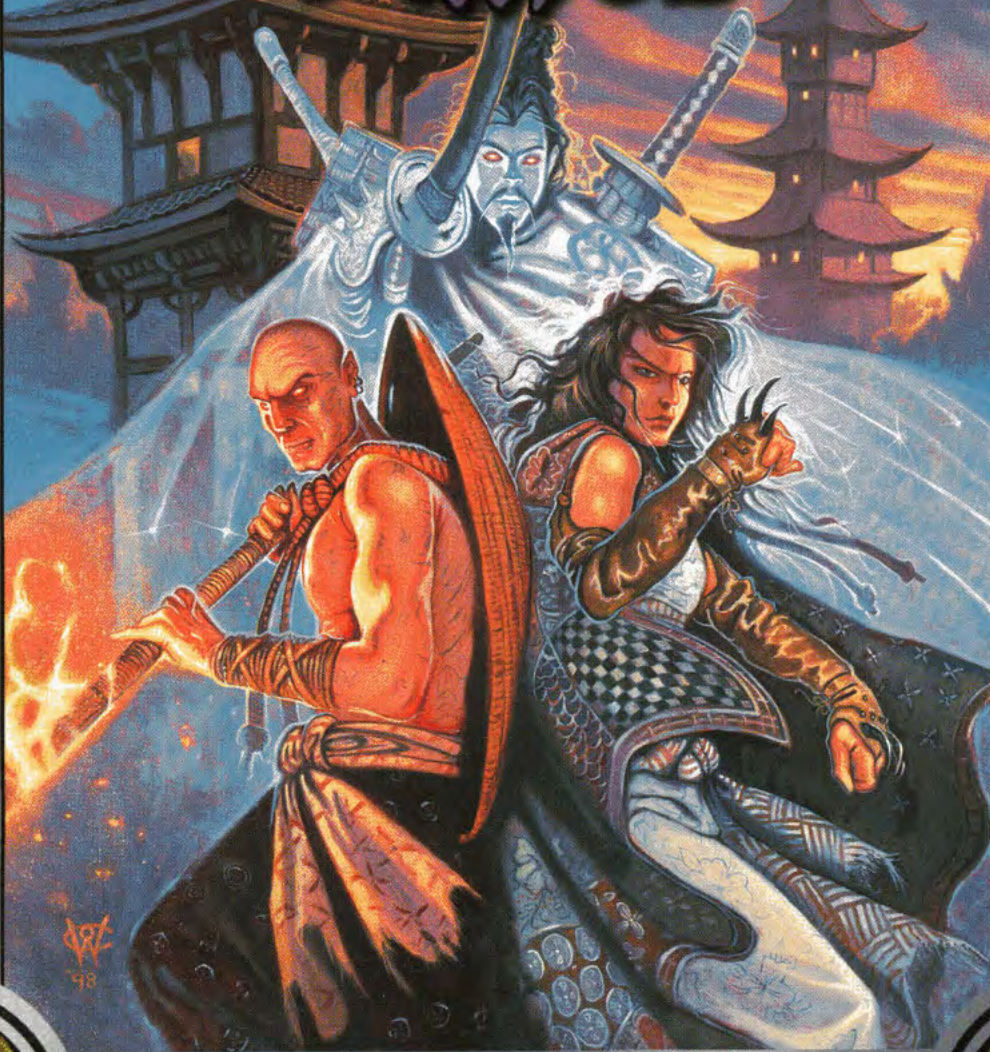




Legend of the Five Rings™

Unexpected Allies™



98



Villains, Companions and Campaign Ideas



Compiled by Patrick Kapera and Ree Soesbee



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*"Do not judge a man by the lord he serves.
Judge him by his choice of enemies."*

- The Tao of Shinsei



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A Dark Path's Beginning

*It is one man's duty to serve his lord.
One man's duty to give his life that his lord may live.
One man's duty to avenge, if his lord fall before him.
It is one man's duty, in all things, to know truth.*
— Akodo's Leadership

The lands of the Akodo were sprawled across magnificent hills and forests, each curve welcoming them home. The grass was a little greener here, the woodland more lush, and the road sweeter to the eye than any other province in the Empire.

It was home.

The youngest *taisa* in the Family Guard, Akodo Ginawa chuckled as he watched the smiles grow across the faces of the magistrates around him. It had been three weeks since their lord sent them out to retrieve the head of a bandit that plagued the village of Hitoekawa. The sack swung near Ginawa's leg, thumping gently against his horse's flank. *Osore-oi* had been the bandit's name, and he had shouted it from the hills as the Akodo legion charged. *Osore-oi!* Yet, the bandit had died with a sword in his belly, screaming like a small child, an honorless dog. Watching him with anger, Ginawa had vowed never to die that way.

Never.

Akodo Uragiri, Lord of the Shinboru Province, awaited within Shiro sano Ken Hayai for their return. Ancestral home of the Akodo family, it was the Palace of the Swift Sword, the high rooftops of a golden palace surrounded by a city as fair as the steel of an Akodo blade. The guards at the castle gates saluted with dignity as the soldiers passed them, smiling faintly beneath their bronze *mempo* masks. One gravely stepped forward to inspect their travel papers, nodding his head in reverence to the mon of the Akodo lord. After a few moments to properly scan the papers themselves, the guard formally asked, "What is your duty within these walls?"

"We seek Lord Uragiri-sama." Futetsu, Ginawa's *chui*, called out from beside the *taisa's* mare.

"He is within the *shiro's* walls." The man bowed, returning the papers. "Futetsu-san, Ginawa-sama. Lord Uragiri-sama has given

orders that you are to be admitted, and given time to bathe." The guard's voice was sharp, clear and strong. "Your men may rest themselves in the barracks."

Ginawa nodded.

"Hai," the lieutenant agreed. "My Lord Ginawa and I will do his bidding."

The interior of the keep's high walls contained a small city, complete with tea-houses and merchants. Ginawa passed them all, caring little for their diversions, but Futetsu smiled, pointing at the brilliant lights that sparkled across a small, clear pond.

"Ginawa, old friend," he began, "how long has it been since we have visited the House of White Tears?"

His lord snorted. "Ten days."

"Too long," the *chui* replied. "Did I tell you that once I have gained my title and lands, I am going to buy the beautiful Nanko's contract?"

"A hundred times, Futetsu."

"And a hundred times more you will hear it," he smiled, fingering the hilt of his sword idly. "She was born samurai, not like the other girls. Her mother was an *Ikoma*."

"She's a *geisha*."

"All women have faults, Ginawa-sama."

At that, the Akodo laughed. "Yes, Futetsu. And all men will ignore them. Come, our lord is waiting."

Beside him, Futetsu nodded, and staunchly ignored the rippling pond. Ginawa cursed, glowering at his *chui* with feigned disapproval. "Very well. You go. I will meet with you before we enter our lord's chamber, in an hour. And if you are late..."

"Hai, Akodo Ginawa-sama!" Futetsu bowed curtly, smiling.

As they parted, Ginawa shook his head. Men and women were dogs and shadows. Run after one, and it scurries away. Walk apart from one, and it will follow.

Better to chase glory, instead.



"Well done, samurai." Akodo Uragiri's voice was harsh, uncompromising even in approval. He was a bitter-looking man, wrinkled and gnarled like an aging plum tree, but his hands were stone-still as they lifted the cup of sake. His swords hung in golden saya by his side, gleaming with the care of a dedicated warrior. "Tell me of the battle."

Beside his aged *daimyo*, Ginawa seemed hardly a man, his youthful face ignoring the passage of seasons that Uragiri's face showed. He bowed again, pressing his head to his hands before he spoke to his Lord. "The bandit's men were thirty and three, positioned beside a twisted river. Our attack drove them out of their hold, and into the basin beneath a hill. Once there, we had the advantage of higher ground and better men, and the *ronin* were easily destroyed."

Beside Ginawa, Futetsu sat motionless in *seiza*, his knees folded beneath him on a silken pillow. As he continued his tale of vengeance and bravery, Futetsu allowed his eyes to encompass the room. The interior of an Akodo palace was not sumptuous; it held none of the opulence of Crane buildings. It was the house of a warrior, the *dojo* of a general, and the final resting place of heroes.

Uragiri's room was filled with reminders of brave battles and lost clansmen. Tanto and other weapons, some pristine and others broken purposefully, littered the walls like jewels in a maiden's hair. Ginawa did not move nor lift his hands as he spoke, but sat very still. His hair, a thick black ponytail, was swept back in the latest fashion of the clan. Bright Akodo colors shone proudly from his *haori* vest, and his twin swords waited patiently in their brown saya.

Futetsu smiled inwardly. His new captain was a brave spectacle, indeed.

"And that, my Lord," Ginawa finished, "Is how we defeated the bandit Osore-oi, and protected Akodo lands."

There was a long moment of silent appreciation as Akodo Uragiri nodded. "Well done, *doshi*." The term of respect between clan mates. "You have served the Akodo well, and will be rewarded. Go now."

Both Ginawa and Futetsu bowed again, touching their fingers to the cold wooden floor before they rose. "Our lord dismissed us swiftly," Futetsu murmured once they had reentered the stone corridor outside Uragiri's room. "Do you believe we have angered him?"

Ginawa snorted. "If we had, do you think our heads would still be chattering atop our shoulders? Come, let us celebrate our victory..."

"At the House of White Tears." Futetsu smiled.



The eyes stared from the darkness, their reddened gaze dripping blood and fury. He screamed, struck at it with his katana, leapt to battle it, but the eyes still watched him.

Waiting. Staring. Already knowing his demise...

"My lord?"

The eyes widened, and between breaths, a katana appeared in his hand. It glistened like water in the moonlight, and the eyes retreated. They were afraid. He lifted the strange sword and cut them in two.

"My lord?" Louder, this time.

Something red and sticky dripped down his hands, but it was not the blood of his enemy. He looked down at the katana that lay at his feet, and the sword's blade was a river of blood.

"Lord Ginawa-sama!"

A muttered breath, a chomping snort. "What? Futetsu...?" A hand scuffled instantly for a sword. Despite the sake's haze, Ginawa instantly took stock of his location.

He was in the geisha quarter, at the House of White Tears. Now he remembered. Futetsu had brought him here, then abandoned him for the charms of the lovely Nanko.

"My Lord, Akodo Uragiri demands to speak with you. He has sent me for you." The messenger bowed, his white *hakama* shining faintly in the flickering candle of the hallway.

"I come." Instantly awake at the sound of his lord's name, Ginawa rose from his futon. "Where is Futetsu-san?"

"Uragiri asked only to see you, Ginawa-sama."

He nodded, and the messenger led him out of the magnificently painted doors of the house, through the city of Shiro sano Ken Hayai. "Where are we going?" Ginawa asked impatiently as they walked through darkened roads and twisting paths.

"Uragiri does not wish this meeting to be a public one."

Ginawa's eyes narrowed, but he obeyed. Soon, they arrived at a small teahouse at the south end of the city, its red mahogany eaves sprinkled with carvings of Fortunes and dancing monks. "Your lord is here, samurai." The messenger bowed and knelt by the door as a servant opened the finely paneled rice-paper doors with a hushed sigh. "I will await you here, to lead you back once more."

"No need, boy." Ginawa did not hesitate as he stepped into the darkened mouth of the teahouse. "I know the way."

The Laughing Monk was a teahouse of great fame and ill repute. Many samurai came here, and few left with their koku intact. It was a den of gambling, a place filled with vice and decadence. A dark stain on the soul of Shiro sano Ken Hayai, yet one which the Akodo allowed to fester.

"Better the enemy that one knows than the enemy in hiding," Ginawa whispered to himself as he crossed the threshold.

Though it was late, and the full moon had nearly touched the horizon, the teahouse was not empty. Men rested on long cushions, attended by white-faced geisha with painted eyebrows. Ginawa's steps were slow, careful.

"Ginawa..."

The whisper was subtle, nearly lost in the laughter of a drunken *heimin* maidservant.

"Ginawa..."

The door to the room was a thread's width open, but Ginawa could see flickering light through the red paper wall. With an arrogant hand, he slid aside the screen and looked within.

"My Lord?" Akodo Uragiri rested in *seiza* by the window of an empty room, the walls scrubbed bare of decoration. Beside him, a lacquered sword-box rested, its surface dull from the weight of many years. A single candle floated in a water-filled bowl near the center of the room, casting shadows on the ceiling.

"Come here." The magistrate had fallen to his knees by the door, properly respecting Uragiri's station.

"Hai, my Lord."

As he approached, the candlelight caught the crags in his Master's face, the thin lines of defeat and age that wrinkled his countenance like old leather. "Ginawa," the general spoke again, "Tell me again of the battle with Osore-oi. There is more, I know."

With shame, Ginawa lowered his face to the floor. "I did not think it worth your interest, my lord Uragiri-sama."

"All things which trouble my doshi," the general commanded sternly, "are within my interest. Give me your sword, and then you may speak."

Ginawa's brown eyes thinned with concern, and he bowed his head again. With a steady hand, he unlaced the tie which bound his father's sword to his belt, lowering the weapon to the floor in humble respect. A man's lord only asked for his *katana* in two instances. First, if that man had honored his house, and the lord wished to make a show of his gratitude by once more offering fealty to the samurai. Secondly, if the samurai was to be ordered to take up his second blade – the *wakizashi*, symbol of a samurai's soul. The weapon used to commit *seppuku*.

Akodo Ginawa shuddered faintly. "Yes, my lord Uragiri-sama."

Uragiri's hand lingered above the hilt of Ginawa's katana as the samurai placed his blade upon the floor between them. "Tell me the tale. Leave nothing out, let nothing shadow your story."

"All is as I have told you, my lord," Ginawa began, his young voice steadied by courage and will. "But there is one thing which I did not bring myself to mention. A small thing only..."

"I will decide that."

Ginawa flinched from the anger beneath his lord's voice. "Hai, Uragiri-sama, *sumimasen*." The apology caught in Ginawa's throat, but he continued.

"One man among all the ronin fought above the rest. His technique was unknown to me; a Unicorn variant of some kind. He was dark-skinned, and his armor was unmarked, sullied. The armor of any other ronin." Ginawa continued, "His death would have been glorious, a testament to the strength of Akodo discipline. Yet some dark magic was afoot, my lord. His death..." a pause. "His death was filled with *maho*."

Uragiri nodded sagely. "I had heard that Osore-oi touched his soul with blood and darkness, but I did not know he had assistance. Continue."

"My weapon did nothing to him. It met with bone and sinew, but tore away no blood. Each strike of my katana only pushed him backwards. There were no wounds, no sign of injury." Ginawa stared resolutely at his father's blade as if to draw strength. "I have never met the man I could not defeat."

The sounds of the tea-house had receded, boisterous samurai enjoying all the privileges of the Willow World behind thin paper screens. Outside, a faint breeze moved the branches of the flowering cherry, drifting soft petals onto the wide lake of the district.

"At last, Master, he did fall, though I do not know why. He fought with strength but not honor, and though I could do him no harm, we slaughtered his companions until not a man stood beside him. Even Osore-oi's best guards had died, yet this...

ronin... still lived. When he fell at last, his body turned into smoke. Blackened, foul-smelling mist, which sprang from the laces of his armor and through the eyes of his mempo, hissing as it sank into the ground. But I never saw him bleed, never saw the wound.

"Perhaps he was a beast, his length upon this land, like an Oni, restrained to the time of his master's death. When Osore-oi fell, so too did this man."

The image returned to Ginawa as he spoke the words. Again, he saw Osore-oi kneeling from a belly-wound, screaming in pain and fear. As Ginawa once more removed Osore-oi's head, he heard a piteous cry from the black-armored ronin. Beside the bandit's body, the creature knelt in anguish, its mempo falling aside. The face inside the helmet was shifting, changing – first the visage of Osore-oi, then that of one of the other bandits, and then it was Ginawa himself, melting like wax from a candle. "I know your face, now, samurai," it breathed, "And I will not forget..." The ground had hissed and burned as the creature dissolved into thick, dark clouds of foul-smelling smoke. Ginawa had staggered back, but as he did, he looked at the fallen armor and the dissipating ball of smoke.

Somehow, in the darkness of it, the cloud had eyes.

"Ginawa," Uragiri's voice startled the samurai from his torturous dreaming. "Ginawa, you are my doshi. You are beyond the times of children. How many summers have you seen?"

"Seventeen, my Lord Uragiri, and four of them in your service."

Uragiri nodded. "Your father, too, served in my command. I fought beside him for the Akodo house, and it was I who took his swords from his side when he fell, to bring them home to you." Uragiri turned his face from Ginawa, looking once more out the window at the flowering cherry tree waving faintly in the night air. "Your father never failed me."

Ginawa's face reddened at the implication, but said nothing.

"But perhaps I have failed you." The words were soft, but Ginawa raised his head in confusion.

"Uragiri-sama?"

The aging general raised his scarred hand for silence, and Ginawa said no more. "When I took the weapons from the body of your father, I thought to spare you his curse. You shared your father's bravery, his spirit. I did not wish to see you share his burden, as well."

"I do not understand, Master."

General Uragiri reached out his hand and took away the sword in its brown saya. "This sword belonged to my grandfather, and to his mother. It was not the sword of your father. Oh, yes," he said, "You bear the *wakizashi* of your house, as your father before you, but the katana was never your own."

As Uragiri lifted away the blade, he turned to set the lacquered box in its place. The hinges were brass, tarnished with age but sturdy, and the lock which held the lid tightly against the base appeared to be nothing so much as a Lion's head, mouth opened in a great roar. "In this box is the true sword of your father."

The box shone dimly in the flickering candlelight, the laughter of the teahouse echoing from its dim gleam. Ginawa reached to touch it, his hand feeling the solid metal of the lock, the smooth wood of the box itself. "Where is the key?"

"It has no key."

A sharp edge of the brass hinge caught at Ginawa's finger, tearing slightly at the skin. A drop of blood colored the metal as Ginawa jerked his hand away. "No key?"

Uragiri shook his head. "I placed the sword in this box, which your father kept for the purpose. Since that day, I have told no one of this. The secret was for your ears alone, and no other. If your father's box ever had a key, I have never found it. Perhaps it was cremated with his body, or some foolish *eta* stole it long ago. I only placed the sword within the box, and closed the latch." The mouth of the lion's head keyhole roared in frustration, frozen in a silent grimace. "To claim the sword, you must shatter the box."

Ginawa nodded. "If it is truly the sword of my father, then I will gladly pay such a price." He reached for the wakizashi at his belt, but Uragiri hand stopped him.

"Know this, Akodo Ginawa, that if you bear this sword, then you accept its burden. This is your only chance to refuse." The old man's eyes were shadowed, haunted, yet something within them hungered for Ginawa's answer.

"In my father's name, I accept."

Uragiri slowly withdrew his hand from the lid, his fingernails drawing a thin shriek from the lacquered wood. "So be it"

With a sharp, clean stroke, Ginawa shattered the mahogany. His wakizashi bit deep into the surface, revealing the thick silk padding within. Another stroke, and the lid tore away beneath Ginawa's eager blows.

Within the box lay a stunningly elaborate red saya, as bright as scarlet blood. The sword hilt glittered, pure silver and jet-black laces, as fresh and new as if the sword had been created yesterday. Yet the craftsmanship was that of several hundred years ago. Ginawa sheathed his wakizashi as Uragiri rose, and reached for the scarlet blade.

He lifted it from the ruins of the box's twisted body, holding it aloft in the candlelight. The shadows danced down the curve for the saya, casting themselves heedlessly against the far wall. A single *kanji* symbol was molded into the *tsuba* of the blade, its hilt wrapped fondly around the curves and lines of the word. "*Fukushu*."

Revenge.



Dawn came, three days later, with brilliant flame, drenching the young Akodo samurai in sweat and dust. Lessons at the Akodo dojo were not for children, or for youths, but for all soldiers, regardless of rank or station. The day a man ceases to prepare, Akodo's *Leadership* taught, is the day he begins to die.

Uragiri sat to one side of the great wooden floor, watching the students spar on their huge tatami mats. Resting in the shade of the open dojo ceiling, the wind ruffled his white hair and tugged at his silk *gi*. Ginawa could not help but steal a glance at the aged general, hoping to catch his attention with martial prowess.

Uragiri's eyes had no time for it. Ginawa flung his third opponent across the mat, scoring a solid kick into the man's ribs before he even touched the ground. Nearby, other Akodo leapt toward their captain, testing his skill and agility with their own.

Suddenly, in the middle of the combat, Uragiri stood. Unconcerned with the ferocity of the struggle on the mat or the bravery of the students before him, he yawned broadly.

"Is something wrong, Uragiri-sama?" one of the other Masters asked.

"No, not at all." With a deft hand, Uragiri waved him off, turning to leave the mat. Casually, he walked to the edge of the dojo, stepped off the rice tatami, and strolled down the lane.

Futetsu stared, his mouth open in amazement. Ignoring his opponent, he stepped toward Ginawa and hissed, "Is something wrong with our lord?"

Ginawa gasped great heaving breaths of exertion as he took his stance. "No. He seemed fine last night." Something in Futetsu's voice stopped him, and he asked, "Why?"

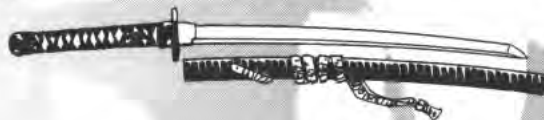
"After fifty years of service as an Akodo soldier, and a lifetime of training at the dojo, he walks out on the soldier's contests?"

"He is an busy man, Futetsu. Perhaps he has a meeting."

"...without bowing to the *sensei* of the dojo?" Futetsu glanced to the far end of the mat. Even now, the Akodo teacher clenched his fists in fury. The insult was irreparable.

Ginawa nodded, puzzled. "He is old, Futetsu."

"Of course, Ginawa. Old." The answer seemed to silence him, but Ginawa watched Uragiri's back as the general walked away, finding no answer to his own questions.



"A soldier's life is the only life worth living, *neh*, Ginawa-sama?" Futetsu smiled.

All Akodo are born to be soldiers. They serve their days rigidly, learning the uncompromising ways of *bushido* and honor. It is the path they must walk, decided before their knees were first bruised from crawling at their mother's knee. Ginawa was no exception. He lounged beside his samurai, eating his rice with disinterest and listening to their cacophony of speech.

"Ten men, I tell you," one boasted. "Ten men, and three Oni. Only by my ancestor's grace did I live through that day..."

"Fourteen. Fourteen Otaku, and their steeds had eyes like fire!"

"The ground was wet, and marshy, but Ginawa-sama knew the way. He led us to the rear of the battle, and we struck like Osanowo's own sword! That's how he became our *taisa*. Through courage alone."

Akodo Ginawa smiled, chewing another ball of rice. The men respected him, and that was good. Without respect, a leader was nothing. Their arrogant words told of more than courage in the face of the enemy. They told stories of loyalty and honor, things any Akodo would be proud to die for.

Ginawa placed his bowl on the ground and gathered his swords.

"Where are you going, taisa-sama?" Futetsu looked up from the conversation with interest.

"To the Hall of Ancestors."

Futetsu nodded with respect. A man's time alone with the spirits of those who had passed before was sacred, worthy of honor. It was one of the most ancient shrines of the Akodo, one of many that were scattered through the Lion lands. All of the halls were places that lingered in their mind and soul each day of an Akodo's life. Some said that the spirits spoke to them there, that the statues themselves came to life and whispered wisdom and strategy. Futetsu smiled, watching Ginawa's retreating form.

It was enough to know that they were watching.

The stone of his ancestor's figure was cold and hard, granite carved from a mountain that once stood far to the south of Kyuden Ikoma. It had been brought here over four hundred years ago; Ginawa remembered the tale as he lit a stick of incense.

"Matsu-sama," Ginawa whispered, staring into the fierce eyes of the statue. Kneeling at the feet of Matsu Hitomi, Ginawa remembered her tale. "You, who faced great enemies for our clan, hear my words. You fought the Crab when they challenged our power, and your strength defended your own family when your commander ordered you to take the palace of your betrothed."

The blood in Ginawa's veins soared with the memory of the heroic saga. Though the lineage was not reflected in his name, Ginawa's grandmother had been of Hitomi's descendants, married to an Ikoma, whose child married into the Akodo, making her son a child of the Matsu - through his matriarchal line.

Though the blood that bound them was faint, Ginawa knew Matsu Hitomi heard his words. Her stone face did not soften as she stared down from her granite pedestal, but the bravery of her soul touched his heart with courage.

As he let his mind trail into silence, Ginawa heard the whispers of the Lion - Akodo, Matsu, and others - speaking to ancestors long past. They whispered to the souls of those who had departed for Jigoku, resting in the land of heroes and warriors. In the Hall, rows of tremendous statues lined the corridors, some serving as pillars to hold the massive ceiling high. A soft breeze flowed through the many-chambered structure, smelling of sweet incense and bitter sweat. Three *heimin* servants knelt in the dirt outside the Hall, waiting for their masters to emerge. Their knees were brown with mud, faces strained with hours of stillness, but they could not stir, could not enter.

This was a place of samurai. It was a place of legends.

"Ginawa!"

The voice startled Ginawa from his reverie, his eyes flying wide at the sudden sound. Two hours had passed in meditation, and yet he felt no more at ease than before.

Again, the loud shout, like a whip-crack in the silence of the Hall. "Ginawa!" Uragiri stood over his retainer, staring down at him with cold eyes.

"Hai, Uragiri-sama!" Unfrozen at last, Ginawa spun away from his ancestor's statue, bowing to the general and attempting to ignore the stares of the Lion who struggled to meditate despite the interruption.

"Get up. I have need of you."

The command took Ginawa by surprise. His commander, ordering him away from meditation at the feet of his ancestor? "Yes, Uragiri-sama," Ginawa stuttered, trying to regain his balance. As he stood, he saw two Akodo guards approaching to handle the disturbance.

"You waste your time here, when I have ordered you to come?" Uragiri snarled, his voice growing louder, echoing through the Hall of Ancestors. Ginawa hesitated, and Uragiri growled, "Come with me, boy, there is much to do, and little time. This foolishness has wasted a half-day already, and I will stand for no more delay."

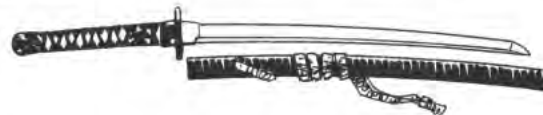
"Hai, Uragiri-sama," Ginawa whispered, abashed and confused. He turned to put out the incense that had been lit at the base of Hitomi's statue, but Uragiri pushed him aside. "You would delay me again, Ginawa?" The general's voice was a roar, and Ginawa stared openly, amazed at this strange display.

As a guard raised his hand to speak, Uragiri tipped the bowl containing Ginawa's incense stick to the ground, watching the soft sand run out over the burning charcoal, quenching the flame. "Deal with this mess, taisa-san. And do not bother meeting me at my tent. I have no further patience for wastrels and lazy samurai."

With that, Uragiri strode past the two guardsmen, ignoring their bows and marching out the open doors of the hall.

Ginawa and the two guards stared at the general with amazement, eyes wide and mouths open. Around them, the voices of the ancestors whispered into silence.

As Uragiri stormed out the open door of the Hall of Ancestors, Ginawa saw Futetsu bow outside, allowing the old man to pass him by. When he raised his head, his eyes met Ginawa's in a troubled stare.



"Your father's sword?" Futetsu stared at the saya that hung by Ginawa's side. "I have never seen anything so beautiful." He wiped his own blade with an oil-rag, removing impurities and dust before the battle.

"I am honored to bear it," Ginawa nodded, cleaning the steel blade with incense and oil. "The coming battle will surely test its strength." *And my own*, he thought silently.

It had been six days since the pair had returned from their combat with the bandits, and only a day and thirteen hours since Uragiri had declared that Akodo troops would march on a neighboring Dragon watch-tower. Their blades were shining, pristine and revered, but still the two continued to clean them.

When the dawn came, the fighting would begin.

"Ginawa-sama..." Futetsu began hesitantly. "May I ask your opinion?"

"Hai."

"It seems strange that Uragiri would command us to march against the Dragon in the village of Kuchikeru, does it not? We have never been at war with them, and the Togashi have never cared for political gain. What purpose does it serve?"

"I would never question my Lord's orders," Ginawa snapped.

"Of course, Sama, of course. But... if you were the lord, why would you choose to fight the Dragon?"

"A tactical question, Futetsu?"

"Completely, taisa-sama."

The captain looked out at the cresting hills to the north with a thoughtful eye. "Across those hills lies Kyuden Tonbo, the keep of the Dragonfly. If we strike here, we strike at their lands. Perhaps some feud has again begun between our clans?"

"If we fought even a minor clan, would we not send twice the men we have here?"

Akodo Ginawa shrugged. "I would have chosen to, but I would not have attacked this particular hill, if that were my goal. It is too far to surprise even the small armies of the Tonbo."

"Mm. And what else would you resolve, tactically?"

"It is possible, through taking this hill, to gain a better mastery of the Dragon border." His words were halting, thoughtful.

"A border which we need to defend because the Dragon are well-known for their aggressiveness." Futetsu's voice was placid, even, with no hint of the sarcasm apparent in his words.

"Even so."

A longer pause. "And what of the Crane, whose border we ignore?"

Ginawa raised an eyebrow. "I grow weary of this game, Futetsu."

"A tactical question, my captain. I wish only to learn." His humility denied the deadly seriousness behind his eyes.

"If I were to ignore the Crane, it would be to draw them into Akodo lands, and destroy them through their overconfidence."

"Assuming we could reach Shiro sano Ken Harai before their forces, of course." The miles between the Akodo keep and their legion were long, and the Crane stood but a short distance from the road. With luck, Ginawa knew that his troops could arrive a mere fourteen hours after the Crane had a chance to attack.

Far too late to make a difference.

"Enough. We kill Dragon tomorrow, Futetsu." Ginawa stood, sheathing the new blade impatiently.

"We kill Dragon, our peaceful neighbor, on the orders of a senile old man." The words were whispered, but they struck Ginawa's heart like a tanto through his ribs.

"Silence!" Ginawa turned, anger flaring in his eyes, warring with the concern there. "Our orders are our orders. Uragiri is not senile. You have seen him yourself - he speaks clearly, he commands with authority. Could a broken man do that?"

Futetsu was quiet for a long moment. "No, Ginawa. But neither could the man I know and serve."

"What lies do you speak?"

The lieutenant leapt to his feet, his hand touching the hilt of his katana. "I speak no lies, Ginawa. Look - look at us! We risk war for a man who does not *remember* to bow to his sensei of fifty years. We serve the orders of a general who has no respect in the hall of his ancestors. We fight against our allies, while the Crane, our enemies, inch closer and closer to Shiro sano Ken Harai!"

"Uragiri's orders are his to give. It is our duty to follow them."

Ginawa struggled to control the overpowering anger that swept through his body, and realized his hand was clenched about the hilt of the red-sheathed sword. With a great effort, he released the katana, allowing it to fall back into the folds of his obi. Sweat pooled on his forehead from the effort, and Ginawa felt his vision swim. He shook his head again, angrily, controlling the killing rage that sprang upon him. "No."

"Uragiri's orders are his to give. Hai. But what if it is not Uragiri giving the orders?"

"You believe that he is being controlled?"

"I believe that he has been replaced."

Ginawa stared at Futetsu in shock. "Replaced..."

The man from the bandit camp.

The faces.

The eyes in the smoke were Uragiri's eyes.

"By the Fortunes..." Ginawa stepped back, kneeling from the weight of the realization. The hilt of his katana warmed in his hands, shifting beneath his fingers like an old friend. "We must return to Shiro sano Ken Harai. Immediately."

"Hai, taisa-sama." Futetsu knelt before him, lowering his head in respect and sorrow. Then he snapped to his feet and turned to gather the men.



The hallways of Shiro no Ken Hayai were dark with twilight, heavy with expectancy. Ginawa's men remained outside the high keep's walls, safe within the city that they guarded.

Futetsu walked beside his master, his footsteps echoing Ginawa's own. Together, they passed each bastion of the Akodo, each dining chamber and garden, stalking Uragiri's quarters as a tiger would hunt his prey. Their steps were methodic, unhurried, slowed with the burden of duty.

If they were right, they had saved the lives of a hundred men, and destroyed an infiltrator within the Akodo ranks.

If they were wrong...

The door was made of thin paper, and no guards stood watch. Behind the *shoji*, flickering candles painted faces on the colored screen, patterns of things to come.

"Lord Uragiri?" Ginawa's voice was firm.

"Yes?" The voice sounded strange, weary.

Ginawa looked neither right nor left, but stared directly into the closed doorway. "I have news."

"Enter."

Ginawa slid the screen door aside, bowing respectfully before he stepped into the general's chamber. Nothing had changed since his last visit, no piece of dust moved. It was exactly as before. Somehow, the stasis disturbed him.

Futetsu bowed as well, sliding the doors closed as they entered. The window above the general's low table glittered with stars, shining through the open aperture like a thousand eyes hiding within the sky.

"Yes, Ginawa-san?" Uragiri was dressed in simple robes, the garments of a man who is preparing to travel a long distance, and Ginawa's eyes hovered on the empty obi at his lord's side. "How goes the battle?"

Uragiri would never be without his swords.

"How goes the battle?"

A pause, as Ginawa assessed the situation. Uragiri was alone, without guards, and without weapons. Only the blades which hung on the walls around them would provide any threat. "There was no battle, Uragiri-sama"

"The Dragon have surrendered?" The general's voice was shocked... disappointed.

"We did not engage."

"What?" Uragiri breathed deeply, a long, shuddering breath of anger. "Did you not understand my orders? My commands were clear! Attack the Dragon at Kuchikeru!"

"I refuse your right to give me orders. I do not know you." Ginawa's voice was level, steady, his hand on his sword-hilt.

Uragiri rage did not shift from the gaze of his captain. "You may be correct," he said heatedly. "I have not known you for many days, Ginawa." Casually, he reached for the sake before him, and his wrinkled hand trembled.

The movement caught the captain's eye, and now Ginawa was certain. This man was an impostor. His face seemed to shift in the candlelight, reminiscent of the creature sent into screaming blackness on the fields near Osore-oi. Akodo Ginawa's lips twisted into a horrid snarl. "You are as good as dead. Surrender yourself, and my daimyo may show mercy."

"I do not care for your lord, or your mercy."

Futetsu took a step away, lowering himself into a martial stance and readying his weapon. The sword at Ginawa's belt shuddered, and Ginawa could feel an awakening spirit within. *My father's soul*, Ginawa thought, *it has come to show me the way!*

"You are not my lord!" His voice was shrill, harsh in the emptiness of the evening breeze.

"I have known Ginawa for years, Futetsu, yet he has not been himself these days. He is disobedient, cowardly."

"You lie!" Ginawa cursed.

"Futetsu, I command you to take your captain's head." The order was bland, calm and rational. "He is irrational, disobedient, and honorless. He is not worthy of the Akodo name." Beside Ginawa, Futetsu paused, confused.

"This man is not our lord, Futetsu. He is a spy, taking our lord's name and dragging us through the dirt. You know your duty."

"Ginawa-sama..."

The sword's rage was building, and Ginawa felt his father's anger. First his lord, now his trusted lieutenant? The spy was clever, but Uragiri's eyes showed fear. "You are not my lord!" Ginawa screamed, fury building ever higher. He felt the sword's hilt slide through his hands, and the blade leapt an inch from its saya.

"I am Akodo Uragiri, general of the Lion."

"You lie!"

Suddenly the sword leapt another three inches forward, and Ginawa's will began to crumble from the effort to keep it restrained. *Patience, father, this spy will pay for his black deeds.*

"If you are my lord, truly the master of this house, then answer me one question." His hands fought with the blade, struggling to contain its hatred, its overwhelming need for blood and battle. "Whose sword do I carry?"

Uragiri barely moved his eyes, taking in the blood-red saya at Ginawa's side. "I do not know. I have never seen that blade before."

Ginawa felt his will break, as Revenge leapt from its saya with a howl. The stroke of the sword was enough to send Uragiri's body rolling on the ground, head forever parted from the neck. *"This is my father's sword!"* Ginawa screamed, and the echo tore through the room with an uncontained, unnatural wind.

The body lay still at his feet. Any moment, it would twist into blackness, twine into smoke as it had before. The body would melt, the face would change, the eyes...

Nothing.

Nothing at all.

"By Shinsei," whispered Futetsu as the blood began to pool. "What have you done?"

The body lay on the floor, bleeding, and Ginawa felt the sword pulse thickly in his hand. Futetsu stood beside the body, horrified. "You killed him. You slaughtered him before he could draw his weapon. You killed our lord."

"I... I thought he was the creature... I don't know what made me do it..."

"You murdered our lord, Ginawa." Futetsu's voice shook.

"He was a spy!"

Futetsu backed away from the tableau and leaned heavily on the stone window sill. For a moment, neither man spoke.

The silence was broken by soft footfalls in the corridors of the palace. "The guards are coming," Futetsu said quietly.

Ginawa nodded, sinking to his knees.

"You know what you must do."

"Will you be my second?" The request was emotionless. Futetsu nodded, drawing his katana as Ginawa pulled open his gi.

"The guards will be here soon. You must hurry."

Without ceremony, Ginawa drew his wakizashi from its resting-place in his obi and placed it on his lap. The short steel glittered faintly in the starlight. Ginawa took the hilt in his hands and lowered the blade toward his belly, feeling the sharp point of the sword against his stomach.

"I am ready. Wait for my stroke."

Futetsu nodded, looking warily toward the window.

The seconds passed like hours, and each breath was a luxury. A man can never understand what it is to face death until he sees the strength of his own life ebbing from him. Akodo Ginawa had been ready for this possibility since his childhood, but the thought had not prepared him for the reality.

The cold hilt stung his fingers, and each movement of the wind through the trees caught his imagination. He could see them, their green dimmed by the night sky, the stars shining from their tapestry of motion. He lifted his wakizashi and pulled it toward his belly with a firm, unyielding stroke. As he did, he looked to the side, hoping to catch a glimpse of color in the blackened sky, something he could hold in his mind on his journey into the Jigoku.

Instead, he saw Futetsu, and Futetsu was smiling.

Out of instinct, Ginawa spun his wakizashi in his hands and reversed the blow, sending the sword into Futetsu's chest.

Parrying easily, Futetsu laughed, stepping around the sword-blow with the ease and grace of smoke in the wind. His eyes, blood-red and curdling, shone with victorious glee.

"You!" The wakizashi fell to the floor at his feet as Ginawa leapt toward his chui's throat. Futetsu leapt back, surprised by the suddenness of the attack. Then, as Ginawa drew himself angrily to his feet, Futetsu laughed, a laugh which was cold and bitter, mocking the core of the samurai's heart.

"I see that you finally understand. I have repaid you for the death of my master with the death of your own." The voice was not Futetsu's, nor could it ever be. "Your chui died easily, like a little boy, as soon as you entered the city. The rest was a simple task." The creature's face began to melt, to drip like wax through a sieve as it smiled. Grotesque and bestial, its katana came down a hair's breadth from Ginawa's shoulder, glancing from the skin of his left arm. Blood trickled down his sleeve, joining the pool of shame on the floor below.

Somehow, *Fukushu* – Revenge – was in his hand once more. It whistled through the air, unchained and filled with hatred. "This was your doing, ronin!" Ginawa howled in rage, the need for revenge filling his soul with blood.

"And that blade was not your father's, though it has served its purpose well. I must thank you for accepting its burden so easily – I had thought you would sell your soul less cheaply, but you were

so very willing to believe. So easy to deceive." Mocking laughter traced through the foul voice, and Ginawa howled with anger. "You will never be free of its burden. Complete your *seppuku*, Akodo. The alternative is a life of slavery to Luchiban's blade."

Their swords clashed, parried, and broke free, leaving the creature's blade scattered through the blood on the floor. For a moment, the faceless thing seemed surprised, a ripple of wax trembling through its flesh. "I will find you," Ginawa said. "I will seek you out, no matter what the cost. No matter where you hide."

The face shifted again, into Uragiri. "Do you wish to kill your lord once more, Ginawa-sama?" the creature mocked.

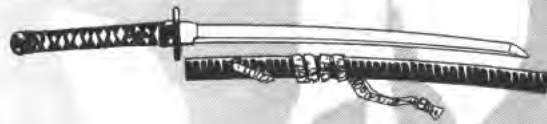
"You copied my lord's face. You gave me orders to destroy the Dragon, when you knew there was no war. You played at being my lord, and led me here to kill him."

Its voice was hissing smoke, the sound water makes when spilled into the ashes of a still-living fire. "Oh, no, samurai. You are mistaken. I only took Uragiri's face once, when I gave you the weapon you now hold." The creature's visage changed once more, and Ginawa found himself staring into a perfect mirror. The shapeshifter spread its clawlike hands wide in a perverted gesture of innocence. "All the other times," it laughed, "I was you."

"It was your idea to insult the sensei, Ginawa. You agreed to meet Uragiri three hours before he came to find you in the Hall of Ancestors, and your good word convinced him to attack the Dragon. Brave, steadfast Akodo Ginawa. You also stole your master's swords and threw them into the river." Its laugh was twisted, mocking. "How sad for you."

With that, the form shuddered into mist and smoke, falling through the air, out into the wind. Ginawa leapt, driving the steel of Revenge through the smoke and hoping to gain a final strike against the betrayer before it could vanish entirely, but it was too late. The wind held nothing, and only laughter shook the leaves of the flowering cherry tree.

Yet, when Ginawa drew back the bitter blade, its steel ran with a trickle of blackened blood.



A ronin walked down the road, away from Shiro sano Ken Harai. He wore no mon, no colors to distinguish him, and his once-neat hair fell into his eyes carelessly. He walked with the step of a man who has seen the eyes of death, and will never forget its visage.

He has no family, only memories of better days, a time that was stolen from him by treachery. If revenge can repay one-tenth of the pain he has suffered, then he would gladly pay its price.

It is a burden he would not set down until its debt has been paid. One day, the ronin known as Ginawa swore, he would find his lord's true murderer and return the gift that was given in his father's name.

One day, he would see those eyes again.





Introduction

Welcome to *Unexpected Allies*, a compilation of friends, enemies, villains, and companions for the L5R RPG. Here you will find information to help you design antagonists, create interesting and exciting non-player characters for your campaign, and introduce them into your game setting. *Unexpected Allies* gives Gamemasters a leg up on creating well-rounded and believable NPCs, as well as offering new character templates for players.

The Characters

Reader Warning: The NPCs contained in this book have been selected and carefully tailored to fit into the Emerald Empire setting: with only a few exceptions, none are so spectacular or weak as to appear lopsided. Also, some of the characters in this compilation are unique. You may be able to create them, but you should get GM approval first.

Keep in mind that these characters often have lives and goals of their own, and may take a bit of adjustment to integrate them into a Gamemaster's world. They have personalities and quirks, likes and dislikes, passions and hatreds. These characters have been selected partially for their individuality, the parts that make them unique. Using them at a table changes the dynamic of play. Their depth adds to that of the world around them, making it a little more believable. It also makes them a little more dangerous; remember, everyone has secrets, some of which they desire to remain secret...

Populating Your World

It is a Gamemaster's primary job to make NPCs live and breathe, so that the player characters have an entire world around them, filled with people they can interact with. Not *for* them, *around* them. He chooses the complexity, level of intrigue and mystery, and other factors, and is responsible for creating and roleplaying characters within those parameters.

ON BALANCE

At the same time, a Gamemaster should take care to adjust the individuals mentioned in this book to his own setting. Not every Gamemaster wants to introduce a Moto with an Ashalan traveling companion, or a Phoenix samurai-ko gone bandit. Many of the adventure hooks contained in the NPC backgrounds are specific, and involve conflicts which will make them unusable in some campaigns. Gamemasters should always feel free to adjust these characters so they are suited to their overall campaign style.

Also, be certain to adjudicate the power scale of NPCs included here to challenge the talents of your specific group – even if an NPC in question is going to be friendly to the player characters, they should not overshadow what the PCs are doing, nor should their abilities make the scenario too simple, or downright impossible.



The Format of Unexpected Allies

The first section of this book gives you information about creating villains, building believable NPCs, creating and using scenarios with antagonists, and how to use villains in your campaign. When we use the term “villain”, we mean “antagonist” in its most basic sense – “someone who opposes.” We cover criminals, motives, identifying marks and other idiosyncrasies of common NPC types, as well as how to create your own fully fleshed-out NPCs. We'll cover the various types of villains which occur commonly, what kinds of plots and schemes work well in Rokugan, and how a samurai can face them without finding his own sword in his belly. Lastly, we'll give hints and suggestions for what to do when a villain dies, how to end an NPC-driven adventure or campaign, and how to pass the torch on to a new breed of antagonist.

In the second section you'll find a ton of NPCs, complete with story, background, and statistics, ready to be used instantly. Some of them are deliberately designed to be wicked, while others are more like long-lost friends. Still others will seem like both. In Rokugan, every step is a dangerous one, whether you are passing through the Shadowlands or spending the winter in court. Every word reveals something about its speaker, and each advantage that is revealed only hides a deeper trap for the unwary.

Be careful: the book in your hands is dangerous.



Villains, Villains Everywhere

Black and White in Rokugan

Many game worlds are designed for easy conflict, filled with monsters, beasts, and horrors that are created simply to be fought and killed. Rokugan, the land of the Emerald Empire, is not such a setting. A character is often knee-deep in a web of intrigue and suspense, and the answer to the question, "Who's the bad guy?" is not so easy to define.

Villains are created to provide a foil for the player characters, to get in the way of their goals, actions, and loyalties. They produce strife, either intentionally or unwittingly, and they provide the players with an enemy to be defeated. In Rokugan, however, a villain might only be antagonistic because they oppose a player character's goals; someone who denies a samurai the right to seppuku could be a villain, as might a trusted lord. Many characters in this book are "villains", while others are only chance encounters, rogues, and interesting people to meet in your games.

Rokugan is filled with people, and it is the Gamemaster's job to define them. He creates NPCs, conceives their purpose and personality, and then places the PCs in situations where they must confront the NPCs, for good or for ill. If every villain is merely a carbon copy of the previous one, your players will quickly become bored. And when NPCs become flat, two-dimensional, or unmotivated, even the most detailed adventure soon becomes no more than a killing spree.

It can be problematic to create NPCs that are villains in every sense of the word. Save for genuine psychopaths, people always have *some* good qualities. Take a Lion daimyo who is slaughtering Crane peasants. He might be:

- A loyalist, fighting to regain a lost clan treasure that was stolen by the Crane. In this case, his loyalty should be commended.

- Slaughtering the peasants because they have contracted a horrible plague, which they are about to spread through the lands of both the Lion *and* the Crane. His methods may seem brutal,

but – in the end – he may save more lives than he takes by eliminating the village.

- Convinced that the village is corrupted by the touch of the Shadowlands, and that the only way to eliminate the Taint is to destroy them all. Here, his sense of duty to the Empire would be commended by even the most rough-shod Crab.

So, then, why is *your* villain a bad guy? It's entirely possible that he is a raving lunatic, simply killing peasants for amusement, but that doesn't make for a good story. In such a case, the Lion's lord will simply command the seppuku of his insane minion – or better yet, allow the PCs to slay the madman before he causes more shame and trouble.

By making villains fully defined people, and giving them important (and justifiable) goals and motivations, you create more than a simple enemy. You create *drama*. And when the player characters discover why the "mad Lion" is killing off a village of peasants, they just might find themselves joining the destruction.

All People Wear Masks

It can be assumed that everyone in Rokugan has two faces: the one they show to everyone else, and the one they wear only for themselves. Because Rokugan is a land with very little privacy, it is imperative that you be able to hide your true feelings at all times, lest your enemies and jealous observers discover them and use them against you. If you cannot hide your secrets from your closest friends, then you are not safe from *anyone*.

A popular tale in Rokugan is the legend of Bayushi and Shinsei. Legend states that the little monk explained to the First Scorpion the use of a mask to hide one's true emotions; behind a mask, a person can say whatever he likes and be trusted that it is correct. In many ways, the Scorpion are the most honest people in the Empire, for their masks are external and obvious. They do not hide behind pretense, but rather, behind blunt truth.

When the player characters meet an NPC, their first impression can last for the remainder of that NPC's existence. Is the person stealing something? Making a bargain? Claiming victory in a duel? No matter what the circumstances, the individual will most likely be remembered for their first few actions; any events which come thereafter will only serve to enforce or betray that impression. The mask has been set, and the NPC has been quantified in the players' minds.

This can be both a tool and a handicap for Gamemasters. If you wish the players and their characters to rely on the information gained about an NPC, then you should carefully plan each encounter involving them beforehand. The most basic interactions, responses, and outward emotions that the NPC will show upon meeting the PCs should be scripted and rehearsed, so that he has the desired effect on them.

It is not always useful for player characters to identify an NPC as a villain in their first meeting. Sometimes, the mask which an NPC wears should be thick enough that PCs *believe* they have

met an ally, only to be surprised by the actions of the NPC later in the story. Other times, the PCs may truly have met someone who can aid them – but not at this time. Timing and motivation can make an enemy out of the closest companion, just as it can forge a companion from a dreaded foe. And one of the greatest lessons to be learned in the Emerald Empire is that of irony; a former-friend-turned-enemy who holds the solution to a current problem, for example.

In games which focus upon moral dilemmas and matters of ethics, it should be difficult to tell what an NPC's motivations are. This is particularly true in a society where so much is done behind closed shoji screens and beneath waving fans. The social face of an NPC is extremely important. Does he hide his scheming behind brash anger? Threats of violence? Or does he whisper pleasantries and hide behind veiled friendship until the time is right to stab a tanto into his opponent's back?

What happens if an enemy has been misidentified, and the PCs discover their error too late? The final arbiter of many such situations is the duel. Those who win such duels are always right; the Emerald Empire makes no allowances for testimony found after the fact. Even if a duel's outcome can be proven to have been in error, it is the truth of the matter once the duel is resolved; the players may have found the real culprit, but they will never be allowed to prove it in court. Such matters must wait to be settled personally, at a later time.



Honor, Glory, and Loyalty

We are often asked about the difference between Honor and Glory in the *Legend of the Five Rings* RPG. When you create and play a villain, you have a wonderful opportunity to play these two statistics against one another.

Honor, the internal count of a character's self-worth, is determined by his true actions. A samurai who always obeys his daimyo is certainly honorable, as is one who impeccably follows the code of Bushido. But if the samurai is only *pretending* to observe these codes of conduct, they will temporarily act as if their honor is much higher than it truly is on their character sheet. They are only playing at being a truly 'honorable' samurai, of course, and when their facade is disrupted, the NPC's true status will be revealed through their actions.

Glory is an entirely different situation. Because Glory is the representation of how the world outside views the character, and a measure of how well-known and respected he is, it is rare (if not impossible) to have a character who appears to have a much higher Glory than he truly does. Unless the character is an impersonator, "borrowing" the Glory of a much more famous individual for a short time, he has little to no impact on how his Glory is seen by others. This is *not* a literal Glory-stealing, but rather, if no one knows the character Shosuro Jomiko, when she dresses up like the famous general Matsu Tsuko people will recognize Tsuko (her Glory precedes her), while Jomiko herself has a much lower Glory score.

It is quite possible for a person to have an extremely low score in one of these traits and an extremely high score in the other. Someone who dutifully performs deeds for their lord accrues Glory, but if those deeds are secretly underhanded or banal, they will certainly lose Honor in the process. (Though the outside world only sees that the samurai is trusted and cared for by his daimyo, the samurai knows in his heart the truth of his actions.) On the other hand, a samurai who consistently follows the code of Bushido, but is forever placed upon the Crab Wall with no superiors to record and celebrate his deeds may have a high Honor, but gains little or no Glory.

A character's loyalty may have nothing to do with his sense of self-worth (Honor), however, or the status (Glory) which has been accorded him by his peers. At its heart, Rokugan is a world of choice and consequence. If your players aren't having to think about their actions, then they aren't being challenged in a manner appropriate for the world. Use villains to challenge their morals, their perceptions, and their sense of duty. Force them to consider their actions against the code of bushido – but also by their own moral sense of right and wrong. Many of the greatest epics involve a hero whose suffering is derived from differences between his personal beliefs and those he is forced to adopt.

Twisted, not Evil

Aristotle said that a true protagonist must change in some way, that their character and personality must grow by the end of the story. He called this theory "recognition and reversal", and attributed it to the audience's need to see moral progress (or disintegration) within a story. Conversely, the role of the antagonist in literature is to be the spur which causes such progress. For example, a courageous, Bushido-endorsing Oni might cause a thick-witted Crab to come to the shocking belief that the Shadowlands could produce something decent and honorable.

If a villain which your party encounters simply holds a different view of Bushido, is he evil? And if, by the end of the campaign, the party finds themselves understanding and believing in many of the same precepts which an NPC "villain" did, are they the truly the same PCs that began the adventure?

Villains need not necessarily be "bad guys", nor must they be inherently evil. Think of them as foils who complicate the plot or prohibit the characters from achieving their goal. Some "villains" are really nothing more than annoying bumbler or meddling sycophants. The reason these NPCs are disliked or ignored is their effect on the PCs' lives, not a malicious desire to inflict harm upon them.

There are a great many ways to present such characters while controlling their appeal to the players. Being helpful is the most important distinction. NPCs who support the efforts of the group will generally be received well, regardless of how annoying their personalities are, while those who hamper the PCs immediately become liabilities, if not outright enemies. Shared interests are another; players are more receptive to those NPCs whom they have greater contact with. Finally, NPC dialogue and mannerisms may be tailored to the party (and the players) with a specific reaction in mind, though this requires intimate knowledge of the players and PCs which the GM may not have.

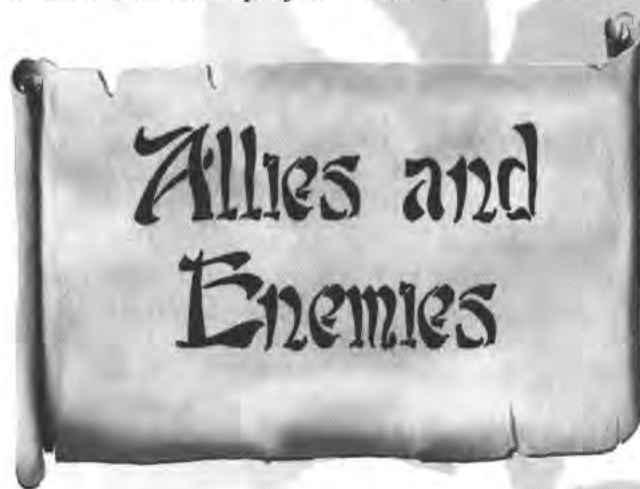
True Villains

True villains are separated from criminals and petty irritants in their capacity to rise above the norm. A proper antagonist must be more powerful or influential than the protagonists (in this case, the player characters) in order to be properly effective in this role. Extraordinary social Skills, special talents, or enough brute force can also provide an edge for such characters, though none of these are as effective in the long-term, and certainly not in a setting such as Rokugan.

Some villains can ascend to this status through the PCs' reactions to them. Antagonists who merit the party's (and particularly the players') hatred become the topic of dinner-table conversation for many years after the conclusion of a campaign. Truly memorable villains sometimes attain an honorary position

in the group, treated like "just another one of the boys." How the *Gamemaster* interacts with the players while acting as an NPC has the most significant impact in this regard; the words used, body language implied, and descriptions of events including NPCs should be carefully considered if he wishes to develop this aspect of an NPC.

The frequency of PC encounters with true villains can fluctuate according to the needs of the campaign. A classic scenario involves a villain that the PCs cannot affect, especially when the opposite is not true. Completely aware of a villain's machinations, the PCs may have no testimony with which to accuse them. Such campaigns, and such villains, are the stuff of legend. Epic games could even focus upon a number of such true villains - one for each PC - each of whom must be conquered and overthrown before the party can retire.



How to Build Believable NPCs

When Gamemasters sit down to create an NPC, they are usually looking for two things: 1) that the NPC is believable, well-rounded and "real"; and 2) that the NPC's appearance and mannerisms suit the personality of the character and the intent of the adventure they will appear in. Whatever the "flaw" of the villain - be it avarice, lust or self-preservation - those personality quirks will certainly come through during play. If the character is greedy, he may own extremely fine robes, or rather poor ones. He will certainly keep an eye on his money, and probably count all their koku himself, rather than allowing his wife to perform the traditional role. Though an NPC may seem completely normal, charming, and urbane on the surface, an intuitive player character should be able to discover these eccentricities and begin to put them together. Such quirks are best used to provide additional clues within the larger setting (adventure).

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

The best place to start is with a rough character sketch. This concept can be as simple as "a courtier whose goal is to destroy the Unicorn Clan", or as complex as a finished adventure outline focusing on their activities. It is important to know where the NPC will fit into an adventure the Gamemaster is planning, and whether they will be the sole driving force or simply a sideline to another plot (possibly even one that focuses on another villain).

It's a good idea to have a list of character details. This can be accomplished just by asking yourself a few simple questions. What is the NPC's name? What does the character do? Where was he born? Another is to keep notes of everything you say at the gaming table *as* and *about* the major NPCs. This serves two purposes: 1) when you have a good idea, it will be recorded for future use, and 2) maintains continuity for the NPC (without which, the players' sense of disbelief will wane, and their interest will soon follow).

Build a brief biography around the rough sketch you have made. Give the character a name. Beyond simple statistics for the L5R system, a character's name is the most important feature you can give him. Is he a Shinjo? A Doji? A Yasuki? Each one of these families comes with its own stereotype (and School Techniques). Sometimes, it's helpful just to know what stereotype you are drawing from, so that you can consider what your players will expect from the NPC in advance. A personal name is more difficult. If you want it to be elegant, use a longer name with more syllables, like Yoroshiku or Baytunaga. If the character is very young, a repetitive name might work well, such as Kiko or Chienshen.

A good villain must have a flaw. Hopefully, it will be one that the PCs can exploit to their benefit during the game. At the very least, villains should be presented with the same level of detail and realism that you ask of your player characters.

Also, even if they are the samurai ideal (a flaw in itself), they must vary (in opinion, demeanor, or goals) from one or more of the characters. After all, if they looked at everything exactly the same way as the PC, how would the two ever come into conflict? When you are making up the NPC's beliefs and goals, be sure to look at them from your player characters perspective.

Perhaps one of your PCs' valued beliefs - such as a Lion's dedication to honor - could be expanded into a flaw for the

villain? For instance, if the villain is a Crane who is performing horrible acts in the name of honor, then he may become interesting to a PC who understands the nuances of integrity in the Emerald Empire. The PC may see the villain as a logical progression of his own goals, taken to an extreme. Perhaps the villain can serve as a warning to the player character, beginning with identical goals and ideals, but then perverting them over time. Eventually, the NPC's warped philosophy shapes them into the villain the GM desires. This tactic works best with NPCs who make regular appearances in a campaign, like supporting cast members of a TV show. The GM can develop them through the course of play, leaving the player to watch as his "mirror image" is twisted beyond recognition.

Conversely, it is possible for the villain to

be in complete opposition to a PC. Perhaps a dedicated Lion PC meets and must deal with a completely dishonorable Scorpion, or Yasuki. While it is easy for the PC to revile such an NPC's methods, a scenario can be built in which the NPC challenges the samurai's tightly held ideals, if the Gamemaster is clever and prepared. The player character must decide why he adheres to those ideals, and in many cases, what he is willing to sacrifice to keep them.

ANCESTOR AKODO SAMUNE: DIED 522 (3 POINTS)

Akodo Samune was one of the most colorful bushi in Akodo family history. Son of an Akodo and an Ikoma, he was gifted not only with a talent for kenjutsu but also with a duelist's short temper. Unfortunately, he was also only four and a half feet tall full-grown, and was mercilessly bullied by larger boys during his childhood. During the worst of the assaults, Samune struck a ferocious blow and killed his tormentor. Samune should have been killed or exiled, but was saved by the intervention of his sensei, who took responsibility for the angry youth and trained him in kenjutsu and the tenets of bushido.

Though still prone to pick fights, Samune did well when his sensei introduced him at Winter Court. The Emperor, impressed by the youth, insisted that Samune join his personal retinue as a yojimbo.

That decision was to prove fortunate; two weeks after the appointment, the monster Iuchiban rose and attacked Otsan Uchi. While it was Akodo Minobe, Samune's sensei, who trapped Iuchiban, it was the short samurai with a short temper who protected the Emperor's children from the *maho-tsukai's* undead horde.

Akodo Samune lived out his days in the Emperor's service as one of his most loyal and ferocious bodyguards. Today, Ikoma still speak of him with reverence, his diminutive size scarcely considered a handicap when compared to his bright and full heart.

Benefits: The benefits of taking this brave ancestor are twofold. The PC adds a die of damage (rolled and kept) when attacking a larger character who has a lower Honor Rank. Also, when confronted by a creature with a Fear Rating, the TN for the PC's Willpower roll is reduced by 10.

- Created by Adrian Rammelt

Character Descriptions

When the party first encounters an important NPC (or even a "trivial" one in a more detailed setting), they should be given an predetermined impression as scripted by the Gamemaster. The physical, mental, and spiritual attributes of an NPC should be carefully balanced to support this impression in the players' eyes. As has been said, the easiest way to do this is for the Gamemaster to know his players' common reactions and triggers away from the table, and to play off of those. This produces the most natural, fluid roleplaying interaction.

Barring this, however, GMs must fall back on a few proven standards of character development, the same ones used by professionals to write screenplays and novels. Some examples include judicious use of adjectives (avoid overwhelming the players' imaginations), action-oriented speech (giving the players something to feel involved in, and using the NPCs as "mobile scenery"), and the portrayal of emotions when describing characters (particularly those who provide impetus or are integral to the plot). Lastly, remember that simplicity is always the most effective manner with which to present the supporting cast; too many details, and the players stop paying attention.

QUIRKS AND IDENTIFYING MARKS

Sometimes the thing which player characters will remember most about a specific NPC is their dialogue. If you have a samurai who laughs constantly, or who always whispers behind a raised fan during conversation, you've gone a long way toward building a clear and descriptive picture of the NPC in your players' minds. You've also given them a hook to associate with the character.

Consistency is the most important lesson to learn when presenting quirks and other identifying character traits. If a Crab bushi is walking with a limp he acquired hunting in the Shadowlands the first time the PCs meet him, the GM is thereafter obligated to reference that flaw every so often in future encounters; more importantly, he is obligated not to contradict it. Speech, mannerisms, and other obvious features are more difficult to maintain. GMs should be careful how these are presented in their games; players may become used to the GM speaking in a certain accent for an NPC, or tapping his forehead when in deep thought as another, and will thereafter expect the NPC to be presented in the same manner. Avoid committing yourself to such details unless you can follow through with them consistently (or the character is not returning).

On the other hand, you can advance a story to great effect through dialogue or character scenery. Remember that showing is always better than telling; you can merge descriptions of your NPCs with their surroundings, creating sweeping images through their actions.

A list of quirks, identifying traits, and motivations can be found on page 33 for GMs to use when fleshing out their NPCs.

As always, you may randomly generate a quirk or motivation, or simply pick one.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The first thing a GM says about a character usually defines his place in the game and reputation with the PCs. It is very difficult to adjust such an opinion once it has been formed. Many times, when an NPC has failed in the role the GM intended, the best option is simply to create another character to fulfill that role instead of trying to change the players' minds. An even better option, however, is to be single-minded in your presentation of the NPC in the first place. There are several things to remember when constructing a scene involving the first encounter with an NPC.

It is important that the characters be allowed to make their own decisions about an NPC, rather than simply believing what you tell them. Physical description is wonderful to depict a setting, but becomes tedious when you're trying to portray a living, breathing character. There are only so many ways to say that a person is "short" or "tall", "fat" or "thin", before your characters begin to look like carbon copies of one another.

A more effective way of introducing an NPC is to make them unique through dialogue and style. To do this, develop personality



traits and mannerisms that are not seen elsewhere in your game, or put a new and interesting spin on an old one. Players love intriguing characters, especially if they are both believable within the setting and touch upon their own personal interests.

Holding back information about a character in an obvious fashion is another way to get the attention of your players. The magistrate who remains in the shadows and never speaks, the merchant who always sells certain items to the lowest bidder, and the bushi who simply refuses to speak of his past are all good examples. Be careful, though, to have justification for doing this. Players that find out they are being led by the nose for nothing will be resentful, while those who are treated to a good story for ferreting out an NPC's secret will feel vindicated (and perhaps entertained, which is what this is all about in the first place).

The scene in which a character is first met is another important factor to consider. Stressful encounters tend to lead to more aggressive player reactions, which in turn can color their impression of an NPC within that scene; the players are more likely to jump to rash conclusions with little justification. Tranquil moments are rarely better; idle players are restless players, who latch on to any stimuli the GM offers. They center their attention upon the NPC, ignoring other, more important matters. Worse, they may attach so much importance to NPCs presented in a vacuum that they focus on them long after the current scene (or even adventure) ends.

Bringing NPCs into play for the first time during periods of marginal activity is always best. The players that wish to focus upon the character can, while the rest still have something to do.

The NPC can be drawn against the backdrop of larger action, allowing the GM to utilize one in a description of the other; this offers a more fluid setting, and frequent parallels for the GM to draw upon throughout the scene.

FAULTS

Perfect people are boring, often more so than stereotypes. They are rarely dramatic, and provide no alluring flaws for PCs to exploit. Worst of all, they hold up a mirror to the world, pointing out and focusing upon the deficiencies of others.

Player characters, who generally have their own share of baggage to carry (by virtue of Disadvantages and the inherent drawbacks gained during character creation and a typically illustrious adventuring career), have every right to resent perfect NPCs. They may be magnanimous about the issue and merely ignore a "perfect" NPC, or they may take more drastic measures to prove their point, but in the end, the story suffers for the presence of such unrealistic characters.

Faults provide great definition for a character, giving them handicaps to overcome, habits to break, or permanent setbacks that must simply be endured. All of these reinforce character traits, as the character must either contend with their problem or give up. One path leads to personal vindication, freedom, and sympathy; the other results only in despair and pity, as the character is trapped by their own misgivings.

As an example, how much less interesting would Luke Skywalker have been without the ever-present threat of

temptation from the Dark Side? The only major hurdles for him to overcome would have been his inexperience and lack of knowledge. Darth Vader would have held far less influence in his life, and would have been far easier to hate with impunity. And his inner struggle at the end of *Return of the Jedi* would never have been possible.

ANCESTOR MIRUMOTO TAKEDA: DIED 480 (8 POINTS)

Mirumoto Takeda was a sensei of the Mirumoto Bushi School, obtaining the post after a lifetime of study, meditation and rigorous daily practice. He advocated practice with the sword above all else, but his cautious approach to fighting contrasted sharply with the aggressive techniques commonly taught by the school. Takeda-sensei always said, "There will be but one moment when you can give your life for your lord. Prepare always for that moment."

After a long series of brutal raids in nearby mountains by a band of ogres, Takeda's advice proved correct. The mighty ogres had terrorized farmers and small villages throughout the Dragon lands for many weeks. Their uncharacteristic organization made them fierce enemies, and many bands of Mirumoto scouts died tracking them.

At the last, Takeda's daimyo took to the mountains himself, intending to end the threat. His band of warriors – including Takeda – was waylaid by the ogres, who hurled rocks from a high bluff, killing many. The daimyo ordered a retreat through a narrow pass, the only escape route from the area. But the ogres – much faster and more familiar with the terrain – quickly overwhelmed them.

Seeing their peril, Takeda said, "My lord, the moment has come." His daimyo escaped through the pass while Takeda and the remaining guard held the pass against a dozen ogres. At his return to their keep, the daimyo found a scroll written in Takeda's hand, consisting of only a single phrase: "I was prepared."

Benefits: Descendants of Mirumoto Takeda understand his philosophy of self-sacrifice, always ready for a "single, defining moment." During combat, they may elect to give up one of their Attacks per Round to increase their TN to Be Hit by 5. When using Full Defense, they receive an additional +10 to their TN to be Hit. This is in addition to other modifiers, such as armor, daisho technique, or use of Full Defense.

– Created by David Krieger

Like any plotline, faults give characters direction and impetus, a course of action within their own life that must be managed or defeated. New ripples can be introduced, developed, and eventually completed, all under the auspices of a single character flaw. This is also illustrated well by the young Jedi. His first encounter with the Dark Side (being told of it by Obi-Wan Kenobi) is relatively benign, presenting him with a basic understanding of the Force and its two opposing aspects. But the confrontation with Vader in *The Empire Strikes Back* brings the temptation into sharp focus, and becomes even more complicated when he discovers that the Dark Lord is his own father. How can he overcome his temptation when his own flesh and blood is the personification of it? Leia is another layer of the subplot; when he finds that she is his sister, Luke feels he must protect her from the life of a Jedi, or she, too, will risk succumbing to the Dark Side. Defeating the Emperor at the end of the trilogy is the culmination of that chapter of his life, a final confirmation that he is stronger than his weakness.

In the end, he overcomes his fault, but the journey is laced with personal turmoil and epic decisions. These are the very essence of Rokugani life, and GMs should strive to emulate this kind of story in their games. Faults provide an endless array of stories to tell and challenges to present, both for the characters that possess them and all those who come in contact with them.

PERSONALIZING NPCs

The characters in this book, as well as those from the numerous *Way of the Clans* sourcebooks, can easily be used as villains, set "against" the characters in a campaign. Or, looking through the character section, you may find that one or more of them strike your fancy, and that you would like to work them into your game somehow. But if your campaign focuses upon only a small portion of Rokugan, how do you integrate NPCs from varying backgrounds, or who come from distant provinces, or whose goals and interests have nothing to do with the game at hand? Random enemies are fine for a quick adventure, but rarely lead to anything more interesting. Only a villain who is deeply ingrained in the plot structure of a campaign will cause the characters to feel victorious when they thwart him.

So how do you invoke this kind of connection? The answer is nebulous, and differs from Gamemaster to Gamemaster and group to group. The best way, of course, is to give the PCs some personal interest in the PC, preferably one that will last as long as you want the character to remain in the game.

Guest Stars vs. Recurring Cast Members

Guest Stars, or NPCs that you only want to remain for a short time, should be tangential to the plot or PCs' goals. Picture a Moto courier who is carrying a message that the PCs need to see; once they track him down and convince him to let them view the scroll's contents, his role in the game (at least, from the PCs' perspectives) is complete. Other reasons could be created to keep him in the game if you or your players find him an enjoyable

element, but - unless you have gone out of your way to include them ahead of time - will have to be concocted on the spot (or at a later date).

Those whom you intend to reappear in the campaign should be given further motivation to care about the PCs, or vice-versa. They might be hunting the group (an open-ended plotline, lasting as long as the PCs are wanted, or alive), or be the focus of a long-range conspiracy in the game. Mysteries are perfect for prolonging NPC "guest appearances", as players are inevitably drawn to what they do not understand (especially when it looks as if they are only steps away from finding out).

Role-Reversal

One of the hardest enemies to defeat is one with whom the PCs sympathize. This kind of "role-reversal" in an RPG can add longevity to an NPC (by causing doubt in the players' minds about their feelings for him), or become the platform for new stories involving the character. The kindly NPC who ultimately proves a liability (or worse, a threat) to the party is a classic example. Do the PCs get rid of a valuable friend in the interests of larger stakes (as during the Angel-turns-evil plotline in Season Two of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*)?

As always, all of the characters included here are subject to your own tastes and gaming style. Change any of their statistics or backgrounds as you see fit, to incorporate them more cleanly into your own campaign. Some of them might be completely appropriate as villains, which might be the same character used as a companion in another Gamemaster's campaign. That's the point. Whether allied or antagonistic, the characters presented in *Unexpected Allies* are designed to be rich additions to your game world. Use them as you wish, and we hope they will be useful templates when you create other NPCs in the future.

Using NPCs For and Against the PCs

In most games, there are essentially three types of NPCs. The first are those whom the players interact with all the time, but pay little attention to. They are information brokers, contacts, witnesses, and all the other "bridges" between one scene in an adventure and another. Except in games with very confined settings (a small village that the party never leaves, for example), or those in which a small pool of recurring NPCs have been developed during play to fill such roles, these "bit players" are present only to impart some important fact or point in the direction of the next big encounter. These kinds of characters almost never have statistics prepared before a game.

Then there are the characters that help the group accomplish their goals, and those who stand in the way. These are usually fleshed out a little more, given statistics, and connected intimately

to the central story the GM is trying to tell. Most have clear-cut intentions and a set number of facts that the Gamemaster intends to give the players, but the ultimate role they play at the table is left to the specific conditions they are met under (which, as we all know, can change at the drop of a hat when roleplaying).

Just because an NPC has been created to fulfill the role of a heroic aide or villainous obstacle for the PCs does not mean that they cannot serve the opposite function. As you are playing, it may become clear that an NPC you originally intended as one is more appropriate as the other. In this case, you can simply "swap allegiances" behind the scenes, without the players' knowledge. They will be none the wiser, and the game will flow far more smoothly for it.

Of course, this may not be the sole reason for such a change. Sometimes, it is important merely to ensure that certain events occur to or around the PCs, and an NPC (perhaps even one that did not previously seem important) may be perfectly placed to help the story along. Again, the motivations, goals and actions of an NPC can be altered during play to accommodate such an instance.

The trick is in preparing NPCs for your games that make this kind of shift possible. Obviously, those less familiar to the party are prime candidates, with a smaller chance of some previously

established facet of their background getting in the way. But placing them in positions of relative power or influence, or where they can gather a great deal of information, can help this process immensely as well.

Merchants, daimyo, sensei, magistrates, Imperial advisors, couriers, yoriki, courtesans, and a host of other NPC types are ideal. Anyone with the ability to affect their environment helps, as does being able to pass information through the "proper channels at the proper times." Experiment with the types of NPCs that excite you most, and always have a few extra ways for them to be used at the table, and you should be able to adapt their actions to those of your players, improving your campaign's focus and direction with little trouble.



Criminals, whether they are run-of-the-mill bandits and burglars or far more high-class infiltrators and spies, all have one motivation in common: personal gain. Whatever other motive the individual has, their most basic reason for performing villainy is to improve their own lot in life. But since this is a given, it is also *expected*. GMs who rely on nothing more than simple greed to supply the drama for their villains will quickly find their players becoming bored looking elsewhere for the intrigue they crave.

SECONDARY MOTIVES

To properly draw the group's interest, a GM must keep a steady stream of fresh ideas flowing into the players' minds. Of all the characters at the GM's disposal, perhaps the most high-profile is the central villain of any given adventure. They should be motivated by more than personal gain; they should have a slant that captures the players' imaginations, or irritates their moral stances.

A secondary motive is one of the easiest ways to give a villain a special flavor, particularly if the secondary motive is altruistic. This again plays upon the idea of role-reversal, in which the PCs are made to feel sympathy for an enemy. For example, PCs might come to hate a character that consistently tries to kill them, until they discover that he is being coerced to do so by another who

has kidnapped a loved one. Or they may relentlessly hunt an NPC who has stolen a prized artifact, until they find that it contains the antidote to a poison ingested by the NPC's wife.

Secondary motives also increase the humanity of an NPC. Few people are truly single-minded, and NPCs designed that way are usually far less believable than those with histories and ideas of their own beyond their "one true purpose." Beyond simply having something for them to do in your adventures, appealing secondary motives can also increase an NPC's longevity in your player's eyes. Engaging ones may even have the players asking when they are returning between appearances.

CRIME IN THE EMPIRE

Obviously, there are few true cases of altruism, in Rokugan or any other world. If an NPC kills someone to avenge his father's death, then he is performing the crime for himself: to give himself a sense of completion and resolution, and in honor of his fallen ancestor. This is one of the principal things that players of L5R must keep in mind – that many of our compelling motives mean nothing to Rokugani.

In the Emerald Empire, personal gain is rarely differentiated from gains for your family or your clan. "Taking care of yourself" means not only taking care of your own honor and social status, but also supporting your daimyo and his clan. Ultimately, it is more important to a samurai that his clan and lord are provided for than for he himself to benefit. This is the core concept behind *seppuku* and the self-sacrificial attitude often seen in classic Rokugani tales.

One of the most important things about dealing with crime in the Emerald Empire is to note the difference between a crime committed in our modern world, and the same crime performed by a member of Rokugan's society. For example, evidence simply does not exist: testimony and honor replace such trivial things as fingerprints and bloody knives. In our society, people counterfeit money, but Rokugan's system of currency is difficult to manipulate. Every koku is stamped with their clan and the Emperor's mon, and even if false koku can be made, where would they be spent? Daimyo are the only individuals with a great deal of koku, and they know exactly how many koku they have been given. Surplus is rare, and always noted.

Several of the crimes we take for granted in modern stories (including many superseded by the simple clarity of the Empire's rigid social system) have no Rokugani equivalent. With the average samurai's nigh-absolute devotion to Bushido and his own lord, and that lord's devotion to his own lord, etc., many crimes are treated differently, or not considered infractions at all.

But in exchange, there are a host of new crimes to draw from, mostly derived from infractions against the code of bushido or another accepted social norm. For instance, breaching the will of one's lord and conducting an illicit duel is considered a capital crime in Rokugan.

Obvious and Concealed Crimes

Gamemasters must carefully consider a crime, its punishment, and the ramifications of committing it in the Empire before including it in their games. What makes the event notable? What attracts the attention of the player characters to the crime? Why did the perpetrator choose to perform the action, and how did he do it? What tools or allies did he have? Such important details cannot be overlooked by Gamemasters; they certainly won't be missed by the players.

There are two basic types of crimes which lend themselves to drama: the concealed crime and the obvious crime. A concealed crime is one which the protagonists must investigate, with few or no clues left at the scene. Murder is usually a concealed crime, in which the villain is unknown and the motive is questionable. Other hidden crimes include (but are not limited to) theft, arson, and hired assassins. These crimes are all unknown quantities which the PCs must investigate in order to discover what has been done, and by whom. Concealed crimes tend to be straightforward, even if their circumstances are complex or convoluted.

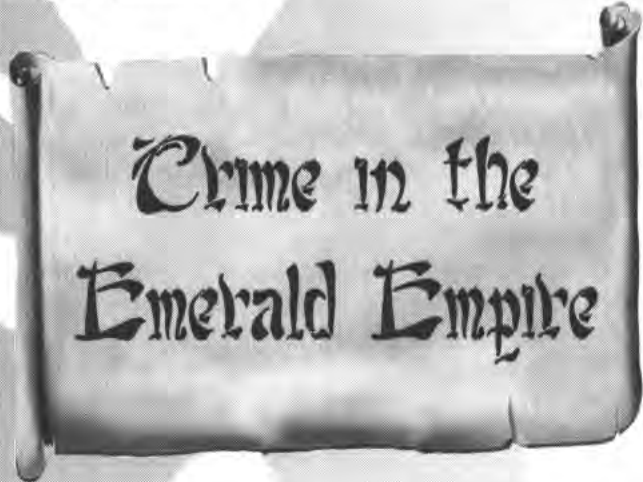
An act which is completely unknown to the characters – such as blackmail or espionage – can be considered another type of concealed crime. The PCs must discover the existence of the crime before they can discover who, how, and why. The overall arc of the game is discovery, with one clue leading to another until the plot is solved.

Games revolving around concealed crimes require meticulous attention to detail from GMs, and a high level of perseverance from the players, as well as a solid adventure structure going in. It is important that a flowchart of potential knowledge gained is created before the first session is run, and that auxiliary plots, NPCs, and events are considered in case the PCs stray from the beaten path.

Obvious crimes, however, can be more difficult plots to gamemaster. When the player characters already know what is going to occur and must find a way to prevent the crime from taking place, you are presenting an obvious crime. If the PCs know who "did the deed" but are unable to pin the blame on the true culprit, you are also playing an obvious plot. Obvious crimes tend to be less straightforward, and involve more danger – the criminal is going to be aware that he has been 'found out' by the PCs, and is not likely to be willing to come clean. Perhaps, if the crime is espionage, the spy has already completed the mission and been re-adopted into their original clan as if their alter-ego never existed; the PCs know that Shosuro Jusako is the same person as the "deceased" Hida Oko, but can they ever prove it?

Other obvious crimes include those in which the characters themselves were involved. Perhaps the party was ordered to attack a traveling bandit caravan, only to discover too late that

they slaughtered innocent ambassadors from a Minor Clan. Now they are the guilty ones. Who was the actual villain? Their daimyo, who ordered the attack? The spies who relayed the information to the daimyo, insisting that this caravan was filled with bandits and plunder? Or maybe even the Rank 1 bushi who delivered the PCs' orders? The characters had better discover the treachery swiftly, before their own crime becomes known and they are condemned.



Crime in the Emerald Empire

Thievery

For many, thievery is a simple proposition of monetary gain. But in a world of samurai and daimyo, everything a samurai needs is provided for by his lord. So why in the Empire would anyone steal?

There are many, many reasons.

When we talk about theft, we have to consider the types of items which would be stolen. Is the item priceless, ancient or powerful in some way? Does it have some sentimental or aesthetic value? Was the theft motivated by politics or espionage? One of the most famous crimes of our world was the theft of the Mona Lisa in 1911 by an Italian house painter. When the picture was recovered some two years later, the thief confessed he had done it "for his country." He wanted to see the Mona Lisa hung in Italy, where da Vinci had painted it, and where he felt it rightfully belonged.

Archaeology in Rokugan is an imperfect science, but many items still retain quite a bit of value due to their age. A silk kimono that Shiba personally used would surely be considered a treasure, as would a major clan's first piece of regalia (a sword, armor, mirror, etc.). Sentimentality is a major factor in an item's worth, and it is likely that a thief would prey on those historical and emotional ties when they choose an item to heist.

PIRACY, ROBBERY, SMUGGLING

Another type of "thievery", robbery is much more personal and up-front. Theft may at first seem to be a distant event, but when the crime occurs as the shipment is passing through Lion lands – and the caravan guards claim to have been attacked by "bandits" (possibly someone in disguise) – then the plot grows deeper. Attacks, witnesses, and threats of brutality all conspire to make what could have been a simple theft into a full-fledged robbery.

Theft at Sea

Robberies are also common at sea. Rokugani have not developed sailing to any great extent; rarely do sailors venture beyond sight of land. But coastal shipping lanes and passages are popular, and used often. If something valuable is being transported via kobune or junk, it is simple to determine which path the boat will take, and an even more simple task to capture the ship.

When a boat is attacked, fighting rarely occurs. Fire is deadly in a Rokugani boat, and even the threat of ramming is enough to curb combative impulses. If a pirate has three boats and his target has one, the typical *heimin* crew will gladly give up in exchange for their lives. After all, if the pirate rams their kobune, both ships will sink – and the pirates have two more ships to take them home.

The Big Payoff

The professional robber or pirate tends to spend their career looking for the "big payoff" – the single event or attack that will gain them enough koku to be able to retire from their dangerous life. They look for jobs with large rewards and low chance of being caught. Classically, robbers also seek a certain amount of publicity for their task, hoping to become renowned for their daring and bravery, as well as their cunning and luck.

Before the Theft

Unlike many simple thefts, robbery is always well-planned; the typical robber needs to know many things about his target. What kind of security does the robber have to overcome? Will there be witnesses? Where is the object they are taking kept, and how will the robber carry it away? Preparation and training are important. Often a true criminal will spend weeks training for the event – picking similar styles of locks, studying the location where the event will occur, researching and practicing to combat the fighting styles of any guards, and the like.

These kinds of theft require equipment, and often allies – henchmen – to aid with any combat that may arise. If the crime is piracy, then where will the criminal get the kobune? The sailors? How does he dock his boat, and where? Do the *heimin* sailors know what their mission is, or were they told nothing?

After acquiring the equipment, hiring the men, and making all the preparations, a robber must decide exactly how to initiate the heist. Are his men preparing to attack from ambush? Or are his

boats going to chase their target by night – lanterns out – to get as close as possible before an alarm is sounded?

After the Theft

Once the job has been finished, what is the pirate or robber to do with the “big payoff”? Rokugan is a small country, for all its divisions and political factions; what daimyo will not recognize a box of golden koku, inscribed with the mon of the Dragon Clan? The Yasuki and Daidoji are often willing to enter into questionable business deals, but only so long as no sign of the crime can be tracked to them. Those golden koku? Melt them down into a poorly-made statue, and the Yasuki will often trade it for legitimate money, despite its obvious “amateur” look. This is the form that money laundering typically takes in Rokugan, because it is easy to know where a koku has come from – the Imperial Mon and the mon of the clan to whom the koku was given are clearly imprinted on both sides.

Other items are harder to launder, and often require much work to unload. Rice, for example, is exceptionally difficult. Nearly every clan wants it (that way, they do not have to cash in their Imperial koku), but few clans are willing to accept rice and grain that they have not accounted for to Imperial tax collectors. Minor Clans are more likely to make such deals, as their land production rarely meets their population base.

Con Artists and Forgery

Con artists use deception and intimidation without resorting to the threat of violence. Their specialties include cunning misdirection and fraud in order to acquire the target of their game. Whether their target is a physical item or the trust of a powerful individual, con-artistry requires intelligence, cunning, sophistication, and the willingness to deceive and improvise.

Though swindling is technically a non-violent crime, it can swiftly become dangerous for all involved. Armies with misdirected or unwise orders can mean the loss of an entire war. The courtier who trusts the wrong individual too easily gives away his own secrets and those of his family, putting all of them at risk through his incompetence.

Forgery focuses upon the illicit duplication of materials, mostly of the printed kind. The correct paperwork can go a long way toward establishing someone’s identity, especially in a society so dependent on testimony and trust. Forgers are often minor cogs in a much larger criminal wheel, paving the way for the true culprit to act as someone he is not, or to go where he would normally be restricted from. Such characters make excellent diversions from standard play, or minor elements of a larger mystery, providing information between scenes.

Able deceivers can pass themselves off as nearly anyone – members of a trusted aide’s entourage, for instance. When a large group comes to visit a major establishment, castle, or city, an extra maid is rarely noticed. Particularly if the group is large, both

THINGS THAT CAN BE FORGED IN ROKUGAN

Art	Maps
Banners	Medals, commendations
Battle plans	Mon
Blackmail documents	Notes of Credit
Census papers	Orders – military, etc.
Debts of honor	Paintings
Diaries	Personal notes
Forbidden texts	Pillow Books
Identities	Poetry
Imperial decrees	Promotions, demotions, etc.
Kitsuki journals	Sculptures
Koku	Secret communiques
Letters of debt	Spells
Letters of reference	Supply orders
Literature	Tax records
Lost Knowledge	Travel Papers

parties may assume that a deceiver works for the other person involved. Setting a minor fire within an estate and arriving with the firemen sent to handle the blaze is another effective deception, as firemen are respected and honored individuals. Because fires are so devastating to Rokugani buildings, firemen are rarely questioned or asked to show identification, particularly if there is obvious evidence of a fire.

Most con artists use fairly brief schemes, rather than attempting to maintain the ruse for an extended duration. Sleight-of-hand tactics are often integral to this type of excursion, as the short term con man rarely has more than a few minutes with his target, and must rely on misdirecting their attention to dupe them. A longer term swindle might involve far more elaborate preparation – forged documents (“letters from home”, travel papers, and other items to ensure that the surrounding victims believe the individual to be legitimate). Please refer to the chart on this page for a partial list of items that may be forged in Rokugan.

Kidnapping

Kidnapping, the restraint and abduction of an unwilling victim, can play a part in any number of schemes. A villain may wish to blackmail the victim’s family or clan, or they may wish to gain the use of information or abilities which the victim possesses. In rare cases, kidnapping is justified as being “for the victim’s own good”, and result in illegal marriages or other betrayals of trust.

Kidnappings are almost always motivated by someone who knows the victim personally. Whether this is a rival, a brother, or a jealous lover, it is typical that the kidnapper is aware of their

specific target before the crime takes place. Kidnapping, unlike homicide, is almost never random.

Most kidnappings involve ransom demands and elaborate requirements for the safe return of the hostage. Sometimes, kidnappings are very obvious and flamboyant, intended to impress upon the subject's family that they will be treated poorly, or that they are in great danger. Thus, the kidnapper(s) expect that the family will act more swiftly, and be unwilling to compromise the life of the hostage.

Typically, a kidnapping in the Emerald Empire is held in great confidence by the victim's family. To have a family member stolen away is cause for great shame, even if no one in the house is clearly responsible (the palanquin was attacked and all the guards killed, etc.).

Kidnappings for political pressure are more common than those performed for koku. In Rokugan, it is illegal to travel a clan daimyo's roads unless he has given express permission to do so, commonly in the form of signed and sealed travel papers. In this way, a daimyo can maintain several hostages in his palace or family holding, simply by finding reasons to delay or refuse their travel requests. If another daimyo attacks or does not succumb to political pressures, the hostages can be put to death easily.

In Rokugan, such an arrangement is often the basis for political alliances. As an example, the daughter of a prominent Crane house might be sent with her maidservants and entourage to the lands of the Phoenix. Purportedly, she is there to study the ways of Shinsei in their famous libraries, and as a "student" of Phoenix culture. In truth, the girl is a hostage, sent by the Crane to assure the Phoenix that their dealings with them will be completely trustworthy. Her stay in Kyuden Isawa will be sumptuous, and she will be treated in every way as the noble daughter of a prestigious line. However, she will not be allowed freedom of movement or solitude, and her

stay will be extremely polite, with an undercurrent of tension. But if the Crane betray the Phoenix, the girl will no doubt be killed.

Two or more of these "hostages" often provide a better arrangement than a marriage contract (and are conveniently far less permanent). Once a husband or bride has married into another clan and left their previous house, their original family no longer has any ties to their well-being or status; thus, a bride or groom is rarely made into a political hostage with any effectiveness. In some (extremely rare) cases, a samurai or daimyo may be kept from traveling by their host. Travel papers may go awry, or the roads may be deemed "unsafe." Such a circumstance is hardly honorable, and if it is ever publicly found to be a ruse, could cause debilitating repercussions throughout the Emperor's Court.

It should be noted that extortion is different from kidnapping, and involves an obvious threat of physical violence to the abducted person, rather than a simple demand for ransom. Fanatics often use extortive kidnapping in order to gain publicity for their cause. A ronin who threatens a daimyo's wife and demands that the daimyo publicly support his claim to form a new Minor Clan is an excellent example of such extortion. Rarely is the kidnapped person simply threatened with death; in Rokugan, to die in the service of one's lord is an honorable thing, and will be rewarded with high honor in Jigoku. Instead, torture and

slavery, or the release of some delicate information, are more common threats.

Terrorist kidnappings tend to center around publicity, rather than the actual demand. Few such events have occurred in Rokugan's history, but those which were successful have had a major impact on its society. One such instance is the kidnapping of the Emperor Fujiwa's (Hantei V's) son, which sparked the rise of the Gozaku rulership of the Empire (see *Winter Court: Kyuden Seppun* for more information on the Gozaku). Terrorist

ANCESTOR: HIRUMA KAZUMA: 302-327 (2 POINTS)

Hiruma Kazuma earned his place in Crab Clan history as the first to establish long-term communication with the Nezumi of the Shadowlands. Posted at Hiruma Castle with his father in 314, the two were deceived by their Kuni advisor, Kaigen. Kaigen had made a blood-pact with Oni, granting them access to the castle in exchange for immense personal power.

Kazuma had never liked or trusted Kaigen, and the Kuni knew the boy would become a liability. When the undead hordes attacked the castle, Kaigen recommended that the young samurai ride across the Shadowlands to Kyuden Hida, to find help. Ichizo reluctantly agreed and, wishing his son well on his quest, ordered him to ride under cover of darkness, and find reinforcements.

The Kuni planned to send Nezumi to hunt Kazuma down. He knew that even if the plot failed, the young samurai would never make it to the Carpenter Wall in time to save his father. But, at dawn of the day the castle was to fall, an army crested a nearby ridge, led by Hiruma Kazuma. The soldiers were rattlings: the pack sent to kill him, and ten times more.

It is not known how the Hiruma compelled the Nezumi to help him, yet his rapport with them freed the castle from siege and has become legend within the Hiruma family and the rest of the Crab Clan. Many say that his blood has a special bond with the Nezumi, one that continues within his descendants.

Benefits: Kazuma was the first Crab to establish a long-term alliance with the Nezumi. Kazuma's descendants may purchase Rattling Allies for half cost and receive a Free Raise on any social rolls with Nezumi.

- Created by Rich Wulf

kidnappings occur to force powerful political figures to take notice of smaller events around the Empire, and to possibly recruit those who could be loyal to their cause.

A kidnapping committed for reasons other than jealousy or the desire for political or monetary reward is rare, and usually the product of a deranged mind. Often, such abductions involve children, or individuals who match a certain sex, age, or physical type (known as a profile). Kidnappings by serial killers or other insane individuals fall into this category, and although these incidents begin as kidnappings, the majority end only in the death of the victim.

Drugs and Illicit Crimes

Although Rokugan does not have such modern problems as prostitution or gangland drug-scenes, its hidden corners still swell with opium, and the streets of Ryoko Owari fill with the haze of the pipe. So long as opium exists in Rokugan, the illicit drug trade will thrive. Sponsored by the Scorpion and the Crab, opium remains a powerful (and very addictive) substance, its abuse is hidden deeply within the shadows at the edge of the Empire. Those who seek to escape reality indulge in such desires, and once they have begun, have little hope for a life outside vice.

Homicide

Homicide is the most well-known crime in the world. Murder, practiced either deliberately and with planning or through savage, emotional action, is a common theme in many plots. In Rokugan, homicide is more common – seppuku and fatal duels are practiced with regularity, and death is a common punishment. Whether purposeful, reckless, or unintentional, all deaths are investigated by the daimyo of the samurai who has been killed.

Although many of these cases (such as the investigation of a well-known and public duel) are cursory, it is certain that the family daimyo of the deceased will be interested to know the specifics. One matter which is crucial to deaths of the samurai caste (and one which is rarely thought of in the western world) is the question of *honor in death*. Did the samurai die honorably? Did he compromise himself or his family through his actions before or during his death? In these cases, the circumstances surrounding the samurai's death are as important as the actual cause of death itself.

However, when dealing with criminal murder, it is important to consider the psychological behavior of the individual who has performed the action. Serial murderers often perform their crimes in order to satisfy some insane urge or repressed desire. A samurai who falls in love with his geisha, only to be later rejected by her, might resort to jealous murder. Murder is commonly used as a means of control or domination, or to bring about fear.

The first step in any murder is to gain control over the victim. Whether the control is political or physical is up to the mindset and motivation of the attacker. Physical control is the deliberate separation of the victim from any means of physical help. For example, a delicate Shosuro maiden might gain control over her victim by asking him to meet her alone in a garden at night, then offering a sexual liaison. Once the victim has arrived (alone), the Shosuro enacts her plan, poisoning his wine or stabbing a tanto into his back.

Political control is more subtle, and often more difficult to trace. The same Shosuro maiden might choose to murder her victim by arranging for his honor to be permanently stained. Thus, the victim would be forced to commit suicide, and his death would eliminate the evidence of the crime in the process. Another situation could include military commands that arrive in an opposing general's hands, ensuring that the victim is killed in some minor military skirmish. In this way, the murderer has control over the victim's future path, if not over their direct actions, yet all the control is indirect (and therefore difficult for others to piece together).



The Murder Scene

If the setting of an adventure is to be a criminal investigation, the first step a Gamemaster should take is to plan the death. Does the villain use poison? Falsify a duel or battle? Create a setting where the person to be killed is deliberately placed in harm's way (such as a Crab with no sense of balance placed atop an Otaku steed)? Include the killer's means of controlling the victim, as described above.

Once you have determined these things, you must choose their motive, or their *means of killing* their chosen victim. A killer rarely commits random acts (and never if you wish the intrigue of an adventure to be genuine); proper murderers should have a personality, quirks, and means of establishing control and arranging the death of their intended victim. Whether the death is a singular event or a part of a larger chain of deaths is another consideration when you are setting the scene.



Determining how the murder was committed, and with what weapon, is more important when the murderer is personally responsible for the crime, and especially if the PCs are expected to follow up their investigation directly from the crime scene. Common weapons used include: katana, tanto, strangulation, blunt objects (such as furniture, boken, or a hand/foot), poison, and suffocation. Remember that most criminals are discovered because of clues which they do not realize that they have left behind (or that they subconsciously plant in an effort to enact their own capture).

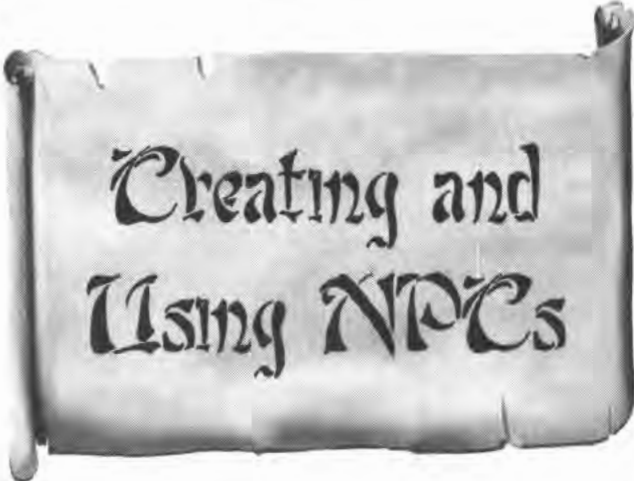
Complications arise when designing a "perfect" murder mystery, however. Players are almost never predictable, latching onto and following clues which you did not plan, or even conceive when putting such an adventure together. You must pay particular attention to detail when plotting such sessions, taking as many variables and possible character actions into consideration as possible. Be sure that all of your clues (especially any that are created as physical props to be given to the players) are explicit. Only include subtle hints when you are sure that there is a reasonable chance that the players (not the characters, but the *players*) will figure them out.

NPC design and presentation are equally critical. The players will scrutinize everything that each of the NPCs says, and watch how they act (including *the Gamemaster's* mannerisms while portraying them). You must be one hundred percent within the mindset of each NPC you present in such situations, if you wish to avoid leading the players astray.

In environments where the truth is held very close to the GM's vest, players tend not to trust anyone or take anything they are told or shown for granted. Both of these conditions create a "hostile" setting in which the GM must either carefully manipulate the players into discovering the truth, or roll the dice and hope that the group comes out alive.

Of course, much of this can be avoided by reducing a murder mystery scenario to the "standard" tabletop RPG, in which all rolls are made in plain view, everything is accepted as it is described, and the role of the PCs is mainly to ferret out the important clues from red herrings and NPC obstacles. The problem here is that the game loses much of its allure; it is difficult to depict mystery when everything is out in the open.

Ultimately, these tips must be merged with your own playing style. What is most important at the table is for everyone to have fun. Follow your instinct, revise your play style per experience, and let the adventure, NPCs, and players do the rest.



Creating and Using NPCs

Hopefully, by this time, you've got some ideas for well-fleshed antagonists. You've detailed their backgrounds, personality quirks, and reasons for interacting with the player characters. You've chosen their crimes, or reasons for opposing the player characters. They have motives and their "social face." Now, what do you do with them?

FIRST QUESTIONS

The first questions a Gamemaster should ask when brainstorming how to use a villain are:

- How do I want the player characters to react to this NPC?
- What would I prefer their first impression of the individual to be? Their second?
- In the long run, how do I want my players and their characters to see this individual? What is their last impression?
- Should he die at the end of the adventure? The campaign?

Who is the person you've created? Did they evolve "outside" their setting, a mysterious enigma, or are they the samurai-next-door? Initial impressions and introductions are of critical importance to the use of the villain; it is important to take these into account when you prepare to use your newly-created "bad guy" in the campaign.

THE SET-UP

A villain's introduction is paramount in how they will be received by the characters. Whether the characters are brought to speak with a dour, aggressive Phoenix interrogator (an obvious villain), or they first discover a grisly murder he committed (a concealed villain), the trouble they will be dealing with must be brought to their attention. At this point, the information presented to the PCs must be clear, coherent, and accessible. In this way, the characters (and the players) establish clear views of the situation and all relevant NPCs. Impressions are made here that can be used by the Gamemaster as the adventure proceeds to help guide the plot in the direction he desires.

The Hunt

One of the most common types of "set-ups" is the Hunt. This type of scenario typically involves a concealed villain and an obvious crime. A body is discovered or a ship is attacked, and it is up to the characters to discover what has occurred, and who is responsible. Typically, the villain of such an enterprise is not intended to continue after the present crime is solved (though he might be linked to a larger conglomerate of criminals who could prove to be a major stumbling block to the players over the course of a longer campaign).

A good example of the Hunt scenario is Shinjo Kusen, who has attacked a Doji ship, stolen the gold which was aboard, and melted it down into poor statuary for sale in the Crab lands. In this way, Kusen attempts to cover his tracks and launder the koku he has stolen from the Crane. The players only know that a ship has been attacked and sunk just offshore of the Crane peninsula. They must investigate to discover a single sailor who survived the wreck; he has been badly wounded, and until now, has been unable to tell his tale. He speaks of an attack in the night by a daring kobune. It rammed his smaller junk, slaughtered the sailors, and made off with the gold. The pirates, led by a man wearing Unicorn purple, thought that all the sailors had been killed, and did not notice the witness hidden in the water among the wreckage. Now the characters must use their limited information to seek out those responsible for the crime, and bring them to justice. If possible, they must also recover the lost gold (or many Crane peasants will surely starve without koku to purchase rice). If the characters are successful with their investigation, they will certainly discover Kusen and unveil his crime. They may capture him, or bring him to justice, thus fulfilling the requirements of the scenario as a whole, or they may wind up eliminating him.

Now let's change the scenario a bit. What if Kusen worked for a much larger organization of pirates, possibly funded by the Yasuki, in order to take out Crane shipping lines and ruin their profit for the year? Suddenly, our isolated villain is no longer the important criminal, but merely one piece of a larger tapestry. The true "villain" may be the Yasuki conspirators, or a single pirate who commands the Yasuki fleet. Now the Gamemaster has a campaign, kicked off by a single, interesting, well-scripted NPC.

Betrayal

A second type of scenario which works well as a campaign introduction is Betrayal. Here, the characters themselves already know who the "villain" is, as he is responsible for wronging them in some way. If the characters are sent by their lord to slaughter a bandit caravan, and then they discover (after the fact) that they just murdered an Otomo on a hunting trip, they have been Betrayed, and the plot has begun. Now they must discover why their lord sent them, and what they can do to right the matter without sacrificing their own lives.

TYPES OF VILLAINS

There are a number of basic villain conventions that can be used at the table, to elicit various reactions from the players. Several are listed here, with definitions and notes for how to use them.

The Surprise Villain

This type of villain is used to best effect when the group is assuming that the current adventure is routine, or they have falsely accused another of a crime. Surprise villains are a staple in many fictional genres, including the murder mystery and suspense-drama.

Gamemasters who wish to include a surprise villain in their game must carefully build an adventure structure which draws the PCs' attention away from the true culprit of the piece, while still supporting that person's guilt. The clues can focus upon another NPC (as is the case in countless "who-dunnit" serials), or on another subplot or aspect of the crime which keeps them busy until it's time for the big revelation.

Some of the clues shown to the PCs *must* point to the true villain during play, or the PCs will feel misled when they find out who it is. Not introducing the central villain of a story until its last moments is the hallmark of many low-ball movies and poorly-written novels. There must be *something* that the players can point to when the action is over, and say, "Oh! I get it! That's how it was done!" Keep this in mind always when using surprise villains.

The Lurking Evil

When the players know that there is a villain out there, but they cannot put their fingers on him, they are searching for a lurking evil. The supernatural enemy that cannot be seen or heard, but all know is very close, is a good example of a tangible lurking evil. But many such villains are not immediate threats, or even in physical proximity to the PCs, throughout a game.

The latter usually manifest as someone or something that has the ability to affect the PCs (or other victims) from a distance. Merchants, courtiers, daimyo, and others with connections or clout to influence the lives of their victims from a far (often through subordinates) are lurking evils.

The key element to remember when using a lurking evil is suspense. If the PCs do not feel threatened by the villain, then he has failed in his purpose, but it is equally important that they not know where, when, or how he will strike next. Secondary plotlines, red herrings, and misdirection are very important here, as is maintaining the players' focus at the table (if they are munching on chips and talking about the last hockey game, how are they supposed to feel on edge?). Avoid "shock value" scenes (in which you raise your voice or slam your hand down on the table to startle the players); this tactic is very adversarial, and not fair to the players. They are not experiencing suspense here; merely a knee-jerk reaction to sudden noise or impact.

The last thing to consider when using a lurking evil is when and how to reveal the villain. If the final scene comes too quickly, or is too abrupt, the players will be disappointed, or resent such a small pay-off. If it is drawn out too long, or over-dramatized, the players' anticipation will wane, and all your work will go to waste. The safest route when using a lurking evil is prepare an open-ended story (one which has many prepared events or subplots you can include at any time, and which can be ended with little effort). Then watch your players; when they lose interest, introduce an event. When they are giving up, throw them a bone. And when you have obtained a satisfactory level of suspense, begin the final scenes.

The Endless Chain

So the players have finally eliminated the villain, and are enjoying the fruits of their labors. They have received Glory, Honor, and the thanks of all the victims, and can look forward to the next big adventure...

...when suddenly, another crime is committed that matches the method and motive of their last enemy *precisely*. What is happening? Who is the new criminal? Did they actually fail somehow?

The endless chain is perfect for campaign play. The party overcomes an adversary, only to find that he was only one of many, or the lowest man on a much larger totem pole. They are faced with giving up all that they have gained fighting the first villain, or contending with an unknown number of new ones.

In Rokugan, this kind of enemy fits very nicely, and can have many complicated permutations. The characters might be plagued by an endless stream of Shadowlands creatures, often within Imperial borders, all of which point to a common source out beyond the Carpenter Wall. After several of these (each a potential adventure), the group hunts down and destroys a Blood Speaker who seems to know them, and claims that it is not yet over. Months later, more creatures emerge, leading to an much greater threat within the northern mountains, that is somehow connected to the Blood Speaker. The ultimate cause of this situation could be anything, from a slighted shugenja who has gained influence with the monsters to a maho-tsukai who has somehow learned (possibly through prophecy) that the characters are destined to overthrow him.

This can continue for as long as the GM likes, and is easily manipulated to fulfill the needs of his current group and campaign.

The Obvious Villain

Sometimes, you know exactly who committed a crime and how, but you cannot prove it. This is even more prominent in the Emerald Empire, where a villain can obtain amnesty from the players' efforts simply by virtue of a powerful ally who vouches for him. The PCs' goal here becomes the acquisition of contrary (and incontestable) evidence to prove the villain's guilt.

These types of games are very difficult for Gamemasters to plot, and even harder for them to run. Every avenue the PCs may take to prove their point, and every angle they can come up with to support it, must first be considered by the GM, unless he is willing and able to make up such information (and why most or all of it will not help) on the fly.

Most importantly, the Gamemaster must have at least one piece of evidence the PCs can use to bring the villain down ready before the game starts. He must know how the PCs can discover it, where it is hidden, and whether the villain himself knows of it (in which case, he is likely trying to stop them from getting it). Creating a flowchart for the investigation can only help, as well.

The Powerful General

This type of villain is best suited for combat-oriented campaigns, as they have been placed in charge of (or dominated) a large number of servants. Military commanders, Oni lords, daimyo, and others who have large retinues beneath them fit this category.

These villains gain their strength from numbers, and from the presence that controls those numbers. More often than not, such characters are outside the PCs' range until a final encounter, when the PCs must square off with them once and for all. Campaigns revolving around such villains can be extended by ensuring that they always escape, usually behind large force they have thrown at the PCs. But games in which the player characters never come in contact with the central villains rapidly grow stale; GMs should consider only using this type of villain single-shot adventures and short-term campaigns.

The Friend Gone Bad

Perhaps the most extreme villain scenario is the one in which a friend goes rogue, switches sides, or begins actively working

against the PCs. There should *always* be a good reason for such a villain, justifying his aberrant behavior – one that the PCs can point to and understand themselves. Unless part of the adventure is discovering why the figure turned, sudden shifts in loyalty without explanation can detract from the story, and the enjoyment of all present.

The best reasons for NPC friends to throw their lot in with the PCs' enemies are usually personal, or integral to the NPC's background. The reason should be carefully designed to elicit a desired response from the party; most players betrayed in this

manner will immediately devote their attentions to eliminating, hurting, or capturing the NPC. Their anger will fuel their need to find him and end the storyline. If this is what you want, then just about any justification (or none at all) will do.

But if you want the storyline to continue for a while, or you are interested in making the players think about what has happened (especially from the NPC's point of view), give them a reason to sympathize with him, and then show it to them. Maybe the NPC is not in control of their own actions, merely the puppet of a maho-tsukai? Or perhaps he is acting out of need (to protect a sibling or child, or to reacquire an ancestral item that has been stolen)? If the players see the NPC's suffering, they will probably *feel* it as well, unless their connection to him was lax to begin with.

A particularly cruel variant of this villain type is the PC Gone Bad. There are only two ways to pull this off without causing problems at the table. Either the player must be aware of the storyline ahead of time (and agree to his part in it), or the GM takes over a PC that remains when a player has left the game. Be very careful with this plotline. If used more than once per campaign, you risk losing the players' trust, and they will come to expect such subterfuge in every

ANCESTOR: BAYUSHI AKORU 408-440 (3 POINTS)

Bayushi Akoru was a minor functionary in Otosan Uchi. One of many aides to a higher ranking diplomat within the Imperial Court, Akoru never distinguished himself in any way, even amongst those of his own clan. He worked for many years in the position, never considered for promotion or transfer of duty. Akoru spent his free time alone, as he had no friends to speak of, even amongst his close associates. People rarely thought of him when he wasn't around, and barely noticed him when he was. He was born, lived, and died, with no special achievements or recognition to mention.

It is only now, hundreds of years after his death, that the records of early court life show otherwise. Through the process of elimination, several deeds which assisted the plots of the Scorpion Clan while he lived have been linked to him. None of them can be confirmed as his handiwork, but there are several events that can be believably credited to no other.

The Ikoma and historians of other clans remain perplexed as to how a person could be so well-connected to so many intricate plots without ever sparking anyone's interest. Today, the only thing for certain is that Bayushi Akoru was either the victim of gross assumption, or a master manipulator whose works in life will never be fully appreciated, even in death.

Benefits: Players who take Akoru as an ancestor find themselves forgettable and easily overlooked. People don't think about them, and tend to overlook them, even when they're present. No reliable description of the character is available unless they do something to attract substantial attention. The character may roll and keep one extra die in all Stealth-based Skill checks, but may never take the Ally Advantage, or have a Glory Rank of higher than 1.

– Created by *Jonah Medeiros*

session. This can undermine good stories that you have planned, and ruin the future of gaming at your table.

PLAYER REACTIONS TO NPCs

Throughout the last section, we spoke about how to prepare adventures, NPCs, and such to draw certain reactions from your group. Proven Gamemasters use this tactic all the time to drive their stories, compel their players, and create drama. It takes practice to accomplish, and should always be limited to "throw-away" games (single-shots, and those that have no bearing on important storylines), until you are well-aware of your players' common feelings on a large number of topics.

Avoid using this tactic when running games for those you do not know (such as a new group or at conventions, where you are unaware of the person across from you). Preparing an adventure so that the players must react in a certain way or fail is unfair unless you are prepared to help them along when things go awry.

The players' reactions to the NPCs in your game can have a great effect on long-term play, however. Friends and enemies that the group feels strongly about should be cherished, just as the classic allies and villains of movies and literature. Moriarty, Morden (of B5 fame), and Fu Leng have all captured this interest, being as important to the continuing story as the central characters themselves.

END OF THE LINE

Eventually, it will come time to end the current storyline, and retire your compliment of villains. There are several options, the most important of which we have highlighted here.

When a Villain Dies

This may happen as a result of the PCs finally catching up to the villain and doing him in, or could be engineered by the Gamemaster toward some specific purpose (perhaps in conjunction with the "Passing the Torch" option, below). The end of a villain's life should always mean as much as his career did – both to the players and to the campaign itself. Gamemasters are encouraged to script such sequences in keeping with the villain's personal background and history with the party, drawing parallels between previous events and present outcomes, and concluding any outstanding plotlines he has racked up.

Passing the Torch

When a villain dies, he might desire his legacy to continue in some way. This can take the form of a student or apprentice, or might be some condition he has left behind to annoy the PCs (a plague, for instance, or an ideal that others have embraced).

However it manifests, the players are left with something to remember the villain by – a calling card that outlives him, and

continues to influence their lives or environment. There are many variations of this theme in the present L5R storyline, the Shadowlands themselves perhaps the most prominent. Fu Leng's corruption continues to spawn ever greater horrors for the Empire to deal with, even long after his "death."

ANCESTOR OTAKU KUNAMI: DIED ??? (5 POINTS)

Among the Otaku, this myth is popular; the other members of the Empire, even the Shinjo and the Ide, often scoff at its obvious falsehood, calling it a parable rather than a historical truth. However, the Otaku hear their mocking words, and they smile, for only they know how much of the tale is true...

For a short time during their wanderings, the Otaku were threatened with being enslaved by a brotherhood of heartless sorcerers in a city known as Laramun. One samurai-ko among them – Kunamiko – was not content with accepting their fate, and choose the most beautiful and intelligent Battle Maidens to infiltrate the brotherhood as concubines.

Soon, members of the brotherhood fell upon one another in jealous rage, years of slights and envy brought to the surface by the Battle Maidens' skillful manipulation. While their volleys of magical destruction streaked across the night sky, Otaku Kunami broke into the brotherhood's inner chambers and found the great steed Vata, another hostage of the brotherhood. He was the stallion of a herd of mystical horses, enslaved as the brotherhood's calvary.

A bargain was struck between them: Kunami would free him, and the stallion and his people would serve the Battle Maidens. There was only one condition. Kunami would have leave the palace by riding Vata, with no bridle or saddle, and remain upon Vata's back until sunrise of the following morning.

Songs of the following skirmish tell of her ride atop a horse of fire and wind, full of cunning and immeasurable strength. After the fighting was over, in the last, long moments before dawn, Kunami was cut by the wind of their passage, burned by the heat of Vata's body, and battered as he twisted and jumped, tossing her about. But she would not be thrown, and with the first sign of new light, the Otaku took their places upon the great steeds, watching the fires of the Laramun before the rising sun.

Benefits: Descendants of Otaku Kunami are superb handlers of horses, the envy of all Unicorns. They have the ability to perform incredible tricks with ease. Battle Maidens of her line gain a free Raise to their TN if performing tricks or stunts while riding. During normal activity, they cannot be unhorsed. Other Raises must be made normally.

– Created by Kevin Sanborn

MISCELLANEOUS QUIRKS 1

Roll two dice:

- 1-2 Becomes easily bored
- 3-4 Counts everything
- 5-6 Cries a lot
- 7-8 Delusional
- 9-10 Does math problems in head
- 11-12 Easily angered and unhinged
- 13-14 Eats constantly
- 15-16 Allergic to something
- 17-18 Enjoys the company of elders
- 19-20 Fastidiously clean
- 21-22 Glutton
- 23-24 Very smart, on the inside
- 25-26 Has a favorite saying
- 27-28 Blinks less often than normal
- 29-30 Has an extensive vocabulary
- 31-32 Hates children
- 33-34 Remembers everything said
- 35-36 Highly intuitive or empathic
- 37-38 Hypochondriac
- 39-40 Inquisitive
- 41-42 Intensely bitter
- 43-44 Keeps a log of everything
- 45-46 Keeps home shrine closed
- 47-48 Brushes or plays with hair
- 49-50 Loves a specific food
- 51-52 Loves *bunraku* (court music)
- 53-54 Miserly
- 55-56 Overly sensitive
- 57-58 Phobic or manic
- 59-60 Psychopathic
- 61-62 Quiet, pensive
- 63-64 Short-term memory
- 65-66 Stubborn
- 67-68 Thinks like a westerner
- 69-70 Vain
- 71-72 Very Cautious
- 73-74 Clutches hands together
- 75-76 Clumsy
- 77-78 Compulsively twiddles fingers
- 79-80 Cannot sit still
- 81-82 Cracks knuckles
- 83-84 Grinds teeth
- 85-86 Hums tunelessly
- 87-88 Overeater
- 89-90 Raises eyebrow when talking
- 91-92 Says everything twice
- 93-94 Speaks with a lisp or stutter
- 95-96 Fidgets with loose objects
- 97-98 Taps feet when standing
- 99-100 Chews tea leaves

MISCELLANEOUS QUIRKS 2

Roll two dice:

- 1-2 A fortune or kami in disguise
- 3-4 Always carries favorite item
- 5-6 Refers to non-existent lord
- 7-8 Berates those beneath her
- 9-10 Can't remember names
- 11-12 Carries hidden weapons
- 13-14 Has shugenja spells on fans
- 15-16 Competitive
- 17-18 Constantly pets cat or dog
- 19-20 Deep sleeper
- 21-22 Devout follower of Shinsei
- 23-24 Feared by animals and kids
- 25-26 Eavesdrops on others
- 27-28 Commanding to everyone
- 29-30 Light sleeper
- 31-32 Makes impossible threats
- 33-34 Never acknowledges loss
- 35-36 Never drinks alcohol
- 37-38 Never makes eye contact
- 39-40 Draws patterns in the air
- 41-42 Overly polite or cordial
- 43-44 Performs origami endlessly
- 45-46 Purposely violates etiquette
- 47-48 Rarely bathes
- 49-50 Resourceful
- 51-52 Signature weapon
- 53-54 Speaks in the third person
- 55-56 Speaks metaphorically
- 57-58 Surrounded by sycophants
- 59-60 Treats peasants well
- 61-62 Verbose
- 63-64 Visits people in their dreams
- 65-66 Wears kabuki make-up
- 67-68 Wears ornate saya and obi
- 69-70 Writes bad poetry
- 71-72 Covered in scars or tattoos
- 73-74 Deep or high-pitched voice
- 75-76 Has one swath of white hair
- 77-78 Has an unfocused, or "evil" eye
- 79-80 Has no sense of smell or taste
- 81-82 Raspy breathing
- 83-84 Light on feet, graceful
- 85-86 Nagging cough
- 87-88 Different colored eyes
- 89-90 Very attractive
- 91-92 Webbed toes
- 93-94 Has a limp
- 95-96 Mute
- 97-98 Missing a limb, eye, or hand
- 99-100 Wears only one color

MOTIVATIONS

Roll two dice:

- 1-2 Acceptance
- 3-4 Ambition
- 5-6 Ambivalence
- 7-8 Ancestry
- 9-10 Anger
- 11-12 Approval
- 13-14 Blackmail
- 15-16 Boredom
- 17-18 Coercion
- 19-20 Curiosity
- 21-22 Death
- 23-24 Defiance
- 25-26 Depression
- 27-28 Devotion
- 29-30 Duty
- 31-32 Envy
- 33-34 Extortion
- 35-36 Fear
- 37-38 Glory
- 39-40 Gluttony
- 41-42 Greed
- 43-44 Guilt
- 45-46 Happiness
- 47-48 Hatred
- 49-50 Honor
- 51-52 Hunger
- 53-54 Insanity
- 55-56 Jealousy
- 57-58 Justice
- 59-60 Karma
- 61-62 Love
- 63-64 Loyalty
- 65-66 Lust
- 67-68 Morality
- 69-70 Necessity
- 71-72 Obligation
- 73-74 Obsession
- 75-76 Perfection
- 77-78 Possession
- 79-80 Power
- 81-82 Pride
- 83-84 Respect
- 85-86 Revenge
- 87-88 Spirituality
- 89-90 Stubbornness
- 91-92 Threats
- 93-94 Tradition
- 95-96 Vanity
- 97-98 Roll Twice
- 99-100 Roll a Quirk

Section Two



Friends and Foes

Hida Kabe

The blood of the the Hida family courses with ferocity and strength through this Crab's veins. Born of Gobura, who was born of Shuzuri, Kabe can trace his ancestry back to Hida Yugira, a much-lauded and decorated warrior who fought at the Battle of the Thundering Shrine.

It is rumored that Yugira is just another of many names for the legendary Osano-wo, a myth substantiated by the fact that Yugira held his ground against a fierce horde of Shadowlands minions during the worst fire-storm in the history of the Okabe shrine's history. He never lost his footing, and the raging storm around him is said to have merely spurred him on to greater anger. He was like a wall of flesh that the agents of Fu Leng could not hope to pull down.

Born to such elite stock, Kabe has been raised to meet very high standards and expectations; his parents, both highly respected generals of the Crab legions, are very proud of him. But they are also the classic Crab ideal – impassive, distant, and quietly nurturing. They expressed their adoration of young Kabe through diligence in his pre-*gempukku* training, religious discipline, and providing opportunities for him that rapidly became the envy of many other Crabs his age.

As a result, Kabe's first missions to the Shadowlands took place at a very young age. He accompanied his parents on Hida patrol and Kuni surveillance missions until he was deemed strong and wise enough to venture out on his own, and then granted permission to attach himself to other Crab tours through the blighted realm as he wished.

Kabe is most content while in the Shadowlands. He is by no means corrupted, having no physical sign of the Taint, and exhibiting no behavior that could be attributed to it. Yet it is obvious that he feels at home beyond the Carpenter Wall, where the horrors of Fu Leng roam. He spent the remainder of his childhood – and much of early professional career – taking assignments that would allow him to indulge in this passion.

Just a few years ago, while traveling alone in along the southern edge of the Empire, Kabe came across a ratling hiding within the immense carcass of a fallen beast. He immediately raised his tetsubo to strike it down, assuming that it was tainted – or worse, insane. But he saw that the ratling was terrified – not of him or his weapon, but of something else that stalked the area. When Kabe investigated, he was attacked by a small, but savage, creature he could only attribute to Fu Leng's twisted imagination.

It was only three feet in height, a small and pudgy mass of writhing flesh, but it was incredibly strong and agile. More than

a challenge for Kabe alone, the samurai positioned himself to retreat, falling back to the Wall, where he could acquire reinforcements and return. But at the last moment, out of the corner of his eye, he saw the ratling, frigid with terror and unable to flee from the vile Oni.

Kabe stood his ground, wondering at his odd resolve to save the shivering ratling, but knowing in his soul that he was being guided by a higher force. The Oni approached, prepared to make a meal of both his prizes, but was suddenly thrown back by a blinding pulse of lightning that had originated... from within Kabe himself!

The Oni was still conscious, though dazed by the sudden attack, and Kabe rushed to secure the ratling and leave the area. He would have to undergo the Ritual of Purification after this was through, but somehow, he was sure that there was no other way. The ratling *must* be saved.

The Hida were amused by Kabe's "elaboration" and the Kuni studied the ratling – whom they came to know as Scitch'ik – for many weeks before things returned to a semblance of normal for the samurai. Eventually, it was decided that Scitch'ik would join Kabe as an "assistant" of sorts, being quite knowledgeable of the Shadowlands borders, and Shinomen forest, which have become Kabe's personal assignments.

He walks their lands still.



Hida Kuri

Like most Crabs, Hida Kuri has been trained since birth to combat the horrors of the Shadowlands. Understandably, his demeanor has been adversely affected by the terrible things he and his fellow bushi have witnessed. He acts and speaks crudely, often bordering on offense. He is always filled with rage and never runs from a fight, even when he should. And he is filled with a consuming lust for battle that none of the creatures he has encountered can satisfy.

The son of a Hida captain whose fall to the Taint is nearly a legend among the Crab, Kuri has become the focus of much fear and revulsion within his own clan. Except for a small number of warriors who share his interest in battle, Kuri is alone along the Carpenter Wall.

Some claim that the woman he knows as his mother – Hida Tanako – died of a broken heart, of a shamed face, or both. She carried the burden of her husband's dishonor for many years before confiding in Kuri about his father, and the awful truth of his death:

Hida Yome was considered one of the finest commanders of the Crab Clan, a fierce engine of war guided by a preternaturally sharp and tactical mind. His efforts had prevented more than one breach of the Kaiu Wall and helped to protect the Empire since his *gempukku*. Commendations for valor and intuitive understanding of the enemy decorated his simple home, but he was also humble, and refused to revel in the glory his position and skill afforded him.

When Yome was thirty-two years old, he met a lovely Hiruma maiden and was instantly infatuated. He is said to have spent his shifts upon the Wall's upper ramparts composing poems and songs in honor of her beauty, the words gently drifting to the blighted fields below like Amaterasu's own sweet caress.

The two were eventually wed, and bore a son – Kuri – who was their greatest love and greatest obsession. Tanako was their handmaiden, she revealed, though her connection with the child would soon change.

Yome's happiness was to be short-lived; mere weeks after Yuri's birth, Yome's beloved wife and child were abducted by a *maho-tsukai* and taken beyond the Wall, into the heart of the Shadowlands. No reason was ever given for this event, nor was a ransom requested. Yome, consumed with irrational grief, ignored the commands of his superiors and gathered a cadre of his best men to give pursuit.

The *maho-tsukai's* tracks were easy enough to follow through the cracked landscape, and eventually led him to the outermost gates of an ancient and forgotten keep. He and his men entered, but only he would ever leave; moments later, an immense army of Oni and undead footmen swept into the area and laid siege to the castle.

Inside, Yome and his command fought the *maho-tsukai*, finally overwhelming him and charging into his inner sanctum. What they found there permanently damaged Yome's mind, and destroyed the senses of all his surviving soldiers.

Upon a an altar of obsidian, Yome's son could be seen, cradled within a pool of living blood which enveloped him like a second skin, trapping Yuri from the outside world. No sounds were heard from the baby, and it was still, but Yome knew it to be alive. Its eyes darted about with an unnatural sense of its surroundings, and gazed upon Yome with vile understanding.

His child of only two months *recognized him by sight*.

Nearby, Yome found the tortured body of his former wife. She had been sacrificed as part of the ritual that Yome had interrupted, her blood spread in a meticulous pattern throughout the room. He wept for her spirit, but his tears were lost within her remains, and he felt her slipping away...

Yuri was rescued, but he never fully recovered. The whites of his eyes are colored a deep blood-red, and his skin is as smooth as when he was a child, a stark contrast to his current age of 32. Yome never told anyone of his son's brush with blood-magic, though he has revealed the truth to the boy himself, hoping that Yuri will one day be able to reconcile his past.

His inner search continues today.



Kida Tetsumaru

Once, while campaigning in the east, Tetsumaru made camp with his men atop a promontory overlooking the sea. As was his way, he spent the evening in rough companionship with his soldiers, drinking *sake* and gambling. This was his life, the hard lot of a man-at-arms, at once cruel and pure, free of the deceit and excesses of courtly life.

A sudden wish to bathe in the golden waters took hold of him and he strove toward the sea, fumbling with the straps of his armor. Then he heard a voice. The sound was beautiful, but heavy with a wildness and passion that Tetsumaru had never heard before. The words were strange and accented, and it seemed to Tetsumaru that the melody rose and fell with each breaking wave.

Tetsumaru could make out a solitary figure standing at the beachline, dark against the sea foam. With a muttered oath, he set off at a run, sand flying from his sandals. The rocks were wet and slippery, however, and Tetsumaru fell to his knees. The singing had stopped, and the sea roared terribly around him. In anger, Tetsumaru lurched away from the rocks, determined to enter the water.

It was colder than he expected; the rushing sea sucked hard at his armor, threatening to drag him out with the waves. Try as he might, he could not plot a straight course against the swirls and eddies, and in desperation he dropped his sword and lunged, trying to reach the black rocks nearby. But a large wave pounded his back and Tetsumaru fell into a quiet darkness. He almost failed to notice the hand which grasped his arm like a steel band as he passed out...

When he awoke, Tetsumaru saw the moon high above him, shining silver. His fingers curled into the sand; surprisingly, his right hand found the damp grip of his katana. He remembered the regret he had felt before committing it to the sea, and wondered at its return. Then he became aware of where he was, lying on the beach, just where the damp sand met the dry, his armor untied and lying neatly arranged about him, his clothes stiffened with salt and sand. He shivered as the wind freshened over his skin.

"Lie back." The soft voice he had heard before. "Your struggles have weakened you." Tetsumaru's grip tightened around his sword, but his will collapsed before this gentle command and he sank back into the sand. Standing beside him was a tall woman lit from above with the opalescent light of the moon, a crescent of silver surrounding her.

Her long black hair fanned out behind her, and its fragrance washed delicately over him. She wore a simple pale green kimono, embroidered with dragons of silver thread. Beneath it, Tetsumaru caught tantalizing glimpses of the soft glowing pearl of her flesh, and he felt a sudden rush of excitement. He was compelled to touch her, to embrace her.

He seemed to hear again the strange music which had drawn him before. His hand reached for her as she knelt beside him. The waves crashed into their forms, its cool frothing sharp and biting against their skin...

Later, towards morning, Tetsumaru sat alone and stared into the campfire. Around him, his men slept in readiness for the journey which the rising sun would bring. In his heart, Tetsumaru felt a deep pain and for the second time this night, and he stared at his hands; this time, however, he knew the cause of his pain. He looked up towards the western mountains, to where the moon – now pale – was setting, and remembered her last words:

"You have heard the song of the sea, Tetsumaru, and it has flooded your soul. It will live in your heart and be as precious to you as the son which we have made will be to me. The sea swells and ebbs, Tetsumaru, and so will your power and fortunes. But we will meet again, my love, once more before our lives are over."



Kuni Godaigo

Few men in Rokugan are as universally despised as Kuni Godaigo. Cursed with physical deformities since birth, Godaigo was forced to live much of his life away from public view. His first few years were a gauntlet of ridicule and torment. The children of his birth-village called him *bakemono* and worse as the hurled stones and rotten vegetables at him during his daily chores. Other times, they would simply beat him to a bloody pulp if he so much as raised his eyes to look at them.

Godaigo was a great disappointment to his father, and at the age of six, he was sent away from his family's estate to a far-away temple in the Dragon lands to study the Tao. Living within the secluded world of the temple grounds, Godaigo never had the opportunity or drive to learn all the intricacies of Rokugani society. He spent his days in quiet study and his nights in meditative contemplation. Within the confines of the guarded shrine, Godaigo poured over ancient scrolls and musty texts and was – for a time – content.

After ten years of contemplative study, Godaigo was ordered to return to his homeland to attend a yearly gathering of the Kuni family at Hida Castle. After a long, dusty trip home, he presented himself before the family elders. Godaigo, very uncomfortable in large social gatherings, soon found a darkened corner away from the crowd and decided to remain as inconspicuous as possible. But he attracted the attention of one notable individual – a *tsukai-sagasu*.

On the final night of the assembly, all of the new members of the convocation were ordered to present themselves before the elders. Godaigo took his place in line and noticed an odd figure standing with the family elders. The newcomer's clothes were ragged and travel-stained. His face was a harsh testament to his grim work as a witch-hunter. The Kuni inspected the new recruits as he paced with measured steps before them. The newcomer's gaze rested upon Godaigo. "You will be my new apprentice," he said, and with that declaration the conference came to a close. Godaigo departed that night with his new master, Kuni Noda. Godaigo studied as a witch-hunter for several years before setting out on his own as a full fledged *tsukai-sagasu*.

Through the years, Godaigo has acquired quite a few scars and slight signs of the Shadowlands Taint, all of which have further marred his abhorrent physical appearance. Godaigo's skin is covered in boils, warts, scars, red blotches, and other even less-appealing skin abnormalities. His teeth are darkly stained and crooked. He often goes for weeks between baths. Godaigo

uses his grotesque countenance to intimidate peasants and samurai alike. When he needs to remain inconspicuous, he'll hide beneath a great basket-like hat.

In conversation, Godaigo is sarcastic, tactless, and foul. Most samurai in the Empire who know of his skill at tracking cultists and other Shadowlands entities give Godaigo grudging respect. Due to his lack of etiquette and cultural refinement, Godaigo is rarely invited to grand courts. The need for his talent must be great indeed for him to receive an invitation; few Daimyo are willing to put up with his lack of civility without a reason.

His ruthless tactics and dogged determination to track down the spawn of the Shadowlands has earned him quite a reputation. He is known for his skill with the sword as well as his knowledge of the Shadowlands. Godaigo has cut a bloody swath through the Empire tracking down Bloodspeakers, cultists, and Oni alike. He is a man consumed with malice for the creatures of the Shadowlands. Some whisper that the scars he bears upon his face are from an encounter with a loathsome creature that left his mentor dead. Others speculate that the marks come from his old teacher and Godaigo is tracking down the creature that was once Kuni Noda...





Name: Daidoji Shogusha
Clan: Crane
School: Hida Bushi
Honor: 3.2

Rank: 3
Glory: 5.4

Stamina 3
 Willpower 4



Primary Weapon
 Katana 4k2

Skill	Level
Archery	2
Athletics	3
Battle	4
Dance	1
Defense	3
Etiquette	2
Hand-to-Hand	2
History	3
Horsemanship	2
Kenjutsu	4
Law	1
Lore (Instruction)	2
Lore (Sailing)	2
Lore (Shadowlands)	2
Medicine	2
Wrestling	5

Strength 3
 Perception 4



Roll & keep to hit
 7k3

Agility 3
 Intelligence 3



Roll & keep Damage
 7k2

Reflexes 3
 Awareness 4



TN to Be Hit
 20 (Light armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 3

Wounds

6	-0
6	-1
6	-2
6	-3
6	-4
6	Down
6	Out
6	Dead

Techniques

The Way of the Crab
 The Mountain Does Not Move
 Two Pincers, One Mind

Special Notes

Fine Katana

Advantages/Disadvantages

Different School (Hida Bushi)
 Obligation (Grandfather)
 Social Position (Sensei)

Daidoji Shogusha

Daidoji Shogusha has traveled extensively throughout the Emerald Empire. He has toured the great Carpenter Wall, studying the behavior of the Shadowlands creatures beyond (and, if rumors are to be believed, studying the strategies and tactics of the Crab armies posted there as well). He has fought alongside the Lion regiments posted as the Emperor's right hand. And he has taught among his own people, helping fledgling Crane bushi to feel the flow of battle within them, and how to use it as a single, decisive sword within their hearts.

Shogusha was raised by his grandfather, Hida Doreni, after his parents were killed in floods caused by a series of terrible storms. Shogusha had been staying with the old man for the season, and – without other family to turn to – was adopted by him thereafter. The memory of his home crushed beneath a rising swell of water haunts him still, and on many clear and quiet nights, he is sure that he has heard the panicked screams of his parents as they were swept away...

Doreni was a loving man, and did his best to comfort the abandoned boy. Enjoying a pleasant spring day of fishing, he would often take his grandson to the seas south of the tidal landbridge, which were rarely visited. The waters there were dangerous, but Doreni knew them well, and kept the two from the more precarious spots. They would have lengthy conversations about anything that the two could think of, and Shogusha loved the way that Doreni would treat him like an adult, speaking to him with conviction and respect.

Many years later, after his *gempukku*, Shogusha's true interests surfaced, and he began to hear the siren call of adventure beyond his humble home. "I have grown beyond your influence, grandfather. I wish to learn the lessons of Bushido and become a proper samurai, as my father was before me. I must understand what he was, or I will never be able to let him go."

Shogusha traveled for many weeks after that, seeing many wondrous things and meeting many new friends (and a few new enemies as well). Within months, he was drawn back to the sea, where he joined Lord Daidoji's naval forces. He traveled with them for some time before returning to his grandfather's home.

The boat slip where he had spent so many cheerful nights with the man was empty, and none had seen Doreni since Lord Moon had last been dark. The next morning, Shogusha borrowed a friend's boat to search the fishing grounds. He sailed all day, skirting the coastline and even traveling up many of the local rivers, but found no sign of his beloved grandfather.

Near dark, he headed home, sure that the man had been correct, and that they would never see one another again. Without warning, his hand began to guide the rudder with a will of its own, and his mind danced with odd images of far-away places. Soon, unearthly screams drifted over the water from the tortured land to the west, rousing him from his daydream. The Kaiu Wall loomed to the northwest, and Shogusha could make out the remains of his grandfather's boat shored upon the black sand ahead. Its mast was splintered and strewn across the deck.

A small campfire could be seen on the shore, a figure sitting next to it, warming itself. But when Shogusha approached, it stood and raised a decaying hand toward him, as if to prevent his progress, coming to a stop just within the glare of the flickering light from the fire.

"Grandfather!" Shogusha whispered. Then louder, so that he would hear, "We must leave, before the tide pulls the boats away."

His voice croaked in response. "No, Yellowfin. Only you may leave. I am condemned here..." He shrugged the blanket from his shoulders, revealing a wide expanse of mangled flesh surrounding a deep gash. "There is no hope for me."

In his heart, Shogusha knows that he should have killed the man, granted him an honorable death instead of allowing the contagion to spread. But his love for the man was too great, and his fear of what Doreni was becoming too strong, and he found himself running for the shore, and the safety of his boat...

Today, nearly ten years later, he has returned to the Shadowlands, to search for the monstrosity he allowed to survive. Occasionally, when he is close, he can still feel the pressure of its presence, building within his own heart. He hopes to end that pressure soon...





Name: Daidoji Tenkazu
Clan: Crane
School: Daidoji Bodyguard *Rank: 1*
Honor: 3.2 *Glory: 1*

Stamina 2
 Willpower 2



Primary Weapon
 Katana 3k2

Skill **Level**

Strength 2
 Perception 3



Roll & keep to hit
 6k3

Archery	2
Battle	1
Defense	2
Iaijutsu	2
Investigation	2
Kenjutsu	3
Lore (Bushido)	2
Lore (Crane)	3
Meditation	2
Painting	2
Poetry	1
Sincerity	2
Yarijutsu	1

Agility 3
 Intelligence 3



Roll & keep Damage
 5k2

Reflexes 3
 Awareness 3



TN to Be Hit
 20 (Light armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 3

Wounds

7	-0
7	-1
7	-2
7	-3
7	-4
7	Down
7	Out
7	Dead

Techniques

The Force of Honor

Special Notes

Advantages/Disadvantages

- Antisocial (Moderate)
- Major Ally (Ide Tadaji)
- Kakita Blade
- Leadership
- Obligation (Ide Tadaji)
- Soft-Hearted

Daidoji Tenkazu

Tenkazu is the first son of Daidoji Usaji (a not so prominent Crane). His childhood was cut short by tragedy. His father's death at the hands of disease and age forced Tenkazu to help his mother, Daimoko, raise his two younger brothers, Hiki and Asagai. Instead of embittering Tenkazu, however, this only spurred him to work harder and strive for more in his life. His childhood would soon be over, he knew, and adulthood stretched out before him like an endless and uncharted road...

Tenkazu sought training with the Daidoji, where he studied under his uncle, Daidoji Ishitaka. Tenkazu was dedicated, serious, and naturally skilled, yet selfless and caring in everything he did. At one point in his schooling a younger boy had lost his shinai, and it was obvious that Ishitaka-sama would discipline him. Tenkazu took his own shinai and gave it to the young samurai, knowing that Ishitaka would be much less angry with him. Such activities marked the remainder of his schooling, and Tenkazu became known for his giving nature.

At his *gempukku*, Ishitaka presented Tenkazu with his Kakita blade, *Shiji Gaki*. "The spirit of this blade will awaken to destroy those that would bring the family harm. Bring honor to your family with it, Tenkazu. You are now a man. Enemies of the Crane will know your sword is as true as the arm that wields it. Do not waver in your task."

Tenkazu could not speak. He took the blade and scabbard from his uncle, held it to his head, bowed, stood, and wrapped it to his obi with precision and diligence. He has not drawn the blade since.

Whether due to the political machinations of the Crane, or Tenkazu's lack of notoriety, or maybe just an odd sort of luck, Tenkazu has never been assigned to a post requiring him to draw steel. Each of his duties has been a simple and mindless task. Guarding a patch of swamp, escorting prisoners, patrolling farmland, and a host of other duties far removed from glory have conspired to ensure that few ever hear the name "Tenkazu."

The passion that drives Tenkazu keeps him ready, but his fate stifles his desire for life. In his 18 years as a bodyguard for merchants, ambassadors, and courtiers, he has been little more than window dressing. He has never married, never led an army, never accepted a challenge, never fought off bandits, and never rescued an innocent. Life is always just over the next crest, waiting to hide from him before he arrives. Tenkazu's life is comparable to his sword – the perfect weapon, deadly and refined, but never leaving its scabbard.

A waste.

Tenkazu owes a great deal to his friend and sometime mentor, Ide Tadaji (see *The Way of the Unicorn*, page 70), who has championed his name in court, when others will not. Tadaji's praise of Tenkazu seems to have no end. Some time ago, unknown to Tenkazu, Tadaji successfully thwarted an attempt by Bayushi Akeu to discredit the aging samurai; Akeu has since said nothing ill of the "great" Daidoji since.

Tenkazu met Ide Tadaji some time ago in Otsan Uchi. He was serving as a bodyguard to a Doji courtier during a simple Unicorn "feast." The atmosphere was friendly, light, and like nothing the Crane had ever encounter before. The conversation was open and inviting. Tadaji took an instant liking to the quiet and reserved man. They spoke together for some time and it was obvious to Tadaji that this Crane would be simple to manipulate and control. After the dinner, the two samurai retired to a private room where they enjoyed music, sake, and poetry. Even with the geisha surrounding them, Tenkazu's futon remained cold and alone that night. It was this "inaction" that keyed Tadaji to the true honor of Tenkazu.

How perfect he would be for what Tadaji had planned next...



Kakita Hazuko

Kakita Hazuko, a young Crane shugenja, is a recognizable figure at Winter Court. She is graceful, attractive, intelligent, and available for marriage; this availability is due to her frustrating marriage requirements, and her desire to avoid the duties of motherhood. The only daughter of a sickly and over-protective Asahina matron, Hazuko was bombarded by tales of how horrible it was to bear children, and how each of the seven children in her family gradually chiseled away their mother's strength. Hazuko's own birth was far less problematic; her mother claimed that this was a sign of her great future, and grossly pampered the young Hazuko.

Upon reaching her *gempukku*, Hazuko was taken to Shinden Asahina. While much of her haughtiness was corrected there, she continued to place herself firmly at the center of her own universe. This worried the Masters of the school, since the role of shugenja was one of integration and communication, not isolation and insulation. Finally, it was discovered that Hazuko had a natural aptitude for dancing. The elders of the school quickly set her on a regimen of practice and contemplation with other talented girls. She excelled, and learned the ancient dancing art of "gliding" (using Air spells to assist in impressive dancing moves). Eventually, Hazuko realized that the world was far less harsh than her mother had led her to believe.

Contrary to her mother's wishes, she did not become a monk. Instead, she decided to experience the world denied her for so long. She returned from Shinden Asahina a new woman. While she has come a long way since her early days, Hazuko still has a reputation for snobbery. She has an intense fear of love, marriage and childbirth; they terrify her. Simple acts such as long embraces and kissing are repugnant to her.

While Hazuko was studying at the Temple, another tragedy occurred. A mother, visiting the temple to seek fortune for her unborn child, was critically injured on the grounds of the Shrine. Rather than comforting the woman, the Asahina ordered that she be removed from the sacred grounds, so that her death would not contaminate its purity. As she was carried out by Hazuko and the other women, she cursed Hazuko for obeying the shugenja's cruel demands. The supposed curse states that Hazuko would suffer torments at least "nine times nine" the anguish the unfortunate mother experienced if she were ever involved with a man. While this story cannot be substantiated, and no taint of *maho* appears to cling to Hazuko, one can never be sure...

Due to her obvious feelings about physical affection, a secret contest known as the "Thawing of the Ice" has sprung up among the young men of Winter Court. Prizes are awarded among them for managing some form of personal contact with the Kakita maiden (social or otherwise) before the snow melts from the largest local statue of Benten each year. Since all six of Hazuko's brothers are members of the Kakita dueling school, this "contest" is told more for its value as a humorous cautionary tale than as a practical competition (although the prize this year is rumored to be a coveted katana forged by the finest Kaiu smiths).

The largest prize (various items of outrageous value) would go to the lucky gentleman who marries her. This event may never occur, thanks to Hazuko's meddling mother. All suitors who ask for her daughter's hand go through a seemingly endless parade of interviews, tests, and interrogations, until the poor lads (or their parents) give up for easier brides.

Kakita Hazuko is a tragic and distant figure. Due to the cruelty of men eager to use her (for prizes or as a well-connected wife), the jealousy of rivals, and her own fears of intimacy, she is incredibly defensive. A sensitive man with whom she can have a platonic relationship may be able to win her heart - some day. PCs might attempt to wed, woo, or befriend Hazuko. Her unique dancing abilities assure her a place in Rokugani courtly life for many years to come.





Name: Kakita Kazuyoshi
Clan: Crane
School: Kakita Bushi *Rank: 3*
Honor: 3.7 *Glory: 3.5*

Stamina 3
 Willpower 3



Primary Weapon
 Katana 3k2

Skill	Level
Archery	3
Artisan (Noh/Kabuki)	1
Battle	2
Courtier	2
Etiquette	2
Hand-to-Hand	3
Heraldry	1
Horsemanship	2
Iaijutsu	5
Kenjutsu	4
Knife	1
Meditation	2
Oratory	2
Poetry	3
Rhetoric	2
Shintao	3
Sincerity	2

Strength 3
 Perception 3



Roll & keep to hit
 8k4

Agility 4
 Intelligence 3



Roll & keep Damage
 6k2

Reflexes 4
 Awareness 3



TN to Be Hit
 27 (Fine light armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 4

Wounds

_____	6	-0
_____	6	-0
_____	6	-0
_____	6	-1
_____	6	-2
_____	6	Down
_____	6	Out
_____	6	Dead

Techniques

- _____ The Way of the Crane
- _____ The Sudden Strike
- _____ Strike From the Void
- _____
- _____

Special Notes

_____ Fine Katana, Wakizashi, Tessen,
 _____ Daikyu, Helm, and Kimono

Advantages/Disadvantages

- _____ Clear Thinker
- _____ Kakita Blade (Rose of Iron)
- _____ Quick
- _____ Strength of the Earth (4 pts.)
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Kakita Kazuyoshi

Kakita Kazuyoshi was born just under ten miles from Shiro sano Kakita. His father, Domaru, is a poet-turned-magistrate, and his mother, Kinako, is a skilled Doji painter. Kazuyoshi is the oldest of six children, and his parents expected him to excel beyond the accomplishments of his siblings. But all of his brothers and sisters have achieved success, becoming noted dignitaries, well-known duelists, and respected shugenja. Kazuyoshi pales in comparison in his parents' estimation, and they consider him a failure.

One of his brothers, Yotso, is a tutor at the Kakita academy acting school, while Reitoko, a sister, is responsible for two recent discoveries within the elusive element of Air, and even the Phoenix Council of Five has had to take notice. The twins, Kaaze and Wahori, attend the Daidoji bodyguard school, and show impressive promise even at their bright young age of ten. And the youngest, Deinko, has captured the minds and hearts of all she knows at the Doji courts. Kazuyoshi's family expects great things when the seven-year old beauty makes an appearance at Winter Court this year.

Meanwhile, Kazuyoshi studied the Iaijutsu arts at the Kakita Dueling Academy, as he has for the last eleven years. Perhaps as a result of the pressure, or maybe due to his own lack of self-confidence, he graduated second-to-last in his class at the late age of eighteen. All through school, few believed that he would graduate to his *gempukku*, and most mocked his slow progress.

In an effort to show Kazuyoshi the true meaning of dedication, his father arranged for him to be trained in the same dojo where the great Kakita Toshimoko had learned the steps of the One Strike. Kazuyoshi knew that should he fail to grasp the concepts and physical regimen presented to him, it would be an irrevocable blemish on his father's honor, and he would be excommunicated, or worse.

But Kazuyoshi's mind refused to settle upon his studies. Always wandering to far-away places and the thrilling peaks of adventure, it seemed that Kazuyoshi would never be able to fulfill his family's wishes.

Then came his final exams. Kazuyoshi did not seem nervous about what was happening to him, but inside he was dying. He stepped before the Grey Crane himself, and bowed. Toshimoko looked upon him and barked, "Show me the Wheel Stroke to Four-Sides Cut." The rest of the class knew that Kazuyoshi would have trouble with such a complex maneuver, and were stunned when Toshimoko added, "While sitting."

Holding his breath in anticipation and fear, Kazuyoshi grasped the hilt of his blade, and focused. Closing his eyes, he imagined his surroundings, and then placed himself within the mental picture. A smile came to his lips as he envisioned the brilliance and gentle perfection of his stroke, and the cheers of his fellow students around him. He saw the eyes of the Grey Crane's eyes lift in telling pleasure. And – most importantly – he thought of his parents, rising to salute his moment of joy.

The feeling was extraordinary.

Then Kazuyoshi heard a single word, invading his thoughts and breaking his concentration. Panicked, he assumed that he had failed the test, too consumed in his own petty dream to perform. But the word had come from Toshimoko, loud and clear to pierce the roaring cries of the Crane assembled around him.

The word had been *Kanzen*, "Complete."

Without realizing his action, Kazuyoshi had performed the maneuver. His state of enlightened "swordlessness" had robbed him of the moment, but his parents would talk about it for years to come. They are proud of their son, and his "flawless execution" of the Wheel Stroke to Four-Sides Cut.

For the first time in his life, he had lived up to his name, which meant "Harmonious Joy." He was his own master, in command of his own destiny.

Complete.





Name: Kakita Tsuburo
Clan: Crane
School: Kakita Bushi
Honor: 1.8
Rank: 3
Glory: 2.4

Stamina 3
 Willpower 3



Primary Weapon
 Katana 3k2

Skill	Level
Archery	4
Athletics	3
Etiquette	3
Horsemanship	3
Hunting	3
Iaijutsu	5
Investigation	2
Kenjutsu	3
Meditation	2
Shintao	3
Sincerity	2

Strength 2
 Perception 3



Roll & keep to hit
 7k4

Agility 4
 Intelligence 4



Roll & keep Damage
 5k2

Reflexes 4
 Awareness 3



TN to Be Hit
 20 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 4

Wounds

6	-0
6	-1
6	-2
6	-3
6	-4
6	Down
6	Out
6	Dead

Techniques

- The Way of the Crane
- The Sudden Strike
- Strike From the Void

Special Notes

Advantages/Disadvantages

- Driven (Regain his focus)
- Haunted (by his father)
- Lost Love (Nagisa)
- Way of the Land (Crane)

Kakita Tsuburo

Kakita Tsuburo was very young when his mother died, the victim of a sporadic illness that swept across the Crane lands and then vanished. His childhood was difficult, his father trying desperately to compensate for the boy's loss, but in the end only able to help him understand part of his true heritage.

Shortly after his mother's death, he and his father moved to the Kakita training grounds, where they lived for many years. His father, Heisen, was well-known within the Kakita family, being both a respected sensei and an honored *gunso* of the Crane armies. Recognizing his son's pain, and being quite proud of his early development as a duelist, he introduced the boy to many important figures within the academy, and all visiting dignitaries. He told Tsuburo that he had a great opportunity within his life – to honor his mother's life with his own skill.

Throughout the rest of his formative years, his father turned his son's anger into motivation, urging him to excel at everything he attempted. By his *gempukku* ceremony, Tsuburo had already been chosen to study under Kakita Getai, a famed general of the Crane armies who had returned to training during his retirement. Tsuburo's future looked bright, and all the proper eyes were watching him.

But shortly after his assignment with Getai began, his focus began to waiver. Secretly, he had fallen in love with an enchanting woman living within a nearby village. Her name was Nagisa, and he was drawn to her as a moth to the flame. He visited her nightly, and his mind was always swimming in her grace, even during his early morning kata and afternoon meditation.

This was immediately noted by the sensei, whose regiment demanded relentless attention and absolute dedication. Getai reported this lapse to Tsuburo's father, whose response was angry and hurtful all at once. "How could you dishonor your mother's memory like this?" Heisen demanded. "Your shameful carelessness may cost you the best opportunity you will ever receive to make something of her life."

Tsuburo's refused to answer, knowing that the truth would only hurt his father more than silence. He endured the screaming resentment, hoping that he could somehow regain his focus and make the man happy again. But in the following weeks, he failed to improve his mind during practice, and Getai threatened to discontinue his training.

Yet the worst blow was still to come. Only days later, Nagisa told Tsuburo that she had fallen in love with another man. She said that he was another duelist at the Academy, but refused to

name him, saying that she did not want to see either man injured in a meaningless challenge.

Consumed with grief, Tsuburo issued an open challenge to the man who had stolen away his beloved, and waited for a response. But when the request was answered and his opponent stepped forward to meet his sword, his heart sank.

The face of his challenger was his own father's.

Both samurai knew that they could not ignore the challenge or back out of the duel. Tradition demanded that only one of them walk away that night. But Heisen knew that his son had a bright future ahead of him, that he had a chance for a proper family if he would step aside.

"I have lived a full life," he said to Tsuburo, "and you are in the springtime of your own." With that, Heisen entered the duel and allowed his son to win, cutting him down. Confused and stunned by these events, Tsuburo fled back to his Nagisa's home...

...but only found another body. Knowing of the sacrifice her lover was planning to make at the duel for his son, she was heartbroken, and had decided to join him.

Today, Tsuburo is only a hollow shell. He walks the halls of his ancestral home alone, refusing to take visitors. Some claim that he speaks to his father as if the man were still near, but most disregard him as simply mad.





Name: Mirumoto Utsuro
Clan: Dragon
School: Shinjo Bushi *Rank: 3*
Honor: 4.3 *Glory: 5.3*

Stamina 4
 Willpower 3



Primary Weapon
 Katana 3k2

Skill *Level*

Strength 3
 Perception 3



Roll & keep to hit
 8k4

Archery	5
Battle	3
Defense	4
Etiquette	3
Heraldry	3
Horsemanship	5
Horse Archery	4
Hunting	3
Iaijutsu	3
Kenjutsu	4
Meditation	3
Painting	2
Sincerity	2
Yarijutsu	2

Agility 4
 Intelligence 3



Roll & keep Damage
 6k2

Reflexes 4
 Awareness 3



TN to Be Hit
 30 (Heavy armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 4

Wounds

6	-0
6	-1
6	-2
6	-3
6	-4
6	Down
6	Out
6	Dead

Techniques

- _____ The Way of the Unicorn
- _____ The Dance of the Blade
- _____ The Four Winds Strike
- _____
- _____

Special Notes

- _____ Medium castle (100 koku/year)
- _____ Fine Katana and Wakizashi
- _____ Rank (Taisa)
- _____
- _____

Advantages/Disadvantages

- _____ Different School (Shinjo bushi)
- _____ Gentry
- _____ Inheritance (Father's daisho)
- _____ Lost Love (Shinjo Kiku)
- _____
- _____

Mirumoto Utsuro

Allow me tell you the tale of the lost Dragon samurai named Mirumoto Utsuro. He was sent to the Unicorn at an early age to master the ways of horsemanship; he excelled in his studies, and was remarkable at firing a bow while mounted. Riding would become his greatest love. Utsuro became something of a legend among the Unicorn; one tale even describes how he waited for an ambush, striking the bandits with great accuracy, even though they remained unseen throughout.

Utsuro's life among the Unicorn was comfortable and happy; he was treated like one of their own. During his training, he lost his heart to a beautiful maiden named Kiku, and was granted her hand in marriage for his faithful service. Completing his *gempukku* ceremony, Utsuro returned to the Dragon with his bride, earning the respect of his daimyo for his success abroad. It seemed as if life were paving a perfect, unblemished path for the young samurai, but his test was soon to come.

Utsuro shared a special bond with his father, and when the venerable Mirumoto passed, he was crushed. The family daisho was left in Utsuro's care, and he had it placed in the family shrine to honor the noble man he had lost. He instructed all in his household that "upon pain of death, none shall touch my father's sword."

One day, while away on clan duties, a gang of bandits came to Utsuro's estate. Uncaring and unprincipled, the bandits planned to vandalize the family shrine as well. Utsuro's wife Kiku, seeking to save her husband's honor, went to the shrine and took down the honored swords and carried them to safety, knowing that by doing so she violated her husband's wishes.

Utsuro returned late the next day to find his home in shambles, his servants dead, and his wife Kiku with a wakizashi in her belly. She wore ceremonial death robes, a sign that honorable *seppuku* had been committed. On a pillow near her side lay three scrolls. One was a letter to her love, asking forgiveness for her dishonor. Another was a final haiku. And the last was an explanation of what occurred.

After reading them, Utsuro took up his father's sword. Tears fell upon the blade as he wept for his lost love. From that day forth, Utsuro wore the swords that once honored his family, and which had claimed the life of his precious mate.

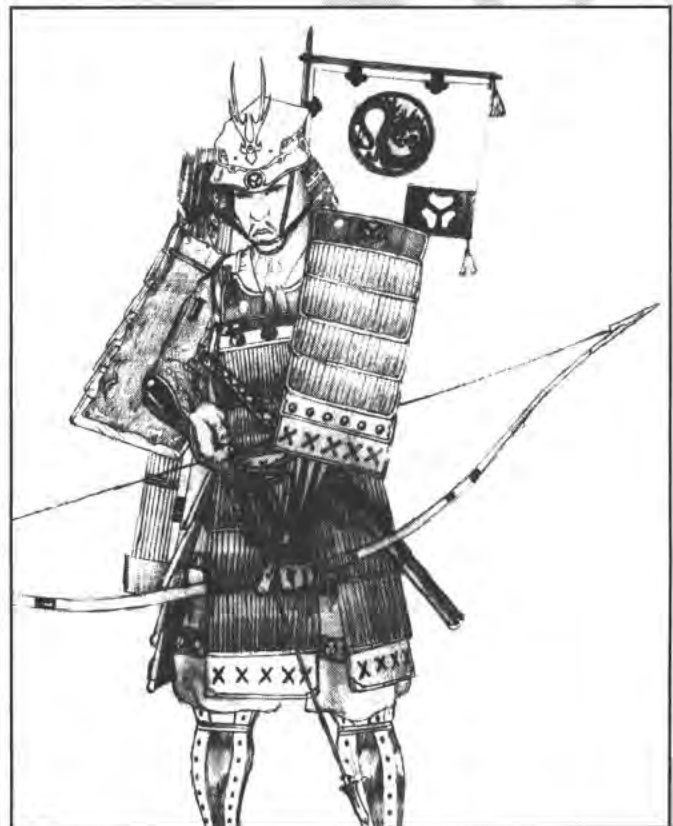
Thereafter, Utsuro traveled Rokugan. Remorse and shame bit at him, and he felt that he must take up a cause in honor of his loss. Several other Dragon samurai went with him, each answering directly to the daimyo. During their travels, Utsuro learned to trust his swords above all else. The spirit of the blade

felt as that of his lost love, and often warned of the presence of the Shadowlands when they drew near. Each time he used them, Utsuro went into a deep mind-slumber, and fought like a beast himself. His brethren were concerned that the sword might one day control him, and their fears worsened when he claimed that Kiku sang to him through the blade, giving his heart the strength to live beyond her.

Utsuro's story is unfinished. There is still more to him, more that you should know and learn. But the story of Utsuro's love is over; he never married again. Yes, there was a competition for the hand of a beautiful Kitsune maiden, but the spirit of his dead wife soured the event.

Within his heart, Utsuro knew that he could not love another. The sweetest crimson blood of his once-beating heart had been spilled by his own hand. To hear him say it, "There is more than just this life, this breath. There are a hundred thousand years beyond this one. I will not sully my soul with actions in this. Again, some day, I shall see the face of my Kiku. When that day comes, I will be whole again. A samurai is the sum of himself and all his actions, forged by those that have come before. If you choose to languish in the moments, and forget the times between, you lose what is precious and pure."

Utsuro's tale is still being told...





Name: Togashi Abekuni
Clan: Dragon
School: Togashi ise zumi
Honor: 2.0
Rank: 2
Glory: 3.5

Stamina 2
 Willpower 2



Primary Weapon
 Tanto 1k1

Skill	Level
Astrology	1
Calligraphy	1
Craft	1
Etiquette	1
Hand-to-Hand	1
History	2
Ichi-miru	2
Investigation	1
Lore: Hantei Family	2
Lore: Otosan Uchi	2
Meditation	1
Nazodo	2
Shintao	3
Sincerity	3
Tantojutsu	1

Strength 2
 Perception 2



Roll & keep to hit
 5k4

Agility 4
 Intelligence 4



Roll & keep Damage
 3k1

Reflexes 3
 Awareness 3



TN to Be Hit
 25 (No Armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 2

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

Tattoos

- Arrowroot
- Bamboo
- Butterfly

Special Notes

- Rank 1 Kitsuki Technique

Advantages/Disadvantages

- Bad Reputation (Irresponsible)
- Chosen by the Oracles
- Colorblind
- Ear of the Emperor
- Kharmic Tie (Togashi)
- Multiple Schools
- Noble Birth

Togashi Abekuni

*"The Elements are no more mysterious
Than your own shadow.
Lift it, crush it, hold it in your hand,
Throw it behind you, and it stays.
When you understand, then you will be Togashi's child."
– Togashi Nyoko*

Once, his name was Otomo Tamekago, youngest brother of the ruling Emperor. Forsaking the courts of his family and leaving behind his name, he traveled to Togashi's mountain. It is said that the trees bowed their heads so their branches would not tear at him. That is not the truth.

Like all truths, his story is much simpler.

From the day of his *gempukku*, he lived in the court of the Hantei, speaking often to the Kitsuki Masters and following in the footsteps of his chosen sensei, Kitsuki Yasu. Only when he first saw the Champion of the Dragon, Togashi Yokuni, kneeling at the foot of the Emperor Hantei, did he truly understand his place in the world.

"All things have a master and all men must serve. Few are able to serve someone who is truly their superior, and most men must find truth in illusion." His intelligence refused to accept the legends of the Togashi Champion and the *ise zumi*. He spent ten years of his life searching for the truth and looking to escape the answer that his mind would not accept. When he discovered the legends were true, only one choice remained.

The path up the mountain was clear.

By then he was 26, already too old to begin a journey of such magnitude. It was thought foolish by some, but Tamekago sought to know and be something beyond his meaningless flesh. As he saw it, the mountain was his salvation.

Tamekago sat at the base of the Togashi's mountain, smoking a cloven pipe and staring into the clouds that surrounded the palace atop the high rock walls. For three days, he watched as the sun and stars passed the palace, rotating in endless cycles in the sky above the mountain.

He rested on the third day; no food passed his lips and he consumed droplets of water only when his thirst was dire. The clouds and the mountain seemed to merge, becoming one, despite their obvious differences. He dreamed of an *ise zumi* approaching from the mountain, his body covered with a twining

Dragon. The Dragon's mouth opened, and fire spewed down the *ise zumi*'s hands and shoulders.

"Why are you here?" the tattooed man asked Tamekago.

"I am here to climb the mountain," he answered.

"And why have you not begun?"

"I have." Tamekago smiled, his voice croaking and parched. "I am the mountain, my Lord."

Although he could see no face, he sensed that a smile had crossed the lips of the enigmatic dream.

Tamekago's initiation into the *ise zumi* was swift, and less than five years later, he climbed down the mountain once more, determined to see the rest of Rokugan.

His name was now Togashi Abekuni.

"Where are you going, Abekuni?" his fellow *ise zumi* asked him.

"I am seeking Jigoku," he laughed, his body covered in twisted vines and complex spirals. "When I find it, I will bring it back to you." The *ise zumi* have never seen him upon Togashi's mountain since that day. Presumably, he has never ceased his wanderings...





Name: Togashi Abokito
Clan: Dragon
School: Togashi ise zumi **Rank:** 3
Honor: 2.2 **Glory:** 3.8

Stamina 3
 Willpower 3



Primary Weapon
 Kaze-do

Skill **Level**
 Bard 1

Strength 2
 Perception 2



Roll & keep to hit
 6k3

Hand-to-Hand 4

Heraldry 3

History 2

Kaze-do 3

Lore (Amaterasu) 2

Medicine 3

Meditation 3

Music 3

Nazodo 3

Origami 2

Painting 2

Shintao 4

Tea Ceremony 2

Theology 3

Agility 3
 Intelligence 3



Roll & keep Damage
 4k2

Reflexes 4
 Awareness 3



TN to Be Hit
 20 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 4

Wounds

6	-0
6	-1
6	-2
6	-3
6	-4
6	Down
6	Out
6	Dead

Tattoos

Crane
Chrysanthemum
Monkey
Unicorn

Special Notes

Advantages/Disadvantages

Ambidextrous
Balance
Chosen by the Oracles
Clear Thinker
Daredevil
Hands of Stone
Lucky
Magic Resistance (2 pts.)
Quick
Voice

Togashi Abokito

Abokito was left on the steps of a Togashi monastery one fateful morning twenty-three years ago. Unsure of his parentage, it was assumed by the monks of the order that he was nobility and would be raised as a samurai. When the time came for him to choose a path, the monks would aid and guide him on his chosen path.

Throughout his early formative years, Abokito showed a great deal of physical stamina. Climbing and leaping from rocks, trees, shrines, and temples were just a small part of the feats that Abokito could muster. Word of his unnatural development quickly spread through neighboring villages, and many of the children from them would sneak away from work to watch him. When he would climb atop a Torii Arch and then leap to the ground below – twisting and turning in the air – they would clap and holler for more.

At seven years, it was determined by high-ranking Togashi lords that Abokito would serve them as an *ise zumi*. He was taken from the monks, and traveled with the Togashi to one of their mountain retreats, where his training began in a cold, dark, solitary room. He was deprived of sensation for the first three months of his stay, locked within a small chamber that made the world seem to turn in odd directions around him. Three months is a lifetime for a young boy; it was an eternity for young Abokito.

The experience still brings shivers to his spine.

Time moved slowly for the active young man as he was forced through one meditative session after another. He yearned to break free of the life of the Togashi monks, but their temple-fortress was impregnable, particularly for a young boy with no weapons, and soon... no hope. It seemed as if the time of his *gempukku* and his tattoos would never come. At 13, the monastic life was wearing upon his patience. But it would be another four years before Abokito would outlive his tortured new life, and become a true Togashi.

When his time finally came, it was at yet another cost. Yokuni ordered that he be given two tattoos – the monkey and the centipede. Abokito would not be given a choice. As he advanced in his training, he was ordered again and again to suffer the tattoos that Yokuni demanded, with no regard for his own desire. It seemed as if Abokito would never know privilege or choice, as if he were being taught a lesson in humility.

Today, Abokito leads a pleasant life, filled with wonder and joy. He has known the company of many of the wisest people in the Empire, and would like to think he has changed their lives in turn. Some might say that he knows neither sorrow or loss. They might even say that he is blessed by the *kami*, that everything has a way of working itself out for him. He is considered lucky, fortunate, a source of enlightenment. People who desire to be blessed migrate to him. And as a monk, Abokito is more than happy to acquiesce.

A few years after his *gempukku*, Abokito encountered an ogre guarding a rugged pass through the mountains. The ogre was facing off against a ronin named Sanzo, and it looked as if the samurai would die. Then the ogre lunged, and the samurai's blade cut deep into its belly. The hulking mass shambled to the earth with a resonant crash, and Sanzo cut away the head, then wiped his blade clean. Not smiling or changing his dour disposition at all, Sanzo picked up his belongings and began his long walk back down the mountains. Abokito followed...



Akodo Yakume

Yakume believes in Bushido, but finds it too restrictive. Impatient and easily frustrated, he occasionally “loses sight” of the Code when it interferes with an investigation or his desire to be well-known. Realizing this to be a character flaw, Yakume tries to overcome it, but so far has had no success. His most recent pilgrimage has taken him from school to school, seeking the advice of different masters about Bushido and what it means. The lack of a definitive answer, however, has planted a seed of doubt in his mind, and Yakume fears the moment will arrive when he must leave Bushido behind.

Yakume was raised by his paternal grandparents after his mother died in childbirth. His father had disappeared while on a mission for the Akodo family many years before. His grandfather, a retired bushi, devoted much time to his art and had little interest in raising another child. He did so solely from a sense of duty to his son, whom he missed greatly.

Several years later, after a particularly brutal argument, Yakume’s grandfather cruelly compared the boy to his father, claiming that he would never live up to his parents’ greatness. Yakume’s self-confidence plummeted. When his *gempukku* neared, Yakume’s attitude worsened, and he became jaded. And when he was at his weakest, and his life seemed too frail to continue, he met Chisuya.

Disguised as a geisha who attended the samurai of his home city, Chisuya was actually a very clever spy, who fed from Yakume’s weaknesses, molding him. She showed him how to withdraw, hiding his thoughts, and how to manipulate others by tailoring his reactions to their personalities and moods.

She also focused on him, listened to him, and spent many long nights indulging his fragile ego. She asked him about his life, his family, and his clan. Eventually, she asked him about his daimyo...

His newfound inner strength impressed the Lion, who asked that he be assigned to Ikoma Nanako after his *gempukku*. He was to work with the Imperial Magistrate as one of her deputies, and aid him in all things. He was only one of two deputies assigned to this high-ranking magistrate, however. The other was named Mirumoto Kagi, and clearly resented Yakume’s presence. He constantly worked to undermine the Akodo’s reputation with their Ikoma lord, and sully his image with the Lion Clan as a whole.

While en route to Ikoma Castle, the magistrate band investigated the disappearance of a hetman from a Matsu village. During their investigation, they learned of a then-unknown

diamond mine beneath the village, in which mujina secretly labored to exploit the area’s resource. They had captured the hetman and turned him over to someone the mujina called “Master”, and who – presumably – headed many of the criminal activities in the region.

Delaying their travels, Ikoma Nanako and her deputies shut down the diamond-smuggling operation and delved further into the mystery, searching for the identity of the mujina “Master.” Eventually, they tracked down an Agasha shugenja who was using powerful magic to transport diamonds to his home deep within the Dragon mountains. They confronted him at his outpost, killing him and recovering much of the stolen wealth.

Yakume had been integral in the investigation’s success. His forthrightness with suspects and ability to face opponents without a shred of fear were ideal for the challenges they faced, and even Kagi’s manipulations were not enough to dull his contribution.

Nanako looked forward to great things for Yakume.

But when they returned, Akodo Yakume was informed of a terrible tragedy. Lion forces near Beiden Pass had been captured, and their lord killed.

Yakume’s lord.

The man whom he had spoken of to the geisha.



Akodo Yoruga

There is a samurai who serves himself before his lord. There is a samurai who cares little for honor and laws, yet wears the badge of a Magistrate. There is a samurai who is merciless, dishonorable, and a blight upon his ancestors' name. There is a samurai who maims and murders most anyone that he has a cause to.

His name is Akodo Yoruga and he is a scourge of the Empire.

Yoruga's life began simply enough. In fact, it was as typical as any samurai could ask for. Ancestral guidance and devotion to his cause were just two of the motivations that drove him during his formative years. When his father died in glorious battle, a shrine was built in his father's name. The funeral ceremony was attended by many members of the clan, and Yoruga's lifelong friend Togashi Otoshi came down from the mountains to attend the gathering.

Some months passed, and Yoruga slipped into despair over his father's passing. On the outside, he looked dour and brooding – not uncharacteristic for one who has lost a father. But deep inside, Yoruga was troubled, and despair gripped him. He drank heavily, and visions of his father haunted him from night to night. Sleep was an illusion, a grand plateau that he would never reach. Many nights, Otoshi sat up with his sick friend as the midnight terrors came, filling Yoruga's mind and exploding from his throat.

The months extended into years, and Otoshi never left the home of Yoruga as the consuming force of the Akodo's madness took over. One morning, Otoshi entered Yoruga's room to find him preparing to commit *seppuku*. The Dragon leapt at the blade and smashed the wakizashi in two, cutting off the better portion of his left hand in the process. Yoruga and Otoshi began shouting over and the rights of a man to take his own life, and the fight ended with Otoshi turning his back on Yoruga, never to return.

After Otoshi left, Yoruga was free to indulge his despair. First, a few bottles of sake, followed by a few drinks of shochu. Yoruga put on pieces of his armor in between drinks, violating the ritual of dress cherished by the Lion. His anger consumed him. When fully prepared, the plates and greaves were misplaced and awkward, strapped to him in odd configurations. Yoruga didn't notice, and didn't care. Filled with anger, Yoruga marched to the home of Akodo Kage to demand the right to *seppuku*. When Yoruga left he bore the mon of a magistrate. To this day, none are sure what occurred within.

Since then, Yoruga has served as a magistrate for his clan, though he remains self-serving, angry, and insolent. Yoruga is a pathetic samurai whose anger clouds his mind and soul. His rage is directed at those who get in his way, and sometimes inanimate objects he perceives to be acting "against him." Without a value system to keep his derision in check, Yoruga has become a chaotic force of nature that will only stop when he dies.

Yoruga has been known to visit backwater villages in the lands of the Scorpion, Unicorn, and Crane, with little respect for or remorse over the people there. Once he killed the headman of a village because he was snoring too loud. Another time, he broke the legs of the most healthy males in the village, so they couldn't work, forcing the women and children into the fields in their place. All the while, Yoruga enjoyed the fruits of their labor and consumed more than his fair share of rice and sake.

Unchecked and unanswerable for any of his wrongdoings, Yoruga's malice continues as a stigma to the samurai code. His lord Kage seems unwilling and uninterested in correcting this behavior; it is only too apparent that Kage reinforces Yoruga's negativity. It should be noted that Yoruga has not been spotted by anyone that could substantiate these claims (*i.e.* no samurai), and any that dared approach him would surely earn his scorn, if not his vengeance.





Name: Ikoma Tsuge
Clan: Lion
School: Akodo War College *Rank: 1*
Honor: 3.7 *Glory: 0.3*

Stamina 2
 Willpower 2



Primary Weapon
 Katana 3k2

<i>Skill</i>	<i>Level</i>
Archery	1
Bard	1
Battle	2
Calligraphy	1
Courtier	1
Etiquette	1
History	2
Iaijutsu	2
Kenjutsu	2
Law	1
Lore (Bushido)	1
Lore (Lion)	1
Painting	1
Poetry	1
Sincerity	1
Tea Ceremony	1
Theology	1
War Fan	1

Strength 3
 Perception 3



Roll & keep to hit
 4k2

Agility 2
 Intelligence 3



Roll & keep Damage
 6k2

Reflexes 3
 Awareness 3



TN to Be Hit
 15 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 3

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

Techniques

The Way of the Lion

Special Notes

Advantages/Disadvantages

- Antisocial (Extreme)
- Benten's Blessing (Handsome)
- Dependent (Grandfather)
- Dishonored
- Frail Mind
- Gullible
- Kharmic Tie (Grandfather, 3)
- Soft-Hearted
- Tactician

Ikoma Tsuge

Tsuge is as awkward as a samurai can be. Born an Ikoma to a proud historian who wished his son to lead men to battle, he followed a regimental life of honor and schooling. This life even continued well past the day that his parents were murdered.

At the moment his parents died, all direction in Tsuge's life ended. Only 12, it was too late for Tsuge to leave the Akodo War College, but too soon for him to begin a life of service to his grandfather, Ikoma Sukemi, as he was expected to do.

Sukemi was a kindly old bard, but a blight on the Lion Clan. He has been relegated to tasks far below his station (he has a Glory Rank of 4), and his fate is to spend the remainder of years as a liaison of the Lion within one of the worst backwater houses of the clans. The cause of his misfortune is unknown to most, and perhaps lost to those who once knew, but Sukemi has brought such shame to his family that none from the Lion will have anything to do with Tsuge as a result.

By virtue of his lineage, Tsuge is bound to service his grandfather – by honor, by name, and by default. This position has forced the young Ikoma – who is trained in the art of war, skilled with the blade, and focused on the honor of his clan – to suffer the same fate as his grandfather. He travels beside the man, from one minor estate to another, telling stories of things done over 50 years ago, and all the while, his honor and skill wither away...

Tsuge is described as quiet and timid. Few regard him as more than an oaf, and his inability to rebut anything in court adds to his "clumsy" reputation. But to some degree, Tsuge's physical stature and prowess serve him well. Lions are often ignored in court – overruled, out-argued, or otherwise disregarded. Most do not have the proper social presence for such an environment. Yet Tsuge has an valuable tool that even he is not aware of – his military training.

His presentation of character is what serves him, without effort. Standing at attention, katana and wakizashi tied perfectly to his obi, Tsuge is a model of physical perfection. It is obvious to others that he has been trained to kill. It is not so obvious to Tsuge that others in court fear his blade, that he is perceived as threatening and ominous. Because of this, he and his grandfather are given latitude in many arenas that others would not. It is *perceived* that he is adept with the blade and is therefore respected. It is *perceived* that he is a quiet and stern warrior and therefore feared. It is *perceived* that he is more than he is...

And so – without his own knowledge – he has *become* more than he is.

Tsuge is an anomaly. His existence seems plagued with difficulties and challenges, yet his face shows no sign of age, and his spirit perseveres despite the obstacles set before him. Always and forever loyal to his family and his clan, Tsuge serves where others do not, but more importantly where others *cannot*.

The scorn he receives from warriors of his own clan is equaled by the amount of respect he commands (quite accidentally) from attendants of the smaller courts throughout Rokugan.

In spite of it all, Tsuge's love and dedication to his grandfather seems to be a cover for a much deeper truth. Those few who know him well have never seen them apart, and would be hard-pressed to notice anything unusual or out of place with such an inwardly complex individual.

A matchmaker by the name of Doji Suko recently approached Tsuge with the offer of a young Mantis bride. Tsuge's response was simple: "The ancestors will guide me to a bride, not a bride to me." When offered a new station, Tsuge replied, "Not without Sukemi-sama." Even the gift of a fine obi was refused with, "My grandfather requires your respect more than I. Perhaps you can find a gift suiting him?" He has shrugged off almost every generous act by another, and reflexively pushes away those who wish to be close to him.





Name: Kitsu Osuji
Clan: Lion
School: Kitsu Sodan-Senzo *Rank: 3*
Honor: 4.2 *Glory: 3.3*

Stamina 3
 Willpower 3



Primary Weapon
 None

Skill	Level
Calligraphy	3
Courtier	2
Etiquette	2
Heraldry	3
History	4
Investigation	3
Lore (Ancestors)	3
Lore (Imperial line)	3
Lore (Jigoku)	3
Meditation	4
Sincerity	3
Theology	3

Strength 2
 Perception 4



Roll & keep to hit
 None

Agility 3
 Intelligence 5



Roll & keep Damage
 None

Reflexes 3
 Awareness 4



TN to Be Hit
 15 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 3

Wounds

6	-0
6	-1
6	-2
6	-3
6	-4
6	Down
6	Out
6	Dead

Techniques

- Sense Ancestors
- Commune with Ancestors
- Summon Ancestors

Special Notes

Advantages/Disadvantages

- Antisocial (Moderate)
- Benten's Blessing
- Dark Secret (Premonition)
- Fascination (Imperial line)
- Full-Blooded Kitsu
- Haunted (by spirits of the Imperial line)

Kitsu Osuji

Throughout his formative years, Kitsu Osuji was taught to respect his elders and worship the dead. As all Lions are, he was trained to keep one eye keenly focused on the present, while the other maintained a vigilant watch over the ancestors who walk alongside each and every samurai.

Those who have come before are like an extended family to Osuji and his kin, and must be equally respected and minded. They are ordinarily silent, gracing the present generation only occasionally with their wisdom, and then only with great courtesy and care. But when they do intercede in present affairs, it is the Kitsu who answer their call, and who strive to interpret their message for the good of the Empire. That is the sacred trust that has been placed in the hands of the Kitsu family.

Carrying the pure blood of those who could hear the elusive voices of their predecessors, Osuji was accepted into the Kitsu Sodan-Senzo school after his *gempukku*. There, he prepared to serve his Empire as all in his line had since the first Kitsu were discovered by Akodo. He was trained to listen to the humble mutterings of past heroes, filtering through the endless stream of wordless thoughts and prideful emotions for messages of import, and to make sense of these messages, so that all of Rokugan could benefit from them.

During his time at the Sodan-Senzo school, Osuji showed great interest in the Imperial line. Fascinated by the long history of the most honored family in all the Empire, he spent many long hours studying their lineage, learning each name and reading all the biographical accounts he could find. If he were any but a Kitsu, whose life is spent in near-constant commune with the dead, he might have been considered obsessed and counseled on the matter. But as it happened, he was simply given space and silent encouragement. "What harm is he doing?" the Kitsu Masters would ask. "All he wishes is to know more of his charges, which can only result in their respect. Let him be."

Osuji's interest in the Imperial line did not go unnoticed. After his graduation from the Sodan-Senzo school, he was recommended for a position at Otosan Uchi as an advisor to the Emperor's family, to commune regularly with the spirits to which he had become so accustomed over the years. Grateful beyond words, he happily accepted, and traveled to the Emerald City at the first chance.

The following decade was like a cheerful whirlwind to Osuji. All of the visitors to the city, and those who lived there were kind and helpful, and his new sensei, Kitsu Tobuse, was pleasant and insightful. Together, they developed his fledgling skills and

honed them to a razor's edge. Tobuse became like a surrogate father to Osuji, showing him the proper etiquette when dealing in delicate discussions with the ancients, and the potential pitfalls within Jigoku, the realm of the dead.

Tobuse's daughter, Ineko, was equally considerate to Osuji, and the two became fast friends during the first months of his stay within the Kitsu Palace. Ineko was much younger than Osuji, and when the time came for her to choose a place to serve the Empire, she opted to remain in the city. She apprenticed to an Imperial courtier and joined the polite ranks of refined society. She and Osuji were married two months later.

Eleven years ago, Tobuse succumbed to his advancing age, and passed into the realm of Jigoku to await his next life. The pain of his loss was lessened for Osuji, who could speak with his mentor, but Ineko was devastated. Osuji spent much of his time over the next several months comforting her, but his attention was very shortly drawn by something else...

At the birth of Emperor Hantei 38th's son, Sotorii, the spirits of the Imperial line began speaking in twisted phrases, their voices laced with sorrow and fear. They claim that the boy will be the death of the line – and worse, the doom of the Empire itself. And they have turned to their dearest champion, Osuji, to do something about it.

For ten years, Osuji has carried this burden with him, watching the Emperor's son blossom into a man. He is torn between his love for the Emperor and his love for the Empire, filled with wonder and fear, and hoping that the spirits of old are wrong.





Name: Matsu Okujo
Clan: Lion
School: Akodo Bushi
Honor: 2.2

Rank: 3
Glory: 4.2

Stamina 3
 Willpower 3



Primary Weapon
 Katana 4k2

<i>Skill</i>	<i>Level</i>
Archery	2
Athletics	2
Bard	1
Battle	4
Defense	4
Hand-to-Hand	2
History	1
Horsemanship	2
Hunting	1
Iaijutsu	4
Investigation	1
Kenjutsu	3
Poetry	1
Shintao	1

Strength 4
 Perception 4



Roll & keep to hit
 6k3

Agility 3
 Intelligence 3



Roll & keep Damage
 8k2

Reflexes 3
 Awareness 3



TN to Be Hit
 20 (Light armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 3

Wounds

6	-0
6	-1
6	-2
6	-3
6	-4
6	Down
6	Out
6	Dead

Techniques

The Way of the Lion
The Strength of Purity
With the Strength of My Ancestors

Special Notes

Fine Katana

Advantages/Disadvantages

Brash
Kharmic Tie (Ikoma Nidoko)
Different School (Akodo Bushi)
Quick
Sworn Enemy (Kakita Ryurai)
True Love (Ikoma Nidoko)

Matsu Okujo

Studying at the Akodo War College provides you with everything you need to be a great Lion samurai. But one thing they don't teach you is how to court properly. Matsu Okujo, therefore, was in unknown territory when he met the person he knew was his soul partner, Ikoma Nidoko. In the end, he won the girl's heart solely by virtue of his true feelings, and his impulsive action...

Unfortunately, the social graces lacked by Okujo were a natural talent of another who desired Nidoko's hand, a Crane courtier named Kakita Ryurai. Both began to court Nido independently at first, and Ikoma Nido tried to prevent them from finding out about one another. But she failed, and became the focus of a vicious competition between them.

Eventually, their conflict grew beyond friendly rivalry, and Okujo challenged Ryurai to a duel to first blood. The winner would have Nido's hand, and the loser would leave her forever. For his part, Kakita Ryurai was quite conciliatory. He waited until Nido arrived, then gave a sincere speech about how it was unfair for both men to demand Nidoko's attentions. He would give Nidoko up, he proclaimed, because he cared for her. Okujo was irate at being denied an honorable challenge, however, and completed the duel by nicking Ryurai on the cheek, making his victory official.

After the duel, Okujo and Nidoko were sent on various missions across Rokugan, and Ryurai returned to the Akodo Palace. But soon enough, the Kakita began to meddle in the Lions' lives. Even though he had forfeited the duel, he continued to pursue his romance with Nidoko. Okujo went to Ryurai and challenged him to another duel - this time to the death. Ryurai was hesitant, but Okujo wouldn't be denied.

Ryurai struck first and had Okujo at his mercy. But instead of destroying the Lion, the Crane courtier seized the opportunity to gloat about his superior dueling skills. This gave Okujo the opportunity to focus all of his force into one blow which split Ryurai in two.

Okujo surrendered himself the next day to officials who were investigating Kakita Ryurai's "murder" for his lord. The Lion was brought before the Emperor and Akodo Toturi, where he explained his actions, and Ryurai's death. The Emperor had to acknowledge the duel, which had been properly arranged through the lords of both samurai, but could not forgive the disrespect; Okujo had spilled noble blood inside the Emperor's own home. He was banished from Otosan Uchi.

Unfortunately the wars between the Lion and the Crane had become severe, and Okujo and Nidoko were summoned to help fight. On the way back to Lion lands, Nidoko disappeared. She left Okujo a note that said, "I must deal with my dishonor in my own fashion. Do not follow me."

Okujo grudgingly obeyed.

Matsu Okujo, upset about the disappearance of his love, took out his frustrations against the Crane armies. During one battle, Okujo captured the Crane banner, and carried it back to his headquarters, demoralizing the enemy.

Yet, Nidoko still failed to return. She was nowhere to be found. Eventually, Okujo set out to find her, following a path that led into Phoenix territory. Rumors of a samurai matching her description, carrying a baby and traveling with a Crane samurai, abounded. Okujo still looks for her, afraid to know her true fate, but unable to turn back. He defies her will by following her, but cannot allow himself to care. She is his life, and all of his glory is for nothing if she is not beside him.

Traveling with him is his *chui* Daishi, assigned to defend him from all danger. Daishi would gladly give his life for his lord, but does not know how to protect him from the danger of the truth (if Nidoko has truly borne the son of a Crane). Only when they discover the girl's fate will he know how to protect his Lord. Daishi prays that decision will never come.





Name: Asako Gojikata
Clan: Phoenix
School: Asako Henshin *Rank: 2*
Honor: 0.5 *Glory: 1.3*

Stamina 2
 Willpower 2 **Earth** (2)

Primary Weapon
 Katana 3k2 / Dai-kyu

Skill	Level
Acting	4
Archery	4
Athletics	4
Calligraphy	2
Commerce	3
Defense	2
Gambling	3
Hand-to-Hand	2
History	1
Investigation	2
Kenjutsu	3
Meditation	2
Medicine	1
Mimic	3
Shintao	3
Sincerity	3
Sleight of Hand	4
Stealth	4

Strength 3
 Perception 3 **Water** (3)

Roll & keep to hit
 6k3

Agility 3
 Intelligence 3 **Fire** (3)

Roll & keep Damage
 6k2

Reflexes 4
 Awareness 4 **Air** (4)

TN to Be Hit
 20 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____ **Void** (4)

Initiative
 One die + 4

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

Spells

Rank One: The Riddle of Air
 Rank Two: The Riddle of Water

Special Notes

Advantages/Disadvantages

Bland
Dependent (Reiuko)
Insensitive
Precise Balance

Asako Gojikata

She was once known only as Gojikata, a *hinin* girl born into a lowly eta family living at the foot of the northern Phoenix mountains. She was bright and agile, and many smiled with bitter pity in their eyes when they looked at her. She would never know the privileged life of a samurai, though her heart beat with the same fury.

She was a peasant... nothing more.

When she was four, the rice paddies dried up and the taxes could not be paid in full. Gojikata's father was worked to death in the fields, along with many others, to satisfy the tax collectors. She still remembers his smiling face as he told her that he would be back in the fall, then locking eyes with him as he was led away to work in another province. He never returned.

Her mother, Reiuko, tried to explain to little Gojikata what had happened when the fall snows came and he had not yet returned. She told the girl that he had gone on to another life, a better life. But Gojikata would have none of it. She knew her father's true fate, and hated the "rich samurai" for his ignominious death. She vowed to make them pay for it – in kind.

Reiuko tried to make Gojikata understand that the Celestial Order existed for a reason, and that the *hinin* were servants and menial workers for a reason that they could not comprehend, and Gojikata feigned understanding. But inside, she knew that she would take the abundant wealth of the samurai away from them. She would remind them that the *hinin* were human, too.

Then the Michibiku came for her. She was too young to understand what was happening to her, only weeks into her sixth year. But Asako wanderers had sensed her potential, and moved quickly to acquire her before it manifested. They were curt and abrupt, arranging for her release into their custody, buying her from the lord she and her family had known for two generations.

She could not refuse; she had no rights.

She could not fight; she was not trained as a samurai.

So, for the second time in her life, she said goodbye to a parent, and was taken away by the shugenja.

Gojikata had somehow been born with the latent talents of an Asako *Henshin*, the Asako told her. She had the ability within her to tap into and manipulate the Gift of Man, a very special power passed down from the time of the *Kami* themselves. She would go with them to the secret Asako Henshin Academy, where she

would learn how to control the abilities that would soon manifest within her.

For several years, Gojikata worked to focus the confusing energies that came and left her vision. The experience was harrowing, and left her dry and empty, but she eventually learned to harness her vision and even manipulate the forces of nature, to a degree. The first time she used her talents, she knew that they could help her get what she wanted.

They could help her in her quest to hurt the samurai.

The Asako Fushihai took notice of her obsession, though they could not discern its source. They only knew that something had died within the girl when she was very young, and that – even though she began her Asako training soon in life – she was in danger of losing her way along the sacred Path of Man. If she were not careful, if the illness within her spirit was not corrected soon, she would stray, and be lost forever.

Gojikata has been denied access to further Riddles or knowledge within the Asako archives. For now, the Fushihai are dedicated only to discovering the source of her pain.

To do that, they know, she will have to return home, and face her past. Otherwise, she will never see the future.



Isawa Ahiro

Fearing that she would never bear children, Ahiro's mother prayed constantly to the Fortunes for a son. She spent many hours, weeks, and even years before their shrines, beseeching them to bless her family. At last, she had twins, but at the cost of her own life. Although he never said it out loud, their father was very bitter for losing his beloved, convinced that the Fortunes had robbed him of his wife to grant her request.

As were all children in their family, the twins were sent to school in the ways of the Elements. They rarely saw their father, who was usually buried in his research. Both children were bright and gifted in the arts, quickly rising through the fundamental training of their clan. They were also very competitive – something their teachers encouraged, and used to aid their studies. As they grew, the competition between them only increased, and as their father realized their true potential, he became even more bitter.

When they were fourteen, their father was killed in the Crab lands while battling a vicious Oni that tormented its victims with their greatest and most secret fears. The final torture their father endured was to reexperience the pain of his wife's death. After his release into Meido, he was set free as a restless ghost, and – blaming the twins for the death of his wife – found himself bound to them, destined to haunt their lives forever. The presence of his lost father drives Ahiro to correct his own faults, and feel empathy and – knowing their less brutal face – to show pity for restless spirits as well.

Then Shiba Tirue entered their lives. She was beautiful, and of great station, and the twins both fell in love with her. Unfortunately, it was soon revealed that Tirue's father was a traitor, selling Phoenix Clan secrets to the Scorpion for personal gain. One year before, Tirue had come across a scroll that detailed her father's transgressions, and – fearing its implications – had stolen it. She hid it among the love scrolls that Ahiro's brother had given her.

Seeing that Tirue was distraught, Ahiro's brother pledged to cheer her up. He knew where she kept the scrolls he had given her, and decided to slip a small gift in with them for her to find later. When he saw the scroll, however, he knew immediately what it meant – and what he could use it for. So, forgetting the gift, he left with the evidence in hand.

His intent was to blackmail the Scorpion Clan, but – being only 16 – he was no match for them. They promptly turned the tables on him, and planted evidence that he and Tirue were the traitors. Realizing what had happened, Ahiro's brother panicked.

He begged to make a deal with the Scorpion, who gladly complied. In return for the original scroll, he would be cleared of all implications, leaving Tirue to take the fall – alone...

Tirue's father was disgraced, and her own nobility stripped, leaving her nearly a ronin, hardly considered a "true" Phoenix – among her own clan, or in the eyes of the rest of the Empire.

Ahiro is dedicated to reclaiming his love's true heritage, and hunting down the man he once knew as "brother." He also wishes to find a way to defeat the menace of the Shadowlands, and free his father from his eternal torment. He pores over every scroll he recovers, and questions every person he meets, hoping each time to find something that can help him.

Ahiro is fascinated by the world around him. Secretly prideful that he has been able to travel far from the Phoenix lands to experience the world, he hopes to collect as much information as possible to help his clan solve the many mysteries of the Elements. He also harbors a deep respect for life, taking his role as a shugenja very seriously. Ahiro is filled with a sense of balance in all things – he is difficult to anger and allows most slights to go without response. He tries to temper his youthful pride and aggressiveness with the teachings of the peaceful Phoenix Clan, and feels his personal honor is measured by his own actions, not by the idle chatter of others.





Name: Isawa Chiroku
Clan: Phoenix
School: Isawa Ishiken
Honor: 1.3
Rank: 2
Glory: 2.4

Stamina	2		2
Willpower	3		
Strength	2		2
Perception	5		
Agility	2		1
Intelligence	1		
Reflexes	2		2
Awareness	5		
Void Points Spent			6

Primary Weapon
None

Roll & keep to hit
Doesn't fight

Roll & keep Damage
Doesn't fight

TN to Be Hit
10 (No armor)

Initiative
One die + 2

Skill	Level
Astrology	3
Bard	2
Calligraphy	2
Cipher	2
History	4
Investigation	1
Lore (Shugenja)	4
Lore (Void Magic)	4
Lore (Various others)	
Meditation	3
Research	2
Shintao	3
Spellcraft	3
Tea Ceremony	1

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

Spells

Sense Void, Drawing the Void,
 Sense, Commune, Summon,
 Accounts of Shorihotsu, Blessing
 of Purity, Calm Mind, Moment
 of Clarity, The Path to Inner
 Peace

Special Notes

**Advantages/
Disadvantages**

- Bad Reputation (Insane)
- Contrary
- Enlightened Madness (Air)
- Forbidden Knowledge (10 pts.)
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Isawa Chiroku

*"I can't feel my eyes or face.
My lips are saggy flesh on the end of a useless tumor.
I am nothing but sinew and uselessness.
Today is the day of my destiny.
Today ends the mystery."*

– Isawa Chiroku

Isawa Chiroku's humble beginnings don't matter. His uselessness doesn't begin there. I won't start there. I won't tell the story of how he became what he is. I won't hide behind honorable words or effete discourse. I will tell you the truth.

I will tell you that it all began with one mistake...

A few years ago, Isawa Chiroku was searching for a murderer. The key to finding this man lay in entering his mind. Chiroku entered the mind of Nakiro – "The Blade" – a notorious killer in the Phoenix lands. Once inside, he was able to understand and manipulate the villainous thug, but at a price. Once the subdued Nakiro was captured, Chiroku found he could not escape the mind of the murderer. His sleep remained.

The Phoenix were at a loss as to releasing their trusty Ishiken from the foul mind of Nakiro. Days passed, and the tension began to mount. In a lonely prison cell, the foul and demented Nakiro began to twitch as fervor and anxiety rose in everything and everyone around him. Then suddenly, silently, the world began to crack around the killer. His eyes widened, his mouth spit forth vomitous sludge, and ears bled with a thick, unearthly ichor. Nakiro was dead, and when Chiroku woke, his mind was useless. That is where his story begins...

A few years ago, Isawa Chiroku challenged Agasha Goemon to a duel of fire. Goemon had claimed that Chiroku's sister was not kidnapped, and that the ruse of his "torment" was as fake as his magic. Chiroku knew no response, other than to fight. Each shugenja's master was addressed to approve the duel. Tempers were high, but it took many weeks for the daimyo of both families to accede to the request. It shouldn't have mattered, however; Chiroku's loss of face would have been a more acceptable defeat.

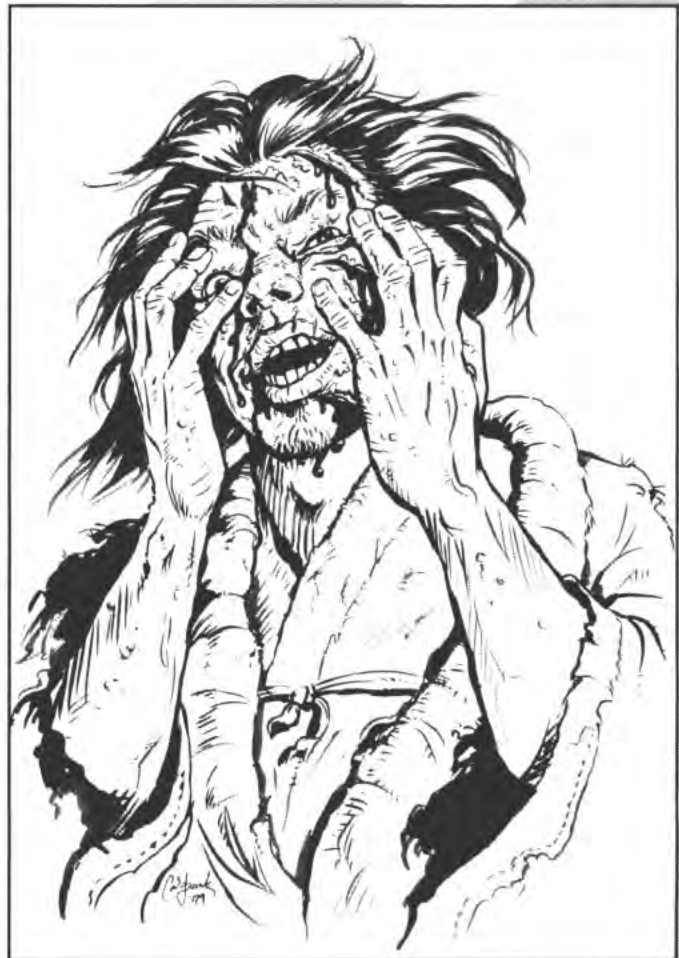
Mad kami swarmed through the air around the Ishiken. In a flash, they cut and tore at Chiroku. Horrible sounds erupted from the flayed, scarred, and emaciated shugenja. Before Goemon could summon spirits to his aid, the husk of his opponent lie smoking and curled in an inhuman pose. Chiroku's

charred form lie dormant for many hours before he stood and choked for air. He would never be the same. That is where the story begins...

A few years ago, Isawa Chiroku opened a scroll not meant for mortals. Inside lie the words and incantations to magics unsummoned in over 1000 years. The results were permanent and unforgiving. That is where the story begins...

A few years ago, Isawa Chiroku summoned the powers of the Earth while in an underground grotto. The Earth rebelled, and Chiroku found himself beneath several tons of rock for many days. Chiroku's fear of dark, enclosed places gagged him, and he began to claw and scrape at the very earth he had summoned. When he was able to finally free himself, Chiroku's madness had grown to encompass everything he saw. That is where the story begins...

A few years ago, Isawa Chiroku met a Yogo. That is where the story begins...



Shiba Rojiman

Like an untamed stallion, Shiba Rojiman has always been fiery and tempestuous, unable to maintain the attention to detail demanded of warriors within his family. Unable to meditate for any length of time or even complete the tea ceremony, Shiba trainers flagged him early on as a lost cause, recommending that he be included in the rank and file of the Phoenix infantry, where his anger and frustration could be directed, and he could be of some use to the Phoenix Clan.

"Rojiman cannot protect anyone while his vision is limited to the blade," they said. "We need those who can disregard all but their charge, to become an Isawa's body and mind, to replace them unto death."

This greatly disappointed Rojiman's immediate relatives, who had had great hopes for the young samurai. His father, in particular, took the news hard, as he had once wished to become a Shiba yojimbo himself, to serve the noble Isawa family in the sacred role set forth by their Kami ancestor, but was robbed of his opportunity when a freak training incident took his eye.

Rojiman's father did not understand his dysfunction. Being the picture of health and strong as an ox, he was an ideal candidate for the Shiba schools, but they would not have him. "You are too concerned with yourself to care for another!" The wounds Rojiman felt from these words cut far more deeply than any he would receive as an adult.

Rojiman did not resent the Isawa and their elitist primping as so many young Shiba do. He was simply not grounded in his surroundings. He was constantly distracted, his mind lost within any one of a thousand heroic dream-scenarios. He became easily bored with the present, and could not remain idle for very long without a senseless outburst.

His words were always blunt and pointed, preventing him from making any lasting friendships, and his lack of tact cost him and his family many important contacts. Other samurai his age were cruel to him, knowing that he had a short fuse; they would laugh and tease him until he exploded in anger.

But one day, during a brutal hazing, Rojiman lashed out. He wildly wrestled any within arm's reach, forcing two of them to the ground, where he blindly beat them until they went limp. Several long moments later, he was dragged from the two bodies by Kamen and others, who had been summoned by the survivors of his "vicious attack"

The Shiba Masters watched the recovery of the two victims closely, withholding their judgment until it was known that they would live. Neither would become a Shiba protector; one would

never walk again, and the other had extreme difficulty speaking, his mind damaged in the assault.

The Shiba knew of the conflicts Rojiman had endured with the others, but this outburst was a surprise. "He is needlessly aggressive," they told Rojiman's father. "He is no use to us, and he is now a danger to all those around him. Though we cannot fault him for protecting himself, it is obvious that he needs to be placed in an environment in which he can excel."

At the first opportunity, Rojiman was transferred to the Hida, where he was placed under the careful guidance of their finest tutors. He immediately responded to the harsh martial training he received at their school, the disconnection he displayed releasing an explosion of physical prowess. For the first time in his life, Rojiman was in his element. He was at peace.

One of the Masters took a personal interest in him. Hiruma Meiso, an aging Crab who had spent the bulk of his years among the Hida, recognized within Rojiman the same level of intensity and single-mindedness that drove the infamous Hiruma Berserkers. There were moments during the battle drills he knew that Rojiman was only one heartbeat away from becoming unhinged.

Meiso set himself to unleashing Rojiman's hidden rage. With every passing day, his frenzy increases. He is like a caged animal, ready to be let free...





Name: Bayushi Lorenko
Clan: Scorpion
School: Shinjo Bushi
Honor: 2.5
Rank: 1
Glory: 1.8

Stamina 2
 Willpower 2



Primary Weapon
 Katana 3k2

Skill	Level
Acting (Kabuki)	1
Archery	1
Courtier	1
Defense	1
Etiquette	1
Heraldry	1
Herbalism	1
Horsemanship	2
Hunting	1
Investigation	1
Kenjutsu	1
Knife	1
Sincerity	2
Stealth	1

Strength 2
 Perception 2



Roll & keep to hit
 4k3

Agility 3
 Intelligence 3



Roll & keep Damage
 5k2

Reflexes 3
 Awareness 3



TN to Be Hit
 15 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 3

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

Techniques

The Way of the Unicorn

Special Notes

Advantages/Disadvantages

Benten's Blessing
Dependent (Infant son)
Different School (Shinjo Bushi)
Gaijin Name
Voice

Bayushi Lorenko

It wasn't supposed to be this way for Shinjo Lorenko. Her father had been trying to find a suitable husband for her since she was a child, but her *gaijin* name and appearance meant that most matchmakers refused to help. As she grew into a strikingly beautiful young woman, her father despaired of ever finding the proper husband for her and decided to enroll her in the Bayushi school, hoping that she might learn to take care of herself.

Lorenko possessed a keen mind and stubborn determination. When observers from throughout Rokugan came to inspect the Scorpion's next generation of bushi, they could not help but notice the tall samurai-ko with pale features and long, flowing brown hair. And without exception, representatives of the Seven Great Clans would sigh and mutter, "It's a pity she's so... *gaijin*."

None of this particularly bothered Lorenko. She knew her duty, and the spirit of Lady Shinjo flowed through her "*gaijin*" veins with much more veracity than anyone realized.

By the time her *gempukku* ceremony arrived, a long-rumored diplomatic initiative between the Unicorn and the Scorpion had been a success, and age-old blood feuds were been resolved. She was honored to be summoned to appear before Shinjo Yokatsu and Ide Tadaji. To cement the alliance, the nephew of the Scorpion Daimyo would take a Unicorn bride. Her father had begged that she be granted this honor: Lorenko later found out he was the only father who volunteered his daughter for the "honored" position.

There was to be no *gempukku*, only a wedding.

Lorenko did her best to fit into Scorpion society. She threw away her dowdy riding kimonos and began to wear the finest crimson-dyed silks. She learned that a little perfume could make her smell like cherry blossoms rather than a stable. She even learned to drink her tea without horse milk. Best of all, she liked the way the delicate Scorpion mask hid her *gaijin* features.

Despite her worst fears, her husband proved to be surprisingly patient with his new bride. Their marriage became somewhat comfortable, and when Lorenko gave birth to an heir, her husband was as proud as any new father. The next few months were the happiest in Lorenko's life. She never knew the joy that a baby boy and an attentive - if not yet loving - husband could bring. She reeled in her good fortune; things weren't supposed to go this way for Shinjo Lorenko.

They didn't. One morning she was awakened by the sound of her servants screaming.

Lorenko had been sleeping in a pool of blood that flowed from a tanto in her husband's back.

Sometime during the previous night, an assassin had used that tanto to strike down her husband. She was immediately arrested for her husband's murder, based on the testimony of a despicable shugenja neighbor. But as she was led to her execution, one of the hooded guards turned and slaughtered the others. It was Shoji's brother Aramoro who quickly explained that the murder was a by-product of a much greater plot. Lorenko was given three days to find enough evidence to force the shugenja to recant in open court. Only if she could accomplish this mission would she be worthy of the name Bayushi.

Lorenko spent the next three days dodging magistrates and unraveling the plot against her husband. She discovered that the shugenja had summoned an Oni bound to her husband's name. The Unicorn she had been would have just killed the shugenja and avenged her husband, but the Scorpion she had become knew he was far more valuable alive. She blackmailed him, forcing him to recant his testimony.

Lorenko was thereafter offered full fealty to the Scorpion Clan and a position as a diplomatic courier. Her position makes her a prime target for anyone wanting to learn the secrets of the Scorpion, or to prevent them from passing on the secrets of others. She watches and learns from the Lady Kachiko, and survives by combining the speed of Lady Shinjo with the deception of Lord Bayushi. Through it all, she watches over her infant son and wonders if someone will strike at him when they cannot catch her.

And she wonders one other thing as well. Was that her husband's blood she slept in that night, or the blood of the Oni?





Name: Bayushi Toshiro
Clan: Scorpion
School: Soshi Shugenja
Honor: 1.5
Rank: 4
Glory: 1

Stamina 3
 Willpower 4



Primary Weapon
 Bo Stick 2k2

Skill	Level
Bojutsu	5
Calligraphy	2
Defense	5
Etiquette	2
Iaijutsu	5
Intimidation	3
Jujutsu	5
Kenjutsu	3
Meditation	2
Origami	3
Shintao	4
Sincerity	2

Strength 3
 Perception 4



Roll & keep to hit
 10k5

Agility 5
 Intelligence 4



Roll & keep Damage
 5k2

Reflexes 5
 Awareness 4



TN to Be Hit
 25 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 5

Wounds

6	-0
6	-1
6	-2
6	-3
6	-4
6	Down
6	Out
6	Dead

Spells

- Sense, Commune, Summon,
- Command the Mind (Innate),
- Essence of Air (Innate), The Fire From Within, Hands of Jurojin,
- Inflame, The Path to Inner Peace, Way of Deception

Special Notes

Advantages/Disadvantages

- Antisocial
- Ascetic
- Black Sheep
- Bland
- Colorblind
- Combat Reflexes
- Forsaken
- Hands of Stone
- Innate Abilities (see Spells)

Bayushi Toshiro

As a child, Bayushi Toshiro would say to his parents that he “loved to make the birds fly.” They would simply laugh at his imagination, but for many years, he honestly believed that he was responsible for their places in the sky.

What he did not realize then was that he was gifted with the blooming powers of a shugenja; the Elements were merely “speaking with him.” By his eighth year, he was able to tap directly into the Air and Water, *feeling* the same emotions as the kami within them. And by the tender age of ten, he could tap into the energies of nature, creating and manipulating minor tendrils of air and subtle eddies of water to do his bidding.

He practiced Jujutsu and Bojutsu perhaps more than he should have. Enjoying their simplicity, he could set his mind to other tasks while he practiced, which allowed his twin prodigal talents to manifest and grow at a roughly equal rate. Toshiro grew to believe that the Bo Stick and his bare hands held a distinct advantage over the samurai standards (the katana and wakizashi), in that he could use them to put a man down without immediately killing him. The inherent logic and humanity in this was important to him, and fueled his lack of respect for the samurai class.

The Scorpion Clan saw him as a prime candidate for the Soshi shugenja school, where he could harness his latent abilities with the Elements – and where they could train him into an assassin of frightening precision...

During his time at the school, Toshiro began to notice something amiss with his family. They stopped coming to see him, and were not there for his *gempukku*. He was told that they were on a delicate mission for the clan beyond Scorpion borders, and that they would return soon.

Then, several months later, Toshiro was told that he would have to kill his own parents, who had betrayed the clan and were threatening to testify against the Scorpion at the Imperial Courts. He was given no choice – this would be his only chance of avoiding his parents’ dishonor himself.

But Toshiro – for all his dark impulses – could not bring himself to harm his own blood. He refused to kill them, and left the clan to find out why his parents would testify against them, hoping that, in the process, he would find the answers to the nagging doubts he felt about the Scorpion in the process.

Arriving too late to prevent them from testifying, he tracked down and visited the people that had birthed and raised him. But someone else had beaten him to it. Within the chambers, their bodies lay within growing pools of their own blood.

Toshiro has no idea who killed his parents, but he is sure that the Scorpion had nothing to do with it. They welcomed him back into the fold without missing a breath, assuming that he was responsible for their deaths. But he knows that he is not, and suspects that the person who did also forced them to testify against the Scorpion.

The masters of manipulation are being manipulated...

Personality: Toshiro’s passions have always paralleled his erratic mind, at once calm and comforting, with an underlying tension that threatens to explode at the slightest provocation.

Never fitting in with anybody, Toshiro has always lived on the edge. But in his spare time, he has taken up many hobbies to relax his mind and ease the pressure within him. Origami, painting, and other “mindless” tasks are among his favorite pastimes; he indulges in them fanatically to curb his dangerous impulses.

The Tao is another tool he uses for this purpose. Beyond being a guidebook for his spiritual erudition, he looks to Shinsei’s teachings as a way to grasp the confusing world around him, which plague him regularly. Toshiro does not comprehend why many Rokugani customs persist, especially those which restrict a person’s ability to “choose for himself”, or those which involve ambiguous moral stances.

Bushido, in particular, is a quandary to Toshiro. After many years of careful consideration, he has finally come to the conclusion that it is nothing more than a tool which he can use to manipulate “samurai.” He looks past its rigid tenets, pointing out the delicate acceptance that it demands, and condemns it as nothing more than a crutch.





Name: Shosuro Niobu
Clan: Scorpion
School: Bayushi Courtier **Rank: 1**
Honor: 1.3 **Glory: 2.1**

Stamina 2
 Willpower 3



Primary Weapon
 Wakizashi 2k2

Skill	Level
Courtier	3
Defense	3
Etiquette	2
Investigation	3
Kenjutsu	3
Law	2
Lore (Shadowlands)	4
Naginata	3
Poison	3
Seduction	2
Sincerity	3
Stealth	4
Yarjutsu	2

Strength 2
 Perception 3



Roll & keep to hit
 6k3

Agility 3
 Intelligence 4



Roll & keep Damage
 4k2

Reflexes 4
 Awareness 4



TN to Be Hit
 20 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 4

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

Techniques

Weakness is My Strength

Special Notes

Advantages/Disadvantages

Ancestor (Bayushi, linked with his Crab commander)

Shosuro Niobu

Trained at the Bayushi Courtier School, Shosuro Niobu was not considered one of its most talented students. Try as he might, he couldn't capture or fully appreciate the subtlety of the Bayushi techniques. He felt within his spirit a growing need to do something – anything – rash, whenever he tried to focus on a complex scheme. His mind was not set to do the duty that his clan demanded, yet with encouragement, favors, and a soft convincing voice, he completed his training. A close relative of the daimyo's wife, Niobu graduated with honors and was given a grand *gempukku* despite his lack of accomplishment. He carries this shame close to his heart and it haunts him still in everything he does.

Two months after his *gempukku*, he escorted Yogo Asami to the Emperor's Winter Court, an honor that filled his heart with pride. Here he was, Niobu, among the greatest legends of Rokugan – Kachiko, Toturi, Hoturi, Baka, Sorai, Yoshi, Yuri; all of them present.

"But with the coming of greatness comes the attendance of foolery." At the court, a drunken Crab was waving his arms about and telling grand tales. He spoke of the valor of his comrades on the great Carpenter Wall. He called the courtiers cowards who would rather talk than draw their swords. He called the Crane children and Scorpion peasants. His drunken behavior escaped most everyone's notice. But not Niobu.

Niobu shook his head in disbelief. This Crab dared to speak ill of the great men and women of the Emperor's court! Niobu opened his mouth to speak, but the Crab waved his hand and dismissed him. "None of you would survive a single night on the Wall." Niobu's eyes grew narrow. Most everyone must have heard the belligerent Crab, but no one seemed to take notice. *'Someone should say something'* he thought to himself. Swallowing his Scorpion teaching, Niobu approached.

"To survive longer on that Wall than you ever would in this court."

The room grew silent. Now people were listening. All eyes turned to the Scorpion courtier and the Crab bushi. The game was set. Winter Court was a place for such extravagant claims. But this was something new. Who would acknowledge such boasting? Certainly a duel was imminent.

Then, a slender figure moved through the crowd, placing a hand on each of their shoulders. "It is done," she said with a velvet voice, turning to Niobu. "You will spend a year on the Kai Wall."

Then she turned to the Crab. "And you shall spend a year here... with us."

She smiled. "We shall see who returns to their clan in one piece."

It has been eight months since that day. The fight on the Wall is endless. There is always something to do, something to fight. The fire inside Niobu has a focus now, and he is not so scared of the silly, harsh words of the "dancers" in the courts.

On the Wall, Niobu has lost three fingers, a few teeth, and his left eye, but he has gained the respect of the Crabs standing beside him in defense of the Empire. He has forgotten the games and dances of the courts, for his breath is filled with the battle cries and war songs of the proud and bold Crab Clan. He has even forgotten his own name, preferring the name his brothers have given him...

"Little Scorpion."

Uniquely, Niobu is both blessed and cursed. His beautiful features and radiant voice still shine through his rough exterior, but his disfigurements and battle scars are a reminder of his station and what has become of the soft-spoken courtier.



Shosuro Omomi

Shortly before Omomi was born, his father divorced his mother in favor of a young and beautiful Unicorn diplomat. His mother, the niece of the Shosuro family daimyo at that time, returned home in shame, where his uncle helped her give birth to him. The Shosuro daimyo named the boy Omomi, which means "weight", for the burden that his mother bore.

Nineteen years later, most of the courts of Rokugan, and all who really care to pay attention, are aware of Omomi's lineage. He has spent the better part of his youth rebuilding his honor in the face of his father's abandonment, acting as a *yojimbo* at court, so that he may better impress the influential visitors there.

His ultimate goal is to raise his station to a point where he may confront his father, challenge him to a mortal duel, and reclaim his proper bloodline. But his father has become the diplomatic attaché of the Shiba daimyo through his marriage into the Unicorn Clan. His betrayal of Omomi's mother gave him a great deal of power, which Omomi now must overcome in his vendetta, if he wishes to avenge his past.

Beyond this obsession, Omomi desires his own son, Chikumo, to have the father Omomi himself never knew, and to pass on a favored bloodline to the boy when he reaches his *gempukku*. His wife, the beautiful daughter of a Kuni Witch Hunter, is the only exception he has allowed himself without caring how it affects his rigid self-image, and he once loved her quite passionately, though this spark has waned in recent years.

Possibly in response to the heavy duty he has burdened himself with, Omomi has taken another lover to ease the troubles in his personal life: Yukiko, a geisha who resides near his home. He believes (incorrectly) that his wife does not know of his affair, and continues to monitor his reactions and carefully plot his moves around her. Chikumo, knowing of the inner turmoil her husband suffers, is hurt by his liaison, but cannot bring herself to deny him. For now, their marriage remains as stable as could be hoped, given the circumstances.

Omomi holds Bushido in the highest regard. He knows that it is his greatest tool for improving his personal and family honor, and in reclaiming his ancestral line by killing his father. Thus, he tries to uphold the samurai ideal wherever he goes, unless his father is present (in which case, if pressed enough, he can lose control of his emotions).

Privately, Omomi is concerned about the reputation of his native clan. Their actions for and against the other clans of the Empire rarely sit well with him, and he must constantly

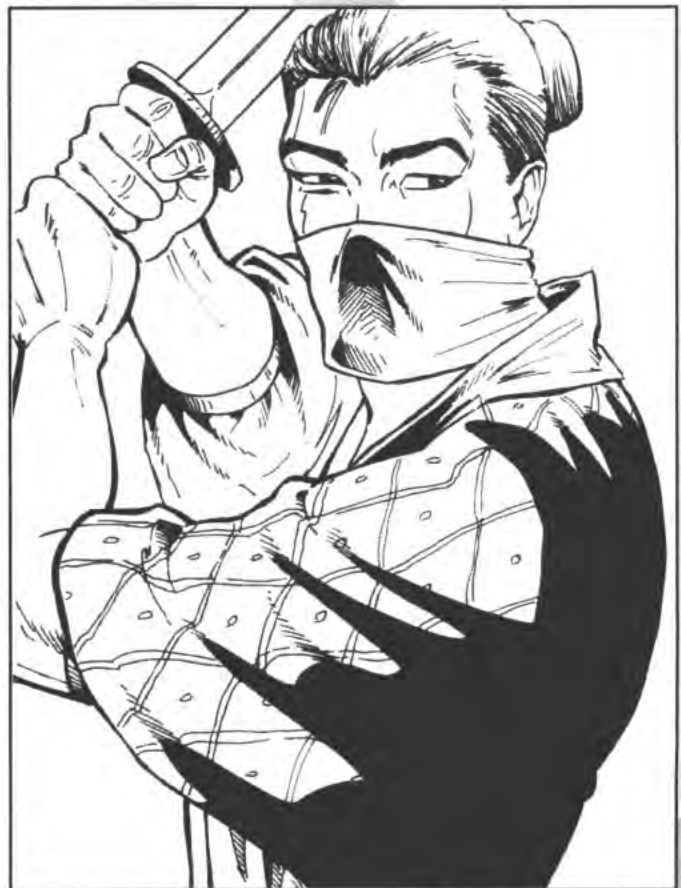
reconcile his personal ethics with their "underhanded" philosophy. Outwardly, however, he remains as true to them as possible, knowing that acting against his own clan will not help either his family's reputation or his chances against his father.

Omomi prepares every day for death, knowing that the time of his challenge could come at any time. He has already written his death poem, which he has had stitched into the inner lining of his vest, to be found at his final breath.

This mentality affects everything Omomi does. In this regard, if no other, he is the perfect samurai – without fear of death, he can charge into any situation, unconcerned about the outcome. Occasionally, when memories of his father surface, he becomes angry, or remembers that he must survive to ensure his disrepute, and this dedication is lost. Fully aware of this failing, though, he works to correct it as early as possible.

Omomi is tall, like his father, but is lithe and narrow. His hair is long, and worn with a well-kept topknot. Except in battle, he does not wear armor. He favors dark clothing and – unlike many Scorpion – rarely wears a mask; he has an old and tattered silk scarf of his mother's which he wears instead.

His katana is not worn, per se; instead, it is always carried in his left hand, ready to be drawn at the slightest provocation.





Name: Soshi Bento
Clan: Scorpion
School: Soshi Shugenja **Rank: 3**
Honor: 3.6 **Glory: 3**

Stamina 3
 Willpower 3



Primary Weapon
 Wakizashi 3k2

Skill	Level
Acting	2
Bo Stick	3
Calligraphy	2
Cooking	2
Courtier	2
Craft: Mizugusuri	2
Hand-to-Hand	2
Horsemanship	2
Investigation	2
Kenjutsu	2
Knife	2
Locksmith	1
Poison	2
Shintao	3
Sincerity	2
Stealth	1
Tea Ceremony	2

Strength 3
 Perception 3



Roll & keep to hit
 5k3

Agility 3
 Intelligence 3



Roll & keep Damage
 6k2

Reflexes 3
 Awareness 3



TN to Be Hit
 15 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 3

Wounds

_____	6	-0
_____	6	-1
_____	6	-2
_____	6	-3
_____	6	-4
_____	6	Down
_____	6	Out
_____	6	Dead

Spells

- Sense, Commune, Summon,
- Counterspell, Bad Karma,
- Biting Steel, Calling the
- Elements, Calm Mind, Cloak of
- Night, Fury of Osano-Wo, Know
- the Mind, Nature's Touch, Path
- to Inner Peace, Sympathetic
- Energies, Whispers on the Wind,
- Winds of Distraction, Wind-
- Borne Slumbers

Advantages/Disadvantages

Small

Soshi Genju

Like many Scorpion, Soshi Genju is not what he appears to be. At first impression he is a poor, wandering monk in search of enlightenment. His garb is a simple robe with no mon, a bo staff with bells at the top, and a small pack of personal effects wrapped within his bedroll. On his left bicep is a tattoo of a crow to indicate his allegiance to Shinsei (it is actually a *kage yakiin* that looks like a crow).

But all of this is a ruse. Genju is a wily, crafty, unscrupulous thug dressed as humble monk.

Even after a few discussions with Genju, it is difficult to imagine he is anything but a monk. As a shugenja, he has been trained as spiritual leader and a master of the *kami*. As a Scorpion, he has been trained to perform many clandestine operations. As such, his guise as a wandering monk protects him from casual scrutiny and observation, and provides him with the perfect cover; he can mingle freely with the general populace, and move from town to town without raising undue suspicion.

To perpetuate his disguise, Genju has shaved his head and keeps his arms covered. His wakizashi remains hidden in his bedroll, but even those that see it can assume he was born a noble (as he will assure them). Genju generally remains quiet and stays out of the way of important samurai.

Although at first glance, Genju's wakizashi appears plain and nondescript, it has been forged specifically for a Scorpion. The hilt is designed to conceal a scroll, and is wrapped in red and black silk. The blade has a red tint to it which masks any poison placed on it. The tsuba is larger than normal, and is engraved with what appear to the untrained eye as merely a series of lines twisting and intertwining. In actuality, these are the images of two scorpions holding claw to tail; upon closer inspection, this can be made out quite clearly. If asked about the weapon, Genju says, "Even Shinsei saw truth in the Scorpion. There is no harm in such a design. Perhaps your mind is troubled with something deeper than the ways and means of a poor monk?"

Each time he leaves home, Genju takes with him a complete identity. Although his disguise is always the same, his name, cover story, and purpose are always different. Once, he served as a mute pail-bearer to a Crane diplomat, following the man everywhere he went for an entire year, spying on his activities. Another time, he lived among peasant farmers in a highly populated Lion rice village; after a few months, he was able to train the peasants with jitte, nunchaka, and bo, and incite them to riot against their clan "oppressors" (Genju carefully disappeared before the bloodshed began). And still another, he

posed as a monk of the Shintao, subtly influencing the thoughts of passing samurai.

Genju's many disguises have served him well. As an infiltrator for the Scorpion, his monk "persona" allows him access most everywhere. Soshi Genju presently goes by the name Shisuto, and provides counsel to a Phoenix noble named Shiba Kirume whom the Scorpion hope to draw into war. It has been very easy for him to send important messages back to his Clan through delicate spell use and planned sessions of "meditation." So far no one has suspected a thing.

Eight months ago, a Shosuro actress serving as a minor scribe and assistant to Shiba Katsuda approached Bento during a gathering of clan officials. She revealed herself as a Scorpion and informed him that she knew his true identity. She also said that something big was about to happen among the Isawa and Shiba, and if all went well, she would have all their secrets. He should do nothing for the next few months that would jeopardize his position.

That was eight months ago, and Genju has still heard no word...



Name: Otaku Karasiko
Clan: Unicorn
School: Otaku Battle Maiden Rank: 2
Honor: 3.3 **Glory: 3.6**

Stamina 2
 Willpower 2



Primary Weapon
 Katana 3k2

Skill	Level
Athletics	3
Battle	3
Defense	3
Etiquette	2
Horse Archery	3
Horsemanship	5
Hunting	2
Investigation	2
Kenjutsu	3
Law	2
Lore (Bushido)	3
Medicine	2
Naginata	3

Strength 2
 Perception 2



Roll & keep to hit
 6k3

Agility 3
 Intelligence 3



Roll & keep Damage
 5k2

Reflexes 3
 Awareness 3



TN to Be Hit
 20 (Light armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 3

Advantages/Disadvantages

- Major Allies (Minor Clans)
- Ancestor (Otaku Shiko)
- Great Destiny
- Inheritance (Fine Katana)
- Sworn Enemy (Bayushi Iromu)
- Sworn Enemy (Ikoma Kitura)
- Way of the Land (Unicorn)

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

Techniques

- Riding in Harmony
- The Void of War

Special Notes

- Fine Katana, Wakizashi, Armor,
- Dai-kyu, Naginata, Daisho

Otaku Karashiko

Otaku Karashiko's parents occasionally remind her that much is expected of her. They remind her of the ghostly figure that appeared to her moments before the culmination of her *gempukku*, who claimed to be her ancestor Shiko and presented her with a fine katana wrapped in purple silk. They also remind her of the figure's words: "You are being observed..."

This omen of good fortune was analyzed again and again over the years, and many theories have been proposed. Most believe that Karashiko is destined for some as-yet-unknown greatness, and even the clan elders look upon her with hushed anticipation. To date, Karashiko has not fulfilled this prophecy, but she remains an important member of the Unicorn Clan, regardless.

Shinjo Yasamo, Karashiko's over-protective father, never wanted her to join the Otaku Battle Maidens. He knew that if she did, she would eventually face the two-faced Scorpion or the hate-filled Lion. He feared for his daughter's life, for word of her career's auspicious beginning would surely reach the clan's enemies, who would seek to strike her down.

But Karashiko's mother – Otaku Kari – disagreed. A respected Battle Maiden herself, she was sure that the training Karashiko would receive in the school would be her greatest asset in life. And since Kari's influence grossly exceeded Yasamo's own, she would have her way. Although Kari died a few years prior to her graduation, she assured her daughter a valuable position as a liaison to the Minor Clans.

Since her training, and against the wishes of her isolationist father, Karashiko has met her share of honorable samurai and nobles across the Empire. From ronin to Minor Clan daimyo to Imperial Courtier, she has met and conversed with a wide array of individuals. She has successfully made a few close friends and forged several alliances that she can draw upon in times of need.

Yet she has also made many enemies along the way. Ikoma Kitura, for example, wishes nothing less than her outright disgrace. Once a close associate, Kitura accompanied Karashiko during several of her most glorious assignments, recording her words and deeds for future generations. It is said that he loved the Otaku deeply; he wrote two ballads and more than a dozen poems, which remain in the Ikoma libraries, as testaments of his feelings for her.

But her open refusal of his advances – and a bitter argument over them during a pivotal diplomatic feast – have soured his emotions. Now, he works to discredit her at every turn, even composing prose revealing her "hidden dishonor." Though Kitura once had a great many social and political contacts to use against

Karashiko, his obvious defamation campaign has ruined his public reputation, and it seems – for now – that he will have to attack her from another angle if he wishes to gain his revenge.

Professionally, she has also gained a nemesis in Bayushi Iromu, whose interest in the Minor Clan territories comes into direct conflict with her goals on a regular basis. So far, their clashes are restricted to the courts, and have remained subtle, but there is danger that they will explode into sabotage and open violence in the not-so-distant future.

Karashiko is still not completely comfortable with the weight of responsibility she has assumed. The omen of her *gempukku* continues to linger in the back of her mind, and she wonders how it will come to pass.

Are the spirits of her ancestors still watching her? And what is the purpose of their observations? What do they see in her future, or know of her past?

And why?



Name: Otaku Tokuko
Clan: Unicorn
School: Otaku Battle Maiden Rank: 1
Honor: 2.5 **Glory: 1.2**

Stamina 2
 Willpower 2



Primary Weapon
 Katana 3k2

Skill **Level**

Archery	1
Athletics	1
Battle	2
Courtier	1
Defense	2
Hunting	2
Horse Archery	2
Horsemanship	3
Iaijutsu	1
Investigation	2
Jujutsu	2
Kenjutsu	2
Lance	1

Strength 2
 Perception 2



Roll & keep to hit
 5k3

Agility 3
 Intelligence 2



Roll & keep Damage
 5k2

Reflexes 3
 Awareness 3



TN to Be Hit
 25 (Heavy armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 3

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

Techniques

Riding in Harmony

Special Notes

Advantages/Disadvantages

Large
 Meddler
 Reputation (Short temper)
 Strength of the Earth (2 pts.)

Otaku Tokuko

The story of Tokuko's birth revolves around her mother's dedication to the Otaku and their glories upon the field of battle, a dedication which Tokuko herself has inherited.

Otaku Gomiko and her unit of Battle Maidens were famed for their prowess in war, and had seized several critical victories against the Lion along the border of the Crane. They reveled in the initial charge at an enemy, and opted for all of the most difficult assignments and posts. But their success – and growing tensions along the Unicorn-Crab border – resulted in their recall so that they could be dispatched to fight a new enemy. The border skirmishes were heating up, but the rough terrain had reduced the conflicts to guerrilla fighting and minor battles.

Once, during routine patrols, Gomiko disappeared while scouting ahead of the unit, only to be found several miles from her route, her horse trapped in an elaborate snare. Gomiko herself had been severely wounded in an ambush.

Gomiko never recovered from her injuries, drifting in and out of unconsciousness. Astounded, the shugenja tending to her soon learned she was with child, and worked to save both. Gomiko died while in labor, possibly due to the child's abnormally large size. They named her Tokuko, which means *small gain*: the shugenjas' idea of a cruel joke, since in their minds the Otaku had lost a fine bushi and gained a bastard.

Tokuko was raised by her Uncle Mondo. He loved the child dearly, having no family of his own to care for. She attended the Otaku school, far from prying eyes outside the clan. The Unicorn Masters – noting how even the Otaku children called Tokuko "Our gift from the Crab" – had decided to shield her from the hurtful comments of outsiders.

As Tokuko grew into womanhood, the radiance within her shined through. Her body filled out and her face gained the features that many in the clan remembered as her mother's. She was beautiful, to be sure, but her unusual size stunted her ability to use it to her advantage. It was difficult for those around her to be enchanted when she towered over them like the most sturdy tree in the forest.

After her *gempukku*, Tokuko's was given her mount, which she named Ikaze ("Wind"). The animal proved to be her best friend and closest companion from then on. Ikaze was large for his age and breed, just as Tokuko herself was. Though the horse had been given to her in jest (and because no one else could ride

it), it proved to be a very able mount, learning quickly and responding to Tokuko as it had to no other in the Unicorn stables.

Even long after her graduation, her clansmen muttered about her questionable heritage. But where she was once unable to respond, her immense size and strong limbs now gave her the chance to teach them a lesson. She struck out at the worst of them – Ryoko, another Otaku girl whose own age was very close to Tokuko's, and who had grown up and schooled with her for years.

When her uncle Mondo pulled her from Ryoko's battered form, Tokuko was scarred from her right wrist to the elbow (the mangled patch of flesh can still be seen today). Ryoko did not fare as well. Her left arm had been broken, and she had been stabbed in the chest with her own knife. Thereafter, her breathing was very shallow, and her voice rasped when she spoke.

None ever teased Tokuko again. She has gained a reputation for being short of temper, and exceedingly wrathful to those who provoke her, traits which have ensured her a post with the same unit her mother once served with.

Today, she wanders the Crab-Unicorn borders freely, an open challenge to both clans – a peacekeeper who maintains the balance by force of strength and will alone.



Shinjo Tomoso

Ever since Shinjo Tomoso was a little boy, he had an unusual affinity for animals. Any beast he approached – even wild ones – was friendly toward him, responding to him as if they knew his thoughts. He used this ability to his advantage on numerous occasions, both as a child and well into his adulthood after his formal training was underway.

Tomoso was one of the most promising students the Shinjo bushi school had ever seen. Having a natural talent with horses, he was the example that many sensei pointed to in their presentations, and that many students aspired to, though few attained. When he was riding, it was as if he and the mount were one; a visiting Crane artisan even composed a poem after witnessing his symbiosis, referring to the scene as “a vision of true and unblemished beauty.”

Unfortunately, throughout his time at the school, the other students placed Tomoso on a pedestal, and he became very proud and arrogant as a result. By the time he was ready to leave his training and take a place among other servants of the Empire, his sensei feared that his superiority would lead to recklessness.

At his *gempukku* ceremony, Shinjo Tomoso was all too eager to prove himself to the daimyo of his family. He immediately volunteered to join the forces sent to battle the Crab in the south. His mind was filled with visions of glory and respect from even the most battle-hardened veterans, of being named the hero of the day, and other equally unreasonable notions.

But the reality of the day did not meet his aspirations, and in fact fell quite short of them. The Unicorn troops caught the Crab unaware, but the enemy was quick to recover, and inflicted massive casualties upon them. During the battle, the standard of the Unicorn fell when its bearer was trapped in a brutally effective pincer maneuver. Tomoso, feeling the moment of his glory at hand, scooped up the flag and led the final charge against the Crab.

Suddenly, his steed was cut down from beneath him by a sudden flurry of archery fire. His left leg was pinned beneath her, the bones crushed. And as he lay helpless upon the field of battle, all he could feel was sorrow – not for his own failure, but for the loss of his beloved mount, Hikiosu.

The Unicorn were successful that day, but the price of victory was far too high for Tomoso. He never rode again, vowing to honor Hikiosu's memory in abstinence. His leg eventually healed, but it never regained the strength necessary for strenuous activities, such as running or lifting heavy objects. And though he was heralded for his valor and heroic actions, and earned great esteem within the Unicorn Clan, it was all hollow. His best friend had died with his greatest pleasure; he would never feel the blissful wind through his hair, or know the exhilaration of a fast gallop again.

That was fifteen years ago. Tomoso's shattered ego eventually healed as well, and he remains a faithful servant of his clan. But the bitter taste of loss lingers, and he must remind himself every day that his suffering had a reason – that his sacrifice helped his clan flourish, and that for one fleeting moment, he was a true hero.

Today, he has dedicated his natural talent with animals to a new calling, the training of war dogs. His “students” are widely considered some of the finest servants a samurai can ask for, and there is always high demand for his services.

Tomoso tends to be gruff and a little antisocial, happiest when he is alone with his dogs, whom he thinks of as his best and most respectful friends. He has recently been appointed a Unicorn Clan Magistrate as well, a duty which he takes very seriously. He can be found patrolling the villages within his jurisdiction regularly, a pack of war dogs at his side at all times.



Dairy

The ronin known as Dairy is one of the most powerful fighters in the Empire. His prowess with the blade is unmatched, as are the epic stories of his ferocity and foul temper. To the peasant, he is a hero. To the samurai, he is the worst thing a man can become – honorless, disillusioned, and mercenary.

Isawa Dairy was born the son of Isawa Nesan, Master of Fire, but long ago he abandoned his claim to the name and mon of the Phoenix Clan. Nesan was a dedicated Master, giving all of her dedication and enthusiasm to the Phoenix. Through her leadership, the Council brought peace and settled disturbances both in their own lands and abroad.

Dairy was twelve years old when the Scorpions first began to tutor him in his “destiny.” Dairy, a proud young shugenja, used his Scorpion-taught abilities to defeat all competition, and rapidly grew to become one of the foremost students in the School of Fire. By the age of sixteen, he was clearly the finest student in the school, and the obvious choice for Nesan’s successor. His Scorpion trainers had given him much knowledge of weaponry, as well as spellcraft, and taught him how to make his opponents sickly through poison and other methods.

While the Scorpion thought they would control the next Master of Fire by helping the boy rise to prominence within his school, they did not realize the price of Dairy’s ambition. Rather than creating a shugenja vulnerable to manipulation who was completely supported by their strength, Dairy’s own gifts flowered, and he soon began to believe that he no longer needed Scorpion assistance to usurp his mother’s place on the Council. Angered when Dairy no longer heeded their demands, the Scorpion created a masterful plot to take their revenge on him.

Three months later, Isawa Nesan was murdered by her own son’s hands, and Dairy endured the ritual of the Forgetting for his crime. His ability to speak to the spirits, to control and cast magic, was forever gone. He would never again know the joy of the Elements, never again hear the *kami* as they whispered to him on the night wind. The power he had struggled all his life to master had been stolen from him without remorse.

Since that time, Dairy has turned his single-minded devotion toward mastering the blade. He has shown that he shows promise in this field, as well, and over the course of fifteen years, he has become one of the greatest kenjutsu fighters in the land, feared from the regions of the Lion through the territories of the Crane.

He has only lost one battle – the fight in which he lost his eye. Few know the tale, and fewer still are willing to disturb the

ronin’s travels in order to ask, but the whispers circulate through the court of the Hantei. It is said that during a chance encounter, Dairy gave insult to a traveling Crane and refused to step off the road so that the Crane could pass. Refusing to accept the Crane’s “superior station”, Dairy challenged him to a duel, to test which of them was the better man, and who should pass first upon the road. The deal was struck, the two swordsmen took their stances, and when it was done, the ronin knelt beside the road, a bloody bandage wrapped about his head.

Kakita Toshimoko never gave the matter a second thought, but Dairy has never forgotten it. One day, he curses, he will avenge himself upon the Crane who took his eye; until then, he wears the tsuba of one of Toshimoko’s finest students as an eyepatch, a testament to his oath. The student, of course, did not survive.

When roleplaying Dairy, be bored with danger. Never smile. Be angry at men with superior attitudes, and willing to test your might with the blade if anyone so much as looks at you sideways. Dairy is a tall samurai, muscular and condescending. He carries a large arsenal of weapons, including katana, tanto and wakizashi, and he rides the horse of the last man who challenged him to a duel.

He is a dangerous man.



Fusaki

Fusaki is a quiet man, humble and unobtrusive. He has studied in three of the greatest libraries of the Empire, and has since retired to the Northern Holy Home Village, only a few miles from the outskirts of Otosan Uchi, the Imperial Capital. Fusaki maintains his own small collection of scrolls, notes which were taken at the great libraries he has visited in his lifetime.

On some, the Phoenix moon shines, gleaming brightly with memories of the Isawa lands and the great library of Kyuden Isawa. For ten years, Fusaki served as a humble apprentice to the Isawa, trading his days in service for nights of study. He copied astrological signs, studied the stars and portents, and grew to know many of the patterns and stories of the sky and stars. For a time, he studied beneath Master Eju, the Master of Air. Although he learned the art of spellcraft, Fusaki never excelled in it, preferring to spend his time in research rather than magic.

After a time, Fusaki moved on to the Shinjo provinces, to learn the barbaric wisdom of the Children of the Ki-Rin. Beside Iuchi Daiyu, Iuchi Takaai, and others, Fusaki studied the strange concepts that they had brought back from the lands of the Burning Sands, marveling at tales of strange sorcery and items crafted by the hands of gods. The Shinjo taught the awkward little man to ride, and though he was never very adept, when he chose to leave Unicorn lands at last, he was given a sturdy Shinjo pony, to carry him to the end of the Unicorn lands.

When Fusaki left the lands of the Ki-Rin, it was to return to his humble home in the North Village, content with the scrolls and wisdom he had obtained. However, his journey home was interrupted by a lone figure standing by the roadside. It wore a thick cloak, wide jingasa, and his face was covered by shadows and white kabuki paint. "You have traveled the length of the lands to the north, Fusaki-san," the Kuni whispered softly. "Certainly, you were not about to consider ignoring the wisdom of the Crab?"

With that, Fusaki's life took a bizarre twist. He found himself apprenticed once more, to a Crab shugenja named Kuni Noda, master of the dark studies of Oni, mujina, and other abominations of the Shadowlands. Fusaki's world became a path of danger; yet at every turn he was protected by his master, a man of great wisdom and greater skill. Soon, Fusaki came to understand that the lessons of the Crab were as important as any

scroll he might read in the great libraries, and that learning them was critical to the Empire's survival.

In his time with the Kuni, Fusaki forgot his pride and self-importance. He remembered only the gentle wisdom of the Phoenix, the practical lessons of the Unicorn, and the dedication of the Crab. Although he does not owe his entire life to the Crab, he owes them the understanding of life, and that means much more to him. He has grown very close to the Kuni, and when they visit the Emperor's lands, many of the mysterious shugenja from the Crab lands prefer to stay with Fusaki in his humble house rather than within the great golden walls of the Imperial City. They feel comfortable in his simple garden, behind his safe stone walls, where they discuss matters of true import - the Carpenter Wall, the battle with the Shadowlands, and the dangers of the Dark One who sleeps in the farthest south.

These are the things which have shaped Fusaki's life. Their wisdom still remains with him, forever recorded in the small collection of scrolls which he carefully maintains.

They are his memories.



Ginawa

Akodo Ginawa. The name is a curse in the Lion lands, usually followed by a prayer to the Seven Fortunes to keep his destiny apart from those who spoke it.

He is Akodo no more.

Ginawa is dirty, smelly, uncouth, and uncaring. He has left behind the arrogant, proud Lion samurai that he once was, dedicating his life to finding the man who was responsible for his lord's death. He seeks to die in the service of his murdered lord, a man who was as a father to Ginawa.

As a young man, Ginawa's parents were killed in battle with the Unicorn. Seeking only to follow in their footsteps, Akodo Ginawa struggled to be the finest warrior that the Akodo had ever known. He clung tightly to the Code of Bushido, kept his honor stainless, and never succumbed to those temptations that plague many other samurai.

You would never know it to look upon him now. His shaggy face hides his shame, and his eyes glint with a touch of madness. Once he heard the voice of his ancestor, Matsu Hitomi, but now he hears only the throbbing rush of blood and vengeance that hangs at his side.

The Bloodsword *Revenge*.

Revenge is the name of the ancient blade, its kanji twisted into the tsuba of the katana. Beneath its blood-red saya, the steel of the sword glints, impossibly fine and strong. It is said that such a blade can never be broken, and that its burden will drive a man to madness. The tales may be right.

It was crafted by the sorcerer Iuchiban in ancient times, and given to the Lion Clan as a gift. Lion bushi whisper of it, and of the Champion it drove mad. Its power is great, but so is the price that must be paid to conquer it. Ginawa was given the blade by the man who killed his lord, and it was because of the blade's dark song that Ginawa betrayed his own honor, driving himself to the path of the ronin.

It will be the blade who repays his lord's death, when Ginawa finds the man who was responsible.

Yet, like smoke, the image of the soldier fades in Ginawa's mind, the face churns and changes, leaving only smoke, mist... and eyes. Eyes that Ginawa will never forget, and will always recognize. The eyes of Shadow.

In the past few years, Ginawa has been a sell-sword, serving as a guardsman, magistrate, and messenger. He has met many of the great samurai of Rokugan, from the noble Isawa Tadaka, of the Phoenix Clan, to the mysterious Togashi Yokuni, who said not a word, but turned away in silent meditation when the ronin approached.

Ginawa is foul-mouthed. He never smiles, and he constantly travels, looking into first one, then another man's eyes, as if seeking something deep within them. When he does not find what he seeks, he travels on, stopping only to earn a few koku in exchange for his services. If he does not buy food, he buys sake, and gambles through the night, trying to bury the past in haze and risk.

Ginawa is covered in scars, his clothes are filthy and lice-ridden, and he hasn't bathed in months. His desire to find and kill the assassin is deep, as is his hatred of liars and deceivers. He has been known to fly into a bloodthirsty fury if he feels he is being deceived or lied to. Scorpions are instantly suspect, of course. His eyes are ever watchful, and his smile and his voice drip with sarcasm.



Hasame

Though Hasame is a ronin, he is the exception to the rule. For years, he has served the Lion house as faithfully as any of its men born Akodo, and he has learned from them through diligent study and great effort.

Hasame is still a young man, with little hair on his chin and an outgoing smile, but his face is touched with sadness. His father was an Ide who left his clan to serve the Lion, and for that, he was stripped of his name and family.

The heart of the tale lies with the Shinjo, and one man's obsession with the ancient heritage of his clan. Hasame's father, when he was a young man, was a scholar, a promising shugenja. He served with the Iuchi, and spent great hours with his father, Hasame's grandfather, trying to learn the secrets of the hidden land across the mountains – the Burning Sands. One day, they were offered a chance beyond their greatest dreams, a chance to read the precious texts of the Shinjo and research the ancient languages and tales of the desert people.

They accepted with pride, and spent a year in the Shinjo libraries trying to piece together the tales of the Unicorn's passage, but to no avail. Many scrolls were missing, years of travel and legend unavailable. The Shinjo lorekeepers insisted that the scrolls were lost long ago during the Unicorn's perilous journey through the Shadowlands, but Hasame's father was not convinced. He began studying late into the night, poring over scroll after scroll, searching the library for the missing texts. On more than one occasion, he was rebuked for his persistence, told to return to his studies and forsake his efforts to divine the missing portions, but these warnings only made the young man more willing to search. He traveled far from Shinjo lands, visiting the Ikoma libraries and the palace of the Fox Clan, looking for any trace of information about the missing years. While he journeyed, he married, and his Kitsune wife gave birth to a son.

When Hasame was old enough, he went with his father, through all the lands of the Empire, looking in library after library, looking through one scroll and ancient text after another, inspired by his father's quest.

In the end, they discovered what he had been looking for – the Lost Texts of the Unicorn, preserved unknowingly by the Crab who had found the Shinjo when they first raced forth from the Shadowlands. The Crab, of course, had no idea what they held, and could not read the strange language – the language of the Burning Sands. They had considered it to be some goblin prank, and when Hasame and his father asked to be given the scrolls, the Crab readily agreed.

But what they found inside was nightmare. Stories of shadow and darkness, of infiltration and the engineered death of the Shinjo house, these and more plagued the scrolls with evidence too plentiful to be ignored. Afraid that if he returned to the Unicorn lands with the information, he would be killed by Kogat assassins, the Ide and his son left their family ties and refused to come home to the lands of the Ki-Rin.

They live now on the edge of Lion lands, in a small village unclaimed by the Seven Great Clans. Hasame knows the secrets that his father holds, and keeps them close; the scrolls are buried and safe from discovery and harm. Hasame's family tends to their crops and peasants with a protective eye, exchanging their services to the village for a share of the harvest. Together, they protect the land from bandits and other dangers. Hasame himself has often served with the nearby Akodo house, assisting with tracking and map-making for the area, and serving as a guardsman on many occasions where the Lions could not afford to send their own. He is trusted by them, and well thought of despite his ronin status. Though Hasame has not been asked to swear fealty to the Lion Clan, he hopes that one day they will accept his blade and offer him a name to replace the one he lost so long ago.





Name: Goju Hoseki
Clan: None (Goju)
School: Goju
Honor: 0
Rank: N/A
Glory: 0

Stamina $\frac{3}{3}$
 Willpower $\frac{3}{3}$



Primary Weapon
 Ninja-to 1k2

Skill	Level
Acrobatics	3
Acting	1
Calligraphy	2
Defense	4
Explosives	1
Intimidation	3
Kenjutsu	2
Manipulation	2
Ninjutsu (Nageteppo)	2
Ninjutsu (Ninja-to)	4
Ninjutsu (Shuriken)	3
Poison	2
Sleight of Hand	3
Spellcraft	2
Stealth	3
Tantojutsu	3

Strength $\frac{4}{3}$
 Perception $\frac{3}{3}$



Roll & keep to hit
 8k5

Agility $\frac{5}{5}$
 Intelligence $\frac{5}{5}$



Roll & keep Damage
 5k2

Reflexes $\frac{5}{4}$
 Awareness $\frac{4}{4}$



TN to Be Hit
 25 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 5

Wounds

6	-0
6	-1
6	-2
6	-3
6	-4
6	Down
6	Out
6	Dead

Spells*

- By the Light of Lord Moon
- Gift of the Wind
- Strike at the Roots
- Sympathetic Energies

Advantages/Disadvantages

- Ally (Goju Adorai)
- Perfect Balance
- Shadow Points: 5
- (Insubstantiality, Swiftiness, Stealth, Mimicry, Shinobi)

Special Notes

* Hoseki has Spell-like abilities, listed here as Spells. These are not "Spells" per se, but rather specific Shinobi abilities. She needs no scrolls to use these effects, and cannot learn more. The effects are not based on the *kami*, (therefore, no Sense, Commune, or Summon) but on her unique Shadow abilities. She has 5 Shadow Points, to reflect her nature. Hoseki is not to be used as a PC.

Goju Hoseki

Hoseki...

The name whispers in the wind around the Kuni palaces. Hoseki, Hoseki, handmaiden of the Hida daimyo's wife. A failed shugenja, Kuni Hoseki realized her true parentage too late, after she had been trapped by its curse.

Hoseki...

The true Kuni Hoseki was murdered as a child, stolen away in the night and this babe left behind as a cuckoo replaces the eggs in a sparrow's nest. As a child, Hoseki had watched the displays of her father and mother, magical abilities which she hoped to learn when she came of age.

But it was not to be. Hoseki showed no promise, no talent for such studies, despite her prestigious lineage. For nights on end, the stripling Kuni studied and practiced, able to master only the simplest skills. No matter what strength she called forth, or what dedication she placed in her studies, something within her own soul still blocked her will, refusing to connect her to the kami of the natural world. The spirits would not listen to her; to them, she was a shadow, unreal and unnatural.

Her parents were devastated, but said nothing, always encouraging their daughter along to pursue other opportunities. She learned the way of the warrior, and journeyed to the Hida palaces to serve as a handmaiden for the wife of Hida Kisada after the birth of his youngest son. Though ostracized from the Kuni shugenja, Hoseki continued to study, practicing with almost fanatic discipline, but to no avail.

One day, a traveling monk came by the palace, selling stories in exchange for a night's food and rest. He spoke of great heroes to those in the hall who stayed and listened; but as the hour grew late and the audience dissipated, the stories began to change, becoming tales of horror and mystery. Hoseki was enthralled. Something in the stories, between the words and gestures, spoke to her of hidden secrets. When the monk pled weariness, it was Hoseki who offered to lead him to the guest chambers, and their conversation continued until dawn was only a few hours away. She learned many things from him, and before her eyes, the twisting powers of Shinobi began to heed her call, rather than the spirits of the kami that she had been taught to seek out.

"There is something hidden in you, Crab," he murmured, smiling. "And now it is trying to be freed. All you must do... is let yourself succumb to its power."

"Yes." Hoseki's eyes grew wide, thinking that the man spoke of her attempts to master magic. "You see, I can only feel a small amount of my parents' strength. It is as if..."

"As if something fights you? Struggles against your every effort?"

"Yes," she whispered, amazed. He understood.

"You battle against yourself, my child. Cease your combat, and let your soul free. You will find your true ally where you least expect it, for it is already within you."

Hoseki listened to the monk's words, and by the time he vanished in smoke with the rays of dawn, she was not surprised. Something dark had awakened within her; she could feel her true potential - her true heritage, welling inside.

She was a Goju, and the blood would tell her the way. Her studies in magic, her fanatic dedication, had been rewarded. But the sorcery which burned in her soul was not the magic of the kami, nor the blood-sorcery of *maho*. It was true *Shinobi*, the black shadow of the true ninja.

Within a week, she was gone, never to be seen again.



Name: Morito Tokei
Clan: Unicorn Clan Ronin
School: Iuchi Shugenja *Rank: 2*
Honor: 2.7 *Glory: 1.3*

Stamina 3
 Willpower 4



Primary Weapon
 Wakizashi 2k2

Skill	Level
Calligraphy	1
Commerce	1
Defense	1
Falconry	1
Herbalism	1
Horsemanship	2
Hunting	2
Kenjutsu	1
Meditation	3
Oratory	2
Painting	2
Spellcraft	1
Yomanri	1

Strength 3
 Perception 3



Roll & keep to hit
 4k3

Agility 2
 Intelligence 3



Roll & keep Damage
 5k2

Reflexes 3
 Awareness 3



TN to Be Hit
 15 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 3

Wounds

6	-0
6	-1
6	-2
6	-3
6	-4
6	Down
6	Out
6	Dead

Spells

Sense, Commune, Summon,
 Biting Steel, Bo of Water, Castle
 of Water, Earth's Stagnation, The
 Fires That Cleanse, The Fist of
 Osano-Wo, The Path to Inner
 Peace, Sympathetic Energies

Special Notes

**Advantages/
 Disadvantages**

Black Sheep
Idealistic
Proud
Sensei (Naka Kuro)
Social Disadvantage (Ronin)

Morito Tokei

In the lands of the gaijin, when the sands roll from the heated breath of the dragon of air, a man must know loyalty. He cannot stand alone, if he wishes to survive. He must be his brother's keeper...

– The Lore of Lady Shinjo

Many men say that they support their family. They walk about, wearing their father's name, and they bow to the ancestors; men they did not know or cherish. The tales are enough, they say, and their dedication to their blood-relations is unchallenged. But there is only one man in Rokugan who knows the true value of brotherhood. A shadow in his brother's footsteps, Tokei has chosen the path of dishonor rather than betray the trust between his brother, Otaku Morito, and his own heart.

Their story began simply; brothers of the Otaku house, they clung to one another when their elders told them that they were 'less' than others. When the girls who would be Battle-Maidens were given their foals, the two brothers stood aside, unable to understand how they could be refused, overlooked. When they were children, Tokei was weak and sickly, and Morito often stood by his side, beating off the bullies and older boys who made fun of his little brother. Once, when Tokei fell into a swift-moving river, Morito risked his own life to drag his brother to their shore. They were always close as children, and never did Tokei forget that his life was in his brother's hands.

Tokei was not as bitter as Morito about the exclusion they suffered at the hands of the Otaku – the path of the Unicorn was not his greatest hope. He studied the fortunes and the *kami* under Iuchi tutelage, and tried to ignore the outright subjugation of his Otaku cousins.

One bitter afternoon, Morito claimed that he would ride a Unicorn's steed, and prove to all in their family that males were as worthy as the females had been. Unwilling to leave his brother to his shame, Tokei followed, hoping to find a way to convince his elder brother not to try, to leave the foolishness and return to the Shinjo school where he had been trained.

But Morito would have none of it. He saddled and bridled one of the finest steeds, and leapt to its back in the paddock outside the barn. Perhaps it was the fortunes, willing that the pair be forever separated from the lands of their birth, or perhaps Lady Otaku lifted her hand in vengeance that day, but the steed began to flail and thrash. Uncaring of its own life or

safety, the stallion threw himself against a fence, shattering the poles and ruining the horse's leg.

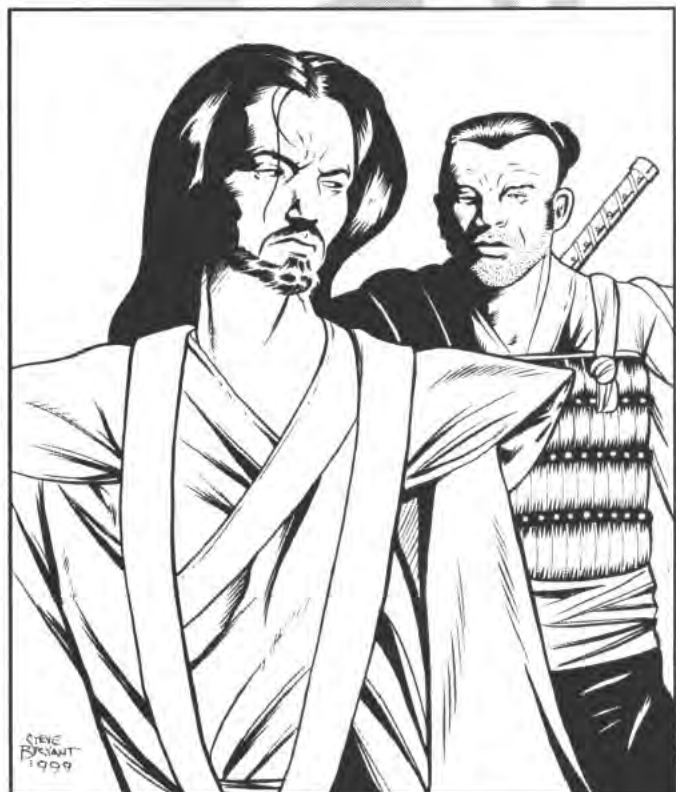
When the stablemaster arrived, there was nothing that could be done to save the horse; Morito was to be killed for his recklessness, and his disobedience. Tokei stepped forth, begging that his brother be sent into exile. He offered to commit *seppuku* to free his brother of the crime, but the Otaku were determined. In the end, Morito was exiled from Unicorn lands, stripped of name and status, a ronin. Tokei, refusing to leave his brother's side even in his greatest shame, also gave his name. He left that morning, walking by his brother's side.

Some three years later, the young man met a stranger by the road while the two set camp. The old man offered to trade them rice in exchange for an evening by their fire, and the ronin agreed. Eventually, they told the sad tale of their exile to the old man, and he nodded wisely. "I have heard of such things," he murmured. "In fact, it is the reason I have sought you out."

The man's name was Naka Kuro, and inspired by the bravery of a brother who would sacrifice everything for his blood, he came to seek out Tokei and make him an apprentice.

"I will not take 'Tokei,'" Kuro said. "Tokei is the name of a masterless man, and no worthy man is truly without a master. Look into your heart, child, and tell me where your truth lies."

Tokei did, and when he looked up, his brother was standing near him, every inch filled with pride for his little brother's accomplishment. "My truth is my family, sensei. My name is Morito Tokei."





Name: Naka Kuro
Clan: Phoenix
School: Isawa Shugenja
Honor: 3.9

Rank: 5
Glory: 6.8

Stamina 5
 Willpower 6



Primary Weapon
 Wakizashi 2k2

Strength 5
 Perception 6



Roll & keep to hit
 5k5

Agility 5
 Intelligence 7



Roll & keep Damage
 7k2

Reflexes 5
 Awareness 6



TN to Be Hit
 25 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 5

Skill	Level
Advanced Medicine	4
Calligraphy	5
Cipher	4
Courtier	3
Etiquette	3
Heraldry	4
History	5
Lore (Many)	3-5
Meditation	5
Oratory	3
Origami	4
Painting	4
Poetry	3
Research	5
Rhetoric	5
Shintao	5
Spellcraft	5
Theology	4

Wounds

10	-0
10	-1
10	-2
10	-3
10	-4
10	Down
10	Out
10	Dead

Spells

All known Spells as scrolls
 (and a few that haven't been found yet)

All possible as Innate Abilities are known as Innate Abilities

Special Notes

Grand Master of the Elements

Advantages/Disadvantages

Ancestor (Naka Kaeteru)
Ascetic
Can't Lie
Chosen by the Oracles
Forbidden Knowledge
Great Destiny
Higher Purpose (Teach the Empire)
Kharmic Tie (Naka Kaeteru)
Magic Resistance (3 pts.)
Precise Memory

Naka Kuro

*Each generation, one will rise to assume the mantle of scholar.
Each generation, one will rise to assume the mantle of leader.
Each generation, one will rise to assume the mantle of villain.
Each generation, I will rise to guide men to virtue and
perfection. It is a holy duty that I cannot deny.*

– Naka Kaeteru

Born to a rather unimportant Isawa family, Kuro completed his shugenja schooling and reached his *gempukku* at the record age of 10. During the ceremony, he was recorded as saying, “I see things that I know have happened, or that will happen. I do not need to be there to know they are true. All that matters is truth. If the Council of Five deems it proper, I wish to complete my schooling now. I am ready.”

By the age of 23, Kuro had amassed all of the knowledge the Phoenix Clan Masters could teach him. Catapulting from sensei to sensei, Kuro competently challenged each of them, questioning everything they took for granted. When the time came for Kuro to be appointed the daimyo of his family, he refused the offer, saying “Leading weak men is no better than being weak. I must teach others before I can command them.” Several years later, Kuro announced that he would no longer be a Phoenix. Three years later, the Oracle of Air offered him the title *Naka* (“Understanding”) as his own.

For over 40 years, Kuro has wandered. “The whole of Rokugan is a great canvas that I must paint. If there is a shred that lacks color, I shall bring it brushes and ink. If there is a portion that is dull, I shall add what is missing. If there is a city with too much color, I shall show it water and clean hands. If there is anything I have failed, I shall not rest until the failure is gone.”

Naka Kuro commands respect without being threatening, commanding, or loathsome. He is like a gentle child holding a soft petal in cupped hands. Those who have spoken with him return blessed with a youthful vigor, as if the world’s weight has been removed. They say he is so at peace with his surroundings and the Elements that simply to speak with him makes others one step closer to enlightenment. Whatever Kuro’s secret, he is a blessing to all of Rokugan.

Akodo Toturi once met Kuro and returned with a smile on his face and confusion in his eyes. He does not speak of it. The Emperor has invited Kuro to stay as his advisor to the Empire on several occasions, but his reply is always the same. “Rokugan needs me. I have other work to perform.” Whether the Emperor

truly believes in this self-appointed quest, it is certain that he condones it. Anyone else who dared to deny the Emperor would certainly have been killed.

The humble story that began in the Phoenix lands at his *gempukku* has remained within the public eye ever since, and is now considered nothing less than epic. Though the act of claiming the title of ‘Naka’ was at first challenged as arrogant, there is no longer any doubt of his merit; many great shugenja seek him out for guidance and training. He has chosen to train none: only a ronin boy, once Unicorn, who asks no favors and claims no great wisdom.

Naka Kuro is the most famous shugenja in Rokugan. His age is said to be nearing 90 years, but he looks to be no more than half that. He remains proof that a healthy spirit can outlast a withering body, providing the former with the strength of legends.





Name: Sanzo
Clan: Dragon Clan Ronin
School: Mizumoto Bushi **Rank: 1**
Honor: 1.8 **Glory: 1.1**

Stamina 3
 Willpower 2



Primary Weapon
 Katana 3k2

Skill	Level
Defense	1
Hand-to-Hand	1
History	1
Iaijutsu	1
Intimidation	1
Investigation	1
Kenjutsu	3
Meditation	2
Stealth	2
Tea Ceremony	1
Wrestling	2

Strength 3
 Perception 3



Roll & keep to hit
 6k3

Agility 3
 Intelligence 3



Roll & keep Damage
 6k2

Reflexes 3
 Awareness 2



TN to Be Hit
 20 (Light armor, if any)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 3

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

Techniques

Daisho Technique

Special Notes

Advantages/Disadvantages

Coward
 Dishonored
 Driven (to recover father's sword)
 Haunted (by his daughter)
 Social Disadvantage (Ronin)

Sanzo

*The words of the Tao are simple.
Following the Tao is complex.
So does the simple show the outward things,
The complex reveals the soul.*

– *The Tao of Shinsei*

The wind howls in the Dragon lands outside a destroyed village whose timbers long ago ceased to burn. No bodies lie there; it is empty of all life. Devoid of all meaning save memories.

But the memories of that small village still burn in the mind of one man, who remembers his wife hard at work on her silk-loom, and his pigtailed daughter, playing at her knee. He was a samurai, a simple man whose life was spent protecting the villagers under his care. Those who knew him are all dead; his daimyo never paid much care to his small territory, and would not remember his face. Only that the taxes were paid; that was all that the Dragon required.

But all men remember the ogres who came, crushing every village and farm in their terrible grip; the lands of the Dragon are typically peaceful, hidden in small pockets of fair weather between storm-torn mountains. Each valley is distinct, far from the others, and many were burned before the ogres had been noticed by the Mirumoto. Many more died before the Dragon Clan troops could come and drive the ogre bandits away.

They were far too late to save his family. No one stood in the village square, no man came to fight the ogres as they tore his *heimin* servants into shreds. But one man saw it all occur.

He saw his daughter beaten, her arm broken and crushed by an ogre's hand. He saw his wife's tattered body, swinging like a banner from the window of his once-lovely home. The man called to his daughter as she ran into the burning house, seeking shelter from the ogre's great fists and colossal laughter. She hid there, screaming, as the fire took her life.

He will remember those screams with each nightfall, every waking moment filled with the echo of her pitiful cries. His wife's face fills his waking moments, smiling with love for him, and cherishing his strength and courage.

A strength, a courage which failed him in the face of death.

The ogres believed the samurai to be dead when they left the village, carrying every scrap of food and weaponry they could find. One, the leader, slung his father's swords over his back.

He did nothing to stop them from going.

His courage had been broken the moment he saw them crest the hill, and he had run, calling to his daughter and his wife. He

was too late to reach the village, too late to do any more than give his life to die with them, and he could not bring himself to leave the wet reedy marsh beside the small village stream. Its bitter waters hid his tears as he watched every move the ogres made, each scream from his child within the burning house.

After they had died, he saw the ogres take away his father's swords – swords he had left within his house because he was unwilling to carry them into the fields with the *heimin*.

He knelt beside the ashes of his home with tears staining his face and hands, feeling the full weight of his cowardice, and he swore to see them avenged before he allowed himself to die.

Sanzo – for that is his name – knows that his inaction did not kill his wife and child. They would have been dead, murdered by the ogres shortly after his own body had fallen into the mud by the road's side. Yet, he also knows that he should have died with them, fighting the ogres with his father's sword rather than cowering in the stream bed as the village burned around him.

He will never forget his failure, and the tears of his past will never leave his eyes. The only reason he has to live any longer is to avenge his family, and then complete his own death – death by his father's sword.

He will spend the final days of his life hunting down the ogre who wields it.





Name: Tsuo
Clan: None (Heimin)
School: None
Honor: 1.3
Rank: N/A
Glory: 0.2

Stamina 2
 Willpower 3



Primary Weapon
 Bo Stick 2k2

Skill	Level
Athletics	2
Bo Stick	2
Craft: Farming	3
Craft: Gardening	2
Defense	2
Gambling	1
Herbalism	2
Horsemanship	1
Hunting	1
Lore (Bushido)	1
Nofujutsu	2
Stealth	2

Strength 2
 Perception 2



Roll & keep to hit
 4k2

Agility 2
 Intelligence 2



Roll & keep Damage
 4k2

Reflexes 3
 Awareness 2



TN to Be Hit
 15 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 3

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	Out
4	Dead

Techniques

None

Special Notes

Advantages/Disadvantages

Bland
 Driven (to be samurai)
 Great Destiny
 Social Disadvantage (Heimin)
 Soft-Hearted

Tsuo

"One day, I'll be a samurai in a great general's army, and when that day comes, you won't call me Tsuo anymore. I'll be someone else then. Someone better."

Dreams are the food of ambitious men, and none more so than the peasant boy Tsuo. He fights as a Crab ashigaru levy, struggling to learn the way of the staff and the jitte, hoping to become a deputy to a magistrate who will take him far from his little village. Someone who will teach him the Code of Bushido, and help him to become a samurai.

Tsuo is not a valiant man, but he is an honest one, raised on the stories and legends of the Seven Fortunes and the Thunders who went into the Shadowlands with Shinsei. He is poor, accustomed to working in the fields in order to have enough rice for his sickly sister and aging mother. He does not want them to suffer while he is in the ashigaru forces, so he sends half of his rice home to them.

He joined the Crab armies seeking to make himself known to their commanders, to be noticed. While hoping to be trained as a samurai is far too much for a *heimin* to ask, he still dreams of it, looking into the Twilight Mountains and imagining Shinsei coming down from the peaks.

"You have done well, Tsuo," the dream-Shinsei tells him, "and now it is time for you to know your true parentage. Your father was a samurai..." Whatever clan, whatever name, the end of the story is always similar. Tsuo's family, overcome with the joy of finding their lost son, teach him to be a nobleman, and he, his mother, and his sister live out the rest of their lives in peace.

That day has never come. The mountains are barren and only the crows call Tsuo's name.

He fights bravely, and the only true battle which he has been sent to fight went well. He returned alive. As an ashigaru levy, that is the only distinction: a poor battle is one from which you do not return. He watches each samurai who passed by, offering them service and information on a variety of topics (he has a quick mind and a clever tongue), in the hopes that they will ask his name. That they will remember him.

None have. They thank the *heimin* for his information, and ride away on their fine horses, headed for the palace of Kyuden Hida on some mission of great importance, while Tsuo remains ankle-deep in the muck.

The Hida don't know he exists, though he was instrumental in his ashigaru unit's victory. He is a genuinely fine warrior, despite his heritage and lack of training, and his quick thinking has saved the lives of many peasants in his legion.

He hasn't been noticed, however, and it is unlikely that he ever will be. Tsuo's life is one of tragedy and constant hope – each samurai who visits the Crab lands is another opportunity to "discover his destiny", and every wandering noble is another source of hope.

Once, a traveling monk stopped and spoke to him for a while, telling him pieces of the Tao and speaking of the Code of Bushido. Tsuo listened with great interest, memorizing as many of the quotes as possible. When he has opportunity, he repeats them to the other peasants, making them believe that his knowledge is much greater than it actually is.

He asks samurai who are traveling by to explain them to him again, desperately hoping they will take interest in his search for knowledge – but none have. *Perhaps the next one who comes by will notice me*, Tsuo always thinks to himself, watching the bright tassels on their horses as they ride away. Perhaps the next one.





Name: Yugoro
Clan: True Ronin
School: None
Honor: 0.3

Rank: N/A
Glory: 6.1

Stamina 3
 Willpower 4



Primary Weapon
 Katana 3k2

Skill	Level
Archery	3
Athletics	3
Battle	2
Defense	4
Engineering	2
Explosives	2
Forgery	4
Gambling	3
Hand-to-Hand	2
Horsemanship	2
Iaijutsu	3
Intimidation	4
Investigation	2
Kenjutsu	4
Law	2
Leadership	2
Lore (Various)	2-4
Poison	3
Stealth	4
Yarijutsu	2
Wrestling	2

Strength 4
 Perception 3



Roll & keep to hit
 9k5

Agility 5
 Intelligence 4



Roll & keep Damage
 7k2

Reflexes 4
 Awareness 4



TN to Be Hit
 20 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 4

Wounds

6	-0
6	-1
6	-2
6	-3
6	-4
6	Down
6	Out
6	Dead

Techniques

None

Special Notes

Advantages/Disadvantages

- Absolute Direction
- Bad Reputation (Bandit Lord)
- Combat Reflexes
- Crab Hands
- Crafty
- Cruel
- Enemies (Many)
- Insensitive
- Strength of the Earth (2 pts.)
- Way of the Land (Rokugan)

Yugoro

Yugoro is a bandit, proud of his trade and as dangerous as any man on the coast of the Empire. He controls the roadways that span the south of Phoenix lands, plaguing travelers and caravans alike. He does not hesitate to kill merchants, but is more likely to send them running to spin tales of the great bandit-lord that robbed them of everything they owned.

Yugoro is tall and burly with a touch of fat. One would expect him to swagger, but he walks with a sailor's roll and swings his arms loosely, like an ape. However, his speed with a sword indicates the flexibility of his arms. At least once, he was not flexible enough: a tremendous scar runs the length of his face and he is missing several teeth.

Yugoro is constantly looking for ronin and peasants with physical prowess to serve in his brigand band. He asks but one question – "Can you fight?" He will work with anyone, no matter how low or disreputable, and all men know better than to betray or deceive him, particularly when koku are involved. His lieutenants mutter that he is the bastard child of a Yasuki and a troll, filled with the worst traits of both. They say he killed an ogre with his bare hands, and those few who have survived his wrath claim that he must be a Mantis, for his anger is as great as a thunderstorm... and twice as dangerous.

The bandit daimyo works hard to protect his reputation, and to spread more such tales. He is a bully by nature, blessed with the physical strength and intellect to back up his threats with real menace. He's made quite a few enemies, but he has proved useful to a number of the clans (Great and Minor) over the last few years, and has quite a few underhanded "favors" (and blackmail victims) to call upon if the need arises.

Yugoro was born a peasant. Life would have dealt him a permanent and lasting blow had he not acquired the direction and ambition he has come to rely upon. Yugoro educated himself by listening (when he could) to the samurai children in the local Phoenix villages, and to their tutors. The Phoenix have no record of him within any of their census reports – even as a child. Yugoro excelled in hiding, and has remained unnoticed throughout most of his lifetime. Now, he has honed the art to a fine science. He has numerous "veils" to hide behind – from river beds and cave dwellings to assumed identities and forged travel papers. He can show up anywhere in Rokugan, and usually has a band of thieves and ronin working for him wherever he travels.

His underground bandit empire one stays unified through fear and respect: and the criminal syndicates of each area bow to

Yugoro in a complex and hidden web of loyalty and dominance. His prowess has touched so much of Rokugan that he has developed a separate identity for each of his "domains", with which he fosters fear and perpetuates his "mythic" status.

The actual number of bandits under Yugoro's leadership is unknown. His domain is so hidden that he must maintain everything in his head, for fear of capture or sign of weakness. If documentation of his followers were obtained by the magistrates of the Empire, his worst fears would be realized. As such, he is always seen with a pensive look on his face as he counts to himself, or wiggles his fingers, trying to maintain all the sums in his head. Blackmail is much easier for him; those he extorts commonly remember who they are.

Yugoro is known by many names, depending upon the province and clan territory he is encountered in. Some regions speak his title only in whispers, and are afraid to mention his exploits to magistrates, helping to solidify his stranglehold on many poor and unprotected villages. His many names include Sanpao, Gujuro, Hiretsu, Kyoza, Shukore, Forest Killer, and The Demon. Rumors abound of the exploits of these individuals, and anything that is heard about him is as likely to be fairy tale as truth.



Bento

Bento is an unimposing ten-year-old peasant boy, the ninth child and seventh son of Kuto and Yatike, of the farming town of Tsuma. Yatike, his mother, died giving birth to him. From the day he was born, Bento never uttered a sound.

Some say he was touched by the fortunes; others mutter that his mother cursed him. Those close to the family, though, readily discount the latter, knowing Yatike as a loving, religious woman, incapable of such hatred for her own son.

When Bento was nine, he was chosen to aid Kitsune Takari during the Topaz Championship, a great honor for the boy and his family. He performed menial tasks with an enthusiasm that impressed the warrior, and Takari took a certain fatherly liking to him. After the competition, Takari requested that Bento continue to serve him, and his father proudly relinquished the boy into the samurai's hands.

Takari, an Imperial Magistrate, found young Bento to be very resourceful. He had a fair grasp of etiquette and – with several cousins as servants to important families – was able to obtain information through channels that were unavailable to the Magistrate. Most importantly, no one paid Bento much attention, allowing him to maneuver among them as an effective spy. Takari grew fond of Bento, and started educating him in basic literacy, hunting, and other mundane skills.

During a mission to eliminate two ogre bushi that were pillaging a small village at the edge of the Phoenix provinces, Takari was fatally wounded. He charged young Bento with returning a cherished artifact to his homeland. It was called *Reishiheido*, a beautiful war tessen that had been given to Takari by his father.

Over the following weeks, Bento stole across the heart of the Empire, dedicated to returning the precious fan. Eventually, the item was delivered to its rightful owners, though none know the identity of the hero who brought it back to them. Bento has not been seen since, though he surely wanders Rokugan still, searching for a new lord as worthy as his last...

Bento's Inner Gift: At his mother's death, the child Bento was touched by the Fortunes Ebisu and Fukorokujin. They smiled upon the *heimin* woman for the hard work and humility she endured throughout her life, and guided her through death and beyond.

As a result of his brush with the Fortunes, Bento has an uncanny connection with *kami* of all sorts. He can speak with the spirits within most anything, be it an ancestral sword, a baby,

a favorite unicorn steed, a magic tessen, or a pet fox. His "conversations" with them are as fluent as common speech, but as the ability draws from his humility, innocence, and purity of soul, Bento can only converse when none are watching him.

Bento once attempted to communicate his ability to his father, pleading mutely for the sow that did not want to be slaughtered, and the wok that was tired of being banged about, but Kuto would have none of it and punished Bento instead. Since then, Bento has never revealed his gift, not even to Takari, who might actually have believed him. He is not yet sure whether his "gift" is a blessing or a curse, but knows that he must hide it until he can be sure, and until he can protect himself from those who would hurt him because of it.

Bento's Personality: Incredibly polite, and very humble, Bento is fervently loyal to those he finds to be truly honorable. He only reveals his playful side to those whom he considers his closest friends, careful and guarded around all others.

He has seen too much for a boy his age, and this shows in the lines of his face. But somehow, he manages to remain positive, always looking to the next dawn, expecting a brighter day.

Bento also knows that he cannot return to the life of a simple peasant boy. He has seen and heard too much. But the world does not frighten him. In Rokugan, no one cares about a mute peasant boy, and Bento knows that is his greatest asset.





Name: Hartuisun-wo
Clan: Mantis
School: Mantis Bushi
Honor: 0.6

Rank: 4
Glory: 4.3

Stamina 4
 Willpower 4



Primary Weapon
 Naginata 3k3

Skill	Level
Athletics	4
Battle	2
Commerce	4
Defense	3
Forgery	2
Gambling	1
Hand-to-Hand	5
Hunting	2
Investigation	2
Kenjutsu	2
Lore (Crab)	4
Lore (Crane)	3
Naginata	5
Nofujutsu	4
Sleight of Hand	3
Sailing	5
Stealth	3
Tetsubo	3

Strength 5
 Perception 5



Roll & keep to hit
 9k4

Agility 4
 Intelligence 3



Roll & keep Damage
 8k3

Reflexes 3
 Awareness 4



TN to Be Hit
 15 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 3

Wounds

8	-0
8	-1
8	-2
8	-3
8	-4
8	Down
8	Out
8	Dead

Techniques

- _____ Fight Without Steel
- _____ Voice of the Storm
- _____ Claws of the Mantis
- _____ Yoritomo's Rolling Wave
- _____

Special Notes

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Advantages/Disadvantages

- _____ Ambidextrous
- _____ Blackmail (Many Crane)
- _____ Greed (3 pts.)
- _____ Heart of Vengeance (Crane)
- _____ Perfect Balance
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Hartuisun-wo

Hartuisun-wo is one of the most influential merchants of the Mantis Clan, controlling a great fleet of ships (junk and kobune alike) throughout the island chain to the east of Rokugan. The true strength of his fleet has reportedly never been felt, and many of the ships' captains do not even realize whom they truly work for. He is very careful to keep his myriad employees at a minimum safe distance, both for their own safety and anonymity, and his own.

Smuggling, bribery, blackmail, psychological warfare, and outright theft – few things are beyond Hartuisun-wo's capacity or experience. He has attempted nearly every offense the Emerald Empire has to offer, and succeeded at most. In fact, the only crime he knows he cannot commit is murder, with the exception of one man, who became his greatest obsession...

Unlike many villains, Hartuisun-wo's childhood was not troublesome, nor were his family cruel to him or unsupporting. His parents were Mantis silk merchants whose life together had been idyllic and calm, and whose only potential failing was to teach their son that money was the true source of power within the Empire. They encouraged his mind first, sharpening his ability with numbers and skill at reading others' true feelings, only allowing him to proceed with his martial training when he had completed the day's mental chores.

The family had a good deal of influence within the Mantis lands, and a few long-term contacts within the Crane Clan on the mainland, but their wealth was humble compared to what Hartuisun-wo himself would one day gather. They lived upon one of the smaller islands to the northwest of Shima no Kinu and the Mantis Clan Palace, where they maintained a small compound a few loyal servants. Their life was peaceful and comforting.

But then, one spring morning, a Crane merchant vessel arrived from the mainland. It was commanded by an arrogant Doji duelist by the name of Bake, who proved to be quick to temper and impossible to appease. He visited each of the silk merchants on the island, coming to Hartuisun-wo's home just as the sun was setting for the day.

The silks presented by the Mantis couple were well above the quality their neighbors offered, and their prices were understandably higher. Doji Bake decided that the cost was not only too high, but an insult to his station, and promptly cut both of the merchants down. Leaving with the silks, he tossed a single koku upon their bodies, a final disgrace to them, even in death.

Unable to challenge the Crane, Hartuisun-wo could only stand and watch his perfect life crumble before him.

In the months following the incident, Hartuisun-wo was taken in by the other families upon the island. He was given all the formal training of the Mantis, but with a far more balanced curriculum than his parents had provided. His instruction now included raw martial development, but he knew that the path to his ultimate revenge did not lie with the sword.

With no other family to inherit his parent's business interests, Hartuisun-wo took them over. Few believed that he would be able to manage them efficiently at his age, but his common-sense approach to the complicated world of barter economics proved more than adequate. Within two years, he had doubled his family's wealth, and acquired all of the neighboring estates upon his home island. This became the headquarters of his smuggling and extortion empire, and remains his home to this day.

Intoxicated with the heady power granted by his newfound wealth, Hartuisun-wo set his sights on Doji Bake and his own smuggling interests. One well-placed and very expensive bribe later, Doji Bake found theommel of a long tanto buried in his back. And with several carefully calculated plots, the Crane's ships and wealth found their way into the Mantis' hands.

Since that day, Hartuisun-wo has never looked back. Beyond understanding true power, he now wielded it, and with each new dawn he increases it. His favorite tactic is to bribe prominent or powerful Cranes upon the mainland to acquire their goods at a tremendous discount, then sell them back through the Yasuki syndicate for a sizable profit.





Name: Iuchi Yoru
Clan: Unicorn (born Ashalan)
School: Iuchi Shugenja *Rank: 4*
Honor: 2 *Glory: 1.1*

Stamina 4
 Willpower 4



Primary Weapon
 Khadja 3k3 (3k4 as crystal)

Skill	Level
Astrology	5
Athletics	2
Bard	4
Bojutsu	3
Calligraphy	4
Craft: Sandsmith	3
Defense	2
History (Burning Sands)	4
History (Rokugan)	2
Intimidation	2
Investigation	2
Khadja	4
Lore (Burning Sands)	4
Lore (Unicorn)	2
Meditation	2
Research	3
Shintao	3
Sincerity	2
Spellcraft	4
Stealth	3
Yarijutsu	3

Strength 3
 Perception 6



Roll & keep to hit
 8k4

Agility 4
 Intelligence 7



Roll & keep Damage
 6k3

Reflexes 4
 Awareness 2



TN to Be Hit
 20 (No armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 4

Wounds

8	-0
8	-1
8	-2
8	-3
8	-4
8	Down
8	Out
8	Dead

Spells

Sense, Commune, Summon, All known Air Spells, Accounts of Shorihotsu (Innate), Benevolent Protection of Shinsei (Innate), Burning Sands*, Force of Will, Grounding Energy*, Jade Strike, Path to Inner Peace, Purity of Shinsei*, Reflective Pool, Sharing the Strength of Many, Step Between the Stars*, Strike at the Roots
 * Lost or secret Spells Yoru has recovered over the decades he has spent in Rokugan

Advantages/Disadvantages

Adopted Blood
Allies (various Iuchi)
Dependent (Moto Kagibe)
Driven (to find Fourth Avatar)
Elemental Attunement (Air)
Innate Ability (see Spells)
Irreproachable
Never Sat on a Horse

Iuchi Yoru

By Ashalan standards, Iuchi Yoru is quite young; he is a mere 737 years of age and unable to remember the Day of Wrath which nearly unmade his homeland in the Burning Sands. It is rumored that he was one of the Ashalan's ancestral royalty (an obscure group called the *Indaya*) before some great shame drove him to flee, though this has never been confirmed.

Little is known of Yoru within Rokugan; indeed, most do not even realize that one of his breed exists within the Empire at all. He speaks little of his past, and only to those who have somehow overcome the bitter mistrust he feels for mortals. To date, this list includes a handful of high-ranking Unicorn and his dear companion, Moto Kagibe, whom he knows as Qayla of the Seventh Chronicle (see the next character description for more).

Yoru has perhaps the greatest living knowledge of the Unicorn Clan's time beyond the mountains, greater even than the clan's own historians. He personally witnessed the Kami Shinjo's momentous decision to elevate the peasant servant Moto Soro to the status of samurai with his own family, and has periodically counseled many of the Moto clansmen over the last several centuries, steering them clear of hardship and misfortune.

Fifty-two years ago, Yoru was still known by his birth-name of Nashaar. He came to the Unicorn through the lands of the Naga, who are said to be ancient adversaries of his people. His companions were Moto Kagibe, then only a child, and the boy's parents, who had been charged with procuring a woman of great power to be born within the Emperor's lands in the coming generation – someone they called an "Avatar." The aggression of the serpent-men was both unexpected and unrelenting, however, and only Nashaar and the child survived the trip, crossing the River of the Unexpected Hero and entering the Spine of the World Mountains alone.

The two travelers were not well-received at first, but Nashaar soon proved invaluable to the Unicorn. Eventually, he was officially accepted into the clan, taking the Blood Rite according to their Laws of Adoption. He was named Yoru (which means "night") in honor of his odd skin color, and granted the status of samurai, though he was warned to remain covered in public.

Due to the Rokugani view that those with extraordinary power have somehow been "touched by the gods", Yoru avoids using his native magic in Rokugan. Instead, he has adopted the schooling of the Iuchi Shugenja School, only diverging from their teachings when he feels that another avenue presents greater opportunity for direct interaction with the Elements. Yoru is fascinated with the Rokugani pantheon (Fortunes, ancestors, and

the like), and devotes enormous time and resources to unlocking their secrets. Most other Iuchi who are familiar with his private endeavors approve, not yet realizing the disregard he has for his "test subjects."

Yoru remains outside the central chain of Unicorn command, though the reasons for this remain unclear. He is known only to be one of the Iuchi's chief researchers, a man of great integrity (with perhaps a hint of enlightened madness). The only ones who know of his true heritage are his lord, Moto Kagibe, a few trusted Unicorn, and Shinjo Rikei, to whom he was married three years ago (again, see Moto Kagibe's description on the next page).

The Khadja: Yoru brought this weapon with him from his homeland; it is the only one ever seen in Rokugan. Lighter and more versatile than a naginata, the khadja requires special training (in the form of the Khadja Skill) from a master of the weapon. Most techniques with it are fast and fluid, meant to unbalance and overpower a foe, while simultaneously keeping him at a distance. The crysteel blade is forged with a special method known only to Ashalan Sandsmiths. It does not have a Strength value as common Rokugani crystal, being magical in nature; instead, those skilled in its use keep an extra die when rolling damage against creatures affected by crystal.





Name: Moto Kagibe
Clan: Unicorn
School: Moto Bushi
Honor: 2.4

Rank: 4
Glory: 3.8

Stamina 4
 Willpower 5



Primary Weapon
 Longsword 1k4

Skill	Level
Animal Husbandry	3
Archery	4
Battle	2
Defense	3
Hand-to-Hand	3
History	3
Horse Archery	3
Horsemanship	3
Hunting	2
Intimidation	2
Kenjutsu	3
Longsword	3
Lore (Shadowlands)	1
Meditation	2
Mountaineer	2
Music (Fue)	3
Oratory	1
Shintao	3
Sling	3

Strength 4
 Perception 3



Roll & keep to hit
 6k3

Agility 3
 Intelligence 3



Roll & keep Damage
 5k4

Reflexes 3
 Awareness 2



IN to Be Hit
 25 (Heavy armor)

Void Points Spent _____



Initiative
 One die + 3

Wounds

8	-0
8	-1
8	-2
8	-3
8	-4
8	Down
8	Out
8	Dead

Techniques

- _____ Purity of the Breath
- _____ Facing the Dark Within
- _____ Justice of Our Ancestors
- _____ Avenging Our Own

Special Notes

Shadowlands Taint: 2.2 Points
Manifestations: White hair, wracking cough (with blood), pale skin tone, mild paranoia, cloudy pupils, hears the voice of Fu Leng

Advantages/Disadvantages

- _____ Allies (Various Unicorn)
- _____ Ancestor (Moto Soro)
- _____ Bad Health
- _____ Gaijin Gear (Riding Horse)
- _____ Gaijin Gear (Longsword)
- _____ Gaijin Gear (Sling)
- _____ Gentry
- _____ Jealousy (Iuchi Yoru)
- _____ Large
- _____ Moto Curse
- _____ True Friend (Iuchi Yoru)

Moto Kagibe

Silently, like the calm night air before a bitter storm, Moto Kagibe is dying. He is rotting from within, becoming a hollow, diseased shell fluttering in pale wind before a laughing moon. How he came to be this way is another story altogether, one which begins fifty-two years ago, beyond the northern mountains in an arid waste called the Burning Sands.

His name was Ma'rhadi. His parents were far-seekers of the Ra'Shari gypsies, charged with retrieving a woman whom the bone-readers had predicted would be born into a coming generation of Rokugan's children. The family set out across the Ivory Kingdoms, guided by an Ashalan explorer named Nashaar. They brought horses and equipment from their native land, though they realized that they would have to abandon them once they passed into the Emerald Empire.

They were only hours from the border of what the Rokugani called "The Shadowlands" when a pack of serpent-men, apparently offended by the presence of their guide, descended upon the group, fatally wounding both of Ma'rhadi's parents before they could flee. As they lay dying upon the corrupted earth, their breathing shallow, they spoke of the importance of their mission, and how he would have to persist if the world were to continue.

"The Fourth Avatar..." they said to him, "is critical to the Coming Age. Without her... the Ritual is not possible. The Chronicle will not end... and time will cease to have meaning. When the Chronicle continues for too long... the world will break... down... Bring her... home."

Shinjo's Law demands that no Unicorn may cause the death of another, but young Ma'rhadi was unable to comply. The pain his parents felt as the foulness of the ground seeped into their souls was too much for him to bear, and with two swift blows, they were gone. Today, Ma'rhadi (who took the name Kagibe after his induction into the Unicorn Clan) looks on this action as a harbinger of dark tides, the moment at which the ill wind took hold.

It is no doubt that the Taint of Fu Leng crept into him as well that day, as the searing pain of his boil-ridden skin and the deformity of his face can attest. Moto Kagibe, though now an honored member of the Unicorn and liked by many, has become a grim

shadow of his former zeal, a mouthpiece for his would-be father, Iuchi Yoru (see previous description), and their joint quest to find the missing Avatar.

He suffers endlessly, unable to relish the extravagance of his position or the friendship of his family. It has been said by those who know him that it might be best to venture on his *kurichitai* soon, but he refuses. "When you walk beside death at every moment," he tells them, "there is no need to pass on. I am content to remain."

Yoru, who understands his hidden pain but can do nothing to end it, remains his closest ally and friend. There have been wedges placed between them, such as the marriage of the Ashalan to Shinjo Rikei; Kagibe loves the woman dearly, but knows that she could never return his passion, and so he remains - as always - idle, living vicariously through Yoru's immortality.

Year by year, the Moto has come to look on the eternal vitality of his partner as a final irreverent jest.

He can feel the wind nipping at his fragile fingers...



Kitsune Kenjo

*Even in times of peace, a samurai always carries swords.
- Akodo's Leadership*

Kenjo, a very minor son of the Fox Clan, has always been taught the ways of the warrior. Born a bushi in a house of shugenja, he has striven to find his place in a world filled with unfamiliar things. His father, a powerful spell-caster, could not teach him the arts of war, and no clan in the Empire would divulge their secret teachings to him.

He struggled to learn the ways of kenjutsu on his own, hoping that a sensei would allow him to enter their school and begin proper training. But that day never came. The letters he sent and the politics he struggled to understand kept him from his true desire, and his swordsmanship remained only passable.

Kenjo struggled on his father's farmlands, helping the *heimin* to carry their loads and fulfill the harsh taxation of the Imperial Court. One day, that all changed.

A older, brash Kitsune samurai traveled through their lands, demanding room and board for his journey. Graciously, Kenjo accepted the burden and allowed the samurai to remain in their home for the evening, hoping to hear tales of the Empire. The Fox samurai, however, was not so friendly. He was on a mission to the Unicorn Lands, he repeated often, because - through favors and deals with the Scorpion - he had gained admittance to their prestigious bushi school. The Scorpion were planning to learn the Unicorn's tactics, sending the traitorous Kitsune to them, and then hiring him to teach their own bushi.

The visiting samurai laughed at the deals he had made, claiming that the Fox Clan's bonds of loyalty to the Unicorn made them soft and useless. After eating tremendous amounts of rice and gulping down bottle after bottle of sake, he demanded that Kenjo's sister attend him that evening, in the manner of a geisha.

Offended, Kenjo demanded that the honorless samurai leave their house, but he refused, drawing his sword and threatening to kill Kenjo if the Fox's sister did not do as he demanded. She denied him, and the man lifted his sword to strike her down.

Kenjo responded with a warrior's instinct. Leaping between them, he grasped the hilt in his own hands, reversing the blow into the visitor's own stomach. When the man lay dead at their feet, Kenjo and his sister realized the horrible danger. A swordsman was expected to arrive at the Unicorn school, and now he would be missed. If they went to the Scorpion, they

would surely be killed. Only the Unicorn could help them; it was a risk, certainly, for someone within the Unicorn Clan knew of the deception being planned.

Kenjo took his own armor and sword, the samurai's traveling papers and horse, and embarked for the lands of the Unicorn himself. His sister waits for him in the farmlands of his home, praying to the Fortunes that her brother will some day return home.

Kenjo has studied with the Shinjo for nearly a year, learning their fundamental techniques and attempting to uncover the plot which has brought him here. He pretends, dutifully, to be the swordsman they had expected, adopting the other Kitsune's name and history (as best as he can piece together), and hopes that the Scorpion who will eventually come for him will not remember the man's face. Though his life is in great danger, he thrills to learn the ways of the blade which were once denied him, and hopes one day that his training will allow him to destroy the Scorpion plot before they discover his ruse.

Yet, in the Shinjo palace, a traitor already knows his secret...



Seppun Soishi

The Seppun family has a long and honorable tradition of protecting and serving the greatest men and women of Rokugan. Thanks to the diligence of Soishi's family, the brightest lights in the Empire have been kept safe from harm. All within the Emperor's lands know that the man or woman watched over by a Seppun is one to be reckoned with.

Otomo Tonaka was such a man, but he was no "bright light of Rokugan." He was a manipulative, backstabbing, blackmailing sycophant who would do anything to advance his career and position within the realm. Just how it was that Soishi was assigned to protect him remains a mystery. But it certainly didn't come as much of a shock to the samurai when the Emerald Magistrate (his superior) ordered that Tonaka be killed.

A week prior to a proposed trip to the Unicorn lands, a messenger from the Emerald Magistrate arrived, along with a small bundle. The message asked that Soishi pass the bundle's contents to another Imperial Magistrate, Ide Furasa, who had been ordered to cause Tonaka's death. Soishi was to assist Furasa in any way possible.

Ironically, Soishi knew Ide Furasa from their time at the Unicorn training grounds, where the Seppun learned the fine art of horsemanship. Under cover of night, Soishi delivered the package to Furasa at the Ide Palace, and the two samurai spoke. Although they were never close friends, the fact that they were both assigned to such a delicate operation piqued their interest. But they had little time to evaluate the situation. If they were to avoid detection, they must move quickly, and without thought.

Two mornings later, Seppun Soishi's lord was dead.

The following day was the first of a three-day festival held at the home of a merchant lord, Yasuki Utobeko, whom Tonaka was close to and occasionally conducted business with. Tonaka's death created quite a stir among the assembled nobles, and Soishi's remaining time at the festival was spent dodging magistrates' questions, salvaging his own reputation (now that his charge had died during his watch), and keeping Furasa's name and face out of view.

Through a long series of clever and inventive machinations, both Soishi and Furasa managed to get through the festival without being incriminated in Tonaka's death, and they returned to the lives they knew before the assassination order. Ide Furasa returned to his Ancestral Palace for his next assignment, and Seppun Soishi reported to the Emerald Magistrate for another charge. Seppun yojimbo rarely remain anywhere for long after

their lord dies, and Soishi was no exception. He was assigned to an ambassador within the Dragon lands, Otomo Gide, and left his former life behind, trying to bury the events of Otomo Tonaka's death beneath a thick veil of diligence.

Had this not been the case, had anyone who knew him before been near, they would have noticed the change in him. Once young and idealistic, Seppun Soishi had gained a taste for the power he – and all samurai – hold over life and death. Through Tonaka, he had also been exposed to the underhanded dealings of Rokugan's dark and dishonorable belly, and was fascinated. Over the following years, he began gambling, trading in illegal items, and indulging in new frontiers of perversion.

Then the scroll arrived.

It was written in a simple, flowing hand, and had no seal.

The author claimed to have murdered Ide Furasa and to know the truth of Tonaka's death.

And it demanded Soishi's seppuku....



Shazaar

The Shazaar is the first Naga to have awakened in the Empire. She is a swift learner, but even so, has been hard-pressed to survive alone. Around her, the world has changed; the cities of the Naga have crumbled, and new palaces have grown from the hills and rocks which were once barren. Pale-skinned, furred creatures live there, speaking a language which chitters and shouts. It was all she could do to step out of the Shinomen Forest and watch them. They are terrifying – and they are everywhere.

When the Naga were awake, over a thousand years ago, their culture was strong and rich, filled with the glory of civilization and the rich spiritualism of the Bright Eye and the Pale. The Akasha, the Naga collective consciousness, spoke freely of her people, of their joined souls and of their stories. It is silent now, touched with the sleep of the ancient Naga race, and its voice does not speak to her. All her life, Shazaar has been a scout for her people, but now she struggles to understand the strange ways of the world around her. If her people are going to awaken – and she prays every day that they will – they will need her to explain this world to them. They will need to understand the changes and the dangers of this new Empire.

The Shazaar (a title given to a diplomatic scout, rather than a hunter or a warrior) was once known as Ischar. Since her third shedding of skin, she has been the Shazaar, taking the title as her name in the Naga manner. For nearly a year, she has watched them, spending unmoving days by the river near human villages and habitations, listening to their language until she could recognize and pronounce some of its simplest words. Today, she hopes that she is ready to leave the enfolding groves and integrate herself into the world around her, to better understand the ways of the new beasts.

It has worked... poorly. Her first try was to move from the woodlands in her natural form, hoping to speak directly to the *hoo-mans* and convey her plight. The Falcon peasants screamed and fled, crying of Oni and howling for their samurai guardians. Shazaar slid back into the Shinomen, cursing the language barrier that prevented her from communicating her true nature. But she was determined to try again.

Shazaar's second attempt was only slightly more successful. She slipped into her "legged" form, carrying a basket of weeds as she had seen the peasants do. Her green skin made the *heimin* scream and flee once more, and Shazaar vanished into the woods.

Now, she has conquered her difficulties. The language comes more easily, and her legged form is no different from the color of the peasants when she uses the gifts of her Chameleon heritage. A large hat and wide kimono (taken from the abandoned Falcon village) completes her outfit. She has even taken a knife from one of their villages, and learned to use it.

Shazaar is cautious, not impulsive; she watches, but does not act. Her travels down the roads of Rokugan have been filled with fear and sorrow. She hates the Shadowlands, feeling their rise to power in the far south even through her loneliness.

One of the things she has discovered in Rokugan that brings her great joy is sushi (sashimi). Shazaar spits out the rice when she steals sushi, but she can eat an awful lot of fish.

She wants to prepare her people for their awakening, and seeks to learn as much as she can about this new world and its people. Shazaar has been forced by nature and duty to learn about the *hoo-mans*, and although they seem strange, their companionship is better than the aching loneliness of the silent Shinomen.

She comes to them in her legged form, mimicking their noises and their actions as best she could. When her people awaken, she will be able to communicate all that she has learned to them through the Akasha. The samurai she meets are not simply teaching her. They are teaching her entire race.



Otosan UchiTM



A thousand years ago, the Hantei Emperors built a city that would stand forever.

Otosan Uchi has remained indomitable for generations. It is time for her to reveal her secrets at last...

Prepare to meet your Emperor.

AEG

*LegendTM
of the
Five Rings*