that can affect Invulnerable creatures. Its damage dice explode on 9's as well as 10's on their initial roll, but anytime the wielder rolls two or more explosions on the same damage roll, the blade's curse is activated. Thereafter, any opponent of the sword's wielder will gain a +1k1 bonus to any damage rolls against him. The curse lasts until the wielder dies or he abandons the sword for at least a year – however, like the Blade of Secrets, the accursed Blade of Truths is a difficult weapon to give up (Willpower roll at TN 30).

THE BLOODSWORDS

There are no more feared (and desired) *nemuranai* in the history of Rokugan than the Bloodswords, created by the mad artisan Asahina Yajinden at the behest of his master, Iuchiban. Four such swords were completed, and each of them has wrecked terrible havoc throughout the land, causing deaths in the hundreds or even thousands and almost always bringing absolute ruin to their wielders. (The original creation of the Bloodswords and their impact on the Empire at that time is discussed in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Enemies of the Empire*, Chapter Two.) After such catastrophes the swords usually disappear, only to resurface again years or generations later. No Bloodsword has ever been permanently destroyed, although one (Ambition) was broken and then re-forged into a *wakizashi* rather than a katana.





The Bloodswords are self-aware and irredeemably evil objects, and they can communicate mentally with those who bear them, constantly trying to lure their wielders down the path of madness and slaughter. It is believed that Bloodswords consume the souls of those they slay, growing steadily more powerful the more souls they consume. Mechanically, all Bloodswords are 4k4 katana (save for Ambition, which is a 3k3 wakizashi) and have the ability to harm any foe, regardless of normal immunities – including supremely powerful entities such as Oracles and Dark Oracles. Each time a Bloodsword kills someone and consumes the victim's essence, it “banks” a Free Raise which its wielder may later use as he chooses.

AMBITION (YASHIN)

The Bloodsword Ambition has had more influence on the Empire's history than any other. The Scorpion Clan kept it secretly for hundreds of years, and in that time only three Clan Champions succumbed to its sinister song of treason and corruption. Two of them died within days of making use of the sword; the third was Bayushi Shoju, who launched the Scorpion Clan Coup and thus helped bring on the Clan Wars. At the end of the Coup, the sword was broken, but years later it was re-forged into a wakizashi. Ambition's curse is triggered any time its bearer interacts with someone who has lower Glory but higher Status; the bearer must succeed at a Willpower Roll against a TN of 25, or the will of the sword compels him to attack the individual instantly. However, the bearer also gains a continual +2k2 bonus to all Sincerity (Deceit) and Stealth Skill Rolls.

JUDGMENT (HANDAN)

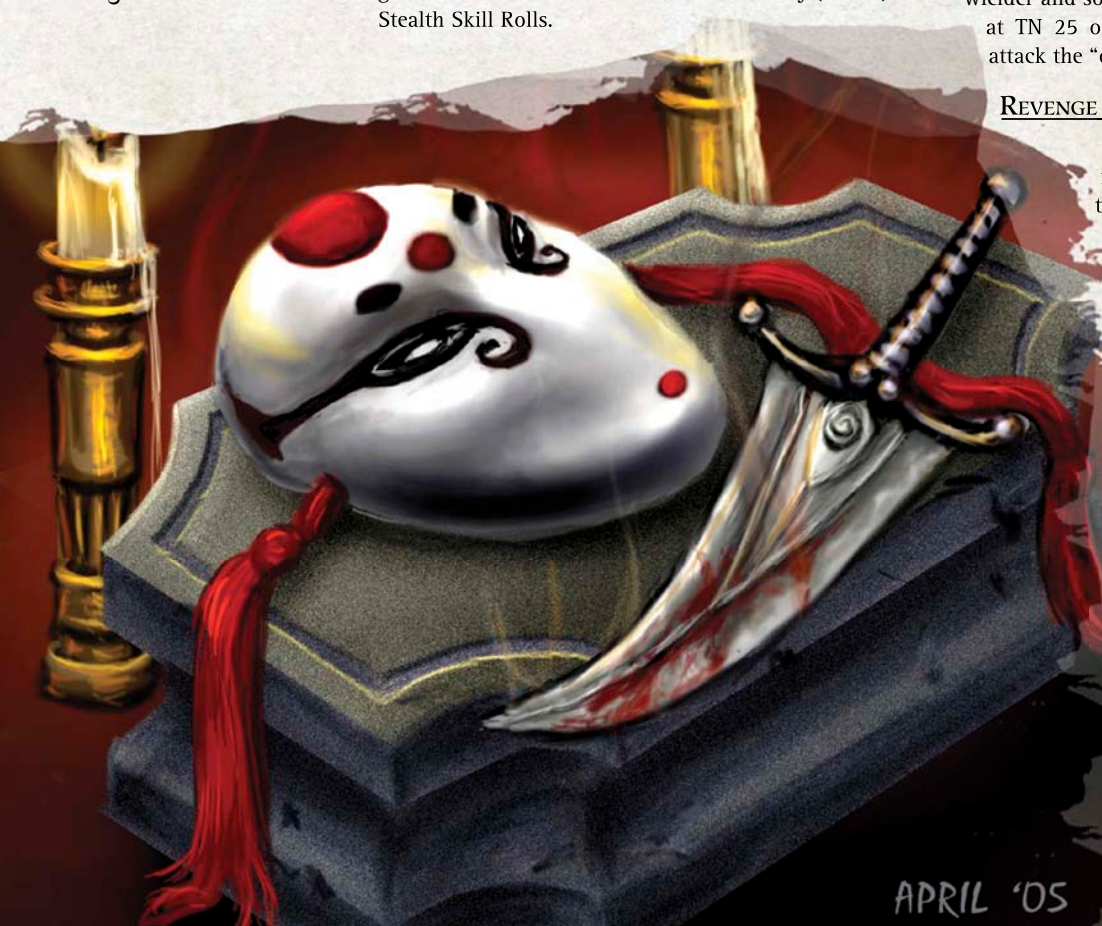
This sword was originally gifted to the Crab Champion, Hida Tenburo, a man known for his harshly judgmental character. The Bloodsword drove him to slaughter his entire family, finding them unworthy of the Hida name, then kill himself for the same reason. After that time the sword remained largely unnoticed by history (though it may have secretly emerged several times to wreck havoc) until the twelfth century, when the Phoenix shugenja Isawa Mizuhiko used it to hunt down and kill several of the Dark Oracles. Unfortunately, Mizuhiko himself was eventually consumed by the sword. Judgment allows its wielder to discern others' Honor Rank with a simple Perception roll at TN 20. However, Handan will sometimes lie and tell its wielder the target's Honor Rank is 1.0, regardless of their true Rank. Any time the sword's wielder believes someone has wronged him or failed to live up to the code of Bushido, he must roll Willpower Roll at TN 25. If he fails, the will of the sword compels him to attack that person. Judgment also grants a +2k0 bonus to all attack rolls made with it.

PASSION (JONETSU)

Of the four known Bloodswords, Passion has had the least perceptible impact on the Empire, since it was lost soon after it was forged and to the best of anyone's knowledge has never been recovered. Yajinden gifted this sword to his own lord, Doji Tanaka. The Crane Clan Champion proclaimed his love for a young geisha, murdered his wife and children, then hurled himself from a cliff into the sea, taking Passion with him. Passion grants a +1k0 bonus to all Kenjutsu rolls made with it, but any time another individual comes between the sword's wielder and something he desires, he must roll Willpower at TN 25 or the sword compels him to immediately attack the “obstacle” to his wishes.

REVENGE (FUKUSHU)

The most savage and destructive of the four known Bloodswords, Revenge drove the Lion Clan Champion to launch a disastrous invasion of the Dragon lands over a minor perceived slight. Although the blade disappeared after that, it seems to have remained active in the hands of various minor samurai, eventually resurfacing in the twelfth century in the hands of a disgraced Akodo samurai named Ginawa. The ronin eventually learned to resist the sword's sinister appeals and when he was reinstated to the Lion in his later years he gifted the sword to the Phoenix Clan for safekeeping. Revenge grants its owner the Combat Reflexes and Quick Advantages along with a +3k0 bonus to all Kenjutsu rolls made with it. However, if anyone slights or obstructs the sword's wielder, he must roll Willpower at TN 25 or attack that persona immediately.



THE CELESTIAL SWORDS

Toward the end of the War Against the Shadow, the Ancestral Swords of the Great Clans were carried away to the Celestial Heavens by Shinjo; her mother Amaterasu felt the clans were no longer worthy of wielding them. Two decades later, the legendary weaponsmith Tsi Xing Guo ascended to the heavens as the Fortune of Steel after the end of the War Against the Spirits. To show that the new Lord Sun and Lady Moon watched over the Great Clans, he created eight new swords out of the finest steel in the Spirit Realms, and these were gifted to the Champions of each of the clans.

All of the Celestial Swords are extremely powerful *nemuranai* and are considered to be both Jade and Crystal for the purpose of what opponents they can harm. Each sword also has its own unique properties, as outlined below.

CELESTIAL SWORD OF THE CRAB CLAN

Hida O-Ushi was the first to receive Yuruginai, the Celestial Crab sword, and though she carried it she generally preferred to use her dai tsuchi. Once her son Hida Kuroda took her place as Crab Clan Champion he proudly wielded this blade until it his death and the shattering of the sword during the attack in the Kaiu Wall by Daigotsu's forces. (This led some Kuni scholars to doubt the authenticity of the sword, since Tsi Xing Guo had asserted that all of the Celestial Swords were unbreakable.) Yuruginai was retrieved from the battle and given to a smith named Kaiu Tasuku, who reforged it into an even stronger blade. It has been used by every Crab Clan Champion since that time.

Yuruginai is much thicker than the other Celestial Swords, and its *tsuba* and hilt are intricately detailed. The original *saya* was lost when the blade was shattered; the new one bears jade inlays and blessed symbols, and their power ensures it is never in danger of losing its luster.

Mechanically, the Celestial Sword of the Crab is a 3k3 katana which gains a +3k0 bonus to attack and damage rolls against opponents with at least one Rank of the Shadowlands Taint. Moreover, it strengthens its wielder's connection to his own Earth, such that he is considered to have +1 Rank of Earth so long as he carries the blade.

CELESTIAL SWORD OF THE CRANE CLAN

Megumi is considered to be the most beautiful of the Celestial Swords, with a blade of pure white steel and a *tsuba* of gleaming ivory; the hilt wound with fine light blue silk. In fact, at first glance the sword-blade appears to be made of ice or crystal, a permanently polished blade which gleams with unbridled brilliance. The sword rings with a pure clear note when it is drawn by the Crane Clan Champion, much as the old Ancestral Crane sword did.

While Megumi is a potent weapon on the battlefield it also aids the wearer in courtly endeavors. Unfortunately, it shares its name with a Crane who brought shame to her clan, a woman named Daidoji Megumi. Her fall to the Taint means in modern times the name Megumi is considered unlucky, and some fear the sword itself has become ill-favored.



Mechanically, Megumi is a 3k3 katana whose keen edge and effortless motion enhances the wielder's abilities in iaijutsu duels. The wielder gains a +3k0 bonus to all Iaijutsu Skill rolls. In addition, the sword's light and airy spirit enhances the wielder's emotional sensitivity – he is considered to have +1 Rank of Awareness while he carries the blade.

CELESTIAL SWORD OF THE DRAGON CLAN

Of all of the Celestial Swords created by the Fortune of Steel, Suryn is the most shrouded in mystery. In fact, even its name is a mystery, a secret known only to the Clan Champion. When Tsu Xing Guo presented the blade to the Dragon Clan Champion Togashi Hoshi, he spoke with him alone about the sword, and afterward Hoshi revealed the sword's name to his son Satsu. Some years later, Satsu proclaimed the Fortune of Steel had also created a wakizashi in the Celestial Heavens to match Suryn and complete a daisho set. According to him, one day a great hero of the Dragon will find that blade and learn the name of the katana into the bargain; this will be a sign his destiny is to become the yojimbo to the Dragon Clan Champion.

Suryn is one of the more simply-designed of the Celestial Swords, with a utilitarian look and very little ornamentation beyond a dragon's head carved into the hilt and the image of a dragon in the metalwork of the *tsuba*. The hilt is wrapped in plain green silk.

Mechanically, the Celestial Sword of the Dragon is a 3k2 katana which seems to almost guide its wielder's hand to deflect enemy blows; so long as the sword is held and used in defense, the wielder gains a +20 bonus to his Armor TN. The sword also allows the wielder to see through any and all magical illusions so long as he carries it.

CELESTIAL SWORD OF THE LION CLAN

By far the most oft-used of the Celestial Swords is Shinrai, the sword of the Lion. In appearance it is almost as simple as the Celestial Sword of the Dragon, albeit with a slightly lighter blade. Its gold *tsuba* is engraved with a prowling lion and the hilt is wrapped in orange silks. Originally gifted to Kitsuo Motso, the Lion Clan Champion at the time, the blade saw little action until it passed on to Matsu Nimuro. Nimuro presented Shinrai to Emperor Toturi I in a recreation of past Lion tradition (during the





Hantei Dynasty the Ancestral Sword of the Lion was held by the Emperor unless the Empire needed the Lion to go to war). However, Toturi returned it, explaining he would accept it back only when the Empire was at peace. The sword has been wielded by every Lion Champion since then.

Shinrai is a 4k3 katana whose fierce spirit grants its wielder a +3k0 bonus to all Kenjutsu Skill rolls. In addition, if the sword is used against opponents of deficient Honor, it practically leaps forward in its eagerness to slay such unworthy foes. Against an opponent of Honor Rank 3.0 or less, the sword grants 2 Free Raises for the Extra Attack maneuver. However, the flip side of this is that the sword refuses to be wielded by those who are themselves of insufficient Honor – a character with an Honor Rank less than 4.0 will find that Shinrai functions for him like nothing more than an ordinary 3k2 katana with no special properties.

CELESTIAL SWORD OF THE MANTIS CLAN

The Mantis Celestial Sword, Nobori Raiu, is longer and has a more curved blade than its brethren. The katana has a tsuba and handle of ornately carved jade, with red gemstones embedded the hilt, and almost seems to hum with electricity. When Yoritomo Aramasu first received Nobori Raiu he claimed it must have been forged from lightning instead of steel, and those who have seen its wielder call down the Heavens against the foes of the Mantis have no problem believing this.

After Aramasu's death at the hands of the Scorpion, the sword was stolen by a servant who initially hoped to sell it before realizing being caught with the weapon would mean certain death. Years later, a Crane acquired the blade and gifted it to Clan Champion Yoritomo Kumiko. When she in turn died in the Battle of Broken Waves, many feared the sword would be lost forever, but it washed ashore and was returned to the Mantis Clan, where it has remained since. It may be noted that almost all Mantis Champions who have possessed the sword have preferred to fight with their kama, wearing the Celestial blade but seldom drawing it.

The Celestial Sword of the Mantis is a 3k3 katana which grants its wielder the ability to sense the upcoming weather for the next 24 hours. It is said that if the sword is wielded by the rightful Mantis Clan Champion (or by a direct descendent of Yoritomo, regardless of position), it

can be used to summon a powerful lightning bolt from the sky. This is a Complex Action, and the lightning bolt inflicts 6k6 damage on its target, who is also deafened and knocked Prone.

CELESTIAL SWORD OF THE PHOENIX CLAN

While for most of the Great Clans the loss of their Ancestral Swords was very upsetting, it was a matter of far greater concern for the Phoenix, since the Phoenix Clan Champion was chosen by the interaction between the Soul of Shiba and their Ancestral Sword, Ofushikai. Their new Celestial blade, Keitaku, was a noble weapon but did not share this property. It required the ascension of Shiba Tsukune to the Celestial Heavens as the Fortune of Rebirth to restore the link to the Soul of Shiba. For a time, Keitaku was carried by Tsukune's son Aikune, but after Aikune became linked to Isawa's Last Wish he passed the sword on to the new Clan Champion, Shiba Mirabu. Since Mirabu's death the sword has been enshrined in Shiro Shiba, though doubtless some future Champion will find a need for it once more.

The golden steel of Keitaku's blade burns with an inner fire that matches the power of the Phoenix Clan's spiritual icon. The hilt is wrapped in orange silk, with a tsuba carved with an intricately designed phoenix.

The Celestial Sword of the Phoenix is a 3k3 katana; as a Free Action, the wielder can call forth the spirits of Fire from the blade, causing it to be engulfed in bright flames. While in this state the sword gains a +2k2 bonus to damage. The sword also enhances its wielder's connection to the Void, granting him three bonus Void Points per day so long as he carries it.

CELESTIAL SWORD OF THE SCORPION CLAN

The most unassuming in appearance of all the Celestial Swords, Churetsu looks much like a common katana that could belong to any samurai. However, when it first came into Bayushi Yojiro's possession he recognized its true value, for the blade emitted a red glow that none but him could perceive. Yojiro wanted to ensure the sword's safety, so he had several duplicates made, storing them in a heavily guarded chamber in Kyuden Bayushi. Then he had the Yogo enchant the sword so that whenever its bearer was killed, the spirits would bear it back to that chamber. None but the Clan Champion know which sword is the real one, for only the Clan Champion can see the red glow of the awakened kami within the blade. The Champion sometimes bestows the blade on trusted agents to carry out important missions.

The ebony handle of Churetsu is carved in the form of a scorpion's tail, and the plain black tsuba carries no distinctive markings. The blade is purported to be able to cut through almost any substance.

The Celestial Sword of the Scorpion appears to be a mundane katana unless it is wielded by a loyal and true member of the Scorpion Clan. In the hands of a proper Scorpion, it is a 4k3 katana whose supernal speed grants the wielder a +2k2 bonus to his Initiative rolls. The sword's subtle and clever spirit also grants the wielder +1 Rank to his Awareness so long as he carries it.

CELESTIAL SWORD OF THE UNICORN CLAN

One of the more exotic-looking of the Celestial Swords, Enginoshi has a curved bright-silver blade vaguely similar to the scimitars of the Burning Sands; its tsuba is crafted into a stylized unicorn and made of gold that does not warp. One of its oddest design features is a hilt formed into the shape of a twisted unicorn horn; it appears to be made from pure ivory, though a few have suggested it may actually be a horn from a literal unicorn. The saya is covered in fur with jade inlays, making it look out of place anywhere but in the Unicorn Clan.

When Moto Gaheris received the sword from Tsi Xing Guo, he thanked him but claimed he preferred the sword already at his side; he placed Enginoshi in Shiro Shinjo for safekeeping. However, this was a clever lie to conceal the reality that he was carrying the sword; the blade in Shiro Shinjo was a duplicate. Each Clan Champion since has continued wearing Enginoshi, but since the copy remains in its place of honor at Shiro Shinjo, most outsiders assume they are wielding a mundane sword.

The katana is a 4k3 weapon infused with the speed and vitality of the Unicorn, making its wielder faster and more agile in combat. He gains a +1k1 bonus to both Initiative rolls and Kenjutsu Skill rolls. If he is fighting from horseback, the bonus is +2k2 instead.

DAIDOJI UJI'S JADE AIGUCHI

During the reign of Emperor Toturi III, a strange and unique spirit was transported to Ningen-do from the Realm of Thwarted Destiny. Within the realm of dreams was an alternate reality, a dream of Fu Leng himself in which he triumphed at the Second Day of Thunder. The last Crane left alive in that world was Daidoji Uji, and he was eventually expelled from that reality during a supernatural confrontation with one of Fu Leng's allies (see Chapter Ten of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories* for details). Uji wound up in the borders of Maigo no Musha, where he encountered other thwarted spirits and entities, and learned he could never return to his own world. His only choice was to go to Ningen-do. There, he re-entered the service of the Crane Clan, taking on the alias of Daidoji Fumisato.

Among the relics Uji brought to Ningen-do with him are a pair of daggers made of pure jade and infused with Earth kami, strengthening the steel so as to be nigh-indestructible. While their appearance is plain and unadorned, they are supernaturally sharp and their jade makes them particularly effective against the Shadowlands Taint. When Uji finally retired, he passed them on to the Crane Clan as an heirloom.

The Jade Aiguchi are a pair of unbreakable 1k1 knives. They are made from pure Jade and thus can affect Invulnerable creatures. Moreover, their extreme sharpness allows them to ignore 5 points of Reduction, regardless of its source.

DRAGON'S CLAW KATANA

When the Elemental Dragons withdrew from the mortal realm during the Clan War, the Void Dragon wished to bestow a gift upon a mortal. The Dragon crafted a katana out of one of its claws and gave it to Agasha Ashiko, a dedicated and thoughtful woman with some ability in Void magic. Since she herself was not trained with the use of swords, she gave this magnificent blade to her husband, Daidoji Kedamono, who in turn passed it on to his daimyo for study. Intensive study of the blade by the Crane led to many insights into its otherworldly nature.

Several years later two Crane artisans, Asahina Yuri and Kakita Isako, set out to try to replicate the Dragon's Claw Katana. After several failures they succeeded in crafting new swords based on the original. All of these blades emulate the appearance of the original, with distinctly curved blades and a pair of dragon claws on the golden tsuba. Since the later swords are mortal replicas, they only embody some of the potency of the original divinely-crafted blade. A total of eight of these swords were made, gifted to the four families of the Crane; however, in the years since three of them have been destroyed – the Crane discovered dishonorable actions would cause the swords to destroy themselves by twisting and warping. Moreover, four other blades have gone missing, and their fate is unknown.

The original Dragon's Claw Katana is a 3k3 katana and a nemuranai which can harm any opponent, regardless of their normal immunities. So long as the wielder maintains an Honor Rank of at least 4.0, the sword grants him 2 extra Void Points each day and allows him to add his Void Rank to the total of his Kenjutsu and Initiative rolls.

The later, mortal-forged Dragon's Claw Katana are 3k2 swords which grant their wielder 1 extra Void Point per day.

THE EMPEROR'S UNDERHAND

During Rokugan's first war against the Shadowlands, the Crab and Scorpion Clans were united in a fight not only for the young Empire's victory but for its very existence. To that end, Bayushi spared no expense, literal or figurative, in his effort in the war. While the Crab crashed against the endless lines of goblins, demons, and ogres, Bayushi and his favored students crept through the shadows. The Scorpion turned the tide of war more than once by making ruthless and terrible decisions other men could not. Among other things, the Scorpion betrayed the other clans in little ways that actually aided the war effort – they would assassinate incompetent officers, for example, then kindly suggest replacements who were far more skilled. They would create battle plans which placed allied forces in hopeless positions but in return inflicted terrible losses on the enemy. Bayushi was never glad to give such orders, but he knew he had to.



The only exception to these tactics was that the Scorpion Kami ordered none of the Crab be sacrificed in this manner unless they volunteered for it. Bayushi knew his brother Hida's vassal Hiruma had a keen mind and would perceive what the Scorpion were doing. Never once did Bayushi lie to his brother, and in return often Crab vassals volunteer for Scorpion assignments they recognized as death sentences. In effect the Scorpion and Crab entered into an alliance that was never recorded, an agreement sealed only in the blood of the Empire.

Hida knew what Bayushi did was repugnant, but he also knew it had to be done. The Crab Kami felt deeply conflicted, for he had finally found something he would not sacrifice for his Empire... and he was glad his brother could. Bayushi saved Hida's honor, and in return the Crab protected the Scorpion as best as they knew how. It was during this time that Hida ordered a fine dagger of carved jade be made for his brother, reinforced with Kuni's magic to be an effective weapon. Though the gift was never formally presented, and no particular reason was stated for its creation, the two Kami knew it was a symbol of their unspoken bond.

Kaiu named the blade the Emperor's Underhand, knowing for whom it was destined, and Bayushi enjoyed the name. The tanto never left Bayushi's side until after the war, when he gifted it to one of his distinguished generals

as a reward for bravery. The gift encompassed yet another unspoken agreement, that the Bayushi general would be at the Crab Clan's disposal should the need arise. Over time, as the Crab solidified their hold on the southwestern region of the new Empire, the need for a blade effective against the Shadowlands became less and less critical. Eventually, the dagger was passed down to each new rikugunshokan of the Scorpion Clan as a symbol of office rather than any sign of solidarity with the Crab.

Mechanically, the Emperor's Underhand is a 2k1 tanto with a blade of pure jade; it is extremely lightweight and has a very small tsuba. In addition to being able to harm Invulnerable creatures, the dagger's jade grants protection from the Taint to its bearer, as if he were carrying an unlimited supply of jade fingers (the awakened jade of the nemuranai never succumbs to the Taint).

EXTINGUISHING LANTERN

In Rokugan, fires can be disastrous, since many buildings are paper and wood. The shugenja in the Phoenix Clan created the minor artifacts called Extinguishing Lanterns for the purpose of averting such catastrophes. The lanterns contain specially-empowered Fire kami who draw other such kami to themselves; thus, instead of spreading light, they draw all the fire from the surrounding area into themselves, extinguishing all flames within fifty feet of the lantern.

Much to the dismay of the Phoenix Clan, some of these lanterns have found their way into the hands of other clans who put them to more unsavory usages. For example, the lanterns can be used to ambush night-time encampments by extinguishing all fires and thus throwing the camps into utter darkness. Criminals have also used these lanterns to extinguish the lights of night watchmen or pursuing city guards.

FIVE SWORDS OF LEGEND

Togashi Nyoko was born in the sixth century during the reign of the Steel Chrysanthemum. She showed promise as a shugenja, but also pursued the skills of a bushi and a swordsmith. She became fascinated by Kaiu's teachings and under the mentorship of Togashi Furukusai she began experimenting with incorporating magic into swordsmithing. (She also fought a famous duel, the *Duel of the Moment's Edge*, recounted on page 17 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Air*.) While she created many weapons over the course of her life, and her teachings inspired later generations of swordsmiths across the Empire, her greatest accomplishment was creating the Five Swords of Legend.

BITTER

The blade which Nyoko named Bitter is considered unbreakable, having withstood countless battles unblemished and unbroken. Nyoko's views on Bushido and mental balance tended to infuse her swords, and Bitter is no exception. Its simple appearance is deceiving, as the hilt bears no ornamentation and the pale clean steel of the blade is marked only by Nyoko's stamp. While Bitter is quite powerful, there can be severe drawbacks for those



who wield this sword. The Dragon Clan has kept the katana within its ranks, but only uses it sporadically because of how dangerous the demands of the sword can be; it will turn on a wielder with little honor. In a way, the blade is cursed, for it will attempt to rid the world of an honorless wielder. Those of low Honor Rank (3.9 or less) who carry Bitter suffer relentless nightmares of such unimaginable horror that many of them end up committing seppuku.

In the twelfth century, Bitter is wielded by the Dragon Clan hero Mirumoto Rosanjin (see *The Great Clans*, page 94) who carried it into his final fight at the Battle of the Tomb of the Seven Thunders. During the skirmish Bitter is lost, last seen buried under a pile of dead oni.

Mechanically, Bitter is an awakened *nemuranai* (able to harm Invulnerable foes). Its DR is equal to 5k5 against opponents without an Honor Rank (or with Honor Rank 0), but declines to 4k4 against foes of Honor Rank 1, and further declines by an additional 1k1 for every two Honor Ranks beyond that. (Thus it does no damage at all to an opponent of Honor Rank 10.)

COURAGE

Little is known of Courage, for shortly after its creation it was gifted to the Crab Clan to aid in their struggles with the Shadowlands. It was wielded by Hida Yuukan, a bushi who frequently served as yojimbo to Kuni scholars studying in the Shadowlands; when he and his charge were killed, the sword disappeared for six hundred years. It was rediscovered during the Clan War when a samurai named Togashi Miyoki was protecting the Shrine of Osano-Wo from Yogo Junzo's Shadowlands army. In the midst of the fight she noticed a gleaming sword being wielded by one of the zombies attacking her. She retrieved the sword and returned it to the Dragon Clan, where it was soon identified by Nyoko's stamp upon the blade.

Courage has a golden handle and the blade also has an elaborate dragon design racing down the steel in gold. It is known to protect its wielder against the influence of fear, but it also bears a similar flaw to Bitter: resisting a samurai who tries to flee a battle, regardless of the odds.

Mechanically, Courage is a 3k2 katana and an awakened *nemuranai* (able to harm Invulnerable foes). The wielder gains a +3k3 bonus to resist Fear effects. However, the wielder must also make a Willpower roll at TN 25 to be able to retreat from a battle or skirmish – if the roll is failed, the sword compels its wielder to stay and fight regardless of the odds.

HONORABLE

The wakizashi called Honorable is an elegant blade made with the same pale steel as its companion sword Bitter. Its hilt is wrapped in red silk with a plain black tsuba. Honorable and Bitter form a matched daisho set, but while Bitter is seldom utilized, Honorable has found more frequent employment, especially amongst the daimyo of the Mirumoto. Legend claims the sword was first used by Togashi Nyoko herself when she fought Hida Raiden in the Duel of the Moment's Edge.

One of Honorable's more curious features is that the wakizashi reflects the purity of the bearer's soul. Those



with a true heart find the blade shining and bright, whereas the honorless find themselves quickly exposed as the blade loses its luster and darkens. In many cases it has been used for seppuku ceremonies, as its keen blade provides a swift death to the worthy – while its edge turns blunt and causes a more painful death for the unworthy. Like Bitter, Honorable was lost during the Battle of the Tomb of Seven Thunders, and the ultimate fate of the daisho is unknown.

Honorable is a 2k2 wakizashi and an awakened *nemuranai*. Its DR increases by +1k1 if its wielder has an Honor Rank of 5.0 or higher, and an additional +1k1 if his Honor Rank is 9.0 or higher.

HUNGER

The most notorious creation of Togashi Nyoko is Hunger, a no-dachi even she felt was too harsh to wield. Shortly after its forging she attempted to melt it down, since she believed its spirit was flawed and a danger to any who wielded it. The sword resisted her efforts to destroy it, and was eventually put to use by the Mirumoto. Hunger soon gained a reputation as a bloodthirsty weapon, in many cases seeming to urge the wielder to take foolish risks in battle. Eventually, the Mirumoto daimyo agreed with Nyoko that the sword was a threat, and it was locked away and eventually forgotten.

Over a hundred years ago, Hunger reemerged in the hands of a Unicorn bushi, Horiuchi Daini, during a skirmish in the Dragonfly lands. His no-dachi was described to be as red as blood and cut a swathe through the Dragon soldiers he fought; he was only taken down after killing five of the six Dragon samurai opposing him. The blade disappeared again after the battle and its ultimate fate is unknown.

Hunger has a hilt and *tsuba* of simple design; both they and the blade are normally golden in color, but when the blade is used in battle it throbs blood red, almost like the beating of a heart. Mechanically, it is a 4k3 no-dachi and an awakened *nemuranai*. The sword's eagerness to kill grants its wielder a +2k0 bonus to Kenjutsu Skill rolls. However, it also causes the wielder to gain the Overconfident and Brash Disadvantages (if he already possesses one or both of those Disadvantages, the TN to resist their effects is increased by 10). In a skirmish, he may only take the Full Attack stance, and in a Mass Battle he must always be Heavily Engaged if he has a choice.





THE MIRUMOTO WAKIZASHI

This blade is different from the original wakizashi carried by Mirumoto himself, which is part of the Dragon Clan Ancestral Daisho (described on page 93 of the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*). The short sword known simply as the Mirumoto Wakizashi was the last blade crafted by Togashi Nyoko. She made it from a strange red ore of unknown origin. Nyoko wrapped the blade's hilt in red silk and capped it with a mysterious dark jewel.

The Mirumoto Wakizashi is a 2k2 wakizashi and an awakened *nemuranai*, able to harm Invulnerable opponents. When used with the Niten fighting style (katana in one hand, wakizashi in the other), it also grants the wielder an extra +5 bonus to his Armor TN.

HOJATSU'S BLADE

Hojatsu's Blade was first wielded by the young Mirumoto Hojatsu, adopted son of Mirumoto, before he inherited the Ancestral Daisho of the Dragon from his father. Hojatsu gained his own fame and recognition for his study of dueling and swordplay, and he expanded his father's writings on swordsmanship into the seminal work Niten. Even after he became Mirumoto daimyo, Hojatsu still preferred to fight duels with his own blade, and legend claims it was Hojatsu's sword which took the life of Kakita when the two rivals met for the final time.

In modern times, this katana is normally wielded by the sensei of the Iron Mountain Dojo. It is crafted of ancient simple steel and is quite utilitarian in design, but the awakened spirits of the blade are said to enhance the wielder's skill in *iaijutsu*.

Hojatsu's Blade is a 3k2 katana and is considered a *nemuranai* for the purpose of harming Invulnerable foes. If the wielder of the sword has at least one Rank in the *iaijutsu* Skill, he gains the benefits of the Assessment and Focus Emphases, whether or not he has purchased them with Experience Points.

THE KATANA OF FIRE

During the time of the Clan War, the Oracles of Light sought to redress the imbalance created by the emergence of the Elemental Terrors by enlisting two mortal artisans, Iuchi Yugosha and Asako Shingon, to craft a set of five Elemental Items to counteract the monsters of the Dark Oracles. For the Katana of Fire, Yugosha and Shingon created a weapon which was not just a sword but an embodiment of the Element of Fire. Once it was completed, they gave it to the Phoenix hero Shiba Tsukune, who wielded it during the Second Day of Thunder. The katana was lost a short time after, and many believe the Oracles may have hidden it away until the Empire has need of its strength once again.

Despite its great power, the Katana of Fire can normally pass for a mundane sword of excellent craftsmanship; the grip is wound in bright crimson silk and the red saya is emblazoned with the kanji for Fire. However, once it is

drawn the sword's blade bursts forth with searing flames that immolate those unfortunate enough to be struck by it. The katana blazes even more fiercely when it encounters dishonorable or Tainted opponents and reaches hungrily for them, drawing its wielder toward those who need to be cleansed by sacred Fire.

Mechanically, the Katana of Fire is an awakened *nemuranai* with a DR of 4k3, and the flames which wreath its blade inflict an additional +1k1 of Fire damage. Against Tainted foes (or opponents with an Honor Rank of less than 2.0) the flames do an additional +2k2 damage.

MANTLES OF FIRE

During the many centuries the Agasha were part of the Dragon Clan, they experimented with a variety of alchemical and magical techniques. One of their discoveries was a way to infuse the material of a cloak with powerful Fire kami. Those donning these mantles found their spells were more powerful and their weapons inflicted more harm on their foes. After the Agasha left the Dragon Clan for the Phoenix Clan, they ceased to create these items, but the successor Tamori family recreated them within a generation. Later, the Phoenix Agasha developed a new and more peaceful version of the Mantle of Fire, a defensive item in which the power of the Fire kami was only unleashed against those who sought to harm the wearer.

These mantles usually take the form of either a haori (favored for the more aggressive version) or a full-length cloak or body-wrap (favored for the defensive version). Invariably these garments are woven and dyed in the colors of fire – red, orange, and yellow – with embroidered flames adding further decoration. Both the Agasha and Tamori test the skills of apprentice shugenja by having them attempt to craft these vestments, viewing the work (whether successful or not) as a valuable learning experience.

The original, aggressive version of the Mantle of Fire awards a +Xk0 bonus to melee attack rolls and to Spell Casting rolls for Fire spells, where X is the wearer's Fire. The later "peaceful" version of the Mantle of Fire unleashes the wearer's inner Fire against anyone who strikes him in melee, inflicting XkX damage (where X is his Fire Rank) on such persons and creatures.

SHAMESWORDS

Ever since Asahina Yajinden created the dreaded Bloodswords, countless maho-tsukai have attempted to emulate his dark works. However, since Yajinden was jealous of his secrets and refused to share his techniques, none have successfully duplicated his creations. The closest approximation of the Bloodswords are the Shameswords, created by the mad monk named Kokujin using the Anvil of Despair, the very artifact on which Yajinden forged his original masterpieces.

Toward the end of the Four Winds era, Kokujin kidnapped a group of Dragon samurai and used their souls to create the Shameswords; one sword was also made from the soul of his own acolyte, Hitomi Kobai. Some believe

that in his own strange way Kokujiin was complimenting his former clan by using Dragon samurai to make these weapons; regardless, the swords' purpose and Kokujiin's true intentions for them are still not understood. The total number of Shameswords is unknown, but eight of these have made their way into the Empire's lore: two served as Kokujiin's own daisho, while six others have turned up elsewhere from time to time, usually bringing great misfortune of whoever is unlucky enough to gain possession of them. Yajinden himself considered the Shameswords crude but effective; the blades seem to entice their wielders to try to turn their power toward the good of the Empire, only to lead them to turmoil, chaos, and death – after which the blade disappears for a few years. All of the Shameswords are unnaturally sharp and seem to have an innate ability to find their wielder. They are also immune to destruction, despite the many efforts to melt them down or otherwise dispose of them.

Mechanically, all of the Shameswords are unbreakable and are considered *nemuranai* (thus, able to harm Invulnerable foes). They have additional specific properties as outlined below.

THE BLADE OF FURY

As its name implies, the Blade of Fury makes those around it more irritable and violent, prone to anger and passionate outbursts. The blade has a marbled black and red hilt and a matching saya, but seems otherwise unremarkable until it awakens during combat, whereupon it begins to throb a sickly dull red. The sword seems to convey mastery of the *niten* two-handed kenjutsu style, and the Dragon believe it must have been forged from the soul of a Mirumoto samurai. Some have speculated it may contain the soul of Mirumoto Junnosuke, the Tainted samurai who was slain by Toturi Tsudao. Regardless, the sword's brief history is one of bloodshed and horror.

The Blade of Fury is a 3k3 katana whose wielder automatically gains the Brash Disadvantage. If he is already Brash, the TN to resist its effects is increased by 10.

THE BLADE OF GUILF

It is uncertain whose soul is trapped in the Blade of Guile, and a few Dragon have argued none in their clan are capable of the level of guile this sword inflicts upon its wielder. The influence of the sword causes the owner to lie even when its not in his best interest to do so, obscuring the truth whenever possible. The Blade of Guile is the least ornate and most practical in design of the Shameswords, with a tsuba of dull gold and a saya of unadorned black. Even the handle is wound in a common black silk. Indeed, this weapon often passes as a sword of ordinary craftsmanship, hiding its nature from all but the one who wears it. On at least one occasion the sword was carried by a Scorpion, Shosuro Atesharu, who found its nature agreeable to his own.

The Sword of Guile is a 3k3 katana. The wielder of the sword finds it extremely difficult to tell the truth about anything important (although he can still be truthful about trivial or mundane things). Any time the character wishes to resist the sword's power and tell the truth, he must make a Willpower roll at TN 20.

GAIJIN ITEMS: BRONZE LANTERNS

The items known as Bronze Lanterns originated in the Senpet Empire, beyond the Burning Sands. They were brought back to the Empire by the Scorpion Clan during the Hidden Emperor era, and remain a closely guarded secret of the Bayushi family. Of course, any samurai who visited the lands beyond the Empire's borders could also have discovered these items, and it is possible the Unicorn also brought some with them when they returned to Rokugan in the eighth century. Regardless, no Rokugani shugenja have been able to replicate these items, and they do not seem to obey the rules that govern normal Rokugani magic.

The lanterns appear to be crafted out of a single piece of an alloy the exact color of bronze, but they are far stronger than bronze should be. Foreign designs of circles, lines, and squares decorate the sides of the lamp, their meaning a mystery to all but their Senpet creators. The lamps' shape resembles a flattened teapot sitting atop a "foot" of metal, and they are small enough to fit in the palm of an average adult's hand. A circular cover can be removed to fill the lamps with oil.

The power of the lanterns is simple but potent: they can imprison the gaijin spirits known as the *jinn*, the Children of Smokeless Fire. Each lantern holds a single *jinn*, who can be summoned forth by speaking a specific command word (different for each lantern) and rubbing the outside of the lantern. Once this is done a mist pours from the lantern's spout and solidifies into the *jinn*, who is compelled to obey the commands of the holder of the lantern.





THE BLADE OF HUBRIS

The Blade of Hubris is more subtly corrupting than many of its brethren. Its owner will initially believe he is acting in his lord's best interest, and only later will come to realize his own desires have superceded his superiors' will. In appearance the gleaming blade is as white as snow, with a handle wound in fine blue silk and a black tsuba that seems to be made of iron. The Dragon have no knowledge of which soul is housed within the blade, though many names have been offered in speculation.

The only known appearance of the blade was in the possession of Doji Jotaro, an Emerald Magistrate and officer within the Imperial Legions. While most of Jotaro's career was exemplary, after he began to succumb to the influence of the sword his decisions ended in disastrous consequences, sullyng his reputation and dishonoring his family. He eventually retired rather than bring further disgrace to his name and that of the Imperial Legions. It is not known if he kept the sword or if it departed after he was no longer useful to it.

The Blade of Hubris is a 3k3 katana which causes its bearer to gain the Overconfident Disadvantage. If the character already has that Disadvantage, the TN to resist its effects is increased by 10.

THE BLADE OF THE MEEK

When Kokujin forged this katana he made the mistake of using the soul of Tamori Chieko, a woman known to be both compassionate and gentle of spirit. Kokujin mistook Chieko's biddable nature to be the weakness of being Meek, but in fact she was far more pure than he believed, and the Anvil of Despair was only able to take part of her soul. Thus the Blade of the Meek is less dangerous than the other Shameswords, though still not a safe item to wield by any means.

The Blade of the Meek appears to be made out of pale gold, with engravings of a snake devouring its prey decorating the hilt, tsuba, and saya. It seeks to insert thoughts of failure into its wielder, leading even the most confident samurai to doubt his own decisions and become increasingly hesitant to take action.

The Blade of the Meek is a 3k2 katana which causes its wielder to gain the Disadvantage Doubt, associated with the Skill which is most important to that character (GM's judgment).

THE BLADE OF PENANCE

A tattooed man called Hitomi Akuai was used to create this sword, but during its forging he could not withstand the pain of having his soul ripped from his body, so Kokujin was forced to cut the process short. As a result,





this Shamesword takes the form of a wakizashi instead of a katana. It has a carved golden handle and tsuba, a purple and blue textured saya. The blade exudes a sense of creeping unease to any who view it, and those who wield it find their dreams haunted by poor decisions from their past and sins they committed against those they loved and served.

The Blade of Penance was first used by Hiruma Todoru, daimyo of the Hiruma, who carried the sword rather than let it fall into the hands of the Bloodspeaker cult. For many years he found it impossible to get rid of the sword; even when he locked it away in Shiro Hiruma's vaults he would later find it back in his hand. Eventually he sought help from the Dragon Clan, whose shugenja were able to break the sword's curse and free him from its influence.

The Blade of Penance is a 3k2 wakizashi. Anyone wielding the sword finds himself constantly haunted by past failures and mistakes. If the character has any Disadvantages representing previous personal failures (GM's judgment - examples could include Dark Secret, Driven, and Sworn Enemy), he suffers a penalty to all Skill rolls equal to the Point value of the Disadvantages.

THE BLADE OF SLAUGHTER

Like the Blade of Fury, the Blade of Slaughter is an aggressive nemuranai with little purpose beyond mindless violence. Intent on creating the Shameswords at any cost, Kokujuin sacrificed his own acolyte Hitomi Kobai to the Anvil of Despair to forge this weapon. However, as he lay on the Anvil Kobai repented of his actions and prayed to his former mistress, the Lady Moon, Hitomi. She interceded, freeing him from the Anvil after only the Tainted half of his soul had been captured. However, that portion of Kobai's soul was imbued with pure murder and chaos, so the Shamesword became exceedingly violent in nature. Kobai remained linked to the sword after its creation and could often sense its location and usage.

The golden hilt and *tsuba* of the Blade of Slaughter are plainly adorned, but the *saya* is covered in etchings of skeletons, fire, and scenes of mayhem. The sword is a 3k3 katana whose wielder automatically loses all benefit from the Balance Advantage. Moreover, any time the wielder is in a dangerous or potentially violent situation, he must roll Willpower at TN 20 or respond with lethal violence.

WYRMBONE KATANA

During the War of Dark Fire, the Dragon Clan fought many battles with the wyrm-riding Yobanjin who plagued their lands. When the Yobanjin attacked Shiro Tamori, many of their troops (including a significant number of their wyrm mounts) were immolated by the molten lava of Tamori's Furnace. After the lava cooled, the Tamori discovered that while the flesh of the creatures had been wholly incinerated, the bones remained intact and indeed resembled steel fresh from the forge. Although many Tamori felt it was wrong to touch the remains of a dead creature no matter how much fire cleansed it, a few of them wished to see what could be made from these uniquely metallic bones.

The alchemist and Earth shugenja Tamori Tomaru led his fellow crafters in retrieving and experimenting on the wyrm bones. Since the ribs of the beasts already bore a similar shape to a katana, Tomaru and his smiths focused their initial efforts on this. Much to their surprise, the bones of the wyrms proved relatively easy to work with, the blades almost forming themselves. The first test of the new swords came when the Army of Dark Fire attempted to assault Toshi Ranbo, the Imperial city. Dragon samurai armed with Wyrmbone Katana found some of the speed and strength of the wyrms was lent to them, allowing them to easily dispatch their foes.

Wyrmbone Katana are 3k3 katana which bestow a +1k0 bonus to their wielder's Initiative and Attack rolls. The swords are extremely rare and remain quite controversial, even within the Dragon Clan, and only about a dozen have been made.

YUMI OF FIRE

In the year 1160 the Oracles of Light discovered their interference in Ningen-do had caused a Celestial imbalance; they decided to withdraw from the realm of mortals for a time. Not wishing to leave mankind without some sort of assistance in their absence, each Oracle personally created a powerful nemuranai. The Oracle of Fire, Isawa Mitori, crafted the Yumi of Fire; it was a difficult process, since the weapon was innately more attuned to Air. His intention was to create a weapon which would allow one man to stand off an army. Mitori realized there was great potential for the Yumi to do harm, but he believed if it fell into the wrong hands it would prove mankind undeserving to represent the forces of the Celestial realm.

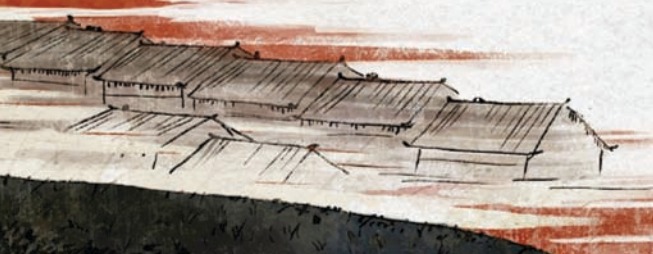
The Yumi of Fire was hidden away in a remote village within the western Unicorn mountains, where it was used by peasants for hunting. Its true essence was awakened when a Unicorn scout, Shinjo Jinturi, defended the village from a group of Bloodspeakers. During the desperate fight he picked up what he thought was a simple peasant bow, and was shocked when his first arrow erupted into flame, pierced his opponent with unerring accuracy, and immolated him in a storm of fire.

The Yumi of Fire is made of plain ash-wood and feels slightly warm to the touch, as if recently released from its owner's hand. Although it seems otherwise wholly unremarkable, its true properties awaken any time a samurai wields it. Arrows fired from the Yumi of Fire seem to almost guide themselves to their targets, awarding a +1k1 bonus to Attack rolls made with the nemuranai. Moreover, the arrows erupt into flame during flight, inflicting an additional 3k2 in Fire damage on their targets.





THE HUNDRED STARS DOJO





THE HUNDRED STANCES DOJO

Mirumoto Saiko flexed her arms before picking up a pair of bokken, swinging them around to make sure the wooden swords were properly balanced. She felt confidence in her heart, for she had been preparing for this moment for many weeks. She had stayed up every night to study the writings of the previous sensei, learning the stances and their applications, as well as the adaptations required by her own family's niten two-swords style. She had already defeated several other students, including some who had been attending the dojo for a much longer time. Now she had won the right to challenge the champion. She had spent the last hour in calm meditation, filling her soul with tranquility.

She was ready.

Her opponent waited for her, standing immobile on the other side of the mat. Matsu Hirotaro was strongly built and his body sported many scars. Saiko had seen him fight several times before, and the Lion matched the fury of his family with the skill of the Akodo with whom he had studied. His face was impossible to read, and as she approached he simply bowed, offering her the respect one warrior shows to another regardless of rank, age, or allegiance. She returned the bow and assumed her stance, the shorter bokken facing forward and the longer one kept low and toward her back, forming an almost perfect line.

Seppun Osokawa approached the two bushi, her shugenja robes softly rustling on the polished wooden floor. "By the grace of Osano-Wo, Fortune of Fire and Thunder," she proclaimed, "may this challenge be won by the worthiest. May the spirit of the Hundred Stances guide your blades. May Honor shine through as you face one

another." Her prayer completed, she took a step back and brought her hand down in a chopping motion. "Begin!"

Saiko circled her opponent to her left, a move he immediately mirrored. Seeking an immediate advantage, she lashed out with her longer bokken while angling the shorter one to protect herself from a possible counterattack. Hirotaro tried to knock her wooden sword out of the way, but she managed to touch his left shoulder. She spun around and aimed for his knee, and once again he almost lazily parried the blow, not preventing a hit. What was he doing? Another hit and she would win.

Hirotaro took a step back and held his bokken high above his head, standing perfectly still, his face still as impassive as when the fight began. The first stance? Saiko could not decide if he was giving up or mocking her. Regardless, if he was tired of his role as the champion of the Hundred Stances Dojo, she would gladly relieve him of the burden. She stepped forward and brought her swords down together...

... and she was on the floor, her blades far away from her, and Hirotaro's own bokken resting against her throat.

"Matsu Hirotaro is the winner," Seppun Osokawa proclaimed, a formality but one required by protocol. Hirotaro took a step back and bowed, the exact same way he had earlier. Saiko just sat there, stunned, her On so shaken that her mouth gaped in disbelief. Finally the hushed whispers of the other students brought her back to her senses.

"How?" she whispered.



"You are not ready to learn," Hirotaro said. He turned away and racked his bokken, preparing to leave.

Saiko's last shred of calm broke. She leaped to her feet, screaming, "I want to know how!"

The whispering fell silent. Hirotaro turned back to face her. Saiko felt a chill wash away her rage, suddenly aware

he might simply kill her for speaking to him so disrespectfully. But his face did not change its calm expression.

"You know the forms, and you know me. You were perfectly prepared. But a blade is not a still figure to be contemplated. It moves, it creates, it lives. Your knowledge is nothing if it restricts you rather than opening your world."

Hirotaro turned and left, leaving Saiko to contemplate her shattered dream.



The Origins of the Hundred Stances Dojo

The ronin behind the creation of the Hundred Stances Dojo remains something of a mystery. It is generally believed the man who called himself Oshiro was a sensei, a master teacher of a respected school of kenjutsu and a talented warrior, although his original style of training remains a matter of debate. Supposedly, the turning point in Oshiro's life was when a warrior from a far-away land visited his province and utterly and easily defeated him. The identity of this warrior is lost in time, with some claiming he was a legendary bushi from the Dawn of the Empire such as Kakita, Matsu or Mirumoto. For Oshiro, who was reputed as the finest warrior in his homeland, the defeat came as a great shock. He realized how little he really knew about the art of the blade, having previously only used and faced a single style of swordsmanship. Oshiro requested a *musha shugyo*, a warrior's pilgrimage, from his lord. He wanted to travel the Empire, learn the other styles of fighting, master the art of kenjutsu in his lord's name, and return to train a new generation of peerless warriors. His lord accepted his request, and Oshiro said goodbye to his family and home.

He never came back.

Oshiro traveled for years, fighting other swordsmen and observing others' battles, learning every possible way. He offered his services to others both to survive and to gain more opportunities to encounter different styles of swordsmanship. Even in those early days of the Empire, there were many schools of fighting already in place, and many small but important variations in style from teacher to teacher and warrior to warrior. For a while Oshiro was content to record his observations, and he accumulated a prodigious volume of scrolls detailing all the duels he witnessed and fought. His own skill grew, as proven by his survival in the life of a ronin, but he still struggled to understand the true depth and complexity of swordfighting. How was he supposed to understand, much less master, dozens and dozens of varied techniques, sometimes contradictory in their approach? How could the

one-sword quick-draw style of the Kakita be reconciled to the twin-sword style of the Mirumoto or the precise lethality of the Akodo?

It is said that Oshiro, like many great early heroes of the Empire, found wisdom in the Tao. It had not occurred to him to look there for answers, but a monk who heard of his quest became interested in him and showed him the way. Shinsei had taught Rokugan that though the world appeared to be segregated, made up of distinct phenomena and individuals, in truth this was an illusion – all of reality is one. All Elements are really one Element, the Void. Thinking about this, Oshiro realized the individual techniques did not matter. All schools of kenjutsu had in common the blade, the enemy, and the goal of victory. Although they all looked different to an untrained eye, there were common patterns that showed hints of a greater truth. Enlightened by this realization, Oshiro returned to his wanderings but stopped trying to understand each style. Instead, he began to record their underlying stances, the ways warriors moved in a fight.

Although the effort was full of trial and error, Oshiro slowly acquired a grounding in what he considered the underlying forms of swordsmanship, combining them into a fluid and versatile basic fighting style. This allowed him to win a number of noteworthy victories, attracting an unwanted element: fame. Ronin, and later even young samurai from the Great Clans, sought Oshiro's patronage and attention, wanting to learn what was slowly becoming known as the Hundred Stances style. Oshiro had no interest in this, since his loyalty still remained with his original lord and he did not even believe his studies were complete yet. Dealing with prospective students and endless requests for demonstrations slowed down his own learning process, which was especially frustrating since Oshiro was now trying to identify the most obscure and complex postures which could still be used in a sword fight.

Eventually, one of the lords who was searching for Oshiro's services sent men with instructions to bring him back by force if needed, refusing to believe a mere ronin would reject his offer of patronage. By this time Oshiro was a dangerous fighter, and he fought off several approaches from this inconsiderate lord's men. Eventually, unable to rid himself of them, Oshiro fled to a desolate plain where he hid his scrolls in one of the many rocky outcroppings dotting the area. When his assailants caught up with him, Oshiro declared he had destroyed his scrolls and committed seppuku on the spot, dying by the blade he had lived by rather than let his insights be misused.



The First Founding of the Dojo

Oshiro's scrolls were discovered years later by pure chance, long after the Empire had all but completely forgotten about their existence. A Scorpion samurai of lesser note, Bayushi Sawao, stumbled upon the scrolls while on the run from his enemies (the exact details of this incident are lost to time and the ministrations of the Shosuro family historians). The desolate plain seemed a good place to lose his adversaries, and while making camp for the night he glimpsed a scroll case peeking from beneath the rocks. He dug up the scrolls and quickly realized their true value. Having himself lived a life devoid of spiritual study, and being a warrior of only meager skill, Sawao was fascinated by the texts and resolved to dedicate his life to them.

Once he had survived his journey, Sawao retired from the Scorpion Clan, a request granted due to his low political status and distressingly numerous enemies. Freed of his obligations, he set out to build a dojo near the spot where he found the scrolls, thinking this would honor their writer while also distancing himself (and any potential students) from the distractions of the world at large. He initially hoped to attract a large group of followers, but his less-than-impressive warrior reputation worked against him, and only a handful of close friends and curious retirees followed him. Still, that was enough for them to build the dojo bit by bit, living on their own meager resources and occasional alms.

Although Sawao never became a master of the blade, his own writings remain important to the Dojo of a Hundred Stances. He reviewed and organized Oshiro's notes and was the first to rediscover and use the expression "Hundred Stances" to describe the style of fighting the ancient ronin had pioneered. Although the putative "hundred" stances were always more apocryphal than exact, it was an easy way to describe the underlying concept. Sawao also numbered the known stances, a step which some later purists believe debases the subtle nature of the fighting style but which also made it much easier to reference, learn, and teach it. Sawao's initial group of students also included a couple of genuinely skilled swordsmen, and their observations were crucial in helping to further develop the style. The group maintained an ascetic life, studying the Hundred Stances much like monks would study the Tao, avoiding all distractions outside the study of the blade.

Sadly, Sawao's past caught up with him when a group of ronin he had wronged in the past located him and attacked the dojo. While their skill had grown over the years, Sawao and his students were still few and ill-equipped – the legend says Sawao fought the assailants off with a bokken, having renounced his katana when he retired. He and his men battled valiantly but were eventually all killed; the marauders torched the place, leaving the ruins as a testament to an eccentric man's work and the few who had followed him.

OSANO-WO AND THE OLD WARRIOR

Long before the Hundred Stances Dojo, the area on which it is now built was a vast uncultivated rocky plain. Tales say that in the early days of the Empire a young Hida Osano-Wo, not yet a Fortune but already a formidable warrior and heir to the leadership of the Crab Clan, visited the area and met an old man who was resting on a rock. The old man was clearly a samurai himself, and Osano-Wo struck up a conversation with him. The old man had led a dutiful but unremarkable life. Osano-Wo praised him for his service to his clan, but could not help comparing himself to the old man, since he had already defeated many enemies and was heir to a glorious future. The old man was irritated by Osano-Wo's pride and offered him a challenge. The Crab warrior could not imagine he could be defeated, and accepted without even asking what the challenge might be.

The old man challenged Osano-Wo to defeat death. And with that, he breathed his last breath and quietly passed away, having himself lost the same challenge.

Though this ancient story is not found in the Crab libraries, the local peasants claim it was this challenge that drove Osano-Wo to the greatest feats of his life, including his legendary attacks on the kingdom of the trolls. Of course, when Osano-Wo died, he was elevated to become Fortune of Fire and Thunder, but those who live in the plains surrounding the Hundred Stances Dojo say he simply defeated death. To them, the lightning which often strikes the area is just a reminder of Osano-Wo's victory, a message to the spirit of the nameless old man.

Rediscovery, and the War for the Dojo

It was not until many more years had passed that anyone started paying attention to the Hundred Stances again. When the ruined dojo was finally discovered, it was by a small force of Lion samurai sent to patrol the area; it was a period of relative peace in Rokugan, and the Lion were attempting to extend their reach by revisiting previously unexploited regions. The plains surrounding the dojo were not particularly attractive, but the officer leading the group, Akodo Kentsu, hoped to build a small fort to monitor the area. He was very surprised when he and his men found the dojo, since nothing of that sort was recorded on any maps. Kentsu grew more intrigued when he found some of the Hundred Stances scrolls and immediately ordered his men to collect all the scrolls they could find. Sadly, some were lost or destroyed, but



a surprising number had survived – it appears one of Sawao’s last acts had been to protect or hide as much of his work as possible.

Kentsu was himself a devoted student of kenjutsu and quickly delved into the texts. He realized the Hundred Stances could be instrumental to further development of the art of kenjutsu, making the scrolls a prize asset for the Lion Clan. With the approval of his superiors, Kentsu assigned his men to rebuild the dojo, making improvements to the structure with the superior resources Sawao and his small band had never possessed. Kentsu also avidly studied the Hundred Stances and Sawao’s observations on them, trying to pierce the secret of the style and to fill the holes of the missing scrolls. Then he began teaching the Stances to his men; since they were disciplined soldiers with a solid understanding of the basics of kenjutsu, Kentsu was able to quickly introduce them to the basic aspects of the Hundred Stances. Oshiro’s discoveries were adaptable enough that any School could make use of them without losing its own Techniques. The huge number of stances and seemingly endless combinations between them meant that actually mastering the style a very long process; most students were content to learn a few stances and applications before moving on. However, Kentsu and a core of dedicated students went on to spend years at a time in the new dojo, furthering their understanding and refining their kenjutsu until they became true masters. The Lion Clan took notice and started sending promising students to the dojo, further improving its reputation and value. The Hundred Stances style’s subtle applications and ability to blend with existing Schools meant the rest of the Empire did not immediately realize the Lion had found a new edge for their kenjutsu training, and for a time the clan enjoyed a surfeit of talented warriors.

However, this was not to last. Eventually the existence of the dojo came to the rest of the Empire’s attention. One of Kentsu’s students named Akodo Hitsuko defeated a Crane

samurai in a kenjutsu duel at the Imperial Winter Court, and rumors of her impressive skill quickly spread. Hitsuko did not want to reveal the source of the Lion Clan’s secret edge in kenjutsu, but Crane courtiers manipulated her into doing so lest she shame her sensei, and thus the world learned of the Hundred Stances dojo. Other clans soon began demanding to know how the dojo was founded and what claim the Lion had to the territory (and the scrolls) in the first place. Many more duels were fought, particularly by Hitsuko (who was all too aware of her role in the problem), but nonetheless the truth surfaced bit by bit. Many clans started claiming Oshiro had been one of their own, even when such claims contradicted written history. However, the strongest claim to the Dojo came from the Scorpion, who could point to Bayushi Sawao as its “true founder” – after all, he had discovered the scrolls and built the original structure.

To the surprise of the Lion, the Scorpion decided to prove their claim by strength of arms. Soon an army showed up in the stormy plains surrounding the Dojo, far quicker than the Lion had foreseen. However, the Dojo had a large number of students, most of them advanced practitioners of kenjutsu, and the Lion were able to push back the original attack and send for reinforcements of their own. The Dojo was not built to withstand a siege, so the forces of the Lion and Scorpion constantly attacked and counterattacked each other in brief but fierce engagements. When some Scorpion samurai started showing knowledge of the Hundred Stances, the Lion accused them of spying and stealing, while the Scorpion maintained Sawao’s legacy had survived among them through one of his students and had influenced their modern warriors’ style. Whatever the reason, many great swordsmen fought and died on both sides. While the Lion Clan never relinquished control of the place, they suffered a crippling blow when Kentsu died fighting to hold off a breach in the Dojo’s walls. Once more the Lion claimed

foul play, while the Scorpion pointed out the aging Kentsu was not the man he used to be, no more fit to lead the Dojo than the Lion Clan itself.

During the weeks of fighting, a small force of Phoenix samurai and shugenja arrived, hoping to negotiate a truce and prevent further bloodshed. However, after speaking with nearby villages about the legends surrounding the plain, the Phoenix concluded the place was sacred to Osano-Wo and asked for it to be left in their stewardship as guardians of the Empire’s faith. Some Mantis samurai quietly mentioned the Phoenix Clan had once harbored Osano-Wo’s murderer, but their voices were not loud enough to prevent the claim, particularly after the Crane (still bitter over Hitsuko’s victory but also not willing to let the Scorpion seize a powerful asset) lent their support. The Phoenix Clan force was smaller than the others, but was highly trained and made clever use of



magic to support its attacks. The battles around the Dojo became even more chaotic as the three clans fought each other constantly while trying to never show signs of weakness lest the others temporarily ally and crush them. Since all of the forces involved were relatively small, however, many battles were resolved by kenjutsu duels, leading to surprising turns and making many individual warriors on all sides quite famous.

As winter approached the battles threatened to turn into a stalemate, and all three clans were growing tired of losing so many talented warriors without result. Meeting under a banner of truce, the Phoenix commander offered a solution: the clans would call for the arbitration of the Seppun family, who would determine which clan would control the Dojo henceforth. The Lion readily agreed, confident in the honor of the Imperials and the veracity of their own claim, but the Scorpion were initially suspicious. They eventually agreed under the condition they would be allowed to choose the specific Seppun representative who would arbitrate the matter. The Lion and Phoenix reluctantly agreed, and were surprised when the Scorpion chose Seppun AKentsu – a relatively minor samurai, but more importantly a shugenja with no practical experience of the sword. Still, they were honor-bound to accept his decision, and all three clans withdrew their forces while waiting to hear from AKentsu.

The Seppun Administration

Many believed Seppun AKentsu was picked by the Scorpion because his inexperience and lack of influence would make him easier to manipulate. However, the young Seppun had ideas of his own and refused to give in to intimidation or listen to favors of any kind. He carefully researched the history of Oshiro, Bayushi Sawao, Akodo Kentsu, and the legends surrounding the plains themselves, as well as meeting with all parties and listening to many tales of valor from the battles surrounding the Dojo. AKentsu even investigated any and all claims of descent from Oshiro, no matter how ludicrous they were.

Over the course of his work, AKentsu realized two things. First, Oshiro's texts were truly a treasure of the Empire, mixing spiritual wisdom and fighting acumen in equal parts. Second, no clan would let another keep such an advantage to itself, and given the Dojo's isolated and indefensible location, its destruction would be sure to follow.



When AKentsu invited all the Great Clans to send delegates to the Dojo, they expected it to be handed over to one of them, most likely the Scorpion, Lion, or Phoenix. Instead, to their surprise, AKentsu declared he was placing the Hundred Stances Dojo under direct Imperial administration. All of the clans would be able to send their samurai to attend the Dojo, and a kenjutsu tournament would be held to learn which clan would be allowed priority access to the Hundred Stances texts. Whichever clan's samurai was the champion of Dojo would have first access to the scrolls, but could be challenged at any time, ensuring that only the worthiest swordsman would ever be sensei of the dojo. (Some versions of this story claim AKentsu received the inspiration for this solution in a dream sent by Osano-Wo himself. Others believe his decision was the Scorpion Clan's goal all along, since the clan realized it did not have the strength to win the war.)

The clans reacted with various levels of indignation or enthusiasm, but they remained honor-bound to accept the Seppun shugenja's terms. AKentsu declared the first tournament would happen immediately, and all the delegates – many of them veterans of the battles for the Dojo – sparred against each other. In the end it was Akodo Hitsuko, who had brought the Dojo to fame in the first place, who became the new sensei of the Hundred Stances. She agreed to let students from all of the clans study under her leadership, although as the sensei of the Dojo she retained primary access to the texts and favored the Lion Clan with her knowledge.

The Dojo has remained under Seppun administration ever since. They maintain the building and manage its security, as well as supervising and blessing any challenges





for the role of sensei. Over the years nearly all of the Great Clans have had one of their samurai win access to the Hundred Stances scrolls, and the Dojo attracts students from all across Rokugan. Although the sensei regulates which clan has full access to the scrolls and priority in use of the facilities, no student is ever turned away, and it is always possible to exchange favors with the current sensei for access to the scrolls or for direct instruction. The constant change of teachers and the competition between all students and challengers maintain an atmosphere of both rivalry and excellence in the Dojo, and it is known among kenjutsu aficionados as one of the finest places to further one's skill.

Customs of the Dojo: The Challenges

In theory, anyone can challenge the Hundred Stances sensei at any time for his position, so long as the challenge is always in the form of a kenjutsu duel. However, over time a number of protocols have evolved regarding these challenges, thereby maintaining a certain order in the way the Dojo is run and led.

First of all, the challenger usually comes from the ranks of students already present at the Dojo, since understanding of the Stances is important if one is to become sensei. He does not have to be studying directly under the current

sensei, but the requirement that he at least be enrolled at the Dojo prevents any talented swordsmen from just swooping in and claiming the position.

Secondly, since the challenge must be a duel of kenjutsu, the challenger needs to be trained in the sword and able to wield it with skill. Thus, the vast majority of sensei have always been bushi, although there have been a few exceptions.

Thirdly, there cannot be more than one challenge per day – a rule the Seppun instituted after a single samurai once tried to challenge the sensei twelve times in the same day. Moreover, one who loses a challenge is expected to wait for at least a month before making a new attempt to defeat the sensei.

These restrictions put a lot of pressure on the Seppun, who authorize and administrate the bouts, and they try to make sure all the clans get fair chances for their warriors to become sensei. It is not uncommon for the various would-be challengers to unofficially duel each other first, both for practice and to thin the ranks of applicants for official challenges to the sensei. While this preliminary dueling may seem random or confusing to outsiders, those within the Dojo always keep a mental list of who has defeated who, when the next challenges are due, and when the one month limit will expire.

Challenges themselves are highly ritualized affairs. The dueling circle (see the description of the Dojo later

in this chapter for its description) is always blessed by the resident Seppun shugenja, invoking the judgment of Osano-Wo on the contestants and making sure no magic, friendly or otherwise, is used during the duel. Most challenges are usually conducted with a bokken, although Mirumoto-trained samurai are permitted to use a second one to represent their wakizashi (a custom instituted after a Mirumoto won the sensei position for the first time). More rarely, a duel may be fought to the death with live steel, but this usually only happens if some kind of offense has been given by one of the parties and the Seppun judge it worthy of being resolved with blood.

The winner of a challenge is usually the first to achieve three strikes on his opponent, although there are other factors. Disarming or knocking down an opponent can be enough to win, particularly if done in an impressive manner. A challenger who is knocked unconscious or rendered unable to fight through injury is also automatically disqualified, although it is consider crude to use such methods to win. (Such views have not prevented Crab warriors from using broken bones as the avenue to victory.)

In all cases, the decision regarding the winner is made by the presiding Seppun shugenja, and the judgment and honor of the Seppun is never called into question. When there is not a clear winner, the Seppun consider display of skill and mastery of the Hundred Stances to choose a victor. The Seppun can also disqualify a contestant if they believe treachery, dishonorable conduct, or some unfair advantage is present. As mentioned above, magic is precluded, even if shugenja who carry the blade enter the contest. (Kiho are a debatable issue, but one which almost never comes up, since the number of warriors who are also proficient in Kiho is few indeed.)

Physical Description

The Hundred Stances Dojo is not a particularly large complex, nor does it have any strategic value. Rather, its importance comes from its famed history and its large number of notable inhabitants. The Dojo itself is a large one-story building, with a single tower in the middle of its inner courtyard overlooking the surrounding area. The Lion Clan can be thanked (or blamed) for the simple yet efficient design as well as the rather unimaginative names by which the different parts of the Dojo are called: the North, West, South, and East Wings. Each Wing is divided into several rooms, easily accessible through a network of corridors. The plain where the Dojo resides is devoid of any notable features, and known mainly for its frequent storms and grass fires, all of which further isolate the Dojo from the rest of civilization. The nearest settlement, Roaring Thunder Village, is extensively shaped by the presence of the Dojo

OTHER TIMES, OTHER PLACES

Where and when is the Hundred Stances Dojo situated? Like the other campaign settings presented in the Elemental series of L5R supplements, the Dojo is intended to be adaptable to any setting. Most clans have bits of land that are not exploited or patrolled, such as the desolate plain on which the Dojo is set, and thus it could be located in any clan's territory. It could also be set in the "neutral ground" in between two clan territories, or at the edges of the Empire, or in Imperial lands. The only required constant is that it be far from any major settlements, so as to provide the isolation the Dojo uses to keep its students focused.

Similarly, there is no specific time at which the Dojo was founded and no specific era in which it need to be depicted. Although the text makes references to the Mantis, Unicorn, and Spider, these NPCs and themes can be easily removed if those clans are not present in the GM's current campaign. Keep what you like, change or remove what you don't, and make the most of the information provided here!



THE NORTH WING: THE DOJO

It is in the North part of the building that the Dojo proper can be found. While the whole building is usually referred to as the "Hundred Stances Dojo," this room is where the actual training happens. It is believed to be the oldest part of the structure, first built by Bayushi Sawao and his students and later rebuilt by Akodo Kentsu and his men. Although the wooden structure, tatami mats, and other such elements have been frequently changed, the external walls are still mostly the same, and in some places one can still see signs of the fire which consumed the place in Sawao's day. The room is extensive, stretching for most of the North Wing, giving it an elongated shape. It can easily hold a hundred students at a time, although the sensei of the Hundred Stances are rarely so welcoming. The polished floor and wooden pillars are kept clean by the servants, not an easy task considering the amount of sweat, blood, and wood splinters spilled by the students. There are several weapons racks with dozens of bokken, as well as many open slots where students may place their real blades while training. A Seppun usually watches over the blades, and other Seppun bushi can be found standing discretely close to the walls of the Dojo; they are the only ones allowed to enter while in full armor and weapons. Their presence goes a long way towards defusing any arguments or dishonorable conduct.





Another feature of the Dojo is the dueling circle, marked with a simple chalk line on the floor, and blessed daily by the attendant Seppun shugenja. Only challenges to claim the sensei position are allowed to take place in this circle, and the rest of the time the area is given a wide berth. The repeated blessings by the Seppun over the course of generations have led the Dojo's students to consider the circle a sacred place, and they believe no treachery of any sort can succeed within it. Anybody approaching the circle, even accidentally, receives severe warnings from the attendants. When duels actually happen, almost the whole population of the Dojo gathers to watch, but they stay well back from the sacred circle; only the two duelists may enter its bounds.

The Dojo's superficial appearance and daily activities depend on the current sensei's predilections. The sensei is the sole authority for all Dojo matters, and organizes the training schedule, chooses the student roster, and even selects decoration of the room. For example, sensei from the Lion Clan will frequently adorn the room with paintings depicting scenes of battles from the time of Akodo Kentsu. The Scorpion, on the other hand, will often add shoji screens to segment the room and dim the light, and like to hold classes at night. Since the sensei also decides who is allowed to train with him, attendance varies considerably from one sensei to the next.

There are many rumors and legends attached to the main Dojo chamber. One of the most persistent tales is related to Bayushi Sawao himself, who is believed to have died during the fire which destroyed the original Dojo. Many claim to have encountered his ghost within the place; supposedly, Sawao can teach invaluable secrets about the Hundred Stances, but he will burn alive those

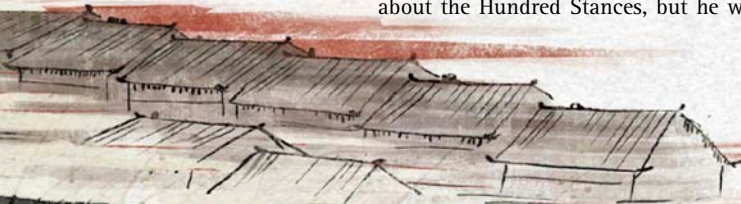
he finds unworthy – which is most samurai not from the Scorpion Clan. Invariably, every year at least one student will claim to have sighted him, and any fires in the Dojo are always blamed on Sawao's spirit. A more common rumor, although one rarely repeated within hearing of Lion samurai, claims this room is not the original one; supposedly, the real Dojo was so beyond repair it was completely razed and this one was built in a nearby place, a successor in spirit only. This would mean the remnants of the original Dojo could still be out there, waiting to be found.

THE NORTH WING: STUDENTS' QUARTERS

The portion of the North Wing not occupied by the Dojo itself is home to the Student Quarters. Due to the distance to the nearest village, the majority of students in the Dojo reside within the building, although it can become somewhat cramped when there are a large number of students enrolled. The sensei, guests of honor, the administrator, and the various Seppun all have their own private quarters; everybody else is quartered here. The place is divided into two large rooms, one for men and the other for women, each with dozens of small identical beds that give the place the feel of a military barracks. Since the students are usually bushi (and frequently soldiers), this is usually not a problem. Still, the place tends to be quite packed, so courtesy dictates that after dark the chambers are used only for sleeping – all other activities take place elsewhere.

Many students try to keep token reminders of their homes, so it is common to find weapon racks, potted bonsai trees, small statues, pillow books, and other items next to the student's beds. The students also naturally tend to congregate by clan, and during times of intense inter-clan competition this will lead to banners appearing in the different portions of the quarters where each clan's members sleep.

Due to the intense crowding, disagreements between students can sometimes escalate, and brawls have been known to erupt – which is part of why samurai from the same clan usually stick together, and why everybody tries to stay clear from the Crab. A few Seppun guards usually stand post close to the barracks, and truly rowdy and disrespectful students may find themselves arrested and locked in the magistrate's office (see the description of the Watchtower). Drinking is not permitted in the student



quarters, despite the frequent complaints by Crab and Mantis students. The separation of genders is strictly enforced to prevent any kind of scandal or dishonorable behavior, but since many students are young warriors with strong spirits, romantic trysts are often unavoidable. Students are caught every year trying to sneak into the other dormitory, and usually excuse themselves by saying they simply picked the wrong door, as the two chambers are quite similar. Servants at the Dojo are used as conduits for love letters, and are said to be “in Benten’s service” when they are seen passing between the two rooms frequently. Keeping track of all the infatuations in the Dojo can often be as complex as a game of letters in a major court.

The Quarters are a frequent topic of discussion between the sensei and the administrator, since few samurai really appreciate staying there. Over the years many have asked for the quarters to be expanded, or for an inn to be built outside the Dojo’s premises to relieve some of the pressure. So far none of these options have been accepted, since the Dojo’s Seppun supervisors are usually very conservative in their attitude and there is little in the way of spare funds to draw upon. Moreover, students must be very careful when phrasing complaints, since it is a common practice for sensei to simply send away some of the students when complaints about crowding become too loud. Thus the majority of students simply endure the crowding, trying to get their rest while ignoring the enemies sleeping in the exact same room with swords at arm’s reach – a unique exercise of the virtue of Courtesy. And a few students, the most influential or politically astute, sometimes manage to get themselves considered as “guests” and obtain their own private quarters.

THE EAST WING: SEPPUN QUARTERS

The Seppun administrator and his attendants, including other shugenja and the various guards who watch over the Dojo, all have private quarters in the East Wing. This is a much better arrangement than the students’ condition, but not a surprise considering the respect accorded to the Seppun family and the importance of their duties in this place. Their rooms are small but comfortable, and all include a copy of the Tao of Shinsei for reference. There are two sentries posted in front of the administrator’s room (whether he is present or not), and since the Dojo’s corridors allow others to bypass this area entirely when going through the East Wing, it is usually much quieter than elsewhere. It is not uncommon for Seppun guardsmen to take advantage of this quiet to meditate in their rooms when off duty. The area as a whole is noticeably more decorated than the rest of the Dojo, with tasteful paintings, sculptures, and ikebana. Although normally only the Seppun themselves live here, there has been at least one occasion when a storm destroyed part of the student quarters and the Seppun allowed them to stay here for the interim until repairs could be completed.

The Administrator’s room rests at the end of the corridor, ensuring its protection by every Other member of the family in case of danger. It is slightly larger than the other ones, although nowhere close to the size of Imperial quarters elsewhere in the Empire. Since its inhabitant is traditionally a shugenja, the place often looks like a miniature shrine, littered with incense, scrolls, and the statue of whichever Fortune the current administrator favors. Visitors are expected to leave their swords at the door (even if all they carry is a bokken) out of respect for the administrator’s peaceful nature; only his fellow Seppun are allowed to bring any weapons inside, since the room is seen as representing the Emperor’s peace in an otherwise violent place. Most administrators reinforce the security of their room with magical wards, bringing woe to those who come uninvited.

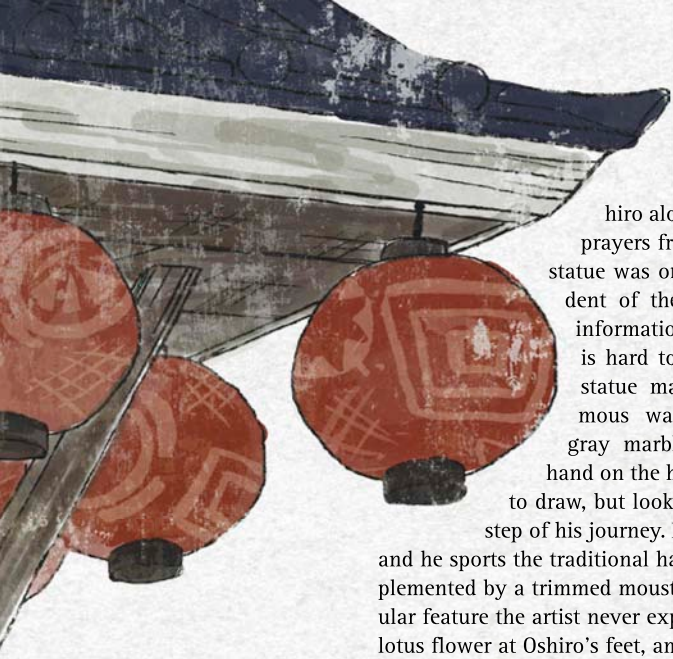
Because the Dojo was rebuilt in a time of strife, it is commonly rumored that the administrator’s quarters include escape tunnels leading away from the building. Whether this is true or not is unknown, and the Dojo has never come under serious assault since the days of Akodo Kentsu and the war with the Scorpion and Phoenix Clans.

THE EAST WING: OSHIRO’S SHRINE

The Dojo’s enigmatic founder is still a presence there today, centuries after his death. His groundbreaking theory of finding all basic stances common to the art of kenjutsu allowed samurai to see sword fighting as a unified art rather than an array of rival schools. Although his actual remains have never been found, the Dojo maintains a shrine here to his memory, revering him as a true visionary and prodigy. Although his clan of origin has never been conclusively proven, all samurai at the Dojo pay respect to his spirit.

Oshiro’s Shrine is a small room, barely large enough to hold four persons at a time. It holds a statue of Os-





hiro along with a stone tablet with prayers from the Tao of Shinsei. The statue was originally a gift from a student of the Kakita family; although information on Oshiro's appearance is hard to come by, most agree the statue manages to capture the famous warrior's spirit. Made from gray marble, it depicts him with a hand on the hilt of his sword, as if ready to draw, but looking ahead as if to the next step of his journey. His face appears weathered and he sports the traditional haircut of the samurai, complemented by a trimmed moustache and goatee. A particular feature the artist never explained is the presence of a lotus flower at Oshiro's feet, an image out of place for the Dojo (no such flowers are found in the area). The sculptor, Kakita Noryo, is known to have researched Oshiro's history extensively, so some believe the lotus might have a deeper meaning, while others suspect it was some sort of private statement from Noryo regarding his own life.

Behind the statue is a simple wooden case, carefully maintained for decades, which contains the only surviving original copy of Oshiro's scrolls, together with Bayushi Sawao's annotations. Only the current sensei is allowed to peruse them, and this is the source of most of the prestige associated with the sensei's position. Although over the years many clans have had access to these scrolls, they are very extensive and take months to fully understand let alone master, so continued access to them is considered a great prize. (It is believed the Seppun may have copies of the scrolls, but if so they have never admitted to it.) Unlike the other prized locations of the Dojo, the scrolls and shrine are not guarded by the Seppun but instead by two bushi from the current sensei's clan. This custom has occasionally led to tensions and unpleasant accusations, but considering the champion of the Dojo is usually the most powerful warrior in the place, few are willing to say anything that would risk a formal duel to the death.

A later but noteworthy addition to the shrine is a small alcove to one side dedicated to the memory of Bayushi Sawao, the man who first discovered Oshiro's scrolls and codified the Stances. Many clans opposed the idea of adding this element, since they appreciated the purity of Oshiro's unknown allegiance and thought a shrine to a Scorpion samurai – no matter how modest – diluted this purity. However, the Scorpion proved very persistent and reminded everyone that Oshiro's own scrolls included Sawao's annotations. The Seppun eventually granted the request, quelling the debate once and for all. Sawao is represented by a much smaller statue, and is depicted with his hands behind his back, wearing a simple mempo covering the lower half of his face. A single incense stick and ancestral tablet complete the alcove, which always seems overshadowed by Oshiro's presence. Normally, few aside from the Scorpion pray to Sawao's spirit, but when the sensei hails from the Scorpion Clan, it is considered bad form not to give at least a short prayer of thanks to Sawao's spirit when entering the shrine – and the guards are happy to remind anyone of that custom.

THE EAST WING: THE SENSEI'S QUARTERS

Considering the unorthodox way in which one becomes the sensei of the Hundred Stances Dojo, it is not surprising that the Sensei's personal quarters are the most extensive in the building, slightly bigger than the Seppun Administrator's, albeit with no other personal quarters surrounding them. The first room is actually a meeting room where the sensei greets his guests; it is usually kept with very bare decoration, since frequent use coupled with the often rapid changes of sensei make it tiresome and impractical to renovate each time. Instead, the only item of note is a pair of swords displayed on the wall, directly behind the sensei when he is receiving guests. The swords are said to have been recovered by Akodo Kentsu from the ruins of the original Dojo, and may have belonged to Oshiro, Sawao, or one of Sawao's students. The scabbards and handles are burnt black, but the blades are still in a surprisingly good state, leading some to believe their spirits have been awakened. However, this remains speculation since the blades have never been used in combat out of respect to those who paved the way for the Dojo to exist. It is customary for the sensei to receive only one guest at a time, which is believed to be a form of symbolic sparring, a sign of the Dojo's dedication to one-on-one combat.

The second room is the personal quarters of the sensei. This is where the master of the place can rest away from the stressful and challenging environment of the rest of the Dojo. Not surprisingly, it tends to be much more customized by its occupants, and it has become a tradition for each sensei to leave a small token of his presence behind. As a result the place can seem a bit cluttered, with dozens of scrolls containing notes and poems, a small collection of netsuke miniatures, and even a large tetsubo from a rather notorious Crab sensei. Each piece has a story to be told, and many sensei who hold the office for a significant amount of time make it their duty to learn more about these reminders (most of whose origins can be learned in the Dojo's library). The room has all the amenities one could expect: a writing desk, armor stand, sword stand, and so forth. A small sliding screen allows the room to be opened up for a beautiful view over the plain.

THE SOUTH WING: THE LIBRARY

While the Dojo as a whole is quite obviously a warrior's place, it was built to protect and understand a series of texts, so it is no surprise many students here are quite well educated. The library was first built during Akodo Kentsu's time, as he was himself (like many warriors of his family) as adept with a quill as he was with a sword. Since the schedule of lessons at the Dojo is somewhat informal, decided by whoever is the sensei at the current time, many students spend their idle time in the library searching for the extra piece of knowledge which will make them into the perfect warrior. Many sensei encourage this course of action, and indeed can often be found here themselves furthering their own studies. The place is also among the quieter places in the compound, and some come here just to enjoy the silence.



The building itself is rather dark, since it was thought too many window openings would only serve to expose the texts to the infamously furious weather of the area. As a result many visitors bring their own lanterns or candles to their studies, enduring the threat of a fire for the sake of proper light. The many scrolls are kept on large shelves that stretch from floor to ceiling, and many writing desks are available to whoever wants to take notes or make a copy of a scroll. The only individuals who can claim priority in access to these scrolls are the administrator and the sensei; otherwise, everything is on a first-come-first-served basis.

The library is traditionally watched over by a Seppun, usually a shugenja. Currently this duty falls to a middle-aged man named Seppun Kurou. Visitors find him helpful and cheerful, far from the dour curators they may have met in libraries elsewhere in the Empire. However, Kurou is quite fanatical about the organization of the scrolls in the library, and any student endangering the system (let alone the scrolls themselves) will quickly find himself at odds with the curator. Aside from that, though, Kurou is an enthusiastic scholar ready to discuss any topic, from different types of writing paper to the styles of kenjutsu from lost Minor Clans. He rarely leaves the library at all, always busy adding new texts to it and making it sure it remains properly organized. Anybody bringing interesting new writings to be added to the library will quickly earn the man's favor.

The largest section in the library is of course devoted to kenjutsu. Almost anything about swordsmanship can be found here, from detailed personal essays on the art to historical accounts of duels and battles. Naturally, both Kakita's *The Sword* and Mirumoto's *Niten* are present, along with the writings of any previous sensei who put words to paper. There are also more general sections to the library, and a samurai wishing to know more about history, theater, or poetry may be surprised to find how well-stocked the library is despite its remote location. Perhaps the most surprising element is the very large theology section, but this makes sense when one considers how both the Tao and the Fortunes had bearing on the Dojo's creation, and the Seppun have always favored an atmosphere of piety. Many spiritual essays can be found here, as well as collections of local legends.

THE SOUTH WING: THE MINOR DOJO

The chamber known as the "minor dojo" was never a planned part of the complex; rather, it grew up as a natural by-product of the Dojo's rules. As dozens of prospective students and challengers flocked to the Hundred Stances Dojo, it quickly became apparent the sensei would have

neither the room nor the desire to teach them all. The rules of the Dojo made sure there was no shortage of challengers, but simultaneously ensured not all students would receive the sensei's teachings. The Seppun quickly realized the problem and allocated an empty room for other students to practice, avoiding any idleness which could have given rise to discontent or friction. Over time, a small group of individuals emerged who had served as sensei but had then been defeated. These samurai might have lost access to the Hundred Stances scrolls, but they still retained much useful knowledge and began teaching smaller classes of their own. This in turn ensured most clans had access to the basics of the local fighting style, which quelled resentment and prepared challengers who sought the position of champion. As such, the minor dojo has become an integral part of the larger Dojo's functioning.

The room itself is quite large, having been built during Akodo Kentsu's time as a storage room for war supplies. Its maintenance falls somewhat behind the rest of the building in the order of priorities, and while one could never accuse the servants of leaving it dirty, the occasional tear in a mat or shard of wood stuck in a pillar does happen. Since the minor dojo frequently sees many classes training at the same time, it makes great use of paper screens for segregation, and can look almost like a maze to novice visitors. The division of space happens more-or-less through consensus, since few samurai wish to shame themselves by bickering over something so petty, much less attract the attention of the Seppun.

This is also a place where students can practice on their own, with a single partner, or train in other forms of swordsmanship or even other weapons (although the latter is frowned upon). Many of the informal challenges between the students take place here, and these attract a fair amount of attention. The room is large enough for a sizable audience to gather, although only the most talented





contestants ever attract really large crowds. Contrary to the main dojo chamber, there is no Seppun presence to guard samurai or their blades, so the different clan groups tend to police themselves to avoid the possibility of shameful confrontation.

Many sensei come and go in the minor dojo, some with months of experience as champion of the Hundred Stances, some with just a few lessons under their belt but enough charisma and direction to gather followers. A few of the more prominent teachers in the minor dojo include the following:

- ☉ **Shiba Danji:** This aged man rarely fights anymore, his left arm having suffered a terrible fracture he never fully healed. This happened during the challenge which cost him his position as champion after months of uninterrupted dominance. Although he cannot demonstrate swordsmanship moves properly anymore, Danji remains one of the leading expert on the Hundred Stances. Some consider his views as slightly dated compared to more recent and popular teachings, but his mind retains a sharpness which can lead many students to important breakthroughs.
- ☉ **Bayushi Suke:** Suke has held the position of sensei twice, although only for about a week each time. Still, this was enough to cement his reputation as a great swordsman even if he does not seem interested in the position anymore. Unsurprisingly, he only teaches Scorpion Clan samurai. His two-piece metal mask covers his entire face and mouth and is painted completely black. His classes are famous for being extremely difficult to qualify for, and he punishes any failures harshly, but many of his students have moved on to become strong challengers.
- ☉ **Mirumoto Iyoka:** A middle-aged man has gained some controversy in the Dojo since he gave up the position of sensei only one day after winning it, having taught only a single lesson. Iyoka claimed he was not ready for the position and has never sought to win it again, despite the encouragement of many who consider him a very strong warrior with great technique. Instead, Iyoka seems content to teach new students. His class is noted for never using anything but real steel during training, as Iyoka considers bokken and similar instruments inappropriate for the real study of kenjutsu. While there have never been any serious wounds or incidents during Iyoka's lessons, the sight of a dozen bare blades in a crowded dojo tends to make people quite nervous.

THE SOUTH WING: GUESTS' QUARTERS

As if the Dojo was not crowded enough with students, teachers, administrators, and servants, it also attracts occasional visitors and guests without any direct involvement in its lessons. Due to the distance to the nearest village, these guests also require housing; as a result, the Seppun have arranged for a handful of rooms to be added to the South Wing for this purpose. The rooms are fairly small but are well apportioned so that no one need feel insulted at having to stay. Since they are located next to the minor dojo, guests must endure quite a bit of noise at most hours of the day and sometimes even into the night.

A single room in the Guest Quarters is used as a neutral meeting area, and also serves as a refuge for those guests who do not wish to mingle with the martial population of the Dojo. The meeting room can comfortably accommodate six people, and is decorated with paintings representing various Fortunes, a gift from an inspired artist who stopped in the Dojo long ago. This place is also frequently used by the sensei or administrator when they wish to greet guests who will not be staying as students. A few examples of guests who can be encountered at the Dojo are presented here:

- ☉ **Otomo Gaitsu:** A young courtier of the Otomo Family, Gaitsu has decided he wants a yojimbo trained in the Hundred Stances Dojo after hearing of their prowess at the Imperial Winter Court. Since he is in no hurry, Gaitsu is content to simply observe training sessions and stay at the Dojo for a while until he makes his choice. Many at the Dojo are not overly pleased with his presence, since Gaitsu is flirtatious, arrogant, and drinks quite frequently, but his family connections have prevented any repercussions. Many students try to mask their real skill when he is around lest they end up being selected as his yojimbo.
- ☉ **Isawa Korihime:** A discrete presence in the Dojo, Korihime is a fire shugenja who is touring the Empire to collect legends related to the Fortune Osano-Wo. She has stopped at the Dojo to collect the local stories, pay her respect to Oshiro's shrine, and exchange thoughts with the Seppun regarding the nature of Osano-Wo's Rock (see below). She can often be found in the library, watched closely by her dour yojimbo Shiba Suro. Suro has no interest in the Hundred Stances and is too focused on watching his charge to appreciate the value of the Dojo's training.
- ☉ **Kakita Osatsu:** Osatsu is a swordsman of remarkable talent and has acknowledged the potential of the Hundred Stances, but refuses to join the Dojo's learning program. Instead he is currently exploring another area of interest: painting. Osatsu strongly believes in a parallel between the swift stroke of the blade and the similar movement of the brush. He can frequently be seen in the main or minor dojo, composing paintings and practicing calligraphy based on the students' movements. Many of these works are quite good, but Osatsu believes he has yet to create his true masterpiece.

THE WEST WING: THE SERVANTS QUARTERS

Considering how many samurai attend it, with many of them remaining there on a permanent basis, the Hundred Stances Dojo needs a large number of servants to function properly. Due to the distance from the nearest village, the servants must be housed on-site. Technically, all the Dojo servants are vassals of the Seppun, although they usually tend to organize themselves rather than waiting on the Seppun for orders. All of them originally hail from Roaring Thunder Village, and they often still have families and homes there. Some relish the opportunity to work closer to the samurai and live in secure conditions, while others are made nervous by the large numbers of warriors around them and miss the companionship of their kin in the village. Regardless, several dozen servants are present at any given time, attending to the needs of the Dojo; they are rarely even noticed by samurai, but are an integral part of daily life around the building.

The servant quarters occupy a large part of the West Wing, although the arrangement of corridors allows a samurai to walk through the wing while completely avoiding their residences. The area is even more cramped and disorganized than the students' quarters, and most servants sleep in a large communal room with very little privacy. Thankfully, this is not much different from their lives in the village, so they make do easily enough. Most servants live in the Dojo for at least six months at a time, sometimes going up to a year without visiting their homes in the village, so they try to make their room look like home; thus many of them have flowers, drawings, toys, or other mementos from their village, making the otherwise bland quarters more lively. Those with talent often play music in the evenings to alleviate an otherwise boring life. The quarters also double as a meeting area when there is a problem which must be dealt with or new tasks need to be assigned. In many ways, the servants' quarters function like a small village within the walls of the Dojo itself.

The leader of this small population of heimin is a middle-aged woman named Osoné, a widow who lost her husband to disease some years ago. She runs the servants with a fair but strong hand, punishing any misstep harshly but showing full understanding of each individual's abilities and needs. She enjoys a good reputation with the few samurai who know who she is, and under her authority the servants of the Dojo have been given more independence than before. Osoné worries that the Dojo is nearing maximum capacity, as the growing number of students and guests are straining resources to the maximum. So far it is still functioning properly, without a hitch, but any misfortune could quickly turn the place into a disorganized logistical nightmare.

Like any other settlement, the Hundred Stances Dojo requires a few eta to function correctly, primarily to collect waste (although they must occasionally take care of a deceased student). However, samurai will never consent to let hinin live under the same roof as them, so the

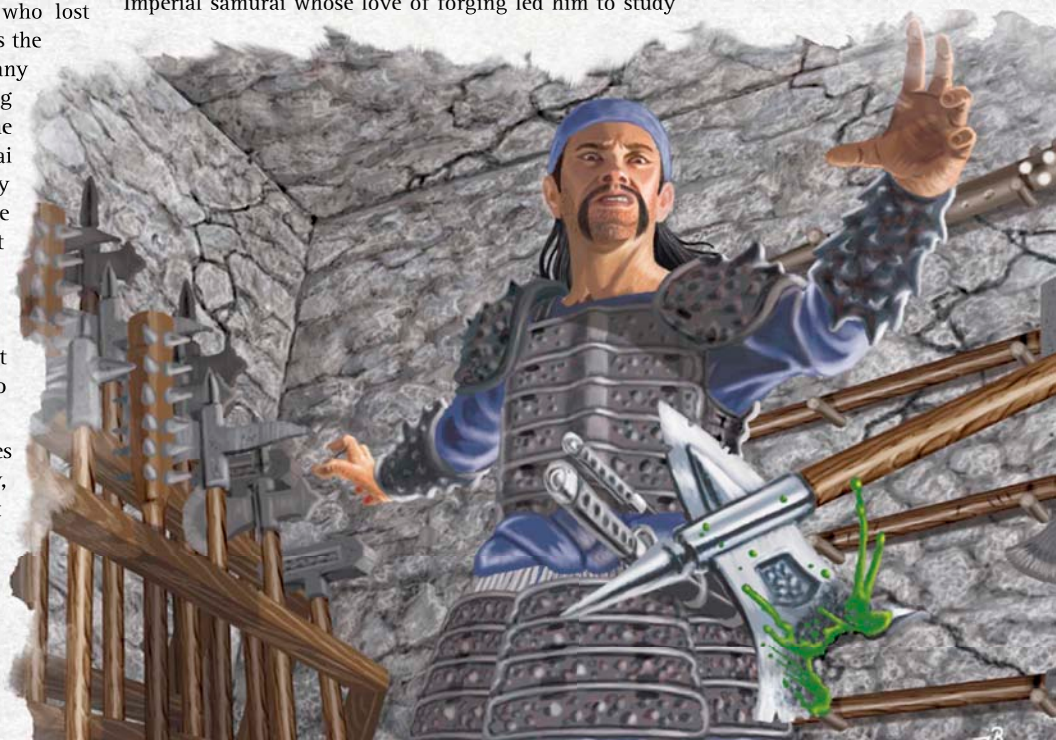
few eta working at the Dojo inhabit a trio of huts about half an hour's walk away, conveniently hidden from samurai eyesight by the gentle roll of the plain. The eta live in miserable conditions even by the standards of their kind, and must frequently be replaced as they succumb to exhaustion or disease. They spend nearly as much time repairing their houses as they do taking care of the samurai's needs, and apart from the occasional benevolent monk's visit from the monastery in Roaring Thunder Village, they find little solace in their lives.

THE WEST WING: THE ARMORY

As one might expect in a place dedicated to the art of the blade, the Hundred Stances Dojo maintains an extensive armory as well as a small smithy (since some of the sparring is done with live weapons, swords often get chipped or otherwise damaged). The Lion samurai who reconstructed the Dojo were practical people and built an armory and attending smithy when the place first came under assault. As a result, the Armory is a well-maintained and spacious section of the Dojo, and receives daily visits from samurai eager to ensure the soul of their ancestors remains untarnished.

The Armory comprises two areas, the first being a large open room with supplies for maintaining and caring for swords: tsuba, scabbards, polishing kits, silk for the handles, and so forth. The armorer, who works for the Seppun Family, is usually found here behind a small desk, and is happy to advise samurai on their choices of supplies. For more extensive care or repairs, the armorer will retreat to the back room, the home of the smithy originally built by the Lion. While the smithy is used only rarely, it is more than enough to repair any sword or even occasionally forge new ones. When it is in use the smoke can be seen from miles away on a clear day, and is sometimes used by travelers on the plains as a guide to the Dojo's location. The armorer frequently sleeps in the smithy, which doubles as his personal quarters.

The current armorer is a man named Miya Haike, an Imperial samurai whose love of forging led him to study





with the Kaiu. Most samurai mistake him for a Crab, since Haike is a large, portly man with an impressive mustache, but his manners show the mark of Imperial education. Haike loves his work and can speak for hours on every aspect of sword-smithing, design, maintenance, and decoration throughout the Empire. He has recently taken to forging his own swords when not otherwise busy, and his first few efforts have received praise for their excellent balance. A few students have been gifted with these swords as a reward for exceptional performance or service, and Haike hopes to soon get his first commissions from the Great Clans. Although he does not believe he will ever be a true master smith, he is more than content to make his own modest contributions to what he considers to be the true soul of the Empire. An elderly servant named Okoro assists Haike in his daily duties, which include cleaning and maintaining the armory as well as the occasional unavoidable monetary exchange.

THE WEST WING: THE BATHS

During the renovation of the Dojo following the three-sided war for control of it, construction workers stumbled upon a small underground spring of great purity, since it had never been disturbed before. The Seppun administrators recognized the opportunity this presented and had both a well and a bath-house built immediately. With the addition of man-made heat, the waters provide samurai with much needed hygiene and relaxation, making extended stays at the Dojo far more tolerable than they would be otherwise. Almost every samurai at the Dojo visits the baths daily, and for many it has become a social occasion, a time to relax with one's peers without worrying about training or competition. There is a widely-held belief that the waters of the spring have curative properties, and students often try to stay longer in the baths after suffering injuries during training. Unfortunately, due to the high attendance at the Dojo the baths are in constant demand and samurai can rarely stay in the water as long as they would wish. Servants will commonly signal the current users that their time is up by announcing the firewood and stones need to be replaced lest the water becomes cold. In the evenings, when most samurai have already taken their daily baths, the place becomes more quiet and bathers can sometimes rest in the hot water for a considerable time, even sending for food and drinks.

The bath's chambers are divided into male and female sections by shoji screens in the outer rooms and a wooden barricade in the main soaking pool; this maintains propriety, although local custom allows for conversation to take place across the barriers so long as there is no visual contact. The main pool is fed directly by the underground spring, and kept warm through the use of heated stones arranged to give a natural appearance. Samurai soak in this pool after cleansing themselves, and it is by far the favored section of the bath-house. Since the pool is not enough to accommodate all bathers during busy times, the baths also have several wooden tubs, which while less popular are easier to keep warm for a sufficient length of time.

A large number of servants take care of the baths, as they require considerable labor to keep them operating, clean, and in good condition. These servants are supervised by a married couple, Sutsu and Sakiko, who the Seppun brought in from a distant province reputed for its fine baths. While they are doing an excellent job, Sutsu and Sakiko are distrusted by the other servants, who consider them strangers and dislike their perceived snobbish mannerisms.

THE WEST WING: THE RESTAURANT

Another amenity made necessary by the long-term stays of students and guests in the Dojo, the restaurant is busy at almost all times. Due to the Dojo's high attendance, it usually remains open though most of the day rather than at specific mealtimes, allowing samurai to get a quick meal in between their duties and ensuring everybody is served at least once a day. Meals can also be delivered directly to the samurai's quarters, and of course important personages such as the sensei and the administrator get their own meals delivered every day.

The restaurant also serves as a general relaxation place for samurai, much like the baths. Swords are expected to be left outside, and many leave theirs at the nearby armory to be polished while they are eating. As a result, the atmosphere in the restaurant tends to be more relaxed and friendly than in the training rooms, albeit not quite as informal as in the baths. The restaurant is also a common place for bragging, and almost no meal goes by without someone openly boasting of a great deed or pompously challenging another warrior to a duel of skill. The proud and flowery language of samurai is fully expected here, and the restaurant is rarely a boring place.

Physically, the restaurant is a high-roofed one-story room with several exits to the nearby corridors. There is always one table specifically designated to each Great Clan, ensuring the students can sit with their own to avoid any potential conflict. (Depending on the era, this can be anywhere from six to nine specific tables, and in times where more clans serve the Emperor the place can feel distinctly cramped.) The tables are all of equal size, which makes it difficult for the larger delegations to attend in full, particularly the Lion Clan students. However, it is perfectly acceptable for samurai of one clan to sit at another clan's table – if everyone agrees. For example, Phoenix samurai will frequently sit with the Crane, and only need to politely ask to do so, but for a Scorpion to seat at the table of the Lion Clan would require a Lion samurai to vouch for him. Members of the Imperial families, when they frequent the place at all, can sit wherever they choose with no restrictions, and their choice is often perceived to be a sign of favor to whichever clan they select. Minor Clan samurai have to request the patronage of a Great Clan to be granted a place, which is not necessarily difficult but might come with political consequences. It is extremely rare for ronin to be granted entrance to the Dojo at all, of course, and a wave-man would have to be greatly favored to sit with samurai of the Great Clans.

The restaurant is currently run by Bentoishi, a very large heimin with boundless energy. The place has been in the care of his family for generations, and he takes as much pride in his cooking as a samurai does in his honor. His dishes include a great deal of poultry, which is just as well considering the Dojo's location on a remote plain which only has a few minor streams, not nearly enough to supply fresh fish daily. Bentoishi loves his work but sometimes regrets the Dojo's poor access to resources; anyone able to bring him rare spices, fresh exotic food, or uncommon beverages will earn his gratitude. Bentoishi is actually a very connected man for a member of the lower caste, since he knows every face in the Dojo and everyone's eating habits.

THE COURTYARD

The Dojo maintains a large open space in its center, both out of traditional design and to help alleviate the pressure of crowded living with so many samurai. The courtyard is a large flat square area filling the space between the four wings, with a single watchtower at its center (see below). A small section of the courtyard close to the West Wing is roofed, providing a small stable. Safe from the high winds which beset the surrounding plain, the courtyard is the site of many activities. The most common is training, since many students prefer to spend all their time sharpening their skills. Most practices taking place here involve samurai executing kata or performing more general calisthenics. The variety of kata which can be seen here in the morning is fairly impressive, and many guests will wake up early to be able to witness this spectacle. A few samurai, particularly the Unicorn, will on occasion use the courtyard for simple horsemanship exercises, albeit in small numbers so as not to disturb others. Others practice with different weapons, such as bows or polearms, but usually alone and in small amounts so as not to run counter to the spirit of the Dojo. Most training stops during the bouts of harsh weather which frequently strike the area, although the Mantis and Crab will stubbornly continue their efforts even in the worst conditions.

Aside from training, many samurai use the courtyard for short walks, providing an opportunity for conversation or relaxation. It is also a common place for meditation, since the ground is hard-packed and kept swept clean.

The courtyard has a single cherry tree in the southeastern corner, apparently a holdover from earlier generations. A few samurai, mostly from the Crane Clan, have taken to maintaining it and have added a few other hardy plants around it, providing a small garden of sorts. While many more warlike samurai would prefer to see the space used for practical purposes, the Seppun appreciate the effort and uphold it. A well is located nearby, providing water for the whole Dojo through access to the same spring that feeds the baths.



The north side of the courtyard is also where aspiring students congregate and patiently sit in hopes of attracting the sensei's attention. These so-called supplicants often wait silently for days or weeks, and it is considered improper to address them if you are not the sensei. Leaving before the sensei's current training sessions are over is deemed inappropriate for supplicants, since it shows a lack of dedication, and some have been known to pass out after spending countless hours in rain, snow, or blistering heat. (A local story tells of one student which was struck by lightning during such a supplication yet survived, leading the sensei to believe he was blessed by Osano-Wo.) Usually, however, a few days of determination are enough to earn a hearing with the sensei. Whether the supplicant is ultimately accepted is entirely up to the champion of the Dojo, and his decision can be influenced by anything from politics to religious omens.

THE WATCHTOWER

The watchtower is the only part of the Dojo which was not present in some form during the days of Bayushi Sawao. It was added by the Lion, who felt the need to keep an eye on the surrounding plain for possible attacks. After the Dojo became property of the Seppun, the watchtower lost its military purpose, but was still kept and maintained if only because it offered extra space the Dojo sorely needed. A single sentry is still posted at the top at all times, but his duties are more focused on looking out for wildfires and new arrivals than for rampaging armies. Since this is considered a lesser yet honorable duty, the Seppun have delegated it to the Great Clans, picking one clan at random every day and letting its members decide who will man the tower during the morning, afternoon, and night shifts.



The tower, which is often referred to by Lion Clan samurai as Kentsu's Tower, is a sturdy three-story structure, a marked difference from the single-level Dojo surrounding it. It is peppered with arrow slits, a strong reminder of its initial role as the key to the Dojo's military defense. The first level, originally designed as barracks for soldiers, has been converted into a storage room and is cluttered with barrels and crates of food, construction materials, and other such supplies. These would take quite some time to remove if the Dojo ever came under attack again, but given that any such attack is highly unlikely, the Seppun see no need for concern. Servants frequently visit this level, conducting inventories or transporting materials to and from the tower.

The second level, where archers would be stationed in the days when the Lion Clan owned the Dojo, has been converted into a small office for the magistrates who occasionally visit the area. While crime is rare in the Dojo, the mixture of many different clan samurai means that any incident which does occur requires Emerald Magistrates' involvement. Thus, the office is always maintained clean and well furnished for their use. The level also has a small cell the Seppun use if there is ever a need to hold someone until a magistrate can arrive, or to simply teach rowdier students a lesson in humility after drunken antics.

The third level, where sentries used to be posted facing all directions, now only has one sentry, circling periodically between all four sides. This level also has a small shrine commemorating the Lion Clan soldiers who died defending the Dojo from the Phoenix and the Scorpion. Samurai of those latter two clans have reported feeling uncomfortable while on their sentry duties, and while stopping short of claiming the place is haunted they have occasionally lobbied for the shrine's removal... thus far, to no avail.

THE FOUR GATES

The Dojo has four entrances, since its location makes it liable to receive visitors (or attacks) from all directions. All four gates are wide enough to allow two riders to come in side-by-side. They are constantly manned by the Seppun, although volunteers from the ranks of the Clans will on occasion be allowed to lend a hand.

The North Gate is called the Gate of Thunder; the East Gate is the Gate of Wind, the South Gate is the Gate of Fire, and the West Gate is the Gate of Rain. All four take their names from the natural phenomena which often occur around the Dojo. The gates are large and sturdy, and the passages beyond cut straight through the four wings of the Dojo to allow any incomers to directly access the courtyard. This was originally a deliberate design choice by the Lion Clan, which wanted to be able to move troops quickly between the courtyard and the four gates.

In modern times, the gates usually remain closed to protect the Dojo against the whims of the weather, but are instantly opened for most samurai even if they are only visiting the area. The gates are locked at night to ensure the Dojo's security, since its isolation makes night-time visitors highly unlikely. Although the plain is empty for miles around, the Seppun do not wish to take any risks with the security of their guests. Thus far, their record at the Dojo is flawless.

THE PLAINS

One of the stories about the plains surrounding the Dojo is the claim that they were originally called the Plains of Thunder, but after the main monastery of Osano-Wo was established in a similar region the name was taken away. While the plains do not have any official name on the Imperial maps, many in the area refer to them as the Plains of Lightning, possibly in a lighthearted jab at the more famous modern Plains of Thunder. Some samurai simply call them the Hundred Stances plains, in reference to their most famous feature, while those of a more poetic nature call them Oshiro's Grave in tribute to the ronin swordmaster.

The plains are gently rolling and somewhat rocky, extending from the Dojo in every direction as far as the eye can see. The poor quality of the soil and irregular access to fresh water makes them quite unfit for cultivation, explaining why they were left unoccupied until the Dojo was founded. Only a few minor rivers, little more than streams, meander through the plains – all of them can be crossed by foot and present no obstacle to travel.

The plains are famous (or perhaps notorious) for their terrible weather. Storms are quite frequent in the area, often with heavy thunder and ferocious winds. It is not uncommon for lightning strikes or prolonged droughts to result in wildfires which spread for miles around, making the area quite dangerous to the unwary. On the advice of the local peasantry, the samurai at the Dojo regularly burn any





vegetation within thirty feet of the buildings. This has helped the Dojo survive more than one major wildfire, although the smoke and heat are still serious problems even if the flames are kept away from the buildings.

The Dojo makes little actual use of the plains. However, for most of the samurai residents the plains are the only thing they can see for months, so many of them wander across the land once or twice during their stay. The plains are a popular location for horse rides, although one must be wary of the many rocky outcrops. However, it is easy to get lost on the plains due to the lack of clear geographical points of reference. Because the plains are so desolate and lightly traveled, it is not uncommon for wandering samurai to stumble across remnants of the old war between the Lion, Scorpion, and Phoenix; bringing back any such mementos is a good way to earn favor with the respective clans they belonged to.

Many younger samurai believe some of Oshiro or Sawao's scrolls might still be hidden somewhere in the Plains, perhaps in one of the many stone outcroppings which dot the landscape. There are also occasional rumors about ruins of nonhuman origin in some remote part of the area. Thus, newcomers to the Dojo will visit the plains more often than most, hoping to find something interesting. More reasonable or experienced samurai keep to the only clear road through the plains, which connects the Dojo to the nearest village.

OSANO-WO'S ROCK

One of the few area landmarks which is not related to the Dojo or its history, the object called Osano-Wo's rock predates human settlement in the area. It is a five foot tall outcrop of black basaltic stone. Many are baffled by its very presence, since there are no active volcanoes anywhere near the area. The local peasants believe it is the spot on which the old man of Osano-Wo's legend met the Crab heir and then died; they claim the Fortune struck the earth with lightning to honor the old man's memory and remind him of how he had defeated death. Whether this is true or not, the rock has become a center for Osano-Wo's worship. Many samurai, both from the Dojo and from elsewhere in the Empire, seek out the rock to pray to the Fortune of Fire and Thunder. There is no shrine built on the rock, though it is fairly easy to find due to its peculiar nature. Offerings are frequently left on or around the rock, and are collected regularly by the shugenja of the Dojo.

Worship of Osano-Wo here is unorganized and generally is a personal matter, although a few recommended prayers can be found in the Dojo's library. During storms everyone stays away from the Rock, since it is believed Osano-Wo might strike down any who stand too close.

Once per year, at the height of summer, a procession travels from Roaring Thunder village to the Rock. Monks lead hundreds of peasants through the plains over the course of several hours. All of the peasants bring what remains of their firewood from the previous cold seasons (which can sometimes be a heavy load to bear) and deposit it around the rock. After a lengthy prayer from the monks, thanking Osano-Wo for giving them the gift of fire and

sparing them the gift of thunder, the peasant set the pile of wood ablaze, only departing when it is entirely consumed. The ritual has been in place for as long as anyone can remember, and has never been skipped, not even during times of war or famine, lest the peasants face the wrath of Osano-Wo. (It may be noted that unlike the samurai, the peasants do not believe themselves at risk of being struck by lightning when they are near the rock, and in fact the ritual has been conducted during extreme storms on more than one occasion.) The exhausting trek, coupled with the high temperatures and difficult weather, sometimes result in one or more deaths, particularly among the elderly. Those who depart the mortal world this way are believed to have found favor with the Fortune of Thunder and supposedly meet with great fortune in their next incarnation.

Although samurai have occasionally observed this ritual, none have ever joined it, believing it is something which properly belongs only among the peasantry.

ROARING THUNDER VILLAGE

Located a good six hours' walk away from the Dojo, Roaring Thunder Village lies on the edge of the plains, and is the closest link between civilization and the Dojo. Although the settlement pre-dated Oshiro's journey to the plains, it has been extensively shaped by the presence of the Dojo in modern times. Nearly all students and guests travel through it before visiting the Dojo, so the village sees an unusually high number of samurai from all across the Empire. The locals exhibit a surprising amount of knowledge and savvy concerning the outside world, as well as an extensive knowledge of proper etiquette when addressing different members of the samurai class. The village is technically under Seppun supervision, although like the servants of the Dojo the villagers mostly police themselves. Through an arrangement between the Seppun and the Imperial tax collectors, all goods delivered to the Dojo are discounted from Imperial taxes, so the village is fairly prosperous and regards the Dojo as a beneficial presence.

The village comprises about a hundred buildings, generally of sturdy construction to withstand the storms which come out of the plains. A few carefully-irrigated rice paddies provide most of the food, and a small patch of forest offers both protection from the wind and useful lumber and firewood. The town's modest community of eta lives within the confines of the small forest, using the trees as extra protection against the elements (they cannot afford the more solid materials used in peasant habitations). A modest stream flows through the forest and waters the rice paddies before meandering into the plains, offering the occasional fish to supplement the peasants' diet.

Several shops in the village cater to samurai visitors, offering goods such as writing paper, kimono, and books, but the building almost all samurai visit while going through Roaring Thunder Village is the inn, known as the Master's Last Stop. Supposedly, Oshiro stayed there before he departed for the plains. Thanks to the steady flow of travelers to and from



Students of the Hundred Stances Dojo

the Dojo, the inn is large and quite well apportioned for such a remote location, and owner Korotsu is a rich and influential man in the area. He is affable and helpful with all samurai passing by, and resourceful enough to be able to grant visitors most of their requests, however unusual. While he wishes he had full control over the village, the role of headman has fallen to Jonsu, an elderly man who is widely loved and who has family connections to a large share of the village's population. Jonsu tends to be very conservative and pious in his decisions, preferring to keep things the way they are, while Korotsu advocates expanding the village's reach and influence through various economic projects. So far Jonsu has retained the favor of the village, but Korotsu's coins do attract a certain kind of individual ready to listen to his ideas.

The other place of note in Roaring Thunder Village is the monastery, located on the edge of town adjacent to the plains. It is maintained exclusively by monks from the Order of Thunder, dedicated to the Fortune Osano-Wo. Although they are skilled in martial training, the monks here rarely see any sort of conflict and focus on prayer and devotion to the Fortune rather than searching for conflict. Their initiation rites involve frequent trips across the plains, sometimes for days at a time, as they attempt to commune with the Thunderer and improve their endurance. The monks are very well-regarded in the village, since they frequently help with mundane tasks and their prayers are credited with sparing the village from the worst of storms harrowing the plains. It is also common for abandoned and orphaned children from the village to be sent to the monastery.

Obviously, those who attend the Hundred Stances Dojo tend to be bushi. Even courtiers or shugenja who have some level of proficiency with the sword usually find a whole place dedicated to kenjutsu somewhat tedious. However, that does not mean everything at the Dojo is solely related to fighting, and a variety of characters find a place there. Others can simply be visiting guests, in the area for one reason or another (see the description of the Guest Quarters earlier in this chapter).

Students from the Crab Clan

Interest from the Crab Clan in the techniques taught at the Dojo tends to vary from samurai to samurai. While most Crab samurai's lives are dedicated to war, few embrace kenjutsu to the level displayed there, preferring either other weapons or more pragmatic techniques. Still, for the advanced student the Dojo has a lot to offer, and the Crab allow occasional samurai to attend if only to show their strength to the other clans. The Crab care little for the occasionally complex politics of the Dojo, and their attendees have been known to ruffle the feathers of more refined samurai – which, according to some Crab, is half the fun of attending in the first place.

Sensei from the Crab Clan tend to be stern and practical, frequently offering to teach pupils from other clans in exchange for periods of service on the Wall or other favors to support their clan's war against the Shadowlands.

Their classes include endurance training and tips on how to adapt the Hundred Stances to fighting against nonhuman opponents, something which makes most other students feel ill at ease. Students of the Hiruma Bushi School (in those eras when their Techniques are available and not lost to the Shadowlands) tend to represent a large percentage of Crab attendance, since their teachings focus more on kenjutsu than those of the Hida. Still, the occasional Hida does crop up in the Dojo, and their strength and stamina make them feared contestants in matches. The odd Kaiu can also sometimes be found there, trying to pierce the secrets of bladesmithing by wielding the sword, or working in conjunction with the Armory (see the descriptions earlier in this chapter).





HIRUMA ERIKO, THE VETERAN

When the Crab sent Hiruma Eriko to the Hundred Stances Dojo, they had solid hopes for her. She was a talented student of the blade with a flawless record in her home dojo, and showed not only eagerness to learn but also a good-natured disposition rarely found in her clan. When she arrived Eriko immediately started learning as much as she could from the highest-ranked Crab student, and challenged the sensei as soon as she felt ready. She performed well but was ultimately defeated. Still, a passionate plea for another chance and the promise of better results allowed Eriko to extend her stay at the Dojo. That was years ago, and still she has not left. Eriko is one of the oldest student of the Dojo, having spent years learning with many other warriors and sensei to perfect her knowledge of the Hundred Stances. Showing the determination typical of the Crab, Eriko has never given up on he studies, always believing she is on the edge of a breakthrough. Her extended stay and honorable behavior have won her a network of friends and allies in and out the Dojo, and no one knows its inhabitants like she does.

While she has never won the sensei's position herself, Eriko's knowledge of the Stances is broad enough that she can teach junior students, and she has enough knowledge of kenjutsu for most of them to learn something useful from her. She realizes her chances of actually winning the champion's position are getting thinner every year, so Eriko has switched her focus to attempting to train the perfect student, a student who can win the position of sensei and honor her and her clan through the victory.

Now approaching forty years of age, Eriko is still a fit and capable warrior, although her long hair has begun to turn gray. Her lords have long forsaken any hopes of marrying her, since she is too stubborn to leave the Dojo, but her advancing age and lack of outstanding results have led some to suggest she should retire to the Hiruma lands to teach a new generation of warriors. Eriko dreads this possibility and has begun to consider other means, however desperate, to read the scrolls of the Hundred Stances before she finally has to leave the place she has called home for so many years.

HIRUMA ERIKO, THE VETERAN

AIR: 3	EARTH: 4	FIRE: 4	WATER: 3	VOID: 3
REFLEXES: 4		STRENGTH: 4		
Honor: 5.3		Status: 2.4	Glory: 4.1	

School/Rank: Hiruma Bushi 4

Skills: Athletics 4, Courtier 2, Defense 5, Etiquette (Conversation) 3, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 2, Investigation 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 6, Kyujutsu 2, Lore: Shadowlands 3, Sincerity (Honesty) 2, Stealth 3

Kata: Striking as Air, Striking as Fire, Veiled Menace Style

Advantages: Allies (Several at the Dojo), Higher Purpose (Train the next Hundred Stances sensei)

Disadvantages: Fascination (Hundred Stances), Hotei's Curse

Students of the Crane Clan

The Hundred Stances Dojo is a place favored by the Crane. Although they would much prefer if all attention was focused on the Kakita Dueling Academy, that school focuses more on the specific art of iaijutsu than on the general ways of kenjutsu, and thus avoids too many comparisons. Yet many Crane still learn to use the blade outside a duel, and the Dojo presents a superb place for them to do so. Of course, an environment drawing samurai of all clans also offers tremendous chances for networking, trading favors, and securing alliances, so the Crane are careful to send those of their bushi who are equally at ease in a fight and at court. Furthermore, they have always been close allies of the Seppun, whose skillful administration of the place they appreciate, so many Crane feel at ease in the Dojo.

Since the Crane Clan has three families with warrior traditions, they send a variety of individuals to the Dojo. The Doji students excel at mingling with others, while the Kakita have the mindset necessarily to fully immerse themselves in the study of the Hundred Stances. Daidoji students are rarer but still attend with some regularity, and are useful to gain the respect of the more warlike clans. Those Crane who claim the sensei position tend to invite many out-of-clan students in exchange for appropriate favors, building the alliance networks the clan needs, and they give the Dojo a more friendly and cooperative mood when they are in charge. Likewise, Crane students are some of those more likely to work with other clans' sensei by making it beneficial for both parties to cooperate. This does tend to draw the jealousy of other delegations, and even in the Dojo the Crane Clan's iaijutsu skills remain its best defense.

KAKITA SHOTSUNE, THE CHALLENGER

Kakita Shotsune's arrival at the Dojo drew immediate notice. The young Crane warrior is charming, talented, eager to learn and deadly in a fight. It is clear to all (including Shotsune herself) that she is expected by her clan to become the next sensei of the Dojo. She relishes the prospect – she is the last heir of her family line, her parents having both died on a battlefield of little glory, and she yearns to rehabilitate their line through great deeds. In true Crane style, she splits her days between perfecting her art and ingratiating herself with other students, ensuring that when she becomes sensei she will have a friendly, helpful group of samurai to work with. Although she has yet to issue an official challenge, every single one of her fights against other students has resulted in victory, and some believe she is simply taking her time gathering the techniques and insights she needs to defeat the champion.

However, having spent a few months at the Dojo, Shotsune has begun to realize she truly admires the current sensei. Her mind is too focused and too honorable to allow herself feelings of romantic love, but she has a deep respect for her fellow warrior, both his skill and his behavior. While she herself has great talent, she has begun to wonder if she would truly do better as a sensei. She



might win a flashy victory, only to lessen the chances for anyone to truly understand the Hundred Stances. The dilemma has begun to gnaw at her, and when the time comes to fight the champion she is unsure whether she will truly be ready.

In another time and place, Shotsune could have been a great sensation at court. Despite her short stature, her flowing long white hair and infectious smile have won her the affections of many samurai. While she likes to indulge in harmless flirting on occasion, those who push it too far are quickly reminded that Shotsune practices iaijutsu and carries one of the sacred blade of her family, the last heirloom of her parents. Still, she has yet to ever take a life and has lived a relatively sheltered life, far from war or strife. It does not escape her that if she becomes sensei she will have to teach students to do something she has never done herself – to kill other samurai in battle.

KAKITA SHOTSUNE, THE CHALLENGER

AIR: 4	EARTH: 2	FIRE: 4	WATER: 2	VOID: 3
REFLEXES: 5		PERCEPTION: 3		
Honor: 7.3		Status: 1.5	Glory: 5.2	

School/Rank: Kakita Bushi 3

Skills: Artisan: Poetry 3, Athletics 2, Courtier 2, Defense 3, Etiquette (Courtesy) 4, Iaijutsu (Focus) 5, Investigation 2, Kenjutsu (Katana) 6, Kyujutsu 2, Meditation 2, Sincerity (Honesty) 3, Tea Ceremony 2

Kata: Breath of Wind Style, Disappearing World Style, South Wind Style, Striking as Air, Strength of the Crane, Striking as Void

Advantages: Bente's Blessing, Great Potential (Kenjutsu), Paragon (Honor), Sacred Weapon (Kakita Blade)

Disadvantages: Idealistic, Small, Soft-Hearted

Students of the Dragon Clan

Despite not being involved in the Dojo's creation, the Dragon Clan has always had one of the strongest showings in the Hundred Stances Dojo. The Mirumoto family is the source of most Dragon Clan attendees, unsurprising given the family's passion for kenjutsu. Of course, the Kitsuki and even the Agasha (and later the Tamori) are also frequently swordsmen, as well as the occasional Togashi who refuses to let go of the sword when he takes his vows. Since the Dragon are more used to original ways of thinking than other samurai, and appreciate the Taoist wisdom which underlines the principles of the style taught at the Dojo, they find it an amenable place. Of course, most Dragon Clan samurai practice the two-swords Niten style of the Mirumoto rather than fighting solely with the katana like most of Rokugan. However, since the days of sensei Mirumoto Buracho (the first Hundred Stances champion from the Dragon Clan) the Niten style has become accepted in the Dojo, and Buracho himself wrote extensive essays on how the Stances naturally mesh with it.

The Dragon Clan rarely forces any of its vassals to attend the Dojo; rather, the clan simply allows students with a strong enough reason to go to do so. In some cases Dragon samurai seemingly find the place through sheer coincidence, and stay when it proves to their liking. Indeed, the samurai of the Dragon Clan appreciate the place's remote location and are always the strongest proponents of remaining isolated from mundane distractions. When a Dragon sensei is in charge, he will usually select students based on personal instinct rather than perceived political favors or military prowess, leading to a slightly confusing state of things for other students. This also means a Dragon sensei will sometimes refuse to teach a fellow Dragon based on personal reasons, which further baffles other clans.

MIRUMOTO SAIKO, THE FAILURE

As a child, Mirumoto Saiko did not immediately attract the attention of her sensei. While she performed appropriately during her lessons, she was neither a prodigy nor a troublemaker. Instead, Saiko was a quiet and withdrawn child who practiced and studied in silence and seclusion, finding her own answers through patience and determination. When she finally passed her gempukku, many were surprised at how skilled she had become, validating her attitude in her own eyes and her teachers' as well.

Saiko's initial assignments were as yojimbo to a succession of courtiers, and while she learned a few things about politics she spent all her free time further studying and practicing her fighting techniques. Her skill in duels proved very valuable to her clan, and she slowly rose through the ranks until she was admitted to the elite circles of the Dragon swordmasters. That remains the proudest day of her life, a feat none in her family had ever achieved before. Saiko would have happily gone back to defending the honor of the Dragon Clan in the courts, but she overheard something which caught her attention: two of her sensei were discussing famous dojo when the Hundred Stances Dojo came up. Saiko immediately became fascinated with the idea of a place solely dedicated to the art of the blade, and the chance to prove her value to her clan and to Rokugan at large seemed too good for her to pass. She pleaded to be sent to the Dojo so she could master the Stances and become the new sensei, proving to all the strength of the Dragon Clan. Impressed by her rise in skill so far, and intrigued by her enthusiasm, her sensei agreed to send her.

Saiko approached her time at the Dojo the same way she approached anything: with preparation, careful study, and intense focus. She spent her days training on her own, speaking with other students who had knowledge of the Stances, and piecing together the information contained in the scrolls. She carefully selected her opponents to both cement her reputation and learn more about the Hundred Stances. When her time came to challenge the sensei, she was perfectly ready... and her defeat came as a great and terrible shock. Saiko's shaken confidence let her temper flare to the surface, and she shamed herself by shouting



at her opponent, asking to know the reason of her defeat. The champion spoke of the blade as a living, creative thing, something difficult for Saiko to understand given her methodical and pragmatic spirit.

To this day Saiko still struggles to accept the sensei's words. She has lost her focus and has not participated in any challenge, official or not, for weeks. She is a lost soul in the Dojo, and new arrivals are left to wonder who the silent and forlorn Dragon might be and why she never trains in public.

MIRUMOTO SAIKO, THE FAILURE

AIR: 3	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 4	WATER: 2	VOID: 4
REFLEXES: 4	WILLPOWER: 4	PERCEPTION: 3		
Honor: 4.4		Status: 2.0	Glory: 4.3	

School/Rank: Mirumoto Bushi 3/Swordmaster 1

Skills: Athletics 2, Courtier 1, Defense 5, Etiquette 2, Iaijutsu (Focus) 5, Investigation 1, Jiu-jutsu 3, Kenjutsu (Katana, Wakizashi) 7, Kyujutsu 2, Lore: Shugenja 2, Lore: Theology (Fortunism) 4, Meditation 3, Sincerity 1

Kata: Striking as Air, Strength of the Dragon

Advantages: Strength of the Earth, Wary

Disadvantages: Brash, Doubt (Kenjutsu)

Students of the Lion Clan

The Lion Clan is one of the clans with the strongest presence at the Hundred Stances Dojo, not surprising given that it came to prominence during their stewardship; many Lion also maintain the ronin Oshiro was one of their own. Regardless of historical claims, the fact remains that between the Matsu, the Akodo, and even some Ikoma and Kitsu, the Lion has many hundreds of swordsmen eager to perfect their skill at the Dojo in service to their clan, and only careful screening by the Lion themselves prevents the place from being flooded with students. As a result, most Lion attendants are already talented warriors and form the benchmark against which other clan students measure themselves. Of course, this also means the Lion receive the largest share of informal challenges, putting them at the forefront of the Dojo's competitive atmosphere.

There have been many sensei of the Lion Clan since the Seppun administration begun, starting with the first one, Akodo Hitsuko – which the Lion are quick to remind everyone. As such, many Lion students have had access to scrolls of the Hundred Stances, and the position of sensei is more important to them for its influence and glory than for further access to knowledge many of them already possess. Sensei of the Lion Clan tend to restrict their teachings to their clan mates, although exceptions are sometimes made if anybody can measure up to their



almost impossible standards. Conversely the Lion will constantly seek challenges to sensei from any other clan, and will target the sensei's clan mates for challenges as long as their tenure in the position lasts. It is generally understood the Lion would have many more duels to the death if not for the authority of the Seppun, who they respect immensely. They still request these more frequently than any other clan, since their standards for what constitutes a lethal insult tend to be much lower than any other clan's.

MATSU HIROTARO, THE CHAMPION

Matsu Hirotaro was born the child of a Matsu mother and an Akodo father, and it was always understood that would attend the Akodo bushi school rather than the school of his namesake. This suited him perfectly well, for while Hirotaro definitely had the fires of battle burning in his heart, he had also inherited his father's calm and composed behavior. While his sisters went on to become famous warriors in the Matsu armies, Hirotaro applied himself to master the style of his father's ancestors. Very early, it became apparent that Hirotaro was blessed with a sharp mind and impressive coordination, and he learned kenjutsu as easily as some learn to walk. And while he was a man of few words, Hirotaro had a good grasp of tactics, and when he passed gempukku he was immediately placed in command of his own squadron. Hirotaro threw himself in every battle like it was his last, showing his enemies no mercy and sparing his men no effort towards victory. He was well on his way to becoming one of the most successful of Lion Clan warriors when the senior Lion student at the Hundred Stances Dojo died in a duel.

Since Hirotaro was seen as one of the strongest swordsman in the clan, he was selected to replace the late student. He complied, silent as always but altogether willing, seeing this as an opportunity to further refine his fighting style. He took to the Hundred Stances naturally, having plenty of personal experience to supplement his studies in the Dojo. When his clan pushed for Hirotaro to challenge the sensei, he obeyed and achieved a brilliant

victory, using both mastery of the Stances and his own skill and natural dexterity to perform impressive and intricate hits on his opponent. Hirotaro thus became the new champion of the Dojo and has remained so ever since, defeating numerous opponents before and since.

As a teacher, Hirotaro is austere and demanding, favoring students who already have a solid grasp of kenjutsu rather than newcomers to the art. The bulk of his direct apprentices come from the Lion Clan, although he accepts a few others – particularly if they prove their worth by defeating a Lion Clan samurai first. As his tenure as sensei lengthens, Hirotaro has come to realize he longs to return to the field of battle. Here he feels more and more like a caged beast unable to fight side by side with his brethren. Honor and duty prevent him from conceding defeat or even voicing his feelings, so he secretly hopes for a stronger student to one day take his place. So far, no such samurai has appeared.

MATSU HIROTARO, THE CHAMPION

AIR: 3	EARTH: 4	FIRE: 5	WATER: 4	VOID: 4
REFLEXES: 4	AGILITY: 6			
Honor: 7.8		Status: 4.4		Glory: 6.6

School/Rank: Akodo bushi 5/Akodo Kensai

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle (Mass Combat) 4, Defense 3, Games: Go 5, Iaijutsu 6, Investigation 3, Kenjutsu (Katanas) 8, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Bushido 5, Lore: History 4, Sincerity 3

Kata: Disappearing World Style, Striking as Fire, Striking as Water

Advantages: Balance, Elemental Blessing (Fire), Great Potential (Kenjutsu), Quick Healer

Disadvantages: Asocial (2 points), Can't Lie

Students of the Mantis Clan

Since none of their families have any great interest in kenjutsu, the Mantis Clan has never readily become involved in the Hundred Stances Dojo. However, they also hate to be seen showing weakness, so there is usually a modest Mantis presence there, albeit one of the smallest delegations. Samurai of the Mantis Clan do have enough leeway in their training that a few pick up kenjutsu, particularly in the Yoritomo family. Also, Mantis samurai who have trained with other more traditional clans as a result of alliances or hostage exchanges are often picked as Dojo students. In any case, the competitive atmosphere at the Dojo is one which suits the Mantis quite well, and they also appreciate the respect toward their ancestor Osano-Wo at both the Dojo and among the peasants.

A Mantis sensei is not known to have happened to the Dojo in recorded history. There are rumors of a sensei named Yoritomo Zoichi, a drunken brawler who supposedly held the position for exactly one day (losing it after he sobered up), but the Seppun dismiss this as a fable. Regardless, if a Mantis were ever to win control



of the Dojo, it is quite possible the place would become even more eclectic, opening avenues of learning for more diverse fighting styles. The Mantis sometimes complain about the isolation of the Dojo, and while they certainly do not mind the frequent storms, they have pushed for the establishment of a village closer to the Dojo; this has yet to succeed, but the Mantis are nothing if not stubborn. In the meantime, every Mantis student throws himself into the challenges daily, and if their techniques have yet to win much respect their spirit certainly has done so.

TSURUCHI KINSHIRO, THE ICONOCLAST

To say Tsuruchi Kinshiro is not the typical student at the Hundred Stances Dojo is a bit of understatement. The foul-mouthed warrior is by his own admittance a better archer than a swordsman, and considers the katana to be only one of many weapons a samurai can use on the battlefield. Nonetheless, his presence has made quite an impression. It threatens to bring discord to the Dojo, but Kinshiro would not have it any other way.

Born after the Tsuruchi became a part of the Mantis Clan, Kinshiro grew up part of a rapidly changing world and learned to adapt to circumstances. After completing his gempukku, he served in a variety of functions, including scout, soldier, yoriki, and first mate on a Yoritomo ship. Through it all Kinshiro displayed great feats of athleticism and endurance, but also attracted a lot of trouble through his disrespectful speech and stubborn adherence to his own opinions, however inappropriate they might be. He joined the ranks of the Tsuruchi Swordsman after one too many samurai called him a coward for refusing to defend himself with a blade, and repaired the insult by cutting down that samurai in a duel a few years later. Kinshiro did not see his kenjutsu training as a controversial thing, since his mother was from the Yoritomo family, but it still caused arguments and tensions with other members of his own family. When an opening presented itself for an extra Mantis student at the Hundred Stances Dojo, Kinshiro was directed there, as much to get rid of him as because he was one of the few members of his family with enough skill to ever qualify.

Kinshiro readily adapted his style to the Hundred Stances, but he found the almost religious respect other students had for the sword aggravating, while they were less than thrilled at training alongside a man whose ancestors shattered their own katana as a rite of passage. After fighting in a few duels, due to insults on both sides (and winning his fair share of them), Kinshiro was able to avoid further harassment, but he decided that was not enough. He began teaching his own kyujutsu classes on the plains surrounding the Dojo, an act which further incensed traditionalists. Kinshiro has even started considering adding knives to the repertoire of his classes, and although his own students are few, the mere fact that they apply the Hundred Stances philosophy to weapons outside swordsmanship is enough to cause much anger and controversy. Kinshiro becoming sensei seems a far-fetched possibility, but it is one dreaded by many.

GM'S OPTION: MECHANICAL BENEFITS OF BEING SENSEI

Although claiming the position of sensei has obvious social benefits, players and GMs alike may wonder if there are any game-mechanic benefits to gaining the position. After all, it does grant access to the secret scrolls of a master swordsman. It is up to the GM exactly how much benefit derives from knowledge of the Hundred Stances, but the following list provides a range of options:

Obviously, the champion's position brings honor and glory to him and his clan. The GM can grant a bonus of Glory and Status to the character, and perhaps even a few points of Honor if he undertook the position in selfless service to his clan. Of course, a later defeat will mean the loss of Status and perhaps of Glory or Honor as well, depending on circumstances.

Perhaps the sensei finds access to the scrolls allows him to make new headway in his personal studies. The GM can grant the sensei 1 or 2 XP toward raising his Kenjutsu Skill, provided the character regularly studies the Hundred Stances Scrolls.

Alternatively (or in addition) the sensei may be able to use the Hundred Stances scrolls to teach others more efficiently. The sensei can award 1 or 2 bonus XP to his students for increasing their Kenjutsu Skill.

Perhaps the secrets of the Hundred Stances are already out in the Empire, specifically in the Lion Clan. The GM could use the Akodo Kensai Path (found in the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Great Clans*, page 139) to represent the effects of the Hundred Stances training. This makes sense given that the Lion were the ones who truly organized and spread the training of the Hundred Stances.

Finally, truly ambitious GMs can devise a new Alternate Path or Kata exclusive to the Dojo, one which only the sensei (and possibly his students) can learn.



TSURUCHI KINSHIRO, THE ICONOCLAST

AIR: 4 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 3 WATER: 3 VOID: 3

WILLPOWER: 4 AGILITY: 4

Honor: 3.4 Status: 1.5 Glory: 5.2

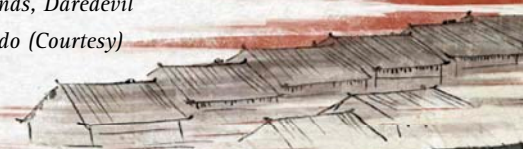
School/Rank: Tsuruchi Archer 4 (Tsuruchi Swordsman Path)

Skills: Athletics (Climbing) 5, Commerce 2, Courtier 2, Defense 5, Etiquette 1, Hunting 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation (Interrogation) 3, Iaijutsu 3, Jiujutsu 4, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Knives (Kama) 3, Kyujutsu (Yumi) 6, Sailing 1, Sincerity 1, Stealth (Sneaking) 3

Kata: Strength of the Mantis, Striking as Air, Veiled Menace Style

Advantages: Blood of Osano-Wo, Crab Hands, Daredevil

Disadvantages: Contrary, Failure of Bushido (Courtesy)





Students of the Phoenix Clan

The Dojo is a place uniquely focused on kenjutsu, and by extension killing, but the peaceful Phoenix Clan sends students to the Hundred Stances in surprising numbers. Many think this is only because the clan had an initial claim on the place before the Seppun took control and thus do not want to be seen giving up on it. However, the truth is many Phoenix appreciate the spirit of pious learning found at the Dojo, and they hope to foster inter-clan cooperation among the students. The bulk of Phoenix students always come from the Shiba, the only true warrior family of the clan, whose traditions do place a great deal of importance on kenjutsu. The odd shugenja of the Isawa (or later, the Agasha) does occasionally show up, usually from among those associated with the Element of Fire, but no member of the Asako family has ever been known to attend. The Phoenix also maintain a keen interest in the plains around the Dojo and the various legends associated with Osano-Wo, since they always involve themselves in all religious matters.

Quite a few Phoenix sensei have graced the Dojo over the years. When they are in charge, duels to the death all but disappear, since the Phoenix Clan's stance on them is similar to the Seppun family's. They also give a more peaceful atmosphere to the Dojo in general, as constant drilling gives way to studying the writings of past teachers and long periods of meditation to find one's inner focus. Phoenix students overall tend to seem more interested in learning than in winning, even if the two are connected. They are less aggressive than many other clan samurai in their challenges, and thus it can be a surprise when a new talent arises from their ranks.

SHIBA SAINIKO, THE SCHOLAR

Like many children of the Shiba family, Sainiko grew up expecting to become a yojimbo to a powerful shugenja, the greatest honor one could imagine – at least according to her parents. For a time she was indeed a bodyguard, and she performed all her duties without complaint, finding happiness in her simple and honorable existence. But when her younger brother came of age, her parents asked her to serve as his yojimbo instead. While Saitu was a skilled warrior himself, he had a tendency to get himself into trouble easily and to overestimate his own abilities. He spent a lot of time in court, where his skills as a duelist were the most useful but where he all too often got in the way of important personages. As such, Sainiko's parents made her promise to watch over him. She did so, smoothing ruffled feathers in the background and fighting in his name when he was not around to see it.

When her brother was finally sent to the Hundred Stances Dojo, he was incredibly excited to attend, but Sainiko just smiled and packed her belongings. She knew in such an environment there was great risk for him to offend many people, so she would definitely be needed there. However, she has found herself liking the place more and more, especially since it feeds the needs of her mind as well as her body; she can discuss kenjutsu with

her fellow bushi and compare techniques with many other clans. Sainiko is probably one of the few students who has never tried to challenge the sensei, nor does she ever intend to despite being quite a capable warrior herself. Instead, she prefers to research the Dojo's history and has spent hours pouring over texts discussing Oshiro's origins and life. She has slowly begun to piece together the clues she believes will lead to his true identity, although she has begun to fear such a discovery could re-ignite the war for the Dojo. As a true Phoenix she dreads the prospect, but cannot bring herself to abandon her research. In the meantime she keeps smiling and protecting her brother, hoping a solution will emerge that allows her to safeguard both the truth and the peace

SHIBA SAINIKO, THE SCHOLAR

AIR: 3	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 4	WATER: 3	VOID: 3
INTELLIGENCE: 5				
Honor: 5.8		Status: 2.3		Glory: 4.1

School/Rank: Shiba Bushi 4

Skills: Athletics 2, Courtier 2, Defense 3, Etiquette (Courtesy) 4, Iaijutsu 2, Investigation 4, Jiujutsu 1, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: Bushido 2, Lore: History (Hundred Stances Dojo) 6, Lore: Theology (Fortunes) 5, Meditation (Void Recovery) 5, Sincerity (Honesty) 2, Spears 2

Kata: Strength of the Phoenix, Striking as Air, Striking as Fire, Striking as Void

Advantages: Hotei's Blessing, Irreproachable

Disadvantages: Driven (learn Oshiro's origins), Dependent (Brother, 3 points)

Students of the Scorpion Clan

Much of the Scorpion Clan's attitude towards the Hundred Stances Dojo is colored by Bayushi Sawao's original creation of it (Oshiro's origins cannot be traced with certainty, much to the Clan of Secrets' chagrin). The Scorpion do not appreciate having their propriety taken from them, but the Lion Clan's might and skill prevented them from taking the Dojo back before the Imperial house intervened. The Seppun stewardship has been a boon overall, since it offers a neutral environment the Scorpion can exploit to their advantage. There is always plenty of Bayushi and Shosuro samurai in the Dojo, and since the Bayushi Bushi school is very traditional in the weapons it teaches, this comes as no real surprise to anyone. The Scorpion are certainly one of the largest delegations in the place, and even the occasional Soshi and Yogo show up to study there.

There have been quite a few Scorpion sensei over the years, which has led to scandalous rumors that the original scrolls have been copied or even replaced by the Clan of Secrets. Possession of such copies or display of their knowledge would certainly result in many challenges from samurai of other clans or perhaps even a resumption of the



old war for the Dojo. Other than spawning such rumors, the Scorpion sensei are best known for never teaching outside their own clan, making them prime targets for challenges from other factions. This also makes Scorpion students rather unpopular outside their own ranks, so they tend to congregate together and cooperate to present a united and dangerous front to all rivals.

BAYUSHI SETSU, THE CHEAT

A dark shroud of rumors surrounds Bayushi Setsu, as perhaps befits a member of the Scorpion Clan. While he has been quite successful at the Dojo, most of his victories occurred in very suspicious circumstances. His first opponent fell sick on the day of the fight and was easily defeated. Another one had his bokken break during the fight. A samurai-ko seemingly refused to strike him during the fight, and later departed suddenly from the Dojo, leaving behind only a poem imploring Benten's mercy. While Setsu has so far escaped any specific accusations, everybody in the Dojo believes he has only won his challenges through cheating. It is simply difficult to pin anything on the glib-tongued samurai, who shrugs and smiles behind his mask at any accusation. Of his many victories he remarks only that his opponents would have lost regardless of any circumstances.

As always with the Scorpion, the truth is more than what it appears to be. While Setsu did cheat on his matches, he did so as specifically instructed, and always just clearly enough to get noticed but not convicted. This has made him a useful tool for the Scorpion, since he has become an intimidating and distracting opponent while other more subtle plots of the clan have become harder to detect. Ironically, at least some of the fights could have been won fair and square by Setsu, who is actually quite talented, but the Scorpion needed him to send a message to other clans each time. Setsu does not flinch when his clan requests his services, but he sometimes longs for a worthy opponent he could face and defeat in a straight fight. His reputation and missions make these few and far between, so Setsu has become increasingly bored with his life in the Dojo. He has begun to work on schemes to attract more interesting opponents or even to become the next sensei. He has not put any such plans in motion yet, but the more bored he gets the more he considers doing so.

Bayushi Setsu has the look of the classical villain of Scorpion plays: his long jet-black hair is tied in a sleek ponytail, while a piece of black cloth covers the lower half of his face. Yet he often smiles below it, and although the

smile never really reaches his eyes his roguish attitude has made him quite popular with some of the Dojo's ladies. To Setsu, romance is either a tool to another end or a distraction from something far more beautiful: the way of the sword.

BAYUSHI SETSU, THE CHEAT

AIR: 4 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 3 WATER: 3 VOID: 2

AGILITY: 5

Honor: 2.1 Status: 2.0 Glory: 3.1 Infamy: 2.7

School/Rank: Bayushi Bushi 3

Skills: Athletics (Climbing) 3, Courtier (Manipulation) 4, Craft: Poison 5, Defense 5, Etiquette (Courtesy) 3, Iaijutsu 4, Investigation (Notice) 3, Jujutsu 2, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Sincerity (Deceit) 4, Stealth 3, Temptation (Seduction) 2

Kata: Breath of Wind Style, Hidden Blade Style, Strength of the Scorpion, Veiled Menace Style

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Dangerous Beauty, Read Lips

Disadvantages: Infamous, Insensitive

Students of the Spider Clan

The youngest of the Great Clans is the latest to join the Hundred Stances Dojo, and only the most daring of Spider samurai will claim Oshiro as one of their own. To the Spider, the Hundred Stances Dojo is not just a place of learning but also an opportunity to face the other clans on an equal footing, with the Seppun as the reluctant arbiters of their competition. In the short term the Spider are not pursuing the position of sensei but instead focusing on developing techniques that can make use of the





Hundred Stances against the other clans. Each victory in a challenge is one more step towards earning respect and fear for the Spider, making it worth all the effort to get to the Dojo in the first place. Generally only members of the Daigotsu family attend the Dojo, since they represent the vast majority of the clan. All attendants are pure and untainted, since the Seppun would never allow this place to be defiled by the blessings of Jigoku. Besides, the Spider refuse to let the other Great Clans believe they have an unfair advantage in challenges.

In the Spider Clan's short existence there has not yet been a Spider sensei to head to Dojo, but the clan does relish the prospect of eventually attaining that goal, while other samurai dread it. One can presume a Spider sensei's tenure would be extremely violent and cutthroat, since they have already been lobbying the Seppun for more duels to the death. In fact, a death-duel would probably be a requirement for studying with the Spider – just one more reason for the other clans to avoid the prospect.

DAIGOTSU MAKIKO, THE KILLER

When the latest Spider Clan samurai first arrived in the Dojo she did not look like much of a threat. Makiko was pale and frail-looking, and so unwilling to talk that at first she was taken to be mute. She silently and patiently learned the Hundred Stances, training with her clan-mates and whoever was willing to spar with her. When her first official challenge came, her opponent was confident he would win easily... until Makiko crushed his throat with a single hit from her bokken. Her clan claimed it was an accident, and although much tension and political upheaval ensued, Makiko was eventually allowed to remain in the Dojo after apologizing to the dead student's clan and family.

Then her second challenge came and resulted in another kill, as Makiko caved her opponent's chest in with a powerful series of strikes. This time it was not forgiven so easily, and several clans took up arms, triggering a brief skirmish within the Dojo until the Seppun intervened to maintain the peace. Since blood had been shed on all sides and the initial challenges had never been specified as being only to first blood, there was ultimately little recourse for the other clans. The Spider Clan's position remained that Makiko did not mean to kill her opponents, and the only way to prove them wrong would be yet another duel. Thus, Makiko remains in the Dojo to this day, usually accompanied by her fellow Spider to prevent her from being attacked by others.

The Spider do not know Makiko's true origins. They found her in an isolated village where she seemed to be the last survivor of some kind of a murderous rampage – which may, perhaps, have been her own. What they do know is that she has an unlimited talent and an unlimited lust for killing. This was enough for them, and she was adopted into the Daigotsu family despite her unknown status. The Spider are fully aware the girl is somewhat deranged, but they believe formal training can shape her into a powerful tool for the clan. The Hundred Stances

Dojo is a perfect way to prepare her for her future duties with the Spider, since there she can face the styles of almost all the major schools in Rokugan. Additionally, some Spider enjoy reminding other clans that samurai are killers no matter how civilized they may be, and Makiko is a disturbing symbol of that truth.

DAIGOTSU MAKIKO, THE KILLER

AIR: 3 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 3 WATER: 2 VOID: 2

AGILITY: 4 STRENGTH: 4

Honor: 1.1 Status: 1.0 Glory: 2.9 Infamy: 4.0

School/Rank: Daigotsu Bushi 2

Skills: Athletics 3, Defense 2, Hunting 1, Iaijutsu 3, Intimidation 5, Jujutsu 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 5, Knives 4, Kyujutsu 2, Lore: Shadowlands 2

Kata: Strength of the Spider, Striking as Fire

Advantages: Dark Paragon (Strength), Strength of the Earth, Touch of the Spirit Realms (Gaki-do)

Disadvantages: Antisocial (4 points), Compulsion (Murder – 4 points), Infamous, Obtuse

Students of the Unicorn Clan

The interest the Unicorn Clan has in the Dojo varies greatly from one family to another. The Utaku, the most traditional of all the Unicorn families, are interested in the art of kenjutsu and can frequently be found here, although their quiet and withdrawn attitude makes them unobtrusive guests. The Shinjo tend to use both traditional and gaijin weapons, but they all train in kenjutsu and so are often found in the Dojo as well. Their outgoing nature makes them welcomed guests, and they easily mingle with samurai of other clans. The Ide usually forsake the way of the warrior, but those who do employ weapons tend to stay close to accepted Rokugani practices, and a few of the rare Ide duelists have spent time studying the Hundred Stances. The Moto are split, since many of them prefer the gaijin scimitar to the katana, but their proud nature and alien customs rarely make them welcome guests in the Dojo's mixed social environment. No Iuchi has ever been known to attend the place, since their own areas of interest are far removed from melee combat.

Few Unicorn sensei have ever graced the Dojo, but those who did claim the title made it into a rather different place. The Unicorn sensei almost never restrict their teachings, preferring to foster a collaborative atmosphere. They have even been known to make the Dojo into a forum of sorts where other Rokugani and even gaijin techniques of swordsmanship can be openly discussed and studied. This can cause considerable controversy, particularly with the more traditional clans and those involved in the Dojo's early history, but the Unicorn weather the criticism as they always do. As students, their optimism and friendliness makes them well liked at the Dojo, and their shared love of kenjutsu serves to remind other samurai that the children of Shinjo are not so different from them after all. They challenge other students frequently, but their challenges



often take on a more casual nature and they appear to consider victory less important than the excitement of the fight.

MOTO KURENAI, THE PUPIL

Unlike many other students, Moto Kurenai was not particularly excited when he arrived at the Hundred Stances Dojo. Certainly he was a warrior through and through, and relished the prospect of measuring his might against samurai of other clans, but he thought of the katana as just one weapon among many and was more comfortable with his scimitar in his hand. Although he tried his best not to offend anyone, his attitude was obvious to more perceptive samurai and he did not make many friends, sticking to his own clan's company more often than not. This initially fitted Kurenai well enough, since he had rarely traveled outside the provinces of the Unicorn Clan before and found the rest of Rokugan to be a hostile and confusing place.

Slowly, however, Kurenai was forced to admit he was missing something. Although his basic technique was solid, he was defeated more often than not by junior students who had never faced a Unicorn in battle before. This chafed him, for he had thought of the Moto School as peerless, and his first impulse was to blame the problem on his own inadequate skill. But however much he studied with his Moto brothers and sisters, there were particular elements of fighting their teachings did not cover, and he began to increasingly see his own School as limited, constrained by a single source of knowledge. Kurenai started studying the Hundred Stances far more assiduously and began to make progress, but it seemed to him even this was not enough to really progress beyond his limitations. The solution came to him during a prayer to Shinjo. Just as Shinjo had listened to the wisdom of the Ujik-Hai during her travels through the steppe and made their knowledge her own, so would he search for a teacher to show him the way of the katana among the other Rokugani.

Kurenai's request to study with the Akodo triggered a minor crisis in the Dojo's society. While the Lion appreciated Kurenai's sincere request for guidance, and one of their sensei was willing to teach him, Kurenai had not requested the permission of his own sensei or lord before acting, and the Moto family saw his act as one of near-treason. They expelled him from their school and forbade him ever to return.

Kurenai laments the abandonment of his comrades, but he feels what he gained by learning with the Lion far exceeds the drawbacks of his situation. Mixing the Moto and Akodo styles with knowledge of the Hundred Stances has allowed him to become a very skilled warrior for his young age. He is currently pondering whether he should continue learning the techniques of the Akodo School or petition another clan for the next step of his learning journey; perhaps the Crane. The possibility that the Lion Clan would take offense at this in the same way as his own family did goes give him pause, and he prays daily to Lady Shinjo for guidance



MOTO KURENAI, THE PUPIL

AIR: 2	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 3	WATER: 2	VOID: 3
REFLEXES: 3		STRENGTH: 3		
Honor: 4.7		Status: 1.2	Glory: 2.7	

School/Rank: Moto Bushi 1/Akodo Bushi 1

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle (Mass Combat) 4, Defense 4, Etiquette 1, Horsemanship 3, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 1, Investigation 1, Jiujutsu 3, Kenjutsu (Katana, Scimitar) 5, Kyujutsu 3, Lore: History (Lion Clan, Unicorn Clan) 3, Perform: Storytelling 3, Sincerity 3

Kata: Strength of the Lion, Strength of the Unicorn

Advantages: Multiple Schools

Disadvantages: Black Sheep

Students of the Minor Clans

There are as many views on swordsmanship among Minor Clan samurai as there are Minor Clans, if not more, but it is difficult for Minor Clan samurai to access the Dojo at all. While the Seppun make the Dojo open to all Great Clans, the arrangement is not really considered to include the Minor Clans, and thus they must obtain a recommendation from either the Seppun or a member of the Great Clans with connections at the Dojo; neither is an easy task. Of all the Minor Clans, only the most warlike ever bother trying to send students at all. At various times the Badger, Boar, Falcon, Hare, Monkey, Ox, and Sparrow have been known to have students in residence, with the Monkey and Sparrow having the most success – both through their dedication to kenjutsu and the support of the Imperials or the Crane. The Wasp, during their time as a Minor Clan, avoided the place entirely. The Bat, Centipede, Dragonfly, Fox, and Snake Clans never paid the Dojo any real attention, while only a rare few Tortoise samurai ever





attended – often with motives more related to who was attending than to what was being taught.

Considering how difficult it is for their samurai to even get in, the Minor Clans make sure only to send their best and brightest to the Dojo. A single bad student might ruin their chances for a long time. As a result, while such students can usually be counted on the fingers of one hand, they tend to be skillful warriors and attract considerable interest.

No sensei has ever come from the ranks of the Minor Clans, but such a personage would surely attract far more samurai from his clan and perhaps the other Minor Clans as well, greatly changing the political landscape of the Dojo. There would also surely be pressure from the Great Clans to maintain their own access to training, as well as frequent challenges to take back the sensei position for one of theirs. It is worth noting that only one samurai (name and allegiance lost to the years) ever claimed Oshiro came from the ranks of the Minor Clans. The bloody duel that followed ensured no one would ever made a similar claim.

SUZUME HIKARU, THE PRODIGY

Hikaru was born the only son of a minor family of the Sparrow Clan, and his parents rejoiced at his arrival despite their meager possessions. Hikaru grew up to be a cheerful, friendly child, always ready to help with chores at home or in the field. When he was sent to the local dojo to begin his training, it was the first time he ever met a samurai outside of his family, but his hard-working attitude and charm quickly won him many friends. He also turned out to be a natural learner: he absorbed every text and lesson given to him, and his skill with kenjutsu impressed his teachers, particularly coming from a child with such a peaceful disposition. A year before his gempukku, Hikaru was already assisting his sensei in teaching the junior students, and when he became an adult he was singled out for praise by the school's teachers, filling his parents' hearts with pride.

But a fine blade was not enough to fill a man's belly, and so Hikaru returned to his home, back to the fields and the village he knew. Both parents and sensei agreed this was a waste of his talents, and they used what few favors they had to try to arrange for something greater. Eventually they managed to secure a place for him at the Hundred Stances Dojo, where he could continue learning the art of the blade and win glory for his clan, perhaps even securing a patron from a Great Clan. Hikaru accepted the news with a smile and polite thanks, but secretly he was heartbroken to leave his beloved home. Nevertheless, he left for the Dojo determined to make his clan proud, his daisho in his belt – and with little else in his possession.

The Hundred Stances Dojo has proved to be both challenging and exciting for Hikaru. He was not prepared for the dazzling array of clans, families, and schools he encountered there, and he is frequently confused by the politics of the place. On the other hand, his skill has already attracted attention, and after a few friendly challenges the current sensei of the Dojo has accepted him as a student, a rare feat for a member of the Minor Clans. Several samurai from the Great Clans have approached him with offers of patronage, on one occasion even a wedding offer (which would come with a new oath of fealty), but Hikaru has so far politely declined, if only because there are too many offers and they all appear sincerely appealing. He knows he will eventually have to cave in and let a Great Clan support him, but he is too worried about offending other potential benefactors to make a hasty decision. While Hikaru's skill with the sword grows daily, he often finds himself longing for the simple hills of his childhood, where all he had to worry about was the next harvest.

SUZUME HIKARU, THE PRODIGY

AIR: 3	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 2	WATER: 2	VOID: 2
REFLEXES: 4	AGILITY: 4			
Honor: 6.8		Status: 1.0		Glory: 1.8

School/Rank: Suzume Bushi 1

Skills: Athletics 2, Defense 2, Calligraphy 3, Craft: Farming 2, Etiquette 2, Iaijutsu 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 3, Lore: Bushido 3, Lore: History 3, Lore: Theology 3, Perform: Storytelling 3

Kata: South Wind Style, Striking as Air, Striking as Earth


Advantages: Ebisu's Blessing, Prodigy

Disadvantages: Gullible

Imperial Representatives

Ever since the mediation between the Phoenix, Lion, and Scorpion, the Imperial families have been deeply involved in the Hundred Stances Dojo. A small force of Seppun is always present at the Dojo, providing security for the grounds, students, and visitors. The reputation and honor of the Seppun family is one of the key factors that prevents the samurai in the Dojo from





turning against each other to obtain sole possession of the Hundred Stances scrolls – instead, they remain focused on personal challenges and the contest for the sensei position. The Seppun administrator takes all decisions not controlled by the sensei, and authorizes all duels and challenges. Traditionally the administrator is a shugenja to provide an added sense of holiness and reverence to the function, as well in tribute to Seppun AKentsu, the first to oversee the Dojo. This also ensures no administrator ever tries to become sensei, which would look like the Seppun were abusing their position. Between this responsibility and the guards on site, the Seppun family always has a strong presence in the Dojo.

Of the other Imperial families, the Miya rarely attend, although the odd one will appear who does want to learn more about kenjutsu. The Otomo have never sent a student at all, although they often visit as guests for their own purposes.

Although the majority of Seppun present are too busy with their own duties to attend lessons, a few do take time to study the Hundred Stances. Custom in the Dojo dictates that Seppun samurai are always allowed to study with the current sensei; moreover, they cannot be challenged, although they may issue challenges of their own. None of them has ever attempted to become sensei, since they are already guaranteed access to training, but if one achieved this it would be an interesting situation since it would mean no clan would have guaranteed training while the Imperial families would have total control of the place.

On occasion, the greatest swordsmen of the Dojo have been recruited by the Seppun family itself as a reward, either through an oath of fealty or wedding, and this is yet another reason why the competition at the Dojo is so intense. Obviously such offers require both a stupendous display of skill, a character beyond reproach, and great piety.

SEPPUN OSOKAWA, THE ADMINISTRATOR

Seppun Osokawa has led a life of constant service and relentless purity. Born the eldest of three sisters in a Seppun family traditionally associated with shugenja, she always had a responsible attitude towards

her younger siblings, frequently taking care of them while her parents were tending to other duties. Despite this extra work she completed her training in the Seppun Shugenja School with honor, a testimony to her persistence and organizational skills. She spent the first few years of her adult life tending to a temple dedicated to Ebisu in the Imperial capital while still watching over her sisters until themselves passed gempukku.

With time, Osokawa's temple became known for its great feeling of harmony, for she fervently prayed to the Fortune every day and maintained order among the visitors through a mixture of clever politics and occasional spells. She earned fame when she remained in the temple during a terrible storm, ensuring her daily prayers would not be interrupted, burning incense to the Fortune even in the worst moments. After the storm the holy place was found to be completely undamaged, a clear sign of the favor of Heaven. The Emperor himself took note of Osokawa's actions and declared her sacrosanct, a humbling achievement. What followed surprised her more, as she was assigned to be the new administrator of the Hundred Stances Dojo.

Osokawa accepted the task but requested her sisters accompany her. Since then she has worked tirelessly to take care of the Dojo. Between the ritual blessings of the challenges, the maintenance of the shrine to Oshiro, the resolution of political conflicts between the clans, and countless other daily aspects of





the Dojo she has her hands quite full. She has even taken up studying the theory of kenjutsu so she can better relate to the bushi she supervises. Osokawa is for the most part well-appreciated for her sound judgment and holy status, but the clans continue with their rivalries and squabbles nonetheless. Often, Osokawa wonders if they are truly worthy of this place, though she has not yet found a way to improve the situation.

Osokawa is a middle-aged woman of simple beauty, although her busy schedule does not let thoughts of marriage enter her mind. She wears the traditional and complex robes of an Imperial shugenja, and her long black hair flows down to her waist unadorned. Her sister Osoko takes after her, an equally dedicated priestess if noticeably more shy; she is married to the Seppun warrior who serves as her yojimbo. The youngest sister Osuki is another matter: outgoing and emotionally fickle, openly courted by several samurai at the Dojo. Although Osokawa loves both her sisters more than anyone else, Osuki tends to give her headaches, and she frequently wishes she was more appropriate in her behavior.

SEPPUN OSOKAWA, THE ADMINISTRATOR

AIR: 3	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 4	WATER: 2	VOID: 4
AWARENESS: 4		WILLPOWER: 4		PERCEPTION: 3
Honor: 7.8		Status: 5.7		Glory: 4.6

School/Rank: *Seppun Shugenja 4*

Skills: *Calligraphy 3, Courtier (Rhetoric) 5, Defense 3, Etiquette (Bureaucracy, Conversation, Courtesy) 5, Investigation (Notice) 3, Kenjutsu 1, Lore: Heraldry 5, Lore: Kenjutsu 5, Lore: Theology 5, Meditation 5, Sincerity 3, Spellcraft 3, Tea Ceremony 3*

Spells: Sense, Commune, Summon, Biting Steel, Extinguish, The Fires From Within, Shining Light, Symbol of Fire, Light of the Sun, Elemental Ward, Jurojin's Balm, Force of Will, Earth's Protection, Wall of Earth, By the Light of the Moon, Benten's Touch, Path to Inner Peace, Wisdom & Clarity, and all spells restricted to Imperial family members. Osokawa has many of these memorized – the GM is free to choose which ones as needed.

Advantages: Clear Thinker, Friend of the Elements (Fire), Sacrosanct

Disadvantages: Dependent (2 points – sisters Osoko and Osuki)

Ronin

Attending the Hundred Stances Dojo is very difficult for wave men, as with almost everything else in their lives. Similarly to Minor Clan samurai, they are not covered by the agreement which opens the Dojo's doors to all Great Clans. Furthermore, they lack even what little political or economic support the Minor Clans can provide to their vassals. As a result ronin are rarely admitted unless they can demonstrate tremendous prowess or unusual connections. One notable exception is ronin who are actually clan samurai on *musha shugyo*, as Oshiro himself was on a warrior's pilgrimage when he developed the Hundred Stances and thus the Dojo makes a point to open its doors to similar individuals. Inevitably, some true ronin have occasionally pretended to be on a *musha shugyo* to disguise more unsavory origins, but the clans are usually quite good at spotting such interlopers, and punishment is as swift as it is brutal.

There has not been a ronin sensei since the days of Oshiro himself (who never actually had the time to teach anyone, although his intention was always to do so once he returned to his clan). The thought of a ronin becoming champion of the Dojo is inconceivable to most clan samurai. It is quite possible any ronin who won the position would be accused of cheating, and certainly he would face relentless challenges to drive him out of office before his presence created a scandal. Setting aside such an unlikely event, any ronin who do enroll at the Dojo must walk a narrow line between not appearing skilled enough to be perceived as a threat while still showing enough skill to justify remaining there. Needless to say, this is not an easy feat to accomplish, and many ronin eventually leave the Dojo, unable to learn in such an environment.

RYOTARU, THE BASTARD

A ronin by birth, Ryotaru was born the son of a peasant woman and an unknown samurai who left a mediocre daisho behind for his child as the sole proof of his existence. While his mother always seemed to remember the man fondly, Ryotaru grew up surrounded by the taunts of other children and the gossip of the villagers. While his birth gave him samurai status, his mother never married and lived in poverty, trying to provide for both her son



and herself. As soon as she gave him his daisho, Ryotaru ran away from this meager home, never to look back. In his mind nothing could be worse than what he had lived through so far.

However, the world was not kind to a young boy with only his blades to prove his status as a samurai. Quickly realizing a man could not feed himself on honor alone, Ryotaru began selling his fighting services to the highest bidder. Although he had not received any formal training, he seemed to have an innate understanding of kenjutsu. A sympathetic older ronin saw enough in him to teach him a few advanced fighting techniques, but Ryotaru did not linger with him and wandered aimlessly from one job to the other. For a long time he seemed content to simply survive from one day to another, learning what he could to further develop his skills.

But in truth Ryotaru was searching for one man: his father. Deprived of both the simple life of a peasant and the security and purpose of being a samurai, Ryotaru resented his father both for seducing his mother and for abandoning his child. Using his mother's description as a starting point, Ryotaru endlessly questioned, investigated, and searched for the man. Eventually he realized his father was a clan samurai who had encountered his mother while on a *musha shugyo*. The man practiced a distinctive form of kenjutsu which had led him to several victories. Eventually, by sheer accident Ryotaru witnessed a similar style from a Phoenix Clan magistrate. The magistrate revealed himself to be a student of the Hundred Stances Dojo, and Ryotaru headed there without waiting further.

Gaining entrance to the Dojo was not easy given Ryotaru's lack of recommendation and lineage; however, the impetuous young samurai defeated a student in a duel while waiting outside the Dojo and used his victory to bully his way in. This has not won him any friends, but he does not care - while the kenjutsu lessons are interesting, Ryotaru is really here for only one purpose, to find his father. Whether the man was a previous student or is still here he does not know, but whenever he finds the man he will demand an explanation for his actions. Otherwise, Ryotaru will let steel do the talking for him.

RYOTARU, THE BASTARD

AIR: 2 EARTH: 3 FIRE: 3 WATER: 3 VOID: 2

REFLEXES: 4

Honor: 4.1 Status: 0.0 Glory: 2.1

School/Rank: Disciple of Sun Tao (Insight Rank 2)

Skills: Athletics 3, Defense 3, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 3, Intimidation 2, Investigation 4, Jiujutsu 3, Kenjutsu (Katana) 4, Lore: History 1, Medicine 3, Stealth 1

Kata: Striking as Earth, Striking as Fire

Advantages: Higher Purpose (find his father), Touch of the Spirit Realms (Yomi - kenjutsu)

Disadvantages: Brash, Social Disadvantage: Ronin

A Mini Campaign: The Herald of Thunder

The following section offers a potential small campaign set within the Hundred Stances Dojo. The arrival of a charismatic prophet of Osano-Wo leads to factionalism both in and out of the Dojo, and the player characters can determine the outcome. While the action is predominantly martial, there will still be plenty of chances for more social or spiritual characters to shine. The events can be played out as described here or modified to suit the GM's specific campaign.





ACT ONE: THE HERALD ARRIVES

The story can be set at any time of the year, although the summer season is probably the most appropriate. If (as is most likely) the characters are already attending the Dojo, the GM should make sure they have the chance to make connections, negative or positive, to at least some of the NPCs populating the Dojo to enhance their involvement in later conflicts. (The NPCs may include both those listed earlier in this chapter and others created by the GM, as desired.)

If the characters have not yet arrived in the Dojo, the following ideas may be used to get them there together:

- ❶ A young Emerald Magistrate named Seppun Aruhito is sent to oversee a dispute at the Dojo between two samurai of rival clans, one accusing the other of touching his blade without permission and demanding a duel to the death as a result. As a young and inexperienced man, Aruhito chooses to surround himself with a variety of yoriki to assist him, bringing the characters to the Dojo under his supervision.
- ❷ A special occasion could provide an excuse to have the PCs congregate at the Dojo. For example, the celebration of a new sensei, or a ritual commemorating the death of Oshiro. The PCs could meet on their way to the Dojo or during the celebration itself. They might also be yojimbo for an important guest, with little to do once they arrive in the Dojo but explore the area.
- ❸ If the GM would like to make the Herald of Thunder a more ambiguous character, the PCs could be guided to the Dojo through visions sent by Osano-Wo in different ways (a lightning strike pointing the way, a feverish dream regarding the plains, shapes seen in flames reminiscent of the Dojo, etc). The PCs could then meet on their way to the Dojo or while researching the meaning of their visions in the library.

When the Herald of Thunder is introduced, ideally one or more PCs should be present in the Courtyard to witness his arrival and to notice he specifically enters through the Gate of Thunder, pausing for prayer as he does so. The man's appearance draws the notice of many samurai, for he is a hulking monk with burn scars all over his hands and his face – what can be seen of it, for he is wrapped in the traditional white scarf of the sohei warrior monks. A bisento is strapped across his back, but he does not appear to be aggressive, only contemplating the courtyard with what seems to be contempt. As soon as any samurai addresses him directly, he will deliver his arrival speech in a booming voice.

“My name is Hitotsu, Herald of Thunder and prophet of Osano-Wo. The Thunderer has sent me a vision, and I bear his message to you. He has grown angry at the petty squabbles of the clans and their lack of devotion on what is his sacred land. This Dojo will go down in flames along with all who refuse to depart. Leave now, and be spared Osano-Wo’s vengeance. Stay, and face the fury of Thunder.”

Most samurai will either be shocked at the man's impudence, impressed by the sincerity with which he delivers his message of doom, or simply intimidated by his fearsome appearance and the reputation of his monastic order. If a samurai tries to cut him down for his words, Hitotsu will fight back and probably win, although he is not interested in actually killing anyone. Regardless, having delivered his prophecy he will leave the Dojo, not heeding any calls to stay or explain himself further. He travels to Roaring Thunder Village, and PCs may choose to follow him there to learn more.

The news of Hitotsu's proclamation will spread quickly. While most samurai will dismiss the man as a lunatic, some will take notes of the many legends which surround the plains and the connection of the area to Osano-Wo and his monastic order. Considering the nature of the Dojo, it is quite probable a few duels (albeit only to first blood) will erupt over the issue. The Seppun administrator will allow such duels to prevent too much tension from building too much. The current sensei will insist on continuing his lessons, dismissing Hitotsu as a crazed individual of no consequence.

If the PCs do not try to learn more about Hitotsu on their own, the Seppun administrator will ask them to do so. Although she knows most of the samurai here dismiss him as a lunatic, she is disturbed by the thought of the Fortune's wrath falling on the Dojo and wants to know if the monk has any credibility. She will require the PCs to be discrete in their investigations, since she does not want to add to the already high tensions in the Dojo.

Regardless of whether they investigate on their own or at the Seppun's request, the PCs can easily track Hitotsu back to Roaring Thunder Village. The PCs find the village has a certain air of tension, with villagers who are usually welcoming now being highly deferential and trying to avoid the samurai. (This will be even more noticeable if the PCs have come to the village recently, since merchants who were previously cheerful and welcoming will be very business-like or simply close their shops.) Even the inn will be quiet, since no other samurai are present. Hitotsu has been spreading his words throughout the village, and the peasants are uneasy and in some cases frightened by the prospect of the Fortune's wrath.

Regardless, the PCs can easily learn that Hitotsu is at the monastery. In fact he has taken command of it by virtue of his seniority within the Order of Osano-Wo, displacing the previous abbot, Zanchu. The monks for the most part seem convinced of the Herald of Thunder's truthfulness and follow his orders, but Zanchu is uneasy about this, and PCs with diplomatic skills may be able to get him to quietly admit that he fears Hitotsu is on a False Path.

Hitotsu will receive the PCs in the monastery's main temple, where he sits in meditation in front of a statue of Osano-Wo in his wrathful aspect. He will answer any questions truthfully, and his every word rings with the strength of his convictions. If the PCs specifically ask about the vision he has received from the Thunderer, he will close his eyes and recount it: *"I saw warriors killing one another, with no sense or reason. Thunder flashed around them, and Osano-Wo descended from Heaven to land on a black rock. He cried out in wrath: "What have you done? How dare you soil what is under my protection? Fire and thunder shall purify this land, and woe to the one who dares stand against me!" And the land burned, and the skies broke as a hundred voices wailed in pain and anguish over the judgment of the Heavens."*

The vision is open to interpretation, but Hitotsu will claim he has received visions from Osano-Wo before and his understanding of them has always proven right. He believes the presence of the Dojo angers the Fortune of Fire and Thunder, and it must therefore be removed before the Fortune's wrath inflicts terrible destruction. He will cite any petty squabbles currently occurring at the Dojo as examples of wasted honor and lives (such as the duel over a samurai touching his rival's blade, if this was the reason the PCs came here).

Once Hitotsu tires of PCs' questions, he will end the meeting by declaring he must "prepare for tomorrow." Further attempts to question him will be rebuffed firmly. Note that while monks are not a part of the samurai caste, they are traditionally treated with respect and are entitled to use weapons to defend themselves. Wise PCs will avoid antagonizing the monastery inhabitants.

Unknown to most at this point (possibly even to Hitotsu), a force of monks has followed him here to join his cause. If the characters stay in the village for a while longer they may encounter these monks when they arrive. There are about twenty of them, all wearing the white wrappings of sohei and carrying polearms; they are fanatically devoted to Hitotsu, ready to answer any insult with steel.

Once the PCs finish their investigation and travel back to the Dojo they will be unimpeded, although the GM can add some tension by depicting a small scouting force of the monks trailing them back to the Dojo, or showing the weather starting to worsen – which could either an omen or merely a regular storm as often happens in the area.

THE HERALD OF THUNDER

Born the child of a simple farmer, Hitotsu joined a monastery of Osano-Wo by his own will after he received his first vision at age six – it guided him to the doors of the temple. He survived a harsh education by the Order of Thunder, which quickly noticed he was naturally gifted in the arts of war. Hitotsu took to his training and duties with a degree of intensity that made his fellow monks either admiring or worried. As an adult he grew to be a very large man, and his intensely charismatic attitude won him the respect of many of his peers and earned him a place near the top of his Order. His most devoted students and followers believe him to be a true prophet of Osano-Wo.

There is nothing in this world Hitotsu will not sacrifice to accomplish the wishes of his patron Fortune, and if the will of Osano-Wo requires destroying the Dojo and its students, so be it.

HITOTSU, HERALD OF THUNDER

AIR: 4 EARTH: 4 FIRE: 5 WATER: 3 VOID: 3
 REFLEXES: 5 STAMINA: 5 STRENGTH: 5
 Honor: 4.1 Status: 0.0 Glory: 6.2

School/Rank: Brotherhood Monk (Temple of Osano-Wo) 5

Skills: Athletics 5, Battle 5, Defense 5, Divination (Omens) 4, Intimidation 5, Investigation 4, Jujutsu 7, Lore: Theology (Fortunes) 7, Meditation (Void Recovery) 5, Polearms 5, Sincerity (Honesty) 5

Kiho: Riding the Clouds, Soul of the Four Winds, Cleansing Spirit, Earthen Fist, Embrace the Stone, Way of the Earth, The body is An Anvil, Breaking Blow, Channel the Fire Dragon, Dance of the Flames, Destiny's Strike, Falling Star Strike, Ride the Water Dragon, Slap the Wave, Waves in All Things, Touch the Void Dragon
Advantages: Bishamon's Blessing, Blood of Osano-Wo, Hero of the People, Inner Gift (Lesser Prophecy), Large, Leadership, Magic Resistance (4 points), Strength of the Earth

Disadvantages: Brash, Driven (destroy the Hundreds Stances Dojo)





THE DISSIDENT CLAN

For the purposes of this presentation, we are assuming this clan is the Mantis due to their connections with Osano-Wo, but the GM should feel free to choose another clan if it better fits the needs of his campaign. Other good candidates for the role include the Crab (who also share a blood connection to the Fortune), the Phoenix (who fear any Fortune's wrath but especially that of Osano-Wo), or the Dragon (who have close ties to the Brotherhood of Shinsei and a strong knowledge of prophets and omens). Whichever clan is ultimately involved, the decision massively escalates the friction at the Dojo, as that clan's delegation stops teaching or attending lessons and constantly asks the sensei and administrator to shut down the Dojo.



ACT TWO: THE STORM GATHERS

Whenever the PCs return to the Dojo, they find it in disarray. Their identity is politely but firmly checked by Seppun guards at the doors – it is obvious security has been increased. After they get inside, they can learn why: one clan has declared itself in favor of the Herald and wishes to evacuate and then destroy the Dojo.

Other clans react to the Mantis in various ways. Some cautiously listening to the dissident clan's ideas, others ignore it and try to act as if nothing is happening, and the most vehemently opposed try to get the Mantis expelled or even held as prisoners. The Seppun administrator will try to maintain peace as much as she can, but arguments, brawls, and duels will spontaneously erupt all across the Dojo. Depending on the PCs' strength and player preferences, the GM may opt to depict a chaotic brawl in the restaurant, a theological debate in the Library, or

a subtle gossip game in the Baths. The important thing is to show the Dojo is displaying signs of fracture – and for the PCs to hear the arguments of both sides so they can formulate their own opinions.

Some time later, the sentry on the watchtower will warn of an approaching force coming from the direction of Roaring Thunder Village. Hitotsu has returned with a mix of his own monk followers and monks recruited from the village monastery, a total of about thirty men. Approaching the Gate of Thunder once again, Hitotsu asks to speak to the leader of the Dojo. The administrator orders all samurai to wait in the Courtyard with weapons at the ready, then lets the monks enter. Heedless of the administrator's attempts to engage in conversation, Hitotsu delivers another of his messages: *"I see you have persisted in your folly and decided to stay in this accursed place. Very well. Osano-Wo grants his blessing to those he finds worthy, and that blessing is might. I and every single man behind me challenge you in a fight to the death, one on one, to see who the Fortune truly favors. Let death be the final expression of truth."*

Although in theory the samurai at the Dojo are more than numerous enough to overwhelm the smaller force of monks, and can ignore challenges from non-samurai, Hitotsu's insult is hard to let go unanswered. The Seppun administrator will allow the fights to take place, believing this is the best way to try to prevent a larger conflict. Many students will volunteer to fight, so the sensei will handpick some of them to face the monks one by one. This is a good opportunity to spare PCs who lack fighting skills or political connections, or conversely to showcase those who have one or both.

The monks are all formidable opponents, and unless the PCs are unexpectedly dominant the fights will most likely result in about as many victories as defeats for each side. The fights go on for some time in an otherwise largely silent Courtyard, with blood slowly staining more and more of the ground. (Each combatant will fight only once.) Eventually Hitotsu will be the last one left to fight, and his challenge will almost assuredly be met up by the sensei. A PC with impressive eloquence and skill might be able to justify taking the sensei's place with appropriate role-play and Skill rolls, and such an action might earn Honor given that Hitotsu is a deadly opponent. If the sensei does face the Herald of Thunder, it will be a fight of titans, refined swordsmanship against brutal force and supernatural prowess. Shockingly, Hitotsu wins, although his final blow appears more lucky than skilled.

Regardless of the outcome of the fights, the remaining monks will retreat afterward, since their lack of total victory means their attempt to force the samurai into leaving has failed. Any attempts to pursue them will be chastised by the Seppun administrator, since they won their fights honorably and to pursue the matter will shame the memory of the deceased.

The death of the sensei will have tremendous repercussions. It is quite probable that many



samurai, particularly in the sensei's clan delegation, will request permission to commit seppuku in shame over their mentor's defeat. The Mantis and others who believe the Herald's words will become even more vehement, seeing his victory as an undeniable omen. A few of the most ambitious will point out a new sensei is needed and start calling for an immediate tournament to choose a successor. The administrator, temporarily the sole authority in the Dojo, will try to focus on sending to the village for eta so the dead men and women can be granted proper funeral rites, which she announces will be held in the Courtyard that night.

The PCs are free to take sides as they choose. They may gain significant influence within the Dojo depending on their actions here, especially if some of them won duels against the monks.

That night, the administrator leads the funeral ceremony in the Courtyard, with all the remaining samurai gathered to witness it. However, during this time one of the samurai at the Dojo will try to take advantage of lower security elsewhere in the building to start a fire. The arsonist could be anyone, but for greatest impact it is preferable to select a character the PCs have been interacting with a great deal, and ideally a samurai from a clan which has not declared itself for the Herald. (This shows that his ideas have started to spread to others regardless of overall clan stances.) The fire will be started in the Restaurant, currently empty due to the funeral, and will initially spread through the West Wing, endangering the Armory, Servant Quarters, and Baths. Some PCs and NPCs may try to contain the fire, while the more compassionate might help evacuate the servants (many of whom will otherwise be trapped in the West Wing). Savvy characters might think of rushing to protect Oshiro's shrine, since this might be a plot to get access to the Hundred Stances scrolls. Depending on where their loyalties lie at this point, the PCs can hunt down the arsonist or help him escape. Regardless, renewed violence will almost certainly erupt as several the clans (probably wrongly) immediately accuse the Mantis of starting the fire.

In the aftermath, the Dojo will be in chaos. The Mantis Clan samurai will probably be dead or fled, the West Wing will be severely damaged, and there is still no sensei to lead the students. The Seppun administrator will do her best to keep the peace but she is clearly losing control of things.

ACT THREE: THE THUNDER STRIKES

The day after the duels, Hitotsu returns once more, this time bringing an army. Several more monks have arrived overnight and he has rallied the majority of Roaring Thunder village behind him, their fear of the Fortune's wrath greater than their fear of samurai. He may also be joined by samurai supporting his vision, such as any Mantis Clan samurai who escaped after the fire. His forces quickly surround the Dojo and prepare for a military assault.

Without a sensei, and with the administrator lacking any experience in such matters, the samurai at the Dojo will lack leadership or a clear chain of command. This can

WHAT IF HITOTSU DIES?

Although Hitotsu will prevail in a duel with the sensei, it is possible he might lose a duel against a PC who manages to persuade the sensei and the Seppun administrator to let him step in. It is also possible that PCs of a more impetuous, ruthless, or pragmatic bent may decide to dispose of Hitotsu at some other point in the scenario, recognizing him as the source of their troubles.

It is entirely possible that killing Hitotsu will end the scenario. On the other hand, the GM can also choose to have his death make him into a martyr, inspiring the rest of the monks and villagers to even greater determination (and thus allowing the GM to play out Act Three more-or-less according to the script).



be the opportunity for a charismatic PC to step up and lead the defense of the Dojo. Alternatively, one of the senior Seppun officers could take on the mantle of commander, though he may not be as effective.

The GM can use the Mass Combat rules to play out Hitotsu's assaults on the Dojo, or simply run a series of skirmishes and action scenes, whichever works best for his group. Regardless of which approach is taken, the first assault should be a bloody affair. The forces of the Dojo have superior training and equipment, but the Herald's troops are more numerous and at this point are quite fanatical. The Dojo should be able to throw back the assault but not without severe losses. There should be plenty of opportunities for heroic action on both sides of the conflict, such as leading the assault on the damaged West Wing, dueling a samurai who switched sides, or protecting a group of servants desperately trying to avoid the conflict.

At this point, the PCs should all have a good idea of whether they believe in Hitotsu's prophecy or not. If they are still siding with the Dojo, the Seppun administrator will select them for a sortie to try to take a message for help back to the Empire. Depending on the PCs' strengths, this might be a covert mission (waiting for the night to fall to slip out unnoticed), a direct assault (breaking through enemy lines while supported by other warriors), or possibly even a deception (convincing Hitotsu they are either switching sides or walking away from the conflict). Regardless, it should not be an easy mission, since the Herald's forces are maintaining constant surveillance on the Dojo. If the PCs get away too easily, Hitotsu can send a small force to chase them, leading to a race across the plains or a series of ambushes amid the rocks there.

If the PCs go to Roaring Thunder Village, they will find it almost empty except for the inn. Korotsu, a few of his servants, and some other friends have stayed behind, unconvinced by Hitotsu's rhetoric and not wishing to encounter a violent death. Korotsu's knowledge of the





area will make him an ideal way to send out a message for assistance, although he may try to bargain with the PCs for increased privileges in return for his help (he is perceptive enough to recognize which samurai will be amenable to such deals and which are more likely to kill him for his insolence). Regardless, if the PCs get his help he can send out his fastest and most reliable servants to contact any magistrates or military commanders in the area. Alternatively, if the characters do not wish to rely on a commoner to solve their problems they can demand mounts from the inn's stables and ride on to summon help for themselves.

If some or all of the PCs are leaning towards Hitotsu's side of the argument, there are several options. If they are still in the Dojo (and have not revealed their loyalties) they can choose to take action against the defenders, or perhaps try to make covert contact with Hitotsu himself. If they do manage to contact him, he will ask them to strike at the head of the Dojo by killing the Seppun administrator. This is quite a test of faith, since she is both honorable and of high birth, not to mention a holy shugenja; however, she is also the last real leader the Dojo has, and her magic is a powerful obstacle to the conquest of the complex. She is constantly guarded by Seppun yojimbo, but their numbers will have dwindled during the earlier assaults of Hitotsu's army and some of them may get re-assigned to more urgent duties, creating openings for the PCs to strike. Surviving such an assassination will be quite difficult, since the PCs will most likely instantly be marked as traitors and attacked by anyone remaining within the Dojo, but if they manage to escape they will be held in high esteem by Hitotsu and his men.

If the PCs have already switched sides and are outside the Dojo, Hitotsu will use their inside knowledge to plan surgical strikes against the defenders. If they have shown

political influence or high eloquence, he might even task them with convincing more samurai to switch sides, or to commit protesting seppuku in order to end the conflict earlier. Another option, particularly if the fight has gone badly so far, would be for the PCs to go back to the village to convince Korotsu to help them, not an easy task since the rich man values his security and has a fair number of villagers under his command – possibly even a few ronin if the GM wants to make things more interesting.

Regardless, unless he is killed Hitotsu will eventually launch an all-out assault on the Dojo. A storm will accompany the final attack, with thunder and lightning raking the skies – perhaps because Hitotsu waited for a storm, or perhaps because Osano-Wo is truly watching the battle, or perhaps merely a coincidence. The outcome should at this point depend significantly on the PCs' actions, whether they sent for reinforcements or supported Hitotsu. The Dojo's students and guests will probably fight to the very last, offering plenty of opportunities for duels, sacrifices, and last-minute heroics. If the PCs are fighting on the Dojo's behalf, they will likely wish to attack the Herald of Thunder himself if they have not already done so. Hitotsu is a formidable fighter, but depending on the PCs' own capabilities they might be able to defeat him, particularly if he is already wounded (a common occurrence when using Mass Battle rules) or they corner him using superior numbers (a bit less honorable, but then again, criminals are not worthy of honorable treatment).

If the Herald of Thunder wins, the Dojo will be razed to the ground. Depending on how the Empire at large sees his actions, Hitotsu may be labeled either a dangerous rebel or a true prophet. Regardless, it is quite probable his following will grow and he will most likely end up taking violent action again somewhere else.

If the Dojo survives, there will be much rebuilding to do. The village will probably have to be punished for its participation in Hitotsu's actions, although the fact that some (like Korotsu) refused to support the attack and that the village is essential for the Dojo's operations might lead to at least partial clemency. There will also have to be a new sensei, perhaps even a new Seppun administrator, and the question will arise of whether the worship of Osano-Wo in the area needs to be investigated or perhaps even suppressed for the Dojo's safety. If Oshiro's scrolls were destroyed (by the arsonist's fire or during the battle), the future of the Dojo will be at risk; however, this could also be the start of a new story as the PCs are sent around Rokugan to hunt down possible fragments or copies of Oshiro's teachings.



Story Hooks

What follows is a short list of story hooks for the Hundred Stances Dojo setting, presented in the Challenge/Focus/Strike format introduced in the L5R RPG core rulebook. Most of these avoid referencing specific NPCs so as to remain as flexible as possible, but the characters presented in this chapter can easily be used to fill roles in the scenarios here. The GM should feel free to modify any other details not suited to his current campaign setting; these are intended mainly as inspiration for new stories, not as iron-clad templates.

THE SEPPUN CHAMPION

Challenge: A new warrior arrives in the Dojo, hailing from the Seppun family but wishing to become a student rather than just another sentry or bodyguard. It quickly becomes obvious he is highly talented, and he wins several key challenges against famous students. He is immediately accepted by the current sensei, but makes a shocking announcement: he intends to defeat the sensei, then close the Dojo to anyone but members of the Imperial families, for he believes the Great Clans to be unworthy of Oshiro's legacy.

Focus: The warrior's perhaps foolhardy declaration creates many ripples in the Dojo, for he has enough skill to make his plan viable and is a highly respected member of the Seppun family. Things become even more complicated when the Phoenix Clan delegation – who lack any challenger currently hoping to become champion of the Dojo – announce they support his candidature and decision, and will retreat from the Dojo should he win. Other clans start talking about alliances to prevent the Seppun warrior from reaching his goal, and this triggers the hostility of the Phoenix Clan.

Strike: The administrator, despite being from the same family, does not want the young warrior to win, believing him foolish and arrogant. She contacts the characters and asks them to prevent him from becoming sensei, either through convincing him or defeating him – but he must not be killed, and honor and face must be maintained. Given both his very strong fighting skill and the watchful support of the Phoenix Clan, it will not be easy to accomplish this, and other more ruthless samurai might take a more direct approach.

WISDOM IS SILENT

Challenge: After a brilliant kenjutsu match, a new sensei takes office, hailing from the Dragon Clan. He invites all samurai in the Dojo to attend his first lesson, to the excitement of many junior students and especially those from clans currently out of favor with the Dragon. However, at his first lesson the sensei simply instructs the students to sit down and meditate with him for several hours, before departing without another word. Students are shocked but initially believe it is some kind of test;

WHAT ABOUT THE VISION?

The Herald of Thunder is a flexible story to allow the GM to shape it for his players and their characters. One detail left intentionally vague is the meaning of Hitotsu's vision. Depending on the campaign's style and tone, it does not have to be fully explained, but a few possible options are as follows:

Hitotsu's vision and interpretation might actually be accurate. Fortunes can be fickle beings, and it might take just such a single seemingly innocuous event to push Osano-Wo over the edge and finally enrage him beyond endurance. If that is the case, during the final battle the storm should grow even stronger as the Fortune shows his wrath. If the Herald is defeated, this will not be the end of the Dojo's troubles, as Osano-Wo will send fiercer and more violent storms to try to drive these unsatisfactory samurai away. For a particularly dramatic ending, Osano-Wo himself might descend from the Heavens, and his personal wrath should have dire consequences such as fires engulfing the plains and damaging nearby provinces.

For a twist on the above result, perhaps Hitotsu's vision was genuine but his interpretation was flawed. Instead of a warning against the Dojo, it was a warning against his own actions and intemperate rage. After all, he is a violent warrior-monk who brings discord and bloodshed to a sacred area. In this case the storm turns against the monks more than the Dojo (although still damaging the area somewhat – Osano-Wo is not famous for his subtlety). Convincing Hitotsu of the error of his ways is no easy task, given his arrogance and self-confidence, but it is also an original and properly spiritual way to resolve the conflict.

As a more extreme option, Hitotsu may have simply made up the vision, either as a plot to increase his influence and power over the area or just in a fit of madness. If he is consciously deceiving others, his NPC profile should be revised to remove Inner Gift from his Advantages and add the Deceit Emphasis to his Sincerity skill. Such a character could even be a façade for something more sinister, such as a ronin warlord, a member of the Lost, or a creature of the Lying Darkness trying to conquer or destroy the Dojo. (The Lying Darkness in particular is known to target key pieces of Rokugan's history and identity as part of its long-term goal to undo the world.) Either way, Osano-Wo will probably not manifest in any way, although it could be a suitable bit of irony if lightning strikes down the false prophet... just be careful not to rob the PCs of a more satisfying ending earned on their own.





however, the situation repeats the next day and the next, and the Dojo grows silent, a place where kenjutsu is supposedly taught but no fighting happens.

Focus: Several clans begin to chafe at the sensei's very unconventional method of teaching, and their warriors begin issuing challenges. However, the sensei claims he is currently unable to hold a blade and so cannot face any of his prospective opponents. Since he is still technically teaching his classes, and accepting everyone into them, the Seppun administrator tolerates the situation, and the clans grow more restless. Members of the Dragon Clan start to encounter mockery outside of classes, and it will be only a matter of time before they draw blades to defend their honor. The sensei remains in his private quarters when not teaching his classes and refuses to answer any questions.

Strike: The sensei contacts the PCs. He believes he is at the edge of a great breakthrough in the Hundred Stances Style, possibly even a full and complete understanding of it, but he needs a peaceful mind to accomplish this and thus for the Dojo to be at peace too. He asks them to help keep the peace in the Dojo and convince the other samurai to join him in his efforts. He also requires they do not use their blades in the Dojo to avert any flow of violent energy. This should grow increasingly difficult to enforce as samurai from other clans start pushing for another challenge, harassing the Dragon Clan, and speaking of starting classes of their own in the minor dojo. But if the PCs succeed they could be the first recipients of a new Technique from an enlightened teacher.

THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY

Challenge: A Shosuro historian arrives at the Dojo, claiming he has discovered new documents which could shed light on Oshiro's origins. This immediately makes the different clans nervous, since Oshiro's indistinct origins are what made the Dojo possible in the first place. After comparing his documents to the ones found in the library, the historian announces he believes Oshiro was a member of the Scorpion Clan. He is immediately accused of bias and treachery, while the Clan of Secrets defends him. The Seppun administrator refuses petitions for a duel to the death, but the situation grows more difficult daily.

Focus: To cross-reference his information and confirm his theory, the historian asks to be given access to Oshiro's scrolls so he can check certain facts and study the calligraphy. The current sensei refuses, but this actually helps the agenda of the Scorpion Clan as they start whispering he is simply unwilling to reveal the truth. The Scorpion start sending daily challenges to the sensei, and some samurai from other clans also begin to issue challenges or demand to see the scrolls. Many clans begin fearing the Shosuro's theory is going to be proven true one way or the other.

Strike: The sensei requests the PCs travel to a nearby city which holds archives from the times of Oshiro and obtain a text describing the ronin; supposedly this can be found in a daimyo's journal from that particular era. If they

manage to obtain it (not necessarily an easy task, since the current lord is not a strong admirer of the Hundred Stances Dojo), they discover it seems to corroborate the Shosuro's arguments. What will they do with such a proof? Do they dismiss it as a forgery planted by the Scorpion in advance? Do they destroy it to preserve the Dojo's peace? What if they bring it back to the sensei and it is never mentioned again? And what if the Scorpion's prime contestant wins and gives the scrolls to the historian to prove his theory – will they accept the result, or fight it as yet another lie from the Clan of Secrets?

THE BARD'S TALE

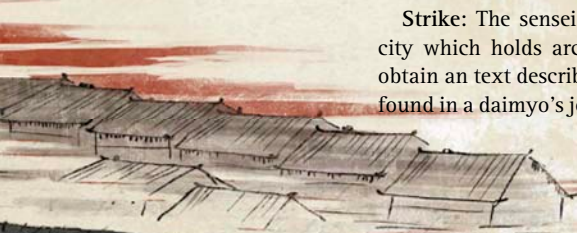
Challenge: An Ikoma bard nearing retirement arrives at the Dojo as a guest, requesting to observe the students during their lessons. He is a well-respected man with an illustrious career, so the administrator readily agrees. The bard eventually reveals he is looking for a samurai to compose his last story about, a final work of art before retirement. This could bring great glory to both the samurai and his clan, and the students start competing in various challenges and displaying their skills to attract the bard's attention. However, his choice eventually falls on a young ronin.

Focus: The clans are all incensed, particularly the Lion themselves as they feel the bard is implying the ronin has more skill than they do. The choice is even more baffling considering the ronin is an inexperienced warrior who has not been involved in any notable challenges or prominent training sessions. Trying to disarm the crisis, a high ranking samurai from the Lion Clan offers the ronin fealty, but he shockingly refuses. This is more than the Lion can accept, and they start petitioning the Seppun administrator for permission to challenge the ronin to a duel to the death. The administrator refuses to allow anybody to die for a story, but knows without allies or a lord to back him up the ronin's days are numbered.

Strike: The ronin is actually a clan samurai on a masha shugyo, which is why he cannot accept the offer of fealty. He believes revealing his true allegiance would invalidate the nature of his pilgrimage and lessen the potential for his tale. He and the bard ask for the characters' help in fending off the assaults – political and literal – of the Lion Clan while the story is being completed. If they succeed, they will win the favor of a famed artist and perhaps also of whatever faction the ronin is tied to – assuming he is not lying about his pilgrimage, of course.

NIGHT OF THE LIVING FIRE

Challenge: During a regular training session, the sentry atop the watchtower screams in alarm as he spots a wildfire on the plain. The Dojo, accustomed to this problem, quickly reorganizes itself: lessons are interrupted and scouts are sent out on the plain to make sure everybody is accounted for before the doors are closed. Shugenja are mobilized and sentries stand at the ready with buckets of water, particularly near sensitive locations such as Oshiro's shrine and the Library. The fire soon surrounds the entire Dojo and continues burning well after all grass



should have been destroyed. Shugenja efforts to quell it lead only to brief respites, and it soon becomes apparent the fire is supernatural in nature.

Focus: A second alarm is heard as soldiers wearing Scorpion and Phoenix colors emerge from the plains, attacking everyone in the Dojo indiscriminately, apparently unaffected by the fire. They disappear once struck down or captured, and knowledgeable observers can notice the style of their weapons, heraldry, and armor goes back to the days of Akodo Kentsu's defense of the Dojo. The initial assault is repelled, but the fire does not abate and it seems only a matter of time before the phantom warriors return and overrun the buildings.

Strike: The spirits' assault seemed coordinated, suggesting a leader. A careful search through the library might lead to clues as to who the spirit leader is or why the spirits have returned now; perhaps such a search can also find a way to awaken the spirits of Lion soldiers using the watchtower's shrine to counteract the enemy attacks. Time is of the essence, as the flames grow closer and the spirits return for blood.

SONS OF THE WIND

Challenge: A few samurai wandering the plains report seeing riders, always staying out of contact range. Soon, supply convoys come under attack, and the troubles escalate until an important Imperial guest is reported

missing. Scouting parties are sent in all directions, and experienced trackers might be able to locate the attackers, only to be shocked by the scope of their forces: they have an encampment numbering in the hundreds, almost all mounted, and seem to be a roaming horde of ronin and bandits. While rescuing the hostage is possible, it does not make the group less of a threat to the Dojo and its inhabitants.

Focus: The bandits start attacking the Dojo, using tactics the Unicorn can easily recognize: hit-and-run, horse archery, and refusing to engage the defenders directly. This makes the battle frustrating to the defenders, albeit light in casualties. A night raid appears specifically targeted at Oshiro's shrine, and whether it is stopped or not, it proves the bandits know exactly what they are after. However, the Dojo's limited number of horses make it hard to formulate an effective counterattack.

Strike: The leader of the bandit horde, a man named Zoinichi, sends a message over the walls with an arrow. He claims he is Oshiro's long-lost descendant and demands the scrolls he considers his birthright. He offers to meet in his camp and parlay with a small group of samurai. While most will find his claim ridiculous at best, this is an opportunity to buy time and perhaps get an inside look at the bandits' camp and forces. A more ruthless group of samurai might try to assassinate Zoinichi, though he has the fighting skill one would expect from the heir of an ancient master swordsman.





NEW MECHANICS

Chapter One: Fires of War

The Crab Clan

THE CRAB KNIFE-FIGHTERS

A few Crab have specialized in knife-fighting over the years, enough for the clan to maintain a few sensei who teach advanced knife techniques. Many of these are sailors, especially Yasuki, who prefer a fighting style which uses small, cheap weapons in an environment where speed and mobility are more important than reach and power.

NEW ALTERNATE PATH: CRAB KNIFE-FIGHTERS [BUSHI]

- Rank: 3 or 4
- Replaces: Hida Bushi 4, Hida Pragmatist 4, Hiruma Bushi 3, or Hiruma Scout 3
- Requires: Knives 3

TECHNIQUE: ONE BLADE, BOTH HANDS

The Crab knife-fighting technique emphasizes using the empty hand to grasp, control, and distract the opponent, setting him up for the knife-hand to deliver the lethal blow. When fighting with one open hand and a tanto, you add +3k1 to your damage with tanto and may ignore all effects of your opponent's armor. (If your opponent is a creature with inherent Reduction, you may ignore 5 points of that Reduction.)

The Dragon Clan

HOJATSU'S LEGACY

"Watch your opponents carefully. If you watch he will reveal his timing to you. Strike when his timing does not allow him to act. Strike when your opponent believes you cannot."

The final technique of Mirumoto Hojatsu was developed late in life as a result of his rivalry with Kakita; unwilling to concede defeat to an opponent who could strike faster, Hojatsu instead devised a way to disrupt his opponent's rhythm and thereby win regardless of speed. It is believed this technique was used for the first time in the final duel between Hojatsu and Kakita, in which Hojatsu died and Kakita was mortally wounded.

NEW ALTERNATE PATH: HOJATSU'S LEGACY [BUSHI]

- Rank: 4 or 5
- Replaces: Mirumoto Bushi 4 or Mirumoto Taoist Swordsman 5
- Requires: Iaijutsu 5

TECHNIQUE: STRIKE WHEN YOU CANNOT

The student of Hojatsu's last technique learns how to use intellect and aggression to disrupt an opponent's rhythm in an iaijutsu duel. During the Assessment stage of a duel, you may take a Free Action and spend a Void Point to force a Contested Kenjutsu / Fire roll with your opponent. If you win the roll, your opponent cannot spend Void Points on the Focus roll for that duel.





The Mantis Clan

MANTIS WHIRLWIND FIGHTERS

Yoritomo is credited both with perfecting the final technique of his family's school and also with developing this powerful variation of the Mantis fighting style, the so-called Whirlwind Fighting style. This form relies on a mixture of relentless motion and relentless attacks to both obstruct enemy blows and overwhelm the foe with rapid strikes. Among the Yoritomo it is often the preferred fighting form to use in duels within the family, and some Mantis call the masters of this style "Whirlwind Duelists."

NEW ALTERNATE PATH:

MANTIS WHIRLWIND FIGHTERS [BUSHI]

- Rank: 4
- Replaces: Yoritomo Bushi 4
- Requires: Knives (Kama) 5

TECHNIQUE: WAVES RUSH TO SHORE

Whirlwind Fighters are a constant blur of motion, using their swift and relentless strikes both to deflect their opponents' attack and to break through their defenses. When fighting with a kama in each hand, you may add your Knives Skill Rank to your Armor TN, and gain a bonus of +3k0 to your damage rolls with kama.

The Scorpion Clan

THE SHOSURO ASSASSINS

The Assassins are the venomous sting of the Scorpion, their activities one of the greatest sources of paranoia in all Rokugan. They are trained to dispatch all manner of targets in every sort of circumstance, relying on tanto as small, easily concealed weapons which are ideal for infiltration work. The Shosuro Assassins learn to employ precise knife cuts and stabs to slay their targets in a matter of seconds with a minimum of noise and commotion.

NEW ALTERNATE PATH:

SHOSURO ASSASSINS [NINJA]

- Rank: 6
- Replaces: N/A
- Requires: Craft: Stealth 5, Knives 5, must have attained Rank 5 in either the Shosuro Infiltrator or Shosuro Actor school

TECHNIQUE: THE HIDDEN BLADE

The Assassins are the elite killers of the Shosuro shinobi orders, trained to kill their targets with a single precise stab or slice. When attacking a surprised or unaware opponent with a knife, you may activate this Technique by spending a Void Point (as a Free Action). Your attack will target a vital spot, and any Raises for damage you make on that attack are kept dice (+1k1 per Raise) instead of unkept (+1k0).

The Minor Clans:

THE UJINA SKIRMISHERS

The Hare Clan traditionally focuses on a highly athletic and unpredictable school of kenjutsu, but the Hare's Ujina family prefers to fight with knives. After joining the clan, the founder of the Ujina established his own dojo to teach his two-knife fighting style; although the Ujina Skirmishers have never advanced their style enough for it to become a school of its own, they are a significant asset to their clan nonetheless.

NEW ALTERNATE PATH:

UJINA SKIRMISHERS [BUSHI]

- Rank: 2
- Replaces: Hare Bushi 2
- Requires: Knives (Tanto) 3

TECHNIQUE: MASTER OF THE QUICK BLADE

The Ujina are trained to fight with a tanto in each hand, cutting their foes to death with swift and deadly strikes. When fighting with a knife in each hand, you gain a +1k0 bonus to your Initiative rolls and a +1k1 bonus to your damage rolls with knives.

Hitsu-do

Hitsu-do is an extremely offensive martial art with few defensive maneuvers. It focuses on speed and power, striking with punches and kicks that commit all of the martial artist's strength and infuses each strike with the power of Fire.

NEW ALTERNATE PATH: STUDENT OF HITSU-DO [MONK]

- Rank: 2
- Replaces: Any Brotherhood Monk 2, Kikage Zumi 2, Kuni Witch-Hunter 2, Asako Henshin 2
- Requires: Jujutsu (Hitsu-do) 4, Fire 3, access to a Hitsu-do dojo

TECHNIQUE: THE WAY OF FIRE

The practitioner of Hitsu-do learns to harness his inner Fire chi, using it to empower his strikes – but this has a price, since such use of one's own Fire is also harmful. When making an unarmed attack, you may opt to call on your inner fire, but you suffer Wounds equal to your Fire x2. (Any Wound Penalties from this damage are applied after your attack roll is completed.) In return, your unarmed damage for that attack has a base DR of 0k[Fire] instead of 0k1. (This does not stack with the unarmed damage bonus from the Advantage Hands of Stone.) For mechanical purposes, using the Hitsu-do technique is considered to be the same as using a Mystical Kiho.

Special: The practice of Hitsu-do makes it easier for its students to master the ways of Fire. Your Fire Ring is considered to be 1 Rank higher for the purpose of learning Fire Kiho.

New Kata: The 1,000 Years of Steel

The 1,000 Years of Steel are a series of Kata that became widely popular in the twelfth century, gaining support among talented swordsmen throughout the Empire. Originally devised by the unlikely pairing of a Mirumoto swordsman and a Kakita duelist, the Kata series built upon centuries of technique refinement from both schools, and also capitalized on certain oft-denied similarities between the two styles of swordsmanship. It was the hope of the series' founders that these Kata might help promote better relations between the martial institutions of the Crane and Dragon clans, but so far this does not seem to have been the case; in fact, the use of the Kata series has become another point of contention between the two schools as often as not.

Although the 1,000 Years of Steel are specific to the twelfth century, they could easily have been devised earlier in the Empire's history (perhaps under a different name) and GMs should feel free to adapt them into any campaign setting.

HITSU-DO ACROSS THE EMPIRE

As the text of Chapter One notes, there is a scattering of Hitsu-do dojo and practitioners across the Empire, including in several bushi and shugenja families. In the default representation of Hitsu-do, only those of a mystical and ascetic nature (e.g. certain Monk schools) can truly master the ways of Hitsu-do. Other, lesser, students of this martial art are represented mechanically by the Jujutsu (Hitsu-do) Emphasis. However, if the GM is running a version of Rokugan in which martial arts figures more prominently, or one in which mystical and supernatural elements are dominant (such as the Togashi Dynasty setting from the L5R 4th Edition supplement *Imperial Histories 2*), he may opt to represent this in the game by making the Student of Hitsu-do Path available to any samurai who can find and attend one of the Hitsu-do dojo.

If this option is used, it is strongly recommended that the same option be made available for the Kaze-do Path from the L5R 4th Edition supplement *The Book of Air*, as well as for any future martial arts Paths in upcoming books.



THE EMPIRE RESTS ON ITS EDGE

The first essential truth of the Steel Kata series is that the ancestors of both families believed the way of the sword was reflected in every aspect of life. Those who master this kata come to understand a true warrior can balance all things on the edge of a pure blade.

- Ring/Mastery: Air 3 or Fire 3
- Schools: Any (Mirumoto and Kakita bushi reduce the Ring requirements by 1)
- Special: Can only be used with a katana or daisho
- Effect: Upon learning this Kata, choose one High Skill that is not a combat skill. You must spend +2 Experience Points each time you increase your Rank in that Skill. When you are utilizing this Kata, you gain a bonus to the total of your Kenjutsu or Iaijutsu Skill Rolls equal to your Rank in the chosen High Skill.





THE WORLD IS EMPTY

The masters of both the Kakita and the Mirumoto schools understand that a hidden connection exists between all things in the universe – what the Phoenix refer to as the Void. The connection, when properly understood by a swordsman, can give rise to moments of true greatness.

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 4 or Fire 4
- **Schools:** Any (Mirumoto and Kakita bushi reduce Ring requirements by 1)
- **Special:** Can only be used with a katana or daisho
- **Effect:** When this Kata is activated, you gain a bonus of +Xk0 to your Kenjutsu or Iaijutsu attack rolls, where X is equal to the number of Void Points you currently possess. This Kata's benefit lasts for a number of Rounds equal to the number of Void Points you possess when you activate it, ending during the Reactions stage of the last Round. When it ends, you lose 1 Void Point.

VICTORY OF THE RIVER

True mastery of the sword is the understanding that between the time the sword is drawn and the time it is sheathed, there is only one strike. The strike may dance and weave like the wind or flame, but a true master makes ten attacks in a single movement.

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 5 or Fire 5
- **Schools:** Any (Mirumoto and Kakita bushi reduce Ring requirements by 1)
- **Special:** Can only be used with a katana or daisho
- **Effect:** When you successfully strike an opponent while this Kata is active, his Armor TN is reduced by 10 against your subsequent attacks for a period of three Rounds. However, your own Armor TN is also reduced by 10 while this benefit is active. You may only have one opponent affected by this Kata at a time, and the effects are not cumulative, although subsequent strikes can “re-set” the three-Round time limit.

STANDING ON THE HEAVENS

The Mirumoto and Kakita have been rivals for more than a thousand years, but they are tied together by a single commonality: the soul of Thunder. Mirumoto rode to the Shadowlands alongside Kakita's daughter to defeat Fu Leng, and neither returned. In this, both families share a connection to one another and to the Heavens themselves. As Shinsei said, fortune favors the mortal man.

- **Ring/Mastery:** Air 6 or Fire 6
- **Schools:** Any (Mirumoto and Kakita bushi reduce Ring requirements by 1)
- **Special:** Can only be used with a katana or daisho
- **Effect:** Once per Round, when you are struck by a successful attack roll during combat, you may spend a Void Point as a Free Action to force your opponent to immediately re-roll the attack

Chapter Two: Fires of Magic

The Crane Clan

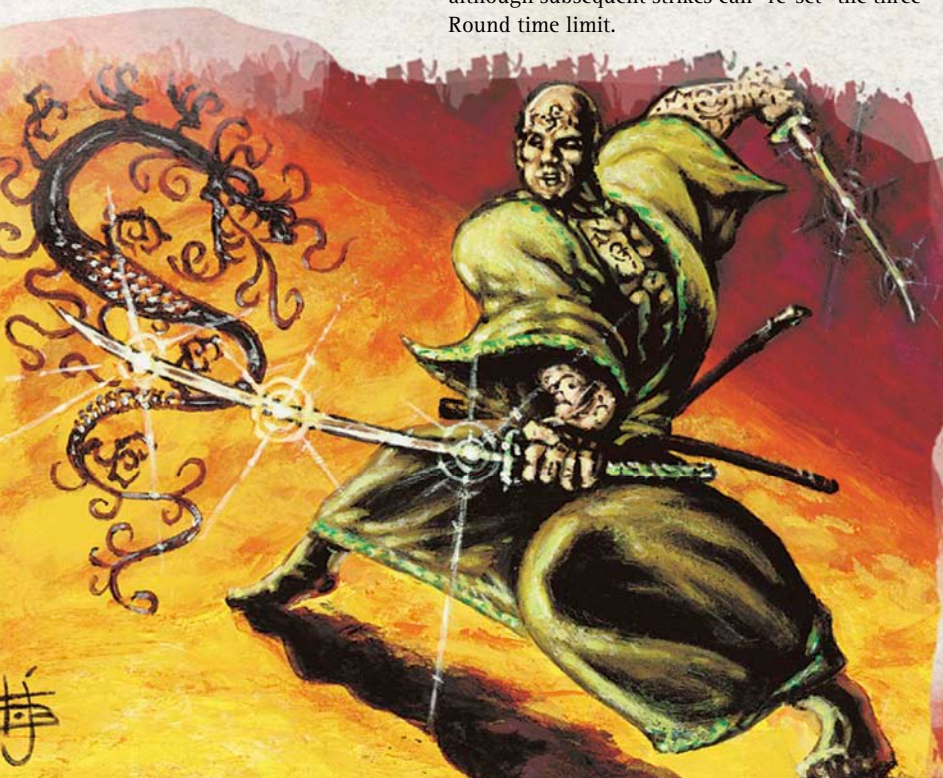
THE ASAHINA FIRE SCULPTORS

The Asahina family are known both for their devotion to peace and for their appreciation of beautiful things, and it is not uncommon for individuals in the family to pursue the creative arts, including sculpture – many of the Asahina monasteries and temples are filled with splendid and famous statues, with admirers traveling from all over the Empire to look upon them. A lesser-known artistic tradition within the family depends not on the permanence of stone but instead on the fleeting beauty of fire to create its sculptures. The Fire Sculptors are few in number but famed for their work, and they are welcomed in many courts where their talents can be appreciated – for the brief time they exist.

NEW ALTERNATE PATH:

ASAHINA FIRE SCULPTORS [SHUGENJA, ARTISAN]

- **Rank:** 2
- **Replaces:** Any Shugenja 2
- **Requirements:** Fire 3, Artisan (Sculpture) 2
- **Special:** A GM who wishes to represent the greater degree of control a Fire Sculptor has over the Element of Fire may opt to allow a Fire Sculptor to gain one Free Raise on a Fire spell once per day.



TECHNIQUE: THE INNER SHAPE OF FIRE

An Asahina Fire Sculptor is capable of creating beautiful but fleeting shapes rendered in fire, heat, light, or smoke. You may expend a Fire spell slot and make an Artisan (Sculpture) / Fire roll (base TN is 20, adjusted by the GM depending on the complexity of the sculpture being created). The sculpture will last a number of minutes equal to your Fire Ring, but requires full concentration during that time (i.e. you may do nothing except Free Actions). The sculpture vanishes instantly when the time elapses or you cease concentrating. The GM should award suitable Glory for a successful Fire sculpture “performance.”

The Dragon Clan

THE TRANSCENDENT BROTHERHOOD

The often-maligned Transcendent Brotherhood embraces a strange philosophy that pain tempers the body and the mind, making it easier to attain a transcendent state that approaches Enlightenment. Although the sect is regarded as dangerously eccentric by the Brotherhood of Shinsei and has been excommunicated from that organization, the Dragon have offered them a home within the Tattooed Orders. It seems there is some degree of validity to their claims, and those who have embraced their philosophies have demonstrated they capable of impressive feats of clarity when touched by the agonizing kiss of fire.

NEW ALTERNATE PATH:

THE TRANSCENDENT BROTHERHOOD [MONK]

- Rank: 2
- Replaces: Any Tattooed Order 2
- Requires: Fire 3, Earth 3, Meditation 3
- Special: GMs who wish to show the Transcendent Brotherhood as gaining greater success and acceptance within the Empire may do so by expanding access to the Path to encompass any Shugenja or Monk School.

TECHNIQUE: APOTHEOSIS OF FIRE

Members of the Transcendent Brotherhood seek to use pain as a means of achieving clarity of thought and spirit. Once per day, you may spend at least one hour in deep meditation and make a Meditation / Fire Roll against a TN 20. With a success, you harden yourself against the physical harm done by fire and heat, although you still feel all the pain of being burned. (GMs may opt to impose partial or temporary TN penalties to represent the effects of the pain.) For a number of hours equal to your Fire Ring, you are immune to damage from normal, mundane fires and heat (not magical fire or extreme natural heat-sources such as molten lava). One Raise on this Meditation roll will make you immune to magical sources of fire; two Raises will make you immune to damage from any source of fire, even a volcano. While experiencing the pain of being burned, and for ten minutes afterward, your intense focus and clarity of thought grant you a bonus equal to your Fire Ring to the total of all Awareness, Perception and Intelligence-based Trait and Skill Rolls.



The Mantis Clan

THE COLLEGE OF CLARITY

A creation of the Moshi family, the College of Clarity is less of a formal learning institution and more of a philosophical movement that focuses on allowing one's ascendant Fire-aligned chi to grant a pure and unadulterated view of the world. The College remained very obscure until some samurai realized its philosophies lent themselves well to the study of iaijutsu. Since that time, some duelists have traveled great distances to avail themselves of the College's teachings.

NEW ALTERNATE PATH:

THE COLLEGE OF CLARITY [COURTIER]

- Rank: 2
- Replaces: Any School 2
- Requires: Fire 3, Meditation 2
- Special: A samurai who uses the Clarity of Fire to enhance his focus in iaijutsu may make the same roll, but instead of gaining the Advantage effect, he instead gains a bonus of +1k0 to any one Iaijutsu (Focus) / Void Roll made during the same time period (number of hours equal to his Fire Ring).

TECHNIQUE: THE CLARITY OF FIRE

The College of Clarity teaches its students to draw on their inner Fire to promote clarity of thought and recall. By meditating for at least one half hour and making a Meditation / Fire Roll against a TN of 15, you gain the Clear Thinker and Precise Memory Advantages for a number of hours equal to your Fire Ring. If you already have either or both of these Advantages, their bonuses are increased by +1k0.



The Phoenix Clan

AGASHA ALCHEMISTS

The Ikakeya are a lesser known sect of the Agasha family who have deliberately avoided the attention of outsiders ever since their family joined the Phoenix Clan. These individuals have continued their studies of the alchemical formulae and techniques from their time with the Dragon Clan (and which the Tamori family has continued in that clan). The Ikakeya are known for their skill at producing potions and other alchemical items that contain the essence of their magic, as well as for their skill at transposing and combining different Elements for maximum effect.

NEW ALTERNATE PATH: AGASHA ALCHEMIST [SHUGENJA]

- Rank: 3
- Replaces: Agasha Shugenja 3
- Requires: Fire 3, Spellcraft 3

TECHNIQUE: FURY OF THE ELEMENTS

You may store a Fire spell with the Area of Effect “one target person” or “one target creature” in an alchemical preparation for later use. The stored spell may be activated instantly by anyone as either a Simple Action (to drink a potion) or a Complex Action (to throw it, using Athletics (Throwing) / Agility). By spending a Spell Slot for another Element (except Void), you may also give a spell stored in this manner either an additional Elemental keyword, or replace its Fire keyword with another Elemental keyword. For example, by spending an Earth slot, you could cause the stored spell to be both Fire and Earth, or just Earth, for all purposes related to the type of Elemental keyword associated with the spell. A spell may only be given one additional Elemental keyword this way.

THE INFERNO GUARD

The Elemental Legions of the Phoenix Clan are a legend even among the Empire’s military traditions. The Firestorm Legion and their attendants in the Legion of Flame are the most aggressive of the Elemental Legions, ever on the forefront of any battle in which they are part of the Phoenix forces. Despite their overwhelmingly aggressive tactics, however, even the vaunted Firestorm Legion must give some attention to defense, and that is the purpose of the Inferno Guard. They defend positions by creating walls of fire, they protect by immolating archery fire from the sky, and they obscure by filling the skies with thick plumes of smoke.

NEW ALTERNATE PATH: THE INFERNO GUARD [SHUGENJA]

- Rank: 3
- Replaces: Isawa Shugenja 3
- Requires: Fire 3, Battle (Mass Battle) 3, Fire affinity.

TECHNIQUE: MENACING FLAMES

Members of the Inferno Guard learn how to employ certain Fire spells to maximize the apparent threat they represent to opponents. When casting any Fire spell that does not list “One Target Creature” or “One Target Individual” as its Area of Effect, you may either spend a Void Point or expend an additional Spell Slot to give the spell an additional effect of Fear X, where X is the Mastery Level of the spell.

GM’s Option: Counterspelling

In some RPG systems, it is possible for spellcasters to counteract opposing spells. Some earlier editions of the L5R RPG have also explored this idea, but due to the timing issues involved with “interrupting” another person’s action, these mechanics can often become problematic. Accordingly, L5R 4th Edition did not include a “Counterspell” option in its basic rules.

However, given the nature of Rokugani magic as prayers which entreat the kami into action, it does seem logical that a skillful shugenja could use his own prayers to disrupt another shugenja’s spell-casting, either by disrupting opposing kami with his own or by persuading opposing kami not to listen to the enemy spellcaster. If GMs wish to explore this possibility, the following optional rules are suggested.

WHO CAN COUNTERSPELL, AND WHEN

A shugenja who has at least 5 Ranks in the Spellcraft Skill may attempt to Counterspell any normal Rokugani spell being cast by another shugenja. (Maho, Nothing spells, and gaijin magic of all kinds cannot normally be Counterspelled.) The would-be Counterspeller must be aware that a spell is being cast (GM’s judgment, but in general any shugenja can recognize the sights and sounds of spellcasting) and must be within a reasonable distance (suggested maximum range is 50’ x School Rank).

If the enemy spell takes more than one Complex Action to cast, the Counterspelling shugenja may always make the attempt to Counterspell so long as the Initiative order allows him to take a Turn in between the start and end of the spellcasting process (this will almost always be the case). However, if the spell only takes one Complex Action to cast (either due to being a Mastery Rank One spell, or due to the caster taking Raises to cast it in only one Action), or if for some reason the Counterspelling shugenja does not have a Turn between the start and end of the spell-casting process, then a Counterspell may only be attempted under the following conditions:

- The Counterspelling shugenja is acting before the casting shugenja in the Initiative order, and chooses to delay his Turn for the purpose of potentially Counterspelling.



- The Counterspelling shugenja is tied with the casting shugenja in the Initiative order.
- A specific shugenja may only attempt to Counterspell each enemy spell once, even if he has multiple Turns during the time when the spell is being cast. If multiple shugenja have the ability to attempt a Counterspell against the same enemy spell, they may make their Counterspell attempts separately or they can combine their efforts (see below).

COUNTERSPELLING PROCEDURES

A shugenja who is attempting a Counterspell takes a Complex Action and expends a spell slot in the Element which is opposed to the Element of the spell being cast (any shugenja who has Spellcraft of 3 or higher will be able to sense the Element being used in a spell). Fire opposes Water, Air opposes Earth, and Void opposes itself.

The Counterspelling shugenja then makes a Spell Casting Roll using the opposing Element (applying Affinity/Deficiency if appropriate). If the total of his roll is higher than the Spell Casting Roll of the shugenja casting the spell, the Counterspell is a success and the spell fails to take effect. (Observant GMs may note there is a potential timing issue here – if the Counterspelling shugenja is acting “in the middle” of a spell that takes more than one Complex Action to cast, the caster has not made his Spell Casting Roll yet. In this case, it is recommended that the caster make his Spell Casting Roll immediately but the final effects not be seen until the time when the spell would normally be cast.)

If multiple shugenja are making a combined attempt to Counterspell a single enemy spell, the combined effort uses the highest Ring Rank and the highest School Rank among all the shugenja, and adds a +1k1 bonus to the roll for each shugenja beyond the first.

INSTANCES WHERE COUNTERSPELLING IS IMPOSSIBLE

In order to be effective, Counterspelling must be able to disrupt the kami at the moment they are being invoked through prayer. This means there are a number of instances in which it is not possible to Counterspell.

Any effect which “stores” a spell for later discharge, such as the spell Silent Waters, the Agasha and Tamori alchemical potions, or the Yogo paper wards, cannot be Counterspelled.

The Unicorn Clan’s Meishodo magic, which is a blend of Rokugani and gaijin techniques, does not involve a Spell Casting Roll to use and thus cannot be Counterspelled.

ADDITIONAL COUNTERSPELLING OPTIONS

If the GM wishes to add more depth to Counterspelling, some or all of the following additional options may be added to the Counterspelling rules. Note, however, that the more such rules are added, the more complex and time-consuming Counterspelling will become.

- **School Bonuses:** Certain schools and magical traditions within Rokugan are better at Counterspelling. Any shugenja who is enrolled in the Phoenix Inquisitor Advanced School gains a +1k1 bonus to Counterspelling attempts. Any shugenja trained in the Yogo Wardmaster School or the Seppun Shugenja School gains a +1k0 bonus to Counterspelling attempts.
- **Powerful Spells:** It can be more challenging for a shugenja to Counterspell magic which is beyond his own capacity to cast. If the spell which is being Counterspelled is a higher Mastery Rank than the Counterspelling shugenja could normally cast, he must call one Raise on the Contested Roll for each Mastery Rank by which the spell exceeds his capacities.





Taryu-Jiai Dueling

Duels of magical power between shugenja have been around since the early days of the Empire, when the Isawa used them to settle differences between themselves. Over the centuries the practice has slowly spread to other shugenja families and schools, and social conventions have risen up around such duels in much the same way as with iaijutsu dueling. Taryu-Jiai remains a rare practice overall, since it is quite unusual for shugenja to be willing to fight a duel of honor for themselves rather than following social convention and letting their yojimbo fight for them. However, it does play an important role in any tournament involving shugenja – especially the Tournament of the Jade Champion in those eras when the Jade Champion is an active office. Such tournaments usually end in a contest of Taryu-Jiai in much the same way as bushi tournaments such as the Topaz Championship and the Emerald Championship end in a contest of iaijutsu.

Socially, a Taryu-Jiai duel is treated in much the same way as any other “alternate” form of dueling: that is, it is considered an acceptable substitute for iaijutsu if both parties agree to use it to resolve their differences. As mentioned, this is a popular choice among the Isawa, but much rarer elsewhere. Like an iaijutsu duel, a Taryu-Jiai duel can be conducted to first blood (usually judged by whoever inflicted the heavier injury on the opponent) or to the death. The more peaceful shugenja families and schools generally refuse to fight lethal Taryu-Jiai, viewing them as an improper use of the spirits.

TARYU-JIAI MECHANICS

A duel of Taryu-Jiai uses a loosely similar overall structure to an iaijutsu duel, but there are significant mechanical differences since the shugenja are calling on the power of the kami directly rather than fighting with weapons. The exact length of a Taryu-Jiai duel varies – matches between powerful shugenja have been known to last several minutes – but GMs who wish a more standardized feel can rule that a Taryu-Jiai duel happens in three Rounds in the same manner as an iaijutsu duel, and the steps outlined below assume this to be the case.

Taryu-Jiai does not use the Center Stance. (If the duel is taking place in Rounds, the duelists are typically in the Attack Stance throughout.)

STEP ONE: SELECTION

Before the duel begins, each duelist chooses which Element he will call upon for the duel. This will usually be the Element in which he has Affinity, though this is not required. Also, in some instances the duelists will specifically agree to fight using a particular Element – for example, two pacifistic shugenja might choose to fight a

Duel of Air. The choice must be made from one of the four normal Elements – there are no duels of Void, not even between Ishiken.

STEP TWO: ASSESSMENT

On the first Round of the duel, each shugenja attempts to sense the Elemental power and capability of his opponent. This is a Contested Roll of Spellcraft / Void. The shugenja who wins the Contested Roll learns the Ring his opponent has selected and the opponent's Rank in that Ring. If he wins the Contested Roll by at least 10, he also learns either the opponent's School Rank or his Void Rank (player's choice).

After the Assessment step, either shugenja may opt to acknowledge defeat and thereby end the duel. If neither shugenja concedes, the duel proceeds.

STEP THREE: EMPOWER

On the second Round of the duel, both shugenja begin praying to the kami and gathering the energy of the Elements around them. This will often produce very impressive visual effects as the kami gather and swirl around the two shugenja, whose eyes glow with the power of the kami in the same manner as when casting spells. This stage of the duel is considered to be “full concentration,” meaning the shugenja may only perform Free Actions and can potentially be disrupted by outside distractions, enemy attacks, etc.

STEP FOUR: STRIKE

On the third and final Round of the duel, both shugenja unleash their gathered Elemental power, attempting to overwhelm their opponent. This is often a quite spectacular event as massive numbers of kami swirl and clash, stones and flames erupt from the ground, whirlwinds sweep out of nowhere, and so forth.

Mechanically, this is represented by the shugenja performing a Contested Spell Casting Roll using the Element of their choice. Affinity/Deficiency apply as normal, and spell slots are likewise used as though the shugenja cast a spell of that Element. Other aspects of School Techniques generally do not apply (since the shugenja are unleashing raw Elemental power rather than using specific types of prayers such as Illusion or Jade) but the GM may opt to let them apply if it seems appropriate.

The shugenja who wins the Contested Roll inflicts 2k2 damage on his opponent, plus an additional 1k1 damage for every differential of 5 by which he beat the opponent's total Spell Casting Roll. The shugenja who lost the Contested Roll inflicts half as many dice (rounded down) of damage on the winner.

If the duel is non-lethal, the winner is whoever inflicts more Wounds in the Strike. If it is a duel to the death, the shugenja will continue to repeat the Empower and Strike steps until one opponent falls – any duelist who is reduced to Down or Out in a lethal Taryu-Jiai duel will be immediately overwhelmed and slain by the opponent's kami.



ADDITIONAL OPTIONS

GMs who wish to add more depth to Taryu-Jiai duels may wish to explore the following options:

- **Disruption** – The GM may add depth to the Empower step by allowing the shugenja to try to disrupt their opponents' control over the kami and thereby gain an advantage in the subsequent Strike. This is resolved as a Contested Roll of Spellcraft / [Element] (where Element is each duelist's chosen Element for the duel). If one duelist beats the other's roll by at least 10, the winner gains a +1k1 bonus to the Strike roll.
- **Specific Elemental Effects** – The GM may opt to add specific effects to the duel to reflect the Elements chosen for the duel. For example, Air is a less violent Element, so the GM could let half the damage inflicted by Air in a duel be “non-lethal” buffeting/smothering damage that has no lasting or lethal effect. Conversely, Fire is more violent and destructive, which could be represented by adding +1k0 to the duelist's damage; Water is the Element of clarity and could award a +1k0 bonus to Assessment rolls; and the weight of Earth could reduce an opponent's mobility and stamina, represented by the opposing duelist becoming Fatigued.

AVATAR DUELS

Certain high-powered shugenja duels involve the duelists summoning forth powerful Elemental avatars and using these avatars to wage battle against each other by proxy. In game terms, this is accomplished by casting the various Rank 6 “Rise” spells (Rise Earth, Rise Water, etc) and using these powerful summoned kami to fight a skirmish combat. Since the summoned avatars are infused completely with the energy of the kami, they are able to damage each other (ignoring Invulnerability). The fight continues until one of the avatars is reduced to zero Wounds and thereby dispelled.

New Fire Spells

FIRE KAMI'S BLESSING

- **Ring/Mastery:** Fire 1
- **Range:** Touch
- **Area of Effect:** One target creature (may be caster)
- **Duration:** 1 hour
- **Raises:** Duration (+1/2 hour per Raise)

This prayer calls on the Fire kami to stimulate the mind and memory, allowing the recipient to recall the most obscure information, details he may have encountered only once or briefly. For the duration of this spell, the target gains a +Xk0 bonus (where X is the caster's Fire Ring) to any High or Merchant Skill rolls using the Intelligence Trait.

GIFT OF AMATERASU

- **Ring/Mastery:** Fire 1 (Defense)
- **Range:** 50'
- **Area of Effect:** 50' radius sphere
- **Duration:** 10 minutes
- **Raises:** Range (+25' per Raise), Duration (+5 minutes per Raise)

This spell is a prayer to Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, asking her to bestow her favor on the caster in the form of radiant Fire kami. (In the twelfth century, when Amaterasu is superceded first by Yakamo and then by the Jade Sun, the name and forms of this spell changes, but the effects remain the same.) Once the prayer is completed, warm sunlight blazes down on the chosen area, bathing it in full daylight even if it is at night, indoors, or underground. This spell is particularly popular among shugenja who are assigned to assist in the protection of castles and other vital locations, since a sudden blaze of daylight can be a very effective deterrent to thieves, assassins, and spies.

OSANO-WO'S BLESSING

- **Ring/Mastery:** Fire 1
- **Range:** 100'
- **Area of Effect:** 40' radius
- **Duration:** 30 minutes
- **Raises:** Range (+25' per Raise), Area of Effect (+10' radius per Raise), Duration (+10 minutes per Raise)

This prayer acts in the exact opposite way of the commonly-used spell Extinguish; instead of urging the Fire kami to depart and thus put out flames, it urges them to greater energy and vigor, making flames harder to extinguish. For the duration of this spell, all fires within the area of effect become impossible to extinguish by normal means, and any magical effort to put them out (such as the aforementioned Extinguish spell) must succeed in a Contested Fire roll with the caster of Osano-Wo's Blessing.





This spell is controversial, since it can result in otherwise controllable fires in cities and villages raging out of control. Pacifistic shugenja such as the Asahina and Isawa generally eschew its usage.

WARNING FLAME

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 1 (Battle)
- ☉ Range: Touch
- ☉ Area of Effect: One target person (may be caster)
- ☉ Duration: 10 Rounds
- ☉ Raises: Duration (+2 Rounds per Raise), Area of Effect (+1 person per 2 Raises)

Fire is the Element of wit and intellect as well as the Element of destruction. This spell excites the Fire kami within the mind, allowing the target to notice threats and react to them far more quickly than normally. For the duration of the spell, the target is immune to being surprised, adds +1k0 to any Initiative rolls he makes, and may add +3 to his Initiative total during the Reactions stage of each Round.

PURITY OF SHINSEI

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 2 (Defense)
- ☉ Range: 50'
- ☉ Area of Effect: One target person/effect
- ☉ Duration: Instantaneous
- ☉ Raises: Range (+10' per Raise), Area of Effect (+1 target per 2 Raises)

This spell was originally devised by the Isawa to deal with the threat of Yobanjin magic, and later spread to the rest of the Empire when other gaijin threats became more frequent. The spell calls on Shinsei's principles of Elemental unity and harmony to oppose unnatural foreign magic, using the energy of Fire as a focus.

Purity of Shinsei ends the effects of a gaijin spell or spell-like effect. Typically this means targeting an individual who is being afflicted by an ongoing gaijin spell effect (such as a samurai laboring under a foreign curse), though it can also target an effect which is not afflicting a specific individual (such as a foreign curse on a castle, a village, or a physical item). The GM has final discretion on whether a particular gaijin magic effect can be countered with Purity of Shinsei.

If the optional Counterspelling rules as in use, the GM may opt to let a shugenja who knows this spell attempt to Counterspell *meishodo* spells and gaijin magic.

WINGS OF FIRE

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 2 (Travel)
- ☉ Range: Touch
- ☉ Area of Effect: Self
- ☉ Duration: 10 minutes
- ☉ Raises: Duration (+5 minutes per Raise), Special (move at +1 Water Rank for 3 Raises)

This prayer is a simpler and less potent form of the spell Wings of the Phoenix, although it is also slightly more flexible in that it does not require a suit of armor to act as an "anchor" for the Fire kami. When this spell is cast, a cloud of Fire kami gather and take the form of large feathery wings sprouting from the caster's arms and back. The caster may use these wings to fly slowly (normally moving at a speed equal to Water 1, regardless of his actual Water Ring). If the caster is able to glide (e.g. he is already at a significant height above the ground), he can move more quickly, as though he is Water 4. While the spell is in effect, the caster cannot use his arms for anything but flapping and moving his fiery wings, severely limiting his potential actions; also, he will set fire to any easily flammable objects (such as paper or spell scrolls) he touches, although the Fire kami will avoid harming his clothes.

When the spell ends, the Fire kami immediately disperse, regardless of whether the caster is on the ground or in the air – unlike the friendly Air kami, the mercurial and aggressive Fire kami do not particularly care about the caster's fate once they depart.

AGASHA'S SHIELD (TAMORI'S CURSE)

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 3 (Defense, Wards)
- ☉ Range: Touch/Self
- ☉ Area of Effect: 30' radius around caster
- ☉ Duration: 6 Rounds
- ☉ Raises: Area of Effect (+5' radius per Raise), Duration (+1 Round per Raise)

Originally devised by Agasha shugenja who were working with hanabi (fireworks), in modern times this spell has been renamed Tamori's Curse by the Tamori family. The spell creates a zone of protection in which Fire kami



friendly to the caster reject any intrusion by other Fire kami. Any hostile Fire spell cast within the Area of Effect suffers a -4k0 penalty to the Spell Casting Roll. Any hostile Fire spell cast from an outside location that attempts to project Fire effects into the Area of Effect (such as spells like Fires From Within) will suffer a -3k0 penalty to its DR as Agasha's Shield disperses and weakens the kami.

OATH OF THE HEAVENS

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 3
- ☉ Range: Touch
- ☉ Area of Effect: Two target persons (see description)
- ☉ Duration: 5 Rounds
- ☉ Raises: Duration (+1 Round per Raise), Special (+1k0 to the bonus per 2 Raises)

This spell was originally a secret spell of the Agasha family, and has sometimes been credited as being invented by Agasha herself during her rescue from goblins by Mirumoto Hojatsu. In modern times, both the Phoenix Clan Agasha and the Dragon Clan Tamori know the spell, although the Tamori use it far more often. The spell calls on the Fire kami to form a link between the ferocity of a bushi and the intellect of a shugenja, allowing both to work in concert to greater effect. The caster traditionally targets himself and one friendly bushi (usually, though not always, a yojimbo), although it is also possible for the caster to bestow the spell's benefits on a different shugenja rather than himself.

For the duration of the spell, both recipients receive a +2k0 bonus to all rolls involving the Fire Ring and Fire Traits (e.g. all rolls involving Agility and Intelligence). However, the links also makes each recipient vulnerable to effects on the other - if either recipient becomes Fatigued, Dazed, or Stunned, the other immediately shares the same Condition. Moreover, if either recipient is reduced to Down, Out, or Dead, the spell's effects immediately end.

THE BREATH OF BATTLE

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 3 (Battle, Imperial)
- ☉ Range: 30'
- ☉ Area of Effect: One target person
- ☉ Duration: 5 Rounds
- ☉ Raises: Area of Effect (+1 target per 2 Raises), Duration (+1 Round per Raise), Range (+10' per Raise)

This prayer, variously credited to the Isawa, the Kitsu, or the Seppun, is the positive counterpoint to the notorious Haze of Battle prayer. Where Haze of Battle drives its target into a maddened frenzy of combat by exciting the Fire kami within him, The Breath of Battle invokes a positive and honorable ferocity by using Fire to call on the divine favor of the Sun. The target of this spell gains a +1k1 bonus to all Agility-based Skill Rolls and a +1k0 bonus to all Damage rolls so long as he remains under the direct light of the Sun. The spell cannot function underground, at night, or when the Sun is obscured by clouds (although the spell Gift of Amaterasu can circumvent this restraint), but it ignores minor obstructions to sunlight such as foliage or shoji screens.

WHISPERING FLAMES

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 3 (Illusion)
- ☉ Range: 50'
- ☉ Area of Effect: All persons within 10' radius
- ☉ Duration: 3 Rounds
- ☉ Raises: Range (+10' per Raise), Area of Effect (+5' radius per 2 Raises), Duration (+1 Rounds per Raise)

The creation of this spell is credited to Asahina himself, who sought ways to use Fire magic peacefully after he joined the Crane Clan, but in modern times it is found in the ranks of many different families. The spell causes the Fire kami to gather and dance in a pleasing visual shape and with a soothing rhythmic light. Those who gaze upon the Fire kami see an entrancing and appealing vision that distracts them from taking violent actions. All persons within the Area of Effect find themselves entranced and are considered Dazed for the duration of the spell. However, the targets may attempt to shake off the spell's effects during the Reactions Stage of each Round with a Willpower roll against a TN of the caster's Fire x10.

This spell's effects are most potent against Rokugani, since the Fire kami find it more difficult to create entrancing images for those they do not understand. The GM may award gaijin and nonhuman targets a bonus to their Willpower roll to resist the spell's effects. Animals, bestial creatures, and mindless creatures such as undead are completely immune to the spell.

BLESSING OF THE SUN

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 4
- ☉ Range: Touch
- ☉ Area of Effect: One willing target person (may be caster)
- ☉ Duration: 3 Rounds
- ☉ Raises: Range (may change to 10' with 2 Raises), Duration (+1 Round per Raise)

This spell infuses the target's limbs with a rush of aggressive Fire kami, allowing him to move and think





more quickly and to ignore pain and weariness. However, there is a price to be paid for such Elemental vigor, since once the kami depart the body becomes even more weary than before.

The recipient of this blessing feels a rush of burning energy and a quickening of thought. He instantly recovers from the Dazed Condition if it is in effect. Moreover, for the duration of the spell, the target's Fire-related rolls (e.g. any roll using Agility or Intelligence and any Spell Casting Roll using the Fire Ring) may ignore both the effects of being Fatigued and the TN effects of Wound Penalties. However, once the spell expires, the target becomes Fatigued (this stacks with any pre-existing Fatigue effects) and cannot recover from this Fatigue in any way (rest, magic, or Techniques) for 24 hours.

ESSENCE OF FIRE

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 4 (Wards, Imperial)
- ☉ Range: 10'
- ☉ Area of Effect: Two target duelists
- ☉ Duration: One iaijutsu duel
- ☉ Raises: Special (see text)

This spell was originally developed by the Asahina to prevent magical tampering with iaijutsu duels. In the Crane view, iaijutsu is a test of the duelist's own inherent skills and talents, and using the kami to aid in a duel violates its proper nature as the sacred judge of right and wrong. (The Crane also suspected certain other clans, such as the Scorpion and Dragon, of "cheating" with magic during duels.) This spell ensures that no magical effects will dilute the duel's test of skill. In Crane lands it is traditional for shugenja to invoke this spell as a blessing on an iaijutsu duel, and the custom sometimes appears in other clans and families as well – particularly the Seppun.

When this spell is cast, a flow of Fire kami race through the chosen targets and drive out any other active kami on them, immediately ending any ongoing spell effects they may have on their persons. The Fire kami remain until the end of the duel, protecting against further interference – any spell which targets either duelist before the duel concludes will suffer a -3k0 penalty to its Spell Casting Roll.

In modern times, a few shugenja have developed a more controversial variant of this spell which also uses the Fire kami to interfere with the targets' memories and suppress their knowledge of bushi Techniques. This tactic is especially popular with shugenja from clans which do not focus on dueling, since it makes a duel purely a test of raw skill with no advantage to those descended from Kakita or Mirumoto. Casting the spell with this additional effect requires 4 Raises.



EYES OF THE PHOENIX

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 4 (Illusion)
- ☉ Range: 25'
- ☉ Area of Effect: One target creature
- ☉ Duration: 1 hour
- ☉ Raises: Range (+5' per Raise), Area of Effect (+1 creature per 2 Raises)

This spell's name is somewhat ironic, and has sometimes been credited to a Scorpion shugenja with a low opinion of the Isawa. Regardless of its origin, the spell's effect is to persuade a small cloud of strong Fire kami to float directly in front of the target's eyes. This makes it appear to others as though the target's eyes have caught on fire, an unsettling effect to say the least. When the spell is cast, any allies of the target suffer a Fear 3 effect (if they are vulnerable to Fear – undead are immune, and the GM may rule that other creatures are resistant or immune if it seems appropriate). More importantly, for the duration of the spell, the target is considered to be Blinded.

CASTLE OF FIRE

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 5 (Battle, Defense)
- ☉ Range: Centered on caster
- ☉ Area of Effect: Circle with a radius of 30' from caster
- ☉ Duration: 10 Rounds
- ☉ Raises: Area of Effect (+5' to radius for 2 Raises), Duration (+2 Rounds per Raise)

Like the other Castle spells, Castle of Fire is a defensive prayer, in this case a more sophisticated version of Wall of Fire. It calls on the kami of Fire to erect a barrier surrounding the caster. The fiery barrier is 1' thick and 10' high; anyone who is standing on its location when it appears must roll Reflexes at TN 20 to leap away (either inside or outside the Castle) and avoid being burned. The Castle's barrier instantly incinerates any arrows or other missiles which try to pass through it. Creatures which pass through the Castle's barrier (or are caught by it when it appears) suffer 6k6 damage and are set afire.

CONSUMED BY FIVE FIRES

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 5
- ☉ Range: 100'
- ☉ Area of Effect: One target creature (and caster)
- ☉ Duration: Instantaneous
- ☉ Raises: Range (+50' per Raise)

One of the most potent and deadly of Fire spells, but also one used only by those facing the most desperate need. The spell invokes an array of powerful Fire kami to strike down the target with incredibly powerful heat and flame – but in order to persuade so many kami to strike with such immense power, the shugenja must bestow them with a gift of his own life-force.

The target of this spell is instantly killed, reduced to Dead and then burned down to ashes in a matter of seconds. However, the caster immediately suffers the

same number of Wounds as were inflicted on the target – an effect which is often, though not always, lethal. This damage cannot be reduced or mitigated in any way, and if it is lethal the caster cannot avert death.

This spell will automatically fail if it targets a creature which is resistant to Fire, and it cannot kill divine entities such as Fortunes.

THE DRAGON'S TALON (KURO'S FIRE)

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 5 (Battle)
- ☉ Range: 100'
- ☉ Area of Effect: Up to 10 target creatures within range
- ☉ Duration: Instantaneous
- ☉ Raises: Range (+25' per Raise), Area of Effect (+2 targets per Raise)

A potent battle spell favored by the Elemental Master of Fire and also used by high-ranking battle shugenja from several clans; in the twelfth century Naka Kuro, the Grand Master of the Elements, also used this spell and it came to be called Kuro's Fire in his honor.

Regardless of its name, this spell calls on the unmatched power of the Dragon of Fire to strike down large numbers of lesser foes. When the prayer is completed, bolts of fire resembling the snarling heads of dragons streak out from the shugenja's hands, striking down the chosen targets. Each target suffers 8k6 damage. However, the nature of this spell is such that the Fire kami will only attack targets who they consider weak and unworthy; in game terms, the spell can only target foes of Insight Rank 1 or 2, or nonhumans of comparable power (GM's judgment).

CURSE OF THE BURNING HAND

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 6
- ☉ Range: 10'
- ☉ Area of Effect: One target creature
- ☉ Duration: Infinite
- ☉ Raises: Range (+5' per Raise)

A truly powerful curse which has only been employed a few times in the Empire's history, the Curse of the Burning Hand binds a hostile Fire kami to the soul of the target, making it all but impossible to remove. The spell is difficult and requires a full minute to cast; also, the caster must succeed in a Contested Fire Roll against the target in order to inflict the Curse. Once it is in place, the target finds himself constantly wreathed in flames; these fires do not harm him, but harm any friends, allies, or innocents who touch him. The fire inflicts 3k3 damage on anyone who touches the cursed individual, and set alight any physical objects he touches which are flammable (e.g. wood, paper, clothing, etc). However, because the Fire kami is hostile, it will not help its victim against his enemies – the flame will suddenly recede any time he tries to use it as a weapon.

Barring any outside interference, the spell's effects will last indefinitely. However, other spells which remove

magical effects can potentially end the Curse of the Burning Hand if the GM judges them to be appropriate; likewise, other effects which drive out kami (such as Banishment) can remove the Curse.

RISE, FIRE

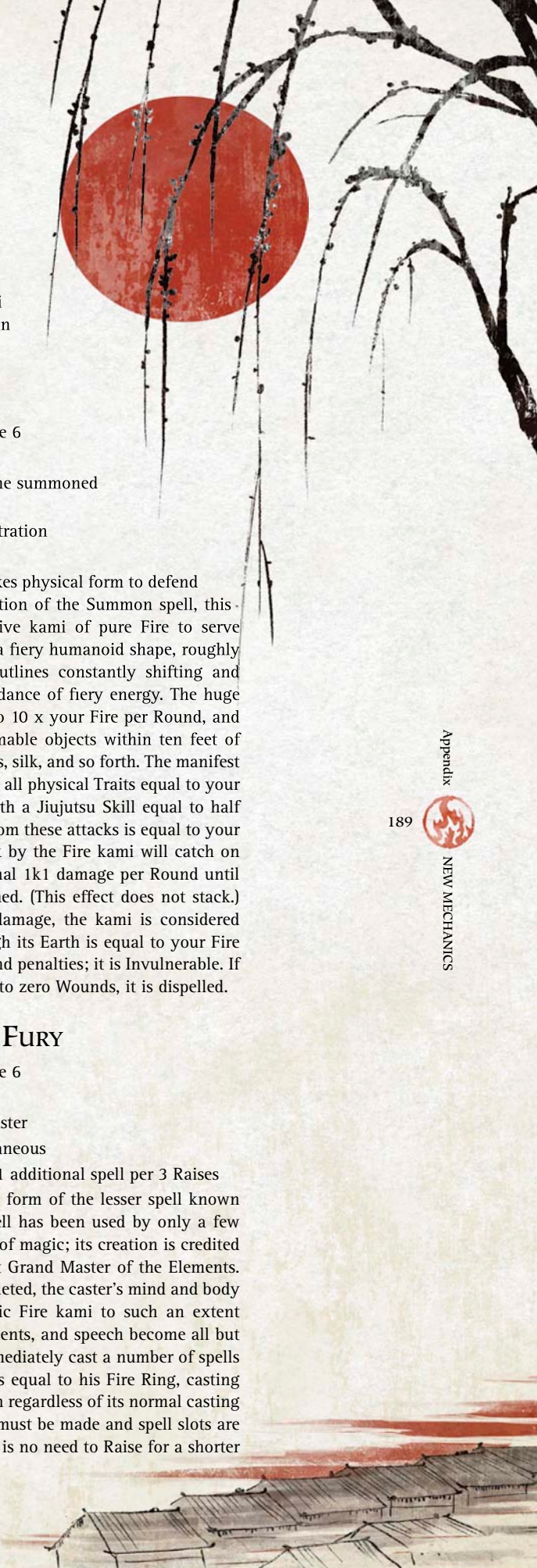
- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 6
- ☉ Range: 30'
- ☉ Area of Effect: One summoned spirit
- ☉ Duration: Concentration
- ☉ Raises: None

Fire itself arises and takes physical form to defend you. The ultimate realization of the Summon spell, this prayer summons a massive kami of pure Fire to serve you. It takes the form of a fiery humanoid shape, roughly ten feet in height, its outlines constantly shifting and changing in a perpetual dance of fiery energy. The huge Fire spirit can move up to 10 x your Fire per Round, and it ignites all easily flammable objects within ten feet of itself – paper, leaves, grass, silk, and so forth. The manifest kami is treated as if it has all physical Traits equal to your Fire Ring, and attacks with a Jujutsu Skill equal to half your Fire Rank; the DR from these attacks is equal to your Fire Rank. Anyone struck by the Fire kami will catch on fire, suffering an additional 1k1 damage per Round until the flames are extinguished. (This effect does not stack.) For purposes of taking damage, the kami is considered to have Wounds as though its Earth is equal to your Fire Ring, but suffers no Wound penalties; it is Invulnerable. If it is successfully reduced to zero Wounds, it is dispelled.

THE ELEMENTS' FURY

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 6
- ☉ Range: Self
- ☉ Area of Effect: Caster
- ☉ Duration: Instantaneous
- ☉ Raises: Special (+1 additional spell per 3 Raises)

A supremely advanced form of the lesser spell known as Hurried Steps, this spell has been used by only a few highly advanced masters of magic; its creation is credited to Naka Kaeteru, the first Grand Master of the Elements. When this prayer is completed, the caster's mind and body are infused with energetic Fire kami to such an extent that his thoughts, movements, and speech become all but superhuman. He may immediately cast a number of spells of Mastery Level 4 or less equal to his Fire Ring, casting each spell as a Free Action regardless of its normal casting time. Spell Casting Rolls must be made and spell slots are used as normal, but there is no need to Raise for a shorter casting time.





Chapter Three: Fires of Peace



The Lion Clan

THE IKOMA HISTORIANS

The Ikoma Historians are a specialized sub-group within the Ikoma courtly schools, recruiting students from both the Omoidasu and the Lion's Shadow. They are an elite group within the family, charged with supervising the Empire's official histories, and regard their duties as a sacred trust. They frequently make use of their access to the secrets of the Empire's history to protect both Imperial and Lion interests, and most of the members of the hidden Ikoma-Shosuro alliance are drawn from their ranks.

NEW ALTERNATE PATH: IKOMA HISTORIANS [COURTIER]

- Rank: 3
- Replaces: Ikoma Bard 3, Ikoma Lion's Shadow 3
- Requires: Lore: History 5

TECHNIQUE: THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

The Ikoma Historians are tasked with comprehensively recording the official histories of the Empire – and also with concealing inconvenient aspects of that history. You are expected to always be ready to record the events around you, and as such you are trained to memorize and perfectly recall anything worthy of inclusion in the historical records. When you take this Path, you acquire the Advantage Forbidden Knowledge (Empire's True History). You gain a Free Raise on all Calligraphy rolls and you may roll Lore: History / Intelligence at TN 25 to accurately recount any incident you have witnessed and any story you have heard, down to the smallest detail – including details you may have missed at the time.

The Phoenix Clan

THE ASAKO SCHOLARS

In every generation there are a few members of the Asako school who display the "Mind of Fire," a tremendous natural talent for memory and an intuitive grasp of how to apply connections between different fields of study in ways nobody else could have imagined. These individuals are trained in the special dojo of the Scholars, where their gifts are honed for both scholarly research and courtly service.

NEW ALTERNATE PATH: ASAKO SCHOLAR [COURTIER]

- Rank: 3
- Replaces: Asako Loremaster 3, Asako Henshin 3
- Requires: Investigation 3, Intelligence 4

THE HIDDEN PATTERNS

The hallmark of the Asako Scholars is their ability through the study of multiple topics to spot the patterns between seemingly unrelated events, sharing their wisdom with their fellow Phoenix and thereby bringing success to all. If you have spent at least one day observing the patterns within a court or other social setting, you may roll Investigation/Intelligence at TN 25 to detect and understand the hidden patterns underlying others' behavior and goals. Rivals and enemies cannot benefit from Raises on Social Skill Rolls against you and cannot spend Void Points on Social Skill Rolls against you for the next 24 hours. You may Raise on your roll to share the benefits of your insight with your friends and allies (one person per Raise).

Chapter Four: Stone Within

NEW SCHOOL: THE ORDER OF REBIRTH

The Brothers of the Order of Rebirth come from a militant tradition of sohei who once served in the ranks of the Order of Thunder devoted to Osano-Wo, the Fortune of Fire and Thunder. The Order embraces new paths and philosophies in an attempt to unlock new truths about both the self and the universe. Their subtle disregard for tradition has earned them a fair amount of disdain from other sects, but the brothers of Rebirth tend to ignore this hostility; as an oft-repeated maxim of their sect observes, the first step upon a new path is always the most difficult.

NEW BASIC SCHOOL:

THE ORDER OF REBIRTH [MONK]

- ☉ Devotion: Fortunist
- ☉ Benefit: +1 Intelligence
- ☉ Honor: 6.5
- ☉ Skills: Athletics, Jiujutsu, Lore: History, Lore: Theology, Meditation, any two Skills.

TECHNIQUE: CHANGING THE WAY

The Brothers of Rebirth celebrate different approaches in all their myriad of forms. Each time in a given encounter that you attempt to utilize a Kiho of a different Element than any Kiho previously used in the same encounter, you gain a bonus of +5 on the activation roll.

NEW SCHOOL: TENGOKU'S FIST

Centuries ago, the Order of Tengoku's Fist was created as an offshoot of the Shrine of the Seven Thunders. The divide was philosophical, and although it was amicable, the two sects no longer have much to do with one another (this causes some observers to assume hostility where none exists). The monks of Tengoku's Fist see violence not as an inherently evil thing, but rather as a natural part of existence found in all aspects of life regardless of good or evil, honor or dishonor. They are among the Brotherhood's more serene sects of sohei, however, for they do not view violence as a first resort, merely as a viable option to be considered equally with all others. When violence is called for, they tend to prove exceptionally gifted at dispensing it.

NEW BASIC SCHOOL:

TENGOKU'S FIST [MONK]

- ☉ Devotion: Shintao
- ☉ Benefit: +1 Agility
- ☉ Honor: 4.5
- ☉ Skills: Athletics, Battle, Jiujutsu 2, Lore: Theology, Meditation, any one Skill.

TECHNIQUE: THE HAND OF THE HEAVENS

The monks of Tengoku's Fist strike with surety and purpose, and their strength is magnified by the influence of the divine. When making an unarmed attack against an opponent, or an attack using a bisento, a bo staff, or a weapon with the Monk property, you may gain a Free Raise on the attack roll if your Fire Ring is higher than your opponent's Fire Ring.

NEW SCHOOL: THE TEMPLE OF HEAVENLY WISDOM

The Temple of Heavenly Wisdom is one of the eldest, perhaps the eldest, monastic traditions within the Crane Clan's provinces. The temple itself was ancient when the Lady Doji first approached it, having been created by primitive men to revere the oldest of the Fortunes. These monks and their studies aided the Lady Doji in the promotion of culture throughout the Empire, and in the

process their temple became something of a sensation in early Rokugan, affording the brothers there an unexpected amount of social prestige and influence. This was something of an anomaly in the early Brotherhood and created some difficulties for the sect, but in the intervening centuries the impact of monks upon Rokugan's society has long since been accepted by the Brotherhood's leadership.

NEW BASIC SCHOOL:

THE TEMPLE OF HEAVENLY WISDOM [MONK]

- ☉ Devotion: Fortunist
- ☉ Benefit: +1 Intelligence
- ☉ Honor: 6.5
- ☉ Skills: Courtier, Etiquette, Lore: History, Lore: Theology, Meditation, Sincerity, any one High Skill.

TECHNIQUE: THE LARGESSE OF FUKUROKUJIN

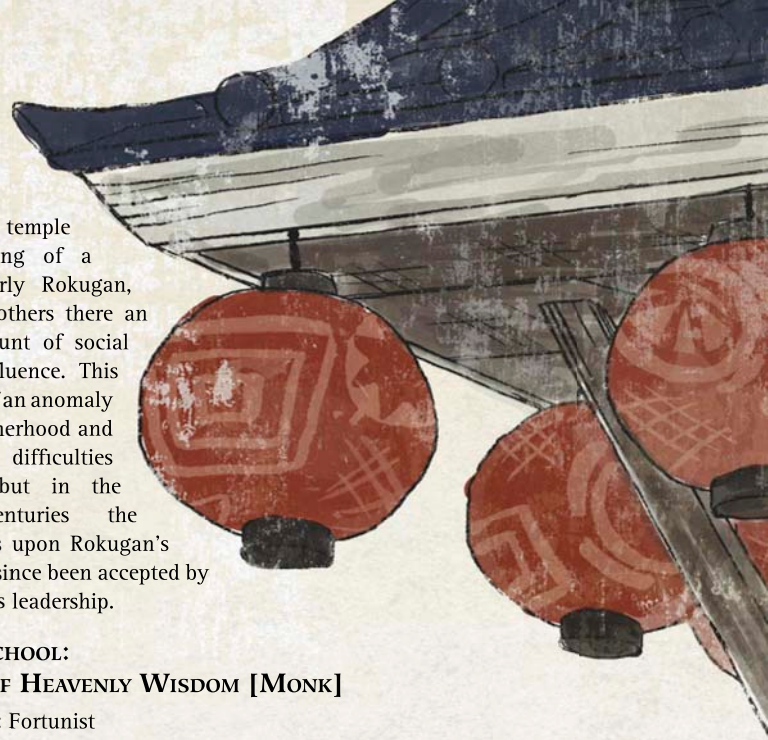
The Fortune of Wisdoms showers his blessings upon those monks who revere him, granting them insight into the ways of politics and diplomacy where others might make grievous errors. When making any Social Skill Roll, you may select any one Kiho you possess. You may not use that Kiho for the remainder of the day, but you gain a bonus of +1k1 to the Social Skill Roll. You may only select each Kiho you know once per day for this purpose.

New Fire Kiho

THE MIND'S FIRE

- ☉ Ring/Mastery: Fire 4
- ☉ Type: Internal

The truly enlightened mind can easily grasp that Fire is the source of creation and inspiration as well as simple destruction. By focusing his Fire-aligned chi into ascendance, a monk can gain incredible clarity. When active, this Kiho grants you a bonus of +2k2 to all Intelligence-based Skill Rolls. When the Kiho ends, you are immediately Fatigued. The truly enlightened mind can easily grasp that Fire is the source of creation and inspiration as well as simple destruction. By focusing his Fire-aligned chi into ascendance, a monk can gain incredible clarity. When active, this Kiho grants you a bonus of +2k2 to all Intelligence-based Skill Rolls. When the Kiho ends, you are immediately Fatigued.





SEVER THE DARK LORD'S TOUCH

- Ring/Mastery: 5
- Type: Mystical (Atemi)

A mind at one with the universe can perceive and affect the bonds that tie the physical world to the world of spirit, even when the world in question is as insidious and despicable as the Realm of Evil. While this Kiho is active, a successful atemi strike against an unintelligent undead creature results in a Contested Roll, pitting your Fire against the undead's Shadowlands Taint. If you are successful, the undead is instantly destroyed, its connection to Jigoku severed.

Special Notes: This Kiho is quite popular among the more aggressive members of the Kuni family, and its Mastery requirement is considered 1 Rank lower for Kuni Shugenja and Kuni Witch-Hunters.

SEVEN STORM'S FIST

- Ring/Mastery: 6
- Type: Martial (Atemi)

The chi of Fire flows through the body as all forms of chi do, but when its flow is disrupted, it can be particularly painful and disorienting for those not accustomed to the sensation. When this Kiho is active, a successful atemi strike against an opponent forces a Contested Fire Roll between you and that opponent. If you are successful, your opponent is Stunned for one Round

New Tattoo: The Volcano Tattoo

While this tattoo is active, the skin of the monk's torso and upper limbs takes on the appearance of lava, a surface of searing-hot blackness riven with brightly glowing fiery cracks. Any flammable object which strikes the monk's body – including wooden weapons and arrows – will sear to ash within moments, and consequently the monk is considered to have Reduction of 5 against such attacks (due to their burning up before they can deliver the full impact of their blows). Metal weapons inflict normal damage, but the wielders of such weapons must succeed in Contested Fire rolls against the monk or be forced to drop their weapons due to the intense heat (Sacred Weapons and nemuranai are immune to this effect). Unarmed attacks (including the Strike option while grappling) inflict normal damage and suffer no ill effects, since their impact does not crack the fiery surface of the lava.

GM Notes: The Volcano tattoo only affects the monk's torso and upper limbs, so its effects may be evaded by the use of the Called Shot Maneuver to strike the lower limbs, head, etc. The GM may rule that unarmed blows that strike with great force (beyond 2 kept dice) do crack the surface of the lava, causing the attacker to suffer Wounds equal to the monk's Fire ring.

Chapter Five: The World of Fire

New Supernatural Creatures

BASAN

The Basan are creatures from Chikushudo, sometimes referred to as "mountain roosters," who live primarily in mountainous regions; they are also called *Basa-basa*, an onomatopoeic name mimicking their distinct call. Basan resemble oversized roosters with vibrant plumage that can glow like a sunset or darken to pitch black. They breathe blue or green flames, although these flames do not burn unless the Basan is angered or frightened. They are nocturnal and, due to their ability to darken their feathers, are rarely seen – although their noise can keep entire villages awake.



AIR: 1 EARTH: 1 FIRE: 2 WATER: 1

REFLEXES: 3

Initiative: 3k3

Attack: Spur 4k2 (Complex)

Damage: Spur 2k1

Armor TN: 20

Reduction: 3

Wounds: 10: +10; 20: Dead

Special Abilities:

- ☉ **Breathe Flames.** If a Basan is angry or afraid, the colorful flames it breathes can suddenly turn searing hot and dangerous. In these circumstances, the Basan may breathe flames as a Complex Action, automatically striking any one target within 15' of it. The DR for this fire is 4k3.
- ☉ **Plumage:** As a Free Action, a Basan can change its plumage to any shade (or mixture) of red, orange, blue, and black. When a Basan uses this ability to camouflage itself, observers must succeed in a Hunting/Perception roll at TN 30 to spot it.
- ☉ **Spirit**
- ☉ **Swift 3** (when flying).

FURIRIBI

A Furiribi is the spark of a human soul, a sort of lingering spiritual after-image, trapped in the mortal world after death; the name literally means "aimless flame." They are floating balls of purple fire that drag long tails of light as they move, and tend to linger in places where their bodies died, retaining some residual spark of the personalities they had in life. Some play pranks on travelers, and if they were the victim of poison or murder, they may attempt to lure other mortals to their deaths. The touch of a Furaribi burns the spirit, causing the victim to gradually waste away and die of illness, his own soul drawn to the Furaribi that touched it.

AIR: 0 EARTH: 1 FIRE: 1 WATER: 0

REFLEXES: 3

AGILITY: 3

PERCEPTION: 2

Initiative: 3k3

Attack: Touch 3k3 (Complex, ignores armor)

Damage: See "Soul Touch" below

Armor TN: 20

Reduction: N/A

Wounds: N/A

Special Abilities:

- ☉ **Fear 2**
- ☉ **Insubstantial:** A Furaribi can pass through any solid non-living object.
- ☉ **Superior Invulnerability:** A Furaribi is a creature of pure spiritual energy, and as such is immune to nearly all physical and magical attacks. Striking it with jade, crystal, or obsidian, or with spells that have the Jade or Crystal property, will not harm it but will cause it to retreat from the area for at least a full day.



- ☉ **Soul Touch:** The Furabiri's Touch attack ignores the target's armor (if any). Anyone touched by a Furabiri loses the ability to spend Void Points for 24 hours, and loses the ability to make Stamina rolls to resist sickness or poison for the same period. The duration is cumulative with each touch.
- ☉ **Spirit**
- ☉ **Swift 4**
- ☉ **Ward Vulnerability:** A Furaribi cannot defeat or pass through any kind of magical ward, and will not enter an area protected by the spell Ward of Purity.

New Shadowlands Creatures

ELEMENTAL TERRORS OF FIRE

The Greater and Lesser Terrors of Fire can be found anywhere in Rokugan or the Shadowlands. They can be summoned by maho-tsukai, but because the Terrors of Fire obey only the Dark Oracle of Fire, anyone who summons them cannot actually control them.

GREATER ELEMENTAL TERROR OF FIRE (TAKI-BI NO ONI)

The Greater Terror of Fire, known as Taki-bi no Oni, resembles a woman of otherworldly beauty whose body is made entirely of intense green fire. This demon can fly, hurls balls of flame, and controls the path and intensity of all mundane flames around it. It burns so hot that those who merely approach suffer injury and heat stroke. Taki-bi no Oni takes special delight in inflicting burns on mortals, as well as incinerating temples and burning important documents. It seldom remains for long in any one place, instead wandering the land and leaving a flaming wasteland behind.



AIR: 3 EARTH: 4 FIRE: 7 WATER: 2

REFLEXES: 4

Initiative: 6k4

Attack: Flaming Fist 7k7
(Simple)

Damage: 4k1 + Burning
Touch (see below)

Armor TN: 25

Reduction: 10

Wounds: 30: +5; 60: +10; 90:
Dead

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 6.0

Skills: Intimidation 5

Special Abilities:

- ☉ **Aura of Heat:** Anyone within 10' of the Taki-bi no Oni becomes Fatigued by heatstroke during the Reactions stage of the first Round.
- ☉ **Burning Touch:** Wooden weapons such as staves and arrows are incinerated after striking the Taki-bi no Oni. The Taki-bi no Oni's Fist attack ignores all effects of the defender's armor (if any). Also, anyone who touches or is touched by the Taki-bi no Oni is set on fire, burning for 1k1 damage per Round until the fire is extinguished.
- ☉ **Fear 4.**

- ☉ **Flight:** The Taki-bi no Oni may fly at will, and is considered to have Swift 2 when flying.
- ☉ **Gout of Flame:** A Taki-bi no Oni may opt to hurl a ball of fire as a Complex Action. This attack has a range of 500' and erupts into a violent fiery explosion, inflicting 5k4 of fire damage on everyone within 10' of the impact point.
- ☉ **Superior Invulnerability:** In addition to the normal benefits of Invulnerability, the Taki-bi no Oni is completely immune to fire-based attacks of all kinds.

LESSER TERROR OF FIRE (MOETECHI NO ONI)

The Moetechi no Oni are less powerful than the Taki-bi no Oni, and appear to be small wisps of flame that retain a vaguely humanoid shape. They are incorporeal and can pass through solid barriers easily, but everything they pass through is afflicted with intense heat and fire. They revel in pure destruction, with no method or purpose to the chaos they inflict.

AIR: 2 EARTH: 2 FIRE: 4 WATER: 1

REFLEXES: 3

Initiative: 4k3

Attack: Burning Touch 6k4
(Simple)



Damage: Burning Touch *Armor TN: 20*
1k1

Reduction: 6 *Wounds: 20: +5; 40: +10; 60:*
Dead

Shadowlands Taint Rank: 5.0

Skills: Intimidation 2

Special Abilities:

- ☉ **Burning Touch:** Wooden weapons such as staves and arrows are incinerated after striking the Moetechi no Oni. The Moetechi no Oni's Touch attack ignores all effects of the defender's armor (if any). Also, anyone who touches or is touched by the Moetechi no Oni is set on fire, burning for 1k1 damage per Round until the fire is extinguished.
- ☉ **Fear 3.**
- ☉ **Fusion:** If two or more Moetechi no Oni come together, they can "fuse" into a single demon, gaining +10 Wounds each time. If ten or more Moetechi fuse together in this way, they become a Taki-bi no Oni.
- ☉ **Incorporeal:** The Moetechi no Oni floats through the air and may pass through solid objects at will; any such objects which are flammable will be set on fire by this.

- ☉ **Magic Resistance:** Moetechi no Oni has three Ranks of Magic Resistance against all Fire spells.
- ☉ **Superior Invulnerability:** In addition to the normal benefits of Invulnerability, the Moetechi no Oni is completely immune to mundane fire.
- ☉ **Swift 3**

WANYUDO

A Wanyudo is the re-embodied form of a specific corrupted mortal soul that fell to Jigoku – either a monk who disregarded his oaths, or a daimyo who treated his heimin subjects with especial cruelty. It takes the appearance of a decapitated head affixed to the hub of an oxcart-wheel, set ablaze with otherworldly fire. The eyes are burning and tormented, the face forever twisted into a terrifying grimace of pain and anguish; it is not capable of speech, although it can emit a horrifying scream. The Wanyudo turns on its axle as it moves through the air, leaving trails of flame behind it. It is tormented by its state, but hates the virtuous even more than its own torment, and always viciously attacks any virtuous mortal it meets.

New Mundane Animals

NIGHT HERON

A nocturnal bird with black, brown, and white plumage, found in the forests of the Phoenix, Crane, and Unicorn lands. It prefers damp areas and swamps, and will eat anything – its diet includes insects, fish, frogs, crustaceans, and even rats and moles. On nights of a full moon, the night heron will glow a pale blue (a phenomenon called *Aosaginohi* or “Blue-Heron Fire”) due to phosphorescent spores that adhere to its plumage while it is fishing. Night herons are not aggressive when facing larger opponents and always prefer to flee from danger, although they will fight if cornered.

AIR: 1	EARTH: 3	FIRE: 3	WATER: 2
REFLEXES: 3		AGILITY: 4	STRENGTH: 3
<i>Initiative: 4k3</i>		<i>Attack: Crush 5k4 (Simple)</i>	
<i>Damage: Crush 5k2, plus fire</i>		<i>Armor TN: 20</i>	
<i>Reduction: 10 (5 against crystal or obsidian, 20 against magical fire)</i>		<i>Wounds: 30: +5; 60: +10; 90: Dead.</i>	
<i>Shadowlands Taint Rank: 5.0</i>			

Special Abilities:

- 🔥 **Burning Touch:** The touch of a Wanyudo will set alight any easily flammable objects such as paper or clothing. Anyone struck by the Wanyudo's Crush attack will also be set afire, suffering 1k1 Wounds per Round until the fire is doused.
- 🔥 **Fear 4**
- 🔥 **Flying:** The Wanyudo flies at all times, rolling through the air on its supernatural wheel, and thus is not troubled by terrain obstacles.
- 🔥 **Spirit**
- 🔥 **Strength of the Dead:** The terrible scream of the Wanyudo has a dreadful effect on mortals. Once per hour the Wanyudo may scream as a Complex Action; anyone within 50 feet who hears the scream must make a Contested Willpower roll with the demon. Failure means the victims are Stunned.
- 🔥 **Superior Invulnerability:** In addition to the normal benefits of Invulnerability, the Wanyudo is also completely immune to mundane fire and has increased Reduction against magical fire.
- 🔥 **Swift 2**

AIR: 1	EARTH: 1	FIRE: 1	WATER: 1
REFLEXES: 3		AGILITY: 3	PERCEPTION: 3
<i>Initiative: 3k3</i>		<i>Attack: Beak 3k3 (Simple)</i>	
<i>Damage: Beak 2k1</i>		<i>Armor TN: 20</i>	
		<i>Wounds: 8: +5; 16: Dead</i>	

Skills: Hunting 3, Stealth 3

Special Abilities:

- 🔥 **Eye Strike:** If a night heron inflicts more than 10 Wounds with its beak, it has struck and destroyed its foe's eye.
- 🔥 **Swift 3 (when flying).**

ROOSTER

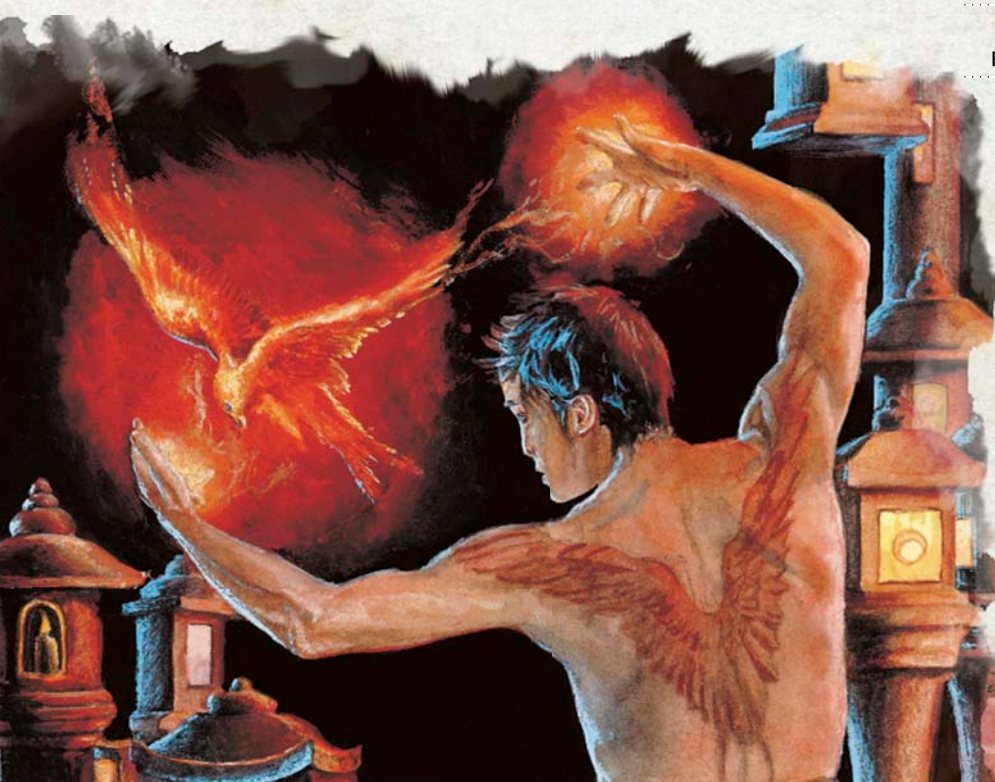
The rooster is associated with Amaterasu due to its greeting the sun each morning, and some peasants believe the crowing of a rooster can banish evil spirits. Shinseist monks consider roosters to be good luck and allow them to walk freely through temples and shrines. Roosters are fierce birds when facing foes of their own size (or smaller) but will not fight larger enemies.

AIR: 0	EARTH: 1	FIRE: 1	WATER: 1
REFLEXES: 2	WILLPOWER: 2	AGILITY: 2	PERCEPTION: 2
<i>Initiative: 2k2</i>		<i>Attack: Spur 3k2 (Simple)</i>	
<i>Damage: Spur 1k1</i>		<i>Armor TN: 15</i>	
		<i>Wounds: 5: +5; 10: Dead</i>	

Skills: Hunting 2, Stealth 2

Special Abilities:

- 🔥 **Swift 1 (Swift 2 when flying)**





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"The essence of Fire is the way of passion and destruction, of creation and death. It is oneness with the driving impulses of the innermost spirit and the sheer, raging intensity of the wildfire that scours the plains."

- TAO OF SHINSEI

Fire is the fiercest and most destructive of the five elements, the burning passion that drives men both to war and to create in equal measure. The searing influence of the flames can push mortals to pen the most beautiful of poems or perform the most impassioned dances, to sing the most mournful of all song, or the paint the most resonating images one's eye has ever beheld. Likewise, fire can push a man to anger, to wrath and ruin, to destruction and death. No war has ever been fought that was not driven by the burning inside one man's soul.

The Book of Fire is the third in a series of elemental sourcebooks for the Legend of the Five Rings Role-playing Game, books that explore the themes of the five elemental Rings. The Book of Fire explores the many aspects of samurai culture that center upon the tempestuous Fire Ring and its aspects. From the silent intensity of the poet to the blazing chaos of the field of battle, every aspect of the fearsome essence of Fire will be examined. In this book you will find:

- An extensive examination on the Emerald Empire's emphasis on the art of *kenjutsu*, the way of the sword, and its many aspects, including how thousands of samurai across the land are trained in its intricacies each and every year.
- A detailed discussion of the most sacred of all crafting arts: swordsmithing.
- The power of Fire magic in its many aspects, from sheer destruction to repair, inspiration, and enhancement.
- New Fire-centered Kiho and new monastic orders associated with Fire.
- The Hundred Stances Dojo, a new and detailed Fire-themed campaign setting that can be inserted into any L5R game.
- And much more!



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