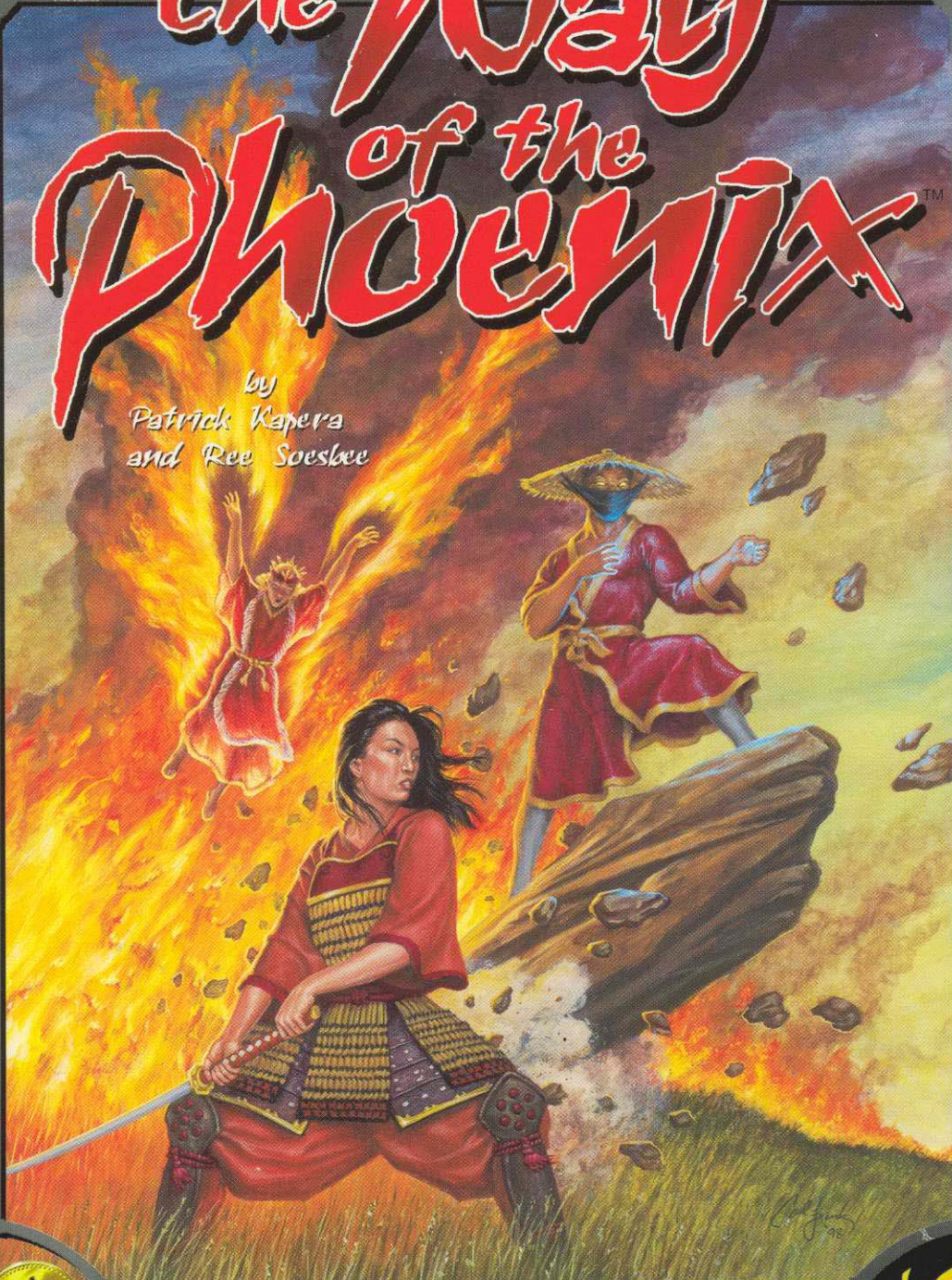


The Way of the Clans: Book Seven

The Way of the Phoenix™

by
Patrick Kapera
and Ree Soesbee



Legend of the Five Rings™





Legend of the Five Rings

The Way of the Phoenix



*"If you are willing to sacrifice yourself for all things,
then you can be trusted with the world."*

– Shiba



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Ryan gave us the kick-start we needed, and provided constant inspiration, even from afar.
Marcelo wrote "Dueling Shugenjas" (Insert banjo music here, please).
Jim wrote numerous battles and ancestors, and reminded us not to put his name in capitals (which we did anyway - sorry, Jim). 030272/092495
Jennifer again gave definition to the undefinable. Her treatise on Void Magic shaped the shadow.
Scott provided enthusiasm and raucous cheers, as well as a battle or two.
Ross gave us thousands of incredible ideas about the monks, and defined Shinseism in Rokugan.
D.J. wrote the spell creation rules and kept our ramblings coherent.
Dave made rules suggestions and boiled Chapter Three until it was nice and tender.
Ben committed 'artistic *seppuku*' by completing nearly all the artwork in the book outside of Chapter Four, in just three short weeks. We love you, Ben, and we hope your wife is speaking to you again.
Cris followed through with the 'legacy of Chapter Four,' making all of the Who's Who characters come to life, and giving them the personality we almost managed to put in the text. Also, she didn't laugh at us when we told her the art deadline.



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The Measure of Mortality

Shiba sat calmly, listening to the monk's words of wisdom to Emperor Hantei. He was scarcely conscious of the writing quill in his hand as it scrawled the half-understood sentences across a sheet of crisp rice paper. A single, low-burning candle lit the Imperial Throne Room, casting wavering shadows between the thick tapestries upon the walls.

"Hantei," the small man who had introduced himself as Shinsei continued, "I have enjoyed our time together immensely, but I ask again - will you let me take seven warriors into your brother's realm?"

Hantei reclined in the deep seat, running his forceful fingers below his chin as he considered the request. Several hours earlier, the conversation had begun with the same words, and though many, many had been said since, none had weighed as heavily upon the Emperor as those.

A long stillness fell over the room, and Shiba looked down at the stack of blurry pages he had written. *If every rice paddy in the Empire were sacrificed for paper, we still could not capture the sum of this man's wisdom*, he thought. And as he looked up, he noticed that Shinsei was looking at him. The wise man's eyes penetrated her like the sharpest blade, yet cut with the delicate grace of the finest geisha. He was gently probing the Kami for...

"I will grant your appeal," Hantei began. "My brothers and sisters will be gathered at once."

"I'm afraid that cannot be," Shinsei countered. "Only the Children of the Earth may combat Fu Leng and win."

"Mortals?" Hantei asked.

"Precisely. 'Fortune favors the mortal man,' Hantei. They are the future of this world. They are the ones who must fight for it."

Hantei was silent for another long moment. The decision to send mortals into Fu Leng's realm weighed heavily upon him. But he had been taken by this little man's knowledge. Easily the finest warrior he had ever seen, and doubly so the most learned, the words he spoke were true. The Emperor knew this in his heart.

"Agreed," he said finally. "You may have your warriors - chosen by the Kami from among their provinces."

"I must choose them." Again, the little man surprised Hantei.

"Very well."

Shinsei bowed his head low before the seated man, and his eyes darted suddenly back to Shiba. The Kami was unsettled by his stare, as if his right to exist there in that place, in that time, was being challenged. Then Shinsei rose and turned to leave, touching Shiba kindly upon the shoulder as he passed.

When Shiba stood, the prophet observed his night's work. Picking up one of the brittle pages, Shinsei asked, "Do you know what this is, Shiba?"

"It is a record of your talk, Shinsei," he responded.

"No." The word carried more import to Shiba than any of the last several hours. It shamed him with the weight of ignorance. "To you, this is only the present, a single evening's labor to be passed on to another for transcription. But to those who will come later, this is history. Mistakes made, glories hallowed, battles won and lost... lessons learned."

Shinsei's eyes focused into Shiba's again, conveying a message: *You cannot appreciate history, because you will live forever.*

"We must teach them to remember what has come before, so that we can improve the future. They must be part of what they are struggling for, or they will never prevail."

That is why you cannot fight Fu Leng.

"Come, Shiba. I will need your help to finish this."

"To finish...?"

"Reconciliation."





Shiba trudged onward through the blasted landscape, eyes level with the horizon. He couldn't afford for them to shift, or the dark influence of this place would seize them and never let go. He walked in the the same stance he had assumed so many days before, carried his sword in the same defensive position. He could not afford to stop, or sleep, or think. If he did, Fu Leng's realm would destroy him.

He did not allow himself to consider the condition of Shinsei and his last remaining charge, nor how they had fared since the Isawa had discovered their presence in the Shadowlands a lifetime ago. Sworn to defend the Isawa and serve the needs of the Children of the Earth, the task had fallen upon Shiba. To find the lost Thunders, and bring them back to the land of the living, Shiba must go into his Dark Brother's realm. He only thought of their safe return, but Shinsei's words still haunted him, with each step he took through the blasted land.

...you cannot fight Fu Leng.

Shiba had known when he entered the Shadowlands that he was doing so at immense personal risk. He did not think about whether he would be coming back. Yet now, out in the black, shattered wilderness, he began to doubt that he would ever see his brother's Emerald Empire again. And Asako's face continued to haunt him...

Ahead, within the shelter of two great and jagged spires of rock, Shiba heard the sounds of combat. A blast of fetid air suddenly exploded from within, lighting the sky for miles in every direction. Fighting down the urge to turn back, Shiba forced his way up and into the mouth of the unnatural structure.

Within, curled into the apex of the stones, was a multi-limbed creature whose skin seemed to have been flayed away, leaving only rancid strips of grey membrane strapped over its pulpy underskin. An Oni, but just not any demonspawn. This beast was the first of its kind and the most powerful creature in Fu Leng's realm. Behind it stood two figures, one Shinsei and the other unrecognizable behind a mask of blood. As Shiba strained to see, a portion of the beast's belly twisted toward him and eyes erupted from within it, observing the new arrival with a startling objectivity.

Shiba braced, prepared to engage the Oni, but was surprised to see it jerk backward, recoiling at some attack from below. Losing its grip upon the

stone, the Oni crashed down into the bitter earth before him. Shinsei's blood-soaked companion pounced upon it, brandishing a crimson wakizashi. Three arcing stabs ripped into the Oni's back. With a howl, the First Oni's belly tore again, and an arm reached to grasp the man in the rainbow cloak, crushing his ribcage before carelessly tossing him at Shiba.

Him. Her. Shosuro. The bloodstained face was its own mask, and as Shiba looked down upon the slowly rising mortal Thunder, he saw no fear in her eyes.

Shiba heard the obscene shifting of the Oni approaching. Raising his katana as high as he could, he brought it down into the disgusting mass. The edges of the cut curled back upon themselves in its wake, revealing a dark purple interior that pulsed to a jagged, irregular beat. Hesitating only a moment, he continued his assault, swinging back and forth as forcefully as he could manage.


He could see Shosuro, her wakizashi in hand, thrusting and sweeping to the side. She was covered in blood - blood which appeared to be the Thunder's own. He hoped he was wrong.

A moment later, without warning, a large fist formed of the creature's flesh burst out from within its wounds. Shocked at the amount of strength and substance left in the First Oni, Shiba struggled to free himself from its malignant grasp. His sword had fallen to the ground somewhere beneath him, and his fingers worked in vain to find purchase on the fleshy column's surface.

First a harsh tingling, then an agonizing fire swept across his skin, as he realized his flesh was melting away. His chest was an inferno of pain as nerves and muscle first numbed and then dissolved. He fought to remain calm, rational, focusing on the problem, not the symptoms, but Shinsei's words kept returning to him through the haze of agony.

...you cannot fight Fu Leng.

Through a rupture that formed in the Oni's mid-section, its eyes appeared once more, projecting out from it upon long stalks of rigid purple tissue. They advanced until they were level with Shiba's own and then... blinked. The casual, uncaring way in which the First Oni was killing him finally took hold, provoking Shiba into wrathful action. Taking a firm hold of both stalks behind the bulbous whites, he yanked to the side, ripping them free from the main body with a single, violent motion.



Immediately, the mass of its flesh retreated, dropping him roughly into the ground. Whipping about and wildly sprouting random limbs, the Oni lashed out at anything around it. It made a sound like that of a dying horse as it knocked aside one of the stones and leapt free of the ebony prison. Its terrible screams of agony could be heard for many long minutes after while it shambled across the dead countryside, preparing to die. Even now, smaller creatures gathered, following it. Preparing to feast.

Shiba collapsed into a shattered heap. Through a reddish haze, he saw a small form approaching, and heard the wings of a crow. Hushed words flowed like cool water into his remaining ear. *"Shiba..."*

It was Shinsei.

"I am dying," Shiba muttered through moments of anguish.

"No. You may not live, but you will go on."

Confused, Shiba peered through the growing darkness, feeling his body beginning to choke. Breath became a labor, and each second stretched into eternity. Eternity...

"You have learned the measure of mortality. Now you must learn its secret..."

With that, Shinsei leaned closer, until he was almost touching the fallen Kami. His voice continued to echo in Shiba's mind, whispering a long and complex litany. As he continued, Shiba saw the world contract, and the stars begin to draw close. The earth and the sky - mortal and immortal - and the Path between the two. For a startling second, an infinite, celestial walkway hung before him. A Path that mortals would not be ready to venture upon for ages to come, but one that could not be ignored. In Shinsei's words, Shiba found the truth of man's beginning and its end, and every point in between. He saw the challenges they would face, and knew how they would overcome them. He saw the face of every human who would ever live, and knew the final fates of all. He was suddenly one with the entirety of human existence...

...and, for the first time, he understood why they were so important.

They needed a protector.

A guardian.

A guide.

Shiba had sworn to defend humanity. Now, he must prove that his word was good... for eternity.

"You will take the Thunder - and what I have given you - back to the Empire."

I cannot... thought Shiba, but his voice had already ceased. His body felt no more pain, and only the Path hung before him, a thousand stars in a savage, black sky.

"You must."

Weeks later, Shosuro stumbled out of the Shadowlands. Shinsei and Shiba were nowhere to be seen.

Except by Shosuro.

"Shiba..." She murmured as she fell to her bloody knees outside Otsan Uchi. The crowd gasped and fell back. Bayushi stepped forward to take her into his arms.

"Shiba is not here, daughter..."

Shosuro smiled. "You are wrong. He is everywhere." She looked into the sky, and then her eyes fell upon a young man who had carried her into the Imperial City. As she smiled, he bowed, and vanished into the unsuspecting crowd. Shiba, whose spirit watched over the scene of her death with a proud, fulfilled gaze, had brought her home.



The cool night air tugged at Asako's mind. Weary from a day of celebration, she found it difficult to focus. The Empire rejoiced in its salvation, its victory over Fu Leng, but Asako could only weep at the terrible losses of the war. Further, the wedding of her son and Isawa's daughter was only a few weeks away, and her mind felt numb and drained after hours of contemplating the complicated angles and uncomfortable presence of their wedding gift. She was sure that once it was complete, it would be more... appealing, but in its present state, it was like staring into the heart of the sun during an earthquake.

She closed her eyes, hoping the dizziness would pass.

"You always looked lovely in the moonlight, Asako."

The voice was eerily familiar, and made her forget the dull ache in her head. Suddenly alert, she bolted upright and whirled around to face the intruder. Standing before her was a man she did not know. His hair was black, and long, and his face bore the features of Shiba's children. He wore the colors of the Phoenix, but he had never come to her before. Yet his eyes... his eyes looked for all the Empire like those of her dearest friend.

"Shiba...?"

"Asako, I have something for you," the voice was the same.

"What?" She tried desperately to rationalize what she was seeing, hearing. "How can you be here? You look like Tsuzaki..."

"I am many things. I am Shiba, and yet I am Tsuzaki, son of Shiba. We are... both."

"How can this be...?" Her voice trailed off as the realization sunk in. "You never returned from the Shadowlands."

"I have something I must give you."

Asako's next question dwindled into a silent stammering. She found herself suddenly captivated by her old friend's voice. It was like falling into a deep chasm, and watching the sun's light blotted out beyond the shrinking rift above. Every word unlocked lost truths within her that she could not, should not understand.

"Asako, you must listen to me very carefully. I have been given a gift that mortal man must know and charged with the choice of its human guardian. Someone must protect the knowledge until the rest of you are ready for it. Someone must guide all of you down the Path."

"What..." Asako tried desperately to bring questions together, to make Shiba explain, but she was now completely enraptured with his words. They crept into her and began multiplying, merging to form new ideas - concepts she didn't grasp, but could see in her mind's eye.

"Humans are the key to greatness, Asako. They alone can stand against the forces that will threaten the Empire. They alone will be able to forge history, and understand the measure of mortality. I am here to show you how to guide them.

"I am here to give you the future..."



Welcome to the seventh book of our *Way of the Clans* series. *Way of the Phoenix* is designed to help Game Masters to complete their vision of the most magical clan in the Emerald Empire - The Phoenix. Until recently, all visitors to this secretive land have been treated with gentle contempt hidden under veils of courtesy, but now, the Council of Five has opened the borders of their provinces. Many view the Phoenix with fear and hatred, condemning their strange practices and ardent studies as the work of cowards and pacifists. Some even whisper that their research

into forbidden lore has tainted the souls of the Elemental Masters themselves.

The truth to that does not lie in this book, although you may discover hints to some of the Phoenix Clan's greatest secrets here. *Way of the Phoenix* is not the final word on the powerful clan of shugenja, but rather presents some information which your Game Master may find useful to his or her own campaign. As usual, the Game Master has the privilege of determining the powers and mysteries of Rokugan's greatest spellcasters. You may find that their version of the Phoenix is different from what is presented here, and that the secrets which we've shown are not the darkest wisdoms hoarded by the clan of Shiba.

In this book, you'll find insight into the views which the other clans hold of the Phoenix, including their travels through the distant provinces of the Empire; the history of the Phoenix, from the day Isawa refused to swear fealty to the Children of the Sky to the formation of the Council of Five, and the bonding of the Isawa, Shiba, and Asako forever into one clan; and all the rules and guidelines you'll need to make your own unique Phoenix characters, including new skills, advantages and disadvantages, and the new Isawa *Ishiken* and Asako *Henshin* schools, plus elemental specialists and the all-new mechanics for shugenja duels.

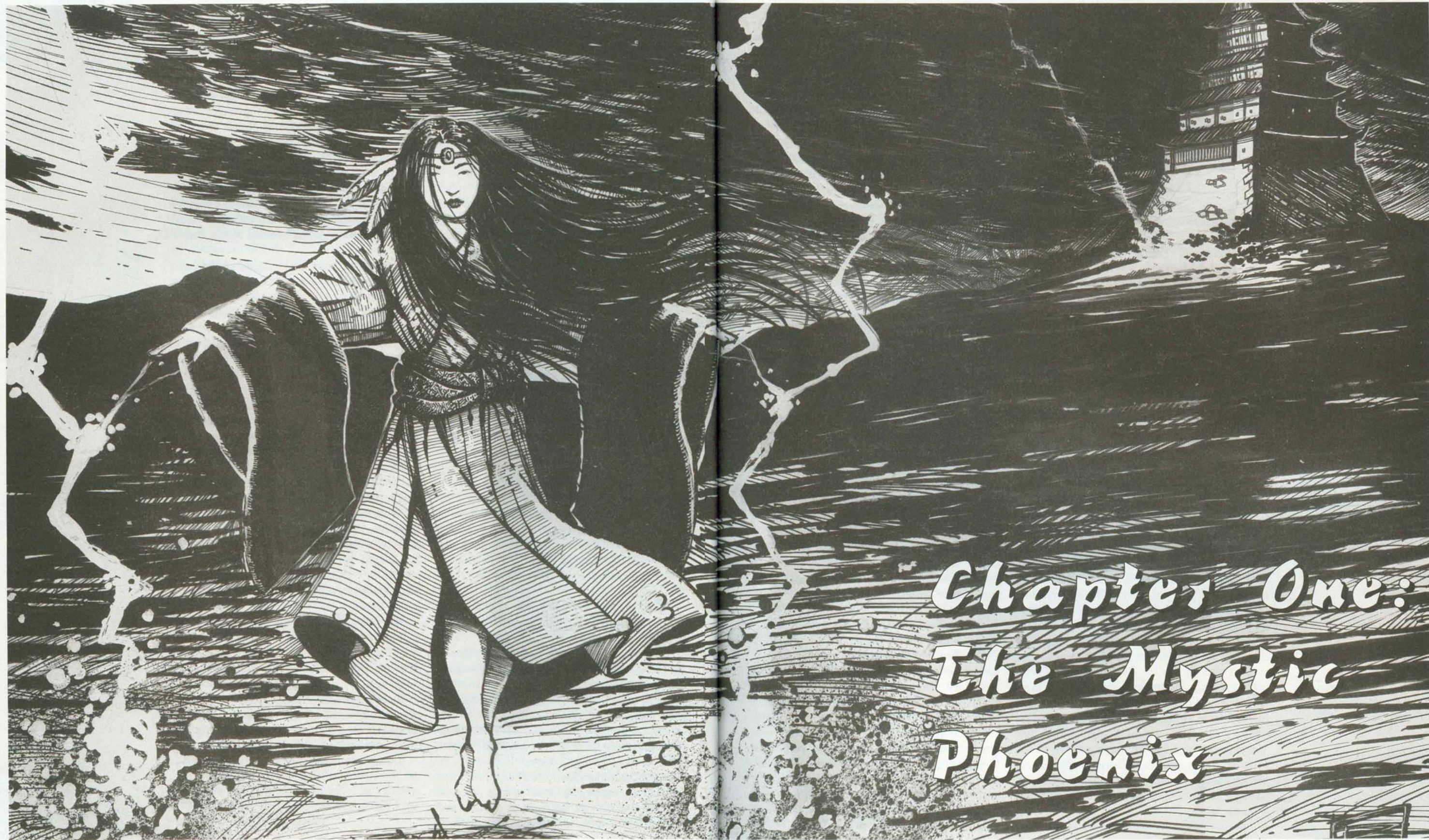
For a thousand years, the Phoenix have stood on the border of this world and the Celestial Heavens, refusing to accept only one Way. The Isawa Masters have had the strength to defy all those who would tell them where their path lies, and forged their own truths from the bitter realities of war and darkness. The Phoenix Clan holds the secret of magic, and the true power of mortal man.

Are you prepared to risk your mortality to understand their darkness? Are you ready to learn the secrets of a thousand years, and face the next age with the knowledge that you will be condemned for all that you have done?

Don't fear death - these are the lands of the immortal Phoenix, bringer of the Sun. The only things you have to fear are the truths which hide inside your soul.

Immortality is just within your grasp.





*Chapter One:
The Mystic
Phoenix*



SHUGENJA AND MONKS

Although the distinction between shugenja and monks is tenuous, the people of Rokugan are quick to point out that they are not in any way the same.

While a monk is the keeper of a temple or sacred place, a shugenja is bound only to his spells. A monk focuses on *kiho*, the essence of focusing body chi, while a shugenja's studies led them to the *kami* for guidance and power.

Other differences include their study of the Tao – while a shugenja studies the

Tao for its lessons on wisdom and knowledge of man, a monk studies the

Tao to understand the riddles of enlightenment. A shugenja is not typically seeking to be enlightened, only to exist in harmony with her fellow man.

Lastly, a monk must obey the oaths of the monastery he or she belongs to, from chastity to ritual purification. Unless a shugenja is currently under oath as from an apprentice to a Master, they are free to live their lives as they see fit. While a monk owes no

fealty to a *daimyo*, a shugenja has all the responsibilities and prestige of a member of the samurai class, and are treated as such by the peasants and others they encounter.



Chapter One: The Mystic Phoenix

The following treatises have been written by members of the many clans of Rokugan, detailing some of their experiences with the mysterious Phoenix Clan. Although the Phoenix are reclusive, they are not complete hermits, and stories of their Elemental Masters are popular children's tales around the fire. The stories below were written by those who know only what the Phoenix choose to tell. Pay close attention to the lessons they teach, but remember: as magic is formed by the will of the caster, all legend is shaped by those who tell the tale...

FROM THE JOURNAL OF IDE AMU, FIRST AMBASSADOR OF THE UNICORN TO THE PHOENIX

With a sore heart, I arrived in the lands of the Phoenix, not knowing what I might find there. The stories of their strange practices and odd rituals had reached us; even during the War upon our return, the Phoenix spell-crafters hurled down the elements as if they owned the sky and sea. Our own shugenja have not such strength, and it is said that our understanding of the Tao of Shinsei is different – corrupted, the Rokugani claim, by our long travels.

They also say that the Phoenix can assist us in understanding the strange culture of this new land. Our relations with them have been sporadic. In the court of the Emperor, they spoke against us, saying that our claim to Shinjo's blood was 'blasphemous' and that we were a threat to the Empire. Their shugenja fought against us, claiming loyalty to the Hantei line and defense of Rokugan, while their pitiful armies remained far from the battle.

We have seen nothing of these Phoenix save their tremendous, arching spells in the night. Such an opponent – one who fights from afar – cannot be respected or feared, but only pitied. The stories of Mekhem and the words of Shinsei both speak scornfully of such a foe; shall we not learn from their wise words?

Yet I had been sent, the ambassador to this new world, to visit each of the clans in turn and learn their histories. In this way, the noble Emperor claimed, the Unicorn can truly return to this land, our ancestral home. I journeyed to the lands of the Crane, and was greeted with brotherhood. From the Scorpion and the Lion, nothing but scorn and an obvious desire to steal away our treasures. Who could tell what kind of reception I would receive from these self-appointed 'masters of magic'?

I approached the castle of the Shiba with my entourage, an Otaku battle-maiden and my old friend, Iuchi Tagiso. The Otaku spoke of strange feelings brought on by the winds of the night. Foolishness, I claimed, and we traveled onward. Yet, even in the day the darkness seemed to press closer in these haunted lands, and the feeling of being watched only grew stronger with each passing step.

We stopped to rest within a great box-canyon, a pass through which the road wound. Though the path was small (no more than two men abreast, or one of our great steeds, could pass through many areas), it seemed to bear the marks of frequent passage. The walls of the pass were hewn from the tremendous mountain by a force more powerful than the most earnest miner, worn smooth by wind and carved with figures of gigantic men and women. Each one seemed to be hundreds of years old, and my friend Tagiso approached them with nothing short of awe.

Each one stood nearly forty feet tall, with eyes carved deeply into the shale and white marble. Their robes flowed in granite waves from their upraised arms, and their monstrous visages hung suspended from the walls of the pass like abandoned specters of ancient heroes. We walked beneath them – or perhaps, among them – with reverence and awe, unable to comprehend what force had carved them, or for what purpose. If these strange monoliths were the work of the Phoenix, then perhaps they could tell us of their creation. We continued in this manner for nearly three days, past thousands of unknown faces and looming figures.

Weary and restless, we hurried our steeds through the pass, hoping that with each turn we had come to the ending. The Otaku rode ahead, keeping guard, and I rode with Tagiso. "Sake?" he offered, and I was glad to accept, as the day was warm, and the heat had become oppressive. As I lifted it to my lips, however, I heard the Otaku cry out. In a widening of the ravine, sat a small man wearing a silken robe of Phoenix colors. Although his form was slight, he blocked the narrow path, and we could not pass.

The Otaku approached warily, but the man never moved. Even his eyes never blinked from their study of the rocky slope before him. I heard their conversation from the back of my steed, but the man's words seemed only to enrage my escort, and she pressed her steed closely against the wall of the chasm. Her horse's hooves striking sparks from the loose shale, the Otaku challenged the man for the right to pass beyond. Wary, but desperate to prevent bloodshed between our clans on the eve of our new friendship, I pressed past the Iuchi and lowered myself to the ground. As I approached, I heard the shugenja's voice, low and even, speaking loving, entrancing words to the Otaku.

Flattery. He must have been mad.

Her sword-hand flinched toward her daisho, and her face reddened. "Defend yourself!" she cried, and with a swing, her sword leapt for the man's throat.

A resounding crack, a ringing as wide as the heavens, and the blade of her sword fell to the ground, severed as if she had struck the face of the marble pass itself. She faltered, her skin turning white as her ancestors' souls shrieked within her, and I stepped forward as she sank to her knees.

"Who are you?" I asked of the man.

"My name is not yet important, Amu-san," he spoke, and I could hear the smile in his words. "Oh, yes," he said to my surprised look, "we knew you were coming, and we have prepared for your visit."

At this, Iuchi Tagiso murmured into my ear, "It may be a trap. Be ready." From my feet, a strange echo came from the stone, and I heard his words reverberate eerily, much louder than intended. I looked at the man in the path, his eyes still staring at the stone wall, and I knew he had heard the exchange.

"It is a trap, Iuchi." The Phoenix murmured, and for the first time, I saw his eyes. They shone

an eerie green, glowing as if formed from twin orbs of jade. Merciless, they bore into my companion's soul, and he stepped back. "But not one of my making."

"What..." whispered Tagiso, "What are you speaking of?"

"Why don't you rest, my friends," the Phoenix's voice suddenly took a friendly tone, "and have some sake?"

"What?" said I, confused, but I saw my companion's eyes widen. The Phoenix made a gesture, and of its own accord, the sake canteen leapt from my hand, springing to Tagiso's feet.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Tagiso's voice shook, and I turned to look at his face. White, pale fingers reached for my shoulder





as he stepped away from the canteen on the ground.

"Better yet," hissed the seated shugenja, "feed it to your horse, that we might watch its belly burn. And when its tongue is black from the poison, you can tell your master why you trusted the Scorpion when they spoke of peace."

"Tagiso, is this true?" I said. "Is the sake poisoned?"

"No, no, of course not."

Something in his voice made me pause. Some subtle nuance that I had not heard before echoed through the chasm, and the voices of the monolithic figures seemed to whisper in unison. Tagiso stepped back, faltering. "No..." I could not tell if the whisper was his, the gigantic figures', or my own.

I scooped the leather canteen from the ground, and held it to him. "My friend..." His eyes were cold and frightened. "Drink the sake."

"You trust the word of a Phoenix? A sorcerer?" Another step back, toward the figure of a tall man in armor, a giant stone carving towering twenty feet above us. "Over my own?"

And somehow, I did. Perhaps it was my own failing, or perhaps the strange shugenja had cast some spell over me which dulled my emotions, but I stood and watched as Tagiso drank the bag

dry. And when his convulsions were done and the blackened body lay in a heap at the feet of the gigantic warrior on the cold rock face, I knew who had spoken the truth.

The Otaku still knelt beside her broken sword, rage and hopelessness warring on her young face. Beside her, the Phoenix slowly rose, and reached to join the two halves of the blade on the ground. "Stop!" she cried as his hands closed over the breach.

"What was broken by anger can be healed by trust." His eyes met hers, and she was frozen, as I had been, beneath his strange jade gaze. When he removed his hands, the blade was whole.

"Return to your people, Katsako, and tell them that Amu-san is safe with us."

Her eyes widened as she gazed at her family katana, and she reverently accepted it when he offered. "I was told to escort him through the entire journey. To the Elemental Masters..." she protested softly, out of duty.

"And you have done so." A strange voice rang from above, and I saw four figures standing in the high clouds above the mountain pass. "Now it is time for you to return, and for Amu to come with us..."

"...if he dares." The Master of Earth stood at my side in strange friendship.



I could see his smile beneath his wide-brimmed hat. "The journey is over, Otaku-san," I whispered. She bowed reverently, head turned to the ground in complete supplication.

"No, Amu-san," my new guide smiled. "The true journey is only beginning."

LETTER FROM HIRUMA TOJU TO AN IMPERIAL MAGISTRATE, REGARDING THE DEATH OF MATSU KAIKI.

My Lord,

I have been asked time and again to explain our involvement in the duel between Matsu Kaiki and Isawa Uona, both by those who were there and those who heard about it later. No one seems to be capable of understanding why a member of the Crab Clan would be willing to fight and die for one such as Uona. After all, we are "foul mouthed barbarians," despising the remainder of the Empire and lashing out at those who displease us. The Phoenix, on the other hand, are cultured and pacifistic, the antithesis of everything we supposedly stand for. Why, then, would we find them so agreeable? And why would we side with one of them against the Lion, a clan much closer to our outlook and ideals?

Uona herself provided as good an answer as any. Several years ago, her superiors dispatched her to the Crab land to collect her brethren Tadaka and bring him home. She came without a yojimbo or any of the other trappings of nobility. It was just her and the wagon driver, arriving to take the wandering Master of Earth back to the Phoenix lands.

It was obvious from the moment she arrived that she was a Phoenix. With her delicate skin and quivering eyes, she seemed as out of place on the Kaiu Wall as a peasant in the Emperor's court. The Phoenix hated violence, as everyone knew, and the appearance of one in the most brutal place in the Empire made for some shocked looks. My fellow bushi took note of her frail form. A little girl? On the wall? What an outrage! Did she think she was a warrior? Would pretty words and pacifism save her from Fu Leng?

Their words soon turned to insults, which they began hurling at her with vicious ferocity. They called her weakling, coward, shrinking quail. They challenged her to pick up a sword, then laughed at her when she demurred. They spoke with all the derision they could muster, and I dare

say were as intimidating as oni. With another Clan, the remarks would have sparked a duel or worse. But Uona just bowed silently and accepted it, neither condemning her tormentors nor speaking in her defense. The tears rolling down her cheeks testified to the effectiveness of the insults and their impact on her sensitive soul, yet she would not respond. She would not even open her mouth to speak.

Then it happened. A warning cry rose from one of the lookouts and all eyes turned to the Shadowlands. Somewhere in the fog, a scouting party was trying desperately to make their way to safety. Sounds of their hurried pace wafted through the air, as did the roar of their pursuers. Something was following them, something large and terrible and very angry. There were at least as many Oni out there as there were members of the scouting party, and they were growing closer. As the scouts stumbled into view, the creatures leapt upon them, rending and tearing with their great claws. The shouts became screams and blood began to flow like water, all in front of the bushi's horrified eyes. Archers on the wall took aim, but they were too far away to waste a shot. It seemed the scouts would die within sight of the wall.

No one noticed Uona until she had acted. Uttering a prayer to the Fortunes, she leapt above the ramparts of the wall and flew into the air. The wind picked her up in its mighty grip and launched her across the space. She landed before the carnage with the grace of a dancer and rose to face the rampaging Oni. They turned towards her with malevolence in their eyes, but she was unafraid. The tears dried on her cheeks, and she leveled her gaze at her adversaries. Before they could act, she flung her hand up, and shouted supplication to the spirits of the air. They came in a rushing whirlwind, matching the Oni's howl with their own. Their power darkened the skies and whipped the River of the Last Stand into waves of foam. Yet for all their strength, they were extraordinarily focused – the mighty winds which circled around the Oni didn't touch the Crab scouts just a few feet away.

Uona continued chanting and now the Oni felt the magic which she had conjured. They had ceased the assault on their would-be victims and turned to deal with this new threat. But they couldn't move. The air around them had become a prison, and blew with such fury that not even their mighty forms could stand against it. They tried to walk towards Uona, but couldn't lift their




THE OTHER CLANS

For nearly a thousand years, the Phoenix have immersed themselves in study – study of the Tao, of nature and spellcraft, and of those who surround them in the Empire. Because of their attention to detail and their understanding of human nature, they have some rather interesting views about the other clans.

Crab: "The Crab are the most ruthless, vicious, ill-bred members of our noble Empire – and with good reason. The dangers they fight each day provide safety and comfort for the rest of Rokugan. Each day, we rise to complete our learning, but they rise to battle and to war. Only their ruthlessness has enabled us to survive. They are to be commended and assisted... and perhaps taught a lesson or two."

Crane: "The Crane are most like us in the Emperor's lands. Their ways are noble, and their honor shines as bright as the sun. Yet they do not heed the most basic lesson of the Tao. 'Provide for others, that your own soul will be provided for. If they suffer from their greed, they are to be pitied. However, their strength in the court is not to be ignored, and their alliance with us has been profitable for both sides. If they can help us keep the Empire at peace, then we shall stand by their side.'"

(continued)



THE OTHER CLANS

Dragon: "The Dragon hide from the Empire, and because of that, they are loathed. Anyone who says that their soul is pure should not hide themselves in a gilded cage, but walk among others. As Asako said, 'An untested virtue is no virtue at all.' Perhaps they hide in their mountains because they do not want us to see their true face? Nevertheless, we shall soon have their secrets for our own..."

Lion: "Who can speak for the Lion when they will not close their own mouths? They are a clan of wandering braggarts bred for war. If they wish to test our resolve, we shall give them war. And when their little soldiers crawl from the battlefield with twisted flesh and shattered minds, perhaps then the Emperor's 'right hand' will be willing to speak of peace."

feet. They tried to wrap their claws around her, but couldn't move their arms. Then, as they snarled with hatred and impotent anger, the wind began to lift them off the ground. The hurricane pulled them up, first slowly, then faster and faster. As they flew up into the air, their howls turned to cries of surprise. They moved in a wide arc, like stones thrown at a distant foe. They flew through the sky until they were out of sight, landing some miles distant and away from the Kaiu Wall.

Only then did Uona's chants fall silent. She bowed low before the stupefied scouts, then knelt to assist the wounded. She remained with them for the rest of the evening until they were all safely behind the wall. The stammered thanks and whispered apologies seemed to affect her not at all; to her, the task was worth doing in and of itself.

I was not present to see Uona's heroism myself, but I heard about it from my brethren and believe every word of it. Not even the greatest Kuni could call such mighty spirits the way she did. More importantly, however, she exercised her power in such a way to meet her goals without compromising her philosophy. The Oni were dispatched and the scouts were saved, but without bloodshed. I know of no other clan whose philosophy can stand up to such strain. I know of no other clan who can exercise so much power with so much control. Such a clan – regardless of their philosophical differences – deserves the utmost consideration and respect. The Phoenix understand more about honor than any of the so-called "civilized" clans, and lack the galling hypocrisy of their peers.

So if a Lion samurai wishes to challenge their honor – be it Uona's or anyone else's – I will gladly defend it. And if the clucking hen's nest of Rokugani courts wishes to spread more lies about them, I will refute them with every breath I take. It is truly rare to find those in this world who practice what they preach; the Phoenix do, and are all the more admirable because of it.

OBSERVATIONS OF AGASHA TAMORI

She is a kind girl, this Phoenix, who has come to observe our paths. For nearly three months, she has been among us, struggling to understand our ways as we study hers. A strange competition has sprung up among several of the *ise zumi*, to see who will teach her the most about our clan. It is

good that we have visitors now and then. They sharpen our minds.

Late this evening, she came to my humble door. I found myself smiling as her young servant-maid bowed to beg my permission for the Phoenix maiden to approach. Eager to continue our conversations, I bid her enter.

But this was not like the other nights of sharp wit and courtier's games. Tonight Kaede seemed distraught, and her dark hair hung thickly about her shoulders. Managing an impeccable bow, she rose to greet me, but I waved her to the pillows by my side. Lifting my chopsticks, I speared a small piece of cucumber as she delicately reached for her bowl. Such courtiers, these Phoenix, for all that they know the mysteries of the Kami. If I had not known better, I might assume that the maiden beside me was a Crane. Hair, long and dark, and a hint of beauty to her face, did nothing to disguise the ready intelligence behind her black brows. Too much intelligence.

We spoke of Shinsei and Togashi, and the legends of our clans. "We are so alike," she said, hiding her thoughts behind a smile. "It is surprising that our clans have not grown closer."

"Do you think so?" I asked.

"Of all the Kami, only Togashi and Shiba knew the value of silence – Togashi when Shinsei spoke, and Shiba, when he was asked to kneel before Isawa," Kaede murmured. "We must learn from their sacrifices and their gains."

"Oh?" I hoped to draw her out, find where her thoughts were hiding.

"Togashi's tale shows the same sort of sacrifice. His determination to fast until he has discovered Shinsei's meaning is a sacrifice for the future of his clan, don't you think?"

I looked at her placidly, and silently lifted my cup to my lips.

She looked at me, her eyes dark. "Well, what do you think of the story?"

"What I think is not important. Togashi knows what he meant."

Her eyes closed, and she sighed. As our conversation continued, my concern grew. Something was very wrong, and she was hiding it. As I pressed with questions, Kaede became distressed. We spoke of the Kami at length, and she told me of the legend of Shiba. "He sacrificed his pride, his birthright, and at last, his life – all for the sake of the clan."

"And Shiba's choice has given you strength?" I asked.



THE OTHER CLANS

Scorpion: "No other clan has as many secrets as the Scorpion, and that makes them worthy of our respect. It does not, however, make them worthy of our trust. Their subtlety is their greatest strength, and we must be sure to have them on our side when the darkness rises again."

Unicorn: "They have a single advantage, and they have been shouting about it for centuries. Since they came to our Empire, the faith and trust of the old ways has been shaken, and their blasphemous babbling has been tolerated for too long. If they choose to leave behind the trappings of their 'other land', then we shall be glad to teach them the ways of civilization. Until then, let them keep their horses and strange clothing. They will learn too soon that their luck cannot last forever."

A moment. "No," she whispered. "It has given us something else."

I waited for her to continue, but she only stared out at the cold night as if she could see images upon the wind. At last, she spoke again. "What do you expect of your students here in the Dragon schools, Tamori-san?" Something in her voice chilled me, and her black hair hung like a frozen waterfall.

As a servant poured more sake into my glass, I stroked my beard and replied carefully, "Only what they are capable of."

She smiled, and a hint of sorrow spoke through her features. "How do you know what they are capable of?" She whispered, but her question was not for me, and so I did not answer. I could only wonder what her Masters had taught her, that brought such a strange mix of sense and absence to her eyes. At last, she returned, and her voice was stronger.

"Tamori-san," she said in a level tone, "You spent many winter months with us, and you were a very gracious guest. I hope we were gracious hosts."

Images of parties, revels, festooned ribbons through the brightly lit Phoenix halls, and tables of food that would rival the opulence of the Doji raced through my mind... and the libraries. Of all the things I had seen in the Phoenix lands, surely

their libraries had held the most mystery for me. I spent long days between those tall shelves, reading each scroll with reverent hands. The I remembered Kaede's young eyes as she stood beside her crippled father. The Master of the Void. All my research had been unable to discover his mysterious abilities, unable to reveal his true face. He knew what I was searching for, and yet he did not prevent me.

Instead, he sent his daughter to our lands.

"Yes," I replied. "Yes, you were."

"Did you learn anything while you stayed with us?"

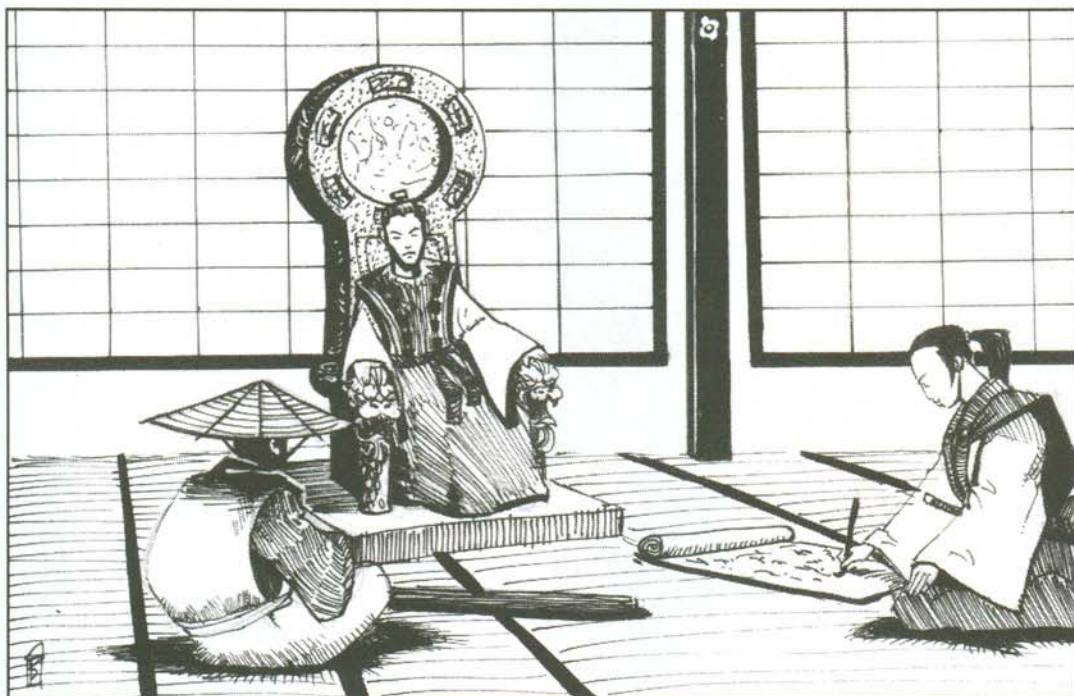
"Yes. Yes, I did."

"What did you learn?" She leaned toward me, the candlelight shining from her dark skin and her eyes open wide. Within them, the secret of the Void was hidden. So close, hidden within the deepest heart of a maiden half my age, and yet I could not grasp its meaning. Her soul, her father's soul... the blackness of the stars. Something...

Then it was closed to me. I smiled at my own foolishness. It was not yet time for me to know the truth.

"Patience." In the echo of my voice, I could hear the laughter of the elements.

We are not the only ones with riddles to solve... or secrets to hide.





Chapter Two



The History of the Phoenix




THE JADE CHAMPION

Long ago, the Empire was attacked by the great sorcerer, Iuchiban, and his bloodspeaker minions. In response to such flagrant use of *maho*, the Emperor Hantei commanded that a new position in his court be established: the Jade Champion. The responsibilities would include keeping the Empire safe from such evil magic, as well as maintaining a tight grip on all magic use in the Empire.

Needless to say, the Elemental Masters of the Phoenix were furious at the Emperor's decision. Such a post could only interfere with their own supremacy of spellcraft, and any non-Phoenix appointed to the post could rightfully ask to be made privy to the secrets of the Council.

At once, the Phoenix began to make plans for the removal of the position. Within five generations, the Jade Champion's post was empty, and the appointment all but forgotten within the Imperial Court. The responsibility had turned into a joke, and the secrets of the Council of Five were again the sole province of the Phoenix.



The Isawa

"All true knowledge has a price." – Isawa Tadaka

Of all the families of the noble Phoenix house, the Isawa are, by definition, the most prominent. For hundreds of years, the clan has been shaped by the will of the Council of Elemental Masters, the most powerful group of shugenja in Rokugan. While the role of a shugenja is typically that of passive advisor, for the Isawa, it means becoming one with the greatest powers of the universe.

HISTORY

Before the fall of the immortal Kami, the blood of the Moon fell from the heavens, mixing with the tears of the Sun. Between these two most illustrious substances, a bit of earth was caught, and the world was formed. Man walked upon the surface of the world, and the greatest of these was Isawa.

When the Kami gathered the population of the world together and divided them into clans, Isawa stood among them, watching carefully. When the first Hantei was crowned and the awestruck populace bowed before the Prince of the Heavens, Isawa did not bend his head to the ground. "What makes them worthy of our servitude?" he whispered to his brothers and sisters, and they nodded in unison. With that, they left the hill which was to become Otosan Uchi, and headed to the north, to begin their own city.

The city of Isawa was said to have been a large, sprawling complex of houses and huts, surrounded by a tremendous stone wall carved from the rocks by the power of magic. Although the studies of spellcraft in Rokugan were primitive, the creation of such a structure was surely seen as miraculous to the early people of

the Emerald Empire. This, combined with the location of the city in the high mountain range on the northern coast, kept it isolated from the spreading civilization. This is not to say that life in the city was uncivilized. Records in the Isawa libraries concerning this period contain numerous references to inventions, scientific and religious discussion, and the fervent worship of a pantheon of benevolent spirits known collectively as 'the Fortunes.' In fact, worship of the Fortunes has been carried down to common Rokugani culture, as the first and best beloved servants of Lady Sun.

While the other humans in Rokugan were content to be led by Hantei and his siblings, Isawa and his followers simply ignored the expanding Empire, spending their time in research and study of the world around them. Legend says that Isawa's younger brother first discovered the craft of magic, but that Isawa himself realized the tremendous potential of the art. "Now," said Isawa, "the Children of the Sky have no power over us. We, the Children of the Earth, are their Masters."

In the cold northern mountains, despite harsh conditions, the city thrived. Isawa saw this as another mark that mortals did not need the guidance of the Kami. "We can live in this world without their help," he said to his growing fellowship. "Is it not by the work of our own hands that we have survived and prospered?"

When the armies of Fu Leng invaded Rokugan from the corrupted fields of the Shadowlands, the people of the city of Isawa ignored the threat at first. Because it was so far to their south, and they were shielded by the young Empire, the danger of the invading horde seemed irrelevant to their peaceful tribe. Soon, however, the wandering groups of Oni and goblins made their way to the northern lands, destroying the peaceful villages and blackening the soil with their Master's foulness.

The spellcasters of the Isawa attempted to defend the city with magic, but it was clear that the overwhelming numbers of their enemy would take their toll; even their greatest shugenja could not maintain the fortification.

Perhaps their arrival was guided by Lady Sun, or perhaps holy Shinsei knew more about the city than he claimed. On the day that Isawa's youngest sister was killed by a marauding Oni, Shinsei and Shiba arrived to call Isawa to fight for the Empire. The daughter of Isawa met them at the gates to

the city, dressed in white, her hair torn in mourning. "My father cannot see you," she said to the visitors, but they did not heed her, and continued to the pyre in the city square. There, a strange sight met their eyes.

Around the fires stood the Isawa, their arms raised to the heavens, and their voices lifted in a strange chant. From their hands flowed blood as red as the setting sun. This was before the time of the great *maho-tsukai*, when the magic of blood was unknown to all but the greatest sorcerers. Isawa knew only that his magic was not magic of the Kami to whom he had sworn never to be a slave.

After the burial, Isawa, Shiba and Shinsei met in the gardens outside Isawa's home. Shiba asked how such foulness could be a tribute to the spirit of a beloved sister. Isawa answered only, "It is our way." Until that moment, the word 'maho' had never been used within the Empire. The creatures of Fu Leng knew nothing of blood magic, nor did the children of the Kami know its price. It was the Children of Earth who first unleashed this terrible dark power, not the servants of Fu Leng. Even after the primitive Isawa foreswore its use, centuries later a man known as Kuni Nakanu researched methods of blood magic which raised maho from a primitive art to a destructive evil force.

With *maho*, Isawa had learned the techniques to bind an immortal soul to the material world. In the fields of Isawa's lands, united around the castle, stood the spirits of the fallen, risen with blood and bound to the walls themselves. "Without the strength of our brothers and sisters," said Isawa, "we cannot hope to survive this evil which you have brought upon us. It is the nature of the Children of the Earth to survive - no matter what the cost. If we sacrifice our very souls, we will preserve life for our children."

Shiba stepped forward then, and spoke. "If your concern is for the children, then be concerned not for their bodies, but for their spirits."

Before his words could spark disagreement, the small monk stepped forward. "Blood calls for blood," he murmured, "but there is another way..."

Isawa listened, and Shinsei spoke long into the night. By the time the moon set in the summer sky, a bargain had been made. Isawa would come with Shinsei into the darkness of the Shadowlands if Shiba would swear that he and his descendants would always protect the city. To cement this, Isawa swore his fealty to Shiba's line - but with a condition. "I am not your subject," Isawa thundered, "and I will not have my people believing that I have sold them into slavery. If I am to swear my children to your line, you must kneel before me as I offer service."

To another Kami, this request might have seemed preposterous - a son of Amaterasu bending down before a mortal. However, to Shiba, the price was low. By bending his knee, he would gain not only the powers, knowledge and strength of the Isawa family, but also a Thunder for the salvation of the Empire. It was a simple choice between his pride and the lives of thousands. Without hesitation, Shiba knelt, and Isawa gave him the oath.



THE JADE CHAMPION

(CONTINUED)

In order to ensure that the post of Jade Champion be forever lost, the Phoenix established a chain of elite shugenja, trained to deal with *maho* and similar magics. These groups, known as Inquisitors, still exist today, and maintain the control of the Elemental Masters over all spellcraft in the land.

The Inquisitors focus their investigations on any obvious use of *maho* or blood magic, destroying it wherever it is found. Uniting their efforts with those of the Kuni Witch Hunters, the Phoenix Inquisitors have proved an effective counter-measure against the incursions of *maho* which sporadically dot the lands of the Emerald Empire.



GISEI TOSHI

Just north of Pale Oak Castle, deep in the Isawa woodlands, there is a small road. It continues for many miles, twisting through the mountains and curving across countless *li* of hills.

Long after a common traveler would likely stop following the contrary little road, it ends as a broad tunnel.

Beneath the mountain lies another road, which leads to the most splendid city in the Phoenix lands. The city of Gisei Toshi (also called the City of Sacrifice, or Isawa's City) is a myth to many other clans, and the Phoenix like to keep it so. It has never been recorded on any map, nor do the Phoenix report its growth and population to the Emperor's census keepers.

The City of Sacrifice is warded from discovery by the powerful magic of the Isawa. It is the home of the greatest library of the Phoenix, and the final resting place of the Tao. No weapon is allowed there, for the Phoenix believe that to carry implements of war into the city of Shiba's Oath would insult the living spirit of that covenant.

To the south, on the fields of Ootosan Uchi, the threat of war grew nearer. Thousands died on the battlefield, Lion and Crab alike, defending the bastions of the Empire. As they fell back before a brutal assault, a tremendous light scarred the heavens above them. From the north, twenty shugenja flew, their robes fluttering in the wind which held them aloft. Their hands moved with dangerous incantations, and fire sprang from their fingers. Confused and unable to counter the sorcery, the Oni fell back from the battle, fleeing to their Master's side.

A KAMI ON HIS KNEES

When the news spread of the price Shiba paid for Isawa's help, the Phoenix Kami only smiled and said, "The arts of peace and war are like the two wheels of a cart which, lacking one, will be unable to stand."

It was Lady Doji who explained her brother's enigmatic words. "Shinsei teaches that man, not the Kami, have the power to change the world. Shiba's children will be the wardens of the world, not the makers of it. Their duty is more honorable than ours, for the Master teaches us to know all paths as one. Perhaps only Shiba understands this."

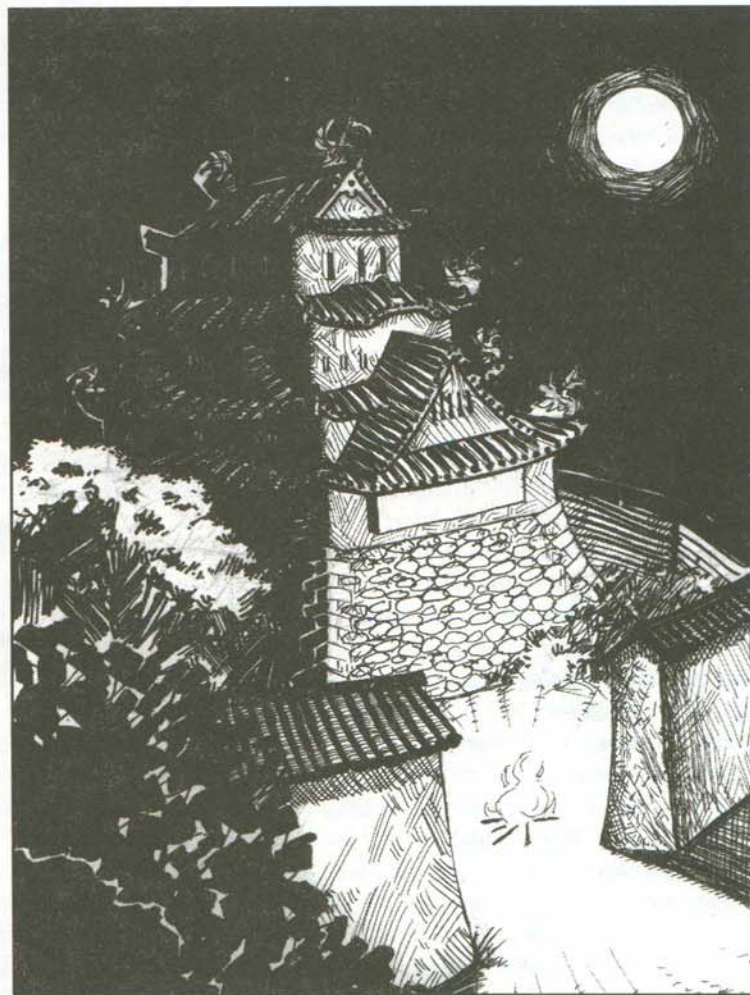
In many depictions of Isawa and the Phoenix Kami, Shiba is shown in the classic 'kneeling' stance - not out of disrespect for the Phoenix Clan, but to show his dedication to the defense of the children of Isawa. In fact, Shiba's kneeling is considered to be one of the most heroic and valiant moments of Phoenix history, and children of the clan who are too stubborn or prideful are asked 'are you so tall that you cannot bend your knee as Shiba did?'

GISEI TOSHI

From the day Shiba knelt before Isawa, the City of Isawa has been known as

Gisei Toshi, or the City of Sacrifice. After Isawa left to follow Shinsei and his Thunders into the Shadowlands, Shiba began to live in the great northern city with his new followers. Although the rest of the Elemental Masters tried to accept Shiba as a brother, there was always an amount of tension. That tension has continued through the centuries, and remains prevalent within the ranks of the Isawa family today. As each Shiba Champion comes before the Elemental Council and kneels to proclaim his right to speak for the clan in the courts of the Emperor, it is clear that the Isawa maintain control over the future of the Phoenix.

The Seven Fortunes of the Isawa were first worshipped in Gisei Toshi, and their statues stand there to this day. For hundreds of years, offerings have been placed at the feet of the gentle spirits, invoking their beneficial aspect, and warding off their wrath. Once the Isawa were brought into the



Empire, the worship of the Seven Fortunes spread, bringing their wisdom to the lands of Rokugan to stand beside that of Shinsei. To some, these fortunes are the lesser children of the Sun and Moon, while others believe them ancient heroes whose deeds have raised them to the Celestial Heavens. The Isawa, however, believe they are protectors and powerful spirits in whose hands the wheel of the world is spun.

For centuries the Seven Fortunes have been worshiped, and their temples rival even those of the Shinsei monks. Often, when nobles retire from life in the courts, they go to one of these temples to spend the rest of their lives in contemplation and prayer.

DEFENDERS OF THE REALM

Since the inception of the Phoenix Clan, the Isawa have taken on the role of the traditional 'guardians at the gate' of magical lore and knowledge. They protect inexperienced shugenja from stumbling onto unforeseen dark powers, and shield Rokugan from the terrors of *maho*. In their pursuit of this position, Isawa shugenja often travel the country, seeking lost knowledge, and maintaining information channels with the other schools of magic. Thus, it is common to see Isawa apprentices studying for short times with the other clans, learning their innovations and returning to teach them to their Phoenix brothers.

The Phoenix, and the Isawa in particular, are often criticized for their suppression of knowledge. Some say that entire rooms of the famous Isawa Libraries are devoted to *maho*, blood magic and Oni-summoning rituals, and that instead of destroying such foul knowledge, the Elemental Council retains it and examines its effects. Of course, the Isawa hotly deny such allegations, claiming that only scholarly texts on such matters remain in their care, and that the Elemental Council destroys such evil sorcery anywhere it can be found.

The tremendous resources of the Isawa to destroy such incursions is aided by the fanatic assistance of the Kuni Witch Hunters. Over the centuries, the two families have created an alliance in order to more effectively find and crush *maho* incursions when they arise. Between the efforts of the two clans, Rokugan has not had a major uprising of blood magic since the time of Iuchiban.

ISAWA TRADITIONALISM

Of all the clans, the Phoenix are the most traditional. Advocating the ways of life instituted by the first Hantei and his siblings, the Isawa maintain their lands without significant change from generation to generation. Because of their conservative views, other clans often defer to the Phoenix to settle disputes over the traditional way to handle matters. Where the Crane are masters of fashion and change, the Isawa maintain the measure by which change can be seen.

The Isawa are notoriously true to their word. If a treaty is made by an Isawa, it will be kept. When they do, they watch like hawks to be sure that the other side treats the agreement with as much respect as they do.


The traditions and ritual processes of clan, government and other facets of Rokugani life are dearly advocated by the Isawa, who believe that Shinsei taught all that mankind needed to know. Anything else is superfluous at best, dangerous at worst.

The Isawa Shugenja

"Power does not come from the heavens, my daughter. It comes from our minds, our hands, and our hearts. Never doubt that, for it is the greatest secret of the universe – we are not the servants of destiny, but the makers of the future."
– attributed to Isawa


The shugenja of the Phoenix are known throughout the Empire and beyond, and their prowess with the raw forces of nature are legendary. While some clans boast to be the most proficient in certain areas of spellcraft, only the Phoenix can claim to be the most universally skilled mages in the Empire. Certainly, their knowledge of the elements is miraculous, and their training – which begins before they can walk – is the most rigorous in the land.

The Phoenix maintain that all other shugenja schools in Rokugan owe their origins to the Isawa, for the Phoenix say that magic itself was discovered by the Isawa alone. If this is true, they shared the wisdom in small pieces throughout the Empire, for no other school has the complete spectrum of powers and abilities which they have mastered. The Unicorn? In Iuchi's notes, it says he was taught 'a few basic spells from Isawa.' Crane? The Asahina Temples owe their founder's life, and



GISEI TOSHI (CONTINUED)

Only the greatest allies of the Phoenix have ever been to Gisei Toshi, and each of them have sworn an oath to maintain the city's anonymity. When the Phoenix are asked about the story of Shiba and Isawa, they tell listeners that Gisei Toshi is intended to be an apocryphal tale, and that its meaning is but a parable.

A circular crest featuring a stylized phoenix in flight, set against a dark background with a lighter circular element behind it. The crest is framed by a decorative border.

that of his brethren, to the Phoenix. The Scorpion? The same. Although the Kuni, Kitsu, and Agasha may dispute the claims of the Isawa, it is certain that large portions of their magical aptitude were taught to them by aspiring Isawa shugenja, eager to display some new piece of lore or arcane knowledge.

Yet, of these, many have been offshoots of the Phoenix Clan which never returned to the fold. In the prophecies of Uikku, the Isawa believe that this is foreshadowed. *“When the Phoenix burns brightly in the sky, it must leave half its soul in ashes upon the earth. In this way will the flames of the Five cover the Empire in brotherhood...”* For each family that has left them, the Phoenix have gained a permanent link into the lives and children of another clan.

Originally, spellcraft was taught only to a few children in a generation. The ancient histories of the city of Isawa say that a great Festival was held every ten years, and children who showed the most promise were accepted as apprentices – one per Master. Never did the number of apprentices outnumber the Masters, and all tutorials were done orally. No records of the exact Festival or of the traditional training of such a shugenja remain in Rokugani libraries, but the brief details which

remain show that the Festival was a grueling and arduous process. Scholars believe it was designed to kill those who had the pride to attend, but who did not have the fortitude to master the rituals.

However, when the First War with the Shadowlands came, the Isawa traditions had to change. The advent of the Phoenix as a clan of the Empire brought new goals and ideals into Isawa culture. The Phoenix were expected to defend the Empire against the invaders, and to send healers and other magicians onto the field of combat, so that the minions of Fu Leng could be driven back. Isawa sent each of his five brothers and sisters to the Great Clans, leaving only the Scorpion without a teacher. These First Isawa educated the first shugenja of the Empire. Members of the Iuchi, Kuni, Matsu, Doji and Agasha families were all initiated into the path of the sorcerer, though the children of the Lion and Crane Clans had little success. Although these teachings were little more than rudimentary *kiho*, it was enough to support the Isawa in their contributions during the First War.

Records of all clans show that, without the magical support of the Isawa, the War against the Shadowlands would certainly have been lost, even before the Seven Thunders left upon their



quest. When the five brothers and sisters of Isawa lent their support to the cause, Fu Leng was unable to further the march of his armies into the green fields of the Empire. Though many died, it without the swift intervention of the Isawa, many more would have been lost.

THE ROLE OF THE SHUGENJA

Be a child of the Elements, and they will protect you. Be a friend of the Elements, and they will tutor you. Be a Master of the Elements, and they will guide you.

– Isawa Ujina

The role of a traditional shugenja in Rokugan is that of a wise man, a keeper of religious teachings and thoughts. They are expected to perform all the duties of scribe, priest, mouthpiece to the fortunes, and keeper of the secrets of the clan. When a shugenja enters a village, it is not uncommon for the peasants to offer a bowl of rice and tea to the wandering priest. Indeed, to refuse might result in ill fortune for the inhabitants, of it is believed that the Fortunes watch over their chosen children.

If a shugenja settles in a town or village, it is certain that they will be treated with great respect. As a village elder or headman, the shugenja will be expected to solve disputes, guide religious ceremonies such as the blessing of a house or newborn child, and teach the peasants of the words of the Tao and the worship of the Fortunes.

However, it should be made clear that shugenja are far more than wandering priests. They are respected, yes, but not simply for their wisdom and religious insight. A shugenja has the ability not only to speak to the *kami*, but to cause them to manifest. Fire from the sky, water from stones and other mysterious things occur when a shugenja asks the spirits to move in accordance with their will. Only one man in a thousand has this ability. Those trained to speak to the *kami* are a class above ordinary samurai. They are allowed certain privileges, so long as they do not abuse them. For while it is proper to speak to a shugenja with deference and respect, it would be inappropriate for that shugenja to ever take note of his position, or use it for gain in any way.

Shugenja, like bushi, are typically born into the samurai (noble) class. They are afforded all the privileges of rank from birth, educated and treated with respect from their first days of life. When they show signs of ability, the shugenja of

their household come to speak to the spirits about the child. If the response is favorable, the child will be taken to the schools of the shugenja, and trained there. It takes many years to learn the ways of spellcraft – not simply the calling of spirits and how to use their power, but the proper invocations and prayers. To be a shugenja is more than mere magic-using. It is the unity of your soul with the soul of the universe, and the ability to call upon the kindred spirits of the world for their willing aid and assistance.

A shugenja is not typically taught the ways of warfare and kenjutsu, but some houses prefer for their magicians to know something of defense. There is an ancient saying among the Empire, “*Let the man who wears the sword use the sword.*” If a shugenja chooses to wear a katana, they must be prepared to use it – in a duel, on the field of battle, or otherwise. If they do not choose to wear the sword, then they are stating that they are a non-combatant, and are treated with the same courtesy as a courtier or other peaceful profession. In this way, a shugenja who does not wear a katana may choose a champion to stand for her honor when she is questioned. She may refuse to fight in a battle, particularly if she is from the famously pacifistic Isawa family.

The Isawa view the craft of the shugenja as the highest calling a man can attain. They place it above that of noble rank or awarded honor, for they feel that anyone who has the talent to be a shugenja has been given the greatest gift of mortals – the power to control and command the world about them. They use their abilities for peace, and rarely enter warfare unless they feel that more lives would be lost by refusing to fight. Only in defense will an Isawa shugenja use his spells to destroy, and only when threatened will they be brash or foolhardy. Restraint and control are the heart of the Isawa shugenja. If a man cannot control his own desires, how can he perfect his spirit?

SHUGENJA AND WAR

For centuries, the Isawa have been staunch defenders of peace. More than even the gentle Crane Clan, the Phoenix has given their lives to prevent warfare, often interceding on behalf of an oppressed minor clan or *daimyo*. Their reason for this has always been an insistence that all life is sacred. From peasant to Emperor, each mortal life is a gift from the Fortunes, and no life should be thrown away for temporal reasons.

THE ISAWA MON

The *mon* of the Isawa may be the most widely known family symbol in the Empire, save only that of Hantei himself. Certainly, it is worn by hundreds of shugenja in all the clans of Rokugan, showing their ties to the teachers of spellcraft. Students who graduate from the Isawa schools, and even those who simply stay for a few years after their graduation from the schools of other clans, wear the mark as a badge of pride.

The *mon* bears the symbols of the Five Elements, symbolizing the arcane ties which the Isawa have to the *kami*. The spiral pattern indicates their belief that all things in nature are part of each other, bound by the fabric of eternity.



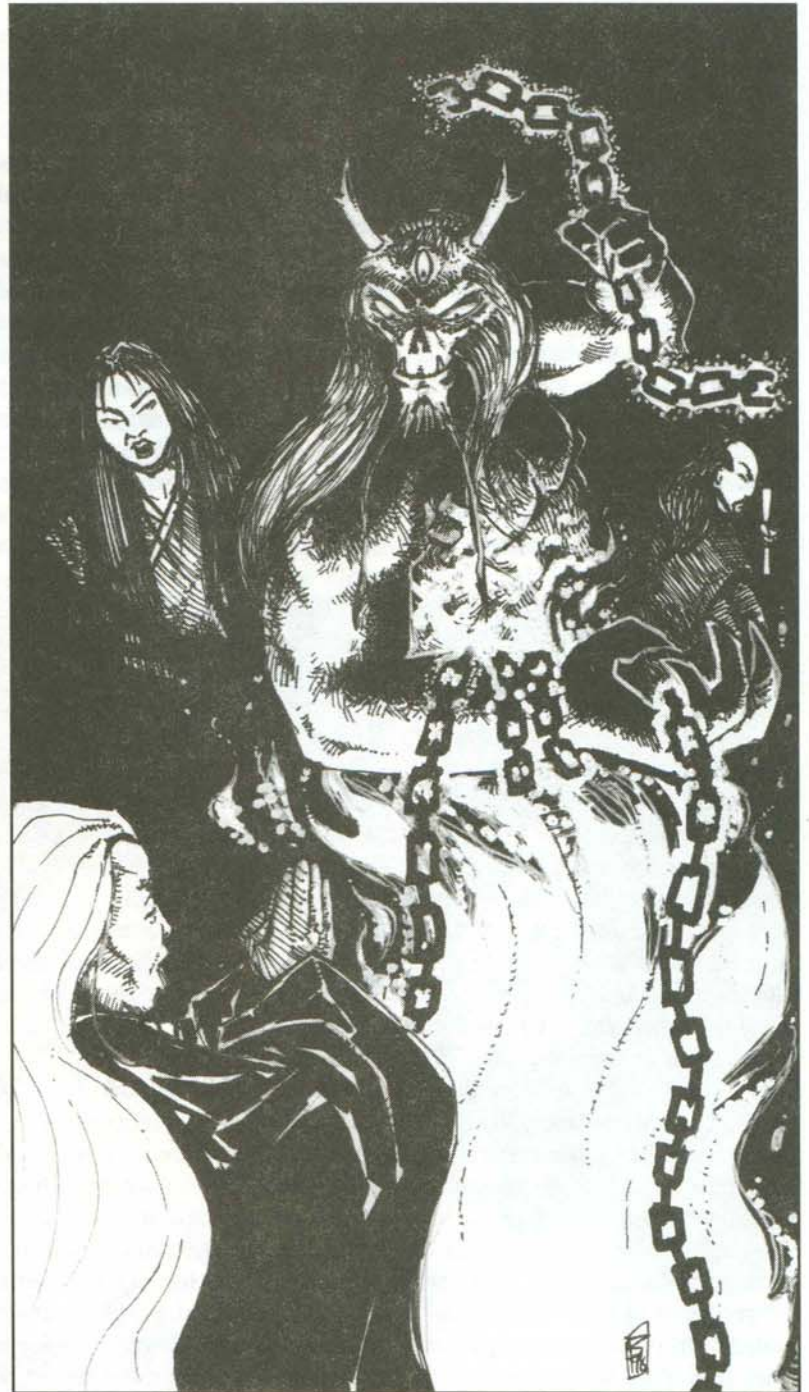
This attitude has gained the Phoenix many friends in distant clans, but those words often turn to bitter complaints when the target of Phoenix pacifism is a Lion stronghold or a Dragon outpost under assault by the Phoenix's allies. No ties of politics or family can sway a determined Isawa from attempting to find a peaceful solution to all difficulties.

This is not to say the Isawa are incapable of fighting. Unlike their southern cousins, the Asahina, the Isawa practice military maneuvers in their training, determined to make sure that if war comes, they can end it as rapidly and with as little loss of life as possible. Where the Asahina would surrender rather than kill, an Isawa will seek every method of peaceable solution, including the loss of his own life. If those methods do not work, an Isawa is willing to use binding spells, holding spells and other force to restrain or remove the problem. Only after all methods fail will the Isawa turn to violence. If the clan is to go to war, it must be done with a unanimous vote of the Council. Only under complete unity will the Phoenix take up arms as a clan. Let the Shiba alone deal with troublemakers, bandits and other difficulties requiring petty brutality; the Isawa are above such things.

The few battles in which the Phoenix have contributed are legendary for the swift and effective use of

crippling magical force. Certainly, their Elemental Masters are capable of great violence and ruthlessness, although they rarely utilize their potential for warfare.

At times, this pacifistic ideal has brought the Isawa to difficult circumstances. During the First War with Fu Leng, the Isawa turned to blood magic to defend their homeland, tempting fate



and karma rather than resort to open war against the creatures of Fu Leng. Afterwards, in the great battle of Sleeping River, the Isawa tried again and again to speak with the sorcerer Iuchiban, to resolve his desire to take over the Empire. In their negotiations, legend says they offered to ally with the Bloodspeakers if he would accept a reasonable compromise.

Although the Isawa are admired for their dedication to their peaceful ideal, their resolve can be as dangerous as the wars they attempt to avoid. Certainly, if Iuchiban had accepted Isawa Ryuiso's offer, history may have been a great deal different than we know it today. Some clans whisper that if another great war comes, it would be best to keep the Phoenix far from the battlefield - not only to save their peaceful intentions, but also to cut short their dangerous negotiations and willingness to compromise virtue in the name of peace.

Maho

We are monsters. We are nightmares. In the land of the spiritually blind, we are cursed to see clearly.

— Isawa Akuma

Long ago, legends say that the Isawa used the darkest of magics to defend their homeland. Sorcery of blood and sweat, defined by the summoning of creatures and rituals whose specifics are best left lost to time, were the magic practice of the ancient inhabitants of Gisei Toshi. Only after the coming of Shiba and Isawa's oath did they learn that such magic slowly corrupted the souls and turned the mind to evil. An old text reads:

"Once an animal has the taste of human flesh, it seeks it ever after. So, too it is with the dark sorcery known as maho, whose lure of blood and power is greater than the will of a human heart. Though you try to escape it, with each beat of your heart, it returns to haunt you. Though you have left it behind, it will never leave you..."

The 'sixth element', made up by the presence of Fu Leng, is said to be the element of corruption, and its power is great. Once a shugenja has been exposed to it - through the Shadowlands Taint or other means - he begins to manifest signs of corruption. Maho is not as obvious or visible as the Taint of the Shadowlands, but it is no less dangerous. In their thousand years of history, the

Phoenix have developed ways to identify and destroy maho magic and its users, for they believe that such spellcasters can never be truly turned away from the lure of the dark power. While the Kuni Witch Hunters are the masters of dealing with escaped Taint, it is the Phoenix who have gathered the greatest amount of information on maho. Often, Asako or Isawa shugenja spend years training with the Kuni, learning their methods of identifying the Taint. Then, with their own resources, the Phoenix turn that knowledge to finding maho within the Empire, and stamping it out with a ruthless might.

The two *maho-tsukai* best known to the Phoenix were Iuchiban, the ancient Blood Sorcerer himself and Isawa Akuma, who dedicated his studies to summoning and controlling great Oni. Although the Phoenix deny it, it is whispered that their libraries hold the diary of Iuchiban's first experiments, as well as several copies of his tainted scrolls and magics.

Akuma was a Phoenix shugenja who attempted to further the clan's knowledge by creating his own spells for entrapment and control of powerful Oni. His fate is well-known throughout the Empire, as is the terror which bears his name.

The most prominent documents about *maho* are the 'Iuchiban scrolls,' records of rituals to raise dead, lay curses and other forbidden magics. Other scrolls, including those of Iuchiban's second-in-command, Asahina Yajinden, are kept in the Phoenix vaults for safekeeping. By studying these spells and the lesser documents taken from each *maho-tsukai* which the Phoenix have destroyed, the Isawa have gained quite a bit of information on how to perform and control maho magic.

While it is possible for an ordinary shugenja to use the power of *maho* only once, with each subsequent use it becomes harder and harder to resist. The magic becomes easier, and more effective. The spells take less time to cast, and are less strenuous.

Maho requires prayer to the Dark God, whether or not the caster is aware of where his energy is being sent. Each word of petition, each stick of incense serves only to awaken and further the power of Fu Leng, and bring about his eventual release. Thus, the Isawa are firmly dedicated stamping out the use of *maho*. After destroying a *maho-tsukai*, the Isawa collect anything the sorcerer had studied, for defense

ISAWA ARIMINHIME

Isawa Ariminhime was said to have been the sister of the first Isawa, who died on the fields of the Gisei Toshi before the coming of Shiba and the Great Oath. In desperation, Isawa bound his sister's soul to the walls of the city, begging her to defend its populace against he invading Oni and goblins of Fu Leng.

The *maho* ritual was more successful than even Isawa could have predicted, and even today, the soul of Ariminhime still walks the plains of Gisei Toshi. If at any time, the walls of the city are touched with blood, her spectre will appear to defend the Phoenix Clan.

There are those who say that Ariminhime's soul is in agony, tortured by the blood ritual which has bound her, but all sightings of the ghost disprove this theory. She appears as a plain girl with long black hair, and a gentle face. Her hands are soft, but appear to have been dipped in blood, and her palms have been slashed by some unknown force.

Her knowledge of spellcraft is unparalleled, although she has no time to give lessons or teach students. Her only thought is to protect Gisei Toshi, and she has all eternity to complete that vow.





MYTHOLOGY

Everyone knows the story of Lady Sun and Lord Moon, of how he swallowed his children and Hantei sliced open his belly to free them, of how Fu Leng was the last child to fall free. As he fell, he reached out to grab Hantei, as if to say "If I must become mortal, so must you." Fu Leng landed apart from his brothers and sisters, deep into *Jigoku*, the Dead Realm. *Jigoku*, like the Underworld, is not for the living, and he was changed by the experience. He could no longer live in the light of his mother, Lady Sun. In this way, Fu Leng fell farther than the other Children of Sun and Moon.

After years living in darkness and death, Fu Leng left the Dead Realm. Because of his time there, he caused corruption wherever he stepped. He brought with him the creatures he found there, the Oni, to do his bidding; together they established the Shadowlands.

against the next *maho-tsukai*, whoever that may be. Although some say it can never happen again, that does not stop the Isawa from collecting the information. Just in case.

THE DARK WAY

Young Isawa Tanayama crept quietly along the polished hallways of the Isawa Shugenja School. It was the Hour of the Rat, and everyone was asleep. The air was cool and silent. Tanayama cupped his hand around his candle flame, lest he be discovered. Up ahead was the school's library.

The dreams started not long after he found what appeared to be a hidden panel high up on a shelf. In them, voices whispered of power and respect. The thought of circumventing years of backbreaking study and arduous work appealed to him.

Oh, at first Tanayama did his best to ignore the dreams, but they grew ever more insistent. Perhaps if he simply looked at the secret cubbyhole, curiosity would be assuaged and he could get a decent night's sleep.

Stopping at the corner, he peered around to make sure he was alone. He was. Who would need to protect scrolls from their own shugenja? It was a lapse in security of which Tanayama would take advantage. On the balls of his bare feet, he quickly padded down to the library door.

When he opened it, his heart sank. There, seated at a table lit by a single flickering lamp, sat Master Iku. Fearing a sound thrashing in the morning, he fumbled with an excuse.

But the old man interrupted him. "Come in, boy. I've been expecting you," he rasped. It was then that Tanayama noticed the open panel, the aged parchment on the table. "Now you will learn about true power."

Those who practice *maho* serve Fu Leng. They may believe that they bend the power of the Shadowlands to their own will, but in the end they are mistaken. Shugenja who practice *Maho* are selfish and greedy. They have no concern for duty, honor, lord or family. By using the element of corruption, they seek an easy route to power. For them, the ends justify the means, and usually the ends are their own self-aggrandizement. Or they believe they simply take a short cut – they don't plan to travel the Dark Way for long, just this once – but end up Fu Leng's creature.

THE MAGIC OF THE NAMELESS ONES

After the war between darkness and light, between Shinsei and his Seven Thunders and Fu Leng, many believed the threat from the Shadowlands was over. The Black Scrolls were safely hidden by the Scorpion Clan. No one would dare use *maho* after so noble a battle.

Yet three shugenja did just that. Nakanu, Yajinden and Iuchiban each sought out Fu Leng for their own aims. They are said to have awakened Fu Leng's spirit in *Jigoku*, and made pacts with him for power. Fu Leng had his own agenda, though, for all who call upon evil end up his pawn. Little is known about Nakanu and Yajinden. The first is credited with raising the dead, and the second followed Iuchiban, teaching him the *tsangusuri* lore of the Asahina and creating the fabled Bloodswords.

But the greatest expression of the sorcerer's art came in Iuchiban. Many hundreds of years ago, he was the most prominent shugenja in all Rokugan, and some say a trusted advisor to the Emperor himself. Two magistrates of the Emerald Champion discovered his researches into *maho*, and he fled Otosan Uchi. Soon thereafter, an army of undead things moved out of the Twilight Mountains, Iuchiban at its head. Armies of samurai from each of the Seven Clans, led by the Emerald Champion, rode against Iuchiban and his cult of Blood Speakers. After a mighty battle that lasted seven days, they defeated Iuchiban. Or so they thought, for his evil did not end.

ROLEPLAYING A MAHO-TSUKAI

Those who practice black magic are called *maho-tsukai*, or servant of magic. They practice a variety of *maho* techniques such as raising the dead, calling down curses, divination and enchantments, and summoning Oni. It's a common misconception that sorcerers do what they do simply because they're mad. That robs *maho-tsukai* of their subtle nuances and makes them paper tigers. *Tsukai* have their own motives, which most Rokugani don't understand.

In a world where duty to one's lord and family is the highest calling, the *maho-tsukai* puts himself first. These people want something – be it power, fortune, fame – and take the easy path to get it. While everyone else adheres to the Celestial Order, *maho-tsukai* believe they are somehow superior to the will of heaven. Those who claim a higher cause, such as 'strengthening

the Empire through conflict,' really only want power over others. Ironically, no matter how much power they desire, they wind up serving Fu Leng.

Some *tsukai* become interested in maho for scholarly reasons. They seek to understand the Shadowlands or the Oni. They convince themselves that what they do is for the greater good. Some foolishly believe they can control the element of corruption. These hapless souls tend to live only a short time after they accede to the subtle manipulation of *maho*, as they are slowly controlled by the very element they seek to master. Others are merely curious. A few serve Fu Leng faithfully, working to further his ends. These craven individuals hope to improve their position, believing Fu Leng will lift them up over their betters. Almost all maho-*tsukai* believe they're the ones in charge, when really Fu Leng is. These *tsukai*, ultimately, are puppets on a stick.

Most maho-*tsukai* try to hide their activities. Some live in seclusion, far from prying eyes. Others hide in plain sight, serving as Fu Leng's spies. They appear as normal shugenja for as long

as they can, serving their clans. In a society where everyone wears a mask all the time, they cannot keep up the pretense for long. Eventually, because of their haggard appearance or a misplaced word, their mask slips.

Not all a sorcerer's allies are supernatural. Weak, cowardly individuals are drawn to *tsukai* like moths to a dark flame. A *tsukai* who manages to survive for long eventually attracts attention from others like him - brigands, thieves, and the like. Most believe the Celestial Order somehow cheated them. Truly powerful *tsukai* sit like spiders in the center of a web of agents and allies. Those who confront them should be forewarned.

The Council of Five

Before the Phoenix Clan was born, the tribe of Isawa lived in the city now known as Gisei Toshi, the City of Sacrifice. They were ruled by Isawa, the first shugenja, and his six siblings. During the war with Fu Leng, their city underwent a



tremendous change - Isawa's youngest sister was killed, her spirit irrevocably bound to defend the city walls, and Isawa himself was called to follow Shinsei into the Shadowlands. After swearing fealty to Shiba and acquiring the Kami's promise to forever care for the Isawa Tribe, the only command Isawa had for his remaining five siblings was, "Guide our people."

And so they have. For over a thousand years, five members of the Isawa family have been chosen to sit upon the Great Council and make decisions of policy for their clan. Over time, these

members have traditionally been chosen from the finest shugenja in the family, each with a distinct specialty. Together, they make up the most powerful governing body in Rokugan, and comprise the pinnacle of spellcraft and magical lore. The recipient of each seat on the Council is chosen by one of two means: either the retiring Master selects from his favored apprentices, or in cases where that is not possible (the unexpected death of a Master, for example) the other Masters on the Council decide.

In the beginning, competitors for the Master's Chair were required to fight to the death before their ascension, defeating in combat any who would oppose their claim. In this way, the ancient texts state, all who might be jealous of the new Master would be destroyed by their power, and all question of who was the finest shugenja would be obviously settled. However, as civilization came to the Phoenix lands from the rest of the Emerald Empire, the ritual of replacement became a symbolic challenge, where the finest students of the School of the Element would compete in harmless duels and tests of ability.

Typically, it is well-known who will be the next Master of an element before the reigning Lord makes public their decision, but at times the outcome of these duels and tests still determines the successor. Many times, the candidate best suited for the chair is overlooked because of his temper, arrogance or other unsuitability, and a more stable (if less gifted) student is chosen in his place.

THE POSITION OF THE COUNCIL

The Council of Five rules the Phoenix Clan, making policy and law for their lands and maintaining the Emperor's taxes and roads. They govern the clan, and their word is law. While the Shiba champion speaks for the Phoenix, it is the Council who tells him what to say. Anyone who defies the will of the Council finds themselves outcast from the clan, ronin and dishonored.

Phoenix pacifism is a well-known facet of their clan. Often, some say that the gentle intelligence of the Phoenix only hides their cowardice, but they would be mistaken. On the contrary, when the Phoenix go to war, they use magics of such devastating power that the ramifications can take years to heal - burned fields, slaughtered armies and overwhelming imbalance in the Elements. In that sense, it is



obvious why the Elemental Masters are reluctant to commit to war.

Further, the Isawa Masters are confident in their supremacy of magic in Rokugan. Although other houses have spellcasters, none is so dedicated to their art and research as the Isawa. No other clan provides the support and collects the knowledge which the Isawa require, nor are any other bushi so committed to assisting the shugenja as the Shiba. This confidence pervades everything an Isawa is and does, and provides the backdrop into which their complex system of rulership is brought to play. While 'common' shugenja are almost never chosen as Master of an element, it does occur in extremely rare circumstances.

Where others trust in honor or duty, the Phoenix, and the Elemental Masters in particular, trust in power. Sheer magical aptitude and intellect are the keenest weapons of the Council of Five, and they do not refuse their duty to be the guardians and protectors of all magic in the Empire. They maintain units of 'Inquisitors' to assist in the search to destroy cults and users of *maho*. These Inquisitors, servants of the Elemental Masters, report only to the Council of Five, and are commanded only by them, or by the Emperor himself. In such matters, the experience and wisdom of the Council remains supreme in the Empire, and even the Hantei know to defer to their advice.

The Elemental Masters are also the guardians of magical treasures, from ancient relics of the Hantei Empire to obscure *maho* rituals and dangerous wisdom. It is said that the Isawa Council have one of the greatest secrets of all time in their possession: three of the famous Black Scrolls. Sold to them by a traitorous Scorpion, they are kept in secret locations around the Empire, protected by all the powers of the Council of Five and revealed only to a member of that elite band of rulers. If this truly is the case, then the Isawa are keepers of one of the deepest burdens known to the Empire: the soul of the Dark God.

THE FORGETTING

One of the most powerful rituals known to the Isawa is called simply 'The Forgetting'. When a shugenja has proven himself unworthy of the abilities and knowledge of the elements, or has dishonored himself or his clan by his actions, the Isawa send out their finest servants to bring him

back to their lands. Once captured (typically by a contingent of Asako or Isawa interrogators), the shugenja is bound, forbidden food or drink for two days, and taken before the Elemental Council to discuss their crimes.

If the subject is found guilty, at the decision of the Elemental Council, the ritual of The Forgetting is performed. Such an act has only been done once or twice in a generation, and only when a shugenja is deemed irretrievable. Once the Forgetting has been started, no force can stop it, and no intercession will undo the magic which the Council of Five weaves.

The Forgetting is an elaborate rite, lasting nearly sixteen hours and demanding intricate perfection and grace on the part of each Master on the Council. It cannot be cast without all five Masters present, nor can it be hurried in any way. Essentially, it strips the offending shugenja of their ability to summon, speak to, or even sense kami, robbing them of all magical knowledge and aptitude and leaving them a mere husk of their former self. The Forgetting is considered one of the foremost punishments at the Council's disposal, and it is only performed when they are unanimous that it is appropriate.

Once shugenja have been Forgotten, they are no longer a shugenja, nor may they ever again learn, research, or even understand the mysteries of spellcraft. The look at their once-familiar scrolls, and the language seems only gibberish. Studies which had taken years to complete now seem to them to be nothing more than the ramblings of a demented mind. The only memories they have of casting spells seem hazy and indistinct, and they no longer feel the energies of the *kami* around them. They will never cast a spell again.

ISAWA DAIRYA

The only use of this powerful ritual in living memory is the Forgetting of a young man known as Isawa Dairya, the son of Isawa Nesan, Master of Fire. Nesan was a dedicated Master, and had served the Council for nearly twenty years, dedicating herself toward guiding the Phoenix into a new age of peace and prosperity. Through her leadership, the Council brought peace, settled disturbances both in their own lands and abroad, and established prosperous trade treaties with the Unicorn. However, her gentle methods did not make alliances within all the houses of the



THE ISAWA MASTERS

Although the Council of Five has publicly said that there has never been an Elemental Master who was not of the blood of Isawa, there are records in the Ikoma libraries which prove them wrong. Once, a member of the Kitsu family was chosen by the Elemental Masters to join their ranks as the new Master of Fire - a decision which cost the Phoenix many bitter words.

Over the unanimous dissent of the School of Fire, Kitsu Taiko joined the Council - as an Isawa. After swearing fealty to the Isawa family and their clan, and removing himself forever from the House of the Lion, he remained Master of Fire for fifteen years before passing into the Void.

Taiko seems to have been the only Master of any element who was not born an Isawa, and the members of the Phoenix house are quick to note that Taiko's tale may be an apocryphal one. However, the Ikoma dispute the argument, and have the texts to prove it.



FESTIVALS

The most important celebration associated with ancestor worship is the Bon Festival. This is the time when departed ancestors return to visit the homes of their descendants. Evil spirits – those who met a violent end or who have no grave – also return. Two sets of altars are prepared: one for a family's ancestors and one for those who have no one to provide for them.

Extended families come together from across Rokugan, as well. Traveling to the graves of their ancestors, Rokugani light lanterns to greet these returning spirits and hang them outside their houses to guide them home. At night, shugenja perform a Bon dance, intended to entertain the spirits and prevent them from becoming angry and harming people. They travel from house to house, dancing for each family. At the end of the festival, people send the spirits back to Jigoku by floating lit candles down nearby rivers.

Although not a festival, everyone will eventually have a funeral. This is typically a simple service, to which family and close friends are invited. The shugenja prays for the departed, conducting the spirit safely to Jigoku. Corpses are then cremated and buried in a cemetery, the spot marked with a stone monument. Families return to the family burial ground every Bon Festival to clean tombstones and welcome the spirits of their departed relatives.

Empire, and when a Scorpion courtier approached her son, he was ripe for their machinations.

Dairyra was twelve years old when the Scorpions first began to tutor him in his 'destiny', making sure the young man knew that he was to be his mother's successor, and teaching him many things the Isawa did not know. Dairyra, a proud young man, used these abilities to defeat all competition. He rapidly grew to become one of the foremost students in the School of Fire. By the age of sixteen, he was clearly the finest student of his generation, and the most obvious choice for Nesan's successor. The Scorpion who had trained him had given him knowledge of weaponry as well as spellcraft, and taught him how to make his opponents sickly through poison and other methods.

While the Scorpion thought they would control the next Master of Fire by helping the boy rise to prominence, they did not realize the price of Dairyra's ambition. Rather than creating a manipulable shugenja who was completely supported by their strength, they had given him the tools to seize power for himself. Dairyra's own gifts as a shugenja flowered, and he soon began to believe that he no longer needed Scorpion assistance to take his mother's place on the Council. Angered when Dairyra no longer heeded their demands, the Scorpion created a masterful plot to take revenge.

Three months later, Isawa Nesan was murdered by her own son's hands, and Dairyra was cast through the ritual of the Forgetting for his crime. While Dairyra has never denied that he did indeed kill his mother, he has always maintained that Scorpion treachery brought the event to pass. For nearly fifteen years, he has traveled the land of Rokugan as a bushi, seeking wisdom on swordplay from any teacher who would accept him, and taking his revenge on both the Scorpion and the Phoenix – who refused to accept the honest word of a young man.

The Isawa Libraries

One of the greatest treasures of the Phoenix clan are their magnificent libraries. Although other clans claim that their records are the most complete, or contain the most 'accurate' portrayals of history, the Phoenix are the only clan which can say that their library has a castle to itself. In

sheer size, the Isawa library completely overwhelms all other such edifices, and its monumental amount of information is unrivaled in the land.

The two most important libraries to the Phoenix Clan are those located within Kyuden Isawa, and the secret libraries of Gisei Toshi. While the Isawa kept the library at Kyuden Isawa, it has been the Asako's role to maintain the works at Gisei Toshi. Because of the division between the Asako and the Isawa shortly after Shiba's death, the Asako were forcibly removed from the City of Sacrifice, but their librarians remain in its palatial halls. Unable to leave the Grand Complex, the Asako of Gisei Toshi lead secluded, sheltered lives, entirely involved with their scrolls, manuscripts and spells; their duty to the Phoenix there, as elsewhere, is eternal.

The Worship of the Fortunes

One of the oldest religions in Rokugan, and the ancient religion of Gisei Toshi, is the 'Way of the Gods,' Kami-no-michi. Rokugani believe the world is filled with supernatural beings with the power to affect their lives. These are the Thousand Fortunes – Lady Sun and Lord Moon, Ebisu, Bishamon, Inari and a myriad of nature spirits. Every rock, river and grove has its own deity. The Fortunes foster villages, bring rain, protect fishermen on their journeys, and much more. Angry, they cause calamity and hardship – bad luck, torrential storms and illness. Properly appeased, they bring good fortune, health and calm weather. At important times – birth, harvest, calamity – Rokugani call upon the Fortunes to bless their lives.

THE NATURE OF THE KAMI

The pantheon of *Kami-no-michi* is complex and convoluted. Rokugani believe in a lot of gods, from Amaterasu and the Seven Fortunes to individual nature spirits. The Thousand Fortunes are called *mikokami* in Rokugani, a word which means 'little god', and represents the divine aspect of the lesser fortunes. The worship of the Fortunes considers the Sun (Amaterasu) and the Moon (Onnotangu) to be the highest echelon of existence, but concentrates all worship and

reverence on the Seven who came afterwards, and their successors.

When talking about the Thousand Fortunes, Rokugani identify two types. The first, called the Seven Fortunes, are mighty gods who transcend the world, like Daikoku and Bente. *Mikokami* are lesser nature spirits inhabiting every living thing, and take more interest in the lives of humans.

There are many different kinds of mikokami. Some are the personification of a power of nature, such as growth, wind and earthquakes. Others are deified souls of the dead, most notably the children of Sun and Moon, but also previous emperors, heroes and great sages. Still more *kami* embody of qualities such as love, hard work and wisdom. Lastly, individual natural objects such as rivers, trees, mountains, animals and rivers have their own *kami*. Rokugani further classify them by the things they do – *kami* who create, *kami* who set things right, and *kami* who bring misfortune. Often, the same *kami* displays different aspects. Kuroshin, a mikokami of agriculture, creates bountiful harvests by making rain, but brings misfortune by withholding it.

While mikokami are not as powerful as the Seven Fortunes, Rokugani still venerate them. It is a great feat to attract the attention of the likes of Inari; summoning an earth *kami* is much easier. *Kami* have been known to intercede with the Celestial Court on behalf of mortals. While Inari might not directly answer a petition for a rain storm, a *kami* might carry the petition to her on the shugenja's behalf. It is easy to offend *kami*, who demand the respect due them, and who can lay a curse as easily a sorcerer curses an offending peasant. Depending on the *kami*'s might, and pique, this could range from inflicting the offender with simple bad luck to causing a drought.

Every region, town and village has its own festivals celebrating something important only to the local area. Along the coast, for example, villagers honor Suitengu, Fortune of the Sea, asking her to send plentiful fish hauls; farmers in the interior have little need to honor a 'fisherman's god'. In the north, in the lands of the Phoenix Clan, everyone celebrates the Isawa Festival. Held on the shortest day of the year, everyone turns out to encourage the sun to climb higher in the sky. Individual villages have their own festivals and holy days, to honor those *kami* who are kindly disposed to them (or to placate

those prone to anger). In Sunda Mizu Mura, for example, villagers turn out to venerate Willow-Healing *kami*, the tree spirit who ended a plague by intervening with the Fortune, Ekibyogami.

The format of these festivals are usually the same. First there is the ritual purification, not only for the shugenja, but for wherever the *kami* is expected to travel. Villagers light giant torches and carry them along the route the *kami* will take around their *mura*. Meanwhile, shugenja might bathe in freezing cold water or walk across hot coals. The shugenja then invite the *kami* to visit them, the participants bowing respectfully at the proper time. This *norito*, or prayer, states the purpose for the invitation. In a format unchanged in centuries, the shugenja explains why they impose upon the *kami* – to celebrate a festival or make a special petition.

The *kami* is believed to enter the *shintai*, or god body, usually a statue in the form of the *kami*. Before the festival, shugenja oversee the construction of portable shrines into which the *shintai* is placed, which are then paraded through the village. Once the *kami* arrives, it is welcomed and performances put on for its entertainment. These dances are the origins of *noh*, *kabuki* and puppetry. *Kami* supposedly enjoy it when mortals drink and frolic. Afterwards, it shares a communal feast in which food and wine is consumed equally by all. Sharing a meal with a *kami* is a great honor.

With the banquet concluded, the shugenja makes his petition known. Usually, this is an entreaty for a good harvest or bountiful fishing, or a request for good weather or protection from evil. At the conclusion of the festival, the villagers send the *kami* on its way. Festivals are largely ceremonial; shugenja rarely summon a *kami* to appear, though they have been known to appear nonetheless.

Ancestor Worship

Lady Koichi stood in her garden, a vision of delicacy beneath her parasol. The garden was her favorite spot, even in winter when it was buried beneath snow. She could most often be found here, especially when troubled. It was to this place that she summoned Asahina Tanaro.

As the shugenja strode around the pond and over the little bridge to her tea house, he could see



MIKOKAMI

Ekibyogami, Fortune of plague and pestilence

Emma-o, Fortune of death and judge of the underworld

Jizo, Fortune of Mercy
Musubi-no-Kami, Fortune of Marriage

Toyouke-Omikami, Fortune of Grain

Inari, Fortune of Rice
Isora, Fortune of the Seashore

Kaze-no-kami, Fortune of the Wind

Kenro-ji-jin, Fortune of the Soil

Kojin, Fortune of the Kitchen

Koshin, Fortune of Roads

Kuroshin, Fortune of Agriculture


Osano-Wo, Fortune of Fire and Thunder

Sengen, Fortune of Mt. Sengen

Suitengu, Fortune of the Sea

Tenjin, Fortune of Writing/Literature

Uzume, Fortune of Dancing



THE FORTUNES AND THEIR ROLE IN ROKUGAN

In Rokugan, there are many, many gods, most of which are referred to as Fortunes. There are the well-known, oldest Fortunes (typically called the "Seven Fortunes"), and the Lesser Fortunes (of which there are literally thousands). Lesser Fortunes are created by posthumous Imperial decree, making the Emperor himself the sole determining factor in who ascends to become a god.

The Asako believe that they have not only circumvented this process, but invalidated it. The Emperor's decree, to them, has thus become a "false path" to realizing humanity's gift. Of course, the validity of their claim has never been proven either, and being part of the proud Phoenix is a hindrance in this regard. Ultimately, they realize that they Emperor's word is still law and, not wanting to upset the careful balance that has been created in the Empire (of which the Phoenix and, thereby the Asako, are part), they continue hiding their secret from general view.

that something weighed heavily on her mind. The rumors had been true, he thought.

She sat, eyes contemplating a bee buzzing among her flowers. It pained Tanaro that her face should be bothered by worry. He bowed and asked "How can your humble servant assist you, Lady Koichi?"

She looked up at him. "My husband. He has been gone for two weeks, when he said he'd be back in one." Tanaro thought that was her trouble. The two had only recently been married, and unlike many marriages, theirs had been a love match. Unfortunately, urgent business – bandits in the south – called her husband away.

"The road between Kosaten Shiro and Shiro Daidoji can be treacherous, my lady. Perhaps Lord Daidoji was delayed by a storm," he said. He was careful not to use the word 'waylaid.'

"There has been no word of bad weather. A messenger arrived from Kosaten Shiro this morning. And weather would not have delayed Gosuta an extra week."

"Bandits can be tricky, difficult to root out like weeds," he tried again. She cut him off before he could continue.

"Ask my ancestors, Tanaro. They will know what happened to my husband." She nodded to herself. "Yes, ask our ancestors to watch over Gosuta and bring him home safely."

"As you wish, my lady." Isawa Tanaro said, bowing, as he headed for the family shrine.

BELIEFS

Perhaps the oldest religion in Rokugan, ancestor worship venerates the souls of those who have gone before. Rokugani believe the spirits of the dead live on in *Jigoku*, the Underworld, where they work off negative karma accumulated in life. One's ancestors watch over the family, either providing aid in the form of advice, or reproach in the form of hauntings. People make offerings of food, prayer and incense to their ancestors, in gratitude for the gift of life and a way to ensure future prosperity.

The living can also help free a soul languishing in *Jigoku* by offering prayers and incense. Thus, honoring one's ancestors not only encourages good fortune, it helps speed the ancestor to reincarnation. Neglected ancestors, or those who don't have anyone to pray for them, often return to feed on the living or terrorize the disrespectful family. Angry spirits who died a shameful or ignominious death stalk the world,

seeking revenge before they can be reborn. Properly cared for spirits, however, sometimes return to provide guidance or supernatural aid to their descendants.

MYTHOLOGY

Central to ancestor worship are the concepts of karma and rebirth. Throughout life, a person earns karma based on his actions. Good actions merit good karma, while bad actions attract negative karma. A person's karma not only affects his or her current incarnation, but has an even greater effect on the cycle of reincarnation.

For Rokugani, the world consists of six realms, which make up the Wheel of Existence: the realms of humans, gods, demigods, animals, ghosts and demons. A person may be reborn into any one of these realms, depending on his or her karma. A person who has lived a selfish, venal life might be reborn into the world of animals, there to live out a lifetime as a horse or a slug. Living a pure life, a person might be reborn into the world of humans again, this time at a higher level (bushi instead of *heimin*, for example) or as a god.

The idea of rebirth is central to the path of bushido. Because a person receives numerous lives, samurai often place little value on their current incarnation. This allows them to charge heedlessly into battle; a samurai need not fear death, for he receives another life. By obeying the precepts of bushido, he need not worry about his reincarnation; a popular belief among Rokugani says "samurai are fated to pay for their actions in this life by returning as samurai in the next."

THE GODS OF THE UNDERWORLD

When the soul departs this world, it travels to the Underworld, *Jigoku*, to await its next rebirth. Before it can be reborn, it must be punished for any impure actions. By working off negative karma in this way, the soul can be reborn in a pure state; the karma slate is wiped clean. There, Emma-o metes out all manner of tortures, such as beating the sinner's soul with iron rods, making it eat molten lead, or impaling it repeatedly on sword trees. Oni administer punishments, which can last for thousands of years.

Fukurokujin is also considered a Fortune of Mercy, who travels to *Jigoku* to relieve the suffering of souls there. He protects them from the darkness and works for their reincarnation. Rokugani pray to him to help their ancestors work off their bad karma, or provide a brief

respite from the tortures. He pleads cases before the Fortunes, arguing to get them a better incarnation on the Wheel of Existence.

THE RELIGION

Ancestor worship is not an 'organized religion'. There is no centralized power structure, no text, no dogma. It's a folk religion, concerned with man's relationship with the spirits of those who have gone before.

Generally, people worship their own ancestors. Every home has a shrine to the family's honored dead. Here, family members make offerings of food, incense and prayers for their ancestor's salvation and to speed their time in *Jigoku*. People also venerate the souls of legendary heroes, such as Matsu Kijoruko or Uikku, hoping these powerful spirits will look favorably upon them in some endeavor. Though prayers are not offered directly to Emma-o, people pray to Jizo to liberate their ancestors from suffering.

The people of Rokugan have an uneasy relationship with the spirit world. On the one hand, they fear ghosts and the Underworld. Like a tiger in the woods, a ghost is dangerous, though not necessarily evil. On the other hand, Rokugani honor the spirits of their dead. There are two distinct styles of ancestor worship in Rokugan – that of the bushi and that of the heimin. Each reflects a different approach to ghosts and spirits.

THE BUSHI

Bushi seek an enduring relationship with their ancestors. They believe that family members who have performed extraordinary deeds, died honorably, or were wronged in life continue to live on. They think of these spirits as 'family kami,' living on in Yomi, a sort of Valhalla from which the honored dead watch over their progeny. Good fortune comes from helpful ancestors, while bad fortune is obviously the result of an angry spirit. By making the proper offerings, bushi hope to head off potential calamity and speed their ancestors on their way to their next incarnation. Every family worships the founder of their clan (the great Kami) as well as those attributed with legendary feats. For example, the Daidoji family shrine honors the original Doji as well as the first Daidoji and Daidoji Masashigi, the hero of the Battle of the Landbridge. Although being haunted is widely considered a curse, many samurai deem a *shiryo's* attention an auspicious occurrence, a sign of favor from the honored dead.

Shugenja, usually the Kitsu, typically serve as spirit mediums for the bushi. A nobleman might ask a shugenja to pray for an ancestor's salvation on the family's behalf. When indecisive or in trouble, they call upon shugenja to commune with their ancestors, and gain advice or favor. A bushi suffering from bad dreams often consults a shugenja to interpret these messages from the spirit world. Believing omens to be signs from a watchful ancestor, bushi ask shugenja to interpret these, too. If bad fortune strikes, shugenja attempt to divine the source and assuage whatever angry ancestor is at the root.

THE PEASANTS

Because mankind is born out of the mixture of Lady Sun's tears and Lord Moon's blood, even farmers have an immortal soul. Among the peasants, Yomi is a place not for hallowed heroes, but 'between lives,' where the soul awaits rebirth. Peasants attribute misfortune to the presence of malicious spirits, the spirits of those who have escaped the Underworld. The world is filled with *Goryo* (vengeful ghosts) and *Gaki* (hungry ghosts). While the bushi want to commune with an ancestor's spirit, the heimin want as little to do with the spirit world as possible, viewing all spirits as harmful. Ancestor worship among the heimin is a preventive measure, a way to avert bad fortune. So long as one's ancestors are happy, they'll remain where they belong. Every peasant family honors its oldest known ancestor as well as their immediate relations and any spirits who appear to demand inclusion.

Among the peasants, shugenja typically find employment as exorcists, protecting them from marauding ghosts. Peasants don't commune directly with the spirit world, and don't seek input from their ancestors as much as the bushi. When disaster strikes, however, they seek out a shugenja to find the source of the trouble and appease the restless spirit. A shugenja can make a decent living by selling talismans against *goryo*. Funerals are another source of income. In addition to these jobs, shugenja are sometimes hired to care for the restless dead, those without descendants to care for them.

THE ANCESTOR'S SHRINE

No matter the caste, every family maintains a shrine to their ancestors. This shrine is always unobtrusive and austere, consisting of a few funeral tablets, an incense burner, a bowl of rice



THE SEVEN FORTUNES

Benten, Fortune of Romantic Love

Bishamon, Fortune of Strength

Daikoku, Fortune of Wealth

Ebisu, Fortune of Honest Work

Fukurokujin, Fortune of Wisdom

Hotei, Fortune of Contentment

Jurojin, Fortune of Longevity



THE SHIBA FESTIVAL

Although Amaterasu is the sun goddess, villagers in the Phoenix lands believe that Shiba's spirit can intervene on their behalf. In the coldest part of winter, they encourage the sun to be reborn as the Phoenix is reborn from its own ashes.

Shugenja perform ritual dances and plays retelling stories of Amaterasu and her children. In one popular practice, a shugenja dresses in a bright red and yellow bird costume and hides inside a giant paper egg. Other shugenja dress as Oni and dance around it, until the phoenix-clad shugenja bursts from within and runs around banishing them.

and perhaps a bottle of sake. Funeral tablets are made of wood, standing a few inches tall bearing the name of the ancestor. Old, prestigious families have many funeral tablets on their shrines. Some bushi and wealthy merchants commission artists to paint a portrait of the deceased, which they hang over the altar as a visual memento of the person, though this is rare. A small statuette of Shinsei might also be kept here. Shrines are typically kept someplace easily accessible, though private, usually in a corner of the main room. Some bushi keep their family shrine in a cabinet, which can be closed for privacy and easily transported from place to place.



"Choosing between two evils is still choosing evil."

- from the war banner of the Shiba family

The Shiba occupy a curious position in the scheme of Rokugan. They are the descendants of Kami, with the blood of the gods flowing through their veins, yet they remain subordinate to the mortal Isawa family. The Clan Champion is chosen from their ranks, yet he does not rule with absolute authority. They are warriors in a clan of peace, fighters in a province where violence is abhorred. Yet they remain vital to Phoenix interests, and perform their often thankless roles with courage, honor, and conviction.

History

The Shiba trace their lineage back to the Kami of that name who fell from the sky with the other First Ones. Shiba was thoughtful and pragmatic, intensely interested in the new world he and his siblings found themselves in. He questioned the

men and women he met about everything, and could often be found studying the habits and movements of others. During the contest to determine the new Emperor, he watched the others carefully as they moved, and lasted quite some time by methodically applying what he had learned.

Unlike his brother Togashi, who sought to cut himself off from Rokugan, Shiba wanted to be a part of everything he saw. He would spend an entire day watching a farmer plant his field, or listen intently to a random conversation between two old friends. He remembered everything he saw, and tried to use his knowledge to integrate himself into the new world. He wanted to learn from humanity, be a part of their struggles, participate in the lives they knew. It wasn't easy; mortal men were uneasy around his fallen divinity, and his brothers and sisters found him too conciliatory to tolerate for long. As time went by and his studies continued, he became more and more cut off from the very world he desired to connect with.

He found solace with the arrival of Shinsei. The wise little man understood Shiba's isolation, and spoke soothing words that both enlightened and comforted him. In Shinsei, Shiba saw how the lives of men had meaning, and the ways in which they were linked to the divine. He became a devout follower of the little man, and when Hantei had his famous discussion with Shinsei, it was Shiba who insisted on recording their discourse. The results were the Tao of Shinsei, whose burned and torn remains still rest in the library at Gisei Toshi.

When Fu Leng arose and the Seven Thunders gathered to fight him, Shiba lobbied to journey with them. When told he could not, he turned to Isawa and looked him straight in the eye.

"They will need your magic in the Shadowlands," he spoke softly. "Will you go with them?"

Isawa's answer was brutal, and in the end, only Shiba's vow to forever defend and serve the Isawa would buy his loyalty. So Shiba knelt before the mortal in the heart of Gisei Toshi, pledging himself and his children to the service and defense of the Isawa forevermore. Isawa left with Shinsei that very day.

The fallen Kami took his responsibilities very seriously. Knowing that Isawa's followers knew little of the Empire they had just joined, he insisted on having a member of his family



accompany them when they traveled south. He commanded his children to learn as much as they could about the martial arts and the skills needed to be a *yojimbo*, for only then could his promise be fulfilled. The Shiba children took his wishes to heart, and strove to defend their charges from any possible threat. The Shiba family continues to uphold these duties to this day – serving both as defenders of the Phoenix lands and bodyguards for Isawa shugenja who have business in the south.

THE PHOENIX DREAM

Sequestered from the remainder of the Empire, Shiba set out to forge the identity of the clan he had now inherited. He left the Isawa alone to study their scrolls and made sure those not of shugenja status fulfilled their duties promptly. With that accomplished, he turned his attention to Shinsei, and ways he could keep the little man's wisdom alive. He continued to study the *Tao of Shinsei* and worked to spread its teachings throughout his realm. The Isawa began to temper their studies with Shinsei's lessons, and the clan bushi incorporated it into their military training. Shiba saw all of this and smiled, for he knew that the Tao would never die as long as it lived in the hearts of men.

But still, something eluded him – some kernel of identity that his people seemed to lack. They were happy and healthy, and went about their business like the remainder of the Empire, but they had no form. No unity. No sense of common identity that could bring them closer together. There was friction between his family and the Isawa, friction which sent ripples through the peasantry and beyond. While on the outside, things seemed peaceful, Shiba could see the tension slowly taking its toll on his charges. He pondered what to do, but could think of nothing that would solve the problem. After considerable thought, he retired to his chambers, hoping that a night's sleep would give him a fresh perspective.

That night he had a dream, more vivid and intense than any he had experienced. In it, he stood upon a high mountaintop while a huge flaming bird flew towards him. The bird's feathers were scarlet and yellow, and seemed to burn into the fabric of reality itself. It soared over his head before settling on a tree branch and staring at him imperiously.

"What sort of creature are you?" he breathed.

"I am the universe entire," the bird returned.

"How can you be the universe entire," Shiba asked. "when you are so obviously composed of the element of Fire?"

"Fire is my form, but not the totality of my being. I was hatched from an egg, from the fluids of life, so I am obviously from the element of Water. I soar through the skies with the wind under my wings, so I am quite clearly from the element of Air. I die as ash and rise whole from the ground again, so I must be from the element of Earth. And I am all these things, and none of them too, so I am truly from the element of Void."





STANDARD SHIBA HOUSE GUARD

Rank 3 Shiba Bushi

Earth: 4

Water: 3

Fire: 2

Air: 4

Void: 3

Attacking: 5k3

Damage: 6k2

TN to be Hit: 20 (25
when in armor)

Wounds: 8: -0;
16: -1; 24: -2, etc.

Notable Skills: Lore:
Shugenja 2, Archery 4,
Defense 3, Kenjutsu 3,
Iaijutsu 2

Special Abilities:
May add Void rank to
any hit or damage rolls.
May spend a Void point to
increase/decrease TN of
any spell targeting him by
5; May spend a Void point
for an additional action
per round. May use all
Void points on a single
action.

Shiba pondered its words carefully before speaking again.

"But if you are the universe entire, then how can I be separate from you?"

"You are not separate, but one and the same. I am the reflection of your soul just as you are the manifestation of mine. We are death reborn, immortality through a thousand lifetimes. We are the cycle of the cosmos, spinning in patterns as old as time. We will die in flames only to rise

again and again, until the sky itself collapses. We are the Phoenix – the Eye of Eternity."

The fallen Kami woke with the bird's words on his lips. Without saying a word, he rushed from his rooms into the heart of Gisei Toshi, where he rang the great summoning bell. The citizens gathered around to hear him speak, and even the Isawa shugenja stirred from their libraries, for they sensed something monumental was afoot.

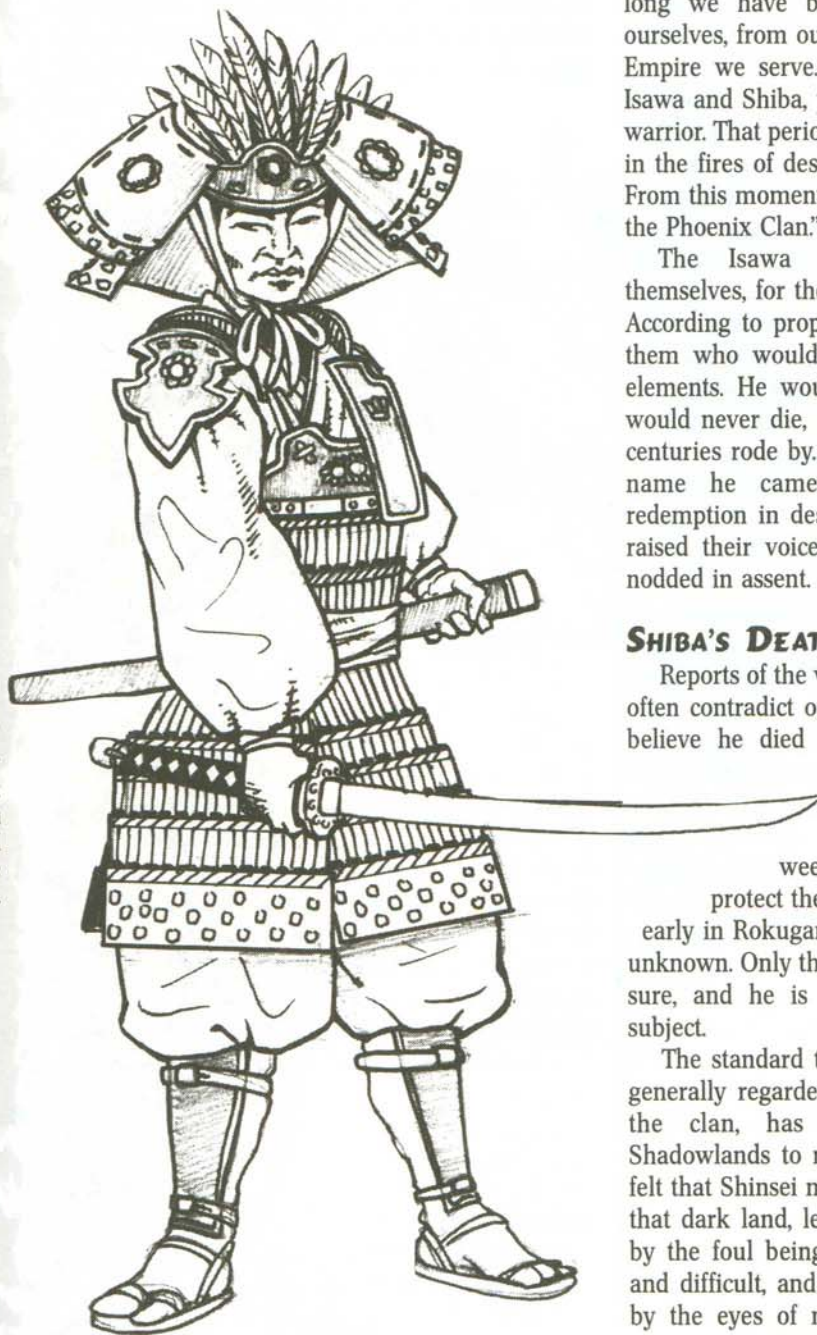
"Hear me, my people," Shiba began. "For too long we have been divided – divided from ourselves, from our common goals, and from the Empire we serve. For too long, we have been Isawa and Shiba, peasant and noble, scholar and warrior. That period is past. I have seen our future in the fires of destruction and the joy of rebirth. From this moment forward, we will be known as the Phoenix Clan."

The Isawa murmured quietly among themselves, for they had heard that word before. According to prophecy, one would come among them who would speak with the voice of the elements. He would be as a flaming bird that would never die, only fall and rise again as the centuries rode by. They would know him by the name he came as – Phoenix, life-giver, redemption in destruction. And as the populace raised their voice to cheer Shiba's words, they nodded in assent. Surely this was meant to be.

SHIBA'S DEATH

Reports of the way Shiba died are sketchy, and often contradict other elements in history. Some believe he died hundreds of years after first falling from the sky. Others say he was killed in the final battle with Fu Leng – mere weeks after he had promised to protect the Phoenix. As with many events early in Rokugan's history, the absolute truth is unknown. Only the Phoenix Champion knows for sure, and he is strangely tight-lipped on the subject.

The standard tale, told to Shiba children and generally regarded as canon by the majority of the clan, has Shiba venturing into the Shadowlands to rescue the Seven Thunders. He felt that Shinsei must not be allowed to perish in that dark land, lest his knowledge be corrupted by the foul beings there. His journey was long and difficult, and he faced many terrors unseen by the eyes of men. But eventually, he found



Shinsei, along with the last surviving Thunder, the Scorpion Shosuro.

When he returned, it was not as Shiba. The firstborn son of the Kami, Shiba Tsuzaki, vanished from the palace of the Shiba shortly after his father had gone, telling his family that his father was 'calling' him. When he returned, the wisdom of the age was in his eyes. "My father is dead," he proclaimed, "But he will live forever – in his descendants."

There was a sudden stillness, and the air was suddenly filled with tension. Those present felt a palpable wave of invisible energy. There was another presence behind Tsuzaki's face – the soul of a Kami was now fused with his own, and he knew his father would never leave him again.

The Shiba Bushi

As stated earlier, the Shiba are placed in perhaps the most awkward position of any family in the Empire. They must maintain a delicate relationship with the ruling Isawa, serving and protecting them while at the same time clashing with them over issues of clan policy. While they conduct their duties with honor and dedication, it is clear that they chafe sometimes under the Isawa's control. They have never hesitated to do what is asked, but they aren't always happy about it. The key to the Shiba lies in understanding how they can serve those with whom they so often disagree.

The first duty of the Shiba is to protect the Isawa. Their founder made this vow a thousand years ago, and ever since then, his descendants have striven to fulfill it. For the Shiba, it defines their responsibilities in this life, and gives them a single overriding purpose. Following their *gempukku*, they serve a period in the Home Guard, patrolling Phoenix lands and defending it from any threat. The Shiba fortresses form a semicircle on the outer edge of the territory, which prevents the sanctity of the Isawa Woodlands (and the schools and libraries therein) from being defiled by outsiders. After a time – usually three or four years – those who wish may become *yojimbo*, assigned to protect an individual courtier or dignitary. It is here where the Shiba truly excel, and where their vow to defend their fellow Phoenix takes its strongest form.

The Shiba look upon their Isawa charges as a parent might look upon a gifted yet naive child.

They must be kept safe, for great things shall come from them, but they cannot be trusted to survive on their own. Phoenix shugenja who venture into the world have often spoken of their *yojimbo*'s 'suffocating' presence, and one once joked that he did not need a shadow as long as a Shiba was there to do its job. When they travel among Rokugan's courts and castles, a Shiba *yojimbo* constantly scans for potential threats and dangerous situations. While the Isawa discusses philosophy or interacts with various dignitaries, the Shiba watches the crowd, looking for troublemakers or anyone carrying a weapon. At night, she ensures that the Isawa's room is secure, and only sleeps within short sight of him or her. If danger does arise – be it deliberate or accidental – she immediately positions herself between the Isawa and the threat, heedless of her own safety or the safety of those nearby. Nothing must touch the protected shugenja – not even at the cost of the Shiba's own life.

Shiba bushi are notorious amongst Rokugan's various House Guards for constantly asking about security measures – how many guards are posted, where they are positioned, what shifts they serve in, etc. For many *gunso*, a Phoenix's visit is terribly trying, precisely because they can't get away from the *yojimbo* long enough to get any real work done. The Shiba take pride in this dubious reputation: not only does it speak to their dedication, but to their ability to fulfill their ancestor's ancient oath: defend the Isawa, or die in the attempt.

One would think, with such dedication, that the Shiba never question the Isawa in any way. Nothing could be further from the truth. Friction between the two families has always existed, and the Shiba often express frustration that their shugenja charges don't understand their philosophy. Because they are more immersed in pragmatic political reality than the Isawa, they often come to conclusions that the Isawa do not like. Sometimes, they say, violence is necessary. Sometimes, you must take steps to defend yourself. But the Isawa refuse to bend from their peaceful ideals; they consider it their calling to adhere to what is right rather than what is possible. Because they are sequestered behind their walls and rarely interact with the outside world, it is easy for the Isawa to take the moral high road.

The Shiba have no such luxuries. As bushi, they must ensure the sanctity of their clan's lands,

THE SHIBA MON

The *mon* of the Shiba family is a set of crossed swords, surmounted by the flames of the Phoenix. While the background is a stoic black, the flames and swords are done in vibrant gold and silver, symbolizing the eternal dedication of the Shiba to their founder's oath. There is a variant of the Shiba *mon* which is used by those bushi who serve Isawa shugenja as a *yojimbo* – the central area between the swords then also contains the symbol of Void, stitched in shining gold.





SHIBA'S WIFE

Many stories are told of Shiba's wife, but the one most considered accurate by Ikoma Historians is as follows:

Shiba traveled the lands of Rokugan for many years before the coming of Shinsei. He walked with Shinjo when she said goodbye to the Empire, and he followed his brother Akodo as he searched for loyal followers. At last, he came to the palaces of Otosan Uchi, where he met with his sister Doji and brother Hida. Between them, they convinced Shiba of the practicality of taking a wife. Doji spoke of the usefulness of someone who was as lovely as the stars, and could sing sweet songs, inspiring romantic love, while Hida insisted that the purpose of a wife was to make a family, to help defend the house against threats, and stand on the front line of war at her husband's side.

At last, Shiba gave up. "Find me a woman with all of these qualities," he said, "and I will marry her."

At that, both Doji and Hida despaired of ever finding the perfect woman to be their brother's partner.

One day, a woman came to the gates of Otosan Uchi. She was as fair as summer, and in her eyes was a quiet bravery which spoke of her true heart.

and sometimes deal with unfortunate political realities in the process. As yojimbo, they must watch for threats, and suspect persons or incidents who may appear harmless. And as the descendants of a Kami who watched Fu Leng nearly conquer the Empire, they realize that isolation does not necessarily mean safety. Their dedication has made the Shiba intensely aware of the need to maintain a rapport with the outside world, and meet force with force if the situation calls for it. When they find their hands tied by Isawa vagaries, it can be truly enraging. Some of the arguments between the Shiba and Isawa are intense enough to shock a Crab.

Many outsiders often ask why, if the Shiba argue with the Isawa as often as they do, they are so devoted to protecting them from harm. For the Shiba, the answer is easy. They do their duty not for the shugenja they protect, but to honor their founder (who continues to watch them through the eyes of the Champion). As far as they're concerned, the Isawa have no say in whether they are guarded or not; it's not up to them. They will be protected from the outside world whether they like it or not. Even if a yojimbo's charge were to cursed and abandon her in the middle of the wilderness, she would continue to follow him from a distance and do all she could to maintain his safety. In such an environment, it's easy to see how tension and arguments may spring up.

Not that this can be exploited by other clans. The Phoenix – Isawa, Shiba and Asako – consider their internal squabbling to be clan business, and do not permit outsiders to trifle with it. Whatever disagreements they may have with each other, it never goes past their lands; they swiftly close ranks in the face of external pressure. A Shiba may complain about the stagnant traditionalism of the Isawa masters, but suggest that he work against them somehow, and he will turn on you like a rabid dog. Many Scorpion and Crane have learned this lesson too late, as their efforts to further divide and undermine Phoenix unity have resulted in lethal duels with enraged Shiba samurai.

THE CHAMPION

In most clans, the role of Champion falls to the head daimyo, the undisputed leader of all those beneath him. Not so the Phoenix. The Isawa Elemental Masters rule the clan with undisputed mastery and the Champion must inevitably bow to their whim. While he is granted the respect due

his position, and serves as a mouthpiece to the rest of Rokugan, he lacks the authority to dictate policy for the clan. Strangely, this has never been a problem. The Shiba understand the Isawa's need for autonomy, and have never used the Champion for political ends. He will often argue with the upper echelons of Isawa daimyos, questioning and critiquing their policies, but at the end of day, he will nod his head and acquiesce to their wishes.

There has been much speculation among those familiar with the Phoenix as to why this is so. Some say it is because of Shiba's ancient promise to protect the Isawa; certainly the Champion would be more aware of that vow than any other. Others contend that the Champion is often too busy with military matters to worry about the Isawa; he or she leads the Phoenix armies and must therefore devote a substantial amount of time to drilling and organizing the troops. Still others feels it is because the Shiba, as bushi in a clan of shugenja, are simply too weak to make their voices heard, and that the Champion is nothing more than a puppet to keep them happy. The truth, as with much else in the Phoenix Clan, lies in all of these things and none of them. But more than anything else, it lies in the fact that the Champion carries a burden of which none beyond the Phoenix are aware.

Each time a Champion dies, his or her soul passes on to another, who then takes up the mantle. This has happened since the death of the first Shiba and continues to this day. Like their fiery namesake, the Champion falls, only to rise again in a new generation. Each Champion knows that he has been granted a form of immortality – that his soul will join with all of the others when he passes the mantle on to a new Champion. Each successive passing transmits the memories, feelings and emotions of the previous Champions into the current one, allowing him or her to draw upon the experiences of all those who have come before. While the Champion's own personality remains dominant, and the changes wrought by the transition are difficult to detect, the force of numerous souls now support his or her actions.

The power of channeling so much life energy is considerable, but the burden can be quite traumatic, and some Champions are unable to take the strain. The Isawa, historically, have provided the assistance needed to make the transition a painless one, and to ensure that the

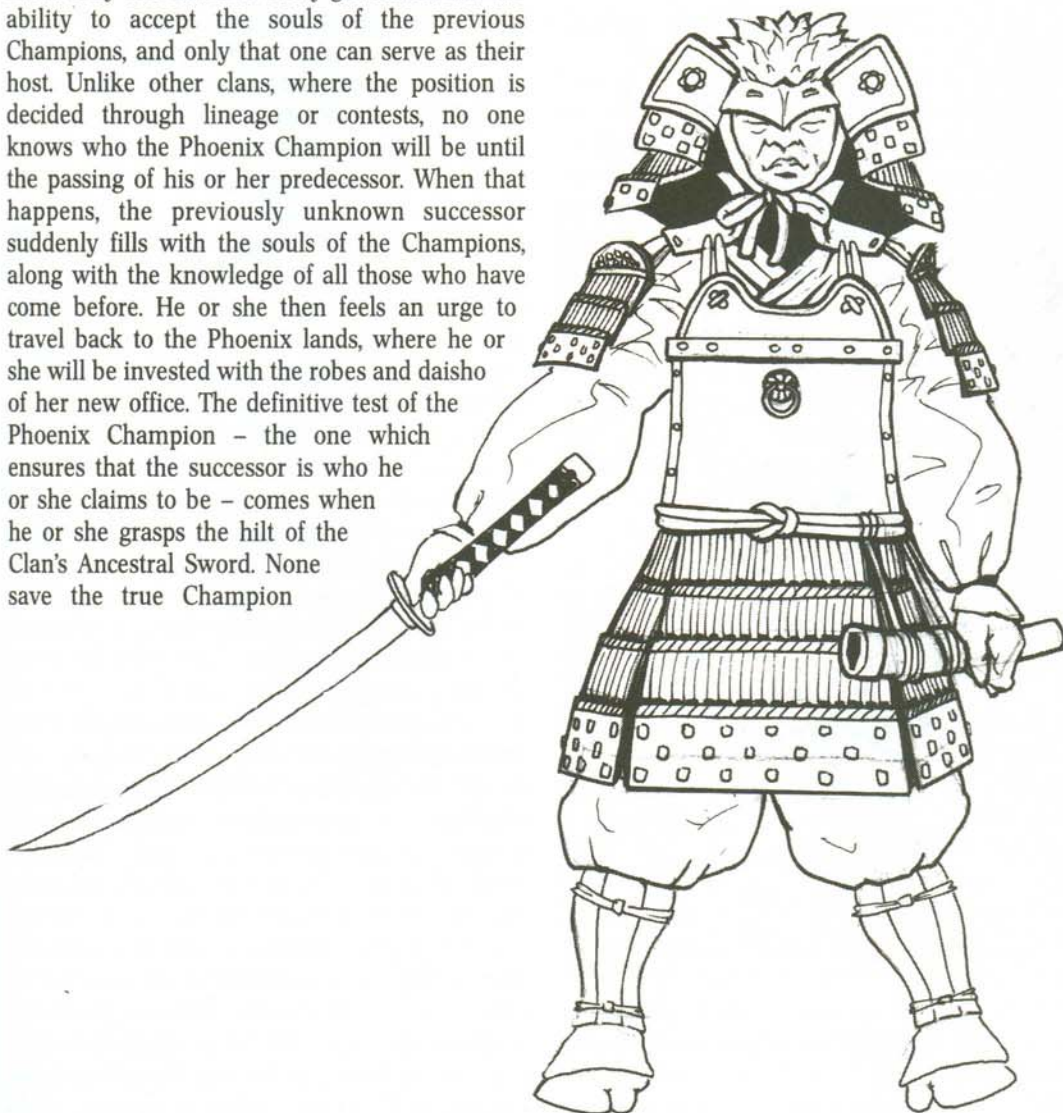
new Champion can properly control the whirlwind of voices now raging within his or her mind. Sometimes, even this isn't enough; occasionally, Champions are seized by strange prophetic fits, and speak in voices that echo through the future and the past. With a burden such as this, and the knowledge that his or her mind may not be entirely balanced, it is small wonder that the Phoenix wish to entrust their leadership elsewhere. The Champion is a valued advisor, and his connection to the souls of the past is quite cherished, but his potential instability is too dangerous to place control of an entire clan upon. Let the Elemental Masters dictate Phoenix policy; the Champion should not be troubled with the added responsibility.

The Champion is chosen by an accident of birth. Only one Shiba in every generation has the ability to accept the souls of the previous Champions, and only that one can serve as their host. Unlike other clans, where the position is decided through lineage or contests, no one knows who the Phoenix Champion will be until the passing of his or her predecessor. When that happens, the previously unknown successor suddenly fills with the souls of the Champions, along with the knowledge of all those who have come before. He or she then feels an urge to travel back to the Phoenix lands, where he or she will be invested with the robes and daisho of her new office. The definitive test of the Phoenix Champion – the one which ensures that the successor is who he or she claims to be – comes when he or she grasps the hilt of the Clan's Ancestral Sword. None save the true Champion

can touch the katana. To all others, it will twist and wrench itself out of their grasp the instant it is touched. Thus, the true Champion will always be known from any pretender, and the souls of the Clan will always be assured of their position.

Prominent Phoenix Battles

As a clan of pacifists, the Phoenix have historically shied away from glory on the battlefield. Their isolated territory and lack of plentiful resources have discouraged invaders from attacking them and further heightened their reputation as peaceful noncombatants.



SHIBA'S WIFE

(CONTINUED)

She came begging the help of the Kami to save her homeland from a dark evil which had begun to invade, and the minute Shiba saw her, his heart was stolen away. "What is your name, maiden?" He asked.

"My name is Tsamaru," she replied, and he followed her to her homeland.

Unknown to the Kami, however, this woman lived deep beneath the ocean's waves, in a city built of coral and shale. Here, the legends of the beast which Shiba faced to win her hand vary wildly, but all relate that the two fought side by side with honor, and brought the beast's teeth back to the Emperor's Palace to mark their victory.

Soon after, Shiba asked the quiet young maiden for her hand in marriage, and she consented. Although it meant that she would never return to her undersea palace, she was willing to remain forever with the Kami of the Phoenix.

Tsamaru's body is said to have been placed among the heavens when she died, many years later, and the brightest star in the northern sky is named for Shiba's love.

Nevertheless, there are some conflicts which even the Phoenix have been unable to avoid, and moments when their quiet contemplation has been troubled by the drums of war. Major battles in the Phoenix's history are outlined below.

THE BATTLE OF SLEEPING RIVER

All of Rokugan has heard the story of Iuchiban, and how he tried to usurp the sovereign



Emperor with the power of black magic. At first, the Isawa attempted to negotiate peace with the Blood Sorcerer, but their attempt failed. At the Battle of Stolen Graves, some five hundred years

ago, the Phoenix were forced to join the Seven Clans in battle against Iuchiban, and crushed his unholy power beneath their might. When they learned that Iuchiban could not be killed through mortal means, they ordered a great tomb be built to imprison his body. The Phoenix were asked to place all the magical wards they could upon it, and ensure that no sorcerous power could ever escape. This they performed with all the skill they possessed, and the resulting enchantment was sufficient to keep Iuchiban from escaping his stony prison.

Or so they thought. Some two hundred years later, the sorcerer's spirit slipped free of his bonds, and once again plotted against the Emerald Throne. By the time the alarm had been raised, he had gathered his Bloodspeakers at a hidden plain near the Sleeping River. Then, using the *maho* power of their order, they were able to raise an army of undead soldiers to fight for them. The forces of the Seven Clans arrived there just as the zombies and skeletons rose from their terrible resting places.

The bushi of the Empire had been trained to deal with the undead, but their numbers were small, and they did not expect their foes to attack with such ferocity. The zombies and Bloodspeakers swarmed out from their positions, striking with focused precision at the advancing troops. The bushi fought valiantly, but they could not prevent the undead from breaking through their lines. Chaos descended as the simple entrapment of a small group of cultists degenerated into a horrific brawl. The Bloodspeaker sorcerers pressed their undead minions mercilessly, breaking the samurai into a thousand groups to be crushed at whim. Bushi and shugenja fought side by side in a desperate effort to hold them off, but as the battle went on, their hopes began to dim.

It was the Phoenix who rallied the forces of light and allowed the army to recover. Supported by the Shiba and wielding all the power in their considerable arsenal of spells, the Isawa shugenja struck down the gibbering undead. Wave after wave of magic flashed through the skies as zombies were returned to the earth through mystic fire and freezing ice. The Bloodspeakers tried to fight back with their dreaded *maho*, but they were no match for Phoenix Elemental Masters. The Shiba yojimbo struck down any foe who approached, and allowed the Isawa to do their work. They drove Iuchiban's forces back into



the plain, giving the overwhelmed Imperial Army a chance to recover. What could have been a complete rout was transformed into victory, and while the clans suffered horrible casualties, they did not break. The Phoenix had given them the will to fight on.

The battle lasted for seven days before the forces of the Empire could finally declare victory. Iuchiban's spirit was trapped once again, and transported back to the Tomb, where Isawa magic bound him within the very walls of the place. He remains there to this day. The zombies were destroyed and the Bloodspeakers smashed – those few who survived were scattered to the four winds. Bloodied yet unbowed, the clans could rejoice that Iuchiban was no longer a threat. A monument placed in the center of the field today commemorates the great Battle of Sleeping River, and acknowledges the sacrifice of all samurai – whatever their clan – who died stopping the Bloodspeaker's plans.

For more details on Iuchiban and the Battle of Sleeping River, see *The Tomb of Iuchiban* boxed set.

THE FIVE NIGHTS OF SHAME

(From the Tales of Isawa Usun)

Long ago the heights of the Dragon Heart Plain were filled with a prosperous folk. A young family held the plain, calling themselves the Snake Clan. Through trade with the lands to the south, their lives were comfortable. They were an unassuming, small family of samurai, whose service to the Empire was unremarkable in all respects save their complete loyalty. But to this family of noble men came disaster.

An ancient spirit haunted the land around the castle – one who would not rest. For many years, the Shuten Doji came calling at the castle on the first evening of each month, screaming its fury and begging the family to heed its pleas for mercy. Although the small family of the Snake struggled to ignore its summons, one dark night, the young son of the daimyo was unable to resist its siren call. Once he had gone to its side, the hauntings seemed to stop – for a time.

When the daimyo of the castle died, all the Phoenix lands mourned, for he had been a loyal servant to their Empire, and a friend to the Phoenix Clan. Seven days after his father's pyre had been lit, the son ascended to rule his family castle and their small village. However, there was a darkness in his soul. He had been taught foul

secrets by the Shuten Doji, and thought to seize immortality through *maho*. Only through the intervention of the Fortunes were the Phoenix able to uncover his plot. Within days, the Shiba acted. The forces of the Phoenix Clan descended upon the village like a wave of flame from the heavens. Elemental magic met blood sorcery while Shiba blades felled every living soul. In five days, no man, woman, or child of the Snake Clan lived. From the south, the rest of the Empire looked on the slaughter with horror and outrage, and a missive from Hantei himself was sent to the Phoenix, demanding that they explain their actions. Two words were the only response from the Elemental Masters: "Never again."

Never again.

BATTLE OF THE BROKEN DAISHO

(From the Tales of Isawa Usun)

In the seventh year of the rule of the 23rd Hantei, an ancient feud burst into flame. Kakita Gosano, whose family had been killed long before by Matsu assault, stood ready to kill the Matsu daimyo. On the high northern plains, the two generals had gathered great armies, each swearing to destroy the other. After minor skirmishes, the main forces met in a valley near the Road of Fierceness.

A bolt of lightning split the clear summer sky, tearing the world open, and a fierce downpour began in the middle of the valley. Shiba Toriiko, Champion of the Phoenix, and Isawa Anoso, the Master of Water, strode out of the curtain of gray. Behind them came an army of the Phoenix.

Toriiko knew of the battle to come, and despised the great loss of life over men's pride. As the Crane and Lion armies approached, she placed her army – a mere 20,000 men – between the two great forces. For fifty years, the Phoenix had not stuck a blow against their neighbors, but now their warriors stood ready beneath the banner of their Champion.

Both the Crane and Lion generals demanded an explanation. "You would rip the Empire apart for a hundred years with the consequences of this day," said Toriiko. "Your rage would outlive you both. My men will not live in the world you would make." Matsu Tusun believed the response meant that the Phoenix would stand with their allies the Crane. Striding furiously back to his encampment, he ordered the charge. Lion arrows rained upon the Phoenix forces, and Matsu samurai drove forward into the Phoenix lines.


SHIBA AND FU LENG

When the Children of the Sky fell to the Earth, it was Shiba who first asked why their youngest brother was not with them. Shinjo, too, began to search for Fu Leng, but her tale is elsewhere.

Shiba walked into the lands known today as the Shadowlands with no fear. It is said that those lands were green and fertile once, filled with ancient civilizations and relics of another Empire, but Shiba saw none of this. The records he wrote of his journeys speak instead of a great darkness which lived on the path to Jigoku, and the sadness he felt when he passed near to that place.

Scholars have assumed that this 'dark land' which Shiba speaks of is in fact the Festering Pit, but there are those who would disagree. The descriptions are of a black place, whose color has been drained and where even the earth has no sign of life.

Within the place is said to be a river, a dark void of souls, and something... else. The Isawa Masters guard this information jealously, and have occasionally sent others to seek for this place, but to no avail. The Phoenix Champion will not speak of it, and if Ujimitsu can translate the strange text, he has never volunteered the information.



THE PATH OF MAN

The secret Gift that Shiba chose Asako to guard a thousand years ago was the capacity to open up human or Kami perceptions to a level where the Path of Man is apparent.

This is not a physical path, so much as a spiritual one. Everyone walks along it every day of their lives, though only a select few realize it. Even they are not consciously aware of it.

They "sense" it as they would the presence of an ill intention, or a lost thought. These enlightened Rokugani know that there is a guiding force behind the progress of humanity. They know that there is a reason they are where they are, when they are, why they are. In many ways, they are more satisfied than others who cannot see.

But there is a drawback to knowing of the Path. Once its course has been revealed, there is no rationalizing idle inaction or foolish judgements. Those exposed to the Path rarely consciously choose to ignore it, for if they do, they may find themselves wandering from its graceful direction into the dark abyss beyond. Some (like Fu Leng and Iuchiban) never return.

However, even the stoutest of bushi fell back in confusion as not one Phoenix drew his sword.

Upon the field, between the two great armies, the Shiba died in scores without flinching. As each man fell, another came forward to take his place. Hardened veterans trembled at the Phoenix's discipline. Word reached Gosun that some of his commanders had committed *seppuku*, caught between his order and the bravery of men who would die but not yield one inch.

To the east, Kakita Gosano rode into the Phoenix ranks. When Phoenix and Crane met, the only sound was of the violence and bloodshed in the west.

"Good Phoenix, this is not your fight. Will you stand aside?"

Toriiko shook her head.

"You stand in the way of justice? Think of the blood the Matsu have already spilled, among your family, and my own. The peaceful Crane who have died for Lion greed!"

"I will not gaze on a world devoured by pride, Kakita." She rested her hand on her sword.

Instantly Gosano shifted his footing, ready to strike, and looked into her eyes. There, he saw only firm resolve, and the discipline of steel. She was ready to die, he decided. And she was going to win. Flustered, only his pride propelled his stroke.

She never moved.

As Shiba Toriiko's body fell to the ground, the defeated Crane heard her words again in his mind. She had been stronger in every way. She had not even been speaking to him. He felt the presence of his forefather, the ancient soul of Kakita, turn away in shame.

Matsu Tusun received Gosano's broken swords at noon. "I will retire to the Asahina Temples and try to build the world Shiba Toriiko will never see. With words, not blood." Knowing only that his enemy was samurai no more, having given up both swords and family, Tusun withdrew. And he wondered what she must have said to break a man like that. It was a greater vengeance than he could aspire to.

The autumn of that year was a quiet one.

BATTLE AT FATE GORGE

There he sat, gazing upon the reflecting pool, as the armies of the Matsu and Isawa faced one another for a coming battle - a coming battle that would answer a question that many had

forgotten. Many, but not Isawa Kaiyoko, the current Master of Water. The Lord General of the Lion, Matsu Uniri, had made a challenge that the imperial shugenja were an unnecessary addition to the Armies of the Emperor. The courtly Isawa argued that their magics were unsurpassed and that an army of soldiers was no match for an army of Isawa shugenja. The Shiba cheered the motion and said that any army of Isawa would surely defeat an army of Matsu. Uniri knew when a challenge was being made. He rose, removed his katana from its *saya*, and cut his own finger. He quietly uttered the word "done", and left the court. The entire assembly knew the meaning of the words and the battle of Matsu and Isawa would a fierce display of power.

Three months later, Isawa Kaiyoko watched from her sanctuary as eight Shiba prepared to be teleported to the Matsu war room the night before the battle. The Shiba knew that they would never return, but it was their duty to see that the battle between be determined without Matsu leadership. A bold and decisive move for the Isawa, but a necessary act if the Isawa were to be deemed worthy of the emperor's aid.

Eight men entered the portal, and Isawa Kaiyoko sat gazing at her pool awaiting the fall of Uniri. When the portal opened and the Shiba emerged they faced the wrath of not one, not two, but three Matsu determined to see them dead. Isawa Kaiyoko had calculated for Uniri and his wife Yunaki, but not for a ten-year-old Matsu Tsuko. The first strike from the first Shiba coming through the portal fell short and he was easily killed. The second Shiba brought her sword down swiftly into the distracted Uniri's body. Yunaki gathered her katana and swiftly dispatched the Shiba one by one, while her husband destroyed another two Shiba with his last strength. But it was Matsu Tsuko and her boken crushing the windpipe of the last remaining Shiba that sealed the fate of the Isawa army. As the Lion guards rushed into the tent, Kaiyoko's reflecting pool discerned nothing more... and her fate at the battlefield tomorrow would be left at the hands at an equally fierce General, Matsu Yunaki.

When the Matsu assembled for battle the next day the war cry of a ten-year-old girl could be heard: "I am Matsu Tsuko, daughter of the great Daimyo Uniri, and I have slain a cowardly Phoenix with a stick and my own honor. How many Phoenix can claim this?" The Matsu roared,

and then charged. And the rest is the history left for a bard to tell.

BATTLE OF THE SUN PRINCESS

(as told by Isawa Ryote, Master of Earth)

When the fog lifted from valley, I watched as the Dragon army stalked along the ground, with their samurai and shugenja at their back. The General of our army said, "Remain still. The fog would protect us. They cannot see us, but we can see them. Hold fast your arrows until I give the word. Prepare your magics, shugenja. Your time is soon." I was sure he was looking at me when he said that. I could feel his confidence. A supernatural strength overcame me and the magics inside of me boiled. It was all I could do to contain the energies I was sure I would burst.

The Dragon approached and I feared that I would attack too soon, and alert them to our position. My sensei stood over us and looked at me, as if she knew. She looked and paused with a soft glance; a soft pensive glance that I have etched into my mind since that day whenever the energies seem too much to bear. But it has always been the little things with my sensei that made learning and knowing so different, yet so alike.

When the fog began to part, my sensei, our General and everything else joined the fog and became it. The energies of thousands unleashed from the fog upon the battle and the Dragon shugenja found themselves fighting against the very air, while the bushi fell to the powerful lightning and thunder that ravaged their unprepared lines.

I was part of it. Isawa Ryote. Now a mere sensei to a small flock of children that will someday fight and become part of an army. And when I tell them what it will feel like, I know that they do not understand. So I merely smile and give them a soft, pensive look, and I know that they understand.



"When will you leave me, Asako?"

"Never, my Lord. Never."

– *Night Sky Blackened*,
a play by Isawa Moriheo

The Asako family are the exception to many rules in Rokugan. They are enigmatic like the *ise zumi* of the Dragon Clan, yet their encouraging philosophy mimics that of the Lion's Ikoma. They are as proud as any Lion, yet they do not consciously oppress or criticize anyone outside their house.

Their origins are inseparably linked with those of modern bushido, revolving around the arrival of the Prophet and the sacred knowledge he brought with him to Rokugan. Chief among the innovations he gave the fledgling Empire was a great secret passed into Asako's hands by her old friend Shiba – several years after his death.

Asako's Life

Lady Asako was, in her youth, one of many human companions to Shiba, the Phoenix Kami. They traveled together and learned much from one another about love and life, loss and death. In those days, Asako was married to Yogo, a great shugenja, and they walked Rokugan with a pride born of the friendship of gods.


With the coming of Fu Leng's dark armies, however, Shiba was drawn into the intrigues of war, and appeared to her less and less. Asako contented herself with perfecting her craft of healing the injured and infirm. Throughout the first months of the war, she traveled with Shiba's



THE ASAKO MON

The *mon* of the Asako is comprised of a simple hand, holding a quill. The quill ends in flames, symbolizing the Phoenix for whom the family serves; the quill itself is the sign of their devotion as historians and keepers of information. It is said that the Asako once used another *mon* – one with far more sinister overtones – but if it is true, then that *mon* was lost long ago.





THE MYSTERIES OF THE ASAKO

On the surface, the *Henshin Academy* appears to be a training ground for librarians and historians.

Those who will eventually replace the caretakers of the Imperial Library in Gisei Toshi, and those who will serve the Empire alongside the Ikoma, study here with the *Michibiku* (see sidebar, p. 62) and the true Henshin.

All of them undergo the same (initial) schooling, and acquire their first Mystery within the halls of the Academy.

But this is where the similarity ends. To the outside world, the Asako designate a pupil's course of life study after his graduation from the First Rank of training. Thereafter all of his information is gleaned through experience, contemplation, meditation, and practice. This has led to the false sense that the Asako have little of actual use to present them beyond fundamental concepts...

...and this is precisely what the Asako desire. Nothing could be more dangerous to their cause than discovery of their knowledge, and the easiest way to protect that knowledge is to convince the world that it does not exist.

armies, tending to those wounded in battle, all the while praying for an end to the violence.

She missed her beloved Yogo, who was fighting elsewhere against the Dark One's minions. She wished for nothing other than a return to the simpler life they knew before. But that would not be. During a glorious victory, Yogo was cursed by Fu Leng to betray the ones he loved the most, and returned to Kyuden Isawa as a corrupted man.

He tried desperately to break the curse, but not even the greatest Isawa shugenja could reduce it. He considered *seppuku*, but at the last moment was swayed by the Scorpion, Bayushi. With the knowledge that he would never love the Scorpion, and was therefore safe within their care, he joined them, and never returned again.

Upon hearing of her husband's deed, Asako was crushed. She returned home to her son, but everything had changed. She was bitter and without hope for the future. Then Shiba returned, offering a place for to begin again, among friends. He offered his home for her to take as her own, an arrangement she gratefully agreed to. Her son, Sagoten, was less forgiving of the state his father had left things in, however. Anger and resentment swelled within him like a monsoon, and he vowed to avenge the cruel abandonment he and his mother had suffered.

Late in the war, Shiba went to the Council to request his aid, but was flatly refused. "We are protecting ourselves with the very forces that you have provided us, Shiba," Isawa said, "and we will not sacrifice our lives for your cause."

Shinsei's reply was simple and direct. "You are saving the bodies of your people, Isawa, but you are still sacrificing their spirits." This served to bring him around, but he had a condition for his agreement to join the Thunders in the Shadowlands; Asako's son, upon his *gempukku*, would marry Isawa's daughter. Thus, the houses of the Phoenix would be unified.

Realizing how much his true father's enmity of the Isawa could be inflamed but not what would be done to his mother in the process, Sagoten agreed to the offer, and preparations for the marriage commenced. Among these plans was the announcement of a grand elemental masterpiece to be constructed by the finest shugenja in the clan. The construct would be a testament to the union of generations to come. For more on this item, see 'Isawa's Last Wish' sidebar on page 106.

The Great Secret

Months later, Lady Doji came to the lands of the Isawa and requested that they divine the locations of the Thunders in the Shadowlands; they had not been seen or heard from since they left with Shinsei. Perhaps more out of concern for their founder than the others, the Isawa complied. They discovered that only one still lived, but they could not discern who.

Shiba volunteered to enter the Shadowlands to find the surviving Thunder and what remained of Fu Leng's armies. He was given the approximate location and disappeared into the blasted lands. For weeks, he did not return, and Doji and the Isawa feared the worst, until one day a figure was seen stumbling back out again. It was Shosuro, and she carried twelve black scrolls and an obsidian hand.

With her final words, Shosuro gave the items to the samurai gathered outside Otosan Uchi, claiming they were the doom of the Dark Son of Heaven. None ever heard the story of her rescue, how she came to escape the Shadowlands, or of the final fate of Shiba for many years.

With Isawa gone, work on the great magical construct slowed, but final arrangements continued. The newly-built Ki-Rin Shrine would host the ceremony, and emissaries from all the clans would be present. The wedding was being referred to as 'Isawa's Last Wish', for it was announced in his last public moment in the Empire.

Mere weeks prior to the wedding, a most unexpected visitor appeared to Asako, and the story he told was an amazing one indeed. Shiba, merged with the spirit of his son, Tsuzaki, spoke to Asako of entering the Shadowlands in search of the last Thunder, and how he had come upon Shosuro with the holy man Shinsei, as they were being attacked by one of the last great Oni generals.

"The beast fell upon them with careless brutality," he said in a saddened voice Asako would carry to her grave, "and that was the only thing that kept any of us alive. I entered the fray, intending to defend the heroes with my life. Shosuro was already badly wounded.

"Together, we dispatched the monster, but not before I had suffered a crippling injury. Afterward, when I expressed doubt that we could return home without help, Shinsei-*sama* spoke to

me calmly, whispering words of comfort and support. He told me that Shosuro must return to the Empire, and that I would carry her back.

"He continued whispering to me as I lay bleeding into the dead earth. I trusted him, knowing that he carried within him the wisdom of a thousand lost sages. But there was more... much, much more..."

Asako was confused, as much by the sudden reappearance of her lost friend as by the story he told. "What...? How are you here?" she asked.

"I am here by the grace of a truth that will not affect the world for many centuries. It is what Shinsei explained next to me, there in the Dark Lands. A great secret has sustained me beyond death, and I have chosen you to guard it until humanity is ready."

"I don't understand," Asako breathed, dazzled and bewildered all at once.

"You don't have to. Not yet. All you have to do is listen, and remember..."

As Shiba continued to speak, she found herself lost in his words, slipping between them into another level of comprehension, in which she was privy to universal maxims beyond the scope of anything any human had ever known. She was becoming something new...

"There is knowledge you do not yet realize," Shiba began. "Lost paths to divinity that humans are denied by birth and blood. But they are linked to you in that you are a gifted race, destined to walk the path of godhood in time. In the centuries ahead, you will discover that your ultimate state of being is far more than any imagine.

"The Fortunes favor you. Mortals will be the champions of the next age. Your gift is your resilience, and ability to adapt under the harshest circumstances. Nature is a crafty obstruction, and retards your progress. There are ways to trick Her, however, to slip past Her watchful eye, to take the next step toward apotheosis..."

They talked throughout the night, delving into forbidden mysteries and enigmas. When the dawn came, Asako was alone, and the spirit of her family had been born.

The New Way

"Fortune favors the mortal man." – Shinsei

Asako had many ideas for how to teach Shiba's secret to others. She took all the information she had received and wrote it down

in a script of her own devising, only sharing the cipher for it with the handful of individuals she had revealed the truth to. They determined to redesign the cipher every generation to avoid accidental (or intentional) exposure to the sensitive words. They then began recruiting shugenja to help them research the theories.

Publicly, however, Asako and her new companions continued her work as a healer. This was as much a labor of love as it was a security measure, as Asako truly desired to heal the wounds of her fellow Rokugani. With the knowledge of man's destiny fueling her passion, she quickly acquired a name as a miracle-worker of sorts. Those who did not know better claimed she had learned much of her husband's spell-crafting ability before he left.

At Shiba's behest, her new family's focus shifted to include more than just the healing of bodies, however. They also recorded history. Shiba had said that this was an important part of understanding the human condition, and that to achieve their potential, humans would have to know what has gone before. "So Shinsei has revealed to me, and so I pass on to you," he had told her, now known to the Phoenix as the Great Library of Gisei Toshi.

So they collected every lost fable they could find, wrestled every elusive myth from the mouths of reticent wayfarers, until their treatises on the past could be compiled. They formed an extensive library chronicling not only the great war with Fu Leng but also the hundreds of legends about the events before that, when the Kami walked the land. So impressive were the volumes they amassed that Emperor Hantei himself dedicated a part of the city to build an immense structure to house them in.

To this day, it is unknown how the Isawa discovered that the Asako had been given information denied to them, or how they knew that it was magical in nature. But their explosive reaction is well-documented. They called for the immediate release of the knowledge Shiba had given Asako, and when refused, they demanded that Asako and all her 'family' leave the city at once.

To the relief of all involved, the wedding was cancelled, and the shugenja charged with the creation of the magical gift were ordered to halt their work. No one outside their order ever saw the gift, or discovered its nature. The few words spoken of it related a sense of grandeur and a feel




THE MYSTERIES OF THE ASAKO (CONTINUED)

So, early on in every Asako career, a choice is made by the *Fushihai* as to the direction a student will progress in. Librarians and historians, who are not deemed ready for the Path, are sent away to continue their development elsewhere, while the remainder are taken under the wing of a *Henshin* sensei, who will hone their ability with The Gift.

To those outside the family, all of this seems perfectly mundane. No one ever questions the Asako (save perhaps the Isawa, who still bear a significant grudge for not being chosen to guard Shinsei's hidden knowledge), and rarely are any but the librarians or historians bothered by outsiders. The ruse has worked for the last several hundred years, and the Asako have no intention of altering it.

(continued)



THE MYSTERIES OF THE ASAKO (CONTINUED)

Finally, absolutely no one – even within the family – who has not achieved School Rank Five (*Fushikai*) is aware of the path's existence. All Asako believe there to be only four Mysteries available until the moment that the other Masters come to them and reveal the Path and its majesty. Then, and only then, are they allowed to study it for what the Asako believe it really is, and acquire the secrets of immortality. Even so, such candidates are sequestered for upwards of three to five decades before they integrate back into Rokugani society, that they may come to understand the importance of not revealing The Gift to anyone. Every conceivable precaution has been taken to prevent this from happening.

So far, the Asako have prevailed in this regard – or so they believe.

of elemental mastery never envisioned before or since. It remains hidden away by command of the Emperor.

By Shiba's request, a small contingent of Asako's loyal historians remained to tend the massive Imperial Library, still under construction. As a concession to the irate Isawa who controlled the city, these Asako would never be allowed to leave. Monks would attend to their needs, bringing them food and necessary supplies. They would spend their entire lives within the dusty halls of the Library, never setting foot outside again. Eventually, it was decided that, for purposes of their retirement as well as replacement, they should be allowed to be transported outside the city walls by their attendants, and their successors brought back. Even then, the foot of an Asako has never been allowed to touch the ground of Gisei Toshi since the day Asako defied the Isawa.

Asako resolved to leave the city with the rest and strike out for new territory. They would need a secure place to continue their probes into the limits of human existence. Beyond Gisei Toshi, in the wilderness of northern Rokugan, the Asako settled near the Ki-Rin Shrine, where the wedding between Asako's son and Isawa's daughter would have occurred in mere months. There, they founded a small village, and began to develop the philosophy that guides the family even now. Eventually, they also founded the outpost that would eventually become Shiro Asako in the central Phoenix lands, as well as a secretive stronghold in the north called Doro Owari Mura (Road's End Village).

THE ASAKO TODAY

The Asako family has not suffered any great tribulations or had to overcome any external challenges in the thousand years since the war with Fu Leng. They have had two benefits most other families of the Great Clans have been without – the time to develop independently and freedom from political interference that would otherwise have stunted their growth.

This, coupled with the extraordinary information they have protected since Shinsei walked among the clans, has resulted in a decided solidarity. The Asako are unified to a fault. Yet even their simple delineation of priorities has caused a certain amount of distinction within their ranks. In short, both basic

schools of 'Shinseist thought' are represented in the Asako.

There is one portion of the family devoted to further researches of the Secret and its implications for all of Rokugan. They develop training methods for bringing out the latent abilities all humans share, and incorporate them into formal school practices. They include the members of the Asako who have been the most 'enlightened', who have traveled the farthest down the Path, and who continue explorations far beyond the scope of anyone else in the known world.

Isolationist in the extreme, these Asako adhere to the doctrines most older, retiring samurai do. They are aloof and difficult to get a clear answer from. But they are also the most knowledgeable, and thus can provide the greatest wisdom if understood. Ultimately, they are also the most experienced of the family, and thus the adjudicators of their rigid schooling system. They decide who is and is not ready for the next tier of Ascendance.

There is another faction within the Asako, however. Outgoing and friendly, they are dedicated to the development not only of themselves, but of all Rokugani. They are the lower-level practitioners of the mystic abilities granted through control of the Secret. They follow the Way of Shinsei and prepare the 'younger clans' for a time when they can become like the Asako: one step closer to godhood.

Together, the Asako have grown almost as far away from the rest of the Phoenix as the other families have from each other. There is little care for structure elsewhere within the clan, however, and the Asako have taken it upon themselves to at least make a token effort to keep the Phoenix unified. In truth, they spend more time with the people of the other clans than they do with the Isawa or the Shiba, but the intent is there.

And in these times, that is all that is required to make a world of difference.

The Asako realize that their beliefs would be considered heretical, even blasphemous, by others in the Empire. They are guarding the secret to mortality itself, and immortality beyond that. They will never reincarnate again, for they are already preparing for transcendence from the mortal coil – to become true Fortunes themselves.

They are the pinnacle of human experience. The Asako have already made the leap from 'what they were' to 'what they are becoming'.

They have tapped into spiritual resources that allow them to craft bodies like a sculptor would clay. They can change the attributes of a person at will, making him faster, stronger, healthier, or more resilient to poisons or fire. Or they can even make him slower, weaker or more susceptible to disease or famine. Physically, people are simply a pliant compound to mold to their whims in endless experiments concerning the fate of every living being.

None of those initiated into the higher ranks of study have died of natural causes in three hundred years, and when one of them dies to violence, all are lessened for it. One fewer of their number will walk the Path of the Gods. In theory,

the victim of such an atrocity would still return eventually, reincarnated as another Asako, yet the family harbors ill feelings toward such perpetrators regardless. The fates of those who have committed such an act, even through ignorance, have been rumored to be most unpleasant...

Throughout, the Asako have remained pragmatic and optimistic about the future of Rokugan. Shinsei told Hantei that the word samurai meant 'servant'. The Asako say that all Rokugani are each others' servants, and that they must strive to protect and nurture one another.

They are striving still.



THE ASAKO SCRIPT

All documents created by the Asako are written in a convoluted script that must undergo several transcriptions before it can be read by those outside the family (or even in the lower ranks of the Asako themselves). Additionally, the Imperial Librarians develop a new multi-layered cipher and transcribe the extant texts every generation to prevent outsiders from gaining their valuable knowledge.



This was developed by Asako and the first of the family to secure The Gift and prevent its capture by those outside the clan. They did not have magic to aid them in this endeavor, and so they had to cultivate advanced calligraphy techniques to accomplish the feat. Today, this talent has become innate for all Asako librarians, and serves as their basis for written knowledge.



Chapter Three



Character



Chapter Three: Character

In this chapter, you will find new creation rules for Phoenix Clan characters, including new Advantages, Disadvantages, Skills, and Schools, plus information on designing Isawa *Tensai* (elemental specialists), the enigmatic *Ishiken* (Void Shugenja) and the Asako *Henshin*. Lastly, at the end of the chapter is a set of Heritage and Fortune Tables, which focus on the facets of the Phoenix most commonly encountered.

New Skills

ADVANCED MEDICINE/ ACUPUNCTURE (PERCEPTION)

While this is not a magical skill, it is the physical ability to treat minor wounds or provide relief and healing for injuries and common sicknesses. Not all diseases can be healed through application of this skill, nor can all poisons be reversed, but it gives the user a chance to determine what poison or sickness affects the recipient, and counteract it. Characters with the Acupuncture skill can use their ability with a successful Perception + Advanced Medicine roll versus a TN of 15 (less if the wounds are not severe, greater if the wound is traumatic or the disease serious) to successfully treat a patient. Such patients will heal at twice the normal rate thereafter. Patients can only be treated with this skill once per wound or disease. Poisons can be determined with a TN of 20 or higher, and can only be treated if the healer also has the Poison or Lore: Poison skill. This is a Craft Skill.

CIPHER (INTELLIGENCE)

This advanced form of Calligraphy allows the encryption or decoding of written information.

The Asako use a more developed version of this to keep their texts from being read by outsiders. Magical and sensitive knowledge is often coded in this manner. In game terms, an Intelligence + Cipher roll is made secretly by the GM whenever a player with this Skill tries to encode something. Later, when someone with the same Skill tries to decode it, she rolls her Intelligence + Cipher vs. the original total. Calligraphy will not permit decoding of ciphered material. This is a High Skill.

RESEARCH (INTELLIGENCE)

This skill adds a one-time (per spell researched) -5 TN to a shugenja's research spell roll, no matter to what extent the shugenja has mastered it. It also reduces the shugenja's time to research a spell by one week per Rank of Research skill. It cannot go beneath the one month minimum research time for any spell. This is a High Skill.

SPELLCRAFT (INTELLIGENCE) (SHUGENJA ONLY)

This skill provides the shugenja with enhanced knowledge of magic and the *kami*. A shugenja with this skill can roll Intelligence + Spellcraft versus a TN of 20 to sway a kami's view of them from hatred to mere dislike, or neutral to friendly. Further, it can be used to identify spells being cast in the area, and to understand complexities about an unfamiliar spell. Lastly, a successful use of Intelligence + Spellcraft at a TN of 25 can determine if a spell has been cast in the area recently, or to identify what spell has been cast on a person. This skill can be used to identify the residual effects of a spell that was cast in the recent past (up to 1 hour per level of Spellcraft). This is a High Skill.

New Advantages

BLAND (2 POINTS)

Characters who are Bland tend to be unassuming, quiet folk with average build and features. Because they are not striking in any way, it is easy to forget their name and appearance. They have no real distinguishing features, and many people simply look away when they pass nearby. Being bland is both an advantage and a disadvantage; someone who is bland has a greater likelihood of being ignored when

disguised or wishing to avoid notice, but they also have a smaller chance of being noticed for recognition or award by their daimyo.

CHOSEN BY THE ORACLES (5 POINTS)

Occasionally, a child is noticed by the Oracles and guided gently through their life. While this does not mean that the person so chosen is destined to become the next Oracle, it means that the Oracle takes a definite interest in their life and well being – to the point of interfering when the individual is not doing as the Oracle thinks best. Because the Oracles are mystical, barely-human creatures, their idea of 'best' and 'worst' can be very different from our own, and their meddling can be a double-edged sword.

DAREDEVIL (4 POINTS)

People who take the Daredevil advantage are more capable of surviving incredible odds. Whenever this character does something risky, or performs an impossible feat (GM's discretion as to what exactly that constitutes), the GM secretly rolls a die. If the die roll is even, the character receives a +10 bonus to their roll (unknown to the player) for that feat. Otherwise, there is no benefit from this advantage.

ELEMENTAL ATTUNEMENT (6 POINTS)

Characters with this Advantage have a bonus to their use of one element, and a detriment to their use of another. A shugenja who is 'aligned' with one element is said to 'resist' another. Earth and Air resist each other, as do Fire and Water. Spellcasters gain a -5 TN bonus when casting any spells of their aligned element. However, they suffer a +5 penalty when casting spells of their resisted element. For example, a character with Elemental Attunement to Fire gains a -5 to all TNs while he is using that form of magic, but a +5 to all Water spells. This bonus/penalty scheme also applies to magical attacks against the character. If an Earth-attuned character is being attacked by Earth, his TN to be hit is considered +5, while if he is targeted by Air, the TN is reduced by 5.

ELEMENTAL CONVERGENCE (6 POINTS) (ISHIKEN ONLY)

Unlike a standard Innate Ability, this Advantage allows a Void mage to use a Void spell

a number of times per day equal to their Void Rank without it counting toward their total available Void spells. This is accomplished through a dedicated regimen of constant practice and application, in which the character studies the complexities of *that single method* and its various uses. Every Void method can result in hundreds of possible effects, so this process often takes years to accomplish, and only one Void spell may ever be considered an Innate Void Ability for any character.

Mastery of a Void spell will not grant this Advantage – only the standard benefit to the PC no longer requiring the scroll to cast it. Also, the common Innate Ability Advantage may still be purchased or acquired during play for Void spells; this has the same effect for them as for common spells.

FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE (PHOENIX ONLY) (1-10 POINTS)

This advantage is a form of the 'Inheritance' advantage from the basic RPG. However, rather than inheriting a physical item or ability, the character has some secret knowledge which should be kept hidden from the rest of Rokugan. Because of the reclusive nature of the Phoenix, family secrets are passed only from one member of the household to another as death comes to take the original holder of the secret. Such secrets are considered the most precious knowledge a member of that family can hold. Each family is publicly known (within their clan) to have this secret, although the majority of Rokugan does not know. The information is jealously guarded by the Phoenix Clan.

This knowledge can be anything from the true ritual to summon an Oni to the location of a Black Scroll. For each point spent on this Advantage, the character's secret is more potentially damaging to him and his clan, and he will be more seriously watched. In any case, fellow Phoenix PCs should be informed that he holds some Forbidden Knowledge; NPCs tend to treat the character differently – better or worse, depending on the NPC.

ISHIKEN-DO (5 POINTS) (ISAWA SHUGENJA ONLY)

This Advantage is required of all Isawa who wish to become Void mages. It is the latent ability all candidates for *ishi* status possess, allowing them to reach out into the Realm of Void and see

ISAWA TENSAI OUTFIT

Isawa *Tensai* receive as their opening outfit (all of Fine quality):

Kimono, Traveling pack, Scroll Satchel, Wakizashi, Tanto, 5 koku, First Aid kit, 3 scrolls (blank)

ASAKO HENSHIN OUTFIT

Asako *Henshin* receive as their opening outfit (all of Average quality):


Kimono, Traveling pack, Wakizashi or Bo Staff, Tanto, 3 koku, First Aid kit, Acupuncture set, Quill and Ink

ISAWA ISHIKEN OUTFIT

Isawa *Ishiken* receive as their opening outfit (all of Average quality, any two of Fine quality):

Kimono, Traveling pack, Scroll Satchel, Wakizashi, 5 koku, 5 scrolls (blank), 3 sticks of Incense





the myriad patterns swirling between the other four. Most importantly, this allows them to comprehend what they are seeing. Should a person ever be exposed to the Realm of Void without this Advantage, the subtle eddies would either be invisible to them, or drive them insane.

New Disadvantages

CONTRARY (3 POINTS)

A player character with this Disadvantage may not remain neutral about anything. He does not have to act, but must have an opinion about everything he encounters. This means that the player must take a side in every dispute, seek to solve every problem (even if he can't), and never stand by idly while others do things. In game terms, this means that he must make a Simple Willpower roll vs. a TN determined by the GM (commonly between 5 and 20) to avoid acting in tense situations. Should he fail the roll, he must do something decisive, regardless of the consequences.

CURSE OF THE KAMI (10 POINTS)

You have little connection to the Elements beyond that required to grant you sentience. Any spell you are trying to cast has its TN increased by 10 and takes twice as long to cast. You can never learn any school Techniques or develop any of your own.

ENLIGHTENED MADNESS (PHOENIX SHUGENJA ONLY) (1, 3, OR 6 POINTS)

Similar to the Disadvantage in *Way of the Dragon*, this character has a form of permanent madness brought on by an uncontrolled release of energy within the soul. For the Phoenix, such troubles can be the result of a ritual going terribly awry, or a spell which was cast incorrectly. The madness triggered by later spellcasting is closely related to the original spell which was miscast. Every once in a while, your madness takes control, and you wake up with no memory of your actions. Every spell-induced madness is different, but all are irrevocable. Such a character must be warned: your mind is not your own, and one day, it will turn against you.

When the character is created, choose an element (Air, Fire, Water or Earth; you may not choose Void for this disadvantage unless the

character is a Void Shugenja). Any spell the shugenja casts from that element could cause the character's madness to surface. A Simple Willpower roll is required for the shugenja to maintain his wits. When he casts such a spell, the TN to keep his sanity is 20. (A character receives 1 point for one element, 3 for two, and 6 if three elements can trigger the roll).

Each shugenja's madness is unique and personalized. The player should work out its details and detrimental effects with the GM at the beginning of the campaign.

FORGOTTEN (PHOENIX CLAN ONLY) (4 POINTS)

For some terrible reason, the character has been Forgotten by his clan. The ritual of Forgetting has been cast upon her, and she has been stripped of all magical ability, spellcasting knowledge and ritual lore. She may never gain any new knowledge of such things. The character must be a non-shugenja, and can never use magical items or abilities that require magical aptitude.

JEALOUSY (2 POINTS)

Because of the highly competitive nature of the Phoenix Clan, this disadvantage is common among clan members. A person with the Jealous disadvantage must choose another character or dependent NPC, and constantly try to outdo them. Once they feel that they have successfully 'beaten' the character in question, the disadvantaged character will 'latch on' to another, better opponent, and continue their sense of rivalry. Unlike the Proud or Vain disadvantage, the Jealous character does not necessarily feel that they are superior - simply that they must prove themselves so, at any opportunity. With the GM's permission, this disadvantage can be attached to a skill or ability instead, and the character will be driven to constantly prove that ability, particularly against anyone else who has shown aptitude in it.

MOMOKU (8 POINTS)

Every Rokugani hero has the potential to achieve "greatness". Periodically, there come moments in every hero's life when he must tap into a reserve of "something extra" to perform a miraculous feat or obtain a remarkable victory. The character with the Momoku Disadvantage does not have this reserve to tap into. They must

rely solely on their own skill and daring to solve the problems they face.

Perhaps this is because of some dark dabbling with *maho*, or due to their ancestors' disgrace before or angering of the Fortunes. Whatever the cause, this character cannot use his Void Points to boost his Traits under any circumstances. As far as he is concerned, Void is a distant, unknowable thing, and he has either turned a blind eye or is without the knack for it.

YOGO CURSE (3 POINTS)

Members of the Asako family are closely related to the Yogo, a family within the Scorpion Clan. Although the two families have been parted since the day of Yogo's curse by Fu Leng during the First War, some members of the Asako family occasionally pop up with the terrible affliction. The curse decrees that some action, whether intentional or unintentional, will betray the person you love the most. The more you try to avoid it, the more painful that betrayal will be.

Shugenja Taryu-Jiai

The bushi of the Emerald Empire prove their worth or defend their Honor through a personal display of skill: the iaijutsu duel. But what about shugenja? It is truly rare to see a shugenja using his sword against a bushi. It is more common for the shugenja to have a stand-in fight for his Honor against a bushi, and if the stand-in dies, to pay for the stand-in's life with his own. But long ago, when Emerald Champion Kakita instituted the tradition of dueling and the etiquette guiding it, Isawa Ujikki asked, "But Lord Kakita, how can we who have not dedicated ourselves to the blade defend our honor?" Kakita found himself with no answer, for he did not understand the traditions of the shugenja. He spent many nights in meditation, and in discussion with Isawa Ujikki on the potential protocols of shugenja dueling each other. The following is the result of their meetings, published in the famous scroll titled "Shugenja Taryu-Jiai."

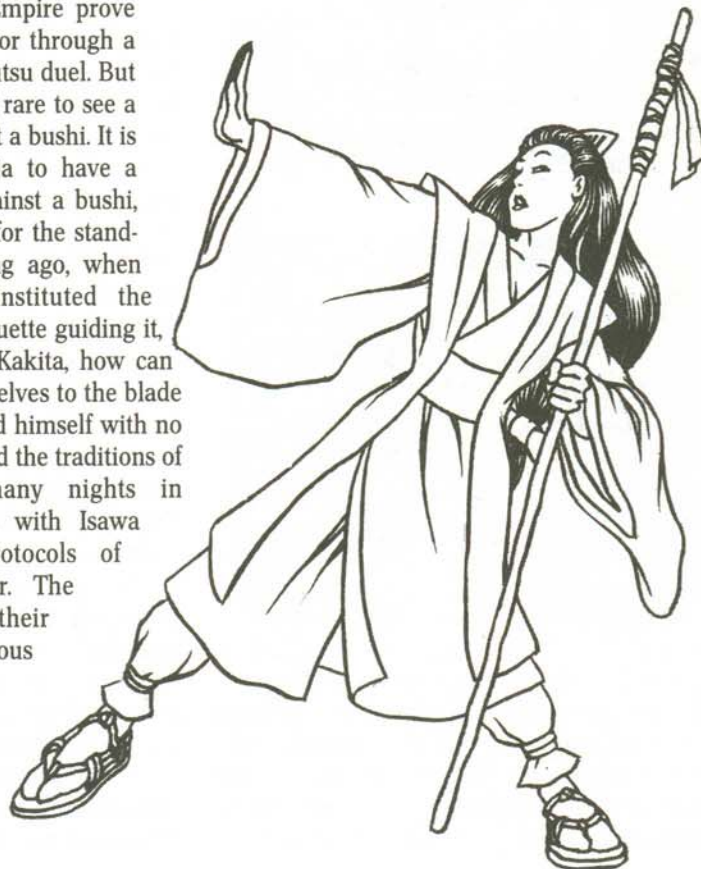
As with the standard procedure for initiating an iaijutsu duel, the shugenja who wishes to challenge

another must first petition her own daimyo to petition the daimyo of the challenged. Then the noble lord of the challenged must accept on behalf of the challenged shugenja, and then the challenged shugenja must accept. A rather lengthy process indeed. Of course, a spontaneous duel circumvents this process, but is generally frowned upon by the daimyo of the combatants. Furthermore, as with an iaijutsu duel, either of the combatants may concede victory to her opponent before the match without loss of face (Honor).

Basically, a shugenja duel is a display of power by the combatants, a proclamation of their ability to harness & control the energy of the kami of an element, and then project that energy at their opponent. So much more of a sight to behold is a shugenja duel than a sword duel.

DUELING PROCEDURE

1. The shugenja who initiates the duel declares which of his Elemental Rings he will use. Then the challenged shugenja declares his or her choice of element. Each shugenja rolls Declared Ring + School Rank, keeping their Ring. The TN for this roll is 5x the opponent's Declared Ring. If a duelist



SHUGENJA & THE DAISHO

Shugenja are allowed to wear a wakizashi as a symbol of their station in the samurai caste. If a shugenja wears a katana as well, then they are outwardly displaying that they have a degree of skill in the bushi's weapon. If they are challenged to an iaijutsu duel, they must accept - and fight for themselves.



THE SCHOOLS OF WIZARDRY

The Schools of Wizardry which train the Isawa *Tensai* are located throughout the Phoenix lands, in keeping with the Isawa preference for isolation and separatism. In the Isawa woodlands, the School of Air is located, among swaying trees and blissfully quiet terrain. The School of Fire, led by Isawa Tsuke, is housed in a tremendous stone building on the cliffs of the Mountain of the Sleeping Thunder. Firebird Falls, the legendary river which flows from the Shrine of Uikku, is the location of the School of Water, and the School of Earth is a series of caverns deep beneath Kyuden Isawa.

Each of the schools is said to have been founded by a Master of the element, long ago. Some even claim to have been built by the brothers and sisters of Isawa himself, and it is certain that Isawa Ouno, brother of the Thunder and the first Master of Earth, once held classes within the caves beneath his brother's palace.

gets Free Raises to cast spells in their chosen Element (e.g. as a school bonus), increase his opponent's TN by 5 for each Free Raise. If a duelist's Declared Ring is the opposing element to his opponent's Declared Ring, he rolls and keeps an extra die.

2. Whichever duelist exceeded his TN by a greater margin inflicts Wounds on his opponent equal to his total die roll. The duelist who exceeded his TN by a smaller margin inflicts Wounds on his opponent equal to the amount by which his TN was exceeded. If a duelist fails to

ELEMENT	OPPOSING ELEMENT
Air	Earth
Earth	Water
Water	Fire
Fire	Air

meet or exceed his TN, he takes Wounds equal to the amount by which he fell short, in addition to the Wounds inflicted by his opponent. If both duelists fail, they both take damage and may not cast spells in their Declared Rings' element for one day per five Wounds received.

3. The shugenja who inflicted more Wounds is usually considered the winner; as in an iaijutsu duel, it is customary for his opponent to concede at this point.



Isawa shugenja are trained from a very young age to become guardians of the elements. More than any other clan, the Phoenix expect their children to be in touch with the *kami*, and to have a thorough grasp of magical theory. From birth,

Isawa children see spellcraft in use, watching elders and apprentices as they learn their skills through study, devotion, and hard work.

When a child is six years old, the shugenja of their immediate family gather at a meeting to determine if a child is acceptable for shugenja training. Almost invariably, the Isawa send their children to the school – it is considered a great dishonor if an Isawa child is not accepted to the Academy of Wizardry. For the Shiba and the Asako, it is less an obligation and more a simple test to decide the child's options for the future.

Once the child has had time and opportunity to learn the basic rituals and prayers of the *kami* – around age eight – she is tested again for her aptitude in each element. Any child found lacking in more than two elements is immediately dismissed from the school in disgrace, and sent to the Shiba bushi school. Afterwards, if the child passes her tests, her training is completed with a single Master who may have one to five apprentices of his own. The Master chooses each child based on aptitude, field of interest, and family lineage.

Thousands of apprentices are presented to Masters each year, but very few are chosen by the Masters of the Council, the Grand Shugenja of the Elements themselves. The Elemental Masters have only three to five apprentices of their own, but they have a scholarly system where they may actually have ten to fifty children learning from their 'school'. An apprentice is responsible not only for his own studies, but for a small group of younger children who look to him for training and tutelage. In this way, say the members of the Council, the children learn not only spellcraft, but also responsibility for themselves and others – the true requirement for anyone who wishes to sit upon the Council of Five. These children study to become *tensai*, a word which means 'prodigy'; they learn how to manipulate one element to the exclusion of all else, suffering in their overall knowledge in order to further their unique talent with one.

Perhaps fifty new children each year are chosen by the Elemental Council; of those, fewer than half remain after their first year's study. Apprentices to the Elemental Masters do not see their Lord or Lady for many months while they are trained by another, higher-ranked and more experienced *tensai*. Competition and rivalry are rampant in this system, as each apprentice knows her or she may be the one chosen to replace the

Master when his or her time on the Council ends. Thus, the *tensai* schools are extremely competitive and require the utmost dedication. Students who fail return to another Master, who is more willing to give them the 'personalized' training available to typical Isawa Shugenja.

Students who succeed, of course, cannot all expect to be the next Master of their element. Only one shugenja in a generation reaches the pinnacle of training and knowledge that comes with true Mastery of their craft. Those who do not reach those lofty heights are rarely chastised: the training is itself so rigorous and demanding that it is respected across Rokugan. Many clans beg for *tensai* to teach at their academies. An elementalists can be assured of a prosperous future, whether serving as a trusted advisor to his clan, or traveling the countryside spreading the wisdom of the Fortunes and Shinsei. Elementalists are treated with respect and honor. Bearing the badge of fellowship, a graduate of the college can expect loyalty and friendship – at least in public – from other members of this austere fraternity, no matter where they should meet.

But for those who are chosen to achieve the supreme position of Master of an Element is the greatest accomplishment of a lifetime. The *tensai* chosen to bear the burden of leading the Phoenix Clan and sit on the Council of Five must be willing to speak for their clan and guide its philosophies and actions. These wizards truly guide the destiny of the clan, so their backgrounds must be impeccable, and their complete mastery of their spellcraft unquestioned.

Benefit: +1 to one trait in the Ring of their chosen element

Skills: Calligraphy, Meditation, Shintao, Theology, History, plus 2 other High skills. Isawa Shugenja get a free raise for all rituals.

Beginning Honor: 3, plus zero boxes

Beginning Spells: Sense, Commune, Summon, plus 2 of their 'primary element' and 1 of a 'secondary element'

TECHNIQUES

Because the *tensai* shugenja are taught as standard Isawa shugenja for the first few years of their training, they have full knowledge of the workings of general spellcraft. However, they have completely devoted themselves to their singular field of study, be it Earth, Air, Water or Fire. Void *tensai* are covered hereafter, in their own school.

In game terms, this means that *tensai* receive a Free Raise to any spells within their element for each school rank. Thus, Isawa Tsuke, who is a rank 5 *tensai* of Fire, has 5 Free Raises for all fire spells. These raises may be used in any way the player chooses, whether for distance, damage, or accuracy, and may be divided as the player sees fit.

However, such devoted training to one element is certain to leave a *tensai* somewhat lacking in knowledge of other elements. Although the *tensai* can learn and cast spells of any element, it is more difficult for them to do so. Spells of all elements other than their primary have a +5 to their TN for every school rank past the first the *tensai* has achieved. Isawa Tsuke, in our example above, has a +20 TN to all of his Water, Earth or Air spells.



Of all the elemental forces which a shugenja can draw from, the most powerful and the most difficult to control is that which lies between and joins the others: Void. Each of the other elements – Earth, Air, Fire, and Water – allow shugenja to call upon and direct only their individual forces. Also, it is commonly understood that the mages in question must master the appropriate fundamental concepts, learn the necessary spells, and undertake certain risks should they perform those spells incorrectly.

The shugenja who studies Void, however, understands that everything in the world contains *all* four basic elements, held together by the least tangible essence – Void. It is like the silence between notes of music, giving rhythm and shape to the whole. To the man who understands the relationship of Void to all other things, and who has the innate ability to personally perceive that

THE SCHOOLS OF WIZARDRY

(CONTINUED)

It is said that there was once a place where the Masters of Void met to train their students in the exacting and dangerous studies of Void Magic, but that ancient site was destroyed when a Master of the Void went mad, nearly 300 years ago. Since that time, the Masters who have followed have chosen few students, and preferred to train them personally as they travel across Rokugan. Because of this, the acolytes of the Master of Void are often said to follow 'The Path of the Wanderer' by the students of other Masters.





THE DANGERS OF VOID

The realm of Void was not meant for man. This much is known. If a Void mage spends too much time lingering in the Realm, they may find memories of either adjacent world (that of the elements or the physical realm) more and more confusing, until they become the alien reality, and Void the familiar. They will be lulled into a false contentment there, eventually eliminating all desire to leave.

At the highest level, Void shugenja are constantly aware, in a peripheral way, of the flow of energies around them. Most of the time, this is like the low murmuring of a stream nearby. But without the training of the Ishiken to support them, it becomes a flood of so much sensory data that the person will quickly be overwhelmed.

This state has been the downfall of more than one untrained or improperly trained Void sensitive.

relationship, distance and form become inconsequential. When he practices Void magic, he doesn't only risk the power getting away from him or causing physical (and external) damage. He risks being lost entirely within the source of the power itself, unable to recognize or distinguish between the elements and what they compose. For such an unfortunate soul, the world becomes a ceaseless canvas of swirling color, all bleeding into itself - forever.

THE REALM OF VOID

Imagine the world we know as a human body, which is seventy percent water. Then imagine that the four elements that shugenja in Rokugan have been studying are only the remaining thirty percent: components of all - bones, muscle, tissue, sinew, tendons - but only components. Water is what holds together the human body, gives its shape form, and combines with all the other parts to make the whole work. No other substance in the human body is more important for proper functioning. So it is with Void. None of the other elements, regardless their sheer power, are able to exist within the world without Void's support. It is in everything, part of everything.

Void is everywhere, everywhen - all at once.

To the beginning practitioners of this art, opening themselves to the Void is like being caught in a great river, pulled along in the rush of things. It requires an immense amount of discipline to pull oneself from the flood. This is why those who practice Void magic have little time to study anything else. Their control must be absolute, or they will drown.

Once he has mastered the founding precepts (swimming), which can take up to several decades for the least adept initiates, an apprentice immediately begins to specialize. There are no fickle Void magicians, no one who can truthfully claim to be proficient in more than a handful of techniques. This is because all Void magic abilities are trained as complete schools of thought, regardless of their similar foundations. They have all the intricacies and three times the danger of common magic, and unique care must be taken with every one - indeed, every use of every one.

They slowly learn to cast themselves into the rush of the world's undercurrent, and to recognize and interpret what they find there. They must know how to visualize the things they sense; simply because something can be perceived does

not convey understanding of what it is, how it is important, and how to treat it safely. Eventually, they will also learn the ultimate truth - that the earth beneath them, the bird that flies overhead, and the trout that swims in the river miles away, are as much a part of them as their own feet, their own hair, and their own hands.

This stage of realization is called *Ishika*, or 'comprehension.'

The Void Apprenticeship

When a child is born with an affinity for Void, it comes quickly to the attention of existing Void *Ishiken* (Masters). It is in fact the task of all living *Ishiken* to listen for these births across the world's underlying stream of Void, evaluate them once they are located, and determine the appropriate course of action. Children born with only a mild sensitivity may well be left alone. The ability may manifest in them as vague feelings of 'something wrong' (i.e. a danger sense) or an especially strong tie to one or more individuals (like a Kharmic Tie - see the Advantage in the L5R RPG). Or the ability may never surface at all.

If a child possesses more than a glimmer of Void consciousness, the *Ishiken* must then make a decision. Depending on the strength of the talent, the disposition of the child and their family, and a host of other factors, the council decides either to erect a set of mystical "blindness" to muffle the child's sensitivity, or take them in as an initiate (termed a *Ishi*). This decision is made during the first five to ten years of the child's life, during which time he is very closely observed by the *Ishiken* (though rarely with any knowledge of them or his true potential).

Ability with Void becomes increasingly dangerous to ignore past that point, since the untrained children will have no way of understanding, let alone controlling, their additional sense. In the worst case scenario, they may find themselves lost within the flow of Void, blind to reality and unable to comprehend what they are seeing. In the end, these shugenja are rarely brought back from the brink; *Ishiken* trying to reel them in often only push them further into madness.

What's more, the earlier in life that training commences, the easier it will be to absorb. A child



who is introduced to it will have a far less rigid lens through which to view the lessons, and thus will have a less difficult time of it. Those who are naturally sensitive to the Fifth Ring will likely not survive to full adulthood, and even if they do, would more often benefit from *seppuku* than belated training.

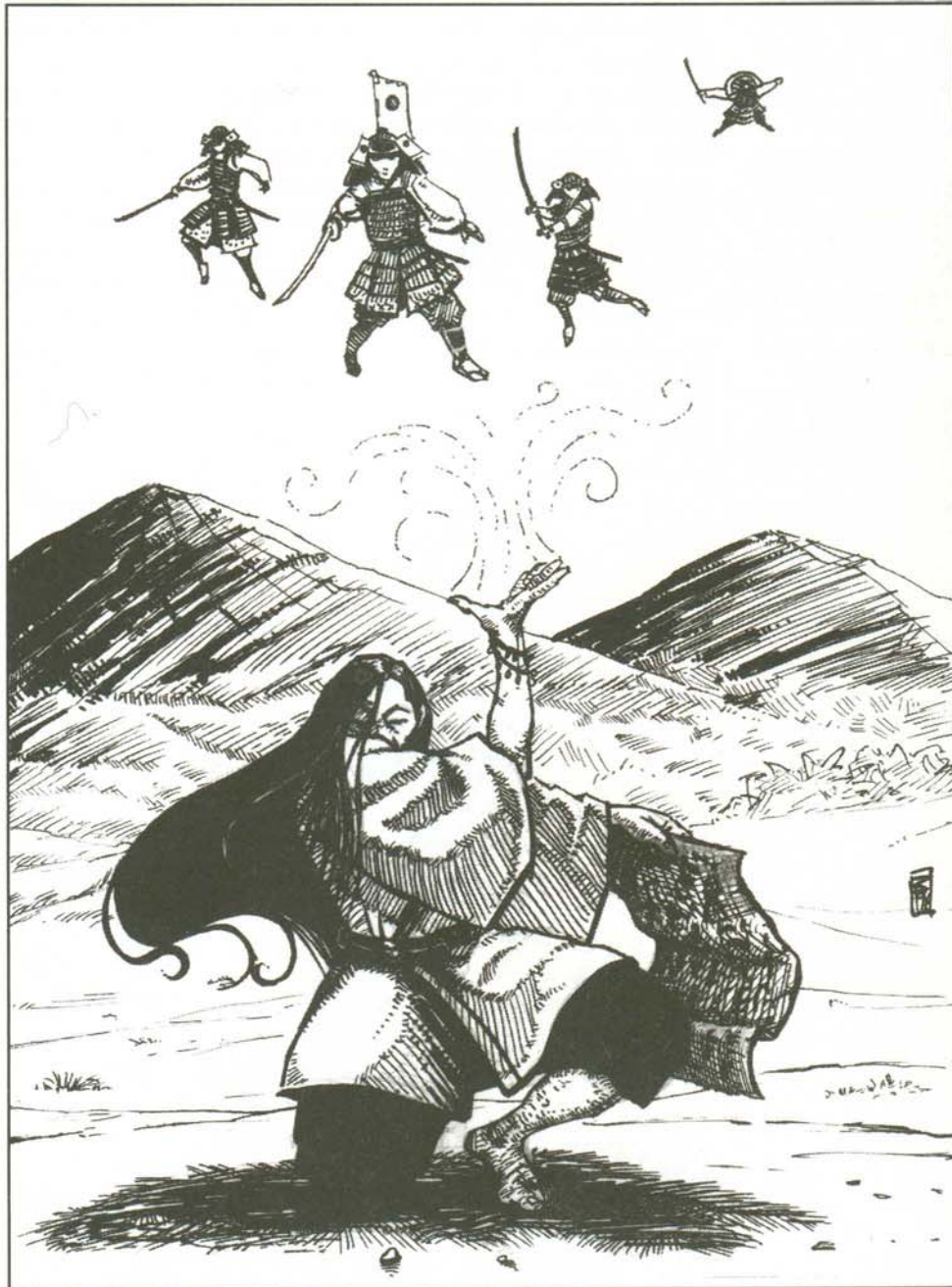
Master constructs 'buffers' between the student and the ether he is coming to know, only lowering them as he becomes convinced of the child's ability to sustain the impact of Void's rush upon his psyche.

THE FIRST DAYS

Once it has been determined that a child should be trained in the art of Void, a suitable Master must be found. Often, this is not the *Ishiken* who discovered the child. Each Master generally takes on only one apprentice at a time, and it is often not convenient, or even possible, for him to simply take on another. The first *Ishiken* will typically be the one to visit the person's family, however, explaining to them the critical necessity of training their child to harness the power he possesses.

The young adepts spend most of their youth living and studying with their assigned Master, who often becomes something of a surrogate parent. They normally don't leave the Master's side for the first one to five years of training, depending on their progress through the first stages of development. After that, they are sometimes allowed to make short visits home, but are never allowed to venture elsewhere. Outside influences are considered a burden to the child's progress, to be avoided at all costs.

Early days spent with the teacher consist of building the requisite trust, forming a close bond between the two that often follows them to their graves. This serves as the student's first 'anchor' in the world he knows, meant to help him maintain control in the coming years as he ventures into the Realm of Void. During this time, the



Playing a Void Shugenja

ISHI AND ISHIKEN

Although all Void shugenja are referred to as *Ishi*, only those who have attained true comprehension of the element of Void can be termed *Ishiken*.

This distinction is important: it denotes the difference between a student and a Master.

Those who call themselves *Ishiken* must typically have attained the fifth ring of comprehension, and only they take on the tutoring of children who show talent in the mysteries of the Void.

Like all abilities in *Legend of the Five Rings*, Void magic can be broken down into two distinct arenas of development: ability and discipline. These roughly equate to one's natural talent with Void magic (represented in the game as their Void Ring), and the degree of training they have had with its use (represented by their acquired School Rank).

Also, Void spells and effects can be categorized by the three basic abilities all shugenja share - Sense, Commune, and Summon. Of course, early in a *Ishi's* career, they are limited to sensing the Realm Between. But as they progress, they will find themselves able to use it to interact with the physical world and others (communing with

them), and change others, and the world around them (summoning Void - through the target).

Note that *Ishiken* can use common shugenja spells, with no restrictions other than their initial allotment (see below). These spells are acquired as a result of their Void training, not as a dedicated course of study (*i.e.* discovered or received during the natural course of their Void training). This is why so few of them are gained at the outset of a Void shugenja's career. Future spells can be acquired by *Ishiken* the same as any other shugenja.

Benefit: +1 Void

Skills: Lore (Void Magic), Meditation 2, Shintao, Tea Ceremony, any 2 other Skills

Beginning Spells: Sense Void, Drawing the Void, Sense, Commune & Summon, 2 spells of a second element of their choice, and 1 of a third.

Beginning Honor: 2, plus five boxes



Void Spells

It is important to note that only *Ishi* and *Ishiken* can use Void spells. There are no exceptions to this rule. As stated before, Void magic requires absolute dedication, and no other interests can be entertained by its practitioners.

Void magic follows the same method for spellcasting as all other magic (*i.e.* there are three steps - Attunement, Focus, and Release), but there is a twist. Instead of drawing the energy of the element into themselves, Void mages venture out to it, then manipulate it where it is (changing the Void of the target). This works as follows:

STEP ONE: ATTUNEMENT

The shugenja passes 'outside himself' (mentally and spiritually, for Rokugani see them as the same thing in this regard), and locates the portion of Void he wishes to tamper with. This journey in itself can be dangerous, and much of the innate risk in performing Void magic is related to it, as are the symptoms of those risks.

STEP TWO: FOCUS

The *Ishi* concentrates, both to maintain their precarious position in the Realm of Void, and to shape the element of Void into what they desire. This is what will cause the desired effect when release finally comes.

STEP THREE: RELEASE

This is essentially the same for *Ishi* as it is for typical shugenja. Satisfied with the crafted element, they release it back into place, to affect whatever target it was 'attached to' (between the elements of). Of course, Void mages have an additional concern at this stage. They cannot achieve full release or they risk losing themselves within the Realm, never to return.

All Void magic rolls are made with the Void Ring + School Rank, keeping a number of dice equal to the caster's Void. In all other ways, mechanical and metaphysical, Void magic follows the normal tenets for spellcasting. All Void spells are written in the same format, and adhere to the same rules.

Note that Void spells can be learned any time they are accessible to the character and he or she is capable of casting them. They are only organized by Ring to represent when they are commonly learned by *Ishiken*.

THE RINGS OF VOID

The following sections detail the progress of a 'common' Void shugenja, documenting when they are typically introduced to certain theories, abilities, and spells. Keep in mind, however, that many Void shugenja deviate from this path, learning some things faster than their brethren and others more slowly. That is to be expected. The chaos of the Realm of Void demands it.

Mechanically, this means that any spell that a shugenja can cast can be used, regardless of the current School Rank of the shugenja. However, finding an *Ishiken* that is willing to reveal Third Ring spells to a First Rank apprentice could be next to impossible, as most are reluctant to put

students in undue danger. In the end, the acquisition of any spell of a higher Ring than your Rank should be the source of an adventure of its own, or something equally significant.

Beru Saishome - First Ring of Void

When the teacher feels that the link between the child and Void is strong enough, lessons begin in the First Ring, or Beru Saishome. This consists of focusing their latent sense, first learning to forget what they know about the world. They meditate in a very still place for hours or even days on end (each Master has a room specifically prepared for this kind of activity), gradually tearing down the remaining barriers that the Master has placed.

Through this time, the apprentice is carefully monitored for signs of confusion, dementia, euphoria, or madness. All of these are common results of prolonged exposure to the new world; for the student, it is much like being thrust into a place where the laws of physics have gone awry. She must learn to contend with the distorted view, return safely, and readjust thereafter. Her active training begins in earnest on the day that she is able to complete this first task with a degree of regularity.

Early application of Void can be tricky. The shugenja student is aware of the second world, but has little or no actual ability with it. Even though Void magicians are trained by doing, the elemental images they are exposed to are strong, and can confuse or disorient the weak of mind or spirit. Player characters learning this Ring can attempt to perceive simple things, like the pulse rate of others, the speed others are moving at, or the weather across a village, but little more.

At this stage, they essentially leave their bodies mentally, passing through the Realm of Void, but only venture out as far as their *Ishiken* feel they can handle. Until they have proven themselves (and almost never before attaining at least the Second Ring), the anchor remains their lifeline to the world of their birth.

At the earliest levels of their training, Void spells focus on sensing things through the web of Void. By understanding the basic elements that make up all things, *Ishi* can in essence become one with another object or individual. This allows





THE FICKLE ESSENCE OF VOID

One absolute certainty about Void magic is its potential unpredictability. There have been cases noted wherein strongly sensitive individuals have experienced a sudden "leveling off" in the strength of their abilities, even though they may have shown incredible natural talent in their youth. Similarly, shugenja exhibiting only moderate ability have experienced abrupt swells in their power, often with tragic results. In at least a handful of cases, this occurred in adults who had been blocked early in life and gone on to pursue other studies. The swell of power overwhelmed the blocks, either killing them or driving them mad.

After this, the student reaches out longer and farther with every venture into the elemental substrata. She learns to see her place in the scheme of things. She, like everything else, is made of raw elements held together by Void. The fire that is a part of the student is the same fire that burns in a magical explosion, or helps to make up the physical aspect of the Imperial Palace. The water that is a part of the student is the same water that flows into the sea, or through the sky as mist.

Once they recognize this, distance becomes a thing of little consequence. They sharpen their sight into the Realm of Void to a degree that allows perception of the raw elements at more and more remote locations. They can pick apart the pieces of a person, an animal, or a spell, and learn its most intrinsic components. This can be extremely useful for the purposes of discovering what spell is being cast over a rise, how many people are in a house two miles away, or even what a goblin is feeling beyond the Kaiu Wall.

ALTERING THE COURSE

Base TN: 20

Casting Time: 3 Actions

Duration: One day or one story, whichever is less

Concentration: None

Mastery: 4

Raises: N/A

Effect: This is like saving up all your chi for a 'critical moment', then focusing it into one very effective action. All the other shugenja in Rokugan may look at the effort and claim that the caster is favored by the Fortunes, but she knows the truth – that she has managed to circumvent Fate and alter the course of history.

This spell allows Void magicians to spend a number of Void Points on any action, up to their School Rank. Of course, this does not allow them extra Void Points – only a faster way to use the ones they already have. *This means that a shugenja studying Void with a Void Ring of 3 and a School Rank of Four can spend any or all of them on a single action, but they would not return to be used again until the following story, or as gained by regular rest.*

MOMENT OF CLARITY

Base TN: Target Trait x 5

Casting Time: 4 Actions

Duration: Caster's Void in rounds

Concentration: Focused

Mastery: 3

Raises: Casting time, Duration


Effect: When casting this spell, the shugenja must choose a Skill to grant to the target. The Trait that this Skill is based upon is used both to determine the TN of the spell, and the effect. If successful, the target gains the Skill at a Rank one higher than the Trait, allowing him that many dice to roll, but not keep. This effect lasts for a time equal to the caster's Void in rounds.

Beru Sanbanme – Third Ring of Void

The next step is to learn to superimpose the recognizable images of things over their raw elements, which is roughly akin to puzzling out a picture-association puzzle, blindfolded. There is a danger, especially for the beginner, of becoming caught up in the formless world of Void. The experience can be very soothing, a sensation of ultimate belonging, but it requires a great deal of discipline to return to a state of comparative isolation. See the 'Dangers of Void' sidebar (page 56) for more detail.

Once the *Ishi* has mastered the joint activity of sensing both the true nature of things and its concrete, worldly image together, he can begin to perceive things in both layers, or either, over long distances. This can be used to identify a murderer as he is committing a crime elsewhere within a castle, reveal a well-crafted deception or lie, or affect the Void in others, causing them what they will see as hardship and grief or good luck and the active intervention of the Fortunes.

Subtly changing the way in which Void flows through others is a large part of this Ring's training. *Ishi* who have mastered the Ring can reduce it, disconnecting others from the elements they are composed of, or open the floodgate, allowing them moments of 'divine inspiration' or remarkable karma.



ASAKO HENSHIN ACADEMY: THE MICHIBIKU

The Fushihai often choose certain students to leave the Academy and continue their work for the family as guides for rest of the Empire. These chosen Henshin receive a +1 Awareness instead of the normal +1 Willpower, to represent their training with social skills. They complete the first level of their training with the ordinary Henshin, but walk a different path.

These pupils, thereafter known as Michibiku, make their way out into Rokugan, only returning to complete their training at the end of each Rank's study. Unlike the Imperial Librarians or the Historians, these Asako can continue their training in the Henshin School, but they must do so from afar.

KHARMIC INTENT

Base TN: 15

Casting Time: 3 Actions

Duration: Varies

Concentration: None

Mastery: 4

Raises: Casting Time, Duration.

Effect: This spell allows a shugenja and a target to share their Void Point pools for an amount of time equal to the caster's Void Ring. Both parties must agree to the link, and thereafter



they can 'share' Void Points for all normal purposes, until the duration expires or both run out of Points. After the spell is successful, neither may opt to break the link or oppose the use of a Void Point without the agreement of the other.

VOID RELEASE

Base TN: Highest Trait of Target x 5

Casting Time: 5 Actions

Duration: Caster's Void Ring in rounds

Concentration: Total

Mastery: 5

Raises: Casting Time, Duration

Effect: When successful, this spell allows the target to use their highest Trait Rank in place of another of their Traits for the duration. This means that a character with three in all Traits save Strength (which he has a four in), could have a four in any of the other Traits if this spell were used successfully.

Beru Vonbanme - Fourth Ring of Void

Finally, the student learns to permanently remove the barriers their Masters have erected, relying instead on their own discipline for defense. They learn to be their own anchor, withdrawing into themselves to shut out the distraction of the rest of the world. This progression is to the Third Ring much like the Second was to the First - more a rite of passage and refinement of application than a new level of learning.

Ishi of this Ring can now affect others and the world around them to a far greater degree, and often without permission. They can forcibly steal others' Void, or change their other attributes through it. They can alter events as they are occurring, or change the future.

Yet the dangers are greater as well. Such specific use of the Void Element can backfire. *Ishi* can find their own Void slipping away, or the Void flowing through them going still and feeble. Events can occur in completely unexpected ways. Fate is a dangerous enemy.



ISHIKEN IN ROKUGAN

Void shugenja are relatively rare in the Phoenix Clan, and certainly in Rokugan as a whole. In general, the outward manifestations of their magic are less impressive than their shugenja brethren. But in households that understand the nature of their ability, they are welcomed for their insight and understanding, not to mention the good fortune they often bring.

Most decline positions in court or among magistrates, preferring to stay in more secluded places that allow them the solitude they require. Even after their time with the Ishiken, they are often consumed by an urgent need to experience more and more of the Realm of Void. Often, this effect upon them has been called an obsession, or a dependency. Regardless, it allows little time for socializing or petty conflicts in the physical world.

them to gather information similar to the way other shugenja speak to the kami of various objects to ask questions.

SENSE VOID

Base TN: 10

Casting Time: 3 Actions

Duration: Concentration

Concentration: Full

Mastery: 2

Raises: Accuracy, Distance sensed, Amount sensed

Effect: This is the fundamental Void magic ability. It is the first that any *Ishi* learns. Like its sister ability for standard shugenja, this allows him or her to reach out with their mind and sense the world around them. In practice, this works somewhat like 'astral projection', where the spirit-mind of the individual leaves the body for a time, exploring the unseen layer of reality most are rarely aware of.

The truth, however, is that you never really leave your body at all. Your consciousness does, to a degree, but it is always intimately connected to your physical anchor (a shugenja's Ishiken during training and himself once he reaches the first School Rank). Should this connection ever be neglected, or broken, the shugenja will find himself free-floating through the Realm of Void, with little likelihood of ever returning.

Mechanically, this means that after the first roll to see if Sensing the Void worked, another must be made every half hour of travel through the Realm. The second roll (the first during the journey) is at TN 10, but all successive rolls are at +5 to the TN. This modifier is cumulative; thus staying away from your anchor for long periods of time could result in becoming lost in a 'frozen, quiet world' between the moments.

The distance that the Ishiken desires to sense should determine the initial TN of the spell, with 10 being roughly within line of sight. Beyond that, the basic TN should be raised by the GM accordingly (perhaps 15 across a large village and 25 or more across an entire clan's territory).

This spell allows the following things to be gleaned:

- Thoughts (human or animal)
- Emotions (human or animal)
- Component elements of a person, place, or thing, and how they are arranged
- Illness or injury (the presence of, the nature of as relating to the elements, etc.)

• Supernatural phenomena (the presence of) – although this can result in some danger if the roll is failed. If the Taint is involved, then another immediate roll against the Taint must be made per normal rules.

Simple uses of this spell, such as confirming obvious emotion or sensing a high level of the Taint, should not suffer modifiers. But more complex uses, such as discerning hidden feelings, should accrue an appropriate modifier to the initial TN.

DRAWING THE VOID

Base TN: 15

Casting Time: 2 Actions

Duration: Instantaneous

Concentration: None

Mastery: 4

Raises: N/A

Effect: This spell allows a shugenja to 'grab' a Void Point from the Realm while he is wandering. After it is acquired, the Point may be used as all other Void Points the character has. An Ishiken may only cast this spell once per day.

Beru Damome – The Second Ring of Void

To an *Ishi* looking into the Void for the first time, it is as if the world itself has taken off a mask. The concrete seam between things slips away, leaving only the raw elements that make them up. Earth, Air, Water, and Fire move around each other in a perpetual dance. They take shape outside the invisible framework that holds them suspended in time and space. This frame, the space in between other things, is the Void, and it is introduced to *Ishi* at this stage solely through its absence. Everything else, all the elements the student must learn if they are to recognize what is not among them, is seen as a wash of energy and raw color.

With the help of their anchor (the Ishiken) the student learns to draw himself back to the concrete, replacing the 'mask' so that he may see the world as a solid entity again. The change of perspective after this first journey is permanent. Having once seen the fluid nature of things, nothing is ever as safe or certain for the student again.

VOID STRIKE

Base TN: Target's Void Ring x 5

Casting Time: 5 Actions

Duration: Instantaneous

Concentration: None

Mastery: 6

Raises: Additional Void Stolen

Effect: This spell allows the caster to 'steal' one of the target's Void Points. If successful, the Points stolen are simply transferred from the target to the caster. Additional Points can be stolen, but two Raises are required for each additional Point. Also, the caster may only steal as many Points as he has Void Ranks each day.

VOID SUPPRESSION

Base TN: Trait to be Affected x 5

Casting Time: 5 Actions

Duration: Caster's Void Ring in rounds

Concentration: Total

Mastery: 7

Raises: Casting Time, Duration

Effect: When successful, this spell forces the target to use their lowest Trait Rank in place of the Target Trait for the duration. This means that a character with three in all Traits save Strength (which he has a four in), could be made to have a three in Strength if this spell were used successfully on them.

Beru Ganbonme - Fifth Ring of Void

The Fourth Ring of Void is considered by almost all *Ishi* to be the final stage of development, for although a Fifth Ring exists, it is entirely limited to *Ishiken*, who have made it their mission to unify their vision of both worlds. They alone walk the Realm of Void unchecked.

It is rumored that *Ishiken* have abilities far beyond any *Ishi*, including the complete theft of another's Void. This experience has not been witnessed by any who will speak openly of it, but stories have been spread of those 'unraveled' by an *Ishiken's* will. Other tales include a form of 'communion' with a target, in which the strange and terrible vistas of the Realm of Void - as seen by the *Ishiken* - are revealed in all their unbridled fury to others. Instant death or irreparable madness are all that remain.




In Rokugan, the word *henshin* means 'change', but can also be translated as 'progress' or 'rebirth'. The Asako chose this as the name for their independent academy as a tribute to its purpose; to train students to harness The Gift that Shiba gave Asako a thousand years ago. In that time, remarkable advances have been made with it, and significant steps have been taken toward what the Asako believe to be the ultimate fate of humanity.

Samurai across the Empire have begun to tap into The Gift already, but they refer to the effort as 'Techniques'. The Henshin have taken this practice a step further and developed what they call 'Mysteries'. While Techniques are the mystical by-product of years of discipline, learning to focus the Elements around you, Mysteries are a direct manipulation of those forces. In essence, the Henshin have discovered how to sculpt the elemental forces around them into pliable, and applicable, effects.

But there is a requirement. The Henshin are still human, however advanced they may think they are, and must act in accordance with human limitations. They cannot defy the laws of nature. They cannot simply command the Elements to do as they wish, but must entice them. They do this using what they call 'Riddles', closely-guarded methods of enforcing their will upon the Elements.

Over time, the Henshin have managed to sharpen their talent with Riddles to the point where they can 'trick' nature into submitting to them. It is roughly akin to deceiving another person, thus causing them to react in a foreseeable manner. However, the Elements - once gauged properly - are far more predictable than humans, and thus easier to manipulate. They




ASAKO HENSHIN ACADEMY: THE MICHIBIKU (CONTINUED)

The Michibiku represent the bulk of Asako from Ranks Two to Four, which is one of the reasons that no one realizes that the Academy has more than one Rank of study. They travel the regions of the various clans, nurturing the people they meet. They are expected to show them how to act, how to treat each other, and how to believe, so that they may one day be born Asako and embark on the final journey of their Path as humans.

The Michibiku have learned not to reveal their true intentions to the outside world, for people react badly to rhetoric preached to them, especially from those of another clan. Instead, they are content to move among the masses, helping or giving advice where they can, and never interfering if they feel it will add to the already ignoble reputation their family has acquired.

As factions of the Asako go, this one has the greatest potential for role-playing. Gamemasters are encouraged to direct their Asako player characters to this branch.



THE LIFE-CYCLE OF THE HENSHIN

Any Asako may opt to enter the Henshin Academy, though very, very few graduate even to the Fourth

Mystery, let alone the Mystery of Fate. This is because the progress of every Asako is closely

monitored by his sensei and, above that, the *Fushihai*.

Every action taken and every word spoken by an Asako serves to further define their role - not only within the family, but for the rest of this lifetime.

This is why Asako are so careful about what they say and do. They carefully

consider every option before acting, half-confident and half-fearful of the result with every decision. The

Asako believe that they are the pinnacle of human existence - that every other

Rokugani is destined to reincarnate within the Asako family eventually (when they have advanced far enough along the Path).

Thus, to make a mistake and lose ground at this stage is extremely critical, and most undesirable.

are also arguably more dangerous to incite in this manner. Should a Henshin fail to properly confound an Element, it is likely to strike back at him decisively.

A Henshin is a non-shugenja class, and cannot cast or research spells as do shugenja.

Benefit: +1 Willpower

Skills: Calligraphy, Defense, Hand-to-Hand, History, Medicine, Meditation, Shintao

Beginning Honor: 2, plus 5 boxes

Mysteries

Henshin are trained in the ways of the Elements in their first years with the Academy. This provides them with a general knowledge of how the Elements react to outside stimuli, and how to gauge their next manifestations. Thereafter, Henshin are tutored in the first Four Mysteries, learning the Riddles and Rank Effects of each Element with the progression into each new School Rank. The student is allowed to choose his own course of research, thus tailoring his abilities to his own likes, dislikes, and goals.

A Henshin PC chooses an Element to focus on during each of his first four Ranks. The order in which they are chosen is of paramount importance, for once an Element is chosen for a School Rank, it may not be chosen again for another and the ability gained at that School Rank will never increase (*i.e.* if a player chooses to learn Water at School Rank One, he gains the Rank One ability with the Water Element, but will never gain any further knowledge with the Element).

As the higher Ranks provide more mastery over the associate Elements, this should result in a strategy in a player character's progression through the game; if a PC wishes to have a great amount of ability with Fire, for instance, he must wait to acquire it.

A Henshin may use both Rank Effects and Riddles in the same day, but may not use them more times total per day than his rank in the corresponding Ring. For instance, a Henshin with an Air Ring of 2 may, in one day, perform the Air Rank Effect twice, the Air Rank Effect once and the Riddle of Air once, or the Riddle of Air twice.

RANK EFFECTS

As Ranks are assigned, the PC gains the ability to add or subtract their Rank in a particular

Element from their own associated Ring, or half that value (rounded down) from the associated Ring of another. Even though the PC may progress into a higher School Rank, the Elements he has already assigned will never provide more than the value of the School Ranks they were originally learned at. These abilities require no roll, and the duration of the effect is equal to the Henshin's current School Rank. The use of a mystery is considered a combat action.

For example, a character is currently at School Rank 3 and has chosen the following Rank/Element assignment - Rank One Air, Rank Two Fire, Rank Three Earth, with none for Water yet. He may do the following:

- Add or subtract 1 from his or someone else's Air Ring for three turns, or
- Add or subtract 2 from his or 1 from someone else's Fire Ring for three turns, or
- Add or subtract 3 from his or 1 from someone else's Earth Ring for three turns.

Note that he cannot yet affect his or anyone else's Water Ring.

RIDDLES

Riddles direct the Elements through a body, thus changing the target in some way. This is very, very dangerous, and requires a Simple Roll of the associated Ring, with a TN equal to five times the School Rank the Element was learned at, in order to successfully pose the Riddle. The four Riddles are:

Riddle of Earth: The Henshin may ignore his (Chosen School Rank for Earth) + Earth Ring in Wounds, or heal the same amount of Wounds taken by another.

Riddle of Water: The Henshin may add his (Chosen School Rank for Water) + Water Ring in dice rolled (not kept) for physical Perception checks.

Riddle of Fire: The Henshin may add his (Chosen School Rank for Fire) + Fire Ring in hand-to-hand combat. This cannot be used for combat involving weapons.

Riddle of Air: The Henshin may add his (Chosen School Rank for Air) + Air Ring in dice rolled (not kept) for social interaction checks (including to see if someone is lying or to resist someone else telling if they are lying).

For example, the previously mentioned Third Rank Henshin has an Air of 2. While attending an Imperial social function, he subtly questions another about something of import to the Asako. He suspects that the other is lying, and carefully invokes the Riddle of Air, focusing the Element of Air through him and enhancing his already acute senses. If he successfully invokes the Riddle, he will add three dice to his Contested Roll against the other's Sincerity (2 for his Air Ring and 1 for the original School Rank chosen for Air).

Invoking the Riddle of Air requires the Henshin to make a successful Simple Roll, rolling and keeping his Air Ring in dice (two) to beat a TN of 5 (five times the original School Rank it was learned at, which was one).

Should this roll be failed, the exact opposite of the intended effect occurs. If this results in a negative dice pool or value, then the attempted action or effect fails automatically.

In the same example, if the Henshin were to fail the Simple Roll (rolling, say, a 1 and a 3), then he would subtract three dice (the number he would have added) from his pool.

There is no duration for Riddles – they are single-shot applications.

THE FINAL MYSTERY

The Final Mystery is that of Fate, and those that learn it are forever after known within the Asako as *Fushihai* (or Masters). No one ever chooses to become Fushihai (indeed, none – even within the Asako themselves – know that there is another Rank of training; see the 'Mysteries of the Asako' sidebar, p. 44). The Fushihai choose those who are ready to join their ranks, based on the merits of their progression through the first Four Mysteries and their understanding of the Riddles.

These scholars of the Path have advanced to a point at which they are fully aware of it, and can perceive their place on it at all times. With effort, they can even perceive the locations, directions, and pace at which others are moving along it as well. Everything they do and say – everything they *don't* do or say – affects their place on the Path, and they know it. They act according to a strict code of conduct dictated by the words originally passed down to Asako and actively avoid doing things that will hinder their progress.

No player character should be allowed to achieve Rank Five in the Henshin Academy without serious consideration by both the Gamemaster and player involved. The responsibility of knowing the greatest, most protected secrets of the Asako is a heavy one, and the role of the Fushihai requires a certain distance from humanity in general. Many of them do not see others outside the family for the duration of their lives, and this would certainly detract from an ongoing campaign. Should a player wish to acquire such a level of mastery with The Gift, it would likely be best if it were considered the pinnacle of his game career, and the end of his character. Retire him – it is for the best.

Should the mechanics for the Final Mystery ever come into play for some reason, they are as follows:

- The Fushihai automatically gain the Contrary Disadvantage. The Fortunes are a fickle bunch, with contrasting peaceful and wrathful aspects. So are the Fushihai. They believe they are that much closer than everyone else to the next level – that of the Fortunes – and in this regard, they are right.

- They gain the heady ability to alter Fate. A number of times per day equal to his Void, the Fushihai may re-roll an action that failed or did not succeed to his expectations. If the new roll is less desirable, then he may opt to use the original. No Void points are expended using this ability.

- Finally, they no longer grow old, and will never die by disease or age. They are, for all intents and purposes, immortal, and may only die by violence. Should this ever happen, the whole of the Fushihai will mourn, for the loss of one so close to divinity is great indeed (for more on this, see the 'Life-Cycle of the Henshin' sidebar).



THE LIFE-CYCLE OF THE HENSHIN (CONTINUED)

Should an Asako not be chosen by the *Fushihai* to fill the ranks of the Imperial Librarians in the City of Sacrifice or join the Ikoma as Imperial Historians, they will progress along a set course of development that will (hopefully) result in their immortality in time. The course is roughly as follows:

Birth: All Asako believe they are either the spirits of lost Asako reincarnated for another try or members of the other clans who have advanced to become Asako.

Mayushi: This is the name for all Asako, Ranks One to Four. It means undeveloped, as they have yet to prove themselves worthy of the next level of the Gift's understanding. Note also that this is the time during which most are chosen to leave the Path and become librarians or historians, or Michibiku (see previous sidebar).

Fushihai: This is Rank Five, the Mystery of Fate and final stage for all Asako before passing on to become Fortunes (as they believe). At this point, they become immortal, and will not die until killed or reaching apotheosis.

Apotheosis: The Asako becomes a Lesser Fortune (or so they believe).

Heritage Tables

During character creation, each player is allowed the privilege of rolling upon these tables without cost – once. Up to two additional rolls can be made, at a cost of one Character Point each. Be warned, however! For while the Mystic Phoenix may allow one journey into their realm without harm, they almost certainly will not allow another... or will they? Begin at Heritage Table 1.

HERITAGE TABLE 1: THE MYSTIC PHOENIX

In this and following tables, the ancestor affected should be agreed upon by both the player and Gamemaster.

ROLL	RESULT
1:	Distinguished Past. Roll on Heritage Table 2.
2-4:	Undistinguished Past. No benefits or penalties.
5-6:	Dishonorable Past. Roll on Heritage Table 3.
7-9:	Mixed Blessing. Roll on Heritage Table 4.
0:	Forbidden Knowledge. Roll on Heritage Table 5.



HERITAGE TABLE 2: DISTINGUISHED PAST

Sometimes, heroes are born in the ashes of great events. Other times, they are born of will alone...

ROLL	RESULT
1	Mystic Blood. The blood of an original clan ancestor courses through your veins. Gain 3 Insight, and you may purchase any ancestor at half the required CP.
2	Proud Magic. An Isawa ancestor bested dozens of rival shugenja in magical duels. Gain 4 Honor Points or an Innate Ability (PC's choice).
3	No Fear. An ancestor was well-known for his escapes from death. Gain the Daredevil Advantage.
4	Enlightenment. One of your ancestors was an Asako <i>Michibiku</i> , and traveled the Empire cultivating the younger clans. If Asako, gain 5 Honor Points. If Isawa, lose 5. If Shiba, there is no benefit or loss.
5	Blood of the Kami. An ancestor was discovered to be the Shiba Champion for his generation. Gain 1 Glory Rank and the sword he carried (a katana of fine quality).
6	Last Stand. One of your ancestors died defending the Emerald Empire from the <i>gaijin</i> . Gain one Imperial favor: it can be called upon at the PC's discretion, but can only be used once.
7	Void Master. Your ancestor tutored some of the greatest Void apprentices in history. You may take the <i>Ishiken-do</i> Advantage for free, if you so desire. If not, gain 3 Honor Points.
8	Elemental Master. The infamous Tomb of Iuchiban was built with the help of your ancestor, an Elemental Master. Gain 5 each Honor and Glory Points, and 1 Rank in Engineering.
9	Code-Breaker. One of your ancestors was an Asako in the Great Library of the Isawa, and spent many long hours studying the old tongues. Gain 1 Rank in the Cipher Skill.
0	One of your ancestors managed to prevent a battle that would have needlessly cost the lives of hundreds. Gain 3 Honor Points and the Voice Advantage.

HERITAGE TABLE 3: DISHONORABLE PAST

Traitors can be bred of an unclean mind or a tainted spirit, or from nothing more than the inability to retain a secret...

ROLL	RESULT
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1	Forgotten! Part of a group dedicated to the free distribution of magical knowledge, one of your ancestors betrayed Phoenix secrets to shugenja of the other clans. He was promptly exiled from the Isawa. Gain the Forgotten Disadvantage, but no points for it.
---	--

2	Exiled! You have odd features and dark skin. At your birth, it was discovered that your mother was having an affair with someone who was "not from Rokugan". Soon after, your mother fled into the northern mountains and your father committed <i>seppuku</i> . You are now Clan Ronin, and you will have to find another school to advance past Rank One.
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3	Tempted! A famous shugenja in your line was seduced by a charismatic but insane colleague who believed that she could capture and harness the force of one of the original seven Kami. It turned out that he was to be nothing more than a material component in the ritual, and when he was drawn from the ruins of the madwoman's fortress by Imperial Magistrates, little remained of the man he once was. Gain the Weakness Disadvantage (PC's choice of Trait), and lose 3 Points each of Honor and Glory.
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4	Loose Lips! A courtier in your line once insulted the Emperor. Gain the Contrary Disadvantage, but no points for it.
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5	Fallen! Your Shiba ancestor failed to protect his charge in battle. Lose 3 Honor Points and gain a 1-Point Haunted Disadvantage (with the fallen shugenja), but no points for it.
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6	Scoundrel! The courts of Otosan Uchi were ablaze with scandal during the time of your ancestor, a notable – and extremely lucky – shugenja who used his talents as a womanizer, gambler, and cruel manipulator. Gain 6 Points in Luck and 2 Ranks in the Lechery Disadvantage, but no points for it.
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7	Impudence! Bushi within your family cut down a Fushihai out of spiteful revenge for some petty slight. Even though they committed <i>seppuku</i> shortly after, the Fortunes have ignored your family ever since. Gain the Momoku Disadvantage, but no points for it.
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8	Corrupted! Your ancestor was an Isawa dedicated to discovering the truth behind dark magics others consider 'unclean'. He was seduced by his own obsession. Gain 1-3 Ranks in Lore (<i>Maho-Tsukai</i>) or Research – PC's choice – and an equal number in the Shadowlands Taint.
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9	Imperial Traitor! Centuries ago, one of your ancestors consorted with an oni general, conspiring to bring down the Kaiu Wall. He sent sensitive information to the Shadowlands, then went across himself. He may still be out there, somewhere... Lose 1 Honor Rank, and gain the Driven Disadvantage (to destroy him), but no points for it.
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0	Lost Knowledge! Due to the bumbling of your ancestor, important information (the layout of an ancient tomb, secrets of the Path of Man, etc.) has been lost – presumably forever. You must make it your mission to find it. Lose 1 Honor Rank (that returns when the information is found), and gain a 4-Point Obligation Disadvantage, but no points for it.
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HERITAGE TABLE 4: MIXED BLESSING

The eternal cycle of life and death, knowledge and ignorance, enlightenment and endless corruption continues; with good, there must come some evil...

ROLL	RESULT
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1	Dark Secrets. Your ancestor came across Forbidden Knowledge. Roll on Heritage Table 5.
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2	Illicit Affair. Some say that the eternal splintering of the Phoenix Clan is carried into the children of every generation, and that there will never be peace between them. Some of the same say that your ancestor's love affair with one of another family was wrong. Everyone says that you are insane to love one from beyond your bloodline. Gain the Kharmic Tie Advantage with someone from another Phoenix family.
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3	Obsessed. Your ancestor was constantly bested in something, and it cost your family their lands. You are sure that you can improve on the past. Choose one of your Skills and add 1 Rank in it; gain the Jealousy Disadvantage with that Skill, but no points for it.
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4	Unremarkable. One of your ancestors went their entire life without being noticed, and people have told you that you look and act just like them. Gain the Bland Advantage and lose 1 Glory Point.
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5	Spoils. One of your ancestors killed someone important in a duel. If Shiba, gain 3 Honor Points. If Isawa, gain 1 extra spell (PC's choice, any element). If Asako, gain 2 Insight. All families gain the Sworn Enemy Disadvantage from the proper clan as well, but no points for it.
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6	Tainted Bargain. Your ancestor summoned an oni, and was consumed by it. It must still remember who it was, however, because family legends refer to it returning periodically to protect its descendants – for a price. At any point, the PC may call upon the oni for help (once), but thereafter must fulfill an Obligation to it (as determined by the GM).
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7	Doomed Cult. One of your ancestors was part of a sect devoted to learning better ways to heal others. Unfortunately, they were cursed. Gain 2 Ranks in Advanced Medicine/Acupuncture and the Permanent Wound Disadvantage, but no points for it.
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8	Infiltrator. One of your ancestors spent time in another clan's schools to steal their secrets. Unfortunately, they never came back, and have sired a new line of relatives you are responsible for. Gain the Different School Advantage or 5 Honor Points (PC's choice), and a 4-Point Dependent from the appropriate clan.
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9	Another Calling. Your ancestor ignored his duty to the clan and became what he always desired to be – an Imperial Magistrate. Although your clan was not too happy, the Magistrates have never forgotten his dedication. Gain the Bad Reputation Disadvantage, but no points for it; also gain the True Friend Advantage.
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0	Message From the Gods. An ancestor vanished in the mountains for a month, returning with what he claimed was a message from the gods. Gain 3 Ranks in any Lore Skill, but also receive a 4-Point Obligation (GM's choice).
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HERITAGE TABLE 5: FORBIDDEN KNOWLEDGE

Either you or one of your ancestors stumbled across something you should never have discovered (as indicated by the table that brought you here). On this table, "procurer" refers to the focus person (you or your ancestor). If Asako, add 3 to your roll. If Isawa, subtract 3. If Shiba, just roll.

ROLL	RESULT	ROLL	RESULT
-2	The procurer stumbled onto a brutal battle scene, and one of the victims was an Asako. Upon his body was a scroll written in ancient cipher. You now have the scroll. If you can get it to the Isawa Masters, gain 1 Glory Rank and the Sworn Enemy Disadvantage (6 points; entire Asako family), but no points for it.	7	The procurer either guarded or stumbled upon the ancient wedding gift intended for the first Isawa-Asako union, guarded by the Shiba. Looking into its incredible depths, He or she changed forever. If Isawa, gain one spell. If Shiba, gain one Rank with your primary weapon. If Asako, your School Rank is considered one higher when using Rank abilities you already possess. Of course, whenever you use these, you feel the elements around you watching. It's probably nothing; ignore them, and they may go away...
-1	The procurer was the subject of his sensei's bizarre elemental experiments. Gain the Elemental Attunement Advantage (element chosen by PC).	8	While searching through a cavern beneath the house of a missing hetman, the procurer discovered the skeleton of something with too many arms. His hand grazed it, and a hundred baths have failed to wash the experience away. Gain the Haunted Disadvantage, but instead of being visited by a ghost, the PC has visions of a far-away, savage land.
0	Discovery of an power-laden elixir gave the procurer special ability with elemental spirits. Unfortunately, there is only a limited amount of it. Gain 1 Rank in Spellcraft and a 2-point Compulsion Disadvantage (with the elixir), but no points for it.	9	Even the <i>kami</i> have secrets, and the procurer discovered one of them. They're guarding something out in the elemental realm, and they know where it is. Gain a 10-Point Forbidden Knowledge Advantage and the Curse of the Kami Disadvantage, but no points for it.
1	The procurer dabbled with the dark arts successfully. If shugenja, gain 1 <i>maho</i> spell (designated by the player or GM). If bushi, gain an enchanted weapon (per the Immortal Steel spell), which houses a minor Oni that likes to speak at all the wrong times.	10	A dying Ikoma passed on the story of his <i>Ishiken</i> patron to the procurer. Gain 1 Rank in Lore (Void Magic).
2	Problematic experimentation with healing spells has gone terribly wrong. Gain the Quick Healer Advantage and the Permanent Wound Disadvantage, but no points for it. This wound can never be healed.	11	The procurer has strayed from the Path of Man, and ventured out into the darkness. Somewhere they found a new source of magic, powerful but alien. Gain an Innate Ability with one spell you can cast, and the Enlightened Madness Disadvantage with that spell's element as the trigger, but no points for it.
3	The procurer accidentally slipped through into the realm of the <i>kami</i> during a ritual gone awry. When he came back, minutes later, he brought something with him. Gain one extra Void Point to spend each story (e.g. if you have a Void of 3, you have 4 Points per story), but whenever the last is used (i.e. all your Void Points are used in one story), make a Simple Void roll vs. a TN of 15 or lose control (your GM runs your character) for your Void in hours.	12	The Asako have more secrets than lives, and many that they are willing to kill to protect. The procurer accidentally stumbled into a <i>Fushihai</i> ritual during his days at the Asako Henshin Academy. In exchange for the removal of that day from his memory, they promised another step along the Path of Man. Fortunately for you, the effects of that bargain linger in the blood. While using all Riddles, increase the effect by one die (added with success; subtracted with failure).
4	An <i>Ishiken</i> opened a portal to the Realm of Void, and dragged your ancestor into it. Gain 2 Ranks each in Lore (Void) and Shintao, with a 4-Point Phobia (magic).	13	Once, long ago, the procurer made the mistake of mentioning something he called the 'Riddles' to another - an Isawa. Ever since then, the family has hunted your line, convinced that you have some or all of the information denied their family one thousand years ago. Gain 2 Ranks to be added to any of the Skills in your basic package and the Sworn Enemy Disadvantage (6 points; entire Isawa family), but no points for it.
5	Extensive investigation of the darkest arcane lore has resulted in a nervous condition for the procurer. Gain 3 Ranks in any magical Lore, as well as the Epilepsy Disadvantage, but no points for it. Unfortunately for you, any spell with a TN over 10 can be considered 'stress'.		
6	Fame and fortune were ensured through the procurer's impure practices. Gain the one Rank in each of the Wealthy and Social Position Advantages, but also the Dark Secret Disadvantage. Use your resources well...		

PHOENIX FORTUNE TABLES

The player may roll on these tables once only, at a cost of three Character Points. An even roll indicates that the Fortunes favor you, while an odd result means that you have been forsaken...

"FORTUNES FAVOR ME"

ROLL	RESULT
1	You have come across Forbidden Knowledge. Roll on Heritage Table 5.
2	Due to the well-maintained relationship between your family and the Imperial throne, you have been requested to serve in the Imperial Palace: if Shiba, as an Imperial yojimbo; otherwise, as an Imperial sage.
3	You've just inherited a parcel of land. Unfortunately, the Isawa have laid claim to it as well, saying that it is a place of religious importance. "A god died there," they say...
4	You once saved one of your companions' lives, narrowly rescuing them from some horrible fate. This experience created a bond between you that has never faded. Once per story, either one of you may choose to use one Trait of the opposing character for one Action. Thereafter, however, the original Trait value is reduced by the difference for three Actions (minimum 0). Death cannot result from this effect.
5	Your sensei has extensive resources you can draw from (a sizable library for shugenja, or a well-equipped dojo for bushi). If shugenja, gain 1 Rank in Research. Otherwise, gain 1 Rank in a weapons Skill you do not already have.
6	Accidental Evidence. In the process of casting a scrying spell, one of your ancestors discovered something incriminating about someone else. Gain the Blackmail Advantage, which can be assigned any time you like. Once assigned, it cannot change.
7	Prodigal ability manifests early in life. If shugenja, gain the Elemental Attunement Advantage. If bushi, gain the Ambidextrous Advantage.
8	Your family is granted a boon by the Emperor for services rendered. Two items in your starting outfit are of fine quality.
9	You have been gifted with a remarkable find - a true phoenix egg! You must care for it until it hatches, and then raise and train it until its time of rebirth comes. Even though you know nothing of animals, your family tells you that it is an honor that cannot be refused.
0	You were born special; 'Chosen by the Oracles,' they say. Gain that Advantage. If Isawa, gain 5 Glory Points. If Shiba, gain 3 Glory Points. If Asako, gain the Sworn Enemy Disadvantage (5 points; Isawa, but they do not seek to kill you - only draw you into their family). No points are gained for this Disadvantage.

"FORTUNES FORSAKE ME"

ROLL	RESULT
1	You have come across Forbidden Knowledge. Roll on Heritage Table 5.
2	The gift your father left you at his death was a very old charm, captured during the decimation of the Snake Clan. Its serpentine chain supporting a single, pale green crystal with a globule of blood trapped inside. It's quite valuable. Too bad you'll never be able to sell it...
3	Childhood injuries result in lost training. If shugenja, lose one spell. If bushi, lose one Rank in your primary weapon Skill. No CP are gained for this.
4	You were born under a bad sign! If Asako, gain the Yogo Curse Disadvantage, but no points for it. If not, gain 3 points of Unluck.
5	A disastrous encounter with mad shugenja results in a Phobia of shugenja at Rank 1, with no CP gained.
6	You were an orphan, left at the steps of a shrine as a baby during a terrible thunderstorm. No one is sure of your true clan lineage, and you have had to work that much harder for everything you've earned. Gain the Adopted Blood Disadvantage, but no points for it. Also, two items from your starting outfit are of poor quality.
7	Your first love was killed during a conspiratorial shadow-war with another clan. Though neither of you had anything to do with it, you are the one who suffers. Gain the Lost Love Disadvantage, but no points for it.
8	When you were born, there were complications. One of the defects could not be reversed. Gain the Lamé Disadvantage, but no points for it.
9	You have been doing remarkably well in your studies, even though you are sure that nothing you have done has been right. Little do you know that your performance is being boosted by a childhood rival who is just setting you up for a fall. Gain the Nemesis Disadvantage, but no points for it.
0	No bad fortune - yet. Don't worry, though. An equitable Gamemaster would never exploit such an opportunity...





Chapter Four




*Who's Who in the
Phoenix Clan*



INSIGHT

Perceptive readers will note that the statistics given for the characters described in this Who's Who do not necessarily add up to the insight total given for that character's School Rank. This is deliberate. For some games, it may be necessary for Hida Kisada, the Crab Clan Champion, to have a Horsemanship skill of 4. For others, such a skill would not only be highly inappropriate, but may ruin a well-thought out campaign or adventure. Therefore, we have only mentioned the most prominent skills for each character, leaving gaps in their insight totals where other skills and abilities can be determined by your GM as he feels is appropriate.

GMs should feel free to fill in whatever skills and abilities are needed for any Who's Who character (up to their insight maximum for their given School Rank), or simply allow them to develop in time, as the PCs interact with the character.



Chapter Four: Who's Who in the Phoenix Clan

The Isawa

ISAWA KAEDE

Earth: 3

Water: 4

Perception 5

Fire: 2

Intelligence 3

Air: 4

Void: 7

School/Rank: Isawa *Ishi* 4

Honor: 4.7

Glory: 6.2

Advantages: Chosen by the Oracle (Void), Clear Thinker, Great Destiny (Oracle of Void), *Ishiken-do*

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (her birth), Softhearted

Skills: Advanced Medicine 2, Calligraphy 2, Etiquette 2, History 5, *Kagaku* 2, Meditation 5, Research 3, Shintao 5, Tea Ceremony 3, Theology 3, Lore (Dragon Clan) 2, Lore (Shugenja) 4, Lore (Void) 5

Spells: All Void spells listed in this volume, and a few more, plus any spells in the Core RPG that the GM and those sees fit to assign or design (focusing on healing and nature).

Level-headed and patient, the Acolyte of Void is said to possess a wisdom far greater than her years. She stands a little over five feet in height, but anyone under the scrutiny of her discerning gaze would swear she was taller than that. Her hair and eyes are black, and her skin is a darker brown than that of most members of her family.

As a child, her younger brothers called her 'little shadow' until their father made them stop.

Kaede's mother, Doji Ninube, died giving birth to her daughter, and so Kaede and her father have always been very close. From her early childhood she has demonstrated an incredible affinity for the complex work of Void magic, and there has never been any real doubt that she will one day succeed her father as Master of Void.

Not only does Kaede possess exceptional ability, but she also has the dedication and diligent mind of a scholar. Although she finds a deep joy in the life that speaks to her so clearly through her connection to the Void, she also understands the necessity of control over that ability.

While still a child, Kaede greatly favored a pet rabbit that her mother's father had sent to her as a birthday gift. Every day when Kaede rose in the morning, her first act was to feed her pet, then to brush him. Every evening, before bed, she would go and fetch her rabbit from whatever pile of clothing or patch of flowers he had wandered into, and set him on her bed to keep her company while she slept. She named him Ubi, and he kept her company when her training kept her too busy to play with other children.

One day while sitting in the garden and petting her rabbit, Kaede was enjoying the feel of the sun on her skin. A flock of small birds fluttered in the nearby trees. And when Kaede stretched out a little with her spirit, she could feel the little brook bubbling at the bottom of the hill and the sensation of tiny fish in the cool water. She giggled as the phantom fish tickled her feet.

"Poor Ubi," she said kissing the rabbit's nose. "You look so hot. Do you want to feel the brook water?" The rabbit looked up at her with pink-rimmed brown eyes. Its nose twitched, and its small pink tongue darted along her finger tips. "You do, don't you, Ubi," Kaede squealed with a young girl's delight. Looking close into the rabbit's eyes, she pushed just a little, and something in Ubi flared suddenly brighter. The same awareness that Kaede enjoyed rushed into the rabbit - brook, fish, birds, sun, ants in the ground, owl in the trees, flowers' roots spreading out for water beneath the cool ground. With a shiver, it went stiff, the delicate pink around its eyes growing a darker shade of red.

Kaede didn't have to question what she'd done - she'd felt it as it happened. But her child's control over the force of Void was not enough to

stop the process once begun. Dropping the stiff, still rabbit, she ran home as fast as she could, tears streaming down her face.

She found her father seated in his favorite chair near the door of the house. Sobbing, she began to explain what had happened, but he only shook his head. He had already perceived the entire incident as it occurred.

"That is the way of things, my daughter," he said, laying his hand on her head. "What you and I know is not for others to understand. The knowledge is too great for them." His voice was sad, and Kaede saw that he was not looking at her. Instead his gaze followed Ieku, his second wife, as she walked across the far side of the garden. "We know more than many can conceive of. The tops of mountains that are too high for any man to climb are familiar to us. And yet, in some ways, we are still alone." He shook his head, then turned back to Kaede. "You must learn to be lonely as you learn to be strong, daughter. Because it will be a rare man who can stand beside you and not fear or resent what you are." Her father's words stayed with Kaede, and she worked even more diligently at her studies in the years to come.

On her fourteenth birthday, it happened that Kaede was walking alone in the woods near her home. She was enjoying the fullness of the day, the wind in the trees, the birds in song, the life that teemed all around her. For a while, she let her spirit open to all that was near to her, taking in the joy of the day and holding it close. But after a while, the flurry became too much, and she pushed it slowly away as her father had taught her, pulling inward more and more until she was aware only of her own form, standing in the woods. Then she continued her walk.

So tightly had she shuttered herself that she never noticed the bear until it reared up above her.

Falling back in shock more than terror, the young Kaede reached out along the currents of the Void, seeking to calm the beast, to make it realize that they had no cause to fight. But as she touched the turmoil of energy that was the bear, she found no calm place in it to reach. Instead, she was nearly overwhelmed by the great sickness of mind and body that drove the thing to frenzy. For a moment she feared the sickness would claim her, as she felt herself plummet, but the training caught her and she came back to herself.

All of this had taken only the barest moment, and the bear, still looming over her, began to fall forward, teeth and claws gnashing. With a sharp cry that made no audible sound, Kaede flung power at the beast, expanding the Void within it. The bear reared back, filled with Kaede's power, and its own awareness flared with her fear. It cried out in anguish as a thousand sounds, smells, sights and thoughts filled its animal mind. Then it fell to the ground with a sound like thunder, and did not move again.



ANCESTOR:

ISAWA AKUMA

250 - 283

3 POINTS

Centuries ago, the shugenja known as Isawa Akuma sought to discover the secrets of identity. He spent years studying within the Kuni and Imperial Libraries, went to the Kitsuki for advice, and even spent time at the Kaiu Wall, observing the dark legions of the Shadowlands.

Eventually, he discovered that his goal would be out of reach within the known Empire. He prepared for weeks, and then - despite the fervent warnings of the Crab - ventured into the Dark Realm of Fu Leng. No one would ever see Isawa Akuma again.

He was convinced that the knowledge he desired rested in those creatures, and with the abundance of them beyond the wall, he hoped one of them might have it.

He did find his answers, but only after an Oni whose power and cunning he had underestimated taught it to him. The Oni stole his name, stripping him of exactly what he had been seeking all those years.

Those choosing Akuma as an Ancestor gain Free Raises equal to their Void when combating Oni, but are also born into only the lowest social climates (acquiring a 3-point Social Disadvantage without cost) as a result of his fall.



ANCESTOR:

NAKA KAETERU

13-160

14 POINTS

Naka Kaeteru was the first Grand Master of all the Elements. Born to a humble family, Kaeteru took it upon himself to see the world. He wandered through a virgin

Rokugan attempting to learn what the land, and sky would teach him. He visited creek and tree alike, pondering the questions that plagued him, all the while cleansing his mind of worry.

He walked to ever corner, learning lessons from all parts of Rokugan, and turning his mind to knowledge. Kaeteru traveled for many years before coming to pass a beautiful grove. He sat there and meditated. When someone passed seeing a lone monk sitting beneath they would ask the monk what he was doing. "Thinking," was always his reply.

Although she continues to train with her father, much of Kaede's learning was finished on that day. She has learned more intimately than most men and women dream of, the ebb and flow of energy that is life. A young woman now, she is engaged to marry Akodo Toturi, the daimyo of the Lion. She has met him only briefly, and although she does not know if he will be the rare kind of man that her father spoke of, the kind who will be able to accept her understanding, she holds some hope.

ISAWA UONA

Earth: 2

Water: 3

Fire: 4

Air: 4

Void: 3

School/Rank: Isawa Tensai (Air) 3

Honor: 4.1

Glory: 7.0

Advantages: Benten's Blessing, Inheritance (Tsangusuri: Feather of the Crane), Wealthy (7)

Disadvantages: Meddler, Overconfident, Vanity

Skills: Athletics 1, Calligraphy 3, Courtier 4, Heraldry 4, History 2, Investigation 3, Manipulation 3, Meditation 2, Shintao 3, Spellcraft 2, Theology 2

Spells: All Air spells, plus any spells in the Core RPG and those that the GM sees fit to assign or design (focusing on beauty and investigation).

Isawa Uona is the youngest daughter of a rather mediocre shugenja of a minor Isawa family. A lovely child, it was thought that she would become a courtier for her clan, but the Fortunes willed otherwise. When Uona was seven, her parents sent her to the Kakita Academy, hoping that their daughter would perform well enough to achieve a position there among the Crane. Although

Uona showed promise in dance and song, her true talent seemed to be in haiku.

Uona shone in description, lyric and meter, and her voice rang with confidence and clarity. The Crane were suitably impressed. However, her career as an artisan was cut short when she met the aged Asahina Tomo, a master of spellcraft and the art of tsangusuri creation. He recognized the power lying dormant within the young maiden, and brought her to an intense ritual designed to awaken the sleeping Air *kami* within a powerful fetish. The ritual had a few unexpected consequences.

Rather than opening the young Uona to the Air *kami* and helping her skills as an Artisan improve, the spirits within the fetish arose and surrounded her. Carrying her high above the ritual ground, the living wind cradled her and whispered secrets beyond the Crane's imagining. Once they had gently released her, the spirits vanished to the north, to tell the dying Master of Air that his new apprentice had been found. Reluctantly, Asahina Tomo and the professors at



the Kakita Academy were forced to release Uona from her vows as a student, and return her to the lands of the Phoenix for proper instruction in her true calling – to become the next Master of Air.

The current Master of Air is an elderly man named Isawa Eju. For the last six years, Uona has served as his foremost apprentice as his condition has continued to deteriorate. His ailment is severe: he has lost the use of both his legs and arms, and has become weaker with each passing season. The Asako healers have been able to do nothing but lessen his suffering, and although the Master seems content, rumors persist that he will not live beyond another season. Eyes turn to the young Uona, his likely successor, and doubts arise within the council, because of her youth and inexperience.

Of course, all of this attention and speculation within her clan has made Uona more than a little self-conscious about her position as Eju's premier assistant and likely successor. She seems shy and retiring, but beneath the pale exterior, Uona is proud of her duties and responsibility, as well as believing that she is the best person for the title of Master of Air.



ISAWA TADAKA

Earth: 7

Water: 4

Strength 5

Fire: 5

Air: 4

Reflexes 6

Void: 4

School/Rank: Isawa Tensai (Earth) Rank 5

Honor: 4.5

Glory: 7.7

Shadowlands Taint: 0.2

Advantages: Ancestor: Isawa Akuma, Social Position (Elemental Master of Earth)

Disadvantages: Fascination: Oni no Akuma, Driven: To free ancestor's soul, Powerful Enemy: Isawa Rujo

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Defense 4, Etiquette 1, History 5, Kenjutsu 4, Lore (*Maho-Tsukai*) 2, Lore (Shadowlands) 5, *Maho-Tsukai* 1, Meditation 3, Shintao 4, Siege 3, Theology 2

Spells: All Earth spells, plus any spells in the Core RPG and those that the GM sees fit to assign or design (focusing on jade and corruption).

Scarred by jade, burned by dark knowledge, Isawa Tadaka has already seen more evil and danger than most Elemental Masters ever dream – and has been the source of more destruction toward the denizens of the Shadowlands than even the Kuni know. His hatred of the foul beasts that roam Rokugan's southern reaches is legendary, and his family whispers of dark pacts

ANCESTOR:

NAKA KAETERU

(CONTINUED)

"Perhaps you should meditate along with me." Before a month had passed, the grove was filled with those who wished to know the secret of being. Kaeteru would merely smile and say, "Think on it, and you will have your answer." Kaeteru spent his remaining years in contemplation guiding those around him to the task of enlightenment. When the Phoenix were forming as a clan, they took Kaeteru under their care and fed him, calling him and his teaching part of what is great about the spirit and mind. He was the first ever monk to be given the title of *Seishin Ichibiku* (Spiritual Guide or Enlightened Host) and to this day is revered by both the Monks of Shinsei and the Asako as the foremost teacher of contemplation that Rokugan has ever known.

Any shugenja who takes Kaeteru as her ancestor is always considered to have a Void two higher than it is, and may always add two additional dice to her meditation score when meditating or helping others to meditate. If the honor of the shugenja is ever reduced to 1 or less, Kaeteru will disappear forever and never return.



ANCESTOR:

ISAWA IJIME

601-649

-3 POINTS

Ijime was born to a very large uncaring family. As the youngest daughter to many older boys she quickly became the target of ridicule and abuse. Growing without love or attention, Ijime built imaginary places in her mind that she could retreat to, when the weight of the world seemed too much to bear. By the age of 8 she came to realize that her powers of perception allowed her to not only create an imaginary world in her mind, but also to manifest the images and manipulate them for others to see. She hid the talent away fearing more scorn from her family, but one day while a Magistrate was visiting, her powers displayed themselves without her control. The dancing world of tiny butterflies and beetles sparked and whistled before the Magistrate. He summoned the family and asked if this child's gift was being advanced through training. At the age of nine, she was well past the age of training as an Isawa. When none would speak, the Magistrate surmised the problem, and swept up the young Ijime upon his horse.

and evil prophecies which shroud the Master of Earth.

Long centuries ago, Tadaka's ancestor, Isawa Akuma, summoned and was destroyed by the most fearsome Oni ever to walk the face of the Empire. Twelve feet tall and filled with acid for blood, the beast reviled its master, and struggled to break the bonds with him in any way it could. At last, Akuma was not strong enough to hold the beast, and it tore free from his grasp, destroying the Elemental Council and taking Akuma's name in revenge for his imprisonment.

At least one of Akuma's descendants has not forgotten this blasphemy. At least one still seeks revenge for the slaughter of his ancestor, and the rape of his name.

Tadaka's quest has led him into the darkest parts of the Shadowlands, through the fields of waste and the blackened rivers in search of the Oni which dishonored his house. For five years, he has spent every waking minute in preparation, uncovering foul rituals and gleaning their secrets, discovering new ways to fight the evil minions of Fu Leng with a passion that rivals even the most fanatic Kuni. He has spent years in study and contemplation, and has risked his life, his mind, and his very soul in his attempts to destroy the beast.

Tadaka was a quiet boy, engrossed in his studies and overshadowed by his elder sister, Isawa Kaede. Her skill with magic, and her obvious aptitude for the difficult practices of Void caused her to be considered a prodigy. Nevertheless, there were no ill feelings between the two as they grew up, and in fact they were quite close. Tadaka may have felt that his sister owned the limelight, but he was as much in love with her as the rest of the clan, and there was never jealousy between them. Kaede, for her part, felt tenderness and kindness toward both of her younger brothers, but with Tadaka, there was a special closeness. They were alike enough in age that they shared many of the same interests, studies and hobbies, and spent much time in the same circle of friends. When Tadaka decided to study for a year in the Crab lands, they parted with sorrow, and their friendly letters were delivered regularly by courier.

It was in the Kuni lands that Tadaka realized his calling. The spirit of his ancestor appeared to him, gagged and silent, but beseeching him for aid. Tadaka took up the quest to restore Akuma's name and defeat the horrendous Oni which had

destroyed him. His letters to his sister became sporadic, and when Tadaka decided to remain with the Kuni for another year, it was no surprise to his masters at the Isawa college.

At last, the Master of Earth himself sought out the errant apprentice, challenging his research and the validity of his work. Tadaka was furious. Lashing out, he challenged the Master of Earth to a magical duel - the loser would renounce his position within the Phoenix Clan and become forever ronin. Isawa Rujo accepted, and the battle commenced.

When the young Tadaka was victorious, it shook the foundation of the Council. Rujo was outcast for his arrogance, and Tadaka was invited to become the Master of Earth in his place. Assured that the position would only capitalize on his ability to research and locate the murdering Oni, and lured by the promise of knowledges forbidden to all who were not on the council, Tadaka accepted. Since then, he has divided his time between his studies in the Shadowlands and his duties on the Elemental Council, leading the Isawa (and the Phoenix) into dangerous territory. Some say that the Master of Earth is too 'close to his work,' and that the mask he wears is to cover the first signs of Taint growing in his body, but Tadaka responds to them with only scorn.

ISAWA TOMO

Earth: 4

Water: 6

Fire: 3

Air: 3

Reflexes 5

Void: 5

School/Rank: Isawa Tensai (Water) 5

Honor: 2.1

Glory: 4.1

Advantages: Crafty, Luck (2), Social Position (Elemental Master of Water)

Disadvantages: Obligation (Owes his life to Yogo Shidachi)

Skills: Craft (sailing) 2, Calligraphy 5, Cipher 3, Dance 3, Defense 2, History 3, Lore (Scorpion Clan) 2, *Mizu-do* 1, Poison 4, Shintao 5, Meditation 4, Shintao 3, Theology 2

Spells: All Water spells listed in the Core RPG plus those that the GM sees fit to assign or design (focusing on deception and stealth).

Few among the Isawa have had their calling come as strongly as young Tomo did. All his life, the energies of the nearby Seikihi River had moved Tomo deeply. Its power carried him across the whole of the empire. Its strength slashed through the Spine of the World. And it was the sea which, to the child who would be the Master of Water, was the most awesome thing in the world. Imagine, a body of water so great that no one could tell him what was on the other side! He knew he was to walk the path of Water.

When they were children, Tomo and his much older brother Tadaka once decided (as most boys do) to run away to the Shadowlands, where their parents would never find them. Of course, Tomo suggested they go by way of the Seikihi River. One afternoon, the

boys gave their half-sister Kaede the slip and ran for the mountains. For two months, they eluded the search parties, using the river and constant movement as cover against their aged father's spellcraft. The Seikihi River soon met the River of the Drowned Merchant, and crossed the Spine of the World toward the River of Gold.

Although their adventures were numerous, they soon fell into trouble in the Scorpion lands. They were captured by bandits, who intended to sell them to foreign caravans as slaves. With the help of a boy named Shidachi, they staged a successful escape attempt. Shidachi traveled with them only for a short time, until they returned to the heart of Scorpion lands, where he brought the errant boys to the Yogo for assistance. The Yogo returned the boys to their father, Isawa Ujina, who was frantic in his worry for his sons.



Even as a man, Tomo remembers that summer. While Tadaka had always looked away to the south, Tomo had eyes only for the waters that carried them. To regain favor with his father he declared himself an Adept of Water years before a choice was necessary. Soon Ujina's youngest child had found his way back into the Master of Void's heart.

Tomo is a man still filled with the joy of doing what he loves. His childhood mischief has not dimmed with his maturity, and he can often be found proposing wild and inventive solutions to the difficult problems which face the Council. At the same time, however, his stillness in meditation is like the deep pool. His keen mind analyzes problems like wave wears stone. His sensei is amazed at the willingness of the kami to comply with the young man. When Isawa Kaiyoko stepped down as Master of Water, she knew,



**ANCESTOR:
ISAWA IJIME
(CONTINUED)**

She never saw her family again. Ijime was brought to the Isawa and trained as if she had been learning all along, with no special treatment. She was expected to do the work required to catch up.

At the age of 16, when she was finally prepared for her *gempukku*, she died from a rupture in her head. When her body was found, blood trickled from her ear, and the snarl on her face painted the picture of abuse and anger. Her powers of magic would never be fully known by the Phoenix. With honor, her body was consigned to the fire.

Anyone taking Ijime as an ancestor is constantly haunted by images of a dark imaginary world beyond the normal realm. This unbalancing "euphoria" may unhinge a samurai and cause them distress in formal settings. All contested rolls have an increased TN of 5, and all social rolls require a TN increase of 10. Dueling is done as if the Void of the samurai is one lower, and all meditation attempts are at a TN of 40! However, they are able to glean insight into perplexing situations. The samurai receives a one die bonus to all skills involving puzzles, investigations, and other 'unsolvables'.



ANCESTOR:

ISAWA TAKAO

465 - 489

2 POINTS

The spirit of Isawa Takao is a fierce impetuous force that guides the hand of his descendants and impels their actions. The brash nature of this spirit is what led him to his death some 500 years ago. Isawa Takao was an amazing Master of Fire. At his peak of power, he had far exceeded the expectations of his many senseis. At the age of 21, he was the Master of Fire and was deciding the course of events for the Isawa. The remaining Masters of the Elements found his methods rash and immature, but his station afforded him some leeway. When Takao was 24 he sought to prove the might of the Oracle of Fire and challenged him to a duel. He swore his powers would command and dominate the Chosen in ways none had known before. When the time came, a giant tower of fire rose from the earth, and licked at the sky.

despite his inexperience, Tomo was ready for the post.

And now the river has brought Tomo one more gift. Yogo Shidachi, the friend of his youth is coming to study at Kyuden Isawa. Unlike Tadaka, who rapidly forgot Shidachi in the excitement of returning home, Tomo intends to repay the Yogo boy for his assistance. Tomo believes that he is being given a chance to make good his debt to the Scorpion who saved his life. It is a debt he will gladly repay.

ISAWA TSUKE

Earth: 6

Willpower 8

Water: 3

Fire: 8

Air: 3

Void: 4

School/Rank: Isawa Tensai (Fire) Rank 5

Honor: 4.5

Glory: 4.7

Advantages: Higher Purpose (Establish Phoenix Clan as a power in the Empire), Social Position (Elemental Master of Fire), Strength of the Earth (4), Tactician

Disadvantages: Brash, Blackmail: Akodo Kage (5), Jealousy

Skills: Battle 3, Calligraphy 3, Cipher 2, Courtier 2, Defense 3, History 3, Iaijutsu 5, Kenjutsu 4, Law 2, Manipulation 2, Meditation 3, Shintao 5, Theology 5

Spells: All Fire spells listed in the Core RPG, plus any other spells that the GM sees fit to assign or design (focusing on military application and destruction).

Isawa Tsuke is the second most experienced Master

upon the Elemental Council at this time, and possibly the most powerful. Between Eju's ailments and Tadaka's obsession with the Shadowlands, Tsuke can certainly be considered the 'leader' of the Elemental Council. With a thought, his mighty magics can level buildings, destroy armies, and slaughter those he feels are 'unworthy'. Some call Tsuke malicious, vicious, or vindictive but he sees himself as an honorable tyrant, forced to lead because he is the only capable choice.

Tsuke's scorn for the other Elemental Masters is well hidden. Warlike in his ways, he considers their pacifism to be the simpering of weak minds. Their reluctance to use their powers to cause change in the Empire is, to him, a sign of their disloyalty to the Emperor and the Imperial line. A loyalist at the core, Tsuke served in the armed forces of the Imperial Guard for many years before returning to lead the Council. As such, his



grasp of military and political tactics is broad, and his ability to defend the Phoenix in time of war is unquestioned.

However, the Shiba are not so confident in Tsuke's leadership. They mutter angrily about his control over the Council as their soldiers are sent to patrol the border with the Lion, afraid that Tsuke might break the oldest convention: peace. If he commands them to move against Mamoru Kyotei Toshi, who knows how the Phoenix will respond?

During his service to the Emperor, Tsuke developed a reputation among the Seven Clans – and not a pretty one. Known for his dueling ability, Tsuke's preferred tactic of destroying bandit gangs was to stand at a distance and slaughter them, one at a time, with his spells. As his troops kept the bandits hemmed in, Tsuke's fire rained down upon them one man at a time. Only when each one had died in blazing agony did Tsuke's volleys cease. "Now," he would say, "they know the price of their actions." Without remorse, pity, or regret, Tsuke's justice denied all pleas for help or mercy, and only delivered swift, violent death.

Yet while he served as the Emerald Champion's chief shugenja, few bandits dared raise their hand upon the roads and in the cities of Rokugan.

Tsuke keeps his contempt in check, relying on his martial training to give him the discipline that is not innate in his personality. He deals with the rest of the Council on an extremely professional level, mediating disputes with brutal efficiency. His leadership is met with various responses – Isawa Tomo has no leadership ability at all, while the Master of Air is grateful that Tsuke is willing to take initiative. Isawa Tadaka uses Tsuke's ambition to gain more time to spend with his studies of the Shadowlands. Of all the Masters, only Isawa Kaede – an mere Acolyte serving in her father's stead – has ever chosen to question Tsuke's will on an important issue, and when she chooses to speak, her words are always heeded. This has not gained her an ally in the Master of Fire, but the silent rivalry is entirely on his side – Kaede rarely even notices that she has caused any trouble.

ISAWA UJINA

Earth: 2

Water: 4

Fire: 4

Air: 6

Awareness 8

Void: 8

School/Rank: Isawa *Ishiken* 5

Honor: 2.8

Glory: 5.3

Advantages: *Ishiken-do*, Social Position (Elemental Master of Void)

Disadvantages: Lost Limb (Right Arm), Lost Love (Doji Ninube), Weakness (Earth)

Skills: Calligraphy 3, History 3, Meditation 4, Shintao 3, Lore (Myth & Legend) 2, Lore (Ninja) 3, Lore (Shadowlands) 2, Lore (Void) 5, Theology 3

Spells: All Void spells listed in this volume, and a few more, plus any spells in the Core RPG and those that the GM sees fit to assign or design

On the day that Isawa Ujina was born, a pure white wren flew into the birthing chamber and circled three times around the bed where his mother lay, holding her newborn child. Then it landed on the window sill.

"It is a good omen," one of the midwives said, nodding solemnly. "Birds bring joy, and the wren is a wise animal."

"You are mistaken," replied her companion. "This wren is the color of sorrow. It is not natural, and it heralds misfortune in the boy's life."

His father just entering the room, heard the woman's words, and without a sound, he drew his katana and cut her down. As she fell, drops of her blood splashed onto the wren in the window, staining its cloud-white feathers crimson. The bird took flight.

"I will not tolerate the words of foolish women wishing harm upon my son," Isawa Nodari said, his voice firm. "Remove the body, and clean up the mess," he instructed the other woman. "And do not speak of this again."

True to her instructions, the woman never spoke of the matter again and, in the years to come, she served as Ujina's maid. She saw the white and crimson wren only one more time in her life.

Ujina grew tall and slender like a young tree. He was agile and deft and his ability with the katana was impressive even at an early age. But there was never any doubt that the path of the sword would be only a pastime. From the very

ANCESTOR:

ISAWA TAKAO

(CONTINUED)

The fires could be seen for miles, and for many, many moments, Isawa Takao watched it dance. It seemed as if the Oracle of Fire were caught in a trance. And then suddenly Takao stepped forward into the fire and was consumed by it; quickly it disappeared into nothing. The world fell silent as the Master of Fire was no more.

Anyone taking Isawa Takao as ancestor may roll one extra die when casting fire spells, but is assumed to have the Brash disadvantage in addition to all other disadvantages. If the samurai already has the Brash disadvantage then all honor tests have a TN of 35.



ANCESTOR:

SHIBA TORIICO

802 - 827

I POINT

When Shiba Toriiko was young, her beloved aunt became the Oracle of the

Wind. The child, not knowing what that might mean begged her to do a "trick". The Oracle laid her hands on the girl and looked into the wind. Her expression soured.

"What is it, Tama-san?"

"To know the future is to deny hope."

"There is always hope for peace," the girl solemnly intoned.

The Oracle smiled. "Grow strong. One day you will save peace."

Shiba Toriiko, Champion of the Phoenix, died at the hands of a Crane swordsman, defending peace. Her life is immortalized in 'Worlds In Her Eyes' the epic poem by the once-Crane poet Gosano. The Phoenix remember her gift to all on the 4th day of the Horse.

Those who take Shiba Toriiko as an ancestor are always eligible for the karma rule should they die trying to prevent strife.

beginning, Ujina demonstrated a sensitivity to the world around him that marked a great affinity for the rarest of Phoenix magics. By the time Ujina was eight, the Master of Void came to visit him in his home. The Master had already felt the stirrings the young boy made with his awareness, like ripples in a still pool. When he entered the house, Ujina approached him with the informal affection of a child toward a favorite grandfather, or an old friend.

After dinner, the Master and Isawa Nodari sat down to discuss Ujina. "The boy is familiar with me because, as I have felt him in the way of things, so he has felt me. That I am here now in the flesh is only a formality. Your son and I are already quite familiar, and that is remarkable," said the Master frankly. "He will stay with you one more season. Then he should begin to study with me in my home. As his ability grows, he will feel too much. To leave him unguided would be cruel. But as soon as he is trained a little, I will send him back to you to spend the winters, when the world is more still and quiet."

Proud of so great an honor, Nodari agreed even though no question had been asked of him. Three days later, the Master departed. And three months later, he returned and took Ujina away.

Ujina studied with the Master for ten years. His *gempukku* came and went, and he returned home for the ceremony. But it did not hold the significance it did for most children. Ujina's training began when it was necessary, and continued until he had learned all that the Master could teach him. He learned to be quiet and hear all the world around him, farther and farther out. And he learned how to listen only to the rhythm of his own heart beating, when the rest became too much to bear.

Isawa Ujina returned to his parents' home at the age of nineteen. He was quiet but friendly, and found a tremendous joy in life. In his father's presence, the family servants treated Ujina with the reverence his son deserved. But alone with the young man, they spoke as easily with him as he did with them. Ujina had little use for formality when he could hear his servants' blood flow with the same pace as his own and could feel the little joys and sorrows of their lives even before he looked at their faces.

At the age of twenty, Ujina met Doji Ninube, the daughter of a Crane lord whose castle stood on the other side of the hills that bordered the lands of Ujina's family. The two courted and were

betrotted to wed. Two months before the wedding, Ujina sat in his garden, enjoying the clarity of twilight. His betrothed was making the several days' journey from her father's house to his, and feeling lonely for her, he reached out along the wind, seeking the scent of her perfume.

He could smell the thick, sweet smell of the jasmine in his garden. He could smell the brisk air of the mountains. He could smell the sharp tang of the pines along the roadway. And he could just smell the faint citrus of her hair... Then all the scents, all the sounds, and all the textures went out of the world. Ujina looked around him and, as if in a dream, the animals in the garden stood perfectly still. The trees didn't stir in the wind. The water of the small brook seemed to flow in place. Ujina searched for the feel of his own heart beating and all was silent. As he watched, the color began to bleed out of things around the edges, and those edges seemed to blur before his eyes.

"Ujina?" A voice that sounded familiar but felt entirely alien licked at his ear. Then, the world returned in a rush, the water pounding, colors blazing, the thick sweetness of the flowers cloying, and his heart pounding so hard and loud it must surely explode. Forcing himself to concentrate as the Master had shown him, he slowly brought things back into focus. For a time after that, Ujina was afraid to venture out. The fear itself was alien to him, for he had not been afraid for a long time.

Ninube did not arrive. On the fourth day after she should have come, he reached out for her again with his mind and senses. This time he felt nothing. He searched and searched for her familiarity, but he could not even find the empty place that she would have left had her spirit fled the plane. Instead, it was as if she had never been. On the sixth day after she should have arrived, Ujina rode out to her father's castle to see what had occurred.

At his almost in-laws he learned that she had left as planned with a full entourage, but nowhere on the road had Ujina encountered them. Search parties went out, but found little. A group of Imperial Magistrates was called. Ujina would have accompanied them in their search, but Ninube's father begged him to stay behind, saying that he could not afford to lose his neighbor's child along with his own. They waited and waited together, but the magistrates never came back.



Finally, another magistrate arrived, this one a Kitsuki investigator called Kaagi. Ujina and the new magistrate went out to search, and the things they saw made Ujina afraid for the second time in his adult life. They recovered Ninube, but not before the second midwife's prophecy had come home. Ujina was wounded badly while saving his beloved. His right arm was lost, and the side of his face and body were left horribly scarred.

Ujina returned to his family's home a very different man. Ninube stayed with him and nursed him through the worst of his illness. When he was well enough, they were married in a small ceremony with only their parents and the trees as their witnesses.

And still, Ujina's misfortune did not end. His father, always proud, grew ill very rapidly. Within a month, he could barely move, and within two, he could no longer speak. Ninube played the nursemaid to him as well, spending long hours keeping him company now that Ujina was able to care for himself. She would spend all day in her father-in-law's room, and her voice could be heard reading gentle haikus to him. But each evening, he only looked weaker than before.

Ujina himself could no longer stand his father's presence. He could feel too strongly the revulsion the old man felt for his son and himself, both of them crippled and weak. On the morning his father died, Ujina could not open himself to feel his father's spirit drift on the start of its long journey.

Most of his time was spent alone in his rooms or else in his garden. Even the servants he had always been close to looked on his scarred countenance with revulsion, and it pained Ujina too much to be near them. The only company he could stand was Ninube's and that of the Master of Void.

The Master came to visit regularly if not often. When he looked at his student, he saw only the pain in his heart, and he did his best to alleviate that. But he never stayed very long.

And after he had gone, Ninube would say, "I do not think that he likes me."

"It is only that you do not know him," Ujina would say shaking his head. But during one visit, Ujina watched the Master carefully. They were drinking tea when Ninube entered the room. The Master put down his cup and laid his hands on his knees, palms down. He nodded to Ninube respectfully. She moved around the room tidying this and moving that. All the while, the Master's eyes never left her. Finally, looking nervous, she bowed curtly and left the room. Then the Master turned back to his tea, picked up the cup, and drank.

"Do you not like my wife, Master?" asked Ujina, confused and upset.

"I do not know her." The Master's words echoed Ujina's own almost identically. The Master





ANCESTOR:

SHIBA KAIGEN

375-408

2 POINTS

Shiba Kaigen stood alone at a focal point of the Phoenix's history. He had been ordered to guard a mountain pass just north of Otosan Uchi when an invading Lion force attempted to charge into Phoenix lands. If the Lion had been able to reach the opposite side of the pass, the Phoenix might have been taken unaware.

Without previous warning, the Phoenix would not have had a unified front against the Lion, and might certainly have been destroyed.

The courage of all the Shiba line changed that destiny. Kaegen and his men held the pass and fought the Lion while a message was sent to the Isawa. He used unorthodox strategy, and integrated the power of the *kami* into their defense, saving the pass at the cost of their lives.

The Phoenix do not honor a particular day for Shiba Kaigen. His sacrifice fills the ages. Whenever a Phoenix bushi travels the Treacherous Pass they stop at the narrowest point and shout Kaigen's Oath:

"My breath I give to the Phoenix!"

continued. "I know each pebble that rolls under the tide of the southern-most ocean of Rokugan. I know each ant that is born and works and dies under the foundation of this castle. And I know each sunrise as it blooms. But I do not know your wife. Do you?"

Ujina had no answer, and so he let the matter rest. The next day, the Master left. Two months later, Ninube came to him to say that she was with child. Ujina called to the Master to tell him so and to ask him to come again.

But the Master replied, "I will not come yet."

Five months later, only a few hours before dawn, and during a fierce storm, Ninube had her child. The same midwife who had delivered Ujina stayed with his wife to deliver her daughter. Thunder crashed so loud it took all the sound away and so it was impossible to tell if the baby cried as it came into the world. But its eyes were open wide and it seemed to see right away. As she wrapped the infant in soft cloth, the midwife looked to the window and saw the red-stained wren poised in the window sill as if waiting.

Ujina, waiting outside, felt his daughter enter the world. And as he did he felt something terribly, terribly wrong. He opened the door to the birthing chamber and looked at the baby in its nurse's arms. The child looked back at him right away, and her eyes were only half her own.

"I do not know you, little girl," he said softly. "Not by half. And I do not know your mother." He looked at his wife, lying exhausted on the bed, the only furniture in the small tower room. Her face was Ninube's, but he had to think far back to remember that, back to before they were married. When he examined her carefully, he recognized her as a woman he knew a long time ago, not one he had seen every day for the last several years.

"Take the baby downstairs," he instructed the nurse. He could feel that she was afraid.

"How are you, wife?" he asked, approaching the bed.

"Well enough, husband," she replied. And although her brow was slick with sweat, and her body trembled with the recent strain, the eyes that looked out at him were entirely calm, as if they did not recognize that there had been an ordeal.

"Did you kill my father, wife?" Ujina's voice was even.

"I did indeed, husband."

"Did you kill my betrothed, wife?" He stood at the foot of the bed.

"I did indeed, husband," said the thing on the bed. It was very hard, now, for Ujina to place Ninube's features on the thing that lay before him. They didn't seem to fit, and they slipped at the edges when he didn't pay close attention. The lightning flashed so brightly through the window that it seemed to Ujina that in the brightness, he could see right through her.

"I will destroy you," Ujina said, his voice distant as he felt the power of the lightning coursing through him. His whole body glowed with it in the darkness. "I will forget you," he said, and the thunder echoed in his voice.

"You can only destroy what you know," she hissed, "that which you understand." Flinging herself forward, something dark and alive flew from her hands. Like dark, sharp birds, the barbs pierced Ujina as he spun to his left, striking up and down his already mutilated right side. Pain like acid burned through him, and he could feel his skin bubbling and the poison coursing toward his heart.

"You're wrong," he gritted through clenched teeth. "I can also destroy what I love." He staggered with pain, then pulled himself upright, lurching toward the bed. "And I know you now." He reached out with his left, whole hand. "You are my daughter's mother." His left hand made a ragged, tearing motion, and in that moment, he unmade her. The woman on the bed fell away like weft threads when the warp is torn out, or bits of sand in a gale.

The storm fled in a last roar of thunder, the sky going utterly still. Ujina stood alone in the empty room except for a small white wren in the window sill. As he approached the bird, he saw that it was whole and healthy, and yet it stood in a pool of fresh blood. With his left hand he reached out to it and felt the soft brush of its feathers as it took to the air.

Pulling a sheet from the bed to cover his ruined right half, Ujina limped downstairs to where the nurse and baby waited. He took the child from the fearful maid and cradled her in his good hand.

"You are Kaede," he said looking into her strange, dark eyes. "Isawa Kaede. And you will grow strong and happy." And as he watched, her eyes cleared, and grew a little less dark, and she made a soft gurgling cry as babies often do. Turning to the nurse he said, "Never speak of this again." The old woman only nodded.



For the rest of the night, Ujina sat with his baby daughter in the corner of his front room. In the morning the Master came to him. "You have seen through the last illusion, my friend," he said settling in a chair beside Ujina. "You are the Master of Void now."

In the years since that night, Ujina has raised his daughter well. She has grown up strong and happy, and he has taught her all that the Master taught him. A year after the death of his first wife, he married Isawa Ieku, who bore him Tadaka and Tomo, the Masters now of Earth and Water. But the poison of the barbs that struck him the night of Kaede's birth still courses through his body. The nature of the poison would strike at his heart if he let it, and through his essence, corrupt the very element he holds and protects.

Ujina is strong as no Master has been before him, and he holds the poison in check, keeping it from destroying his spirit. But he does so at the expense of his body. Even now, the power warps and changes him, so that physically he bears little resemblance to the man he was, and sometimes to a man at all. But Ujina holds back the darkness and keeps the power for the day his daughter is able to take it on.

The Shiba

SHIBA TETSU

Earth: 3

Water: 3

Fire: 2

Intelligence 4

Air: 2

Reflexes 4

Void: 3

School/Rank: Shiba Bushi
2

Honor: 1.3

Glory: 3.3

Advantages: Ancestor:
Shiba Kaigen, Daredevil, Great
Destiny, True Love: Yuki no
Onna

Disadvantages: Small,
Gullible

Skills: Archery 4,

Calligraphy 1, Defense 2,

Kenjutsu 3, Meditation 1, Naginata 2, Shintao 4,
Tea Ceremony 3

From the days of his youth, Tetsu was a quiet boy, lackluster and often forgotten by his companions. He seemed to have no real interests, and spent most of his time following his friends on their wild escapades. In fact, he was considered quite a sour child, spoiled and unhappy. His parents, wealthy courtiers, acquired anything he wanted, trying to assuage his boredom. But to no use - Tetsu seemed insufferable. Finally, his parents decided to send him away to be trained as a bushi in the Shiba school. He rebelled, running away into the Isawa woodlands. Although they found him the next morning, the experience changed his life forever.

For days, he spoke of the 'snow maiden' he had met in the woodlands, and how she had defended him from the storm. Even to his child's mind, she was beautiful - long black hair, and silken skin, her voice soft and cool. She had found him, alone and crying, beneath a tremendous oak tree, and



ANCESTOR:

SHIBA KAIGEN

(CONTINUED)

Only a bushi may take Kaigen as an ancestor, for the warrior spirit which lies on in his descendants will accept no less. Those who do take the One Man Alone (his title in the ancestral records) are proud of their forefather's death, and ready to emulate it if ever the time should come.

Because Kaigen was able to perform his feat through his knowledge of spellcraft, descendants of Kaigen are allowed to spend one year within the halls of the Isawa academy, learning much about spells, magic and the *kami*.

This knowledge gives the bushi a greater aptitude for using spells in battle, understanding the destructive potential of shugenja, and bringing the elemental spirits to supplement his own strength in combat. If a shugenja within 10 feet spends a Void point, the descendant of Kaigen may gain an extra action, even if he has already performed his only action for the round. This additional action may not be an attack, but may be used to perform any other ability or maneuver.



ANCESTOR:

ASAKO

DIED 57?

4 POINTS

The original head of the Asako family was heartbroken by the sudden departure of her husband, Yogo, for Scorpion lands.

Deep down, she never forgot his betrayal, but she would never have grown into the charismatic and wise leader if his destiny had been otherwise.

Shiba showed her what it meant to be human, divulged The Gift to her, and opened up the Path of Man before her eyes. He saved her life, and in return she became everything he told her she must be – dignitary, diplomat, mother, guide, leader, and founder of one of the most secretive, enigmatic bushi schools in the Empire.

She and her family helped build the Imperial Library in Gisei Toshi, compiled hundreds of volumes of lore about the war with Fu Leng, and formed a conscientious collective to care for the future of the entire world. But for all her efforts, she could not save her own son.

had comforted the lost boy. With her words of encouragement, he learned that becoming a bushi was not a punishment, but rather a high honor – and that service to his clan was the greatest duty he could be given.

When he returned, he was a changed child. Bright and open, laughing and happy, Tetsu shone with life and spirit. He excelled at the martial arts, learning every *kata* with pride and determination. His temperament became less sour, and he made many friends. As he grew to become one of the finest students in the school, he continued to spend his summers in the castle near the Isawa woodlands, hiking and searching for his mysterious companion. Although he has never found her, he swears that she watches him, and with pride in his heart, he says that one day he will find her again.

There are some in the Shiba school that say he is the next Champion, but Ujimitsu smiles when he hears the rumors. “Tetsu is a strong bushi,” he says, “but his place is not at the head of the Clan. He has another destiny.” The courtiers, of course, claim that this is nothing but Ujimitsu trying to remove the spotlight from Tetsu.

Tetsu has heard the rumors, and recognizes that he gets preferential treatment because he is thought to be Ujimitsu’s successor, but he does not care. Power, prestige, position – these mean nothing to him. Only serving his clan and finding the snow maiden drives him to be the finest bushi he can become. He has mastered the art of *yarijutsu*, and the technique of allowing his soul to be led by the magic of the *kami*. He says these things were gifts of the woodlands, and perhaps he is right.

SHIBA TSUKUNE

Earth: 5

Water: 3

Fire: 2

Intelligence 4

Air: 3

Void: 5

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 2 / Shiba Bushi 3

Honor: 4.2

Glory: 6.0

Advantages: Inner Gift (Empathic), Multiple Schools (Akodo Bushi / Shiba Bushi), True Love (Isawa Tadaka)

Disadvantages: Lost Love (Shiba Norihatsu)

Skills: Archery 2, Calligraphy 1, Cipher 1, Defense 4, Kenjutsu 2, Lore (Shugenja) 4, Meditation 2, Naginata 4, Shintao 3, Tea Ceremony 2

All her life, Shiba Tsukune has known exactly what she wanted. Born the second child to a wealthy Shiba landholder, many suggested the young girl would live in the shadow of her promising older brother, Norihatsu. Nothing could be further from the truth. Six years separated the two, but as the poet Kakita Ujina said, “They are like twins, separated by birth.”

Her father, Shiba Jimen, sent his son to the Shiba school, but as a favor to the daimyo of the Shiba family, he was allowed to send his daughter to the Akodo War College. The correspondence between the two was constant, each sharing their discoveries and lessons with the other. Tsukune’s father didn’t need any Kitsu shugenja to tell him his children shared a karmic bond, and rejoiced that they would bring great glory to his house.

But her father celebrated his good fortune a little too soon. On New Year’s Day, on his way home from the Shiba school, Norihatsu’s horse slipped in the mud, and the young Phoenix fell from his saddle, breaking his neck. Norihatsu died instantly, but his sister’s suffering was only beginning. Tsukune was practicing kenjutsu *kata* when she suddenly screamed, fell to her knees, and began weeping. Akodo Kage himself knelt beside the child, asking her if she was hurt, but she could do nothing but mutter “My brother, my brother...”

Tsukune fell into a deep, waking sleep soon afterward. Her father brought her to the Elemental Masters, but not even their great wisdom could heal his daughter. Finally, a Kitsu came to investigate, and after a long deliberation, she turned to the Shiba. “Your daughter has been cut off from half her soul,” she said. “That is her wound. And she will not recover until it is healed.”

A summer passed with Tsukune locked in her room, barely eating and doing little but watching the sunset. One night, Jimen crept into her room and stood behind her as she stared at the sinking sun. He asked his daughter if she was ready to return to her studies at the Akodo school, but she shook her head. “No,” she said. “I am a Shiba. I will train with my brothers and sisters here.”

Train she did. Every waking hour was devoted to her bugei skills. She used what she learned at



the Akodo college and applied the principles to her Shiba teachers' training. She spoke only when addressed and never played games with her childhood companions, but studied the books she brought back with her from the Lion schools. The only companions she had were her cousin, Isawa Uona, and a young Kitsu who was studying with Uona at the Isawa school. When Tsukune was supposed to spend summers with her family, she went to the Mirumoto school to discover their secrets. She spent three months there, returning with 'Rhythm and Timing' tattooed across her shoulders.

The lessons she learned from the Akodo and Mirumoto, along with her Shiba training, had taught her much, and for the remaining years of her training, she gained the nickname 'Little Turtle' from her teachers. Whenever involved in a match, she would stand cold and stoic, staring at her opponent, waiting to watch his movements. She would allow him two or three quick strikes, but would always step just out of his reach while she watched him. Then, on the fourth strike, she would strike him the moment he was ready with his own blow. The teachers were impressed, and so was her proud father.

When she was sixteen, her teachers decided it was time for her *gempukku*. A day before the ceremony, she was informed she would join the prestigious order of *chikai*, and be a loyal *yojimbo* to one of the most promising shugenja in Rokugan: Isawa Tadaka. She was deeply honored by the offer and promised to swear her life to him.

The next day, at the ceremony, she was introduced to the shugenja. Her cold, stoic stare looked at Tadaka ... and melted. A sensation she had not felt for nearly a decade swept over her. She saw in Tadaka's eyes that something had stirred

in his soul as well. All through the long ritual, their eyes never parted and it seemed as if time itself had stood still. When Tadaka took her hand in his own, she felt the energies running through her blood set afire; she could barely stand as he sliced her palm with the knife and she whispered, "My life is yours." She saw Tadaka's lips move just slightly as he whispered the same words to her.

Three months have passed since that day, and Tsukune has not been able to keep the young shugenja from her thoughts. She stands beside him, so close to him, and she cannot keep her mind on her duty. She knows that something has happened to her, something that cannot be explained by an Asako's alchemy or a Kitsuki's reason, but something that has changed her life forever. She cannot say how or why, but she knows that she is bound to Tadaka, much the same way she was bound to her brother.

She remembers the months that passed after her brother died, and she remembers how the



ANCESTOR:

ASAKO

(CONTINUED)

Sagoten was a difficult youth, and a spiteful, vindictive adult; where Asako never forgot her husband, Sagoten never forgave him. Even all of Asako's bright and hopeful enthusiasm after Shiba's return could not fully heal the wounds her son's unspent rage created.

Asako did not ascend to the realm of the Fortunes. Neither did she live on among the *Fushikai*. Her death came early on in the family's growth, when their understanding of the Path was still young. They believe that she walks among them, however, or has since reincarnated through the family again and proven herself worthy to join the gods.

Those who choose Asako as an Ancestor gain her luck with companions, in the form of a 6-point True Friend Advantage. The player may design another character to fill this role, as the GM desires. They also inherit her son's wrathful nature, however, which results in the Brash Disadvantage. Should the PC ever be betrayed by anyone, this becomes the Driven Disadvantage, and he will be devoted to his or her downfall thereafter.

ANCESTOR:
ASAKO INGEN
DIED 243
275 - 312
402 - 779
5 POINTS

Asako Ingen was the pioneer responsible for discovering and refining the initial ventures into the aspects of the Gift resulting in the *Fushihai* (immortals), though most Asako do not realize this. He had been obsessed with the Path since he was first accepted into the *Henshin* Academy over eight hundred years ago. Convinced that the Riddles were only the beginning of something far greater, he embarked on a lifetime-long journey to unravel their intricate puzzle.

At the end of his life, Ingen finally managed to lay the groundwork for the modern view of the Path, but died of old age before it could be completely realized. His last words were reportedly "I would be as a god!" Some 32 years later, another great Asako thinker, Reisha, became enraptured with the idea of solving the Path's pattern. Although he showed incredible acumen with the higher dynamics, his promise was nipped in the bud when he was killed during a surprise Crane attack. His last words, as well, were said to be "I would be as a god!"



incident almost killed her. When she thinks of Tadaka's secret journeys to the Shadowlands (journeys he forbids her to accompany him on), she knows that one day, she will feel the wrench on her soul she felt when she was a little girl, but this time, she does not know if she will be able to survive it.

SHIBA UJIMITSU

Earth: 5
Water: 5
Strength: 3
Fire: 4
Air: 6
Void: 5
School/Rank: Shiba Bushi 5
Honor: 4.9
Glory: 8.3

Advantages: Ally: Doji Satsume, Ancestors: (All Shiba Ancestors), Irreproachable, Soul of the Kami

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (wife and daughter's deaths), Small

Skills: Archery 5, Calligraphy 3, Defense 4, Etiquette 4, Horse Archery 2, Kenjutsu 5, Manipulation 2, Meditation 4, Naginata 4, Shintao 4, Tea Ceremony 3

The leader of the Shiba family and Champion of the clan is quite atypical for a Phoenix. On the one hand, he represents everything a Phoenix Champion should be - wise, thoughtful, well-versed in the code of bushido and dedicated to defending the clan at all costs. On the other hand, he is far more than his appearance suggests, and occasionally demonstrates quirks and depths that not even his closest friends are comfortable with.

There was nothing overly remarkable about Ujimitsu while he was growing up. He listened intently to what he was told, and rarely spoke back to his elders. He performed well, but never excelled at anything. His interests lay mainly in sketching, which he was never good at, and singing, which he only did while alone. Hardly the trademarks of a noted bushi. His *gempukku* ceremony was uneventful and he took up a post on the border of the Phoenix lands along with dozens of other Shiba school graduates.

He was with his unit during a patrol along the coastline one morning when the previous Champion finally died. Ujimitsu fell from his horse into the surf as the souls of a thousand ancestors filled his mind. He cried out in adulation and pain, trying to encompass the experience with hopelessly inadequate words. He spoke in strange tongues that none had heard before and called on 'his mother' the sun to



forgive him for failing her. The Crane allies in his patrol thought he was mad. Luckily, though, his *gunso* had been trained to recognize the signs, and he knew what was happening. As soon as he was well enough, Ujimitsu was dispatched to the Shiba family palace, where his status was confirmed. He now held the soul of the Clan Champion, and formally took the office soon thereafter. The humble bushi serving an undistinguished post now found himself leading an army of a hundred thousand.

All of it took Ujimitsu quite by surprise. He had expected to be a *yojimbo* for some shugenja, not the guardian of the entire clan. In addition to his new duties, he had the voices of all his predecessors whirling in his head. During the first few days, he felt he was losing himself in their cacophony and came close to irretrievable madness several times. The Master of the Void, Isawa Ujina, and the other Elemental Masters helped him regain his equilibrium. They taught him several meditation techniques and ways to soothe his tumultuous mind, as well as instructing him on how to make use of the powerful souls within him. When he emerged from their instruction, he was at peace with his new status, and ready to take the position fate had decreed him.

Since then, he has performed above expectations and brought a new sense of honor to his clan. The Shiba troops have been sharper since he took over, their movements and positioning more precise. Ujimitsu remains thoughtful and quiet, but has learned that observation is the key to self-improvement. By studying subjects carefully – whether friends or foes – can see their weaknesses and either correct or exploit them. He has restored respect to the Phoenix military; while still small and weak, it is no longer the object of ridicule it once was. Those who know credit Ujimitsu – and the voices he carries within him – with the change.

He had a family once, but they died some time ago. His wife committed *seppuku* over a matter of honor, and he was forced by honor to kill his young daughter immediately thereafter, as she cursed the souls of the Hantei before the Emperor's own eyes. The incident is clouded in secrecy, for it occurred in the midst of delicate negotiations with the Lion Clan. No one present at the time speaks of the matter, and asking Ujimitsu about it is tantamount to suicide. As far as he is concerned, his family never existed.

Strange stories have followed Ujimitsu since he became Champion – stories which even the Phoenix describe as abnormal. He appears to be able to move with unheard-of speed and defy the laws of nature and reality at whim. Reports have surfaced that he is capable of appearing in two places at once, and he has been credibly seen hundreds of *li* (miles) apart within the same hour on the same day. Ujimitsu himself professes ignorance on the whole matter, claiming that such stories are outlandish fictions and nothing more. Those close to him, however, say he enjoys the mystique the stories give him, and plays them up whenever he can. Whether there is any truth to them – and what they may imply about the Phoenix Champion – no one can say.

Ujimitsu is a small, unassuming man, easy to overlook. He lacks the dominating presence of other Clan Champions and seems cowed by the pomp and formality his position demands. But his eyes hold the depths of ten centuries, and he speaks with the quiet authority of one absolutely sure of himself. While he argues quite often with the Elemental Masters – urging policy changes, increased troop expenditures, etc. – he does so only behind closed doors and never speaks ill of them in public. He continues to sketch when he finds the time, and often retreats to draw in the solitude of the Isawa woods. He never lets anyone see his work, however, claiming it is far too crude to display.

Ujimitsu wears his hair in the traditional samurai topknot, and carries the Phoenix Clan daisho wherever he goes. He prefers walking to riding whenever he can, and he always wears the same battered sandals on his feet. Lately, his face has appeared more haggard than usual, and servants in the Isawa palace whisper that he has not been sleeping well. He has yet to let it interfere with his duties, however.

Ujimitsu's unique Advantage (Soul of the *Kami*) is intended to represent the thousand years of wisdom and knowledge he can call upon from the other souls of Phoenix Champions. These souls have nearly unlimited knowledge of basic skills, and common wisdom gained from nearly forty lifetimes. The skills given in Ujimitsu's description above are those earned by Ujimitsu himself, and are available to him without accessing the wisdom of the *Kami*'s soul. No one other than the Phoenix Clan Champion can have this Advantage, and it is only given during game play. This Advantage can only be granted during

ANCESTOR:

ASAKO INGEN

(CONTINUED)

Six hundred years ago, yet another Asako, known as Beiwa, made productive inroads into the field of research. This time, he was successful. The gates to the next level of humanity's existence were flung open, and Beiwa stepped through. He freely gave his insights to the Asako family, and directed formally the portion of the Academy dedicated to the Final Mystery for almost four hundred years. He died under mysterious circumstances in the year 779. (Many believe it was the result of poison.) His last words were "I would be as a god!"

No one has reported those words among the Asako since that day.

Those with Ingen as an Ancestor are considered to be 1 School Rank higher for all purposes when using Riddles.

UJIMITSU'S WATER RING

Shiba Ujimitsu's Water ring has remained 5 while his Strength has dropped to 3. Once his Strength was higher, but an incident involving his daughter, the Shiba ancestral sword, and his ancestors debilitated him. See *Winter Court: Kyuden Seppun* (p. 114) for details.



ANCESTOR:

ASAKO HANASAKU

98-153

4 POINTS

Asako Hanasaku discovered much of what now fills the Asako libraries. His eclectic, almost esoteric research classified him as dishonorable and aberrant, but the good work Hanasaku performed on his own body changed the very nature of study for the Asako. Poisons, plants, fish, eggs, inks, blood, oils, and spices were ingested, scraped into the skin or otherwise consumed by Hanasaku in order to discern their properties. His knack for understanding anything was a blessing to the Phoenix and the rest of Rokugan, as a very unfamiliar world was being explored.

play by the Game Master, and only to the Phoenix Clan Champion when the previous holder of that position dies.

The Asako

ASAKO TOGAMA

Earth: 2

Water: 3

Fire: 2

Air: 3

Intelligence 4

Void: 3

School/Rank: Asako *Henshin* 2 (Air, Water)

Honor: 2.8

Glory: 1.7

Advantages: Ally: Doji Shizue, Clear Thinker

Disadvantages: Fascination: Knowledge of

Iuchiban, Forbidden Knowledge (Iuchiban's name)

Skills: Artisan: Music 1, Bard 2, Calligraphy 4, Cipher 2, Defense 2, Forgery 4, Hand-to-Hand 3, History 2, Lore (Iuchiban) 2, Lore (*Maho-Tsukai*) 3, Medicine 1, Meditation 3, Research 4, Shintao 2, Law 5

Quietly confident and secretly, pleased with himself, ten-year-old Asako Togama laid down his writing brush and folded his hands in his lap. Around him his fellow students did likewise. The instructor, whose dictation had only moments ago been recorded in wet ebon strokes by twenty eager hands, was now inspecting his students' work, meandering down the rows from the head

student to the back, leaning over to make an occasional corrective mark. He was slightly more than halfway through when he reached Togama, but the youth felt no shame at being so far from the front. After all, every other student in the class would be going through *gempukku* in a few short weeks. That event was still years ahead for the prodigious young shugenja-to-be.

His apprenticeship was nearly as rapid, though not without incident. His master at first thought the young man to be overly proud, and in an attempt to teach humility gave Togama several archaic pictographs to translate to modern Rokuganese - including one meaningless one he had made up on the spot. Instead of staring blankly at the fake symbol, Togama quirked his eyebrows, then suddenly stood and strode from the room. He returned well after dinner hour with a two-hundred-year-old caravan tax manifest, one





of whose items was a warm winter cap used by the primitive Isawa. The symbols matched exactly.

Togama has always been precocious, but that hasn't stopped him from becoming one of the most well-loved people in the Asako family. Welcomed at every court in the land, Togama's research and studies have made him a favorite, and his dry wit have given him the air of a courtier. He has traveled through many lands of the other clans, as far south as Kyuden Doji, and to the wicked city of Ryoko Owari in the west. The Scorpion, Unicorn, Lion and Crane welcome him with open arms, and while the enigmatic Dragon make no overtures of friendship to the traveling Asako, he is certain that one day he will receive an invitation to visit their grand libraries as well. And that, he says, would be his greatest feat.

Recently, Togama has become embroiled in some political trouble, however. Because of an unusual discovery of ancient documents beneath Otsan Uchi, Togama began to research the history and lineage of the Imperial line. As he was finishing the text, it became known that he had uncovered the secret of Iuchiban's true name. However, in an unfortunate incident, Togama's original documents were destroyed before they could be brought into court. Togama takes the defeat with a grain of salt, however, and although he will not discuss the matter, he simply smiles enigmatically and responds, "if my work was a lie, why has it been so carefully unwritten?"

For now, Togama stays in Asako palace, traveling among the libraries of the Isawa and the Shiba. He greets visitors with a ready smile and a quick comment, and is always willing to spend time discussing his favorite work with those who are willing to listen.

ASAKO OYO

Earth: 2

Willpower 4

Water: 3

Perception 7

Fire: 2

Intelligence 5

Air: 3

Awareness 6

Void: 3

School Rank: Asako *Henshin* Rank 5

(Water, Fire, Earth, Air, Void)

Honor: 2.8

Glory: 1.2

Advantages: Higher Purpose (Warning of Henshin Dangers)

Disadvantages: Bad Reputation (Lunatic), Missing Eye, Enlightened Madness (Knowledge), Forbidden Knowledge (The Great Secret)

Skills: Bard 2, Bo Stick 3, Calligraphy 1, Defense 2, Hand-to-Hand 3, Herbalism 3, History 3, Investigation 2, Kenjutsu 2, Lore (The "Gift") 4, Medicine 2, Meditation 5, Shintao 5, Theology 3

Asako Oyo was born one hundred and forty-two years ago, to a caretaker of the Isawa Library in Gisei Toshi. His mother died in childbirth, and he was adopted into their small community thereafter. Early on, he was exposed to the many tales housed within the building, the Asako reading stories to him from the volumes every night.

He exhibited an extraordinary mind, and consumed thousands of words a day from the many dusty texts within the library's endless halls. But there was something about him that saddened the Asako caretakers. He never seemed content, always looking out the high windows longingly, as if knowledge was not enough for him.

When even the Asako mind games and word puzzles began to bore him, it was decided that he should be entered into the *Henshin* School at Shiro Asako. But the Isawa did not permit any of the Asako to leave the library before retirement, and so the Henshin prepared to smuggle him out with the monks who delivered food and supplies.

Shortly before he would have received his *gempukku*, Oyo was brought outside the walls of Gisei Toshi and given food and a map to Shiro Asako. He arrived there several days later and presented himself with all the dramatic flair and youthful enthusiasm he could muster, relating his heritage and right to attend. He was accepted into the school, perhaps based more upon his passion than his blood.

Over the following years, Oyo displayed an unprecedented acumen with the mystical techniques the Henshin sensei offered. His mind pieced together complicated physical dynamics most would take years to grasp. In fact, it often seemed that he was beyond the current field of study, envisioning the lessons that would come tomorrow or next week. The Masters who asked what he was distracted by were often shocked at his answers, which showed a depth of knowledge

ANCESTOR:

ASAKO HANASAKU

(CONTINUED)

Hanasaku died while testing a rare, mold-colored poison - afterwards known as *Jin-Hana Saku* poison. With a tiny drop on his tongue his body convulsed, and then his left arm went numb. As he recalled it to a scribe, he said, 'It tastes sour, like old rice milk.' With his research complete, he drank a bit of sake to clean his mouth. Moments later, the body of Hanasaku collapsed, and fell to the ground. He never woke.

The samurai with Hanasaku as an ancestor is cursed with the unquenchable desire to know what everything is. Anything undiscovered or unknown to the Asako is a new frontier to be tested. A Willpower roll against the TN of 20 is necessary to resist the allure of trying anything new. However, Hanasaku's knowledge of the bizarre gives the samurai an automatic rank for all rolls involving Medicine, Poison, Herbalism, and all lore rolls involving strange events and information. Buying rank one in any skill still requires the expenditure of one Character Point.



ANCESTOR:

KITSU TAIKO

717-781

7 POINTS

Kitsu Taiko was an unassuming babe of peasant birth. A strong child, he learned to walk and caper before his peers could crawl.

When Taiko was very young, his house was attacked by brigands who slaughtered his family. The brigands planned to steal the household's money and goods, and sell the young boy to a laborer as an apprentice. The young Taiko had other ideas. In the midst of the attack, he called forth the spirits of long-dead fires. When he was found, Taiko sat alone amidst a blackened pile of rubble. The Kitsu who found him say they were guided by the spirit of a fire-like, lion-maned beast whose ghostly eyes spoke of centuries of wisdom. Taiko was taken to Shiro sano Ken Hayai immediately, and placed in their care.

When he was accepted into the school of the Kitsu, he was only four years old.

Taiko had an amazing affinity for the school of Fire, and although his Kitsu blood was too weak to do much more than hear an occasional spirit, he soon grew to prominence as one of the most deadly shugenja in the Empire.

far beyond that which a student of his experience should have achieved.

When he reached the fourth rank of training, the *Fushihei* began to take a more concerned look at his progress. What they assumed at first to be a symptom of his racing intellect, one that would work out once the studies became difficult enough to require his full attention, now frightened them.

He was developing too quickly. The *Fushihei* had no frame of reference for this. They did not know what would happen to a person who

walked the Path of Man prematurely. If Oyo was not completely ready, or the conditions of his enlightenment not absolutely controlled, then the result would be worse than any of them imagined. Their answer was simple.

Oyo was drawn out of his studies and denied access to further knowledge of the Path until he had time to acclimate into what he was becoming. He was assigned instead to the *Michibiku*, where he would remain until they were assured that he was ready for the next step.



What they did not consider was Oyo's preternatural ability to collate information and make leaps of logic. Over the next two decades, as he continued acting in accordance with the wishes of the Asako Masters, his subconscious made connections between learned truths and perceived theories. Throughout, he was never called back to the Henshin School: whether because the Masters had forgotten about him, or were avoiding him he was never sure.

Finally, only scant years before he would have joined the Asako monks tending to the librarians he was born among, he made a significant discovery. The final leg of the Path was only an elaboration of what has come before, he theorized, and thus training was not required to achieve it. He had managed to do something never before known - he had 'slipped' into the next rank of training without the benefit of a sensei.

New vistas of comprehension opened up to him like a budding flower on the first day of spring. He was completely aware of himself, his body, and the anxious spirit within. Oyo knew himself to be that spirit, that the shell that housed it was nothing more than a vessel carrying it down the Path - to...?

What was he striving for? What great secret plagued his spirit so that it begged for release? And once it was released, where would it go? These and a thousand other questions formed a maelstrom within him, and drove him to a point where he recognized that insanity was but a single thought away.

Returning to the Shiro Asako, he begged the counsel of the Masters. He wished nothing more than an answer to what he was becoming, what they had done to him...

They studied him for scant hours before realizing their horrible mistake. They had granted him the means to continue on his own without the guidance he would need to remain on the proper Path. Oyo had strayed in his maturation, wandering off into the corrupted darkness beyond. They had arrogantly presumed that he would not be able to continue his walk without them.

They were wrong.

Asako Oyo has become a lesson to the Masters that they would spend the next thirty years correcting. Deep meditative trances and intensive spiritual forays into his soul were only the beginning of the torment he suffered while they

attempted to draw him back onto the Path. By the time his spirit was rescued, it had changed beyond recognition. Oyo was no longer the man the Asako knew.

He was distraught, and pained. One of his eyes had gone stark white, and he spent entire weeks shivering from the terrifying things he had seen beyond. Moments of clarity only served to worsen his state, for they were when he spoke of the future. He claimed that he had seen images of a time when the clans would wage war upon one another, when the Dark One would return to topple the Empire, and when a darkness would sweep the land, leaving a great void in its wake.

For almost one hundred years, the *Fushihai* and their most trusted assistants guided Oyo down the Path, consciously suppressing his tainted nature. He was their greatest mistake, but could prove to be their most valuable asset as well. If they could guide him past the boundary, into the heavens, then it would prove that there was hope for even the most distracted soul.

Over the years, his ramblings grew more coherent, and he spoke less and less of what he had seen. Whether he had forgotten it, or refused to relate it, none knew. His prognostic glimpses became fewer and less frequent, and it was eventually determined that they were becoming less distant, as if he were "approaching" a pivotal moment in time.

Two years ago, he escaped.

Now he wanders the countryside of Rokugan, alternating between the present and points only minutes ahead of himself. The Henshin search for him, trying to bring their lost sheep home, afraid of what will happen when he catches up to his visions. They know of his position on the Path - that he is dangerously near its end. This is the most critical point of his development, and if he were to slip again, this close to divinity, who could guess at the result?

Asako Oyo stumbles through the Empire, screaming to anyone who will listen:

"Do not trust the Asako! We are not ready!"



ANCESTOR:

KITSU TAIKO

(CONTINUED)

His ability was the deciding factor in many of the foremost battles of his day, and he made numerous innovations to the knowledge and spellcraft of Fire magic.

Taiko believed in confronting problems with force, and destroying obstacles rather than seeking ways to avoid them. Any problems with the enemy, he would say, should be resolved by killing them all, and then asking the Kitsu to interrogate their souls in *jigoku*. No other answer would satisfy him. When he retired from the Emperor's service, he was invited to travel to Phoenix lands and become the next Master of Fire.

Taiko accepted, and was released from his duties to the Lion clan. Although he died a Phoenix, his heart was with the Kitsu, and his descendants are still found among both clans.

Only a shugenja character of the Lion or the Phoenix can purchase this ancestor. The shugenja may choose an element, and they are considered to be well-loved by the *kami* of that element. Attempts to commune, summon or sense spirits of that element will be met with friendship, and the character may roll and keep one extra die when casting spells of that element.



Chapter Five



***Sample Phoenix
Characters***

Isawa Fetish Collector

At your birth, a man in a battered hakama arrived from the crossroads. He told all your family that he was only passing through, and needed a safe and dry place to sleep for the night. Upon seeing your newborn form, and in return for your parents' gracious assistance, he gave them a sealed scroll case, to be opened at your *gempukku*. The next sunrise he was gone without a word, never to be seen again.

Fourteen years later, you cracked the wax seal and gazed at the contents of the long case. Within was a scroll of aged rice paper, rolled loosely as if coiled within the box against its own will. That very evening, ignoring the other gifts you received, you delved into the arcane scripture upon it.

You were never the same again. Your parents claimed that you were less caring of others, worried at your wanderlust. Your growing obsession with material objects - particularly *tsangusuri* and other magical trinkets - frightened them. They said you were becoming corrupted by a dark fascination. Too late, you know they were right.

Only days after reading the scroll, the first voice entered your mind. You did not recognize it, but it sang like an old friend. It knew your heart's longing, and promised to fulfill it if you would come and take it away. You were afraid, but the images were enchanting, full of grand wonder and enigma...

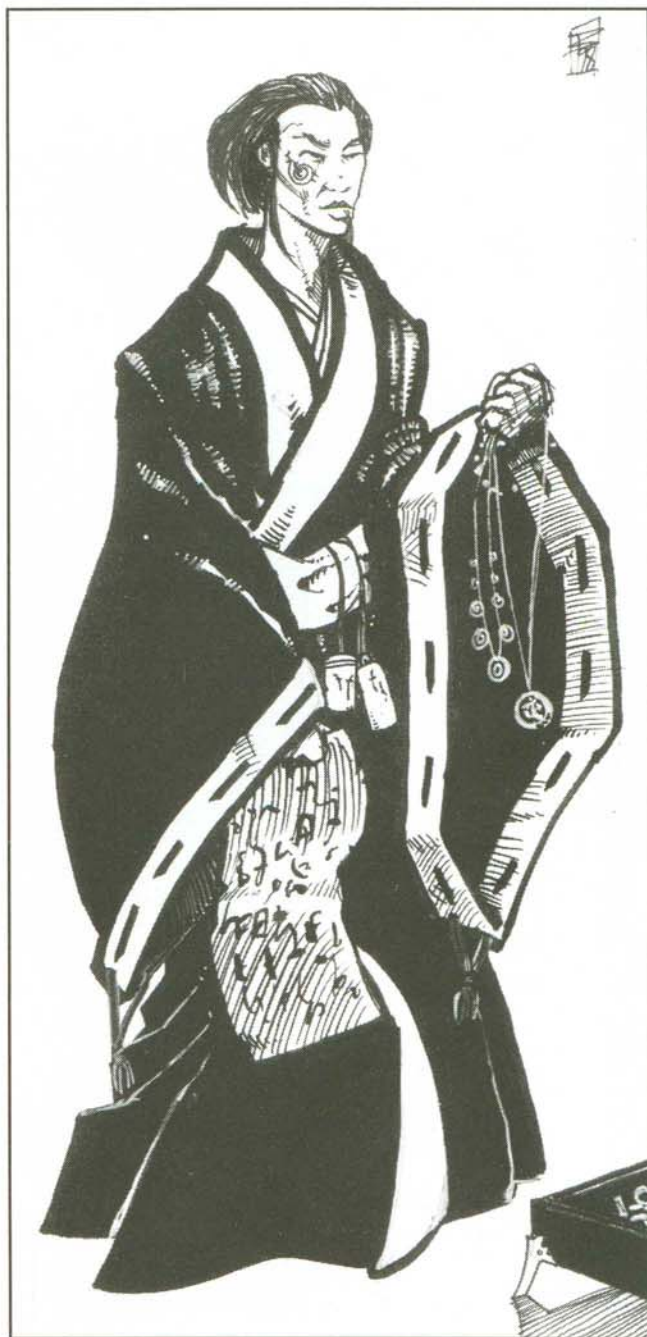
Through visions of far-away landscapes, the voice guided you to a shrine. Inside you found a very old spice-shaker. You didn't know what to do with it, but a new voice promised you it was a powerful item that would provide you immeasurable magic - if you followed to another location. You did, several times, and with every new fetish you can feel the magic swelling within you. Unfortunately, power is not the only thing the items grant. You can feel something growing within you, like the weight of a child within your soul.

Now you are beginning to wonder why you ever followed the evil voices and their 'vision-trail'. You are besieged by a growing hatred you can't define. There is a gathering darkness within you, as if something is trying to break free from your body. Every time you follow a voice, something terrible

happens, and someone dies. Most recently, a traveling companion you cared quite deeply for - a Shiba magistrate - was thrown from her horse.

And the new voice in your head is another of your friends...

You have gone too far and learned too much to turn back now. Will you accept the great power the voices offer you, sacrificing everyone and everything you care about? Or will you seek out a way to silence them, destroy the fetishes, and finish this monstrous magic once and for all...?





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Isawa Collector

Clan:
Phoenix

Profession:
Shugenja

Primary Weapon
Wakizashi 2k2

Primary Armor
None

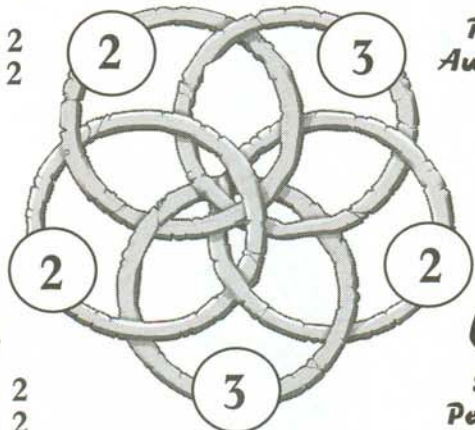
TN to be Hit
(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)
15

Fire

Agility: 2
Intelligence: 2

Air

Reflexes: 3
Awareness: 3



Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 2

Void

Void Points Spent:

Insight: 140

Spells

- Sense, Commune, Summon,
- Accounts of Shorihotsu,
- Evil Ward, Cloak of Night,
- Fires From the Forge, Inflammation,
- Wind's Distractions

Skills

Appraisal	2
Calligraphy	3
Commerce	1
Investigation	3
Kenjutsu	1
Lore (Tsangusuri)	1
Lore (Maho-Tsukai)	1
Meditation	2
Shintao	2
Sincerity	2
Sleight of Hand	1
Theology	1

School: Isawa Shugenja **Rank:** 1

Wounds

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

Advantages/ Disadvantages

- Heart of Vengeance
(GM's Choice) +3
- Forbidden Knowledge
(Fetish Scroll) +3
- Fascination
(Dark Fetishes) -2

Glory: 1



Honor: 2



Experience Points:

Amnesiac Ishi

You can't remember your name.

Or where you were born. Or who your parents were. Or who your friends are. Or what you were doing that caused you to wake within a riverbed one week ago, covered in moss and steaming blood. All you are sure of is that you are a shugenja, an elemental spell-caster with the ability to manipulate the Fifth Ring - Void.

You have no sensei, but you think that you did before the accident that caused your loss of memory. You can almost remember a face, someone protecting you, holding you back when the forces you harnessed were beyond your scope. Someone guiding you back home when you ventured too far out into the Realm Between the Elements. Whose outstretched hand beckoned for you to come back before...

A battlefield. You were upon a battlefield when it happened. No, perhaps a battle had erupted around you, like a field of locusts descending upon a small farm. A sequestered tower. Everyone there was a friend. You could trust them not to harm you. Until the locusts came and destroyed everything. You were lost in the Realm of Void, attempting a spell for the first time, and they took your master, and someone else, away from you. Everyone disappeared, and you were free.

Everyone was dead...

Another face comes to you sometimes, more and more. That of a young and sturdy warrior, someone who helped you, protected you. But you cannot remember where he is, or whether he still lives. You know that somewhere, however, there must be someone that can tell you who you are, and what you were doing out in the Void that caused this tragedy.

There must be.

You have tried to venture back out into the aether, to find the trail home. But it is too much for you to absorb - there are too many things to look at, to listen to, to understand. If you let go, you can almost hear someone calling your name in the distance. You wish desperately to give into it, to float away and

never come back, but who would you become then? Why are you filled with fearful awe when you look out into the Void?

You could give up, commit *seppuku*, end this nightmare now while you are still in control of what little is left of your mind. But what would that accomplish?

Which is more important - peace of mind, or peace of the soul?





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Isawa Ishi

Clan:
Phoenix

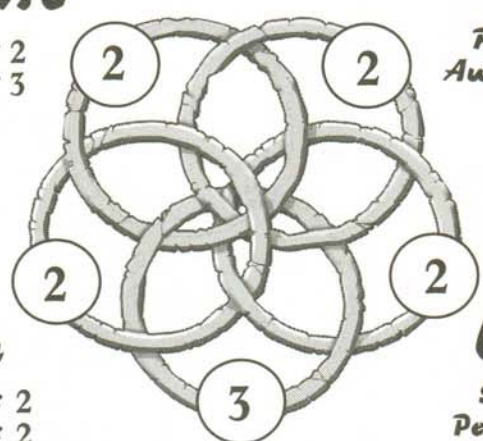
Profession:
Shugenja

Fire

Agility: 2
Intelligence: 3

Air

Reflexes: 2
Awareness: 3



Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 3

Void

Void Points Spent:

Insight: 125

Primary Weapon

Wakizashi 2k2

Primary Armor

None

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

10

Skills

Calligraphy	2
Hand-to-Hand	1
Intimidation	1
Investigation	2
Kenjutsu	1
Lore (Shugenja)	1
Lore (Void)	1
Meditation	2
Shintao	2
Tea Ceremony	2

Spells

- Sense Void, Sense, Commune,
- Summon, Alter the Course,
- Drawing the Void, Evil Ward,
- Elemental Ward, Inflamm

School: Void Apprentice **Rank:** 1

Wounds

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

Advantages/ Disadvantages

- Innate Void Ability
- (Alter the Course) +6
- Ishiken-do +5
- Enlightened Madness
- (Triggered by Void) -2

Glory: 1



Honor: 2



Experience Points:

Asako Michibiku

You were born to the Dragon and lived the first several years of your life among their lofty peaks, spending all your youthful afternoons in their peaceful monasteries, and all your quiet evenings in somber contemplation. But the simple bliss of the Dragon was not your first calling, and even though you miss the beautiful snow-capped mountains, you would not trade your life as an Asako Michibiku for anything in Rokugan.

You are a nurturer, a person dedicated to the welfare of all the clans equally, without bias or favor. Your mission is to guide the younger families of the clans, to make them understand their place upon the Path of Man. To show them how to better themselves so that they may achieve human greatness, as you and all your Asako brothers and sisters have. And to do this, you must go out among them, be the example of the proper way to speak, act, fight, and die.

This is what the Asako *Fushihai* who came to your mountain home said to you the very night of his arrival. You did not understand it then, were not ready for the knowledge of your soul's place on the Path. You did not believe him when he told you that you - in your last life - had lived over four hundred years, and were very nearly immortal before being struck down by a villainous Isawa who sought your knowledge.

You believe now. The Path of Man has been revealed to you, the truth of the world laid out before your young eyes. The aged soul within you is remembering more and more of the Path every day. You are "destined for glorious ascension", they say. And the things you can accomplish, even without the benefit of training - surely, they must be proof of the validity of the Asako claims.

You hope that it is all true, but realize that there are flaws in the scheme. A day does not pass when you are free of doubts. How could you have been an Asako - such an established Asako - and been reborn a Dragon? Would not the Path prevent such cosmic mistakes? Would not the Fortunes guide the victims of such unfortunate ends to fitting new lives?

And if so, then what did you do that caused your errant rebirth? Sometimes, when you are walking the Path, you have a sense of others nearby. But that is impossible. "Every person must walk the Path alone," your *Fushihai* has told you.

Are you sure of who you are?

Are you?





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Asako Michibiku

Clan:
Phoenix

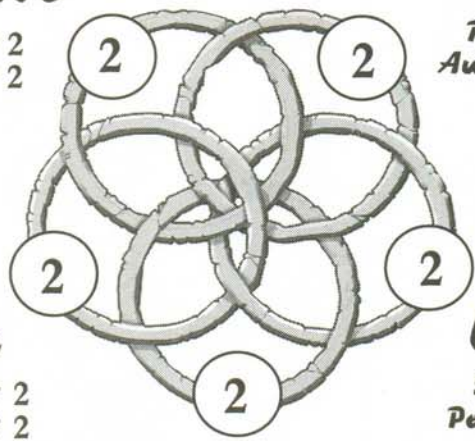
Profession:
Bushi

Fire

Agility: 2
Intelligence: 2

Air

Reflexes: 2
Awareness: 3



Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 3

Void

Void Points Spent:

Techniques

Rank One: The Riddle of Air

Primary Weapon

Katana 3k2

Primary Armor

Light

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

10

(15 with armor)

Skills

Archery	1	Herbalism	2
Athletics	2	History	2
Battle	1	Ichi-Miru	1
Calligraphy	1	Kenjutsu	2
Cipher	2	Lore (Path of Man)	2
Courtier	1	Meditation	2
Defense	1	Advanced Medicine	2
Etiquette	2	Nazodo	1
Hand-to-Hand	2	Shintao	3
Heraldry	1	Sincerity	2

Insight: 133

Wounds

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

School: Asako Henshin **Rank:** 1

Advantages/Disadvantages

Higher Purpose +2
(Immortality)

Dark Secret -5
(GM's Choice)

Nemesis -5

Glory: 1



Honor: 2



Experience Points:

Shamed Yojimbo

You have failed in your sacred duty. As a yojimbo, you were charged with the protection of a single Isawa shugenja, to keep him safe and out of harm's way until his *inkyō*. But he is gone, and you are shamed for his loss. He is thought dead by the Shiba and Isawa elders, destroyed in a freak accident when his *Ishiken* was killed during an attack on his stronghold. But you know better.

He is alive, though you have no idea where he has vanished to. All you remember of the events of the last several hours you spent with him is that the *Ishiken* was preparing a special training session, one in which he said that the "gates of Amaterasu's throneroom would be cast open and the future of the world laid out like a roadmap." You were concerned for the safety of your charge when the *Ishiken* said that he would be assisting, and to this day you wish that you had interceded...

*A battlefield. There was a great battle, and you were the only defense against the invaders. A field of locusts had descending upon the *Ishiken's* sequestered tower. You were sure that they desired the secrets the Void Master knew of the next world, the level between the Elements. They came and destroyed everything. As you were forced back into the meditation room, you found the mages locked in a deep trance together, journeying beyond the physical realm. And after overwhelming you, before your stunned eyes, the raiders struck down the *Ishiken*, killing him with brutal purpose.*

In that instant, your charge – your friend – vanished in a violent release of brilliant energy...

Since that day, you have felt his presence. He is not here, not near you, but you know that he is alive. Perhaps he has finally journeyed permanently beyond the "veil", passing into the Realm of Void forever. But you suspect that this is not the case. He feels closer than that.

A search of the ruins of the tower yielded a man from one of the raiders' bodies. The Unicorn. The Moto. What reason would they have for doing this? What could have urged them to attack the Phoenix so savagely? Could it have had something to do with the spell that took your shugenja away?

The Shiba have called for your *seppuku* but you cannot give up. You are sure that he is out there somewhere, possibly in

great danger or pain. Your duty is to him until you are sure that he is dead or gone forever. Some would call you ronin for your dedicated disobedience, but you cannot allow yourself to listen. You will be vindicated when he is found, or comply when you know that he is safe. Or die in the process. Regardless, you will have been true to your vow throughout.





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Shamed Yojimbo

Clan:
Phoenix

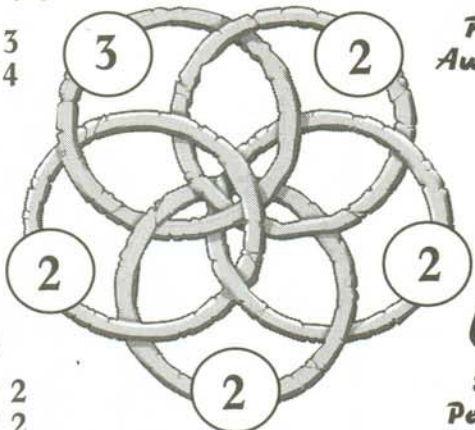
Profession:
Bushu

Fire

Agility: 3
Intelligence: 4

Air

Reflexes: 2
Awareness: 2



Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 2

Void

Void Points Spent:

Insight: 127

Techniques

- _____ The Way of the Phoenix
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Primary Weapon

Katana 3k2

Primary Armor

Light

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

10

(15 with armor)

Skills

Archery	1
Athletics	2
Battle	1
Defense	3
Intimidation	1
Kenjutsu	3
Meditation	1
Shintao	1
Tea Ceremony	1
Yarijutsu (Sasumata)	3

Wounds

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

School: Shiba Bushi **Rank:** 1

Advantages/ Disadvantages

- Kharmic Tie +5
(Shugenja)
- Bad Reputation -2
(Lost Shugenja)
- Driven -3
(Find Shugenja)

Glory: 1



Honor: 2



Experience Points:

Corrupted Henshin

Whatever has taken hold of you was never considered in Shinsei's philosophy.

You are a *Henshin*, or you were until the darkness deep within your soul erupted and you were summarily ejected. You're quite surprised they let you live, and you're sure that if they saw what you have become, they wouldn't make that choice again. The Asako are careful about the secrecy of their knowledge, but moreso of its contamination. And that's exactly what you are - a contamination, a plague...

You think it began with your father, but you can't be sure. You don't remember much about your true parents, having been taken when you were very young to study with the *Fushihai* Masters. You were told that your father had been killed before your birth, and that your mother had slipped into madness as a result. She remained with the daimyo of your village, who had taken an interest in her welfare, and you were collected for training.

Years of successful preparation for the Mysteries of the Asako all but erased the shadows of your past, until - one year ago - you noticed a rash on your right hand. Within weeks, your skin became rough and dark, as if blood was gathering beneath. Even the Asako healers could do nothing to staunch the infection's spread, and soon the word 'Taint' was passing through the courts and libraries of the Asako.

Kuni and Kitsuki were brought in to study the odd phenomenon, but none could identify it. Stranger still, you were feeling stronger every day, as if the dark patch was providing you with an untapped well of power. Your studies of the martial arts excelled, and your performance with physical coordination and applied weapons training far exceeded all others.

Then the flashes began. Images of things to come, fevered, half-remembered scenes of the future. The first of your own bleak future, a time when the darkness would spread across you whole, to swallow you up in its cold, empty embrace.

You know that if the Asako were ever to discover the truth of what you are becoming, you would be doomed to die, never

knowing what your father was, or what he has passed on to you. So you have fled their lands, and have since heard that they are hunting you.

You visited your mother, but only one word could be understood within her unending fit of lunacy...

"Shosuro..."





Legend of the Five Rings

Name: Corrupted Henshin
Clan: Phoenix

Profession: Bushi

Primary Weapon

Bo Stick 3k2

Primary Armor

None

EN to be Hit

(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

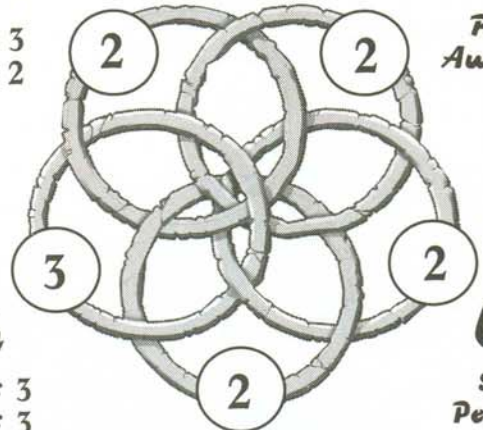
10

Fire

Agility: 3
Intelligence: 2

Air

Reflexes: 2
Awareness: 2



Earth

Stamina: 3
Willpower: 3

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 2

Void

Void Points Spent:

Skills

Athletics	1
Bo Stick	2
Calligraphy	1
Defense	2
Hand-to-Hand	3
History	1
Medicine	1
Meditation	1
Shintao	1

Insight: 123

Techniques

Rank One: The Riddle of Fire

School: Asako Henshin **Rank:** 1

Wounds

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

Advantages/ Disadvantages

Inner Gift	+6
(Precognition)	
Major Ally	+4
(Minor Daimyo)	
Black Sheep	-3
Taint (3 points)	-3

Glory: 1



Honor: 2



Experience Points:



Appendices





"ISAWA'S LAST WISH"

"If there is to be no peace between the families of the Phoenix, then they do not deserve the harvest of Isawa's last wish..."

Emperor Hantei proclaimed this at the dissolution of the first proposed marriage between the Isawa and Asako families, almost a thousand years ago. Since then, the gap between the families of the Phoenix has widened, though it may not be obvious to those outside the clan.

Probably the greatest physical representation of this is the magical construct consigned by the Phoenix Clan when Isawa's daughter Akiko was engaged to to Sagoten, Asako's only son. It is said that the item was the greatest supernatural achievement of all time, and those select few who have seen it can only say that it is the closest thing to perfection they have ever witnessed.

Formed from the Void using all four Elements, the construct's original intent was to be a shining beacon for the future of the clan. It can take any shape, according to the disposition of a viewer.

Appendix I: The Oracles

A TREATISE ON THE NATURE OF THE ORACLES BY ISAWA KAEDE

The Five Oracles of the Elements have long been a source of interest and concern among our clan. To the Phoenix, these creatures (for it is not entirely accurate to call them 'human') embody all that is powerful and pure about each of our cherished elements. To see the Oracle of Fire, for example, is considered an omen of the most significant import, and when one hears the words of the Oracle of Earth, there is no choice but to obey.

But how did these legendary creatures of myth come to be, and how might we begin to understand their nature and the source from which they sprang? From legend and apocryphal tale, we are told that the Oracles were created when Lady Sun and Lord Moon's children first arrived on the world, and were greeted by the Children of the Earth. These humans, our forefathers among them, were crude and incomplete, lacking judgment and wisdom. The Children of the Sky led them, caused our civilization to be formed, and created the Emerald Empire.

But other creatures lived before the coming of humans, so we are told, such as the Naga, or the mythic Dragons. Our studies into the Celestial Heavens (see *Dragons*) show that the land of the Dragons (assumed to be the same fabulous heaven where Lady Sun and Lord Moon live) is a vast paradise. The Ki-Rin and other mythic beasts are also said to be spirits from this paradise, cast out or choosing to live among mortal kind.

Stories tell that the Dragons saw the creation of the Children of the Earth, and were fascinated by their nature. They offered gifts to those whom

they thought were worthy, and even brought some mortal souls to live among them in the Celestial Heavens. However, Lady Sun and Lord Moon soon grew jealous. Concerned that the Dragons' interest in our kind would lead to the destruction of the Empire, they lifted the Celestial Heavens away from the firmament of Rokugan. With the separation, the Dragons were forced to choose: carry away those mortals whom they loved, parting us from our world, or leave us forever behind to be subject to the ravages of age and death. Thus, the tale relates, the Dragons chose to leave parts of themselves behind, that they might always be able to contact our world, and learn of its people. As guardians of these 'soul-shadows', the Dragons each chose one individual, to carry a small part of the Dragon's spirit, and serve as their voice in the Empire.

If the myths which we have in the Isawa library are to be considered, then these 'guardians' are the origins of the Oracles. Each individual chosen to bear the burden of a Dragon's soul was also given the gift of sight into the Celestial Heavens, and this gift has become what we now know to be an oracular power. It cannot be disputed that the mysterious Oracles have great power and tremendous enlightenment – even Shinsei is said to have once sought out the Oracle of Earth in defense of the Emerald Empire (see *Stories of Shinsei*, recorded in *Kyuden Isawa*).

However, the argument still exists as to the nature and existence of the Dark Oracles of the Elements – those foul beasts whose power rivals the gentle Oracles of Light. Can it be possible that they, too, have some connection with the Celestial Heavens – or, perhaps, the darkest pits of Jigoku – and have earned some small portion of the Dragons' powers? Perhaps stories of immortal Oni who have taken human form would be a more appropriate explanation of their origin, or perhaps they are Oracles whose ties to the mortal world simply cannot be comprehended. In any case, these Dark Oracles seem to have some mystic connection to their 'opposite' among the Light, and they delight in tormenting each other.

Information on how the Oracles designate a successor is, at best, sketchy. It would appear that an Oracle has no knowledge of any previous 'mortal' existence, although there are documented testimonies of individuals recognizing one of the Oracles as a long-lost family member. Whether such amnesia is the result of spiritual enlightenment or some more sinister purpose is

unknown, but it is certain that the Oracles no longer maintain any contact to the human world outside of their function as the bringers of prophecy and fortune. Each one seems to live far beyond mortal lifetimes, as descriptions of an Oracle seem to be consistent within our records for as long as five hundred years. To illustrate the point, it is documented that the current Oracle of Fire has maintained his current shape for nearly 250 years, and shows no sign of age. It is not known how, or when, he will choose his successor.

However, in the same vein, it is also certain that each Oracle's new form seems to have the same knowledge as its previous incarnation. A history speaks of a time when the Oracle of Air changed forms within a week, as Shiba Goiko was meditating on her questions to the Enlightened One. During a brief span of days, Goiko relates, she met the Oracle three times. The first two times, the Oracle of Air seemed to be an aged woman in soft red silk, but the third time it had changed into the form of a young man. However, the young man remembered Goiko, and seemed intimately familiar with the conversations and questions she had discussed with the previous incarnation of the Oracle. Although it is possible that the Oracles have some kind of mystical shape-changing ability, it is far more

likely that they simply cease to inhabit one form, and adopt another when the time is right.

Those who doubt the power of the Oracles have never met one. Tremendous forces, both spiritual and physical, protect them from all harm. Combined with their supernatural abilities and the protection of the incarnation of the Dragons of the Celestial Heavens, the Oracles' only limitation is their genuine disinterest in affecting the governance of the Empire. They trade their knowledge of the future for stories of intrigue, war and heroism, and can rarely be found outside their hideaways. In fact, considering the ever-moving nature of the fortress of the Oracle of Air, for example, it is not unusual that an entire generation goes by without any contact from an Oracle at all.

However, when the Oracles do act, their abilities shake the foundations of the Empire. Although they do not appear to be creatures of wrath or compassion, they act with a singleminded of purpose that betrays their interests. Isawa Gojundo, famous researcher of the Dragons, once wrote of the Oracles:

"They are the eyes and ears of the Celestial Heavens, and the guardians of the portals to that shining realm. Each one is filled with the spirit of the Dragon which guides them, and the soul of that great spirit shines from behind their eyes.



"ISAWA'S LAST WISH"

(CONTINUED)

A Dragon ambassador reported what he saw in a clan journal: *"It was like staring into a thousand thin strands of potential greatness waiting for someone to encourage, guide, support... enlighten. It was so human that I could scarcely fathom it. The shugenja of the Phoenix are truly the most skilled in all of Rokugan."*

When the Isawa and Asako split, the item was hidden, never to be completed, in a small shrine in the Isawa mountains. At first, this arrangement seemed sufficient, but soon, arguments began over who controlled the Shrine - first by the Isawa, and then by the Asako. Both families objected to the item's continued existence. They were in agreement: In its unfinished state, the creation was dangerous.

Hantei, angered by the attacks and arguments, denied possession of the shrine to both families, leaving the Shiba its sole protectors for nearly a thousand years. But a few months ago, reports made reference to 'strange occurrences' involving the item (including a series of brutal elemental mishaps, and several deaths).

(continued)



"ISAWA'S LAST WISH"

(CONTINUED)

What the Empire does not know about the construct is that it is a reactive entity, capable of adapting to external stimuli. It was meant to unite the Isawa and the Asako, and through them promote peace across the Empire. But there was something the masters who crafted it did not consider – that it could learn to teach itself.

The brief time it spent in the presence of its creators deeply affected it. Asako, full of hope for the future, had taught it humanity, and granted it empathy. That changed when the battles began. It learned from the warring families how to kill. It learned how to destroy, and how to alter life so that it withered and died.

Those who had created it had made an terrible error – they had trapped hundreds of *kami* within it, driving them mad. Over the centuries, the *kami* had become sponges for arcane knowledge and human emotions. Now when someone looked into it, their lives were laid open for the deranged *kami* to absorb. The secrets of the Asako and the magical prowess of the Isawa had been harnessed, and now it was attempting to reach out to those outside the clan.

Although their bodies seem familiar, noble, and completely human, it is certain that the souls which inhabit their bodies is something which we cannot fully understand. Only once have I seen an Oracle show genuine interest and concern in any material occurrence, and it was a sight which I shall never forget. The Unicorn was yet new to the realm, and considered himself a hunter of beasts. When he spoke of the Dragons as creatures to be slain for sport, the Oracle drew herself above us, and spoke. When I write 'drew herself up,' I do not mean rose in the air, or even stood from her seat on the throne. What I inferred was a spiritual raising, a feeling that a soul which was a thousand times larger than either of us, rose through her, and with a motion of her hand, the man was no more.

You will think this was a simple trick, and that any shugenja could complete the feat done that day by the Oracle of Water. Yet, I tell you again, the man was no more. It was as if he had never been. I traveled to his family, whom I had met years ago, and spoke to them. They turned me away as if I was mad. "We have no such son," they spoke, and I know they believed it. His soul had been erased from the annals of time as if it had never been. I do not know if it rests in Jigoku, for I cannot ask the Kitsu to search for it. You see, after three years of traveling with this man, and what must have been thousands of days of shared time, I cannot even remember his name..."

The homes of such immortal beings change as radically as they alter their forms. The two times I have been honored to visit the palaces of the Oracle of Air, both were tremendous structures with glowing globes of starlight, suspended among the winds many *li* above the ground. Moving with the clouds, the palace traveled several hundred *li* in the course of only a few hours of questioning. Although I speak of the Oracle of Air as though he has several homes, I am not entirely certain that both palaces I visited were not, in fact, the same place changed through the will of the Enlightened One.

Similar stories are told of the other Oracles. The Oracle of Fire is said to have his home inside the bowels of the Mountain of Sleeping Thunder, where the lava burns brightly enough to sear the eyes from a man's head. Inside a sleeping Naga city, the Oracle of Water is said to hold court over *ningyo* (sea-beasts) and other mythical creatures. Of the Oracle of Earth, we are the most certain,

for her tall tower in the Twilight Mountains is made of fine vines, twined so thickly about each other that they form the structure itself, as firmly as any stonemason could ever construct. Inside this tower, she sits upon a throne made of a stone unlike any other found in this land, reciting riddles and whispering laughter. It is not known if she is mad or simply unaware of her behavior. However, those who have seen her agree that her beauty is timeless and perfect in its cold, marble state.

The Oracle of the Void, if there is such a creature, is thought to live in the ancestral land of Jigoku, or on the border where this world meets the next. What little information we have on this most fascinating figure is limited, at best. No reports of anyone receiving aid or prophecy from an Oracle of Void has been recorded in nearly 300 years, and scholars fear that the Oracle was unable to choose a successor at the time of its passing. Thus, it is possible that no new Oracle of Void was created, and the position will forever be left empty. If this is true, than the Dark Oracles must have encountered a similar tragedy, for their number is also incomplete. However, many spirits who have returned from Jigoku (so the Kitsu say) have spoken of such an entity, and although little information is available, I am confident that an Oracle of Void does exist.



Located on the far northeastern ends of the Empire, the Phoenix lands have been spared the bloody conflicts which mark so much of Rokugan's territory. There is a magical aura about the area, a hushed and reverent atmosphere that is anathema to any acts of violence. The territory is dotted with holy shrines and monasteries, each one speaking to a sacred memory or tradition to

be upheld. Entering Phoenix lands, one feels as if a boundary has been crossed, that the roads and woodlands belong less to humanity than to the *kami* and *hengoyokai* who have dwelt there since the dawn of time. No battles have been fought on Phoenix lands for centuries, an unspoken agreement among Rokugani to respect the Isawa's pacifism.

THE ISAWA WOODLANDS

The Mori Isawa are among the most magical and least-known areas in the Empire. The Isawa require privacy to conduct their research, and consider the boughs and hollows of the Forest off-limits to those not of the Phoenix Clan. The trees in Mori Isawa are not as old as those in the mighty Shinomen Forest, but they have a quiet power all their own. The *kami* in them are very potent, and for this reason, the Isawa family uses wood from the forest in creating scroll-paper. They are careful to offer prayers to every tree they cut down, lest the spirit who inhabits it curse them with bad luck.

There are many pathways in the forest, but most are hidden, and require a guide to properly navigate. Two larger roads run from Isawa castle to Shiro Asako and Ajiroi Oku Shiro, but only those traveling with a member of Phoenix clan may use them. The forest *kami* hide it from all others, thus ensuring the protection of the two secluded locations. The Isawa may be pacifists, but they have ways of defending themselves.

Shugenja often meditate amid the trees of the forest. They tend to use natural clearings and hollows for their activity here, having no wish to despoil the area further than necessary. Tradition holds that Isawa preparing for their *gempukku* ceremony must spend at least one night alone in the woods, contemplating the universe and their place within it. To the particularly blessed, *kami* sometimes appear and disclose secrets.

Besides the spirits and the Isawa shugenja, there is a large contingent of kenku within the forest. Inquisitive and good natured, they have developed a strong rapport with the local humans, who respect their autonomy. *Heimin* hunters and woodcutters are scattered throughout the woodlands, earning their keep from the bounty it provides. They know many secrets about the land they occupy, and both the kenku and Isawa shugenja hold them in high regard. The *heimin* of Mori Isawa are better treated than nearly any other peasant group in Rokugan.


ISAWA CASTLE

Just to the east of the forest, along the shore of the great eastern sea, lies Kyuden Isawa, home of the greatest shugenja in the Empire. Like those who inhabit it, it is quiet, standing in harmony with the white sands and rolling waves around it. Its walls are pitifully small, hopelessly inadequate against any kind of military assault. But other powers protect them: runes are etched into the stones, mighty spells encircle the grounds, and spirits are bound to defend the Phoenix home at all costs. Those who march against the castle find the elements themselves turning against them; the sand sinks beneath their boots, waves crash down upon them with stunning force, and lightning strikes like retribution from the gods. Such magical assaults stand in stark contrast to the peaceful and introspective nature of the Isawa.

The last time Kyuden Isawa was attacked was long, long ago, following the death of Osano-Wo. The Isawa unknowingly gave sanctuary to the killer; when they would not return him to face justice, Osano-Wo's Lion-born son – living in exile on the islands of Silk and Spice – launched an attack. Phoenix magic struck down his forces left and right, but he reached the great wooden gates of the palace. Screaming for his father to aid him, his blows were suddenly augmented by a great blast of lightning which threw open the gates. The Isawa were so overcome by the spectacle of divine intervention that they turned the killer over immediately.

Beneath the foundation of Kyuden Isawa lies the great library – the largest collection of magical scrolls in Rokugan. Every spell invoked or cast within the Emerald Empire has found its way here, to be catalogued and studied by the Isawa shugenja. Only select members of the family have access to the library, and one must go through proper channels to obtain a particular scroll. As magical research continues, new spells are being added constantly, and an entire branch of the Isawa is dedicated solely to keeping the library organized. The protections cast on this area are even more powerful than those on the walls above.

Most of the Isawa peasantry lives along the coastline, fishing for tuna and herring in the cold northern waters. Villages dot the white sandy beaches, and hardy merchants sail up the coast to trade their wares. The Phoenix lands are more isolated than most, and its denizens welcome materials and news from the remainder of the



"ISAWA'S LAST WISH"


(CONTINUED)

Emperor Hantei immediately made two commands. First, none other than Shiba bushi would ever be allowed to approach the device again. Second, the device was to be destroyed – deconstructed – immediately.

Several accidents, and more than a few deaths, can be attributed to the item, as it realizes that the humans formerly protecting it now seek its end. More than a few Shiba guards have gone mad when the device entered their mind to discover the truth.

The last several months have proven to be a stalemate, and this may continue for some time. The shugenja observing it have reported their initial conclusions to the Emperor, and the answers are bleak: "We cannot destroy it without fighting it, and that means losing more of our knowledge to it. Today, if it were to begin lashing out, we believe that it could destroy thousands. Even the most promising shugenja would fall in time, as each man who fell had his memories absorbed, fueling the device."

The Phoenix have created an abomination that they cannot control.

A circular crest featuring a stylized phoenix rising from flames, set against a dark background with a light-colored circular element behind the bird.

Empire. Isawa peasants are hard-working and friendly by nature, and their enlightened outlook and good spirits to insulate them from their cold, gray surroundings.

From Kyuden Isawa, roadways split in four different directions, leading to three other Isawa palaces and the ancestral home of the Shiba family. The Isawa castles are similar in design to Kyuden Isawa; all have libraries (consisting mostly of copies from the primary library at Kyuden Isawa) and all have magical wards to protect them from danger. The Isawa also use them to discuss private Clan matters, and to impress courtiers willing to make the long journey. Most Isawa try to study at all of the palaces sometime during their life. It increases one's perspective to change surroundings once in a while.

SHIBA CASTLE AND THE PLAINS

The Shiba have been charged with defending the Phoenix Clan, and occupy the areas to the south of Isawa territory where invaders have to pass. The rich fields and open plains of Shiba territory are much like those elsewhere in Rokugan. Fertile farms and townships cover the landscape, and although the roads are thin and difficult to traverse, civilization has thrived.

Instead of holy shrines and wandering shugenja, however, the Shiba lands reflect the martial spirit of their owners – with checkpoints, military barracks and the occasional marching formation declaring order. While the number of Phoenix bushi remains small, their presence is felt here as much as in any Lion or Crab province. The soldiers are well-behaved and carry out their duties with honor, and the peasantry is comforted by the security of their presence.

Despite the bitter winters in Phoenix lands, the fields of the Shiba are among the most fertile in the Empire, and trade prospers between the Phoenix and their Crane allies. Roads twine through fields, making them treacherous to pass in the snows of high winter, but the Shiba have developed ways of traveling despite the thick cover. Shoes built for walking over the snow, and special cloaks and wraps keep communication between the Shiba and the Isawa open even during the season of Winter Court.

Kyuden Shiba lies on a swath of land between the Isawa Forest and the sea. Those wishing to penetrate into Isawa territory must first pass through it. It is a bewildering affair, a haphazard maze of seemingly unconnected courtyards, keeps and bastions, all thrown together like a child's playthings. But its walls are sound and the bushi



school within teaches its students well. It is positioned well along the route to the Isawa lands, requiring only a small contingent of soldiers. With their limited numbers, the Shiba have learned from the Daidoji: take advantage of every geographical detail.

Some have suggested that Kyuden Shiba's layout is not haphazard at all, but rather the product of a mysterious and elaborate pattern. Most scoff at the notion, but the only Kaiu engineer to ever visit the palace went insane soon after leaving.

THE MOUNTAINS

The solitary Asako family dwells in the mountaintops ringing Phoenix territory, both in the eastern spurs of the Great Northern Mountains and throughout the bulk of the smaller Yama no Kuyami range. The atmosphere in Asako lands is similar to that found in the Dragon territories – beautiful, lonely, and more than a little mysterious. Shrubs, trees, and waterfalls are common here, each one adding to the area's stark natural beauty. Shrines and holy sites dot the mountain peaks, ranging from Reihaido Uikku to secret Gisei Toshi in the North. Pilgrims making their way to one sacred location or another often comment on the serenity of the landscape – blemished only by the odd inn or Asako palace as signs of habitation. Winters in the mountains are particularly beautiful, and the Emperor sometimes holds Winter Court at an Asako estate. While civilized trappings are few and far between, the roads are well-maintained, for they are often the easiest routes to other locations in the Empire.

Though technically outside the Phoenix lands, many nearby shrines are cared for and protected by the clan. The Shrine of the Ki-Rin, Sleeping Thunder Mountain, Iron Rings Cascade – all are attended to by orders of Phoenix monks. No other major Clan is nearby, so the Phoenix are really the only ones who can. Out of respect for other clans' pride, the political boundaries have never been changed to reflect this – it wouldn't do to have the peaceful Phoenix controlling more territory than, say, the Lion. When these particulars are explained to them, the monks just smile and go on about their duties as they have for hundreds of years.

THE ASAKO PROVINCES

The Asako family are not incredibly materialistic and, except for the basic need for shelter and secrecy, do not maintain holdings in Rokugan like other families. They have been given a host of land spread out between the other Phoenix territories as requested by the family founder, Asako, during their split with the Isawa. These are cared for by the descendants of Asako, and are ruled over by minor daimyos appointed by the Council of Five.

Curiously, no Asako holdings rest on the inner borders of Phoenix lands. Thus, no Asako village or town must ever contend with the other clans. Some claim that this was another of Asako's requests, and still others claim that the Phoenix recognizes the Asako's military weakness, and tries to protect them. Either way, the Asako have managed to remain a largely disregarded family for almost a thousand years – and that is precisely as the Asako desire it.

The largest Asako holding is their palace, which is still small by comparison to its Shiba and Isawa rivals. Located beyond Shiro sano Chuijitsu na Shinpu (the Castle of the Faithful Bride), Shiro Asako is little more than a moderately defensible mountain fortress. It is accessible only by way of a long, winding trail through the crags. Although it is a beautiful place, the Asako rarely share it with others – their castles to the south have far more stunning views, and it is in those southern reaches where they hold court.

For social gatherings and beautiful scenery, the primary option in Asako lands is the castle which overlooks the Shrine of the Ki-Rin. Gisu Castle is built beside a lake of crystal water and a sparse forest of brown trees which spike high into the heavens. Constructed to please the eye as well as be functional, Gisu Castle hosts several large events every year upon its immense tiered balconies and huge courtyards. (For more on this location, see the adventure supplement *The Code of Bushido*).

The most interesting site within Asako control, however, is the also the one most overlooked by the rest of the Empire. Doro Owari Mura (Road's End Village, #107) is a tiny place where no one ever visits and few ever leave. It is, for the most part, self-sufficient, having managed to procure low-profile trade from within Kyuden Isawa, and far-reaching merchants of the Mantis Clan. None would ever have a reason to go there, as it has little to offer outsiders, yet the greatest secret of



THE PHOENIX CLAN ARMOR

The Shiba house has a long history of honor and culture, rivaling the Crane clan with dedication to the peaceful arts. However, on occasion, the Shiba must fight for their ideals, defending the Phoenix Clan.

When the Phoenix are forced to enter war, the Champion's first duty is to stand before the Council of Five and be given the ancestral armor of the clan. It is a magnificent suit of plates, forged in the fires of Sleeping Thunder mountain by an ancient Dragon Clan Champion.

Once worn, the armor can only be removed by its owner, and it fits itself perfectly to the proportions of the bushi who is chosen to bear it. While it is in use, the owner radiates a 10' radius into which no spells can be cast. This sphere of Void prevents any *kami* from entering the area, shielding its wearer with his conscious thought. The wearer can allow for any individual spell to take effect (for beneficial purposes).

Further, the wearer of the armor has the ability to *Sense Void* as if they were an *Ishiken* of the same rank. He cannot cast spells, but he can use this ability once per day.

YUKI NO ONNA

The creature known as Yuki no Onna (and she will be referred to as a single entity, although scholars have argued that there is more than one), or the Snow Maiden, is a popular figure in Phoenix myth and legend. Her pale skin, snow-covered hair and soft voice are commonly depicted in tapestries and other works of art, and in stories.

In fact, Yuki no Onna has only been seen in Phoenix lands, and some say she is the spirit of a lost shugenja who died trying to find her way home in a blizzard. Others tell tales of a lost child of the Dragons, given human form and unwilling to leave the world of mortalkind. Still further tales say that the Yuki no Onna is the incarnate spirit of the Isawa Woodlands, given form by the tremendous amount of *kami* who inhabit the sacred forest.

Whatever the case, she is a benevolent spirit, and can only be found on cold winter days, dancing in the snow through the Isawa lands. Her beauty can capture the heart of the most stoic samurai, and visitors to the Phoenix lands should be warned not to follow her into the depths of the wood, lest they be forever lost to the snow.

the family is hidden within its neglected heart. Road's End Village is the stronghold for the *Fushihai*, the masters of the *Henshin* Academy, immortal researchers of the Path of Man.

When a student of the *Henshin* becomes eligible for his fifth Rank, he is sent to Road's End Village to spend the remainder of his days furthering himself and learning all he can of the Path and its implications for all of Rokugan. Few *Fushihai* ever leave the village, and those who do travel only to the Great Library in Kyuden Isawa to pass direction to the Asako there before returning directly.

None have ever visited Road's End Village and returned with knowledge of its true purpose. Most remember nothing, though some have pleasant dream-like recollections of an uneventful stay. The *Henshin* located at Shiro Asako draw any attention as practitioners of their arts, leaving the *Fushihai* to their business.

And that is precisely as the Asako desire it.



Appendix III: Spell Research

Certainly, every shugenja school in Rokugan has a library full of established spells. Schools from the Kuni Wastes to the Isawa Woodlands teach Jade Strike and The Path to Inner Peace. But those spells had to come from somewhere.

A new spell begins when a shugenja envisions an effect that he'd like to produce, but which none of the time-tested methods produces. His first move, once he's determined that no refinements on an existing effect will serve, is almost always to retreat to his school's library.

SCHOOL RESEARCH LIBRARIES

The information taught by shugenja schools, and the main topics covered in their libraries, varies from clan to clan. The Kuni emphasize Earth spells, with their jade-based applications against Shadowlands creatures and their warding magic. The Soshi, on the other hand, favor the information-gathering aspects available through Air magic. If your school has an extensive library in the element you're researching, it's easier to find the information you need.

Some people are more attuned to a particular element, as well. This often gives them an advantage while researching new spells in that element, as they have a natural connection to the *kami* of the element.

It is, of course, necessary to obtain permission from the head of the school before beginning to use its resources. The honorary head of the school is the family's daimyo, although that person often delegates the responsibilities to someone more pedagogically inclined. If the family daimyo is not the school head, researchers must obtain permission from both before proceeding. On rare occasions, when the researcher is particularly noteworthy, the clan daimyo involves himself and

explicitly grants – or denies – permission to expend the clan’s resources on the research. If any of these people fails to grant permission, the researcher may not continue, although (if they wish to push their luck) they may appeal upward through the chain of command. It is nevertheless not honorable to pester the clan elders for permission to research a spell when they have assigned you another duty.

Assuming that the clan approves sponsorship of the research project and grants use of its magical facilities, the researcher works under the auspices of the clan. This means that the clan is the official owner of the spell upon its successful completion; sometimes they decline to share it, resulting in Clan Secret Spells. The clans are always interested in new magical knowledge, and keep a close eye on anyone extending their frontiers. A researcher’s notes are customarily left in the school’s libraries, whether or not the research bore fruit. It would be unthinkable for a shugenja to research a new spell and not give all materials pertaining to it into the care of his school.

Those who went to a shugenja school of another clan often have a tricky time of it when it comes to research. If the clans in questions are on good terms, there is less of a problem, and both the school at which the student studied and the school at home customarily receive copies of the research. If they are at each other’s throats, however, it is very difficult to receive permission from the clan elders to study in enemy territory; and while they may grant permission to study at the home school, its practices will be different enough from those learned at the foreign school that research will be problematic at best. Furthermore, the students and faculty who stayed at home often take a dim view of those who went to another clan’s school, and frequently are less than entirely cooperative.

Ronin shugenja, and those out of favor at their school or otherwise not permitted to use a library, have a very tough task ahead of them. Without a thousand years of other people’s mistakes to inspect, it’s very easy to get in over your head. It’s not impossible to create a new spell without the benefit of a research library, but it is extremely difficult.

Newly-graduated students are hardly ever granted permission to begin spell research. Although they might keep notes that could eventually turn into an actual research project,

the head of the school generally can’t be bothered speaking to shugenja who are not advanced enough to have a reasonable chance at success. Rank 3 shugenja are usually granted permission; Rank 2 on occasion.

ACTUAL RULES

Your shugenja wants to come up with a new spell. What does he have to do? The first step is to come up with the effect. Write up the spell’s effect in detail: if it’s not at least 200 words, your GM may reject it as insufficiently detailed. What is the spell trying to accomplish? Which, if any, of the core RPG spells is it similar to? What element is most appropriate to the effect, and how will you get the attention of that element’s *kami*? (Will you even use the element most appropriate to the effect?) Once you have their attention, how will you convince them to do what you ask? What’s it going to affect: you, someone you’re touching, a thirty-foot radius, or someplace in the Burning Sands? Does the spell make a permanent change, or does it last for a set period of time? The core spells represent hundreds of years of Rokugani research. You’re advancing the state of the art; make a case for it.

Once you have written up your effect, add to it the element in question, and what (if anything) you want Raises to accomplish. Hand it to your GM. He now reviews the spell and decides whether he’ll permit your shugenja to research it. The GM can take as long as he wishes to review your ‘grant proposal’ – assume at least one full game session – and can require changes to the spell, reject it completely, or permit it in its original form. If he’ll let you go through with it, he’ll compare it to existing spells and determine the spell’s difficulty (TN to cast), casting time, duration (if not specified in your write-up), mastery level, and concentration required. The bigger the effect you want the spell to produce, the higher the difficulty and casting time will be, and the more concentration it may take to maintain. He’ll also inform you whether he considers the effect to be appropriate to the element you’ve chosen.

If the GM determines the Mastery Level of the spell to be higher than your shugenja’s Ring + School Rank, the spell is beyond your capacity to research, and you’ll have to try again with a less-powered proposal.

Once he’s handed this information back to you, you have to decide how diligent your shugenja



SPELL RESEARCH: MAJOR EFFECTS By RING

Earth

Protection and warding
Affecting Earth Ring
(Stamina and Willpower)
The ground:
earthquakes, the land in general
Minerals and metals

Water

Curing: illness, poison,
Wounds, fear
Detection: finding
objects, finding kami,
scrying
Affecting Water Ring
(Strength and Perception)
Water: rain, rivers,
bodies of water

Fire

Fire: creating and
targeting
Creating light
Creating and targeting
lightning
Flight
Affecting Fire Ring
(Agility and Intelligence)

Air

Creating illusions and
concealing the real
(invisibility/hiding in
shadows)
Flight
Detection: hidden things,
lies, others’ thoughts,
clairaudience
Sleep
Air: the wind
Affecting Air Ring
(Reflexes and Awareness)



SPELL RESEARCH: ASSIGNING MASTERY LEVELS

The Mastery level not only governs whether or not the shugenja has the knowledge to research the spell, but also how difficult the research roll becomes.

Here are some hints on assigning it.

Aside from the four core spells, most Mastery Levels are between 2 and 7. Small effects are a 2 or 3: these tend to provide a one-shot effect. These are also almost always subtle: By the Light of Lord Moon, Amaterasu's Blessing. Spells which return something to its normal state often have a Mastery Level of 3: Fires From the Forge, Hands of Jurojin.

Mastery Levels of 4 and 5 indicate basic spells. A lot of spells in the average shugenja's arsenal have a Mastery Level of 4 or 5: The Path to Inner Peace, Jade Strike, Wings of Fire. Any spell that causes or cures Wounds should have a Mastery Level of at least 4, and often 5 (or higher).

Big effects and rituals usually have a Mastery Level of 6 or 7. These spells are rarely subtle: representative members include The Fist of Osano-Wo, Heart of the Inferno, Know the Mind, Tomb of Jade, Benevolent Protection of Shinsei, Torrential Rain, and Castle of Water. These effects tend to be profound, often permanent, spread over a wide area, and loud.

will be in researching the spell, how naturally apt he is at it, and how much help your library will be. Spell research takes at least one month of dedicated study, with no traveling, adventuring, or other significant duties to detract from the shugenja's studies.

ROLLING DICE

The base TN to research a spell is its Mastery Level x 10. The researching shugenja must roll (Element of the spell) + School Rank to beat the TN. The chart below lists the things that modify this TN.

Once you have a final TN, roll the dice. If the roll is successful, the spell research is successful. It is traditional to write up three copies of a new spell and give them all to the school; one of these copies is then ceremonially returned to the researcher. This ceremony usually carries a modest Glory bonus, especially if the head of school has been very impressed and invites important functionaries to witness it. A demonstration of the spell is *de rigueur* at these ceremonies.

Research Example

Kuni Mokuna wishes to come up with a better way of capturing Shadowlands denizens. The Jade spells are specialized against the Shadowlands, but tend to cause the subject's death in the process, rendering them less useful for study. Mokuna wants something that can immobilize a target, but not kill it, so that it can be shackled and returned to the lab. Earth's Stagnation is close, but not quite what he needs. After some thought, he roughs out his proposal and begins his research. (As mentioned in *Way of the Crab*, the Kuni do not have a formal school anymore. Mokuna does research among his own papers, then fills in the more specialized knowledge with visits to the appropriate colleagues.)

MOKUNA'S PROPOSAL

Crystal has been noted to have an effect on Shadowlands creatures: it is frequently possible to keep them away by strongly presenting a crystal. Still, crystal does not seem to have the same extreme effects on the Tainted as does jade. It is therefore proposed that the natural antipathy the Shadowlands creatures have for crystal be

Spell Research Modifiers

CIRCUMSTANCE

TN MODIFIER

Element is your school's primary element	-5
<i>[Note: Isawa shugenja always get the -5 to their TN, since their school teaches all elements.]</i>	
Element is not taught at your school	+5
<i>[Note: "Not taught at your school" is indicated by the school's starting spells.]</i>	
You are at a different school's library	+10
You are ronin or not permitted to use the library	+15
Spend two continuous months on research	-5
Spend three continuous months on research	-8
Spend four or more continuous months on research	-10
GM considers effect to be from appropriate element	No change
GM considers effect to be from inappropriate element	+10
GM considers effect to be from opposing element	+15
Your rank in this Ring is higher than your rank in any other Ring	-5
You already know five spells from this element	-3
You already know ten spells from this element	-6
The spell has an unusual requirement	GM discretion, up to -5
<i>[Examples: the spell must be cast in full sunlight; there must be total silence during the casting; the spell requires a dram of oni blood, etc.]</i>	



adapted by entreating the Crystal's sleeping Earth spirits to bind, rather than strictly repulse, the Shadowlands creature. Such a Crystalline Prison could overwhelm the corrupt Earth within the creature and render it incapable of motion.

Such a spell would require a pure crystal no smaller than one's thumb. During the casting, the shugenja must stare through the pure crystal at the corrupt target, and implore the spirits within the crystal to adapt their ordinary behavior. Instead of permitting them to strictly repulse the creature on a straight line away from the crystal, the shugenja must convince them to repulse the target in all directions equally. This would have the effect of preventing the Shadowlands creature from making any motion whatsoever.

Since the crystal spirits are often set in their ways, it will be necessary to stare through the crystal and continue the persuasive chant for as long as the effect is desired. Upon the end of the chant, the spirits are likely to become quiescent, and not even to repulse the creature as normal. It is therefore imperative to bind or otherwise render the target harmless before dropping contact.

After submitting the write-up, Mokuna's player and his GM come up with the following description:

Earth Spell: Crystalline Prison

Base TN: Target's Earth x 5

Casting Time: 2 Actions

Duration: variable

Mastery: 5

Concentration: Full

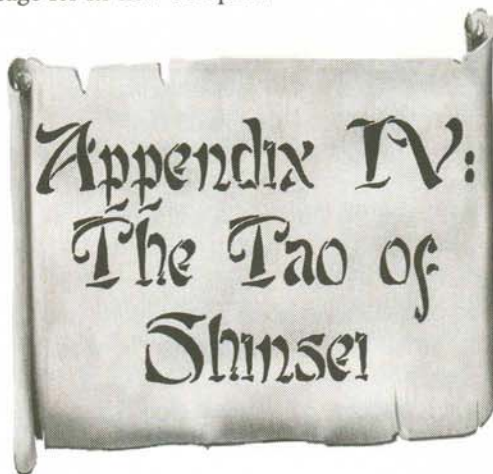
Raises: Casting Time

Effect: This spell is only effective against creatures with the Shadowlands Taint. The shugenja must focus his Earth through a crystal, attempting to immobilize the target, which must be within line-of-sight. If successful, the target is immobilized for as long as the caster maintains his concentration on the spell. The first turn after the spell has been cast, the target may make a Contested roll against the shugenja: the target rolls Earth, while the shugenja rolls Earth + School Rank. If the target wins, it breaks free and automatically wins initiative for the next turn. If the caster drops his concentration or has his line of sight through the crystal interrupted, the spell ceases to operate. No damage is received by the target.

The GM rules that Mokuna, although a recognized authority on Shadowlands anatomy

and function, is less well-read on the properties of crystal. Mokuna must visit his colleague Kuni Nisobu, and borrow her works on the topic for at least one month of studies.

Mokuna now determines his TN to make this roll. It starts at 50, but he has the modifiers School's Primary Element (-5), Highest Rank In This Ring (-5), Already Knows Ten Earth Spells (-6), and Unusual Requirement: Crystal (-2). The TN is reduced to a 32. Mokuna rolls his Earth + School Rank, which is 7k4, and gets a 34, successfully researching the spell. He bids farewell to Nisobu (to whom he now owes a favor) and returns to his laboratory to ready a cage for its new occupant.



During Shinsei's famous discussion with the first Hantei, Shiba took up pen and ink and wrote down all that the little man had to say, and each word that he exchanged with the brothers and sisters of the Kami. When Shinsei rose from Hantei's side to leave, the thick sheaf of papers was covered with text. The monk stopped and smiled down at the kneeling Shiba. "Do you know what you have done?" he said.

Shiba, surprised to be so frankly addressed, stammered, "I have written your words, Shinsei-sama."

"No." Shinsei smiled. "You have begun the destruction of the world." Stunned, Shiba looked down at the text as Shinsei continued. "In each beginning is the thread of an ending, and each story must have a conclusion. In each cradle is the shadow of the grave." The monk stepped toward the door, his hat shading his smile. "You have begun the greatest tale the world has ever known, Shiba-sama," said Shinsei. "Now we must watch it unfold."

SPELL RESEARCH: ASSIGNING EVERYTHING ELSE

The GM must also assign a TN for the spell, as well as its casting time, duration, and concentration. The latter two are often implied in the write-up: does the spell have an instant effect and then evaporate? Does it make a change which is then permanent? Either way, the concentration level is 'none'. Does it last for a couple of turns? The shugenja probably has to pay attention to it, then: the concentration level is probably 'Full' or 'Total', which tend toward "Casual" and "Focused" concentration levels.

TN and casting time play off of each other, since Raises to the TN often speed up the casting time. To get a ballpark TN, multiply the Mastery Level by five and subtract 5 or 10. Most casting times fall between 2 and 5 actions, but rituals and high-Mastery spells rarely take fewer than 10 actions. Spells which do something to an unwilling target often use a TN of (Appropriate Ring or Trait) x 5.

**SPELL RESEARCH:
SMALL
MODIFICATIONS**

Some players may be saying to themselves, "But what if I just want to make a small change to a spell? It just requires a slightly different request to the *kami*. I shouldn't have to research that!" These players are correct.

If you have a slight change to a spell's effect, tell your GM. He'll tell you how many raises you have to make while casting the spell to produce that change.

THE ISAWA AND THE TAO

"An untested virtue is not a virtue at all."

— Asako

Shiba's text, the original recorded lessons of Shinsei, grew as Shiba followed the monk through the countryside, taking him to the palaces of each of the Kami in order to collect the souls who would become the Seven Thunders. As they passed through villages, Shinsei would stop and converse with peasants of the land. From these conversations come the final chapters of the Tao of Shinsei.

When, at the end of their journey, they reached the City of Isawa, Shinsei commanded Shiba to set down his pen. The text was finished, and would forever remain in this place. The Isawa who remained behind with Shiba when the Thunders left for the Shadowlands argued for months about the little text, some calling its wisdom 'blasphemous' to the religion of the Fortunes. After much debate, it was finally decided that the Phoenix would begin a detailed study of the Tao of Shinsei — not to learn the wisdom, but to find its flaws.

At first, the Isawa were challenged to find fault with the little book, dissecting mystery after mystery and uncovering each riddle as it led to another. As they did so, they soon began to find ways to integrate the Tao with their own religion, and within a few generations, the manuscript rested in a sacred place of honor inside the Isawa Library. However, that did not mean that the historians of the Asako and the students of the

Elemental Masters were any kinder to the lessons of the Tao. In fact, their newfound dedication to Shinseism only increased their desire to find any flaw or fault of logic in the text.

Much of the research in the Isawa library which pertains to the Tao is fairly recent because of a tremendous fire which swept through the city of Gisei Toshi seven hundred years ago, destroying much of the library and its contents. Even the original Tao manuscript, priceless to the Phoenix Clan, was nearly destroyed by the inferno, and many Asako gave their lives trying to protect the text. Unfortunately, their efforts were only partially successful. Fragments of the manuscript survived the blaze, but they are blackened and hopelessly fragile. Kept in the deepest vault of the Isawa Libraries, the remnants of the Tao's crumbling pieces barely cover one table top, where they once purportedly filled the space of a hundred scrolls.

However, the Tao was not lost. After the fire, the greatest of the Asako librarians dedicated the rest of their lives to finding scraps of the Tao in other scrolls, discovering quoted material and questioning those who had deeply studied its mysteries. They have recovered a great deal of what has been lost. Although the Tao which is now studied is fragmentary, its wisdom remains as enlightening as the original words of the Master.

UIKKU

About 30 years after the war with Fu Leng, a strange occurrence came to the attention of the Elemental Council. Only one of the brothers of the original Isawa brethren remained, but he led his nieces and nephews on the Council, and decided the fate of the Clan through his compassion and wisdom.

On a rolling plain some distance from the nearest village, a young boy had been found by villagers. The child was no more than four, playing in a trickling stream which arose from a nearby black boulder,



and no other people were anywhere to be found. Deciding that the toddler had been abandoned, the peasants took him back to their village and searched for his parents, but to no avail. No one for fifty *li* in any direction had such a child, nor was anyone missing a little boy.

The child was unusual, with huge eyes of the strangest green-gold. He could speak clearly, and when he did, his voice sounded faintly of far-away rivers and streams. But it wasn't his voice which entranced the Isawa, it was his words. At four, completely untutored in the Tao, the boy could speak verse and quote text, even without ever having seen the manuscript. At this time, peasants in Rokugan were not even fully aware of the existence of the Tao of Shinsei, much less recite it or teach a four year old child its deepest mysteries.

When the Elemental Council was informed, they had the child brought to Kyuden Isawa, where they had the Asako question him. When the Asako asked the little boy about passages from the Tao, he would smile and reply with chapters of apparently memorized material. The Asako were stunned, and the Elemental Masters thrown into turmoil, until one of the librarians came forward with part of Shinsei's teachings.

Deep in the heart of the Tao, during Shinsei's conversation with Hantei, this brief passage is recorded:

"Of the nine children of the Sun and Moon; myself, Doji, Akodo, Shinjo, Hida, Togashi, Bayushi, Shiba and Fu Leng..." began the Emperor.

"No." said Shinsei.

"No?" my brother asked quizzically.

"The Sun and Moon had ten children, though you will never know your youngest brother..."

Scholars have long debated this enigmatic passage, and often argued that the tenth 'child' of the Sun and Moon was mankind, Isawa's 'Children of the Earth'. Certainly, it can be argued that the First Hantei never truly understood mortals as his brothers and sisters did. However, when the boy was discovered in the Shiba lands, it created a frenzy. Could this boy be the Tenth Kami? The resulting arguments have raged for generations, and still continue to this day, although it is still generally accepted that mankind is the 'youngest child of Sun and Moon'.

The boy, however, was kept at Kyuden Isawa, and stayed at the side of the Elemental Council. He was named 'Uikku', a term which means 'gift'.

As he grew, it was clear to see that his mind was weak, and he had been touched by the kami at birth. No magic could heal the distant view in his eyes, nor could the most apt scholar reduce the boy's severe autism.

As he grew older, the boy began to speak of things other than the Tao, of futures and enigmas that he did not pretend to understand. At the command of the Master of Void, the boy's words were written down by scholars and kept. Soon, the Asako began to realize that the lad was speaking prophecy and solving several 'gaps' in the text of the Tao itself.

While the boy known as Uikku never truly 'awoke,' he has become one of the foremost figures in Rokugani religion and wisdom. His prophecies and clarifications of the Tao are taken to be the truth, as much as if Shinsei had spoken them himself. He was raised by the Masters of the Elemental Council, and when he died at age 18, he was mourned as if he had been born an Isawa. A funeral was held in his honor, and his ashes were scattered on the rocks where he was found. A shrine to his honor, bearing the words of his final prophecy, was erected around the stream bed, and it is one of the most popular sites for pilgrimages in the Empire.

The Inner Way

The brigands waited until we made camp for the evening to strike, as we expected. They came at us from the treeline, a motley band charging into the clearing. Togashi Takao quickly found himself engaging three. Isawa Yoten had a scroll in his hands, chanting mystical formulae. Swinging my tetsubo, I looked over at the monk.


"What are you waiting for? Do something!" I yelled.

He looked at me for a moment, then Suiten closed his eyes and drew himself up, his face losing all expression, as though the nerves had been severed. He stood that way for a moment, the battle swirling around him like a hurricane around its eye.

Suddenly, lightning struck the brigand leader, leaving a charred spot where he once stood. The others, frightened and afraid of being next, ran off.

"Was that what you wanted?" Suiten asked me, smiling.

First, says Shinsei, there was nothing. From nothing came duality and from duality sprang the



SPELL RESEARCH: WHAT YOU CAN'T RESEARCH

No reputable school countenances *maho* research. Not even the hardheadedly pragmatic Kuni, with their credo of 'know your enemy', permit studies of actual blood magic. The occasional *tsukai-sagasu* visits to deliver lectures on how to recognize *maho* and what possible weaknesses a *maho-tsukai* has, but there won't be a hands-on demonstration.

Also, although there is a class of spells which permits you to affect another character's Rings and Traits, these spells do not cross elemental boundaries. If a shugenja wishes to affect someone's Water ring, he has to use a Water spell to do it. Non-water *kami* don't understand the request.



ELDERS OF THE TEMPLE

Members of a monastery are organized in a loose hierarchy, based roughly on spiritual accomplishment.

Though positions are supposed to be chosen based on merit, they

sometimes go to former members of the samurai class. All members of a

monastery wear a colored over-robe of their sect.

Members above initiates are called Rishi (typically Rank

One or Two). Supervisors are called *Sozu*, and

manage various aspects of the monastic life. Both wear a black over-robe. *Sojo*

(Rank 4) head the

monastery and wear a purple over-robe. Elders,

called *Dai-sojo*, oversee several monasteries and

report back to the leader of the sect; they typically have

a School Rank of 5. *Dai-sojo* wear a red robe over their

saffron.

Five Rings. Everything is part of a natural cycle described by the Five Rings. The Five Rings are a process, not so much describing actual things (like fire or water), but a cycle through which energy (*chi*) evolves. Fire gives rise to Earth. Earth creates Water. From Water comes Air. But all returns to the Void (which starts the cycle all over again). The Five Rings are a metaphor, where Earth not only describes rocks and trees but also the principle of growth, healing, rejuvenation.

To the Brotherhood of Shinsei, the distinctions between Rings are an illusion. They are the energy of the universe given form. Thus, everything arises from nothing and will eventually flow back into the Void. By embracing the Void, by transcending the distinctions between physical and spiritual, a monk becomes one with the universe.

Shinsei taught that to obtain enlightenment and free yourself from the endless cycle of rebirth, you must overcome your perceptions. You must realize the fundamental nothingness of the universe. The world is a place of illusions and suffering, holding down your soul. Seeing beyond the illusions, embracing the Five Rings, leads to oneness with eternity.

HISTORY

Most people in Rokugan assume monks are simply another form of shugenja, perhaps more devoted, and less capable of spellcrafting. This is far from the truth. To understand the difference between shugenja and monks, we must go back to the beginning, when Shinsei first appeared.

At the time, Rokugan was being invaded by the fearsome armies of Fu Leng, and the Seven Clans could do little to oppose them. At their darkest hour, preparing for an assault on the Uichiman plains, a man calling himself Shinsei demanded an audience with the Hantei Emperor. The rest of the story is well known.

After the conversation between the two men, shugenja scoured the transcript dutifully recorded by Shiba. They sought ways to incorporate this new way of thinking. Soon, Shinsei's first lecture influenced every shugenja's world view and no clan remained untouched. Shugenja came to see the world as organized around the Five Rings. Ancestors no longer simply died and went to Jigoku; just as *ki* came from the Void and returned to it, so the human soul enjoyed a cycle of rebirths. Kami were no longer mysterious forces of nature, but belonged to elemental courts.

While his gift of prophecy spoke through him, the young peasant boy known as Uikku lived among the Phoenix Clan, and they have benefited from this association. Further, the Phoenix have the most complete copy of the Tao of Shinsei and refuse to allow others to view what remains of the original pages. This leads some clans to charge them with omitting important parts of the original text. Prior to Shinsei's arrival in Rokugan, the Isawa were already masters of magic. By melding the 'new way' of Shinsei with the religion of the Seven Fortunes, the Isawa led the way to a new flowering of spiritual thought across Rokugan.

OTHER TEACHINGS

Shinsei's teaching is encompassed in more than just a single conversation with the Hantei Emperor, although it is that text which contains the principal wisdom of the Master. Word of Shinsei's conversation with the Emperor spread, attracting curious samurai from across Rokugan. Many begged him to become their sensei. Before he left for the Shadowlands, witnesses report, he held a brief number of lectures conveying his philosophy.

For four nights, he sat under a pine tree and revealed his philosophy. Each of these lectures was written down by his students, entitled with fanciful names like 'the Lotus Teaching' and 'the Empty Hand Lecture.' Over the years, however, differing accounts have appeared, sometimes written decades after the fact, making it difficult to determine exactly which teachings were his. This isn't helped by the practice used by some monks of assuming the name of previous masters when writing their own texts - a form of 'study guide' known as *sutras*. A *sutra* is an extrapolation of the teachings which originate in Shinsei's Tao, in order to further explain the Master's lessons. For example, the 'Diamond Sutra,' the central text of the Shingon sect, expands on Shinsei's Tao. Though Basso claimed to have received the *sutra* 'from Shinsei himself,' some believe Basso wrote it. (This hasn't stopped people from studying the Diamond Sutra, however.)

Skeptics say that if Shinsei did all the talking his followers say, Fu Leng would have invaded Rokugan without a fight. Others note that if Shinsei taught every lesson, one each night, he'd still be teaching. Whatever the truth, the Brotherhood of Shinsei directly attributes five

sutras to Shinsei (including the Tao of Shinsei), which form the foundation of monastic Shinseism. This compilation is known simply as the Shinsei Sutras.

THE RISE OF MONASTIC SHINSEISM

When Shinsei died in the Shadowlands (and some remain unconvinced that he did), he left behind no successor around which a religion could be built. He did not pass on the mantle of leadership, perhaps to prevent a dynasty of teachers from arising. According to legend, on the morning he and the Seven Thunders set out, Shinsei delivered his final lecture, called the Sermon on the Path of Purification.

The Path of Purification sets out rules governing monastic life, such as abstinence from a host of things, the poverty of monks and shunning politics. Shinsei recommended his followers wander Rokugan and spread his message, though he emphasized the necessity of frequently meeting to deliberate on communal issues. At first the Brotherhood of Shinsei remained disorganized and scattered. For many years, Shinsei's followers wandered the countryside as mendicants, gathering together

every few years at Shinsei no Sumai Mura – Holy Home Village.

Over the next several centuries, these meetings would shape the spread of Shinseism. At these councils, doctrinal and organizational issues were taken up, and major sects took shape as a result. In the first council, convened two years after Shinsei disappeared, the monks agreed to compile and codify Shinsei's teachings. The twelfth convocation saw the establishment of stable communities. Each of the major sects attained recognition through one of these councils – first the Shingon, then Shintao and recently the Pure Land sect.

Eventually, monks began to settle down around Holy Home Village, particularly in the winter months. Among Shinsei's first students were members of the Agasha family, accomplished mystics of the Dragon Clan. Unlike their fellow monks, the Agasha retreated to their mountain strongholds. They were not seen for twenty years, and strange stories emerged from the Great Wall of the North. Fifty years later, representatives from the Agasha family appeared at a council. The other monks were astounded by their spiritual attainments, which encouraged others to retreat to the mountains. The rules set down in the Path of Purification were amended to accommodate this change, and rules governing monasteries were instituted.

NEWER NEW WAYS

Over the centuries, new forms of Shinseism appeared. Initially, the Brotherhood of Shinsei attempted to enforce doctrinal purity, stressing adherence to Shinsei's Five Sutras. This did not stop monks with different interpretations from arising and attracting followers. The matter was quietly dropped and new forms of Shinsei were allowed to stand alongside more traditional interpretations.

The first of these divisions occurred at the tenth Great Convocation, with the introduction of what would come to be known as *Shingon* Shinseism. A monk named Basso appeared with what he called the 'Diamond Sutra,' claiming it to be a 'lost' teaching of Shinsei's. The scroll appeared to be an esoteric interpretation of the Lotus Sutra, and Basso stressed it over Shinsei's other teachings. He considered the Shinsei Sutras, including the Tao of Shinsei, to be an elementary expression of Shinsei's wisdom, and placed little emphasis on them.



OFUSHIKAI, THE PHOENIX CLAN ANCESTRAL SWORD

The ancestral sword of the Phoenix Clan is a delicately encrusted work of steel and pearl, created by Shiba's wife, Tsamaru, as a gift to her husband on the day of their son's birth.

The sword shines with a strange light, and often appears as if water is flowing down the exquisite blade. When held by its proper wielder, the sword provides them the ability to survive beneath the waves of the ocean, without any other source of air.

At any time, the chosen wielder of the sword can summon it to him, no matter what the distance. The sword always appears, unsheathed, in their hand, only moments later. Further, the sword confers the ability to allow its bearer to spend Void point to stop all combat within a 20' radius – those in the affected area will be unable to attack, cast offensive spells, or use aggressive techniques.



ALTERNATE TEACHINGS

At present, there are many different sects of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, with distinct practices and strange kinds of magic power at their command.

Few outside the sect know what Shingon teaches.

Although many believe Shingon is an outgrowth of the Dragon clan's unorthodox interpretations of Shinseism, even that clan does not seem to know the full extent of Shingon's teachings. Those drawn to Shingon learn advanced meditation techniques said to free the mind of all illusion.

According to Shintao, mankind is already enlightened and just doesn't know it. Through meditation, a person realizes this to be true and acknowledges his 'Shinsei nature.' Personal struggle with one's own desires is the key. Only through meditation can one's own True Self be cleansed of all attachments and illusions.

Shintao also preaches a 'common sense' approach that says monks can no longer live in isolation. It eschews the usual prohibitions such as celibacy, though licentiousness is frowned upon, and manual labor. Most monks are expected to work for their food and lodging, supporting the monastery.

Another sect, known as *Shintao*, concentrates more on meditation and less on a study of Shinsei's teachings. Iconoclastic, its masters note that "Shinsei didn't have the benefit of the Tao of Shinsei to achieve enlightenment, so why should you?" Shinsei became a character in a series of parables designed to teach his beliefs directly. Followers eschew the traditional rules laid out in the Path of Purification. Rinzai, a sect of Shintao, focuses on the grappling with enigmatic riddles called *koans*, designed to shatter the student's perceptual framework.

MONASTIC RULES

No matter what sect a monk belongs to, each monastery follows the monastic rules set down by Shinsei in his Path of Purification sutra.

All monks take a vow to observe the following rules: do not eat meat (though they can eat fish); avoid violence; avoid killing for any reason; remain celibate; avoid gluttony and drunkenness; do not defile a holy place; do not commit murder or rape. Similarly, the teachings of Shinsei advocate right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration (collectively called the 'eight petals of the lotus') to achieve release and thus overcome the world of illusions. This makes it hard for a monk to lie, cheat or steal.

To be certain, the Brotherhood of Shinsei is not perfect. They are forbidden from involvement in political activities, though some monasteries have become politically powerful. Shinsei shunned the accumulation of wealth, but some orders employ a loophole which allows monasteries to enrich themselves while their members remain poor. Though the monastic rules prohibit the continuation of social distinctions within the community, this has become a problem from time to time.

A few monks continue to live as wanderers, allowed to come and go as they please, often stopping at local monasteries for shelter. They typically live by begging from lay people, and it is considered meritorious to give alms to such a person. These mendicants wear saffron robes and carry begging bowls. Some study Shinsei's sutras on their own, or receive periodic instruction from a master (who is often a wandering monk himself), while others receive permission to go wandering from their monastic order.

Appendix V: LSR CCG Phoenix Decks

"Begone, Vermin!"

By Scott Gearin

STRONGHOLD

Sacred Temple of the Phoenix

DYNASTY DECK: 51 CARDS

1x Battle at Isawa Palace	.....	C&J	... U
1x Emperor's Peace	.....	Jade	... U
1x Imperial Quest	.....	OE	... R
1x Inheritance	.....	Jade	... R
1x Regions of Rokugan	.....	TOV	... U
1x Imperial Gift	.....	Jade	... R
2x Bridged Pass	.....	Jade	... U
3x Jade Works	.....	Jade	... C
1x Master of the Tea Ceremony	..	OE	... R
3x Merchant Caravan	.....	FK	... C
3x Sanctified Temple	.....	Jade	... C
1x School of Wizardry	.....	Jade	... R
3x Silver Mines	.....	Jade	... C
3x Small Farms	.....	Jade	... C
2x Trading Grounds	.....	AOD	... C
1x Clan Heartland	.....	Jade	... R
3x Asako Ishio	.....	TOV	... U
3x Asako Togama	.....	TOV	... C
3x Isawa Natsume	.....	FK	... C
1x Isawa Norikazu	.....	Jade	... R
1x Isawa Osugi	.....	Jade	... U
2x Isawa Suma	.....	TOV	... C
1x Isawa Tsume	.....	OE	... R
3x Isawa Uona	.....	OE	... C
1x Isawa Uona (Exp. 1)	.....	FK	... R
1x Shiba Kyo	.....	SCC	... C
3x Shiba Shingo	.....	C&J	... C
1x Yasuki Taka	.....	Jade	... U



FATE DECK: 44 CARDS

- 3x Block Supply Lines Jade . . . C
- 3x Entrapping Terrain Jade . . . C
- 3x Focus Jade . . . R
- 2x Refugees Jade . . . C
- 3x Superior Tactics Jade . . . C
- 3x Benevolent Protection of Shinsei . AOD . C
- 1x Soul of Shiba SCC . . . R
- 1x Summon Night Stalker AOD . . U
- 3x Torrential Rains OE . . . R
- 2x Touch of Death Jade . . . R
- 3x Walking the Way Jade . . . R
- 2x Mantis Shugenja C&J . . . U
- 1x Scribe OE . . . R
- 1x Shiba House Guard SL . . . R
- 3x Spirit Guides Jade . . . R
- 1x all Five Rings Jade . . . U
- 1x Anc. Armor of the Phoenix . . . EE . . . F
- 1x Anc. Sword of the Hantei FK . . . R
- 1x Anc. Sword of the Phoenix . . . IE . . . F
- 1x Emerald Armor FK . . . R
- 1x Imperial Standard FK . . . R

This is a moderately fast deck based on bringing in lots of cheap personalities for honor. The key is getting out Clan Heartland and Benevolent Protection of Shinsei/Torrential Rains. With good spell management you should be able to cast each of them 10 to 15 times (not counting Suma's infinite casting with the Emerald Armor or Hantei Sword). Against attack decks you can easily hold out with two Provinces for 10 turns while developing an honor win, even in multiplayer. Duelists will discover your very high average focus value. Isawa Tsuke and Touch of Death provide powerful anti-personality ability, enough to open the door for the occasional attack on honor decks.

"Darkness Incarnate"

By Ray Lau & David Niisato

STRONGHOLD

Sacred Temple of the Phoenix

DYNASTY DECK: 51 CARDS

- 1x Return of Fu Leng AOD . . . R
- 1x The Farther You Fall Promo . . P
- 1x Doom of the Dark Lord Promo . . P
- 1x New Year's Celebration SL . . . R
- 1x Winter Warfare C&J . . . R

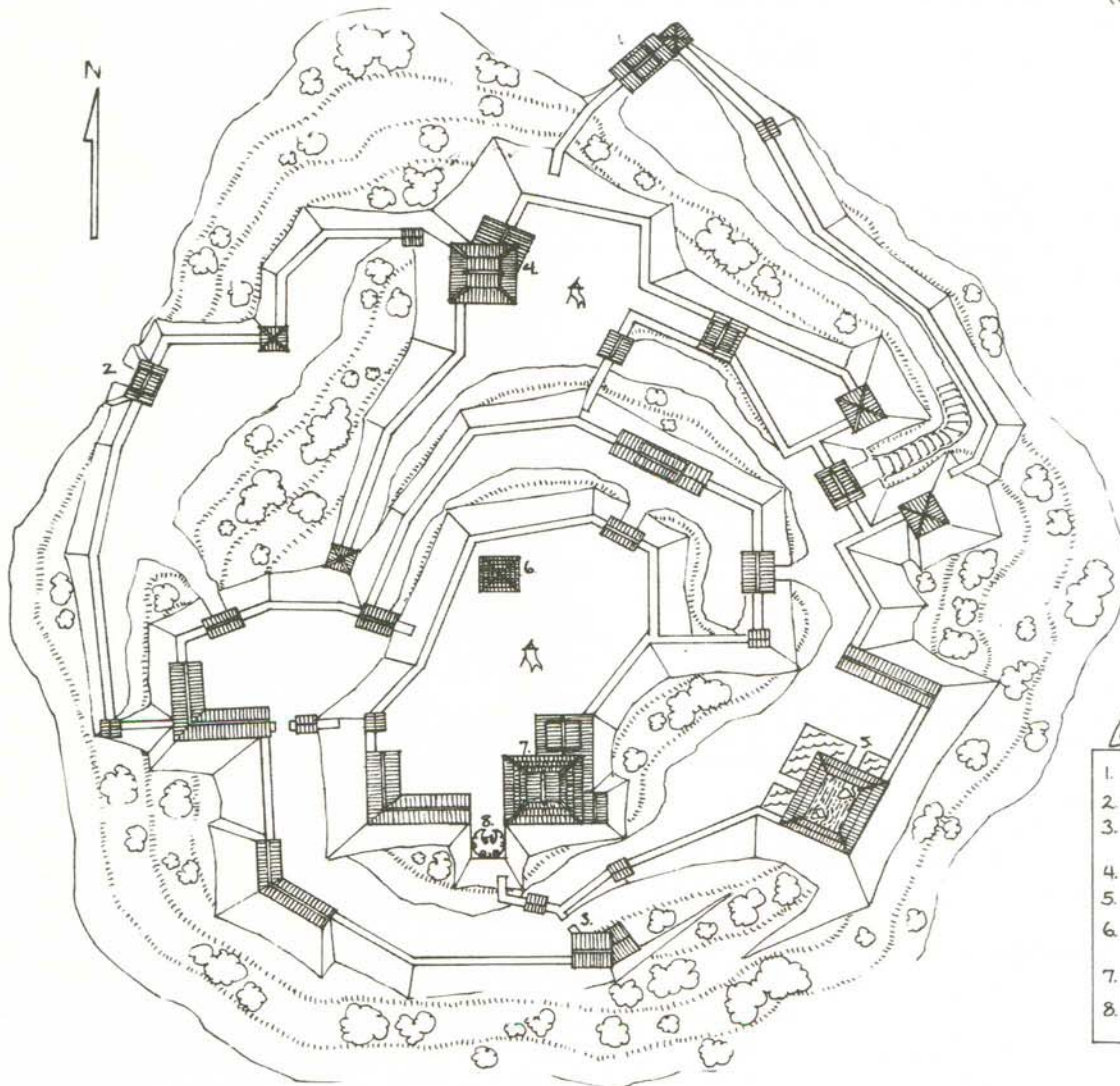
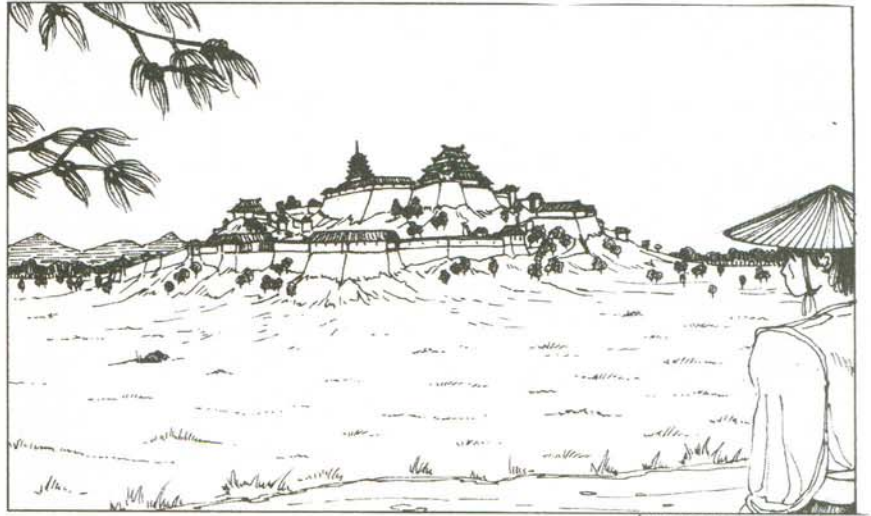
- 1x Hurricane Jade . . . U
- 1x Glimpse of the Unicorn Jade . . . U
- 1x As the Shadow Falls AOD . . U
- 1x The Darkest Day AOD . . U
- 1x Proposal of Peace Jade . . . R
- 1x Kisada's Funeral HE . . . R
- 1x There is no Hope AOD . . R
- 1x Time of the Void TOV . . R
- 3x Agasha Gennai TOV . . C
- 3x Iuchi Katta SCC . . . C
- 3x Ranbe SCC . . . R
- 3x Kuni Yori OE . . . U
- 3x Soshi Taoshi SCC . . . R
- 3x Agasha Heizo C&J . . . C
- 1x Soshi Bantaro (Exp. 1) C&J . . . R
- 1x Isawa Uona (Exp. 2) TOV . . R
- 3x Nobou C&J . . . U
- 3x Small Farms Jade . . . C

FATE DECK: 40 CARDS

- 10x First Shout FK . . . C
- 3x Second Shout FK . . . U
- 2x Third Shout FK . . . U
- 3x Oath of Fealty Jade . . . C
- 3x Frenzy Jade . . . U
- 3x Destiny Has No Secrets Jade . . . C
- 3x Charge Jade . . . C
- 3x Night Battle AOD . . C
- 3x Contentious Terrain Jade . . . C
- 1x Ring of Void Jade . . . U

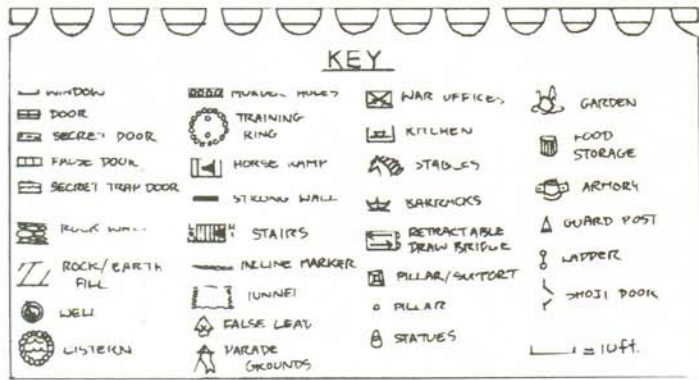
This deck essentially runs itself. Filled with personalities that enter play with just the stronghold, you are almost guaranteed a Personality on the first turn. Nearly all the fate cards do the same thing, increasing the force of your personalities. Potentially, you can begin destroying large provinces on turn two and certainly by turn three. Each turn you get to bring another Personality into play to munch up more provinces.

Accept every duel. Play a ton of first shouts and strip your opponent's cards from him. You've got a Ring of Void and Personalities to spare.

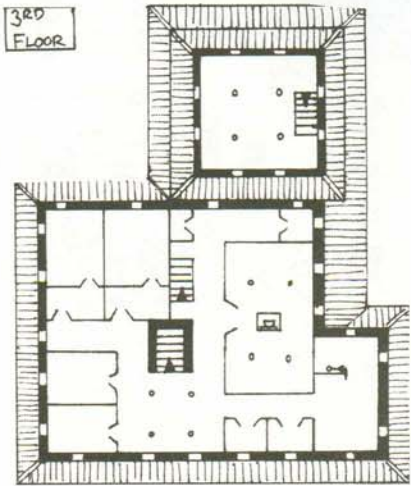


Legend

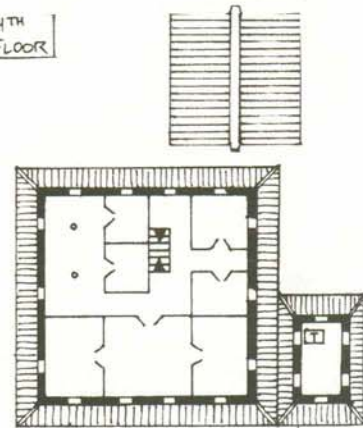
1. MAIN GATE
2. SECONDARY GATE
3. SALLY PORT (CONCEALED BY TREES FROM CASUAL VIEW)
4. BARRACKS
5. ROCK GARDEN SHRINE
6. PAGODA (TEMPLE TO 5 ELEMENTS)
7. TENSHU (DONJON)
8. PHOENIX STATUE



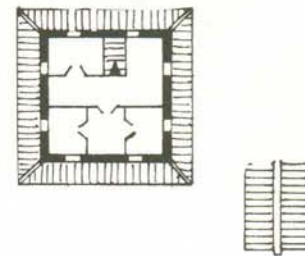
3RD FLOOR



4TH FLOOR

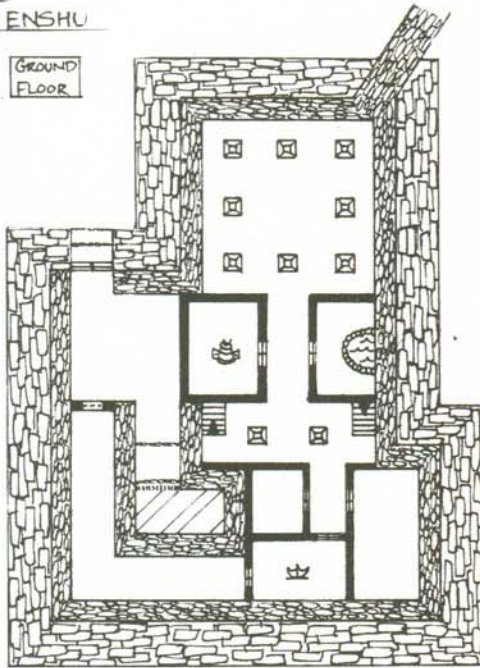


5TH FLOOR

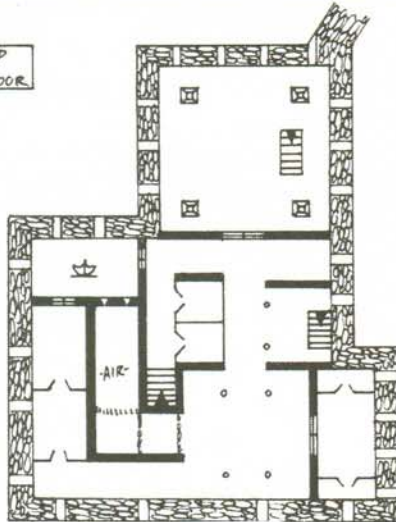


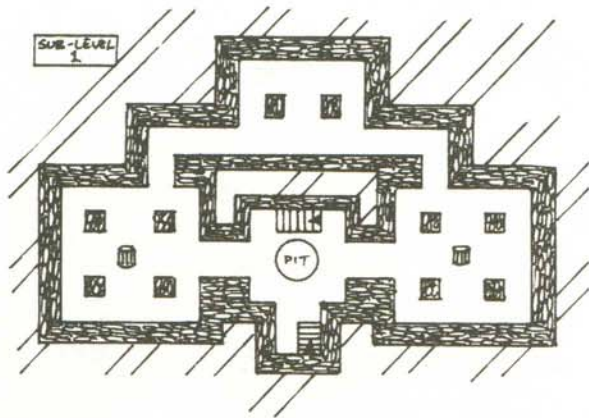
TENSHU

GROUND FLOOR

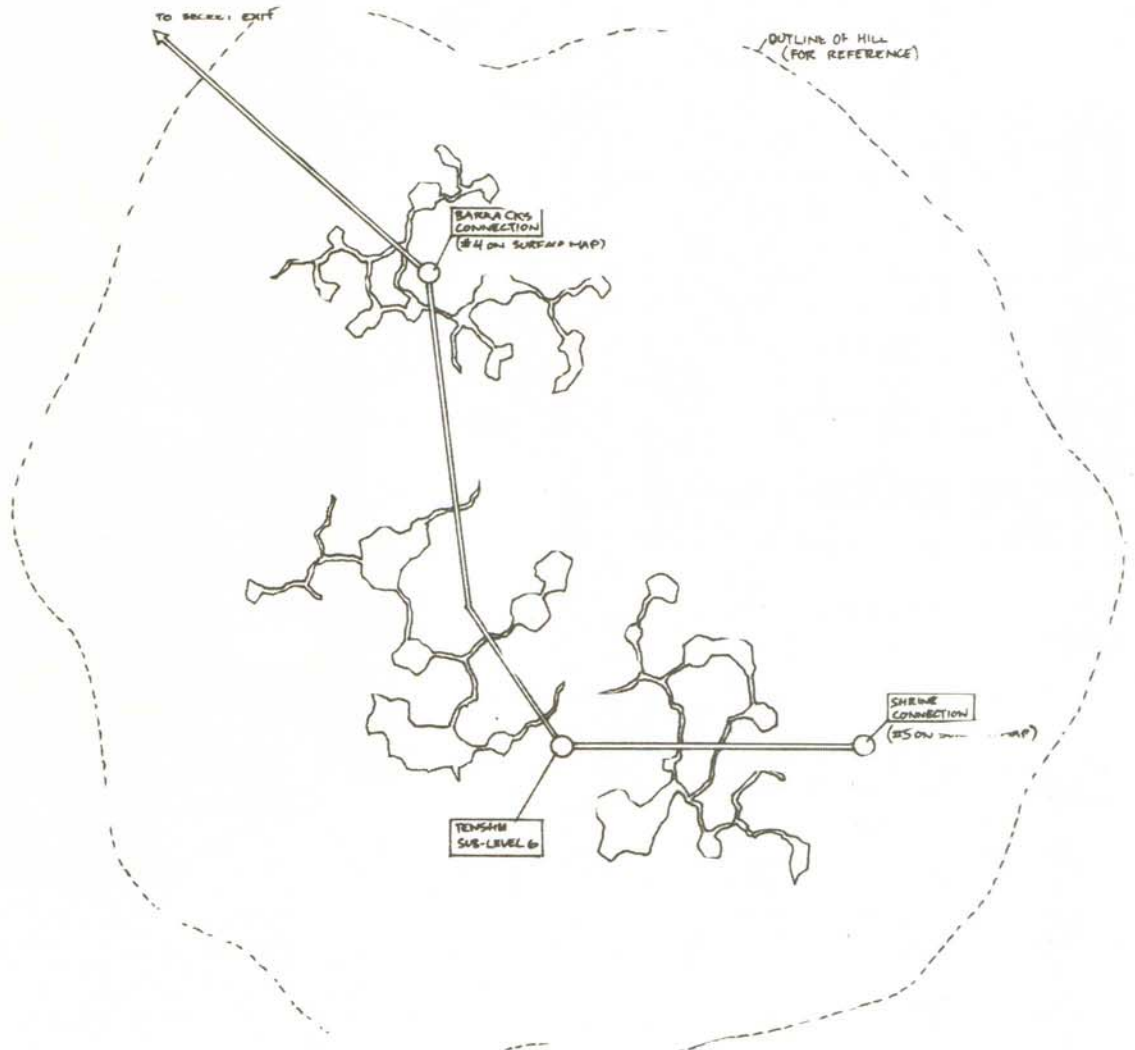


2ND FLOOR





SUB-LEVEL 2-5





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:

Clan:

Profession:

Fire

Agility:
Intelligence:

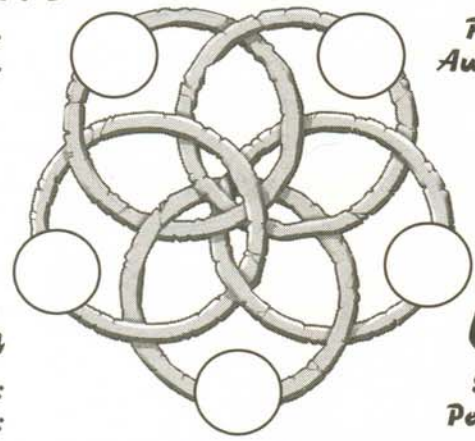
Air

Reflexes:
Awareness:

Primary Weapon

Primary Armor

TN to be Hit
(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)



Earth

Stamina:
Willpower:

Water

Strength:
Perception:

Skills

Void

Void Points Spent:

Spells

Insight:

Wounds

_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	-0
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	-1
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	-2
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	-3
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	-4
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	Down
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	Out
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dead

School:

Rank:

**Advantages/
Disadvantages**

Glory:

Honor:

Experience Points:



Legend of the Five Rings

Name:

Clan:

Home Province:

Allies and Enemies

History and Glorious Deeds

Weapons & Equipment

Gifts, Bestowments and Recognitions



Legend of the Five Rings

Name:

Clan:

Profession:

Fire

Agility:
Intelligence:

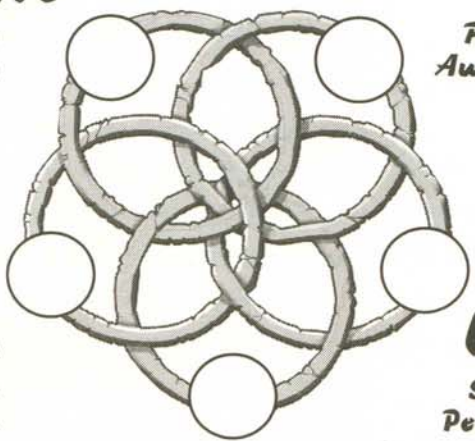
Air

Reflexes:
Awareness:

Primary Weapon

Primary Armor

TN to be Hit
(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)



Earth

Stamina:
Willpower:

Water

Strength:
Perception:

Skills

Void

Void Points Spent:

Techniques

Insight:

Wounds

<input type="checkbox"/>	-0
<input type="checkbox"/>	-1
<input type="checkbox"/>	-2
<input type="checkbox"/>	-3
<input type="checkbox"/>	-4
<input type="checkbox"/>	Down
<input type="checkbox"/>	Out
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dead

School: Rank:

Advantages/
Disadvantages

Glory:

Honor:

Experience Points:

Guided by
prophecy and ruled by an
enigmatic Council of Five, the Phoenix
Clan wields magic that defies comprehension.
In a land of discord, they are a force of peace.
Uncover the forbidden knowledge they guard, and pierce
the mystic veil of Rokugan's most arcane Clan!

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- The History of the Phoenix, including the immortal Asako, defiant Isawa and faithful Shiba, as well as the story of Gisei Toshi, City of Sacrifice
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- Research rules, guidelines for creating your own spells, new Skills, Techniques, Advantages and Disadvantages, and Phoenix Ancestors
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