Legend of the Five Rings™
ROLEPLAYING

# Path of Waves

## The Essential Guide to Rōnin

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*In loving memory of Shaun Lee Dykema 11/15/71–11/5/2018*

*NRDNA*


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*26th Day of the Month of Bayushi, 1119, somewhere near the Lion-Unicorn border*

"Junko! I found foooooood!" Eijiro's voice echoed throughout the empty village street—really, a muddy path—gouged out by endless feet, hooves, and cartwheels. The tall, lanky man held his katana in one hand, idly swiping it like a stick, knocking away a polished pebble with a clang. In his other, he held a pale daikon and bit into it with an equally loud crunch.

"Shut. Up," Junko hissed. The shorter, stockier woman, slightly hunched from bad posture and a life of labor, carried her spear tucked under her arm, ready for a fight. "Bandits will hear, Eijiro."

Eijiro looked around but saw no signs of life, save the crows. "This dump hasn't been hit by bandits. Besides, who would come back to such a no-name village?"

"It has a name."

"Don't be silly, Junko. Villages this small never have a name." He tossed the daikon over to her, and she dropped her spear to catch it.

"You do not know everything," she muttered to herself. She walked over to an inn, slid the door aside, and spied a stew pot, the fire long burned out, the bottom layered with someone's charred breakfast. "I have never liked daikon. It tastes too muddy."

"Then start that pot. I'll look for more provisions."

—

The next day, Junko surveyed the land around the village to get their bearings. She found no evidence of bandits, no new hoofprints, no bodies, no signs of fighting. She also found no indication of the villagers' evacuation. It was as if they had simply disappeared.

Eijiro explored the village itself—which didn't take much time, admittedly—and found only evidence of a sudden disappearance. A bundle of straw lay off to one side. A *yukata* was draped over a stool. A nice pair of sandals sat side by side, waiting for their owner.

Junko returned to find her companion sitting by the empty stew pot placing more of those polished pebbles in clumps and patterns, as if playing a game of Go with only one color. "You will not find breakfast there," she said.

"Not hungry," he muttered as his stomach growled. "I'm just trying to ascertain where we should go next. I can't figure out where we are. If only this village had a name…"

She stretched, popping her back, and said, "Shiraokamura."

"What?" Eijiro sat up with a start. "Wait. What? How do you know that?"

Junko shrugged. "The white pebbles? They are everywhere here. The two rivers nearby wash the rocks until they shine."

"Two rivers?" Eijiro leapt to his feet. "Two rivers? I wonder if we're at the southern border of the Unicorn. Wait, are we in Lion lands? Oh no. That would mean we're near Meiyo Gisei Toshi…"

"Meiyo Gisei?" A strange spasm stretched across Junko's face, something resembling a smile. "You did say you smelled money. Let us go!"

"What? Wait! No, no, no. There are better places to go."

"It is a Lion city. Their cities must be clean and rich. They would care about what happened here. Lion people are noble and honorable."

"You're thinking of the clan families," Eijiro muttered. "And they are far from just or good. Trust me. We'll just find trouble there."

"I want to see a Lion city. Do you think it has those nice kimono you keep talking about?"

"Junko! Listen to me! We cannot go to Meiyo Gisei. We're going north, into Unicorn lands. The horse lords are always hiring *rōnin*."

Junko frowned. "It is cold up there. And I do not like horses. They smell. And they bite."

As usual when they disagreed, they both sat sullenly in silence until they went to sleep.

—

The next morning, Eijiro woke to see only his katana leaning by the post. He leapt to his feet, grabbed his sword, and ran out expecting the thunder of hooves or the shouts of bandits. Instead, the empty village met him with silence. The mud, however, revealed the footprints of Junko's straw sandals, heading south.

When he caught up to her, he found her humming tunelessly, head held high. He said, carefully, "You're in a pleasant mood, Junko."

"You cannot make fun of me. I will get money in Meiyo Gisei—eat well, and talk to the dōshin about the villages," she said. "All is good under Tengoku and earth."

He sighed. "We can't go into Lion lands."

"How much is your head?"

"What? No, Junko, I don't have a bounty."

"Oh. Did you anger someone terribly, then?"

"Er, yes…" Eijiro thought of his father, his mother, and his aunt. The arguments. Stealing away at night with a bundle of koku, his katana, and his now long-lost silk kimono. "Yes, a lot of angry people."

"Then we can just kill them. That is what we are good at, after all." She continued walking, singing, out of tune, that song about winning the smile of a farmer's daughter.

"We can go to any other city, just not Meiyo Gisei."

"If they do not know what happened to Shiraokamura, then they can find out. The Lion people will help."

Eijiro stood in the middle of the path, debating with himself. He could go north like he planned, alone. Earn some good money fighting for the Unicorn. Junko could find her missing father by herself. She didn't need his help. He didn't need hers to survive.

With a sigh, he jogged until he reached Junko's side and matched her pace. Family truly is a burden.

# Welcome to the Fringes of Rokugan

In Rokugan, the Celestial Order is believed to be absolute. Those who stray from this path are seen as a perversion of the natural order. *Rōnin*, masterless samurai, find themselves in the tumultuous place between castes. They might be on a leave of absence to learn of the world, they might have failed in a duty and been cast aside, or perhaps they have never had a lord to serve. They are still considered samurai, however, and are higher than peasants in the Celestial Order—though they do not truly belong in either world, and neither samurai nor peasants readily accept them. And tales of wandering heroes inspire some heimin and hinin into action: unhappy with their lot in life, or simply wishing to protect what they have even at extreme risk to themselves, such commoners take up the blade and act as rōnin might. And then there are those who do not fit into the Celestial Order at all, those who hail from foreign places and practice strange, alien customs. *Gaijin*, foreigners to Rokugan unwelcome by Imperial decree, stand apart from society, and often find themselves consorting with ronin, commoners, outcasts, and criminals…

Yet, tales of rōnin, peasants, and gaijin are among the most daring, exciting, and heroic! To have so little, to be considered one of the lowliest but fight through countless adversities to emerge triumphant, is excellent fodder for the telling of stories concerning the Emerald Empire.

## What's in this book?

*Path of Waves* is a guide to being an outsider in Rokugan, whether a renegade peasant, bitter rōnin, or curious gaijin. The title refers to the year-long, voluntary period where some new samurai, shortly after their gempuku, travel the land as rōnin, without lord or family on which to rely. This period is meant to renew the samurai's allegiance to the security and importance of their clan, though some choose to float on the waves forever.

*Path of Waves* is filled with information on how those living outside, or on the fringes of, the samurai caste survive and attempt to thrive in a society that considers them lesser. Adventures in Rokugan are not just for those deemed worthy by the Imperial Throne; some of the most interesting journeys are had by a ragtag bunch of misfits seeking out fame or glory as their desires collide with their pasts to create rich, dramatic experiences.

This book is divided into seven chapters designed to take players and GMs on an in-depth dive into a little-discussed, but very large, segment of Rokugani society. The first three chapters explore the life of rōnin and give players a new set of twenty questions with which to build their characters, as well as new options for building outsider characters. The fourth and fifth chapters provide GMs with two fully realized settings—each including locations, characters, and adventure seeds—that they can incorporate into their games. The sixth chapter also includes additional information on gaijin and the Ivory Kingdoms. Finally, the seventh chapter provides GMs with guidance on developing games for rōnin and other outsider characters, as well as with a host of new NPCs with which to populate the adventures (and misadventures!) of those living outside of the comfort of samurai society.

### Chapter 1

**The Life of the Rōnin** explores how rōnin come to be and how rōnin characters might act and react to a society that finds them distasteful. This chapter explores rōnin and peasants, the clans, and the relationship between rōnin, *Bushidō*, and the Celestial Order. Additionally, it provides a look at how rōnin make their livelihood without the resources available to samurai of the clans.

## Chapter 2

**Creating a Character** offers players a whole new set of twenty questions for use in creating rōnin, peasant, and gaijin characters. New distinctions, passions, adversities, and anxieties are included, as is a host of new school options. This chapter also contains the tools to allow players and GMs to build their own schools and gaijin cultures.

## Chapter 3

**New Player Options** offers dozens of new techniques, including a collection of rituals that show off the alchemical prowess of the Qamarists, tools to use the celestial implements, or *astras*, of the Ivory Kingdoms, and a variety of new abilities at which the polite members of the samurai class might balk. This chapter also contains new titles, items, and weapons to help make every character feel unique.

## Chapter 4

**Twin Blessings Village** is a fully fleshed-out setting that GMs can use to enhance their games. Encompassing dozens of locations, NPCs, local legends, and adventure seeds, it is the perfect place for outcast characters to start their adventures. The village is fully modular, with guidance included to help GMs place it just about anywhere in Rokugan with a few minor adjustments. GMs can also quickly and easily take a location, NPC, or other aspect of the setting and use it in their games.

## Chapter 5

**Hirosaka** is another fully realized setting for GMs and players to use in their adventures, including locations, NPCs, and adventure hooks. As with Twin Blessings Village, any aspect of Hirosaka can be removed or used elsewhere, and the town can be set in nearly any region of Rokugan with minor adjustments.

## Chapter 6

**Untold Stories** offers guidance on using different themes and developing games (both individual adventures and longer campaigns) for rōnin and gaijin characters. Examples of media to which GMs can turn to for inspiration are discussed, as are strategies for running games that include a mix of character types, such as rōnin traveling with a samurai party.

### ADVENTURE SEEDS

Throughout this book, you'll find sidebars like this one presenting adventure seeds for GMs. If you're a player, you might want to avoid reading these, as doing so could spoil things should your GM adopt the ideas! If you're a GM, you can expand on these seeds to create fully fledged adventures, take bits and pieces, or simply use them for inspiration.

一 **Hook** The hook provides the context for starting the adventure and introduces the important NPCs. We also provide a suggested way to involve the PCs in events, which you can tailor to fit your campaign.

二 **Rising Action** In the next part of an adventure seed, we briefly describe the most likely way for events to escalate, further embroiling the PCs and raising the stakes.

三 **Climax** Finally we offer a likely climax for the adventure, whether that is a decisive encounter with an NPC or a difficult choice the PCs must make. By this point, the events of the adventure are likely to have taken unexpected turns based on the PCs' actions, and you should feel free to modify the climax or resolve matters in whatever way fits the ongoing adventure.

## Chapter 7

This chapter on **Non-Player Characters** includes several new templates for NPCs as well as a collection of new NPC city and village dwellers, animals, and supernatural beings. Players and GMs alike can enjoy many new enemies and allies—from a wandering swordmaster to a mischievous spirit known as a *kappa*—that help to fill out Rokugan's lands.

Rokugan
Great Wall of the North Mountains
Dragon Lands
Unicorn Lands
Spine of the World
Lion Lands
Phoenix Lands
Shinomen Forest
Scorpion Lands
Northern Crane Lands
Crab Lands
Southern Crane Lands
Twilight Mountains
The Shadowlands
Islands of Silk and Spice
KHANBULAK
HISU MORI VILLAGE
NAMELESS VILLAGE
CITY OF THE RICH FROG
CITY OF HONOR'S SACRIFICE
RUGASHI CITY
AUTHORIZED CITY
SHELTERED PLAINS CITY
NARROW PASS CITY
SLOW TIDE HARBOR
OTOSAN UCHI
TWIN BLESSINGS VILLAGE
HIROSAKA
CITY OF LIES
BEIDEN
SHIMOMURA
KUDO VILLAGE
MAEMIKAKE
WALL ABOVE THE OCEAN VILLAGE
WATER MUSIC VILLAGE
KUROSUNAI VILLAGE
THE PORT THAT NEVER SLEEPS
WEST MOUNTAIN VILLAGE
SWIRLING POOL VILLAGE
CLEAR WATER VILLAGE
PALACE OF THE MANTIS
CITY OF LIGHTNING

CHAPTER

# 1

# The Life of the Rōnin

*"Your promised one hundred* bu*," says the noblewoman to Hideki. "Please count it."*

*"Thank you." He does. The rōnin's expression is stoic, but his body betrays his discomfort through the thousand tiny adjustments he makes, the spacing of his legs when he sits, the tension and angle of his arms at his sides. The room is dim, but he's unaccustomed to smooth, spare chambers; straight mats; no clutter. He's especially not used to ladies like the one seated before him.*

*"I will give you some advice," she says. "When you reach town, you will need a vantage point overlooking the harbor, so you notice when the shipment arrives. Keiichi's inn south of the docks will do. Pay, and he will let you stay as long as you want without asking questions. Why are you looking at me like that?"*

*"Forgive me, I—" The rōnin flushes. "I am surprised you know Keiichi's. I have never walked out of there on my feet. Only been—uh—forcefully ejected."*

*"Nowhere better in the country for no-account rōnin to lie low." She grins. "Hid there the better part of a year. Old Keiichi never even asked my name."*

*"You—"*

*"Oh, I was not always a respectable old lady in a fancy castle. Do this thing for me well, and perhaps you will earn that story."*

# Without a Lord

Glory and respect are behind you. A dusty road; cold, wet nights; and a bloody or ignominious end lie ahead. You once had all the advantage and privilege in Rokugan. You traded them away, willingly or otherwise—but you received something in return, something precious and rare in this country. You're free—not from hunger, exposure, violence, or hard work, but no one gives you orders. No Great Clan decides who you are. So here you are, a sword without a master. You may last only a single moment…but it's your moment, and no one else's. How did you get here?

## BORN A SAMURAI

When most people think of rōnin, they think of fallen samurai. According to Shinseist doctrine, a human being's birth as a samurai indicates that their conduct in previous lives accrued a great deal of good karma—or, from a more traditional Shinseist perspective, very little karma of any kind—such that the Celestial Order thought them fit for birth into a life of privilege and responsibility. It is the samurai's job to show the world—and the Heavens—that they deserve the power and respect given to them. A samurai who becomes rōnin then, lives as the ultimate failure. They were given the most precious gift a human can be given at birth and they squandered it through their own weakness.

### Death of One's Lord

If a lord dies without formally naming an heir, they create a power vacuum. Traditionally, a samurai who loses their lord without passing into the service of another must commit *seppuku*. Since the continuity of their lord's noble line is sacrosanct, all of the lord's retainers share responsibility for failing to prevent the destruction of that line. They have failed their lord. If they want their families' names and prosperity to remain intact, they must die.

…However it's often not that simple. If a lord has no heir and they die suddenly or decide to retire to a monastery, and no family exists to take up their responsibilities, what good does it do for all their retainers to die? There are any number of good reasons why a samurai retainer might choose not to commit seppuku. Perhaps they don't want to impoverish or traumatize their family. Perhaps their lord died or left their responsibilities for foolish reasons, and the samurai's death would validate those reasons. Perhaps the samurai thinks suicide is an absurd idea and that any system that demands it is equally absurd. Regardless, the samurai's lord is gone—and that makes the samurai rōnin.

### MATURE THEMES

Seppuku, or ritual suicide, is a harsh reality in Rokugan, and this chapter brings it into starker focus. Rōnin status exists as a counterpoint to seppuku. Rokugani samurai who commit seppuku do so in order to diffuse the social censure that would fall on them and, especially, on their family were they to continue to live. Part of the social censure and disenfranchisement that a rōnin faces is directly related to the fact that they "failed" to commit seppuku.

Suicidal and self-harming thoughts are widespread issues in real life that can be particularly difficult to voice. Because of this, we encourage Game Masters to speak to each player individually about what types of themes they are or aren't comfortable with. Keep in mind that if even one player expresses discomfort with any mature themes, the group should be respectful of this and avoid such content in the game.

If your table is not interested in addressing themes related to suicide, that's as valid a choice as it is to play with seppuku still on the table. You can still play *L5R* with only minor adjustments. In such a game, rōnin may in fact be even more important: the situations that would normally cause a samurai to commit seppuku, or to be ordered to commit seppuku, could instead result in their becoming rōnin.

With the passing of an heirless lord, a neighboring lord is likely to move in to seize their assets. However, this process takes time. News of the death needs to spread. The deceased lord's clan must decide who should gain the advantage and shoulder the responsibility for the lord's holdings. This process can lead to dissension, arguments—even wars, especially if a neighboring clan tries to take the land for itself. Once the clan chooses a successor, if they are close by, the transition period may last only a few months. If not, it could take years for the new lord to muster enough forces to march to the castle and secure it.

In the meantime, all the dead lord's former retainers must decide what to do. Technically, they are rōnin. They might remain in the castle without the lord, in what some refer to as a "ghost fief." They might go on the road and return when they hear the castle is likely to get

a proper lord again. However, they are not guaranteed new employment when a new lord arrives to take it over. The new lord may well see the previous lord's death without a proper heir as a failure on the retainers' part to advise them. Or, when the new lord hears the castle is occupied by rōnin, they may send their troops in without bothering to ask questions.

A rōnin whose lord has died often carries grief or anger as a burden. Their entire life has become defined by their lord's death—a death that occurred outside the accepted circumstances for a samurai. Since the rōnin's lord was samurai, society expects they have their affairs in order should they be called to duty and need to give their life for their own lord. They should have provided for their family and for their retainers in case of their demise. A moment of unexpected tragedy, an accident of nature, or a selfish choice on the part of a rōnin's master has left the rest of the rōnin's life cursed.

## Voluntarily Leaving One's Lord

The code of Bushidō demands loyalty to one's lord no matter their incompetence or wickedness. It is said that a samurai who serves a wicked lord faithfully shows more understanding of Bushidō than one who serves a good lord faithfully. This is not to say that a samurai may never doubt or question their lord's judgment. They must follow a strict order of operations when they remonstrate with their lord, affirming their own feudal commitment to the lord's well-being as they call the lord's behavior into doubt. If a lord commits themself to an evil course of action, the samurai should not rebel against them, overthrow them, or even disobey them. There is only one acceptable way to protest one's lord's failures: seppuku.

But suicide may not influence a wicked, incompetent, or simply distracted lord. If a samurai's suicide would have no effect on their lord and would not protect their family, they might make the unthinkable decision: to leave their lord voluntarily and become rōnin. Passion is another possible motivation for leaving one's lord. Did the samurai fall in love with someone whom they could not love while still serving their lord? Did they swear revenge on someone outside their lord's grasp—perhaps someone their lord forbade them to fight? Did they feel a call to become the greatest martial artist of all, and to travel the country until they achieve that status or die? If so, they might forsake their responsibilities.

Rōnin who took on their status voluntarily may be the most hated and denigrated of all, especially by lorded samurai. They chose to be rōnin and abandon their duty. These rōnin often struggle with the concept of free will, and with both the freedom, and lack thereof, that their rōnin status thrusts upon them. A rōnin may go anywhere and do anything they please—but social disregard and financial exigency hold them back.

## The Lord Loses Resources

One of the most common and humiliating reasons for a samurai to become rōnin is the shrinking of their lord's wealth or lands. If an enemy lord seizes much of a lord's wealth in a war or via a treaty, the lord may need to sell off their holdings to pay debts. If a natural disaster strikes their lands, they may no longer be able to produce enough rice to feed and outfit their retainers. The lowest in status or the least liked would then be dismissed. This process is heartbreaking and humiliating for both lord and subject. Retainers laid off this way generally do not commit seppuku; financial reasons are not considered an appropriate reason to do so. Rōnin status is thus the only choice left to them. A rōnin who gains their status due to their lord's financial exigencies has no dark, tragic backstory to share when someone asks them about their history. There is no grand melodrama, no story of human tragedy: just the question of where their next meal must come from.

## The Endless Year

Many samurai spend a year after their *gempuku*, their coming-of-age ceremony, traveling the country, alone or with friends or relatives of the same age, as "temporary rōnin" (see **Martial Pilgrim** on page 13 for additional information). During this time period, regardless of their birth, they live as rōnin do: wandering the Empire, never staying in the same place for more than a few weeks, earning their keep by doing odd jobs or fighting for the highest bidder. This period gives privileged, sheltered nobles an opportunity to see the "real Rokugan" while testing their childhood training in martial arts and courtesy in the field. This year is difficult and eye-opening for many young samurai, who are eager to get back to their orderly lives when they return from it. For some, though, the freedom they taste during that year intoxicates. Instead of returning to their comfortable routines, they just choose to never go home.

These rōnin are exceedingly rare, but every samurai parent fears their child will become one of them. A samurai who takes on rōnin status this way can probably look forward to a life spent running and hiding from their parents. Due to the scandal that results when a clan's favored children voluntarily choose a life of vagrancy and irresponsibility, most clans throw prodigious resources into reclaiming such errant youths.

### Branded a Rōnin

Some rōnin earn their status because mainstream samurai society simply cannot categorize them in any other way that makes sense—because they have seized a social position for themself and society has no other words for such blasphemy. Is a samurai doing something "no samurai could do?" Perhaps their compatriots will decide they are rōnin.

Open rebellion against one's lord tends to warrant this status. In one high-profile case, a samurai killed their lord in response to the lord's abusive behavior toward his retainers, seizing control of his castle and sending letters to all the lord's relatives and connections that they would henceforth fulfill their lord's duties. This samurai managed to gain the support of nearly all the lord's retainers and now governs their former lord's domain as if they had legitimately inherited it. The samurai's clan has put a bounty on their head, but the castle sits in so defensible a location that any siege would require a discouraging amount of resources to unseat what amounts to a bandit monarch. In lieu of actually doing anything about it, the samurai's clan has instead declared them rōnin. No one knows if the samurai has noticed.

## Lowly Born

According to the Celestial Order, a peasant cannot become rōnin—but that truth has not stopped many a peasant from scrounging up some weapons, learning to swing them, and walking away from their old life onto a path of uncertainty and violence. The even less fortunate may have their comfortable lives ripped away from them, making the path of waves more attractive than any other option. The question remains: why?

Why would a peasant put themself at that level of risk? Why wouldn't they follow the path into which they were born, finding their livelihood in farming, trade, or a craft, vocations always in demand in Rokugan? If they could not practice their parents' trade, why wouldn't they apprentice themself in a different craft or trade? How and why would they learn to fight?

### Love of Fighting

Some child prodigies excel at singing or playing a musical instrument. Others show less savory tendencies, even in their youth. They have violence or cruelty in their heart—or some ineffable combination of their childhood circumstances has buried a demon in their mind. Or perhaps some of these youths crave an outlet for a passion they cannot pursue, have a deep-seated desire to prove themself, or have found that violence is sometimes the only way to protect what one loves.

In the samurai class, in which members inherit violence as their birthright, such proclivities tend to go unnoticed. A samurai child who loves violence, or who cannot help but indulge in it, has ample opportunities to exercise their character. They are supported and told their gifts mark them as having been destined for samurai life. This is not so for such a child among merchants, artisans, or farmers. In those groups, a tendency toward violence or force, whether justifiable or not, can lead to problems both within the community and with the samurai class. Anger issues, unresolved trauma, stress, or the fierce desire to protect can drive these children, soon to be adults, to regrettable action. Most will grow up being told their actions are unacceptable, or spend their youth being punished for simply caring too much. For many, nothing makes sense until a weapon's weight is in their hand and they have a reason to use it.

### A Life of Combat

It is a samurai's duty to protect the peasants who feed and supply them. However, not all peasants benefit even from samurai who succeed in this duty. Skirmishes and battles in Rokugan frequently sweep up towns, villages, and fields in fire, steel, and blood. Marauding samurai expect peasants to give up their provisions and their houses. If they resist, they die; but if they acquiesce, they'll die when the opposing army arrives and finds them giving aid and comfort to their enemies. Sometimes, samurai draft peasants as auxiliaries, crudely arming them and sending them to execute orders in missions they are not expected to survive.

A swaggering samurai occupying a peasant's ancestral home may inspire affronted peasants to sharpen their farming tools and kill the samurai in the night. A peasant press-ganged into a militia considered expendable may survive their unwanted

job. Upon returning to their village, they find it burned and their fields despoiled, and decide to take to the road, their heart pumping with rage. If they're lucky, their family will travel with them. Otherwise, their family's absence will weigh on their shoulders heavier than any pack. They may launch themselves into combat out of a self-destructive impulse or a desire to forget the past. They may have nothing left but a weapon in their hands and a burdened heart.

### Following the Heart

Sometimes, a peasant's life demands something from them they cannot help but give. What if a villager in a little country town winds up in a whirlwind romance with a wandering rōnin or monk? What if some event changes a peasant's life, and they know they must do everything they can to make things right? Or what if someone wronged a peasant and disappeared, and the peasant needs to find them to take their revenge? What if a great clan drafted a peasant's best friend as an *ashigaru*, a peasant soldier, and the peasant had to follow their comrade to keep them safe? Or, perhaps, nothing has happened at all. Year after year, nothing has happened, until one day a peasant feels a calling, maybe in a dream or in the words of a friend, or perhaps the spirits themselves call them to action. And now the peasant has a choice: they can throw what life they have away—their trade, their familial ties—for something else. They can choose to follow the whims of fate or they can choose to stand still, waiting another day, another month, another year for something to come to them—but this may be their only chance.

Those who become rōnin in this way may understand joy and love better than others. They tend to follow their hearts freely, seeking their passions like few others do. They have cast off the pressures of society in favor of freedom and satisfaction. Their tendency to pursue their desires with foolhardy abandon might get them in trouble, but they see their goal as worth it: a life pursuing not just contentment, but elation.

## Born a Rōnin

A strict interpretation of the Celestial Order dictates that a child with one rōnin parent and one parent of any other caste receives the other parent's caste. A child with only rōnin parents has that strangest of classifications: born rōnin. These children grow up knowing only the road, or the small space by its side that their parents have carved for themselves. They grow up fast and learn a wide diversity of skills early in life: alertness, cooking, begging, wilderness survival, and violence.

While the prototypical rōnin child is a child of the road, rocking in a baby carriage with its wheels aimed toward perdition, more young rōnin actually grow up on "islands": in rōnin parlance, small settlements full of rōnin or with a mixture of rōnin and peasants. Islands tend to keep a low profile, their inhabitants interacting with society at a distance lest they be labeled brigands or outlaws and attract hot-headed young samurai eager to make names for themselves. For this reason also, an island has to stay small. Rōnin parents generally expect their children to be ready to take to the road with them or by themselves at any time.

Rōnin children are often the focus of these communities. Other rōnin trust them naturally; after all, the waves are in their blood. Accustomed to the needs and fluctuations of life on the waves, they make natural community leaders and supports for others in similar circumstances. Other parties of savvy travelers, such as magistrates, may add rōnin-born travelers to their party as quartermasters or jacks of all trades.

## LIFE ON THE ROAD

Most rōnin must dedicate the majority of their attention to their basic needs: food, water, shelter, warmth, companionship, and medicine. After that, perhaps on humble comforts or vice. Sometimes these things can be scavenged, but more often, they cost money. And so, a rōnin, who was perhaps once a samurai so wealthy and powerful they could afford to hire someone to think about money for them, now must deal with cash directly. The rattle and click of a string of bu in a rōnin's hand initially feels dirty, like the touch of raw meat. But a rōnin comes to crave that feeling as surely as a dog craves the hunt. If they want it, they must work. Fortunately, and unfortunately, a rōnin's position makes them uniquely suited to do certain things Rokugan needs doing.

### Martial Pilgrim

A warrior on the *musha shugyō*, or warrior pilgrimage, is called a *shugyōsha*. This type of pilgrimage is undertaken by both lorded samurai (especially during the year after gempuku) and rōnin. Lords may deny permission for such a pilgrimage for any reason, however, and there are plenty of samurai who never take one. Many lords who prohibit a musha shugyō fear that their newly minted samurai will succumb to the allure of being a rōnin, bringing disgrace not only to themselves, but to their clan and lord.

A shugyōsha travels from place to place, apprenticing themself to master martial artists they meet and paying for their training by doing housework, cooking, and other odd jobs for the master. Many shugyōsha take the opportunity to test their skills in duels, especially with other shugyōsha. Such duels are generally nonlethal, but tempers sometimes run hot. When they believe they have learned all they need to learn from a teacher—or when the teacher runs out of things for them to do or tires of them—they take their leave and move on.

Musha shugyō as a concept is controversial. The ideal of the shugyōsha is highly esteemed: a warrior dedicated to the pure expression of martial arts, who will go anywhere and do anything to become supremely expert in the art of war, represents the greatest heights to which a martial artist can aspire. However, they represent an exceedingly poor archetype of the martial arts student. Many serious martial arts masters find shugyōsha infuriating and selfish opportunists, appropriators who traipse from school to school taking what they like and failing to contribute to the school's long-term health as senior students or teachers themselves. They often do not stay long enough to grasp the true forms or lessons of a school's famous techniques, instead learning hackneyed versions that outwardly resemble certain moves but do not recreate their essence. A shugyōsha who claims to know a school's famous technique and then catastrophically fails to execute it in a high-profile duel can make that school a laughingstock for years. Worst of all, a shugyōsha who successfully completes their pilgrimage may end up creating their own competitor school and passing off techniques as their own. Accordingly, many popular and highly regarded *dōjō* ban shugyōsha from training there, forcing shugyōsha to conceal their true identity if they want to secure instruction.

However, especially for smaller schools, shugyōsha are sometimes a necessary evil. Sometimes schools don't have enough students for their sensei to make a living off of lessons. Sometimes an elderly teacher without much family needs someone to help out around the house. Further, a shugyōsha contributes promotional value while they travel. Talking about a technique they learned from a school brings that school attention and, hopefully, more students.

### ARTISTIC PILGRIMS

Less glamorous but also far safer and less contentious are pilgrims who follow an artistic path rather than a martial one. Many rōnin take up a handicraft such as woodcarving or a musical pastime like singing to keep their spirits up and their minds active while they endure the hardship of the road. Those with noticeable talent at one of these arts might follow a path parallel to that of the shugyōsha.

### Mercenary

It is widely held that the way of the samurai is found in death—that every true samurai must see themself as already dead and must commit themself to obey their lord's dictates without hesitation or concern for self-preservation. Their lord, however, may not feel the same way. Experienced, veteran samurai are a precious resource to a *daimyō*—and a single arrow can destroy such a resource forever. Therefore, when a daimyō needs a high-risk job completed—or even just when they must swell their ranks quickly—they often look to expendable mercenaries.

Mercenary work for a daimyō generally pairs high risk with high reward. Journeying into no man's land to bait opposing forces forward? Filling out the front line of a squad poised for battle? Scouting deep behind enemy lines? All are likely to get a person killed, but pay those who survive exceedingly well. These jobs

## THE MONASTIC PATH

Seppuku and the path of waves aren't the only options for a samurai whose life has fallen apart. Taking holy orders can be an attractive alternative as monks can reliably expect enough food, water, and medical care to stay alive; a roof over their heads; and society's acceptance of them as practitioners of a respected vocation regardless of their previous station.

Still, monastic life can be daunting. Novice monks usually spend most of their time on hard, unglamorous physical labor. The food is nutritious and filling, but uninspiring. Some orders make special demands of their members: perhaps a vow of silence or chastity, which can also deter a few would-be monks.

Nevertheless, the relative safety and comfort of monastic life can seem very appealing to those who travel the path of waves, constantly on the lookout to find food and spot danger before it hits them. Some abbots specifically rule out prospects whose deportment or appearance indicates rōnin status because their motivation seems suspect. Why give that bunk to a filthy rogue when some pious lordling might be the next supplicant, bringing noble patronage?

pay well, working for samurai of less exalted station tends to be more reliable work. A minor lord without many retainers has fewer resources to expend but is more likely to offer a rōnin work as a bodyguard or castle guard, or in another position normally reserved for lorded samurai. Working for a merchant is less prestigious and sometimes dirtier, since some merchants turn out to be crime bosses by another name, but merchants tend to have plenty of money and a great need to guard it.

### Criminal

The stereotype that rōnin are really no more than common criminals has roots both in truth and untruth. Wanderers with martial skill and nothing to lose do indeed turn to banditry, armed robbery, or protection rackets to make money in difficult times. In cities, they sometimes get involved with thieves or organized crime. The more rōnin there are in an area, the more likely some of them are to resort to criminal activities as a result of too few employment opportunities. High-profile incidents that generate large numbers of rōnin quickly and unexpectedly, like the sudden death of an heirless daimyō, therefore end up generating upticks in crime.

Marginalizing rōnin as criminals allows samurai in power to compound their financial and social advantage over rōnin. The lower a rōnin's status, the less able they are to negotiate and advocate for themselves, and the easier it is for a lord (or powerful merchant, or any other employer) to bully them into dirtier and riskier jobs for less pay. The core of this attitude is the idea that rōnin, having failed in the practice of Bushidō, are undeserving of treatment in accordance with the virtues of Bushidō. A strict understanding of the virtues of Courtesy, Compassion, and Honor belies such an attitude—but the idea that the treatment of rōnin somehow exists outside Bushidō is so widespread and pernicious that the samurai who assert those values in their dealings with rōnin grow rarer every day.

## Rōnin and the Celestial Order

The Celestial Order is an unpopular topic of conversation among rōnin. According to this concept, living creatures—demons, humans, animals, heavenly beings, and everything in between—accrue spiritual merit and demerit, called karma, over the course of their lives. At the end of a life, the being's karmic balance determines the nature of their rebirth. The wicked become demons, the less wicked become animals, and the good become humans, with the best and most deserving becoming samurai.

Devout Rokugani who believe in the Celestial Order argue that the samurai class' military responsibility to protect humans from violence and supernatural evil demands stronger moral fiber and that samurai therefore deserve greater material comfort. Detractors counter that samurai turn out to be about as good or evil as everyone else—and that evil samurai seem to be responsible for the greatest ills that befall Rokugan.

The existence of rōnin flies in the face of the Celestial Order. By a strict reading of this system, a samurai who falls to rōnin status demonstrates that the Celestial Order's system of karma and reward does not, in fact, reliably produce worthy samurai. A rōnin who was originally a farmer, artisan, merchant, or entertainer but claws their way to pseudosamurai status—or even samurai status, in rare cases—is evidence that those with lesser karmic status can do the job just as well as real samurai. The presence of rōnin implies that the

universe makes mistakes and then scrambles to fix them—or else just ignores the failures of its system. To the Celestial Order's adherents, rōnin are injustice and lies embodied—perversions of birth more literal than any Shadowlands monster.

Another viewpoint, a particular favorite of philosophers who dedicate themselves to the Celestial Order, places all the blame for this situation on rōnin themselves. By falling from grace, or rising above their appointed station, they say rōnin defy the Celestial Order by choice; they shirk their responsibilities or strive for accolades they don't deserve. Their failure means they will never again be born as samurai—that at the end of their brutish and short life, they are due for a series of increasingly demeaning rebirths as farm animals, *gaki* (hungry ghosts), or demons with especially dreary jobs in *Jigoku*, the Realm of Evil.

Few are brave enough to bring up these points directly with a desperate, bitter rōnin, though. Some rōnin respond to the idea that they're doomed to remain on the wheel of rebirth as lower beings by immersing themselves in wickedness and vice; after all, they're fates have already been decided. Others use their position outside normal structures of morality and ethics to call attention to the injustice inherent in the system. This business is risky; an aristocrat, who benefits from the Celestial Order, has little to win in a duel with a dirty rōnin over a philosophical disagreement, but they're likely to send a gang of ruffians to beat the rōnin up when they're staggering home drunk one night.

## RŌNIN AND THE TENETS OF BUSHIDŌ

*"No one who lives in luxury understands the true value of Bushidō. They may grasp the meaning. They may even live in accordance with the tenets. But you can't truly know why the tenets matter unless you've been vulnerable. When you've been cut down and you're bleeding out in the alley behind a gambling house, Compassion will save your life. When the wealthy merchant who's promised to pay you can just as easily say they've never seen you before when you come back from the job they sent you on, Sincerity makes sure you can eat. If a rich, powerful samurai is unkind to another samurai—well, that's sad, but they'll live. Spend a month on the road with me, and you'll learn why we came up with these ideas."*

*– Kinnosuke, veteran rōnin*

For the rōnin who still believes in the ideals of Bushidō, there is only one recourse: personal adherence to this code. It is said—controversially, but still—that all those whose life and actions embody Bushidō's seven tenets are real samurai, and will be judged to have fulfilled a samurai's purpose and responsibilities in the final estimation. Any rōnin—whether a peasant who found some weapons in the ruin of their village or a noble samurai who fell—may live according to these tenets. Surely the cosmos will see their faithful adherence to Bushidō. If they're lucky, other humans will, too.

## Compassion

*"First week on the road? Yeah, I can tell. Follow along with me—I want you to practice doing what I do. First, your posture. You're standing up too straight. Tall lady like you, you don't want to stick up above the crowd too much, not unless you want the tough guys trying to pick fights with you to show off. Lean forward just a little bit, like I'm doing—helps if you have to pull away from a punch, or you suddenly have to take off running. Save the lofty noble act for when you're trying to impress someone. No, you don't have to pay—no, keep it. Nice of you to suggest, but someone did this for me my first week on the road, too. I'm just doing what was done for me."*

Rōnin are rarely truly alone. More often, they exist in a community. The stereotype of two rōnin meeting on the road and immediately drawing down on each other is the stuff of fiction. Instead, rōnin who identify one another on the road trade information. What towns are nearby? Which ones are friendliest to vagrants? Which ones have rich people with jobs that need doing? Where are the magistrates based, and do they see rōnin as useful laborers or as likely criminals?

An act of kindness means far more to one who has little than to one who has much. Moreover, compassionate behavior wins a rōnin the respect and regard of others, which are at a premium in their lonely existence. Rōnin crave companionship, love, and laughter as much as anyone, though they must often learn to live without it. Accordingly, kindness and generosity toward others in a similar situation is one of the first things a rōnin who wants to survive learns. The rōnin may have lost their lorded samurai status, but now everyone who walks the wave-tossed road is their sibling.

## Courage

*"They say the way of the samurai is found in death. I say, the way of the rōnin soldier is found in death. 'Rōnin, go stand next to a river and bait their cavalry into charging you' and 'Rōnin, attack them where they're strongest and tire them out so our elites can finish them off' and 'Rōnin, guard this crumbling fortress that's falling apart around you so they think we care about this front.' I wake up every day and wait for orders from a* gunsō *who literally does not care if I live or die. That's their way. This is mine."*

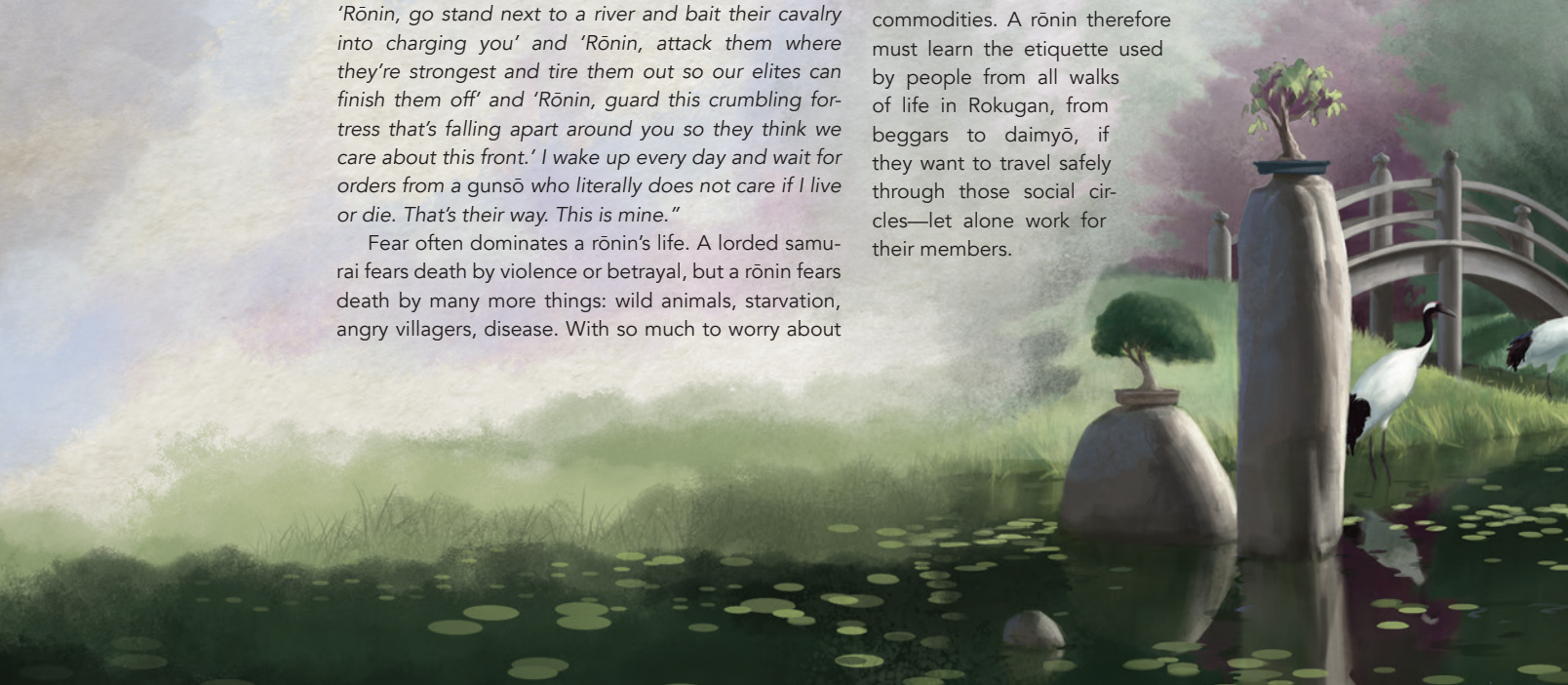
Fear often dominates a rōnin's life. A lorded samurai fears death by violence or betrayal, but a rōnin fears death by many more things: wild animals, starvation, angry villagers, disease. With so much to worry about from so many different sources, a rōnin soon learns to see fear not as a source of pain or doubt, but as a sense, detecting shifts in the environment like an insect's antennae. A rōnin knows fear's value in teaching them where danger truly lurks and how to keep themself—and others—safest from it. If courage is acting in the face of fear, rōnin have more opportunities to show it than anyone.

A rōnin's courage is often impugned by virtue of their habit of running away from combat. Most rōnin would counter that running from battle means something different to them than it does to noble samurai. The reason a lorded samurai does not run from battle is because their reputation rides on their fighting to the death and dying in a heroic manner. The rōnin has no such incentive. A rōnin who stays to die in battle will likely receive no particular accolades, no posthumous elevation to better status—but they may redeem themselves in the eyes of Emma-Ō.

## Courtesy

*"We're going to go in there, and I need you to know that when we do, Lord Ōishi is going to call us filthy animals, worthless wastes of space, or any number of other denigrating names. So, take a breath. Accept it ahead of time. Remember that his words don't define you: your actions do. We need him to pay us for this, and we need him to pay at least some of that up front. So when he lashes out at us, we're going to be polite and courteous. If he really thinks karma put him where he is, then karma will make him pay for it in the end."*

Of all the virtues of Bushidō, Courtesy is the most important and widely understood for most rōnin. A rōnin goes into nearly any social situation at a disadvantage. Samurai see them as an affront to their way of life. Commoners see them as a volatile source of violence and danger. Merchants and artisans see them as commodities. A rōnin therefore must learn the etiquette used by people from all walks of life in Rokugan, from beggars to daimyō, if they want to travel safely through those social circles—let alone work for their members.



Since they do not have the social buffers to protect them from consequences a samurai does, rōnin need courtesy to survive social interaction. Moreover, they quickly gain practice in behaving courteously toward people who are not affording them the same privilege. That said, rōnin life is stressful in the extreme. Outbursts in defiance of courtesy are a constant danger against which they must guard.

## Duty and Loyalty

*"Don't say those words to me."*

Rōnin who were once lorded samurai usually hate the word "Duty" and scoff at samurai who declare their loyalty. Duty betrayed them, and loyalty called for their death. The laws of lord and retainer, the laws that command that those who serve must always follow the whims (no matter how foolish) of those who rule, are the very laws that created the status of rōnin. Rōnin live in opposition to duty's dictates—to stay in one's station, to obey orders, and if one is forced out of servitude to one's lord, to choose death or live as a coward and a failure forever. To rōnin who wish to follow Bushidō, duty is the greatest challenge. To whom, or to what, are these rōnin duty bound? Where does their loyalty lie?

A rōnin is in the unique position to take on duty and offer genuine loyalty by choice. The most common duty and loyalty a rōnin feels is to their family; many rōnin get married, have children, or both, and many maintain relationships with other family members as well. Even those without such associations often end up with "found families" of other rōnin. Some rōnin take on the burden of protecting a region from harm, the way samurai might, especially if the region has no formal samurai authority protecting the people. Rōnin who voluntarily take on the bonds of duty and loyalty are motivated by their own reasons and emotions. They don't have to take on a duty, but they choose to do so, and that makes the duty personal: makes it theirs. In this choice, there is something worth dying for.

Rōnin in *Legend of the Five Rings* do not have the same *giri* attribute as samurai. Their giri is replaced by their past (see **Chapter 2**, page 60, for more information).

## Honor

*"Honor, eh? To have Honor, you must simply believe that your actions are honest, true, and fair. What of the thief, who believes that they deserve the wealth of another because life has treated them unjustly? We may call them dishonorable, but they may believe they have acted morally, taking from the undeserving so their family may eat. Honor is an aspect you hold within yourself, and to measure it is to bear witness to your own soul."*

Honor is the internal, undeniable measure of one's nobility of mind and purity of soul. The only judge of one's honor is oneself, but exclusively with an earnest gaze. An honorable person acts with true integrity, keeping their word as if breaking it would pierce their own heart. In brief, honor is the internal moral compass that guides how a person lives and acts as they attempt to pursue their ideals. Society plays a part in honor only so much as society helps mold the ideals of its members. It is up to the individual to parse out how sincerely they are trying to pursue those principles.

And this is well and good for a lorded samurai, but Honor and rōnin are another story. Most rōnin have been spurned by society, often for reasons outside their control. With their status diminished and their prospects bleak, a new rōnin has little left besides the clothes on their back and their honor. In the harsh world of samurai, a rōnin's chance of survival likely depends on their reputation. A rōnin known for breaking promises, crass behavior, or hurting others is unlikely to be offered work by peasants, and such behavior is likely to draw the attention of the area's lord.

As a result, honor is one of the most important aspects of a rōnin's life. If a rōnin lives honorably, they are more likely to gain favor in the communities they travel among and to begin rebuilding their life, whether that means working to become a lorded samurai again or simply finding contentment amid the harshness of the world.

Some rōnin, however, give up on the idea of Honor. They face disrespect and innumerable slights, preconceptions, and prejudices from the samurai they once may have called family. A rōnin who has given up on Honor steals, lies, and cheats to stay alive. With each dishonorable act, they not only diminish their chance of regaining their status but corrupt their very soul.

### Righteousness

*"When two samurai clans go to war, who bleeds? Who dies? We do, on the front lines of their armies, in the cities they burn, among the masses who go masterless and hungry after an arrow catches a lord who has no heir. Then, when we go to them looking for anything they can spare, they tell us it's our fault we're here."*

The concept of the Celestial Order is meant to advance the idea of righteousness and a kind of cosmic justice. The concept of karma posits that the good or evil inherent to any act accrues an attendant karmic value, one that measures the righteousness, the justice and injustice, of every action performed. However, a rōnin's rise or fall from the place to which karma has appointed them to seems to show that karma makes mistakes. How hard is it, then, for a rōnin to leap from there to the conclusion that the universe does not judge every action justly? That karma does not exist?

But if the Celestial Order means nothing, if karma does not suffuse every action, what is righteousness? It must be the creation of humans. Rōnin know that no cosmic power will take care of the injustices of the world on their behalf. Righteousness, advocating for oneself, seeking out truth among falsehoods and justice in an unjust world must become individual humans' responsibility. They must hold themselves to this standard, with more conscientious attention than someone who relies on karma to balance the scales. Further, in addition to those rōnin who attempt to treat those around them with justice, there are those who decide that, if the Celestial Order has failed, they must take up the burden the universe has dropped. Rōnin vigilantes who obsess over righteousness, taking it upon themselves to punish the wicked and corrupt, are popular stock characters in Kabuki plays. These rōnin are few in the real world, but they have existed from time to time. All a rōnin needs is a burning sense of the world's unfairness and a skillful sword hand to become agent of righteousness in the world, to appoint themself the judge that the Celestial Order has failed to be. A rōnin so motivated is terrifying indeed, a fearsome enemy to the forces of the status quo who require the Celestial Order to maintain their authority.

### Sincerity

*"Be earnest in all you say and do, and you will show the world your Sincerity. Sincerity is purpose, it is vying to be true to your ideals, it is more than simply speaking the truth—to be devoted to Sincerity, you must infuse in every action the earnestness of your heart."*

Many rōnin find the tenet of sincerity difficult to follow, given their lot in life. To be sincere is to be genuine, and authenticity is a hard path to walk when one lives between two worlds. Rōnin are not liars by nature; instead, many become liars by virtue of their station. To be insincere is to live another day: to flatter and praise or make promises but break them when it suits a longer life, earns one a little more coin, or furthers one's social advancement.

Among their peers, rōnin often speak with candid clarity, uttering the truths in their heart and nothing more. But rōnin's voices are so scarcely listened to that speaking truth to nonrōnin may achieve nothing. Instead, rōnin learn to say what their interlocutors want to hear. Rōnin exaggerate their own skills and experience to get jobs they need to live. They swear to recruiters that they would never run from a fight. They obscure their own backstories and manufacture entire new identities in order to live free from the tragedies that drove them onto the path of waves. Only truly trusted friends or confidants, then, win the right of sincerity from many rōnin.

## Rōnin and Work

In order to survive, a rōnin must work. Whether as a patsy for a lord or as a champion for a peasant, a rōnin has no choice but to scrounge up any work they can find to survive in a society that balks at their status. Lorded samurai, more than any others, are likely to have the brute force, the financial and social power, and the inclination to treat rōnin like trash. But a rōnin who hopes to reclaim the glory of a lorded samurai can find no better opportunity for redemption than working with samurai. However, this is highly risky and demands that the rōnin survive conflict after dangerous conflict.

Rōnin who work with samurai for an extended period of time must accustom themselves to being treated as a lower class of human. Rōnin live, eat, and amuse themselves apart from proper samurai. It is in this way that rōnin truly exemplify the contradiction of their position: they are not lorded samurai, yet

peasants often fear them, too. For rōnin, it can feel as though the whole of the world loathes their very being, fears it, or both. Working with peasants is usually easier, as rōnin command respect even with their diminished standing, but the work typically pays very little and does equally little toward achieving their goals. Working with samurai, on the other hand, has the potential for much greater financial reward and social elevation, but it comes at a price. Even in more casual surroundings, such as in a geisha house, samurai often show rōnin far less cordiality even than commoners. After all, commoners are in their required place. Rōnin are seen by some as walking mistakes.

However, regardless of how society views them, rōnin exist and still need to make a living—whether it accepts them or not, society often finds them convenient. This section includes a variety of paths, jobs, and positions rōnin may find available to them and the details of those positions and paths.

## Mercenaries

Most samurai armies are made up of both lorded samurai and ashigaru. Whether ashigaru are career soldiers or drafted peasants, sometimes they don't prove sufficient to adequately bolster an army's ranks, though, and inexperienced troops often perish on the front lines. For these reasons, rōnin are seen as a commodity for filling out battle lines or performing dangerous duties in times of war. Rōnin mercenaries are generally assigned to units that wear simple armor and wield *yari* (spears), *yumi* (bows), or *naginata* (long polearms). The most difficult fighting tends to fall to them, and because most officers will not hesitate to commit rōnin to missions that mean certain death, rōnin die fast and frequently in battle—to say nothing of death from the illnesses that spread quickly through the dense, dirty camps where they live on campaign. Why would a rōnin agree to such harsh conditions? The answer is simple: the risk may be high, but so is the pay and the possibility of catching the eye of a lord.

Once assigned to a squad, a rōnin spends most of their time traveling, making camp, breaking camp, drilling, and performing the thousand thankless and dreary tasks that soldiers must perform to keep themselves and their army alive from day to day. The pay for such duties is good and reliable: samurai are often willing to have their staff promise tidy sums to mercenaries who are likely to die before payday. The ultimate prize for a rōnin in such a position, though, is a commendation for gallantry in battle. Word of a rōnin who is the first into a breach in a castle wall, who takes the head of a higher-ranked foe, or who otherwise performs some act of noteworthy bravery inevitably gets to the army's top brass, who have their staff reward this behavior with a cash bonus or offer a promotion, usually granted in public in order to improve morale and encourage the other rōnin mercenaries to conduct themselves with similar valor. A promotion gives a rōnin greater opportunities to distinguish themself and be noticed. In fact, a rōnin who rises through the ranks this way can return to lorded samurai status. Valor in battle supersedes even deeply held prejudice.

However, the odds that a rōnin will die on campaign are astronomically higher than the odds they will receive attention and promotion. Rōnin who are experienced archers are in a slightly better position; archery is a more demanding and less common skill than spear-bearer, and commanders are more likely to protect skilled archers than skilled pike users. But the steady pay and the distant hope of a return to glory are more than enough to send rōnin rushing to the judgment of Emma-Ō.

### Stories about Mercenaries

The story of a group of unmoored ruffians fighting someone else's war is a classic narrative that has inspired dozens of films and books. The challenge of a mercenary story is to make the players and their characters feel important, like they are the thing on which conflict hinges. If the GM thinks of the conflict as "the PCs' team versus an opposing force," it will indeed be difficult to make the mercenaries feel like the stars of the show in an army full of powerful elites. Instead, a GM can try evoking rōnin-specific themes of unjust systems by envisioning both the opposing force and the

rōnin's own comrades-in-arms and superiors as sources of antagonism. The GM can seed the officer corps with well-meaning but incompetent commanders, talented but selfish individuals, or sympathetic double agents. It is helpful to give the mercenaries the chance to become social and moral leaders to their fellow grunts. The GM can send them on hopeless missions they can overcome through singular resourcefulness and reward them if they do, while leaning on the emotional drama of the times when they don't all make it home.

## GUARD

Samurai put little stock in rōnin assigned to guard anyone or anything. They expect rōnin to switch sides at the promise of a pay raise or to turn tail and run if the fighting gets tough. Merchants and tradesfolk, however, value anyone willing to put their blades to good use protecting their livelihoods. Because of this, rōnin typically find much more guard work among the common folk than from samurai. If a samurai does offer a rōnin a guard job, the rōnin often finds the work is less about vigilance and more about being a warm body, such as acting as a guard for a decoy in a fort or palanquin. In times of mid-campaign scarcity, samurai may place a handful of rōnin under the command of a more reliable officer to guard targets of slightly greater importance, such as supply trains. This kind of work is safer than the front lines of a battle, but it offers fewer opportunities for advancement.

### Stories about Guards

A rōnin who ceases to care about what they guard can easily abandon their post. Making a story about guarding something meaningful, then, means that the GM must elicit investment in the thing the rōnin guards. The rōnin needs to have a reason to care about the person or thing they guard.

Simply being told to protect something puts a character in a reactive position, but story is more dynamic when the protagonists to make active decisions. To draw the guards into making interesting decisions, present them with threats they must pursue proactively. For example, perhaps to keep a samurai officer alive, they must investigate their fellow officers to determine which one keeps sending assassins. Or perhaps to keep a smuggler's cargo out of the hands of bandits, they must help plot a course through the wilderness. Instead of pitting the guard duty against pursuing intriguing plot threads, make pursuing those plot threads the best way to protect their charge.

## RANGER

Many rōnin develop wilderness survival, tracking, and forestry skills that civilized samurai and non-samurai lack. While most clans have dedicated specialists trained to be at home in the wild, these are few in number. Since many rōnin know at least a little bit about how to handle themselves in the wilderness, if a clan needs a wild region scouted in a hurry—for example, in response to unexpected troop movements on campaign—hiring a group of rōnin can provide it with invaluable information.

### Stories about Rangers

Ranger stories can be easier to run than other kinds of rōnin stories because the rōnin are inherently protagonized: they have that job because their high level of facility in the wilderness makes them uniquely suited to solving a problem, and they operate in a small group with relative autonomy compared to ashigaru or guards.

Wilderness–survival stories are a classic of the fantasy roleplaying genre. They offer a good opportunity for players and GMs to indulge in beautiful descriptions of nature, to play with atmospheric clues and signifiers, or to contend with wild supernatural threats such as animal spirits from *Sakkaku* (the Realm of Mischief) or *Chikushō-dō* (the Realm of Animals). A GM with a group of younger players—especially if the GM is not used to running games for kids—should definitely consider the ranger story as a way to keep the business of GMing simple. Introducing interesting animal characters tends to engage and delight younger groups.

## SPIES AND SABOTEURS

Sabotage in war or intrigue consists of covertly attacking a foe's material resources: dumping weevils into their grain, poisoning their wells, loosening wheels and axles on their wagons, cutting their bowstrings,

and so on. It goes hand in hand with espionage: gathering information on an army's strengths and weaknesses. Samurai are expected to act honorably in all aspects of their lives, but in order to advance the goals of their clans, they must sometimes perform unsavory acts. *Shinobi*—covert operatives—embody this facet of samurai culture, and the key for them is to avoid getting caught. One way these spies accomplish this is by engaging others to do the dirty work. Rōnin, in this way, can be particularly valuable assets in clandestine affairs, as long as they operate skillfully and can reliably keep secrets.

Rōnin assigned to sabotage duties may find the best way to accomplish their mission is getting themselves hired by an enemy army. Even if positions are unavailable, they may be able to pass themselves off as ashigaru or camp followers in large armies without much risk of being challenged. Stories circulate of canny, unscrupulous rōnin who got themselves hired as secret agents by two different armies and played both off each other successfully–until, of course, they were caught.

### Stories about Spies and Saboteurs

When seeding story elements about spies and saboteurs, game masters should work with any PCs considering this path on their ninjō (starting on page 62) and establish what their immediate goals are. Inter-group conflict can be interesting, particularly when one PC has been sent to observe another, and such situations can lead to dynamic character growth as a PC begins developing relationships with their target. On the flip side of this, inter-group conflict can be a harrowing road to walk down as PCs turn on one another, breaking group cohesion and creating headaches for the GM. Players and game masters should always talk about what type of story they want to tell together, and discuss whether such conflict would be meaningful and interesting to them.

Tales about spies and saboteurs can also be very intrigue-focused, emphasizing the aspect of understanding what is not said as much as what is said. Performing heists and stealth missions can also ramp up the suspense of a campaign, especially when the stakes are high and the rewards are incredible. Games or arcs that take place revolving around politics will have a significant opportunity for shinobi and other ambitious characters to slink about the shadows or hide in plain sight, advancing their goals and thwarting their opponents.

## Shadow Warrior

A *kagemusha*, or shadow warrior, is a body double paid to impersonate an important military officer. Kagemusha sometimes stand in for their doppelgangers at important functions or are deployed in numbers so that an enemy hoping to assassinate a high-value target will not know which of various caravans or officer corps to target. A rōnin whose appearance, voice, and acting skills are up to the job of kagemusha can be assured a relatively comfortable job that is risky, but not more so than ashigaru duty. There are even stories of kagemusha who went on to assume their lord's identity after their lord passed on—but surely those must be apocryphal.

### Stories about Shadow Warriors

The easiest way to tell a kagemusha story is to make one rōnin the kagemusha and the others their attendants and retainers, essentially a carbon copy of the real lord's own personal guard and household. This option allows low-level rōnin players to engage in the kind of high-powered command and intrigue that normally might be confined to high samurai lords. The rōnin should receive more and more attention and responsibility as they grow better accustomed to their strange positions.

## Tutor

A rōnin with a reputation for excellence in the martial or creative arts may find work with samurai as a teacher or instructor for the young. This vocation dovetails well with the martial or artistic pilgrimage described in the **Martial Pilgrim** section and the **Artistic Pilgrims** sidebar on page 13. In order to acquire such a position among samurai who themselves often excel at martial and creative artistry, a rōnin must find a way to advertise their skill and call attention to themself. Challenging the master of a local dōjō or daring to set up a surprise art installation in a public place can easily get a rōnin run out of town at swordpoint. However, if it works, it can lead to a long tenure as a teacher, a position in which the rōnin may gain the trust of young samurai who make them feel like a respected and honored part of the family.

### Stories about Tutors

A rōnin tutor makes an excellent choice for a one-on-one *L5R* game, as well as an excuse to put a traveling rōnin in contact with some important NPCs. Additionally, it may act as an opportunity for a single rōnin character to play with a group of nonrōnin characters. Tutoring a young samurai ingratiates the rōnin with their family. To incorporate dramatic conflict, the GM should consider having two or more family members pressure the rōnin to teach their pupil toward two different ends, such a focus on martial prowess versus a focus on calligraphy. Including a rivalry with another martial arts school is another excellent way to introduce conflict.

**COURTS OF STONE**

*Courts of Stone*, an additional supplement, is an excellent resource for GMs and players who wish to add more intrigue, spying, and social sabotage to their games.

### WANDERING PRIEST

For some, the way of the wanderer is the only path in life that feels true to the nature of the world. Wandering priests are typically monks or *shugenja* who may or may not have been raised as samurai. Occasionally, though, someone who has a particular proclivity for spiritual pursuits might take up wandering priesthood, and this could be anyone from lorded samurai to rōnin to *gaijin* to *hinin* (though hinin would need to hide their origins due to social stigma). These priests can do a variety of tasks like keeping shrines, blessing harvests, and performing ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. They have no hard restrictions from clans or monasteries, and they tend to work for small or obscure villages in need of spiritual guidance. Such places have little recourse when the *kami* are displeased, as shugenja and their ability to invoke the kami are rare.

#### Stories about Wandering Priests

Wandering priests tend to be an easy addition to pre-existing groups, as their nomadic behavior makes them excellent candidates to adopt the adventuring life. The nice thing about wanderers is that they can be just about anywhere and therefore have the opportunity to meet others on the road or in a village, at a caravan, or at another location or plot hook developed by the GM. Problems a wandering priest might deal with include spiritual problems of villages or individuals, mediating religious conflicts, expelling evil spirits, or otherwise curing spiritual maladies.

## Rōnin and the Clans

How rōnin typically operate with and are received by the Great Clans can have a significant impact on play, and the following write-ups offer GMs suggestions on how these characters might fair among particular samurai.

### CRAB CLAN

The stoic and utilitarian attitude of the Crab tends to frame their view of rōnin fairly positively. They generally treat outsiders with a meritocratic fairness: a rōnin who can fight, withstand hardship, and treat those around them with honesty and respect will get good treatment from the Crab Clan. This is perhaps best exemplified by the Crab's Twenty Goblin Winter, an event designed to give outsiders, particularly rōnin, an opportunity to join or rejoin the ranks of true samurai. The same stereotypes many ascribe to the Crab (blunt, unrefined, rough-mannered, stubborn) are also traits they ascribe to rōnin.

That said, Crab do expect their rōnin hires to stand shoulder to shoulder with them in missions beyond the Kaiu Wall. It can be refreshing for a rōnin to see their employer venturing into the same danger and performing the same difficult actions alongside them, but rōnin working for the Crab have their work cut out for them. Serious battle against supernatural horrors and the risk of corruption are daily occurrences for Crab and rōnin on the Wall.

### CRANE CLAN

Everyone knows the Crane are the most lauded defenders of order, privilege, and propriety. Everyone knows the Crane reject anything uncivilized, unrefined, or out of place. Everyone knows no Crane would ever associate with a rōnin, who represent everything Crane are not. All of these qualities make rōnin ideal partners for members of the Crane Clan.

In fact, the Crane's wealth and unique position allow them to hire a great number of rōnin, which they do out of necessity. The Crane often engage in conflict with the Lion and the Crab; employing rōnin is critical in order for the Crane to stand up to such military might.

The Crane's doctrine of etiquette and courtesy is the outer side of their philosophy. There is also an inner side, which deals with the practice of subverting and defying propriety in strategic ways and at opportune times to achieve devastating results. Only experienced and ambitious Crane courtiers get to learn about their clan's nefarious side, but every serious courtier aspires to learn such techniques, if for no reason other than to catch members of other clans when they practice them. As Crane must maintain the appearance of propriety and courtesy, they need assets capable of doing the things they themselves cannot do in public—ideally, deniable assets. Enter the rōnin.

Crane, especially Crane who believe in the Celestial Order, do not necessarily like rōnin, but they usually respect their necessity. Like the Crane, many rōnin consider Courtesy to be the alpha and omega of their interactions with the world, understanding that tenet to an extent that only necessity can teach. Rōnin who work with the Crane become intelligence agents, couriers of secret messages to arrange assignations or other rendezvous, protectors for those too poor to afford Kakita *yōjimbō* bodyguards, or even intimidating toughs. Crane who work with rōnin stay unpredictable and dangerous—exactly the way the Crane like it.

In exchange, the Crane Clan can grant rōnin all kinds of extremely useful bonuses. Rōnin invariably struggle with social acceptance, and they tend to be behind the curve with regard to upper-class fashions and the vicissitudes of etiquette from season to season. Working with Crane gives them access to that information—an

invaluable asset in securing further work and acceptance among samurai. Historically, Crane also are known to have full coffers; most can afford to pay rōnin very well, and they pay rōnin especially well if they need them to keep sensitive information under wraps.

## DRAGON CLAN

Philosophical and existential questions like "what really defines a samurai?" are the Dragon Clan's wheelhouse. While many Dragon do subscribe to Shinseism, it is the belief of many senior Dragon that a rōnin who exemplifies samurai behavior is, for all intents and purposes, a samurai. More importantly, the Dragon are a clan of self-determination and self-improvement, core beliefs that put rōnin in a unique position to be accepted, at least in part, as long as they are willing to grow.

The Dragon Clan has a larger monastic population than the other clans. It maintains many temples and monasteries, and these are easy for rōnin to join compared to other cloistered organizations. After all, the Dragon's relatively low birth rate necessitates a replenishment of their numbers from somewhere. As a result, a fairly high percentage of Dragon shugenja and monks come from rōnin origins, and thus can easily advance in the clan hierarchy through their understanding of religious and philosophical life and doctrine.

## LION CLAN

Due to their military prowess and penchant for battle, the Lion often employ rōnin in addition to their legions of peasant soldiers. Because the Lion are nearly always in the midst of an active campaign, or are planning to start one, they require numerous fighters to sustain their battles. This is a convenient (though dangerous) source of income for wandering rōnin, as such fighting can last long months, and the job provides steady pay. However, the competitive, high-stress structure and atmosphere of the Lion Clan's armies has fostered certain patterns of mistreatment of the rōnin and ashigaru in their ranks.

In a samurai army, command of contingents of peasant troops and rōnin in the field usually goes to a *taisa*, or captain, and their gunsō, or sergeant. These officers oversee multiple squads, each of which answers to a *kashira*. Taisa and gunsō are almost always samurai; but kashira can be ashigaru or rōnin. The ashigaru both respect and fear these officers; among the Lion especially, the ranks bitterly joke that the Lion's much-vaunted reputation for courage mostly comes from the grunts' sacrifices. But the real problem comes from the *bugyō*, or commissioners, who are responsible for recruiting, equipping, drilling, and feeding the ashigaru and rōnin. An army generally has two or three bugyō (who are themselves sometimes rōnin) assigned to a contingent of non-samurai soldiers: a *yari-bugyō* for the spears, a *yumi-bugyō* for the archers, and perhaps a *naginata-bugyō* in more old-fashioned armies that still field skirmishers with polearms. The Lion emphasis on battle means that the position of bugyō, while it demands a great deal more day-to-day work than the position of gunsō, is considered less prestigious than a gunsō appointment.

In response to this seemingly unfair position, some bugyō drive their soldiers punishingly hard. Bugyō who are recruiters compete with one another to bring the greatest numbers of soldiers to their approving superiors. A few desperate or ruthless recruiters even resort to intimidation or press gangs to swell their ranks. Then, other bugyō drill the Lion ashigaru hard—often too hard. The yari-bugyō and the yumi-bugyō are likely to compete for a gunsō's favor by trying to raise better-drilled ashigaru.

Newcomers to the rank and file can expect endless hours of punishing practice on not nearly enough rice and sleep. Further, a culture of hazing has appeared in some armies, resulting in a number of wasteful deaths with no discernible benefit.

If the higher ranks of Lion leadership are aware of how widespread or damaging these abuses are, they have not acted on it. The rōnin who make up many of these sections have little success going above commissioners' heads to report these indignities. Well-intentioned samurai who might normally be in a position to call unscrupulous bugyō on their unjust behavior are discouraged from interacting with the rank and file. It would take a truly fearless and convincing individual to expose this problem and cause the Lion to live up to their reputation in low places as well as high.

## PHOENIX CLAN

The Phoenix probably interact with rōnin the least of any clan. Their emphasis on academic pursuits and other things that require sustained, expensive education leaves them with little to offer rōnin, and vice versa.

But the Phoenix have a dirty little secret: their clan generates more rōnin per capita than any other clan. Phoenix leadership is somewhat mystified as to why so many Phoenix youth seem to disappear from the clan every year, especially during the wandering year that follows gempuku. The clan's exacting intellectual and academic standards contribute significantly to this phenomenon. The academic rigor and highly structured, specific approach to learning that the Phoenix demand of nearly every samurai can cause stress and frustration to young people whose learning styles do not match the Phoenix standard, or who see a life of study as a dreary fate.

## SCORPION CLAN

Few Scorpion become rōnin, though whether that is due to the clan's focus on duty and loyalty, or because those who stray often disappear, is uncertain. Even so, the Scorpion Clan is all too familiar with the rōnin's plight. Scorpion see rōnin for what they are: samurai who are treated disrespectfully and widely disregarded because the exigencies of their situation force them into behaviors others find distasteful. For this reason, the Scorpion tend to be willing to work with rōnin, secretly, to advance their own schemes. These brief relationships should not be misconstrued as friendship, however, as any who work for the Scorpion should be considered expendable accomplices in the clan's grand designs. The Scorpion Clan's information networks and clandestine activities rely heavily on rōnin contacts scattered throughout Rokugan. When a compromised Scorpion spy needs to go to ground, or when a shinobi of the clan needs eyes and ears to record the doings of both the high and low in a certain region, they reach out to rōnin.

Rōnin are particularly useful as information sources because their combination of low status and connection to the higher echelons of society grants them access to a wide variety of social circumstances. They can draw connections and give context to data that might otherwise not seem related. For that same reason, a cover identity as a rōnin grants a disguised Scorpion access to a broad range of social contexts; however, in order to maintain such an identity, the Scorpion needs connections to real rōnin. The one rōnin in an area who doesn't seem to know the others, or whose behavior clashes with the customs and ideas of their supposed peers, will stick out in the eyes of counterintelligence agents. Assuming a rōnin disguise or blending in with a group of rōnin traveling together is one of the fastest and most effective ways for a Scorpion to disappear in plain sight. Patrols and magistrates are less likely to risk antagonizing a group of armed and desperate rogues to find an errant spy than they are to harass merchants or monastic pilgrims.

## UNICORN CLAN

Like the Scorpion, the Unicorn are used to having their credibility as samurai doubted and mistrusted. In the Unicorn's case, that kind of gatekeeping often derives from their outward appearance: many have foreign features, foreign horses and gear, or unfamiliar traditions. Even more than that, though, the Unicorn identify with rōnin as a concept. They themselves, after all, set aside their obligation to samurai life and traveled away, seeking their fortune in unfamiliar lands, then came back and struggled to reassert their legitimacy as a Great Clan. Shinjo Altansarnai has been quoted as saying, "On some level, everyone secretly thinks all Unicorn are rōnin—even some Unicorn." Some Unicorn who are concerned with their own legitimacy purposefully avoid and even denigrate rōnin, worrying that rōnin marginalization will "rub off" on them. But far more are understanding and accepting toward rōnin.

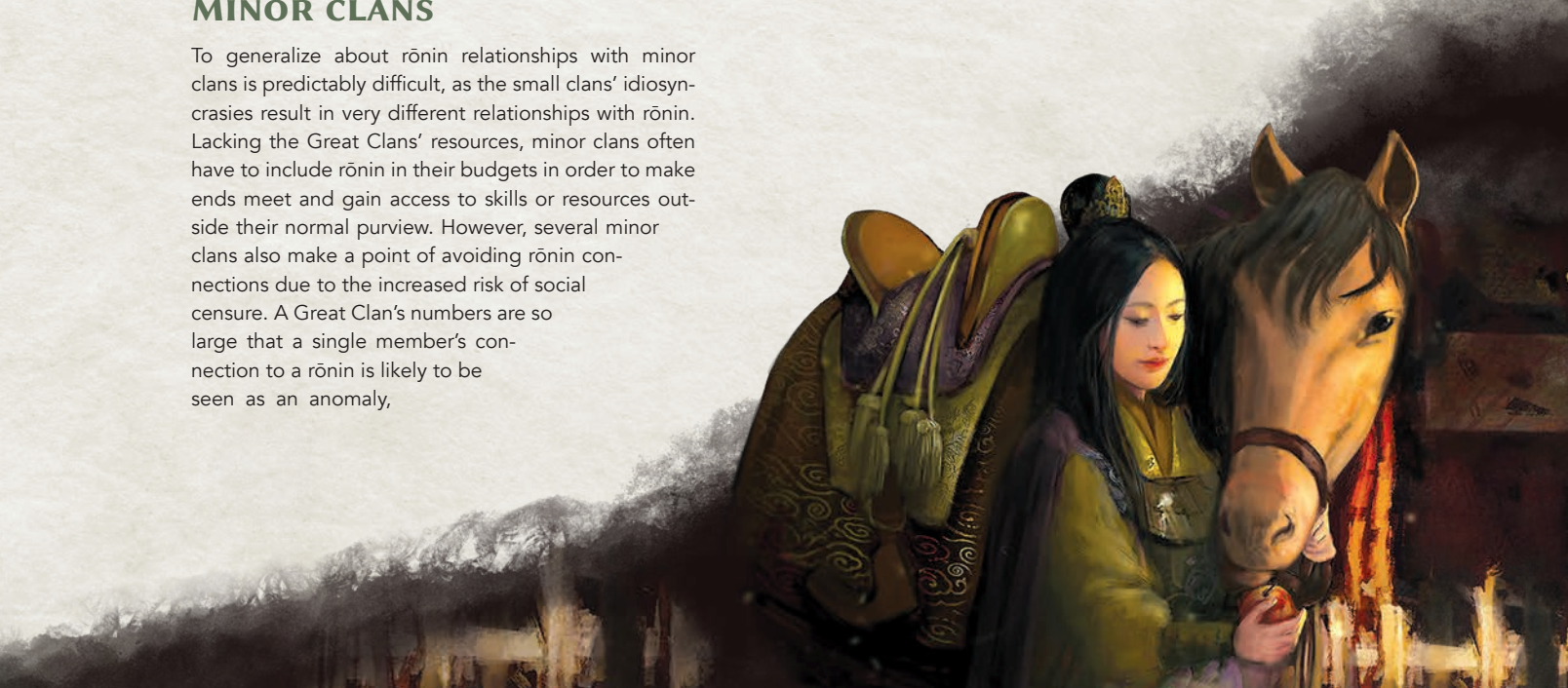
The majority of rōnin working with the Unicorn Clan do so as part of the Unicorn trade network. Their wandering lifestyle fits well with the Unicorn's need to move goods through every kind of territory and to every corner of Rokugan. Rōnin are especially helpful to the Unicorn for transporting goods through difficult terrain, such as highlands or thick forests, where horses and oxen cannot move more quickly than humans. The Unicorn Clan sometimes contracts bands of rōnin to move goods through regions that are dangerous (naturally or otherwise). Those groups sometimes abscond with the goods, but the Unicorn pay a handsome commission to those who deliver, making ongoing employment an even more attractive proposition. Rōnin who serve the Unicorn well over the course of several mercantile journeys are sometimes rewarded with supervisory positions over non-samurai traders.

## MINOR CLANS

To generalize about rōnin relationships with minor clans is predictably difficult, as the small clans' idiosyncrasies result in very different relationships with rōnin. Lacking the Great Clans' resources, minor clans often have to include rōnin in their budgets in order to make ends meet and gain access to skills or resources outside their normal purview. However, several minor clans also make a point of avoiding rōnin connections due to the increased risk of social censure. A Great Clan's numbers are so large that a single member's connection to a rōnin is likely to be seen as an anomaly, whereas a minor clan's connection to one could easily be interpreted as representing the clan as a whole.

Still, several minor clans have close ties to or origins among rōnin. The Hare Clan were formed from rōnin. The Mantis Clan count many rōnin among their number and allow brave rōnin to ascend to positions of significant responsibility in their fleets as easily as anyone else aboard ship (which is not particularly easy). Of all the clans, they offer the most viable opportunities for rōnin advancement, although due to the Mantis' island-living nature and seemingly restless wanderings, many rōnin aren't aware that the Mantis are an option at all. As agents for hire, Cat Clan members often find themselves hired to work alongside rōnin on missions of sabotage or espionage. The Sparrow Clan's poor and wandering lifestyle requires them to move in rōnin circles for companionship and safety. The Deer Clan would prefer not to have rōnin hanging about and tarnishing its reputation, but its matchmakers frequently determine that some rōnin or other is crucial to keeping the universal balance in Rokugan.

One would think the Tortoise Clan's shady dealings would benefit from extensive rōnin assistance. They do, but it's never simple. The Tortoise have high standards for hired help, given that they benefit most from skills in administration, mathematics, and logistics. Tough, intimidating rōnin are in less demand among the Tortoise than rōnin with organizational expertise. Moreover, the Tortoise Clan keeps its secrets. Rōnin who work for the Tortoise can expect to find reliable long-term work if they prove themselves; however, for better or for worse, a rōnin who gets involved with the Tortoise often find it difficult to take to the road after a job. Wherever they go, they find friendly Tortoise representatives who strongly encourage them to return to their old employer for further gainful employment. If they refuse—well, the Tortoise cannot afford loose ends.



# Rōnin and Peasants

Most rōnin spend the majority of their time interacting with non-samurai: farmers, merchants, artisans, and hinin, members of the lowest class. Peasants of these stripes occupy most of Rokugan; they live in the villages and towns that dot the road and till the fields that take up most of the countryside. A traveling rōnin might go a year without actually interacting with any samurai, but they rarely go even a few days without meeting a commoner.

A wandering rōnin on the roads of Rokugan must rely on commoners for most of their food, clothing, and shelter. As they travel along the highways of the Empire, they keep an eye out for signs and friendly travelers that can direct them to the nearest settlements. Upon arriving at such a settlement, they first appraise whether it seems rich enough to offer them work. If not, they have three choices: seek paying work from people who can barely sustain themselves, stoop to robbery, or move on. But if it appears well-off enough that a resident might hire workers, the rōnin has a chance of receiving food, clothing, or shelter for fair labor.

In a town, a rōnin must balance two priorities: appearing nonthreatening, and appearing strong enough to fight off threats or do hard labor. Sometimes they may go door to door asking if anyone needs work done, but it is usually more efficient and less intimidating to install themself in the town square or a tavern. It is often necessary for the rōnin to gain additional notice. If there is a local martial arts school, or a village festival with wrestling matches, a martially inclined rōnin might challenge whoever seems a worthy opponent; even if they do not win a match, putting on an impressive enough show wins them attention and probably work.

Rōnin can usually find more employment options in cities. Cities bring together peasants, merchants, artisans, and even samurai who engage in a variety of businesses and activities that might require extra help. The threat of violence and need for guards are elevated in city locations, especially in places like taverns and red-lantern districts.

## RŌNIN AND FARMERS

Farmers tend to have plenty of food available, which makes them excellent possible employers for rōnin. The trick is to find farmers who need workers and have enough money to hire them. Harvest seasons are the best time to get work from farmers, since they frequently need help harvesting and processing grain. After a harvest, farmers are at the greatest risk of attack from bandits. Peasants who have suffered a bad harvest may have no option but to take up banditry, while peasants who have had a bountiful harvest become targets. Rōnin who have worked alongside the peasants in the fields now get new work opportunities escorting the harvest and farm owner to market or to major cities or castles as they sell their crops.

## RŌNIN AND MERCHANTS

Working for a merchant is the closest some rōnin get to the feeling of being a samurai. Merchants tend to have both money and valuable items worth protecting with armed guards. Most merchants are small-time shopkeepers and traders, but even these sometimes band together to hire a couple of rōnin as security for themselves and their businesses. Merchants with large businesses, though, are the largest per-capita employer of rōnin.

Merchants are obvious targets for criminals. They're easy to kill compared to samurai, and the larger ones have plenty of money to steal. A merchant of any significance needs to retain the services of a bodyguard or two as quickly as possible, and they know that the more violent, intimidating, and disciplined a rōnin seems, the better a bodyguard they will be. Indeed, important merchants sometimes hold tournaments in order to figure out which of the various rōnin available to them will be the ideal bodyguard. Rōnin who start out as guards may end up as escorts for merchandise on the road or as security captains for whole teams of guards.

Rōnin can acquire one crucial commodity through working with merchants: business experience. Rōnin interested in more than just guard duty have the opportunity to observe the merchant at work and sometimes to do other work for the merchant as well, through which a crafty and perceptive rōnin can gain basic skills in mathematics, negotiation, and administration.

## RŌNIN AND ARTISANS

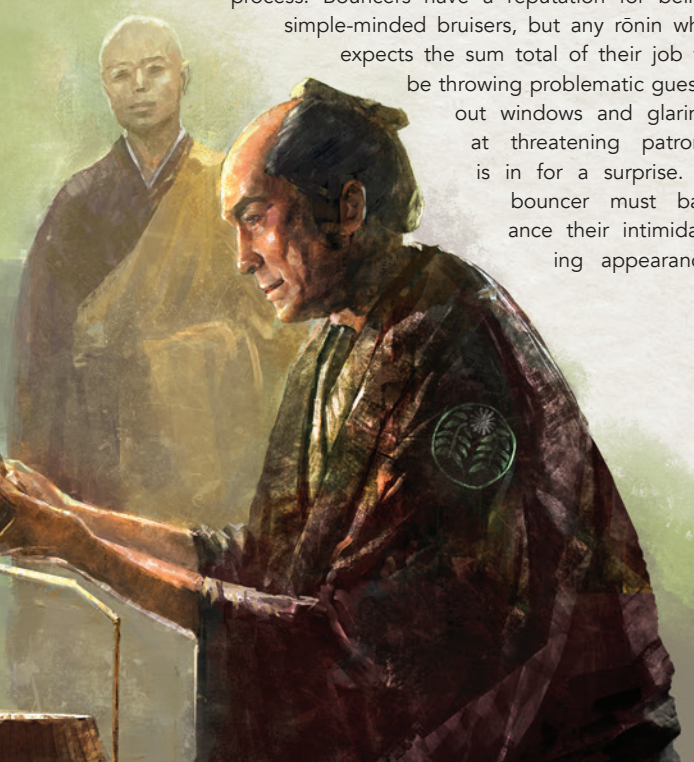
Like merchants, some artisans have both the money to hire guards and important resources and merchandise that need to be guarded. Renowned master artisans especially need to consider hiring rōnin as security, because any time they finish a piece, that piece becomes an object of desire as well as envy. They have to worry not only about criminals, but also about rival artisans who want to pass their work off as their own or destroy their successes in order to eliminate competition. So as not to rely entirely on tired apprentices and distracted journeymen for security, many artisans hire rōnin.

Resourceful rōnin can use the opportunity of working with an artisan to acquire some experience as an apprentice. If they are extremely lucky, the artisan might take them on as full apprentices.

## RŌNIN AND HININ

Some hinin—butchers, those who prepare bodies, and executioners—might fall into the same category as tradespeople; as their fortunes rise and their businesses become more financially successful, they become bigger targets and thus have a greater need for rōnin guards. But the most likely employers of rōnin among the hinin are entertainment businesses—taverns, theaters, geisha houses, music halls, and gambling dens in large cities. Rōnin can work as bouncers or similar security officers for these businesses, guarding performers as they move from place to place and keeping an eye out for noted deadbeats or cheaters at gambling. Around plentiful alcohol, rōnin become doubly important in ejecting disruptively drunk patrons and making sure no one dies of alcohol poisoning.

Working as a bouncer is a surprisingly complicated process. Bouncers have a reputation for being simple-minded bruisers, but any rōnin who expects the sum total of their job to be throwing problematic guests out windows and glaring at threatening patrons is in for a surprise. A bouncer must balance their intimidating appearance with a hospitable attitude that conveys that their establishment is safe and professional, but also fun and approachable—not unlike the way a rōnin must act in order to obtain new work. They need to show courtesy and geniality to regular patrons, but also carefully assess new ones to make sure they aren't too drunk to continue drinking and won't turn out to be threatening or dangerous to their establishment's less-formidable employees. Bouncers at geisha houses, for example, often engage new patrons in casual but calculated conversation to suss out whether they have aggressive intentions toward geisha. They also need good social skills so they can deescalate conflicts before the conflicts turn violent; it is said that a bouncer who has to throw a punch or physically restrain a patron has already made a mistake. Experienced rōnin bouncers are as good at verbally disarming patrons as they are at physically disarming them. Finally, a rōnin will get a lot of use out of basic first aid skills to prevent patrons who do get hit or dangerously drunk from dying of their injuries. No bouncer or tavern needs the death of a patron, no matter how deserved, on their reputation or their soul.



Beyond paid employment, rōnin often spend their leisure time close to hinin: buying nutritious meat from butchers, scavenging with beggars, or socializing with performers. Even a rōnin needs entertainment to look forward to in life. The best part of a rōnin's life is often the time they get to spend in cities after a big job, spending down extra bu that's too much for them to carry on food and entertainment.

## RŌNIN AND FOREIGNERS

Traders, merchants, and diplomats from countries outside Rokugan often hire rōnin to guide them on their travels through the Empire. Rōnin tend not to be prejudiced against people from other countries; there's already enough incoming prejudice in their lives—they don't need to add to that with their own judgments. They fulfill various roles for foreigners, besides the obvious work as bodyguards and guides. Rōnin can work as fixers and translators, teaching foreigners about the customs of Rokugan and introducing them to the people they need to know.

# The Perfect Land Sect

Those who follow the Perfect Land Sect believe in a particular, and some say heretical, interpretation of the lessons of Shinsei, the Little Teacher who aided the divine Kami many centuries ago. They believe that all are equal in the eyes of the Little Teacher, and that by revering him and chanting the phrase *Shoshi ni kie* ("devotion to the Little Teacher" or "absolute trust in the Little Teacher," depending upon how it is written) a person may be welcomed into the Perfect Land when they die, able to achieve Enlightenment and avoid the wheel of reincarnation. The Perfect Land Sect is led by a man named Hige, a one-time member of the Brotherhood of Shinsei. He takes an active role in maintaining the Perfect Land Sect because he believes that the spiritual welfare and equality of all those he meets are of exceptional importance. To members of the Perfect Land Sect, Hige acts as Shinsei's mouthpiece, interpreting messages from the Little Teacher and sharing them with his followers. They, in turn, spread the *kie*, their chant and beliefs, throughout the Empire.

The Perfect Land Sect is as much a philosophy as an organization. Hige personally leads a large group that lives within the wilderness and sends envoys out to prostheletyze, but its beliefs have spread like seeds in the wind. There are now many groups that profess this faith, or variations on it, but most operate independently by region. Hige and the Perfect Land Sect leaders hope to see their philosophy grow and expand—and live on, should anything happen to them. Hige's sect holds that all who believe in the Little Teacher's lessons are welcome, yet because the threat of spies and the anger of the samurai always looms overhead, new members are thoroughly vetted to ensure their faith.

The ideology is not inherently a violent one, but many of its individual leaders do wish to deconstruct the beliefs they consider false. Primarily, they focus on the oppressive caste system of the Celestial Order, which defines a hierarchy of command that is preordained by birth. The Perfect Land Sect also rejects Fortunist thinking, believing that worshiping the Fortunes is not the only way to salvation. Because it rejects so many social and spiritual norms, the Perfect Land Sect is considered illegal and heretical across nearly all of Rokugan. Nevertheless, pockets of the faithful have taken root in the lands of the Dragon Clan, where samurai value individuality and where a dwindling birth rate has impeded the clan's ability to police the peasants for signs of dissatisfaction and unrest.

## SPREADING THE WORD

Hige's desire to see the Perfect Land Sect expand beyond the need for his leadership has found considerable success. Wandering monks, passionate peasants, and discontented rōnin have brought knowledge of the Perfect Land to many scattered villages and towns where people hope for a better life after this one. Many such places have minimal knowledge of Hige and the sect's origins, instead operating as secret communities of believers with varying interpretations of Shoshi ni kie. For some, the kie is simply a belief to be shared with those who are willing to accept the Perfect Land in pursuit of spiritual Enlightenment. For others, it is a weapon of liberation against the samurai class, waiting for the right time to be unleashed. These communities are the ones most likely to spark riots or insurrections, using the kie as a rallying cry to unite those who wish to fight for a better existence in this lifetime.

Yet even among the downtrodden, the Perfect Land Sect is not an easy answer to all problems. Many still believe in the Celestial Order and have put their faith in the idea that by following its tenets they will be reincarnated into a better station in their next life. Others have the good fortune of a generous lord or a stable life, and the thought of undermining their samurai superiors represents a threat to their happiness and livelihood. Often people in this situation live alongside those who are predisposed to join the Perfect Land Sect. The conflict between belief systems can cause families to split apart and communities to cast out well-meaning members who have promoted the sect. Even though the sect promises a better life after death, many of those who follow it are forced into marginalized or threatened positions in this one.

## THE PERFECT LAND AND OUTSIDERS

For rōnin and peasants, the Perfect Land Sect is particularly appealing because it rejects the notion that their worth is tied to factors outside their control, such as their birth. Its ideology says that anyone who follows the Little Teacher with devotion can achieve Enlightenment and happiness after death, and all who accept this philosophy are treated as equals. A rōnin in particular may find the sect's promises tempting, as a rōnin's very existence is seen as a perversion of the Celestial Order, their status teetering between that of a samurai and one of disgrace.

Peasants may find the hope of freedom reason enough to begin chanting "Shoshi ni kie." Especially for hinin, who are walked over, beaten, and ignored

by nearly everyone with whom they come into contact for performing duties that are necessary for the health and wealth of the Empire, any reprieve is a blessing. However, all those who might consider opening their hearts to the Little Teacher must also understand the risks—such blatant disregard for the Celestial Order could easily end with a samurai's katana across one's throat. To some, this thought is one that drives them to become even more devoted.

Some monks do see the plight of those cast down by the Celestial Order and wish to see justice upheld. Others see in the sect an opportunity for personal power and glory. As monks are sources of spiritual authority—and they can read and write, which is often not the case for peasants—many of those who join the sect soon find themselves in leadership positions within it. This is one of many reasons why the Brotherhood of Shinsei sees the sect as a significant threat; the presence of monks in leadership positions in a prominent heretical group gives the group an aura of legitimacy that the Brotherhood would rather see extinguished.

## THE THREE SUTRAS

The Perfect Land Sect was founded at the end of the ninth century by a monk of the Shrine of the Seven Thunders named Gatai. His mentor, Yuzue, had proposed a controversial theory that the old Age of Celestial Virtue had come to an end and that Shinsei would return to usher in a new one. By chanting the mantra "Shoshi ni kie," she hoped to expedite his return. After her death, Gatai discovered a sutra she had written: the *Perfect Land Sutra*. Believing her mantra had guided her to the Perfect Land that her writing described, Gatai began championing her treatise and chanting the kie himself. While his ideas were not well received among the Brotherhood of Shinsei (which exiled him fairly quickly), he found a willing audience among the peasantry of Rokugan.

Throughout the course of his life, Gatai continued to meditate upon the nature of the kie, upon the Perfect Land, and upon his mentor's theories of the Age of Declining Virtue (the age into which she believed they had entered). These meditations were recorded in his own sutra, the *Contemplation Sutra*, and were kept with the *Perfect Land Sutra* by the burgeoning Perfect Land Sect. A third sutra would be added to the collection, the *Declining Virtue Sutra* by a later leader of the Perfect Land Sect, a monk named Joshin. While no one (except perhaps Hige) knows the location of the original sutras, parts of each have been copied at different times and in different places, then distributed among the common people of Rokugan to assist in the dissemination of the kie. It is not uncommon for a regional branch of the Perfect Land Sect to have a piece of one or more of the sutras and to cling to it as a sacred text, studying or using it as it builds its own community of followers. Because most peasants cannot read, the text of a sutra is often irrelevant—simply having a copy of a sacred text can boost the perceived legitimacy of the Perfect Land ethos.

CHAPTER

# 2

# Creating a Character

*Sayaka eyed the gaijin—Khulan?—with mild curiosity. She had been traveling down this road for several days, and when she met the gaijin astride his horse early that morning she had expected to be surpassed quickly. Upon seeing her, though, he had unmounted and began walking alongside her. At first she refused to speak to the fast-talking, burly-looking man. He had offered her an outstretched hand, as if to give her something, but it was empty. Over the next several hours he spoke to her of his homeland, his horse, and how excited he was to be seeing Rokugan, finally.*

*For all his strangeness, Sayaka could see that he was a kind person. He offered her some of his odd rations and did not seem to mind her quietness, and by the time they took their late-afternoon rest she found herself glad to have the company, at least for a time, on this long, endless journey.*

# A Revised Game of Twenty Questions

In the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* Core Rulebook, the Game of Twenty Questions is an integral part of developing and getting to know a character. For players seeking to play a rōnin, gaijin, or peasant character, the revised set of questions better tackles the differences and nuances of struggling, surviving, and succeeding in a society that loathes those who do not fit neatly into the Celestial Order—or those who scandalously reject it.

The questions provided within this chapter are used to breathe life into a character, giving them desires, bonds, histories, and regrets. Mechanical attributes and modifiers are assigned as players make these choices. Throughout the process, players are instructed to write down skill and ring increases as well as other static values to be applied to each character. Players will want to keep a running tally of ring values and skill ranks as they are acquired. Players will need access to the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* Core Rulebook for various portions of the character creation process.

## Character Sheets

To get started, go to www.FantasyFlightGames.com. There, players can download and print copies of the ***Path of Waves* Character Sheet** and the ***Path of Waves* Twenty Questions Worksheet**. Players can also choose to use a blank piece of paper instead of the provided sheets to record information about their character.

When recording information on the character sheet or worksheet, it's best if players use pencil, as characters grow and change over the course of play.

## LIMITS ON SKILLS AND RINGS

All characters begin with 1 rank in each ring and 0 ranks in each skill. Rings and skills have a maximum rank of 3 during character creation. If a choice would result in a ring rising above rank 3 during character creation, then the player must choose a different ring to increase instead, as long as that ring would not be increased above 3.

Similarly, if a choice would result in a skill rising above rank 3 during character creation, then the player must choose a different skill that is not already at rank 3 to increase instead.

For more information on what different ranks mean for rings and skills, see page 22 of the core rulebook.

# Part I: Core Identity (Region and Upbringing)

The first few questions will define your character's origins in general terms.

## 1. WHAT REGION DOES YOUR CHARACTER COME FROM?

For a character who doesn't fit into samurai society, the lands they hail from are as important to their identity as a clan is to a samurai. Even within Rokugan, the geography and character of the land can shift dramatically as soon as one passes over the next hill or crosses a hungry river. The place where a character has spent many years of their life imparts particular skills and may impress upon them certain inclinations regarding how to approach the world, both within and outside the environment to which the character is accostumed.

When you create a rōnin character, you choose a regional option that interests you. A character may be boldly colored by their experiences in this region, may care little for the area but remember its lessons, or may feel shame about their association with that location. You should take this opportunity to start thinking about what sort of childhood your character had and what major life events may have led them down the path they follow now.

### STARTING VALUES

When you begin to answer the *Path of Waves* Game of Twenty Questions, keep in mind the following baseline values for your character:

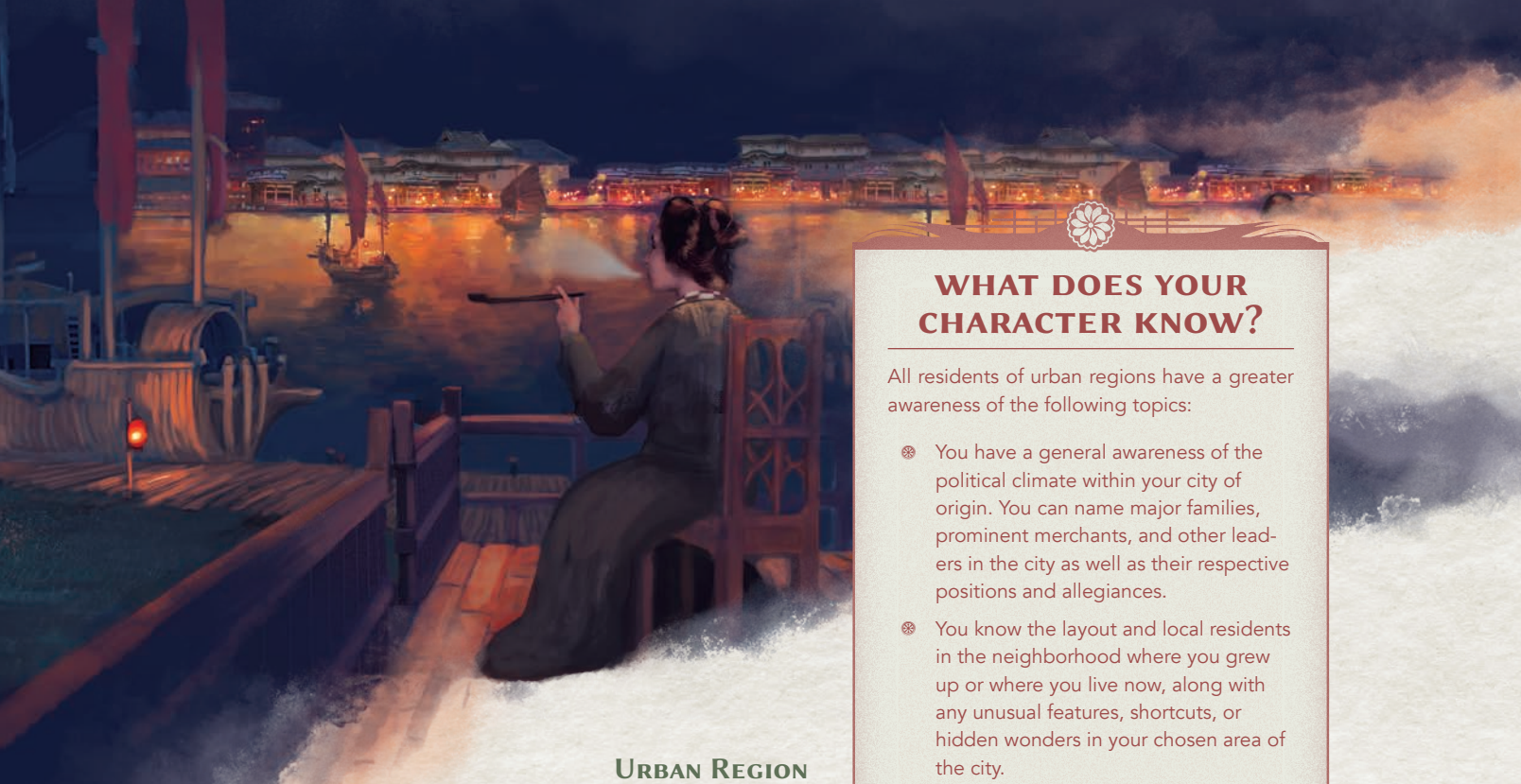
- **Rings:** 1 rank in each ring.
- **Skills:** 0 ranks in each skill.
- **Honor:** Determined in **Question 3**.
- **Glory:** Determined in **Question 1**.
- **Status:** Determined in **Question 2**.
- **Endurance:** Calculated based on your final ring values; (Earth + Fire) x 2.
- **Composure:** Calculated based on your final ring values; (Earth + Water) x 2.
- **Focus:** Calculated based on your final ring values; Fire + Air
- **Vigilance:** Calculated based on your final ring values; (Air + Water) / 2.

**CREATING NPCS**

While GMs certainly can use the rules in this chapter to create NPCs (non-player characters) if they wish, these rules are more suited to the creation of PCs (player characters). While this chapter contains many useful ideas that could help shape the desires and motivations of NPCs, NPCs created in this manner would be more mechanically detailed than most of the examples found in **Chapter 8: Non-Player Characters** in the core rulebook (starting on page 308) and **Chapter 7: Non-Player Characters** in this book (starting on page 227).

**RŌNIN, GAIJIN, AND PEASANTS**

Throughout the rest of this chapter, whenever a passage refers to rōnin, players and GMs can assume this can include gaijin and peasants as well, except when referring to prerequisites or restrictions.



## Urban Region

**Ring Increase:** +1 Air
**Skill Increase:** +1 Commerce
**Glory:** 29

Cities are places where trade flourishes, cultures meet, and many different types of people mix and mingle. Some city dwellers love the press of bodies, the clamor of the marketplace, and the cacophony of conversation, debate, and rumormongering. Others only see humanity packed into boxes; the stink of blood, sweat, and tears; and rampant crime.

The prospect of wealth in urban areas draws a steady supply of labor but also spurs on the abuse and marginalization of that labor. Folk stories warn of the decadence and immorality of the cities—and only some of these are false. Nevertheless, as industry grows, merchants, scholars, thieves, soldiers, sailors, and laborers continue to flock to cities to mingle, work, and trade. To city folk, their home brings to them commerce and ideas of varying worth from across Rokugan and the rest of the world.

This eclectic and exciting environment may foster the spread of heretical ideals. Change comes slowly to Rokugan, but the cities usually spark that change. The sedate, seasonal pace of the farmlands shifts to one of daily hubbub in urban settings. For agrarian people, those who live in the cities appear as alien and strange as any spirit.

### What Does Your Character Know?

All residents of urban regions have a greater awareness of the following topics:

- You have a general awareness of the political climate within your city of origin. You can name major families, prominent merchants, and other leaders in the city as well as their respective positions and allegiances.
- You know the layout and local residents in the neighborhood where you grew up or where you live now, along with any unusual features, shortcuts, or hidden wonders in your chosen area of the city.
- You have knowledge of the impact of crime, poverty, or political unrest that you have experienced in your city during your lifetime.
- Due to the cosmopolitan culture of cities, you have made many connections during your time in your city. You personally have a family member, friend, or business associate who has traveled abroad or knows about political or business dealings in another land.
- You have moderate knowledge of some form of crime or legitimate trade related to the industry or commerce of your city.

## WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER KNOW?

All residents of rural farmland regions have a greater awareness of the following topics:

- You have general knowledge of the political climate within your region. You can name major families, prosperous local farmers, and important government officials to whom your family or local community reports.
- You grew up hearing stories from your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents of major political upheavals or forces that moved through your region and can relate either detailed or exaggerated accounts of any notable events that may have taken place in your family members' lifetimes.
- You are aware of past and predicted harvest times, the timing of the seasons, and any peculiar weather phenomena in your region. You are also keenly aware of the impact of any events (political or otherwise) that interfere with your community's livelihood: the harvest.
- You have inherited a strong oral tradition and can sing or recite folk songs or stories passed down from your ancestors.
- You have a working knowledge of agricultural practices and how to make a living in your region.
- You are largely unaware of larger political movements and concerns, and your cultural awareness is mostly confined to your local community.

## Rural Farmland Region

**Ring Increase:** +1 Earth
**Skill Increase:** +1 Fitness
**Glory:** 34

Though many may think the city is the embodiment of civilization, rural farmland tends to better reflect the organizing power of people and governments. Whether tilling the fields of gentle plains or clearing forests to make use of nutrient-rich soil, a flat, even field represents the taming of the wilds.

Food is the core of any prosperous civilization, and without fertile land entire empires quickly crumble. Food is a force that can both unify and stratify people; all must eat, but the luxury of exotic spices, fruits, or vegetables sets the wealthy apart.

Poets exalt the serenity of the quiet countryside, the whisper of grass and grain in the wind, and the tranquility of hard work tilling the soil. Some governmental officials move to rural areas for the peace and quiet. Some even think themselves rustic despite their servants and elegant mansions. This tranquility is sometimes temporary, however: armies may march across fields and plains, destroying grass and crops, churning these symbols of civilization into broken sod. If a natural disaster tears through such isolated countryside, roads become impassable, crops fail, and the land becomes wild.

The farmers suffer the most when wars, disasters, and governmental neglect destroy their livelihood. Farmers tame the land and carry the weight of civilization on their backs. They keenly understand the balance between nature and humanity.

**GLORY**

When considering samurai characters, glory represents how well a character is acting as a samurai and how well-known they are for representing the tenets of Bushidō.

For non-samurai, glory instead represents personal reputation and renown. Rōnin and other characters who exist outside of polite samurai society view glory as a measure of how people generally view them, including their honesty, good works, and history of paying their debts (both their promises and monetary obligations). Personal reputation is very important for rōnin, as it dictates others' willingness to work with them, offer them jobs, and give them information.

## Sea, River, or Lake Region

**Ring Increase:** +1 Water
**Skill Increase:** +1 Seafaring
**Glory:** 32

The sea, the source of salt and fish but also storms, provides and takes away in equal measure. Wise fishers respect the power of the waves and the devastating effects of floods. Tempestuous, unpredictable, dangerous. Understandable, life-giving, nourishing. All these things are true of the water, and anyone who has spent a substantial amount of time near it knows this.

Rivers and lakes may often be placid, but their power for good and ill must still be appreciated. They can overflow and flood, and they can drown people. Rivers and lakes can facilitate transportation, serve as navigational markers, and of course provide fresh water and fish. Architects and builders utilize water wheels and dams to harness water's power without depleting it.

Water has strong ties to trade and travel. Fishers, sailors, and merchants transport their wares on the water. Rivers act as arteries for the circulation of society, passing goods, news, and people up and down, bringing life and vitality to every place they touch.

## What Does Your Character Know?

All residents of a sea, river, or lake region have a greater awareness of the following topics:

- You have a general awareness of the politics of cities and strongholds connected by the trade routes along your river or body of water. You can name major merchants, family heads, and significant leaders in these areas, and you know their respective positions and allegiances.
- You either have experience with, or have heard stories of, the extreme destructive power of water and the devastation wrought by storms, floods, and violent natural and unnatural phenomena that comes from living so close to water. Conversely, you are also aware of the advantages (both social and material) that come from harnessing the power of water.
- Your life near the waves has taught you how to prepare for floods and hurricanes, and how to travel on the water, whether by swimming, piloting watercraft, or other means.
- You know stories of heroes or antagonists who either prevailed over, or succumbed to, the local waters of your region, and their significance.
- You are familiar with folk songs and tales passed down in your local community, particularly those that portray the spiritual and natural hazards of the water, and can recite at least one from memory.
- You have exposure to cultural customs from distant regions that trade with your people.

## WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER KNOW?

All residents of a forest region have a greater awareness of the following topics:

- You have a general awareness of the politics and border disputes that affect your region. You know the names of major nobles, family heads, and other leaders, and you are aware of their respective positions and allegiances.
- You are aware of any legends and stories, of spirits or otherwise, that are popular or seem dangerous in your region.
- Your experience navigating dense foliage and shrouded terrain has given you basic instincts that help you avoid getting lost and to find your way again in wilderness circumstances.
- You are able to forage, and you possess basic knowledge of hunting techniques, which helps you survive in the forest. You know how to prepare what you find and hunt for consumption.
- You value the power and terror of the deep undergrowth and have a healthy respect for the dangers of your region due to either first- or secondhand experience of these hazards.
- You have working knowledge of animal behaviors and are familiar with the local wildlife of your region.

## Forest Region

**Ring Increase:** +1 Earth
**Skill Increase:** +1 Survival
**Glory:** 30

Forests are wildernesses, some with trees more ancient than Rokugan itself. In some forests, reality blends and shifts, and spirits whisper to one another in the murk. If one enters a forest unprepared, it is only a matter of time before such a person succumbs to either the whims of the spirits or the will of the wilds.

Verdant and lush, forests resound with the melody of birdcalls, rustling leaves, and creaking wood as ancient trees settle into the soil. A wise person learns to live with the wild, perhaps even tame it a little, but they always absorb a bit of that wildness into themselves.

In turn, the forests draw outcasts: bandits, hermits, and whole villages that wish to be left out of battles between warring nobles. These people develop their own idiosyncratic cultural practices, esoteric rituals, and even words, all influenced by the might of nature. Travelers often claim that trolls, *tengu*, or strange human-sized serpents still live in the forests. While "civilized" city folk scoff at these stories, those who live among the trees know better.

## Mountain Region

**Ring Increase:** +1 Void
**Skill Increase:** +1 Meditation
**Glory:** 33

In the mountains, the peaks reach to the Heavens, and the air is thin and cold. Artists have captured the purity of these lands with stark lines and minimalist detail, illustrating their beauty and detachment from the rest of the world. Though scholars see the mountains as a boundary between the sky and earth or as a wall dividing Rokugan, they often ignore the truth that they act as both a barrier and a door.

This environment is perfect for monks and those seeking Enlightenment. Supplicants travel the harsh summit paths, casting off distractions such as love and companionship, civilization and luxury, and money and violence. The austere lands demand fierce independence, exposing repressed weaknesses and revealing surprising strengths. The responsibility for failures here lies completely in the supplicant, and if death claims them, at least they are closer to the gods.

Yet plenty of people have no time for such impractical, wasteful aims. Villagers and hunters, the hardiest of people, can make a harsh but honest living even in the mountains. Generations have lived here, passing on the knowledge of how to survive and thrive. Lest one pity their existence, one should remember that these people enjoy a freedom from the Great Clans and worldly cares unlike anyone else in Rokugan.

### What Does Your Character Know?

All mountain region residents have a greater awareness of the following topics:

- You have a general awareness of the politics of your region. You can name major nobles, family heads, and other leaders, and you know their respective positions and allegiances.
- Having lived in the mountains in your early life, you know major trails and pilgrimage routes, either from traveling them yourself or from hearing from others who take them. You also possess an understanding of the convictions and tenets of nearby monasteries from the pilgrims and adherents who travel along these routes.
- You have a unique understanding of the demands of living in such an extreme environment and have learned how to survive and secure food and water for yourself by foraging, hunting, or both. You have experience traversing your region and thus can handle similar terrain. You are also familiar with how to navigate steep slopes in extreme weather conditions.
- You are able to identify the names of peaks and features of the mountains and valleys of your region, and you can recall associated myths, tales, or first-hand accounts relating to them.

## WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER KNOW?

All residents of haunted regions have a greater awareness of the following topics:

- You have a general awareness of the politics of your region, and you can name major nobles, family heads, and other leaders in your area. You know their respective positions and allegiances.
- Your exposure to the everyday evils of the Taint or another haunted place has numbed you to the strange and the supernatural. Firsthand or second-hand experiences of loss and decay have given you a hard-bitten edge, or at the very least relentless pragmatism when faced with the evils from beyond the Wall.
- You have a general knowledge of either farming, mining, or another marketable technique, based on where you were raised.
- You are familiar with the signs of either the Taint or hauntings, and can identify such effects much earlier than others can.

## Haunted Region

**Ring Increase:** +1 Fire
**Skill Increase:** +1 Command
**Glory:** 28

Brooding skies smother the land, and jagged peaks cut the Heavens. Unfamiliar animals and plants, changed by or escaped from Jigoku, assault the eyes with strange colors, textures, and movements. Even lands east of the Kaiu Wall look, feel, and smell slightly off: a little bitter and sour.

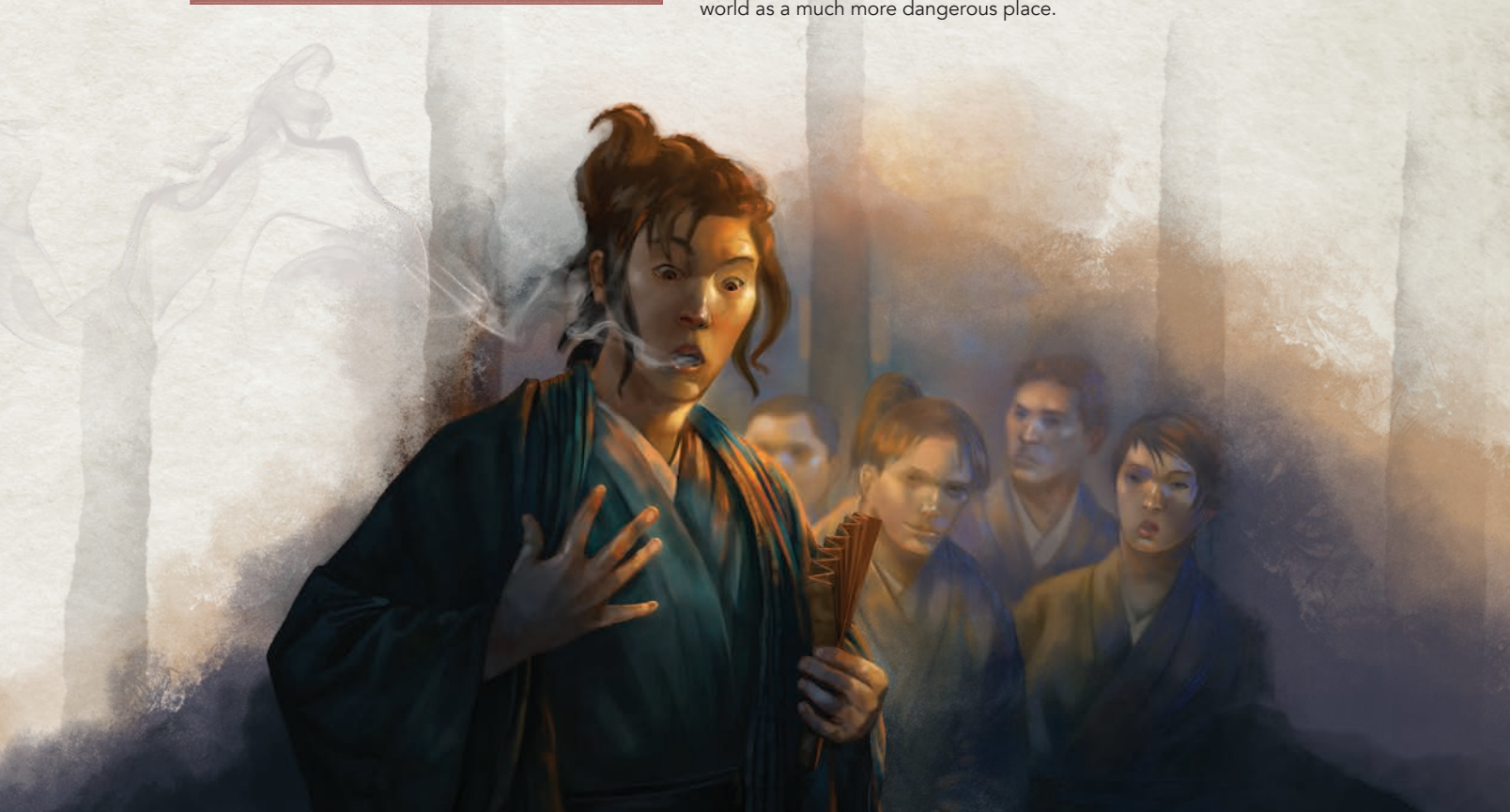
Such lands, effected by the Taint or otherwise desecrated by foul acts, may be most common near the Wall, but other such places dot the landscape in Rokugan and beyond its borders. The Yodha of the Ivory Kingdoms know the vile creations of the Taint all too well as they vigilantly guard the border between the Ghostlands and their gleaming cities.

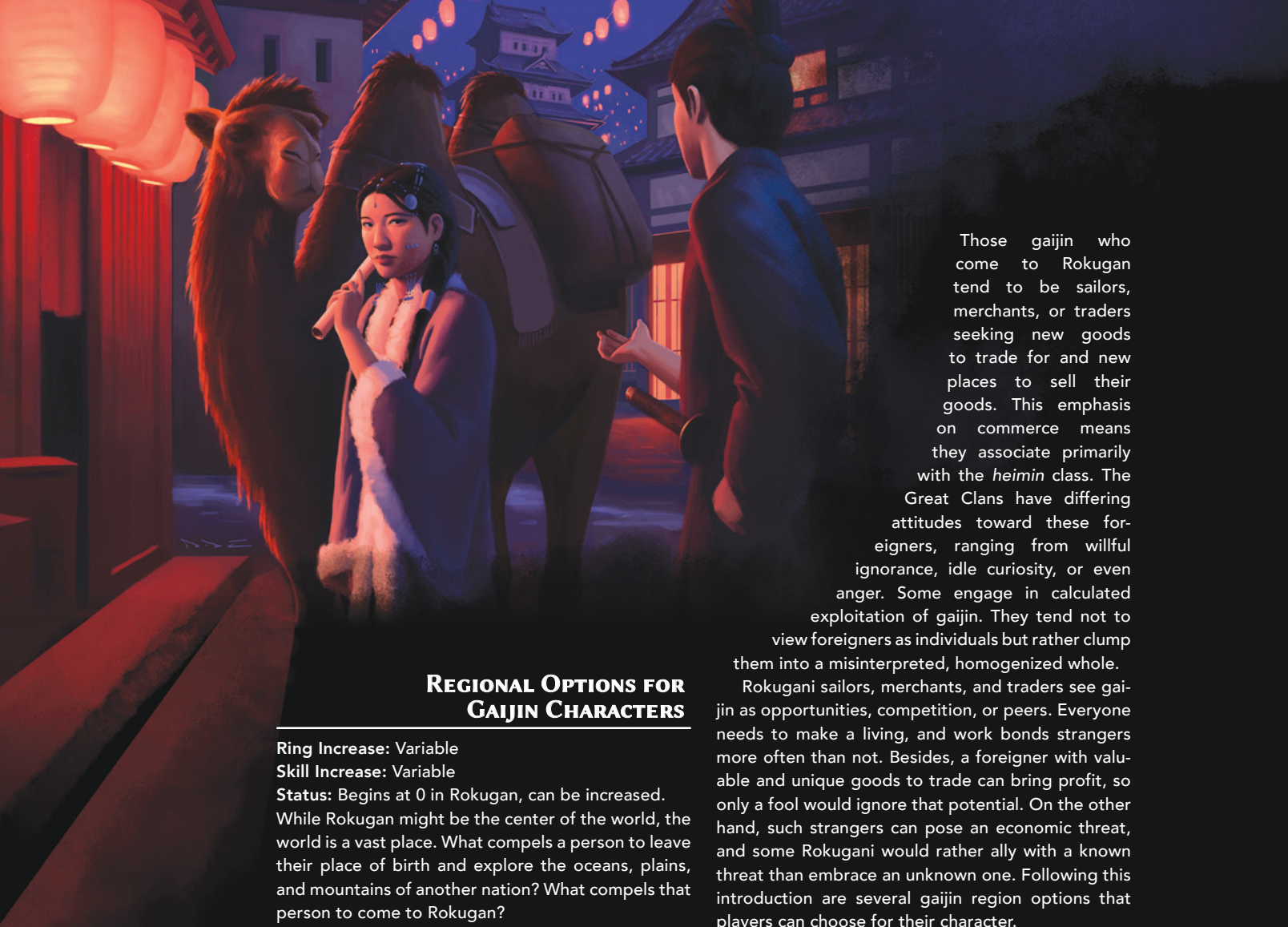
When dealing with Tainted earth, creatures, and objects, peasants and rōnin have little protection. Even well-equipped samurai can fall victim to the evils of Jigoku, so those even less familiar with its dangers and lack necessary precautions like jade, must constantly be on the lookout for the soul-threatening, creeping imbalance.

But the Taint isn't the only spiritual concern in the Empire. Scattered all throughout Rokugan the effects of ghosts, *kansen*, and desecrated places can be felt. Hungry spirits may be trapped in the realm of mortals, or they might wander in from the unregulated slums of *Gaki-dō*. Spiritually corrupted, haunted, or otherwise staining places can exist all over the Empire, and those who hail from regions with such hazards may view the world as a much more dangerous place.

**GAIJIN OPTIONS**

The following three entries are gaijin options for players to choose from. These characters are a bit different from typical choices, and more information on playing a gaijin can be found in **Chapter 6: Untold Stories** starting on page 192.





Those gaijin who come to Rokugan tend to be sailors, merchants, or traders seeking new goods to trade for and new places to sell their goods. This emphasis on commerce means they associate primarily with the *heimin* class. The Great Clans have differing attitudes toward these foreigners, ranging from willful ignorance, idle curiosity, or even anger. Some engage in calculated exploitation of gaijin. They tend not to view foreigners as individuals but rather clump them into a misinterpreted, homogenized whole.

Rokugani sailors, merchants, and traders see gaijin as opportunities, competition, or peers. Everyone needs to make a living, and work bonds strangers more often than not. Besides, a foreigner with valuable and unique goods to trade can bring profit, so only a fool would ignore that potential. On the other hand, such strangers can pose an economic threat, and some Rokugani would rather ally with a known threat than embrace an unknown one. Following this introduction are several gaijin region options that players can choose for their character.

## Regional Options for Gaijin Characters

**Ring Increase:** Variable
**Skill Increase:** Variable
**Status:** Begins at 0 in Rokugan, can be increased.

While Rokugan might be the center of the world, the world is a vast place. What compels a person to leave their place of birth and explore the oceans, plains, and mountains of another nation? What compels that person to come to Rokugan?

## GAIJIN STATUS

Those that hail from a gaijin culture effectively have two statuses. The first is the most important; every gaijin begins with a status of 0 in Rokugan, though this value can be increased during character creation and during play by normal means. This value reflects that gaijin are considered to be outside of the Celestial Order, and therefore have no standing in the Emerald Empire. With that being said, even though gaijin are technically illegal within Rokugani borders, they can gain status and some level of renown among individuals when traveling in the Empire.

The second status value reflects the gaijin's status in their own homeland. This value will very rarely be used, as the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* is designed to help players and GMs tell stories that take place in Rokugan. There are only a limited number of circumstances in which a gaijin's homeland status might come into play. Perhaps, during their adventure, the group must briefly travel the Sand Road and encounter more Ujik, or the group encounters a gaijin NPC while traveling in Rokugan. In case such a circumstance arises, the player and GM should discuss the gaijin's standing in their culture during character creation. When they agree on a value (using the table on page 305 of the core rulebook as a guideline), the player should note this value on their character sheet. Unless a gaijin is interacting with someone from their culture, their cultural status value cannot change unless the GM determines it should. For more information on different ways to run games with gaijin, see **Chapter 6: Untold Stories**, starting on page 173.

## WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER KNOW?

All Ujik characters have a greater awareness of the following topics:

- You have a detailed knowledge of the tribes that make up the Ujik people. You know the various tribal leaders, the specific customs and beliefs of the tribes, and their respective rivalries and allegiances. You also have a reasonable understanding of the numerous dialects of the Ujik language used by the different tribes.
- You are an expert in handling and riding horses, as well as in tending to herd animals such as sheep, goats, camels, and cattle. You are also well versed in eking out a living from a harsh and barren land, being skilled at navigating, tracking, hunting, and herbalism in such places.
- You are skilled in mounted combat. Ujik begin play with a Unicorn warhouse; see the **Unicorn Warhorses** sidebar on page 327 of the core rulebook for more information.

## Ujik of the Plains of Wind and Stone

**Ring Increase:** +1 Water
**Skill Increase:** +1 Survival
**Glory:** 30

The Ujik are a nomadic people who live on expansive, grassy plains sprawling north and west of Rokugan. However, Ujik is an umbrella term encompassing many disparate, largely nomadic tribes. All share a broadly similar ethnicity, but interactions with other cultures bordering the vast ranges of the Ujik have introduced some variety. The tribes also each practice customs and hold beliefs often distinct from those of other tribes. For instance, several revere the Lords of Death, a religion rooted in the cycle of birth-life-death that permeates the natural world. Others hold different beliefs, such as reverence for the earth and sky. Many groups revere multiple sets of deities along with ancestors. Accordingly, the Ujik rarely act as a unified whole. Alliances and rivalries constantly ebb, flow, and shift among the tribes. The Ujik do tell stories of a time when they were united under a great warlord; if this is true, their hardiness, unconventional military tactics, and sheer numbers would have posed a formidable threat to any foe.

One thing that does unite the Ujik is the central role that horses play in their lives. The Ujik claim that a child can be born, raised, and live out their life on horseback, their feet never touching the ground. While this is apocryphal, the Ujik mastery of horses is unsurpassed, allowing the tribes to move great distances while scouting, tracking, hunting, and fighting from horseback as easily as other cultures do on foot.

The Ujik are a proud—even stubborn—people, generally stoic, but fierce in battle and given to boisterous outbursts of humor. Their most basic social unit, the family, can include multiple spouses and span several generations. Families live and roam independently, each led by a family head chosen by criteria unique to that family. At certain times of year, or in response to certain events—for example, at midsummer, or when the last snow has melted off a particular mountain—families join with others from their tribe. These gatherings can eventually include an entire tribe, or even several tribes. Such a massed assembly of Ujik is a raucous event.

Those Rokugani who do happen to meet Ujik tribespeople find that, despite the idiosyncrasies of the particular tribe, many are reminiscent of the Moto family of the Unicorn, at least to most Rokugani. When the Unicorn returned to the Empire in the early ninth century, they brought with them a large cadre of Ujik who had sworn loyalty to the Kami Shinjo. These Ujik became the Moto family. There is still much interaction between the Unicorn and those Ujik tribes whose ranges approach the Empire's western boundaries.

## Qamarists in the Cradle of the World

**Ring Increase:** +1 Fire
**Skill Increase:** +1 Theology
**Glory:** 29

The Cradle of the World, located far to the west of the Empire, is a place of which few Rokugani are even aware. This is partly because of sheer distance, and partly because of the so-called Burning Sands, which, by one Unicorn account, are a "bleak, sun-drenched land of shifting sand and barren rock, where water is a commodity as precious as gold." A Rokugani making the arduous journey would be stunned by the Cradle—a broad expanse of land stretching between two great rivers, so lush and green that it might be the most fertile place in the world.

Thanks to this bountiful landscape, a large and sophisticated civilization thrives in the Cradle. This is the Qamarist Caliphate, a powerful nation-state that has, over time, come to incorporate a diversity of ethnic groups. These are described by a bewildering variety of names: *Nehiri*, *Sogdans*, *Suhili*, *Bandar*, *Ganzu*, and many others. However, all are devoted to Qamarism. This monotheistic religion declares that a succession of mortal messengers, acting on behalf of a supreme deity, have passed down to humans a series of divine laws and values. Now collected into a sacred codex, these form the foundation of virtually every aspect of life in the Caliphate. The caliph, who is hailed as the rightful inheritor of the Nameless Prophet, rules over the Caliphate, seeking to maintain unity among diverse and fractious ethnic groups.

### What Does Your Character Know?

All Qamarist characters have a greater awareness of the following topics:

- You have a good knowledge of the various ethnic groups that fall under the sway of the Caliphate. You know the various important figures and specific customs of each group and their respective rivalries and allegiances. You also speak the language of at least one such group—your own—fluently, and you are at least conversant with the languages of most of the others.
- You have detailed knowledge of the Caliphate, including both the secular and religious politics that affect it. You also know about the caliph as well as the important and influential people who surround the caliph.
- You are familiar with what, to the Rokugani, would be strange folklore, some of which supposedly arises from a time before mortals. This includes creatures such as the foul undead *ghul*; the powerful and dangerous spirits known as *djinn*; the massive eagle known as *roc*; and the *shahmaran*, or Queen of the Snakes, which may be a reference to the enigmatic creatures known in Rokugan as the *naga*.

The people of the Caliphate are extremely diverse in their languages, customs, dress, and behavior. They do exhibit some broad commonalities, however. For instance, because of the extremely hot climate, all tend to dress in loose-fitting clothing, particularly garments made of cotton. The heat also shapes their day-to-day behavior; for instance, it is common for them to spend the hottest parts of the day resting or performing only minor tasks. And while Qamarism is subject to some variations in interpretation, giving rise to a number of sects, Qamarists generally view those not of their faith with at least some degree of wariness. When they do offer their hospitality, though, Qamarists are a most sociable people, showing courtesy and respect to their guests that would rival that of any home in the Empire.

## WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER KNOW?

All Yodha characters have a greater awareness of the following topics:

- You have a good knowledge of the many political entities that make up the Ivory Kingdoms and of the secular and religious tensions, rivalries, and alliances that exist among them. That said, there are gaps and flaws in that knowledge, as the numerous kingdoms and relationships among them are constantly changing. Yodha speak their own language and the common language spoken by most citizens of the Ivory Kingdoms, as well as the languages of those kingdoms and states close to the Ghostlands.
- You have a detailed understanding of Shadowlands threats insofar as they apply to the Ivory Kingdoms. While the Shadowlands Taint functions the same as it does in Rokugan, many other Shadowlands aspects you know about are different, reflecting the different creatures in the Ghostlands and the ways your group has developed to combat them. For example, you know about the nature of *rakshasa*. The more traditionalist Yodhaviya, who dwell outside the Ghostlands, are particularly adept at recognizing these dangerous creatures irrespective of the form they assume. You also know that, with application of the correct rituals, gold and coral are powerful weapons against the Shadowlands and its minions.
- Yodhaniya—particularly those who wage war deep in the Ghostlands rainforest—know how to purify even the most fouled food and water using a ritual known as Nikta. You are also aware of the existence of the Pillars of Purity, ancient and mysterious stone columns that stand astride the Nadati River, removing the taint from its waters as they flow past.
- The Yodha, like most citizens of the Ivory Kingdoms, not only know the naga are real but have come to know the naga well, including some aspects of their language and culture. Known in the Ivory Kingdoms as *shahmaran*, naga are common in the region.

## Yodha of the Ghostlands

**Ring Increase:** +1 Earth
**Skill Increase:** +1 Theology
**Glory:** 29

The Ivory Kingdoms, described in detail starting on page 196, are bordered along a large portion of their eastern edge by a region of thick, gloomy, tangled forests inhabited by evil spirits and terrifying monsters. These "Ghostlands" are, in fact, a natural rainforested area affected by the southernmost and westernmost reaches of the Shadowlands, the vile realm that borders the southern margin of Rokugan. A dedicated group known as the Yodha, which is organized into cadres of supremely skilled warriors, wages a never-ending struggle to hold back these evil forces, just as the Crab Clan does in Rokugan. More details are provided about the Ghostlands, and the Yodha, on page 202.

All Yodha are skilled warriors adept at fighting in the most closed and inhospitable terrain imaginable. They are also adept at recognizing and combating corrupt supernatural powers, using mystical substances such as gold and coral to enhance their formidable fighting skills. However, the grim nature of their endless battle against the Ghostlands has permeated the Yodha psyche. They tend to be dour and taciturn and are particularly suspicious of those they do not know well. To the Yodha, this distrust is justified; among their most fearsome opponents are the shapeshifting monstrosities known as rakshasa, whose queen harbors a relentless hatred for the Ivory Kingdoms. Due to the nature of their enemies, the Yodha are supremely careful, thoughtful, and deliberate, spending days—sometimes weeks—stalking and observing their enemies, striking only when the moment is right.

**GAIJIN DISADVANTAGES**

When making a gaijin character, players may choose the Gaijin Name, Culture, or Appearance (Fire) disadvantage found on page 121 of the core rulebook. However, players and GMs can also decide to ignore this obvious choice in favor of more diverse choices, and either say all gaijin characters automatically receive this disadvantage, or not attach a mechanical disadvantage to a gaijin at all, and instead simply roleplay it as appropriate.

## The Sheelavaan of Bhavyatapura

**Ring Increase:** +1 Air
**Skill Increase:** +1 Courtesy
**Glory:** 28

The central region of the Ivory Kingdoms is dominated by a vast plateau known as the Sonagiri, or Golden Mountain. Ringed by soaring, snowcapped mountains and cut by the mighty Heeratand, or River of Diamonds, the expansive and fertile Sonagiri is the most densely populated part of the Ivory Kingdoms. Bhavyatapura, the City of Splendor, occupies the Heeratand in the center of the Sonagiri. Although they are collectively known as Sheelavaan, which simply means "urbane," the people of Bhavyatapura are diverse in the extreme, comprising a multitude of ethnicities, social castes, languages, religious beliefs, and cultural backgrounds.

As their name implies, the Sheelavaan are generally sophisticated, gregarious, and eloquent. They are used to living in the cramped confines of a massive city; many find the rural countryside and wilderness areas quite off-putting. Most Sheelavaan are accustomed to bargaining and cajoling their way through a complex web of barter economies and currency systems, a skill that they readily apply to nearly any sort of commercial, social, or cultural interaction. They also have a facility for languages, an important skill when living in a place where the dominant tongue may change several times along the length of a single street. More information on Bhavyatapura and the Sheelavaan can be found starting on page 200.

### WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER KNOW?

Regardless of a Sheelavaan's particular ethnicity, culture, or religious background, they have a greater awareness of the following topics:

- You have a general knowledge of the many factions that make up the Ivory Kingdoms, but they are particularly aware of those specific to Bhavyatapura. This includes the many rivalries and alliances that exist in this massive, rambling city. You speak your own language as well as the common language of the Ivory Kingdoms, and often one or more languages of the various factions in Bhavyatapura.
- You are most at home in urban areas and have a great facility for quickly understanding not just the physical layout of a city, but also its key power structures, factions, and underlying tensions.
- You have a good understanding of trade and commerce, being able to discern the value of most goods and items and to bargain for favorable prices or trades. More generally, you tend to be quite persuasive in any dealings you have with others—particularly those not familiar with the eloquence of the Sheelavaan.
- Close proximity to the naga has given you an even better knowledge of the enigmatic serpent folk than most—at least, to the extent any human can understand this mysterious species. The Sheelavaan, like most citizens of the Ivory Kingdoms, not only know the naga are real but have come to know the naga well, including some aspects of their language and culture. Known in the Ivory Kingdoms as shahmaran, naga are common in the region.

## 2. WHAT WAS YOUR CHARACTER'S UPBRINGING?

Many rōnin were raised in the samurai caste, but some were not. Any peasant with a sword and the courage to claim they are a lordless samurai may be able to pass themselves off as rōnin. But even beyond that, playing a peasant character can be an interesting choice in rōnin-style games. The early years of characters from lower castes, from far-off lands, or who are otherwise outsiders in the eyes of samurai can vary wildly.

Because most regions include the opportunity for myriad upbringings, these are not tied to specific areas. Regardless of which region you choose for your character, you should pick an upbringing you feel is appropriate for them. If you have a very specific character idea and none of the following options fit, feel free to discuss adjusting one of these upbringings with your GM. For those playing gaijin characters, these descriptions can be adjusted to fit within the region you hail from, whether it is substituting in a different military structure for the military upbringing or replacing geisha house with a more thematic entertainment establishment.

**Depending on what type of character you choose, you have a particular base status value that is modified by your upbringing.**

- **If you are a rōnin** (even one with a secret upbringing) **your status begins at 24**.
- **If you are a peasant** (and are open about your upbringing) **your status begins at 15**.
- **If you are a gaijin your status begins at 0.** For more information on how gaijin status works, see **Gaijin Status** on page 38.

### Craftsperson Upbringing

**Ring Increase:** +1 Earth or +1 Void
**Skill Increases:** +1 Culture, +1 Design
**Status Modification:** –2 (minimum 0)
**Starting Wealth:** 1 koku

Craftspeople and artisans breathe life into the mundane things that make work easier as well as into the cultural things that make life worth living. The act of creation can also be *dō*: a path, a way of living. The patience, discipline, foresight, and skill to craft a good or piece of art serve as examples to take hold of in life. Such a work benefits the community, improving life and improving the dō of the creator and of those who interact with the work.

Anyone who creates something practices this kind of *dō*, whether they are a carpenter constructing a sturdy house, a weaver making protective clothes for winter, or a brewer making sake. Those who know a craft, such as papermakers, potters, stonemasons, and smiths, can always find work somewhere.

### Fallen Noble Upbringing

**Ring Increase:** +1 to any ring, or based on chosen clan
**Skill Increases:** +1 to any two skills, or based on chosen clan
**Status Modification:** +10
**Starting Wealth:** An heirloom worth 3 koku, wakizashi (or gaijin equivalent)

Is it worse to witness refinement and to lose it than to have never seen it? Fallen noble characters grew up with the culture, education, and politics of a noble house inundating everything they did. Whether they originally were from a Great Clan or were a noble in a land far from the borders of Rokugan, such a character has lost their status and rank to cowardice, corruption, accident, or political maneuvering. Some may still have land, wealth, a home, or a title, but their fall blocks them from benefiting from any of these resources.

Some fallen nobles grow bitter and turn inward, retreating to decadence and self-pity. Others become angry and vengeful, walking a grim path to punish those who have wronged them. Still others work single-mindedly to regain their status, placing themselves and their family into dangerous positions in minor courts, on the battlefield, and in commercial ventures, hoping for the opportunity to buy, coerce, or petition their way back to the position from which they fell. See **Playing a Rōnin** on page 87 of the core rulebook for details on fallen Great Clan samurai, or see **Regional Options for Gaijin Characters** on page 38 for information on gaijin cultures from which a fallen noble might hail.

### Farmer Upbringing

**Ring Increase:** +1 Earth or +1 Water
**Skill Increases:** +1 Labor, +1 Fitness
**Status Modification:** +4
**Starting Wealth:** 2 bu

Farmers, the backbone and stomach of Rokugan, contend with problematic weather, difficult soil, banditry, and strain on personal health to ensure that the Emerald Empire continues to see a new sunrise. Yet, events beyond their control—overtaxation, years of poor harvest, war—threaten not only their livelihoods but their very lives.

As a result, the popular image of farmers being happy and content in their lot ignores the complexities of their reality. While of course those who have suffered no calamities may indeed be happy, many farmers see no relief from endless struggle. A character playing a farmer is often hard-working, pragmatic, and loyal to their own. Such characters may also be skeptical of outsiders, particularly if they have had bad experiences in the past with others.

**WHO KNOWS ABOUT THIS?**

It's very likely that the only person who knows a PC's upbringing is that PC and any other PCs who knew them during that time. There are no records of upbringings or jobs in many places, so a person can claim any number of details about their former life with little stopping them.

If your upbringing is a secret, you may instead ignore the status modification in your selected upbringing and take the **Dark Secret disadvantage** (see page 132 of the core rulebook) or another disadvantage, with GM approval. This disadvantage is in addition to any other disadvantages you gain through character creation.

## Geisha House Upbringing

**Ring Increase:** +1 Air or +1 Fire
**Skill Increases:** +1 Aesthetics, +1 Courtesy
**Status Modification:** –20 (minimum 0)
**Starting Wealth:** 3 koku

The facade of a geisha house, or *okiya*, may exude elegance, sophistication, and artistry, but the inner dealings resemble the ruckus of any restaurant or busy market square. A house employs all manner of people, including accountants, artists, dancers, musicians, teachers, calligraphers, cooks, tea masters, and apprentices all to support the geisha, thus influencing, elevating, and enriching a community.

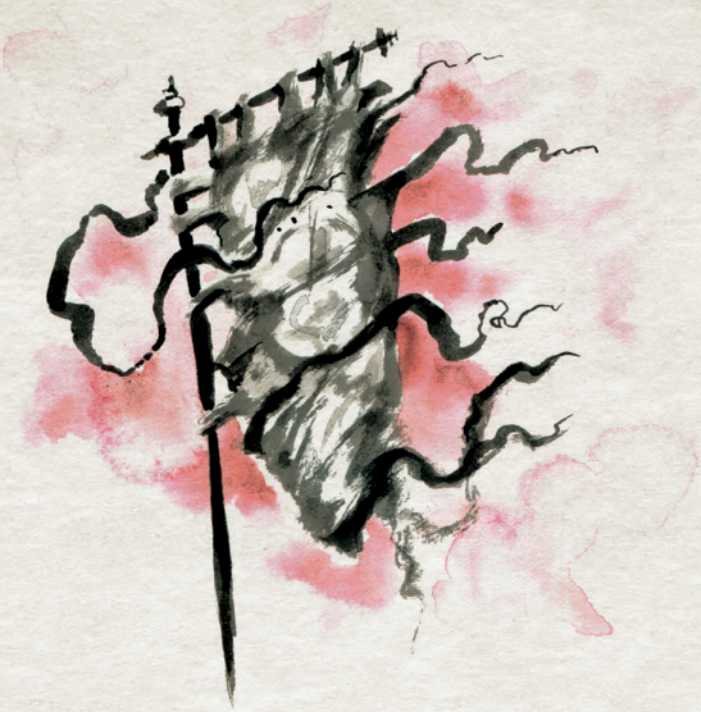
A person who grew up in a geisha house has had the opportunity to experience the strange mixing of the castes—samurai can let their guard down around geisha, who are hinin, or nonpeople, without fear of social repercussions. A geisha house acts as a training ground for up-and-coming geisha, who work to provide a valuable service to exhausted and emotionally spent samurai, peasants, and rōnin alike. In exchange for their talents, which include patience, elegance, and grace, geisha houses also provide clothing, room, and board. A geisha's responsibilities may include tea services, dancing, singing, or just simply listening to their client's woes. The specifics of what a particular geisha house offers varies by the needs of their community and the talents of their geisha.

## Hinin Upbringing

**Ring Increase:** +1 Water or +1 Void
**Skill Increases:** +2 Labor, +1 Survival
**Status Modification:** –20 (minimum 0)
**Starting Wealth:** 5 zeni

People are resilient, and even those some consider "discarded" can find a place in society, defiantly existing through sheer will to survive. Some even rise above this social discrimination to amass wealth (though in secret) and perhaps even influence (though only clandestinely) through strength of body, will, and mind. Their worth is what they make of it, not what the world assigns to them.

Hinin, considered "nonpeople" and the lowest class of Rokugani, may have any of a wide variety of backgrounds. Hinin PCs with this upbringing may have worked as undertakers, butchers, or tanners—occupations that involve handling dead flesh—or as cleaners, street entertainers, actors, or geisha. They may be ex-convicts who have served as town guards. Hinin occupy a veiled existence, usually shunned yet still working in necessary occupations. A person never acknowledges their shadow until they no longer have one. Nevertheless, those considered "low" can still hold their head high—just not in front of certain people.



## Hunter or Fisher Upbringing

**Ring Increase:** +1 Earth or +1 Water
**Skill Increases:** +1 Labor, and +1 Seafaring or +1 Survival
**Status Modification:** +3
**Starting Wealth:** 4 bu

The land and the ocean give abundantly, provided a person is patient and clever enough to take advantage of that plenty. Traps and nets can increase a hunter's or fisher's range, while understanding tracks and the currents can bring them to the right place at the right time. This knowledge gets passed down from generation to generation, preserving expertise through apprenticeships, instruction, and inheritance.

Intrepid hunters and fishers must endure the vicissitudes of the weather, the perils of wilderness and ocean, and the risk of predators. As the wind, earth, and water temper these people, it's no wonder they associate themselves with those elements. Because of this close relationship, hunters and fishers don't think of themselves as masters of the earth or water, but rather as their children. To acquire expertise as a hunter or fisher requires experience, specialized knowledge, and a sense of adventure to find new hunting grounds and fishing spots.

## Law Enforcement Upbringing

**Ring Increase:** +1 Earth or +1 Air
**Skill Increases:** +1 Government, +1 Command
**Status Modification:** +5
**Starting Wealth:** 1 koku

In Rokugan, one of the most common forms of traditional law enforcement, apart from regular samurai who are expected to uphold the Emperor's will and the tenets of Bushidō at all times, are *dōshin*. Dōshin are deputies to a *yoriki*, a permanent magistrate's assistant. Their powers are normally restricted to the routine investigation of crimes involving commoners. They may also have the authority to take up arms and assemble enforcers, particularly to eliminate bandits. As the lowest-ranking law enforcement authorities within Rokugan, they stand at the boundary between government and governed, justice and chaos, samurai and heimin. There, they learn the nuances of the shades of grey in the way the Empire operates. They have learned how they can enforce what laws they can while wrestling with organized crime, but they have also seen how the law can be undercut by those of greater status and rank.

A dōshin learns to play politics to keep the peace and might ignore a samurai's indulgence in criminal activities. On the other side of the divide, while a dōshin must make heimin suffer more under the weight of the law, the dōshin must also balance the need to enforce the law against the power of an angry mob, especially when only a few fellow deputies are available as backup.

## Military Upbringing

**Ring Increase:** +1 Earth or +1 Fire
**Skill Increases:** +1 Command, +1 Government
**Status Modification:** +5
**Starting Wealth:** 1 koku

While the families of the Great Clans bring wealth, influence, discipline, and structure to military endeavors, the families of the lower castes bring something more important: their bodies, blood, sweat, and loyalty. Serving in the military may bring prestige to a rōnin's name, or to an ashigaru's home. It can give them opportunities, but the cost may be great; they must be willing to pay the price of injury and risk death. While an ashigaru is expected to join the military at the summons of their lord, they can usually expect payment and recognition for their hard work. Rōnin often find military work to be some of the most physically demanding, but also the most consistent in pay.

## Rōnin Family Upbringing

**Ring Increase:** +1 to any one ring
**Skill Increases:** +1 Courtesy, +1 Martial Arts [Melee]
**Status Modification:** +2
**Starting Wealth:** 1 koku

In Rokugan, the term rōnin encompasses more than fallen samurai. A rōnin's status is usually passed down to their children, making a rōnin line. This inherited status may have been kept secret from the child, who finds out and wishes to restore their parents' honor, or perhaps a child who is being raised as a peasant discovers their heritage and feels incensed by their lot in life and strives for something more. Rōnin families may also be open about their past, sharing their skills and knowledge with their children in the hopes that they may lead a better life.

An example of a rōnin family, though their blood relation is questionable, are the rōnin deputies that patrol the Imperial-held City of the Rich Frog. These rōnin enjoy consistent work, comradery, and not insignificant sway in the city.

## Organized Crime Upbringing

**Ring Increase:** +1 Air or +1 Water
**Skill Increases:** +1 Skulduggery, +1 Games
**Status Modification:** –8 (minimum 0)
**Starting Wealth:** 3 koku

Every society has rules, and every society has people who break them. By breaking them at significant scale, some people have founded family lines, gained power, and encouraged others to serve as vassals. Society calls people who are part of these organizations "criminals." They wave no obvious banners, but an astute observer can see their equivalent of a family crest in a tattoo, a splash of color on an item of clothing, or a turn of phrase or hand gesture.

Working in organized crime involves anything illegal but lucrative, such as firefighter extortion—by threatening to burn down houses—paid violence, theft, the transportation of illegal goods, and similar schemes. Growing up in such an environment means dealing with society's enmity while keeping one's head high as a member of a strong, perhaps powerful, organization.

### Street Urchin Upbringing

**Ring Increase:** +1 Air or +1 Fire
**Skill Increases:** +2 Skulduggery
**Status Modification:** –7 (minimum 0)
**Starting Wealth:** 4 bu

Characters raised on the streets and born into a lower class may have nothing left to lose in this life. Street life makes it nearly impossible to keep to a righteous path; such characters must do whatever they can to survive, and most have no choice but to prey upon others. Simply surviving such a cutthroat existence requires a level of endurance, resiliency, and audacity the well-off possess only in the rarest of circumstances. As a result, characters with this upbringing can be truly formidable.

Cities provide an abundance of opportunities for those raised on the streets. They contain plenty of prey to exploit and numerous hideaways to make use of. However, some street urchins eventually discover the freedom of the wilderness and turn to banditry. In the wilderness, a person can make their own rules and pretend to be a lord of their own slice of earth. In either case, those raised on the streets tend to form strong networks of like-minded individuals who learn to work together. As do wolves, they find it better to hunt in numbers.

### Temple Upbringing

**Ring Increase:** +1 Void or +1 Air
**Skill Increases:** +1 Theology, +1 Courtesy
**Status Modification:** +11
**Starting Wealth:** One day's rations

Many temples are open to those who wish to find spiritual Enlightenment and who seek to better understand their inner self, even at a young age. Other youth might join a temple to flee a bad situation or an abusive home life. Occasionally, unprepared parents leave children at the threshold of a temple, hoping that the monks within will provide what they either cannot or will not.

Those who have spent formative years in a temple may find themselves caught in a teetering balance between being at peace with the will of the world and seeing myriad examples of that peace being tarnished when they venture outside the temple grounds. Not everyone who is raised in a spiritual house is driven by a desire for justice, but many are, wishing to bring harmony and Enlightenment to those around them.

### Tradesperson Upbringing

**Ring Increase:** +1 Air or +1 Water
**Skill Increases:** +1 Commerce, +1 Aesthetics
**Status Modification:** –6 (minimum 0)
**Starting Wealth:** 2 koku

The cycle of life cannot turn without commerce and trade. A coin is in the shape of a wheel, after all. Society officially considers merchants "low" and base, since they don't produce goods, but without them, a brewer cannot get their sake to the geisha house and a tanner cannot get their leather to the attendant of a samurai family.

Tradespeople can become hubs of a community. Their shops along a village's main street help the village grow into a town, and perhaps even a city, as people flock there in search of goods. Such hubs become places to learn local and regional news, as strangers from all backgrounds come to mingle, gossip, and trade. Those who have grown up surrounded by such activity learn to understand the pulse of a community.

# Part II: Role and School

A character's rings represent their potential, but their school and skills represent their learned expertise. Each school grants a character access to a number of starting skills, techniques, abilities, and equipment, along with a curriculum through which the character can advance by spending experience (see page 97 of the core rulebook).

If a school's starting techniques or curriculum grants a character a technique or the ability to purchase that technique, the character ignores any other prerequisites listed for that technique. These prerequisites are found in the technique's entry. Techniques granted in exception to their prerequisites are marked with the ◈ symbol.

## 3. What is your character's school, and what are its associated roles?

Rōnin exist in the tumultuous position of being technically samurai but cast away from samurai society. Most have lost their lord through political scheming, tragic circumstance, or their own personal failure. Some skillful peasants take up a sword and act as rōnin do, whether to defend what little they have or to attempt by some miracle to fool a lord into taking them on, advancing their social status considerably. Then, there are gaijin, the foreigners who come to Rokugan seeking trade or alliance, or perhaps to escape pursuit, hoping they will be safer in the Emerald Empire.

## School Choices

A rōnin, peasant, or gaijin may or may not have trained in a formal dōjō. Though the schools presented in this chapter are called schools, this does not mean they belong to a specific dōjō or are commonly practiced. The schools in this chapter each represent a path for a character to follow based on the knowledge they've acquired over time, rather than a formal set of principles studied by many students.

If you would like to be able to choose from schools in the core rulebook and other supplements, you may either opt for the **Fallen Noble Upbringing** (see page 43), or you may work with your GM to reflavor a school to fit your character's circumstances or narratively explain how they learned Great Clan secrets.

**During this step, a rōnin character may choose any of the schools listed but may not choose any gaijin schools without GM permission. A gaijin character may choose any school listed in this chapter except for schools associated with a gaijin culture that is not their own.** Each gaijin school presented in this section is specific to the culture indicated in its title and can only be taken by a gaijin who hails from that location. Again, this could be modified at the GM's discretion—perhaps a Unicorn rōnin spent a long time on the Sand Road and learned the ways of the Ujik Diviner, or a Crab Clan peasant met a warrior from the Ivory Kingdoms and learned the ideologies and techniques of that warrior's school.

## Roles

Like the schools in the core rulebook, each school presented here has one or more roles associated with it. **Bushi** are warriors, guards, and instructors by trade, and **courtiers** are politicians, emissaries, and civil servants. **Artisans** are creators, advisors, engineers, and scholars of art. **Shugenja** are those who have a special bond with the kami, a talent typically believed to belong only to those in the samurai caste—however, this is not always the case. Shugenja's talents allow them to wield fantastical powers bestowed by the kami. Like shugenja, **sages** are individuals who wield special powers, but theirs are bestowed by other means, usually outside the bounds of what is considered appropriate in Rokugan. A sage may wield powers granted by gods that rule in lands outside the Empire's borders, or they may have the ability to use techniques such as *kihō* in ways that are unfamiliar in Rokugan.

**Monks** nominally stand aside from society and serve in monasteries, or they wander the Empire as traveling bastions of wisdom. Finally, some characters study the shadowed ways of the **shinobi**: assassins and spies who operate outside of Rokugan's laws, but also represent an important and influential part of its history—though this is difficult to prove.

**EXPERIENCE POINTS AND CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT**

Over the course of play, characters will gain experience and will be able to spend that experience to make their characters more potent. For information on this process and guidance on how school curriculums work, see pages 97–98 in the core rulebook.

## ELEMENTS OF YOUR SCHOOL

Each of the schools presented here follows a certain mold. Let's take a moment and go over the different elements that go into each school, and how that modifies your character.

- **School Name:** This is the name of your school, which also identifies whether the school is taught by a specific group, or is a more general path.
- **School Description:** This is a brief flavorful description of your school.
- **Rings:** When you select this school, this specifies which of your character's rings you increase by the specified amount.
- **Starting Skills:** This entry specifies a collection of skills that you can elect to give your character a rank in. It also specifies the number of skills you can choose (unlike the rings, you must choose a number from the overall list).
- **Honor:** This is your character's starting honor.
- **Techniques Available:** These are the types of techniques your character can purchase when they advance after character creation.
- **Starting Techniques:** These are techniques your character starts the game with. Unless the entry specifies that you must choose from a list, your character starts with everything listed here. Techniques are listed in **Chapter 4** and in the core rulebook.
- **School Ability:** Each school has a unique ability associated with it. Your character gains that ability when you choose the school.
- **Starting Outfit:** This is the clothing and equipment your character starts play with.
- **School Curriculum Table and Mastery Ability:** The rest of the school writeup consists of a curriculum advancement table. This is organized into ranks, each with a number of advancements listed (skills, skill groups, techniques, technique groups). The ◈ symbol denotes privileged access to techniques or groups. As you use experience points to purchase these advancements, you increase your character's rank in their school, which makes their school ability more powerful. At rank 6, they gain a powerful and unique **Mastery Ability** as well.

NEW TECHNIQUES

Techniques with bolded names are new to this book and can be found starting on page 86.

## The Wandering Blade [Bushi]

The rōnin's path is a difficult one; each day is a struggle for survival. For some, the road becomes their mantra. They walk the way of the gleaming blade, the glint of the arrow, the approach of steady resolve. These warriors have honed their skill in their preferred style and have become adept at protecting what they have, for fate has seen fit to bestow them very little but their weapon and their ferocity in battle. While wielding their signature weapon, the power and skill of these fearsome combatants rival the training of even the samurai of the Great Clans.

**Rings:** +1 Earth, +1 any other ring

**Starting Skills (choose five):** Fitness, Martial Arts [Melee], Martial Arts [Ranged], Martial Arts [Unarmed], Meditation, Performance, Smithing

**Honor:** 35

**Techniques Available:** Kata (⚔), Rituals (♨), Shūji (✓)

**Starting Techniques:**

- **Kata (choose one):** Striking as Air, Striking as Earth, Striking as Water, Striking as Fire
- **Shūji: Wanderer's Resolve**

**Signature Weapon (School Ability):** Choose a signature weapon category (or unarmed) with GM approval. When using a weapon from this category for an Attack action or Performance check, roll one additional skill die. Additionally, when making such a check you may suffer fatigue up to your school rank to alter that many results of your kept dice to ✿ results.

**Starting Outfit:** Traveling clothes, any one weapon of your signature weapon category of rarity 8 or lower (with GM approval), any two items of rarity 4 or lower, and one trinket (see page 219).

| | ADVANCE | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| RANK 1 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Commerce | Skill |
| | Medicine | Skill |
| | Sentiment | Skill |
| | Rank 1 Kata ⚔ | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Bellow of Resolve** ✓ | Technique |
| | ◈ Tactical Assessment ⚔ | Technique |
| RANK 2 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Smithing | Skill |
| | Survival | Skill |
| | Rank 1–2 Kata ⚔ | Tech. Grp. |
| | ◈ **Rushing Ox Style** ⚔ | Technique |
| | **Wayfarer's Path** ✓ | Technique |
| RANK 3 | Trade Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Culture | Skill |
| | Meditation | Skill |
| | Rank 1–3 Kata ⚔ | Tech. Grp. |
| | ◈ Iron in the Mountains Style ⚔ | Technique |
| | **Tonight, I Am Your Opponent** ✓ | Technique |
| RANK 4 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Games | Skill |
| | Performance | Skill |
| | Seafaring | Skill |
| | Rank 1–4 Kata ⚔ | Tech. Grp. |
| | Bravado ✓ | Technique |
| | ◈ **Void's Embrace Style** ⚔ | Technique |
| RANK 5 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Sentiment | Skill |
| | Rank 1–5 Kata ⚔ | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Bond of Heroes** ✓ | Technique |
| | **Roar of Encouragement** ✓ | Technique |
| RANK 6 | **Unseen Blade (Mastery Ability):** When you perform an Attack action, you may spend ✿ as follows: ✿✿+: Chose a character in range of the weapon you used with vigilance lower than your original target. If you succeed, that character suffers physical damage equal to your weapon's base damage plus your ranks in Fitness. | |

## Student of the Talon [Bushi, Shinobi]

Those that follow the art of the talon are adept at landing critical blows from a distance with spears, bows, or other ranged weapons. The distance and precision with which they strike is reminiscent of a viper's bite, rapid and deadly. This art is most common among hunters who have spent much of their lives quietly taking down prey to feed their families, or rōnin that either took a fancy to the dance of spears or the distance of a bow in their former lives, or those who have lost their sword and have little choice but to learn a new method of making a livelihood on the fringes of society.

**Rings:** +1 Air, +1 Water

**Starting Skills (choose five):** Fitness, Martial Arts [Melee], Martial Arts [Rangd], Meditation, Sentiment, Skulduggery, Survival

**Honor:** 30

**Techniques Available:** Kata (), Rituals (), Shūji ()

**Starting Techniques:**

- **Kata (choose one):** Soaring Slice or Hawk's Precision
- **Ninjutsu:** Skulk

**Piercing Insight (School Ability):** Once per round, in a skirmish, when you inflict a critical strike on a character at range 2–5 or a character at range 2–5 inflicts a critical strike on you, you may increase or decrease the severity by your school rank.

**Starting Outfit:** Traveling clothes, any one weapon of rarity 6 or lower, yumi (bow) and a quiver of arrows with three special arrows (one armor-piercing arrow, one flesh-cutter arrow, one humming-bulb arrow; see page 236 of the core rulebook, or yari (spear), and one trinket (see page 219).

| | ADVANCE | | TYPE |
|---|---|---|---|
| RANK 1 | Martial Skills | | Skl. Grp. |
| | Commerce | | Skill |
| | Courtesy | | Skill |
| | Survival | | Skill |
| | Rank 1 Kata | | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Flowering Deceptions** | | Technique |
| | **Chaotic Scattering** | | Technique |
| RANK 2 | Martial Skills | | Skl. Grp. |
| | Medicine | | Skill |
| | Sentiment | | Skill |
| | Skulduggery | | Skill |
| | Rank 1–2 Kata | | Tech. Grp. |
| | Heartpiercing Strike | | Technique |
| | **Swirling Viper Style** | | Technique |
| RANK 3 | Social Skills | | Skl. Grp. |
| | Martial Arts [Melee] | | Skill |
| | Martial Arts [Ranged] | | Skill |
| | Skulduggery | | Skill |
| | Rank 1–3 Kata | | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Wasp's Spite Style** | | Technique |
| | **Eyeless Sight Shot** | | Technique |
| RANK 4 | Martial Skills | | Skl. Grp. |
| | Courtesy | | Skill |
| | Medicine | | Skill |
| | Sentiment | | Skill |
| | Rank 1–4 Kata | | Tech. Grp. |
| | Wolf's Proposal | | Technique |
| | **Falling Heavens Shot** | | Technique |
| RANK 5 | Martial Skills | | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | | Skill |
| | Medicine | | Skill |
| | Skulduggery | | Skill |
| | Rank 1–5 Kata | | Tech. Grp. |
| | Deadly Sting | | Technique |
| | **Watch My Back** | | Technique |
| RANK 6 | **Lesson of the Hawk (Mastery Ability):** Once per scene, when performing an Attack action check, you may spend 1 Void Point to have your target treat their physical resistance as 0. | | |

## Treasure Hunter [Courtier, Bushi]

Rokugan is a land filled with a rich and ancient history dating back before the fall of the divine Kami. Before Hantei and his siblings blessed the people with the tools to build an Empire, myriad old species existed across the hills, valleys, rivers, coasts, and mountains. Rōnin, peasants, and gaijin alike sometimes dedicate their lives to hunting down the treasures these and others have left behind, though they rarely turn their noses up at new treasures, either. Those that walk this path are usually roguish smooth talkers, adept at dodging in and out of dangerous situations as if they were simply taking a stroll through a garden. With a talent for quick thinking and a discerning eye, treasure hunters are able to travel the lands seeking untold riches from the ancient past and the dangerous present.

**Rings:** +1 Air, +1 Water

**Starting Skills (choose five):** Commerce, Courtesy, Fitness, Games, Martial Arts [Melee], Sentiment, Skulduggery

**Honor:** 27

**Techniques Available:** Kata (⚔), Rituals (♨), Shūji (✓)

**Starting Techniques:**

- **Kata:** ◈ Tactical Assessment
- **Shūji (choose one):** All in Jest, Rustling of Leaves

**Risk and Reward (School Ability):** You have an uncanny sense for dangerous situations. Your vigilance and focus are increased by your school rank, unless you are Compromised.

**Starting Outfit:** Traveling clothes, any one weapon of rarity 6 or lower, katana, any one item of rarity 3 or lower, any one item of rarity 5 or lower, and two trinkets (see page 219).

| | ADVANCE | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| RANK 1 | Social Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Commerce | Skill |
| | Martial Arts [Melee] | Skill |
| | Skulduggery | Skill |
| | Rank 1 Shūji ✓ | Tech. Grp. |
| | Striking as Air ⚔ | Technique |
| | ◈ **Chaotic Scattering** ⚔ | Technique |
| RANK 2 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Sentiment | Skill |
| | Rank 1–2 Air Shūji ✓ | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Daring Swing** ⚔ | Technique |
| | **Reckless Lunge** ⚔ | Technique |
| RANK 3 | Social Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Commerce | Skill |
| | Martial Arts [Melee] | Skill |
| | Seafaring | Skill |
| | Rank 1–3 Water Shūji ✓ | Tech. Grp. |
| | Dazzling Performance ✓ | Technique |
| | ◈ **Laughing Fox Style** ⚔ | Technique |
| RANK 4 | Trade Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Martial Arts [Melee] | Skill |
| | Sentiment | Skill |
| | Rank 1–4 Kata ⚔ | Tech. Grp. |
| | Regal Bearing ✓ | Technique |
| | ◈ **Ruse of Moon's Reflection** ✓ | Technique |
| RANK 5 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Skulduggery | Skill |
| | Rank 1–5 Air Shūji ✓ | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Watch My Back** ⚔ | Technique |
| | **Roar of Encouragement** ✓ | Technique |
| RANK 6 | **All Part of the Plan (Mastery Ability):** Once per scene when you make a check to resist (see page 26 of the core rulebook), you may spend 1 Void Point to automatically succeed. If you do, you may immediately perform an action. | |

## School of Leaves [Shinobi, Courtier]

Some outsiders have faded away from the judgmental eye of a culture that seeks only to look down upon them. Those that are sick of being treated as social pariahs may become precisely what society deems them to be: untrustworthy outcasts who slink about the shadows, preying on those who would scoff at their presence. Those that follow the school of leaves excel at sowing chaos wherever they go, lying in wait for the perfect opportunity to strike at those who would look at them with contempt, whether with a blade, a bow, or a carefully crafted word.

**Rings:** +Fire, +1 Air

**Starting Skills (choose five):** Fitness, Martial Arts [Melee], Martial Arts [Ranged], Performance, Sentiment, Skulduggery, Survival

**Honor:** 26

**Techniques Available:** Kata (), Rituals (), Shūji ()

**Starting Techniques:**

- **Shūji (choose one):** Honest Assessment, Whispers of Court
- **Ninjutsu:** Skulk, Deadly Sting

**Tactical Cover (School Ability):** While you are in Obscuring terrain, you may treat your physical resistance as increased by your school rank.

**Starting Outfit:** Traveling clothes, any one weapon of rarity 6 or lower, 3 shuriken, katana, any two items of rarity 4 or lower, three knives, and one trinket (see page 219).

| | ADVANCE | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| RANK 1 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Performance | Skill |
| | Skulduggery | Skill |
| | Rank 1 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | Prey on the Weak | Technique |
| | Rustling of Leaves | Technique |
| RANK 2 | Trade Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Games | Skill |
| | Government | Skill |
| | Rank 1–2 Air Shūji | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Staggering Shot** | Technique |
| | Crimson Leaves Strike | Technique |
| RANK 3 | Social Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Martial Arts [Melee] | Skill |
| | Martial Arts [Ranged] | Skill |
| | Sentiment | Skill |
| | Rank 1–3 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | Noxious Cloud | Technique |
| | **Wasp's Spite Style** | Technique |
| RANK 4 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Government | Skill |
| | Sentiment | Skill |
| | Skulduggery | Skill |
| | Rank 1–4 Fire Shūji | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Iaijutsu Cut: Reverse Draw** | Technique |
| | **Ruse of Moon's Reflection** | Technique |
| RANK 5 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Culture | Skill |
| | Performance | Skill |
| | Sentiment | Skill |
| | Rank 1–5 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | Bend with the Storm | Technique |
| | Silencing Stroke | Technique |
| RANK 6 | **Crack Not a Single Twig (Mastery Ability):** You have mastered the ability to adapt to your environment. At the start of a scene, you may choose any number of mundane terrain effects. You ignore the effects of these terrain qualities. (Other characters do not ignore them when making checks against you.) This effect persists until the end of the scene. | |

## Voice of the Wilds [Shugenja, Courtier]

When identified, those with the ability to call upon the kami that are not born into the samurai class are sometimes taken to be raised as one, their low birth typically being considered as a small mistake in the cosmic scheme of things. However, some latent talents manifest later, or in ways that are harder to discern, and so their relationship with the kami is usually strange. These shugenja have received no formal training but have developed a knack for quickly building positive relationships with the kami around them. Their tendency to be more in tune with nature allows a Voice of the Wilds character to request powerful aid in advance, though they lack the discipline to call upon kami suddenly without first building a rapport. Though these strange shugenja can learn specific invocations over time, they typically find formal study difficult.

**Rings:** +1 to any two different rings

**Starting Skills (choose three):** Composition, Courtesy, Games, Meditation, Sentiment, Theology

**Honor:** 35

**Techniques Available:** Rituals (), Shūji ()

**Starting Techniques:**

- **Invocations (choose one):** Commune with Spirits, Divination
- **Shūji (choose two):** Well of Desire, Weight of Duty, Rustling of Leaves, Sensational Distraction

**Naturally Attuned (School Ability):** As a downtime activity, you may select any number of invocations with total school rank prerequisites equal to double your school rank. You can perform these invocations as if you knew them.

While making a check to activate an invocation, if you become Compromised, you suffer spiritual backlash.

**Starting Outfit:** Traveling clothes, one weapon of rarity 6 or lower, one choice of kit (see page 114), a knife, one choice of *omamori* (see page 243 of the core rulebook), one trinket (see page 219).

| | ADVANCE | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| RANK 1 | Trade Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Composition | Skill |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Medicine | Skill |
| | Rank 1 Shūji | Tech. Grp. |
| | Nature's Touch | Technique |
| | Threshold Barrier | Technique |
| RANK 2 | Trade Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Medicine | Skill |
| | Meditation | Skill |
| | Theology | Skill |
| | Rank 1–2 Shūji | Tech. Grp. |
| | Earth Becomes Sky | Technique |
| | Tactical Assessment | Technique |
| RANK 3 | Social Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Composition | Skill |
| | Sentiment | Skill |
| | Theology | Skill |
| | Rank 1–3 Shūji | Tech. Grp. |
| | Fury of Osano-wo | Technique |
| | Hands of the Tides | Technique |
| RANK 4 | Social Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Sentiment | Skill |
| | Survival | Skill |
| | Theology | Skill |
| | Rank 1–2 Invocations | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Mentor's Guidance** | Technique |
| | **False Realm of the Fox Spirits** | Technique |
| RANK 5 | Scholar Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Meditation | Skill |
| | Performance | Skill |
| | Rank 1–5 Shūji | Tech. Grp. |
| | Rank 1–3 Invocations | Tech. Grp. |
| | Ever-Changing Waves | Technique |
| RANK 6 | **Elemental Charmer (Mastery Ability):** You may importune invocations without making an offering. | |

## Artisan of the Roads [Artisan]

Those that travel outside of the high society of Rokugan know that there is so much more to art than expensive materials and fleeting trends. Artisans of the road are adept at scrounging up suitable materials in almost any circumstance, using their surroundings as inspiration to create inventive and visually interesting pieces of art from everyday items, substances, and the nature that lives around them. They are also skilled at convincing and befriending peasants, which is necessary for both acquiring supplies on a tight budget and also finding customers to fund the next artistic endeavor.

**Rings:** +1 Fire, +1 to any other ring

**Starting Skills (choose five):** Aesthetics, Courtesy, Commerce, Composition, Culture, Design, Smithing

**Honor:** 30

**Techniques Available:** Kata (⚔), Rituals (♨), Shūji (✿)

**Starting Techniques:**

- **Shūji (choose one):** Shallow Waters, Whispers of Court
- **Shūji:** Fanning the Flames

**Resourceful Artistry (School Ability):** Once per game session when performing a downtime activity to craft, you may scavenge supplies for your craft worth an amount of koku equal to your school rank. This might include finding plants to make paints, wood for carvings, horsehair for brushes, or convincing peasants to give you parchment, ink, or other supplies.

**Starting Outfit:** Traveling clothes, one weapon of rarity 6 or lower, one piece of art that is half finished, a pack of haphazard art supplies, one item of rarity 4 or lower, one trinket (see page 219).

| | ADVANCE | | TYPE |
|---|---|---|---|
| RANK 1 | Artisan Skills | | Skl. Grp. |
| | Commerce | | Skill |
| | Courtesy | | Skill |
| | Performance | | Skill |
| | Rank 1 Shūji | ✿ | Tech. Grp. |
| | ◈ **Fluent Bargaining** | ✿ | Technique |
| | ◈ Artisan's Appraisal | ✿ | Technique |
| RANK 2 | Artisan Skills | | Skl. Grp. |
| | Commerce | | Skill |
| | Games | | Skill |
| | Labor | | Skill |
| | Rank 1–2 Air Shūji | ✿ | Tech. Grp. |
| | ◈ Dazzling Performance | ✿ | Technique |
| | ◈ **Improvised Assault** | ⚔ | Technique |
| RANK 3 | Martial Skills | | Skl. Grp. |
| | Culture | | Skill |
| | Games | | Skill |
| | Sentiment | | Skill |
| | Rank 1–3 Earth Shūji | ✿ | Tech. Grp. |
| | ◈ Bravado | ✿ | Technique |
| | **Wheeling Sweep** | ⚔ | Technique |
| RANK 4 | Martial Skills | | Skl. Grp. |
| | Courtesy | | Skill |
| | Culture | | Skill |
| | Government | | Skill |
| | Rank 1–4 Kata | ⚔ | Tech. Grp. |
| | ◈ **Mentor's Guidance** | ✿ | Technique |
| | **Laughing Fox Style** | ⚔ | Technique |
| RANK 5 | Artisan Skills | | Skl. Grp. |
| | Commerce | | Skill |
| | Labor | | Skill |
| | Sentiment | | Skill |
| | Rank 1–5 Shūji | ✿ | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Roar of Encouragement** | ✿ | Technique |
| | Rouse the Soul | ✿ | Technique |
| RANK 6 | **Surge of Brilliance (Mastery Ability):** When you craft an item, you may increase or decrease its rarity by up to your ranks in the skill you used to craft it.<br>Once per game session when you make a check to create, refine, adapt, restore, or attune to an item, the check takes an action rather than a downtime activity. | | |

**RESOURCEFUL ARTISTRY**

The materials scavanged or otherwise obtained using the Resourceful Artistry school ability are worth a certain amount of koku for the purposes of crafting them into something, but are not worth that amount for the purposes of selling the raw materials. The worth of materials found this way in the marketplace (in their raw form) is subject to GM discretion.

## Mystic of the Mountain [Monk, Courtier]

Some travel simply for the joy of it. Those that wish to free their hearts from the jealousy that comes from coveting the positions of the higher castes may choose the path of the sage of the mountain. These individuals care more for the journey than the destination and make sure to dole out as many nuggets of wisdom as they can. Those that walk the winding path of the storyteller are just as content sitting around a fire with strangers as they are sharing a drink with friends. But they know much more than stories; these wandering monks are capable of exerting deadly force on those who would attack their allies, their time on the road spent on the practice of unarmed martial arts and storytelling in equal measure.

**Rings:** +1 Void, +1 Air

**Starting Skills (choose four):** Martial Arts [Melee], Martial Arts [Unarmed], Performance, Sentiment, Survival, Theology

**Honor:** 40

**Techniques Available:** Kata (), Rituals (), Shūji ()

**Starting Techniques:**

- **Kihō (choose one):** Ki Protection, The Great Silence
- **Shūji (choose one):** Honest Assessment, Stirring the Embers
- **Rituals:** Cleansing Rite
- **Shūji:** Artisan's Appraisal

**Unexpected Wisdom (School Ability):** You are a wealth of wisdom, which you can dispense a number of times per game session equal to your school rank. On your turn or at any appropriate time during a narrative scene, you may dispense a small bit of wisdom to a character who can hear you and has not benefitted from this ability this scene. The next time a character, including yourself, employs that wisdom they may reduce the TN of that check by 1 and may negate a number of  up to your ranks in Sentiment or Theology (your choice).

**Starting Outfit:** Traveling clothes, one weapon of rarity 6 or lower, one item of rarity 6 or lower, a journal containing little bits of knowledge, one trinket (see page 219).

| | ADVANCE | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| RANK 1 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Performance | Skill |
| | Sentiment | Skill |
| | Theology | Skill |
| | Rank 1 Rituals | Tech. Grp. |
| | Way of the Earthquake | Technique |
| | Air Fist | Technique |
| RANK 2 | Social Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Martial Arts [Unarmed] | Skill |
| | Survival | Skill |
| | Theology | Skill |
| | Rank 1–2 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | Way of the Willlow | Technique |
| | Channel the Fire Dragon | Technique |
| RANK 3 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Performance | Skill |
| | Sentiment | Skill |
| | Survival | Skill |
| | Rank 1–3 Shūji | Tech. Grp. |
| | Way of the Falling Star | Technique |
| | Ride the Water Dragon | Technique |
| RANK 4 | Social Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Martial Arts [Unarmed] | Skill |
| | Meditation | Skill |
| | Theology | Skill |
| | Rank 1–4 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | Touch the Void Dragon | Technique |
| | Pillar of Calm | Technique |
| RANK 5 | Social Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Martial Arts [Unarmed] | Skill |
| | Meditation | Skill |
| | Theology | Skill |
| | Rank 1–5 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | Way of the Edgeless Sword | Technique |
| | Bend the Storm | Technique |
| RANK 6 | **Stories as Tall as the Mountain (Mastery Ability):** Once per scene as a Scheme action you may make a **TN 4 Performance (Air** or **Earth) check** targeting a number of minion NPCs up to your ranks in Performance. If you succeed, each target decides that their actions really are unwise and leaves the scene, if able. | |

| | ADVANCE | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| RANK 1 | Scholar Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Games | Skill |
| | Meditation | Skill |
| | Survival | Skill |
| | Rank 1–2 Water Invocations | Tech. Grp. |
| | Divination | Technique |
| | Fukurokujin's Wit | Technique |
| RANK 2 | Scholar Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Fitness | Skill |
| | Meditation | Skill |
| | Performance | Skill |
| | Rank 1–3 Earth Invocations | Tech. Grp. |
| | Ebb and Flow | Technique |
| | Mask of Wind | Technique |
| RANK 3 | Trade Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Composition | Skill |
| | Medicine | Skill |
| | Theology | Skill |
| | Rank 1–3 Shūji | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Chaotic Scattering** | Technique |
| | Vapor of Nightmares | Technique |
| RANK 4 | Scholar Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Games | Skill |
| | Meditation | Skill |
| | Rank 1–5 Earth Invocations | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Laughing Fox Style** | Technique |
| | **Mentor's Guidance** | Technique |
| RANK 5 | Scholar Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Fitness | Skill |
| | Meditation | Skill |
| | Performance | Skill |
| | Rank 1–5 Water Invocations | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Roar of Encouragement** | Technique |
| | **Bond of Heroes** | Technique |
| RANK 6 | **A Gift of Fate (Mastery Ability):** The Lords of Death have seen fit to bestow upon you knowledge of the possible future and the power to shape it. Once per game session on your turn, you may choose one ritual for which you meet the prerequisites. This does not need to be a ritual you have purchased. You are immediately able to perform that ritual as a single action instead of a downtime activity. | |

## Ujik Diviner School [Sage]

The Ujik represent a wide range of groups along the Sand Road and elsewhere. The Ujik groups that the Unicorn Clan most notably deal with place their faith in the hands of the Lords of Death, countless honored ancestors that ascended to godhood and now govern the laws and realms of life and death. Diviners are individuals that have the natural talent and courage to call upon the wisdom of these arbiters of human mortality. The first vision a Diviner is given once they ask for insight is their own end, so that they will always remember that though they wield the knowledge of the Lords of Death, they cannot escape the fate of all flesh and blood.

**Rings:** +1 Void, +1 Water

**Starting Skills (choose three):** Command, Games, Meditation, Performance, Sentiment, Theology

**Honor:** 40

**Techniques Available:** Earth and Water Invocations (), Rituals (), Shūji ()

**Starting Techniques:**

- **Invocations (choose two):** Commune with Spirits, Embrace of Kenro-Ji-Jin, Caress of Earth, Jurojin's Balm, Wall of Earth
- **Invocations (choose two):** Dance of Seasons, Heart of the Water Dragon, Dominion of Suijin, Innari's Blessing, Reflections of P'an Ku
- **Shūji** (): Ancestry Unearthed

**Seer of the Lords of Death (School Ability):** You can channel rituals in the same way as invocations (see page 189 of the core rulebook).

Once per scene, when you channel you may receive fatigue up to your school rank. If you do, you may immediately make another check to perform an invocation of the same element using the reserved dice from your channel. For each fatigue received this way, you may add one kept die set to an  result.

**Starting Outfit:** Sanctified robes, traveling clothes, one weapon of rarity 6 or lower, a bag of scrying tools including mare's milk, bones, and incense, a Unicorn warhorse (see page 328 of the core rulebook), traveling pack, one trinket (see page 219).

## Qamarist Shield Bearer Tradition [Bushi, Sage]

The proud and formidable guard of the Qamarist Caliphate Empire use their advanced knowledge of the alchemical arts to prepare themselves for battle; their imposing command of shields, spears, and swords to control the battlefield; and their medicinal prowess to quickly recover from otherwise–grave injuries. A shield bearer looms above others in combat, protecting their allies with a ferocity borne from years of intense, grueling training. Though they come from a land of abundance, the warrior-scholars of the Cradle of the World have been trained to survive with only their shield and their sword in the harshest of conditions, traveling far and wide to seek information and prospects for the caliph.

**Rings:** +1 Earth, +1 Void

**Starting Skills (choose five):** Command, Fitness, Martial Arts [Melee], Martial Arts [Unarmed], Meditation, Tactics, Theology

**Honor:** 50

**Techniques Available:** Close Combat and General Kata (), Rituals (), Earth Shūji ()

**Starting Techniques:**

- **Kata:** Crescent Moon Style
- **Shūji:** Courtier's Resolve

**Akilah's Teachings (School Ability):** Once per round after an Attack action check against you fails, if you have a shield readied and the attack is at range 0–1, you may **shield bash**.If you do, the target suffers physical damage equal to your ranks in Fitness plus your school rank.

**Starting Outfit:** Traveling clothes, lacquered armor, yari (spear) or naginata (polearm), one weapon of rarity 6 or lower, Qamarist heavy shield, alchemical kit, the Qamarist holy book, traveling pack, one trinket (see page 219).

| | ADVANCE | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| RANK 1 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Government | Skill |
| | Theology | Skill |
| | Rank 1–2 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | Divination | Technique |
| | **Wanderer's Resolve** | Technique |
| RANK 2 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Government | Skill |
| | Smithing | Skill |
| | Rank 1–2 Rituals | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Goading Taunt** | Technique |
| | **Iron Shield Style** | Technique |
| RANK 3 | Scholar Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Meditation | Skill |
| | Smithing | Skill |
| | Tactics | Skill |
| | Rank 1–3 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Deflective Defense** | Technique |
| | Iron in the Mountains Style | Technique |
| RANK 4 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Smithing | Skill |
| | Theology | Skill |
| | Rank 1–4 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Bonebreaker Style** | Technique |
| | **Mentor's Guidance** | Technique |
| RANK 5 | Scholar Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Martial Arts [Melee] | Skill |
| | Meditation | Skill |
| | Theology | Skill |
| | Rank 1–5 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Fortitude Draught** | Technique |
| | **Bond of Heroes** | Technique |
| RANK 6 | **Fortitude of the Cradle (Mastery Ability):** You may shield bash after you defend against damage, even if the check was successful. After you shield bash, your target must resist with a **TN 4 Fitness (Air 3, Water 5) check** or suffer the Disoriented and Prone conditions. | |

| | ADVANCE | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| RANK 1 | Scholar Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Martial Arts [Ranged] | Skill |
| | Meditation | Skill |
| | ◈ Rank 1–2 Rituals | Tech. Grp. |
| | Weight of Duty | Technique |
| | **Wanderer's Resolve** | Technique |
| RANK 2 | Scholar Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Labor | Skill |
| | Martial Arts [Ranged] | Skill |
| | Rank 1–2 Shūji | Tech. Grp. |
| | ◈ **Fortitude Draught** | Technique |
| | ◈ **Boar's Wrath Style** | Technique |
| RANK 3 | Scholar Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Martial Arts [Ranged] | Skill |
| | Sentiment | Skill |
| | Rank 1–3 Rituals | Tech. Grp. |
| | ◈ Breath of the Wind Style | Technique |
| | **Look Out!** | Technique |
| RANK 4 | Social Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Government | Skill |
| | Medicine | Skill |
| | Theology | Skill |
| | Rank 1–4 Rituals | Tech. Grp. |
| | ◈ **Restorative Transmutation** | Technique |
| | Pillar of Calm | Technique |
| RANK 5 | Social Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Culture | Skill |
| | Medicine | Skill |
| | Theology | Skill |
| | Rank 1–5 Shūji | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Mentor's Guidance** | Technique |
| | **Void Embrace Style** | Technique |
| RANK 6 | **Swift Creation (Mastery Ability):** Once per scene you may perform a ritual that uses the Medicine skill as an action as if it were a downtime activity. | |

## Qamarist Alchemist Tradition [Sage]

The Qamarist Caliphate boasts some of the most gifted alchemists in all of the known world. These mathematicians and scientists have researched and experimented under the blessing of generations of caliphs in order to unlock the secrets of reliably creating various elixirs, draughts, and concoctions to enhance the human body, among other things. To be selected as such an alchemist is an extremely high honor, and these individuals are known for their perseverance, patience, and inventive nature. They are also known for their curiosity and desire to learn.

**Rings:** +1 Earth, +1 Fire

**Starting Skills (choose three):** Courtesy, Culture, Martial Arts [Ranged], Medicine, Meditation, Theology

**Honor:** 52

**Techniques Available:** Kata (), Rituals (), Shūji ()

**Starting Techniques:**

- **Rituals:** Balancing Salve, Cleansing Rite
- **Shūji:** Illuminate the Way, Truth Burns Through Lies

**Creative Execution (School Ability):** When making a check to perform a ritual, you may receive fatigue up to your school rank to add that many kept ■ set to ✲ results.

**Starting Outfit:** Traveling clothes, one weapon of rarity 6 or lower, an alchemy kit (page 114), a book of formulae, a book of mathematics, the Qamarist holy book, one item of rarity 4 or lower, one trinket (see page 219).

## Ivory Kingdoms Sage Tradition [Sage, Bushi]

In the Ivory Kingdoms there are individuals who have become so tuned to their inner energy, or lojas, that they have unlocked the ability to infuse others with it. These sages often go on long pilgrimages, seeking out the truths of the world in their travels. Their technique takes years to master, but their ability to enhance their allies' bodies and minds has turned the tide of many battles. Though they are revered, they tend to be seen as omens of ill luck, as their presence is often associated with difficult times.

**Rings:** +1 Void, +1 Earth

**Starting Skills (choose five):** Composition, Command, Courtesy, Martial Arts [Melee], Martial Arts [Unarmed], Meditation, Theology

**Honor:** 50

**Techniques Available:** Kata (), Kihō (), Rituals (),

**Starting Techniques:**

- **Kihō (choose two):** Cleansing Spirit, Earth Needs No Eyes, Earthen Fist
- **Rituals:** Threshold Barrier

**Gift of Inner Power (School Ability):** You can infuse other characters with your inner energy. After you perform a check to activate one of your kihō, you can receive fatigue up to your school rank and choose another character at range 0–1. If you do, that character gains the enhancement effect of your kihō in your stead (you may still resolve the burst effect, if able). This effect persists a number of rounds equal to the amount of fatigue you received this way plus your ranks in Meditation. Only one character can benefit from your kihō at a time.

**Starting Outfit:** Sanctified robes, traveling clothes, a *talwar* (page 110), one weapon of rarity 6 or lower, a map showing the route from the Ivory Kingdoms to the Sand Road, traveling pack, one item of rarity 4 or lower, one trinket (see page 219).

| | ADVANCE | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| RANK 1 | Scholar Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Fitness | Skill |
| | Rank 1 Kihō | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Landslide Strike** | Technique |
| | **Bellow of Resolve** | Technique |
| RANK 2 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Composition | Skill |
| | Government | Skill |
| | Sentiment | Skill |
| | Rank 1–2 Kihō | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Rider's Haste** | Technique |
| | Lord Hida's Grip | Technique |
| RANK 3 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Sentiment | Skill |
| | Theology | Skill |
| | Rank 1–3 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Thunderous Hooves Style** | Technique |
| | **Cleansing of Coral and Gold** | Technique |
| RANK 4 | Social Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Fitness | Skill |
| | Martial Arts [Melee] | Skill |
| | Martial Arts [Unarmed] | Skill |
| | Rank 1–4 Kihō | Tech. Grp. |
| | Striking as Void | Technique |
| | **Mentor's Guidance** | Technique |
| RANK 5 | Social Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Martial Arts [Melee] | Skill |
| | Martial Arts [Unarmed] | Skill |
| | Meditation | Skill |
| | Rank 1–5 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | Touch the Void Dragon | Technique |
| | Buoyant Arrival | Technique |
| RANK 6 | **Divine Protection (Mastery Ability):** You can perform the Threshold Barrier ritual as an action. When a Tainted being enters an area you have warded against it with this ritual, it suffers supernatural damage equal to your ranks in Meditation and the Prone condition. | |

| | ADVANCE | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| RANK 1 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Culture | Skill |
| | Performance | Skill |
| | Rank 1 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Eyes Up!** | Technique |
| | **Rider's Haste** | Technique |
| RANK 2 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Government | Skill |
| | Seafaring | Skill |
| | Rank 1–2 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Rushing Ox Style** | Technique |
| | **Summon Mantra: [One Implement]** | Technique |
| RANK 3 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Culture | Skill |
| | Seafaring | Skill |
| | Rank 1–3 Earth and Fire Shūji | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Daring Swing** | Technique |
| | Bravado | Technique |
| RANK 4 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Culture | Skill |
| | Government | Skill |
| | Performance | Skill |
| | Rank 1–4 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Swirling Tempest Style** | Technique |
| | **Roar of Encouragement** | Technique |
| RANK 5 | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Culture | Skill |
| | Seafaring | Skill |
| | Rank 1–5 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | **Sear the Wound** | Technique |
| | The Immovable Hand of Peace | Technique |
| RANK 6 | **Tower of Ivory (Mastery Ability):** After you defend against damage, increase your physical resistance by 1. This effect can stack a number of times equal to your ranks in Meditation and persists until the end of the scene. | |

## Ivory Kingdoms Dancing Blades Tradition [Bushi]

The Dancing Blades tradition is a unique set of training techniques that seeks to prepare warriors both mentally and physically for becoming wielders of astras, or implements of the gods. These combatants are capable of taking on multiple enemies at once by guiding their blades in broad, slashing attacks. Warriors of this school are said to look as though they are dancing as they fight, adapting to their opponent's attack with a grace and ferocity that is both mesmerizing and terrifying.

**Rings:** +1 Earth, +1 Fire

**Starting Skills (choose five):** Command, Culture, Martial Arts [Melee], Martial Arts [Ranged], Medicine, Performance, Seafaring

**Honor:** 45

**Techniques Available:** Kata (), Rituals (), Shūji ()

**Starting Techniques:**

- **Kata (choose one):** Hawk's Precision, Warrior's Resolve
- **Shūji (choose one):** Stirring the Embers, Honest Assessment

**Flurry of Steel (School Ability):** Once per scene when performing an Attack action, you may choose a number of additional enemies up to your school rank in range of your weapon as targets for that Attack action.

**Starting Outfit:** Lacquered armor, traveling clothes, a *urumi* (see page 111), one weapon of rarity 6 or lower, a trophy from a slain enemy, one item of rarity 4 or lower, one trinket (see page 219).

### MANTRAS AND ASTRAS

From the Ivory Kingdoms comes a unique type of divine ability; wielding astras, or divine implements of the gods. Such a feat takes years of training from the mythic high sages of the Kingdoms, and even then one must be chosen by the gods as a wielder of their powerful artifacts. For more information on astras and wielding astras, see page 98 and page 187.

Mantra techniques, or techniques that allow one to wield and counter astras, are indentified by the  symbol, a stylized whip-sword.

### 4. WHAT GETS YOUR CHARACTER IN AND OUT OF TROUBLE?

In the rough-and-tumble world of merchants, guards, and thieves, every character has some method they use to try to get themselves out of trouble—and that same method probably gets them there in the first place! Depending on a character's history, they are likely to approach situations very differently from others, whether because of training or because of natural temperament.

Choose one of the following options and increase your ring value by the specified amount:

- **Abrasive, honest, driven (+1 Fire):** A character who naturally leans toward the Fire approach tends to get into trouble because they are abrasive, too honest, painfully curious, or just driven to a fault. Once they're in trouble though, that honesty might in turn win them allies, their curiosity might translate into an inventive solution, or their drive might propel them to succeed.
- **Empathetic, tricky, clever (+1 Air):** A character who gravitates toward an Air approach might find themself in trouble because they empathize deeply with others' situations, because they get caught in the middle of a con, or because their glib attitude rubbed someone the wrong way. Once they're in trouble, these characters are quick to come up with another brilliant plan or ploy, or to use their persuasive personalities to talk their way out of sticky situations.
- **Gregarious, adaptable, charming (+1 Water):** Characters who go with the flow and prefer using Water approaches in their day-to-day lives tend to get in trouble because they're a little too friendly and often too charming for their own good. Once they've gotten themselves into a less-than-favorable situation, their adaptability can help them out of it, or they can use that charm and social prowess in a plan of escape, often smoothing over faux pas with a liquid grace.
- **Patient, stoic, thorough (+1 Earth):** A character who prefers the grounded approaches of Earth can sometimes finds themself at odds with those around them, as their patience and desire for thoroughness can lead to indecision. A character who favors Earth also tends to exemplify Rokugan's typical reserved stoicism, but at its extreme, this can appear to others to be simple indifference, defiance, or worse. When such a character gets themself into trouble, their thoughtfulness and patience usually allow them to win out in wars of attrition, and their attention to detail allows them to consider all possible plans of escape.
- **Contemplative, self-aware, insightful (+1 Void):** Those who favor the comfort and endlessness of the Void and prefer to use its approaches tend to be contemplative and filled with a wealth of insight, although their ability to use these observations to facilitate action can be limited. Characters like this tend to get into trouble because they know themselves and follow their insights rather than following protocol, and this can lead to catastrophe when unknown variables rear their heads. Once in a predicament, these characters are able to use that same insight and thoughtful nature to overcome their obstacles.

## Part III: The Past and the Future

A character's past and how they interact and process it is integral to fulfilling their desires, confronting their struggles, and, ultimately, determining their future.

### 5. WHAT IS YOUR CHARACTER'S PAST AND HOW DOES IT AFFECT THEM?

#### Selecting One's Past Properly

A past is a story, one that can deeply impact a person. Because rōnin have lost their place in samurai society their stories tend to be tragic, ones of circumstances that have kept them from fulfilling their promise or destiny. While **Table 2–1: Sample Pasts** provides a wide range of different pasts, players should feel free to develop their own rather than roll if they desire. The pasts presented here can be used as inspiration to help tell unique, personal stories that offer fun narrative moments!

A past should be a force that propels the character forward, similar to giri, or duty. A past is usually some sort of personal obligation, antagonizing entity, or choice that the character or someone else made that haunts the character even now.

When selecting a past, it's important to keep in mind that this is not something that a character will be able to avoid! Players should choose a past that has the potential to cause problems that the player finds interesting, because the GM will be using these pasts to present challenges, interesting narrative scenes, and discord. When a character's past comes up in a session, it will likely make a character's day unpleasant, conflicting with their ninjō, getting them into trouble, or even threatening their life. There might be hard decisions or tough fights ahead for the character when their past rears its head, and selecting a past that strikes a chord with a player is important in having fun! Characters will struggle, and that struggle should remain fun for players as they watch their character grow.

**FITTING YOUR ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES TO YOUR PAST**

In questions 9, 10, 11, and 12 players will choose advantages and disadvantages. Pasts can be a great source of inspiration for these choices! If it makes sense, players should consider catering their selections to their pasts or using them as a framework in developing their own advantages and disadvantages with their GM (see pages 137–139 of the core rulebook).

## Table 2–1: Sample Pasts

| ROLL | PAST | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|---|
| 01–06 | Spiritual Troubles | Because you desecrated a shrine, ignored an oath, or crossed the Fortunes (or other spirits) in some other way, these forces hound you at every turn. You face curses; misfortune; subtle distrust from those around you, even if they do not know what you did; or direct attacks by spirits. |
| 07–14 | Bad Family History | Your family may or may not have been falsely accused, but sometimes the accusation is enough. Too many people know and judge you for it. |
| 15–22 | Bad Reputation | Due to an actual or imagined wrongdoing, your name is a burden to you. You, or a close relation associated with you, may have:<br>• Been accused of murder<br>• Authored an inappropriate work (a pillow book, a heretical tract, or a satire about the Emperor)<br>• Had a messy affair and perhaps produced a child<br>• Engaged in thievery<br>• Voluntarily left your liege |
| 23–30 | Debts to Pay | You owe a vast sum of money to some individual or family, and you must pay back a percentage of it on a regular basis. If you fail to make a payment, you may find yourself the target of a bounty. |
| 31–38 | Desertion | Whether due to cowardice or for admirable reasons, you left your post. Your commander, liege, or peers intend to bring you back to answer for your crime. |
| 39–46 | Duty | You still adhere to an ideal, whether it comes from a clan, your monastic vows, a governmental post, your family, or other outsiders. Without this ideal, you would fall apart. If you choose this past, you may optionally use the rules for giri in the core rulebook, with your GM's approval (pages 88–90). |
| 47–54 | Fallen Family Legacy | Your family once had a name, land, and title. You still have the name, but nothing else. Your name, however, does not protect you from bitter heimin or ruthless bandits, and other samurai treat you worse than dirt. |
| 55–62 | Family in Need | Your family needs money, medicine, care, attention, rescue from a rival clan or mysterious captors, or some other thing from you. Without it, they will perish. |
| 63–70 | Forsaken Vows | Perhaps you still keep your head shaved, but you were expelled from a monastery or left for personal reasons. You cannot return until you resolve those issues. |
| 71–78 | Long Path of Waves | After your gempuku, you set out to explore the world. You have not returned to your home, and your family seeks to take you back. |
| 79–86 | Lifelong Enemy | An individual or a family has competed against you for the same love, position, power, wealth, or fame all your life. They block you at every turn. |
| 87–93 | Unearned Heroism | You won a duel or contest against a master by accident or via nefarious means. The master or their subordinate seeks you out, and the pressures of your reputation follow you. |
| 94–100 | Witness | You know too much, having observed a crime, spied on some evil magic, or seen nobility where they shouldn't have been. You've kept your mouth shut, but the spied-upon party wants you silent permanently. |

**THE SEVEN TENETS OF BUSHIDŌ**

*The code of Bushidō, or "the way of the warrior" is comprised of seven tenets that act as a guide for samurai. The tenets are Compassion (Jin), Courage (Yū), Courtesy (Rei), Duty and Loyalty (Chūgi), Honor (Meiyo), Righteousness (Gi), and Sincerity (Makoto).*

*More information on these tenets can be found on page 13 of the core rulebook, and more information on how rōnin may feel about these tenets can be found beginning on page 15.*

## 6. WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER LONG FOR, AND HOW MIGHT THEIR PAST IMPACT THEIR NINJŌ?

### Selecting One's Ninjō Properly

Outsiders have as many desires as there are stars in the sky. The path of waves requires incredible fortitude, and no human can withstand that stress without wanting something. In general, players should have the freedom to come up with their characters' ninjō. The **Table 2–2: Sample Ninjō** only represents a tiny sample of potential desires (and players may roll or choose one from here, if they desire); players and GMs can use them to galvanize their own imaginations. To create a good personal desire for a character, this desire needs to have the potential to conflict with their past. On pages 90–91 of the core rulebook there is more information on creating interesting and impactful ninjō. For this book, that advice can be applied to the conflict between ninjō and pasts, rather than ninjō and giri.

## 7. WHAT IS YOUR CHARACTER KNOWN FOR?

No two people follow the same path as they journey through life. While two or more rōnin and travelers far from home may band together to increase their chances of survival, their values, abilities, and actions may vary wildly, affecting how each is remembered by the people they meet along the way.

Choose a talent, event, or other deed that your character is known for. It can be positive or negative, and it may or may not be connected to their past. A rōnin might be known for abandoning their lord, for having a way with animals, or for going out of their way to help peasants. A gaijin might be known for their skilled craftsmanship or their exemplary fighting style. Or perhaps they are known for a being an embarrassment, which has caused them to leave home and wander Rokugan instead of staying with their own people.

- If your character is known for an intentional deed, skill, or pattern of behavior that has helped others, even if they have been shunned or embarrassed about it, they gain +5 glory to represent their social prestige.
- If your character is known for deeds, actions, skills, or even a single event that others have perceived as wicked, harmful, or exceptionally selfish, or if your character did something badly at odds their culture's or family's values, then your character gains 1 rank in a skill that they currently have 0 ranks in. This skill should represent the choices your character has made that have upset the normal order of things in the eyes of their family or society.

## 8. WHAT DOES YOUR CHARACTER THINK OF BUSHIDŌ?

Everyone who lives or travels within Rokugan must decide how they feel about the core of its society: Bushidō. The tenets and teachings of Bushidō encompass all that samurai do—and it is difficult, if not impossible, to do anything within the Emerald Empire without being affected, at least tangentially, by the samurai class. Though peasants are not expected to adhere to Bushidō in most contexts, and rōnin are in a strange position of being samurai with none of the inherent benefits, each should understand what Bushidō is enough to have feelings about it.

However, this may not be true for gaijin characters. Someone who has just arrived in Rokugan may know very little about its culture, which puts them at a big disadvantage. Still, it is more likely that a gaijin visitor would be somewhat versed in the ways of the Empire—at least enough to know how to avoid an untimely death.

### All Who Walk in Rokugan

Whether you are playing a character from the Emerald Empire or a gaijin from a faraway place, stories set in Rokugan work best if you to decide how your character feels about Bushidō and the other primary aspects of the Empire's culture.

## Table 2–2: Sample Ninjō

| Roll | Ninjō | Description |
|---|---|---|
| 01–04 | Achieve Mastery | Whether at swordplay, art, calligraphy, poetry, or even butchery, you seek to be the best through constant challenges. You may, however, settle for merely being seen as the best. |
| 05–08 | Amass Followers | You claim to be a bandit leader, crime lord, or head of a heretical cult. You may actually be charismatic or have an elitist or populist message, but you still need an audience to appreciate you. |
| 09–13 | Assist the Spirits | While others deal with the corporeal, your concern lies with the spiritual. Plenty of spirits are lost, abused by humans, or unmoored from where they belong, and they require compassion. |
| 14–18 | Atonement | You did a great wrong and must make up for it. Your guilt drives you, as does the belief that your death can't correct the mistake: only your actions can. |
| 19–23 | Construct a Great Work | You are driven to construct a masterwork, whether a gate, sculpture, painting, text, or shrine. You need the best materials, ideal location, and perfect inspiration, however, to make your magnum opus last the ages. |
| 24–28 | Discover a Family Heritage | Your family has lost a claim to greatness. You must find it. It could be a lineage scroll, an ancient relic, or a piece of art or architecture. |
| 29–33 | Enact Justice | The Celestial Order has been disrupted. You intend to embody justice by exposing a vicious secret, revealing evidence of a crime, or getting a criminal to confess. |
| 34–38 | Establish a Family | You want to begin a grand lineage. Love in this case is secondary, but your partner, or partners, must share your goal for this family to be strong and united. |
| 39–43 | Find a Lord to Serve | You wish to do what many rōnin long to for—find a lord, a house, and a place where you belong. You wish to regain a status you once lost, improve your station, or integrate into a foreign society as fully as you are able. |
| 44–48 | Find a Sensei | To study under the great masters is the path to becoming a great master yourself, and a sensei's recognition of your potential is the greatest compliment. For those less scrupulous, this also means benefiting from a sensei's reputation. |
| 49–53 | Find True Love | Love may be a frivolous emotion, but it brings you happiness. The world scoffs at such trivialities, making true love rare, but rarity makes it all the more valuable. |
| 54–58 | Gain Mystical Power | You want the power to change the world—reality itself—through legitimate study or as a mahō-tsukai, a blood magic practitioner. You might obtain this power through ancient knowledge, bargaining with a spirit, or supernatural insight from kami or kansen. |
| 59–63 | Kill Monsters | Demons cause misery and weaken society. They may also have caused harm to you or your loved ones. You must destroy these spirits of corruption, both for your own sake and for the sake of the world. |
| 64–68 | Regain Your Home | Perhaps you have traveled far from your homeland and have since lost your way, or maybe your home was destroyed by a natural event, a supernatural creature, or an angry noble. Whatever it was, your home is gone, and you desperately wish to return to or rebuild it. |
| 69–73 | Personal Security | Be it a parcel of land, money to buy your way into a more secure living situation, or a financial stipend, you want some reliable material resource to ensure that you and your family have a future. |
| 74–78 | Recover a Relic | History is a story, and stories carry power. A relic holds all three, connecting you to the past. The relic you strive to recover—whether it has cultural, monetary, or spiritual power—can grant you a future. |
| 79–83 | Build a Reputation | You want your reputation to spread throughout Rokugan, to samurai and heimin alike. Perhaps with a little inspiration, your deeds will be written into history. |
| 84–88 | Tame a Great Beast | Terrifying creatures roam Rokugan. They harass farmers and hunters and disrupt the order of life. Only you can end this threat, by taming it, but there is always another one in the next forest. |
| 89–93 | Uncover a Conspiracy | Whispers in the shadows and behind walls hint of a plot to overthrow or murder those in power. Friends may be foes, and trust is a rare commodity. You walk in those same shadows to bring the conspirators into the light. |
| 94–100 | Wreak Vengeance | A villain has wronged you or someone you care about. The wrongdoer may or may not know or remember you. You have pledged something worse than death for them. |

If you are playing a foreign character, you might choose to think about Bushidō's tenets as a guideline for thinking about core values of your character's home country. The tenets cover a wide range of values, and though your character may not believe in Bushidō, they do believe in something.

### The Tenets of Bushidō

Like the Great Clans, individuals and cultures place different levels of emphasis on various tenets and values. To represent the individuality and nuances of your character's personal beliefs, choose one tenet of Bushidō as **paramount** and one tenet as **less significant** (see **The Clans' Views of Bushidō**, page 301 of the core rulebook, for more information). Then, choose one of the following options:

- Your dedication to Bushidō affects all that you do. If your character's belief in living an orthodox interpretation of Bushidō is very staunch, gain +10 honor.
- If your character's values diverge from some or all of the common values of Bushidō, gain one item of rarity 5 or lower to represent a time when that divergence both benefited your character and pulled them further from the true path.
- You know little about Bushidō and its significance to Rokugani culture. Your ignorance will be short-lived, however, because you will either learn quickly or meet your end at the hand of an angered samurai. Gain 1 rank in one of the following skills to represent your ignorance of Bushidō: Commerce, Labor, Medicine, Seafaring, Skulduggery, or Survival.

## Part IV: Strengths and Weaknesses

Beyond their normal rings and skills, characters are made up of many life experiences, both positive and negative. Many of the following questions dive into the hardships and triumphs of your character, helping to define what makes them unique.

### 9. What is your character's greatest accomplishment so far?

What is your character's greatest achievement so far in life, and how did they accomplish it? Your character likely possesses some ability or strength of character that assisted in this noteworthy achievement, which you should also select at this stage. If desired, it can be interesting to create a contrast between what the character thinks are their strengths and what their strengths really are; your character might not be aware of their own best quality, or they might mistakenly attribute their success to a quality that did not in fact affect it. This is an excellent time to look back at your previous choices regarding your past and ninjō and incorporate those into your choices for questions 9–12.

In addition to deciding on your character's greatest achievement in their life so far, choose one distinction advantage that was key to accomplishing that success or that your character developed as a result of it. See the **Specific Distinctions** sections beginning on page 101 of the core rulebook and on page 68 of this book for various options. If you want to create your own distinction, consult with your GM using the guidance in **Creating Custom Advantages and Disadvantages**, which starts on page 137 of the core rulebook.

### 10. What holds your character back most in life?

All rōnin have some ongoing challenge in their life that makes pursuing their survival and desires even more difficult. This challenge might be a personality quirk such as naiveté, selfishness, or a bad temper; it could be a physical hindrance; or it might even be a spiritual vulnerability such as a family curse.

When choosing a challenge, you should select something that you

think you will enjoy roleplaying (especially at times when your character does not enjoy facing this difficulty). Choose one adversity disadvantage for your character. See the **Specific Adversities** sections beginning on page 116 of the core rulebook and on page 71 of this book for various options. If you want to create your own adversity, consult with your GM using the guidance in **Creating Custom Advantages and Disadvantages**, which starts on page 137 of the core rulebook.

## 11. WHAT ACTIVITY MOST MAKES YOUR CHARACTER FEEL AT PEACE?

The answer to this question could be anything from food and drink to specific activities, certain material possessions, or particular persons. Why does your character like or dislike these things? Does it stem from sharing the activity with a loved one in the past, or from a seemingly spontaneous fascination with the subject itself? How has an enjoyment of this activity shaped your character's life? Have they made friends—or enemies—as a result of this hobby?

Choose one passion advantage related to your character's interests or hobbies. See the **Specific Passions** sections beginning on page 111 of the core rulebook and page 70 of this book for various options. If you want to create your own passion, consult with your GM using the guidance in **Creating Custom Advantages and Disadvantages**, which starts on page 137 of the core rulebook.

## 12. WHAT CONCERN, FEAR, OR FOIBLE TROUBLES YOUR CHARACTER MOST?

Samurai are expected to maintain a controlled facade befitting their station at most times, but no human can avoid having some things that make them anxious, afraid, or angry. Are your character's fears or frustrations derived from past experiences, trauma, or personal failure? Are they related to a person or specific event? Does your character fully understand the source of their emotional turmoil, or do they have trouble expressing or processing these feelings? As with the adversity you selected, you should select something that you think you will enjoy roleplaying when it challenges your character.

Choose one anxiety disadvantage for your character. See the **Specific Anxieties** sections beginning on page 130 of the core rulebook and page 73 of this book for various options. If you want to create your own anxiety, consult with your GM using the guidance in **Creating Custom Advantages and Disadvantages**, which starts on page 137 of the core rulebook.

## 13. WHO HAS YOUR CHARACTER LEARNED THE MOST FROM DURING THEIR LIFE?

Nearly every human owes some portion of their personality, strengths, and weaknesses to the people around them, and usually, a few people in particular stand out as mentors—although their influence is not always positive. Who has taught your character the most about life, for better or for worse? An instructor might have set them on their current path, or a parent's influence might still guide their actions. Your character's old lord might have served as a political mentor, showing them the value of compassion—or of ruthlessness—and thereby shaped their ethos for life.

A good marriage might have led your character to a true peer who helped them overcome a challenge or personal obstacle, while a bad marriage might have left them jaded about relationships overall. Having to care for a younger sibling or child might have caused your character to develop in unforeseen ways. Losing a loved one might have driven your character into anguish, or it might have forced them to grow in ways they never thought possible to stand on their own. A disastrously bad relationship or a long-running feud with a hated rival could have forged your character into the person they are today. Your character might even have met a supernatural being who has served as a guide or patron, or one who set a curse upon your character in exchange for giving your character power or as punishment for spiritual transgressions.

In the **Relationships**, **Habits**, **Bonds**, **and Quirks** section of the character sheet, record the name of the person from whom your character has learned the most, along with the nature of their relationship. Then, choose one of the following options and gain the listed feature:

- One advantage related to your character's mentor and their relationship.
- One disadvantage related to your character's mentor and their relationship, and 1 rank in a skill that your character developed as a result of that relationship.

For specific advantages and disadvantages, see the lists beginning on page 99 of the core rulebook and page 68 of this book. If you want to create your own advantage or disadvantage, consult with your GM using the guidance in **Creating Custom Advantages and Disadvantages**, which starts on page 137 of the core rulebook.

# Part V: Personality and Behavior

Your character is more than a set of statistics on paper; knowing how they are likely to behave in a situation is important when you are roleplaying their decisions and interactions.

## 14. What is your character's most prized possession?

When all of your life can fit in a pack on your back or in a few saddlebags, each possession is special and often holds more sentimental value than its monetary value might suggest. From a common garden trowel a grandparent gave a character to a pillow book they've read a hundred times, everyone has something they value above everything else among their belongings.

Choose one item, either something your character starts with (as listed under their school) or a single item of rarity 5 or lower (subject to your GM's discretion). If you choose an item from your character's starting outfit, you may add either the Ceremonial or the Resplendent item quality to it.

Record the answer in the **Personality, Habits, Bonds, and Quirks** section of your character sheet. Additionally, choose some aspect of the item or something you do with the item that makes it stand out. You might fiddle with it in public, it might be overly large or small, you may believe it is worth much more than it is, or perhaps you wear the item in a strange manner (such as wearing a gardening trowel around your neck on a strap).

### Trinkets

**Table 6–4: Trinkets** on page 219 provides a sample of random items that players and GMs can use to add some strange, weird, or even mildly supernatural items to their campaigns. GMs can feel free to adjust any trinkets to better fit the theme of a given adventure or campaign. Players should take some time to jot down how their character obtained the item why they consider it significant.

## 15. How does your character react to stressful situations?

What emotions does your character show, and why? What events or feelings can make them lose their self-control? Conversely, what emotions can they always control, no matter what? Describe a noteworthy physical response that your character has during times of stress and note it under the **Personality, Habits, and Quirks** section of the character sheet. As your character's strife approaches their composure, they might display this behavior, and it could play a part any time they unmask. See page 31 of the core rulebook and page 182 of this book for suggestions.

# Part VI: Ancestry and Bonds

## 16. What are your relationships to your family, the clans, peasants, and others?

What experiences has your character had with other individuals and groups that have left impressions on your character? How does your character feel about those they travel with, peasants, lorded samurai, and gaijin? Does your character have sympathy for a particular people, or do they harbor resentment and anger toward certain groups?

Record any noteworthy history, quarrels, alliances, or grievances your character has with other groups in the **Relationships** section of your character sheet. Choose one item of rarity 7 or lower that was a gift from one of the groups your character has a positive relationship with.

## 17. What shared history do you have with your group?

If your GM has decided to start your group off already knowing one another, choose one of the following questions, or come up with your own (with GM approval) and answer it with your group and GM. If you or your GM would like some or all members of your group to roleplay through the first time they meet, players may choose an NPC for any of these options instead of another player character:

Which PC (or NPC) have you gone through the unthinkable with? With whom have you survived, doing things you regret to this day? What did you do?

- Which character knows a secret you would rather forget about? What is the secret?

- You owe a debt to someone in your group. To whom do you owe a debt? What is the debt? How do you feel about it?
- You have intense romantic or platonic feelings for someone else in the group. When you speak to them, you exhibit a quirk such as getting flustered, stammering, fidgeting, or otherwise acting strange. What is the quirk? Who is the other person, and do they know about your feelings?
- You have conquered a great beast, whether mundane or supernatural, with two other members of your group. Which group members are they? If they hadn't been with you, you surely would have perished. Do you admit you needed help? Do you resent their help, but stick around because you know you work well together? What was the beast?
- You are impressed with or jealous of another group member's skill in a particular area. Choose a skill you have 0 ranks in and then choose a group member who has one or more ranks in that skill. How do you feel about their talent? Is your goal to learn from them or to become better than them? When did you first witness their talent in this skill?
- You share blood or history with one other member of the group. You both might have served the same lord, lived in the same village, or had the same parent. When you choose this question, ask another player to choose this question as well.

Once you choose and answer a question, you should work with your GM to determine an appropriate bond to apply to your relationship. See page 187 for rules on and options for bonds.

## 18. Who Raised You?

Most people know who their parents are, whether they are noble samurai, humble peasants, or from a far-off land. Occasionally, however, a character does not know their parents or has been raised by others. A village might have pitched in to raise a child, or a child might have been abandoned outside a monastery, geisha house, or home of a samurai. Whatever the circumstances, your character's parents or guardians undoubtedly affected the kind of person they have become.

Record the nature of the relationship between your character and their parents or guardians in the **Relationships** section of your character sheet.

Additionally, gain 1 rank in one skill in which your character has 0 ranks. Determine whether your character's parents or guardians approve of this extracurricular interest or see it as a regrettable deviation, and why.

## 19. What is your name?

Whether your character's parents or guardians chose their name or your character chose it for themself, their name can say a lot about who they are or where they are from. Some characters may only have personal names, whereas others may still bear their family name (or names) as well. Feel free to come up with your own name or roll randomly on the name tables found on pages 228–232.

# Part VII: Death

## 20. How should your character die?

The death of a rōnin or a gaijin in a foreign land isn't usually remarkable. Most succumb to the elements, illness, or malnutrition. Still, some meet their demise in a dramatic fight with a formidable beast or samurai. Depending on what cultures your group's characters hail from and whether or not they hold the Celestial Order close to their heart, their opinions on what an honorable or good death looks like will vary. Some may fear the looming end, while others may look forward to having the chance to be born again, hopefully into a higher station.

How would you like your character to meet their end? Will they earn honor in a courageous death and ascend in the celestial hierarchy? Will they bring honor to their ancestors? Or will they find themself punished for their misdeeds or lost in one of the Spirit Realms, far from home? This has no mechanical implications, but you should keep it in mind. Your GM certainly will…

# New Advantages

The premade advantages in this section provide additional options for players creating new characters. Characters can also gain advantages during play, as described on pages 99–100 of the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* Core Rulebook.

## Specific Distinctions

The new distinctions here follow the same format as those in **Chapter 2** of the core rulebook.

### Ardent Leader (Fire)

*The bandits entered the village but were surprised when they saw no villagers. "Where are th—" one began to ask, but a jagged rock struck her temple before she could finish.*

*Osamu bellowed out to the other villagers, "Attack!" and a hail of rocks and sticks rained down upon the surprised thieves. The thieves drew their swords and began to walk forward toward the closest of the villagers, but Osamu shouted, "Don't let up, these people know nothing of the work we have done for this harvest!" A farmer, emboldened, ran up to one of the bandits and slashed him across the back with a sharp garden hoe. The bandit wailed and called out to his group to retreat.*

*Cheering as the battered outlaws ran away, the villagers chanted Osamu's name. He felt a swell of pride rise in his chest, but humbled himself, "We protect what is ours."*

**Types:** Interpersonal, Mental

**Effects:** The following apply to character with the Ardent Leader distinction:

- You speak with a confidence that most find hard to ignore, and people are more likely to hear what you have to say, even if they are of a higher status than you. This does not mean that those who hear you will heed you, however, and your words may still have undesired consequences.
- When you make a check for which your ardent leadership applies (such as a Tactics [Fire] check to deploy a group of peasants or a Courtesy [Fire] check to excite someone into believing in your plan), you may reroll up to two dice.

## Dashing Scar (Air)

*"And what proof do you have?" growled the leader of the criminals. Oshin calmly lifted his hood, revealing the long, smooth scar that curved down the side of his face from just above his left eye all the way to the right side of his neck. The impressive mark was striking on Oshin's otherwise modest features.*

*Whether it was the scar or the determined look in Oshin's eyes, or a mixture of both, the leader seemed satisfied. "I think we can come to an arrangement, rōnin. You seem to be experienced in these matters…"*

**Types:** Interpersonal

**Effects:** The following apply to character with the Dashing Scar distinction:

- You have a scar or other visible mark of an injury that adds to your heroic reputation. People who see your scar nearly always remember you and think of you positively unless given a reason not to.
- When performing a check for which your scar could act as an asset (such as a Command [Air] check to speak with an authority you do not have or a Skulduggery [Air] check to use your scar to accentuate your roguish charm), you may reroll up to two dice.

## Lucky Hunter (Void)

*Sota sat in a tree, silently breathing in the heavy scent of earth. They had only been out for a quarter hour and already had a fat, lone serow in their sights. They raised their bow, cocked an arrow, and loosed it, striking at the creature's heart. Sota couldn't deny their luck—ever since their first hunt, they had never failed to quickly find the best quarry their village had seen in years. Sota approached the fallen beast and spoke a soft thanks to the Fortunes for their gift.*

**Types:** Physical, Spiritual

**Effects:** The following apply to character with the Lucky Hunter distinction:

- You are exceptionally fortunate in hunting or fishing and are always able to identify the best spots for doing so.
- When performing a check that relates to your luck in hunting animals, trapping animals, or fishing (such as a Survival [Void] check to locate where a vanished target is hiding in the brush or a Seafaring [Void] check to determine the best time to go fishing), you my reroll up to two dice.

## Scrappy (Fire)

*The cloths she had wrapped around her meaty fists were soaked with blood. The crowd was chanting her name in unison. She swung a left hook.*

*Her foe was some ratty farmhand with an ugly face named Hitori. Hitori feinted back, then aimed a kick at her kneecap. The blow connected, cracking tendon and bone and sending her to the ground. Sharp pain shot up her thigh. The crowd drew a collective breath.*

*As she propped herself up on one arm, not ready to give up, Hitori kicked her in the side, knocking her breath out, and she tasted dust. The crowd broke into an uproarious cheer.*

**Types:** Mental, Physical

**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Scrappy distinction:

- You have experience street fighting and brawling either outdoors or in organized settings. When you fight, you know how to employ dishonorable tactics slyly, such as by stealthily throwing dirt into your opponent's eyes or "accidentally" landing a kick in a sensitive area.
- When performing a check during combat to use dishonorable tactics (such as a Sentiment [Fire] check to determine how to offend someone or a Martial Arts [Fire] check to unnerve your foe), you may reroll up to two dice.

## Scrounger (Water)

*Jurou laid out his tools. Some charcoal from the blacksmith, a few bits of wood from a barrel that had escaped from a cart that morning, some discarded twine from a weaver, a few chicken feathers, and his favorite knife.* Perfect, *he thought as he began carving the wood.*

*It took a little time, but Jurou eventually finished and grinned at his work. Before him sat a happy little doll with a body of wood held together by twine, a skirt of feathers, and little shoes colored with coal.* Miu will love it, surely. *He picked up the doll and made his way through the winding streets of Hirosaka.*

**Types:** Interpersonal, Mental
**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Scrounger distinction:

- You are always able to find something to fill your belly and sustain you, though sometimes the only option is repulsive.
- When performing a check for which your resourceful nature applies (such as a Labor [Water] check to find useful items for a task or an Aesthetics [Water] check to find inspiration for an art piece), you may reroll up to two dice.

### Urbane and Worldly (Void)

*"Wait a moment—" whispered Gerlhe, but the bowl was already at her friend's lips.*

*The air inside the yurt was heavy with smoke and the scent of yak butter. Rishaan smiled demurely as they drank the bowl dry. Their host nodded to the pair and stroked his long beard, pleased at the performance.*

*"I have never known a gaijin to drink a full bowl of* airak *so quickly." The older man laughed. "But if I have any say, the Ide family shall surely hear your petition."*

*Rishaan nodded their head in deference, but Gerlhe noticed the nervous twitch in their eye as their host uncorked the hide flask to pour them a second bowl of fermented mare's milk.*

**Types:** Interpersonal, Physical
**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Urbane and Worldly distinction:

- Your experience traveling abroad has prepared you to expertly emulate and adapt to unfamiliar customs in foreign lands.
- When observing an unfamiliar cultural practice or ritual (such as a Performance [Void] check to showcase your ability to appropriately emulate local customs in a land foreign to you or a Commerce [Void] check to feign awareness of local customs during a trade negotiation), you may reroll up to two dice.

## Specific Passions

The new passions here follow the same format as those in **Chapter 2** of the core rulebook.

### Attention (Fire)

*The thrill of having all eyes turn to you is like lightning in the veins. In those moments, the rush of exhilaration is all that matters.*

**Types:** Mental
**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Attention passion:

- At the start of each scene, you can always determine the most effective way to gain the attention of those around you.
- After performing a check to capture someone's attention (such as a Performance [Fire] check to entice a wealthy merchant with hints of future riches or a Games [Fire] check to draw a crowd with a daring move), you remove 3 strife.

### Honest Work (Earth)

*"The feel of earth under your fingers mixed with the sweat of a hard day's toil with the hot sun bearing down on you, your muscles aching from your efforts. Little else in this world is so satisfying as working with your hands, earning your keep. Samurai know nothing of the feeling of pride after planting a whole field of rice by oneself. I pity them."*

– Michi, the farmer

**Types:** Mental, Interpersonal
**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Honest Work passion:

- You are always able to determine how much work is needed to complete a physical, hands-on task, and your work on such tasks is always markedly better than that of others due to your eye for detail.
- After performing a check that requires physical labor (such as a Labor [Earth] check to till a field or a Smithing [Earth] check to fix a damaged tool), you remove 3 strife.

### Passion for [Foreign Performing Art Form] (Air)

*The gaijin from the Ivory Kingdoms play their own manner of* gagaku *music, which is said to have soothing tones. In particular, it is said that these gaijin have their own style of* komabue *flute, which may charm snakes and command sleepers to move in accordance with the player's wishes.*
**Types:** Fame, Interpersonal
**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Passion for [Foreign Performing Art Form] distinction:

- You are skilled in some foreign artistry, such as puppetry, miming, a foreign dance or theater form, or the playing of a foreign instrument; you can also recognize all common forms of the art and know intricate details about its history. Confer with the GM to select a campaign-appropriate art form when choosing this passion.
- After performing a check that relates to your talent (such as a Performance [Air] check to impress a stranger or a Design [Air] check to refine your craft or method), you may reroll up to two dice.

# New Disadvantages

The premade disadvantages in this section provide additional options for players creating new characters. Characters can also gain disadvantages during play, as described on pages 99–100 of the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* Core Rulebook.

## SPECIFIC ADVERSITIES

The new adversities here follow the same format as those in **Chapter 2** of the core rulebook.

### Bullheaded (Earth)

*To have the drive to always move forward in pursuit of one's goals, regardless of the trials and setbacks and pain, is to be blessed with a great strength, and also to be clouded by one's own single-minded purpose.*
**Types:** Mental
**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Bullheaded adversity:

- When you are pursuing a goal directly related to your ninjō, you have a difficult time focusing on anything unrelated to that goal. Your bullheaded nature often creates barriers to your own success when the most direct path isn't the best one.
- When you make a check related to your goal or ninjō that requires planning, subtlety, or nuance (such as a Culture [Earth] check to recall the proper way to introduce yourself to someone you perceive as an enemy or a Courtesy [Earth] check to reason with a merchant who is standing in the way of your goal), you must choose and reroll two dice containing ◐ or ◑. After resolving the check, if you failed, you gain 1 Void point.

### Debt to [Person or Organization] (Water)

*The number kept climbing no matter what Shou did. He had thought working at the geisha house would help him work off the debt his brother had dumped on his parents when he died, but the matron of the house always seemed to find something to charge Shou for. His small corner of the back room, food, the ink for his letters, the ribbon for his hair…He had only wanted to lessen his parents' struggles, but now he was no better than his brother.*
**Types**: Interpersonal
**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Debt to [Person or Organization] adversity:

- You are in terrible debt to a person or organization. If you do not make regular payments to your debtor or fail to fulfill your obligations, they will certainly hunt you down and make you pay, in one way or another…
- When you make a check related to dodging or worsening your debt (such as making a Commerce [Water] check to purchase something unnecessary or a Courtesy [Water] check to convince someone to give you a loan), you must choose and reroll two dice containing ◐ or ◑. After resolving the check, if you failed, you gain 1 Void point.

## Encompassing Duty (Earth)

*"I will lay down my life for my family. Nothing will stand in the way of that."*

– Aina, Ashigaru of the Lion

**Types:** Mental

**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Encompassing Duty adversity:

- You have a duty to something: your family, a friend, a cause, or some other person or ideal. This duty should manifest into at least one discernible goal, one you can work out with the GM. A goal may be to provide for your family, rescue a friend, or achieve a similar aim. You have a difficult time relaxing or focusing on tasks that do not somehow advance your goal, and this may manifest in several ways, including frustration, anger, worry, or nervousness.
- Whenever you make a check related to overcoming something that could hinder you in achieving your duty (such as a Meditation [Earth] check to keep a cool head in an ambush or a Courtesy [Earth] check to reason with a stubborn shopkeeper), you must choose and reroll two dice containing ◐ or ◑. After resolving the check, if you failed, you gain 1 Void point.

## Horrible Scar (Air)

*Hibiki rose from a fitful sleep, his body aching from the prior night. Walking over to the basin of water he stared for a moment at his reflection, shocked by the awful gash that cut across his jaw. "Well," his partner, Kyo, said from across the room, "I suppose you still have your beaming personality." Hibiki swore and threw the basin at Kyo.*

**Types:** Interpersonal, Mental

**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Horrible Scar adversity:

- You have gained an awful scar through your travels and it hinders your interactions with others. People stare at you, treat you unfairly, and otherwise judge you for your appearance.
- When you perform a check to interact socially with a stranger (such as a Courtesy [Air] check to request information or a Sentiment [Air] check to calm someone down), you must choose and reroll two dice containing ◐ or ◑. After resolving the check, if you failed, you gain 1 Void point.

## Many Mouths (Earth)

*The evening air was cool on his neck as Noki stepped inside. Around the table, the glistening eyes and pursed lips of his children glowed in the light of a dim flame. The children scrambled, hand and foot, to swarm around him, clamoring for attention.*

*"Sadako would not stop crying today."*

*"Yuki slapped me, father!"*

*"I want to see the cherry blossoms again. When will it be spring?"*

*The circle fell silent as he produced a small stone jar and, cupping it with both hands, brought it reverently to the table. Each of the children produced a small wooden bowl and held it, their hunger palpable in the darkness of the hovel. With a sigh, Noki removed the lid of the jar, took in the scent of jasmine, and ladled a mouthful into each child's bowl. In moments, each bowl was empty yet again.*

*"That's all for now. We'll need the rest for tomorrow morning."*

**Types:** Interpersonal, Mental

**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Many Mouths adversity:

- You have been saddled with the responsibility to provide food and shelter for many dependents (such as children, elders, or gravely ill loved ones) beyond your means. As a result, you are constantly looking for ways to provide for them, but nothing you do is ever enough to offer more than temporary respite.
- When you perform a check related to providing food, money, or care for yourself or your dependents (such as a Labor [Earth] check to produce food or a Sentiment [Earth] check to soothe your loved ones), you must choose and reroll two dice containing ◐ or ◑. After resolving the check, if you failed, you gain 1 Void point.

## Pursued by [Individual or Group] (Water)

*Aishwarya paused on her horse to look back at the city, a place she had called home for the whole of her life. She realized she might never see her siblings or grandmother again. Aishwarya choked back tears that tried to come.* No, I will not mourn, not now. *She gave her horse a soft kick and rode toward the mountains, away from her duty. A horn blared behind her.*

**Types:** Interpersonal, Mental

**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Pursued by [Individual or Group] adversity:

- You are running from a pursuer who wishes to capture or kill you. It is only a matter of time until your past returns to hunt you down; you are constantly on guard and watching for agents who seek you out. You have difficulty relaxing in public spaces, as your pursuer could be around any corner. Work with your GM to determine the nature of your pursuer.
- When you make a check that draws attention to you in public (such as a Commerce [Water] check to trade goods at a market or a Courtesy [Water] check to win the favor of a court), you must choose and reroll two dice containing ◯ or ◯. After resolving the check, if you failed, you gain 1 Void point.

### Stained Lineage (Void)

*It did not matter that Mizuho never met their uncle, or that they rarely saw their father.* "Those men are liars, cheats!"

*It did not matter than their mother had died of disease.* "I heard she sabotaged her health out of shame!"

*It did not matter that Mizuho spent every day working hard in the village, caring for their siblings.* "I heard one is actually their child!" *It did not matter what Mizuho did: they could not escape their family's reputation.*

**Types:** Interpersonal, Mental

**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Stained Lineage adversity:

- Your family has a bad reputation. Whether this reputation is hyperbole or truth, most people in your region know about your family's history and know you belong to that family. These people make negative assumptions about your character, even when given evidence to the contrary. Even if you aren't awful currently, it's in your blood, and they believe you will live up to your family reputation one day.
- When making a check to interact with anyone from your home region (such as a Commerce [Void] check to attempt trade in the open market without drawing much attention or a Courtesy [Void] check to warn others of an incoming disaster), you must choose and reroll two dice containing ◯ or ◯. After resolving the check, if you failed, you gain 1 Void point.

## Specific Anxieties

The new anxieties here follow the same format as those in **Chapter 2** of the core rulebook.

### Coming Storm (Void)

*The Sugahara family had always been unlucky. Dating back generations, their children had always been born sickly and often perished in even mild winters. Every other year or so some calamity struck their harvest, leaving all others unscathed. Two summers in a row, a* basan, *an angry rooster spirit, burned down their coops, scattering their chickens all over the forest.*

*The young adults of the family had difficulties in matters of love, as other villagers did not want to risk whatever curse followed the Sugahara around. Yasu knew that some catastrophe was always around the corner for her family, and she constantly worried over it.*

**Types:** Mental

**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Coming Storm anxiety:

- Your family has endured some great hardship, such as a natural disaster, mistreatment by occupying forces, high susceptibility to illness, or recurring bad luck. As a result, you and your family are constantly vigilant for this same type of hardship and are wary of the bad fortune that will inevitably befall you.
- When performing a check that involves planning or preparation for securing your or your family's well-being (such as a Medicine [Void] check to sense a specific ailment or a Command [Void] check to warn others of the risk that your family hardship may occur again soon), you receive 3 strife. If this is the first time this has occurred this scene, gain 1 Void point.

### Eyes of Many (Air)

*"If you live worrying about the eyes and thoughts of others, your life is no longer your own."*

– Youta, Mystic of the Mountain

**Types:** Mental

**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Eyes of Many anxiety:

- You are constantly worried that others are watching and judging you, whether maliciously or not. You are unable to relax in crowded places, and you tend to worry about your impressions on strangers more than most other people would.

- After performing a check in a crowded place or where two or more strangers are actively listening to you (such as a Courtesy [Air] check to tell your employer your mission went very well when it did not in front of their other retainers or a Fitness [Air] check to avoid notice), you suffer 3 strife. If this is the first time this has occurred this scene, gain 1 Void point.

### Failure (Water)

*Rina couldn't handle letting her mothers down again. She scaled the cliffside, the blood from her scraped-up hands smearing over the rock. She could see the top now, only a hundred feet above her. She could taste success, see the approval in her mothers' eyes…Then, a handhold crumbled under her grip, and she began plummeting to the ground.*

*Rina woke with a start, her body covered in a thin sheen of sweat.* I can't fail, I can't, I can't, *she thought to herself as she shook away the dream.*

**Types:** Mental

**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Failure anxiety:

- You are constantly worried about failing those to whom you have a commitment, such as family, friends, allies, a mentor, or a master. The thought of letting someone down when you have made a promise induces panic in you that manifests physically and can only be soothed by taking a step closer to accomplishing your goals.
- After performing a check that shirks your obligations or works against keeping a promise you made (such as a Courtesy [Water] check to socialize pleasantly with no purpose when you have a duty to uphold or a Games [Water] check to gamble needlessly), you suffer 3 strife. If this is the first time this has occurred this scene, gain 1 Void point.

### Fear of Stagnation (Earth)

*"Stillness is for the dead."*

– Asuga, Wandering Rōnin

**Types:** Mental

**Effects:** The following apply to a character with the Fear of Stagnation anxiety:

- Staying in one place for too long frustrates and unsettles you. You also have a fear of relational commitments that tie you to one place, and you much prefer to keep moving forward. You find it difficult to have work that requires you to stay in one location for an extended period of time, and doing so causes you to become irritable.
- After performing a check to continue a task you have spent a lot of time on (such as a Labor [Earth] check to work on the same project for more than two days or a Courtesy [Earth] check to make arrangements to stay yet another night in the same city), you receive 3 strife and gain 1 Void point.

# Creating A Gaijin Culture

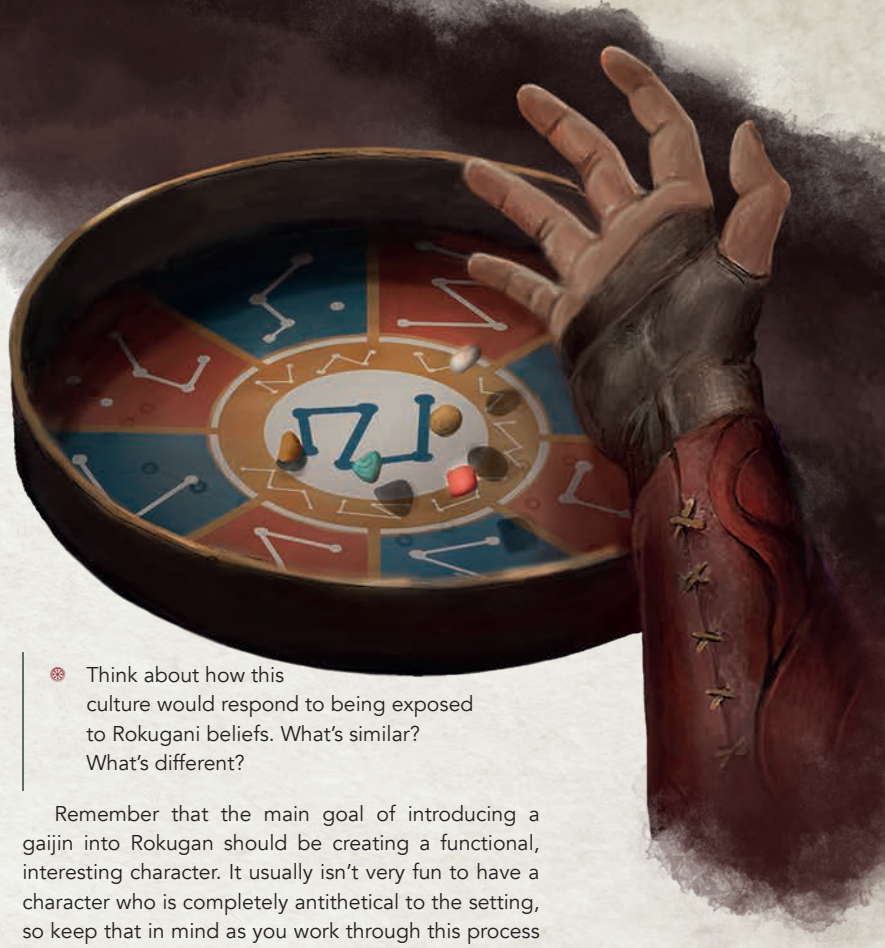
Far beyond the borders of Rokugan are numerous nations and kingdoms, as well as myriad cultures both large and small. As a player or a GM, you may find yourself wishing there were more playable options for characters who hail from places other than the four regions presented in this chapter. To account for the vast number of cultures, factions, groups, and regions and the great or subtle differences between the various people born outside of Rokugan, this section contains the process to delineate a new gaijin culture.

When making a gaijin culture, there is a lot more to consider than just the mechanical benefits. Before you start this process, it's important that you sit down with your GM, determine whether a gaijin character fits into the narrative you're trying to create together, and then establish a framework for what you'd like to create. A list of important questions to ask yourself as you make a new gaijin culture are listed in th following section. Keep in mind that when making a new character, and potentially a culture from which that character hails, it's important to frame it in the context of gameplay in Rokugan. Why are you, as a player, choosing to place this character in Rokugan?

Character motivations aside, what about putting this character in Rokugan in a collaborative storytelling experience appeals to you? What interesting or fun things do you want to do with this character, and how do you want to see them grow? Can you foresee this character being able to function well within Rokugan? The game likely won't last very long if the character isn't able to adapt and be creative.

## STATISTICS AND QUESTIONS

In order to create a character from a new gaijin culture, you will need to choose a **ring to increase by 1** and **a single skill in which you currently have 0 ranks to also increase by 1.** As you do this, think about why, in the context of your character's culture, the traits associated with that ring is cherished.



Again, it's important that you walk through this process with your GM. Building your own gaijin character isn't about optimizing ring values; it's about making sure that the mechanical choices align with the narrative ones. As you are thinking about what ring and skill you'd like to increase, consider the following questions:

- What does your culture value? Consider both societal beliefs on morality and what the culture might value in the physical world. When thinking about societal beliefs, look at the **Seven Tenets of Bushidō** for inspiration (see page 13 of the core rulebook).
- What are the environments like in your homeland? Is it constantly cold, warm, very mountainous, forested, or set up on a massive river delta?
- Does your character exemplify the ideals of your people, or are you unconventional, or an outcast?
- What do your people look like? How do they dress?
- Is religion important to your culture? What about government? How is your culture's society organized? Is it a strict caste system like in Rokugan, or are social classes fluid?
- Think about how this culture would respond to being exposed to Rokugani beliefs. What's similar? What's different?

Remember that the main goal of introducing a gaijin into Rokugan should be creating a functional, interesting character. It usually isn't very fun to have a character who is completely antithetical to the setting, so keep that in mind as you work through this process with your GM. Below is an example of a culture being designed between a player and GM.

## DUKE'S GAIJIN CULTURE EXAMPLE

Duke wants to play a gaijin character but would prefer to make his own culture. He works with his GM to determine that his culture is set in the frigid north, far above Rokugan. He wants to make the culture different from Rokugan but doesn't want it to be too different, because he'd like for his character to feel a familiarity when they travel to Rokugan.

Duke decides to make his kingdom a collection of several city-states, all working together to ensure one another's survival. He decides to keep a caste system, but allows for some social movement, particularly through marriages. He determines the general style of dress for his people and the major resources they care about: food and metal. Because it's so cold, food is scarce and must be grown in specialized greenhouses partially buried in the earth.

As he's discovering how many city-states he wants and what he'd like each to specialize in, Duke realizes that the city-states would value Sincerity and Honor above most other things, particularly because their culture revolves around trading goods. Honesty and integrity are seen as ideal traits in most professions, but his people don't care as much about Courage. He decides this is because other than the cold and starvation, there aren't many threats this far north. Courage, in that case, isn't as valued because it isn't as needed.

As Duke continues to invent ideas for this culture, he realizes that he's torn between choosing Air or Earth as his ring increase. He likes Air because it represents the talking and trading his culture does, but he also likes Earth because it fits in with the production and restoration of goods he sees his people focusing on. Duke asks his GM for her opinion, and she suggests that Earth fits a bit better with the kind of character he usually likes to play. She also suggests that Duke take Commerce as his skill increase to represent the trade aspect.

In this example, Duke puts a lot of time and thought into where his character is coming from to help him engage and operate within Rokugan and make his gaming experience richer. However, this level of depth may not appeal to everyone. If that's the case, players always have the option of taking an existing region option from this chapter (see pages 39–42) and modifying it to fit their vision.

# Building a School

One of the fundamental aspects of a character is the school in which they train. "School" does not necessarily refer to a specific dōjō or guidance from a particular sensei, but it may act more broadly as set of beliefs and stylistic choices that characterize any who follow it. The schools found on pages 48–59 represent archetypal paths an outsider might walk in Rokugan, but these are only a few of the myriad paths available. A character born as a rōnin or a peasant very likely has never set foot in a proper dōjō, let alone trained in one. What distinguishes these characters from others is that they each follow a set of guiding principles that shape how they approach the world.

Below is a step-by-step guide on how to develop unique, interesting schools. A GM can use this to create schools tailored for their specific campaign that are available in addition to, or instead of, the default schools, or to create a school based on a concept that a player has proposed. Alternatively, if a player has a strong idea in mind, they can work with the GM to create a school using these guidelines. As always, the GM is the final arbiter of whether custom-created schools are an option for their individual campaign. Beyond rōnin and peasant schools, these rules can also be used to create new Great Clan, Minor Clan, vassal family, and gaijin schools.

A detailed example is interspersed throughout to show how school development can look with a player and GM collaborating.

## STEP 1: DETERMINE SCHOOL ROLE

### STEP 1: MORGAN BUILDS A SCHOOL

Morgan decides to work with her GM to build a special school for her Qamarist character. She starts with choosing her school role—she wants this school to embody the artistry and mathematical fastidiousness revered in the Qamarist Caliphate, so she chooses Artisan as her only role.

As the first building block in bringing a school concept to life, one or more roles need to be selected to help hone the rest of development. There are seven roles available here (see **Table 2–3: Role Breakdown**, on this page). When selecting roles for a school, it is recommend that only one or two roles be selected, though to create a more complex school, up to three roles can be chosen (as with the **Soshi Illusionist School**, on page 80 of the core rulebook).

After the name of the school, its roles should be listed in order of importance, with the primary role listed first, followed by the secondary (and then the third, if present). The chosen roles will inform the rest of the design, so choosing roles is one of the most critical parts of creating a school! Write these in brackets after the school's name.

### Table 2–3: Role Breakdown

| ROLE | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| Artisan | Creators, advisors, engineers, and scholars of art |
| Bushi | Warriors, guards, and instructors |
| Courtier | Politicians, emissaries, and civil servants |
| Monk | Political influencers, traveling historians, pinnacles of monastic life and (supposedly) above earthly concerns |
| Sage | Those who wield supernatural powers differently from or beyond how a shugenja might wield them in Rokugan |
| Shinobi | Assassins and spies |
| Shugenja | Priests of the samurai caste or others who have a special bond with the kami or can control them |

## STEP 2: CHOOSE SCHOOL AFFILIATIONS AND SUMMARIZE SCHOOL

A school is typically associated with a Great Clan, as most official schools in Rokugan represent the tried-and-true methods crafted by Rokugani masters over generations. However, there are myriad styles and possible avenues for individuality when creating new schools. For this step, the player needs to determine if their school will be specific to a particular clan or gaijin faction, or if it is a more niche type of school that a peasant might use (keep in mind the last two options are not ones that would be easily accepted by the Great Clans). An affiliation determines which characters have access to that school by default (e.g. Crane Clan characters can attend a Crane school). If selecting a Great Clan affiliation, choose a family that this school originates from, though any member of the clan will be able to choose this school.

After choosing affiliations, it's time to come up with a three- to five-sentence summary describing what makes the school exciting and what it's about. This should present the selling point for the school—what about this school would pique someone's interest enough to play it?

## STEP 3: SCHOOL ABILITY

Developing a school ability is perhaps the most critical element of a school's design. A school ability needs to feel balanced and fun, while also embodying the flavor of the school. A key component of a school ability is that **it must scale with school rank.** This means that the ability must take into account a character's school rank and improve in effectiveness as the character advances.

Templates for generic school abilities can be found in **Table 2–4: Generic School Ability Templates** on page 78. A school ability can be based on a template or on an entirely new idea, though starting with a template is certainly easier.

Additionally, each school ability needs a name, which should be decided after creating the ability. A good name should evoke the flavor of the ability, helping everyone to understand how the character's experience in the story translates into the ability's mechanical bonuses.

### STEP 2: MORGAN BUILDS A SCHOOL

Morgan is planning on building a Qamarist school, so she chooses a Qamarist affiliation. She then comes up with the following summary for her new school:

*The Qamarist Caliphate is known for its mathematical precision in its art, requiring keen minds and careful hands to produce the meticulous and awe-inspiring designs. The personal artisans of the caliph are masters of symmetry and mechanical marvels.*

Morgan works with her GM to come up with details about the Qamarist Caliphate to help flesh out her school and will continue to work to come up with other background information throughout the character-creation process.

### STEP 3: MORGAN BUILDS A SCHOOL

Morgan wants to make her school ability reflect her school's aptitude for creating intricate, geometric designs and mechanical pieces with moving parts. She works with her GM to adjust a template from the provided table to flavor one of those abilities to something closer to her school's theme:

***Skill of the Caliphate (School Ability):*** *Before you make a Smithing check, you may receive strife up to your school rank to reduce the TN of the check by that amount.*

## Table 2–4: Generic School Abilities

| ROLE | ABILITY TEMPLATE |
|---|---|
| Any | Choose one skill group when you create this school ability. When you perform a check using a skill from that group, you may treat your ranks in the skill as being equal to your school rank. If your ranks in that skill are equal to or higher than your school rank, or if you have 5 ranks in the skill, you may add one kept ■ set to an ✿ result instead. |
| Any | Choose one skill when you create this school ability. Once per scene, when you make a check using this skill, you may add a number of kept ■ set to ✿ results equal to your school rank. |
| Artisan | Choose one Artisan skill when you create this school ability. Before you make a check using that skill, you may receive strife up to your school rank to reduce the TN by that amount. |
| Bushi | Choose one weapon type or unarmed when you create this school ability. When you make a skill check using this weapon type, if you succeed, you may receive fatigue up to your school rank to add that many bonus successes. |
| Courtier | Choose one Scholar or Social skill when you create this school ability. When you make a check using that skill, you may negate a number of ⟲ symbols up to your school rank. |
| Monk | Choose an action type (Attack, Movement, Scheme, or Support) when you create this school ability. When you make a check to perform an action of this type, before rolling, you may exchange a number of ■ up to your school rank for ⟳. When you provide assistance on an action of this type, the character you assist may exchange one ■ for an ⟳. |
| Sage | Choose one Artisan or Scholar skill when you create this school ability. You may use this skill for invocations, and you cannot channel invocations (see pages 189–190 of the core rulebook). Once per scene, when you succeed on a check to use an invocation technique, you may receive a number of strife up to your school rank to add that many bonus successes. |
| Shinobi | Choose one Social or Trade skill when you create this school ability. Once per scene when you make a check using that skill, you may choose a number of dropped dice up to your school rank and reserve them. Until the end of the scene, when you make a check using a different skill, you may add one of the reserved dice to the check as a kept die, set to the result it had when it was reserved. This expends that reserved die. |
| Shugenja | Choose an effect keyword (Augment, Bind, Curse, Mend, Purify, Scry, Smite, Summon, etc.; see pages 192 and 225 of the core rulebook) when you create this school ability. When you make a check for an action that uses that keyword, you may choose a number of your rolled dice up to your school rank containing ⟲ symbols and reroll them. |

## STEP 4: RING BONUSES

This step is fairly simple; with the flavor of the school in mind, appropriate ring bonuses can now be chosen.

When choosing two ring increases for a school, keep in mind what traits the practitioners of the school value. When making a school for a Great Clan, it's also important to keep in mind the family bonuses and make sure they don't overlap too much. If a player decides their character is from the family associated with the school, keeping the ring values different helps make a more balanced character and avoids going over the 3-point maximum for each ring during character creation (see page 31).

Typically, the first ring increase is based on the primary role of the school, as shown on **Table 2–5: Suggested First Ring Bonus**, and the second ring increase is drawn from what the school is known for, as shown in **Table 2–6: Suggested Second Ring Bonus**. That said, it's prudent to keep in mind that players and GMs don't need to follow this list if they're making something that breaks the mold—and many schools do!

### STEP 4: MORGAN BUILDS A SCHOOL

*Morgan wants her school to be focused on invention and creativity, while still echoing the traditional values and patient might of the Qamarist Caliphate. She chooses to add +1 Fire and +1 Earth to represent this.*

## STEP 5: CHOOSING SKILLS

Once you've chosen two rings to give bonuses to, it's time to select a group of skills from which a player will choose the skills their character starts with. The number of skills a school can give its adherents access to during character creation (listed in the "Skills Available" column), depends on the roles that were selected. The number of skills a character can choose from that group (listed in the "Skill Picks" column) also depends on the school's roles. The skills in the "Common Skills Available" column for each role are skills that are frequently used by characters with that role. If a school has multiple roles, select the category for the primary (first) role of the school. See table **2–7: Skill Choices** on page 80.

### TABLE 2–5: SUGGESTED FIRST RING BONUSES

| ROLE | RING INCREASE |
|---|---|
| Artisan | Fire or Water |
| Bushi | Earth |
| Courtier or Shinobi | Air |
| Monk or Sage | Void |
| Shugenja | The element the school is attuned to |

### TABLE 2–6: SUGGESTED SECOND RING BONUS

| RING INCREASE | TRAIT SCHOOL IS KNOWN FOR |
|---|---|
| Air | Precision, grace, or manners |
| Earth | Patience, tradition, or resilience |
| Fire | Inventiveness, ferocity, or speed |
| Void | Philosophy, selflessness, or insight |
| Water | Adaptability, flexibility, or awareness |

### STEP 5: MORGAN BUILDS A SCHOOL

Morgan now needs to select the starting skill choices for her Qamarist Artisan. Since Artisan is her school's only role, she needs to choose seven starting skills, and players will be able to pick five of those during character creation. She selects Smithing (as it goes along with her school ability), Aesthetics, Design, Courtesy (to get into the good graces of strangers), Games (she can make toys, after all), Medicine (Qamarists are known for their alchemy), and finally, Theology (as religion plays a major role in life in the Caliphate).

**LIMITED CATEGORY ACCESS**

Occasionally, a school might call for limited access to a particular type of technique category. For example, a school may only allow open access to Water and Fire invocations (✋) rather than all invocations. This type of restriction isn't common, but can it can help home in on a school's flavor if used sparingly.

### Table 2–7: Skill Choices

| ROLE | SKILLS AVAILABLE | SKILL PICKS | COMMON SKILLS AVAILABLE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Artisan | 7 | 5 | Aesthetics, Composition, Courtesy, Culture, Design, Martial Arts [Melee], Smithing |
| Bushi | 7 | 5 | Command, Fitness, Government, Martial Arts [Melee], Martial Arts [Ranged], Martial Arts [Unarmed], Meditation, Tactics |
| Courtier | 7 | 5 | Composition, Courtesy, Culture, Government, Martial Arts [Ranged], Performance, Sentiment |
| Monk | 6 | 4 | Fitness, Martial Arts [Melee], Martial Arts [Unarmed], Meditation, Survival, Theology |
| Sage | 6 | 3 | Courtesy, Games, Labor, Meditation, Survival, Theology |
| Shinobi | 7 | 5 | Courtesy, Culture, Skulduggery, Martial Arts [Melee], Martial Arts [Ranged], Medicine, Performance |
| Shugenja | 6 | 3 | Composition, Courtesy, Culture, Games, Meditation, Theology |

## STEP 6: TECHNIQUE ACCESS AND STARTING TECHNIQUES

Next, you'll need to choose what technique categories your school has open access to. Open access means that a member of the school can purchase any techniques from that category as long as they meet any prerequisites (see page 97 in the core rulebook for more information).

Most schools have a Techniques Available list that consists of rituals (🔥) and two other technique categories of the common varieties: kata (⚔), kihō (🌬), invocations (✋), and shūji (📜).

As no reputable tradition would admit to teaching such forbidden arts, access to ninjutsu (✨) and mahō (🔮) is exceptionally rare and should only be given in unique cases. Some unusual, generally heretical school might lack rituals as a technique available to reflect its fundamental opposition to the Celestial Order.

### Starting Techniques

Every school starts with a handful of techniques its members immediately know at rank 1 without having to spend any experience. These are called starting techniques. As with skills, the number of starting techniques that a school gives its members is based on the school's primary role (see **Table 2–8: Starting Techniques**). This step is an opportunity to give starting characters from a particular school access to techniques that they might not otherwise get (such as giving them a rank 2 technique right away or giving a shinobi character some ninjutsu). Schools often also have choices, so someone making a character using this school might have a choice between two kata, then receive two invocations (with no choice), and then a ritual (with no choice).

### STEP 6: MORGAN BUILDS A SCHOOL

As she starts to think about techniques, Morgan knows that she'll want her school to have open access to shūji (📜) in order to better fit in as she travels in Rokugan. She also automatically has rituals (🔥), and decides to keep that. She wants her Qamarist Artisan school to be proficient in fighting to represent the prowess of the Qamarists as well as to round out the school and give her a means of defense, so she chooses kata (⚔) as her final open-access technique category.

### Table 2–8: Starting Techniques

| ROLE | NUMBER OF STARTING TECHNIQUES |
|---|---|
| Artisan | 3 |
| Bushi | 2 |
| Courtier | 2 |
| Monk | 3 |
| Sage | 4–5 |
| Shinobi | 2 |
| Shugenja | 4–5 (including the Commune with Spirits Ritual) |

## STEP 7: CURRICULUM AND MASTERY ABILITY

Developing a curriculum can seem a little daunting at first, but if you break it down into its component parts, the process is actually fairly simple (for a refresher on how curriculums function, see pages 97–98 of the core rulebook).

### Building a Curriculum

Ranks 1–5 of every curriculum table follow the same format, as shown in **Table 2–9: Morgan's Rank 1 Sample Curriculum**. Each rank includes seven advances: one skill group, three skills, one technique group, and two techniques (one of which is usually presented earlier than it would normally be available). These are the advances that players can choose to receive full experience points toward increasing their school ranks. A school can deviate from this formula if it is appropriate (for instance, having one fewer technique and one more technique group at a given rank, or having one fewer skill and one extra technique), but this should generally be used sparingly for the sake of simplicity.

### Skill Groups and Skills

When selecting a skill group and three skills for ranks 1–5, there is only one real restriction: skills selected should not be from the skill group selected for that rank (so after giving a school Martial Skills as the skill group for rank 1, do not give any of the Martial Arts skills, Fitness, Meditation, or Tactics as the individual skills for that rank). A player can give the same skill group and skills across multiple ranks, though some variation should be included that both matches the flavor of the school and gives players an opportunity to build a more balanced character if they so choose. Remember, the options given in the curriculum do not keep players from selecting other options; they just provide guidance and a bit of an extra boost during play.

### Technique Groups and Techniques

When choosing a technique group for ranks 1–5, you have an opportunity to give a school access to techniques to which its members otherwise would not have access (remember selecting technique access in **Step 6**). For example, if you give a school rituals (), invocations (), and shūji () as open access techniques (meaning they can purchase any techniques from those categories if they meet the prerequisites), you could give the school a few kata () techniques in the curriculum as choices or include a limited number of ranks of kata (as they cannot normally purchase kata). For example, you could say that at school rank 2, members of your school gain access to rank 1–3 kata, but they never gain kata anywhere else in the curriculum. By doing this, you give the school early access to rank 3 kata, but you also limit access overall.

Techniques in a curriculum are also an opportunity to give school members early or unique access to certain techniques. Commonly, a curriculum might give access to a technique one rank early, or it might give access to special techniques like ninjutsu.

### Rank 6: Mastery Ability

Rank 6 is different from the first five school ranks in that all it contains is a mastery ability for the school. A mastery ability should be powerful and awe-inspiring, giving members of the school something to aspire to. A player should feel cool when using it! This ability should be particularly efficient, potent, splashy, or exciting in a narrative context.

Some mastery abilities are purely narrative in their effects: revealing that the enemy's sword was replaced with an illusion while it was sitting on a rack, slaying numerous enemies in a flurry of shuriken and silent strikes, or calling one's loyal steed across any distance are simply not effects for which one can provide a template. For such a mastery ability, it is generally advisable to limit the effect to one time per game session, have it tied to a check with a TN of between 3 and 6, or both. It's okay for a mastery ability to generally be able to solve one sort of problem reliably, but if the mastery ability can solve *every*

problem, it's probably too open-ended and needs a narrower use case, or more limitations, such as costs or setup, to use.

For more mechanically oriented mastery abilities, however, **Table 2–10** presents a number of templates that the designer of a school can use (or use as inspiration for developing a new ability of a similar potency). See **Table 2–10: Generic Mastery Ability Templates**, on page 83 for some example starting points.

Finally, remember that each mastery ability needs a name. Mastery ability names should reflect their near-mythical nature, so feel free to make the name a little bit over the top.

### Table 2–9: Morgan's Rank 1 Sample Curriculum

| | ADVANCE | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| RANK 1 | Artisan Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Theology | Skill |
| | Martial Arts [Melee] | Skill |
| | Rank 1 Shūji | Tech. Grp. |
| | ◈ Civility Foremost | Technique |
| | Snapping Branch Style | Technique |

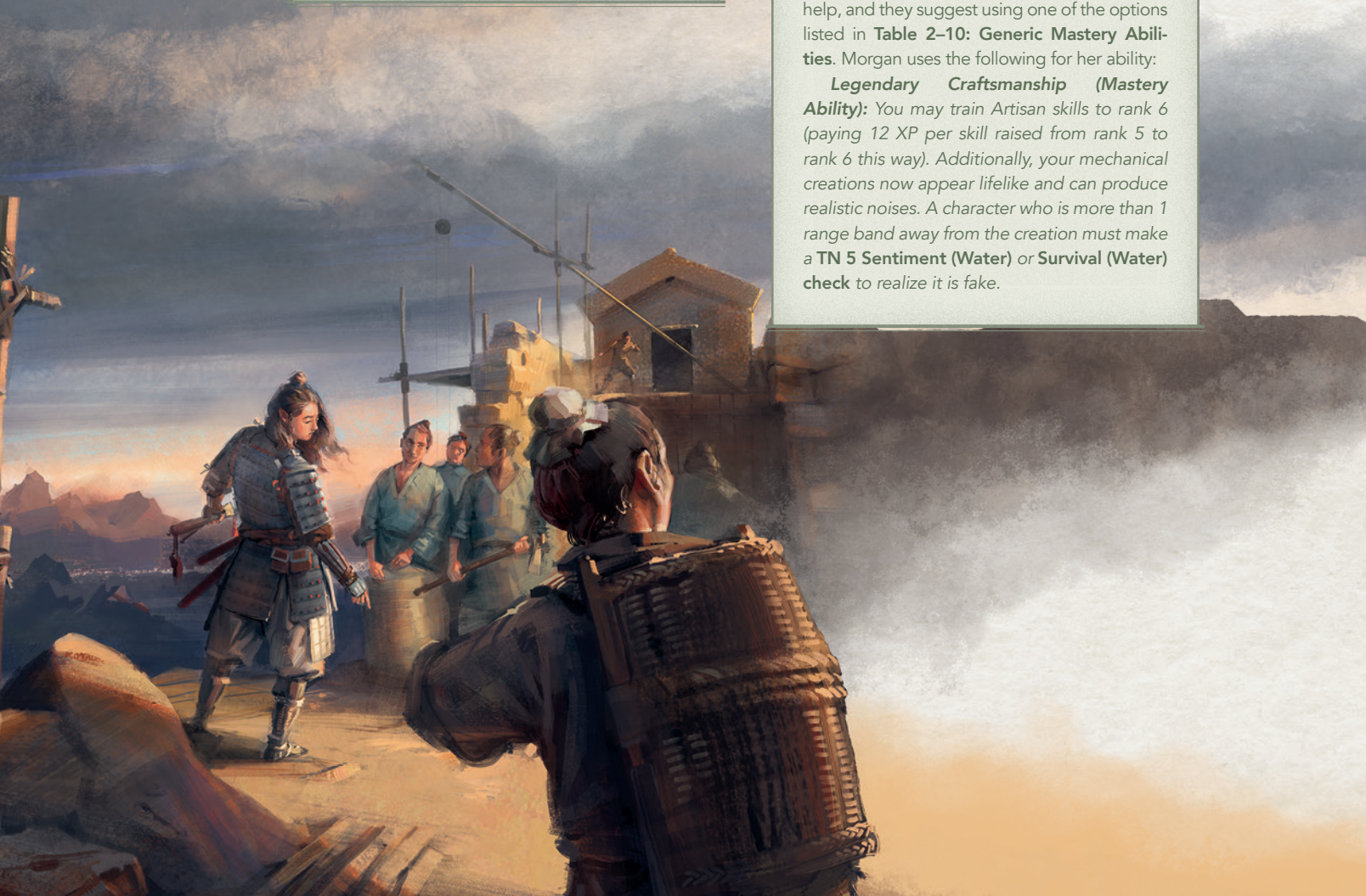
## Step 7: Morgan Builds a School

Morgan begins building her curriculum table on this page, starting with rank 1. She selects Artisan skills as an obvious choice for her Artisan role, then chooses Courtesy to help the school do better in a foreign land, Theology to represent the Qamarists, and Martial Arts (Melee) to drive home the martial prowess of the Qamarists and give the school more versatility.

Next, she chooses to have rank 1 shūji as the technique group, as her school is proficient in communication. She chooses to give her school Civility Foremost, a rank 2 Earth shūji, a rank early to suggest that her school is not prone to violence if it isn't necessary. Then, Morgan selects the Snapping Branch Strike kata to tie in the Martial Arts [Melee] aspect of her character and to illustrate the adaptability and might of the school (this technique lets its user shove opponents away in some cases).

As the last part of developing her curriculum, Morgan finds herself a bit stumped on creating a cool mastery ability. She asks her GM for help, and they suggest using one of the options listed in **Table 2–10: Generic Mastery Abilities**. Morgan uses the following for her ability:

***Legendary Craftsmanship (Mastery Ability):*** *You may train Artisan skills to rank 6 (paying 12 XP per skill raised from rank 5 to rank 6 this way). Additionally, your mechanical creations now appear lifelike and can produce realistic noises. A character who is more than 1 range band away from the creation must make a* **TN 5 Sentiment (Water)** *or* **Survival (Water) check** *to realize it is fake.*



## Table 2–10: Generic Mastery Abilities

| ROLE | ABILITY TEMPLATE |
|---|---|
| Any | Increase your endurance by your ranks in Fitness. |
| Any | Increase your composure by your ranks in Meditation. |
| Any | Choose one technique category the school does not already have available (kata, kihō, invocations, shūji, etc.) when you gain this mastery ability. That technique type becomes available to you. |
| Any | If your school ability can be used a limited number of times per scene, you may spend 1 Void point to use it one additional time per scene. |
| Any | If your school ability requires you to choose something from a list (a skill, a skill group, a technique category, etc.), choose one additional entry from that list when you create this mastery ability. Your school ability applies to both chosen entries. |
| Any | Choose one skill when you create this mastery ability. Once per game session when you make a check using that skill, you may reroll all of your dice. If you do not succeed after rerolling, gain 1 Void point. |
| Monk, Sage, Shugenja | When you defend against damage, you may treat your physical resistance and supernatural resistance as equal to your ranks in Theology. |
| Monk, Sage, Shugenja | Choose one ring when you create this mastery ability. You may train that ring to rank 6 (paying 18 XP). |
| Artisan, Bushi, Courtier, Shinobi | Choose one skill group when you choose this mastery ability. You may train skills in that group to rank 6 (paying 12 XP per skill raised from rank 5 to rank 6 this way). |
| Artisan, Bushi, Courtier, Shinobi | Choose one technique on the curriculum that requires a check to activate when you create this mastery ability. You treat the TN of this check as reduced by your ranks in the skill to activate it (to a minimum of TN 1). |
| Artisan, Bushi, Courtier, Shinobi | Choose one technique on the curriculum that requires spending one or more ✿ to activate when you create this mastery ability. When you spend at least the minimum amount of ✿ to activate that technique, you count as spending that amount of ✿ plus ✿✿ instead. |

**TELLING A STORY**

Each curriculum should tell a story. What does it teach its students early on? What does it hold back until later? What is the journey a person undertakes while walking this path? Is there anything it doesn't teach at all? Remember, the mechanics should inform the reader about the tradition and help them have a picture of a character's evolution as they study under it.

## STEPS 8 AND 9: MORGAN BUILDS A SCHOOL

Morgan works with her GM to come up with the starting outfit for her school. She includes traveling clothes, but requests that the standard ceremonial clothes and ashigaru armor be replaced with concealed armor with the Durable quality. Next, she decides to give members of her school a naginata (polearm) to couple with the Martial Arts [Melee] skill choices as well as a choice of any one weapon of rarity 6 or lower. For her additional equipment, she includes a traveling pack, calligraphy set, journal, and a smithing kit, as well as a Unicorn warhorse to represent the steed she's using from the Qamarist Caliphate.

Lastly, Morgan chooses a name for her school—she decides to go with Qamarist Tinkerer. And that's it! Morgan fills out the Build Your Own School Worksheet (available at FantasyFlightGames.com) and shows the school design to her GM for approval.

## STEP 8: STARTING OUTFIT

This step is about flair and narrative touches. See **Table 2–11: Suggested Starting Outfits**, on this page, for a standard list of starting equipment. If a character is not a Rokugani samurai, they should replace the wakizashi with an appropriate substitute (such as a *bō* [staff] or other weapon of rarity 5 or lower).

## STEP 9: NAME

Lastly, it's time to choose a cool name for your school! You might have already thought of one, but we put this part last so you can look over everything you've created so far and use it as inspiration for creating a unique and interesting name. For recommendations on names, see suggestions starting on page 219.

### Table 2–11: Suggested Starting Outfits

| ROLE | CLOTHING AND ARMOR | WEAPONS | OTHER GEAR |
|---|---|---|---|
| Artisan | Traveling clothes, ceremonial clothes, and ashigaru armor | Wakizashi (short sword) and yumi (bow) with a quiver of arrows | Traveling pack, scroll satchel, calligraphy set or musical instrument, journal |
| Bushi | Traveling clothes, choice of ashigaru armor or lacquered armor | Daishō (katana and wakizashi); choice of yari (spear), yumi (bow) and a quiver of arrows, or naginata (polearm) | Traveling pack |
| Courtier | Traveling clothes, ceremonial clothes | Daishō (katana and wakizashi) and yumi (bow) with a quiver of arrows | Traveling pack, calligraphy set, scroll satchel |
| Monk | Traveling clothes | Daishō (katana and wakizashi) and 1 weapon of rarity 6 or lower | Traveling pack, journel |
| Sage | Traveling clothes, choice of sanctified robes or concealed armor | Wakizashi (short sword) and 1 weapon of rarity 5 or lower | Traveling pack, scroll satchel, calligraphy set, various vials and components |
| Shinobi | Traveling clothes, concealed armor, and mundane clothes | Daishō (katana and wakizashi) and 1 weapon of rarity 7 or lower | Traveling pack, two knives, makeup kit, one vial of poison |
| Shugenja | Traveling clothes and sanctified robes | Wakizashi (short sword); choice of yumi (bow) with a quiver of arrows or a bō (staff) | Traveling pack, scroll satchel, calligraphy set, knife, gifts for the kami |

CHAPTER

# 3

# New Player Options

"I heard you've been picking poppy for your own private stash, is that right?" growled the rōnin as he held his blade to the peasant's throat.

"N–no, samurai-sama, none of us would think of doing such thing!" the peasant coughed out.

Rokuro spat on the ground and grinned, "If that's the case, I think I'll make an example of you just to make sure no one considers it..."

# New Techniques

Few rōnin study, or continue to study, in formal schools, but the techniques they learn are no less valuable than the secretive wisdom of the Great Clan samurai. Whether rōnin are taught by a mountain hermit, a veteran campaigner, or the hard teacher of their own mistakes and experiences, they are likely to know a few tricks that help them match swords and wits with any foe.

# New Kata

The kata in this section cover the rough-and-ready battle techniques of rōnin, the practiced drills of ashigaru, the unique styles of foreign warriors, and more.

## GENERAL KATA

The following kata are not limited to a specific weapon or combat style, and they have close equivalents within most martial arts traditions.

### Chaotic Scattering — Rank 2

*Chaos on the battlefield is generally to the advantage of the underdog. Whether the fight is a sake house brawl or a formal duel, a crafty warrior knows the right time to knock over a table full of drinks, kick up dirt to create confusion, or position their katana in such a way as to blind their opponent.*

**Activation:** As a Movement and Scheme action using a readied improvised weapon, you may make a **TN 2 Survival (Air) check** targeting one position at range 1–2.

**Effects:** You throw the improvised weapon to the chosen position.

If you succeed, choose one of the following terrain qualities: Dangerous, Entangling, or Obscuring. The weapon lands at the target position. All terrain within 1 range band of the targeted position gains that terrain quality. This effect persists for one round, plus one additional round for every two bonus successes.

If you fail, the weapon lands at the target position.

#### *New Opportunities*

**✲ ✲:** Choose one additional terrain quality (Dangerous, Entangling, or Obscuring) to apply to the terrain.

### Iron Shell Style — Rank 3

*To defend against a single, predictable blow, a warrior can dig in, rooting themself and dispersing the force as it comes. Such a complete defense is exhausting to maintain, but it can keep a fighter on their feet when they otherwise would surely have fallen.*

**Activation:** When you perform a Guard action, if you have not moved any range bands this turn, you may spend ✲ in the following way:

**Earth or Void ✲ ✲+:** Choose one character you can perceive per ✲ ✲ spent this way. The next time you defend against physical damage from that character, your fatigue cannot be increased to a value greater than your endurance. This effect persists until the end of your next turn.

### Mind's Edge — Rank 1

*The warrior focuses not on their foe's hands, nor their feet, nor their eyes, nor their sword. Rather, they watch all and none of these things, perceiving their opponent's energy and intentions throughout their entire body.*

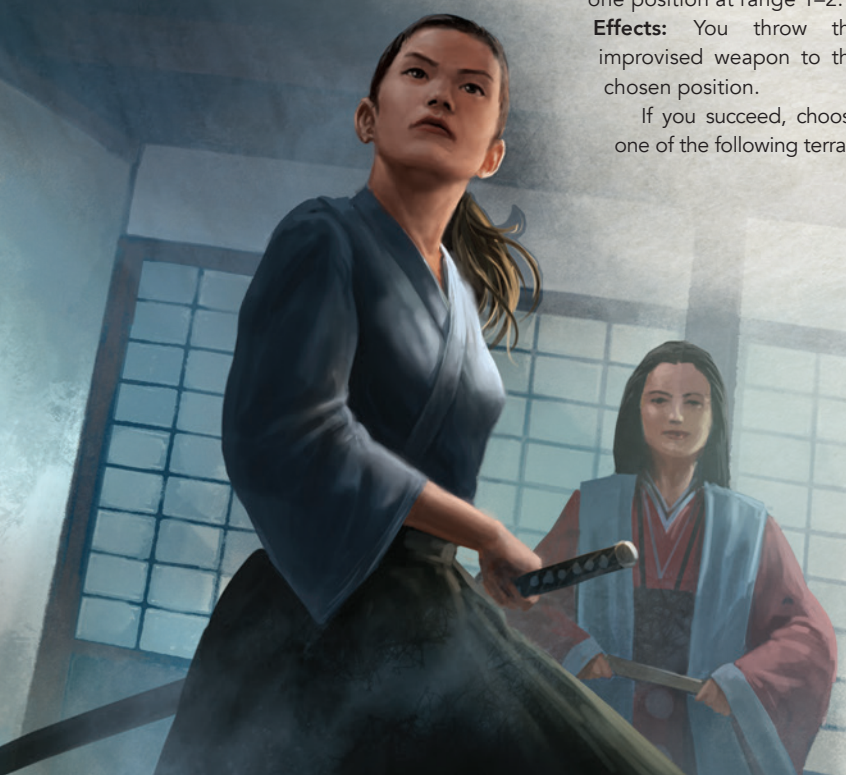
**Activation:** Once per scene, after you perform an action that does not require a check while in a Void stance, you may make a **TN 1 Meditation (Void) check.**

**Effects:** If you succeed, the next time you would receive strife, reduce the amount you receive by 3, plus 1 per two bonus successes. This effect persists until the start of your next turn.

#### *New Opportunities*

**Void ✲:** This effect applies each time you would receive strife before the start of your next turn instead.

**Void ✲ ✲:** You may use this technique one additional time this scene.



### Rider's Haste — Rank 2

*Most samurai are trained in riding, as horses are a symbol of their status and make travel far easier than it would be on foot. Riding across a battlefield is a far more challenging task, however, and fully using the advantages a mount provides can take intense training for both steed and rider.*

**Activation:** As a Movement and Support action, if you are riding a mount, you may spur it to move more quickly.

**Effects:** Your mount receives an amount of fatigue up to your ranks in Survival, then carries you that many range bands plus one, to a maximum of 6.

### Thunderous Hooves Style — Rank 4

*The Ujik whom the Ki-Rin Clan first encountered as they traveled west were terrifying enemies not only because of their skill with the bow, but also because of the experience with which they handled their steeds, easily breaking infantry formations unprepared to face such heavy cavalry. Over the centuries, the Unicorn Clan has both adopted the Ujik's riding methods and extensively studied many of their cavalry tactics to bring an entirely new art of battle to Rokugan.*

**Activation:** When you make a Fitness check as part of a Movement action while mounted, you may spend ✿ in the following way:

**✿+:** One character at range 0 of your ending position per ✿ spent this way suffers fatigue and strife equal to your mount's silhouette unless they choose to immediately move 1 range band away from you.

**✿ ✿ ✿:** Your mount may perform a Strike action with your assistance, targeting one character at range 0 (see **Assistance**, on page 26 of the core rulebook).

### Void Embrace Style — Rank 5

*It is said that some martial artists of surpassing skill can give themselves over wholly to the Void for an instant, foreseeing the exact arc of an attack and completely negating it with little more than a gentle brush of the hand. Tales abound of masters who matched steel with only a flimsy reed or caught an opponent's sword mid-swing, but few warriors can say they have personally seen such mastery on display.*

**Activation:** When you make a **Meditation (Void) check** during a duel or skirmish, you may spend ✿ in the following way:

**✿ ✿:** Choose one character you can perceive, then secretly select a number. The next time you are dealt damage by that character or suffer a critical strike inflicted by that character, reveal the number you chose. If the number is higher than the damage or the severity of the critical strike (before any reductions), you suffer it as normal and this effect ends. If the number is lower than or equal to the damage or the severity of the critical strike, reduce it by that amount, to a minimum of 0. If you reduce it to 0, the character you chose suffers 5 strife. If you reduce the severity of a critical strike to 0 this way, you do not suffer it. This effect persists until the end of your next turn.

## CLOSE COMBAT KATA

The following kata are performed with weapons using the Martial Arts [Melee] or Martial Arts [Unarmed] skill.

### Improvised Assault — Rank 3

*The character adapts something in their environment for use as an improvised weapon that suits their own fighting style. This might mean blocking hits with a chair like a shield, swinging a heavy branch like a club, or even wielding an umbrella with a swordmaster's skill. Such improvised weapons rarely survive combat, but even if a broken sake bottle won't hold an edge for long, a single good stab can often end a fight.*

**Activation:** As a Movement and Support action, you may make a **TN 2 Tactics (Water)** or **Smithing (Water) check** using a readied improvised weapon.

**Effects:** If you succeed, you may choose a Martial Arts [Melee] weapon profile for a weapon similar in shape to the improvised weapon (the GM has discretion over whether the substitution is appropriate). Treat the improvised weapon as having that profile, with its damage and deadliness reduced by 1. This effect persists until the end of the scene, at which point the improvised weapon gains the Destroyed quality.

#### *New Opportunities*

**Water ✿ ✿:** You may immediately perform a Strike action using the readied weapon.

**Water ✿ ✿ ✿:** If you succeed, choose one of the following item qualities: Cumbersome, Razor-Edged, or Snaring. The weapon is treated as having that quality.

### Boar's Wrath Style — Rank 3

*Tales have been told of samurai found dead, their weapons shattered, their hands and feet bloody and battered, amid mountains of their broken foes—a testament to the samurai's final wrath. And such tales likely have a grain of truth, as any skilled brawler can attest to the danger posed by a fighter who is wounded and desperate. Lashing out with a fury born of instinct and training, the warrior responds to harm in kind, smashing enemies with hands, feet, and improvised weapons.*

**Activation:** When you make a check to resist a critical strike during a skirmish, if you are Enraged and not Incapacitated, you may spend ✿ in the following way:
**Fire or Void ✿+**: Choose one of your unarmed profiles or a readied improvised weapon. Each other character at range 0–1 with vigilance lower than or equal to ✿ spent this way suffers physical damage equal to the base damage of your unarmed profile plus 1 for each ✿ spent in excess of their vigilance.

## Bonebreaker Style — Rank 5

*As heavy weapons are exhausting to wield, each blow must count. A sufficiently skilled fighter who uses such a weapon knows exactly where to strike to shatter a femur or snap an arm and end the fight.*
**Activation:** When you make an Attack action check with a Cumbersome weapon, you may spend ✿ in the following way:
**✿ ✿:** If your target would suffer a critical strike as a result of this check, instead of making a check to resist, they suffer the severity 5–6: Debilitating Gash result (see **Table 6–6: Results of Critical Strikes by Severity**, on page 270 of the core rulebook).

## Daring Swing — Rank 3

*Stories tell of pirates swinging from* kusari-gama *stuck into the mast or masters of the spear launching themselves across gaps with* ji. *Few have seen such feats performed, though many Mantis sailors will gladly tell you of the time they swung from the rigging to tackle a shark hungry for their captain's blood!*
**Activation:** As an Attack and Movement action using a readied Snaring weapon, you may make a **TN 3 Martial Arts [Melee] (Water) check** targeting one position within range of your weapon that you could not normally reach. The GM is the final arbiter of whether it is reasonable that you could swing to this position.
**Effects:** If you succeed, you snag your weapon on that position (or another nearby feature of the terrain, such as a beam or tree branch) and then swing to the position.

### *New Opportunities*

**Water ✿+:** Choose a character at range 0 of your final position with vigilance lower than or equal to the ✿ you spent this way. That character suffers physical damage equal to the number of range bands you traveled this round plus your bonus successes.

## Deflective Defense — Rank 3

Large-enough weapons can, in a pinch, serve as shields against missile attacks. If a warrior plants their weapon in the ground and takes cover behind it with a narrow profile, even a *bisentō* makes the likelihood of a lethal hit with an arrow or dart far lower.
**Activation:** As a Movement and Support action using a readied Cumbersome weapon, you may make a **TN 2 Martial Arts [Melee] (Earth) check**.
**Effects:** If you succeed, treat your physical resistance against attacks made by characters at range 2–6 as increased by your ranks in Fitness.

### *New Opportunities*

**Earth ✿ ✿:** After you defend against physical damage from an attack made by a character at range 2–6, that character suffers 2 strife.

## Flashing Steel Strike — Rank 2

*It is always risky to throw a strike with no intention of connecting, as any attack expends valuable time, energy, and focus from one's true cause: to defeat the enemy. However, a well-placed feint can drive the enemy back, putting them in a poor position for the next move. Especially against opponents whose resolve is weak, a threatening display can be an extremely valuable tool, setting up the blow that will end the battle or driving them off entirely.*
**Activation:** As an Attack and Scheme action using a readied weapon, you may make a **Martial Arts [Melee] (Air** or **Fire) check** targeting one character in your weapon's range. The TN of this check is equal to your target's vigilance.
**Effects:** If you succeed, your target must choose one of the following:

- Receive strife equal to your ranks in Performance and the Dazed condition.
- Suffer a critical strike with severity equal to your weapon's deadliness.

### *New Opportunities*

**✿ ✿+:** If your weapon is Cumbersome, choose one additional target with vigilance lower than or equal to your original target's vigilance per ✿ ✿ spent this way.

## Iaijutsu Cut: Reverse Draw — Rank 4

*Offhand draw cuts are a particularly unexpected move, especially among reputable duelists. Taking up a reverse grip with the blade down using the off hand, the warrior makes a quick upward draw, cutting for their foe's face or torso. While this draw leaves the user vulnerable, such an unorthodox draw can often end the fight before it begins.*

**Activation:** As an Attack, Movement, and Scheme action using a sheathed Razor-Edged weapon, you may make a **Martial Arts [Melee] check** targeting one character at range 1. The TN of this check is equal to your target's vigilance.

**Effects:** You draw and ready the sheathed weapon in a one-handed grip. You suffer the Disoriented condition.

If you succeed, your target suffers physical damage equal to your weapon's deadliness plus 1 for every two bonus successes.

### New Opportunities

**:: :::** If this damage causes your target to become Incapacitated, they suffer a critical strike with severity equal to the weapon's deadliness plus your bonus successes.

## Iaijutsu Cut: Sword and Sheath — Rank 2

*Bashing your enemy with a sheathed blade is hardly a refined move, but it can give a fighter the space needed to free their blade. By striking, then pulling off the sheath in a single movement, the fighter also gives themself a second weapon: the sheath. Some rōnin carry iron-shod sheaths for this very purpose.*

**Activation:** As an Attack and Movement action using a sheathed Razor-Edged weapon, you may make a **TN 2 Martial Arts [Melee] check** targeting one character at range 0–1.

**Effects:** If you succeed, your target suffers 5 physical damage with deadliness 2, plus additional damage equal to your bonus successes.

You draw and ready the sheathed weapon in a one-handed grip in one hand and its sheath (see page 112) in a one-handed grip in the other hand.

### New Opportunities

**::::** If you succeed, your target suffers the Dazed condition.

## Landslide Strike — Rank 2

*Lashing out at the foe's legs, the warrior forces their enemy to either abandon their stance or be knocked from their feet. This tactic is especially effective on uneven ground, as the enemy must watch their footing or risk even further injury.*

**Activation:** As an Attack and Scheme action, you may make a **Martial Arts [Melee] (Earth** or **Water) check** targeting one character in your weapon's range. The TN is equal to the target's vigilance. If your target is in Dangerous, Entangling, or Obscuring terrain, the TN is 1 instead.

**Effects:** If you succeed, your target must choose one of the following:

- Receive fatigue equal to your ranks in Fitness and the Prone condition.
- Switch to a different stance of their choice and suffer the Immobilized condition.

### New Opportunities

**:: ::+:** If your weapon has the Cumbersome quality, choose one additional target with vigilance lower than or equal to your original target's vigilance per :: :: spent this way.

## Laughing Fox Style — Rank 4

*The moment after a strike has been launched but before it lands is one of great vulnerability for the attacker—and, if a martial artist is sufficiently skilled, a threat to other foes nearby. By carefully deflecting an attack or grabbing a nearby foe and pulling them into the path of the blow, a cunning fighter can send two foes toppling with a single move.*

**Activation:** When you are targeted by an Attack action, if you have an empty hand, you may spend 1 Void point to immediately make a **Martial Arts [Unarmed] (Air) check** targeting another character at range 0–1 other than the attacker. The TN is equal to the new target's vigilance.

**Effects:** If you succeed, you cease being the target of the Attack action, and your target becomes the target of that action instead.

### New Opportunities

**::** If you succeed, move 1 range band away from the attacker.

**:: ::** If you succeed, the new target also suffers physical damage equal to your ranks in Skulduggery.

**:: ::** If you succeed, both the attacker and the new target suffer the Prone condition.

### Piercing Bolt Style — Rank 3

*Long-hafted weapons have the advantage of reach, but this does not mean that mobility cannot play a key role in fighting styles built around a spear or ax. A slash or jab that might only cause a light wound from a standing position becomes far deadlier with the weight of a charge or throw behind it.*

**Activation:** When you make an Attack action check using an ax or polearm, you may spend ✿ in the following way:

**✿:** Treat the deadliness of your weapon as increased by the number of range bands you have traveled this round, and if you threw it, add the number of range bands it has traveled this round.

### Reckless Lunge — Rank 2

*A diving tackle or flying kick is never an especially safe way to get around a battlefield full of sharp objects and the angry people holding them, but sometimes closing the gap with a dangerous foe is worth the risk of a leaving oneself prone and open to counterattack.*

**Activation:** As an Attack and Movement action using your unarmed punch or kick profile, you may make a **TN 3 Martial Arts [Unarmed] (Fire) check** to launch yourself at a target at range 2–3.

**Effects:** You move to range 0 of your target and suffer the Prone condition. Reduce the TN of your target's next Attack action check targeting you by 1.

If you succeed, your target suffers damage equal to the base damage of your unarmed punch or kick profile plus your ranks in Fitness and must make a **TN 3 Fitness check (Water 2, Air 5)** or suffer the Prone condition.

#### *New Opportunities*

**✿:** If you succeed, your target receives strife equal to your bonus successes.

**✿ ✿:** You do not suffer the Prone condition.

### Rushing Ox Style — Rank 3

*With a roar of determination, the warrior plows forward, heedless of obstacles and foes, to strike a particular enemy.*

**Activation:** When you perform a Maneuver action during your turn, you may spend ✿ in the following way:

**Fire or Water ✿ ✿:** After you move, you may perform a Strike action using a readied Martial Arts [Melee] weapon or Martial Arts [Unarmed] profile targeting one character. The target must be in range of the readied weapon or unarmed profile, and the TN for the Strike action is equal to your target's vigilance. You can only target a character you moved toward this way.

### Snapping Branch Strike — Rank 1

*The warrior whirls the haft of their weapon, jabbing at a foe with the butt or blunt end. By wielding a polearm or club in this manner, a character can essentially use it as a staff, letting them strike enemies inside its normal threat range.*

**Activation:** As an Attack and Support action using a readied blunt weapon or polearm, you may make a **TN 3 Fitness (Earth) check** targeting one character at range 0–1.

**Effects:** If you succeed, your target suffers physical damage equal to 5 plus your bonus successes with deadliness 2.

#### *New Opportunities*

**✿ ✿+:** Your target must resist with a **TN 4 Fitness check (Air 2, Water 5)** or be pushed 1 range band away from you per ✿ ✿ spent this way.

### Swirling Tempest Style — Rank 5

*A spear or club's reach not only allows it to threaten foes at a distance, but also gives its wielder the ability to engage more foes, threatening numerous enemies simultaneously with a furious crash of blows.*

**Activation:** When you make a Martial Arts [Melee] check with a blunt weapon or polearm, you may spend ✿ in the following way:

**✿+:** Choose one character in range of your weapon other than your target with vigilance lower than or equal to ✿ spent this way. That character suffers physical damage equal to your weapon's base damage. You may activate this ✿ multiple times, choosing a different character each time.

### Thunderous Blows Style — Rank 2

*One advantage of a blunt weapon is that it can be wielded with reckless abandon compared to an edged weapon. A warrior with a blunt weapon does not need to waste energy targeting weak points in the enemy's armor and can simply batter them down with sheer, overwhelming force.*

**Activation:** When you make an Attack action check with a blunt weapon, you may spend ✿ in the following way:

**Fire ✿ ✿+:** One character at range 0–1 of your target per ✿ ✿ spent this way receives 1 fatigue, or 3 fatigue if they are suffering the Dazed condition.

### Twin Streams Style — Rank 3

*Wielding two blades as a single instrument of violence, the fighter stabs into their foe with both points or drives home two simultaneous slashes. By presenting two threats simultaneously, the warrior makes it much harder to guard against either.*

**Activation:** When you perform an Attack action check using a sword or ax, if you have another readied weapon of the same category, you may spend ✿ in the following way:

✿ ✿**:** If your target suffers a critical strike as a result of this check, increase its severity by the deadliness of your other readied weapon.

### Wheeling Sweep — Rank 3

*Grappling and throwing are important parts of the repertoire of most combatants, as few strikes do more harm than an enemy's own momentum directed toward the ground. Kicking an enemy's leg out from beneath them or seizing a striking arm can quickly lay even a tough foe low.*

**Activation:** As an Attack and Movement action targeting a character with silhouette 2 or lower using your unarmed punch profile, you may make a **Martial Arts [Unarmed] (Water) check** targeting one character at range 0. The TN of this check is equal to your target's vigilance.

**Effects:** If you succeed, you hurl your target 1 range band in the direction of your choice, plus 1 range band for every two bonus successes. Your target suffers the effects of falling the distance they were moved (see page 269 of the core rulebook).

#### *New Opportunities*

✿**:** Choose one character within a number of range bands equal to the distance you threw the target. Instead of hurling your original target into the ground, you hurl the target at that character, who must resist with a **TN 4 Fitness check (Earth 3, Fire 6)** or suffer the same amount of damage the original target suffers from falling and the Prone condition.

✿**+:** Reduce the physical damage your target suffers from falling this way by 2 per ✿ spent this way.

## RANGED COMBAT KATA

The following kata are performed with weapons that use the Martial Arts [Ranged] skill.

### Eyeless Sight Shot — Rank 4

*To hit a target without seeing it is a masterful feat for any warrior who specializes in projectile weapons. Whether by firing through dense underbrush to hit a deer by the sound of its steps or banking a slingstone off a wall to hit a foe when you feel their heavy footfalls shake the floorboards, there are many ways to use one's other senses to place a shot.*

**Activation:** As an Attack and Movement action using a readied ranged weapon, you may make a **Martial Arts [Ranged] (Void) check** targeting one character within your weapon's range to whom you do not have direct line of sight. The TN of the check is equal to the target's vigilance.

**Effects:** If you succeed, your target suffers physical damage equal to your weapon's base damage and receives strife equal to your bonus successes.

### Falling Heavens Shot — Rank 5

*Arrows, stones, and darts have an arc when fired, traveling not in a straight line to a target but in a curve. The better an archer understands this curve intuitively or intellectually, the better their aim. Rumors and heroic tales recount the exploits of archers with such skill that they can fire bolts straight up, predicting their landing position perfectly and using this to catch foes totally unaware.*

**Activation:** Once per scene as an Attack and Movement action using a readied ranged weapon, you may make a **Martial Arts [Ranged] (Void) check** targeting one character within your weapon's range. The TN of this check is equal to your target's vigilance.

**Effects:** If you succeed, at the start of your target's next turn, they suffer a critical strike with severity equal to your weapon's deadliness.

#### *New Opportunities*

✿**+:** You may delay this effect for one additional round per ✿ spent this way. For each round you delay this way, you increase the deadliness of the critical strike by 2.

### Staggering Shot — Rank 2

*Putting an arrow at a foe's feet can cause them to stumble or trip, and an experienced archer knows how to take full advantage of this, planting bolts to break an*

*enemy's stride or pinning their clothes to slow them down, making any approach extremely treacherous.*

**Activation:** When you perform a Martial Arts [Ranged] check, you may spend ✿ in the following way:

**Earth or Fire ✿✿:** Your target treats all terrain as having the Dangerous quality. This effect persists until the end of your next turn.

**Air or Water ✿✿:** Your target treats all terrain as having the Entangling quality. This effect persists until the end of your next turn.

### Swirling Viper Style — Rank 3

*Firing a bow while moving is extremely difficult, but a master archer can nock and fire an arrow even as they sweep backward to gain distance from their enemy.*

**Activation:** When you perform a Maneuver action during your turn, you may spend ✿ in the following way:

**Air or Water ✿✿:** After you move, you may perform a Strike action using a readied Martial Arts [Ranged] weapon targeting one character in range, treating the TN as equal to your target's vigilance. You can only target a character you moved away from this way.

### Wasp's Spite Style — Rank 4

*Unlike most bees, a wasp can sting multiple times before expiring, letting it threaten numerous foes. So too can a skilled archer menace one target while secretly aiming at another, forcing all enemies in their sight to wonder: "Is it me they are aiming at?"*

**Activation:** When you perform a **Martial Arts [Ranged] check**, you may spend ✿ in the following way:

**Air or Void ✿✿:** If you did not succeed, choose another target at range 0–2 of your target with vigilance lower than or equal to your target's. The new target suffers physical damage equal to your weapon's base damage.

## New Shūji

While rōnin, commoners, and gaijin may lack Rokugani courtly refinement or a samurai education, they often make up for this with insightful perspective, worldly wisdom, flexible thinking, or the courtly and educational background of their land of origin.

## EARTH SHŪJI

Earth shūji focus on the practical and grounded, from the wisdom of those who work to the rousing shout of a hardened drill sergeant.

### Bellow of Resolve — Rank 1

*A well-timed word of encouragement or shout of warning can get a fighter back on their feet at a crucial moment, which can mean the difference between life and death on the battlefield.*

**Activation:** Once per scene as a Support action, you may make a **TN 2 Command (Earth) check** targeting one Compromised or Incapacitated character.

**Effects:** If you succeed and your target is Compromised, they remove strife until their strife is equal to their composure minus 1.

If you succeed and your target is Incapacitated, they remove fatigue until their fatigue is equal to their endurance minus 1.

#### *New Opportunities*

**Earth ✿✿:** You may use this technique one additional time this scene.

**Earth ✿✿✿:** This technique instead targets any number of Compromised and Incapacitated characters of your choice in the scene.

### Look Out! — Rank 3

*When the first arrow falls, a word of warning can save dozens of lives.*

**Activation:** When you make a check to resist an effect, you may spend ✿ in the following way:

**Earth ✿+:** One character per ✿ spent this way may immediately switch to a stance of their choice.

### Mentor's Guidance Rank 5

*Among rōnin, those who live long enough to reach old age tend to be considered especially wise. Many consider it their duty to explain the tricks they have used to stay alive to their younger compatriots.*

**Activation:** Once per scene as a Support action, you may make a **TN 4 Command (Earth)** or **TN 4 Performance (Earth) check** targeting one character.

**Effects:** If you succeed, choose one of your kata, ninjutsu, or shūji techniques. Your target may use that technique as if they knew it. This effect persists until the end of the scene.

## AIR SHŪJI

Sometimes, it is said, a deception must begin with one's allies. Of course, most people who frequently mislead their comrades tend to find themselves mysteriously bereft of allies before long.

### Flowering Deceptions Rank 1

*With a few well-chosen words, a skilled leader can create an opening for one person while impeding another. Allowing one opponent to have an edge can cause them to inadvertently trip up one of their allies. Alternatively, exposing one's own ally to adversity can give another a key opportunity to strike unhindered.*

**Activation:** Once per scene, as a Scheme and Support action, you may make a **Courtesy (Air)** or **Tactics (Air) check** targeting two other characters who are not hostile to each other. The TN of the check is equal to the highest vigilance among your targets.

**Effects:** If you succeed, choose one target and increase the TN of their next check by 2. Decrease the TN of the other target's next check by 2. This effect persists until the end of your next turn.

#### *New Opportunities*

**Air ✿:** Neither of your targets realizes your duplicity in hindering one to help the other.

**Air ✿ ✿:** You can use this technique one additional time this scene.

### Pack Gambit Rank 3

*Whether in conversation or in a fight, numbers account for a great deal, but only if they are guided by a single purpose. To make best use of a large force, a character must be able to give direction, helping multiple others make the most of their efforts to both collaborate and exploit enemy weaknesses.*

**Activation:** As a Scheme action, you may make a **TN 3 Social skill (Air) check** targeting one character.

**Effects:** If you succeed, each character who performs an Attack or Scheme action targeting that character counts as having your assistance (see **Assistance**, on page 26 of the core rulebook). This effect persists until the end of your next turn.

#### *New Opportunities*

**Air ✿ ✿:** Choose one of the target's disadvantages you know. Each character who performs an Attack or Scheme action targeting that character may exploit that disadvantage without spending a Void point (see **Exploiting a Target's Disadvantage**, on page 101 of the core rulebook).

### Ruse of the Moon's Reflection Rank 5

*Things are not always as they seem—the moon's light falls upon the water and appears to be within arm's reach, yet none can touch it. To lead is to tell your subordinates not the truth, but what they need to hear to accomplish their objectives. To face an enemy general is not to move your troops against theirs, but to imagine their troops as if they were your own and to maneuver them to the positions required for your victory.*

**Activation:** As a Scheme action, you may make a **Command (Air) check** targeting any number of characters in the scene who are not hostile to each other. The TN is equal to the highest vigilance among your targets. In a mass battle, you must target all commanders (other than yourself, if applicable).

**Effects:** If you succeed on that check during an intrigue, skirmish, or duel, you may exchange the initiative values of any number of the targets.

If you succeed on that check during a mass battle, you may reveal that two leaders of the same army have exchanged cohorts and positions.

## WATER SHŪJI

Water shūji reflect an awareness of one's environment and surrounding dynamics, letting oneself ebb and flow with the circumstances.

### Eyes Up! Rank 1

*Rōnin who spend their life on the battlefield learn to expand their senses before the fight begins, letting them leap from bedroll to battle in an instant or react quickly to unexpected threats.*

**Activation:** Once per game session at the start of a scene, or as a Support action, you may make a **TN 2 Scholar skill (Water) check** targeting one character.

**Effects:** If you succeed, that character treats their focus as 2 lower (to a minimum of 1) and their vigilance as 2 higher. This effect persists until the end of the scene.

*New Opportunities*

**Water ✲+:** Choose one additional target per ✲ spent this way.
**Water ✲:** This effect persists until the end of the next scene instead.

### Fluent Bargaining — Rank 2

*"And, of course, our fee will need to cover various expenses…"*
**Activation:** When you make a **Commerce (Water) check** to negotiate payment for a job, you may spend ✲ in the following way:
**Water ✲+:** If you succeed, you also convince the client to pay 10% of the fee up front per ✲ spent this way.

### Malleable Formation — Rank 3

*Picking the right person for the job is a key skill for any leader, whether they are an experienced carpenter building a house or a great general commanding an army. So too is knowing when to change tactics—or opponents—even in the midst of a conflict.*
**Activation:** Once per scene as a Movement and Support action, you may make a **TN 2 Command (Water) check** targeting two willing characters at range 0–2 of you who could reasonably reach one another's positions.
**Effects:** If you succeed, your targets immediately move the range bands to switch places. If they do, each target may select a new stance.

*New Opportunities*

**Water ✲ ✲:** You can use this technique one additional time this scene.

### Watch My Back — Rank 5

*Putting your full faith in someone else is the greatest risk a warrior can take. By fighting together without reservation, two can accomplish the deeds that a dozen could not undertake if each operates individually.*
**Activation:** Once per scene as a Movement and Support action, if you are in a Water stance, you may call for a character at range 0–2 to cover you while you rush to complete an important task.
**Effects:** The character you chose may immediately perform a Guard action (see page 265 of the core rulebook) targeting you, ignoring range restrictions.

If they succeed, you may move up to 2 range bands. Reduce the TN of the next action check you perform this turn by 1.

## FIRE SHŪJI

Fire shūji are fundamentally meant to incite—to stir the swell of emotions in others, drawing those others forth to reach their potential, their greatness, or in some cases, their doom.

### Illuminate the Way — Rank 1

*Fire pushes back the darkness, but it is knowledge that truly lights up the world. On the fringes of society, one encounters those whose wisdom is gained through firsthand experience.*
**Activation:** Once per session at the start of a scene, or as a Support action, you may make a **TN 2 Scholar skill (Fire) check** targeting one character.
**Effects:** If you succeed, that character treats their vigilance as 2 lower (to a minimum of 1) and their focus as 2 higher. This effect persists until the end of the scene.

*New Opportunities*

**Fire ✲+:** Choose one additional target per ✲ spent this way.
**Fire ✲:** This effect persists until the end of the next scene instead.

### Goading Taunt — Rank 3

*Ikoma Bards are known for their scathing insults—but for foulness of tongue and raising ire, even these masters of provocation are put to shame by some rōnin.*
**Activation:** Once per scene as a Scheme action, you may make a **Performance (Fire)** or **Tactics (Fire) check** targeting one character. The TN of the check is equal to your target's vigilance.
**Effects:** If you succeed during an intrigue encounter or a duel, your target receives strife equal to their honor rank unless they forfeit that much honor.

If you succeed on the check during a skirmish, that character must immediately move 2 range bands toward you unless they choose to receive 3 strife, plus 1 additional strife for every 2 bonus successes.

If you succeed on the check during a mass battle, that character must target your cohort with an Assault or Challenge action next turn, unless they choose to receive 3 strife, plus 1 additional strife for every 2 bonus successes.

If you succeed or fail, reduce the TN of your target's next check by 1.

*New Opportunities*

**Fire ✲ ✲:** You may use this technique one additional time this scene.

### Roar of Encouragement — Rank 5

*A shout of triumph or desperation can pierce the fog of exhaustion, drawing a warrior back to the now and focusing their energies. A skilled commander knows exactly when to raise their voice and drive their forces on to the final push, eliminating a key foe or turning the tide of the battle with renewed vigor.*

**Activation:** Once per scene as a Support action, you may make a **TN 3 Command (Fire) check** targeting a friendly character.

**Effects:** If you succeed during a skirmish, your target may immediately perform a Strike action with your assistance (see **Assistance**, on page 26 of the core rulebook).

If you succeed on the check during a mass battle, your target's cohort may immediately perform an Assault action (see page 278 of the core rulebook) with your assistance on the check.

#### *New Opportunities*

**Fire ✿ ✿+:** Choose one additional target to immediately perform a Strike (or Assault) action per ✿ ✿ spent this way.

## VOID SHŪJI

Void shūji represent the culmination of purpose: the instant of realizing the truth of a matter and knowing how to pursue it or inspiring that surety in others.

### Wanderer's Resolve — Rank 1

*A samurai with a lord can find resolve in the loyalty they feel, but a samurai with no lord has no easy wellspring from which to draw resolve. This hardship and isolation, however, can lead a rōnin to discover a certainty all their own, for if they do not act, no one else will. The lives of their friends—of those who depend on them—rest solely in their hands.*

**Activation:** Once per scene as a Support action, if you are in a Void stance, you may focus on protecting what is important to you.

**Effects:** You remove 3 fatigue and 3 strife, plus 3 fatigue and 3 strife for each Compromised or Incapacitated character in the scene with whom you share a bond (see **Bonds**, on page 187).

### Tonight, I Am Your Opponent — Rank 3

*Normally, interrupting someone else's duel of honor or battlefield clash is an act of substantial dishonor affecting all involved. However, sometimes a dueling warrior will swallow their pride and let someone else step in. By making an impassioned plea to a friend, speaking nobly to an old rival, explaining why it would be improper for the pair to fight, or simply having such conviction that no others can question their honor, a speaker can attempt to cut into a one-on-one fight between two other warriors.*

**Activation:** Once per game session as a Scheme and Support action, you may make a **TN 3 Social skill (Void) check** targeting one character who is currently fighting in a duel or clash.

**Effects:** If you succeed, you immediately replace your target in the duel or clash, staking your own honor and glory as usual. Your target forfeits half the honor and glory they staked upon fighting uninterrupted.

If you share a bond with the character you are replacing or with their adversary (see **Bonds**, on page 187), no character must forfeit honor or glory for your interruption.

### Bond of Heroes — Rank 5

*Whenever heroes arise—whether they are the Seven Thunders facing Fu Leng or seven humble rōnin defending a backwater village from bandits—it's not just their force of arms that makes them legends. Their bonds, their feelings for one another: these are what drive them to great deeds, and why people tell their tales time and again across the ages.*

**Activation:** Once per game session as a Support action, you may make a **TN 5 Performance (Void) check** targeting each character who shares a bond with you in the scene.

**Effects:** If you succeed, each target removes 5 strife and 5 fatigue, plus 1 for every two bonus successes (see **Bonds**, on page 187).

# New Rituals

Every land has rituals: customs, beliefs, and practices that straddle the bridge between the mundane world and the misty shore of the supernatural. This section contains several rituals practiced in the Ivory Kingdoms and the Qamarist Caliphate, as well as some known to rōnin and other wanderers in Rokugan.

## Balancing Salve — Rank 1 [Qamarist Region]

*Within the known world, al-Zawira in the Qamarist Caliphate is said to have reached the greatest height of the medical arts and sciences. Researchers there tirelessly experiment and meticulously record their results, seeking to understand life, death, the states of matter, and the transitions between them all. Due to the influence of the academies and numerous published texts on medicine and alchemy, many citizens of al-Zawira are learned in the basics.*

*Members of the caliph's Shieldbearers, for instance, learn as part of their training to use an admixture of herbs alongside targeted pressure to stabilize a wounded patient, keeping them alive until a skilled physician can arrive on the scene. The user must know how to apply the cure to the specific ailment, whether it be using hyssop oil to prevent disease from catching or balancing elemental influences to drive away hostile spirits with mercury and sulfur.*

**Activation:** Once per scene as a Support action using an alchemy kit (see page 114), you may make a **TN 2 Medicine (Air) check** targeting one character with the Dying or Afflicted condition.

**Effects:** If you succeed, remove the Dying or Afflicted condition from that character. The target suffers the Unconscious condition and cannot be awakened until the end of the scene.

### *New Opportunities*

**✿:** If inspected by someone who does not know this ritual, the target appears to be dead.

**✿ ✿+:** Choose one additional target per ✿ ✿ spent this way.

## Elixir of Recovery — Rank 2 [Qamarist Region]

*While certain herbs and materials can help to keep an injured patient alive, others can dramatically accelerate recovery times, reducing pain, increasing mobility, and driving off inflammation. Some alchemists base these formulations on alignment with the universe, such as by altering their ingredients' ratios based on the phase of the moon or on the elemental balance within the patient's body.*

**Activation:** As a downtime activity using an alchemy kit (see page 114), you may make a **TN 3 Medicine (Water) check** targeting one character.

**Effects:** If you succeed, your target removes twice as much fatigue when they rest and reduces the TN of their checks to remove conditions by 2. This effect persists until the end of the game session.

### *New Opportunities*

**✿ ✿+:** Choose one additional target per ✿ ✿ spent this way.

## Fortitude Draught — Rank 3 [Qamarist Region]

*The alchemists and physicians of the Qamarist Caliphate are interested not only in treatment, but also in proactive uses of their arts to promote health, vitality, and sanitation. While the more experimental efforts of some researchers seek to awaken the spark of vitality in the base elements of life, more common efforts use herbs and other ingredients to invigorate already living flesh. Alchemical knowledge to strengthen the body against attacks both spiritual and physical is a prized achievement of al-Zawira scholars.*

**Activation:** As a downtime activity using an alchemy kit (see page 114), you may make a **TN 4 Medicine (Earth) check** targeting one character.

**Effects:** If you succeed, your target adds one bonus success to their successful checks to resist critical strikes, plus one for every two bonus successes on the Medicine check. This effect persists until the end of the next scene.

### *New Opportunities*

**✿+:** Choose one additional target per ✿ spent this way.

**✿:** If you succeed, your target also adds the same number of bonus successes to their successful checks to resist supernatural effects (such as the effect of an invocation or mahō technique).

## Restorative Transmutation — Rank 5 [Qamarist Region]

*Surgery is not uncommon in most lands, but when the pinnacle of surgical knowledge is combined with alchemy, it can lead to near-miraculous restorations. Surgeons have even been able to reattach severed limbs, using alchemy to reignite the spark of life in*

*what should be dead flesh. While true resurrection has never been achieved by an alchemist—at least, not by any who have shared such a theologically troubling discovery—substantial progress has been made on healing injuries and treating diseases once thought incurable.*

**Activation:** As a downtime activity using an alchemy kit (see page 114), you may make a **TN 6 Medicine (Void) check** targeting one character who suffered a critical strike of severity 7–8 Permanent Injury or severity 9–11 Maiming Blow in the previous scene. If a limb was detached, you must have that limb to attempt this ritual.

**Effects:** If you succeed, you remove any disadvantage the character received as a result of the critical strike, and they instead gain the Horrible Scar adversity (see page 72).

### *New Opportunities*

**✿ ✿+:** If you succeed, instead of gaining the Horrible Scar adversity, the character gains the Dashing Scar distinction on page 69.

## Cleansing of Coral and Gold — Rank 3 [Ivory Kingdoms Region]

*The Yodha who guard the Ghostlands have spent centuries mastering the art of survival in defiled lands and while hunting those lands' denizens. As such, they train in purification rituals that can cleanse food and water of the affliction of the Ghostlands and can even give those who consume the food and water greater resistance against foul beings.*

**Activation:** As a downtime activity using a small piece of coral and one koku's worth of gold, you may make a **TN 3 Theology (Void) check** targeting a quantity of food and water sufficient for one person for a day. This does not consume the coral or gold.

**Effects:** If you succeed, the food and water are cleansed of the Unholy item quality if they had it, and they are spiritually safe to consume. They remain this way for twenty-four hours.

### *New Opportunities*

**✿+:** If you succeed, you cleanse food and water sufficient for one additional person per ✿ spent this way.

**✿ ✿+:** If you succeed, each character who partakes of this food and water reduces the TN of their next check to resist any effect from an Otherworldly or Tainted being, or from a mahō technique, by 1 per ✿ ✿ spent this way. This effect persists until the end of the game session.

## Wayfarer's Path — Rank 2

*A rōnin's path is never certain, except in its uncertainty. Thus, many rōnin have traditions and rituals that are simple: dropping a leaf and letting the wind carry it, casting dice and reading their direction, or even letting a staff fall and walking the path it indicates. While these methods are not the courtly divinations of Great Clan samurai, many wandering warriors put a great deal of faith in them.*

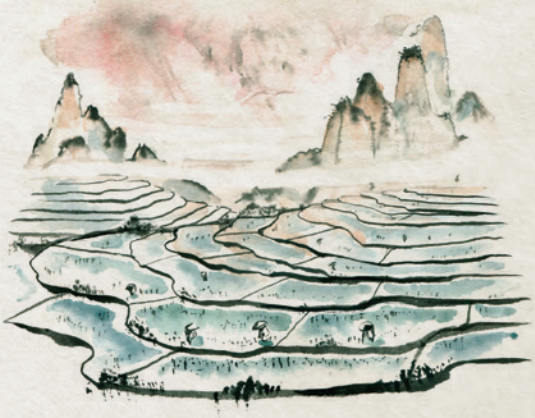
**Activation:** Once per game session as a downtime activity while at a crossroads, in the wilderness, or in another place where your path is unclear, you may make a **TN 3 Meditation check**.

**Effects:** If you succeed, you encounter a sign of one of the following based on the ring you used:

- **Earth:** Direction of someone with whom you share a bond.
- **Water:** Direction of an opportunity to make money.
- **Fire:** Direction of the nearest large-scale conflict.
- **Air:** Direction of a person related to your past or desire.
- **Void:** Direction in which you are needed most.

### *New Opportunities*

**✿ ✿+:** You see a sign revealing the same information for one additional person in the scene per ✿ ✿ spent this way.



**GOLDEN AGE INSPIRATIONS**

During the period sometimes called the Islamic Golden Age (roughly the eighth through thirteenth centuries CE), scientists, artists, and scholars in the Middle East and North Africa made numerous far-reaching advances in philosophy, medicine, science, and art. Many of the most famous scholars of that era studied multiple disciplines, trying to learn about the world through scientific and spiritual pursuits alike. Jābir ibn Hayyān, for instance, was a famous scientist and alchemist whose works have had an enormous impact on both science and occultism, for he researched both with the same level of scrutiny.

In addition to the scientific endeavors of scholars from real-world history, the work of real-world natural philosophers also inspired the techniques of the fictional Qamarist Caliphate's scholars, physicians, and alchemists. While historical figures of the Islamic Golden Age and their fascinating studies of the universe can be good inspiration for stories of alchemy and adventure in the Qamarist Caliphate (or in Rokugan, if one is playing a character from that region), players should keep in mind that the figures' scientific contributions have also been incredibly significant to world history, and should be handled with respect.

# Celestial Implements of the Ivory Kingdoms

Most inhabitants of the Ivory Kingdoms believe that the days of mythic heroes are long past—and it is true that armies of heroes millions strong holding the line against endless hordes of rakshasa occur only in ancient tales. Few who live in the Kingdoms today can profess to have seen a peerless champion take up their bow and blot out the sky with a single volley or shake the cosmos itself with every arrow loosed. Still, the people of the Ivory Kingdoms remain deeply connected to their ancient heroes through religion, story, song, and art. And, occasionally, through the inestimable power of celestial implements.

In the Kingdoms, the wisest of living sages possess the words of the sacred mantras that invoke astras, or celestial implements. A few from each generation of heroes seek out this knowledge, proving themselves worthy of the burden of power and learning to call forth divine tools to aid their cause. These *astradhari*—wielders of astras—are invariably at the forefront of the greatest conflicts, for they possess weapons that can lay waste to armies and tools that can unlock the secrets of the cosmos. Many great heroes and villains alike have held these celestial objects throughout the millennia.

Celestial implements are far from the only form of mystical power in the Ivory Kingdoms, a land with many traditions and places of ancient, supernatural power, from the mysterious river cities of the naga to the ancient Pillars of Purity guarded by the Yodha. Nevertheless, items of divine power, and the mortals who have wielded them, are among its most renowned. Just as a citizen of the Ivory Kingdoms might have heard tales of the shugenja of Rokugan who call to the spirits of the land or the alchemists of the Cradle of the World who unlock the secrets of life eternal, stories of peerless warriors wielding weapons blessed by the gods against other heroes or vile monsters of the Shadowlands are told in many places across the world, including some parts of Rokugan.

## DIVINE SECRETS

To learn to use an astra or other celestial implement, a character must seek out a revered and knowledgable high sage of the Ivory Kingdoms who knows the specific mantra along with the details of its proper use and limitations. Then, perhaps more difficult, the character must prove themself to both the high sage and the deity they are trying to call upon. Most high sages will only train those they deem worthy, and many have rejected students for a variety of reasons—lack of discipline or morality, lack of need, or even improper status. The choice ultimately depends on the high sage's personal judgment.

Generally speaking, this type of mantra invokes the favor of the god to whom the item belongs, at which point the divine blessing infuses an object in the hero's hand. In the days of the mythic kings, the stories say, the greatest heroes were versed in dozens of these

### ASTRAS IN SANSKRIT EPICS

As with many other elements of *Legend of the Five Rings*, astras, astradhari, Yodha, mantras, and naga are inspired by real-world religion and by real-world literature and mythology. In this case, much of the inspiration originates from the Sanskrit epics cycles. In works like the *Ramayana* and *Mahābhārata*, astras appear as the weapons of deities such as Agni, Brahma, and Indra, invoked with a mantra and used by legendary warrior heroes like Rama, Arjuna, and Karna. In many tellings, astras are depicted as missile weapons such as arrows and spears, and each is generally imbued with a unique power that takes effect once it is fired. Many other objects with mystical properties also appear in these epics and have inspired some of the other implements in this section.

As when dealing with any element inspired by real-world traditions and beliefs, GMs and players should give due consideration to their treatment of the topic. Keep in mind that while the content of the roleplaying game is fantasy, it owes its existence to real religion and culture, and these should always be treated with respect. Additionally, it is always a good idea to look to traditional texts and sources of culture, as well as modern adaptations written by members of the culture that inspired an idea, when considering the role it should take in one's game. See page 205 for a list of several sources that were inspirational to this work and can be a good starting point for readers.

mantras and were favored by numerous divine powers. Within the context of the Ivory Kingdoms as they exist today, an individual who has mastered the use of a single divine object is figure of considerable power, and one who has mastered five is a champion whom all but the foolhardiest avoid fighting directly.

### Astradhari Techniques

A character must acquire the astradhari title (see page 187) from a high sage to learn the mantra to invoke a celestial implement. This title grants access to mantra techniques (see beginning on this page).

Note that the Summoning Mantra: [Name of Implement] technique exists independently for each celestial implement. Each must be purchased independently to gain access to a specific implement (i.e., Summoning Mantra: Banhi's Thunderous Astra only ever grants access to that specific weapon, and it must be learned separately from Summoning Mantra: River Stone of Flowing Water, which calls forth a different distinct item). A character may learn a number of specific summoning mantras equal to their school rank (provided they have access to a sage who knows those mantras—and is willing to teach them).

#### Summoning Mantra: [Implement Name] — Rank 1

**Activation:** As a Support action, you may make a **TN 3 Theology check** to call forth one celestial implement. The ring of the check is determined by the divinity whose implement you are summoning.

**Effects:** If you succeed, you *summon* and *augment* one readied item that becomes the celestial implement. Then, you must stake honor equal to two times your honor rank on upholding the implement's restriction while you have the implement (see page 99). The implement persists until the end of the scene or until it is **dispelled**, at which point the blessing ends. If you break the implement's restriction during this time, you lose your staked honor and the implement is *dispelled*.

You cannot summon this implement again this scene.

#### Countering Mantra — Rank 4

**Activation:** When a character you can perceive makes a check to use a celestial implement, if you have a readied celestial implement of your own, you may immediately make a **TN 5 Theology check** targeting that character to attempt to counter their implement's effects. If your celestial implement's element matches the **counter element** of the target's implement, the TN is 2 instead.

**Effects:** If you succeed, your target's implement is *dispelled*. Your target counts as having failed the check to use it, with a shortfall equal to your ranks in Theology, and they do not apply any of its boons to the check.

## Using Celestial Implements

Always the finest examples of their type, astras and other celestial implements are weapons and objects that exceed the limits of human craftsmanship. However, what makes them special are the uniqur, divine qualities they possess. The Spear of the Thunder God is as inevitable as it is deadly and the Arrow of the Naga transforms into venomous snakes upon impact. Each behaves in a unique way, and most are capable of turning the tide of a battle and preventing—or causing—a cataclysm.

### Restrictions on Implements

Celestial implements are bound not by mundane restrictions but rather by will of their owners: the gods. Even after a character summons one, it might bear a restriction or limit imposed by its divine owner. Further, a wielder with the proper knowledge can use one celestial implement's powers to counter another's, putting the wielder at an enormous advantage.

The ability to use a celestial implement can elevate its wielder to prominence. Anyone capable of such a feat can quickly win glory on the battlefield or renown in scholarly circles. However, power and prestige always breed envy, and divine favor all the more so. As astradhari are very rare, there are no orders or social institutions built to protect them, and each must choose their own path in the world. One who wields a divine relic has the power to save a kingdom—or topple it—and both can weigh heavily upon the conscience. To use a celestial implement unjustly is not only devastating, but also contrary to the very order of the universe. Sometimes, which choice is just is not clear to a mortal mind, and power becomes a burden as heavy as the universe itself.

Wise astradhari do their best to avoid overexposing their abilities. An enemy who does not know which mantras a warrior has mastered cannot be prepared to exploit the limitations of the warrior's celestial implements or counter their effects. If an astradhari becomes too famous for relying on a single weapon in their arsenal, their enemies will surely be quick to use that knowledge to overcome the astradhari in battle.

**OTHER DEITIES' IMPLEMENTS**

There are many deities of the Ivory Kingdoms, and the GM should not feel limited to the list presented in this book. From a mechanical standpoint, to define a new blessing source for a celestial implement, the GM need simply determine an appropriate element, counter element, and restriction based on the theme of the deity or mystical being who owns the item.

# Profile of a Celestial Implement

Celestial implements are many in number and vary widely, from arrows that bring sleep to blades that move of their own accord. Some ancient tales even tell of enormous flying ships that blazed across the skies on vast wings. This section offers GMs the building blocks with which to construct a wide variety of celestial implements, depending on the needs of their campaign. Though every implement is unique, from a mechanical standpoint, each one possesses three core features:

- **Blessing Source:** The deity to whom it belongs, which determines its element, counter element, and restrictions.
- **Form:** The physical form it takes when summoned, which determines its base item profile.
- **Boons:** One or more mystical qualities that take effect when it is used. Multiple boons can take effect on the same check if they apply to the same type of check.

## BLESSING SOURCE

The gods of the Ivory Kingdoms are many—some believe these countless varied and unique entities reflect the same ultimate being whereas others do not believe in many gods or forms of god; rather, they hold that a single divine spirit beyond any form or definition pervades all creation.

Different groups within the Ivory Kingdoms tend to direct their veneration toward a particular god or set of gods, and astradhari tend to wield weapons granted by the gods with whom they align themselves—but not always! Sometimes, a kindness paid to a poor traveler is repaid with a divine boon. While most astradhari gain their knowledge from high sages who study theology, stories also tell of gods directly bestowing their gifts upon mortals who act selflessly or heroically. Given the wide span of the Ivory Kingdoms and the secrecy surrounding most celestial implements, who can truly say where each one came from?

Some other supernatural beings, such as naga, can grant access to their own celestial implements. It is whispered that even rakshasa can provide access to dread versions of celestial implements, but if any sages have learned the mantras to conjure their horrifying powers, these secrets have receded into the shadows.

Several of the most powerful divine and supernatural beings of the Ivory Kingdoms are detailed below, together with information on how their celestial implements function.

### Aarav, Bringer of Peace

*Aarav, also known as the Bringer of Peace and the Fount of Wisdom, is revered by scholars as the desired state of being; one of perfect serenity and true insight into the world.*

**Element (choose one upon selection):** Earth or Water
**Counter Element:** Air
**Restriction:** Do not lash out with words or weapons until you have been targeted in kind.

### Ayaan, Follower of Destiny

*Ayaan is a lesser deity in the Ivory Kingdoms' celestial hierarchy, though he is renowned for his importance in the day to day lives of the common people. Ayaan delivers creatures their destiny when the greater deities deem it so, though Ayaan is known to show compassion for those who are good-hearted.*

**Element (choose one upon selection):** Water or Fire
**Counter Element:** Earth
**Restriction:** Show deference to those of higher status and compassion to those of lower status.

### Banhi, Purifier of the Soil

*Banhi is a force of righteousness and justice that many martial individuals revere for her tenacity and conviction. The Yodha of the Ghostlands hold this deity in high esteem for her hatred of that which dwells in that foul realm.*

**Element (choose one upon selection):** Fire or Air
**Counter Element:** Water
**Restriction:** Do not let any Tainted foe escape destruction at your hands.

### Chandi, the Balanced

*In the cosmos there must be balance of all things, the sun and moon, the earth and water, the cruel and the kind. Chandi is a force of fairness that both warriors and scholars seek to emulate in their dealings with others.*

**Element (choose one upon selection):** Air or Earth
**Counter Element:** Fire
**Restriction:** Do not strike down any foe with a school rank or conflict rank lower than your school rank.

### Sahil, Guardian of Transition

*Sahil aids in places of great transition, both in people's lives and in the landscape. Known for his love of sea*

*shores, Sahil is often called upon in moments of great grief and hardship, or moments of extreme joy.*
**Element:** Void
**Counter Element:** Void
**Restriction:** Do not strike an unaware, Incapacitated, or Unconscious foe, or undermine someone's interests behind their back.

### Naga

*The secretive, serpentine naga are known for both venom and healing, and their counsel is valued by the wise.*
**Element:** Water
**Counter Element:** Fire
**Restriction:** Pay due respect to naga and all their serpentine kin, and do not harm any snake.

## FORM

A celestial implement has the same profile and provides the same benefits as its mundane equivalent, with the modifications listed for its form in this section. Additionally, it gains the Ceremonial, Resplendent, and Sacred qualities (losing Mundane and Subtle, if the item had those qualities).

The GM should select one of the following forms for each celestial implement.

### Projectile

An arrow, crossbow bolt, or slingstone that modifies the profile of the weapon with which it is used is adjusted as follows: (Damage +4, Deadliness +4, Razor-Edged).

Or a javelin with the following profile when thrown: (Range 2–4, Damage 4, Deadliness 6, Razor-Edged).

### Melee Weapon

A melee weapon, with its standard profile, is granted the following benefits, though GMs may change the modifications based on the chosen weapon: (Damage +3, Deadliness +2, Razor-Edged or Wargear).

### Armor

A set of armor, with its standard profile, is granted the following benefits: (Physical resistance +2, supernatural resistance +2).

### Utility Object

An item, with its standard effects and profile, may be granted a wide range of benefits and such benefits are subject to GM approval.

## BOONS

Boons, the supernatural qualities possessed by celestial implements, apply when an implement is used as part of a check. The GM should choose two to three boons for each celestial implement, or more at their discretion, keeping in mind that the more boons an implement possesses, the more powerful it becomes. General boons can be applied to any implement, while others are specific to a particular category of item.

### General Boons

The following are boons that can be applied to most celestial implements.

#### Aura of Power

When performing a Support action check using this implement, you may spend ✿ to choose one additional target per ✿ spent this way.

#### Beguile the Senses

When you make an Attack or Scheme action check using this implement, you may spend ✿+ to cause each target with vigilance lower than or equal to ✿ spent this way to suffer one of the following conditions, based on the implement's element: Fire (Dazed), Air (Disoriented), Earth (Immobilized), Water (Exhausted), Void (Unconscious). After the check is resolved, the implement is dispelled.

#### Blessed Revitalization

When you make a Support action check using this implement, you may spend ✿ ✿ to have each target remove one of the following conditions, based the implement's element: Fire (Silenced), Air (Dying), Earth (Exhausted), Water (Enraged or Burning), Void (Afflicted or Dying). After the check is resolved, the implement is dispelled.

**UNLOCKING NEW BOONS**

At the GM's discretion, spiritual study or an encounter with a divine being could unlock new, previously unknown boons on a celestial implement.

**APPLYING BOONS**

An implement can be used for checks that normally use that category of item (for instance, an implement that is a weapon can be used for Attack action checks). An implement can also be used for narratively appropriate checks for which its boons are relevant (for instance, a visibly displayed implement with the Aura of Power boon can be used on Support action checks, and readied implements with the Defensive boon can be used on checks to resist an effect). An implement generally must be readied, worn, or otherwise available to its user for its boons to apply to a check.

Boons can be applied to checks that use any element, even if the element of the implement does not match the element of the check. Only the character who has summoned an implement with its mantra can wield that implement or apply its boons.

### Celestial Step

When you make a Movement action check using this item, you may spend ✲✲ to teleport the distance you would move as part of the action instead of moving conventionally. You ignore the effects of terrain and obstruction while teleporting, and you can reach locations you otherwise could not this way, but you still must be able to perceive your destination.

### Cosmic Devastation

When you make an Attack action check using this implement, you may spend ✲+ to cause each target with vigilance lower than or equal to ✲ spent this way to suffer one of the following conditions, based on the implement's element: Fire (Burning), Air (Silenced), Earth (Lightly Wounded [One Ring of Target's Choice]), Water (Bleeding), Void (Dying [5 rounds]). After the check is resolved, the implement is dispelled.

### Defensive

When you make a check to resist an effect or to use the Countering Mantra technique, if this implement is readied, reduce the TN by 2.

### Earthshaker

When you make an Attack or Scheme action check using this implement, you may spend ✲✲ to add one terrain quality, remove one terrain quality, or both from the surrounding area, based on the implement's element: Fire (add Dangerous, remove Obscuring), Air (add Obscuring, remove Entangling), Earth (add Entangling, remove Imbalanced [One Element, chosen by you]), Water (add Imbalanced [One Element, chosen by you], remove Dangerous), Void (add or remove Hallowed [One Element, chosen by you]). After the check is resolved, the implement is dispelled.

### Flurry

When performing an Attack or Scheme action check with this implement, you may spend ✲+ to choose one additional target per ✲ spent this way. This target's vigilance cannot be higher than the highest among the original targets.

### Overwhelming Force

When performing an Attack action check using this implement, you may spend ✲+. If you do, the next time your target would make a check to resist an effect, they automatically count as failing with a shortfall equal to ✲ spent this way.

### Shifting Shape

When you summon this implement or make a check using it, you may spend ✲ to change it to a different object of the same form (see **Form**, on page 101).

### Transfiguration

When you summon this implement or make a check using it, you may spend ✲✲ to change it to a different object of a different form (see **Form**, on page 101).

### Unassuming

When you summon this implement or make a check using it, you may spend ✲ to cause it to lose the Resplendent quality and gain the Subtle quality.

## Projectile Boons

The following boons may be applied to projectiles such as arrows, crossbow bolts, and slingstones.

### Animal Transformation

Choose an animal profile (such as **Elegant Pit Viper**, on page 236). When you make a **Martial Arts [Ranged] check** using this implement, you may spend ✲+. After resolving success or failure, the implement is dispelled as it transforms into a number of the chosen animals with total ✲ less than or equal to ✲ spent this way times two. These animals are hostile to any targets of the check, and they persist until the end of the scene, or until they are slain.

### Binding

When you perform an Attack action check using this implement, you may spend ✲✲ to cause the target to

suffer the Immobilized condition. Each time the target would remove this condition, they must make a **TN 5 Theology check**; if they fail, they do not remove the condition, instead.

### Deadly Venom

When you make an Attack action check using this implement, you may spend ✿ ✿; if you do and you succeed at the check, you cause the target to suffer the Dying (3 rounds) condition. Then, this implement is dispelled.

### Detonation

When you make a Martial Arts [Ranged] check using this implement, you may spend ✿+. In a skirmish, each character within a number of range bands equal to ✿ spent this way suffers supernatural damage equal to the weapon's base damage plus ✿ spent this way and is hurled one range band away from the point of impact. In a mass battle, the target cohort leader suffers the damage, and the enemy army suffers attrition and panic equal to ✿ spent this way. After the check is resolved, the implement is dispelled.

### Duplication

When you make a check to summon this implement, you may spend ✿+ to summon that many additional copies of it. When you perform an Attack action check with this implement, you may spend ✿ up to the number of copies at range 0–1 of the target to increase any damage you inflict by 1 per ✿ spent this way.

### Fortress Breaker

When you perform an Attack action check using this implement, you may spend ✿ ✿. If you do during a skirmish, your target's armor receives the Destroyed condition. If you do during a mass battle, each fortification occupied by a target is annihilated and no longer provides any benefit. The enemy army suffers attrition equal to your bonus successes, and each leader in the fortification suffers a critical strike with severity equal to your bonus successes. After the check is resolved, the implement is dispelled, and you suffer the Exhausted condition.

### Obliteration

When you perform an Attack action check using this implement, you may spend ✿ ✿. If you do and the check inflicts a critical strike, if the target fails their check to resist the critical strike, they are slain outright unless they spend 1 Void point. After the check is resolved, the implement is dispelled, and you suffer the Exhausted condition.

### Returning

When you perform a **Martial Arts [Ranged] check** using this implement, you may spend ✿+; if you spend ✿ equal to the number of range bands between you and your target, the projectile returns to your hand unless it was dispelled.

### Unerring

When performing an Attack action check using this implement, you may spend ✿. If you do, the target cannot defend against damage caused by the action unless they spend 1 Void point.

## Melee Weapon Boons

The following boons may be applied to melee weapons.

### Independence

This implement moves and fights even when you are not holding it in your hand. As long as this implement is at range 0–4 of you, you may treat it as readied and wield it. As a Support action, you may make it move a number of range bands equal to your ranks in Meditation. Once per round when you perform an Attack action check using a different weapon, you may spend ✿+. Choose a character in range of this celestial implement with vigilance lower than ✿ spent this way; that character suffers physical damage equal to the celestial implement's base damage.

### Inexorable

When you perform an Attack action check using this implement, you may spend ✿ ✿ to ignore your target's resistances.

### Resounding Arrival

When you make a check to summon this implement, you may spend ✿+. If you do so during a skirmish, each character at range 1–3 of you suffers supernatural damage equal to ✿ spent this way and receives that much strife. If you do so in a mass battle, the enemy army suffers that much attrition and panic.

### Rising Power

When you make an Attack action check using this implement, you may spend ✿+. If you fail the check, you may reserve a number of dropped dice equal to

✲ spent this way. On your next **Martial Arts [Melee] check** using the implement, add those dice as kept dice. This effect persists until the reserved dice are used or until the end of the scene.

### Unleashed Fury

When you make an Attack action check using this implement, you may spend ✲+ to choose one additional target per ✲ spent this way at range 0–2 of another target (even if they are not within the weapon's range). This target's vigilance cannot be higher than the highest among the original targets.

## Armor Boons

The following boons may be applied to armor and clothing.

### Agility of Legend

When you make a check to resist a critical strike while wearing this armor, you may spend ✲+. If you do, a number of characters up to ✲ spent this way, of your choice, may immediately move up to 2 range bands.

### Burst of Force

When you make a check to resist a critical strike while wearing this armor, you may spend ✲ ✲. If you do so during a skirmish, each character at range 1–3 of you suffers supernatural damage equal to your bonus successes on the check and is pushed one range band away from you. If you do so during a mass battle, the enemy army suffers attrition and panic equal to your bonus successes. After the check is resolved, the implement is dispelled.

### Harm Returned

When you make a check to resist an effect or critical strike while wearing this armor, you may spend ✲ ✲ ✲. If you do, the attacker suffers a critical strike with the same severity as the one you suffered (before reductions) or the same effect.

### Inviolable

When you make a check to resist a critical strike while wearing this armor, you may spend ✲+. If you succeed at the check to resist, and the critical strike would otherwise be reduced to a severity of ✲ spent or lower, you do not suffer it instead.

### Overwhelming Radiance

When you make a check to resist an effect while wearing this armor, you may spend ✲+. If you do, each character at range 0–3 of you receives 1 strife, plus 1 strife for each ✲ spent in excess of their vigilance.

## Utility Object Boons

The following boons may be applied to non-weapon, non-armor items, such as incense holders, buckets, various kit components, and jewelry. The GM is the final arbiter of what constitutes a utility item.

### Grand Inspiration

When you make a Support action check using this implement, you may spend ✲+. If you do so in a skirmish, increase each target's composure by 1 per ✲ spent this way until the end of the scene. If you do so in a mass battle, increase your army's discipline by 1 per ✲ spent this way.

### Illusions Shattered

When you make a Support action check using this implement, you may spend ✲+ to remove up to one ongoing supernatural effect (such as a persistent effect of a kihō, mahō, invocation, mantra, or celestial implement) from a target of your check per ✲ spent this way.

### Mark of Doom

When you make a Scheme action check using this implement, you may spend ✲+ to reduce the TN of the next Attack action check targeting one of your targets by 1 per ✲ spent this way.

### Resounding Rhetoric

When you make a Support action check using this implement, you may spend ✲+. If you do so in a skirmish, you may choose any number of other characters at range 0–1 to remove fatigue and strife equal to ✲ spent this way. If you do so in a mass battle, you may remove attrition and panic from your army equal to ✲ spent this way. After the check is resolved, the implement is dispelled and you suffer the Exhausted condition.

### Root of Language

If you have this implement readied and are using or holding it, then when you make a check to read, understand, or interact with a piece of text or spoken language, you may spend ✲ to gain an understanding of that language until your implement is dispelled.

### Subterranean Secrets

When you make a Movement action check using this implement, you may spend ✠+ to create a tunnel through the ground to a location within a number of range bands equal to ✠ spent this way. If you use this during a mass battle, you may create a fortification (see page 276 of the core rulebook) that reduces attrition by your ranks in Theology and has a difficulty value equal to ✠ spent this way.

### Soothing Words

When you make a Scheme or Support action check using this item, you may spend ✠+ to remove 1 strife from your target per ✠ spent this way. Reduce the TN of your next Scheme or Support action check targeting them by 1 per strife removed this way. After the check is resolved, the implement is dispelled.

### Unlimited Negation

When you make a check to use the Countering Mantra technique, you may spend ✠ to use it to counter any supernatural effect (such as an effect of a kihō, mahō, or invocation) instead of only the effect of a celestial implement.

### Vitality

When you make a Support action check targeting another character, you may spend ✠+ to reduce the TN of their checks to resist effects by 1 per ✠ spent this way. This effect persists until the end of that character's next turn.

## Introducing Celestial Implements into a Campaign

Astradhari are rare; the most powerful of rajah might have a few dozen astradhari among their court, while the ruler of a small domain might be able to call upon only a handful who have pledged their loyalty in times of crisis, or even upon none at all. The sheer size of the city of Bhavyatapura means that there are always a few astradhari there. However, many sages find the bustle of cosmopolitan life disruptive to their studies. Due to the prestige and historical power of the kingdom of Saamrajya throughout the ages, such sages tend to congregate there. Some members of the fundamentalist Mukka are also known for seeking out the power of celestial implements, viewing the ability to call upon the power of the gods directly as a way to prove the righteousness of their cause.

Despite the efforts of various scholars, the number of existing astradhari at various points in history is very hard to determine. As these individuals have tended to keep their abilities concealed, so too have political bodies often tried to shroud the identities and numbers of their greatest champions, as well as which mantras have been known to them. Astradhari are somewhat more common among the warriors known as the Yodha, as celestial implements are invaluable for dispatching the monsters that reside in the Ghostlands; even supernaturally resilient foes cannot withstand such power. Few who wield these divine weapons leave the Ivory Kingdoms and the Ghostlands, as they tend to have important duties or grave responsibilities there, but there are always exceptions, especially when it comes to player characters.

Within a campaign that takes place in or near the Ghostlands, seeking out a sage who can teach the use of and mantra for summoning a celestial implement might well be a low-rank PC's major objective, especially if the PC is a Yodha or aspires to join that order. Generally, the sage should ask the PC to undertake a number of tests or tasks to prove their skill, dedication, and worthiness as a student before teaching them any summoning mantras. Divine objects often have restrictions on their use, but the objects themselves do not pass moral judgment on their users beyond the limits they impose. As such, most sages are very cautious about whether to teach a would-be student such world-shaking powers.

If a PC from the Ivory Kingdoms is journeying in Rokugan (or elsewhere) and does not have access to a teacher, the GM could allow them to already "know" one or more summoning mantras that are "revealed" over the course of the campaign (when the character purchases the technique mechanically). As summoning mantras for celestial implements are often closely guarded secrets, there is good reason why a PC might hide such powers even from trusted companions.

Alternately, because mantras can be learned directly from the gods, a PC from the Ivory Kingdoms who is in foreign lands could acquire a summoning mantra in any of a variety of encounter types. Any mysterious traveler, unassuming peasant, or oddly familiar

beast could be an earthly form of a deity, and might offer a boon to a worthy PC.

Even if a PC does not seek it out, they could come to learn a summoning mantra by winning the trust of a high sage of the Ivory Kingdoms or by engaging in an act of kindness toward a divinity or mystical creature without expectation of recompense.

## SAMPLE CELESTIAL IMPLEMENTS

Following are a few celestial implements to serve as examples. GMs are encouraged to create others by combining or modifying the blessing sources, forms, and boons described previously in this section.

### Banhi's Thunderous Astra

Bahni's Thunderous Astra is a javelin that transforms into a fiery thunderbolt when thrown, piercing the heart of its target.

#### Bahni, Purifier of the Soil

*Bahni's fearsome wrath against any who would defile the earth with their Tainted hearts knows no bounds. This astra combines the destruction of fire and the force of the wind, ready to strike down any wicked foe.*
**Element:** Fire and Air
**Counter Element:** Water
**Restriction:** Do not let any Tainted foe escape destruction at your hands.

#### Form

Javelin (Range 2–4, Damage 4, Deadliness 6, Razor-Edged)

#### Boons

**Detonation:** When you make a **Martial Arts [Ranged] check** using this implement, you may spend ✿+. In a skirmish, each character within a number of range bands from you equal to ✿ spent this way suffers supernatural damage equal to the weapon's base damage plus ✿ spent this way and is hurled one range band away from the point of impact. In a mass battle, the target cohort leader suffers the damage, and the enemy army suffers attrition and panic equal to ✿ spent this way. After the check is resolved, the implement is dispelled.
**Obliteration:** When you perform an Attack action check using this implement, you may spend ✿. If you do and the check inflicts a critical strike, if the target fails their check to resist the critical strike, they are slain outright unless they spend a Void point. After the check is resolved, the implement is dispelled.

### SINGLE-USE IMPLEMENTS

Some celestial implements are so powerful that they can only ever be used once by a single person, even if the character knows the proper mantra for summoning such an implement. At the GM's discretion, a character might gain single-use access to any celestial implement. These should generally only be granted through narrative events, however, and should not cost experience.

**Unerring:** When performing an Attack action check using this implement, you may spend ✿. If you do, the target cannot defend against damage caused by the action unless they spend 1 Void point.

### Kajri's Mantle of Wind

Kajri's Mantle of Wind is a cloak that protects the wearer, dispersing oncoming attacks and allowing the wearer to move as the wind itself.

#### Kajri, Builder of Heaven's Clouds

*Kajri is known for blessing those who take the kinder path, living life as wanderers and showing compassion to any who are in need. She also appreciates hard work, and is often looked to by craftspeople as a source of good luck.*
**Element:** Air
**Counter Element:** Fire
**Restriction:** You must always hear out those who are in need, and you must always be willing to put your hands to work for the good of the innocent.

#### Form

Modified traveling clothes (Physical 2, Supernatural 2, Resplendent, Sacred)

#### Boons

**Celestial Step:** When you make a Movement action check using this item, you may spend ✿ ✿ to teleport up to a maximum distance you can move on foot over standard terrain instead of moving physically. You ignore the effects of terrain and obstruction while traveling, and you can reach locations you otherwise could not this way, but you still must be able to perceive your destination.

**Inviolable:** When you make a check to resist a critical strike while wearing this armor, you may spend ✿+. If you succeed at the check to resist, and the critical strike would otherwise be reduced to a severity of ✿ spent or lower, you do not suffer it instead.
**Unassuming:** When you summon this implement or make a check using it, you may spend ✿ to cause it to lose the Resplendent quality and gain the Subtle quality.

## River Stone of Flowing Water

### Neha, The Grieving Deity

*The story of Neha is one of tragedy. Long ago, before humans walked the earth she is said to have lost her sister in a terrible war. She still grieves to this day, her tears bringing all rain that touches the Ivory Kingdoms.*
**Element:** Water
**Counter Element:** Fire
**Restriction:** Treat all those who walk beside you as comrades as your siblings, and cherish your time with them.

### Form

A flat, smooth stone the size of a palm. This stone gains the following qualities: (Resplendent, Sacred).

### Boons

**Aura of Power:** When performing a Support action check using this implement, you may spend ✿ to choose one additional target per ✿ spent this way.
**Illusions Shattered:** When you make a Support action check using this implement, you may spend ✿+ to remove up to one ongoing supernatural effect (such as a persistent effect of a kihō, mahō, invocation, mantra, or celestial implement) from a target per ✿ spent this way.
**Subterranean Secrets:** When you make a Movement action check using this implement, you may spend ✿+ to create a tunnel through the ground to a location within a number of range bands equal to ✿ spent this way. If you use this during a mass battle, you may create a fortification (see page 276 of the core rulebook) that reduces attrition by your ranks in Theology and has a difficulty value equal to ✿ spent this way.

# Hand to Mouth

The biggest separating factor between samurai with lords and rōnin comes down to trade and money. Simply put, the lorded samurai has everything provided for them: lodging, education, training, supplies, food, transport, entertainment—the list goes on. But the rōnin has no lord. They must pay for those things themselves or do without.

The impact of this on a rōnin's lifestyle, on their outlook, and on their morality and values is often understated. It is not some minor thing for a rōnin to "keep in mind" while wandering the lands, looking for work.

## TRADE IN ROKUGAN

Trade in Rokugan is considered beneath a samurai's station. This is openly acknowledged by the lorded samurai, who look down upon anyone who resorts to basic commerce. One reason for this is the Empire's embrace of Shinseism, which teaches that material things are spiritually staining and that obsession with money and commerce is a distraction from spiritual development. Desire is the root of all suffering, the Tao of Shinsei teaches, and what is money but the objectification—the worship—of desire itself?

But perhaps a more accurate reason is the pull of social forces: commerce is associated with the lower classes. A samurai would never haggle, because they consider it begging. A samurai would never ask for money in exchange for services rendered, because that is what peasants do. A samurai does not even count the coins in their seasonal stipend, because that might imply they do not trust their lord's judgment. Some samurai, especially those concerned with appearances, will not even handle coin with their bare flesh, considering it dirty and a source of spiritual stain.

Among the kuge and most of the buke—the aristocratic and samurai classes—barter is the most common form of trade. Money, especially coin, almost never changes hands. Their system is one of gifts and favors. This is considered far cleaner than simple trade with coin, which is for the lower castes, not honorable samurai. Coin is backed by goods, but barter is backed by honor and a warrior's word. When a harvest is bad, the minted coin of those lands loses value, but the honor of the lord is still worth much, and there is always something to trade.

But another reason for this trend is that few samurai understand the fluctuating value of coinage or the "worth" of something for sale. Neither would a samurai ever ask what something costs; to ask for a

price implies they are ignorant (a grave insult for the comparatively well-educated samurai) and demeans the other party.

When samurai must resort to paying with coin directly, it is almost always with peasants, and the samurai almost always has a servant physically exchange the coin for them. The common practice is for a samurai to simply give what they think an item is worth (and the peasant must simply accept, or be very skilled at diplomacy) or to pick up an item and wait for the merchant to ask for something in return.

Because rōnin are considered samurai, all of this applies to them as well. But it gets complicated, because the reality of their situation contradicts the role of trade in their lives. Rōnin have nothing supplied for them. They have no lord to pay for everything. A life of hand-to-mouth hardship has made them far more sensitive to the costs of things. They must spend a large portion of their time considering, planning, and preparing to work, trade with coin, and even steal to get by—and such desperate and unclean practices is far beneath a lorded samurai. Rōnin also barter for favors and with their word, if they are honorable enough for others to trust them, but simple barter often isn't enough to sustain a lordless samurai.

Rōnin are notorious for simply taking what they want from the peasantry, terrorizing people who are helpless against them without repercussion. This is especially so for rōnin who once had a lord and are used to having everything paid for them. Why should they change how they've always behaved just to suit a commoner? As a result, most rōnin are little different than bandits in the eyes of many.

A rōnin who is still presenting themself as a lorded samurai lives a higher-maintenance lifestyle than a peasant. If a rōnin doesn't have access to a lord's resources, who will repair their sword? Who will maintain their armor from battle to battle? Who will care for their expensive pony, or clean their silk kimono? These things cost money, assuming the rōnin can procure such services at all. Many find it simpler to sell off their fine things, so they no longer have to worry about them. The pony is usually the first to be sold, followed by the armor. Desperate rōnin will even sell off their weapons, although usually for scrap metal, as peasants are forbidden from wielding them. Such sales are usually to a rōnin's disadvantage, as they do not know what these things are worth and bartering is beneath many of them. In a life cast to the waves, it is the pragmatic who prosper when what money does best is "run out."

Rōnin are subject to financial forces beyond their control. Rokugan has no unified currency, and the value of any type of coin (zeni, bu, or koku) in a particular region may fluctuate depending on how good the harvest was or how much the clan issuing the coin is spending (or saving) to further an upcoming campaign. Lorded samurai, sheltered by their feudal ties, can ignore this fluctuation in value. Rōnin cannot.

Fluctuations in value are almost universally a peasant concern. Merchant samurai exist, but they fill a specific niche required by their clan and have spent generations establishing the means to make financial systems work to their and their clan's advantage. But a rōnin, who relies on money to survive, may discover that their hard-earned coin, which they risked their life to obtain, no longer buys what it did two seasons ago. Or worse, it may not be taken at all.

Additionally, many things a rōnin requires simply aren't for sale. For instance, weapons are not carried at any shop. Katana and other weapons are commissioned by lords on an as-needed basis, because the length, weight, and balance of a sword should be tailored to the size and preferences of the wielder. If a rōnin requires a new sword, they must convince a blacksmith (who may be forbidden by the region's clan to make weapons for people outside that clan) to forge one for them.

More commonly, the rōnin will simply ambush a samurai in a dark alley, kill them, and take their sword. This is much easier, albeit grossly dishonorable, and doubtless will result in severe consequences. However, as time passes, rōnin grow desperate and more willing to sacrifice honor in order to survive.

This is the true danger of a rōnin's lifestyle, and why death is preferred by many. It is a life of slow starvation, not only of the body but of the spirit, of one's morality, of one's pride and dignity. Without a patron, a warrior has no purpose, and honor is no longer an asset.

Some rōnin nevertheless manage to thrive in the harsh world with their honor intact. They accept their new lot in life, simplify their lifestyle, and maintain their dignity in spite of all that is set against them. These rōnin are the very things of legend. They understand that for all they have lost, what they have gained is something no lorded samurai will ever have: their own freedom, something money cannot buy.

## MAKING MONEY

Most rōnin sell their services as mercenaries. The most common customer is a lord of the Great Clans who is unwilling to risk their own vassals for a particular purpose. Lords commonly hire rōnin to serve at the vanguard in battle, for instance. Magistrates may hire rōnin to assist in difficult arrests, and merchants may hire rōnin to protect caravans or guard their shops. Sometimes villagers pool their resources to hire rōnin as protection against bandits or cruel samurai. If a warrior is needed, there are always hungry rōnin to serve in that role.

There are also other, less tasteful ways for rōnin to make money. Urban rōnin often make good informants, and one who is adequately desperate will not think twice about selling information for coin. Sometimes rōnin form bandit groups and steal from caravans. When this happens, they often target the clan that rejected them or whichever lord they blame for their disgrace. City rōnin may also band together in gangs, making money from organized crime or protection rackets such as firefighter gangs. A rōnin may well have done all of the above. This is what it means to be cast to the waves; one cannot know which hand will offer their next meal.

## WANDERING RŌNIN

A common trope in Rokugani theater is that of the wandering rōnin, cast to the winds and seeking their fortune in the world. Many theatergoers find this notion romantic: although the rōnin suffers, the rōnin gets to explore the Empire as they wander along its roads and villages, across borders and throughout the lands, nobly pursuing their destiny.

So how does a rōnin get travel papers? A person can only travel the Empire with the explicit permission of those who maintain the roads, and that requires travel papers. Most papers only permit travel on a specific road, to a specific location, for a specific purpose. For clan samurai, obtaining these papers is trivial. But rōnin have no lord and are not in good standing. For them, it is much more difficult.

If rōnin wish to obtain travel papers, it means humbling themselves before those who can grant them. It means doing favors for magistrates, even if the tasks are demeaning. It means working for free, if work is offered at all.

Without papers, rōnin roam the Empire at great risk. If they are caught crossing a border without travel papers, they might be assumed to be spies or bandits. Former clan samurai may have the travel papers they received when they were expelled from their clan (a courtesy offered to facilitate their expeditious dismissal), but such papers quickly expire. Peasants who choose to masquerade as rōnin may be able to get travel papers (for instance, if they are merchants or traders), but they have difficulty crossing borders if they are illiterate or are dressed as peasants or rōnin while they do so. Unauthorized travel is illegal, so a rōnin caught this way is at the mercy of their captors. It is much safer for rōnin to restrict themselves to a specific region so these problems don't come up.

Even so, rōnin still wander over clan borders in search of employment. Sneaking across the Empire isn't exactly courageous or honorable, but it's not as though rōnin have much choice. It is just another reality of lordless living, another way in which rōnin must risk their very lives just to exist in a world where they don't belong. Besides, if the rōnin's services are in demand, their employer isn't going to ask questions.

**FIREFIGHTERS**

Because most of Rokugan's architecture is constructed from wood and paper, the need for trained firefighters, especially in dense urban sprawls. is high. Unfortunately, many firefighters in Rokugan diverge pretty significantly from what many might think of when they picture a firefighter—Rokugani firefighters are prone to becoming synonymous to protection rackets, extorting people for money or threatening to be just a little too slow to respond to a fire. In the worst of these gangs, they might set the fires themselves to keep their business going or teach a frugal merchant a painful lesson.

# New Gear and Items

While ancestral weapons and masterworks are heirlooms to be protected from generation to generation, many weapons in a samurai's arsenal are considered disposable, or even designed as such. The rōnin does not have this luxury. Without the seemingly endless resources of a clan, without quartermasters, sword polishers, or clan blacksmiths, a rōnin must make do with what they have and make their precious few tools last. Most rōnin ultimately accept weapons that true samurai would scorn, such as those associated with the peasantry, scavenging whatever they can from their fallen foes. Principles are expensive, and rōnin can afford precious few.

### Chain Whip

A specialized weapon made from a series of several stiff metal rods connected by chain loops. This long, flexible whip is used single-handed, with a wooden or metal grip on one end and a sharp metal dart on the other. Non-combat whips also exist, though very sparsely, in Rokugan. Such whips are typically made of a thick leather cord and are used by Unicorn farmers in remote areas to manage livestock.

### Kuwa

Like many weapons associated with the peasantry, the *kuwa* is a weaponized farming implement. Based on the hoe, it is a chopping weapon that is wielded similarly to a two-handed axe. The wielder uses the sharp end to fling dirt into an opponent's face before following up with a devastating chop. The butt end of the handle is also utilized in most kuwa fighting styles as a blunt ramming weapon or to block an assailant's initial attack.

### Sling

Perhaps the humblest of projectile weapons, the sling is a length of braided cord with a pouch for holding a stone. The wielder swings the stone within the sling for momentum, then releases one end of the sling to propel the stone a great distance. Many samurai underestimate a sling's usefulness, considering it a peasant weapon at best and a toy at worst. But in the right hands, a sling's range is greater than that of a bow, and a slung stone can kill an unarmored foe instantly on impact. In addition to being popular among rōnin and peasants, the sling is favored by the Sparrow Clan due to its inexpensive production and the ease of acquiring ammunition.

## Ivory Kingdoms Weaponry

Rarely encountered in Rokugan, the weaponry of the Ivory Kingdoms reflects the fighting styles favored by the people who live in those lands. Weapons develop to suit warriors' techniques and commonly encountered situations, and rarely the other way around. With their adept cavalry and sophisticated traditions, warriors of the Ivory Kingdoms prefer curved blades, backswords, and weapons designed to intimidate as well as to overcome foes with significant size advantage.

### Gada

A common heavy weapon in the Ivory Kingdoms, especially among caravan guards along the Sand Road, the *gada* consists of a long shaft capped with a spherical head with a pointed spike at the very top. Most gada are made of iron, but ceremonial versions are often gilded or dipped in molten gold. Red-coral gada are especially effective against the rakshasa of the Ghostlands and are highly prized weapons associated with the Ivory Kingdoms' greatest warriors. Gada come in massive sizes designed to crush the skulls of charging mounts and in smaller versions designed to be wielded in pairs.

### Talwar

The Ivory Kingdoms sidearm is the *talwar*, or "single-edged sword." A curved saber with one sharp edge and a cross-guarded hilt with a knuckle-bow, it is designed to be wielded in a specialized one-handed grip. The sword's hilt is bulb shaped, requiring that the sword be held differently than those forged by Rokugani. This and the blade's unusual balance means that talwar fighting requires special training; attempting

to use the sword as one might a Rokugani blade can break the talwar or injure one's wrist. However, when a talwar is wielded correctly, the wider cutting tip at the end of its blade affords it more cutting power, making this sidearm an especially deadly weapon.

### Urumi

Considered one of the most challenging weapons to train with, the *urumi*, or "whip sword," is a specialized weapon. Even just to start learning to use it, a person must first know both swordfighting and chain weaponry. An urumi consists of one to three flexible whip blades made from thin steel and mounted to a talwar's handle. Similar to the bullwhip, the urumi excels at keeping multiple foes at bay, but it poses a significant risk of self-injury should anything go awry. This risk does little to dissuade those who study the urumi, however. Due to this weapon's difficulty, wielders who master it are venerated as unparalleled martial artists.

## SHIELDS

Though not particularly common in Rokugan, many other cultures outside of the borders of the Emerald Empire employ the use of shields to supplement their armor. The Qamarist Caliphate, in particular, trains elite guards that specialize in the use of shields as weapons in and of themselves, delivering devastating blows to any who would threaten the caliph or the caliph's people.

A character can only wield one shield at a time.

### Buckler

A buckler is a small, round, oval, or rectangular shield typically a foot and a half across. It provides the wearer several benefits, including increased defense against projectiles, safety for the sword hand, and can also be used as a powerful bludgeoning tool.

While you have a readied buckler, treat your physical resistance as 3. As a Movement and Support action, if you have a buckler readied, you may increase the TN of the next attack action check made targeting you by 1. This effect persists until the end of your next turn.

### Qamarist Heavy Shield

The Qamarists of al-Zawira have a force of specially trained guards who are adept at maneuvering and working with the heavy, advanced shields produced by the master crafters and alchemists of the caliph. These shields cover nearly two-thirds of an average warrior's body, and are extremely heavy. Not only do they offer increased protection from both ranged and melee

assault, but these massive shields can be used to bull-rush opponents and knock over multiple enemies if used by a skilled combatant. These shields are also created to ward off supernatural effects using the secretive methods of the caliph's alchemists.

While you have a readied Qamarist Heavy Shield, treat your physical resistance as 4 and your supernatural resistance as 2.

As a Movement and Support action, if you have a heavy shield readied, you may increase the TN of Attack action checks made targeting you by 3. This persists until the start of your next turn.

## IMPROVISED WEAPONS

In *Leadership*, the Kami Akodo lists the ideals for samurai. Among them was a constant state of readiness: a samurai should be able to defend their lord at any moment and kill with any weapon. Dōjō throughout Rokugan take this to heart, devoting entire courses of instruction to teaching the ever-ready state desired in samurai. Among other things, these courses teach a samurai how to defend themself and kill an enemy from a seated or prone position, such as sitting behind a table during the tea ceremony or just awakening from a deep slumber. Danger can come at any time, and a samurai's duty is to be constantly ready for it.

A part of this training is learning to kill in unconventional ways, with tools that would not normally be considered weapons. While a samurai's personal code forbids taking up most of the arms associated with the peasantry, improvising weapons is considered a very useful skill. This is doubly so for yōjimbō, who are not always afforded the courtesy of being allowed to carry their regular weapons when accompanying their charges into certain places. It is also useful for

courtiers, who frequent courts and other locations where standard weapons are not allowed. Sometimes hurling an improvised weapon at an assailant gains a courtier just enough time for their yōjimbō to intercept the assailant's attack.

### Boat Oar

In Rokugani folklore, tales abound of samurai who, unable to procure their weapon, instead defended themselves with a wooden boat oar. The Rokugani boat oar is made from sturdy, lacquered wood. It has a relatively short shaft and a long, flat paddle with a rounded tip. Due to the top-heavy weight distribution, it is generally wielded with two hands, as one might wield a naginata or *nagamaki*. A typical use of a boat oar in combat is to present the broad side to the opponent so as to shield oneself and catch the assailant's blade; once that blade is embedded in the wood, the oar is cast aside, wrenching the sword from the assailant's hands.

### Chair

Everyday furniture is perhaps the most commonly used improvised weapon, especially among the more martial-minded clans, which even plan for the inevitability of needing to use such a weapon.

### Fishing Net

Most bushi schools regard improvised weapons as a means to delay an opponent just long enough for the bushi to procure or draw an actual weapon, not as a means to end a fight. An example of such a weapon is the common fishing net. The typical fisher's net is made from hemp or jute. Woven into the netting are several empty glass orbs, which act as floaters to keep the net from sinking. A warrior could swing the net, using the orbs as a buffeting weapon, but most commonly they use it to entangle the enemy until a better weapon can be found.

A fishing net must be wielded in two hands.

### Iron Sheath

In a pinch, the hard sheath of a bladed weapon can act as an excellent tool to surprise and temporarily stun an opponent if disarmed. Commonly used by rōnin who have retained their swords from their life as a samurai, many brawls have been settled by a well-placed blow with an iron sheath.

### Lute

The *biwa*, or short-necked lute, has a long history in Rokugan. It is closely associated with travel, courtly proceedings, and storytelling. There are many different varieties of biwa, and different regions have different preferences for its tuning, materials, and make. As an impromptu weapon, the biwa is good for one solid attack, but will likely break upon impact (to the sorrow of nearby music lovers).

### Sake Bottle and Cups

Impromptu fights are common in the rowdier, less refined taverns and inns of the Empire, and especially so in harbors where sailors go to blow off steam. So it should come as no surprise that bottles and sake cups make frequent improvised weapons. Rumors say that Mantis Clan bushi are trained to dual wield the bottle and cup, using the porcelain cup to catch the pointed end of a sword while bashing their assailant with the bottle, a technique that Mantis sailors gladly offer to demonstrate when asked (wise bushi should decline).

### Scroll Case

Ideally, shugenja should never have to lower themselves to fighting in melee, as it is considered disgraceful to attack a priest of the kami. In practice, however, shugenja must sometimes defend themselves with physical weapons, and a lack of conventional weaponry means they must turn to less conventional options. Some shugenja schools teach self-defense with the scroll case, a hollow wooden tube designed to keep paper scrolls clean and dry. Two of these can be dual wielded as clubs or batons or strapped to the forearms as *tonfa*, a type of melee weapon that act as forearm batons. The techniques for wielding scroll cases are identical to those taught for stick fighting, making scroll cases easy to incorporate into martial training.

### Umbrella

The umbrella is the most commonly taught improvised weapon in a bushi dōjō, owing to its versatility and inconspicuous nature. An umbrella can be wielded as one would wield a hooked cane, using the curved handle to grapple and trip as well as to deliver crushing blows. Alternatively, it can be wielded by the handle as one might wield a sword in a two-handed grip. Adding to this versatility, the umbrella can be snapped open to startle an enemy, block an entrance, or otherwise complicate melee for the assailant.

## Table 3–1: Weapons

| NAME | SKILLS | RNG | DMG | DLS | GRIPS | QUALITIES | RARITY | PRICE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **AXES** | | | | | | | | |
| Kuwa | Melee | 1 | 4 | 2 | 1-hand: –<br>2-hand: Damage +2, Deadliness +2, Range 1–2 | Cumbersome, Mundane | 3 | 4 koku |
| **BLUNT WEAPONS** | | | | | | | | |
| Gada | Melee | 1 | 6 | 3 | 1-hand: –<br>2-hand: Deadliness +3 | Ceremonial, Cumbersome, Wargear | 9 | 50 koku |
| **SWORDS** | | | | | | | | |
| Talwar | Melee | 1 | 4 | 6 | 1-hand: – | Cumbersome, Durable, Razor-Edged | 8 | 35 koku |
| Urumi | Melee | 1–2 | 4 | 5 | 1-hand: – | Cumbersome, Razor-Edged, Snaring | 9 | 50 koku |
| **SPECIALIST WEAPONS** | | | | | | | | |
| Chain Whip | Melee | 1–2 | 3 | 5 | 1-hand: – | Razor-Edged, Snaring | 6 | 4 koku |
| Sling | Ranged | 2–3 | 3 | 3 | 1-hand: – | Concealable, Mundane | 2 | 1 bu |
| **SHIELDS** | | | | | | | | |
| Buckler | Melee | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1-hand: – | Ceremonial, Wargear | 7 | 4 koku |
| Qamarist Heavy Shield | Melee | 0 | 4 | 2 | 1-hand: – | Durable, Cumbersome, Wargear | 9 | 50 koku |
| **IMPROVISED WEAPONS** | | | | | | | | |
| Boat Oar | Melee | 1–2 | 3 | 3 | 1-hand: –<br>2-hand: Damage +1, Deadliness +3 | Mundane | 5 | 3 bu |
| Chair | Melee | 0–1 | 3 | 3 | 1-hand (bludgeon): –<br>2-hand (bludgeon): Damage +2<br>1-hand (thrown): –<br>2-hand (thrown): Deadliness +1, Range 0–2 | Mundane | 2 | 2 bu |
| Fishing Net | Ranged | 0–3 | 3 | 1 | 2-hand: – | Durable, Mundane, Snaring | 5 | 5 bu |
| Iron Sheath | Melee | 0–1 | 3 | 3 | 1-hand: –<br>2-hand: Damage +2 | Durable | 6 | 2 koku |
| Lute | Melee | 0–1 | 1 | 2 | 1-hand: –<br>2-hand: Damage +1, Deadliness +1 | Mundane | 7 | 10 koku |
| Sake Bottle & Cups | Melee | 0–1 | 2 | 3 | 1-hand (bludgeon): –<br>1-hand (thrown): Deadliness +2, Range 1–3, Razor-Edged | Mundane | 4 | 5 bu for average quality |
| Scroll Case | Melee | 0–1 | 3 | 3 | 1-hand: –<br>2-hand: Damage +2, Deadliness +1 | Durable, Mundane | 5 | 1 koku |
| Umbrella | Melee | 0–1 | 2 | 2 | 1-hand (bludgeon): –<br>2-hand (bludgeon): Damage +2<br>1-hand (stab): Damage +2, +2 Deadliness | Mundane | 4 | 3 bu |

## PERSONAL EFFECTS

Rōnin must prioritize which tools they carry, since they have no home and few resources. Everything must have a utilitarian use, be easy to transport and tuck away, and justify the expense of maintaining it. Even so, rōnin usually keep a handful of personal effects, for entertainment, to help them unwind, to trade for goods in a pinch, or even just to remind them of better times.

### Dice Kit

Gambling, especially dice games, are a common pastime of rōnin. One of the most popular, Fortunes and Winds, uses a special set of dice with unique faces. Impromptu gambling tends to spring up when rōnin meet, but due to lack of trust, most participants bring their own dice sets. Loaded dice are among the most popular wares purchased by city-based rōnin and are perfectly legal to own—though one should take care not to be caught with them at a gambling session. (Cost: 6 zeni. Rarity: 2. Qualities: Concealable, Mundane.)

### Travel Rations

In a land so vast, it is no small wonder that the Rokugani have developed significant food-preservation techniques to facilitate lengthy travels. Most travel foods are prepared so as to be easily stored and carried, as well as to last for long periods without spoiling.

The typical traveling ration is a portion of uncooked husked rice, dried or pickled vegetables, and a small portion of a flavoring agent, such as dried seaweed or bonito flakes. Wealthy travelers may spring for a small paper container of *sanshō*, ground berries of the prickly ash plant that lend a peppery, minty, slightly acidic flavor to foods.

Other common traveling foods include *onigiri*, or rice balls, which are commonly carried in bamboo sheaths by travelers for a quick meal. Onigiri are made of cooked sticky rice wrapped around a plum or fish filling and hand molded into a circular shape.

Vinegared rice, used in sushi, is a common preserving element for fish. Indeed, sushi began as a preserving technique in which thin layers of fish were sandwiched between two layers of sushi rice, the vinegar acting as a pickling agent. Fish is also smoked or dried and then packaged into small boxes with miso paste (fermented soybean paste), which also acts as a preservative.

Sometimes seaweed or soy sprouts are ground and mixed with barley and salt to make *hishio*, a thick paste used to pickle vegetables or fish for travel. The paste is scraped off, and the pickled food is eaten alone or in stews. Adding water to the hishio paste results in soy sauce (*shoyu*), which serves as a salty condiment. Aged and "brewed" shoyu is prized, but it is usually only affordable for clan samurai.

Beans are an especially important travel food, as they are relatively lightweight when dried and last for long periods of time, but plump up into hearty, morale-restoring stews when cooked. Black and green beans are the most common, as are soybeans, broad beans, and sweet adzuki beans.

In some regions, ropes used to secure goods are made from edible fibrous tuber stalks that are "dried" with miso. These ropes are completely edible and can be chopped and boiled when necessary. (Cost: 1–3 bu. Rarity: 1. Qualities: Mundane).

### Profession Kits

Rōnin who adopt a common trade usually choose that trade based on their own personal needs. Being able to patch one's own clothing, make one's own sandals, or weave one's own straw hats and cloaks are all effective means to help keep one's cost of living adequately low, and perhaps make a little coin on the side.

A profession kit contains tools and minor materials pertaining to the profession, often with a specialized carrying case carved from bamboo or wood or cast in metal. There is no standard for each type of kit, but below are examples of several kits and their possible contents. Players should work with their GMs to determine what items may or may not be available for these kits.

#### Alchemy Kit

This kit is only available as a whole item when in the Qamarist Caliphate, though individual components may be bought for slightly more elsewhere in the world. Used by the Qamarists in their practice of medicine and other sciences, alchemical kits contain both mundane and rare items, such as charcoal and gold dust, that can be combined to perform special rituals that can heal and improve (if only temporarily) living creatures' bodies. (Cost for components: 10 koku. Rarity: 1–9. Qualities: Vary.)

#### Cooking Kit

May contain chefs' knives (not suitable as weapons) with sharpening rod, bamboo skewers, a grinder and pestle, cooking chopsticks, bowls, strainers, a bamboo mat, and a ladle. Some kits may come with seasonings and preservatives, like miso or soy paste, vinegar, and dried kelp. Especially valuable kits may include a vial of pressed oil. The kit is usually carried in a container that doubles as cookware, such as a round wok or a square cast-iron pot with a drop lid. (Cost: 2 koku. Rarity: 2. Qualities: Mundane.)

### Fishing Kit

May contain fishing line, glass floaters, small nets, miso paste (for curing), and wrapping paper in a straw basket. Some fishing kits may include a hemp tether, tiny collar, and padded glove which are used for handling a cormorant bird trained to dive for fish, a practice known as *ukai*. *Gyotaku* fishing kits include charcoal ink and rice paper, which are used to make an impression of the caught fish to serve as proof of one's catch. (Cost: 1 koku. Rarity: 3. Qualities: Mundane.)

### Mason's Kit

May contain an assortment of chisels (not suitable as weapons), chalk, hammers, and measuring implements. Most Rokugani masonry is "dry stone," meaning that there is no mortar binding the stones together, and the stones rely on interlocking friction to remain intact. Even so, some kits may include ingredients for mortar, and those that do also include trowels. (Cost: 2 koku. Rarity 5. Qualities: Mundane.)

### Tailor's Kit

May contain cloth patches of linen or homespun cotton (and rarely silk), hemp thread, sewing needles, and dye tablets. Some kits include cleaning powder, a small seam ripper, and a collapsing bamboo drying rod; to clean a kimono, the garment must be deconstructed, each cloth panel must be washed and dried separately, and then the panels must be sewn back together. (Cost: 3 koku. Rarity: 5. Qualities: Mundane.)

### Weaver's Kit

May contain weaving hooks, framing reeds, dyes, inks, and bamboo lacquer. Some weaver's kits contain shaving knives or other implements to help shave bamboo strips or cut straw. (Cost: 1 koku. Rarity: 3. Qualities: Mundane.)

## FORBIDDEN EFFECTS

There are many belongings that the Great Clans frown upon, even if they aren't outright banned by decree. To be caught with them would demean a samurai in the eyes of others and shame the clan. But as samurai without lords, rōnin need not concern themselves with such things—and often don't.

## RŌNIN CUISINE

Only the most newly minted rōnin do not know how to forage or cook. Wandering the roads and wildernesses of Rokugan, a rōnin cannot expect to find food to buy—or food they can afford. Any settlement may turn out to be hostile or unsafe. Rōnin quickly learn to scavenge their surroundings for provisions. In cities, rōnin sometimes join beggars in picking up discarded food from castles or fancy restaurants or in flocking to monasteries and temples when they distribute meals to the poor. In the countryside or the wilderness, they learn to identify edible wild plants and mushrooms.

Rōnin also hunt and fish for all manner of creatures to acquire much-needed protein. Fish and crustaceans are the most important animals in the rōnin diet, followed by small game and insects that are easily trapped. Rōnin traveling in groups often hunt for larger game, such as deer or goats, although dangerous animals like boar and bears are generally not considered worth the risk.

Given the variability of the ingredients available to them, rōnin cook creatively and are adaptive. They make salads and stews or render meats into sauces to extend meager supplies and make them seem more filling. A person who watches rōnin who have come into some money visiting a farmers' market or a shopping district in a town might be surprised to see that their first priority is likely buying spices. Spices travel well and can transform bland or foul-tasting food into tolerable meals. Even more importantly, they are good for a rōnin's often-shaky health, counteracting the effects of rot and other problems with their provisions.

Rōnin who excel at field cuisine usually can find employment in an army on campaign as a cook. Their expertise in cooking despite the vicissitudes of traveling life is a great asset to a general who wants to keep their army's morale high and health steady. If a character meets a samurai who has developed a taste for heavily spiced dishes featuring all manner of strange ingredients mixed together, they may have come upon a former rōnin, or perhaps just someone who has traveled with rōnin for a significant length of time.

### Chandu

Opium prepared for smoking is known as *chandu*. It is boiled and strained, then cooled into a crystalline block and wrapped in a dry leaf. To smoke chandu requires a number of tools and a special pipe made from nonreactive materials, often ceramic or jade. Because opium heightens one's tactile sensations, opium pipes are made with interesting ridged textures for the imbiber to fixate on as they achieve their high.

Preparing chandu requires deft hands and skill, as the drug must be heated until the resin softens, shaped into a pellet, and then dropped with tweezers into the pipe bowl. Opium dens employ servants to do this for patrons, but rōnin who wish to use opium on their own must learn how. Opium makes users especially light sensitive, so chandu is smoked in the dark. Contrary to popular belief, chandu does not eliminate pain, but simply alters the user's perception so that the pain is bearable or the user no longer cares.

Chandu is legal in Rokugan, but its recreational use is frowned upon by polite society. A person who uses opium infrequently may not become addicted; such a user may be able to cease for months without suffering withdrawal. However, with enough use addiction takes hold, and it becomes nearly impossible to function without a dose. Although opium is important in Rokugani medicine, without proper care, it can just as easily destroy the user as help heal them. (Cost: 4 bu per use. Rarity: 6. Qualities: Forbidden [outside of a medical context].)

### Poppy Tea

The cheapest form of consumable opium, poppy tea is an herbal infusion of poppy straw and dried poppy pods. The dried pods contain both seeds and an opium paste, which give the resulting tea its narcotic effect. While the tea has many medicinal purposes, it is primarily used to achieve an opium high and dull pain sensations. It was banned by Imperial decree in the tenth century. (Cost: 6 bu per cup. Rarity: 7. Qualities: Forbidden [outside of a medical context].)

### Shikomizue

Favored by those who wish to conceal the fact that they are armed, the *shikomizue* is a special sword mount that is indistinguishable from a wooden cane, walking stick, musical instrument, or other such mundane item. What appears to be a harmless, everyday object is actually a sheath for a blade or chain. This allows the carrier to avoid suspicion while bringing their blade into places weapons are not normally allowed, such as tea houses, temples, or even courts. Weapons of this nature are considered violations of the Bushidō tenets of Courtesy (Rei), Righteousness (Gi), and Honor (Meiyo); as such clan samurai view them as suitable only for honorless dogs. A person using a shikomizue selects one sword they own to custom fit to it. This weapon gains the Concealable and Subtle item qualities while sheathed in the shikomizue. (Cost: 2 koku. Rarity: 7. Qualities: Forbidden, Subtle.)

### Thievery Kit

Thieves are reviled in Rokugan, and anyone caught thieving suffers harsh punishment. In the tenth century, several thieves were publicly boiled alive to deter stealing. Since then, so-called "thievery kits" have been forbidden by Imperial law. Such kits contain implements associated with burglary, like thin-picks for lifting wooden barricades on gates and doors, grappling hooks for climbing, and padded sandals for walking noiselessly. Sticks of melting wax are also included, as a common burglary deterrent is sealing a door with wax so that a person can tell if the door has been opened. Lockpicks are less common in thievery kits, since locksmithing is an uncommon skill and usually only daimyō can afford locks; still, some kits may carry various types of lockpicks. A thievery kit is designed to be concealable and overlooked, masquerading as a different object altogether. (Cost: 2 koku. Rarity: 6. Qualities: Concealable, Forbidden, Subtle.)

## New Item Patterns

Not all craftspeople design weapons and armor with the same focuses in mind. What one swordsmith finds critical, another may scoff at in favor of another trait. As a result, weapons and armor are as unique as their creators.

Such specialty items, including swords, armor, and shields, can be obtained in several ways. The first is for a character to apprentice themself to a master and learn the means of crafting a new weapon or suit of armor with the desired pattern; this requires the PC to win the master's trust within the narrative of the game, then spend XP to learn the pattern. If the character is a samurai or has a similar status in another culture, another way is to requisition the item from their lord. Finally, a character could purchase or find an existing item with the pattern already applied to it or could find and commission a master of that pattern to create the desired item. The price for a weapon or suit of armor with a pattern applied to it is the same as the base cost of the item to which the pattern is applied, but the rarity is altered by the pattern's listed rarity modifier.

## Spirit of the Qamarist Pattern

Those who hail from the Cradle of the World—the Qamarist Caliphate—come from a culture of spiritual and military might. The warriors and religious leaders of this iron-willed empire are familiar with the dangerous supernatural beings and creatures that exist across the world. Several great Qamarist alchemists have discovered a way to treat armor to increase its supernatural resistances to fend off such entities.

Armor made using the Spirit of the Qamarist pattern gains +1 supernatural resistance.

**XP Cost:** 5
**Rarity Modifier:** +4

## Ghostlands Yodhaniya Pattern

The Ghostlands hunters of the Ivory Kingdoms, known as the Yodhaniya, spend most of their spend most of their lives hunting within the Tainted domain of the rakshasa. The dense growth within the haunted rainforest makes weaponry like urumi (whip swords) difficult to handle, so most Yodhaniya use blunt weapons like gada, or maces. Their weaponsmiths have learned to make these weapons stronger without adding additional weight and have imbued them with coral and gold to make them highly effective against Tainted creatures.

A blunt weapon made using the Ghostlands Yodhaniya pattern gains +1 physical damage. It also gains +1 additional damage against Tainted beings and the wielder ignores the Cumbersome quality while in Defiled terrain.

**XP Cost:** 6
**Rarity Modifier:** +4

## Kökejin's Heart of the Wind Pattern

Along the Sand Road, the way of the horse is the way of life. Those who design weapons there do so not only with mounted combat in mind, but as the default. A particular master crafter named Kökejin, a mysterious woman who lives in the small oasis city of Süüdriin Gazar, or the Land of Shade, is said to make the sharpest, most versatile spears in all of the Burning Sands. Rumors say the khan himself outfits his best warriors with the deadly weapons of Kökejin.

A polearm made using the Kökejin's Heart of the Wind pattern gains the Razor-Edged and Durable item qualities. Additionally, its wielder treats this weapon's damage value as 2 higher while mounted.

**XP Cost:** 8
**Rarity Modifier:** +5

CHAPTER

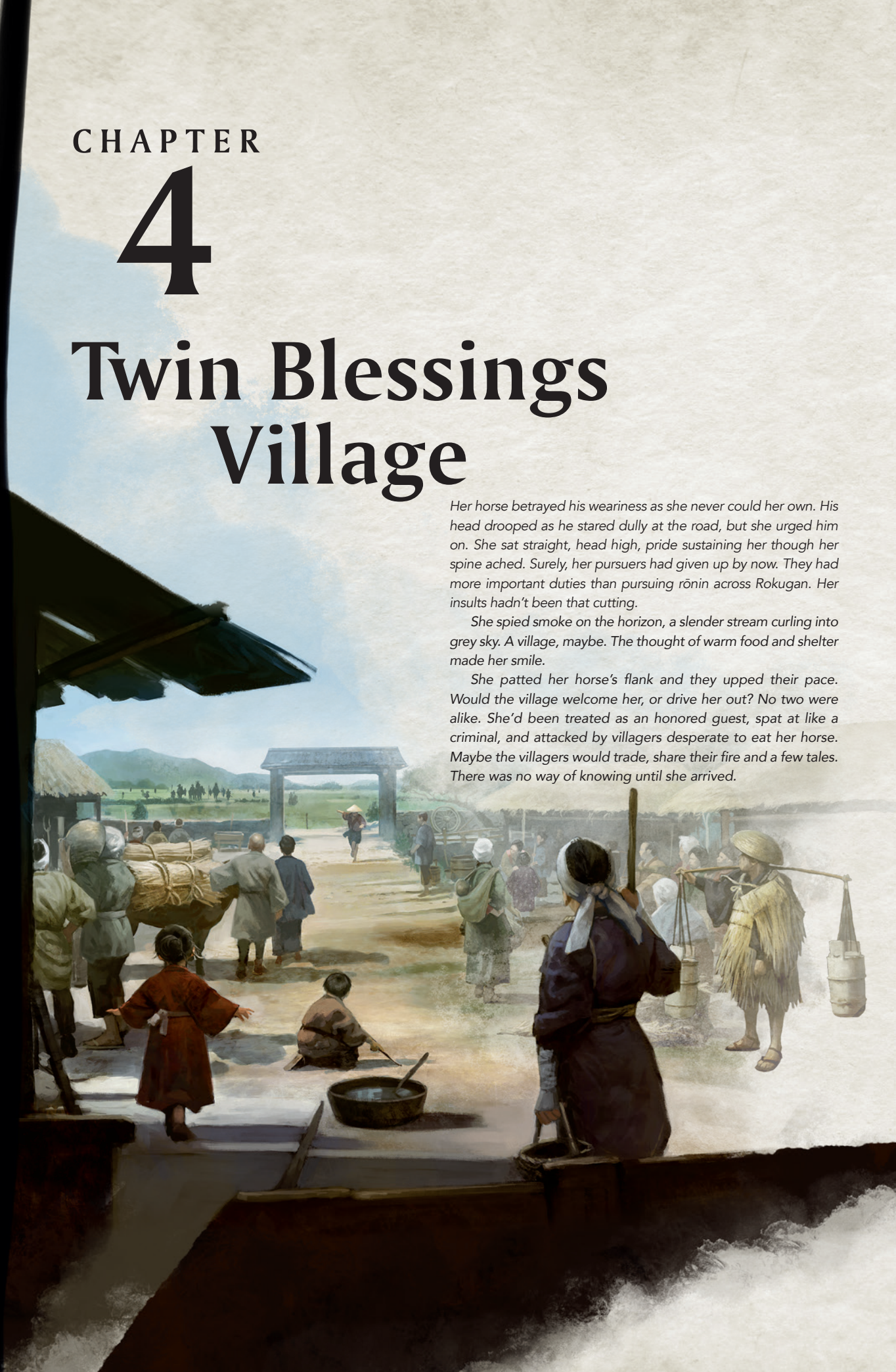
# 4

# Twin Blessings Village

*Her horse betrayed his weariness as she never could her own. His head drooped as he stared dully at the road, but she urged him on. She sat straight, head high, pride sustaining her though her spine ached. Surely, her pursuers had given up by now. They had more important duties than pursuing rōnin across Rokugan. Her insults hadn't been that cutting.*

*She spied smoke on the horizon, a slender stream curling into grey sky. A village, maybe. The thought of warm food and shelter made her smile.*

*She patted her horse's flank and they upped their pace. Would the village welcome her, or drive her out? No two were alike. She'd been treated as an honored guest, spat at like a criminal, and attacked by villagers desperate to eat her horse. Maybe the villagers would trade, share their fire and a few tales. There was no way of knowing until she arrived.*



# How to Use This Village

Every castle, city, and fortress in Rokugan requires farming villages to provide food to sustain it, so the number of villages across the Empire is immense. The peasants who populate the villages and supply the food vastly outnumber the warriors, courtiers, and lords who rely on them. An average village, such as Twin Blessings Village, has around four hundred inhabitants, most of whom are of an age to work. These workers are peasant farmers or fishers, and they are respected above their social peers in other professions, since without their labor, the Empire would starve. At the least, a village's lord ensures their samurai protect it in times of need, because losing one of their sources of food and income would be a financial and practical disaster.

No two villages are the same, but the purpose of this chapter is to present an example village that can be adapted to fit any location, adventure, or campaign. Different types of villages are common in different areas of Rokugan: fishing villages along the coasts, mining villages in the mountains, and farming villages on fertile plains. Some villages become notable for their uniqueness due to the presence of a particularly holy shrine, a specialist workforce, or a strategic position. However, most function in near obscurity as small, isolated, and largely self-governing societies paying rice tax to a lord who presides over them from a distance.

While rōnin usually don't know what to expect from a village until they arrive, most villagers are polite enough to offer some sort of shelter to weary travelers, along with a share of whatever food they have. They might even be willing to hire rōnin as protectors or manual workers, if they can afford to do so. Unfortunately, villages that have had this hospitality abused by dishonorable rōnin in the past may not be so welcoming, viewing rōnin as bandits or criminals rather than as lordless samurai worthy of respect. In such cases, rōnin visitors have to find a way to prove their honor to the villagers, or else persuade them that they are some other type of travelers: pilgrims, merchants, or entertainers.

Many villages have a leader, a priest or shrine keeper, a store of food, and a centralized warming fire. Most grow rice if possible to pay the annual tax, and some keep livestock, while others grow additional crops. Larger villages may have more to offer, such as a blacksmith, a stable, potters, sake houses, teahouses, or even a merchant's shop. Villages are usually built near a source of water, whether a river, spring, or well. There's often a forest nearby, used as a source of wood to make buildings, mend tools, and as fuel for cooking fires.

Since villages are so numerous and varied, GMs can certainly fashion their own. A well-conceived village can be the focus of an adventure, or merely somewhere to pause and recuperate while the PCs are on a journey within a larger campaign. Twin Blessings Village is designed to fit into neutral, Imperial-held territory by default, but it can be easily adapted to suit different landscapes and territories. The following section contains ideas for adapting this village or designing new ones for use within particular clans' territories.

## LOCATING THE VILLAGE IN DIFFERENT TERRITORIES

Twin Blessings Village is described in this chapter as principally a farming village producing rice, millet, plums, and sake. The village is rural and remote, and far removed from clan politics. It can be located without adjustment within neutral territory under the governorship of an Imperial family such as the Otomo. However, to locate it convincingly within the territory of a Great Clan, the terrain, crops, and general attitude of the villagers must be considered. Changing such details reinforces the idea of clan identity, and of the sheer vastness and variety of the Empire.

### Crab Clan

Villagers in Crab territory are satisfied if their land is protected by the Wall and free of the Taint. They rarely grumble about hard ground or scarcity of food, though they often suffer both. As stoic as their samurai lords, these grim-faced peasants work through any hardship. Some are farmers who also fish, keep chickens, or grow tea to trade with other clans for rice. There are also many mining villages in Crab territory, supplying iron ore, which, when turned into steel, both arms their samurai and allows the Crab to trade for food. Jade mines are precious, though there are never enough to meet demand. When a new jade mine is located, temporary villages spring up quickly, and when the deposits are exhausted, the miners move on. Many Crab villages contain skilled carpenters and smiths, and it is not unknown for a particularly skilled smith from the peasant class to have their station raised so they can make weapons for samurai.

Visitors have to earn their welcome in a Crab village, where residents tend to be surly, suspicious, and slow to grant their trust. Showing willingness to work, and sharing tales when the sun goes down, earns the villagers' respect and turns them into generous hosts.

## Crane Clan

The territory of the Crane Clan skirts the eastern coast of Rokugan, making fishing a common enterprise and seaweed a useful harvest, but it also has many farming villages. Crane lands are fertile, growing a variety of grains. In good years—and most are—they produce a surplus of rice, which can be traded, increasing the clan's wealth and allowing the Crane to import the raw materials they cannot produce themselves. Silk-producing farms maintain vast mulberry orchards, the leaves of which can feed silkworms or be used to make a healing tea.

As Crane samurai wish to find beauty everywhere they look, everything from the humblest fishing village to large farms of rice paddies is carefully planned and maintained. Usually, even the peasants enjoy regular meals, and village life among the Crane tends to be the most idyllic in Rokugan. However, when disaster strikes, such as a tsunami blowing in from the sea or a pirate raid, whole villages can be swept away or destroyed, and those that remain show signs of damage, hardship, and fear.

## Dragon Clan

The territory of the Dragon Clan is particularly harsh, and even the hardiest varieties of rice would fail in its frozen mountains. Villagers there are as likely to be hunters as farmers, though grains such as wheat and barley are cultivated in Mirumoto lands, and a number of popular varieties of tea are grown for trade. Mountain villagers tend to keep herds of goats for food, though they rarely offer such meat to visitors in case it offends. Mining villages dot the mountains, extracting metals such as copper and gold, as well as rare crystals and gems. Villagers in Dragon Clan lands might be unused to rōnin visitors, being tucked away in the mountains and hard to find, though they are more used to traveling monks. Most villagers will offer hospitality, but some isolated folk of this remote clan develop unusual customs that might unsettle visitors from other clans.

## Dragonfly Clan

Dragonfly Clan villages focus largely on farming in order to provide food for the Dragon as well as their own. As the gatekeeper of the Dragon lands, this small clan is located near the mountains, with flatter land and more temperate conditions. Dragonfly villagers are almost as mysterious as their Dragon allies, although they are easier to find. They are welcoming but cryptic, somehow never giving a straight answer, particularly if questioned about the Dragon.

## Lion Clan

The plains of the Lion are vast, providing plenty of arable land, though the land is so open that it is particularly at the mercy of the weather. Lion Clan peasants grow millet and wheat, as well as vast quantities of rice. This feeds the large standing army, and it is traded when there's a surplus. Unfortunately, some years see a deficit, and the Lion must rely on importing from other clans.

The Lion train many villagers to fight as ashigaru for at least part of their lives, which means that even a peaceful farming village might prove to have hidden teeth and claws if attacked. Horses, procured from the Unicorn, are trained in some villages before they're deemed ready for the army, and while only samurai smiths make superior weapons and armor, village smiths make as many yari, oyumi, and ashigaru helmets as they do tools for the fields. Mining villages provide metal, but much of it is copper, found in the Spine of the World Mountains, and is traded for iron from other clans. Wood is also a valuable commodity, and villagers near Akodo Mori, the Heart of Vigilance Forest, are likely to be *kikori*, or woodcutters.

## Phoenix Clan

Like the Crane, the Phoenix have many coastal fishing villages and, within Shiba territory, as many farming villages. Several grains are grown, as well as tea and soybeans. As the clan has an unusual number of shugenja, inclement weather is usually not something farmers have to fear. For the same reason, and because the Phoenix are the sacred keepers of Rokugani religion, even the smallest villages boast impressive shrines. Larger villages may exist to feed the shugenja of a nearby temple, rather than a town or castle.

Villagers living near the sacred forest of Isawa Mori are likely to be kikori,

Twin Blessings Village
PEARL-SHINE RIVER
OLD CAVE
ANCIENT STONE FOUNDATIONS
PLUNGE POOL
FOREST HERMITAGE
PLUM GROVE
HOT SPRINGS
LEADER'S HOUSE
KURA
SHRINE TO INARI & THE VILLAGE FOUNDER
WAY STATION
SAKE BREWERY
HENHOUSE
RUN-DOWN HOUSE
RICE FIELDS
MILLET FIELDS
HININ HUT

but even more so than their kin in other clans, these woodcutters marry ritual to their work. They are both skilled and bound to tradition, teaching young apprentices chants by rote and the most fortuitous ways to cut and treat the trees. As kikori cut wood from the forest, they leave offerings and prayers for the kami. The fine timber from Isawa Mori is famous for its blessed qualities, and all villagers treat it with appropriate respect.

## Scorpion Clan

A rōnin's welcome is never assured, but in Scorpion territory, villagers rarely reveal their true opinion until it is too late. Peasant farmers are forbidden to carry steel, but they can improvise using tools from the kitchen or fields, and they likely keep an array of herbs to slip into a meal served to guests. This way, they can make a visiting rōnin talkative and truthful, sleepy and suggestible, or quite ill. Many villages cultivate such useful herbs, as well as poppies, as the poppy trade flourishes in the Scorpion-controlled City of Lies, Ryokō Owari Toshi. Some of this trade is legal, accounting for the vast poppy fields cultivated for medicinal purposes, and some of it is not, which includes recreational use and sometimes dangerously strong strains, providing the Scorpion with a great source of wealth.

Rice is widely grown, so there are many villages of farmers, and Scorpion mining villages along the Spine of the World Mountains produce both silver and jade. Villagers are curious and suspicious in equal measure, and they treat every visitor carefully. After all, each encounter could become an opportunity.

## Unicorn Clan

Villages in Unicorn lands readily welcome travelers and wanderers as kindred spirits, but the peasants there are not afraid to stand up for themselves if their hospitality is abused. The Unicorn have fewer farming villages than other clans, partly because they keep vast stretches of land as pasture for their herds of horses. As the Unicorn's ancestors spent many years as nomads, crop growing is a relatively recent concern for them, though their herds of oxen and other beasts have long provided a source of food and materials. As permanent villages have grown, some have started planting rice, with limited success, and wheat, with somewhat more. Mining villages supply iron, diamonds, and jade. Fishing villages add to the otherwise-sparse food stores. The Unicorn make greater use of leather than other clans do, so villages might also contain tanneries and valued, skilled hinin workers. This position is often at odds with the rest of the Empire, which views hinin as an unfortunate necessity rather than a valuable asset.

## Minor Clans

Villages in Minor Clan territories can be similarly tailored to reflect the attributes of their clan. Most Sparrow Clan villages are farming villages where samurai live and work alongside the peasants. Hare Clan villagers are superstitious but bold, foraging in Shinomen Mori. Badger Clan villagers are suspicious and secretive, while Cat Clan villagers are welcoming and entertaining. The Fox Clan boasts several productive farming villages, but it also relies on foraging in Kitsune Mori, which produces an impressive array of foodstuffs and raw materials.

Mantis villages in particular are distinctive, reliant on the sea and on trade with distant lands. Some villagers work in mining communities, while others rely on the produce of the tropical forests or dive for pearls off the coast. Less concerned with social order than mainland Rokugani, villagers living on the Islands of Spice and Silk judge visitors by their actions, not their status as rōnin or otherwise. Keen to talk and keen to trade, Mantis villagers can be very welcoming, sharing seafood, foreign wine, and far-fetched tales of adventure with their guests. On the other hand, they are also quick to reach for their butterfly swords and defend themselves.

## Geography

Twin Blessings Village owes its name to the twin hills that shelter it from the fiercest weather. These could be replaced by mountains, if the village is located in Dragon lands. Alternatively, the name could come from the two water sources; wherever the village is located, it gets its water from a river that runs right through it, and it has the added benefit of a small hot spring nearby. Some villagers, particularly the older ones, might instead attribute the village's name to a legend of the village founder: see **Local Legends** on page 136.

Thanks largely to the presence of Pearl-Shine River and the digging of well-placed channels, the villagers have plenty of water to keep the rice paddies wet. They also have enough fertile ground for millet fields. The latter provides the bulk of the villagers' food, while the rice pays their taxes and feeds the lord and his court at the nearby castle. The nearest neighboring village is Nestled Village, half a day's walk away. It and Twin Blessings Village both have common-land forest, known as iriai-yama, in different parts of Koden Mori. Although they have been close neighbors for generations, there is a growing tension between these two villages.

For the purposes of this village description, the nearest town is Hirosaka, which is a day's walk away. This town is detailed in the next chapter, though of course the GM can choose to place the village near a different town instead to fit into a particular adventure. Either way, the village has little to do with the nearest town, except to occasionally trade for things the villagers cannot make themselves. As the village has no blacksmith of its own, when tools wear out villagers must trade for more. Some items might be acquired from the occasional visiting peddler, but the town is a far more reliable source.

Some villages fall under the jurisdiction of the nearest town, but Twin Blessings Village is part of the small territory ruled by Closed Shell Castle. The castle is an unpopular holding. The post of daimyō there had been left unfilled for a number of years, the lands managed by a steward. Recently, a new *shugo*, or minor daimyō, named Reju Jikai has moved into the castle with his samurai. Theoretically, this should make little difference to the village. As long as the annual rice tax is paid and the village doesn't need samurai protection, the lord is likely to have little to do with the village at all. However, if the new lord proves cruel, demanding, or simply inexperienced at managing land, his appointment might have a detrimental effect on the village.

While the position and geography of the village can be altered, the forest, fields, and sources of water detailed in this chapter are features that can be used in most settings.

**CLOSED SHELL CASTLE**

Reju Jikai, the new lord at Closed Shell Castle, is a harsh master who overtaxes the villagers. He has no sympathy for their plight, and his magistrate's demands might drive them to starvation—or to take drastic measures. This scenario is explored in the companion adventure *Sins of Regret*, available at https://www.fantasyflightgames.com/en/legend-of-the-five-rings-roleplaying-game/.

### POSSIBLE THREATS

While no two villages are the same, there are a number of common threats that most villagers fear to a greater or lesser degree. Each of these threats can create different problems—and adventure opportunities—in a village.

- Bandits can become a problem anywhere, but the greater the distance between a village and its lord, the greater the problem; samurai can't defend a place they can't reach before the threat has left. Of course, having an inattentive lord, or one who can't spare samurai to offer protection, is as much of a problem as distance.
- Plague and pestilence can spread quickly in a tightly knit village. For villages with no shugenja or monks nearby to offer healing, diseases can threaten to wipe out a village completely.
- Crop-eating pests can threaten the livelihood of any farming village, as well as giving rise to malnutrition or even starvation. The same can be said of droughts, floods, and any weather that might damage a crop or prevent a good harvest.
- Conflict between rival lords, whether within a clan or between two clans, might affect a village before it even hears the news, which trickles slowly down through the classes. Most generals won't stoop to slaughtering villagers, rendering a village useless to either side, but it has been known to occur when reckless or bloodthirsty generals decide they care more about victory than the lives of the innocent. Usually, a rival will take a village from the enemy, but even if the rival treats the villagers well, the villagers still must feed the occupying soldiers. The sight of an army marching toward one's village might not mean slaughter, but it could mean starvation.

**UNFRIENDLY RIVALRY**

*Twin Blessings Village and Nestled Village are both remote and insular. Most of their residents see anyone who is not from their own village as a stranger and a potential threat. In both villages, manners are valued, so visitors are generally well treated, but on occasions when a member of one village visits the other, there is a peculiar, unspoken tension. As Nestled Village has grown, the two villages have found themselves competing for resources in Koden Mori.*

## KODEN MORI

The large forest near the village is the source of many tales—and much awe—for the villagers. They rely on the forest for firewood and timber. They forage for edible mushrooms and berries there, and occasionally they trap animals as well. Though the villagers appreciate the bounty of the forest, they only venture under the trees by day, and they never pass the Cursed Stone that marks the end of their *iriaiyama*. No villager would dare enter the forest at night, when all manner of spirits and monsters, wild beasts, and bandits are about. Each villager can provide a personal account of something they have seen or heard when they remained too late into the evening, such as strange lights or dangerous shadows in the gloom, eerie cries, laughter, or unaccountable silences.

## THE CURSED STONE

This large rock looks like a person turned to stone, and villagers say that anyone who passes it, entering the deepest, darkest part of the forest, risks sharing such a fate. Stories about the stone conflict, however. Some villagers might tell visitors that they fear a monster that drains the life from people, leaving only stone. Others believe the stone was a widow praying so hard and long to be with her husband that she was allowed to leave her body and join him in his next incarnation.

## PEARL-SHINE RIVER

Pearl-Shine River, wide and fast-moving, flows past Closed-Shell Castle, through Twin Blessings Village, and away toward the sea. Its current is so strong that it is safer to fish from the bank than from a boat, and there is little traffic on the water. The river gets its name from the white sheen on its surface in the sunlight. Although the villagers don't know what causes that phenomenon, it hasn't stopped their children from searching for pearls along the bank, or in shallower areas where the current is not as strong. Shortly before the river reaches the village, a small waterfall has formed a plunge pool where the largest fish of the river can be seen. However, the villagers never fish there, because tales warn of disaster that will befall the village if they do (see **Forbidden Waters** on page 138).

## THE VILLAGERS

For ease of reference, this list provides a brief description of all named characters in Twin Blessings Village. Some are given NPC profiles starting on page 126; others can be represented using the **Humble Peasant** profile (page 313 of the core rulebook).

- **Setsuo**, the village leader. He's a popular leader, clever and polite, but he has an undisclosed dark past.
- **Ichiro**, Setsuo's son. He lives with his father but will not follow his example. He is dissatisfied with his lot in the village.
- **Hiroto**, the brewer. A hard worker, Ehana's husband, and Setsuo's closest friend.
- **Ehana**, a master weaver. Committed to tradition; Hiroto's wife.
- **Kaiya**, daughter of Hiroto and Ehana. She weaves with her mother but wishes to create works of art rather than the simple baskets the villagers want.
- **Koson**, a troublesome villager. He is lazy and irreverent.
- **Haru**, a thief. He's hiding in the village, since he's a wanted man in Hirosaka.
- **Michi**, a visiting monk. They work alongside the villagers and secretly teach some to fight.
- **Yorio**, the elder hinin. He lives with his children on the outskirts of the village, ignored by everyone else.
- **Kokoro**, a wise old villager. She sits in the plum tree grove and is a source of village legends and wisdom.
- **Reo**, the dōshin, tasked with maintaining order in and around the village. He does not have much authority or respect among the villagers.
- **Daizō**, the priest. He learned from the recently departed previous priest, and feels inadequate to fulfill the duties left to him.
- **Otoha**, the waystop proprietor. The villagers are afraid of her. She has good knowledge of herbs and sells illegal items.

## THE LAND

Villagers rely on each other, and within a village there tends to be a strong community spirit. Most villagers identify themselves by their village, more so even than by family or clan. The land that makes up their village, fields, and iriaiyama; the water sources they rely on; and the shrines at which they prey are their world. Such shrines and features of the land each have a spirit, or kami, deserving of respect. When there are no fish in the river or the sun fails to shine, it is taken as an outward sign of a spirit's displeasure. The land must be read and signs sought, as the weather, the movement of the birds, and the flow of the river may all be messages from the spirits. By paying attention to the land and observing the appropriate traditions, the villagers hope to avoid disaster.

## SEASONS

Any village that cultivates the land follows the changing seasons closely, though the changes bring different challenges in different areas. Villages growing rice, like Twin Blessings Village, prepare the paddies and plant in the spring, keep the crop wet and weeded through the summer, and then harvest and store the rice in the autumn. In winter, there are still jobs to do: mending and making, stocking up stores of wood, brewing sake, and the other daily tasks. However, particularly during a harsh winter, villagers spend more time together and indoors, along with the chickens, rationing their food stores and keeping fires burning.

# Resources

For rōnin visitors, accustomed to sleeping rough and going without regular meals, being welcomed into a village and offered food and shelter is blessing enough. However, if the rōnin have something to trade or services to offer, they might also be allowed a small share of the village's resources.

Twin Blessings Village grows rice and millet, produces sake, and has a supply of plums. Villagers have eggs, fish, and a small selection of vegetables to offer, along with foods they have gathered from the forest: mushrooms, berries, or herbs, depending on the season. Some of the herbs add flavor to an otherwise bland meal, others have medicinal benefits, and a few are poisonous and carefully avoided. The villagers can sometimes repair tools or weapons, and since they rarely have access to a healer from outside the village, they have some knowledge of healing.

Rōnin visitors should be aware that not only are the houses and fields part of the village, but the river and nearby forest are, too, and all belong to the local daimyō. If strangers attempt to fish in the river or forage in the forest, they might be challenged by the village dōshin, who attempts to lay down the law when there are no samurai around.

## TRADE

Rōnin might have skills the villagers lack, and they can trade their expertise for items or services they may require, such as food, sake, herbs, the repair of their weapons or boots, or healing for themselves or their mounts. The villagers value any news, as they receive little, as well as strange tales of adventures that entertain them. Sometimes an extra pair of hands is welcome; see **Honest Work**. If villagers feel they need immediate protection for any reason, or if any villagers need to make a journey, they might ask for help from any rōnin or samurai visitors.

## HONEST WORK

If visitors are willing to help, there are many tasks around the village they could take on. Unless the GM requires a different season, it is assumed the season is summer, when there is plenty to do. The bridge over the river needs some minor repairs, and as the villagers are proud of this bridge, made of a smooth cypress wood, the repairs must be undertaken carefully. The village road needs maintaining; its holes must be filled with stones and earth. The rice paddies need weeding, and the plums are beginning to ripen and need harvesting before pests get to them.

Apart from gaining the PCs the goodwill of the villagers, who have little to give, each task willingly performed should grant a reward, directly or indirectly. If PCs source wood for the bridge and repair it with appropriate skill and care, a child poking around at the water's edge finds a pearl, which they give to the PCs (with their parents' blessing). If PCs help with the road, a peddler passes by and gives them some unexpected item: an ornate tessen (a metal war fan, see pages 231 and 235 of the core rulebook), a pair of fine sandals, or a mysterious object from a foreign land. For appropriate foreign items, see **The World Outside of Rokugan** beginning on page 192. If PCs help with the weeding, they might find some precious flower growing unexpectedly among the rice. The villagers can advise them to leave the flower for a blessing at a shrine, where they receive healing or a Void point.

# Locations and People

The following section describes locations in Twin Blessings Village, but all are fairly typical locations that could be adapted for use within other villages. If a GM wishes to place Twin Blessings Village in a particular territory, certain locations might have to be left out. Rice paddies, and therefore the sake brewery, would be unlikely to feature in a Dragon or Crab village, for example, but could be replaced with a tea crop and small teahouse.

The buildings and fields of Twin Blessings Village stretch along both sides of Pearl-Shine River, and a single bridge connects one side with the other. The villagers use the river for everything from cooking and bathing to fishing and irrigating the crops. Channels cut between the rice paddies keep the paddies wet with river water, while millet grows on fields farther downstream.

Standing near the river is a small shrine, a stone construction with a sheltered space in which a supplicant may pray or leave offerings. A sake brewery also stands near the riverbank. A hinin hut can be found farther away, hidden from view behind a copse of trees in an area the villagers deliberately avoid.

## VILLAGE LEADER'S HOUSE

Twice as large as the other houses in the village and located in the center, Setsuo's house is easily spotted by any visitor. Like the other buildings, it's made of local timber, with beams cut to interlock, and it has a thatched roof. A movable paper interior wall separates the family space, where Setsuo lives with his son, and the space the village uses either for meetings or to house guests. Setsuo is polite to visitors, attentive to his villagers, and keeps the space warm and comfortable. Villagers feel free to visit him here whenever they have a problem to discuss, though Setsuo is usually out during the day, overseeing and helping with the communal work of the village.

Those who stay with Setsuo are afforded every courtesy. When the *irori*, a sunken hearth, is lit, the interior wall is moved aside so that all inhabitants can enjoy the heat and light. Setsuo, as leader and representative of his village, is a gracious host, providing guests with the two tatami mats he has to sleep on. He serves the best meal he can, which is likely rice with whatever vegetable is in season, along with sake and pickled plums.

### SETSUO, VILLAGE LEADER

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 3 3

Setsuo is a lean, hardworking man with strong arms and a bent back. His greying hair, rough skin, and bright eyes make his age difficult to guess, though his son is barely a man, so Setsuo can't be as old as he appears. Years of stooping in the rice paddies have taken their toll, though he is optimistic, lively, and genuinely fond of visitors and the news they might bring from the rest of Rokugan.

Setsuo has received more of an education than most peasants, sometime in his past. He tries to keep this hidden, but sometimes his knowledge of court politics, samurai etiquette, and geography can be surprising. If questioned, he'll admit that he hasn't spent his whole life in the village, as most have. As a youth, he left to live in Hirosaka, where he gained experience of things he won't admit to. This isn't a period of his life he likes to talk about, particularly within hearing of his son.

Setsuo is also cunning and willing to lie to the magistrate when taxes must be paid, in order for the village to prosper. He has lofty ideas, as though he questions his place in the Celestial Order, but he dislikes violence and would rather use his intellect than rebellion to improve his lot.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 60 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 8 |
| 40 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 8 |
| 24 | STATUS | FOCUS | 4 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR · SHREWD | VIGILANCE | 3 |

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 3 | TRADE 4

**ADVANTAGES**

**Support of the Village:** Social; *Interpersonal*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Dark Secret:** Social; *Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS**

**Nearby Object:** Range 0–1, Damage 2, Deadliness 3/4, Mundane

**Gear (equipped):** Common clothes (Physical 1, Mundane), withered twine necklace

**ABILITIES**

**OVERLOOKED**

When Setsuo makes a check targeting a character with a higher status rank, they treat that character's vigilance as 1 lower.

### Optional Encounter: Mysterious Stranger

One evening, a stranger arrives in the village on horseback, his face hidden by the wide brim of his straw hat, and demands to speak to Setsuo. After a few hushed words, Setsuo abruptly sends him away. This reaction seems surprising, and PCs may wonder why the visitor is being badly treated when the leader is usually such a good host. Setsuo seems worried about something and won't reveal much: only that the rider came from the town and is an old "acquaintance." Perhaps the stranger wishes a debt paid or is a member of a group attempting to rekindle old loyalties.

## SAKE BREWERY

The sake brewery is also the home of Hiroto, Ehana, and Kaiya. It is cluttered with the tubs and tools required for brewing, while tall stands of bamboo grow outside. Though many villagers weave, Ehana is considered a master of the craft and often teaches and assists the others in splitting the bamboo. While Hiroto is referred to as the brewer because he's the local expert, other villagers pitch in when there is a lot of work to do at the brewery, and Hiroto joins the others in the fields for most of the year. When the rice is harvested and stored, any excess is brought to the brewery to rest before being made into sake over the winter.

The villagers also use the sake for offerings to the local kami, for trade in the nearest village or town, and if there's enough they share it between themselves. According to the new daimyō, Reju Jikai, the quality is too poor to send to the castle, and he would rather acquire sake from elsewhere. That suits the villagers just fine, since they like the taste well enough.

### Hiroto, Sake Brewer

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 3 | 2

Hiroto the brewer is a large, well-built, down-to-earth fellow who is nevertheless highly superstitious. At night, he stops his ears with wax so he won't hear anything calling him from the forest, and this makes him hard to wake.

Hiroto works tirelessly in the fields, but his passion is for making sake. He is never happier than when pounding the rice and chanting the brewers' chants at the top of his lungs. This might be why he built his home apart from the others, so no one has to hear him but his tolerant family.

He is immensely proud of his daughter, Kaiya. He is too polite to say so, however, and only sings her praises when he's been indulging in his sake, when the only ones likely to hear are Setsuo or Michi, his closest friends among many in the village. He respects the priest but is somewhat in awe of religious leaders and so cannot relax around Daizō. The same is true, and even more obvious, when he meets a shugenja. He was the same with monks until he encountered Michi, who has been careful to foster an irreverent reputation.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 40 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 9 |
| 35 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 6 |
| 22 | STATUS | FOCUS | 3 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR · LOYAL | VIGILANCE | 5 |

| ARTISAN 1 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Large Stature:** Martial; *Physical* | **Superstitious:** Social; *Spiritual* |

FAVORED WEAPONS

**Sake bottle:** Range 0–1, Damage 2, Deadliness 3/5, Mundane

**Gear (equipped):** Common clothes (Physical 1, Mundane), bottle of sake

ABILITIES

SURPRISING PROWESS

The first time a character makes a Martial Arts check against Hiroto each scene, the TN of that check is increased by 2.

### Optional Encounter: Late-Night Drink

If PCs stay overnight in the village, they might be woken by what sounds like a party: laughter and music coming from the direction of the brewery. Any PCs who investigate find three strangers sitting outside the brewery in a pool of lantern light, drinking the villagers' sake. If they approach, the strangers invite them to join them, and any who join the party spend a pleasant hour and may each remove 1 strife.

The PCs might question the strangers' right to be drinking the villagers' sake, as well as their identities, since they dress in the fine kimono of courtiers but do not act with samurai restraint. These strangers are kitsune—fox spirits who can shapeshift into humans, from Chikushō-dō, the Realm of Animals. These kitsune live in the forest, and though they never speak to the villagers directly, they are confident and comfortable within the village because they know the villagers consider

them benevolent. They are fond of the villagers, and though they help themselves to the odd cup of sake or bowl of rice, they would never abuse what they consider an amicable relationship. If the villagers were ever in difficulty, the kitsune might help them, as long as they could do so without revealing themselves.

Anyone who joins the party finds the kitsune playing a game of riddles, though they are open to the suggestion of composing haiku instead. One of the androgynous members of the group is particularly vain and would appreciate any haiku composed about their beauty, whatever the quality. They reward such thoughtfulness with the gift of a porcelain sake cup with a fox motif. This item has the Sacred item quality.

If the PCs threaten them, harm them, or are at all rude, the kitsune turn into snow-white foxes and flee into the forest. If the encounter ends this way, this brings ill fortune to the village, and the rice crop begins to die. The villagers willingly share their sake with the kitsune, who are loved by Inari, a Fortune of Fertility and Rice, and so may be angry if they learn the PCs brought the misfortune.

## Kitsune

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 2 2

The three kitsune, one woman and two others with androgynous appearances, look like beautiful, jovial young humans and are dressed like wealthy courtiers, in fine silks of russet and silver. They all have the same narrow faces and delicate features, giving the impression they are closely related. Though they seem to maintain human form effortlessly, they retain their bushy tails, which they hide within their clothes. This may be because they cannot change their forms completely, or because they are too proud of their tails to lose them. Either way, after their party has gone on a while, they are less careful to keep the tails concealed.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 25 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 6 |
| 20 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 8 |
| 20 | STATUS | FOCUS | 4 |
| +2, −2 | DEMEANOR · CLEVER | VIGILANCE | 2 |

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 0 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 1

## ADVENTURE SEED: REBELLIOUS YOUTH

**一 Hook** Kaiya is missing. After an argument with her parents, she got upset and ran into the forest. Ehana and Hiroto ask the other villagers to help, but it's going to be dark soon, and many are afraid to search. So Hiroto appeals to any visitors to the village, asking them to bring his daughter back before she's eaten by wolves, turned to stone, or worse.

**二 Rising Action** Kaiya has blundered into the forest, leaving enough of a trail that she can be tracked past the Cursed Stone, but as night falls it becomes difficult for the PCs to see the trail. As the light dims, strange, echoing sounds reverberate through the forest. Soon, glowing green and white lights announce the presence of *kodama*, benevolent tree spirits that lead the way to Kaiya if the PCs follow them. Then, the wolves begin to howl.

**三 Climax** Kaiya doesn't want to return to the village. She wants to go to Hirosaka: that was what her argument with her parents was about. She's sure her skill at weaving will be well received there, as she can make beautiful things. She wishes to make better life for herself. She asks to be escorted safely to Hirosaka, or at least as far as the waystop, and promises to return to her parents one day.

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Dangerous Allure:** Social; *Interpersonal* | **Irrepressible Flirtation:** Social; *Interpersonal* |

FAVORED WEAPONS

**Claws and Fangs:** Range 0–1, Damage 3, Deadliness 4, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Elaborate Robes (Physical 1, Resplendent), sake cup (Sacred)

ABILITIES

SHAPESHIFTER

As a Support action, a kitsune can transform into human form (or back again). While in their fox form, they are silhouette 1. When they become Compromised, their fox feet, ears, or tails reappear.

## HOT SPRINGS

A short way into the forest along a well-beaten path is a natural hot spring and an accompanying *hokora*, a small stone shrine to the kami of the spring. The spring is not large enough to support a bathhouse, but it is a popular place for villagers to visit. They have built a wooden frame around the spring, which makes it easy and safe for a single person to bathe.

### Optional Encounter: Wrath of the Hot Spring Kami

The PCs could inadvertently offend the kami of the spring, which expects gifts from those who come to wash. If they do, each time they move toward the spring, it grows hot and bubbles violently, demonstrating the kami's anger. An appropriate gift of sake poured into the water will placate the spirit. Any PCs who successfully bathe in the hot spring are revived and renewed, removing any strife they may have accumulated.

### PROMISES OF THE SPRING

Below are some small notes about the hot spring that GMs can use to enhance its use:

- Those who stay in the water long enough and breathe deeply of the vapors, are blessed—or cursed—with a vision of their own death.
- The spring is a favorite meeting place for villagers wanting to talk in secret.
- Sometimes the villagers find odd items left there for the kami, valuable or strange things no villager is likely to have left. Perhaps someone lives in the forest and visits the spring, some stranger the villagers—so far—have never seen.

### Kami of the Hot Spring

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 8 2

Only an experienced shugenja would detect the presence of this kami. Yet anyone entering the spring can experience its lively, warming energy, something beyond the simple temperature of the water.

Those who fail to approach the spring correctly soon learn of the kami's displeasure, as the water bubbles and spits. If the kami is not quickly appeased with a gift, or the unwelcome visitor does not leave, the kami grows angry enough to manifest. It rises out of the water in a seething rage: a mutable, watery, humanoid form giving off scalding steam.

While this kami has a quick temper, its watery nature means it may also quickly change its mind and return to its spring, so it won't pursue anyone for long.

2 1 5 1 4

| ENDURANCE 13 | FOCUS 3 |
|---|---|
| COMPOSURE 5 | VIGILANCE 2 |

+2, –1, –1

DEMEANOR - IRRITABLE

ARTISAN 1 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 3 | SOCIAL 3 | TRADE 1

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Liquid Body:** Martial; *Physical* | **Ever-Changing:** Social, Martial; *Interpersonal, Physical* |

FAVORED WEAPONS

**Scalding Spit:** Range 0–3, Damage 5, Deadliness 5, deals supernatural damage

**Gear (equipped):** Cloud of steam (Physical 3, Supernatural 3)

ABILITIES

HOT WATER SPIRIT

The kami of the spring is an Otherworldly being of silhouette 2. Once per scene, as an Attack and Support action, it may target two positions at range 2–4. Hot water erupts between the target points that extends to range 1 in thickness and range 3 in height; this area counts as Dangerous terrain (page 267 of the core rulebook). This effect persists for two rounds. Any character standing where the steam erupts suffers the Dazed condition and must resist with a **TN 2 Fitness check (Air 3, Water 1)** or suffer 5 supernatural damage and the Burning condition.

**KITSUNE**

Some rice-growing villages believe kitsune to be benevolent spirits, and in fact the presence of these kitsune in the forest nearby does provide this village some protection from bandits, so in a way they do bring good fortune. If any PC is a kitsune, they immediately recognize their kin and can tell the other PCs not to harm them. However, if the kitsune PC has a reputation among their own kind, this may affect how the kitsune react. For more information on kitsune see pages 211-212 in *Emerald Empire, The Essential Guide to Rokugan*.

## KURA

The large *kura* in which the villagers store bales of rice is arguably the most important location within the village. Once it is full, there is enough rice in it to pay the annual tax to the local daimyō. The villagers watch the kura carefully for thieves or vermin that might undermine their efforts. The only building in the village with an upper floor, it is also used to store farming tools, though if anyone were to inspect the tools closely, they might wonder why there are so many new and unused ones—more than such a small village requires. In fact, the tools are all suitable for use as weapons; they are being stockpiled by Koson, who hopes to one day join the Perfect Land Sect.

### Optional Encounter: Stolen Rice

Someone has been stealing rice from the kura, and if too much is lost, it will make paying taxes difficult. Anyone who tries to keep watch falls asleep, as though enchanted. Setsuo has instructed Reo, the dōshin, to solve the problem, telling her that if she fails, Setsuo will have to recommend that the magistrate give the position to someone else next time he visits. If PCs help the dōshin, she will owe them considerably. However, if they solve the problem without including her, it will make her look bad, and they'll have made an enemy. The villagers believe something supernatural is at work, but the thief could be a mortal, such as the thief hiding in the hinin hut (see page 134), if he has found a way to inflict victims with a sudden sleep. Certainly, rumor has it that herbs with such an ability grow in the forest, and Otoha at the way station would be able to provide a potion or powder to induce sleep.

### Reo, the Dōshin

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 3 — 1

Reo is a young woman, and until her appointment was as close as a sister to Ichiro. However, when Setsuo recommended her to the magistrate and she received her post, she was honored, and vowed to take the role seriously—sometimes too much so. She guards the kura carefully, and when she is working alongside other villagers at any task, she considers it her role to correct or chide them as necessary. This habit has not won her any friends, and it has soured her relationship with Ichiro to the point of turning these once-close friends into enemies.

Reo is lean and muscular but clumsy. As she has nothing to mark her rank, she ensures that everyone remembers her position by mentioning it often. She wears a club at her side and rests her hand on it as though it were a sword. She seems to take pleasure from criticizing Ichiro in particular. She likes Kaiya more than she'll admit, but she is afraid of her father, Hitoro. When the priest is not around, Reo is Michi's next favorite victim for teasing, and the monk reminds Reo often of her youth and inexperience. However, Reo tries her best to do a good job and genuinely cares for the fate of the village more than her own.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 65 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 6 |
| 45 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 5 |
| 17 | STATUS | FOCUS | 5 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR · AMBITIOUS | VIGILANCE | 9 |

| ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 1 | TRADE 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Salt of the Earth:** Social; *Interpersonal* | **Clumsiness:** Martial; *Physical* |

FAVORED WEAPONS

**Club:** Range 0–1, Damage 5/6, Deadliness 2, Mundane

**Gear (equipped):** Common clothes (Physical 1)

ABILITIES

BURST OF COURAGE

When Reo performs an Attack action, she may choose one additional target within range of her weapon.

## PLUM TREE GROVE

This attractive, fruitful grove grows near the village, visible on the hillside beyond the houses. The village children sometimes play there, as it's deemed close enough to the houses and fields where their parents work. One plum tree in the grove is said to be the parent of all the others. Older than any living villager, it naturally shouldn't still be producing fruit, yet sometimes, at odd times of year, a single plum might be spotted on one of its branches. The children fight over who gets the plum from the oldest tree, claiming it grants a wish.

The rest of the grove is productive, providing a good crop for harvesting by the end of each summer. These plums are sweet and fetch a good price in the town, though some are saved for an annual festival in which the village traditionally invites the inhabitants of Nestled Village to come and try the plums, share sake, and give thanks to the kami of the grove.

## Optional Encounter: The Fire of Youth

Though the two villages have been neighbors for centuries, it's only now that the nearby Nestled Village is growing larger that the two are at odds. As far as the youths of each village are concerned, they are rivals. Usually, nothing is spoken of it, but this year, when the sake flows and tensions escalate, the youths of one side pick a fight with youths on the other. Setsuo's son, Ichiro, is involved, having lost his temper and if he disgraces himself he will lose any respect within his own village. Violence may erupt if no one steps in to prevent it.

## Kokoro's Wisdom

The oldest villager, Kokoro, is burdened with the ailments of age and is no longer expected to work in the fields. The role Setsuo has given her this summer is to watch for ripening plums in the grove, a job she relishes because it is her favorite place to be. Each morning, her family helps her wash and dress her, then carry her to the grove and place her in the shade of the oldest tree there. She leans against the trunk with her gnarled hands cupped in her lap, appearing to meditate. The children of the village bring her food and drink throughout the day, showing respect to the oldest and wisest among them.

The Fire of Youth encounter occurs when Kokoro is napping in her usual seat, unaware of the argument elsewhere in the grove. If someone wakes her, her wisdom can settle the dispute between the youths, as all listen when she chooses to speak. She will also reward PCs if they help, pointing out a single plum growing high on the ancient tree. If the PCs can reach it or carefully climb to fetch it, all who have a taste may decrease the TN of their next Social check by 1 (to a minimum of 1).

Those who visit Kokoro on any other occasion find her more than willing to talk and tell tales of the village. As well as retelling the village legends (see **Local Legends**, on page 136), Kokoro enjoys giving advice to those who take the time to listen.

- Kazuhiko's son still wanders the forest as a deer, and he often takes pity on lost souls. If you're ever lost in the forest and a deer appears, follow it, and it will lead you safely out.
- Setsuo is a great man, but in his youth, he made some grave mistakes. They will catch up with him one day.
- Enjoy the hot spring, but remember to take sake for the kami!
- If you help in the rice paddies, be sure to offer a prayer to Ta-no-Kami, Fortune of the paddies, to work in safety. Otherwise, you may find the paddies are home to venomous snakes.

**VILLAGE GOSSIP**

Sometimes Koson is heard talking to someone at night, when he's alone in his hut. It may be his father's ghost, which haunts him still.

## SHRINE TO INARI AND THE VILLAGE FOUNDER

The largest shrine in Twin Blessings Village is sacred both to Inari, a Fortune of Fertility and Rice, and to the village founder, Kazuhiko, the ancestor of all the villagers. A *torii* arch leads to this shrine, marking the beginning of sacred ground. Both shrine and arch are made of the same cypress wood as the bridge, but painted red. Villagers make regular visits there to leave offerings, ask advice or favors, or simply offer respect and thanks.

Once a year in midsummer, before the rice tax is collected, the shugenja who resides at Closed-Shell Castle travels to the village to conduct a ceremony in honor of Inari. As part of the ceremony, each villager performs for the Fortune or offers a gift. This is meant to represent whatever they are best at in life, so various villagers may sing, dance, bring woven baskets or wooden carvings, or in Hiroto's case, leave an offering of sake. After the ceremony, the shugenja removes all the items on the Fortune's behalf.

### Optional Encounter: Festival Matters

This year, the shugenja has sent a messenger to tell the villagers she is too busy at the castle to conduct the festival. The villagers are worried that Inari will be displeased. There isn't time to travel to the town to find a shugenja, and the villagers are putting pressure on their own priest to conduct the ceremony himself. The priest is not sure which is worse: attempting to conduct the ceremony himself and making an error or forgoing the ceremony entirely.

## RUNDOWN HOUSE

At the edge of the village, one house looks neglected, especially in comparison to the others, which are all well kept. Its thatch is degrading, and moss covers half of the roof. The air inside is damp and stale, the floor unswept and the fire rarely lit. The owner, Koson, can often be found sitting in the doorway for fresher air, making straw sandals. If asked, he reveals he has to make fifty pairs as punishment for butchering one of the village's chickens without permission. He also had to undergo a purification ceremony performed by the priest to cleanse him of the deed. Koson is tolerated because he's a villager born and bred, yet he doesn't quite fit in with the others.

## THE VILLAGE PRIEST

Daizō is a tall young man who already has the stoop common among the farmers in Twin Blessings Village. He rises even earlier than the other villagers to visit the shrines, and he can often be seen wringing his large hands with worry as he hurries from one to the next, then off to the fields to work alongside the other villagers. His main flaw is that he does not feel worthy of his post; even though a priest is not expected to communicate directly with the kami, his inability to hear them makes him doubt his ability to serve them. He is devout to a fault, and when there is any problem in the village that might be the result of a displeased kami, he takes that responsibility entirely upon himself.

Daizō learned from the old priest, who recently passed into Meido. He has great respect for his elders and conducts his duties faithfully, but he is insecure enough to bow to the wisdom of any shugenja, monk, or traveling priest who comes through the village. The exception is Michi, the monk who's currently staying in the village and sometimes seems to show no reverence for tradition at all. The two of them often argue, though Daizō is uncomfortable doing so. He is sometimes left with the feeling that Michi is deliberately goading him, to encourage him to voice his own views.

### Optional Encounter: An Act of Kindness

Koson wants help with rethatching his roof, but the other villagers are reluctant to assist. Setsuo tells him there are too many other jobs to do and it will have to wait, but Koson says his house is becoming damp, which he blames on the demon living in the thatch. No one takes Koson seriously.

If anyone helps him rethatch the house, which would take a day's work, they gain the Afflicted condition for their Earth Ring. This is due to the presence of a *keukegen*, a spirit that lives on the dirt floor of damp houses. Rethatching the roof displaces the shy spirit, which flees, but this doesn't cure the affliction.

## HEN HOUSE

While in some villages inhabitants each keep a chicken or two in or around their home, Twin Blessings Village has a communal hen house, albeit a small one. The villagers close the square wooden coop each night to protect the fowl from foxes. The chickens lay eggs that feed the villagers throughout the year, and in rough years or when there's a festival, some of the chickens may also be slaughtered for their meat. There is an aged but fiery-tempered rooster among them that has been known to attack visitors without provocation.

### Optional Encounter: It's Just A...Chicken?

Late one evening, Ichiro runs through the village ordering everyone to get inside. He goes to Setsuo and tells him that he heard something huge landing near the henhouse, causing the hens to scatter. He heard the beat of giant wings, and he is sure some monster has come to eat the hens. Setsuo wants it driven off, but no one volunteers for the job. Perhaps Ichiro is wrong and has just been startled by one of the hens, or perhaps a spirit has appeared. To include a cockerel-like *basan*, see page 245.

## UNOFFICIAL WAY STATION

Near the village, on a quiet track just off the road that runs between the village and the nearby town, is a building, not much larger than Setsuo's house, known as the way station. The villagers claim never to have visited this disreputable place, and they disapprove of anyone who does. Otoha and her departed husband, who was from Hirosaka, built it to offer rest to weary travelers. She welcomes samurai and commoners alike to drink from her well and share her fire, but it is the merchants, legal and illegal, who are the most frequent visitors. Otoha has a keen eye for herbs and a vast knowledge of their uses. The sake she serves at the way station is infused with an herbal concoction of her own devising, which offers clarity of thought and even "visions." All kinds of black-market items are traded at the way station, out of reach of the town authorities and beneath the notice of the daimyō at the castle, though it sits on his territory.

The way station has a drafty stable, but Otoha has no horse of her own, so travelers often sleep in the stable when there's no room in the main building. It's her son's job to care for any horses stabled there, but he's currently in the town, trading for supplies.

### Optional Encounter: Healing Tea

Ichiro falls sick and the villagers need to trade sake for healing tea at the way station, but none of them wish to go there. If the PCs are willing to make the trade, Setsuo gives them extra sake to exchange for whatever they might want for themselves. At the GM's discretion, all manner of things can be found at the way station: a talisman, a sacred weapon, a rare tea, or even a scroll detailing a mahō technique.

**AMONG THE CHICKENS**

*The villagers love to gossip, and below are some bits of gossip related to Ichiro, the hen house, and the chickens.*

*Ichiro takes particular care of the rooster, as he hopes to take it to fight the rooster in the next village. He wants to win some sort of bet.*

*If the village is ever in deadly peril, the hens will stop laying.*

*Otoha can make a special broth with chicken bones that allows her to control those who drink it.*

**MAGIC OR MYSTERY**

Although some of the adventure seeds, NPCs, and locations in this chapter have supernatural elements, for players who prefer more "realistic" games, these can be adapted. The villagers might still believe a supernatural force is at work, but the GM can choose to resolve the adventure in such a way that the cause is mortal, or they can simply exchange a supernatural problem for a practical one. For example, rather than a keukegen, the damp and dirty environment of Koson's unhealthy abode might be enough to make the thatchers ill.

## THE TROUBLESOME VILLAGER

Koson does not work hard enough, wash often enough, or pray regularly enough. The other villagers mutter about him, but the elders among them know that he's been beset by more than his share of ill fortune, and so they pity him. Koson's father was the younger brother of Setsuo's mother, who was the village leader before her son. She was a popular leader, but rather than being proud of his sister's success, Koson's father grew jealous and bitter. He took that bitterness out on his own family, becoming unreasonably demanding and expecting more from Koson than the young boy could give. When Koson's mother died in childbirth, taking the infant with her, Koson was left alone with his father. Kokoro's main regret in life is that she and the other villagers did not step in and save him.

When Koson's father's anger drove him to drink, he made a spectacle of himself in the village, raving that he didn't need the other villagers and that he and Koson could survive better on their own. He cursed the rest of the villagers and dragged his son into the forest with him, going deeper than the villagers dared follow. No one knows exactly what happened in the forest, but after four days, Koson returned alone. It took years before he spoke again, but he was never the same, and he has never told anyone what happened during his time in the forest. Some whisper that he killed his father and left him unburied, to wander the forest as an angry ghost.

**UNOFFICIAL KNOWLEDGE**

*"Otoha's husband isn't dead at all: she keeps him in the attic. Those who stay the night in the waystop can hear him moaning."*

*"Otoha can't get hold of all those strange items without help. She must be working for someone—some criminal with connections all over the Empire."*

## Otoha, Waystop Proprietor

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 1 — 8

Otoha grows and prepares herbs for healing and other, more dubious purposes. The villagers now fear her, but she was once one of them. She left the village and set up the way station with her husband, but he was from Hirosaka, and the villagers disapproved of her marrying outside the village. This is partly because Setsuo, who had only recently been made leader, was in love with her. Setsuo now maintains that she used her knowledge of herbs to force him to love her before abandoning him, but whether that's true or not only she knows.

Otoha is a mature but attractive woman—also something villagers attribute to her knowledge of herbs—with sharp eyes and a sharper wit. She has an unnerving way of welcoming visitors to the way station as though she already knows them, and she can usually guess what items they would be interested in. She wears bright-colored clothes that are finely made and embroidered as a display of her prosperity.

Although she is happy to talk about her husband's mercantile savvy and obviously has fond memories of his drinking songs, she won't discuss his death. No one knows how he died or what happened to his body. Rumors abound in the village: that she poisoned him accidentally or with purpose, that he was never human to begin with and simply returned to his own kind, or that he had enemies in the town who murdered him when he went there to trade.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 15 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 7 |
| 35 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 16 |
| 09 | STATUS | FOCUS | 5 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR - SHREWD | VIGILANCE | 5 |

ARTISAN 2 | MARTIAL 0 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 4 | TRADE 3

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Fortune Telling:** Scholar; *Spiritual* | **Whispers of Cruelty:** Social; *Interpersonal, Infamy* |

FAVORED WEAPONS

**Tessen:** Range 0-1, Damage 4, Deadliness 3, Ceremonial, Concealable

**Gear (equipped):** Lucky robes (Physical 1, Supernatural 1), 2 poison vials (noxious poison), 8 koku

ABILITIES

**SKILLED HERBALIST**

Once per scene, Otoha may make a **TN 3 Medicine check (Air 5, Fire 1)** targeting one character. If she succeeds, she may remove 3 fatigue and strife from the target, plus 1 additional fatigue and strife for each bonus or . Additionally, she may remove one of the following conditions from the target: Bleeding, Burning, Dazed, Disoriented, Dying, Unconscious, or Lightly Wounded.

**FUTURE SIGHT**

Once per scene, a character may exchange a favor to Otoha for insight into their future. The character chooses a skill group. The next time that character makes a check using a skill from that group, they roll and keep one additional .

## HININ HUT

Out of sight of the village, on the edge of the forest, a hinin family of four lives in a small wooden hut with a leaky roof. Yorio and his three children, Yoshiro, Yoji, and Chouko, wear ragged clothes and go barefoot. They serve the village, undertaking the jobs considered too unclean for the villagers to perform themselves. This includes slaughtering chickens, taking care of the dead, and spreading "night soil" on the fields. They keep out of the way of the villagers, who mostly deign to notice them as little as possible, though do not begrudge them a share of the food.

The hinin do their work when villagers are in the fields, asleep, or otherwise occupied. Their harsh lives have left them physically weak and prone to disease. The father has no hope left and merely struggles on day to day for the benefit of his children. The children, however, hope one day to leave the village and hide their hinin status, making better lives for themselves elsewhere. Such hopes are encouraged by meeting characters like Michi and Haru, who defy convention.

### Optional Encounter: A Bullying Thief

Although the hinin have performed all their usual duties, they have been acting strangely. Anyone who passes within sight of their hut notices them sitting, or even sleeping, outside it. No one wants to investigate too closely, but a thief is hiding in the hut and intimidating the hinin, emerging at night to steal food and sake from the village. The hinin don't know what to do about the unusual situation and are afraid to say anything, knowing they cannot count on the villagers' mercy if they're believed to be complicit in the thief's crimes.

## Haru, the Thief

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 2 3

Haru has fallen on desperate times: otherwise, he wouldn't have stooped to hiding in a hinin hut. However, he is a practical man, one whose fortunes rise and fall erratically, and he comforts himself with the thought that next month he might be sleeping in far grander accommodations. Haru's ambition and confidence are both his greatest assets and his most terrible flaws. He can skillfully impersonate a high-ranking courtier flawlessly for weeks and be treated like an honored guest by a host who's too embarrassed to admit they can't remember their distant cousin. Then, he'll grow overconfident and make a mistake, such as claiming knowledge or a skill he lacks, prostrating himself before someone of inferior rank, or seducing his host's spouse. He managed to do all three recently while staying in Hirosaka, and he left on foot with mounted samurai after him. He knew there was a good chance they'd ride through the village and check the forest, but there was little chance they would think to investigate a hinin hut.

Haru keeps his true origins a closely guarded secret. He has fabricated so many differing stories in his time there is a good chance he couldn't remember the truth accurately anyway. He is of average height and build, with a pleasant but forgettable face, which he uses to his advantage. His deceptive nature and disregard for the Celestial Order may well offend samurai and possibly the villagers as well. Michi would be intrigued to learn of his existence, however, and may have a suggestion for his next endeavor. The monk might tell Setsuo that Haru should be allowed to go to a monastery but secretly encourage Haru to find and join the Perfect Land Sect, which could put his skills to good use.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 05 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 10 |
| 22 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 8 |
| 05 | STATUS | FOCUS | 3 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR · SHREWD | VIGILANCE | 6 |

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 1

**ADVANTAGES**

**Persuasive:** Social; *Interpersonal*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Ambitious Fool:** Social; *Interpersonal, Spiritual*

**FAVORED WEAPONS**

**Knife:** Range 0, Damage 2, Deadliness 4/6, Concealable, Mundane, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Ragged robes (Physical 1, Damaged)

**ABILITIES**

**EXPERIENCED IMPERSONATOR**

Once per scene, Haru can change his demeanor to Ambitious (+2, –2), Assertive (+2, –2), Gruff (+2, –2), or Shrewd (+2, –2).

## ADVENTURE SEED: BANDIT ATTACK

**一 Hook** While the PCs stay in the village, bandits attack. Masked riders gallop through the village, setting fire to houses and helping themselves to what little the villagers have. Some of the villagers want to fight back, but there is no sign of Setsuo, so there is no one to rally them. If the PCs are in or near the village and don't immediately take action, Ichiro tries and fails to rally the villagers, then calls on the PCs to help.

**二 Rising Action** If the PCs help fight off the bandits, the villagers come together with surprising efficiency, wielding their tools as weapons. Someone (possibly Ichiro) throws a knife with suspicious expertise and strikes the bandit leader, severely wounding her. The rest of the bandits flee, riding in the direction of Hirosaka, and the villagers set about putting out the fires. If PCs investigate the fallen bandit, they can question her and learn that she was paid to attack the village, but she won't say by whom. She reveals she is rōnin, and her katana lies unbloodied by her side. When she dies, PCs might investigate the fatal weapon. If so, they find that the knife is far sharper than any villager should own.

**三 Climax** Setsuo returns from the forest to find the scene, and is appalled: peasants aren't supposed to fight—they'll get into awful trouble! He fears for the lives of his villagers if word gets out. He suggests that if the PCs claim to have killed the bandit themselves, they would not be punished.

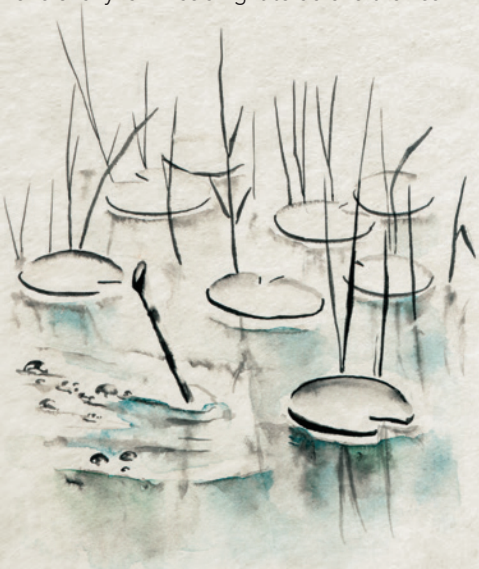
## FOREST HERMITAGE

According to the villagers, Michi, a monk of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, is currently staying in a hermitage in the nearby forest. Occasionally a villager sets off into the forest to deliver food or ask advice, but usually the monk is in the village, perhaps conversing with Setsuo, drinking with Hiroto, or meditating with Kokoro in the grove. More often than not, Michi sleeps in the house of one or another of the villagers rather than returning to the hermitage. The villagers seem to consider the visiting monk one of them, not a stranger. The priest is the only one who has anything bad to say about Michi, making comments about "a lack of respect" and "an excess of sake." No one minds talking about the monk, but no one willingly describes the hermitage's exact location.

If a PC follows one of the monk's visitors or manages to find the monk's location in the forest another way, they discover a clearing that serves as a secret training ground. The monk may spend some nights sleeping there, in a lean-to at the edge of the clearing, but it is by no means a hermitage. Several villagers, especially the youths, including Ichiro, go there to train. The monk is sympathetic to the cause of the Perfect Land Sect and might even be an agent of the sect, but would never admit to this.

### OPTIONAL ENCOUNTER: MICHI'S SECRET

If anyone finds the monk's supposed hermitage, Michi attacks them but does not fight to hurt them. Instead, this is a test of their skills. Since they have managed to find the place, Michi is willing to teach them. The monk makes no apology for training villagers to fight—and does not mention the sect. If questioned directly, Michi remains mysterious and vague but is adamant that anyone of any rank has a right to defend themself.



### MICHI, THE MONK

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 4 2

Michi is a monk of the Brotherhood of Shinsei from Dragon Clan lands. Michi wears a saffron robe and is overly fond of quoting—or misquoting—Shinsei. Michi has come to the village with the purpose of training and perhaps recruiting villagers into the Perfect Land Sect, but not even trainees have heard the monk repeat the sect's chant or claim any affiliation. Michi simply offers the villagers training. If threatened or argued with, Michi retreats into the forest. Apart from training, Michi will not fight anyone. As a mysterious monk, Michi is untraceable and will reappear when the time is right. If Michi is attacked and defeated as an adversary, the monk escapes, but any PC who bests Michi gains 1 XP.

Michi has clearly stayed in the village long enough to be a familiar figure and may appear anywhere in the village. Perhaps because Daizō disapproves, Michi enjoys teasing him. Michi might decide to pray at the shrine just as the priest is about to arrive to light incense or might loudly spout something mysterious and nonsensical when Daizō is about to give someone advice.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 25 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 12 |
| 36 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 10 |
| 22 | STATUS | FOCUS | 4 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR - TEASING | VIGILANCE | 6 |

| ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 0 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Quick Reflexes:** Martial; *Physical* | **Light-Hearted:** Social; *Interpersonal, Spiritual* |

FAVORED WEAPONS

**Sturdy Walking Stick:** Range 0-1, Damage 3, Deadliness 3/5, Mundane

**Gear (equipped):** Monk's robes (Physical 1, Mundane)

ABILITIES

EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED

As an action, Michi can activate any rank 1 kihō of any element, but cannot use the burst effect.

# Local Legends

Village life is highly ritualized. The spirits of the paddies, fields, forests, and rivers are remembered in everything the villagers do. The priest conducts ceremonies throughout the year, during planting and harvesting, asking for help when food is scarce and giving thanks when it is not. Every member of the community learns the local rituals as children while helping out with the village work, and they become ingrained. The villagers are very superstitious, and even though they don't know the purpose or reasoning behind everything they do, they perform the rituals and tasks in the same way their parents did, passing on traditions to the younger generation. If anything were to be forgotten—if the kami of the river, the kami of the rice paddy, or the Fortune of Rice were offended—the results could be dire. There are chants to say when walking through the village at night to keep evil spirits away, and there are chants for when one is caught on the road in a storm to help find the way back to the village. Some chants or songs are used as a way of remembering which herb mitigates which ailment while also giving thanks to the forest spirits. Other chants teach children which tasks to perform in which season, while encouraging the seasons to arrive at the right time.

The villagers revere some of the natural features in and around the village as *shintai*, earthly homes of kami or Fortunes. Some trees, for instance, are believed to contain kodama, so the villagers never cut those trees. Twin Blessings Village has several permanent shrines, including the stone hokora shrine at the hot spring, the stone shrine by the river, and the larger shrine to Inari, made of fragrant cyprus wood. Tradition is considered important for survival, so anyone who breaks or is disrespectful of a tradition is chastised, punished, or even banished from the village. Only Setsuo, the village leader, is innovative, but he is careful not to offend his villagers when proposing new ideas.

The village has a number of local legends that are distinctive, occurring in a particular form only there. However, travelers might encounter similar versions of these stories elsewhere, told in different villages that claim them as their own. At least parts of most of these legends are known by all the villagers, but for the complete tales, visitors should ask Kokoro, who happily tells them in their entirety.

## ADVENTURE SEED: BLOODLESS STEEDS

**一 Hook** The only pony in the village, which belongs to Setsuo, the village leader, is found dead in the river—and drained of its blood. The villagers mutter that visitors must have brought an evil spirit with them. The culprit is actually a kappa that has moved into the river, but it won't show itself unless it sees a potential victim alone on the riverbank, or is lured with cucumbers. For more information on kappa see page 247.

**二 Rising Action** If any visitors to the village have horses, one of these is dragged away the next night, and the kappa continues to take a horse each night. When there are no horses, it takes chickens, then moves on to villagers. Each body is found floating bloodless in the river or lying on the bank.

**三 Climax** The PCs might catch the kappa in the village at night. Alternatively, if a PC goes to the river alone or, suspecting a kappa, takes bait, the spirit might appear. Either way, wrestling it into submission or outwitting it with riddles is enough to make it leave the village for good.

## The Founding of the Village

The village founder, whom the villagers speak of with great respect, is known only as Kazuhiko, but they believe he once had a family name and was a samurai wrongfully disgraced and stripped of his title. The villagers would not normally mention this to lorded samurai, however, for fear of reprisal.

The tale they do tell is that, alone, unarmed, and fleeing honorless bandits, Kazuhiko hid in the river, breathing through a reed. He remained there for four days, the sheen of the sun and moon on the surface of the river successfully hiding him from view. While under the water, he was visited by the river kami, who grew so accustomed to him that they played around him, and they told him when the bandits had finally left the area. When Kazuhiko emerged from the water, he built a shrine to the river kami in gratitude. Then he built himself a house nearby, and that was the founding of the village.

### ICHIRO, SON OF THE VILLAGE LEADER

*As Setsuo's son, Ichiro would be a likely candidate for next village leader, but since he fell out with his once-devoted friend Reo, he has increasingly withdrawn from the other villagers. Now no one believes him to be a suitable leader, least of all his father. He prefers the company of animals, and when he isn't wandering in the forest, supposedly foraging but actually training with Michi, he's tending to the chickens. This last is a task usually assigned to small children, but his father indulges him. Ichiro also loves horses, and he cares deeply if one is injured or worse. The loss of his father's pony would move him to tears in public, which would only bring his father shame.*

*If Ichiro could face his loss of Reo's friendship and understand why it affected him so deeply, he might be able to better control himself. As it is, his frustration and anger build inside him, which Michi has noticed when training him in the forest. Even the monk cannot reach him, however; all Michi can do is train him to channel some of that anger, in case he ever needs it.*

## ADVENTURE SEED: FORBIDDEN WATERS

一 **Hook** The water level of the river is lower than it's ever been, and the villagers are convinced it is only getting worse. Setsuo politely approaches any visitors and asks if they have been fishing in the plunge pool, where fishing is prohibited.

二 **Rising Action** Setsuo and his son investigate the pool, and they encourage the PCs to come with them so they can show them exactly where they must not fish. They still suspect the PCs until they reach the pool. There, they find eyeless fish floating in the water and scattered on the bank. One of these fish is large and silver, and Setsuo fears it is more than an ordinary fish. Surely the village is doomed. After that, villagers complain of strange ailments: in particular, of being stifled in their sleep so they can barely breathe. Childish laughter is heard at dusk and dawn, and if anyone asks the monk or Kokoro for their opinion, they say the fish is just a fish, but that mischievous spirits are to blame.

三 **Climax** Setsuo believes that only by finding the culprit and punishing them to placate the river kami can crisis be averted. The fish have been killed by *kijimuna*, a type of trickster spirit (see page 139). They can be driven away if their trees are felled or burned.

### The Ancestors of the Villagers

Kazuhiko's wife, Masae, gave birth to two sons, both strong boys who obeyed their parents in all things but one: they could not stop fighting, and they disagreed about everything. One hot day, the boys swam together in the river, and they disagreed over who could swim the fastest. Their father heard their argument from the bank, and he feared that one day they would tear his fledgling village in two. He asked the river kami to keep them from fighting. One boy turned into a stag and bounded off into the forest; the other turned into a fish and swam away. Kazuhiko's wife then gave birth to a girl, and over time others joined the village and many became distant descendants of the family.

### Where the Villagers May Fish

The villagers are fortunate there are many fish in the river, but the largest fish live in the plunge pool, waiting for food to come over the little waterfall. The pool is deep, and the current would quickly drag a swimmer or foolish fisher under. There is also an old legend that says the spirit of the village founder's son resides in the pool and disturbing him will bring great calamity to the village (see **Forbidden Waters**). Some think this fish can speak, and whispers to the village children insights into the future. Perhaps this is why the villagers never fish there, or perhaps it is because the river kami are said to play in the pool, appearing either as small children or as large silver fish.

### The Legend of the Plum Tree

Kokoro, who spends all her waking hours in the plum tree grove, already has her own legend. Children of the village, amazed by her many tales and words of wisdom, believe she is not an old woman at all, but the spirit of the oldest tree in the grove. While their parents smile at such youthful imaginings, when Kokoro does breathe her last, her legend will become entwined with that of the tree, and a sacred shimenawa rope will find its way around the ancient trunk, letting visitors know that a spirit resides within.

### Local Spirits

One way of adapting Twin Blessings Village for use in a different landscape is to add legends and spirits that relate to that landscape. For example, if the village is used in a mountain setting, a *yobuko* might be heard at night, echoing villagers' secrets for everyone to hear. In a coastal village, the locals might fear the spirits of sailors who were lost at sea and never received proper

funeral rites, or a sea monster might swim off the coast, capsizing fishing boats. Inhabitants of a mining village might live in fear of a demon in the dark. A selection of monsters can be found in **Chapter 7: Non-Player Characters**, starting on page 227.

## Kijimuna

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 1 1

These small trickster spirits live in trees deep in the forest. The only sight of them most villagers have caught have been glimpses of distant flames like candles burning in the branches. The kijimuna have hair like flames, but otherwise they look like children playing in the forest or fishing in the river. Mischievous rather than malicious, they flee rather than fight.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 00 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 10 |
| 20 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 8 |
| 05 | STATUS | FOCUS | 3 |
| +1, +1, –2 | DEMEANOR · CURIOUS | VIGILANCE | 5 |

| ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 0 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 1 | TRADE 0 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**ADVANTAGES**

**Sneaky:** Martial; *Mental, Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Childish:** Social; *Interpersonal, Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS**

**Spirit Fire:** Range 1, Damage 3, Deadliness 5, deals supernatural damage

**ABILITIES**

### FOREST KIN

Kijimuna are Otherworldly beings of silhouette 1. As a Movement action, they may hide from characters with vigilance 3 or lower.

## ADVENTURE SEED: BLUE LIGHTS

**Hook** Several villagers saw strange blue lights like flames shining in the forest the previous night, and they can't agree whether they're *onibi*—spirits borne of a corpse or resentful ghosts—or something else. The priest, Daizō, argues for ghosts, while the monk, Michi, argues they are only benevolent forest spirits. The rest of the villagers take sides, and tensions rise within the usually unified village. Hiroto takes the side of the priest, but he takes it a step further, suggesting there's been a murder and that the light will lead the way to the unavenged body. Setsuo asks for some brave soul to follow the light and learn its true nature.

**Rising Action** The monk gladly volunteers to follow the lights, and if the PCs agree to do so too, it will be in Michi's company. Michi waits until they are in the darkening forest watching for lights before reminding them that if the lights are onibi, all their souls may be at risk. The monk has been drinking and stumbles after PCs, letting them lead the way. When they see a blue light and move toward it, they hear the sound of water. The source of the light is an *aosaginohi*, a glowing night heron and a type of *yōkai*, standing on the riverbank (see page 242). They must creep forward, or they'll scare the creature and only glimpse it in flight. If they get close enough, the monk whispers that if someone were to steal a feather, they'd have proof for the priest.

**Climax** If a PC attempts to steal a blue feather from the aosaginohi, the bird flies away whether they succeed or not, and it never returns. The monk then chides the PCs and asks them why they thought it wise to follow the advice of a drunken monk, explaining that to have an aosaginohi in the forest was a blessing on the village, and now it is lost. However, if the PCs watch the bird and do not approach, they see it preen itself, leaving a single feather behind when it wades into the water to catch fish, moving away from the PCs. They can then retrieve the feather and return to the village to spread the good news.

**CURSED DOG'S HEAD**

*Some foul spirit or strange magic has animated this large, severed dog's head. Its wolflike snout is matted with blood, and it snarls and growls, teeth bared, hungry for its next victim. Released from its cloth, it flies through the air as fast as it might have leapt in life, but when its cloth is thrown back over it, it falls lifeless once more.*

## Osamu, Malicious Peddler

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 3

At first glance, this mysterious peddler doesn't look much different from the villagers, but there's an odd light to his eyes that becomes an obvious glow when seen in darkness. His dark traveling cloak is made of an odd, stiff material, and the shape of his body is undetectable beneath it, giving rise to rumors that his form is other than human.

Osamu has many strange tales to tell, but no one believes they can all be true. He claims to have traveled all across Rokugan and beyond and he has picked up a few tricks on his journeys. When he's pleased, which means he is getting what he wants, he is polite and pleasant. When he is displeased, he is quick to anger. Perhaps because he has traveled with no company beyond his own for so long, he cares for no one but himself. His selfish attitude, once revealed, seems unnatural to the villagers, for whom community is extremely important; this attitude alarms them even before he pulls any unpleasant tricks out of his bag.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 22 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 7 |
| 18 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 6 |
| 07 | STATUS | FOCUS | 4 |
| +2, +2 DEMEANOR - ASSERTIVE | | VIGILANCE | 3 |

| ARTISAN 2 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Rare Knowledge:** Scholar; *Social, Spiritual* | **Hot-Tempered:** Social; *Mental* |

**FAVORED WEAPONS**

**Knife:** Range 0, Damage 2, Deadliness 4/6, Concealable, Mundane, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Cursed robes (Physical 1, Supernatural 2), cursed dog's head, 2 poison vials (noxious poison)

**ABILITIES**

### STRIKE AND FLEE

Once per round, after performing an Attack action, Osamu may immediately move two range bands.

## ADVENTURE SEED: STRANGE WARES

**一 Hook** A peddler arrives at the village one day with wares to sell. He is pleasant but has some strange items to trade: bones of unidentified animals carved with foreign symbols, dried rats' tails of enormous size to affix to doorways to repel thieves, an odd selection of dried flowers he claims grant everything from a clear complexion to the power to control fire, and small metal amulets said to grant immunity to steel when inserted under the skin.

**二 Rising Action** The villagers are unnerved by the peddler's unusual wares, and no one wants to trade for anything. He is obviously displeased and begins to turn red in the face as he grows angry. The monk prompts Setsuo to offer the peddler some food and sake, but for once, Setsuo is reluctant to offer hospitality. The priest wants the peddler sent away, and when the peddler hears this, he takes something out of his bundle, removing the cloth to reveal a dog's head. This flies toward Setsuo, gnashing its teeth. As the villagers try to fight the dog's head off, the peddler slips away.

**三 Climax** The dog's head might be destroyed, but if it sinks its teeth into anyone, they become possessed and suffer the Afflicted condition for their Fire Ring. They cannot speak but only bark until either the peddler is found to remove the evil spirit or a skilled shugenja undertakes the task.

## Nekomata

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 3 / 1

A creature of the mountains, this *nekomata*—a type of cat yōkai, or living ghost—is a long way from home, which is why it appears so confused. It has traveled a significant distance and has become disoriented in the process. Many nekomata can talk, act, and appear fully human as they carefully select their victims to further their nefarious goals. This particular nekomata was driven from her home and has wandered since, using her powers to survive but taking risks most of her kin would never dare. She knows there are easy pickings in a human village, but she forgets that calling upon the dead to entertain her will likely cause her more problems than it is worth.

While she appears to the villagers as a frail old woman, her natural form is that of a very large two-tailed cat. In this form, she is strong and can rely on her instinct to survive, so she'll probably do very well in the forest, where she can hunt for food. If she survives the encounter, there is a good chance she will return to the village again, but the villagers may be better prepared for her appearance next time.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 00 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 10 |
| 05 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 5 |
| 00 | STATUS | FOCUS | 4 |
| +1, +1, –2 | DEMEANOR · CONFUSED | VIGILANCE | 4 |

| ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 1 | TRADE 0 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Free Spirit:** Social; *Physical, Spiritual* | **Wild Rage:** Social; *Physical* |

**FAVORED WEAPONS**

**Claws and Fangs (after transformation):** Range 1, Damage 5, Deadliness 7, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Common Clothes (Physical 1) or thick fur (Physical 2) if transformed

**ABILITIES**

### TRUE FORM

A nekomata is an Otherworldly being. As a Support action, a nekomata can revert to its true feline form, increasing its endurance and composure values by 4 each.

## ADVENTURE SEED: WEARY TRAVELER

**Hook** An old woman wanders into the village one evening. She is tired and confused, and some of the villagers are afraid of her and reluctant to let her stay. She is clean and well dressed, however, and Setsuo believes she must be from some good family. He says she needs to be cared for overnight, so she might tell them in the morning where she comes from. He would offer her shelter in his own house, but if any visitors are staying with him, he politely asks their permission first.

**Rising Action** In the night, the old woman wakes and wanders off. If confronted, she is just as confused and unforthcoming as in the evening. If anyone follows her, they see her pause to take a drink from an unlit lamp in the corner, lapping up the oil like a cat. If challenged, she lashes out with claw-like fingers before leaving the house. Left to her own devices, the woman stands in the middle of the village in the dark and starts a strange yowling song. She begins to dance, slowly taking on some of the features of a cat, two tails snaking from beneath her cloak. If she is allowed to finish her song, spirits of the dead rise as insubstantial apparitions from the ground to join her, dancing silently in the air. These are the dead family members of the villagers. Any who see them are driven temporarily hysterical and suffer 3 strife.

**Climax** The priest calls for someone to kill the monster and spare the souls of their ancestors, while the monk warns against this, instead suggesting they use fire to drive her away. The latter approach sends her fleeing, and the dead are allowed to rest once more. Any attempt at the former sees her transform fully into a giant, two-tailed cat slaughtering everyone she can get her claws on.

## The Perfect Land Sect

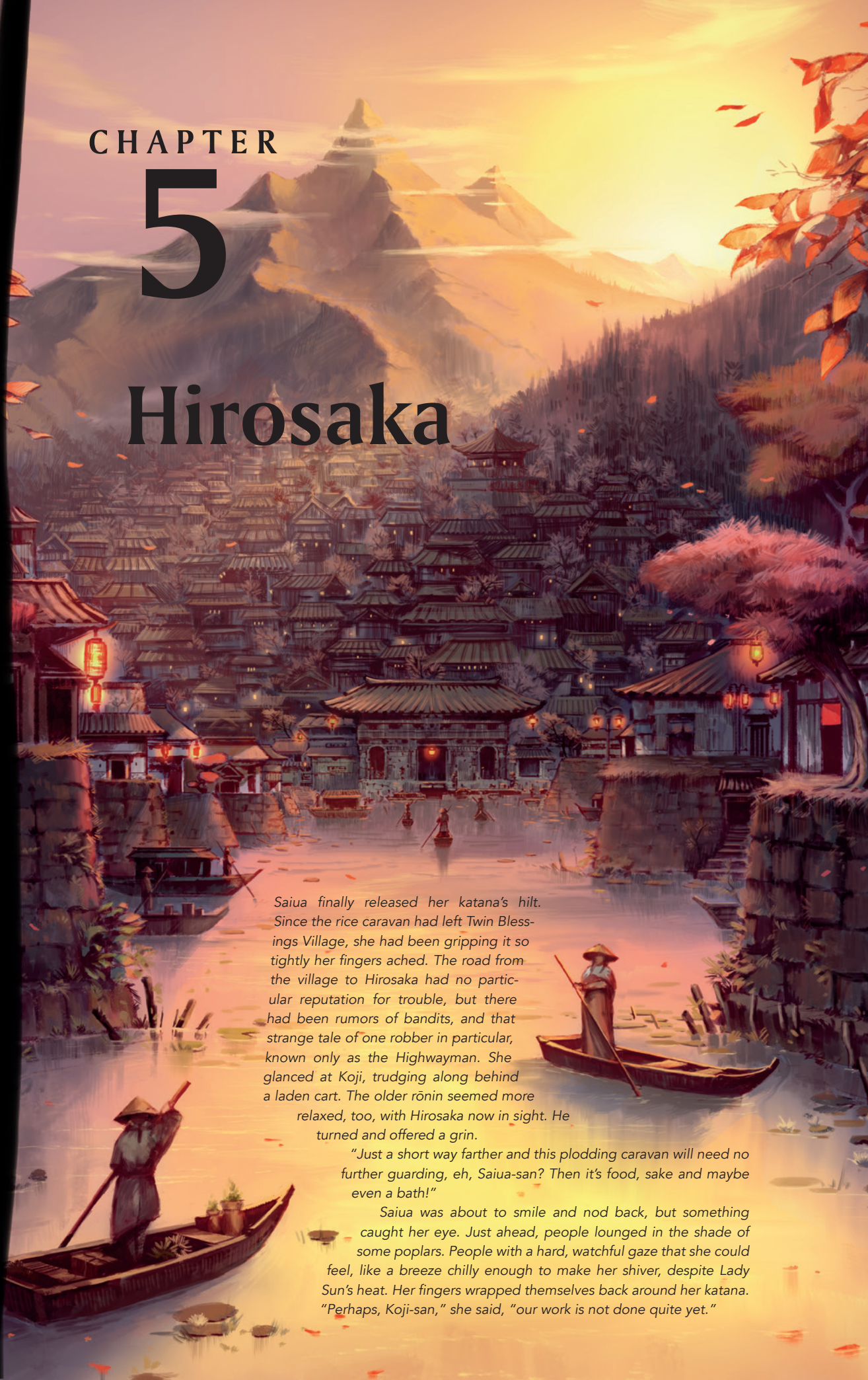
In Twin Blessings Village, the ties to the Perfect Land Sect are both tenuous and unspoken. Most of the villagers have heard of the sect, but few if any have had direct contact. Villagers brave enough to talk about it only repeat rumors or speak as though the sect were a legend. Generally content, many of these hardworking villagers continue their age-old traditions without question, but ambitious youths, or discontent villagers like Koson, are more likely to be open to the new, radical ideas of the sect. Only Michi has any real knowledge of the Perfect Land Sect, and this information is not forthcoming from the monk.

Other villages might have a more direct link to the Perfect Land Sect than Twin Blessings Village does. The sect recruits village leaders surreptitiously so that certain villages become safe havens for members as they travel across Rokugan, teaching their practices to peasants. Villages—especially the most isolated and rural—are prime targets for the sect to recruit from. Daimyō take little interest in what villagers do as long as they pay the rice tax, so Perfect Land indoctrination and training are easy to keep secret, with no samurai the wiser until it's too late. Visitors to such a village might notice it is unusually crowded and that the villagers engage in atypical activities for peasants, such as prolonged chanting, meditation, and even martial training. Weapons might be made in a smithy if there is one, or brought and stored there, though of course they are kept out of view of the casual visitor as much as possible. Some such villages might be unwelcoming or dangerous, or simply fail to show visiting samurai the proper respect.

Ultimately, a village of this sort could make a good base from which a band of Perfect Land followers could take over important roads and rivers, putting pressure on local cities and castles and spreading the sect's influence further. However, making such a bold move currently would draw too much attention, so the sect builds up slowly toward larger-scale organized rebellion, in the meantime inspiring village groups to rebel on a smaller scale. After all, peasant rebellions are not unheard of, even without the sect's help.

The less satisfied a villager is, the more likely it is that the sect appeals to them, so in struggling, downtrodden villages, the sect is most likely to take root. Ironically, many daimyō suspect the prosperous villages more, believing that villagers who don't have to work as hard have too much time on their hands. They fear the peasants will use their time to plot, scheme, and entertain ideas above their station. Occasionally, this belief and its accompanying fear can prompt an otherwise benevolent daimyō to overtax his villages, treat the villagers unfairly, and push them into sympathizing with the very sect the daimyō is trying to discourage.

In some territories, a daimyō who even suspects the sect has taken control of a village might act ruthlessly to quell the threat. Whole villages have been destroyed by daimyō afraid of a sect-driven rebellion. This sets an example for the daimyō's other villages, but some samurai would argue that such action goes against the Bushidō tenet of Compassion and would recommend more restrained measures. In territory held by the Imperial families, such as Twin Blessings Village in its default setting, a magistrate or investigator might be sent in to look into any rumors of the sect. Anyone found to be a member of the sect could be judged and executed as an example to the rest of the village, an action less likely to incite the disapproval of neighboring samurai and daimyō.



# CHAPTER 5

# Hirosaka

*Saiua finally released her katana's hilt. Since the rice caravan had left Twin Blessings Village, she had been gripping it so tightly her fingers ached. The road from the village to Hirosaka had no particular reputation for trouble, but there had been rumors of bandits, and that strange tale of one robber in particular, known only as the Highwayman. She glanced at Koji, trudging along behind a laden cart. The older rōnin seemed more relaxed, too, with Hirosaka now in sight. He turned and offered a grin.*

*"Just a short way farther and this plodding caravan will need no further guarding, eh, Saiua-san? Then it's food, sake and maybe even a bath!"*

*Saiua was about to smile and nod back, but something caught her eye. Just ahead, people lounged in the shade of some poplars. People with a hard, watchful gaze that she could feel, like a breeze chilly enough to make her shiver, despite Lady Sun's heat. Her fingers wrapped themselves back around her katana. "Perhaps, Koji-san," she said, "our work is not done quite yet."*

# How to Use This Town

Much larger than villages, but smaller than cities, towns in Rokugan are the bridges connecting the vital labor of the commoners to the great works of the powerful aristocrats. Hirosaka is a such a place. A small but bustling metropolis in its own right, Hirosaka—which means "broad hill"—is a typical Rokugani town, offering the GM a ready-made setting representing the sort of smaller urban area a party of samurai is likely to encounter. And although Hirosaka is governed by one of the Imperial families, it is designed to be easily translatable to whatever place in the Empire best suits the campaign.

Since it is intended to be representative of a typical Rokugani town, Hirosaka is deliberately generic. For example, while specific past events and incidents that have affected the town in its current form are noted, there is no detailed history provided for Hirosaka. The intent is for a GM to be able to place Hirosaka in any part of the Empire that suits their campaign, adjusting it accordingly and giving the town whatever history and background is most useful to them.

To that end, much of this chapter describes Hirosaka as an Imperial holding in the lands of the Seppun family, near Otosan Uchi. However, information and suggestions regarding locating Hirosaka in other regions of Rokugan are provided throughout, allowing the GM to customize the town as they see fit. Alternatively, a GM may find it more useful to include only parts of Hirosaka in their setting, incorporating them into their own locations, or to use some of the NPCs or adventure seeds provided here in their game. Finally, since Hirosaka is intended to be broadly representative of a Rokugani town, a GM may find it a source of inspiration for creating their own communities.

## AN IMPERIAL HOLDING

Hirosaka is located a full day by foot north of Otosan Uchi, on the eastern bank of the River of the Sun. For nearly two hundred years, the town and the lands around it have been administered by the Imperial families in general, and by the Seppun family in particular. This places Hirosaka in some of the most fertile and fully developed land in the Empire, accentuating its importance as a hub for travel, trade, and commerce. The current population of Hirosaka is about five thousand people, but as the town is a center for both overland and river travel, this number swells and shrinks throughout the year, in parallel with the seasonal activities in the lands around it. For example, in the late summer and throughout the autumn, Hirosaka's population increases as harvested crops are brought in from the surrounding farms and villages to be taxed, sold, stored, and shipped to other destinations. Conversely, in the winter, the population decreases as the commoners return to their rural homes and hunker down against the cold weather.

Hirosaka includes a number of specific locations and is home to a variety of people, which are described in detail in subsequent sections. It is not primarily a military holding, so it has no exterior walls or large defensive works. Generally a prosperous town, it is peaceful and orderly—but this doesn't mean it's free of nefarious schemes and activities. Accordingly, the information provided should be sufficient to allow a GM to use Hirosaka as it is presented here in their campaign. If it is to be located in another part of the Empire, however, then it would be appropriate to make changes to adapt it to that area.

### Using Hirosaka as a Great Clan Holding

If a GM wishes to use Hirosaka somewhere in the Empire other than its default location, then it will likely become the holding of the Great Clan into whose lands it is placed. Much of the town is still usable as portrayed, but to remain consistent with the setting, some aspects of it should be altered to fit the theme of the specific Clan.

### Using Hirosaka as a Minor Clan Holding

Rokugan has a large number of Minor Clans, so providing a detailed overview of suggested changes applicable to each is beyond the scope of this book. To make Hirosaka a Minor Clan holding, GMs are encouraged to use the essential "flavor" of the Minor Clan in question, together with the general geographic and climatic conditions of the new location, to inspire changes to the town. For example, if Hirosaka were located in the islands of the Mantis Clan, it would almost certainly be a port, and it would have the character of a town on a relatively rugged and isolated semitropical island.

#### The Crab Clan

Given the omnipresent threat of the Shadowlands, most Crab holdings are built with defense as their foremost attribute. Accordingly, if set in the lands of the Crab, Hirosaka incorporates the strong defensive works typical of Crab holdings. These include an outer wall of wood and stone; several watchtowers, or *yagura*; and at least two gates: should one be compromised by an attacker, the other would allow for continued entry to

Hirosaka
SAMURAI QUARTER
SUN GLOWING ON MIST INN
TEMPLE SQUARE
HOUSE OF EVERGREENS INN
SHRINE TO INARI
MARKET
SHRINE TO DAIKOKU
TRADING GROUNDS
THE SAKE WORKS
MESS HALL
SMITHY
STABLE
STOREHOUSE
LARK'S SONG INN
COMMONER QUARTER
TRAINING GROUNDS
GUESTHOUSE
THE HOUSE OF THE WINDING PATH INN
BARRACKS
MAGISTRATE'S STATION
DWINDLING FORTUNES GAMBLING HOUSE
SLEEPING QUARTERS
DŌJŌ
GAZEBO
STABLES
ARMORY
STABLES
AUXILIARY BUILDING
GRANARIES
GOVERNOR'S QUARTER
MUNICIPAL COURT
MARKET
GOOD & PLENTY NOODLE SHOP
MANSION
TEAHOUSE
SMALL BARRACKS
GOVERNOR'S ESTATE
FISH SHOPS
RIVERPORT QUARTER
BATHHOUSE
DREAMS FULFILLED
STOREHOUSE
GUESTHOUSE
SAKE HOUSE
WAREHOUSES
SERVANTS' QUARTERS
DOCKS
HININ ENCAMPMENT
WELL
CREMATORY
STOREHOUSE

and exit from the town. The governor's palace is a fortified keep, or *tenshukaku*. Dour and functional like much of the rest of the town, it serves as the keystone of the town's defenses and a place of final refuge should the outer defenses be breached. Military authority typically overrides civil governance, and a well-armed garrison is present. As a Crab holding, Hirosaka may be a port, but it is much more likely to be inland, located on a dominating and defensible terrain feature.

### The Crane Clan

The Crane Clan has the greatest length of seacoast of any of the Great Clans by far, so if Hirosaka is set in that clan's lands, it is just as likely to be a port as to be an inland holding. If it is a port, the town and its surroundings could show damage and repairs from the recent tsunami afflicting the Crane coastal lands, as well as areas still contaminated by salt water and marine mud. Even so, being a Crane holding, Hirosaka is resplendent with traditional, elegant architecture and beautiful gardens, and it contains facilities related to performance and the arts: theaters, schools and studios for sculptors and musicians, shops for kimono makers pursuing new fashion trends, and other pursuits of culture and beauty. A Daidoji holding would also see a great deal of commercial activity. The military is subordinate to civil authorities, so any garrison is small and any defensive works few.

### The Dragon Clan

If Hirosaka is a Dragon Clan holding, then it is nestled in rugged or even mountainous terrain. As the Dragon have no access to the sea, it would not be a port. Little arable land surrounds the town, so it relies heavily on imported food.

Large granaries and storehouses provide for the winter, when travel in the mountains becomes much more difficult and dangerous. The most likely exports are minerals, stone, and related products; likewise, stone is a major construction material. Given jade's shortage in the Empire, a nearby jade deposit would make Hirosaka particularly important—as well as very wealthy and influential. Because of Dragon samurai's diminished birth rate, the proportion of samurai to commoners is considerably lower than elsewhere in the Empire. Monks and holy people, on the other hand, are both more common and more prominent. The Dragon's terrain offers considerable defense, so any garrison or defensive works present are small, while civil and religious authorities are more prominent than they are elsewhere.

### The Lion Clan

As a Lion Clan holding, Hirosaka might sprawl in relatively open country or sit in the more rugged foothills of the Seikitsu Mountains. It may be a river port, but like the Dragon, the Lion Clan has no seacoast. In any case, given the generally militant nature of the Lion, Hirosaka has a larger military presence than most towns of other clans—a strong garrison, more and larger facilities such as barracks and dōjō to support military forces that may be training or operating in its vicinity, and a preeminent military authority. That said, strong defensive works are only likely if Hirosaka is set in a strategic location, as the Lion are not strong practitioners of defensive, positional warfare. Ancestor reverence and worship is a particularly prominent aspect of the town's spiritual character.

## RŌNIN IN HIROSAKA

Rōnin are found throughout Rokugan, and Hirosaka is no exception. What differs in various regions, however, is the extent to which these "wave-men" are welcome in town. In our default Hirosaka, controlled by the Seppun, rōnin are grudgingly accepted, as long as they remain well behaved and reasonably out of sight. The situation would be similar in versions of the town set in Lion, Crane, or Phoenix lands. In times of war, however, when rōnin are more likely to be used as mercenaries, even by these more traditional clans, their presence is somewhat more prominent.

If Hirosaka is set in the lands of the Unicorn, Dragon, or Crab, rōnin are more openly accepted and more visible. This is also true if the town is a Scorpion holding; they may even be welcomed. This isn't altruism, though; to the Scorpion, rōnin are considered to be useful—but expendable—pawns.

### The Phoenix Clan

If located in Phoenix lands, Hirosaka could occupy nearly any geographic setting, from an open plain, to a forested area, to a region of rugged hills and mountains. It could also be a riverport or seaport. As is the case for the Crane, Phoenix architecture is traditional and elegant, but it also incorporates prominent spiritual elements, such as torii arches and numerous small shrines. Secular authorities share power with spiritual ones or may even be subordinate to them. Any military presence remains well in the background, while defensive works are few and discreet. One or more libraries host ongoing scholarly research and compared to other towns in the Empire, temples and shrines are prominent, religious festivals are more frequent and elaborate, and all of these are more central to the everyday life of the citizenry. Monks and holy people are relatively common, but perhaps most notable is the increased presence of shugenja compared to other clans.

### The Scorpion Clan

As a Scorpion holding, Hirosaka could be located in relatively open lands, or it could be set in or near the Spine of the World Mountains or the Shinomen Forest. It could also be a riverport. The architecture is quite traditional but tends to be relatively somber and understated. Like Crane holdings, most Scorpion holdings have a significant presence of commerce and activities related to art and performance; geisha houses and theaters are prominent. Unlike Crane towns, though, a Scorpion Hirosaka has a more evident sordid side, with gambling houses and opium dens operating much more openly, along with a corresponding criminal underworld. Civil authority generally appears predominant, but the Scorpion excel at appearances, so even if there is a strong military presence, it may not be obvious.

### The Unicorn Clan

Hirosaka exhibits some of its greatest changes as a Unicorn holding. It is most likely set amid open plains, but it could be located in more rugged terrain, such as the foothills of the Spine of the World Mountains. The architecture is much less traditional, with evident gaijin influences from the Ivory Kingdoms or Burning Sands, such as domes and slender, rounded spires. Trade in gaijin goods and commodities is relatively common. A significant transient population of nomadic Unicorn—particularly from the Moto family—ebbs and flows with the turning seasons. Commoners are more visible, and more relaxed in the presence of samurai, than among other clans. Military and civil authorities share power, while the military presence varies—it is stronger and more prominent closer to the Empire's western margins and less so elsewhere. Similarly, the more westerly Hirosaka's location is in Unicorn lands, the more likely it is that gaijin are present, including foreign travelers from the Burning Sands or the Ivory Kingdoms.

### GAIJIN IN HIROSAKA

Similar to rōnin, gaijin—people from outside Rokugan—are viewed differently in different versions of Hirosaka. In a Crane, Lion, or Phoenix holding, gaijin maintain a very low profile—if they are accepted into the town at all. The other clans are generally more welcoming of gaijin; this is especially true for the Unicorn, and among Minor Clans, the Mantis and the Tortoise. In these latter cases, gaijin may actually be quite prominent; some of them may live in Hirosaka and may even be involved in commercial, artisanal, and other day-to-day activities. Much more detail about gaijin in Rokugan is given in **The World Outside of Rokugan**, starting on page 192.

## Geography

The location of Hirosaka, along with details of its surroundings, provides a geographic context for the town. This is important, because the location and evolution of a town is shaped by its geography, both physical and cultural.

### LOCAL GEOGRAPHY

The River of the Sun is born in the southern reaches of Yama no Kuyami, the Mountains of Regret, and flows southward through flat, open lands administered by the Seppun family. Its course eventually passes through Otosan Uchi before emptying into the sea through the Bay of the Golden Sun. The river's periodic flooding, usually the result of the thaw following an exceptionally snowy winter, has made the land along its course particularly fertile and productive. As a result, this land is heavily cultivated, with numerous farms and villages typically producing rich crops of rice, barley, and other commodities. Hirosaka and similar towns were established as trade hubs, acting as central clearinghouses for this prodigious agriculturalas it avoided having large

numbers of commoners bringing their harvests directly to the Imperial capital. Instead, agricultural shipments are gathered, enumerated, taxed, and stored in Hirosaka and other towns, with trade caravans moving these and other commodities to the capital and other locations in a methodical and orderly manner.

Because the River of the Sun is prone to flooding, Hirosaka is located on a broad series of low, rounded hills bordering the river—hence the town's name. This allows the town to avoid the immediate effects of the river's flood, although in rare instances, particularly prodigious floods may temporarily isolate the town atop its elevated site. The lower-lying lands around Hirosaka are home to numerous farms, many of which bring their produce directly to the town. The production from farms more than a few hours' journey away is generally first collected at outlying villages before being transported to Hirosaka. An example of such a village is Twin Blessings Village, described in **Chapter 4: Twin Blessings Village**, starting on page 118. It is important to note that only the farms and villages in close proximity to Hirosaka are governed by the daimyō. More remote settlements, such as Twin Blessings Village, are governed by other lords. This can, and does, lead to tension between the governor of Hirosaka and the other lords, as they bicker over matters like the boundaries of their authority and the apportioning of taxes.

Farmed crops are not the only commodity that passes through Hirosaka. Because the River of the Sun is generally navigable once it emerges from the Mountains of Regret, mineral resources such as iron, copper, and stone mined in the mountains are shipped southward through Hirosaka, as is timber harvested from forested areas along the river's course. All of these goods can then be shipped farther south, and eventually to Otosan Uchi, using a combination of river transport and traffic along a well-maintained Imperial road that parallels the river.

Finally, because the land surrounding Hirosaka is quite flat and open, it provides little defense in times of war. Even so, Hirosaka has no external wall and few defensive works, instead relying instead on its location deep inside the Empire and its status as an Imperial holding for protection from those who might consider attacking it.

## VARIANT GEOGRAPHY

The Empire is vast and is home to myriad environments, even within the borders of a single Great Clan. The following are suggestions on how to change Hirosaka if the GM wishes to move it to another geographic setting.

### Coastal Setting

If Hirosaka is located on the seacoast (or on the shore of one of Rokugan's large inland lakes), it may require significant changes.

As rivers flow into the ocean, a port town can be both a riverport and a seaport. A town located at the mouth of a large river could see both river and maritime trade and related traffic. However, the types of traffic would be different: rivercraft such as small boats and barges are generally not suited to open water, while larger seagoing ships are difficult to handle in the confines of a river. Accordingly, the riverport facilities would remain, with seaport facilities and infrastructure being added to the town. An effort would likely be made to keep these port districts as close together as possible to facilitate the transportation of goods from one to the other.

Turning Hirosaka into a seaport adds the following to the town:

- **A safe harbor:** Seaports are generally located on sheltered coves or bays, on the leeward coasts of islands, or in similar places where ships can be protected from rough seas and storms.
- **Docks:** Constructed of wood, stone, or both, docks include piers and jetties, which extend from the shore, and wharfs and quays, which are located along the shore. All provide places for ships to be securely tied up while being loaded and unloaded.
- **Warehouses:** These large, shed-like buildings provide places where cargo can be stored securely and out of the weather. Valuable cargoes may be held in specially built and guarded buildings, while bulky cargoes insensitive to the weather, such as timber and minerals, may simply be stored in open yards.
- **Shipyards:** These facilities are used to maintain and repair ships. They may be as simple as a stretch of beach where ships can be grounded and worked on while the tide is out, or as complex as elaborate docks where new ships are built.

- **Related facilities:** Ports tend to be served by their own districts, which feature inns and rooming houses for transients, sake houses, and gambling dens.

### Mountainous Setting

If Hirosaka is located in a mountainous setting, the most immediate impact on it is the loss of its riverport; even in modestly rugged or hilly areas, rivers generally flow too fast to be navigable. Moreover, as the surrounding area changes from hilly, to rugged, to outright mountainous, the amount of arable land surrounding the town diminishes. A large town is generally only located in such difficult terrain if it occupies a particularly strategic location or features an abundance of a valuable commodity such as jade or gold. Otherwise, the difficulty of keeping a substantial population provided with sufficient food—particularly in the winter, when travel in mountainous areas is curtailed or impossible—makes such a location simply not worthwhile.

If Hirosaka is located in rugged or mountainous terrain, the following changes are appropriate:

- **Substantial food stores:** Since much of the town's food—or even most or all of it, if it is located in particularly mountainous terrain—must be imported, large food-storage facilities are necessary. The summer sees large quantities of food being brought into the town over available roads and stored in spacious granaries and warehouses. Even more effort is invested in ensuring these stores of food remain secure and free of things like vermin; a sudden shortage of food in the depths of a mountain winter could spell disaster for the town.
- **Strong defense:** Being located in rugged, hilly, or mountainous terrain can itself provide the town with strong defensive attributes. Steep slopes and sheer cliffs can limit a potential attacker's approaches; these could be further reinforced by walls and watchtowers, providing for a formidable defense even without more substantial fortifications or a large garrison.
- **Natural hazards:** While much of the Empire is subject to periodic severe weather and seismic instability, the effects of these are greatly magnified in mountainous areas. Nestled among steep hillsides and cliffs, possibly close to the snow line, the town could face threats from flash floods, avalanches, landslides, earthquakes, or even volcanoes.

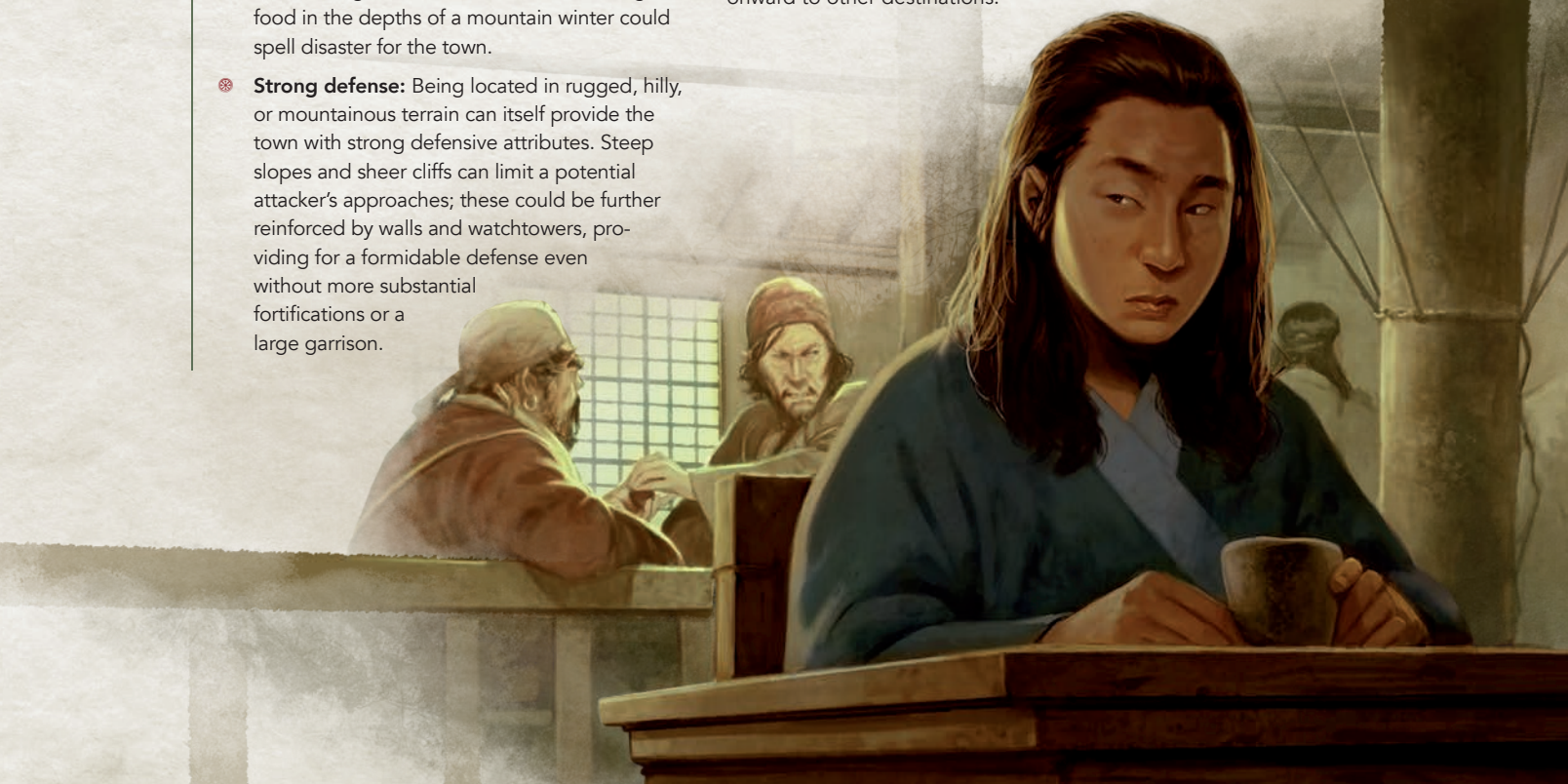
## Resources and Trade

The foundation of Hirosaka's economy, like that of most Rokugani towns, is agriculture. Ensuring that the Empire's people, samurai and commoners alike, have an adequate and reliable food supply is fundamental to peace, stability, and prosperity. Towns like Hirosaka occupy a vital place in the Imperial system of food production and distribution, efficiently linking the multitude of farms that produce food to all of those who end up consuming it.

Only slightly less important than food are commodities such as minerals, stone, and timber; Hirosaka also plays an important role in the acquisition of those, as well as their refinement into a wide range of finished goods.

### The Regional Economy

The default version of Hirosaka is located amid richly fertile farmlands lining the course of the River of the Sun. These farmlands are administered by the Seppun family. The town functions as a regional hub in which food and other commodities from the surrounding region are gathered, taxed, and then shipped onward to other destinations.



The sequence of activities is as follows:

- **Commodities are produced:** Crops such as rice, barley, wheat, and millet are grown and harvested by heimin farmers in the lands surrounding Hirosaka. Farmers within a two-hour journey by foot are considered vassals of the town's governor and bring their harvest directly to Hirosaka. Farms and villages more than two hours away are generally the vassals of other lords; Twin Blessings Village, described in Chapter 4, is such a settlement. Other commodities are produced farther afield: iron, copper, and stone are mined in the Mountains of Regret, while timber is harvested from forested areas in the foothills and in areas closer to Hirosaka deemed unsuitable for cultivation. These commodities are transported to the town both overland and on the River of the Sun.
- **Commodities are taxed:** Taxes are normally collected as portions of each commodity, at rates determined by a series of formulae set forth by Imperial decree from the Emerald Champion. These formulae specify the taxes that may be levied for each commodity by each jurisdiction through which it passes. The overall goal is to ensure a distribution of the commodity that is fair and sufficient to support everyone from the heimin farmers who grow it, to their lords, and up the chain of authority all the way to the Emperor. Collection is enforced by the Emerald Magistrates, as well as by clan and local magistrates. When all taxes have been collected, anything that remains is similarly proportionally allotted to the various jurisdictions for sale, in order to generate revenue. In times of plenty, this can yield considerable wealth. Conversely, poor harvests can make it difficult even to cover taxes, and food shortages—or even famine—can result.
- **Commodities are stored and distributed:** Once taxes have been levied and deducted, goods are stored—food in granaries; mineral ores, stone, and timber in warehouses—or batched up for shipment by merchant caravan or boat to other places. In the case of Hirosaka, most goods are shipped to Otosan Uchi, but some are also shipped to nearby major holdings, such as Yōjin no Shiro in the adjacent Lion Clan lands to the west and Kiken na Roka Toshi (Treacherous Pass City) in Seppun family lands to the east.

If the GM locates Hirosaka in another part of the Empire, then the general sequence above still holds true, but the details may change. For example, if Hirosaka is a seaport, then goods arrive and depart by ship. In this instance, a greater variety of goods passes through the town; for example, it wouldn't be unreasonable for trade to involve rare and valuable timbers, such as teak or mahogany, or exotic spices from the Islands of Spice and Silk.

## THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Hirosaka's local economy is quite diverse. A wide range of specialized economic activities characterizes the day-to-day commercial activity of the town—activity that allows its people to survive and thrive. This includes the following:

- **Food:** Every citizen of Hirosaka is a vassal of the governor, and since the governor is obligated to provide the necessities of life for their vassals, each citizen is entitled to an allocation of food for themself and their family. The specific allocations vary, depending on the social standing of the recipient. A municipal bureaucracy, answerable to the governor, exists to ensure that these allocations are properly distributed, such that all citizens receive their entitlement and no more (of course, favoritism, nepotism, and corruption do creep into the process). However, citizens are able to purchase additional foodstuffs, such as spices, various types of meat, fish, and so on. In this way, citizens are able to enjoy more varied diets; wealthy citizens can eat extremely well.
- **Basic consumer goods:** Every household requires certain items, such as tatami mats, futons, baskets, pottery, utensils, cups, and similar goods. In Hirosaka, as in most other Rokugani towns, the majority of such goods are manufactured locally by heimin craftspeople. Some of these goods are collected by the municipal bureaucracy in what amounts to a form of taxation and are, in a manner similar to that for food, allocated to the citizenry. Most, however, are sold by their makers to those who wish to purchase them, both in Hirosaka and in surrounding farms and villages.
- **Luxury goods:** Goods such as wall hangings, *shōji* screens and other decorative items, fine sake and teas, and so on are produced by both skilled heimin craftspeople and samurai artisans who live in Hirosaka. These goods aren't collected by the municipal bureaucracy, but rather are sold locally or shipped to locations where they can be sold at a profit. Luxury goods from elsewhere are imported and sold at the trading grounds.

- **Services:** A wide range of services is available in Hirosaka. These include entertainment such as Kabuki and other types of stage theater as well as poetry and music recitals. Inns, sake houses, tea shops, and noodle stands are places for people to gather to eat, drink, and socialize. Heimin carpenters and masons build and repair houses and shops, while chirurgeons and herbalists see to the physical health of the citizenry. Much of this service economy is based on a barter system, but paying money for services is always an option.

## The Underground Economy

Not surprisingly, a more-or-less hidden economy thrives in most Rokugani towns, and Hirosaka is no exception. Smuggling, extortion, protection rackets, and trade in illicit drugs—particularly opium—all thrive in this underground economy. In the Seppun-controlled version of the town, the black market is very discrete, but in other versions—for example, a Scorpion, Mantis, or Tortoise Clan version of Hirosaka—it could be much more prominent.

That said, some players may be uncomfortable with overt or excessive (or even subtle) references to some or all such illicit activities. GMs are encouraged to discuss their portrayal of these activities with their players beforehand, to ensure no one's enjoyment of the game is diminished by them.

## Table 5–1: Commodities in Hirosaka

| COMMODITY | LOW PRICE RANGE (E.G., IN A GOOD YEAR OR WHEN IN OVERSUPPLY) | HIGH PRICE RANGE (E.G., WHEN IN A BAD YEAR OR WHEN IN SHORT SUPPLY) | NOTES |
|---|---|---|---|
| Basic foods (rice, grains, vegetables, local fish) | 1–2 zeni | 3–5 zeni | For one person for one day |
| Luxury foods (spices, imported fruits and seafood) | 1–2 bu | 3–5 bu | For one person for one day |
| Basic drink (local sake, good shōchū, beer) | 2–3 zeni | 4–5 zeni | For one person for one day, without drinking in excess |
| Luxury drink (premium and imported sake, imported wine) | 2–4 bu | 1 koku or more | For one person for one day, without drinking in excess |
| Basic consumer goods (tatami mats, futons) | 5–7 zeni | 1 bu or more | Per item; though some items, like utensils, may come in packages of several |
| Luxury consumer goods (shōji screens, artwork, statuary, and wall hangings) | 1–2 koku | 3 koku or more | Unique or commissioned item prices would be negotiated |
| Tools (shovels, hammers, axes, picks) | 6–9 zeni | 1 bu or more | Per item |
| Utility items (rope, baskets, barrels, boxes) | 3–5 zeni | 6–10 zeni | Per item; though some items, such as bags, may come with several |

# Locations and People

For Hirosaka to appear as a living, vibrant community, it must include a variety of locations that both are interesting and make sense to have present. It must also include people, ranging from those at the very top of the social ladder to those of much lower status who may still be notable or influential in the town's affairs. The following sections describe many of the town's more noteworthy places and people.

If Hirosaka is located somewhere other than its default area, then some of the following details change. For example, if Hirosaka is a port, then a location that includes docks, warehouses, and other maritime infrastructure needs to be added. Similarly, if it is the holding of a clan, instead of the Seppun, then it makes sense to rename the governor and perhaps several other NPCs after the families of that clan. Finally, a GM may wish to create other, entirely different NPCs for the town if it suits their campaign, keeping in mind that the NPCs should not only be interesting individuals, but also have friendships, rivalries, and other relationships that help portray them as real people.

## Important Locations

A town the size of Hirosaka comprises hundreds of places and buildings. The vast majority of these are simply background to the game and do not need detailed descriptions or development. The locations that follow are included because they are of particular importance in the town, and because a party of PCs is likely to visit them and engage with people and events at those locations.

Most Rokugani towns are divided into quarters on the basis of function, social class, or some combination thereof. In Hirosaka, these are the Governor's Quarter, the Samurai Quarter, the Commoners' Quarter, and the riverport. Each location described in the following sections mentions which quarter it belongs to.

### The Governor's Estate

Central to the Governor's Quarter, the governor's estate is a sprawl of buildings enclosed in a walled compound on the highest piece of ground in Hirosaka. The largest and most central of the buildings—the four-story governor's yashiki, or mansion—offers a commanding view of the town and its surroundings. The yashiki is one of the very few buildings in Hirosaka constructed largely of stone; only its upper two floors are predominantly wood. In times of strife, the governor's estate, and particularly the yashiki, are intended to function like the inner fortifications of a castle, providing a final place of refuge and defense should the rest of the town fall. In practice, however, the wall surrounding the estate would offer little protection against a determined foe. Rather, it is mainly intended to keep out unwanted intruders and to clearly demarcate the estate's borders. The stone bulk of the yashiki is more formidable and likely could hold off any attacking force not prepared to lay siege for a long time. However, although it is one of the largest buildings in the town, the yashiki can comfortably house no more than a few dozen people, with room for perhaps one hundred in a crisis.

In any case, defense is only a secondary role for the *yashiki*. It is primarily the governor's home, containing apartments for them and their family. It also houses the governor's most senior retainers. Much of the main floor is taken up by a large audience chamber, where the governor holds court (generally only when important samurai are in attendance; otherwise, the municipal court, on page 153, is used). The governor also greets visitors and hosts social gatherings and formal dinners there. To that end, the yashiki is relatively ornate and luxurious; in fact, appearance generally trumps utility and defense. However, if Hirosaka is the holding of a more militarily oriented clan, such as the Crab or Lion, the yashiki is more likely to be a true *tenshukaku*, or fortified keep.

The remaining buildings in the compound consist of storehouses, servants' quarters, a small barracks for the governor's personal guard, and stables. For the use of important visitors, there is a well-appointed guesthouse, separated from the yashiki by a small but sumptuous garden that also encloses a bathhouse and a *chashitsu*, or teahouse.

Entry into the governor's estate is strictly controlled. Even when the governor's court is in session, only those with legitimate business are admitted. The governor's personal guard, a small but well-equipped and highly trained cadre of samurai and trusted ashigaru auxiliaries, staff the two gates to the estate at all times and conducts regular patrols. The overall operation of the estate is overseen by the governor's chamberlain, who has an office and apartments in the yashiki.

## The Municipal Court

When important samurai are in attendance, court is held in the governor's estate, in the audience chamber of the yashiki. Most of the time, however, the governor holds court in the municipal court, a large, primarily wooden building located in the Governor's Quarter. Most of the building is taken up by a large chamber that mimics the layout of larger Rokugani courts. A raised dais at one end of the chamber provides a place for the governor, or their designate, to sit and hear petitions, render judgments, and issue decrees. The rest of the chamber is an open space where attendees can watch the proceedings and where delegates can present and argue their petitions and cases and engage in debate. Unlike courts held in the governor's estate, which are closed to people who aren't invited or entitled to be there, the municipal court is normally open to anyone who wishes to attend. The chamber can hold several hundred people; in practice, however, it is only full when particularly controversial, impactful, or important matters are brought to the floor. Most of the time, the only people attending are those who are immediately concerned with whatever petitions or other affairs are the subject of debate and judgment.

As might be expected, the vast majority of issues brought before the municipal court are of a local nature. Petitions tend to revolve around property disputes, requests for new construction, matters related to taxation, and similar affairs. While these are by no means of Empire-shaking importance, the fact is that much of day-to-day life in Rokugan is dominated by such minor matters. In the court, the governor or their chosen delegate hears petitions regarding these matters, listens to any ensuing debate, possibly consults advisors and those with particular expertise on the subject in question, and then pronounces judgment. The extent to which this judgment may be appealed is essentially also at the whim of the governor. Seppun Sora, the current governor, has only limited interest in such pedestrian matters and usually delegates his chancellor, Otomo Kazuko, to oversee the court. On rare occasions, Sora will deign to oversee court personally, but always on short notice. Many suspect he does it simply to keep everyone on their toes, or occasionally because he has some sort of particular, but inscrutable, interest in certain petitions and affairs.

In addition to housing the court chamber, the municipal court also contains offices for the town's bureaucracy and the chancellor.

## The Magistrate's Station

Although it is much smaller than the governor's estate, the magistrate's station is also a compound containing several buildings. Like the governor's estate, it has a secondary, defensive role, its buildings and enclosing wall being constructed mainly of stone. In fact, it is probably a better defensive location, as it is more compact and utilitarian and much less concerned with appearance and comfort. The magistrate's station is located in the Governor's Quarter, close enough to the estate that it is rumored the two are connected by an underground passageway. It occupies a piece of relatively high ground and looms over the town. This is deliberate, because the magistrate's station is the focus of law, order, and justice in Hirosaka, a fact that its prominent location and foreboding appearance are meant to reinforce.

The largest building in the compound is the magistrate's station proper. It is here that the town's chief magistrate, Seppun Ishima, lives and maintains her office. Fronting this building is the "White Sands of Justice," a small plaza covered in white sand, adjacent to which is a covered gazebo. People accused of crimes are brought there and made to kneel in the sand, the harsh light of Lady Sun beating down as their crimes are declared and judgment is rendered upon them. In inclement weather, an adjacent judicial court building is used for this purpose. The vast majority of crimes requiring a trial are conducted here; those rare crimes involving grave or serious charges or defendants of high social standing are generally held in the municipal court. The "White Sands of Justice" are also used for duels and for punishments such as executions and floggings.

The remaining buildings in the magistrate station compound include a small guesthouse for visiting Emerald Magistrates or clan magistrates, quarters for other municipal magistrates, a dour and secure building that functions as a jail, storehouses, and a stable.

All of the magistrates who normally work there, including the chief magistrate, are municipal magistrates appointed by the governor. Their jurisdiction includes Hirosaka and, by custom, all land that can be seen from the highest vantage point of the governor's yashiki. The various magisterial auxiliaries, such as yoriki and dōshin, generally live in their own dwellings in the town, while hinin deputies, such as corpse-handlers and torturers, live in the Unclean Encampment (see page 158).

## The Temple Square

This small square, located adjacent to the Samurai Quarter, is the spiritual heart of Hirosaka. Each entrance to the square is framed by a torii arch that represents the passage from the secular world to the spiritual world and symbolically cleanses those who enter.

One side of the temple square is dominated by the Temple of the Fortunes: a single large wood and stone building that contains smaller shrines devoted to each of the Seven Great Fortunes and several more shrines dedicated to Lesser Fortunes considered important to the life of the town. The latter include Hamanari, the Fortune of Plentiful Meals; Hujokuko, the Fortune of Fertility; Kojin, the Fortune of Peaceful Homes; and Musubi, the Fortune of Fated Bonds. The remaining Lesser Fortunes are represented by a single shrine. Directly across the square from the Temple of Fortunes is a shrine to Inari, the Fortune of Fertility and Rice. The dedication of a separate shrine to Inari reflects the fact that this "Lesser" Fortune is nevertheless central to the lives of virtually all Rokugani. If Hirosaka is located on the coast, a shrine to Haruhiko, the Fortune of Fisherpeople, likely sits close to that of Inari or, in some cases, may even replace it.

Given the close and prominent connection between the Seppun family and Shinseism, a third side of the temple square is dominated by the Temple of Shinsei. It is here that Hinata, the temple abbot and most senior holy person in the town, presides. If Hirosaka is set in another part of the Empire, its Shinseist presence may be less prominent or may be located in a different section of town. This depends on whether Fortunism and Shinseism are viewed more or less equally or if one is favored over the other in that particular version of Hirosaka.

Surrounding the rest of the temple square is a variety of other shrines, the particular nature of which depends on the town's location. For example, if Hirosaka is set in the lands of the Lion, shrines to the blessed ancestors are prominent. If it is a Crane holding, then a shrine to Sadahako, the Fortune of Artists, is present. As a Phoenix town, Hirosaka probably has a larger temple square and more individual shrines dedicated to a variety of Fortunes.

The monks, priests, and others who maintain the various temples and shrines, conduct services in them, and generally minister to the spiritual well-being of Hirosaka's people live in austere quarters discreetly located near the temple square.

## The Market

Hirosaka has several markets where merchants sell goods and conduct trade. However, when residents refer to "the market," they are commonly referring to the trading grounds, the largest commercial space in town. The trading grounds is an expansive, open-air market that sprawls amid the Commoners' Quarter, close to the Samurai Quarter. Merchants and traders erect stalls and pavilions across this wide, flat space, peddling their wares to customers and making deals with their fellows.

All of this commerce is subject to taxes collected by the municipal magistrates, although some governors, including the current governor, have preferred to collect flat license fees for the use of the trading grounds by sellers, to avoid the complexity of assessing and collecting taxes. This is particularly true for merchants who primarily conduct their commerce by barter, rather than sales for currency. A small but well-used shrine to Daikoku, the Fortune of Wealth, sits adjacent to the trading grounds, offering spiritual encouragement to all who do business there.

A portion of the grounds is set aside for trade in bulk commodities such as rice, grain, and timber. During the harvest in the late summer and fall, this type of activity can monopolize much of the space, even spilling into the surrounding streets in particularly bountiful years. Merchants, sometimes traveling from distant places, vigorously haggle to buy up surpluses, usually on behalf of samurai patrons who maintain a discreet distance from such unseemly commerce. The result is a restless, raucous throng of buyers and sellers. Even when the trading grounds are not overtaken by large-scale commercial trading, however, it is still a boisterous place, and the municipal magistrates keep a watchful eye on them.

Supplementing the trading grounds, several smaller squares in Hirosaka serve as markets as well. Additionally, wealthier and more-established merchants who are permanent residents of Hirosaka work out of numerous shops and storefronts lining many of the town's streets. Only in the Samurai Quarter is all overt commerce prohibited—aside, of course, from the sake houses, noodle shops, and geisha houses that provide services to the samurai who live there. Even the handful of samurai artisans who produce goods such as armor, weapons, and works of art only conduct very discreet business in the Samurai Quarter or make use of heimin merchant intermediaries in Hirosaka's market.

## The House of the Winding Path and Other Inns

As they do elsewhere in Rokugan, inns in Hirosaka offer some combination of accommodations, meals, and entertainment. They span a wide range of quality and respectability, from luxurious to merely adequate.

The House of the Winding Path, located in the Samurai Quarter close to the governor's estate, is a classic *ryokan*, an inn constructed and decorated in a very traditional style. It features a large entrance hall that functions as a common room where guests sit at polished tables enjoying food, drink, and conversation. Various types of sake—some of very fine vintage—are served, as is *ume-shu* (plum liqueur), *chūhai* (alcoholic fruit juice), and a variety of teas. The food is also of fine quality. Hallways lead from the common room to the guest rooms, which occupy two wings enclosing the garden. The guest rooms are well-appointed, with tatami flooring and comfortable futons. Each room opens onto a garden featuring a riot of flowering plants, a koi pond, and an arched bridge over a small stream. A stone path that winds through the garden gives the ryokan its name. At the back of the garden is a bathhouse that is kept amply supplied with hot water throughout the day, so that guests may bathe and refresh themselves at any time that suits them. The kitchen, storerooms, and quarters for the staff are tucked discreetly away behind the bathhouse, at the back of the property, while a stable for guests' mounts is located across the street from the main entrance.

Entertainment is provided by hired performers. Music, song, poetry, and dance are most popular. On special occasions, such as during festivals, more elaborate presentations like *Kabuki* theater or *Bunraku* puppet plays are performed in the garden. Two function rooms are set aside for use by geisha, hired for the purpose of entertaining samurai guests.

Despite being heimin, the proprietor, a woman named Aia, is entirely comfortable dealing with samurai, as are all of the various servants, cooks, and attendants she oversees. Her lord, and the owner of The House of the Winding Path, is reputed to be a Crane samurai of considerable renown—something Aia neither confirms nor denies.

There are several other inns in Hirosaka, all of decent quality, albeit not as luxurious as The House of the Winding Path. Sun Glowing on Mist is the closest competitor, while The House of Evergreens and The Lark's Song cater to a more midrange clientele.

## Dwindling Fortunes (Gambling House)

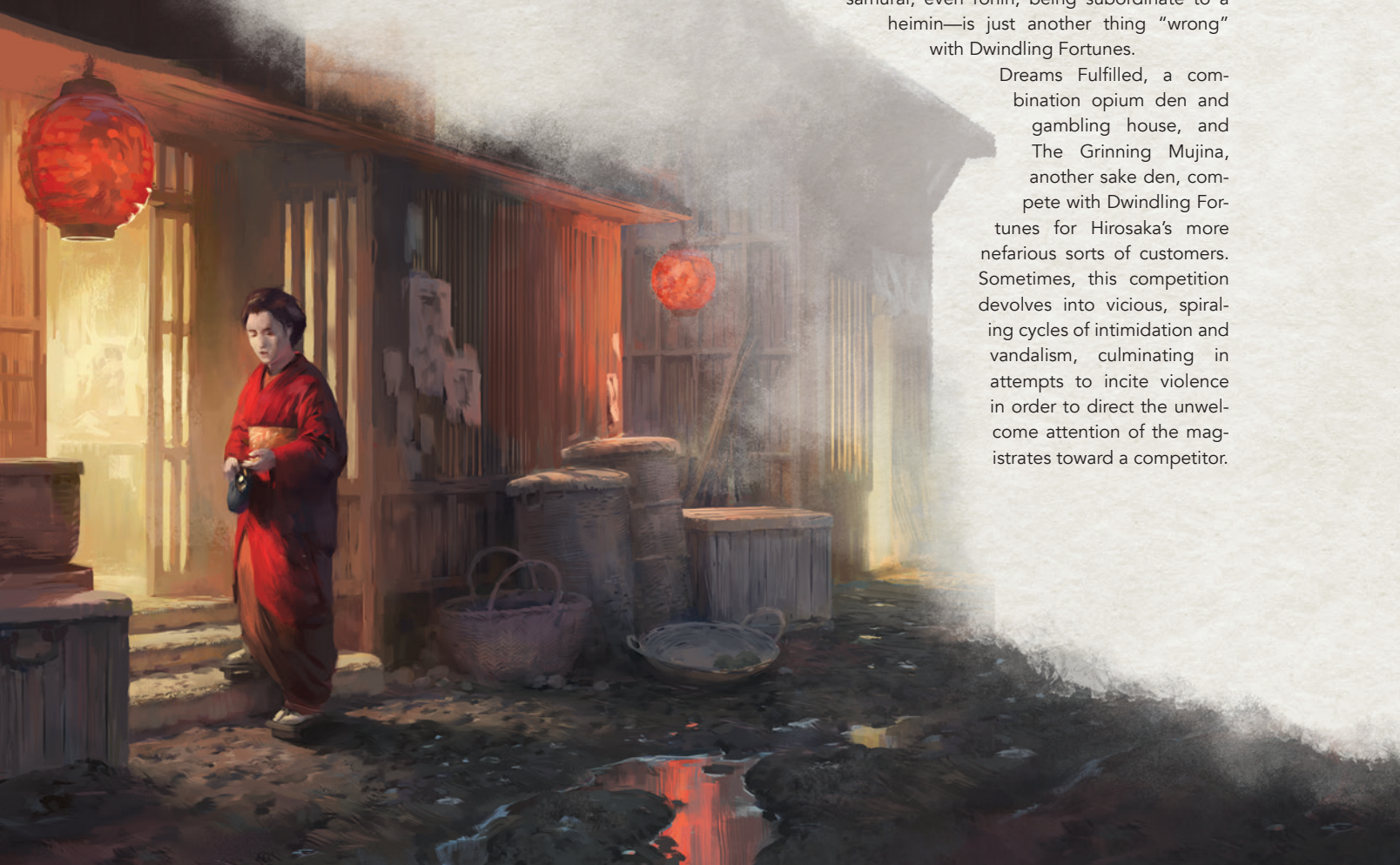
Although Hirosaka's inns are of decent quality, the town has a number of other establishments that could best be described as "seedy." Places such as The House of the Winding Path are not suited for use by most commoners; moreover, samurai sometimes wish to indulge in less-refined pastimes, such as hard drinking, gambling, and even less savory activities. Most such downscale establishments are located in the Commoners' Quarter or riverport.

Dwindling Fortunes is such a place in the river port. A shabby sake house, it features a single dingy common room containing a number of tables, all securely fastened to the grimy floor, and a bar of plain wood. Cheap sake, beer, and *shōchū* (a strong liquor distilled from buckwheat, chestnuts, rice, sweet potatoes, or barley) compose most of the menu, although a dark and acrid tea is also available. There is no food service; if patrons are hungry, they are directed to a nearby noodle shop called Good and Plenty. Nor does Dwindling Fortunes offer accommodations, although those found asleep on the floor are usually just allowed to remain there until they come to. Finally, no formal entertainment is provided, although this is rarely a problem, as the patrons generally provide their own amusement in the form of bawdy songs, the occasional brawl, and gambling.

The latter happens behind the common room, in a smaller room that reeks of tobacco, stale shōchū, and desperation. There, patrons play a variety of games, including dice games such as Fortunes and Winds and Chō-Han; card games such as Kabufuda and Hanafuda, which use numeric and flower suits, respectively; or even gaijin games such as Moksha Patam from the Ivory Kingdoms. These games aren't just amusing pastimes, however. Money—sometimes large sums of it—is won and lost in them. Gamblers unable to pay their debts quickly run afoul of Hirosaka's small and low-key but still ruthlessly unforgiving criminal underworld. The enigmatic gangster known only as Tamiko maintains a stake in the action at Dwindling Fortunes—and at virtually every other gambling house in town.

Dwindling Fortunes' proprietor, a burly heimin named Three-Scar, claims that his namesake facial wounds resulted from his days as an ashigaru fighting for the Lion Clan. Given his reputation for explosive violence, few are willing to challenge him about this. Three-Scar employs a trio of scruffy rōnin as his "staff." The rōnin oversee the common room and gambling den and generally ensure order among an often unruly clientele. This inversion of the Celestial Order—samurai, even rōnin, being subordinate to a heimin—is just another thing "wrong" with Dwindling Fortunes.

Dreams Fulfilled, a combination opium den and gambling house, and The Grinning Mujina, another sake den, compete with Dwindling Fortunes for Hirosaka's more nefarious sorts of customers. Sometimes, this competition devolves into vicious, spiraling cycles of intimidation and vandalism, culminating in attempts to incite violence in order to direct the unwelcome attention of the magistrates toward a competitor.



## The Granaries

The granaries are a collection of storehouses designed to protect foodstuffs from the elements and, to an extent, vermin. They are absolutely vital to the town, so they are stoutly built of wood and stone and are carefully watched over by the municipal magistrates. Virtually everyone in Hirosaka, including the most egregious of criminals, recognizes the critical importance of the granaries, giving them a wide berth and immediately reporting anything that seems unusual or out of place. Not to do so would risk food shortage or famine, especially in the long winter months.

Located roughly equidistant from the River Port and the trading grounds, the granaries are allocated according to the types and quantities of foodstuffs brought into Hirosaka. After setting aside what they are allowed to keep to feed themselves and their families, heimin farmers bring their harvests here to be carefully weighed and then stored. After magistrates and bureaucrats assess and apportion of municipal, clan, and Imperial taxes, merchants compete to purchase the remainder to sell in the local market or elsewhere in the Empire. Virtually all of these transactions occur on paper; actual, physical goods such as rice and barley are only moved when it becomes necessary for shipment to some final destination. This minimal handling of the various commodities not only increases efficiency but keeps the various products cleaner and more secure. Facilities for drying, hulling, and milling rice and other grains meant for local sale and use stand adjacent to the granaries.

## The Sake Works

Hirosaka is home to a small sake brewery, Clouds above Hirosaka, which produces two varieties of sake. One, called Winter Jasmine, is a clear, pale-golden brew of fine quality, made in small batches that are sold primarily in Otosan Uchi as a premium product. A variety named after the sake works—Clouds above Hirosaka—is a cloudy, *nigori* type of sake that is quite good but somewhat too sweet to be considered fine quality; it is mainly consumed locally. Both provide a consistent stream of revenue for the Scorpion samurai Bayushi Touma, who owns the brewery. Touma maintains a house in Hirosaka near the sake works, but he spends little time in the town and relies on Sana, his heimin *tōji*, or brewmaster, to run the works and oversee its sales on his behalf. The town also benefits from the taxes collected on the sales of sake produced.

## The Barracks

The barracks, located adjacent to the magistrate's station and close to the governor's estate, are a group of buildings officially intended to provide for the housing, feeding, and training of up to one thousand soldiers. In reality, even half that number would lead to overcrowding and strain the resources available to see to their welfare. Since Hirosaka has seen little military threat throughout its history, the barracks have been viewed by successive governors as little more than an afterthought, and certainly not a worthwhile investment of time and resources.

The fact that the barracks see little use only reinforces this complacent attitude. A small cadre of about a dozen Seppun samurai are assigned to the town, forming the core of the Hirosaka guard. In times of strife, commoners are drafted as ashigaru to fill out the guard to its full strength of about four hundred troops. However, the samurai of this cadre generally maintain their own homes in the Samurai Quarter, while the commoners, when not drafted, simply go about their regular business and live in their own homes as well. Only during the annual levy drills, conducted during the summer, do the barracks fill up with ashigaru and their samurai commanders. For about two weeks, the barracks are a bustle of activity as the town guard trains and drills. At other times, the barracks sit mostly empty.

Like the governor's estate and the magistrate's station, the barracks form a walled compound. Several buildings are actual barracks for housing soldiers. Others include a command post; a small stable; a dōjō and an adjacent, open yard for drilling and training troops; and an armory for storing weapons with an adjacent smithy and workshop for maintaining and repairing equipment. The enclosing wall is stone, but like the wall around the governor's estate, it is actually more for security than military defense.

Of course, if Hirosaka belongs to a more military clan such as the Crab or Lion, or if it is located in a particularly strategic or dangerous place in the Empire, the barracks are likely to be larger and better defended; it could, in some cases, function as an effective fortress. It may also host a permanent garrison. This is particularly true if Hirosaka is a Crab holding, since all of that clan's major settlements are expected to be able to function as self-contained fortifications against incursions from the Shadowlands that penetrate the Kaiu Wall.

### The Hinin Encampment

There are aspects of the daily life of a town like Hirosaka that are essential, but profoundly unpleasant. Handling and disposing of corpses, cleaning up and carting away trash, collecting and removing human and animal waste (also known as "night soil"), killing vermin, and cleaning streets are all very necessary tasks. They are, however, of such a nature that no samurai could do them without imperiling their honor and glory. Heimin, meanwhile, must remain focused on the vital tasks of growing food, making finished goods, and engaging in commerce. The "unclean" tasks therefore fall to the lowest social class, called hinin or *burakumin*. As is typical in Rokugan, the hinin of Hirosaka live in their own district, which is set apart from the rest of the town. A pair of well-traveled paths—one strictly a footpath, the other suitable for draft animals and wagons—lead northward from Hirosaka to the hinin encampment about a fifteen-minute walk away. Hinin use these paths to travel to Hirosaka, do their work as unobtrusively as possible, and then immediately return to their encampment.

## IMPORTANT PEOPLE

If a town were just a collection of buildings, it would be a sterile and uninteresting place. It is people that bring it to life. The following sections describe the people whom PCs may encounter during a visit to Hirosaka.

Note that if Hirosaka is used as a holding belonging to one of the Great Clans, the family names of the named NPCs should be altered accordingly. For instance, the governor, Seppun Sora, could be Doji Sora if Hirosaka is a Crane holding, Shiba Sora if it is a Phoenix holding, and so on. The details of a particular character can remain essentially unchanged, as these NPCs represent people who could be found in any of the clans. However, a GM could easily revise a named NPC's profile, or substitute their own NPCs, if it suits their game.

### The Townspeople

The vast majority of people PCs are likely to encounter in Hirosaka can be represented by the generic NPC profiles provided in the *Legend of the Five Rings Role-playing Game* Core Rulebook.

- Commoners, including farmers and tradespeople, who make up the bulk of the citizenry, can be represented by the **Humble Peasant** profile, on page 313 of the core rulebook. Merchants could be portrayed as being more skillful in bartering and sales by increasing one or both

### A NOTE ABOUT HININ

In the cosmological hierarchy of Rokugan, known as the Celestial Order, hinin are at the very bottom. To Rokugani, they are effectively dehumanized, being considered little more than property. Their portrayal in Hirosaka reflects this. However, some readers may find this portrayal troublesome, or even offensive, so reader discretion is advised. Moreover, before using such portrayals in a game, the GM and players are strongly encouraged to discuss and determine whether they wish to incorporate such elements in their play. As always, the intent is for everyone involved to have a good time, without being made to feel uncomfortable.

Compared to even the most disreputable parts of Hirosaka, the encampment is a ramshackle place, a warren of small tumbledown homes, a few storehouses, and a dingy crematorium. That said, it isn't particularly squalid; the hinin may be impoverished and entitled to little, but they generally seek to make the best lives for themselves and their families that they can. In the unlikely event a samurai were to visit the encampment, they may find it dilapidated, the hinin living "rough," but they would also likely note it to be surprisingly clean and well ordered. The hinin live according to their own hierarchy and social codes, police themselves, and dispense their own—usually harsh—justice to those who break those codes. They are, of course, subject to Imperial jurisdiction. They are frequently visited by budōka, heimin deputies to magistrates, who keep a watchful eye on them and mete out justice—again, usually harsh—on behalf of their samurai masters.

The hinin encampment is also regularly visited by monks and priests who minister to the hinin and see to their spiritual well-being. Despite being at the very bottom of the Celestial Order, hinin are still part of it and are entitled to such ministration. There is a practical side to this, too—because hinin live hard and often desperate lives, a hinin community could be fertile ground for those preaching sedition and blasphemy, such as cult members and mahō-tsukai.

of the Social and Trade skill groups by 1 and possibly removing the Overlooked ability.

- More militant commoners, such as peasant troops or budōka patrolling the streets as town watch, can be represented by the **Trained Ashigaru**, on page 314 of the core rulebook.
- Petty criminals, and the tough sorts of commoners who serve as members of firefighter gangs, can be represented by the **Desperate Bandit**, on page 315 of the core rulebook. More sophisticated criminals and the leaders of firefighter gangs can be represented by the **Experienced Bandit**, on page 316 of the core rulebook.
- Samurai who live and work in Hirosaka can be represented by the **Loyal Bushi**, on page 312 of the core rulebook; the **Seasoned Courtier**, on page 313 of the core rulebook; and the **Scholarly Shugenja**, on page 314 of the core rulebook (although this latter type of samurai is relatively rare). The Loyal Bushi profile can also be used for magistrates and members of the governor's guard, while the Seasoned Courtier profile can be used for municipal bureaucrats.

All of the above profiles can be further modified to suit specific situations or encounters by applying the NPC templates, on page 311 of the core rulebook. For example, a geisha could be created using the Humble Peasant modified by the Artist template, while a non-samurai monk or holy person could be portrayed by a Trained Ashigaru modified by the Spiritualist template.

## The Town Luminaries

The most important and influential people in Hirosaka are represented by more specific and detailed profiles. A brief description of each of these named NPCs, complete with backstories, mannerisms, and so on, are provided to assist GMs in portraying them during a game.

### THE NOTABLE PEOPLE OF HIROSAKA

For convenience, the following provides a brief summary of some of the more important NPCs in Hirosaka and of those with key roles in the adventure seeds. All are detailed in later sections.

- **Seppun Sora**, the governor of Hirosaka. He was thwarted in his ambitions in the Imperial Court and has become bitter, opportunistic, and corrupt.
- **Otomo Kazuko**, the governor's cunning chancellor. She is the senior bureaucrat in Hirosaka and a scheming powermonger.
- **Seppun Ishima**, Hirosaka's chief magistrate. She is deeply conflicted between an honest devotion to duty and personal ambition.
- **Hinata**, abbot of the Temple of Shinsei. He is a secret adherent and local organizer of the Perfect Land Sect.
- **Yuuto** is the leader of Hirosaka's commoners. He is utterly devoted to the welfare of the town's heimin and hinin.
- **Tamiko**, the enigmatic criminal overlord in Hirosaka. Tamiko's true identity is the subject of rumor, innuendo, and speculation.
- **Bayushi Touma**, the influential owner of the Clouds above Hirosaka sake works.
- **Itsuki**, a heimin woodcutter. Desperate for help because his young daughter, Haya, has vanished into the Haunted Grove in the **Another World** adventure seed, on page 166.
- **Keina**, a charismatic rōnin treasure seeker. She is convinced, in the **Treasure Hunt** adventure seed (page 167), that great riches are to be found in one of several locations in Hirosaka.
- **Mura**, a heimin woman trapped in a burning building. Her young son, Yoshi, seems to have somehow earned the favor of the fire kami in the **Friend of the Kami** adventure seed, on page 168.
- **Watchful**, a sly rōnin featured in **A Smell of Vinegar**, on page 170. Watchful owns The Grinning Mujina, a shabby sake house in Hirosaka, and is actually a vampiric Shadowlands monster using Hirosaka as its hunting ground.
- **Kakita Seiichi**, an artisan and head of the Warai Puppet Troupe featured in **March of the Puppets**, on page 171. He bargained with spirits from Sakkaku to gain artistic success, but he increasingly regrets having done so.

## Seppun Sora, Ambitious Governor

Seppun Sora is all about thwarted ambition. He has lofty aspirations, but his skills as a politician are at best adequate. When he was removed from the Imperial Court, the best his well-connected family could arrange was having him appointed governor of Hirosaka, a position he sees as political oblivion. This has made him a bitter and resentful, dour, and even somewhat cruel man. He is also corrupt, and he is primarily concerned with "looking good."

Sora always seeks to meet with samurai who visit Hirosaka to determine if they might help or hinder him in achieving his goal: to return to a position in the Imperial Court. Accordingly, if the PCs visit Hirosaka and do not present themselves to Sora within twenty-four hours, he ensures they receive an invitation to do so from a detachment of his personal guard. Even then, although Sora feels insulted, he treats the PCs with polite respect, seeking to discern whether they can still be of value to him. If the PCs are in a position to help him achieve his goals or can convince him they are, he shows them continuing favor.

Convincing Sora that they can be valuable to him requires some indication of their importance. For example, letting him know they have been invited to the Imperial Winter Court or are working on behalf of a high-ranking samurai could impress him, particularly if they show him the invitation or a letter from the samurai. If the PCs are lying, they may need to make a **Courtesy (Air) check** with a TN equal to Sora's vigilance of 4. A failed check means that Sora sees through the PCs' deception, is deeply insulted, and ejects them from Hirosaka.

### Seppun Sora

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 3 / 6

Sora is a pudgy, middle-aged courtier who is well aware that life—and opportunity—are passing him by. He is variously disdainful, petulant, and obsequious, depending on the audience and the situation. He is not above bribery, and he has a particular weakness for the finer things in life—good food, better drink, and luxurious surroundings—as well as for beautiful people. On the other hand, he has little time for or interest in the finer details of governing, and no patience at all for complex bureaucracy.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 30 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 8 |
| 70 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 10 |
| 55 | STATUS | FOCUS | 5 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR · BITTER | VIGILANCE | 4 |

| ARTISAN 1 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 3 | SOCIAL 4 | TRADE 2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Wealthy:** Trade; *Material* | **Self-Absorbed:** Social; *Interpersonal* |

**FAVORED WEAPONS**

**Wakizashi:** Range 0–1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Concealable, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Ceremonial clothes (Physical 1, Ceremonial, Resplendent), personal chop, throughly read copy of *Winter* (a pillow book written by Kakita Ryoku)

**ABILITIES**

**WRITTEN ON YOUR FACE**

At the start of a scene, Sora may make a **Sentiment (Air) check** with a TN equal to a character's vigilance. If successful, he is able to discern the character's glory, and status ranks as well as one their advantages or disadvantages (target's choice).

## Otomo Kazuko, Scheming Chancellor

Otomo Kazuko is a study in calculating opportunism enabled by a keen political mind. Three years ago when tsunami battered the Crane coast, she assessed the Empire's state of affairs and determined it was only a matter of time before increasing chaos would engulf Rokugan. Accordingly, she contrived to have herself assigned to Hirosaka, where she could wait out the coming storm. Hirosaka is close enough to Otosan Uchi for her to stay aware of events transpiring there, but far enough away to remain apart from them.

Upon her arrival in Hirosaka, Kazuko immediately ingratiated herself with Seppun Sora, becoming his chancellor who oversees the municipal court and bureaucracy. She has also insinuated herself into the role of the governor's chamberlain, the office responsible for running the governor's household. Such a concentration of power in one individual is unusual, but behind it is a ruthless truth: Kazuko ferreted out the more embarrassing secrets of Sora's corrupt ways, then blackmailed him into giving her this powerful consolidation of offices. She is canny enough to know that the arrangement will only endure if Sora also benefits from it, so she ensures that he at least appears to be an effective governor. Kazuko keeps close watch on anyone who threatens to upset this tidy arrangement and, if necessary, takes harsh action to deal with them.

To that end, Kazuko maintains an elaborate network of spies and informants in Hirosaka and nearby settlements, such as Twin Blessings Village. Very little happens in or near the town that doesn't come to Kazuko's attention. If the PCs wish to hide their activities from her, they must take measures to maintain secrecy, such as holding meetings in private locations or using stealthy means to travel. Otherwise, the GM should feel free to assume Kazuko becomes aware of their activities. Alternatively, any checks the PCs make to keep their activities secret should have a TN equal to Kazuko's vigilance, which reflects the effectiveness of her intelligence network.

Kazuko retains a cadre of enforcers and assassins to deal with any problems her informants uncover. These are represented by the Skillful Rōnin and Desperate Bandit profiles in the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* Core Rulebook, pages 316 and 315, respectively. These enforcers and assassins should be organized such that the PCs' group rank is approximately equal to the NPCs' encounter rank. Kazuko uses layers of well-paid and trusted intermediaries to distance herself from this cadre, so tying them to her is virtually impossible.

### Otomo Kazuko

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 7

Kazuko is a woman in her late twenties who maintains a carefully cultivated air of strict courtly propriety. She is careful and deliberate in all of her dealings; she is polite, but somewhat distant. In true Otomo fashion, she is particularly adept at playing people against one another; a favorite tactic of hers is to offer particular favor to one or a few individuals in a group while ignoring or even being disdainful of others. Ultimately, her goal is similar to Seppun Sora's: to gain a senior place in the Imperial Court. However, she is not as anxious or as desperate as Sora is to do so. She is extremely patient, convinced she will eventually get what she desires.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 60 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 10 |
| 60 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 15 |
| 47 | STATUS | FOCUS | 8 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR - CALCULATING | VIGILANCE | 3 |

| ARTISAN 1 | MARTIAL 0 | SCHOLAR 4 | SOCIAL 4 | TRADE 0 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Divisive Manipulator:** Social; *Interpersonal* | **Fear of Battle:** Martial; *Physical* |

FAVORED WEAPONS

**Wakizashi:** Range 0–1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Concealable, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Ceremonial clothes (Physical 1, Ceremonial, Resplendent), personal chop, book of favors

ABILITIES

#### HIROSAKA FAVORS

Once per scene, a character may make a **TN 4 Courtesy check (Air 5, Fire 2)** to request an item, piece of information, or other small favor from Kazuko. If they succeed, Kazuko accepts their request to the best of her ability. The character who made the check now owes Kazuko a favor in return, and Kazuko learns one of their disadvantages.

If Kazuko calls upon a favor owed to her and a character declines, they must forfeit glory equal to their glory rank. There may also be additional narrative ramifications of this.

## Seppun Ishima, Conflicted Magistrate

As chief magistrate of Hirosaka, Seppun Ishima fills several roles. She is head of law enforcement, commander of the town's watch, overseer of the firefighters, and chief tax collector. Temperamentally, Ishima is well-suited to these tasks; her mother was a well-known and respected Emerald Magistrate in whose footsteps she hopes to follow. Because she wishes to prove herself worthy of her mother's legacy, Ishima is a determined and fundamentally honest magistrate. Such qualities are admirable, but they are problematic in the charged political atmosphere of Hirosaka, where they leave her on the horns of a dilemma.

### Seppun Ishima

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 7 3

Seppun Ishima is a sturdy, brusque woman in her mid-twenties. She always seems to be in a hurry, as though she has many things to do and not enough time to do them. Her commitment to law, order, and justice appears absolute; she seeks to crush—sometimes with an almost zealous vigor—any wrongdoing in Hirosaka. Behind this devotion to righteous enforcement of the law, however, is a woman who is deeply conflicted. The GM may wish to allow hints of this to leak out when roleplaying Ishima. If the PCs attempt to probe her internal motivations to discern more about her inner turmoil, any checks are made with a TN equal to Ishima's vigilance.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 60 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 16 |
| 60 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 6 |
| 43 | STATUS | FOCUS | 7 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR - ANALYTICAL | VIGILANCE | 4 |

| ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 1 | TRADE 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**ADVANTAGES**

**Methodical Mind:** Scholar; *Mental*

**Keen Observer:** Scholar; *Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Officious Tone:** Social; *Interpersonal*

**FAVORED WEAPONS**

**Katana:** Range 1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Lacquered armor (Physical 4, Ceremonial, Cumbersome, Wargear), wakizashi, magistrate's badge, common clothes, personal chop

**ABILITIES**

**KNEEL!**

When performing an Attack action, Ishima may spend ✲ ✲ to inflict the Immobilized and Dazed conditions on the target.

## Hinata, Enigmatic Abbot of the Temple

Hinata has been abbot of the Temple of Shinsei in Hirosaka for as long as most residents can remember. The old man is well-known for his good humor and effusive personality, and has a particular knack for quoting passages from the Tao of Shinsei that are perfectly suited to the occasion. He is extremely popular among Hirosaka's commoners. When word spreads that Hinata will preside personally over a ceremony, congregants flock to the Temple of Shinsei, packing it so tightly that some are forced to stand outside.

The commoners, in fact, seem to be Hinata's primary concern. He spends much of his time ministering to them, even visiting the "unclean" encampment to see to the spiritual well-being of the burakumin. He has been known to conduct entire ceremonies in the encampment, temporarily consecrating hovels to serve as a place for holy observance. This almost unseemly devotion to the commoners raises eyebrows among the samurai of Hirosaka, but all agree that it seems to help keep the heimin and hinin free of unrest.

Unfortunately, much of this is a lie. Hinata is a caring and good-humored leader to his congregants, and he really does have an abiding interest in the commoners. Secretly, however, Hinata is a devotee of the Perfect Land Sect. He accepts the strictures of the Celestial Order but believes that one's place in it is actually something to rise above in a personal quest for Enlightenment. Samurai and commoner alike, he holds, are entitled to engage in such a quest.

Hinata's main role on behalf of the sect is the coordination of its activities in the farmlands and villages surrounding Hirosaka. For instance, Hinata meets periodically with Michi, the monk in Twin Blessings Village (see page 136), to discuss activities and events related to the sect there. Meanwhile, the ceremonies over which Hinata personally officiates, with their packed throngs, are genuinely devout services—but they also provide cover for meetings with other sect members. Hinata occasionally teaches commoners about the Perfect Land Sect and its beliefs, but he does so discreetly and indirectly, and only in the ramshackle confines of the hinin encampment, where no samurai is likely ever to step foot.

### Hinata

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 5

Hinata is a lean and wiry man in his late forties with a friendly and outgoing demeanor, a ready smile, and a quick wit. He is extremely charismatic, applying his innate charm to all his interactions, but he is particularly amiable when dealing with commoners (both heimin and hinin). His knowledge of the Tao of Shinsei is almost encyclopedic, and he often punctuates his speech with appropriate quotes from it.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 55 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 7 |
| 70 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 12 |
| 35 | STATUS | FOCUS | 8 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR - AMIABLE | VIGILANCE | 4 |

| ARTISAN 2 | MARTIAL 0 | SCHOLAR 4 | SOCIAL 4 | TRADE 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**ADVANTAGES**

**Keen Empathy:** Social; *Interpersonal*

**Scholar of the Tao:** Scholar; *Mental*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Dangerous Secrets:** Social; *Interpersonal*

**FAVORED WEAPONS**

**Bō:** Range 1–2, Damage 6, Deadliness 2, Mundane

**Gear (equipped):** Sanctified robes (Physical 1, Supernatural 3, Ceremonial), copy of the Tao of Shinsei

**ABILITIES**

**QUOTE THE TAO**

Once per scene, Hinata may quote from the Tao of Shinsei in a way particularly relevant to the situation and choose a character in the scene. The next Social skill or Scholar skill check the chosen character makes in that scene reduces its TN by 2 (to a minimum of 1).

**QUOTES FROM THE TAO**

While Hinata may have an intimate knowledge of the *Tao of Shinsei*, the GM may not. Accordingly, following are quotes from the Tao of which Hinata is particularly fond. They can be used as is when speaking as Hinata, and they can also be used as inspiration for the GM to develop their own, suited to their game while remaining respectful of real-world religions.

"We tell the tale of heroes to remind ourselves that we also can be great."

"Every day of their life, a person has only one judge of consequence: themself."

"Everyone's life is an epic tale."

"You may kill a truly brave person, but you cannot defeat them."

"Humility is the greatest teacher of all."

"Seek Enlightenment, but expect to never find it."

"Your most implacable enemy is found behind your own eyes."

"There are as many truths about a thing as there are people who see it."

## FIREFIGHTERS IN HIROSAKA

Because of the extensive use of wood and paper as basic building materials, most Rokugani cities and towns maintain organized groups of commoners as firefighters. Ironically, although they usually fall under the jurisdiction of the chief magistrate, groups of firefighters tend to evolve into criminal gangs, and those in Hirosaka are no exception. Hirosaka's firefighters, however, are not sophisticated and influential criminal enterprises. Rather, they are brutish and disorganized street gangs, often in conflict with one another and involved in the lowest and most petty sorts of crimes. When their nasty antics become excessive, Ishima has perceived ringleaders executed, dampening the groups' criminal enthusiasm—at least for a while.

## CRIME

Ishima is aware that some sort of malfeasance is going on between the governor and Otomo Kazuko. She is wary, however, of probing too deeply, fearing that she may uncover an egregious conspiracy that could taint her with her proximity to it or lead to a political backlash that could ruin her career prospects—and with them, any good she could do for the Empire in the long run. On the other hand, if she does nothing, the whole rotten edifice could fall apart anyway, making her look incompetent or, far worse, complicit. She is well aware that she should reveal what she knows to the Emerald Magistrates, but she hasn't yet done so. Instead, she soothes her conscience by telling herself she needs to find incontrovertible proof first. For now, then, she is doing nothing, effectively helping cover up her superiors' suspected wrongdoing. She's keenly aware that this isn't a long-term answer and remains trapped in an ethical snare of her own making. In the meantime, she flings herself into other aspects of her job, earning her a reputation as a determined investigator and uncompromising enforcer of the Empire's laws. Those who have tried to bargain with her quickly regret it; if she does have a price, no one has yet found it.

## OTHER SECTS AND CULTS

Hinata provides the GM with an opportunity to introduce illicit groups other than the Perfect Land Sect to their game. The old abbot's good-natured and charming demeanor can be a cover for membership in any such group. For example, he could secretly belong to, or even lead, a cult of Onnotangu, the depraved and paranoid Lord Moon. Moon cultists tend, like their Celestial patron, to be more than a little paranoid themselves, so their clandestine meetings and rituals are typically held in the moonlight, well away from any towns or villages. Hinata could also be involved with the followers of a mahō-tsukai, an even more dangerous sort of group. He is unlikely to be a mahō-tsukai himself, but he certainly could act as the main recruiter for such a blasphemous cult. Of course, if the GM prefers, Hinata can simply be what he appears: a charismatic old monk with a fondness for the common people.

### Yuuto, Leader of the Commoners

Outside of the large cities, Rokugani settlements have a heimin designated as the leader, responsible to their samurai lord for the welfare and behavior of the commoners who live and work there. In Hirosaka, this is Yuuto, a one-time farmer who earned glory as an ashigaru, until wounds forced him to stand down. He takes his responsibility as leader very seriously, showing great dedication and earnestness in carrying out his duties on behalf of the governor.

Practically speaking, Yuuto actually has limited authority over the town's commoners. Technically, all are subjects of the governor, but most are vassals to myriad samurai who, in turn, owe fealty to the governor. Still, Yuuto has almost as keen an understanding of politics as many samurai, and has become quite adept at exerting influence over most of Hirosaka's commoners without raising the ire of their lords. The governor has little interest in Yuuto, of course, but both Otomo Kazuko and Seppun Ishima find Yuuto useful. Yuuto is well aware that Kazuko and Ishima are, at least on some level, rivals, but he has managed to maintain a beneficial relationship with both—at least, so far.

What makes Yuuto so influential among Hirosaka's commoners, and of such apparent value to the town's samurai, is that he is essentially what he appears to be: a loyal and dedicated servant of the Empire. He sees

no reason why all commoners can't serve the Empire with similar devotion. He is genuinely committed to the precepts of the Celestial Order and firmly believes that all must play their part within its hierarchy. Accordingly, the samurai see him as a loyal vassal and tend to treat his petitions on behalf of the town's commoners more seriously than they might otherwise. Likewise, the commoners benefit from his advocation on their behalf and afford him a great deal of respect as a result. Conversely, anyone seeking to upend the stability of the commoners in Hirosaka, such as those working to incite unrest, find Yuuto a formidable opponent. The Perfect Land Sect in particular has seen Yuuto repeatedly undo its hard work and now considers him a significant problem.

### Yuuto

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 4

Yuuto is an older man bearing the marks of battle: his face is scarred, and he walks with a pronounced limp. He is intelligent, insightful, and politically astute, but particularly in the presence of samurai, he tends to speak only when he has something he considers important to say—and then does so with perfect deference.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 30 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 8 |
| 44 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 14 |
| 20 | STATUS | FOCUS | 7 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR - RESTRAINED | VIGILANCE | 4 |

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 3 | SOCIAL 3 | TRADE 3

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Of the People:** Social; *Interpersonal* | **Scars of Battle:** Martial; *Physical* |

FAVORED WEAPONS

**Knife:** Range 0, Damage 2, Deadliness 4, Concealable, Mundane, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Common clothes (Physical 1, Mundane), 10 koku, a small logbook written in code that contains blackmail on many people in Hirosaka

ABILITIES

**THE PEOPLE'S CHAMPION**

When Yuuto makes a Social skill check, if no target has a status of 26 or higher, he treats the TN as 2 lower (minimum of 1).

## Tamiko, Criminal Overlord

Hirosaka isn't big enough to support its own large criminal syndicate. Instead, it contains elements of several, ranging from a few loosely organized street gangs (such as firefighter gangs) to small cells of larger conspiracies originating from as far as away as Toshi Ranbo and Ryokō Owari Toshi. The result of a such a fractured underworld would likely be unruly disorder were it not for the ruthless cunning of an individual known only as Tamiko. Tamiko manages criminality in Hirosaka, ensuring that everyone gets whatever cut they've earned of the action, while no one oversteps their entitlements. It is an effective arrangement, keeping relative peace among disparate people not known for being particularly peaceful.

However, despite Tamiko's prominence in the Hirosaka underworld, nobody knows—or at least, admits to knowing—who this person is. The name Tamiko, which means "child of the people," is historically a feminine one, but it isn't clear whether this is the real name of the elusive figure. Some believe it is simply a code name for someone else, perhaps a highly placed individual in Hirosaka or even someone from outside the town. Others speculate that Tamiko doesn't exist at all and is a fiction maintained by the various heads of criminal enterprises in Hirosaka to maintain order among the town's nefarious types. There are more than a few people in Hirosaka who would like to uncover the truth, such as Yuuto, who despises the extent to which criminal undertakings in the town harm its common folk.

### Who Is Tamiko?

Though the true identity of Tamiko is unspecified, the GM can either assign it to an NPC (or even PC) of their choice or leave it as an enduring mystery. Note, however, that enduring mysteries tend to intrigue players. If the party becomes truly determined to uncover Tamiko's identity, then the GM may assign Tamiko an identity at that point that can eventually be discovered.

For GMs who prefer to make Tamiko discoverable, we suggest two options. The first is making "Tamiko" a fictional identity used by a cadre of Hirosaka's more influential criminals as a way of maintaining order among their fractious underlings. The second is for Tamiko to be an identity used by Otomo Kazuko to exercise control over Hirosaka's criminal elements. Having anonymous oversight of her cadre of enforcers and assassins is just one way she uses the Tamiko identity to her benefit. Thanks to Kazuko's multiple layers and convoluted lines of communication, associating her with Tamiko is extremely difficult, and also quite dangerous. Kazuko is keenly aware that involvement with the criminal underworld is extremely dishonorable and would greatly harm

her chances of further political advancement. Accordingly, she does not hesitate to silence anyone who starts getting too close to this particularly inconvenient secret.

Until Tamiko's true identity is uncovered (if ever), the GM needs to portray this figure indirectly. The name is well known throughout Hirosaka, but in the way of a persistent rumor or urban legend. A multitude of tales about Tamiko swirls through the noodle shops and sake houses. Some claim Tamiko is either Otomo Kazuko or Seppun Ishima (although such things are said only in hushed whispers, because agents of either could be nearby). Others speculate that Tamiko is someone even more prominent, such as Bayushi Touma. Still others hint at something more—or less—than human, such as a mahō-tsukai, a spirit, or some foul Shadowlands creature. The only things about which the stories and rumors agree is that Tamiko is a powerful and commanding presence in the Hirosaka underworld, and that those who seek to defy or deceive Tamiko are invariably found dead—or simply never found at all.

## Local Legends

A town that has existed for almost two hundred years naturally accumulates its own collection of stories and folktales, many of them rife with strange or supernatural elements. Some are undoubtedly based on actual places, events, and people, while others are probably entirely fanciful. The following sections describe a number of these stories, whether cautionary fables, tales intended to explain historical incidents, or simply yarns told as entertainment around crackling fires.

These are far from all of the stories that flit around Hirosaka like fireflies in the night; the list is neither exhaustive nor set in stone. The GM should feel free to adapt or modify them to suit their particular game, or to use them as inspiration to develop their own. A GM may even wish to use these legends without including any supernatural elements. For instance, the Haunted Grove could simply be a thick, trackless forest in which it is easy to lose one's way.

Supernatural or not, such stories can give rise to interesting and flavorful encounters, and they can also be used to convey information about the game world. For example, ghosts may have useful information to impart (although usually in cryptic ways), while an old legend about an abandoned watchtower or overgrown shrine could point the PCs to a place of significance in the game. GMs and players should remember that the supernatural in Rokugan isn't always hostile, and that ghosts, spirits, and the like can sometimes prove quite helpful.

### ADVENTURE SEED: ANOTHER WORLD

一 **Hook** As the PCs travel near Twin Blessings Village, a frantic heimin woodcutter named Itsuki beseeches them to help him find his young daughter, Haya. She wandered off while he was cutting trees, and her trail appears to lead into what Itsuki believes is the Haunted Grove.

二 **Rising Action** The PCs may either ignore or help Itsuki. This means a choice between committing a breach of the Bushidō tenet of Jin—Compassion—and making a sacrifice for it (see **The Tenets of Bushidō**, on page 301 of the core rulebook). If they seek Haya, they find the Haunted Grove an uncanny and forbidding place. Sounds are flat and muffled in the still air, and twilit darkness seems to pool under the trees, no matter how bright the day. Eventually, they follow Haya's trail to the inky aperture of a cave entrance.

三 **Climax** The cave winds and twists, finally opening back into the forest—or so it appears. It quickly becomes apparent this is Chikushō-dō, the Realm of Animals. Haya is here with several animal spirits, idealized forms of the animals they represent, who are intelligent and can speak with the PCs. Haya is enchanted by the amazing creatures and doesn't want to leave. The PCs must decide if they will try to bring Haya back to the Mortal Realm, whether by persuasion, or coercion—or force.

### STRANGE TALES

Many stories come and go, but some are persistent, enduring from one generation to the next. Such stories typically change in the recounting, but the essential elements of each usually remain more or less intact. How complete the following tales are, and how much each of them is based in truth, is left up to the GM.

#### The Haunted Grove

If one begins the trek from Hirosaka to Twin Blessings Village, it is said, at about the halfway point, one finds an isolated copse of trees beneath which seems to hang an unusual gloom. Peasant woodcutters avoid

these trees, claiming that they are unusually difficult to cut, and that taking saw or ax to them provokes unsettling phenomena: perhaps an anguished sound like a cry of pain, or the appearance of blood oozing from the cut wood. Those who enter the copse may find it far larger than it appears from the outside, and may become lost for hours, or even days. It is claimed that some have never returned at all.

The rumors also say that in the heart of the copse is an ancient, overgrown shrine—although sometimes it is described as a dark, fathomless pool, or a deep, winding cave—that leads to one of the Spirit Realms. If one actually makes the journey, it turns out that there are several copses that could be the Haunted Grove. Perhaps one of them truly is, but only at certain times of the day, or the month, or the year—or in conjunction with certain events, such as a phase of the moon. It is also possible that the Haunted Grove moves from copse to copse, or that all of the copses are, in some way, part of the uncanny phenomenon. Of course, perhaps none of these are true, and the Haunted Grove is only a story.

## Lost Treasure

Hirosaka has evolved and grown over time, with new buildings being constructed on the foundations of older ones. A popular story among the townsfolk suggests that somewhere in the town, an existing building perches atop the ruins of something far older—perhaps something even dating from before the dawn of the Empire. This ancient ruin, which is variously said to either be a shrine, temple, or tomb, is believed to contain a fabulous treasure; whoever finds it is expected to enjoy unending wealth and good fortune. Some, however, say that the ruin is actually protected by a malevolent curse, and that rather than good fortune, whoever disturbs the ancient site will experience affliction, failing health, and ultimately, an agonizing death. Interest in the rumor waxes and wanes; when it is popular—normally because word has spread that someone has finally located the ruin—it isn't uncommon to find townsfolk surreptitiously poking about the foundations of buildings, sometimes even damaging them in their quest for this mysterious "treasure."

## Adventure Seed: Treasure Hunt

一 **Hook** The PCs are approached by a rōnin named Keina, a smart and charming woman who has a reputation for finding lost places and artifacts. Referring to cryptic notes only she can read, she makes a convincing case that the tale of the Lost Treasure is true; moreover, she has narrowed down the possibilities to just four locations in Hirosaka. She asks the PCs to help her investigate each location, the potential reward being great glory—and a share in the wealth, if the PCs so desire. Keina can be represented by the **Skillful Rōnin** profile modified by the Socialite template, on pages 311 and 316, respectively, of the core rulebook.

二 **Rising Action** The four locations are the granaries (one rice warehouse in particular), a dingy courtyard immediately behind Dwindling Fortunes gambling house, a heimin carpenter's shop near the trading grounds, and a small, austere guesthouse behind the Temple of Shinsei. If the PCs wish to investigate each, they must decide if they will do so surreptitiously, attempt to negotiate with the main NPC associated with each location (who are, respectively, Seppun Ishima, Three-Scar, a heimin named Tadashi, and Hinata), take some other approach, or use some combination of strategies. None of the NPCs are especially obliging, although Three-Scar and Tadashi can be paid to cooperate while Hinata looks for some benefit for the town's commoners.

三 **Climax** No matter in what order they investigate the sites, the PCs should find evidence in the last one that Keina is correct: a much older structure once stood there. If the PCs delve further, the GM may choose to have nothing happen (to have it really be just an old ruin), to trigger a blessing or curse, or to have the PCs discover an entrance leading into dank, dark tunnels. As for Keina, if the PCs find things that might be of true value, she seeks to betray them, taking the valuable items for herself or even blocking the entrance to any ancient passages the PCs found and stranding them inside.

## ADVENTURE SEED: FRIEND OF THE KAMI

一 **Hook** The PCs are going about their business in Hirosaka when they hear a shrill horn, the warning that a fire has broken out somewhere nearby. If they go to the scene, they find several buildings ablaze near the trading grounds. The firefighters are already on the job and are containing the fire, but one of the PCs hears a faint shout for help from a building that is already alight.

二 **Rising Action** Failing to act would be a major breach of the Bushidō tenet Compassion, and it could also be a major breach of Courage (see The **Tenets of Bushidō**, on page 301 of the core rulebook). If one or more of the PCs choose to enter the building and attempt a rescue, they must confront thick, choking smoke; intense heat; and impending structural failure. The entire building counts as Dangerous terrain, and any critical strike of severity 5 or greater caused by damage inflicted by this terrain also gives the character the Burning condition.

三 **Climax** The PCs eventually find a heimin woman named Mura and her young son Yoshi trapped by the flames. Strangely, though, the two commoners and their immediate surroundings are unaffected by the fire. The PCs also find their escape from the building much easier, as the fire seems to die as they approach, then flares again behind them. It becomes apparent that the boy, Yoshi, seems to be causing this. Clearly, the boy has somehow earned great favor from the fire kami… but why? Mura admits that Yoshi is an orphan, whom she took in. What is his true lineage? And is this related to the building that supposedly survived the Great Fire?

### The Great Fire

It is a matter of historical record that, about 150 years ago, Hirosaka was ravaged by a devastating fire that destroyed almost half of the town. Unfortunately, this isn't unusual in Rokugan. An enduring tale from the time describes how a lone building survived in the center of the incinerated ruins, apparently completely untouched. Moreover, every person who was already inside or took refuge there emerged entirely unharmed. This particular anecdote is not recorded in any official history, however; the closest reference is an entry on a scroll from the time that expresses surprise at how some parts of the burned portion of the town required extensive rebuilding, while others did not. The more learned note that this is often true about major fires, but the story persists.

Even so, no one can seem to agree which building was the one in question. There are a number of candidates, but none of them seem remarkable in any way. If this tale is true, then there is potentially something significant about that building. Perhaps, for reasons unknown, it gained the favor of the fire kami or fire kami were warded away from it. If the particular building could be found, it would no doubt attract great interest from scholars as well as from those simply interested in protecting the Empire's towns and cities from fires.

## ENCOUNTERS WITH THE SUPERNATURAL

Unlike the legends above, which are deliberately vague in nature and may or may not be true, the following are specific and more detailed supernatural encounters that a GM may use in and around Hirosaka.

### The Sad Little Ghost

Spirits are a fact of everyday life in Rokugan. Many of these are profoundly dangerous, but some are much more ambiguous, appearing inoffensive or even beneficial. Wise Rokugani do not forget, however, that even the most innocuous-seeming spirit can still pose a threat, even if that is not its intent.

#### The Abandoned Farms

An hour's walk southeast from Hirosaka are the dilapidated remains of several abandoned farms. Twenty years ago, an earthquake changed the course of the River of the Sun slightly, subjecting the fields there to chronic flooding. Now, all that remains are collapsing ruins connected by overgrown paths and separated by the wreckage of old fences. Abandoned farms and homesteads aren't unusual in Rokugan, but an odd silence seems to hang over these, accompanied by an uneasy sense of being watched.

Any number of things could draw the PCs to that area. They could simply happen upon the old farmsteads during their travels. Alternatively, they could be sent there to investigate reports disappearances, or even to do something as mundane as examining the fallow land on behalf of Hirosaka's governor.

## The Zashiki-Warashi

Anyone who investigates these ruins eventually encounters a *zashiki-warashi*, the pathetic ghost of a child killed by some ill fortune. This particular ghost is that of a young boy who, sometime after the farms were abandoned, fell down a disused well and died. The ghost appears much as the child did in life, but with a face that is reddened somewhat, as though from exertion.

The little ghost is not directly harmful. He generally keeps his distance from groups of people, but he can be lured closer with sweet, red adzuki beans. Even then, although he clearly understands what is said to him, he won't speak and soon leaves. It is virtually impossible to track a zashiki-warashi that does not wish to be found.

Ultimately, these sad little ghosts are desperate for playmates, so much so that they can actually charm others into playing with them. To do this, the zashiki-warashi tries to entice a single character away from the others. Once alone with his intended playmate, the little ghost begins to weep inconsolably. The character immediately suffers the Immobilized condition and must make a **TN 4 Meditation (Void) check**. If the character succeeds, they remove the Immobilized condition and the zashiki-warashi vanishes. If they fail, they become utterly enthralled by the zashiki-warashi, reverting to the behavior of a child of about six to eight years old. They chase the now-delighted little spirit in rambunctious play around the old ruins; unfortunately, for the affected PC, the area of the abandoned farms is now considered Dangerous or Entangling terrain, or both. This effect lasts until the next sunrise, or until the zashiki-warashi is put to rest. The zashiki-warashi can only have one such playmate at a time, unless the GM wants to make this a more challenging encounter.

## Dealing with the Ghost

The zashiki-warashi is immune to all forms of harm; at best, a determined display of defiance drives him away temporarily. His desire for companionship is so strong, however, that he keeps trying to gain a new playmate, at least as long as potential ones remain near the old farms. The only way to break his enchantment and, ultimately, send him to his rest is to retrieve his physical remains and give them proper funerary rites.

The skeletal remnants of the zashiki-warashi's mortal remains are in a well near one of the abandoned farms. The well is not deep—only about twelve feet—but it is mostly full of water. A character must make a **TN 3 Fitness (Water) check** to reach the bottom and retrieve the remains. This is a complicated task, requiring an accrual of 6 momentum points (see page 253 of the core rulebook). Note that bonus successes on the check contribute to these momentum points. If a character fails the check, they begin drowning (that is, they suffer the effects of suffocation, as described on page 269 of the core rulebook) until they make a successful **TN 2 Fitness (Water) check** to properly orient themselves and get out of the well. That character, or a different one, can then resume retrieving the remains as described above. Note that the PCs may, of course, propose other ways of retrieving the remains, mundane or supernatural; it is up to the GM how effective or quick these might be, or if they are even feasible in the first place.

Rokugani funeral rites call for the remains to be burned while appropriate prayers are offered. Any shugenja, priest, or monk can officiate over this. If the party does not include such a character, then it is necessary to transport the remains to one. The zashiki-warashi "accompanies" his remains, continuing to try enthralling new playmates while he does. Once the remains are properly disposed of, the zashiki-warashi vanishes, never to return.

## A Smell of Vinegar

While the Kaiu Wall, the great Carpenter Wall of the Crab, keeps the vast majority of Shadowlands threats at bay, there are some Tainted creatures that can insinuate themselves into the Empire. Until they are discovered and dealt with, they can pose a fearsome threat.

### A Series of Murders

Word comes to the PCs—perhaps from Hinata or Yuuto—that a number of heimin and hinin deaths over the past several months are suspicious. The magistrates lack the resources or time (or, frankly, interest) to launch a vigorous investigation, so the PCs are asked to look into the matter. The most apparent benefit to doing so would be a major sacrifice for Compassion (see page 301 of the core rulebook), but they would also gain goodwill from Hinata, Yuuto, or whoever brought the matter to their attention. While the bodies have been cremated, by asking questions of the heimin and hinin, the PCs learn that the victims were strangled. Several of those questioned, however, insist that—strangely—some of the victims also seemed to have lost a great deal of blood, which isn't normally a result of strangulation.

### At Last, a Lead

After a number of false leads, the PCs learn that most of the victims had something in common: they were frequent customers at a dingy sake house near the riverport called The Grinning Mujina. Given its shabby character, The Grinning Mujina is frequented primarily by commoners and rōnin. The PCs find it to be a grimy, crowded place, thick with the comingled reek of cheap sake, shōchū, and packed humanity. The owner, a sly-looking rōnin named Watchful, took over The Grinning Mujina just over a year ago and has turned it into a thriving business. If asked about his past, Watchful admits to having once attempted a Twenty Goblin Winter, a Crab event in which rōnin who retrieve the heads of twenty goblins from the Shadowlands are sworn into the clan. He failed, but found good work as a mercenary afterward, giving him the funds he needed to finally buy The Grinning Mujina and settle down.

Nobody in The Grinning Mujina knows (or, at least, admits to knowing) anything about the deaths of any commoners. They simply continue to guzzle their cheap alcohol and wolf down heaping portions of the house specialty, a dish made of dried fish and shredded *hakusai* cabbage drenched in vinegar.

### Watchful's Ghastly Secret

Unfortunately, Watchful isn't at all what he seems. The rōnin known as Watchful died in the Shadowlands during his failed attempt at the Twenty Goblin Winter; what returned to the Wall was, in fact, a vile creature known as a penanggalan. Having taken Watchful's form, the penanggalan—a creature that has evolved in such a way that its Tainted nature is extremely difficult to detect—found it relatively easy to enter the Empire unnoticed. It has lurked in the shadows and byways of Rokugan ever since, perpetrating a series of horrific murders. It is cunning enough to keep moving so that its murders are never connected; it is likely to soon move on from Hirosaka.

If the penanggalan's true nature is not revealed, it can be portrayed using the **Skillful Rōnin** profile (page 316 of the core rulebook) with its Void Ring reduced to 1. If, however, the penanggalan's true form has been revealed (that is, if it is encountered while its head and viscera are detached from its body), then it should be represented by the profile provided on page 171.

Penanggalan are normally accompanied by an odor of vinegar. However, Watchful not only has ensured that The Grinning Mujina is replete with the reek of drinks that are not far from being vinegar themselves, but also has made a point of serving a vinegar-soaked cabbage dish. In the attic over The Grinning Mujina, several large barrels of vinegar are stored, ostensibly for use in preparing food but actually for the penanggalan's use in soaking itself after feeding. Canny PCs may wonder, however, at such a large amount of vinegar stored in such an inconvenient place.

### Confronting the Monster

The PCs may quickly become suspicious of Watchful, in which case simply keeping him under surveillance eventually reveals the penanggalan to them as it flies off to hunt. Supernatural means of detecting a Tainted creature can also reveal it, although the TN of such checks is increased by 1, reflecting the penanggalan's innate resistance to such efforts. If the PCs confront the penanggalan, it fights only until it can flee, then returns to its barrels of vinegar to reunite itself with its body and effect its escape. If the PCs manage to find and destroy it before it can leave town, they gain considerable honor and glory as a result. However, this may bring shame upon the governor and Seppun Ishima for allowing such a monster to go undetected in their town. If the penanggalan succeeds in leaving Hirosaka, it could become an ongoing antagonist for the PCs.

## Watchful, the Penanggalan

ADVERSARY CONFLICT RANK: 8 6

The penanggalan is a bizarre and horrifying creature that can detach its head and viscera from its body. The latter remains hidden away, while the former fly about through the night, stalking victims. When it strikes, the penanggalan strangles its quarry with its own dangling entrails and then drinks its quarry's blood. Returning to its lair, it must soak its bloated viscera in vinegar in order to fit them back into its body.

Penanggalan thrive by remaining undetected. They are formidable in battle but generally avoid open combat, heavily armed and armored victims, and the like. They flee if seriously threatened.

| ENDURANCE 12 | FOCUS 6 |
|---|---|
| COMPOSURE 14 | VIGILANCE 4 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR · WARY

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 1

**ADVANTAGES**

**Horrific Form:** Social; Interpersonal, *Mental, Spiritual*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Endless Hunger:** Social; *Interpersonal, Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS**

**Choking Entrails:** Range 1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5, Snaring, Unholy

**Gear (equipped):** Disconcerting viscera (Physical 3, Supernatural 5, Unholy)

**ABILITIES**

**FLYING HORROR**

Watchful, in its penanggalan form, is a silhouette 2 creature that can fly. It can move vertically and ignores the negative effects of terrain. When performing a Movement action in a skirmish, it may move up to 2 additional range bands, or it may make a **TN 3 Fitness check** to move 3 range bands.

**PROFANE NATURE**

Watchful is an Otherworldly, Tainted being. If its body is destroyed by burning while the head is absent, Watchful dies at the next sunrise.

**IMMOBILIZING TENDRILS**

Characters at range 0–2 do not remove the Immobilized condition inflicted by Watchful at the start of their turn as normal unless they choose to receive 3 fatigue.

**ENSNARING VISCERA**

As an Attack action, Watchful may attempt to squeeze the life out of anyone who it has ensnared. Each Immobilized character at range 0–2 must resist with a **TN 5 Fitness (Earth 4, Air 7) check** or receive fatigue equal to their shortfall.

## March of the Puppets

Unfortunately, even the best of intentions sometimes lead to tragedy. This is especially true when those who do not truly understand mysterious powers attempt to harness them anyway, whether out of pride, greed, or desperation.

### The Warai Puppet Troupe

The Warai (or Laughing) Puppet Troupe and its associated theater in Hirosaka's Samurai Quarter has been a family-owned fixture for many years. The current patriarch, an older Crane samurai named Kakita Seiichi, continues a lineage of ownership going back almost eighty years, when his great-grandfather took ownership of the troupe as part of a marriage treaty.

Until several years ago, the troupe enjoyed reasonable and consistent success. Then it began to falter, its performances becoming lackluster and unoriginal. This made attracting good talent more difficult, which only accelerated the troupe's decline. The past year, however, has seen this reversed. Almost overnight, the troupe's performances changed, becoming well-known for their mirthful comedy, high drama, and commanding and engaging presence on the stage. This fame has spread beyond Hirosaka, attracting attendees from places as prestigious as Otosan Uchi to take in the troupe's shows, which are almost always sold out. This greatly pleases the governor and other town luminaries, of course, as well as the proprietors of inns and sake houses.

### The Secret of Their Success

This fame is well earned; the theater's new performances involve puppets that are truly amazing, so much so that they almost seem to move and speak of their own volition. In fact, they actually do, at least in part. One night last year, Seiichi was visited by a mysterious spirit that offered to turn his fortunes around if he allowed the spirit and its fellows to use the puppets as their physical forms. Desperate in light of the troupe's falling fortunes, Seiichi finally agreed, striking the bargain with the spirit. Almost immediately thereafter, the troupe's puppets became infused with a lifelike realism, becoming animated in subtle yet distinct ways intended to please their audience. As the theater went from sparsely filled to packed, Seiichi was thrilled—even though it meant ignoring the fact that, away from the eyes of onlookers, the puppets actually came to life, walking, cavorting, and even dancing on their own.

**VILE CREATURES**

For more warped and strange creature profiles to add to your campaigns, see *Shadowlands*, a complete supplement for the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* that delves into the mysterious and corrupted nature of the Shadowlands and the creatures that crawl into Rokugan from its Tainted lands.

## A Foreboding Turn

Lately, however, the puppets have been unwilling to remain locked away in the theater between performances. Instead, they have begun skulking about the town and beyond. The spirits' purposes are unclear; they may simply enjoy the novelty of experiencing material existence in the Mortal Realm. However, they may have more nefarious designs. They have begun to commit petty crimes—and these are escalating in seriousness. Seiichi's satisfied delight is fading, replaced by growing worry.

## A Plea for Help

The easiest way to link the PCs to this encounter is to simply have one of them be familiar with, and perhaps even a friend or relative of, Kakita Seiichi. In any case, Seiichi, fearing that the puppets may soon perpetrate something truly egregious, comes to the PCs for help. He is hoping they can offer a solution that will end what appears to be a growing threat from the puppets—but discreetly, so that no one becomes aware that he struck a bargain with unknown spirits. At best, this would be deeply humiliating, and at worst, he could be convicted of partaking in forbidden magics—a grave crime.

When the PCs investigate the puppets, they may make a **TN 3 Theology (Earth 5, Fire 1) check** to try to divine the nature of the spirits inhabiting them. If successful, they learn that the spirits are native to Sakkaku, the Realm of Mischief. For a group of 4 rank 2 PCs, there are 8 puppets present. For other groups, see page 310 of the core rulebook.

Depending on the GM's preference, the puppets may remain together to fight the PCs; in this case, "killing" a puppet should be sufficient to force the spirit infusing it to return to Sakkaku. Alternatively, if the GM wants to make things more challenging, exciting, and potentially amusing, the puppets could scatter, forcing the PCs to chase them through Hirosaka, trying to bring them to heel while not being obvious about it. Finally, the PCs could use supernatural effects to try to coerce the spirits into cooperating or to banish them from the Mortal Realm, or they could even try to negotiate with them. Being from *Sakkaku*, the spirits are mischievous by nature, not evil. Of course, they can still be harmful, and even dangerous, but they are mainly motivated by a desire to experience the Realm of Mortals for as long as possible—and by the need for self-preservation.

### Possessed Puppets

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 1 1

The possessed puppets come in a variety of shapes, including firefighters, a toy duck, and a trio of children. The spirits that possess the dolls can move of their own accord, and can also use minor illusions to make their expressions change from soft smiles to twisted grins with sharp teeth. The dolls can move very quickly, and the sounds of their skittering across the floor is particularly unsettling.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 2 | FOCUS | 3 |
| COMPOSURE | 5 | VIGILANCE | 4 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR · MISCHIEVOUS

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 0

**ADVANTAGES**

**Unsettlingly Quick:** Martial; Physical, Interpersonal

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Easily Distracted:** Social; *Interpersonal, Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS**

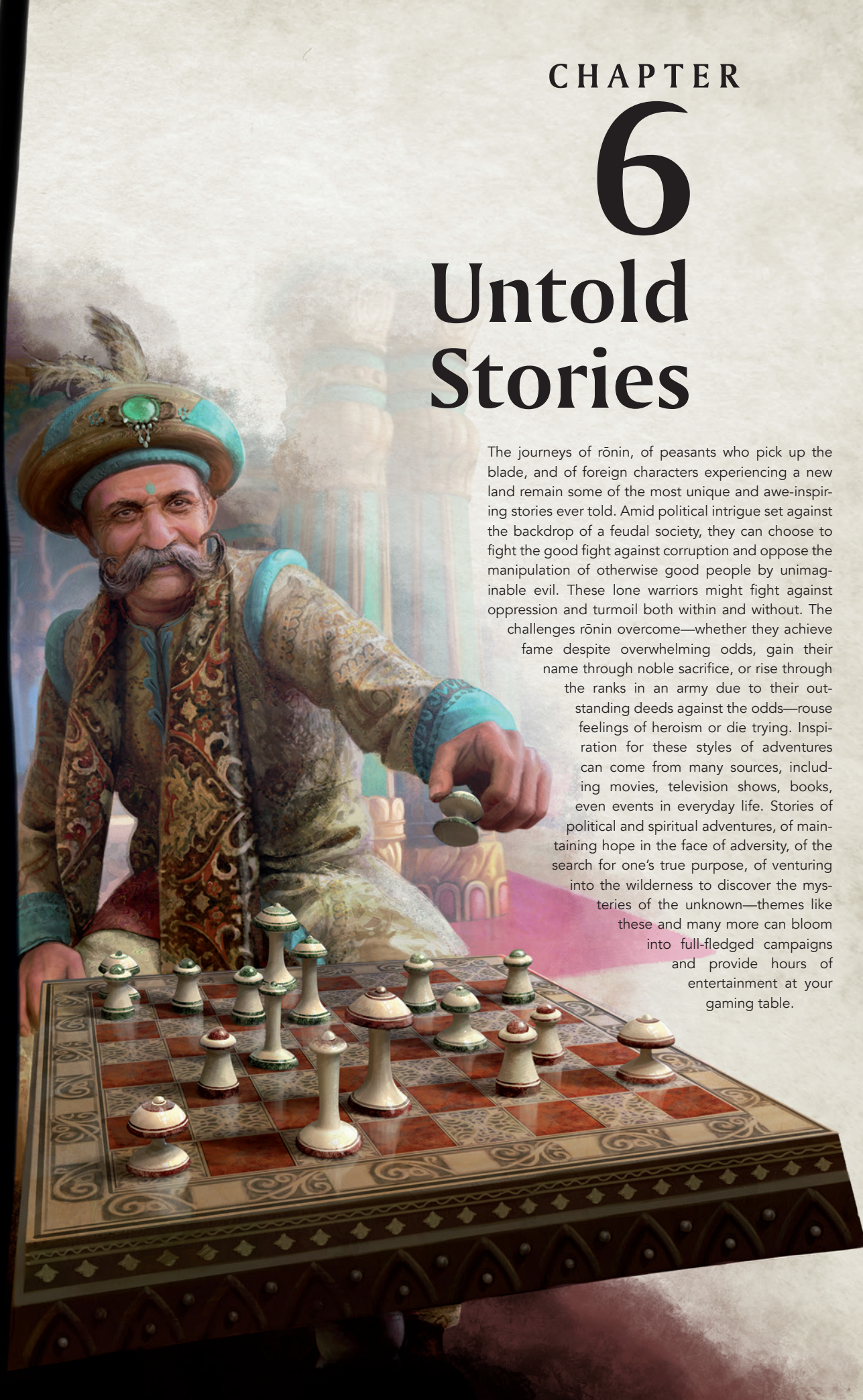
**Sharpened Wooden Appendages:** Range 0, Damage 1, Deadliness 2

**Gear (equipped):** Guise of illusions (Supernatural 3)

**ABILITIES**

**MISCHIEF MAKER**

As a Support action, a possessed puppet may target one position at range 0–2. An area at range 0–1 of that position gains one of the following terrain qualities: Dangerous, Entangling, Obscuring.



CHAPTER

# 6

# Untold Stories

The journeys of rōnin, of peasants who pick up the blade, and of foreign characters experiencing a new land remain some of the most unique and awe-inspiring stories ever told. Amid political intrigue set against the backdrop of a feudal society, they can choose to fight the good fight against corruption and oppose the manipulation of otherwise good people by unimaginable evil. These lone warriors might fight against oppression and turmoil both within and without. The challenges rōnin overcome—whether they achieve fame despite overwhelming odds, gain their name through noble sacrifice, or rise through the ranks in an army due to their outstanding deeds against the odds—rouse feelings of heroism or die trying. Inspiration for these styles of adventures can come from many sources, including movies, television shows, books, even events in everyday life. Stories of political and spiritual adventures, of maintaining hope in the face of adversity, of the search for one's true purpose, of venturing into the wilderness to discover the mysteries of the unknown—themes like these and many more can bloom into full-fledged campaigns and provide hours of entertainment at your gaming table.

## Running Games for Outcasts

Most samurai in Rokugan focus on the Seven Tenets of Bushidō and strive to follow the teachings of their clan. Gaijin—often viewed as potential threats by samurai—fall outside this paradigm, living as outcasts who forge their own existence, doing what they can to survive in an Empire that shuns them. Some players view the freedom of playing a character who lives outside a clan, answering only to their past, appealing. Such a life offers opportunities for the character to go wherever their adventures take them, without feeling restricted or bound by clan doctrines. Such campaigns can offer new players an open-world gaming experience and can offer seasoned players the opportunity to view the setting from a completely different angle.

This chapter seeks to offer players and game masters guidance on how to play as and craft adventures for rōnin, ambitious peasants, and gaijin characters within the setting of Rokugan. The first section discusses how rōnin and peasants who seek to subvert Rokugani norms fit into the setting, how to develop a rōnin's personal code, and how game masters can organize interesting adventures for such characters. This section also discusses how rōnin and peasant characters can fit into groups with Clan samurai, and how this can affect gameplay in positive ways. After all, the goal of adding any element to a game is to increase enjoyment for everyone involved.

The second section offers several new titles that characters can earn throughout a campaign, including a title that allows players to wield the power of the celestial implements of the Ivory Kingdoms. It also goes over bonds, an optional set of rules game masters can incorporate into their games to reinforce the PCs' connections to other PCs and NPCs in the world around them.

The third section delves into gaijin and why players might choose to play a gaijin character, how game masters can integrate such characters into a game, and offers more details about the Ivory Kingdoms. The fourth and fifth sections discuss three-act structures and how to effectively design and run rōnin games. The sixth section that goes into detail about resources for inspiration for rōnin games, and the end of this chapter includes tables for naming characters, as well as a trinket table.

## Games with Rōnin

In many samurai dramas, and in the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game*, what drives the game's narrative is the conflict between two forces: the samurai's giri (their obligations and sworn duty to their lord), and their ninjō (their personal desires, morals, and aspirations). A samurai is ordered to marry someone other than the one they love. Another proud warrior must allow their reputation to be destroyed for the clan's benefit. Duty and desire are opposing forces in a samurai's life, and this game is designed to create friction between what is expected of a clan samurai and what they would prefer to do instead. Which aspect will they betray? Do they choose to do what is right, or what is correct? Do they cast aside their promises and obligations to their family to do what they think is just?

When these forces are in conflict, the GM introduces complications (as described on page 39 of the core rulebook). The GM also uses these to create discord

(page 298 in the core rulebook), hooking players into the narrative by increasing their stake in the story and creating challenging situations with emotional weight. When the consequences of player choices drive the narrative, it makes players feel like a bigger part of the story that unfolds and increases their fun and enjoyment of the game.

But what about rōnin characters? It isn't always obvious at first, but including even one rōnin player character can fundamentally change the game. This is because without a family or clan, rōnin seem beholden only to themselves and their past. Simply put, rōnin have no giri. Indeed, this lack of obligation and strict duty is one of the most appealing reasons to play a rōnin; in exchange for hardship and low status, the character obtains greater freedom than that afforded to a Great Clan or Minor Clan samurai. But this freedom can create a challenge for GMs, especially when the rōnin is included with Great Clan samurai. How does one create complications for rōnin if they have no sworn duty? How does the GM keep the rōnin as invested as characters with giri?

To accomplish this for rōnin characters, giri is substituted with a "past." The rōnin's past is a statement describing the circumstances surrounding how the rōnin came to be in their current position and presents something they must overcome, something to which they are constantly set against and compared. As the game proceeds, the rōnin must reconcile what they wish to do with what they've already done.

In addition, GMs can supplement a rōnin's past by examining and challenging the motivations of rōnin characters. A rōnin's past should come back to haunt them, putting pressure on their ability to pursue their desires. Numerous examples of rōnin characters torn between allegiances exist in samurai media. By identifying the prevalent internal conflicts and motivations of these characters, the GM can find inspiration to bring similar struggles to their gaming table. More importantly, they can provide players of rōnin characters with the same narrative experience afforded to everyone else.

It is especially important for GMs to understand the rōnin's motivations before planning the narrative arc of the campaign. Because a rōnin's past is inherently personal, it can have a significant impact on the story, and may even serve to drive the action entirely, though this should not be at the expense of including other players in the narrative equally. GMs should take the time to discuss this with the rōnin player well in advance.

When making characters for a rōnin campaign, players should be encouraged to break the mold. Normally, Rokugan has little tolerance for individuality. The nail that sticks out gets hammered down, as they say. But because the player characters are rōnin, they're already excluded from the society of the Great Clans, so players may as well make them larger-than-life characters. They could be a peasant pretending to be samurai, a gaijin pretending to be Rokugani, a former lord who relinquished their lands to take a warrior pilgrimage, a duelist who defends farmers, a disgraced courtier trying to hide their identity, the child of heroes who have fallen from grace, or even the offspring of bandit lords. Anything is fair game for rōnin, peasant, and gaijin characters. They should be encouraged to take advantage of the freedom inherent with outcast characters to make them memorable and extraordinary.

## Morality vs. Survival

As mentioned, a primary internal conflict of many samurai dramas is the friction between duty and personal desire. In contrast, the typical rōnin story is about the conflict between two different forces: morality or honor, and the rōnin's survival. Classic samurai media depicts acts of survival as odious or beneath the rōnin's sensibilities, while doing what is right, or following their own code of honor, puts the rōnin directly in harm's way. Often the compassionate or moral choice is actively punished. The dramatic question posed is: will the rōnin risk their own life to do what is honorable and right, even if it gains them nothing in return?

In Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (1961), the main character Sanjuro is a rōnin capitalizing on a gang war being waged within a normally peaceful village, setting both sides against one another and hiring himself out to whichever side will pay more. He acts not out of altruism or virtue, but out of boredom or desire for money; his primary characteristic is a lack of morality, being perfectly at peace with being a rogue. However, he soon encounters a family that is broken and suffering due to the conflict he is perpetuating for his own gain. He is presented with the opportunity to help the family, but doing so puts him at risk of losing not only his sole source of income, but also his life. This is an example of the choice between morality and survival: the right thing is to help these suffering, weak villagers, but Sanjuro would gain nothing for doing this. In fact, no good deed goes unpunished; after saving the family, Sanjuro's betrayal is discovered, and he is tortured for allowing them to get away. Indeed, he is punished *by* his good deed, an object of gratitude from the villagers he saved being the very thing that exposes and damns him.

To adopt this narrative angle, in addition to having players choose a past for their rōnin, the GM can ask them to provide a personal code (see page 181 for more information on developing personal codes).

For a rōnin's ninjō, their player should be encouraged to choose something appropriate to their immediate or long-term survival. "Become a retainer for a Great Clan" is an excellent example, if difficult to achieve. Another could be "become financially secure," or "return to the family's good graces." These things could lift the rōnin back into a comfortable lifestyle and out of relative danger.

Another possibility is for the rōnin's ninjō to reflect a darker, more driven purpose. "Achieve revenge against those who wronged me" is a common trope among rōnin expelled from a clan. "Become a full-fledged samurai" might be the goal of a peasant who is masquerading as a rōnin. Both of these goals are likely to require personal risk to achieve.

## RESPECTING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The Rokugani clans are inspired in part by various Japanese, Chinese, Mongolian, Korean, Tibetan and other cultures across different time periods. This book ventures outside the Emerald Empire to lands such as the Ivory Kingdoms and the Qamarist Caliphate. With these new countries of origin for characters come new cultures, dialects, and religions, each influenced by real-world locales, including India and the Middle East.

It's common for players to want to enhance their roleplaying experience, but some of the ways players go about this can be unknowingly harmful. When someone attempts to portray different accents, stereotypical attitudes, and prejudices their characters may have, this can perpetuate negative mentalities about both the culture being caricatured and gaming communities. This type of behavior is culturally insensitive and can have a very negative impact on individuals both inside and outside the group. The goal of any gaming community should be to be inclusive, welcoming, and fun for everyone involved.

Thanks to social media, gaming groups often meet at venues including clubs, libraries, restaurants, and stores, and each attracts people not familiar with the hobby to witness the entertainment it provides. In such a public forum, it's imperative to respect varying ethnicities and religions portrayed in the game. This encourages inclusiveness and ensures that the integrity of the game remains intact.

While it can seem fun and immersive to try accents or use real-world traditions, prayers, or cultural practices in the game, these are often based on negative or insensitive stereotypes and can misrepresent, offend, or hurt others—especially onlookers and passersby who don't have the context of the gameplay experience and may not realize the group isn't just making fun of someone's heritage.

Instead of using an accent associated with particular culture, a game master might describe an NPC's vocal mannerisms using descriptions such as, "The daimyō rasps thickly, taking deep breaths after every sentence." This use of language allows the game master to portray the NPC in such a way that the players understand how the character is speaking while the GM remains mindful of others.

Many rōnin-style games emphasize the caste structure, in which hinin, commoners, rōnin, and gaijin are seen as lesser beings in the cosmic hierarchy. Elements such as this can amplify notions of bigotry through status, particularly bullying. While the game focuses on a character's standing in society, game masters and players should be aware of how they treat each other at the table.

Military-style games in which some PCs hold positions of authority over others may also have this concern. However, participants in the game are usually friends with a desire to have fun with those they trust. It is imperative to set ground rules surrounding hierarchical issues that occur during play. Focusing on this, and communicating expectations, ensures people are familiar with the position their character is in while keeping in mind the emotional well-being of participants.

Open communication is key, and interactions should never feel like an attack on a player, but rather a narrative moment between two characters—this distinction is very important. If someone expresses that certain interactions feel targeted in their direction (or someone else's), it's important to listen rather than argue. If anyone at the table is uncomfortable, something isn't quite right!

At the end of the day, the goal of any roleplaying game is to have fun and bring people together. Game masters and players should seriously discuss what is and isn't acceptable at the table and strongly take into consideration the perception of the community they are putting out into the world.

To introduce complications, the GM can pit the rōnin's ninjō against their personal code or their past. Can they look away when an innocent farmer is being bullied by samurai of the Great Clan they are trying to impress? Can they accept mere coin for a job that requires the explicit betrayal of the one they love? When they have earned a lord's trust and are so close to being permanently retained and lifted out of poverty, will they cast it all aside to do the thing they know is honorable and right?

## THE HARD LIFE OF WAVES

It's important to remember that becoming a rōnin is often a punishment. It's not meant to be a glamorous life filled with glory and heroic opportunities. The world of rōnin is far different from the world of Great Clan samurai (or even that of minor clans, for that matter). Life as a rōnin is not just hard: it's a life of constant strife, a life of acting like a samurai while living like a peasant. There are samurai who would literally die before becoming a rōnin.

So even in all-rōnin campaigns, GMs should add reminders of the hardships rōnin face. They're distrusted by samurai and peasants. They're mistaken for bandits. They're asked to leave teahouses or challenged by samurai to prove a point. The consequences of their actions are socially harsher than if a Great Clan samurai did the same thing. They might even be harassed by magistrates for crossing a border without traveling papers. Every now and again, the GM should introduce a complication unique for rōnin, something Great Clan samurai rarely have to consider.

It is important to note that while the setting is unkind to rōnin characters, that doesn't mean the GM should be unkind to rōnin players. Their characters should always have a way out, even if things get really tough. Their lives of hardship have made them stronger and more determined. The GM should cut them a break now and again. Maybe they find a sympathetic soul. Maybe there are others like them who join their little band. The GM should make sure at least some of their goals are attainable, should they try. Remember that everyone at the table is there to have fun.

Groups that would like to keep oppression by samurai to a minimum should consider setting a rōnin campaign far from the urban areas of the Empire. Perhaps the party is in a place where the reach of the Great Clans is very weak, like a secluded or unexplored area of Rokugan, where Great Clan samurai typically do not go. Rōnin characters might become local heroes by protecting villagers from bandits and monsters, organizing festivals, and so on. Perhaps their deeds will reach the ears of the local courts, eventually spreading throughout the Empire. They might even impress the Emperor and be honored with a chance to form their own Minor Clan. Stranger things have happened in Rokugan.

As with any roleplaying campaign, it is absolutely essential to talk to the players first and figure out what type of rōnin campaign everyone wants to play. Why do they want to play as rōnin? What types of characters do they want to play? What sorts of situations do they want to encounter? What challenges do they want to confront? Most of all, it is important to be sure that everyone is on the same page and agrees on the preferred tone of the campaign. Everyone may have different understandings of what it means to be a rōnin, and getting that out in the open will help the GM ensure they can craft a narrative for everyone. GMs should make sure players understand the types of challenges awaiting them, listen to players' preferences, and adjust the adventure accordingly.

### Prejudice

Since rōnin have no authority over anyone in the eyes of the government, they instead must build relationships and converse directly with commoners such as farmers and merchants. The key difference between clan samurai and rōnin campaigns are these relationships. While most samurai view commoners as beneath them, rōnin rely on commoners for many of the necessities required to maintain their livelihood. Nevertheless, associating with those of a lower social class places a stain on a rōnin's already-low social standing, which affects the rōnin's reputation.

## THE WAY OF THE RŌNIN

Stories involving a rōnin's ethical conflicts tend to focus on the rōnin's personal beliefs, their place in the Celestial Order, and their abandonment of their belief in that hierarchy. This can create conflict with other PCs in the group; however, this is little different from conflicts generated between samurai of different clans.

The rōnin story is less about keeping in step with a samurai's oath to their clan, and more about lawlessness, survival, and the overwhelming animosity directed toward them. Stories can focus on where the rōnin came from, their direction, their motivations, and how they can claim what they believe they are entitled to. Such stories address adversity and the rōnin's overarching fear of being alone in a world that despises them.

### Freedom at a Price

Choosing a rōnin as a character gives the player additional flexibility in certain ways. A rōnin character has the freedom to go where they want (as long as they avoid Imperial roads), say what they want, and share tea with whom they want—a freedom samurai don't enjoy. Of course, their actions aren't without consequence. For instance, speaking ill of a clan daimyō might still invite challenge from one of their samurai.

Without clan support for food, lodging, and resources, rōnin must do whatever is necessary to survive. Acts of desperation, such as selling their katana to pay for lodging during winter, associating with criminals to obtain their next meal, or even engaging in manual labor are distressing or distasteful to rōnin, even when they are necessary.

But rōnin have even more to worry about than their next meal or a roof over their head—they must also be on constant lookout for their past decisions and experiences coming back to haunt them. Whether a sour relation is hunting them down, their own bad reputation and misdeeds are making survival difficult, or someone from their past is simply on a mission to cause mischief in the rōnin's life, these outcasts cannot fall back on the protection of a Great Clan to ease their worries.

### Strength in Numbers

Rōnin often travel with other rōnin, mainly for protection from bandits looking for their next target, other rōnin hired to eliminate a threat, or samurai looking for a fight.

A group of rōnin with more lax views on Bushidō's tenets can take advantage of opportunities to engage in clandestine operations such as smuggling or espionage, and can take on tasks for a lord who does not wish to sully their hands.

Such a group will also have an array of prospects that come from their familiarity with commoners. For example, peasants make up the largest portion of the Rokugani population, and a rōnin who can rally them to a cause, such as mobilizing them into an army or using them to track down pertinent information, is an incredible asset for a daimyō to have at their disposal. A rōnin skilled in working with commoners can generate much-needed profits to benefit their side operations or keep themselves fed for the next several months.

Rōnin can also go where clans fear to tread, doing what is necessary, driven by their own conscience or a desire to make a name for themself. Whether a rōnin is risking life and limb beyond the Kaiu Wall, venturing into the darkened forests against the

## Table 6–1: Typical Rōnin Tasks

| TASK | DESCRIPTION | SKL. GRP. | RARITY | BASE WAGE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **LOW RISK** | | | | |
| Administration | Maintaining documents for tax collectors, general administration of an estate, scribing documents, and writing letters. | Artisan, Scholar, or Trade | 8 | 1 bu/day |
| Attendant | Acting as a lantern or umbrella bearer or as a servant coordinator. | Artisan, Scholar, or Trade | 5 | 1 bu/week |
| Ceremony | Performing a peasant wedding, blessing a new patch of ground before construction, or purifying leather being tanned. | Scholar | 6 | 2 bu/day |
| Combat Training | Peasant levy training using basic weapons like clubs, spears, and farming tools, along with instruction on preparing moats. | Martial | 3 | 1 bu/week |
| Crafting | Crafting goods or tools, overseeing the creation of leather, or forging weapons. The wage does not include materials. | Artisan | 5 | 1 bu/day |
| Hunting | Gathering food or other resources through the hunting of game. | Trade | 4 | 1 bu/week |
| Sailing | Acting as a crew member aboard a sailing vessel. | Trade | 2 | 1 bu/week |
| **MEDIUM RISK** | | | | |
| Bodyguard (Yōjimbō) or Guard | Serving on a city patrol, as protection for an individual, or for a group such as a caravan. | Martial | 3 | 4 bu/week |
| Bounty Hunting | Hunting down a group or individual who has been plaguing a town or village with the aim of capturing or eliminating the threat. | Martial | 4 | 4 bu/week |
| Extortion | Threatening someone to gain some benefit or payment for an employer. | Social | 6 | 7 bu/week |
| Firefighting | Offering service to fight fires breaking out in a city, town, or village. | Martial | 4 | 2 bu/week |
| Negotiation | Acting on behalf of a daimyō or lord who wishes to deal with another group that may be considered dishonorable. | Social | 5 | 5 bu/week |
| Thievery | Stealing from an estate or individual; includes espionage. | Trade | 6 | 3 bu/week |
| **HIGH RISK** | | | | |
| Kidnapping | Taking a target and removing them from their regular place of abode to another specific locale. | Martial, Social, or Trade | 7 | 5 koku/job |
| Assassination | Eliminating an important member of a council, a local governor, or a bandit leader. | Martial or Trade | 8 | 10 koku/job |
| Protection | Protecting a township, a village during harvest, or a shrine from looters during a ceremony. | Martial | 6 | 1 koku/week |
| Smuggling | Taking livestock, goods, or individuals across established borders. | Scholar or Trade | 7 | 2 koku/job |
| Soldier | Serving in a lord's army. | Martial | 5 | 1 koku/week |

wishes of the local daimyō to save a missing child, or crossing clan borders in the hunt for a wanted fugitive, their unbridled desire for adventure knows no bounds. This behavior can benefit an unscrupulous or shady daimyō who needs tasks performed that clan samurai would find distasteful and perhaps even dishonorable. Rōnin can find this a good source of coin and personal satisfaction, allowing them to continue to survive.

## THE COLOR OF MONEY

Clan samurai find the use of money and even trade as distasteful as they do rōnin, but rōnin require money to move through the hurdles of Rokugani life. Without money, a rōnin must rely on favors, theft, and trading services, all without breaching their own personal code (see page 181). Engaging in financial transactions is distasteful to samurai, yet commonplace among the peasants, and among the miscreants who inhabit the shadowy places where rōnin often venture.

### The Cost of Living

While samurai may demand tribute or use their position to gain favor in obtaining goods and labor for a specific task, rōnin must fight, sometimes literally, for their next meal. It is this lack of resources that sets rōnin campaigns apart.

Rōnin use their skills and knowledge to complete tasks that samurai find beneath them. Readying documents before the arrival of a disgruntled tax collector, training a hapless mob of farmers, or rescuing a daimyō's child from bandits keeps rice in their bellies. Each task may earn a rōnin a much-needed meal, supplies for a long trek through the wilderness, a roof over their head, or the koku needed to repair their favored weapon.

**Table 6–1: Typical Rōnin Tasks** presents numerous options for rōnin to earn koku during their adventures, some through a single skill check, others requiring some time spent adventuring. This table lists the type of task, a brief description of the work performed, some suggested skills used to complete the task, its rarity, and the base wage for its completion. These wages and rarity are only estimates and may vary depending on the urgency of the task, the job's location (including origin and destination when it involves travel), and the types of individuals offering that type of work.

Game masters and players may use **Table 6–1** for examples of ways rōnin can earn favors, equipment, or money, and they can also use it to establish the cost to hire someone for a task a samurai normally finds unsavory.

### Quality above All

Rōnin technically remain samurai and, by their nature, maintain a level of perfection in their work. Game masters may consider multiplying payments received by a character's school rank if appropriate for the task.

### The Clans and Rōnin

The Great Clans use rōnin for a range of purposes, including having them serve as messengers, scouts, soldiers, and spies, especially on missions that would compromise lorded samurai. As clan samurai believe rōnin are without honor, they feel they have little to compromise. Even more malicious daimyō and lords may recognize the desperation some rōnin display, in turn offering them tasks that torture the rōnin's beliefs.

### Table 6–2: Rōnin Clan Relationships

| CLAN | TYPICAL EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS | SUGGESTED PAY MODIFIERS |
|---|---|---|
| Crab | Soldiers and armed recovery teams searching for missing scouts beyond the wall | x 1 |
| Crane | Spies, soldiers, scouts, and messengers | x 1 1/2 |
| Dragon | Wilderness guides and caravan escorts headed to small villages through treacherous terrain to collect taxes | x 1 |
| Lion | Mercenary soldiers, messengers, teachers of ashigaru | x 1/2 |
| Phoenix | Caravan guards, librarians, scribes, and yoriki | x 1 |
| Scorpion | Spies, messengers, and couriers | x 1 1/2 |
| Unicorn | Soldiers, messengers, and scouts | x 1 1/2 |

Although the clans manage to find ways to keep rōnin on a tight leash, most offer some level of employment to rōnin. **Table 6–2: Rōnin Clan Relationships** lists several ways each of the various clans tend to engage the services of rōnin. The table also lists the modification to payments made by each clan. Working directly for one of the Great Clans is a rare opportunity that rōnin use to bolster their reputation.

# Designing a Rōnin's Personal Code

The goal of many rōnin characters is to restore their honor and become part of a clan again or to find a master to whom they may swear fealty. More urgent is their need to eke out a meager existence for themselves. How a rōnin chooses to accomplish their goals, how they live, and what sacrifices they are prepared to make have a direct impact on how they survive in Rokugan.

When developing a rōnin's personal code, there are three important factors to take into account—their *past*; their *ninjō*, or desire; and their views on Bushidō. A rōnin's past often acts as an antagonizing force in the rōnin's life, conflicting and hindering their pursuit of their ninjō. How a rōnin feels about and interacts with Bushidō plays a significant role in a rōnin campaign and is central to the rōnin story, even if the character rebukes one or more tenets. Because a rōnin has the freedom to choose which tenets they feel more closely connected to and also can choose to reject one or more tenets completely, every rōnin lives by a unique personal code of their own choosing, one that guides all of their actions and helps them navigate the consequences of their past and the uncertainty of their future.

The following sections contain guidance on how to create a personal code using the tenets of Bushidō as a guide. Additional information on how rōnin typically view Bushidō can be found in **Chapter 1** beginning on page 15.

The rōnin's personal code should also include a simple statement that summarizes their deeply held beliefs and the behavior they find virtuous. In many ways, Bushidō is a luxury that a rōnin can ill afford, as they must stoop to things in violation of Bushidō in order to survive. Another example could be the defense of the weak: "If you witness an injustice, you are obligated to right the wrong." This is a code that is certain to put the rōnin in harm's way, but perhaps their sense of justice and outrage at the mistreatment of the weak cannot permit them to look aside.

## OPTIONAL RULE: RŌNIN HONOR AND GLORY

To a rōnin, reputation, or glory, is everything. Their honor, however, is often a secondary concern, and that fact is a rōnin's greatest advantage. This attitude allows them to take greater risks, often resulting in more impressive tales of their deeds. Normally, a character who breaches one of the tenets of Bushidō forfeits honor according to the type of breach they performed: trifling, minor, major, or massive (see **Using Social Attributes**, pages 300 to 305 of the core rulebook). When a rōnin performs an act that means they must forfeit or gain honor, such as a breach of their code of conduct, the game master may halve the amount of honor forfeited or gained.

At the same time, with greater risk comes greater accolades upon success, but failures can damage a rōnin's reputation beyond repair. Consequently, when a rōnin forfeits or gains glory, the game master may double that amount. These modifications to the existing glory and honor rules represent the rōnin's reliance on reputation first and foremost rather than on their already tarnished honor.

Game masters should consider the paramount and less significant tenets of Bushidō in a rōnin's personal code and how these affect any decrease or increase in their glory and honor attributes.

## A RŌNIN'S VIEW OF BUSHIDŌ

Part of creating a samurai character is determining that character's relationship with Bushidō. Each clan sees these tenets differently, placing priority on some while downplaying others. A rōnin, however, sets their own belief structure, known as their personal code, and game masters should work with rōnin players to design their character's code to best reflect their character's worldview.

Taking into account what they see as their character's principles, players should consider the extent to which their character values each of Bushidō's seven tenets. In **Question 8: What Does Your Character Think of Bushidō?** in **Chapter 2**, players are asked to pick one **paramount** tenet and one **less significant** tenet to help craft this code (see page 62).

**EVOLVING CODES**

Throughout play, a rōnin's personal code can change as the character develops. As this happens, the code may reflect characters becoming more or less altruistic.

When developing a personal code, it's important to keep these two tenets in mind, but a player can also take this a step further and rank the importance of each tenet and include a sentence or two about how their character regards each tenet. Spaces to write this information out can be found on the *Path of Waves* Expanded Character Sheet available on Fantasy Flight Games' website.

When a rōnin player is determining their ninjō and past, or when they make key choices in game, it's important to keep the personal code and their feelings on different Bushidō tenets in mind. Though only the paramount and less significant tenets have mechanical implications, a GM may use a personal code to direct narrative moments or use a character's adherence to certain tenets as guidelines when asking players to stake or forfeit glory and honor at key game moments.

## THE RŌNIN UNMASKING

The samurai of Rokugan judge themselves according to the tenets of Bushidō. The challenge of adhering to such principles competes with their desires, thereby leading to internal conflict. Rōnin don't usually suffer the same struggle that samurai do, since their adherence to the tenets of Bushidō can be more tenuous. The main source of a rōnin's conflict, then, is their connection with a past that can act as a heavy weight on their conscience, or as something that more tangibly follows them (such as an angry lord hunting them down). This is the strongest element in any rōnin campaign: the struggle to overcome their reputation, whether it is their birthright or is due to their past deeds.

Whether a rōnin is attempting to adhere to Bushidō as a whole or to a personal code, they, like samurai, are susceptible to the emotional stressors associated with that effort. Often challenged with maintaining their emotional resilience through a swarm of abuse, contempt, or ridicule, rōnin must still attempt to contain themselves before reaching a breaking point. Because rōnin still belong to the samurai class, they still suffer the effects of unmasking. Even if a rōnin has never actually been a part of a samurai family, such as in the case of one born into rōnin status or a peasant claiming rōnin status unlawfully, they are still expected to act in accordance to societal beliefs. Failing to act in line with their personal code and outward expectations can impact both their honor and their glory.

### Breaking Point

Through the accumulation of strife in excess of a character's composure, that character becomes compromised and can potentially unmask. This process helps determine the outcome of a scene in which an individual berates, corners, or pressures a rōnin to the point that an emotional outburst is inevitable. A rōnin's unmasking, however, may be different from a lorded samurai's unmasking.

As their behavior is a reflection on their lord, samurai concern themselves with maintaining a level of decorum acceptable to noble society. A rōnin, however, has no such connection, which places them in a unique position such that an unmasking can be a tool

for achieving a desired effect without a complete loss of honor—after all, to those around them, they are already without much honor. When a character's strife exceeds their composure, they may clear their strife by unmasking. Although unmasking is less impactful on a rōnin's honor than on a samurai's, it still has mechanical and narrative effects. Game masters may use the guidance in **Optional Rule: Rōnin Honor and Glory** to reflect the differences in how rōnin approach the loss of honor and glory as compared to a samurai (see page 181).

## TACTICAL UNMASKING

The *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* Core Rulebook suggests that tactically, unmasking can be useful in attaining specific goals such as enraging an already-tormented opponent or relaying information that would otherwise remain unspoken due to decorum (see pages 30–31 of the core rulebook). Such outbursts are not without risk, but they do provide a rōnin with a narrative reason to speak their mind.

The downside to such behavior is that unlike the words of a samurai, a rōnin's opinion may have little impact on the individual they hope to influence. A rōnin is without a lord, after all, so their opinion or testimony often holds little authority and is given little credence. Expressing such opinions, unless carefully considered, can result in their imprisonment or execution, even if the risk to their personal honor is low.

Regardless of who unmasks, their unmasking should be appropriate to the scene, acting as a narrative event in response to a mechanical circumstance. Consequently, rōnin characters are free to unmask in the ways explored in the core rulebook. However, players of rōnin should also consider other alternatives, like the following, to use in their scenes.

### Gross Offense

The character takes great offense from a comment or a nearby item, such as a decoration, flower arrangement, or painting. It is immaterial whether the offense is intentional or not. The character immediately begins to overtly defend their position or voice their displeasure. In doing so, they cause the TN of their next Social skill check to increase by 1.

### Muddled Words

The character becomes confused, and their confusion causes them to lose concentration within the current scene. They begin to have difficulty communicating effectively, mumbling, addressing multiple topics without indicating changes of subject, or speaking far too quickly to be understood, which puts others on guard. In an intrigue, the character reduces the number of momentum points gained by 1, while in a conflict, they reduce their initiative by 1 for the conflict.

### Secret Revealed

The character begins a monologue or speech and accidentally reveals an important detail or secret they know is pertinent to the current scene. The character reveals a secret of their player's choosing which becomes known to all characters in the scene.

### Silent Tirade

The character becomes outwardly dismayed or frustrated, revealing their intentions through facial expressions or some other obvious nonverbal cue. Through smirks, snarls, or other tells, the character allows their visage to falter, exposing their true self in the process. The next action that uses a Social skill targeting the character reduces its TN by 1.

### Unthinking Boasts

The character has an inflated ego and finds solace in regaling others about past accomplishments in order to divert attention from the character's failings. Many frown upon this type of behavior due to its self-indulgent nature, seeing it as hubris. The character forfeits glory equal to their highest ring value.

## INTRIGUES: NEW SOCIAL OBJECTIVES

Whether by negotiating for a fair price on bolts of cloth, rallying an ashigaru platoon against a horde of bandits, or pleading with a tax collector on behalf of a drought-stricken community, rōnin often use their social know-how to resolve conflicts. Rōnin tend to utilize very different preemptive tactics in social interactions compared to their clan counterparts. Communicating with contacts, calling in favors, and gathering information to understand their competition are high on a rōnin's agenda before engaging foes.

The following are several new social objectives that rōnin may use during intrigues. Although these social objectives are particularly appropriate for rōnin, they are usable by any character.

## Endear

During social encounters, rōnin often approach situations from a weakened position due to their status. They must use whatever means are available to alleviate the anxiety of their potential employer and move toward gaining the upper hand. Rōnin discover their business acumen is heavily dependent on their reputation—after all, it is how they sell themselves and the services they can provide. A rōnin can assure an employer of their competence, but it is their proven track record to get a job done that provides them with better opportunities for employment. Building trust both personally and professionally, from their first interaction through their last, helps ensure a rōnin's belly remains full. A character who chooses this objective should state who the target of their advances is.

### *What Does It Take to Complete?*

A character can ingratiate themselves with a potential ally or employer by engaging in social protocols, small talk, or self-promotion with the target. The character using this social objective must accumulate momentum points equal to their target's status rank using appropriate Social skill checks. The TN of the check is based on the target's vigilance.

### *What Is Achieved by Completing It?*

The character endears themself to their target. Perhaps they have established a common interest, charmed their target with stories of their heroism, or learned of a mutual associate who connects them both. At the end of any round in which a character accumulates momentum points equal to or exceeding the difficulty value of the objective, the character may reduce the rarity to find an employment opportunity by 2 or a number equal to their Commerce skill, whichever is greater.

If the target retires from the scene before completion (after completing their own objective or otherwise), this objective cannot be completed.

## Gain an Audience

Bureaucracies and protocols require a level of finesse that most rōnin fail to grasp, but those who do tend to develop for themselves a method of getting to the heart of a situation, gaining employment, or having their concerns heard. Arranging to speak with the right authority is often the best way to advance their position, whether that authority is a daimyō, a local governor, or a crime lord. A character who chooses this objective should state who it is they hope to speak with and the topic they wish to discuss.

### *What Does It Take to Complete?*

A character with the ability to bypass established procedures to speak with an authority quickly gains the upper hand on their way to achieving their objective. Expediting claims, arranging meeting times, or just knowing the right person to converse with can ensure the delivery of a service the character requires. The types of skills used to complete this objective vary depending on the nature of the intended target. PCs can use skills like Skulduggery where criminal elements are involved, Government with governing bodies, and Theology when dealing with religious organizations.

A character using this social objective must accumulate momentum points equal to their target's status rank. Game masters should consider any connections the PCs have with the organization and any relevant history the PC and target have had during the campaign. Momentum should be based on the status of the requesting character, the topic of discussion, and the urgency placed on the request.

### *What Is Achieved by Completing It?*

Through a series of well-considered actions and knowledge of internal bureaucracies, the character has learned the best process for gaining an audience with a target who may be able to assist them with their line of inquiry. The character gains an audience with the target, the nature and security of such arrangements to be determined by the GM.

If the character fails at three consecutive checks toward gaining an audience with their target, this objective cannot be completed.

### Gather Information

Knowledge is power. Important knowledge, however, is rarely free. Its acquisition comes with strings attached or incurs a hefty price. Those possessing it can provide testimony to validate claims, offer insight, or explain the unknown. But in Rokugan, only those of high standing can wield it effectively—after all, who believes the claims of those lower in status than a samurai?

Possessing key information is very useful to those who understand its power to provide advantages over others. Gathering information on a range of topics for later use in negotiations, self-preservation, or trade can prove highly valuable. A character who chooses this objective should state what type of information they are looking for and where they seek it.

#### *What Does It Take to Complete?*

A character using this social objective must accumulate a number of momentum points appropriate to the importance of the information they seek. A character may seek a piece of information relevant to a larger puzzle or to a specific circumstance, or they may simply wish to accumulate details that could prove useful later. Knowing information about a target they seek an audience with can assist them in negotiations and provide them with the leverage needed to secure a deal.

The amount of momentum required to succeed in this objective depends on how impactful the information sought is, who possesses it, and its level of secrecy. The number of accumulated momentum points required is equal to the status rank of the target most affected by the information sought.

#### *What Is Achieved by Completing It?*

The character gains the information they seek. ✿ can be spent to add details to the information obtained, confirm its reliability or validity, or identify the origin of the information. If the character fails at two consecutive checks to obtain the information, it fails to manifest, and the character's inquiries become known to the target. Game masters should be cautious to ensure that failure to obtain the information does not prevent a story from progressing.

## Additional Titles

Gaining a title, as described on page 305 of the core rulebook, is an important narrative event for a character. As a result of the new duties imposed by a title, a character might study new skills and techniques outside of their school which are represented by the title's advancement table. A character who completes a title through spending the appropriate amount of experience gains the listed title ability.

### In Service to a Lord

To be in the service of a lord as a rōnin or peasant is a fantastic honor. For a rōnin, this is one step closer to being admitted into a family or clan and regaining lost status. For a peasant, being seen as valuable enough to perform missions directly for a lord is a recognition of outstanding courage and skill, setting them apart. Working for a lord, however, does not necessarily mean one is accepted as anything more than skilled or useful, and to be in such a position

has a way of drawing unwanted attention from other rōnin or peasants. Though a rōnin might enjoy the opportunity to prove their worth and climb socially, working for a lord does not guarantee the lord's protection or respect. Additionally, a lord can very easily back out of payment for any reason, leaving a rōnin or peasant with no recourse and nothing to show for their efforts.

**Assigned By:** Daimyō, advisors, and other individuals of import who can assign titles to individuals on their lord's behalf.

**Status Award:** +10 (to a maximum of 35)

**XP to Completion:** 24

**Privileged Position (Title Ability):** Once per session, when acting in your lord's interest, you may use their status rank as your own.

## In Service to a Lord

| | ADVANCE | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| TITLE | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Social Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Culture | Skill |
| | Government | Skill |
| | ◆ Rank 1–2 Kata | Tech. Grp. |
| | ◆ Wolf's Proposal | Technique |
| | ◆ Fluent Bargaining | Technique |

## Perfect Land Sect Member

Anyone who hears the chant of the Perfect Land and earnestly accepts the Little Teacher into their life could be considered a member of the Perfect Land Sect. However, unless a person joins a small, regional Perfect Land Sect community, they must impress Hige and the other sect leaders in order to join it formally. Simply finding the main body of the sect is a challenge, and a potential member cannot be accepted until they prove the purity of their commitment to the cause. The Perfect Land Sect's leadership is supremely cautious and skeptical of outsiders, and with good reason. The Empire doesn't like the heretical and dangerous ideas of the sect and is constantly seeking to exterminate the movement.

If someone manages to find and make a place for themself among the sect's members, they may find a loyal and supportive community, even if it comes with the cost of hard work and constant travel. If they join a more regional community, they may find opportunities for leadership or autonomy beyond what their station would allow them outside the sect. Being part of the sect gives members a renewed sense of purpose as they work together to help bring each other out of their challenging livelihoods and toward a common goal of Heavenly peace.

**Assigned By:** A leader of the Perfect Land Sect.

**Status Award:** –5 (to a minimum of 15)

**XP to Completion:** 24

**Trustworthy Cadence (Title Ability):** When making a social skill check targeting a character with status 20 or lower, reduce the TN by 1.

## Perfect Land Sect Member

| | ADVANCE | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| TITLE | Scholar Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Fitness | Skill |
| | Labor | Skill |
| | ◆ Rank 1–2 Water Shūji | Tech. Grp. |
| | ◆ Roar of Encouragement | Technique |
| | ◆ Rallying Cry | Technique |

## Ghostlands Warrior

Those who hunt and live in the vine-choked, Tainted forests of the Ghostlands know all too well what one must do to survive in a place where the very air threatens to change you, where twisting, malignant vines crawl and cling to every surface, and your allies may turn out to be shapeshifting monsters. The Yodhaniya of the Ivory Kingdoms are the only people to willingly spend most of their lives in the Ghostlands, leaving only sparingly to cleanse themselves between the Pillars of Purity (see page 202 for more information). These fierce and cunning warriors have mastered the ability to see through illusions and deception, which is critical in a landscape that constantly shifts and morphs, teeming with vile creatures that change their form on a whim.

**Assigned By:** A member of the Yodhaniya of the Ivory Kingdoms.

**Status Award:** +0 (+10 in the Ivory Kingdoms, to a maximum of 50)

**XP to Completion:** 36

**Eyes of the Yodhaniya (Title Ability):** When you make a check to see through supernatural illusion, reduce the TN of the check by 1. If you are in Defiled terrain, reduce the TN by 2 instead.

### Ghostlands Warrior

| | ADVANCE | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| TITLE | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Medicine | Skill |
| | Survival | Skill |
| | Earth Needs No Eyes | Technique |
| | Soaring Slice | Technique |
| | Cleansing of Coral and Gold | Technique |

### Astradhari

Those who wield astras, the celestial implements blessed by the gods, have been given exceptional powers. These heroes and villains are much rarer than they were in ancient times, but they still exist today. The ability to summon such items requires the influence of a god or intense study under a mentor from the Ivory Kingdoms. If a person can find a sage willing to teach them, they may be able to learn how to summon one of these powerful artifacts, but no sage is willing to teach just anyone these sacred and secret methods. A character must complete tests and trials, which differ depending on the sage in question, to prove their worthiness of wielding such intense power.

**Assigned By:** An Ivory Kingdoms High Sage (such a person may only be chosen by the GM).

**Status Award:** +0 (+25 in the Ivory Kingdoms, to a maximum of 65)

**XP to Completion:** 36

**Sacred Mantras (Title Ability):** You can purchase mantra techniques (see page 98).

### Astradhari

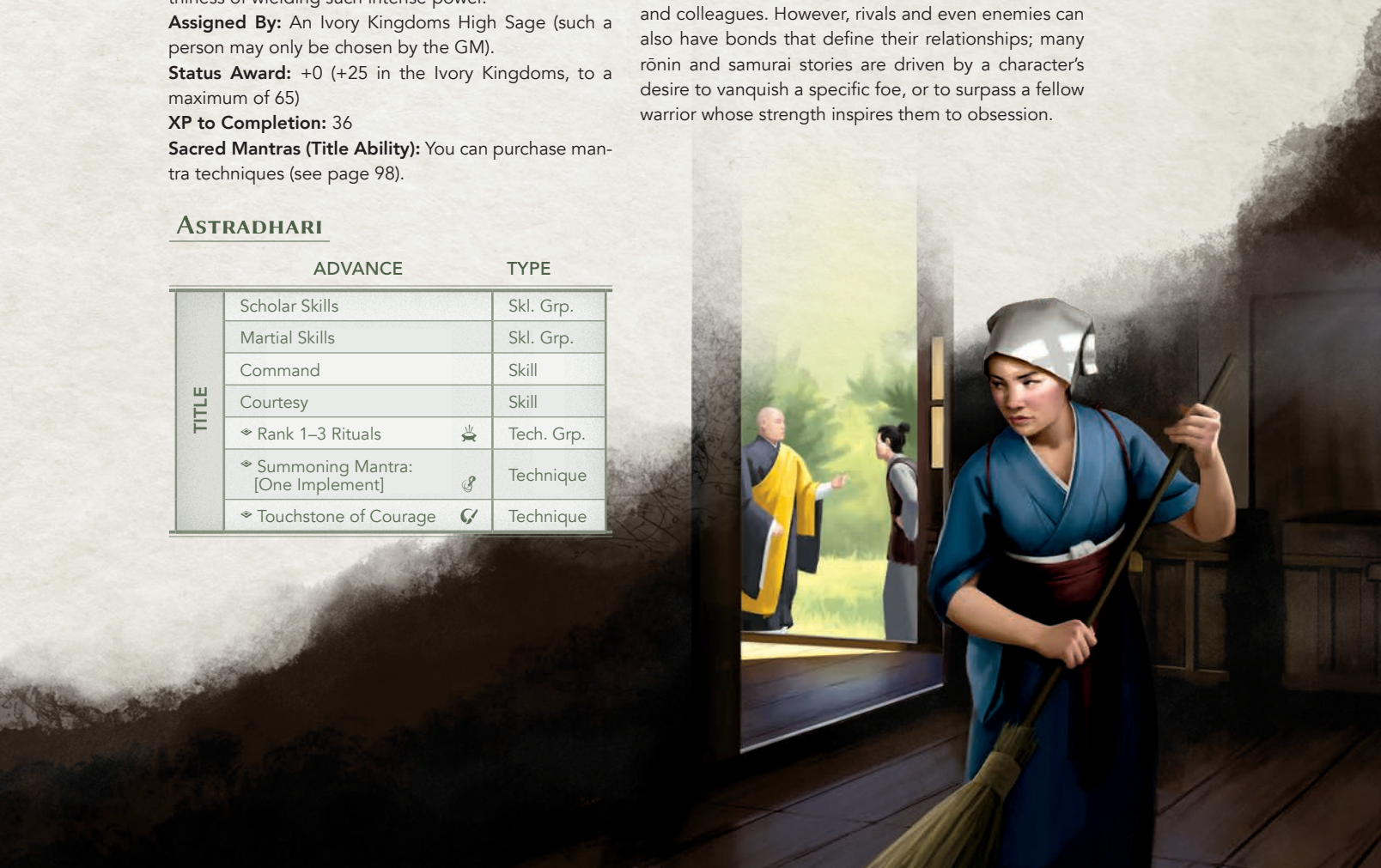
| | ADVANCE | TYPE |
|---|---|---|
| TITLE | Scholar Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Martial Skills | Skl. Grp. |
| | Command | Skill |
| | Courtesy | Skill |
| | Rank 1–3 Rituals | Tech. Grp. |
| | Summoning Mantra: [One Implement] | Technique |
| | Touchstone of Courage | Technique |

## Bonds

The relationships between people are a vital part of stories that revolve around character drama, and *Legend of the Five Rings* relies heavily on related motifs. By default, relationships are reflected purely through roleplaying, and the **Game of Twenty Questions** introduces several relationships as well.

GMs who want to further enable mechanical incentives for this sort of character-oriented drama can do so by including these rules for bonds in their campaigns. Bonds can be recorded in the **Relationships** section of the character sheet, alongside a character's less mechanically detailed relationships. Bonds are especially good for intrigue-oriented campaigns in which who a character knows can be as important as their skills and abilities, or for giving players a specific means to shape their characters' personal stories that touch upon other people in the world.

Bonds are a new way to spend experience points, reflecting the deepening of the connection between two people as they invest energy and emotion in one another. This is commonly done by spending time together, but it can also happen via letter writing, or even during times of separation, as long as the two are deeply connected. Bonds can take many forms. Friends can obviously have bonds, and so can lovers, family, and colleagues. However, rivals and even enemies can also have bonds that define their relationships; many rōnin and samurai stories are driven by a character's desire to vanquish a specific foe, or to surpass a fellow warrior whose strength inspires them to obsession.



## WHAT MAKES A GOOD BOND?

Notably, bonds are more than just close relationships: they are close relationships that are important to the story the GM and players want to tell, and they are by their nature dynamic. A bond is a relationship that can change and grow. A character might have a very close relationship with someone, but if that relationship is not going to be focal to the character's narrative arc in some way or if the player doesn't think it could really develop significantly, it shouldn't be represented mechanically with a bond.

Importantly, bonds do not vanish if the person with whom a character shares a bond leaves or even perishes. The relationship will always be a part of a character who was in it, and the lessons they learned and strength they gained from that connection are permanent. A character can even continue to advance a relationship with a dead person, provided they can still learn more about them, or come to better understand the time the two once spent together. In Rokugan, reincarnation or spiritual echoes might even lead the two characters to cross paths again, in this life or the next.

Bonds between PCs function mechanically, but they are not generally as useful as bonds between PCs and NPCs. This is because bonds are meant to help the GM and players get more out of the PCs' relationships with the characters who appear less frequently in the story (whereas most of the time, all of the PCs are present in the story, and the players can simply roleplay their relationships at the table). The GM should feel free to set the roleplaying threshold for forming a bond between PCs higher than it is between PCs and NPCs.

Bonds generally exist between two characters, but they can exist between more than two characters at the GM's discretion (rather than having many individual bonds, for example, a close fellowship of companions or a family might have a single bond shared by all members of the group).

## FORGING AND ADVANCING A BOND

If the GM has chosen to include bonds in the campaign, a player may request to have their character forge or advance a bond with someone else. The GM decides if the bond or advancement makes sense, and if they agree, the player may spend experience to forge the new bond or to advance the existing bond. (**See Table 6–3: Bonds** (see page 190) to determine the XP required.) If two or more PCs are forging or advancing a bond, each PC must individually spend the full number of XP required for the bond at the same time (as they all gain its benefits). Experience spent on bonds does not contribute toward a character's current school rank or to a title.

## CALLING UPON A BOND

A character can call upon a bond to use its unlocked bond abilities. A character can call upon a bond a number of times per session equal to the bond's rank.

## TYPES OF BONDS

Different bonds are expressed in different ways, and the connections a character forges vary greatly depending on who shares them.

### Old Flame

Rōnin are given to wandering, and sometimes their romances are short-lived by necessity, as work springs up in another town, societal circumstances make the relationship impossible, or the relationship dissolves of its own accord. But as circumstances can fling people apart, so too can they bring them back together. Two rōnin might cross paths again years later only to find themselves employed by rivals, or a rōnin might return to town to discover that their lover of old is now the magistrate whom they must petition for work. Or those who parted on ill terms might discover they must now work together again. Regardless of the particulars of their dissolution and reunion, this bond represents people with a romantic history who find themselves crossing paths frequently, thrown together once again, or otherwise entangled in one another's circumstances.

- An old flame knows your best and worst qualities (and any advantages or disadvantages you possessed at the time you were together—and you know theirs), and is likely willing to use these to achieve their own goals as long as it does not significantly harm you. However, some fondness lingers, and they will do you small favors, such as giving you hints about opportunities you might pursue, warning you of oncoming danger, or pointing you in the direction of someone who has something you are seeking. This help most often arrives when it has not been requested.
- Your old flame's allies are cautious to hostile when dealing with you, depending on how the relationship dissolved, and are generally unwilling to help you unless you offer another incentive. Your old flame's enemies are likely unaware of you, though if they become aware

of your past involvement, they might attempt to use you against your old flame (or vice-versa).

- If your bond rank is 3 or higher, your old flame will take more significant steps on your behalf, although still usually without your request. They might pay off a significant debt of yours without asking for recompense, arrive to rescue you from a bad situation, or put your name into the ear of someone wealthy or powerful who is seeking a rōnin with your particular skills.

**"It's Always Like This with You…" (Bond Ability):** At the end of a scene involving your old flame or reminders of them, after removing strife and fatigue, you may call upon your bond to remove additional fatigue equal to your bond rank, then gain that much strife.

## Partner

To rely on another person completely is an act of great vulnerability, and for many rōnin and outsiders, such vulnerability can seem a fatal flaw others will exploit. Even so, sometimes individuals make long, lasting bonds that build into a true and unconditional trust. Whether partners are close friends, spouses, lovers, fellow soldiers, or simply other survivors of the outskirts of society who rely on each other's helping hands to get by, this bond represents a group that has come to work almost perfectly as a unit, without hesitation or fear that they stand alone.

- A partner trusts you implicitly, and is willing to assist you with nearly anything so long as you can offer a rational explanation of why it is necessary or important. However, they will also intervene to stop you from doing things that they think will be harmful to you.
- Friends and allies of your partner at least tolerate you, will generally give you the benefit of the doubt, and will at least hear you out if you need something, though they generally will not do favors for you unless the favor also benefits your partner directly. Enemies of your partner view you as an enemy, and will seek to remove you from the equation if they think you will impede their schemes against your partner.
- If your bond rank is 3 or higher, your partner will more proactively intervene on your behalf instead of being asked for assistance, and may be more assertive in insisting that you grow beyond tendencies that are harmful to you, such as recklessness. However, if you insist that something is important, your partner will back you with the full means at their disposal, even if you do not explain why it is important to you.

**"Always Got Your Back" (Bond Ability):** Once per scene, you may call upon your bond to know exactly what your partner is thinking (or was thinking at a previous time), or to have your partner know exactly what you are thinking, without any direct communication between the two of you. You (or your partner) must express this idea in five words or fewer, plus additional words equal to your bond rank. When you use this ability, you and your partner may remove strife up to your bond rank, divided between the two of you as you choose.

## Protector and Ward

Most rōnin are responsible only for themselves, but some take up the life of a wanderer for the sake of another. A rōnin might have forsworn their rank and stature to protect the lost heir of their lord, hiding the child from those who see them as an inconvenient loose end—or they might have been the one to refuse such an order, and fled to protect someone their own lord desired to see dead. Or perhaps they simply encountered someone who needed them and their compassion forced its way through the rōnin's world-weary exterior. Whatever the case, a character with this bond has someone who

**EVOLVING BONDS**

Bonds can change over time. If the nature of two characters' relationship changes, such as if a pair of rivals work together for so long that they come to consider each other comrades or if a family member's shocking betrayal turns them into a nemesis, the GM and player can work together to change the nature of the bond. The ranks in the bond remain, but its type changes to the new type.

is dependent on them, and looks to them both for guidance and protection in a harsh world.

If you are the protector, your ward is reliant on you, and cannot fully fend for themself in the world, either due to their age, health, or circumstances. However, they are generally eager to help you to the best of their abilities.

If you are the ward, your protector generally seeks to act in your best interests and keep you safe.

- Enemies of your ward view you as an impediment, and likely target you even before they target your ward, knowing that you will interfere with their plans anyway. Allies of your ward view you positively, and may even feel a great debt to you, assisting you in your quest to protect your ward with significant favors (such as hiding you from your enemies, helping you acquire equipment, or giving you contacts in new places), within their means.
- If your bond rank is 3 or higher and you are the protector, you can always instinctively sense if your ward is in danger. Additionally, your ward begins to learn some skills from you more readily; if they are an NPC, they acquire 1 rank in 2 skill groups in which you possess 3 or more skill ranks. Your ward also starts to act on their own initiative to help you, and might even start to get you out of trouble!
- If your bond rank is 3 or higher and you are the ward, your protector can instinctively sense if you are in danger. Additionally, your protector begins to take an interest not just in your safety, but in the things you do for fun; if they are an NPC, they acquire 1 rank in 2 skill groups in which you possess 3 or more skill ranks, and go out of their way to look out for your happiness in addition to your safety.

**"Under My Protection" (Protector Bond Ability):** Once per scene when you are protecting your ward, their interests, or their memory, you may call upon your bond to treat your endurance as increased by your bond rank until the end of the scene.

## Table 6—3: Bonds

| BOND RANK | XP COST | ABILITY UNLOCKED |
|---|---|---|
| Rank 1 | 3 XP | **Bond Ability (Varies by Bond):** In addition to any narrative benefits of your bond, you may call upon your relationship with one bonded character in a manner based on the type of bond (see the bond ability for the relevant bond type). |
| Rank 2 | 4 XP | **"Like you always say…":** You count as having one bonded character's assistance on a check in which the bonded character is skilled. |
| Rank 3 | 6 XP | **"A familiar presence draws near…":** If the bonded character is an NPC, you may play that character instead of your own character for the next scene (or in an establishing flashback or other appropriate scene, if that character is unavailable or deceased). Remember to adhere to that character's giri and ninjō while playing them. Major decisions on the part of that character must be approved by the GM. If the bonded character is a PC, you and that PC's player may immediately play out an establishing flashback scene that occurred between your characters in the past. |
| Rank 4 | 8 XP | **"You taught me this!":** Use one bonded character's ring or skill ranks (or skill group ranks, if they are an NPC) for a check instead of your own. |
| Rank 5 | 10 XP | **"We are bound by this fate we have made!":** Transfer one of your Void points to the bonded character or gain 1 Void point after they spend a Void point. |

**"I've Been Learning" (Ward Bond Ability):** Once per scene when you or your protector makes a check in which the other has 1 or more skill ranks (or skill group in which they have 1 or more ranks, if the other is an NPC), you may call upon your bond to negate results equal to your bond rank.

## Rival

Not all deep and interesting relationships are completely amicable or totally hostile: such is the case with rivalry. Rivals are two or more characters who might often come into conflict, but they do not hate each another and may even feel mutual respect.

The following are suggested narrative effects for a character with a Rival bond:

- A rival generally seeks to oppose you when the opportunity presents itself and is unfavorably disposed toward you. However, their enmity toward you lends gravity to your position, and it makes those outside of your conflict more convinced of your importance.
- Allies of your rival treat you with grudging respect and suspicion. Your rival's enemies might seek your aid when they face your rival, or they might offer you aid in doing so yourself (such as giving you advice for defeating your rival, quiet political backing, or medical attention after fighting the rival).
- If your bond rank is 3 or higher, your rival views themself as your true foe, and they look dimly upon anyone else who acts against you. They can be relied upon to attempt to keep other people from harming you (so that they can defeat you on their own terms someday).

**"I Will Surpass You!" (Bond Ability):** While making a check, you may call upon your bond. If you do so, you receive strife equal to your bond rank, and then you may reroll up to that many dice.

## Wanderers' Fellowship

With no lord, rōnin have nobody to rely upon and none to protect save themself, making their way through the world like waves rolling across the shore. But even the most independent-minded humans desire a degree of companionship, and there is a certain stability to be found in numbers. As a result, many rōnin form warrior bands, groups that work, fight, suffer, and laugh together. These bonds can become as tight as the tremendously strong bonds of family in Rokugan, or even stronger. In desperate circumstances, this bond can get a rōnin on their feet and back into the fight, helping them to fight on through the pain or face overwhelming odds to save their comrades in arms.

- Other members of your fellowship watch out for your safety (if not always your dignity, especially when it comes to telling embarrassing stories). They help you with modest favors (offering you a cut in on a job they have taken on, giving you an introduction to someone hiring rōnin, buying your sake when your purse is empty and theirs is less empty), and generally expect you to reciprocate such favors.
- Those with whom your fellowship has worked before are generally inclined to regard you in the same way they do your fellows—if they are rowdy or well-behaved, they will assume the same of you. Your actions also reflect upon members of your fellowship, and if you step out of line such that it endangers the group's reputation, they intervene to set you on the right path—or to remove you from the group, if you will not repent.
- If your bond rank is 3 or higher, your fellowship's bonds of loyalty are extremely deep, and other members will accept dangerous jobs with you without question, join your side in battles that do not pay, and perhaps even buy your sake without reminding you about it three times in the next week.

**"Sworn to Duty and to Death" (Bond Ability):** At the start of your turn, if you are Compromised or Incapacitated, you may call upon your bond to remove fatigue and strife equal to your bond rank.

# The World Outside of Rokugan

*Shiba Haru frowned at the Go board. The game likely hinged on his next stone. His opponent, a Mantis named Ichika, waited patiently.*

*A change in the light announced the arrival of…someone. Haru looked up and found a person standing nearby. They were clearly gaijin, a foreigner…from the Ivory Kingdoms, perhaps? He had heard a delegation from that far-off place was in Otosan Uchi, but had assumed they would remain carefully—and appropriately—out of sight. He nonetheless offered a nod; the gaijin was obviously interested in the game.*

*Seeing an opportunity to delay a little longer while continuing to study the board, Haru proceeded to explain Go to the gaijin. The onlooker clearly understood Rokugani, but Haru still kept his words simple.*

*An amused light sparkled in the gaijin's dark eyes. In accented Rokugani, they said, "Thank you, Shiba-san. Based on what you have told me, you should place your next stone…there."*

*Haru offered an indulgent smile—which quickly faded. The placement virtually guaranteed him the win.*

*"You are…an extremely quick study."*

*The gaijin flashed a bright grin and gestured at Ichika. "In the years I have known him, Yoritomo-san has proven a most formidable opponent."*

*Haru looked at Ichika, who merely laughed.*

## GAIJIN AND THE EMPIRE

To most Rokugani, there is the Empire—and then there is the rest of the world, which is considered a largely inconsequential place, home to those who are not part of the Celestial Order. A sour view of gaijin, or foreigners, was hardened in the early fifth century, at the Battles of White Stag and Raging Seas. Spurned by the Empire, a gaijin fleet attacked Otosan Uchi, severely damaging the city and causing the death of the Emperor. Since then, Rokugani relations with foreign groups have been strained at best, and hostile at worst. An official Imperial decree has forbidden gaijin from entering the Empire, though the amount this decree is enforced varies wildly depending on where one is in Rokugan.

This chapter introduces and discusses the use of gaijin characters in the game as PCs and NPCs. It also provides information regarding several gaijin groups and nations, most notably the Ivory Kingdoms.

## WHY PLAY A GAIJIN CHARACTER?

Gaijin characters offer a GM the opportunity to introduce many interesting elements of cultural exchange into their game. For many Rokugani, meeting a gaijin for the first time can be quite a cultural shock. Outside of Rokugan, there are many different civilizations with myriad traditions, habits, and customs, and for a Rokugani who isn't used to such exposure to different ideas, encountering foreign individuals can be both exciting and confusing. Creating gaijin PCs gives players opportunities for challenging and rewarding roleplaying—as long as everyone remains respectful and does not

descend into offensive stereotypes or caricatures. Likewise, by including gaijin NPCs, a GM offers their players similarly challenging play opportunities, while also hinting at a much larger and more diverse world beyond the Empire's borders.

## What Makes Gaijin Different

There are, of course, even more differences between gaijin and Rokugani characters than there are nations in the world. In general, these differences manifest in several broad ways, some of which are listed below to help inspire GMs create unique, diverse, and meaningful nations outside of the Emerald Empire's borders.

### Appearance and Dress

Although it is possible that cultures exist that tend to dress similarly to samurai of the Empire, it is far more likely that a gaijin character wears, in the view of Rokugani, something very different from standard Rokugani garb. Other aspects of appearance could also make it obvious to a Rokugani and a gaijin that the other is a foreigner. Tattoos (particularly facial tattoos), piercings, and other types of body modification; unusual and elaborate hairstyles; and extravagant jewelry are all atypical for the vast majority of samurai, just as samurai hairstyles, certain mannerisms, and the like are unfamiliar to newly arrived gaijin. A character who displays such ostentatious differences immediately attracts the attention and scrutiny of those from another culture who see them.

### Mannerisms

Rokugani samurai are generally not given to obvious body language or open displays of strong emotion. Some cultures may be as taciturn as the Rokugani, but others may be the opposite, given to speaking loudly, laughing openly, making sweeping gestures and similar displays of what, in the Empire, would generally be considered inappropriate behavior except in very private settings. Conversely, samurai reserve may well seem discourteously cold or suspicious to such a culture.

An even more sensitive issue is that of body contact. Unless samurai are intimately familiar, they generally avoid direct, physical contact. Cultures that shake hands, hug, or otherwise make free use of such contact seem distasteful to most samurai, while samurai may appear distrustful to them. The Unicorn, who are fond of shaking hands, are an exception, retaining this custom from their origins among the Ujik of the Plains of Wind and Stone (see page 39). Peasants have their own societal rules, which are less stringent than those of samurai when it comes to physical contact.

### AVOIDING VOCAL CARICATURES

Even if a player is good at portraying accents, it is suggested that GMs and players approach their use with caution. This is especially true if the accent being used is based on a real-world one, and even more so if it is derived from popular culture references such as movies and television shows. Even if well done, a mimicked accent can easily wander into the realm of annoying or even offensive caricatures. "Less is more" is the best approach when trying to portray a gaijin character in the Emerald Empire.

### Language and Speech

It is when speaking that gaijin are likely to most clearly set themselves apart from native Rokugani. Moreover, it is how a character speaks that most vividly portrays them to the other players and the GM.

Any gaijin character should be able to speak reasonably fluent Rokugani, simply to facilitate roleplaying. It may initially be interesting to play a character who travels with a translator, but the novelty of this will likely soon wear off. Although gaijin may well speak in accented Rokugani, it is recommended that the gaijin character's player speak normally during play. Occasionally awkward phrasing and periodically searching for the correct word to use are all unobtrusive ways of reminding everyone at the table that the character is an outsider.

## Gaijin Player Characters

Why would someone wish to play a gaijin character in the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* in the first place? Imperial decree prohibits their presence in the Empire, doesn't it?

While some Rokugani would be hostile toward a gaijin character, most would not. Rokugani samurai know there is a world beyond the Empire's borders, and that good relations with foreign peoples could be beneficial for Rokugan—and, for the more pragmatic, for themselves. A player may choose to play a gaijin character because cultures outside of Rokugan are just as rich, varied, and interesting as the Empire. Every culture has unique traditions and technological and spiritual advancements, such as the Ivory Kingdom's use of celestial implements and the Qamarists' alchemical knowledge.

**PEASANTS AND GAIJIN**

Peasants will generally not know whether someone is a foreigner or merely from some distant part of Rokugan.

The meeting of cultures can offer terrific roleplaying opportunities as these very different people strive to understand one another across a gulf of language, customs, and behavior. This could, in turn, add new dimensions of tension, excitement, and even humor to the game. For those who have played a great deal as samurai, gaijin characters offer the opportunity to roleplay something different.

Still, at least officially, the Empire generally shuns gaijin. Some clans are more open-minded; the Unicorn and the Mantis both have frequent dealings with gaijin, while the Tortoise Clan exists for the purpose of keeping tabs on gaijin nations. Conversely, more traditional factions, such as the Lion, the Crane, and the Imperial families, are more likely to take a dim view of gaijin. Individual samurai from any clan could adopt either a more accepting or a more intolerant stance toward gaijin. Gaijin characters could, therefore, experience a wide range of reactions from Rokugani PCs and NPCs, offering an equally broad array of interesting roleplaying opportunities.

**Game Master and Player Guidance** offers a more detailed discussion of the practical aspects of playing gaijin characters in the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game*.

### Gaijin Non-Player Characters

Using gaijin NPCs in a game is less complex than incorporating gaijin PCs, because they remain under the control of the GM. They can fill particular dramatic roles in the story, entering and leaving the narrative as required.

To what extent and where PCs are likely to encounter gaijin NPCs depends on the GM's particular game. It would be unusual to meet gaijin NPCs simply wandering around the Empire, as gaijin are more commonly congregated around the edges of Rokugan to avoid meeting those that would seek to enforce the Empire's general anti-gaijin stance. Larger groups of gaijin are most likely to be found in the islands of the Mantis Clan, in holdings of the Tortoise Clan such as Slow Tide Harbor, and in the Unicorn lands, particularly in their western reaches.

Elsewhere in the Empire, magistrates enforce strict proscriptions against unauthorized travel. Accordingly, foreigners won't be found alone on the Emperor's roads on their own recognizance. Instead, traveling foreigners are probably accompanied by a protective detail of samurai escorts if they are sufficiently important. For example, a group of gaijin ambassadors from the Qamarist Caliphate, far to the west of Rokugan, could be encountered with their Unicorn escorts en route to an Imperial audience in Otosan Uchi. Alternatively, gaijin encountered on the road might be hostages or prisoners accompanied by samurai guards. If gaijin are traveling alone, particularly deep within the Empire's borders, they likely have an interesting reason for it, or perhaps they are just very lost. Any of these scenarios could lead to a dramatic encounter for the PCs. For example, do the PCs immediately treat the gaijin as a threat? Or do they try to talk to the gaijin, to learn their intent? Do they attempt to help the gaijin? And perhaps most importantly, could they learn useful things from the gaijin that could lead to further complications and adventures?

## Game Master and Player Guidance

A GM and one or more players have agreed to make use of gaijin PCs in their game. What, then, are some of the things to consider in order to derive the maximum benefit from these new characters?

The following sections provide suggestions for both GMs and players regarding the effective incorporation of gaijin characters into a game. Note as well that the Gaijin Name, Culture, or Appearance disadvantage, on page 121 of the core rulebook, is one way of reflecting mechanically how a gaijin character may be treated by Rokugani.

### Familiarity with the Empire

A major factor affecting how a gaijin character is played is their familiarity with Rokugan. Rokugan has developed a very formal and nuanced social code. Other cultures have similarly highly developed codes of social behavior that, naturally, differ from Rokugan's. Members of each culture would find the others' cultures unfamiliar, complicated, and perhaps even off-putting. The extent to which a gaijin character has learned about and experienced Rokugani customs and social behavior, therefore, significantly affects how comfortable the character is in Rokugan and how the player handles the character's interactions with Rokugani citizens. Rokugani PCs' familiarity with various gaijin customs affects how they interact with this character as well.

#### Gaijin Familiar with the Empire

Gaijin who have spent a great deal of time in Rokugan may have mastered the Empire's social complexity. A gaijin character who has lived and worked at length among the Tortoise or Unicorn, for example, may be quite comfortable interacting with other subjects of the Empire (of course, they probably also have assumed attitudes and mannerisms unique to the particular Rokugani people they've come to know). This could be an interesting background for a gaijin character—one

who is just like a Rokugani-born citizen but also has a different ethnicity that is important to them. Moreover, this is probably the easiest way to introduce a gaijin character to a game, as they will smoothly fit into most social situations.

### Gaijin Unfamiliar with the Empire

If a gaijin character is new to the Empire, or hasn't been able to become familiar with its customs, then the GM and players face a different situation. In this scenario, it is presumed that the gaijin character can speak Rokugani reasonably well, but that in most other respects they are clearly an outsider.

Such a character poses more roleplaying challenges than a gaijin who knows the Empire and its customs thoroughly. An important consideration is how well the Rokugani PCs know the gaijin in question. It is easier for the GM to stipulate that the PCs, both Rokugani and gaijin, know and have come to accept one another. Much of the dramatic tension around the character's gaijin status, then, comes from the NPCs they encounter during their adventures. The advantage is that the GM can then choose when and where to make the presence of the gaijin character an issue, and when to let it fade into the background so other story elements can be front and center.

On the other hand, the GM and players may decide to roleplay the first encounter between the Rokugani PCs and any gaijin PCs. The GM still has a way of causing the gaijin to be accepted into the party: by making it the samurai PCs' duty. If the PCs are magistrates, they may have received word that gaijin are in their jurisdiction and have to be escorted to meet with a local lord, or even higher authorities. Alternatively, the PCs may be assigned to escort a gaijin political or mercantile delegation, which includes one or more gaijin PCs, to some location. The situation becomes even easier if some of the Rokugani PCs are from relatively gaijin-friendly clans, because the gaijin characters may find allies—or, at least, more open-minded companions—among them.

### Tension among Gaijin

The term "gaijin" encompasses myriad disparate peoples and nation-states, each with their own interests, biases, and tensions. Gaijin originating from different places may be as unfamiliar with one another as they are with the Empire. It is quite possible that gaijin characters could come from places that are hostile to one another or even at war. GMs and players should look at such situations as opportunities for yet more interesting roleplaying, particularly if samurai characters find themselves in the odd position of trying to mediate relationships between two gaijin characters who are traditional enemies.

## WHY IS THE GAIJIN CHARACTER IN ROKUGAN?

Regardless of how familiar a gaijin character is with Rokugan, an important question remains: why are they in the Empire in the first place? Answering this goes a long way toward informing the character's backstory, which in turn has a fundamental effect on how the character is played and how they interact with other characters.

The following are some suggested reasons why a gaijin character might be in Rokugan. Players and GMs are encouraged to come up with their own reasons as well.

- The character could be a crew member from a gaijin ship or a member of a gaijin trading caravan that has chosen to remain in the Empire or has been stranded there.

- The character could be a member of the entourage of a foreign ambassador or other dignitary visiting Rokugan. Alternatively, the dignitary could maintain a permanent presence in the Empire. (This might seem strange, given the Imperial prohibition on gaijin, but when it conveniences the Empire, even Imperial edicts can be flexible.) A foreign embassy would likely be located in some discreet location, such as in a holding of the Tortoise or Unicorn Clan.
- The character may be a merchant or trader seeking to conduct business with the Empire, or an employee or retainer of one.
- The character may be an explorer, or in the company of an explorer, who seeks to learn more about this unknown place called Rokugan.
- The character may be a spy engaged in covert activities on behalf of their government or other organization. In this case, they need a believable cover story, such as one of the suggestions above. Otherwise, they must make extensive use of disguise and subterfuge, which would itself become a central aspect of the character.
- The character may be a fugitive running from issues in their homeland.

### Playing the Character

During the game, a character's gaijin status and customs elicit a variety of reactions from NPCs (and other PCs) depending on how the character is depicted. If the player portrays a discreet character who tries to avoid attracting attention, then those reactions will probably be much more muted than if the character has a commanding presence and displays the trappings of their culture proudly. A confident and outgoing or brash and outspoken gaijin character might attract a great deal of attention—and a considerable amount of that may be negative. This is especially true in more social situations, such as court, where appearance and propriety are paramount. Many Rokugani samurai would answer unconventional behavior in such places—which they may well see as offensive—with outright contempt or hostility. For instance, unless someone with appropriate authority has extended protection to a gaijin character—perhaps because they are part of a recognized political or trade delegation—then even an unintentional offense, if it is seen as sufficiently problematic, could precipitate the demand for a duel.

This raises another, important issue regarding gaijin PCs. A game featuring foreign characters interacting with an isolated culture offers many opportunities for interesting in-game conflict. However, the GM should be careful not to focus the game primarily on the gaijin characters as a result. Rather, they should help ensure that all the PCs get a turn in the spotlight.

A final possibility to consider is a party of PCs who are all gaijin characters. This would be particularly challenging for a GM, who would have to play essentially all of Rokugan and its people, in a way that balances the nature of Rokugani reactions to gaijin characters in the setting with player enjoyment.

Ultimately, if gaijin characters are adding interesting game elements that enhance the enjoyment of all, while giving a sense of a larger world looming outside the Empire's borders, then their inclusion into the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* should be considered a success.

## The Ivory Kingdoms

Located south and west of Rokugan, the Ivory Kingdoms are a sprawling, shifting mosaic of hereditary monarchies, religious territories, and city-states supposedly united under a single ruler, the *maharaja*. In reality, this ever-changing patchwork of political entities, upon which is superimposed a complex and equally inconstant montage of cultures, religions, and languages, mostly pays only lip service to the maharaja's rule. The result is a long history of strife, ranging from subtle intrigue to open warfare. Various ethnic, cultural, and religious groups rise to great power and prominence before succumbing to both internal and external forces and enemies and then falling back into obscurity. Currently, the Ivory Kingdoms are enjoying a period of relative stability and peace, but all know that this is unlikely to last.

### GEOGRAPHY

Geography affects the locations of settlements, agriculture, transportation, and just about every other aspect of a civilized society. The following sections describe the geographical context of the Ivory Kingdoms.

#### General Geography

The Ivory Kingdoms are broadly defined by an expanse of gently rolling plains, bordered on three sides by the ocean, a massive mountain range to the north, and by thick, swampy forests to the northeast. Where the northern borders are not defined by rocky mountains, the fertile plains give way to salt flats, which themselves finally dwindle into the rocky barren wastelands and desert of the Burning Sands. The central interior of the Ivory

Kingdoms is dominated by the Sonagiri or "Golden Mountain," a massive plateau thrust out from the northern mountains until it ends at a mountain range that dominates the center of the Ivory Kingdoms region.

Little is known about the lands beyond the northern mountains, a range known as Shaktimaan Deevaar, the Mighty Wall. The tremendously rugged terrain, extreme altitude, and hostile, rapidly-changing weather means the Shaktimaan Deevaar is effectively impenetrable. This has benefited the Ivory Kingdoms, as invasions from the north have been confined to entering through the salt flats that exist where the Shaktimaan Deevaar ends, themselves little more hospitable than the mountains.

On the eastern border, however, the situation is very, and grimly, different. The terrain in the northeast is low-lying and poorly drained. This, together with a generally warmer and wetter climate, has resulted in a lush expanse of thick, tangled rainforest. Unfortunately, this region of rainforest separates the Ivory Kingdoms from the southernmost reaches of the Shadowlands, the evil realm encroaching on the southern border of Rokugan. This has spawned a nightmarish realm indeed—to the Ivory Kingdoms, this is the haunted realm known as the Ghostlands. The Ghostlands are described in more detail on page 202. South of the Ghostlands, on the Ivory Kingdoms' eastern coast, a great river irrigates the land of a host of independent cities and villages, many of which are rich with trading partners from foreign lands.

The southern tip of the Ivory Kingdoms is defined by a great swampy delta, sheltered on one side by a small mountain range and on the other by a thick mangrove forest. This is the domain where the naga serpent folk are most numerous, and where their culture dominates. Due to the rich and fertile soil in and around the forest that lines the western coast and wide south-flowing river, many kingdoms have built themselves up in this region, making the interactions between the naga and humans one of cordial allies rather than insular neighbors.

## Rivers and Other Water Features

Drainage through large stretches of the Ivory Kingdoms is limited, resulting in wet, low-lying lands, particularly at the southernmost coast. Many of these wetlands host small lakes, and act as the source of a number of sluggish, winding rivers. These are dwarfed, though, by three great rivers traversing the Kingdoms. The Himapaat, or Snow River, rises in the mountains lining the southern edge of the Sonagiri plateau, flows northward across fertile plains of the plateau itself, then tumbles down a long series of majestic waterfalls and torrential rapids into the southern lowlands. Another river descends from those mountains, the Heeratand. This river, slow-moving and wide, meanders southward through broad, fertile flood-plains to the ocean. An immense delta completes these great waters' journey to the sea, with dozens of shifting watercourses winding among boggy islands thick with reeds, grasses and mangrove swamps. Amidst this delta rises the ancestral kingdom of the naga, giving it a reputation of mystery and magic. A third great river, the Nadati, rises in the Shadowlands-haunted forests of the Ghostlands on the Kingdoms' northeastern margin and flows south through a fertile plain, emptying into the ocean on the Ivory Kingdoms' rockier eastern coastline. The Pillars of Purity keep these waters from spreading Taint to the rest of the Ivory Kingdoms (see page 202).

## Climate

Climate varies greatly across the Ivory Kingdoms. Overall, warmer and wetter weather prevails in the south and east, with a steady progression to a drier and cooler climate as one proceeds north and west. Accordingly, the southern Kingdoms are generally tropical: hot and muggy through most of the year, and particularly wet during the monsoon season in the summer and autumn, when frequent, drenching rainstorms roll in from the ocean. To the east, this heavy precipitation combines with the persistent heat and poorly drained topography to promote lush growth in the Ghostlands' rainforest.

Away from the ocean, the amount of rainfall diminishes. The Sonagiri plateau still receives considerable amounts of rain, but only a fraction of that drenches the southern coastal plains. North of the plateau, rainfall becomes infrequent, relying on rivers flowing through the Shaktimaan Deevar and Sonagiri to provide irrigation. Unlike the physical features that define the Ivory Kingdoms' other borders, the point at which rainfall becomes so scarce that no crops can be reliably grown is effectively the northern border.

## Vegetation and Wildlife

Just as the climate progressively varies across the Ivory Kingdoms, so too does the vegetation. Along the seacoast, and particularly in the great delta of the Heeratand River, saltwater marshes and swamps are common, lush with grass, reeds, and thick, tangled stands of mangrove. Ferns and flowering plants such as orchids, hibiscus, and myrtle are also common.

West of the great delta, and northward along from the coast, mangrove gives way to a more varied array of trees, including many different types of palm, as well as teak, mahogany, kapok, gum and rubber trees, and a riot of vines, ferns, and flowering shrubs. Similar trees make up the Ghostlands, but unfortunately, most of that area is polluted by the malign influence of the Shadowlands. The result are trees and plants that are corrupted and twisted into baleful and sometimes even malign versions of their original types.

North of the Sonagiri plateau, the character of the vegetation changes again, with plants tolerant of drier conditions—mainly various types of grass, but also cedar, acacia, ash, eucalyptus, and some pines becoming common. In the far north, beyond the salt flats, these give way to patchy, scrubby grass, heat-hardy plants like agave and yarrow, and even some types of cactus.

While the staple crops of the Ivory Kingdoms are predominantly rice, wheat, and millet, many of the wild plants above have been cultivated. Sugarcane, cotton, tea, and many types of fruit are also grown, while pine and cedar in the north, and teak, mahogany, and bamboo in the south, are harvested for their lumber.

A strikingly diverse array of animals and birds is native to the Ivory Kingdoms. Notable among them are elephants, monkeys, several species of great cats such as tigers and leopards, rhinoceroses, boars, and several types of wild cattle. Some of these creatures are of great cultural significance in the Ivory Kingdoms.

# Culture and Politics

It would be a monumental task to list and describe every ethnic, cultural, political, and religious group in the Ivory Kingdoms. Not only is there a large number of them, but many of them overlap in all but relatively minor ways. Moreover, they change over time, many of the smaller ones appearing, evolving, and disappearing in a complex response to events in the Kingdoms. This repeating cycle of rise, unification, stability, stagnation, fragmentation, and fall not only is a fundamental characteristic of Ivory Kingdoms society, but also has been a major driver of social change throughout their history.

That said, there are (depending upon who is asked) eight to ten major factions or kingdoms, each united by some combination of geography, culture, politics, and religion. Each is nominally ruled by a monarch known as a *rajah*, but over time, the actual leadership of these kingdoms has varied between individual sovereigns, ruling councils, religious leaders, and even, in a few cases, mercantile guilds. The multitudinous smaller factions are likewise led by various individuals and groups, some of which are dynastic, while others have assumed leadership through great charisma, clever scheming, or even outright violence.

Ruling over all of these various factions—at least, in theory—is the *maharajah*, a supreme ruler with lordship over the entirety of the Ivory Kingdoms. In the closest Rokugani analog, the various rajah are similar to clan champions, while the maharajah corresponds to the Emperor. However, the Empire's Celestial Order offers much more detail and clarity regarding the social hierarchy than does the Ivory Kingdoms' caste system, so what is a clear lord-vassal relationship in Rokugan is much more diffuse and fractious in the Kingdoms.

### Commonalities

Despite the complex and fractionated nature of the Ivory Kingdoms' political and cultural landscape, there are some definite points of commonality among the Kingdoms.

Foremost among these is language. There is, in fact, a multitude of languages and dialects used throughout the Ivory Kingdoms; it is claimed that in the great city of Bhavyatapura alone, one may know a hundred languages and still meet those whose tongue one cannot understand. However, there is one common language, Ivinidi, that is spoken by virtually everyone in the Ivory Kingdoms, at least to some degree. While Ivindi has numerous regional dialects, an ancient and standardized written form is used for most important religious and political documents and texts.

Another commonality in the Ivory Kingdoms involves spirituality. While the people of the Ivory Kingdoms practice a multitude of religions, all generally recognize some aspects of the natural world as spiritually important. For example:

- The tallest of the mountains bordering the Sonagiri plateau to the south, known as Divyagiri, or Heavenly Mountain, is recognized throughout the Kingdoms as a sacred place. Variously, divine beings dwell upon its summit or deep within it, or it forms a passage to the Heavens, and only those pure enough of spirit being able to climb it.
- The three great rivers—the Heeratand, the Himapaat, and the Nadati—all play a central role in the spiritual life of the Kingdoms. One prominent belief is that because they both flow from the mountain range surrounding the Heavenly Mountain, the Heeratand and the Himapaat represent the divine and secular journeys of mortals through life respectively, with one leading toward a region of mystery and the other toward the heart of civilization. Meanwhile, the Nadati, which rises from the Ghostlands and must be constantly purified by the Yodha, metaphorically represents the separate path of constant struggle against evil and temptation.
- Elephants are treated with great respect, and even reverence, throughout the Ivory Kingdoms. They are sometimes used both for work and for war, but their handlers insist the beasts are invited to do so and may refuse if they wish. Likewise, tigers are revered for their power, agility, and cunning, and they are widely seen as the embodiment of an ideal nature that humans can only aspire to achieve.
- The Ghostlands are reviled in virtually every corner of the Ivory Kingdoms. Again, details differ from place to place and faction to faction, but the Ghostlands are generally seen as the realm of evil itself, as a place of entry into it, or as a cautionary reflection of it in the mortal world.

## Important Factions

Currently, there are five Ivory Kingdoms factions that have risen in prominence and power above the rest. Given the history of the Kingdoms, this is unlikely to last, of course; some or all of these will eventually decline, new ones rising in their place. These most influential factions are:

- The Sheelavaan of Bhavyatapura are currently enjoying a period of relative unity, thanks to a somewhat shaky alliance among the most powerful of the district factions in the great city. It would be overstating things to say that the entire city is united behind these factions, but the ruling council they have formed represents a sufficient aggregate of wealth, power, and influence to give the Sheelavaan of Bhavyatapura a great deal of sway in Ivory Kingdoms' politics.
- The Mukka, or "Fist," is a fundamentalist religious group intent on spreading its particular

beliefs throughout the Ivory Kingdoms and beyond. The most devoted adherents of the Mukka are generally found among the lowest-ranking social caste. They see the growing influence of the Mukka as a way of improving their lot in life while remaining devoted to most of the more widespread religious beliefs in the Kingdoms—albeit a harsh and uncompromising interpretation of them.

- The Saamrajya, an ancient, hereditary monarchy, is believed to be one of the oldest—perhaps the oldest—of the Ivory Kingdoms, and the only one that remains substantially unchanged from its earliest days. Most notably, the rulership of the Saamrajya has remained in the same family throughout its entire history. The Maharaja, the titular leader of the Ivory Kingdoms, is also the ruler of the Saamrajya.
- The Tajir, which translates simply to "Traders," are a relatively new faction that consists of a number of wealthy merchants and mercantile houses. They have united under a *samaaj*, or guild, that leverages the members' collective wealth and commercial relationships to influence Ivory Kingdom politics. To date, they have been so successful that the Saamrajya is rumored to have entered into secret negotiations with the Mukka—two groups that should naturally despise one another—to find a way to blunt the burgeoning power of the Tajir.
- The naga are an ancient species of serpent folk who predate the rise of human civilization. In Rokugan, the naga are little more than myth; in the Ivory Kingdoms, however, they live openly and, generally, in harmony with their human neighbors. While naga can be found throughout the Ivory Kingdoms, their ancestral seat of power rests at the heart of the swampy delta which the Heeratand becomes. This city—which would be barely recognized as such by most Rokugani—rests above and below the surface of the swamp, with fortresses of hardwood and coral and buildings too tall and narrow to have been constructed by human architects. They are a powerful faction in their particular areas of interest, but these areas usually have little to do with human affairs. Only when human activities begin to intrude on the naga do they speak up—and the people of the Ivory Kingdoms, regardless of their particular culture or politics, generally listen and then accede.

## SPECIFIC REGIONS

While many regions in the Ivory Kingdoms could be considered of great interest and potential importance, there are two that are particularly prominent.

### Bhavyatapura, the City of Splendor

Bhavyatapura means the "City of Splendor," but the vast city is also known by other names: the Heart of the World, the City of Wonders, and even Bhavyatapura the World City. However, all of these names struggle to capture the true essence of Bhavyatapura. Simply put, Bhavyatapura is thought to be the largest and most complex city in the world.

#### Layout

Located in the midst of the fertile plains atop the immense plateau known as Sonagiri, Bhavyatapura is a huge metropolis that has, over the course of many centuries, absorbed a variety of smaller cities, along with many towns and villages. It extends for many miles along the great river known as Himapaat, and for many miles back from both banks of the river.

### There Is No Map

Given its size and complexity, it would not be feasible within this book to develop a definitive map of Bhavyatapura that also contains sufficient detail to make it useful as a roleplaying aid. Accordingly, a GM who plans to use Bhavyatapura may wish to develop their own map that depicts only the part of it that is immediately relevant to their game. Alternatively, since the city is so large and diverse, it is easy to simply use a narrative description to depict its crowded and vibrant urban nature, and then present the players with a map of whatever type of neighborhood or building is useful at the time. In any case, GMs should remember that the PCs have only the perspective of a single person immersed in this vast urban sprawl, so they would be very unlikely to ever see more than a small and localized part of the city at any one time.

One striking attribute of Bhavyatapura is the extent to which it works as a city, despite its monumental size and chaotic nature. Rokugani cities work as well as they do because they are generally quite orderly and very heavily regulated—and yet, cities in the Empire are still rife with crime, strife, and corruption. Bhavyatapura is far larger than any Rokugani city; moreover, being a largely incidental merging of preexisting settlements, it is generally much less orderly and organized, with

no lack of criminal enterprises and corrupt officials. And yet, despite its apparently chaotic character, Bhavyatapura is actually a stable, very cosmopolitan, and extremely prosperous city. It is the most important center of trade in the Ivory Kingdoms, and the constant movement of wealth through the city gives it enormous political clout.

The people of Bhavyatapura have found solutions to the unique problems they face. For example, following a series of devastating outbreaks of disease, the city authorities eventually determined that the culprit was contaminated water supplies that affected entire neighborhoods. Accordingly, over one hundred years ago, a series of strict protocols intended to safeguard the security and cleanliness of water supplies was enacted, and a system of sewers was constructed to channel waste into the Himapaat well downstream of the most heavily populated portion of the city. There have been no significant outbreaks of disease since.

## Culture, Religion, and Politics

Like the Ivory Kingdoms as a whole, Bhavyatapura has no singular, unifying culture. The closest the city has to its own culture is the concept of the Sheelavaan, a collective term that describes all who live in the great city. In theory, at least, the Sheelavaan recognize Bhavyatapura as their home, a place with a unique identity that sets it apart from the rest of the Kingdoms. Simply living in a particular place is a rather thin sort of "culture," however. Like the Kingdoms, Bhavyatapura is a massive, complex, and shifting montage of many cultures, languages, and religious beliefs. The population groups based on these commonalities tend to concentrate themselves in certain parts of the city. For example, residents of one neighborhood may all speak a language that originated in the eastern seacoast region of the Kingdoms, while the adjacent neighborhood may be characterized by adherents of a religious sect from the northern barrens. That said, there

## IMAGINABLY VAST

While the size and population of Bhavyatapura have been estimated by the appropriate authorities among the Sheelavaan, it is unlikely that they could ever be determined definitively. Not only are the boundaries of the city somewhat unclear, but there is no effective way of conducting an accurate census of such a large population of disparate people. However, some GMs and players may find some rigorous numbers useful, so we suggest a range based on some real-world examples of so-called megacities.

Based on recent studies, Singapore, with a population of 5.9 million people and an area of 518 square kilometers, would have an imposing population density of 11,400 people per square kilometer. This could represent a compact, very densely populated version of Bhavyatapura. Alternatively, for a much larger but less densely populated city, consider the example of Kuala Lumpur in Indonesia; at 7.8 million people and an area of 2,200 kilometers, the population density is 3,600 people per square kilometer. These two examples represent a good upper and lower limit on population and size for Bhavyatapura, which should allow GMs and players to readily visualize its extent.

Since Bhavyatapura has essentially accreted over time from numerous preexisting settlements, the city has no clear division into areas or quarters the way Rokugani cities do. For example, a Rokugani city generally has an area in which most samurai live; another devoted to temples, shrines, and other religious buildings and activities; another focused on commerce; and so on. Bhavyatapura, on the other hand, has at least ten important centers of religious observance in different areas, six having been incorporated into it from cities it absorbed and four having developed in the years since.

Instead, the most important subdivision of Bhavyatapura is into districts known as Nirga. Each Nirga roughly corresponds to the former boundaries of a large town or city that has been absorbed into Bhavyatapura. These predecessor cities were surrounded by walls built for defense and for controlling access and trade. Most of these old walls still remain in place, dividing Bhavyatapura into the series of Nirga that figure so prominently today. It is generally accepted that there are fifteen Nirga, but even this seemingly simple figure is controversial: disputes over the exact boundaries of some of the Nirga mean that, by some reckonings, there could be as many as twenty-one or as few as ten. However, the ruling council of Bhavyatapura currently recognizes fifteen, regardless of the ongoing debates.

is a great deal of overlap and mixing. Moreover, over time, groups tend to wax and wane in numbers and prominence; some eventually disappear altogether, while new ones appear. Given this, it is more accurate to think of the city not so much as a single entity, but rather as a microcosm of the Ivory Kingdoms.

### Defense

Despite its wealth and its prominent place at the center of Ivory Kingdoms affairs, Bhavyatapura has not been subjected to any significant sort of military threat in at least several hundred years. This is in part due to its location on the Sonagiri plateau, whose restricted approaches make it relatively easy to defend. A more imposing obstacle, however, is the sheer size and complexity of the city. It is doubtful that any power in the Ivory Kingdoms—much less any nation in a more distant part of the world—could raise, deploy, and maintain an army large enough to avoid simply becoming swallowed by Bhavyatapura's immense urban sprawl well before gaining any significant control. In fact, the greatest threat facing the city is actually a natural one: the Sonagiri plateau is given to periods of seismic instability, such that earthquakes sometimes do major damage that can be difficult and time-consuming to repair.

## The Ghostlands

The Ghostlands, the Shadowlands-Tainted region that borders the Ivory Kingdoms to the northeast, represent an enduring and egregious threat. In the same way that Rokugan must contend with the ongoing menace of the Shadowlands on its southern border—mainly through the ceaseless vigilance and efforts of the Crab Clan—so, too must the Ivory Kingdoms deal with the incessant peril of the Ghostlands. As is the case for Rokugan, a malign will drives baleful powers and dangerous creatures intent on destruction. The Yodha, a supremely militant faction devoted to protecting the Ivory Kingdoms from the Ghostlands, believe that the ultimate power facing them is a profoundly vile and powerful being known as the Queen of the Rakshasa. To what extent this entity is different from Rokugan's nemesis, the Dark Kami known as Fu Leng, is unclear. One common point that is notable is that the spiritual corruption known as the Taint functions essentially the same way in both places.

### The Terrain

The Ghostlands are a truly forbidding place. Fetid swamps and thick stands of overgrown, sharp-edged elephant grass soon give way to gloomy, tangled rainforest. As in the Rokugani Shadowlands, the plants, the water, and even the land itself are hostile to anyone brave or foolish enough to dare confront them. Trails lead to deep, hidden pools and caves, vanishing behind those following them. Water is murky, polluted, and foul smelling. Leaves and vines pluck and grab, jabbing and slicing at flesh, the vines' keen thorns glistening with toxic secretions. Even the air is a danger, sometimes becoming so hot, humid, and stale that simply breathing is a struggle. What makes the Ghostlands worse than their Rokugani equivalent, however, is density of their vegetation. If the Shadowlands, as bleak and barren as they are, are a dangerous place, the Ghostlands are even more so because of their closed and tight nature. It is rare to be able to see more than a short distance into the thick, brooding rainforest; it is, therefore, much easier to be taken by surprise and ambushed by the horrific creatures lurking here.

### GAMING IN THE GHOSTLANDS

To portray the Ghostlands in all of their baleful menace, we suggest the following:

- Visibility beyond range 3 should be rare, and should never extend beyond range 4.
- Most of the terrain should have the Defiled terrain quality.
- Most of the terrain should also have the Dangerous, Entangling, or Obscuring terrain qualities, or even some combination of these.

Characters who are used to such terrain, such as the Yodha (see page 41), should be able to ignore the Dangerous, Entangling, and Obscuring qualities of terrain. They should also have visibility that extends one range band farther than specified for the terrain in question, but still never beyond range 4.

### Creatures of the Ghostlands

The types of creatures that are spawned by the Ghostlands reflect the most inimical aspects of the Ivory Kingdoms cultures. Some high sages say that the terrors of the Ghostlands mirror those that spill from the mind, and perhaps it is so.

Foremost among the creatures of the Ghostlands are the rakshasa. These terrifying creatures, which

at first seem to analogous to Rokugani oni, are actually shapeshifters, capable of assuming the form of essentially whatever they wish. This makes them truly dangerous foes. Fortunately, they are relatively rare, but the Yodha nonetheless devote a great deal of time and energy to ensuring none of these horrors are able to get loose in the Ivory Kingdoms.

A multitude of other evil creatures lurks in the Ghostlands as well. Although none are as singularly dangerous as the rakshasa, they still pose a major threat, particularly if encountered in numbers. Examples of such monstrosities include:

- **Aleya:** Ghostly lights that can appear as campfires or torches, which lead those duped into following them to their doom.
- **Pishachas:** Flesh-eating demons with bulging veins and protruding red eyes, that are said to have the ability to become invisible and to possess the weak willed, driving them to increasingly disturbing behavior.
- **Bhoot:** A generic term that can include a number of different evil creatures and spirits, but is used by the Yodha to refer to any that tend to be encountered in groups—sometimes very large groups.
- **Vetala:** Malign spirits that inhabit and reanimate corpses, in a way similar to powers ascribed to the corrupted Rokugani elemental spirits known as kansen.
- **Nishi dak:** Foul creatures that can call out in a voice well-known to the listener, leading them to some lonely place before attacking in their true and horrifying form.
- **Baak:** A monster that lurks in deep pools, ambushing those who come too close, pulling their bodies into the dark water and then emerging to take their place.
- **Boba:** A shadowy entity that attacks sleeping people, paralyzing and then strangling them.

## Thwarting the Ghostlands

Just as the Crab Clan protects Rokugan from the Shadowlands, so the Yodha protect the Ivory Kingdoms from the Ghostlands. Skilled and powerful warriors who are well versed in the lore of the Ghostlands, the Yodha maintain a ceaseless vigilance over the malevolent, haunted rainforest. Unlike the Rokugani Crab, they do not maintain belts of continuous fortifications; instead, they deploy forces into the Ghostlands from relatively secure strongpoints, tracking, stalking, hunting, and killing the realm's evil denizens before they can threaten the Ivory Kingdoms. Over time, however, this has led to a schism among the Yodha:

- The Yodhaviya are those Yodha who maintain a watch over the Ghostlands from outside the haunted realm. This was the original approach to their protection of the Ivory Kingdoms: detecting, and then containing and destroying, infiltrations from the Ghostlands. To this end, they maintain a series of redundent fortresses on strategic sites, communicating among them with a sophisticated system of messengers and visual signals. The greatest of these is located on the Nadati River, where ancient stone columns known as the Pillars of Purity stand. By some mechanism that remains a mystery to the Yodha, these enigmatic columns remove the Shadowlands Taint from the water of the Nadati River as it flows past them. Despite many years of intensive scrutiny and study, the effect of these columns—which appear be made of unremarkable sandstone, albeit carven with inscrutable shapes that may be a long-lost language—has never been replicated. The Pillars of Purity, which are considered to be most sacred, seem to be the focus for periodic attacks by rakshasa. Whether these vile creatures seek to destroy the pillars to facilitate spreading the Taint, or for some other nefarious purpose, remains unknown.
- The Yodhaniya are those Yodha who have chosen to effectively take the battle into the Ghostlands. The Yodhaniya spend much of their time in well-protected bastions and camps inside the forest, mounting patrols to seek out creatures of the Ghostlands and destroy them before they can pose a threat. The Yodhaniya were born from a small group of Yodha who, almost two hundred years ago, watched in helpless horror as a massive and unexpected incursion from the Ghostlands plunged into the Ivory Kingdoms, doing enormous harm before finally being stopped. Determined to never let such a powerful threat again gather in the cover of the rainforest, the Yodhaniya entered the Ghostlands and established themselves there, focused on preventing them from being able to assemble serious threats to the Kingdoms in the first place.

While both groups of Yodha share the same ends, an acrimonious debate rages between them. The Yodhaniya believe the Yodhaviya are too cautious and hidebound by tradition, because they only deal with threats from the Ghostlands when they present themselves. Meanwhile, the Yodhaviya see the Yodhaniya as reckless, even irresponsible, needlessly exposing themselves to the spiritual corruption of the Ghostlands while expending effort and blood that would be better employed in accordance with tradition.

## EDUCATIONAL AND INSPIRATIONAL WORKS

Included here is a non-comprehensive list of educational and inspirational works for those who wish to learn more about the rich cultures of India, many of which acted as inspiration for developing aspects of the Ivory Kingdoms, the Yodha, and Bhavyatapura, the City of Splendor.

**Primary Sources, Translated**

The *Upanishads*
The *Vishnu Purana*
The *Garuda Purana*
The *Satapatha Brahmana*
The *Mahābhārata*
The *Ramayana*

**Works of Fiction**

The comic book series *Amar Chitra Katha* is a fantastic resource for retold Indian mythology, great works, history, and stories. It was originally started by Anant Pai in 1967, but is currently owned by Amar Chitra Katha (ACK) Media.

**Film**

*Bajirao Mastani*
*Jodhaa Akbar*

Fortunately, the Yodha have access to two powerful substances, both of which are invaluable in their battle against the Ghostlands.

- Throughout the Ivory Kingdoms, gold, when subjected to the proper rituals, has the power to channel and amplify spiritual powers. When used with coral, it can also be used to purify food and drink of Taint. The Yodha are able to craft talismans of gold, and even incorporate it into items and armor, such that it provides an effective shield against the Taint of the Ghostlands.
- Coral, when properly consecrated, is as inimical to the creatures of the Ghostlands as Rokugani jade is to creatures of the Shadowlands—and perhaps even more so. However, coral is rare, is difficult to obtain from where it occurs in the ocean, and must be subjected to complex rituals in order to be fully effective against the Ghostlands' denizens. When properly prepared, however, items and weapons made of or containing consecrated coral are able to inflict grievous harm to even the feared rakshasa.

**PLAYER AGENCY**

As the adage goes, no adventure survives contact with the players. This is true for any prewritten adventure, in which the hook that starts the characters' journey is a strong one, but slowly weakens with each step away from the adventure's original intent. As players interact with the story, their actions dramatically affect the direction it takes. Game masters should keep this in mind by visualizing the events of the adventure with the end in mind, moving key scenes or plot points to different locations to meet the rhythm of gameplay.

# The Three-Act Structure

This storytelling method consists of an introduction to the characters, a period of rising action during which the heroes appear to become defeated after a significant plot twist, and then the climax of the story, when the heroes rise to the challenge and gain a victory.

The first act sets the scene for the story, allowing the game master to ask a basic question, such as: "Is a rōnin's family more important than their quest to find a lord?" or "Can the characters locate the true assailant behind the assassination plot?" It establishes the characters, both PCs and NPCs, and gives the PCs a reason to pursue the plot the GM has created.

The second act turns that question against the PCs in some way, usually with a plot twist. Examples include: "The samurai's husband is a fraud!" and "The assassin is the rōnin's sister!" The twist makes the PCs second-guess themselves, challenging their resolve. The third act provides an even greater challenge that the PCs must pursue, resulting in either victory or defeat.

## ELEMENTS OF THE THREE-ACT STRUCTURE

The three-act structure contains various elements that move the story forward and, through hooks and events, entice players to engage with the story. The following is a breakdown of each act, each divided further into several elements. Examples of specific elements are included after each section.

## ACT 1: HOOK

The first act of an adventure or campaign involves establishing its setting, including introducing the players to the world they are about to experience more fully. The following elements are important to establish early within Act 1:

- Information about the PCs including explanations of their places in the story, their motivations, and what stakes exist that help drive their journey.
- Important NPC allies or enemies who play a part in the narrative. The GM should reveal their outward intentions to establish their outlooks in a way similar to the way the PCs are established.
- Supporting cast featured in the opening act, such as innkeepers, crime lords, merchants, peasants, governors, or samurai.
- The needs of, or relationships between, individuals important in the narrative.
- Optional foreshadowing elements that allude to the upcoming acts.

### A Call to Action

Once the participants are known, the scene is set for the coming drama. Sometimes referred to as the "call to action" or "catalyst," an event occurs that involves the PCs, thrusting them into unfamiliar territory. Some game masters may wish to use this moment to establish the origin of a rōnin character, introduce a key theme, or perhaps foreshadow future events.

Act 1 defines the overall goal of the adventure. This act often ends in a failure, perceived or otherwise. It takes the initial theme or question posed and centers on the results of any actions the characters take or decisions they make. This may be where the PCs attempt to correct the misdeed that drew them into the conflict in the first place or attempt to ensure they do not fail at the task at hand. This propels the story into Act 2, gives the PCs a reason to fight on, and draws them further into the story:

## ACT 2: RISING ACTION AND TENSION

With the PCs drawn into the story, the plot continues to build momentum. The PCs may seek answers to the problems presented in Act 1, only to find more questions as the situation escalates in intensity and risk. The following elements are important to establish early within Act 2.

- Additional characters who can assist the game master in moving the plot forward or can reveal important information.
- A rising level of importance for their task, with continued challenges to help establish tension and a sense that the PCs could fail at any moment.
- Further reminders about what is at stake and what the consequences are should the PCs fail.

### Challenges and Twists

In Act 2, the PCs deal with situations of increasing difficulty and risk, forcing them to expand their skill sets to better address their predicaments. Eventually, the scenario reaches a breaking point where a plot twist propels the story in a different direction or presents

### THE FOUR-ACT STRUCTURE

While the three-act structure is likely the most recognizable method of storytelling, other structures exist as well, such as the four-act structure, also known as *kishōtenketsu*. Many samurai stories follow this structure, and game masters should at least familiarize themselves with its basic elements, which follow the formula of classic Chinese poetry: Opening, Development, Twist, and Conclusion.

- **Act 1:** The main characters (protagonists) are introduced, and the story's purpose becomes known.
- **Act 2:** The protagonists' journey begins. Along the way, obstacles that the protagonists must overcome to reach their objective appear.
- **Act 3:** Along the path, the protagonists encounter challenges that generate self-doubt and inner conflict that force them to question themselves and whether they are right to follow that path. This helps the protagonists grow.
- **Act 4:** The protagonists complete their journey, allowing them to see how they have changed and improved through their experiences.

a situation for which the PCs are ill equipped. The only way to overcome their circumstances is to work together and use whatever resources they have available to deal with the threat.

## ACT 3: RESOLUTION

The final act in the story or campaign is where the PCs defeat the main adversaries, solve the problems, and possibly claim rewards. Plots and subplots resolve, and the main storyline reaches its inevitable conclusion. Many rōnin stories end in tragedy, so this act may end with rōnin paying the ultimate sacrifice or losing friends along the way. However, rōnin stories can also end in triumph and success. Elements in Act 3 should include:

- The final crisis or event toward which the story has been building. This is something that the story foreshadowed from the start.
- The greatest challenge faced thus far in the story.
- A revelation that the lead antagonist has been manipulating events behind the scenes, or an element revealed at the start that now plays an important role in the conclusion.
- The events that follow the story's climax, including tying up plot points.

### Epic Conclusions

In Act 3, the story reaches its end. The players should feel a sense of accomplishment, along with having developed a better understanding of their character's place in the campaign. The results of the actions they undertook during the adventure should be apparent, as should the impact of the adventure's events have on the immediate area and the people who inhabit it. During this final act, the GM can also introduce further plot seeds to propel the story into the next chapter.

# Running Rōnin Campaigns

This section provides game masters with guidance for creating their own adventures using the three-act structure. This structure may seem familiar, since it is the method used for adventure hooks presented in previous *Legend of the Five Rings* supplements. Campaigns, regardless of length, can also benefit from this structure.

When designing a campaign, a game master can break down its overarching story into the elements of the three-act structure. The following is an example of a single campaign, broken into three adventures, that employs the three-act structure. The difference is that each act within the structure is its own adventure. Act 1 offers an introduction to the characters, Act 2 provides a crushing defeat that spurs the characters to push on, and Act 3 presents the climactic battle.

Although these adventures are part of a linked structure, each makes for a single stand-alone adventure or can be part of an ongoing campaign. Suggestions provided at the end of each adventure help guide game masters in linking the adventures together into a single narrative.

## CAMPAIGN: THE REDEMPTION

There are many stories that can suit a rōnin-style campaign, but none fit the needs of such a campaign more than a story of redemption. While many rōnin are satisfied to lead simple lives, others seek to return to their former glory by regaining the trust of their former lord or finding a new lord. Alternatively, rōnin who started life as peasants or who were born rōnin may seek elevation to samurai status.

In this style of campaign, the story begins during character creation, with players explaining how their characters became rōnin, what those characters hope to achieve in life, and how they expect to get there. The overarching question posed by this campaign is: "What price is paid to reclaim one's honor?"

## ACT 1: FOR COIN OR HONOR

In this adventure, the PCs become entangled in a web of deceit and lies involving a daimyō and his lead advisor. The PCs must choose between the glory of supporting the advisor and the honor of siding with the local daimyō's son.

### Hook

A *seneschal* named Haruto offers the PCs a substantial reward for eliminating a group of bandits led by a mysterious rōnin. The PCs track the bandits to a small encampment. The bandits attempt to fight, but flee if they are losing. In the midst of the brawl, a powerful shugenja appears and covers the bandits' escape. Upon the PCs' return, Haruto informs them that in their absence, bandits infiltrated the castle and kidnapped the daimyō's son, Yotoko.

### Rising Action and Tension

The PCs are hired by Haruto to look for Yotoko and, in the process, they discover that several villages have allied with the bandits. The PCs eventually locate the bandits' hideout and Yotoko. As the PCs execute a rescue, Yotoko reveals that he, too, has allied with the bandits. He explains that Haruto aims to take over the region. The PCs must decide whether to back Yotoko's play or honor their arrangement with Haruto. In either case, the PCs soon learn that Yotoko's father, Ketsubō, has died, allowing Haruto to take over as provincial daimyō in Yotoko's absence.

### Resolution

This situation may be resolved in two ways:

- If the PCs side with Yotoko, Haruto responds by sending a contingent of samurai to deal with them. Once they defeat the samurai, Yotoko asks for aid in rallying the allied villagers into an army before reclaiming the castle and Yotoko's rightful place as daimyō. When the battle turns against Haruto, he flees to plot his revenge.
- If the PCs side with Haruto, he rewards them with coin as promised while Yotoko escapes to plan his next move.

No matter which side the PCs choose, news arrives from the regional daimyō, Yotoko and Haruto's lord, that there is a border conflict close by and she requires troops for her army.

This introduction presents plenty of opportunities for the players to further explore the world their PCs' occupy. It gives several choices that have ongoing ramifications, which gives the impression of a larger narrative. The end of this adventure then provides the PCs with an ally and an enemy, much needed resources, and the potential to increase their standing. The connection between the first storyline and the second is the threat of war and the prospect of further employment from the regional daimyō.

## ACT 2: SPOILS OF WAR

The second storyline begins immediately after the events of Act 1, with the PCs being tasked by their new daimyō, either Haruto or Yotoko, to participate in the border conflict on behalf of the provincial daimyō.

### Hook

The PCs travel to the rallying point for the regional daimyō's army. Quickly placed in charge of a group of heimin, the PCs must train the villagers before taking them behind enemy lines to disrupt the chain of command.

If the PCs sided against Haruto, he arrives soon after the PCs leave and convinces the regional daimyō that there has been a peasant revolt (when it was really just Yotoko seizing control of his father's castle). The regional daimyō offers Haruto military aid to help retake the castle. Haruto defeats Yotoko's forces and imprisons him as a traitor. If, however, the PCs sided with Haruto, he betrays them (after they leave on their mission across the border), claiming they are in league with enemy forces and souring the regional daimyō's opinion of them.

### Rising Action/Tension

Once in enemy territory, the PCs encounter several scouting parties before coming across a caravan laden with military supplies. Likely armed and replenished, the PCs locate the enemy rallying point but find themselves ambushed by dozens of enemies. Certainly overtaken, the PCs are dragged before the enemy commander and come face-to-face with a man they thought dead—Ketsubō, father of Yotoko and former daimyō of the province. Explaining his escape from Haruto's assassins, Ketsubō reveals that he is working with the enemy commander and is hoping to settle the border skirmish without any more unnecessary bloodshed, regaining his castle in the process.

### Resolution

The PCs now have the opportunity to come to a compromise between the two fighting forces. The enemy general is easy to convince with Ketsubō present, but his forces have already mobilized and are closing in on the PC's allies. If the PCs wish to end the battle, they must race against the clock to deliver orders to the enemy forces to stop their assault, and also convince the regional daimyō to hold off her own troops.

Upon arriving at the border, the PCs are set upon by their own forces and learn that Haruto has framed them as spies. Should the PCs have taken sides with Yotoko, they learn that Haruto has again taken control of the castle in their absence and thrown Yotoko in jail.

This storyline ends on a low note to match the structure of a second act. Betrayed and without support, the PCs must make a tough decision on whether to move forward with a specific goal or abandon their post. Along the way, links to previous adventures continue to emerge, continuing to give the sense of a larger story.

## Act 3: The Master's Watchful Eye

The final storyline answers the overall question, "What is more important, coin or honor?" It mixes many of the elements already seen in the overall arc and provides a conclusion.

### Hook

Because Haruto framed them as spies, the PCs are now either imprisoned or are on the run. They must convince the regional daimyō of their innocence, but Haruto's status is likely higher than theirs.

If on the run, rōnin mercenaries hunt them at every turn. If the PCs gave themselves up and were imprisoned, they are put in a cell near Yotoko and can collaborate on a plan. Yotoko has an opportunity to escape (or escapes while the PCs are on the run and contacts them) and requests aid in rallying the surrounding villages and lords.

### Rising Action/Tension

The border skirmish is only intensifying, with Ketsubō being labeled as a traitor. Yotoko learns his father is alive and swears himself to clearing his name and retaking the castle from Haruto. With a sizable peasant army and perhaps the alliance of a nearby local lord, Yotoko and the PCs can either attempt to storm the castle or try to once again speak with the regional daimyō and convince her that Haruto is a snake.

### Resolution

Depending on the PCs' decisions up to this point, there will either be a final intrigue to convince the regional daimyō of Haruto's treachery, or a final major battle as the border fighting spirals out of control. The PCs' have access to a sizable peasant army and can hold off troops if needed, but they will be quickly overtaken if they cannot drum up support from other sources. Ketsubō arrives at the climax of the battle or intrigue and fights with Haruto (if he is still alive). At the end of the fighting, if either Ketsubō or Yotoko is alive and the PCs are victorious (either guiding their peasant army to victory or convincing the daimyō), they are offered a spot at their new lord's side and paid handsomely for their efforts.

If the PCs fail, they are thrown in jail for their crimes and must await their execution—what happens next depends on which NPCs survived and how much ingenuity the PCs have!

# Getting Inspired

The *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* was inspired by many sources and media, a partial list of which appears on page 332 of the core rulebook. For rōnin-centric characters and games, a wealth of inspirational sources can be found, from real-world histories to works of fiction, Japanese folklore and film, and even Western media. Any work where the protagonist is masterless and seeking their fortune in the world is bound to provide some creative inspiration.

## FILMS AND PLAYS

Japanese cinema and the samurai drama are the primary inspirations for *Legend of the Five Rings*, so it should come as no surprise that a wealth of rōnin inspirations can be found in movies, television shows, and theater. The Japanese period drama genre, *jidaigeki*, commonly focuses on Edo period life. Samurai dramas in film are known as *chanbara*, many of which focus specifically on masterless samurai, a consequence of being primarily set in the Edo period, when real-world samurai were in decline. Here, one can find a wealth of inspiration for rōnin characters, with iconic roles such as Zatoichi the Blind Swordsman and Sanjuro the Rōnin Yōjimbō (the latter of which inspired Clint Eastwood's character "The Man with No Name" in the Western *Dollars Trilogy*). Modern films, such as Yoji Yamada's *The Twilight Samurai*, or *Tasogare Seibei,* are also excellent sources, as are the many adaptations of the classic tale of revenge *47 Rōnin*.

Japanese animation can be another excellent inspirational source for rōnin characters, especially for those seeking something particularly dramatic or unusual. Masterless samurai are popular protagonists for anime television and movies, such as the popular *Rurouni Kenshin* television series and the anime movie *Sword of the Stranger*. *Samurai Champloo* is an acclaimed (and highly anachronistic) series lampooning (and often parodying) themes of the *chanbara* genre.

Westerns can also be a good source of inspiration. Historical Westerns are often compared to samurai movies due to similarity in themes; the outlaw cowboy of the American West is very similar to the Japanese rōnin in concept, being a warrior with no home roaming the lands and following their own moral compass. In fact, many Westerns, such as *A Fistful of Dollars* (adapted from Kurosawa's *Yojimbo*) and *The Magnificent Seven* (adapted from *Seven Samurai*, another famous Akira Kurosawa film), are direct adaptations of samurai movies.

### A LIMITED PERSPECTIVE

The **Getting Inspired** section addresses a good deal of literature, films, comics, and other forms of media that have acted as inspiration for the *Legend of the Five Rings* setting. Reading lists and titles that some of the staff at Fantasy Flight Games have enjoyed are also included. This list is by no means comprehensive, and there are plenty of titles, books, and other points of inspiration that may have been left out.

## FICTION

Feudal Japan and Japanese folklore have long served as inspiration for fantasy fiction. From the elegant fantastical works of Lian Hearn to the pulpy supernatural mysteries of Richard Parks' *Yamada Monogatari* series starring a rōnin-esque detective, novels and short fiction are excellent sources of inspiration. GMs and players may also find some inspiration in the *Legend of the Five Rings* short fiction and novellas available through the Fantasy Flight Games website.

Beyond samurai stories, literature from many cultures from around the world is filled with roguish characters who could inspire rōnin counterparts. Chinese *Youxia* "wandering vigilante" characters or the trope of the European "wandering knight" might inspire rōnin characters. Heroic outlaws like Robin Hood, pulp action heroes like Zorro and Dark Agnes, and antiheroes from modern literature would also make good inspiration for rōnin.

## NONFICTION

While Rokugan is not a direct representation of its real-world influences, and real-world rōnin were not exactly the same as those presented in *Legend of the Five Rings*, much of Rokugan's culture invokes and is inspired by actual cultural practices of Japanese history. It can be very helpful to research feudal Japanese history and culture for inspiration. The study of the day-to-day lives of people living in that period is especially helpful for game masters and players. Real-world events, like the Battle of Sekigahara, which began the Edo period and established the Tokugawa shogunate, can serve as great inspiration for political situations, battles, and other events. The stories of real-world Japanese figures like Tsukahara Bokuden, Ishikawa Goemon, Asano Naganori (and his 47 rōnin), Tomoe

Gozen, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (who was born a peasant), Yasuke, Minamoto no Yoshitsune (and his loyal friend Benkei), and Sakamoto Ryōma can provide great inspiration for rōnin characters.

Perhaps the most famous rōnin was Miyamoto Musashi, an undefeated duelist and author of *The Book of Five Rings*. Events from Musashi's life are the subject of many folktales. Of particular note is his famous duel with Sasaki Kojirō; according to legend, Musashi arrived late to the duel and, having forgotten his sword, defeated Kojirō with a boat oar. Although *The Book of Five Rings*, or *Go Rin no Sho*, is Musashi's most famous work (and perhaps with no surprise, a major influence on *Legend of the Five Rings*), his lesser-known work *The Path of Aloneness*, or *Dokkōdō*, details his personal philosophy and outlook on life. Both works are excellent sources of inspiration for rōnin characters, and for Great Clan samurai as well.

## COMICS AND MANGA

As with fiction, samurai drama has long inspired comics, especially manga (Japanese comics). Western comics like Dark Horse's *Samurai: Heaven and Earth* and *Usagi Yojimbo* feature rōnin protagonists striving against high odds, while iconic manga series such as Kozuo Koike and Goseki Kojima's *Lone Wolf and Cub* provide an example of the classic "rōnin seeking revenge" trope, also known as *meifumadō* ("The Road

### A WORD ABOUT ACCURACY

A common trepidation some game masters and players experience when starting a *Legend of the Five Rings* campaign is a lack of familiarity with Japanese culture and history. They may think that they don't know enough about real-world samurai in order to run or play the game. While running a game of *Legend of the Five Rings*, there may exist a temptation to try to directly reproduce feudal Japan in game, with plenty of references to folklore and a casual adaptation of cultural mores from other East Asian countries. It is true that the lore of the *Legend of the Five Rings* setting is influenced by real-world East Asian cultures, history, and folklore, especially that of feudal-era Japan.

However, *Legend of the Five Rings* primary inspiration is not the legends or culture of real-world Japan. Rather, its primary inspiration is Japanese media and media pertaining to samurai. This includes classic period films like those by Akira Kurosawa (*Seven Samurai*), Hiroshi Inagaki (*Miyamoto Musashi*), and Masaki Kobayashi (*Harakiri*), but also pop-culture fantasy manga and anime like those by Rumiko Takahashi (*Inuyasha*), Kazuo Koike (*Lone Wolf and Cub*), and Hayao Miyazaki (*Princess Mononoke*). It also includes fiction by both Eastern and Western authors, such as Lian Hearn (*Tales of the Otori*), Fuyumi Ono (*Twelve Kingdoms*), and Nahoko Uehashi (*Moribito*). And while these excellent works each present a vision of ancient feudal Japan, they are more concerned with their storytelling and characters than with historical accuracy.

Media, especially film, is inherently anachronistic. For example, the typical American Western movie, while based on a true period of American history, is riddled with inaccuracies meant to be overlooked in favor of entertainment value. Similarly, chanbara movies and other Japanese film genres set in ancient Japan have their own anachronistic content for the sake of storytelling. The trick is to get just enough right that the tone and setting seem alive. For the rest, the purpose is to tell a compelling and human story.

In the same way, the goal of a *Legend of the Five Rings* game shouldn't be to accurately reproduce feudal Japanese society on your tabletop. The goal should be to present a world in which a chanbara film might take place, where warriors living in a high-drama society must balance their conflicting obligations and allegiances, where honor and dignity transcend life and death, and where long-kept secrets can be weaponized. In short: to simulate a samurai drama. Knowing themes, tone, and cultural virtues is far more useful to presenting and roleplaying in Rokugan than is being a scholar on feudal Japanese culture. Rōnin characters are supposed to be larger than life. It's more effective to ask, "Is this the sort of character that might be in a Japanese samurai movie?" instead of "Is this the sort of person who would have existed in Edo Japan?"

GMs and players shouldn't feel that they must be an expert, or that they must get everything "right." Inspiration can come from many varied sources. As long as the GM and players are respectful of real-world cultures and entertaining to their fellow players, the point of the game is being accomplished.

to Hell"). *Dororo* by Osamu Tezuka is a story notable for depicting common folk who refuse to shy away from the horrors of war in the Sengoku Jidai, nor the unfairness of feudal society. Samurai are, by and large, the villains of this story, while the heroes are generally outcasts, thieves, and the like. This manga seies was also adapted to an animated series in 2019, also called *Dororo*.

Other examples for inspiration include Kazuo Koike's *Lady Snowblood*, Samura Hiraki's *Blade of the Immortal*, and Takehiko Inoue's *Vagabond*.

### FOLKLORE AND FAIRY TALES

Many Japanese folktales and fairy tales pertain to heroic figures and larger-than-life characters with supernatural abilities, which can inspire rōnin characters for a campaign. Kintarō the Golden Boy, "My Lord Bag of Rice" (in which Fujiwara no Hidesato slays a demonic giant centipede), and the story of a samurai's heroic daughter Tokoyo (after whom Tokyo is named, according to legend) are all examples of such tales.

### PHILOSOPHY

Useful not only for rōnin, but also for Great Clan and Minor Clan characters, manuals on traditional Japanese philosophy can help players and GMs enter the headspace of feudal warrior characters. Perhaps the most iconic is Miyamoto Musashi's *The Book of Five Rings,* the work from which this game takes its name. Other works such as Yagyū Munenori's *The Book of Family Traditions on the Art of War* and Yamamoto Tsunetomo's *Hidden Leaves* can provide an in-depth look at the ethics and mindset of a warrior character.

Interesting philosophical inspiration for characters can also come from non-Japanese sources. The identity and lore of the Scorpion Clan was greatly inspired by Italian philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

Characters whose mindsets and philosophies are incompatible with their clan's make compelling rōnin characters, especially if they choose a life "cast to the waves" instead of compromising their beliefs.

## Themes and Tones for Rōnin Games

Like other samurai dramas, stories about rōnin tend to fall into specific patterns and follow specific themes. Fortunately, the premise of lordless warriors seeking their fortune can fit into many types of stories. Below are some examples of different themes and tones for rōnin adventures, along with some related media examples to provide inspiration.

### FRIENDSHIP AND LOYALTY

Among rōnin, the bonds of friendship can help make a hard life more bearable. The burden is always less when it is carried by more, and hearing another's woes is a salve against one's own suffering. Many like-minded rōnin band together in groups in order to survive. To them, friendship is a way to help ensure they have a safety net against the troubles so common to their lifestyle.

In contrast, true friendship is relatively rare among Rokugani samurai, especially between members of the

### EDUCATIONAL AND INSPIRATIONAL WORKS

**Works of Literary Fiction**

*Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit* by Nahoko Uehashi (Kaiseisha/Scholastic, 1996)
*The Rōnin* by William Dale Jennings (Tuttle Publishing, 1968)
*Yamada Monogatari: Demon Hunter* by Richard Parks (Prime Books, 2013)

**Film and Animation**

*Harakiri* (Masaki Kobayashi, 1962)
*Kuroneko* (Kaneto Shindo, 1968)
*Moribito: Guardian of the Spirit* (Production I.G., 2007)
*Sanjuro* (Akira Kurosawa, 1962)
*Seven Samurai* (Akira Kurosawa, 1954)
*Sword of the Stranger* (BONES, 2007)
*The Twilight Samurai* (Yoji Yamada, 2002)
*Yojimbo* (Akira Kurosawa, 1961)

**Comics and Manga**

*Lone Wolf and Cub* by Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima (Futabasha/Dark Horse, 1976)
*Samurai: Heaven and Earth* by Ron Marz and Luke Ross (Dark Horse, 2006)
*Satsuma Gishiden* by Hiroshi Hirata (Dark Horse, 2006)

Great Clans. One never knows when one must draw one's sword against another clan, and loyalty to one's lord comes before loyalty to friends. Furthermore, it is considered shameful to reveal one's inner thoughts, even to allies and friends. Burdening others with one's own troubles is selfish to do. Many samurai only reveal their true selves to geisha, or to family members they trust deeply. A samurai's friendship is therefore a highly valued thing; it implies trust, camaraderie, and understanding. It is a luxury few samurai can afford, for it also invites betrayal.

But friendship between rōnin and Great Clan samurai, while exceptionally rare, is wondrous indeed. Because it can be shameful to associate with rōnin, Great Clan samurai generally avoid consorting with them in order to preserve their reputation. But when this social barrier is broken, kindred spirits may find much in common. As their bond grows, each benefits from the other, and their friendship transcends the stigma associated with their camaraderie.

A historical example of samurai camaraderie and loyalty is the friendship between Ōtani Yoshitsugu and Ishida Mitsunari, two real-world samurai commanders in the Sengoku period who fought together at the Battle of Sekigahara. Their friendship became the subject of folktales and legends.

Yoshitsugu suffered from leprosy, a disease that was poorly understood at the time and caused him considerable shame and ostracization. In contrast, Mitsunari was an aristocrat held in very high esteem. As the story goes, the two attended a tea ceremony at Osaka Castle, neither having ever met the other. Traditionally the tea bowl is passed among guests, with each guest taking a sip. When the bowl came to Yoshitsugu, a blob of pus splashed into the tea from a wound on his face. Horrified, but unwilling to disrupt the ceremony, he could do nothing but pass the bowl on and watch as each guest abstained, barely concealing their disgust and resentment as they passed the bowl on. But when the bowl finally came to Mitsunari, he unflinchingly drank the entire contents in one gulp, then commented that the tea had been the best he'd ever tasted. Moved by this selfless act of compassion, Yoshitsugu swore himself to Mitsunari's service, and the two became close friends, with Yoshitsugu's loyalty in particular becoming immortalized as his greatest virtue.

To adopt this narrative angle, the GM might have the player of the rōnin character work with the other players to decide which, if any, of the other PCs should be the rōnin's closest friend. Once this is identified, the two players should decide how their characters came to be such good friends. They should consider how the social barrier was broken, how they earned one another's loyalty, how the rōnin benefits from their relationship, and how the Great Clan or Minor Clan samurai benefits. If they wish to improvise a story of their meeting, this should be encouraged.

Bonds should go both ways, so be sure to test the friendship on the side of the samurai as well. Both players should work with their GM to select an appropriate bond for this relationship, if a mechanical benefit is desired. Associating with rōnin is bad for a samurai's reputation; perhaps they must choose between the promotion they want and their friendship. If a samurai isn't cautious, their lord may decide that if they enjoy the company of rōnin so much, perhaps they should become a rōnin themself!

## CAMARADERIE BETWEEN WARRIORS

Just as the lone rōnin is a common storytelling trope, so too is the ensemble of rōnin comrades-at-arms. This mode is suited to a mercenary company, a bandit group, or just a band of rōnin friends. In these stories, warriors of different backgrounds are brought together to achieve a specific goal. They have different motivations and outlooks on life, but they are united in purpose. These warriors must overcome their differences and learn from one another in order to succeed.

Sometimes, the rōnin start out as enemies or rivals. Eventually, they learn to respect one another, or they may become friends (if honor allows it). In other variations, romance may blossom between such warriors, and they come to realize their feelings for one another after risking their lives together. But inevitably, when the goal is achieved, the rōnin part ways, having grown stronger and wiser for knowing one another, not knowing if their paths will ever cross again.

**DESIRES AND PASTS**

When designing a campaign (or even an adventure), it's useful for the GM to strongly consider the desires and pasts of their players' characters when choosing themes. Thematically linking in character motivations can lead to a more engaging setting, and help players feel involved in creating the foundations of the narrative.

In Akira Kurosawa's classic film *Seven Samurai* (1954), seven rōnin are brought together to protect a village from bandits when local samurai won't. Each rōnin is a larger-than-life personality, and they must work together in order to defend the peasants who have entrusted the warriors with their safety.

Another example is the anime *Samurai Champloo* (2004), in which a brute, a rōnin, and a young peasant join forces to seek "the samurai who smells of sunflowers." At first they do not get along, constantly bickering and even fighting one another, but as their quest continues, they come to respect one another and even become better people.

### Using the Camaraderie Theme

The **Friendship and Loyalty** section under **Rōnin Motivations** (see page 212) outlines an effective means of invoking this theme, but GMs who wish can take it a step further.

During character creation, for Question 17 (page 66), players can be asked to choose another player's character at the table. The two players must then come up with a story in which one character mentored the other or the two characters learned from one another.

## JUSTICE

Many samurai movies are refutations of Bushidō and the social division of feudal Japan. In these tales, samurai are often hypocrites or oppressors of lower castes. The law is the "bad guy," either openly cruel and exploitative of the peasant class, or completely indifferent to the cruelty of criminals and the struggle of the weak. In these films, the rōnin is often a force of justice and order, protecting the meek and swearing allegiance to no one. In other variations, the powerless must come to the rōnin and beg for aid.

Many of these tales adopt a specific theme of "warrior justice." If the samurai witnesses an injustice, they are honor bound to avenge it. If they witness the suffering of the weak at the hands of the strong, they are obligated to intervene, even when such action would put them at risk.

This makes the rōnin a vigilante warrior, akin to Zorro or the white-hat cowboys of Westerns. They uphold justice because to do otherwise is odious to their sensibilities, and unlike those they protect, they have the power to enforce their morality.

In many stories, this sort of rōnin finds themself at odds with magistrates or the law, either because the laws only protect samurai, or because of the shame the rōnin elicits in samurai. The rōnin serves as a mirror reflecting shame back at the samurai because, in spite of their low social status and believed lack of purpose, they are far closer to the ideal warrior than the samurai is. Thus, the law seeks to stamp them out.

Sometimes the one who needs justice isn't the meek peasant, but one who cannot operate within the law. Samurai whose hands are tied may turn to the rōnin for help, since rōnin can go where they cannot, can compromise Bushidō ideals to which they are bound, and are free from promises the samurai cannot break. In these cases, the rōnin's additional charge is to keep their agreement with the samurai a secret, so that any failure or shame will not make it back to their employer. A common twist in such stories comes when the rōnin discovers a misdeed by the samurai and then must choose whether to finish the job as agreed or turn against their employer.

In the anime *Sword of the Stranger* (2007), the rōnin Nanashi encounters an orphaned boy, Kotaro, who is being sought by both the local samurai lords and foreign warriors of Ming dynasty China. All authority figures in the film are portrayed as greedy, cruel, uncaring, or downright evil. Nanashi becomes driven to protect the boy from those who seek him for their own mysterious purposes.

### Using the Justice Theme

In order for the justice theme to work, the player characters must be motivated to aid those who seek justice. Rōnin are considered inherently selfish, which is why lawful rōnin are an especially provocative archetype. To invoke this theme, the GM must ensure the players are invested in having their characters seek justice for the wronged party. A good way to do this is to tie in plot elements that are important to them, incorporate their goals, or make the mission "personal."

The justice theme is similar in many ways to the revenge theme, the primary difference being that justice is righting a wrong, while revenge is personal and does not care about right or wrong. The lines between the two can blur as complications arise; the GM can entwine this theme with the revenge motif to provide further complexity and motivations.

## HAUNTED PAST

One thing to never to ask a rōnin: "So how *did* you get thrown out of your clan?" Wise samurai never ask; most rōnin never tell. Or at least, they never tell the *whole* story. The thing about the past is that no matter how far you travel, it can follow you. Find you. Haunt you.

A common theme in rōnin stories is the past that follows them: misdeeds, shameful acts performed with good intentions, failures they cannot outlive, or

consequences they are trying to escape. Severing ties with their clan is bad enough, but even then, the past can come back to haunt them. In these stories, the rōnin hides or runs from their past, often adopting a nameless persona, taking on another identity, or living in self-exile. Such characters tend to be self-punishing, living with the shame of concealing their past and identity. Or they may be doing it to protect someone else, someone whose life would be in danger if they dared make themself known.

Inevitably, they are discovered and forced back into the life of a wandering rōnin. Sometimes this truth is uncovered by an innocent, but often it is a rival or someone connected to their shameful past who reveals their secret, someone they must defeat before they can move on and try again.

This sort of story is closely related to the theme of redemption. However, unlike with that theme, the rōnin is not trying to find peace by making up for their misdeed or coming to terms with the circumstances that led to their exile. Instead, the rōnin is trying to avoid the consequences altogether, claiming to be someone else.

Sometimes the misdeed isn't even something the rōnin did, but something performed by a lord, ally, or family member. A rōnin whose parent shamed themself so greatly that they were cast out of the clan has inherited their parent's sins. The rōnin may not understand or know why they are being hunted, or what their parent did. Driven to discover it, the rōnin may not like what they uncover.

Often this tone incorporates a theme of mystery. Besides building toward revealing what the rōnin did, the story may also reveal details about the event that the rōnin themself doesn't know. Maybe it wasn't actually all their fault after all. Maybe they were set up. Maybe they were betrayed. As they are forced to confront the horrible misdeed that led to their expulsion, they may discover that there was more to it than they originally knew, casting a new light on their situation.

In *Yamada Monogatari* by Richard Parks, the main character, Yamada no Goji, seeks to escape his past through drink and self-punishment. But in the short story "Moon Viewing at Shijo Bridge," his past comes back to confront him in the form of Empress Teiko, who asks him a favor he cannot refuse to do.

## Using the Haunted Past Theme

To invoke this narrative hook, the GM has players of rōnin decide why they were cast out of their clan, but they keep it a secret from the other players. The GM writes it down, giving it as much detail as it requires.

Then, the GM adds at least one more detail the player doesn't know. The GM tells the player that they did this, but they don't tell the player what they added. It is for the player to discover. To add a layer of intrigue, the GM can tie the new detail to another player character's family or clan.

For instance, if the rōnin was cast out from their clan for failing to stop the assassination of their lord's heir, perhaps the GM secretly decides the heir is still alive and was merely kidnapped instead of assassinated. Or for another example, if the rōnin left the clan to escape seppuku, perhaps the GM secretly decides that an artifact of the clan vanished that night, and the clan believes the rōnin stole it. If the rōnin was cast out for a crime, perhaps the GM's added detail is that the rōnin was framed, or that a political rival pushed for expulsion from the clan when the lord was prepared to be lenient. Whatever the detail is, it is something about the rōnin's past that they do not know, something that would shed new light on their circumstances if they were to become aware of it.

Finally, the GM creates an NPC who ties in to the rōnin's secret past: a victim left in their wake, a rival seeking them out, or maybe even a lost family

member or friend who is trying to find them. Anything can work if it fits the story. The GM should try to tie this NPC to the main narrative as well, so other characters have an interest.

As the game proceeds, the GM introduces clues hinting at the rōnin's past sin. The clues should be subtle at first, but they should become steadily more obvious. Every time the rōnin encounters a clue or something from their hidden past, they suffer 1 to 3 strife (per scene). This should occur only occasionally. If the rōnin confesses their sin to the players, they must forfeit glory, even if they are still accepted by the group afterwards.

When the time is right, the GM can introduce the NPC. They should make the stakes high. The goal is to confront the rōnin with a personification of their past. But now, the rōnin is a different person; their time in the world has changed them. Will they succumb to their guilt, or will they face their past and prevail?

Regardless of the outcome, when the dust settles, the GM should drop a hint about their added detail. Something that doesn't add up with what the rōnin thought they knew. There's more to the story. Will they seek it?

## REDEMPTION

One of the most common themes of rōnin stories is the tale of redemption. The rōnin is a samurai who has fallen from grace, but now they have a chance to make up for their past deeds. This theme has much in common with the haunted past, with one important distinction: instead of running from their past, the rōnin attempts to redeem themself.

In addition to contending with external conflict, the rōnin also feels a great sense of remorse. Sometimes the act they committed is one society considers justified or honorable, but deep down, the rōnin knows they have done wrong and must find a way to right it. Sometimes, the act is kept secret, but never for long.

Rōnin redemption stories commonly feature an oath or vow, almost always related to their past sin in some way. It may be refusing to use a specific type of weapon, abstaining from a specific behavior, or simply refraining from violence. In this way, the redemption path is similar to a warrior pilgrimage, or musha shugyō. In some stories, the samurai voluntarily becomes a rōnin in atonement, their guilt being so powerful as to dissolve the worthiness of their position in their own eyes.

Alternatively, the rōnin seeks redemption in the only way they know how: through feats of strength and warrior victory. They can only be redeemed in the blood of their enemies—by killing enough demons, hunting enough monsters, and so forth. Often this motivation is also driven by either a strong sense of Bushidō or a desire for revenge.

In Nahoko Uehashi's Moribito series, the spear-wielding warrior Balsa sets out to atone for the eight lives lost to protect her when she was a child by saving eight lives and balancing her karma.

In the anime series *Rurouni Kenshin* (1996–1998), the protagonist and series namesake feels an overwhelming sense of remorse for the atrocities he committed and the lives he took during the Bakumatsu War. He voluntarily becomes a rōnin and swears never to take another life, wandering the countryside in atonement and righting wrongs in an attempt to right his own karma. As the story proceeds, he encounters numerous ghosts from his own past, as well as temptations to return to a path of killing, but he must resist these things in order to find redemption.

### Using the Redemption Theme

To invoke this theme, the GM has each rōnin player decide why they were cast out of their clan but keep it a secret from the other players. The GM writes down these accounts, giving them as much detail as they require.

Then, each rōnin player creates a personal code that includes a vow or promise made to atone for their past sin. It can be anything that significantly alters their behavior or hinders them, but it should relate to their past misdeeds at least in part. The rōnin's ninjō is to redeem themselves, but their past should somehow hinder this redemption.

As the game proceeds, the GM introduces clues hinting at the rōnin's hidden past. These should be subtle at first but should steadily become more obvious. These clues should only be dropped occasionally. This should create tension as the rōnin character decides whether they should come clean with the rest of their group about their past misdeed in the hopes that the group will still accept them, or hope to resolve it themselves.

Now and again, the GM should place the rōnin into situations where they must choose between holding to their vow or compromising it to accomplish the task at hand. Every time they act against their personal code, they suffer 1 to 3 strife for breaking their vow.

## REVENGE

Perhaps the most common theme for rōnin stories, revenge comes naturally to the wronged rōnin samurai. This is because revenge is an especially easy theme to invoke, particularly with regard to characters who still follow Bushidō. Rōnin may be honor bound to avenge the death of a family or clan member, the death of their lord (whose murder resulted in their becoming rōnin), or a similar event. In some stories, the rōnin's fall from grace was orchestrated by their enemies. Following this event, they bide their time until they can strike back and take vengeance. In some cases, death is not enough; their enemy must suffer the same humiliation and shame.

In Rokugan, a rōnin may desire vengeance against their former family members. This is especially so if the rōnin was innocent of their accused crime or took the fall for a higher-ranked samurai. Rōnin already live difficult lives compared to lorded samurai, but in many ways, this makes them more dangerous. After all, they have nothing to lose.

Often the rōnin revenge story ends with the seppuku of the rōnin. Having achieved their goal, they now follow their master into death. Rarely is the rōnin restored to their former position, but this was never the goal. The complete destruction of their enemy was all they hoped to achieve, and this is all that Bushidō demands.

One of the most famous legends of feudal Japan is the story of the forty-seven Rōnin, also known as the Akō Incident. Based on a historical event that took place in the eighteenth century, this tale has been rendered into story, song, Kabuki, movies, animation, comic books, and all other manner of media. It has been so commonly retold that the term "Chūshingura" was invented to refer to tales about the incident. The earliest retelling was a play performed only two weeks after the event, and it was prematurely shut down by government officials.

As the story goes, the lord Asano Naganori was forced to commit seppuku for assaulting a court noble who had wronged him while in the Shōgun's palace. This made all three hundred of Naganori's samurai retainers rōnin. Of them, forty-seven banded together in secret, waiting and plotting their revenge for two years. Under the cover of nightfall, they launched an attack on the noble's mansion, eventually slaying him and taking his head to their master's grave before committing seppuku.

In a similar tale, Kobayashi's film *Harakiri* (1962) depicts a rōnin protagonist named Hanshirō who seeks revenge against a samurai family for the forced seppuku of his best friend's son.

### Using the Revenge Theme

To invoke this theme, the GM has the player of the rōnin identify or invent an enemy (or enemies) and explain to the GM why they seek revenge. The rōnin's ninjō is to avenge themselves against the enemy.

They desire to take revenge against what or who has wronged them, but this can also create tension as the source of their vengeance represents a pinnacle point in their past. Elements of their past, including details about how they were wronged, can intertwine and conflict with their desire for revenge.

The GM should introduce complications between the rōnin's duty to achieve vengeance and their personal ninjō throughout the campaign. An example might be this: a rōnin loses a loved one in an awful fire, and knows who the arsonist is. However, the rōnin is instead blamed for the fire and is now forced to be on the run as they seek to find and bring to justice the villain who caused the fire and tarnished their reputation. This gives the GM two antagonists to work with—both the arsonist that the rōnin seeks as well as those who hunt the rōnin down.

Further, the rōnin should encounter the object of their need for revenge now and again, occasionally casting them against the other players in the form of discord. In the previous example, the arsonist might turn out to be an ally of another party member, or perhaps another party member sees the arsonist as someone to be protected (perhaps they are old, or weak) causing tension in the party. Perhaps another PC is a monk, who believes in forgiveness and pacifism. Is the rōnin character willing to give up their comrades and new family for a chance at revenge?

If desired, the GM can play with themes of justice as well. To the avenger, justice and revenge are often indistinguishable. If others get in the way, that's their problem! The GM could introduce another character who is driven by the need for revenge and show how their desire for revenge is destroying them. Will the rōnin see themself in this new character?

## TROUBLEMAKER

A frequent trope in rōnin stories is the humiliation of officials and aristocrats at the hands of the rōnin. Usually, the scoundrel or rogue befuddles or defeats far more powerful opponents by using their wits, special skills, or trickery. This is especially true of stories about noble thieves, in which the rōnin overcome traps laid for them through superior cunning and cleverness. Often the humiliated lord deserves the loss of face, because they are cruel or evil.

The common thread in these stories is that the landed gentry are the antagonists, and the rōnin is the hero. The rōnin becomes a force of karma, and the humiliations inflicted are just punishments. For the evil lord to die wouldn't be enough; their reputation must also be ruined. As such, it wouldn't be enough for the rōnin to defeat their opponent through sheer feats of arms, because the superior force of their enemy is an important part of the narrative. It proves (at least to the sympathetic powerless masses) that brains overcome brawn, and that the very clever can at least even the odds against oppressors. Antiauthoritarian themes are common.

However, the rōnin must eventually own up to their trickery, usually in a duel or other such circumstance. The rōnin is caught, exposed, or otherwise brought before the blade of justice. Sometimes they escape, but sometimes that is the end of their tale. This is why such stories are often tragedies.

In Akira Kurosawa's *Sanjuro* (1962), the sequel to *Yojimbo*, the rōnin Sanjuro helps a group of young student samurai save their master from a corrupt official who has taken over their keep. Because he is outnumbered, Sanjuro uses his wits again and again to befuddle and outsmart his foes, even to the point of casting aside his honor and misleading a warrior he likes and admires. He manages to humiliate those much higher than him in station, people who deserve to be brought down a peg or two. But ultimately he must face the warrior he disgraced, one who would have been his friend, in a duel to the death.

The folk hero Ishikawa Goemon is the subject of Kabuki plays and numerous legends. He pits himself against authority figures of the time, relying on his cunning and agility to overcome obstacles and humiliate his foes. However, he is eventually caught, and his punishment is to be boiled alive with his infant son in public. According to the legend, Goemon held his son above the boiling waters until he himself succumbed, impressing the onlooking officers into sparing the child. The type of giant iron kettle used is called a "Goemon tub" after his death.

### Using the Troublemaker Theme

To invoke the troublemaker theme, the GM pits rōnin characters against the oppressive force of a Great Clan. They frame the narrative so that the Great Clans are tyrannical oppressors and the peasantry their victims. The rōnin characters are liberators (or at least become regarded as such) by protecting villages or returning taxes to the people. Obstacles should be overwhelming so as to require careful planning and cunning trickery in order to overcome them. GMs should allow players to plan heists and other such operations against the oppressive samurai class. They should also allow the PCs to expose the corruption and secrets of aristocrats, making them champions of the people.

Alternatively, rōnin characters could be bandits taking from the Great Clans and then vanishing into the mountains. They could have a secret lair. Are they freedom fighters? Are they like Robin Hood's Merry Men? Or are they just bullies?

Leaders of the Great Clans are too busy to deal with meddlesome rōnin at first, delegating these tasks to lesser officers. But as time passes and the rōnin grow more influential, the GM should throw greater and greater challenges at the rōnin, until they are being actively hunted. The rōnin PCs should feel increasing urgency in each session, as they have fewer and fewer places to hide. Eventually, they must directly confront the forces they are undermining. Perhaps even the Emerald Magistrates become involved. How long can the characters escape justice?

# Trinkets and Name Tables

The following section includes a series of tables to help answer questions in **Chapter 2: Creating a Character**. On the following pages, there is a table of random trinkets, which may be altered or otherwise adjusted the the game master sees fit, or can otherwise be used as inspiration when giving players starting trinkets. Trinkets do not typically convey mechanical benefits, though they can if the GM decides all players may have access to a minor mechanical benefit associated with their trinket. Players are encouraged to come up with interesting stories for how they acquired their trinkets.

Following the trinket table there is a series of name tables included that provide sample names for characters both from Rokugan and from the lands that stretch outside of the Emerald Empire's borders. Players and GMs can use dice or a random number generator to select trinkets and names, or they can simply choose an interesting answer from any table.

## Table 6–4: Trinkets

| ROLL | TRINKET DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| 01 | An old clay pot that is missing its handle. Symbols from another culture adorn it, though its craftsmanship strikingly resembles the style of a famous potter from your homeland. |
| 02–03 | A small pouch of random coins, no two alike. They are made from a variety of materials, including gold, silver, bone, coral, and stone. |
| 04–05 | A bundle of a twine-like material that is exceptionally soft. Whatever animal this came from isn't one you are familiar with. |
| 06–07 | A stone doll with two faces, one on the front of its face and one on the back of its head. No one believes you, but you swear the faces change which side they are on occasionally. |
| 08–09 | A single chopstick made of a white wood. A word is written on it, but whenever you show someone, they claim the word is something completely different. |
| 10–11 | A small inkwell filled with a bluish fluid that shines pleasantly in candlelight and glows subtly in the darkness. |
| 12–13 | A paintbrush made from camel hair and a dark wood. The brush never needs to be cleaned; excess paint seems to simply disappear. |
| 14–15 | A heavy key made of steel, the end of which can be twisted and pulled apart to reveal a small, sharp knife. |
| 16–17 | A miniature bonsai tree. No matter what design you create with it, it always reverts back to its original form. You can never manage to catch it during this transformation. |
| 18–19 | A comb made of rugged bone, engraved with an intricate geometric pattern. |
| 20–21 | An origami cherry blossom that has a different name on every petal. Occasionally, a name disappears and is replaced with a new name within a few days. |
| 22–23 | A sake bottle with no label that contains an unknown fluid. When someone drinks the fluid for the first time, roll a ten-sided die to determine what it holds. 1–2: a pleasant, floral sake; 3–4: pure spring water; 5–6: gaijin wine; 7–8: the blood of a horse; 9–10: a tiny manifest water kami (page 251). |
| 24–25 | An ornate turtle shell, about half a foot across. The colors are like nothing anyone has seen before on a turtle: purples, blues, and pinks. Some kami seem to be attracted to it. |
| 26–27 | A pillow book with the initials "A. U." printed on the back. The story scandalously describes the adventures of a young person who uses their looks and cunning to marry into a powerful family and change the course of history. |

## Table 6–4: Trinkets Continued

| ROLL | TRINKET DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| 28–29 | A bedroll made from bear fur, big enough for two people to fit comfortably inside. Anyone who sleeps in this bedroll tends to develop a mild craving for fish. |
| 30–31 | A small pot of crushed charcoal used to accentuate the eyes. The mixture smells like fresh lilies, and it never seems to run out. The bottom of the container has been engraved with two words: "Wolf's Blood." |
| 32–33 | A jar of black sand. Inside the jar is a letter from a sailor, written in a gaijin tongue, writing to their child and saying that they won't make it home. A horrible creature, spawned from the Tainted seas below the Shadowlands, has latched itself onto their ship, and they are sinking into the murky depths. |
| 34–35 | Two small, three-inch blades connected by a two-foot chain. The knives gleam as if they were just polished, though they haven't been in years. |
| 36–37 | An ugly barrette shaped like a toad. It has a small gem in one of the toad's eyes. The other eye is empty. No matter how hard someone tries to break the barrette, it remains intact, and the gem cannot be removed. Roll a ten-sided die to determine the type of gem: 1–2: jade; 3–4: opal; 5–6: amethyst; 7–8: emerald; 9–10: diamond. |
| 38–39 | An eel pendant dangling from a chain. It seems to be made of a greenish, flexible metal. |
| 40–41 | A simple woven basket filled with small, nonvenomous snakes. Roll two ten-sided dice to determine the number of snakes. |
| 42–43 | A song elegantly written on several pieces of fine parchment. The care and design of the document makes it look quite valuable, though the song is rather simple. |
| 44–45 | Three pieces of an ivory chess set that are in pristine condition. Each is engraved at the base, in the common tongue of the Ivory Kingdoms, with the word "faith." |
| 46–47 | A collection of bones and fossils, ranging from exceptionally old to still stained with fresh blood. The bones come from a variety of creatures, including snakes, birds, and small mammals. |
| 48–49 | A small wooden box filled with a variety of exotic seeds, though there is no indication what sort of plant grows from each seed or what care each plant will need. |
| 50–51 | A miniature statue. Roll a ten-sided die to determine what the statue is made of and what creature it depicts. 1–2: a vile Rakshasa from the Ghostlands, made of mossy stone; 3–4: a tengu taking flight, wearing the clothing of a scholar and made of marble; 5–6: a viper attacking a basan, made of painted sandalwood; 7–8: a detailed tree, made of stained clay; 9–10: an elegant horse made of nutmeg tree wood. |
| 52–53 | A pouch full of spices. Roll a ten-sided die to determine from where. 1–3: a faraway corner of Rokugan; 4–6: along the Sand Road; 7–9: the Ivory Kingdoms; 10: the Qamarist Caliphate. |
| 54–55 | A stone tablet depicting naga and humans working together to hunt a massive oni in a forest. |
| 56–57 | A silken, grey hat with a large tear in the middle. The inside has a message sewn into it: "I win, Echiko." |
| 58–59 | The soiled sheath for a wakizashi, with decorations indicating which clan its wielder belonged to. Roll a ten-sided die to determine which clan. 1: Crab; 2: Crane; 3: Phoenix; 4: Dragon; 5: Scorpion; 6: Unicorn; 7: Lion; 8: Mantis; 9: Fox; 10: an Imperial family, as selected by the GM. |
| 60–61 | A small iron cage with a glittering, golden, living cricket inside. The bottom of the cage is engraved with a phrase: "Be not afraid of going slowly. Be afraid of standing still." |

## Table 6–4: Trinkets Continued

| ROLL | TRINKET DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| 62–63 | A worn, red, leather-bound journal. Pages bound in cured flesh may be repulsive to some, but those willing to open it find numerous bits of wisdom scattered among its pages. |
| 64–65 | A translucent, green orb the size of a fist. The surface is near-perfect, as if created by a master crafter. |
| 66–67 | A collection of two dozen slim, fragrant candles. The candles come in a variety of colors and scents, some smelling lovely and others repugnant. |
| 68–69 | The huge, twisted horn of some foul creature. It is remarkably heavy, and its tip is strikingly sharp. |
| 70–71 | A ring puzzle made of a light wood. The goal of the puzzle is to successfully move each ring to the opposite side of the wooden block. Solving the puzzle requires a **TN 6 Meditation (Fire 4) check**, using Meditation as a Scholar skill. |
| 72–73 | A pair of *geta*, shoes, so tall that they look comical. They seem well-worn but are still in excellent condition. |
| 74–75 | The blackish-blue scale of some large, reptilian creature. |
| 76–77 | A beautiful and ornate *diya*, a special incense holder from the Ivory Kingdoms. It seems to be made of stained clay. A vibrant peacock is depicted on the side. |
| 78–79 | A wooden box filled with a variety of seashells. The box smells strongly of the sea, a scent that can be noticed from nearly ten feet away if the box is not properly stored. |
| 80–81 | A thick, hollow wooden reed filled with small pebbles. Both ends are sealed, and slowly tilting the item produces a pleasant, rain-like sound. |
| 82–83 | A book of fantastic and epic tales from faraway lands you've never visited. The stories sound impossible, but the writing is engrossing. The book is called *The Crew of the Spotted Eel and Their Adventures*. |
| 84–85 | A bamboo flute from the Ivory Kingdoms, called a *venu*. It is covered with intricate geometric patterns. On the underside of the flute is an engraving: "To my dearest Amudha, may your music reach beyond the horizon." |
| 86–87 | A necklace of various teeth. The teeth range from exceedingly small to the size of a human hand. Some are blunt, while others seem dangerously sharp. Roll two ten-sided dice to determine the number of teeth. |
| 88–89 | A walking stick, tall and lean, made from the wood of an impossibly old tree. Spirits seem curious about the stick, though no trouble ever comes from it. |
| 90–91 | A set of dice made from blue rock. The sides are incredibly smooth and, for some reason, the dice tend to land on six quite frequently. |
| 92–93 | A pair of ankle bracelets covered in tiny silver bells. The straps are made of a soft, red leather. |
| 94–95 | The deed to a small plot of land in an obscure location. The location and size of this piece of land are subject to GM discretion, though two features are guaranteed: a source of clean water and a section of ground suitable for a small garden. |
| 96–97 | A necklace made of red stone—in a deep, dark shade like old blood—on a simple length of yellow twine. The stone is smooth and blank, waiting to be engraved. Something about the item is a little unnerving, however. |
| 98–100 | A clockwork toy shaped like an animal. Winding a small knob on the side causes the toy to move around. The internal mechanisms, which are fascinating, are from the Qamarist Caliphate. |

### Table 6–5: Rokugani Names

| ROLL | NAME | ROLL | NAME |
|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | Aiko | 50–51 | Michi |
| 2–3 | Airi | 52–53 | Nanako |
| 4–5 | Akemi | 54–55 | Noboru |
| 6–7 | Ayame | 56–57 | Nori |
| 8–9 | Ayume | 58–59 | Ren |
| 10–11 | Chihiro | 60–61 | Ryo |
| 12–13 | Chikako | 62–63 | Ryuu |
| 14–15 | Daichi | 64–65 | Sakiko |
| 16–17 | Emi | 66–67 | Shinbou |
| 18–19 | Fuyuko | 68–69 | Shizuka |
| 20–21 | Hanae | 70–71 | Shou |
| 22–23 | Hinata | 72–73 | Susumu |
| 24–25 | Hoshi | 74–75 | Takahiro |
| 26–27 | Jirou | 76–77 | Takehiko |
| 28–29 | Jun'ichi | 78–79 | Takuma |
| 30–31 | Kaede | 80–81 | Taro |
| 32–33 | Koari | 82–83 | Tarou |
| 34–35 | Katsurou | 84–85 | Tomoni |
| 36–37 | Kazuki | 86–87 | Tsubasa |
| 38–39 | Kenji | 88–89 | Ume |
| 40–41 | Kiku | 90–91 | Wakana |
| 42–43 | Kiyoshi | 92–93 | Yasu |
| 44–45 | Kotone | 94–95 | Yua |
| 46–47 | Makoto | 96–97 | Yuu |
| 48–49 | Mariko | 98–100 | Yuuna |

### Table 6–6: Ivory Kingdoms Names

| ROLL | NAME | ROLL | NAME |
|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | Aarav | 26 | Harikiran |
| 02 | Aarush | 27 | Hrishita |
| 03 | Adah | 28 | Inaaya |
| 04 | Aditi | 29 | Ira |
| 05 | Advik | 30 | Ishranth |
| 06 | Advika | 31 | Jagan |
| 07 | Aishwarya | 32 | Jayanti |
| 08 | Akarsh | 33 | Jayesh |
| 09 | Aruna | 34 | Jeet |
| 10 | Bhaskar | 35 | Jivika |
| 11 | Bhavna | 36 | Jiya |
| 12 | Bikram | 37 | Jyothsna |
| 13 | Chaaya | 38 | Kavya |
| 14 | Chetas | 39 | Keya |
| 15 | Devansh | 40 | Khushi |
| 16 | Dilip | 41 | Kiara |
| 17 | Diya | 42 | Kshitij |
| 18 | Ekta | 43 | Lalit |
| 19 | Faiyaz | 44 | Lathika |
| 20 | Farha | 45 | Lavanya |
| 21 | Garima | 46 | Madhup |
| 22 | Gaurav | 47 | Mahika |
| 23 | Gautam | 48 | Manvik |
| 24 | Geetha | 49 | Maya |
| 25 | Hansh | 50 | Meher |

### Table 6–7: Ivory Kingdoms Names Continued

| ROLL | NAME | ROLL | NAME |
|---|---|---|---|
| 51 | Mishti | 76 | Tarun |
| 52 | Navya | 77 | Tiya |
| 53 | Neerav | 78 | Tushar |
| 54 | Nilaksh | 79 | Udit |
| 55 | Ojas | 80 | Uma |
| 56 | Parth | 81 | Upasna |
| 57 | Rachit | 82 | Uruashi |
| 58 | Ranbir | 83 | Uthkarsh |
| 59 | Rajiv | 84 | Uttam |
| 60 | Riya | 85 | Vaani |
| 61 | Rohan | 86 | Vaibhav |
| 62 | Sachin | 87 | Vaishnavi |
| 63 | Sahil | 88 | Varun |
| 64 | Samir | 89 | Vihaan |
| 65 | Sanchit | 90 | Vikas |
| 66 | Sandeep | 91 | Vinay |
| 67 | Sana | 92 | Vineeta |
| 68 | Sanjana | 93 | Vipul |
| 69 | Sanjay | 94 | Vivaan |
| 70 | Shaan | 95 | Yamini |
| 71 | Shreyas | 96 | Yashvi |
| 72 | Siddharth | 97 | Yashwant |
| 73 | Sparsh | 98 | Yukta |
| 74 | Tanvi | 99 | Zara |
| 75 | Tara | 100 | Zoya |

## Table 6–8: Ujik Names

| ROLL | NAME | ROLL | NAME |
|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | Altan | 50–51 | Monkhbat |
| 02–03 | Altansarnai | 52–53 | Munkhtsetseg |
| 04–05 | Altantestesg | 54–55 | Naranbaatar |
| 06–07 | Bataar | 56–57 | Narangerel |
| 08–09 | Batbayar | 58–59 | Narantsetseg |
| 10–11 | Batu | 60–61 | Nekhii |
| 12–13 | Bayarmaa | 62–63 | Nergüi |
| 14–15 | Bolormaa | 64–65 | Och |
| 16–17 | Chimeg | 66–67 | Od |
| 18–19 | Chingis | 68–69 | Odgerel |
| 20–21 | Chinua | 70–71 | Odval |
| 22–23 | Chuluun | 72–73 | Oktai |
| 24–25 | Dzhambul | 74–75 | Otgonbayar |
| 26–27 | Enkhjargal | 76–77 | Qara |
| 28–29 | Enkhtuya | 78–79 | Sarangerel |
| 30–31 | Ereden | 80–81 | Sarnai |
| 32–33 | Eredenechimeg | 82–83 | Sukh |
| 34–35 | Erhi | 84–85 | Tarkhan |
| 36–37 | Gan | 86–87 | Temujin |
| 38–39 | Ganbaatar | 88–89 | Tsetseg |
| 40–41 | Ganbold | 90–91 | Tuya |
| 42–43 | Gantulga | 92–93 | Uranchimeg |
| 44–45 | Geriel | 94–95 | Uuliinyagaantsetseg |
| 46–47 | Jochi | 96–97 | Yul |
| 48–49 | Khulan | 98–100 | Xandu |

## Table 6–9: Qamarist Names

| ROLL | NAME | ROLL | NAME |
|---|---|---|---|
| 01 | A'idah | 50–51 | Fadwa |
| 02–03 | Aaban | 52–53 | Faheem |
| 04–05 | Aabid | 54–55 | Gabina |
| 06–07 | Aadila | 56–57 | Haajar |
| 08–09 | Aafiya | 58–59 | Habib |
| 10–11 | Aahil | 60–61 | Haikal |
| 12–13 | Aalam | 62–63 | Iba |
| 14–15 | Aaqib | 64–65 | Jafar |
| 16–17 | Baadiyah | 66–67 | Jadwa |
| 18–19 | Badri | 68–69 | Jahiz |
| 20–21 | Baqar | 70–71 | Jalal |
| 22–23 | Basem | 72–73 | Kadira |
| 24–25 | Bashar | 74–75 | Kaheela |
| 26–27 | Chadia | 76–77 | Ma'n |
| 28–29 | Chahra | 78–79 | Makhdoom |
| 30–31 | Daania | 80–81 | Malik |
| 32–33 | Daima | 82–83 | Ojala |
| 34–35 | Damurah | 84–85 | Qabila |
| 36–37 | Dizwar | 86–87 | Qani |
| 38–39 | Duha | 88–89 | Raafiah |
| 40–41 | Eesha | 90–91 | Sa |
| 42–43 | Eira | 92–93 | Saahir |
| 44–45 | Faariha | 94–95 | Taalea |
| 46–47 | Faaris | 96–97 | Waddah |
| 48–49 | Fadi | 98–100 | Zaheer |

CHAPTER

# 7

# Non-Player Characters

As far as a samurai is concerned, most peasants are one and the same. For those who make a living working with, and for, peasants, there are as many unique personalities as there are rays of the sun. For rōnin, gaijin, and especially those who are peasants themselves, being able to identify and work with myriad types of people from humble farmers to brash merchants can mean the difference between a dry place to sleep and being cast out into the wilds.

And if one is so unfortunate as to find themselves making do in the wilderness, in abandoned towns, or otherwise on the road, there are all manner of natural and unnatural creatures lurking in the dark, underfoot, or behind a torn shōji screen waiting to make a hapless wanderer their next meal.

# New NPC Templates

In **Chapter 8: Non-Player Characters** in the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* Core Rulebook, GMs will find NPC templates that, when applied to NPC profiles, help transform a generic profile into a unique and more specialized character. The additional templates in this section increase a GM's options for NPC personalization. GMs may apply any of the below templates to better adapt an NPC profile to their campaign and make them more memorable to players.

## Desperate

Apply this template to someone with nothing left to lose.
**Conflict Rank:** Combat +1
**Ring:** +1 Fire
**Skills:** +1 Martial and Social Skills
**Advantages (add/replace 0–2):** Blackmail on [Name] (Fire) [Interpersonal]; Daredevil (Fire) [Mental, Physical]; Fights Dirty (Fire) [Mental, Physical]; Indomitable Will (Earth) [Interpersonal, Mental]
**Disadvantages (add/replace 0–2):** Disdain for Honor (Void) [Flaw, Mental]; Easily Provoked (Earth) [Flaw, Mental]; Fear of Death (Earth) [Mental, Physical]; Incurable Illness (Earth) [Physical]; Paranoia (Water) [Mental, Physical]
**Techniques (add 0–2):** Kata, Ninjutsu, Shūji
**Demeanor (replace 1):** Assertive, Shrewd

## Dōshin

Apply this template to someone who assists law enforcement, such as a patrol member or guard.
**Conflict Rank:** Combat +1, Intrigue +1
**Ring:** +1 Earth
**Skills:** +1 Martial and Scholar Skills
**Advantages (add/replace 0–2):** Fearsome Presence (Fire) [Social, Interpersonal]; Knowledge of the Law (Air) [Scholar, Mental], Large Stature (Earth) [Physical]; Sharp Eyes (Water) [Scholar, Physical]
**Disadvantages (add/replace 0–2):** Delusions of Grandeur (Void) [Mental, Interpersonal]; Superiority Complex (Earth) [Flaw, Interpersonal]; Whispers of Cruelty (Earth) [Interpersonal, Infamy]
**Techniques (add 0–2):** Kata
**Demeanor (replace 1):** Ambitious, Assertive

## Galvanizing

Apply to someone with great charisma and authority.
**Conflict Rank:** Intrigue +2
**Ring:** +1 Water
**Skills:** +1 Scholar and Social Skills
**Advantages (add/replace 0–2):** Benten's Blessing (Air) [Interpersonal, Spiritual]; Indomitable Will (Earth) [Interpersonal, Mental]; Inspiring (Water) [Interpersonal]; Support of [One Group] (Water) [Interpersonal]
**Disadvantages (add/replace 0–2):** Cognitive Lapses (Void) [Mental, Scar]; Impatience (Earth) [Mental], Perfectionism (Water) [Mental, Physical]; Softheartedness (Fire) [Interpersonal, Mental]
**Techniques (add 0–2):** Kata, Shūji
**Demeanor (replace 1):** Assertive

## Sneaky

Apply to someone the player characters need to keep an eye on.
**Conflict Rank:** Intrigue +2
**Ring:** +1 Water
**Skills:** +1 Martial and Social Skills
**Advantages (add/replace 0–2):** Blackmail on [Name] (Fire) [Interpersonal]; Fights Dirty (Fire) [Mental, Physical]; Flexibility (Water) [Physical]; Keen Balance (Earth) [Mental, Physical]; Subtle Observer (Air) [Interpersonal, Mental]
**Disadvantages (add/replace 0–2):** Disdain for Righteousness (Void) [Flaw, Mental]; Ebisu's Curse (Earth) [Physical, Spiritual]; Paranoia (Water) [Mental, Physical]; Perfectionism (Water) [Mental, Physical]
**Techniques (add 0–2):** Ninjutsu, Shūji
**Demeanor (replace 1):** Ambitious, Shrewd

## Survivalist

Apply to someone used to living in the wilds.
**Conflict Rank:** Combat +2
**Ring:** +1 Water
**Skills:** +1 Martial and Trade skills
**Advantages (add/replace 0–2):** Indomitable Will (Earth) [Interpersonal, Mental]; Quick Reflexes (Fire) [Interpersonal, Physical]; Wilderness Survival Knowledge (Water) [Mental]
**Disadvantages (add/replace 0–2):** Bluntness (Air) [Interpersonal]; Obtuse (Air) [Interpersonal, Mental]; Whispers of Poverty (Water) [Material, Trade]
**Techniques (add 0–2):** Kata
**Demeanor (replace 1):** Detached, Gruff

### Wandering

Apply to someone who has seen the world and still seeks more.
**Conflict Rank:** Combat +2
**Ring:** +1 Water
**Skills:** +1 Martial and Trade skills
**Advantages (add/replace 0–2):** Seasoned (Void) [Mental, Interpersonal]; Secrets (Void) [Mental, Interpersonal]; Travel (Water) [Mental, Physical]
**Disadvantages (add/replace 0–2):** Impatience (Earth) [Mental]; Whispers of Poverty (Water) [Material, Trade]; Restless (Earth) [Mental]
**Techniques (add 0–2):** Kata, Kihō
**Demeanor (replace 1):** Gruff, Shrewd

# New NPCs

The following profiles are additional options for GMs to use as NPCs in their *Legend of the Five Rings* games.

## CITY AND VILLAGE DWELLERS

From rural villages to cultured cities, Rokugan's municipalities bustle with life.

### Annoyed Tax Collector

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 3

Imperial tax collectors are often drafted from yoriki and dōshin, but occasionally tax collection is delegated to an Emerald Magistrate as a veiled demotion. In practice, samurai tax collectors simply receive gathered taxes from the village elder and escort tax caravans to their destination, but occasionally they must deal with villages that are unwilling (or unable) to pay. Due to the tax collectors' general unpopularity, and also because they are frequent targets of desperate bandits, individuals of some martial prowess are preferred for the task, and rōnin are often hired as bodyguards.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 55 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 8 |
| 43 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 8 |
| 39 | STATUS | FOCUS | 4 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR - ASSERTIVE | VIGILANCE | 2 |

Air 2, Water 2, Fire 1, Earth 3, Void 1

| ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**ADVANTAGES**

**Vaguely Threatening:** Martial; *Interpersonal, Physical*

**Imperial Authority:** Social; *Interpersonal*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Unpopular:** Social; *Interpersonal*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Katana:** Range 1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Lacquered armor (Physical 4, Ceremonial, Cumbersome, Wargear), wakizashi, jitte, knife

**Gear (other):** Riding pony, traveling outfit, as many rōnin minions as possible

**ABILITIES**

#### AURA OF DREAD

At the start of a scene where an annoyed tax collector is present, or when an annoyed tax collector arrives in a scene for the first time, all other characters with a status of 65 or less recieves 3 strife.

## Bandit Lord

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 4 3

Few bandits live long enough to accumulate adequate numbers, wealth, and influence to rival those of local lords, but bandits who do are destabilizing powers in their region. These so-called "bandit lords" have enough local power to illegally claim their own "domains," embarrassing the legitimate lords by rebuffing attempts to bring them to heel. Sometimes their names even spread to other lands. Occasionally, a bandit lord who has proven a better and more popular guardian than the local lord is granted that lord's lands and a family name, becoming legitimate by Imperial decree. For this reason, popular bandits are considered extremely threatening, and whenever they are caught, a public example is always made.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 13 |
| 19 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 8 |
| 07 | STATUS | FOCUS | 5 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR - AMBITIOUS | VIGILANCE | 4 |

| ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**ADVANTAGES**

**Age and Cunning:** Martial, Social; *Interpersonal, Physical*

**Killer Instinct:** Martial; *Mental*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Fool's Avarice:** Social; *Mental*

**Overconfident:** Social; *Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Katana:** Range 1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Razor-Edged

**Kusari-Gama:** Range 0/2–3, Damage 3, Deadliness 3, Concealable, Snaring, Wargear

**Gear (equipped):** Lacquered armor (Physical 4, Ceremonial, Cumbersome, Wargear), simple clothes, assortment of knives, sake jug, handful of koku

**ABILITIES**

### GET THEM...

As an action, a bandit lord may have up to two bandits or experienced bandits immediately move 1 range band and perform a Strike action. They count as having skilled assistance (see page 26 of the core rulebook) on this check.

### CUNNING TACTICS

When performing an Attack action check, a bandit lord may spend in the following way:

**:** One character at range 0–2 suffers the Disoriented or Dazed condition.

## Clever Innkeeper

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 1 2

Any respectable town can boast at least one inn, which is run by the innkeeper. Samurai are simply given room and board (and anything else they request), and the bill is forwarded to their lord, so honorable retainers never need sully their speech by haggling or inquiring about cost. Clever innkeepers work this custom to their advantage, freely offering their best rooms and finest foods to unassuming samurai guests, knowing that it will be accepted as proper tribute—and paid for by wealthy lords.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 20 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 6 |
| 23 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 7 |
| 09 | STATUS | FOCUS | 3 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR - SHREWD | VIGILANCE | 2 |

| ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 0 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**ADVANTAGES**

**Daikoku's Blessing:** Trade; *Interpersonal, Spiritual*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Fool's Avarice:** Social; *Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Gear (equipped):** Passable clothes, handful of bu

**ABILITIES**

### OVERLOOKED

When the clever innkeeper makes a check targeting a character with a higher status rank, the innkeeper treats the target's vigilance as 1 lower.

## Discerning Merchant

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 1 / 2

Although they are looked down upon by nobility and rank lower than farmers in the Celestial Order, merchants nonetheless wield considerable power and influence for one simple reason: they have the money to do so. Discerning merchants make a living by selling finer wares almost exclusively to samurai nobility. It is dishonorable to haggle or even ask for a price, and many samurai are not educated in commerce and remain ignorant of what things cost, so the discerning merchant stands to make a significant profit if they maintain a trustworthy reputation.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 25 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 6 |
| 29 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 6 |
| 09 | STATUS | FOCUS | 3 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR - SHREWD | VIGILANCE | 2 |

| ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 0 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**ADVANTAGES**

**Daikoku's Blessing:** Social; *Interpersonal, Spiritual*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Deferential:** Social; *Interpersonal, Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Gear (equipped):** Passable clothes, abacus, handful of bu

**ABILITIES**

### OVERLOOKED

When this merchant makes a check targeting a character with a higher status rank, the merchant treats the target's vigilance as 1 lower.

### AN EQUAL EXCHANGE

Once per scene, as a Scheme action, a discerning merchant may offer one character a gift in exchange for a small favor. The target must make a **TN 3 Courtesy (Air 5, Fire 1) check** to resist. If the character fails, they receive 3 strife plus their shortfall.

## Hired Enforcer

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 1

Little more than brutes and thumb breakers, enforcers are hired muscle employed to intimidate those who refuse to take their employer's threats seriously. Hired enforcers do not care who their employer is—a merchant who was shorted by someone who thought they were clever, a crime lord displeased with a law enforcement official, or simply someone who wishes to assert their authority—they just care that the coin is good.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 16 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 7 |
| 20 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 6 |
| 09 | STATUS | FOCUS | 4 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR - SHREWD | VIGILANCE | 2 |

| ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**ADVANTAGES**

**Imposing:** Martial, Social; *Interpersonal, Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Fool's Avarice:** Social; *Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Club:** Range 0–1, Damage 5/6, Deadliness 2, Mundane

**Gear (equipped):** Passable clothes, handful of bu

**ABILITIES**

### SUCKER PUNCH

When performing an Attack action check, this enforcer may spend in the following way:

: One target gains the Disoriented condition.

## Indiscriminate Cutpurse

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 2

Although folktales venerate those who steal from the samurai class and live, the life of a cutpurse is anything but glamorous. Thieves live desperate, hand-to-mouth lives, always hoping that their next filched coin will finally pull them out of crushing poverty and into an honest living. Some have come to terms with their lot in life, either because they've grown accustomed to it, have come to enjoy the constant threat of discovery and brutal punishment, or have simply lost hope for anything better.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 05 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 6 |
| 20 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 8 |
| 01 | STATUS | FOCUS | 5 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR - SHREWD | VIGILANCE | 3 |

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 1 | TRADE 3

**ADVANTAGES**

**Nimble and Silent:** Trade; *Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Wanted:** Social; *Interpersonal*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Knife:** Range 0, Damage 2, Deadliness 4/6, Concealable, Mundane, Razor-Edged

**ABILITIES**

### QUICK FINGERS

When this cutpurse makes a check targeting a Disoriented character, the cutpurse treats the target's vigilance as 2 lower, to a minimum of 1.

## Novice Rōnin

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 1

To survive on their own, or out of a need to belong, rōnin sometimes band together in small mercenary groups. At a cursory glance, these groups appear identical to bandit gangs, but what distinguishes them is some sense of honor. Upon joining, those recently cast aside by the clans will fashion themselves after a mentor, a rōnin who has proven they can survive the indifference of the waves.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 33 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 12 |
| 35 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 10 |
| 21 | STATUS | FOCUS | 4 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR - GRUFF | VIGILANCE | 2 |

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 1 | TRADE 1

**ADVANTAGES**

**Martial Instinct:** Martial; *Mental*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Unnecessarily Rude:** Social; *Interpersonal*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Katana:** Range 1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Razor-Edged

**Yumi:** Range 2–5, Damage 5, Deadliness 3

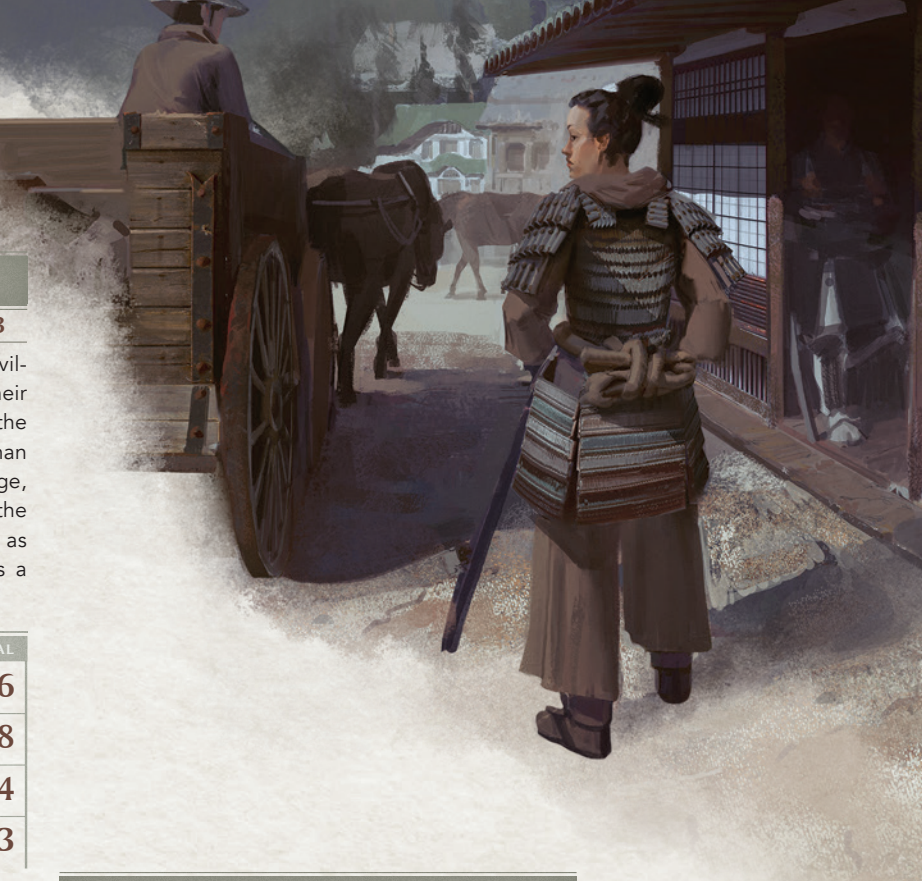
**Gear (equipped):** Worn traveler's clothes (Physical 2, Mundane), quiver, straw cloak, handful of zeni

**ABILITIES**

### STRIKING AS FIRE

When performing an Attack action (Fire) check, a novice rōnin may spend ✿ as follows:

> **Fire ✿+:** Increase the severity of any critical strike dealt as part of this attack by 2 per ✿ spent in this way.



## Traveling Tradesperson

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 1 / 3

Few peasants ever travel farther than the nearest village, and some never even leave the place of their birth. In contrast, merchants travel throughout the Empire, and some are considered more worldly than samurai! When a traveling merchant enters a village, they are often bombarded with questions about the outside world. Sometimes they are even treated as honored guests, although never quite as well as a visiting samurai.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 25 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 6 |
| 25 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 8 |
| 09 | STATUS | FOCUS | 4 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR - SHREWD | VIGILANCE | 3 |

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 0 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 3

**ADVANTAGES**

**Daikoku's Blessing:**
Social; *Interpersonal, Spiritual*

**Worldly Wanderer:**
Scholar, Trade; *Mental*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Deferential:**
Social; *Interpersonal, Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Gear (equipped):** Traveling clothes, abacus, handful of bu

**ABILITIES**

### I CAN FIX THAT

A traveling tradesperson can remove the Damaged condition from most non-supernatural items, including weapons and armor, of rarity 6 or lower. The GM is the final arbiter of what items can be repaired, the cost, and how long the repair takes.

## Wandering Duelist

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 6 / 3

A common trope in Rokugani folktales is that of the wandering swordmaster, a rōnin whose devotion to mastery of the blade outweighs their sense of family obligation and duty. These rōnin not only cast themselves against hardship, but embrace the wild life of the lordless, for this, they believe, is the only way to hone their skill with the sword. Such rōnin easily find work as bodyguards and duelists, sometimes even with a Great Clan.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 45 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 13 |
| 30 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 10 |
| 20 | STATUS | FOCUS | 6 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR - GRUFF | VIGILANCE | 3 |

ARTISAN 1 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 1

**ADVANTAGES**

**Killer Instinct:**
Martial; *Mental*

**Worldly Wanderer:**
Scholar, Trade; *Mental*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Careless:**
Social; *Interpersonal*

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

**Katana:** Range 1, Damage 4, Deadliness 5/7, Ceremonial, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Worn traveler's clothes (Physical 2, Mundane), straw hat, knife, handful of zeni

ABILITIES

### IAIJUTSU CUT: CROSSING BLADE

As an Attack and Movement action using one sheathed Razor-Edged weapon, the swordmaster may make a **TN 2 Martial Arts [Melee] check** targeting one character at range 1–2. The swordmaster draws and readies the sheathed weapon in a one-handed grip. If the swordmaster succeeds, they deal physical damage to the target equal to the weapon's deadliness plus their bonus successes.

### STRIKING AS FIRE

When performing an Attack action (Fire) check, the swordmaster may spend ✿ as follows:

> **Fire ✿+:** Increase the severity of any critical strike dealt as part of this attack by 2 per ✿ spent in this way.

## VIGILANTE SHINOBI

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 4 / 2

Shinobi exist in secret, training in secret, defying the laws of the Emperor and accepting Great Clan gold in exchange for carrying out clandestine deeds. But some shinobi train for a different purpose entirely: to protect the peasants from their own cruel samurai lords. Samurai who wrong the helpless peasantry are visited in the night by an avenging shadow, and those who attempt to subjugate a village simply vanish without a trace.

| SOCIETAL | | PERSONAL | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 00 | HONOR | ENDURANCE | 10 |
| 20 | GLORY | COMPOSURE | 12 |
| 08 | STATUS | FOCUS | 6 |
| +2, –2 | DEMEANOR · INTIMIDATING | VIGILANCE | 3 |

| ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Killer Instinct:** Martial; *Mental* | **Ruthless:** Social; *Physical, Spiritual* |
| **Deadly Silent:** Martial; *Mental, Physical* | |

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

**Kusari-Gama:** Range 0/2–3, Damage 3, Deadliness 3, Concealable, Snaring, Wargear

**Shuriken:** Range 0, Damage 2, Deadliness 4, Range 1–3, Concealable

**Gear (equipped):** Worn traveler's clothes (Physical 2, Mundane), straw hat, assorted knives, caltrops, vials, handful of zeni

**Gear (other):** Infiltration clothes, climbing equipment, makeup and disguises

ABILITIES

### SKULK

Activation: When a vigilante shinobi performs an Initiative or Attack action check using Air, they may spend ✿ as follows:

> Air ✿: If the vigilante shinobi is in obscuring terrain, a crowd, or otherwise concealed from sight, one character with vigilance lower than or equal to the shinobi's ranks in Skulduggery loses sight of the shinobi.

### WASP'S SPITE STYLE

**Activation:** When a vigilante shinobi performs a **Martial Arts [Ranged] check**, they may spend ✲ in the following way:

> **Air or Void ✲ ✲:** If they did not succeed, they choose another target at range 0–2 of their target with vigilance lower than or equal to their target's. The new target suffers physical damage equal to the shinobi's weapon's base damage.

## ANIMALS

The wildlife of Rokugan is especially varied, owing to its many climates and relative seclusion from the rest of the world.

### Blue Shark

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 6 / 0

Sharks are common to Rokugan's waters, although most species are small and harmless to humans. Rokugani blue sharks, however, are an exception. At six to nine feet long, blue sharks are known for their berserker fury and their attraction to blood. They rarely attack humans but become especially dangerous when they smell blood in the waters. They are venerated by some members of the Hiruma family, who admire their speed and silence and have adopted the symbol of the shark in the emblem of their scouting units.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 15 | FOCUS | 3 |
| COMPOSURE | 4 | VIGILANCE | 2 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR · OPPORTUNISTIC

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 2

**ADVANTAGES**

**Swift and Silent:** Martial; *Physical*

**Keen Sense of Smell:** Trade; *Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Hot-Tempered:** Martial; *Mental*

**Weak Spot (Nose):** Martial; *Physical*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Razor Teeth:** Range 0, Damage 7, Deadliness 7, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Thick hide (Physical 2)

**ABILITIES**

#### SEA CREATURE

A blue shark is a silhouette 3 aquatic animal. Increase the deadliness of its bite against a Bleeding target by 4.

#### BLOOD IN THE WATER

As an Attack and Movement action, a blue shark may make a **TN 2 Fitness (Water) check** to slam a target at range 0–1. If it succeeds, the target suffers the Dazed condition, and must resist with a **TN 3 Fitness check (Earth 2, Fire 5)** or suffer the Bleeding condition.

### Camel

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 1

Camels were imported into the Empire by the Unicorn Clan when they returned from their eight-hundred-year exploration of the lands beyond Rokugan. Able to withstand extreme temperatures, sustain themselves by eating tough shrubs, and survive long periods without water, camels were useful work animals to the Unicorn Clan while they explored the Burning Sands and were swiftly domesticated. Camels are hardy and can be trained, but they are more stubborn and intelligent than horses and ponies, and require great patience to handle. The Unicorn still use camels for their woolly fur (which can be spun into textiles) and milk, for carrying goods and other burdens, and sometimes for mounts or even cavalry, as they handle rough terrain better than warhorses. In fact, camels tend to frighten Rokugani ponies and horses, making them effective counters to enemy cavalry (when the camels feel like cooperating). In spite of this, they are generally not used by any other Great Clan, as they are considered distasteful and dirty creatures.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 12 | FOCUS | 4 |
| COMPOSURE | 6 | VIGILANCE | 2 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR · STUBBORN

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 1 | TRADE 0

**ADVANTAGES**

**Survivalist:** Martial; *Physical*

**Temperature Resistant:** Martial; *Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Skittish:** Martial; *Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Gear (equipped):** Woolly hide (Physical 3)

**ABILITIES**

#### LUMBERING

The camel is a silhouette 2 creature. It can be ridden by a human-sized rider.

## Elegant Pit Viper

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 1

Pit vipers are relatively uncommon, although they grow steadily more common as one proceeds west toward the Shinomen Forest. Pit viper venom rots flesh and sours the blood, making these vipers' bites extremely dangerous to humans. They must be provoked to attack; the typical pit viper bite results from accidentally stepping on one. Generally, pit vipers are small, but a unique breed that can reportedly grow up to eight feet in length thrives on the Islands of Spice and Silk.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 2 | FOCUS | 5 |
| COMPOSURE | 5 | VIGILANCE | 3 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR - CAUTIOUS

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 0

**ADVANTAGES**

**Swift and Silent:**
Martial; *Physical*

**Easily Overlooked:**
Martial; *Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Short Temper:**
Martial; *Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Fangs:** Range 0, Damage 1, Deadliness 3, Concealable, Razor-Edged

**ABILITIES**

### VENOMOUS BITE

An elegant pit viper is a silhouette 0 creature. When performing an Attack action check, it may spend +to increase the TN of any check by a target to resist a critical strike inflicted by that action; if the target fails the check to resist that critical strike, they suffer the Dying (4 rounds) condition in addition to any other effects.

## Elephant

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 8 / 1

Elephants are not native to Rokugan, and most Rokugani have never seen one. But a pair are known to be owned by the Ide family daimyō and kept in Khanbulak as a token of prestige, and the Bayushi menagerie keeps one healthy elephant as a curiosity. Generally timid and surprisingly smart, elephants are dangerous only when agitated or when their young are threatened. In the distant Mweneta Empire and the Ivory Kingdoms, the elephant is a valuable working animal and a formidable war animal, and it is venerated as a symbol of intelligence, compassion, and patience.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 20 | FOCUS | 4 |
| COMPOSURE | 12 | VIGILANCE | 2 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR - FLIGHTY

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 2

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Enormous Stature:** Martial; *Physical* | **Skittish:** Martial; *Mental* |
| **Prehensile Trunk:** Trade; *Physical* | |

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

**Tusks:** Range 1, Damage 8, Deadliness 8, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Thick hide (Physical 5)

ABILITIES

### TRAMPLE

The elephant is a silhouette 4 creature. When an elephant inflicts a critical strike, the TN of the check to resist is 6, and if the target fails, they suffer the Dazed condition in addition to the other effects.

## Fox

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 1 1

There are several varieties of fox that are native to Rokugan, including the dusty white snow fox, the more common red, black, and white fox, and the rare silver fox. These creatures are considered intelligent and for many conjure up images of the trickster-spirits known as kitsune.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 5 | FOCUS | 4 |
| COMPOSURE | 4 | VIGILANCE | 3 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR - CALCULATING

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 0

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Curious Nature:** Social; *Interpersonal* | **Easily Spooked:** Social; *Mental* |

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

**Teeth:** Range 0, Damage 1, Deadliness 2, Razor-Edged

ABILITIES

### EXCELLENT TRACKER

A fox is a creature of silhouette 0. It also reduces the TN of all checks to track prey by 2, to a minimum of 1.

## Giant Salamander

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 3 1

Giant salamanders are common in the marshes and rivers of southern Rokugan, although one must seek them out to find them, as they are nocturnal and aquatic, and they dislike living near human settlements. These massive amphibians can grow as large as nine feet long from head to tail, although they typically grow no larger than four. They are peaceful and only attack to retaliate, and when threatened they exude a thick peppery musk that stings the target's eyes.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 10 | FOCUS | 3 |
| COMPOSURE | 8 | VIGILANCE | 2 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR - UNENTHUSED

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 2

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Enormous Stature:** Martial; *Physical* | **Virtually Blind:** Martial; *Physical* |

FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

**Needle Bite:** Range 0, Damage 2, Deadliness 5, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Blubbery hide (Physical 2)

ABILITIES

### HUGE AND SLIPPERY

This salamander is a silhouette 2 creature. The TN of any check to pick up a giant salamander is increased by 2.

### PEPPER MUSK

After a giant salamander defends against damage, each character at range 0–2 of the salamander suffers the Dazed condition and must resist with a **TN 2 Fitness check (Air 4, Fire 1)** or suffer the Disoriented condition as well.

## Giant Hornet Swarm

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 0

Giant hornets are the largest hornet species in Rokugan, growing up to two inches long. Most commonly encountered in Scorpion and Lion lands, giant hornets are feared despite their size due to the potency of their toxic sting, which can incapacitate even a grown adult. Giant hornet swarms are considered especially dangerous, although giant hornets are usually encountered alone. Colloquially known as "sparrow bees," giant hornets are considered a delicacy in rural areas but must be fried in order to neutralize their toxin.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 6 | FOCUS | 3 |
| COMPOSURE | 3 | VIGILANCE | 1 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR - AGGRESSIVE

ARTISAN 0 | **MARTIAL 1** | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 0

**ADVANTAGES**

**Lightning Reflexes:** Martial; *Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Quick to Anger:** Social; *Interpersonal*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Stinger:** Range 0, Damage 1, Deadliness 7

**Gear (equipped):** Hardened Exoskeleton (Physical 1)

**ABILITIES**

### NIMBLE FLYER

The giant hornet swarm is a silhouette 1 creature that can fly. It can move vertically and ignores the negative effects of terrain.

### TOXIC STING

When performing an Attack action check, the giant hornet swarm may spend ✲ as follows:

> ✲+: The target suffers one of the following conditions: Dazed, Disoriented, or Exhausted.

> ✲✲: The target suffers the Immobilized condition.

## Saltwater Crocodile (Wani)

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 5 / 1

Crocodiles are relatively common aquatic reptiles in both the coastal rivers and swamps of northern Rokugan and the marshlands of the Crane. Given enough to eat, Rokugani crocodiles have been known to grow up to twenty feet long and nearly 2,500 pounds. They hunt by floating still, appearing to be a log or other flotsam, and then snapping at unwary prey and dragging them into the water, spinning and thrashing into what is colloquially known as a "death roll." Hunting crocodiles requires multiple samurai; facing one alone in marshy environments is unwise.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 16 | FOCUS | 4 |
| COMPOSURE | 10 | VIGILANCE | 2 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR - OPPORTUNISTIC

ARTISAN 0 | **MARTIAL 3** | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 0 | **TRADE 1**

**ADVANTAGES**

**Enormous Stature:** Martial; *Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Clumsy on Land:** Martial; *Physical*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Teeth:** Range 0, Damage 5, Deadliness 4, Razor-Edged, Snaring

**Gear (equipped):** Thick hide (Physical 4)

**ABILITIES**

### GIANT AQUATIC REPTILE

A saltwater crocodile is a silhouette 3 creature and can move through the water without requiring checks.

### DEATH ROLL

When a crocodile succeeds on an Attack action check against a target, that target suffers the Prone and Disoriented conditions.

If the crocodile and its target are in the water, the target must make a **TN 3 Fitness check**; if they fail, the target begins drowning (see **Suffocation**, on page 269 of the core rulebook).

## Serow (Kamoshika)

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 1 / 1

Roaming forests and meadows in small herds, the serow (or "forest-deer" as they are colloquially known) is a bovid grazer approximately the size of a large goat. Appearing as a shaggy cross between a goat and a deer, the serow has a long face, thick soft fur, backward-facing horns, and cloven hooves. As herd animals, they tend to flee when threatened. Serow are able to scale mountain cliffs with surprising ease. They exclusively eat plant matter and possess excellent hearing and sight. Their seemingly supernatural senses, combined with their natural wall-scaling agility, earns them reverence from shinobi groups, and they sometimes appear on the emblems of secretive shinobi dōjō.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 6 | FOCUS | 4 |
| COMPOSURE | 6 | VIGILANCE | 4 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR - FLIGHTY

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 1 | TRADE 1

### ADVANTAGES

**Excellent Senses:** Martial; *Mental, Physical*

**Lightning Reflexes:** Martial; *Mental, Physical*

### DISADVANTAGES

**Meek:** Martial; *Mental*

### FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

**Hooves:** Range 1, Damage 4, Deadliness 3

### ABILITIES

#### FOREST-DEER

Serow are creatures of silhouette 2. They can clamber up rocky cliffs and exceptionally steep surfaces without issue.

## Emperor Serow

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 1

Serow herds are much smaller than herds of deer and oxen, rarely exceeding six individuals. More often, they roam in mated pairs. However, sometimes a wily serow reaches the age of twenty-five and sprouts a pair of branched antlers and a shaggy mane from their collarbone. This is the so-called emperor serow, a strong animal that attracts other serow into larger herds with its mournful keen. An emperor serow is accompanied by anywhere between four and twenty mated serow pairs and possesses a gleam of intelligence. Their fur is prized for winter wear, but they are difficult game to catch.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 8 | FOCUS | 5 |
| COMPOSURE | 10 | VIGILANCE | 4 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR · FLIGHTY

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 1 | TRADE 1

**ADVANTAGES**

**Excellent Senses:** Martial; *Mental, Physical*

**Lightning Reflexes:** Martial; *Mental, Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Meek:** Martial; *Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Hooves:** Range 1–2, Damage 5, Deadliness 4

**Gear (equipped):** Shaggy hide (Physical 2)

**ABILITIES**

### FOREST-DEER

Serow are creatures of silhouette 2. They can clamber up rocky cliffs and exceptionally steep surfaces without issue.

### PROTECT THE HERD

As an action, the emperor serow may have up to two serow who have not yet acted this round immediately move 1 range band and perform a Strike action with skilled assistance (see page 26 of the core rulebook).

## Macaque

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 1

Also known as "snow monkeys," red-faced macaques are normally confined to the forested Seikitsu Mountains and the Islands of Spice and Silk. However, because they are popular pets of samurai lords, and because they are a sacred animal to Brotherhood monks, macaques are commonly captured and disseminated throughout the Empire. For this reason, they can be encountered virtually anywhere. While they pose little physical threat to an armed and armored samurai, they are curious tricksters, stealing unsecured items and leaping away before much can be done about it.

While they are considered mere nuisances, one shouldn't underestimate the trouble these monkeys can cause. Famously, the skilled ninth-century duelist Matsu Sugeki was publicly embarrassed when, just before a duel with his rival, a macaque stole his sword right out of its sheath and scrambled up a tree with it! Unable to force the animal back down despite hours of trying, Sugeki was forced to use an ally's sword and, unaccustomed to its balance, subsequently lost.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 6 | FOCUS | 5 |
| COMPOSURE | 6 | VIGILANCE | 4 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR · MISCHIEVOUS

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 3

**ADVANTAGES**

**Lightning Reflexes:** Martial; *Mental, Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Curious:** Social; *Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Bite:** Range 0, Damage 1, Deadliness 2

**Gear (equipped):** Something the last person the macaque pickpocketed thinks is still in their bag.

**ABILITIES**

### NATURAL TRICKSTERS

When making an Attack action check, the macaque can spend in the following way:

> **:** Steal an unsecured item within reach.
> **+:** Steal an item from a target with vigilance lower than or equal to the spent this way.

### HUMILIATING

When an Attack action check targeting the macaque fails, the attacker receives 2 strife. When the macaque steals an item from a character, that character receives 3 strife.

## Monstrous Octopus

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 4 / 1

Octopuses are aquatic mollusks with eight legs and soft bodies that thrive along Rokugan's coasts. Dozens of octopus species live in Rokugan's seas. Most octopuses are small and harmless, and they play an important part in Rokugani cuisine. However, the monstrous octopus is an exceptionally large version, between twenty and thirty feet in size and able to amble on land for brief periods. Octopuses are generally shy and prefer to flee rather than fight, releasing an ink cloud to hide their retreat. Still, if they are forced to fight, they are skilled grapplers; many a Rokugani sailor has drowned in one's tentacled grasp.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 10 | FOCUS | 4 |
| COMPOSURE | 14 | VIGILANCE | 3 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR - CAUTIOUS

| ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 1 | TRADE 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

### ADVANTAGES

**Camouflage Skin:**
Artisan; *Physical*

**Eight Strong Arms:**
Martial; *Physical*

### DISADVANTAGES

**Clumsy:**
Martial; *Mental, Physical*

### FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

**Tentacle Arms:** Range 0–2, Damage 5, Deadliness 3, Snaring

**Gear (equipped):** Rubbery hide (Physical 2)

### ABILITIES

#### AQUATIC GIANT

The monstrous octopus is a silhouette 4 creature that moves through the water without requiring checks.

#### MASTER OF DISGUISE

When performing a check, an octopus may spend ✿ as follows:

> **✿+:** The octopus disguises itself in its environment, causing each character with vigilance lower than or equal to the ✿ spent this way to lose sight of it.

## Night Heron

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 1

The night heron is a nocturnal bird endemic to the forests and glades of Phoenix, Crane, and Unicorn provinces. Identified by its black-and-white plumage and its eerie keen, the night heron is known for a phenomenon called "blue heron flame" (*aosagi-nohi*). Under the full moon, the night heron glows pale blue and casts a phosphorescent sheen over anything beneath its beating wings. While the night heron is peaceful enough to be approached, it flees when it is confronted or senses danger, only resorting to blinding phosphorescent flashes and raking talon attacks when it has no other choice.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 5 | FOCUS | 4 |
| COMPOSURE | 5 | VIGILANCE | 3 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR · FLIGHTY

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 2

### ADVANTAGES

**Graceful Flight:** Martial; *Physical*

### DISADVANTAGES

**Easily Frightened:** Martial; *Mental*

### FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

**Clawed talons:** Range 0, Damage 3, Deadliness 5, Razor-Edged

### ABILITIES

#### FLASH-CAST

The night heron may spend a Movement action to hurl itself to a spot within its normal movement range, casting a splash of blue or golden, glowing powder over everything within range 0–1 of where it lands. Those caught within must resist with a **TN 2 Fitness check (Fire 1, Air 3)**; if they fail, they become Dazed.

## Red-Crowned Heron

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 1 / 1

Sacred to the Doji and Kakita families, a frequent subject of art and sculpture, and considered a lucky good-omen animal, the red-crowned heron is named for the bright-red bare patch on its head. With its black-and-white plumage and graceful gait, it is widely regarded as a symbol of beauty, cleverness, and longevity. Although it is the largest species of crane in Rokugan (and perhaps the world), it is not hunted for its meat except by the very desperate. This is partially due to the ferocity with which it defends itself, a display that has inspired martial artists to imitate its wing and claw movements. It is also in part due to the crane's sacred status; needlessly killing one is considered bad luck.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 3 | FOCUS | 3 |
| COMPOSURE | 5 | VIGILANCE | 3 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR - SERENE

ARTISAN 0 | **MARTIAL 1** | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 0 | **TRADE 2**

**ADVANTAGES**

**Graceful Flight:** Martial; *Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Easily Frightened:** Martial; *Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Clawed talons:** Range 0, Damage 3, Deadliness 5, Razor-Edged

**ABILITIES**

### STARTLING AGGRESSION

Once per scene, the red-crowned heron may rise up and furiously flap its wings. All characters within range 0–1 of the heron must make a **TN 2 Fitness check (Fire 1, Void 3)** to resist; if they fail, they suffer 2 strife and become Dazed.

## Rhinoceros

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 9 / 1

Very few in Rokugan are be able to conjure an image of what a rhinoceros looks like, though those who hail from the Ivory Kingdoms are all-too familiar with these massive, aggressive, plant-eating behemoths. Weighing between 3,500 and 4,500 pounds, these single-horned creatures are sometimes referred to as the unicorns of the Ivory Kingdoms.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 22 | FOCUS | 5 |
| COMPOSURE | 10 | VIGILANCE | 3 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR - INTIMIDATING

ARTISAN 0 | **MARTIAL 4** | SCHOLAR 0 | **SOCIAL 1** | TRADE 0

**ADVANTAGES**

**Huge Creature:** Martial; *Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Territorial:** Social; *Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Horn:** Range 1, Damage 8, Deadliness 8, Durable, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Coarse Hide (Physical 4)

**ABILITIES**

### FURIOUS CHARGE

A rhinoceros is a creature of silhouette 4. As an Attack action, a rhinoceros may target a location within range 3–5. The rhinoceros charges at the targeted location, and any creatures within range 0–1 of the location must make a **TN 4 Fitness check (Fire 6, Air 2)** to resist. If they fail, they suffer a critical injury of severity 8 and become Incapacitated.

## SPIRITS AND STRANGE BEINGS

The unexplored corners of Rokugan are home to many strange beings, but some dwell in startlingly close proximity to civilization.

### Akkorokamui

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 7 / 3

When an octopus reaches a certain age and consumes a piece of jade, it is said to become a massive creature known as the *akkorokamui*. This gigantic octopus reaches over 400 feet in size and can regenerate lost limbs within mere minutes. It is said that eating the flesh of an akkorokamui temporarily bestows the properties of jade, making one immune to the Shadowlands Taint. But there is no official confirmation of this rumor, and obtaining such a meal is risky indeed.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 14 | FOCUS | 6 |
| COMPOSURE | 20 | VIGILANCE | 5 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR - FICKLE

| ARTISAN 1 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 0 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**ADVANTAGES**

**Camouflage Skin:** Artisan; *Physical*

**Eight Strong Arms:** Martial; *Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Clumsy:** Martial; *Mental, Physical*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Tentacle Arms:** Range 0–5, Damage 8, Deadliness 6

**Gear (equipped):** Supernatural hide (Physical 3, Supernatural 3)

**ABILITIES**

#### AQUATIC GIANT

The akkorokamui is a silhouette 5 creature that moves through the water without requiring checks.

#### FAST REGENERATE

This octopus can regenerate its lost limbs and injuries in a few minutes. The severity of critical strikes against this enemy is reduced by 3, to a minimum of 1. Burning attacks are not affected by this ability.

### Amikiri

MINION — CONFLICT RANK: 4 / 2

An *amikiri* is the transformation of a scorpion that has reached one hundred years of age, growing in size and gaining the ability to camouflage itself. These creatures hide in ceiling corners, blending into their surroundings, and use their claws to sever mosquito nets, lamp ropes, and other such fixtures. While they are usually relatively harmless, they are deadly adversaries when confronted.

Some scholars believe that the scorpion is not native to Rokugan, but was discovered and brought to Rokugan by Shosuro during her travels as a service to her clan.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 6 | FOCUS | 5 |
| COMPOSURE | 7 | VIGILANCE | 3 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR - AGGRESSIVE

| ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 1 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**ADVANTAGES**

**Camouflage Carapace:** Trade; *Physical*

**Cling to Walls:** Martial; *Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Compulsive:** Social; *Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Scorpion Claws:** Range 0, Damage 4, Deadliness 3

**Tail Stinger:** Range 0–1, Damage 3, Deadliness 6

**Gear (equipped):** Chitinous hide (Physical 3)

**ABILITIES**

#### GIANT SCORPION

The amikiri is an Otherworldly silhouette 1 creature.

#### TOXIC STING

Once per scene when succeeding on an Attack action check, the amikiri may spend ✲ as follows:

> ✲: The target suffers a critical strike with severity 8.

## Basan

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 3 / 1

Also known as the mountain rooster, or "basa-basa" after its distinct call, the basan is a native of Chikushō-dō, the Realm of Animals. It sometimes wanders into the Realm of Mortals. Resembling an oversized rooster with vibrant plumage that darkens into a charcoal color when it is threatened, the basan is able to breathe plumes of blue flame, although these flames do not burn unless the basan is angered or frightened. As it is a nocturnal creature, its keening call and brightly exhaled displays make it a nuisance to rural villages, often keeping everyone awake. However, a basan that wanders into a settlement can be more than just a nuisance, especially when the startled creature sets nearby homes ablaze!

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 10 | FOCUS | 4 |
| COMPOSURE | 8 | VIGILANCE | 3 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR - FLIGHTY

| ARTISAN 1 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Camouflaging Feathers:** Artisan; *Physical* | **Easily Frightened:** Martial; *Mental* |

### FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

**Clawed talon:** Range 0–1, Damage 3, Deadliness 5, Razor-Edged

### ABILITIES

#### CHIKUSHŌ-DŌ NATIVE

Basan are silhouette 0 Otherworldly creatures.

#### BREATHES FLAME

When making a successful Attack action check, the basan may spend in the following way:

> **:** The target suffers the Burning condition.

## Furiribi

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 1 / 2

In the wake of a traumatic death, sometimes an "aimless flame" is left behind: a *furiribi*. These purple orbs linger in the places where their bodies died, luring the unwary to their deaths in swamps, cliffs, or other hazardous places. The furiribi's flame burns not the flesh, but the very soul, causing spiritual illness if left untreated.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 6 | FOCUS | 4 |
| COMPOSURE | 4 | VIGILANCE | 2 |

+1, +1, –2,
DEMEANOR - DETACHED

| ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 0 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**ADVANTAGES**

**Incorporeal:** Martial; *Physical, Spiritual*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Sadness:** Social; *Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Gear (equipped):** Ghostly energy (Physical 10)

**ABILITIES**

### GHOSTLY BODY

The furiribi is an Otherworldly creature of silhouette 0 that can pass through solid objects.

### BURNS THE SOUL

When a creature touches a furiribi they must make a **TN 4 Fitness check (Earth 5, Fire 5, Void 2)** to resist the furiribi's spiritual flame. If a creature fails, they take 5 Supernatural damage and become Exhausted. If the target is already Exhausted, they become Incapacitated.

## Hinotama

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 6 / 1

Natives of the Spirit Realm of Sakkaku, *hinotama* are sentient ball-lighting spirits. Attracted to storms and metallic fixtures, they are known to explode into electric arcs and flames without warning.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 6 | FOCUS | 4 |
| COMPOSURE | 4 | VIGILANCE | 2 |

+1, +1, –1,
DEMEANOR - DETACHED

| ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 0 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**ADVANTAGES**

**Incorporeal:** Martial; *Physical, Spiritual*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Easily Angered:** Social; *Interpersonal, Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Arcing Lightning:** Range 0–4, Damage 4, Deadliness 5

**Gear (equipped):** Electric form (Physical 10)

**ABILITIES**

### LIGHTNING CREATURE

The hinotama is an Otherworldly creature of silhouette 0 that can pass through solid objects.

### ELECTRIC BLAST

When the hinotama makes an Attack action check they may spend in the following ways:

> **:** The target suffers supernatural damage equal to the Attack action check's bonus successes.

> **+:** The hinotama may select an additional target within range 2 of another target for their attack.

## Isonade

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 8 / 1

The *isonade* is a feared creature throughout the Islands of Spice and Silk, often blamed for the loss of fishing boats. Isonade are monstrous sharks with barbed tails and hooked catfish whiskers. When they travel near the surface of the ocean, they cause stormy winds to appear, and they are said to capsize boats with their powerful tails.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 18 | FOCUS | 3 |
| COMPOSURE | 14 | VIGILANCE | 2 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR · AGGRESSIVE

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 4 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 0

### ADVANTAGES

**Accompanied by Storms:** Martial; *Physical*

**Keen Sense of Smell:** Trade; *Physical*

**Terrible Strength:** Martial; *Physical*

### DISADVANTAGES

**Hot-Tempered:** Martial; *Mental*

**Weak Spot (Nose):** Martial; *Physical*

### FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

**Razor Teeth:** Range 0, Damage 7, Deadliness 9, Razor-Edged

**Barbed Tail:** Range 2, Damage 10, Deadliness 5, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Thick hide (Physical 4)

### ABILITIES

#### AQUATIC MONSTER

The isonade is an Otherworldly creature of silhouette 5 that can move through the water without requiring checks.

#### BLOOD FRENZY

When a wound bleeds into nearby waters, the isonade becomes Enraged. While Enraged, it cannot suffer the Unconscious condition, and may perform Attack actions even while Incapacitated.

## Mischievous Kappa

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 2 / 3

Hailing from Sakkaku, the Realm of Trickster Spirits, the kappa resembles a child-sized turtle with a smooth shell, webbed hands and feet, and a small bowl-shaped indentation on the top of its head, in which water is always contained. Kappa live in lakes and ponds and sustain themselves with blood, often attempting to trick wanderers into drowning so they can feast. The water in the bowl-shaped indentation of the kappa's head contains its life energy, so if it is spilled, the kappa becomes weak and desperate. Some say that you can trick a kappa by bowing to it, in hopes that its good manners may take over and it will bow back!

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 8 | FOCUS | 4 |
| COMPOSURE | 10 | VIGILANCE | 3 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR · SHREWD

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 3 | TRADE 2

### ADVANTAGES

**Excellent Swimmer:** Martial; *Physical*

**Lightning Reflexes:** Martial; *Physical*

### DISADVANTAGES

**Deferential:** Social; *Interpersonal, Mental*

**Weak Spot (Water in Head):** Martial; *Physical*

### FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

**Razor Claws:** Range 0, Damage 4, Deadliness 6, Razor-Edged

**Gear (equipped):** Turtle shell (Physical 4)

### ABILITIES

#### AQUATIC SPIRIT

The kappa is an Otherworldly creature of silhouette 1 that can move through the water without requiring checks.

#### LOVER OF GAMES

A character may make a **TN 4 Games check (Air 5, Fire 2)** to challenge the kappa to a game of riddles. If a character succeeds, the kappa offers that character a small favor (such as distracting an enemy or giving the character an item the kappa has). If the character fails, they suffer 3 strife.

## Rakshasa

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 5 / 6

The Shadowlands stands as an imposing force of wickedness and spiritual decay that borders the Crab lands, but this vile land stretches further than most of Rokugan realizes. Even further southwest the Shadowlands warps from long expanses of twisting hills and unforgiving winds to the lush and foreboding Ghostlands forests. Here live the rakshasa, shapeshifting beings who, like oni, feel for humanity. These creatures are bipedal and range from human-sized to over eight feet tall, and possess illusionary magic that can change their appearance to any who view them. Most love to capture and eat human flesh, though some have other nerfarious plots.

| ENDURANCE | 10 | FOCUS | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|
| COMPOSURE | 14 | VIGILANCE | 4 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR · SCHEMING

ARTISAN 1 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 1

**ADVANTAGES**

**Shifting Form:** Social, Martial; *Interpersonal, Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Hungry for Flesh:** Social; *Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Deadly Claws (in natural form):** Range 0–1, Damage 5, Deadliness 4, Razor-Edged, Unholy

**Urumi (whip-sword):** Range 1–2, Damage 4, Deadliness 5, Cumbersome, Razor-Edged, Snaring

**Gear (equipped):** Unholy Hide (Physical 3, Spiritual 2, Unholy)

**ABILITIES**

### ILLUSORY HUNTER

A rakshasa is a being of silhouette 3 that can change their form to appear as a creature of silhouette 2–4. At the start of a scene characters must make a **TN 4 Survival** or **Theology check (Air 6, Void 2)** to attempt to see through the rakshasa's illusory form. If they fail, they receive 2 strife and cannot see through the illusion.

### OVERWHELMING DESIRE

When a rakshasa makes a successful Attack action check they may spend in the following ways:

> **:** The target suffers the Bleeding condition.

> **:** If the target is Bleeding, the rakshasa may heal 3 fatigue.

## Captivating Rakshasa

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 9 / 10

While rakshasa are often thought of as devious, horned and fanged creatures that are ever plotting for their next human meal, some are more perspicacious. Most rakshasa are intelligent, and not all are driven by insatiable bloodlust. When a rakshasa overcomes their urge to feed, they can spend more time refining their illusory and magical arts, making them much more potent and deadly. These older, wiser rakshasa are capable of both good and bad acts, but are often driven to wicked deeds in response to being hunted by humans who view them as no more than monsters.

| ENDURANCE | 16 | FOCUS | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|
| COMPOSURE | 18 | VIGILANCE | 5 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR · BEGUILING

ARTISAN 2 | MARTIAL 3 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 4 | TRADE 1

**ADVANTAGES**

**Shifting Form:** Social, Martial; *Interpersonal, Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Bitter:** Social; *Interpersonal, Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Deadly Claws (in natural form):** Range 0–1, Damage 5, Deadliness 4, Razor-Edged, Unholy

**Urumi (whip-sword):** Range 1–2, Damage 4, Deadliness 5, Cumbersome, Razor-Edged, Snaring

**Gear (equipped):** Unholy Hide (Physical 3, Spiritual 2, Unholy), morbid trophies

**ABILITIES**

### ILLUSORY HUNTER

A captivating rakshasa is a being of silhouette 3 that can change their form to appear as a creature of silhouette 2–4. At the start of a scene characters must make a **TN 5 Survival** or **Theology check (Air 7, Void 3)** to attempt to see through the rakshasa's illusionary form. If they fail, they receive 2 strife and cannot see through the illusion.

### CAPTIVATING CHARM

As an Attack action check, a captivating rakshasa may choose a target. The target must resist with a **TN 5 Meditation** or **Theology check (Fire 7, Earth 3)**. If they fail, the target must immediately move one range band toward another target of the rakshasa's choice and perform the Strike action against them. If no targets are in range, the original target instead suffers 4 strife.

## Tiny Manifest Air Kami

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 5 / 3

Often found in areas known for gentle zephyrs, tiny air kami usually manifest themselves as small whirlwinds, lashing out at any who get too close. These spirits are often angered by smoke and other pollutants filling the air, and can be a painful surprise to any who disrespect them.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 7 | FOCUS | 2 |
| COMPOSURE | 4 | VIGILANCE | 2 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR - FLIGHTY

| ARTISAN 2 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 0 | SOCIAL 2 | TRADE 2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Ethereal Form:** Martial, Trade; *Physical* | **Easily Distracted:** Scholar, Social; *Mental* |

### FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

**Slicing Winds :** Range 0–2, Damage 3, Deadliness 7, deals supernatural damage

**Gear (equipped):** Cloak of Air (Physical 3, Supernatural 2)

### ABILITIES

#### FLIGHT

A tiny manifest air kami can move vertically and ignores the negative effects of terrain.

#### TINY LIVING AIR SPIRIT

A tiny manifest air kami is an Otherworldly being of silhouette 0, 1, or 2, and may change its size as an action. Additionally, whenever a character deals damage to the kami, that character suffers half as much strife (rounded down).

#### BUFFETING GALE

When performing an Attack action check, a tiny manifest air kami may spend ✿ as follows:

> ✿**:** The target must resist a **TN 4 Fitness check (Air 6, Fire 2)** or suffer the Prone condition.

> ✿**+:** The tiny manifest air kami may move 1 range band per ✿ spent this way.

**TINY KAMI**

Myriad elemental kami dwell within Rokugan, each with their own preferences and natures. When a new kami comes into being through reincarnation, they may be quite powerful (living in a whole mountain or river) or very small (inhabiting a single tree, or a bed of flowers). When these smaller kami are displeased, they manifest themselves just as more powerful kami do, but they are a little less physically daunting than their larger counterparts.

Even though they are smaller, these kami are by no means spiritually lesser. They are still capable of offering shugenja substantial aid, and are just as revered as larger kami.

## Tiny Manifest Earth Kami

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 5 / 1

Generally, tiny manifest earth kami make their homes in particularly notable rocks, in fertile patches of earth, or on the banks of rivers or the sea. The are drawn to action when people mistreat nature or disturb the resting place of old earth.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 10 | FOCUS | 2 |
| COMPOSURE | 6 | VIGILANCE | 1 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR · OBSTINATE

ARTISAN 1 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 0 | TRADE 2

**ADVANTAGES**

**Sturdy Body:** Martial; *Physical*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Honest to a Fault:** Social, Trade; *Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Rising Rock:** Range 1–3, Damage 5, Deadliness 5, deals physical or supernatural damage

**Gear (equipped):** Skin of stone (Physical 4, Sacred)

**ABILITIES**

### BURROW

As a movement action, a tiny manifest earth kami may withdraw into the ground. It cannot be targeted by actions or effects, or perform actions other than Eruption.

### ERUPTION

As an Attack and Movement action while burrowed, a tiny manifest earth kami may burst from the ground at a chosen point within range 0–3. Each character at range 0–1 of that point must resist with a **TN 4 Fitness check (Air 2, Water 6)** or suffer 3 physical damage and the Prone condition.

### TINY LIVING EARTH SPIRIT

A tiny manifest earth kami is an Otherworldly being of silhouette 1. Additionally, whenever a character deals damage to the kami, that character suffers half as much strife (rounded down).

### HURLING PEBBLES

When performing a successful Attack action check, a tiny manifest earth kami may spend ✿ as follows:

> ✿**+:** Any characters within range 0–1 of the target must make a **TN 3 Fitness check (Air 1, Water 5)** or suffer 1 fatigue for each ✿ spent this way.

## Tiny Manifest Fire Kami

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 6 / 1

Found most often dwelling in forests recently struck by wildfires or in temple braziers, tiny manifest fire kami are the embodiment of passion. They are easily provoked if they are not properly venerated and given gifts, and can be devastating harbingers of tiny destruction if angered.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 9 | FOCUS | 3 |
| COMPOSURE | 2 | VIGILANCE | 1 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR · INTENSE

ARTISAN 0 | MARTIAL 2 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 1 | TRADE 1

**ADVANTAGES**

**Primal Terror:** Martial, Social; *Interpersonal*

**DISADVANTAGES**

**Endless Hunger:** Artisan, Scholar; *Mental*

**FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR**

**Searing Reach:** Range 1–2, Damage 4, Deadliness 5, deals supernatural damage

**Gear (equipped):** Blazing body (Physical 2)

**ABILITIES**

### TINY LIVING FIRE SPIRIT

A tiny manifest fire kami is an Otherworldly being of silhouette 0, 1, or 2 and may change its size as an action. Additionally, whenever a character deals damage to the kami, that character suffers half as much strife (rounded down).

### MANTLE OF SMOKE AND ASH

Other characters treat the area at range 0–1 of the tiny manifest fire kami as Dangerous and Obscuring terrain. Additionally, if any other character touches the kami with their flesh, they must resist with a **TN 5 Meditation check**. If they fail, they suffer 2 strife.

### SCORCHING TOUCH

When performing a successful Attack action check, a tiny manifest fire kami may spend ✿ as follows:

> ✿**:** The target suffers the Burning condition.

## Tiny Manifest Water Kami

ADVERSARY — CONFLICT RANK: 5 4

Tiny water kami typically make their homes in the puddles of rainy forests, in small ponds, and in the snow drifts of mountain ranges. Usually easy-going creatures, they are often satisified with small and thoughtful gifts such as pure spring water and songs. Those that tread in a tiny manifest water kami's territory should be wary, however, as these spirits are said to pull the very water from the soil if displeased, choking crops.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ENDURANCE | 11 | FOCUS | 6 |
| COMPOSURE | 9 | VIGILANCE | 2 |

+2, –2
DEMEANOR - ADAPTABLE

| ARTISAN 1 | MARTIAL 1 | SCHOLAR 2 | SOCIAL 3 | TRADE 0 |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| ADVANTAGES | DISADVANTAGES |
|---|---|
| **Liquid Body:** Martial, Trade; *Physical* | **Without Convictions:** Artisan, Social; *Mental* |

### FAVORED WEAPONS & GEAR

**Damaging Waves:** Range 1–2, Damage 5, Deadliness 3, deals supernatural damage

**Gear (equipped):** Malleable form (Physical 2, Supernatural 2)

### ABILITIES

#### TINY LIVING WATER SPIRIT

A tiny manifest water kami is an Otherworldly being of silhouette 0, 1, or 2 and may change its size as an action. Additionally, whenever a character deals damage to the kami, that character suffers half as much strife (rounded down).

#### SHAPE OF THE WATER SERPENT

As an Attack action check, the tiny manifest water kami may move to a target within range 0–2. The target must attempt to resist with a **TN 4 Fitness check (Water 6, Earth 2)**. If they fail, the water kami wraps itself around their head and the target begins suffocating (see page 269 of the core rulebook). The target may attempt the resistance check again at the end of each of their turns.

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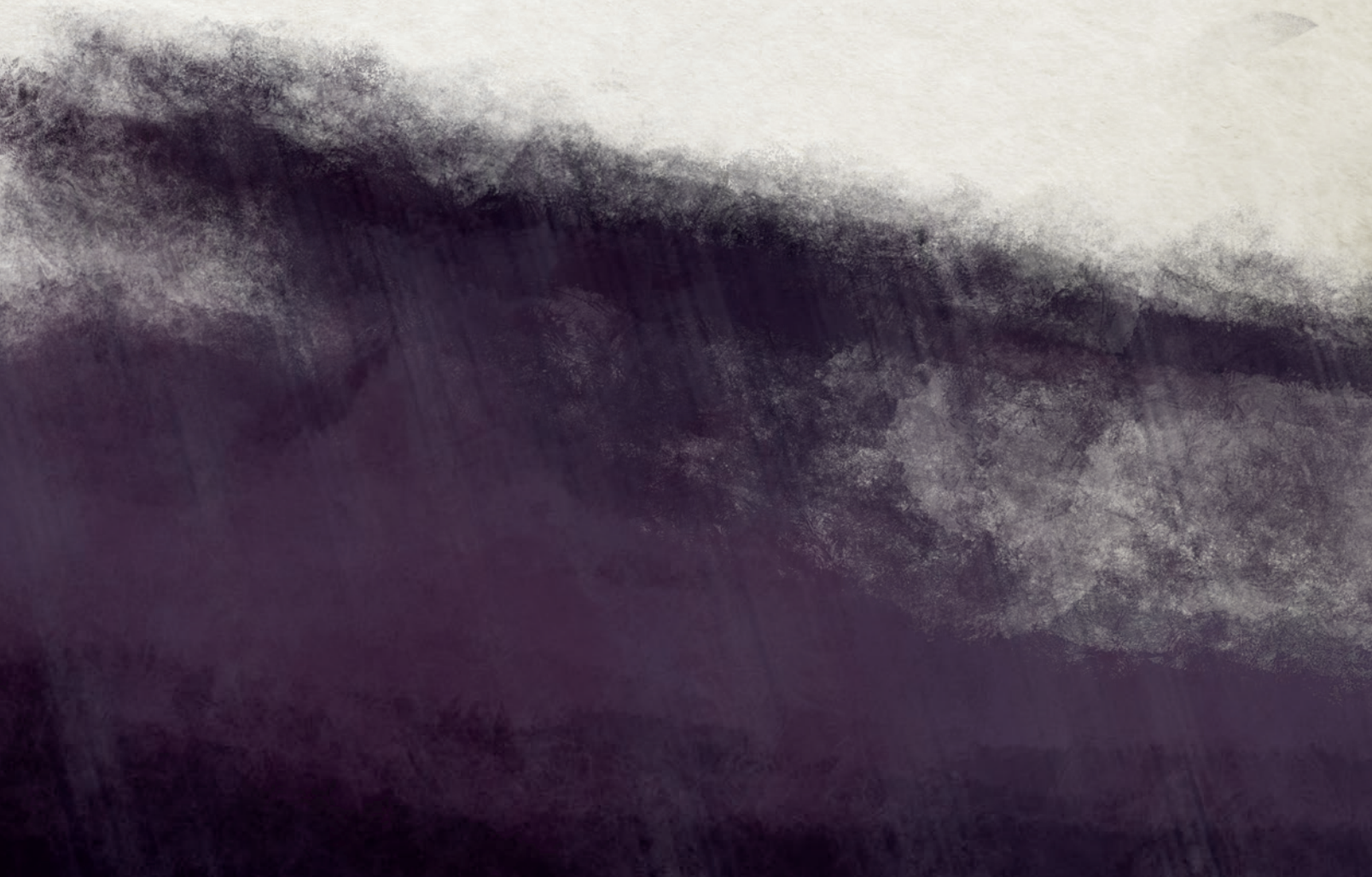

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