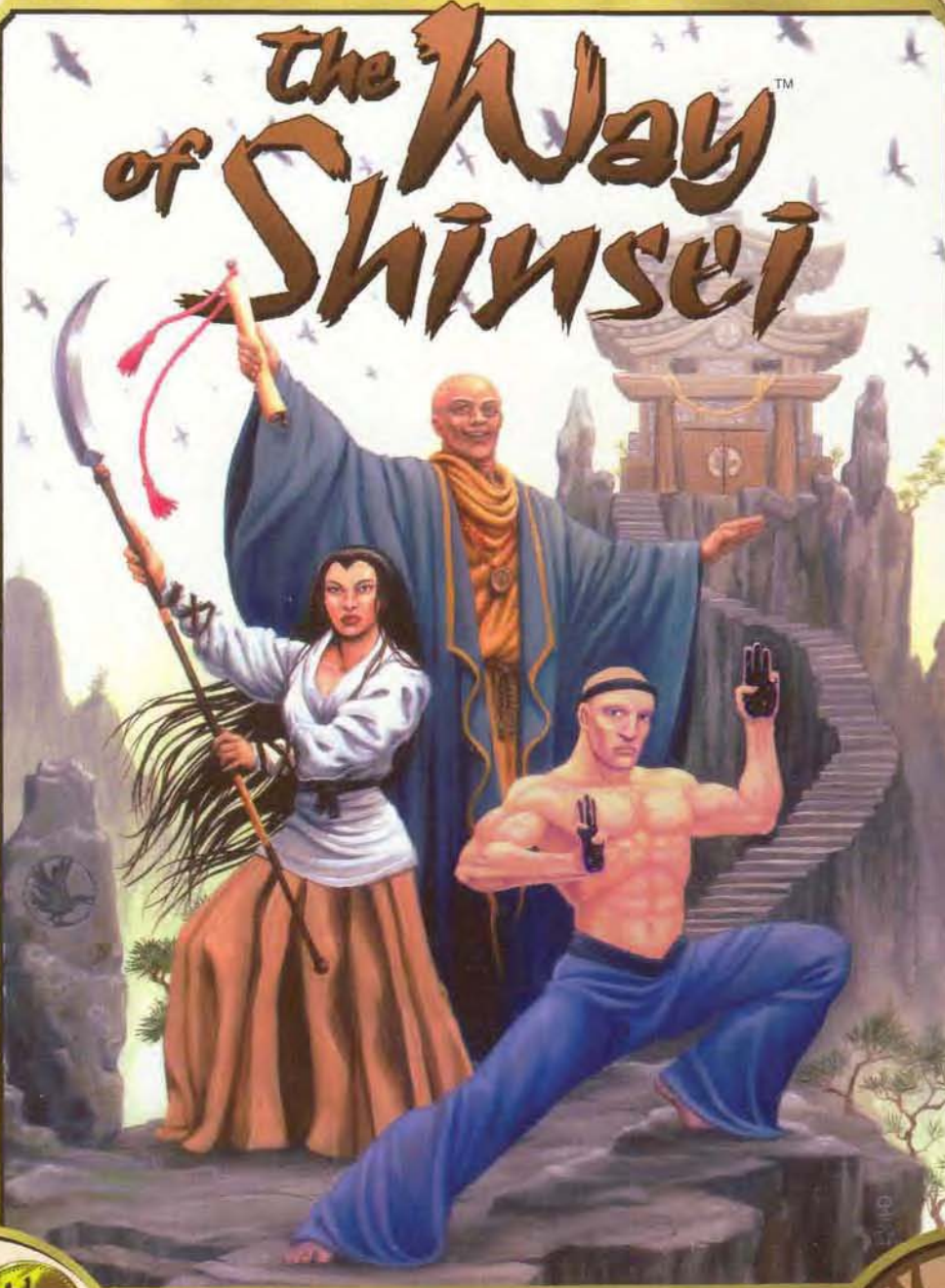




The Way of the Clans: Book Eleven

The Way of Shinsei™



Legend of the Five Rings™





Legend of the Five Rings

The Way of Shinsei



"We tell the tales of heroes to remind ourselves that we also can be great."

- The Tao of Shinsei



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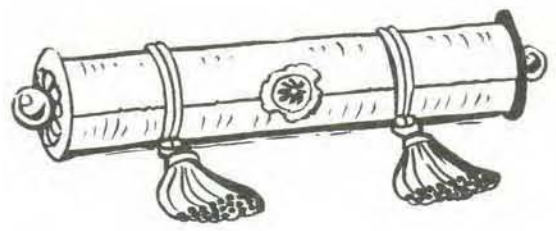
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EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

If a general is wise, he knows that a single man can halt an entire army.

Sometimes the downfall of houses hinges on a fumble of the wrist.

The higher you stand above modesty, the easier it becomes to lose your footing.



"No! You cannot go! Tell me which of them did this, and I'll..." I trailed off. I was fifteen, and I did not know how much cruelty could be created in the name of revenge. I could not think of any fate sufficient enough to rain down upon my father's enemies.

"Stop," he said, and I could hear the pain in his voice. It cracked like the waves on the rocks below Kyuden Doji. "You will find yourself at the end of a poisoned blade, and that will be the death of our whole line, not just me."

I bit my lip in frustration. Death. My father was going to die. Perhaps not by the swift stroke of seppuku, but forgotten in the oubliette called the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

I watched him as he folded his last kimono, white, enclosed in the sky-blue kashimo, and carried it out to the courtyard. He was dressed in plain gray, a symbol of his humility. He looked like a ronin. Of course retiring to join the Brotherhood of Shinsei was the honorable thing to do, the reward of a life devoted to duty. But to be sent away in your prime to a cold, barren cell, to shave your head and waste your best years with shriveled old men and meditate upon a world you did not even participate in – it was a death.

My father gave the last of his personal belongings to the thin monk who waited there. As he watched the monk carry them away to be given to the Brotherhood, he said, "It will not be so bad. I remember how the monks would come to worship at the Shrine of Doji in the spring. You can look for me among them, teaching the village children." My father hesitated, and added, "The Emperor no longer has a need for my knowledge of the political maneuverings of the Clans.

Perhaps the heimin children can put the information to better use."

His words were bitter. My anger choked in my throat. I saw my father's tears as the world he had created slipped away. My mouth was dry as I said, "Just give me a little time, Father," I promised. "I'll make sure they take you back."

My father pulled his wakizashi from his obi and laid the sheathed blade in my hands. "I once thought that, if I had but enough days to live, I could make a difference in this world. Each day, each moment, was precious, because there was so much to live for." He seemed resigned, lost. "Now, all of that time has slipped out of my hands. I look into the future, and see only the Brotherhood and endless days of... nothing at all. I do not know what I will find in that future. But I think, for me, time has ended." He released the blade. "For you, it is only beginning. I will pray for you."

I watched my father walk out of the courtyard, the first steps of his pilgrimage to the monastery and into solitude, and swore that I would free him, somehow. With time.



The room was cold, a barren stone cell empty of adornment. A simple pallet, stuffed with straw, served as a futon. An oil lamp guttered and filled the air with its scent. A set of brushes and paper were the only remnants of the man I had known all my life. I resolved to leave as quickly as possible.

"I have the promises of assistance we need. The Emperor will approve. The Scorpion have been shamed for their part in the incident at Plum Blossom village, and the Imperial Court needs your guidance, Father. It is time to come out of retirement, put aside your poetry, and reclaim your place at court."

My father just watched me with quiet eyes and said nothing. The saffron robes enfolded his frame, still strong, still healthy. Those eyes contained all the sharpness I had remembered from childhood, but as they had when I was a child, they told me my answer. My father did not need to speak. His eyes said "No."

"I cannot."



"But you were forced to retire, Father! Everyone knows that. Your honor in the court was beyond reproach, your counsel heeded by all. The Scorpion saw the first gray in your hair, and turned the Emperor against you, claiming you were too old for your duties. They forced you into this monastery, this exile. Out of jealousy! Do you not remember?"

He answered, but his face still held the half-smile he wore when he watched me as a child. "I remember."

I was angry. I had worked for six years to return my father to his rightful place at the Emperor's side, where once his eloquence prevailed, and he refused to return. He spurned the fruit of my efforts.

The court needed him.

"You wept when the Emperor told you to go. There were rumors you had died of a broken heart, that it was your angry spirit that brought down the Scorpion... did all of that mean nothing to you?"

I needed him.

My father closed his eyes. "It meant everything to me. I lived to serve the Empire. And the Empire was kind to me in return. I had all I wished, and

thought there was nothing more that I could desire."

"Then why...?"

"Here I found the one thing I could never have. Something too precious to sacrifice, even for the sake of the Imperial Court."

My father held out his hand, begging me to understand. I was still too angry to reach to him. All my planning, all I had done for his sake, was being lost.

"What did you find?" I asked bitterly.

"Freedom from time."



The monk saw me before I saw him. I remember he was neither young nor old, a man of my own age. Around him were clustered the children of the town's samurai too young for schooling, to listen to his stories and parables of Shinsei. I had just walked through the middle of





their gathering in my desire to reach the Lady's shrine, so distracted was I by my duties of the day.

"Doji-sama!" the monk hailed. His voice was respectful enough, but there was laughter in his eyes. I was too preoccupied to be concerned. "Sumimasen, Doji-sama. Please forgive us for gathering in such a traveled place, where we could impede your path."

I waved the apology away, not eager to talk to one of the Brotherhood, even after ten years. "It is nothing. I am far too busy to be concerned with such trivial matters." I tried to walk away.

The corners of the monk's mouth tilted upward slightly. "Of course, Doji-sama," he called out again. Then he said, "If I may ask, for the further knowledge of these children regarding the duties of their elders, what sort of tasks are you concerned with this day?" He bowed deeply to me again and said, "Forgive me if the question is impertinent."

I was annoyed with the monk's question, but the day was bright and fair, and the children were watching me with eager eyes. I had enough time to answer for their sake, at least. "I am going to fulfill my obligations at the Shrine of Lady Doji, and then I must meet with the merchants that ship our rice to the Kaiu Wall in order to feed and keep strong the Crab that protect Rokugan from the evils of the Shadowlands. Then I will set up a series of events to permit the Akodo daimyo and the Dragonfly daimyo to interact in a peaceful and controlled setting, so they will be able to come to an understanding and prevent war between the Lion and the Dragon. This will keep the Empire strong. I also will be arranging the Imperial Court's activities in celebration of the Bon Festival. This way, the Emperor can perform the rites that insure that ancestors are properly venerated throughout the land. If I have time, I then will try to compose some poetry in honor of our Lady for the Festival."

I think some pride tainted my words, but I was proud. I had worked hard to reach a position where I could serve the Empire well and see that it was kept on the correct path.

The monk bowed deeply again to me, and the children followed. I stood straighter, pleased at the acknowledgement. The monk then said, "*Domo arigato*. It sounds to me as though you are concerned with many great things, Doji-sama. You have very little time, and on each moment, great things hang. It is perfectly understandable that you would not be able to divert, even for a

instant, to move around this humble class." He bowed a final time to me, and remained bowed until I moved away.

I walked away slowly. I wanted to feel anger toward the monk, but my anger had no fire. I recalled the words I had known since my childhood: "Be more concerned with good actions than with great ones." Instead of rage, I felt shame.

I knelt in prayer before the shrine of Lady Doji, searching in my heart for greater wisdom and understanding, searching for what I had lost. However, I could not search long; other obligations swiftly drew me away. I did not have time.



Many years have passed since then. My father joined our ancestors long ago. Now my hair is gray, and my arm no longer has the strength it had when I was younger. I have said farewell to my sons with the dawn this morning, and now sunset is upon me. I wear a gray robe and stand before the monastery door. I am not angry any more.

"Come, samurai-sama. He will see you now." The monk who has come for me is surprisingly young. He must have been one raised in the Brotherhood. I wonder if he wishes his life were different, wishes that it too had held a wife, lovers, children. Is he bitter?

I will pray for my sons.

"I will go." I am led around the line of waiting supplicants. The abbot awaits me. I kneel humbly.

My star has risen and fallen in the Imperial Court. I have lived much. I bear wounds to my spirit from the battles I have waged, battles fought without raising a sword. I do not have regrets.

"Why are you here, samurai-san?" the abbot asks. The room seems to draw itself about him, and he reaches out to it, one in communion with all things. His wisdom touches levels too deep for me to understand, and that wisdom, that power, captures me like the words of a master orator. But, despite the mantle of power he bears, he is no different than what he seems. He is only an old

man in saffron robes. He reminds me of my father.

I have spent my spirit out in service to the Empire. So much has changed since my childhood, and the world moves too fast for me now. A new Emperor sits upon the throne, and my days slip away in a struggle to catch the fleeting whims of this world.

"I have come to beg your favor. I ask to join the Brotherhood of Shinsei, as my father did before me."

I read the poetry of my father's last years, haiku of rain and the passing of seasons, the crashing of waves upon the shore, and they speak of change and of eternity. I know the Brotherhood will not take everything from me. My poetry still waits. And something more.

"What do you seek here, Doji-san?" the abbot asks again, his voice contained and formal. The other monks watch me with ageless eyes.

I know the correct response. I know that I should say that I am seeking enlightenment. It is expected. But... to become enlightened, to be one with all things, to lose the self... I am not ready to walk that path. I yearn for this world too much. "I seek freedom," I say, breaking the mantra.

The abbot looks amused. "Freedom from what, Michizane?" He uses my name, discarding my family and my heritage. He will accept me into the monastery.

Soon, my head will be shaved, and I will wear the saffron robes.

And maybe then I will find freedom from time.

*The seashore temple...
Incoming rollers flow in time
To the holy flute
- Buson*



EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

A sagacious general, armed with the knowledge of his enemy, will be able to act as if he knows his enemy's every thought.

When you are doing one thing, be concerned with that one thing and nothing else. Distraction breeds disaster.

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



Chapter One:
The Contemplative
Monk



EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

Wisdom can be found in many places, but you must always begin at home.

Knowing your advantages does you no good if your enemy is able to keep you from employing them.

The way of darkness always brings great power. The way of darkness always brings a great price.

Chapter One: The Contemplative Monk

CRAB ON THE WALL

Feh.

Words.

Hida Tamura frowned in scorn over last night's conversation with the monk while he looked out over the Wall.

A dark line formed on the horizon. Never a good sign.

The monk had said that one should not take a life if one wished to achieve enlightenment. Not much chance of that here, Tamura stared out across the killing field, a flat rust-red dust bowl where the bones of millions had been ground to dust over the millennia. Every breath here reeked of death and corruption, yet the monk talked about salvation through purification. Tamura spat out over the battlements.

The dark line began to move in a chaotic shifting. It skittered along the low spots seeking to hide from the watch towers. Goblins. Feh. They never learned. Which, he figured, was a good thing.

Purity. He supposed there might be some people in the Empire, what little was left of it, who could afford to worry over such abstractions. Safe in their shrines and delicate courts, where they could enjoy the Crab's sacrifice by seeking enlightenment. How many of those priests would come down here and risk their precious enlightenment to take a watch on the Wall? The monk had declined his offer.

The massed goblins made an easy target for the siege engines mounted on the Wall. The thump of catapults preceded the large bundles of flaming pitch shooting skyward. The mix of pitch and straw landed within the formation of goblins,

causing some damage but not enough to discourage their advance.

Yes, he thought, *let us all leave the Wall and wander around in a daze contemplating the meaning of life.* Soon goblins would be dragging the farmers out of their houses and tossing them into their stewpots. Then the meaning of life would be to fill the stomachs of any oni with a appetite.

A small hail of arrows lanced down into the goblins. It was pitiful how few fell; clouds of arrows should have decimated the goblins. The Shadowlands army crashed against the Wall; the ladders and ropes made from human skin and bone rattled dozens of spots along his section.

Compassion? It was not worth much on the Wall. Courage and strength kept the Shadowlands at bay. Compassion would cause a samurai to hesitate. Not all creatures of the pit were foul to look upon. A bog hag or a oni would use that compassion like a sharp knife to destroy a samurai.

Tamura tipped the vat of boiling pitch down upon the heads of the first ranks up the ladder in his section. The death screams were lost in the howls of madness down below.

Enlightenment was a dream from a fevered mind. Just look at the Empire. Armies marched in unheard-of numbers slaughtering each other. Courtiers lied to allies in their clean castles. Kisada-sama marched with the undead. For what? Power and greed. The monks were children lost in this tempest, seeking dreams of an idyllic afterlife. He could not blame them for wishing to leave this mess forever; perhaps it would be worse when he was reincarnated at the end of this life. *Not the best of futures*, he thought with a frown.

The goblins clawed over their dead fellows to reach the top of the Wall. Tamura's tetsubo greeted them. The satisfying feeling of a goblin's skull being crushed reverberated through his forearms again and again. Reinforcements arrived. Soon only Crabs walked the Wall.

Tamura looked down the thinly manned Wall and spat again, this time on the Wall itself. Dreams and nightmares. Reality was somewhere in between, he thought. A good wife, the honor of his ancestors, a sturdy tetsubo, clear duty and clear conscience, and the smiling face of his young son. That was the enlightenment he thought of.

MATSU BENKEI

Matsu Benkei had much to do before tomorrow. When he summoned his immediate family to the audience chamber, it did not take long for them to assemble, as his plans were no surprise to them. Before him they knelt: his children, his grandchildren and, in the arms of his granddaughter, his great-grandchild. They waited on his will one last time.

He caught his eldest daughter's eye. She was very much like her mother, fallen in battle many years ago. Kiriyo, plain of feature but with a fire in her eyes that pierced the heart, stepped forward and knelt before him.

"Daughter, tomorrow you shall be *daimyo* of this castle and guide of our family. Armor and weapons you have inherited from your ancestors. Honor and glory you have earned in battle. Now the battlefield will be only a part of where your fighting will be done. To you, my daughter, I give you this fan, a gift from the last empress. Her cousins will be important allies in court."

She accepted the delicate but surprisingly heavy fan with the reverence it was due and returned to her place in the fore of the assembly.

His son came forward next. "You, my son; take my swords. While your sister must lead the family now and her husband will manage affairs at home, you must be her commander on the field of battle. As you have done in the past as her hatamoto, continue to lead as she commands with honor." His son bowed and returned to his place next to his sister.



EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

"...for the more corrupt the soul, the more painful it becomes to look upon the pure. So it is with crystal and jade and the creatures of the dark lands. Remember this, Hantei, for it will one day save your life."

Courage may feed a man's soul, but it is rice that feeds his belly, and an army cannot move on courage alone.

It takes a wise man to see an obstacle as it truly is and not as it appears to be.

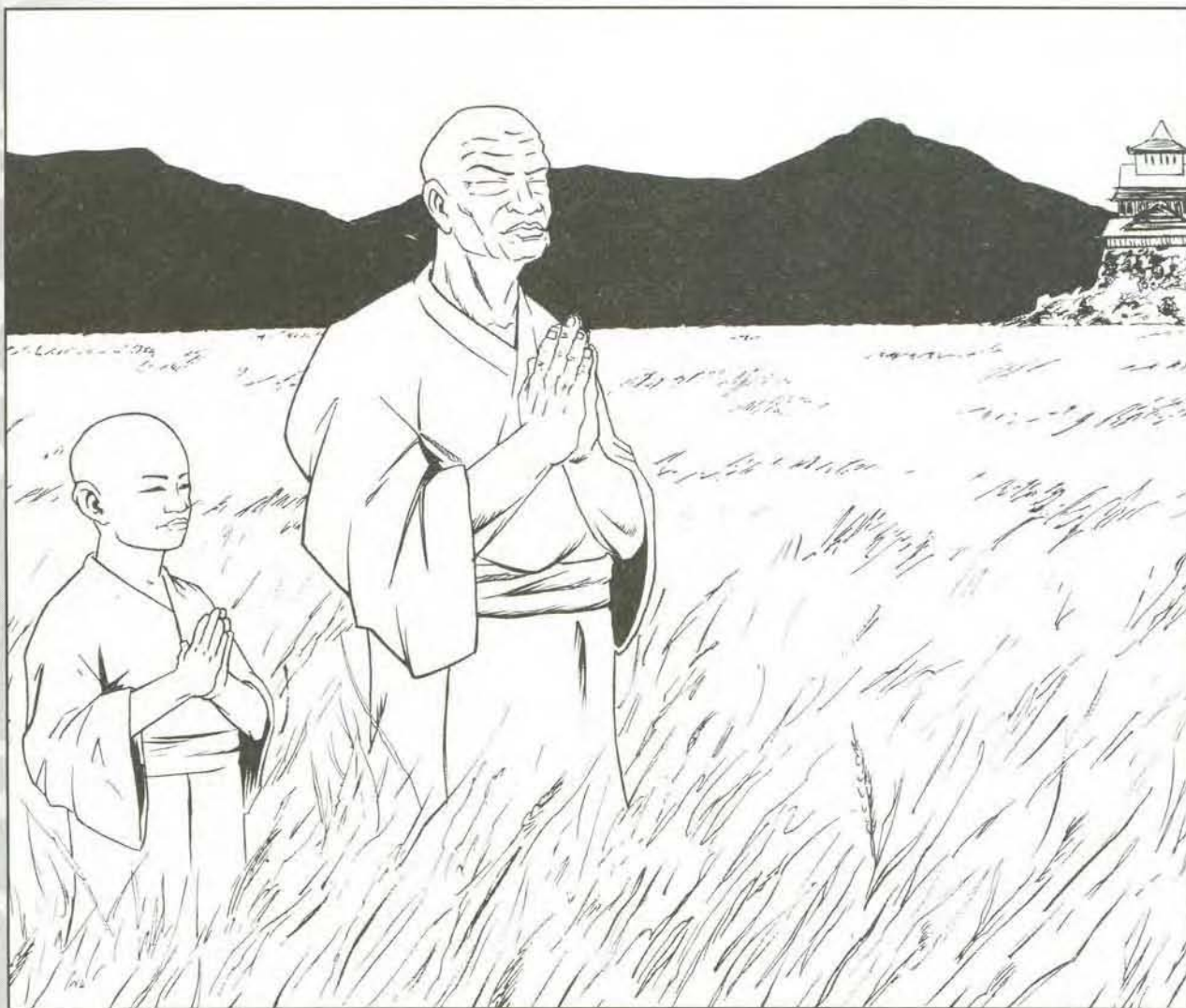




Matsu Benkei then motioned his grandson forward. Like his grandfather in so many ways, he too struggled with his desires; he had become a target of Scorpions seeking advantage from his family. "We cannot have everything we want in this world or even the next, yet if we hold to our honor sometimes we can receive a small portion of our dream." He passed a scroll with the Unicorn mon on the broken seal and indicated that it should be read. His grandson's face brightened at the news within. "The Unicorn party arrived last night. Apparently she is as eager as you for this union. The marriage will be held tonight. As consolation for you leaving our family the ceremony will be held at our castle." He added as a note of faux disapproval, "With most of the expense our burden." His grandson's face flushed

with embarrassment but did nothing to remove his grin.

Last he summoned his granddaughter and her newborn child. She was impetuous and wild on the battlefield – taking risks and accruing higher casualties than other of their units – as well as off it. Her marriage had been a hasty affair. He hoped that her child would focus her energies. "To you, granddaughter, who continues the line of our house." He passed her his copy of Akodo's *Leadership*. "Teach your child of the legacy of the Matsu house, for our house is not in the stone and wood of this castle but in the minds and souls of our people. Do not spend them so freely, for the cost of your next bout of rashness may take what is most precious to you." She would have many months to study the writings of Akodo before she took the field once again.



Finished, he gazed upon his family. He would miss them, but perhaps his journey to enlightenment would bring them together again. He dismissed them with a warm smile and a wave of his hand. "We have a wedding to organize and guests to fend off from the sake barrels." He waved Kiriyo to stay behind. There was still much to discuss with her.

Kiriyo was his only companion in the morning. She watched as he tested the edge of the short blade against the ridges of his thumb. Satisfied with its sharpness he brought it to bear against his topknot of hair. A few quick strokes and his head was as clean as his thoughts. It was strange that just the act of shaving his head in preparation for his next journey in life could summon such peace and clear his mind of years of troubles. Wearing a coarse sturdy robe and carrying a staff, Benkei left his old life behind in search of enlightenment that had eluded him, unburdened by the life of a samurai.

HOME COMING

The morning fog covering the land lent the valley a ghostly pall. The cry of a raven broke the morning's silence, greeting Goro and Master Benzo as they entered the low valley. A sense of tranquility settled about them. Goro knew this valley well; it had been his world before Master Benzo had traveled to Three Hills Village.

Had it been only two years since last he had seen his parents? It felt like a lifetime ago that the traveling monk, Benzo, had stopped at their village to tend the shrine there while the resident priest was ill. Goro had been fascinated by the man, following him around that day and the next before getting the courage to ask a question. To the surprise of all, that question had brought the priest to his parents' house. Master Benzo offered Goro a rare opportunity, one which his parents had accepted with pride. Goro would enter into the monk's care. He would be educated and his service to the kami would bring honor and good fortune to his family and the village.

In those two years Goro had learned much: how to listen to what the kami had to say, the tenets of Shinsei, rituals both great and small; but mostly he learned about the Empire and its people.

Goro followed his master down the narrow path through the rolling hills, their steps silent as the mist that rose from the rice fields. Their travels these last few months had been filled with

danger. Several of the villages they had passed through had been abandoned for one reason or another. Bandits and monsters ran loose across the land. War had come to Rokugan and it seemed it would engulf everything from the Kaiu Wall to the northern mountains. Goro dreaded returning to the village of his family, not in fear of seeing his mother or father but in fear of not seeing them. Would his old house still be standing or would it be a burnt skeleton like those he'd seen in so many other villages?

The song of a finch echoed across the landscape and was answered from the tall grasses. A dragonfly joined them as they walked between well-tended rice paddies, its multicolored wings flickering in Lady Amaterasu's dawn. Goro stared at it as it landed on a bean stalk. It was a display as wondrous as the multicolored leaves the trees had assumed as the light strengthened, one which reminded him of simpler times. He breathed a sigh of relief, his fears assuaged by the orderly nature of the fields. Only a thin layer of water stood in the rice paddies. Perhaps in another twenty days the water would evaporate and the ground would harden enough to begin the harvest.

The path led through the forest of bamboo south of the village. The wind stirred the tall stalks lazily, the soft sound a prayer of welcome and peace to the monk and his pupil. A homecoming, Goro thought. Inside the forest the path forked. One path ran along the top of a small bluff that overlooked the village, the other to the village center. From the bluff Goro could see that his village was in order. Three Hills Village rose out of the mist appearing like a ship on a lake. A few people moved about in the low mist. The watchtower and bell stood as he remembered, as tall as the trees. The headman's house with its second story, which had seemed to be the grandest building in the world two years ago, now looked small and poor. His family's house was located farther along the path behind a rise in the land. His father and brothers would already have been tending their crops for several hours, since first light.

He looked away from the rooftops to find his master gazing at him with some humor. His smile grew lopsided in a comradely way. "It will be different again and again even if it never changes at all," Master Benzo said.

The village was lost from view as they continued up the slope. A simple torii gate



EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

Do not be wary of men who take risks with titles and lands; be wary of men who have nothing to lose.

When darkness descends, a man must find allies in the shadows.

A wise man does not fear long knives, but knives that may only strike close.

There are subtler strategies and deadlier battlefields than even I know.



EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

When ten thousand men
clash with arms and fire, it
is always a single man's
actions that make the
difference.

The only true test of
courage is the last one.

Petting scorpions with a
compassionate hand only
gets you a sting.

Friendship is truly tested
when it is time to share the
burden.

marked the sacred area, the path of packed earth turning to white stones. The gurgle of a small waterfall could be heard. Following the path the bamboo thinned out against the rocky outcropping, being replaced by massive pines. The sound of water grew stronger. Squeezing between a moss-covered rock and a giant pine they entered a shallow depression where the sunlight penetrated in a multitude of brilliant gold-green shafts. The waterfall made golden by Lady Amaterasu's blessings sparkled and danced as it sprung out of a cleft in the rocky slope to fill a large pool. A graceful bridge spanned the stream, continuing the white stone path leading up to a simple wooden shrine. Its delicate architecture was reflected in the dark pool.

Master Benzo and Goro stopped before the shrine. The ablution basin was intact and filled with fresh water, the bucket still wet from hauling the water from the pool. Goro waited for Master Benzo to wash his hands and rinse his mouth, then Goro repeated the ritual himself. Only after they had performed the purification ritual did they enter the shrine.

OTAKU AND THE MONK

Sister,

I hope this letter sees you well. I imagine that soon you and Tsanaumi will heal from your wounds and be ready to ride once again. The Empire is in great need of our attention. Not too long ago, while on my patrol, I had to dispatch some bandits who had fallen upon a lone traveler, an old monk. The three bandits had fought surprisingly well and for my efforts and the glory of Shinjo I received an arrow in the shoulder. I suspect that they were ronin Akodo, but they shall have their reward in Toshigoku nevertheless. The wound was not as deep as yours but still was a minor inconvenience. You always had to outdo me, did you not? The monk, Toba from the Sojo province, was grateful for my intercession and extracted the arrow with practiced hands. I suspect that he had seen more than a heimin's share of arrow wounds in his lifetime.

It intrigued me that one who had been samurai would cast such duties aside and wander the dangerous lands alone. When he asked if he could accompany me along the road, I accepted his company. His demeanor, while humble, still held a presence that reminded me of our sensei.

He had commanded bushi at some time in his life.

At Misae's tea house farther down the road we sat and talked about Shinsei and his teaching. Toba was most passionate about his order. Until that day I had not known there were different types of monks. Being a member of the newest sect of Shinsei, the Pure Land sect, it was his duty to teach and guide people in the way to seek enlightenment. As Misae delivered our meal of tororojiro and green tea, he described how one reaches enlightenment, breaking free of a prison of karma and achieving enlightenment by chanting the phrase "Hail to Shinsei" over and over again. This sincere and faithful chanting was supposed to be all that was required to become enlightened. My disbelief must have been evident on my face, for he apologized quickly for upsetting me.

"Peace," I said with a chuckle. "I am not in the habit of killing old monks that I share a meal with. Tell me, why would someone want to achieve your enlightenment?"

He described a large pool of majestic proportions, large enough for everyone who achieves this enlightenment to float in a large flower and bask in the glory of Shinsei and his wisdom. He asked what I thought of it. I sipped at my tea for a few moments while I thought about this. "It is not something I would wish, Toba."

He was shocked that I would not want such a reward. Was not enlightenment at the foot of Shinsei something an Otaku would seek? He had heard that our standard was a reflection of the purity that we sought and that with Shinsei's teachings we could achieve purity and enlightenment and receive everlasting joy.

I set my empty soup bowl aside on the bench. "Is the path Shinsei sets the only path?" I asked him.

It was the only one he knew of, he answered.

"Yet did you not just say that your order is one of many, each with a different vision of how to become enlightened?"

His brow drew close in thought as he focused on the distance. "Yes," he answered after a short pause.

With lunch finished I gave Misae a handful of zeni for our meals and exchanged some news about the road with her while her son stared at me from around her kimono. You would be surprised at how big he has grown. She needed the money more than I, with paying customers

scarce and her husband missing somewhere in the Lion's armies. Toba and I resumed our journey on the road to Toshi sano Kanemochi Kaeru. Toba's stride kept pace with Kaze's lazy walk, but his thoughts were quite far from the Imperial highway. I rode in silence and out of respect for the monk's contemplation I asked Kaze not to bother him.

A little farther down the road Toba asked if Battle Maidens follow Shinsei's teachings.

"Shinsei was a wise man. We believe in many of the same ideas," I said after some thought.

"But not all of his teaching?"

"No."

"Do any retire from being Battle Maidens to become nuns and follow Shinsei?"

"No," I elaborated. "We are Battle Maidens till the day we die."

We spoke no more of Shinsei. The weather was pleasant and we talked about the climate on the plains of the Unicorn.

That night we stayed with Otaku Omaki-san and her sisters. The village they watched over was neat and orderly: an honor to our family and Kami Shinjo. She had her doshin set about to remove the ronin I had left beside the road a few hours away.

In the morning I bade Toba farewell to retrace my way back down the highway.

"So will you continue your journey to Unicorn lands, Toba-san?" I asked.

"What would you advise, Otaku-sama?"

"Go," I said. "Teach the Tao. Perhaps we shall learn something new from your words." I paused for a moment, then continued with a smile. "But don't expect Shinsei to be venerated on the plains of Otaku. He was, after all, only a man."



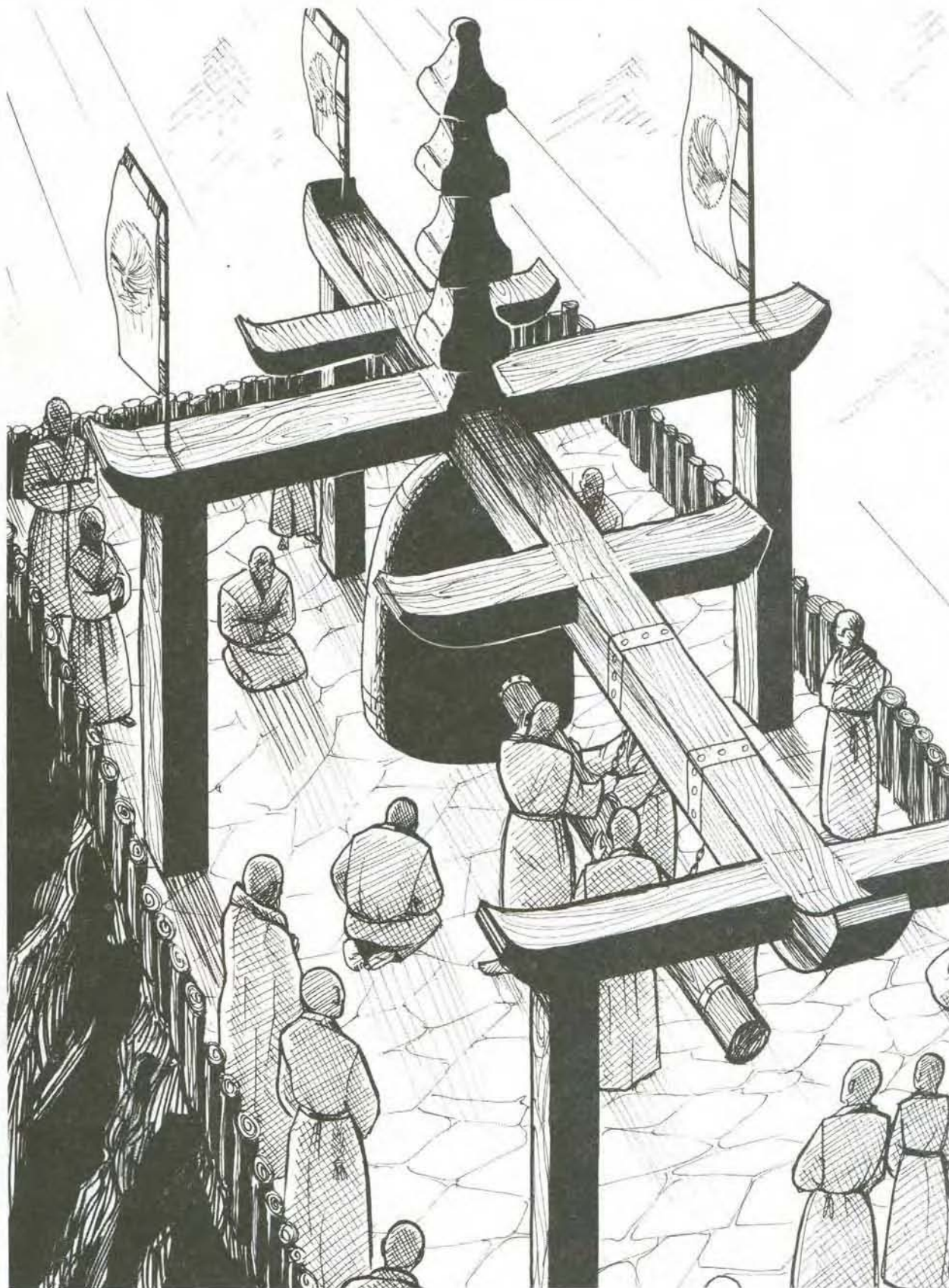
EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

Desperate men employ desperate measures.

You cannot balance the elements while you are without balance.

There are no secrets. There is no understanding. Void is all and nothing. It is the dance of the elements.

A clear mind can topple even the strongest will.



Chapter Two



The Inner Way



TALE OF TOGASHI AND SHINSEI

As Shinsei spoke, the Kami asked questions. The only one who was silent was Togashi, who listened showing no sign of understanding or interest.

Suddenly Togashi stood, looked at Shinsei, and walked away into the forest.

Mirumoto and Agasha followed and found him alone. He said, "I will not move until I understand."

They brought him food and sake, but he refused to move, or eat, or drink. Nine days passed this way, with the sun rising and setting and Togashi motionless in the center of a circle of food and drink. Then they begged Shinsei to speak to him, but he shook his head and said, "When the student is ready, the teacher is there."

On the morning of the tenth day, Togashi could barely speak. His vision was clouded, but he saw Shinsei step to the edge of the circle and kneel. Togashi told him, "I will not move until I understand."

Shinsei smiled and nodded. "Neither will I," he said and he sat down in the circle next to Togashi.

Togashi's eyes filled with astonishment and then he smiled. He nodded and a nightingale flew into the circle carrying a branch from a plum blossom tree. Togashi ate the sweet fruit from the branch, and together he and Shinsei ate the food that encircled them.

Chapter Two The Inner Way

First, there was nothing. From nothing came duality and from duality sprang the 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 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 wherein 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, embraced by the Five Rings, leads to oneness with eternity.

History

Most people in Rokugan assume monks are simply another form of shugenja, perhaps more devoted. 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, as the nascent Empire prepared for an assault on the Uichiman plains, a man calling himself Shinsei demanded an audience with the emperor. The rest of the story is well known.

After the conversation between the two men, shugenja scoured the transcript dutifully recorded by Uikku. They sought ways to incorporate this new way of thinking into their belief systems. Soon, Shinsei's first lecture influenced every shugenja's world view and no religion remained untouched. Shugenja came to see the world as organized around the Five Rings. Ancestors no longer simply died and went to Yomi; just as all 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.

Uikku was a Phoenix Clan shugenja, and the clan has benefited from this association; they have the most complete copy of the Tao of Shinsei, leading some clans to charge them with omitting important parts in the manuscripts they have released. The Phoenix Clan were already masters of magic; melding the "new way" of Shinsei with the older religions led to a new flowering of spiritual thought across Rokugan. The Phoenix Clan has perhaps the most fundamental understanding of the Tao of Shinsei. But they stopped short of Shinsei's full teaching.

OTHER TEACHINGS

Shinsei's teaching is encompassed in more than just a single conversation with the Hantei emperor. The Tao of Shinsei is just one of several lectures expounding his 'new way.' After asking for, and receiving, one samurai from each of the Great Clans, Shinsei took time to prepare, to train his 'troops.' Word of Shinsei's conversation with the emperor spread like wildfire, attracting curious shugenja and samurai from across Rokugan. Many begged him to become their sensei. Before he left for the Shadowlands, witnesses report, he held a 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 and given fanciful titles like 'the Lotus Teaching' and 'the Empty Hand Lecture.' Over the years, however, differing accounts have appeared, sometimes



A NOTE

Some of the information appearing throughout this chapter appeared in a preliminary form in *Way of the Phoenix*. This information is important enough to Monk players that it has been revised and included here. Information in this book supersedes information in that book.

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 sutras. For example, the 'Diamond Sutra,' the central text of the Shinmaki sect, expands on Shinsei's Lotus Sutra. Though Basso claimed to have received the sutra "from Shinsei himself," some believe Basso wrote it himself. (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 sutra, 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 Dragon Clan in particular took the whole of Shinsei's teachings to heart. This would have a major impact on the development of Shinseism in Rokugan.

THE RISE OF MONASTIC SHINSEISM

When Shinsei died in the Shadowlands (although 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, generally called 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 that his followers wander Rokugan and spread his message, though he emphasized the necessity of meeting frequently 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 shaped the spread of Shinseism. These councils took up doctrinal and organizational issues, 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 Shinmaki, then Shintao and recently the Pure Land sect.

Eventually, monks began to settle down around Holy Home Village, particularly in the winter months. The Dragon Clan unintentionally encouraged this process. 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 Shinmaki 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. It was at this meeting that the legendary monk Kobo remarked, "I prefer to practice Shinsei's teachings as I learned them – from Shinsei," and left. He was never seen again.

Another sect, known as **Shintao**, concentrates more on meditation and less on a study of



EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

In order to choose the correct path, you must know the pitfalls that await you.

It is the sound of purest harmony, the sound of the universe. Make your soul sing its song, and you will find there is nothing you cannot accomplish.

Only the face of all that is and is not can reveal the truth.

Winds blow, nations change, fortunes rise and fall; but the simple folk will always be asked to shoulder the weight.

Shinsei's teachings. Iconoclastic 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. The Questioners, a subset of Shintao, focus on grappling with the enigmatic riddles called koans, designed to shatter the student's perceptual framework.

Pure Land Shinseism, a recent development in Rokugan, teaches that Shinsei was a Fortune, similar in character to Jizo, Fortune of Mercy. When he died, he passed on to the "Pure Land" or Great Paradise. Here, deserving souls can study Shinseism directly from Shinsei. From the Pure Land, a person attains enlightenment and freedom from the Wheel of Existence. Lately, peasants have begun to ask shugenja to pray to Shinsei to let them, or their ancestors, into his Pure Land.

Shinsei's Teaching

Shinsei taught that to break the endless cycle of rebirth on the kharmic wheel, an individual must realize the impermanence of the world. The world is a place of suffering, caused by an individual's cravings. It is these attachments to the physical world, through passions such as anger, desire, hatred, grief and joy, which must be overcome.

Only by overcoming your perceptions and seeing beyond the world of impermanent forms can you achieve release from the Wheel of Existence. Enlightenment comes when one stops craving and quiets the self. By understanding that everything, represented by the Five Rings, comes out of the Void, you no longer need to rely on them to sustain the world.

Weakness comes from fixing the mind on the material (the world of forms) rather than the eternal. Even the Five Elements are physical, for they describe a cycle of birth, life and death; they are impermanent, a manifestation of the Void in the physical world. Focusing on the Void, the student can free his soul from the material.

A person who achieves enlightenment is called *noshin*. Those who attain this state simply cease to be. Some monks, however, elect to remain in the world of forms to lead others to enlightenment. These holy people, called *Sennin*, wander Rokugan dispensing wisdom or establish a monastery (or sect) of their own.



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 Shinmaki teaches. Although many believe Shinmaki is an outgrowth of the Dragon clan's own unorthodox interpretations of Shinseism, even that clan does not seem to know the full extent of Shinmaki's teachings. Those drawn to Shinmaki learn advanced meditation techniques said to free the mind of all illusion. Whispered stories tell of monks meditating alongside dead bodies, or spending years locked alone in a dark cell.

Members of the Pure Land sect believe the end of the current cosmic cycle is imminent, as evidenced in the general moral and political decay in Rokugan. In these dark times, Pure Land monks teach, there is no time for complex lessons. Simpler methods to enlightenment are needed. Pure Land Shinseism emphasizes the mercy of Shinsei, to whom they pray as though he were a Fortune. Enlightenment comes through divine grace (a concept foreign to most Rokugani). This sect's popularity, especially among the heimin, continues to increase mainly because it's easy to practice.

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 over 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. Indeed, the world of forms is no threat to the person who meditates properly. It eschews the usual prohibitions such as celibacy, though licentiousness is frowned upon, and against manual labor. Most monks are expected to work for their food and lodging, supporting the monastery.



Organization

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, upon entering a monastery, take a vow to observe certain rules. They may not eat meat (though they can eat fish); they must avoid violence and avoid killing for any reason; they must remain celibate, and avoid gluttony and drunkenness; they may not defile a holy place or 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. While Shinsei banned the accumulation of wealth, some 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, it 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 (often a wandering monk himself), while others receive permission to go wandering from their monastic order.

Members of a monastery are organized by a loose hierarchy, based roughly on spiritual accomplishment. Though positions are supposed to be democratically chosen based on merit, they sometimes go to former bushi. All members of a monastery wear a colored over-robe of their sect. Superior members, those 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



RANKS

A Monk with a Ring of 4 is considered an Adept of that Ring. Monks with a Ring of 5 are considered a Master, such as Master of Fire or Master of Water. Those who become masters of more than one Ring earn the right to call themselves by their own fanciful titles. Those rare individuals who master all Rings are called Master of the Five.

Master of Clouds (Fire and Water)

Master of the Heavenly Mountain (Earth and Fire)

Master of the Hidden Mountain (Water and Earth)

Master of the Inner Crucible (Fire, Water and Earth)

Master of the Gathering Storm (Air, Water and Fire)



THE TAO AND THE UNICORN

Iuchi followed Shinjo on her quest outside Rokugan. There he was mystified to discover shugenja in foreign lands. They called themselves "sorcerers," "warlocks," "magicians," and "wizards." He wondered how it was possible that a shugenja could work magic without invoking the aid of the Seven Fortunes, as their influence didn't stretch far from Rokugan. Iuchi studied with them, trying to understand their powers. He also studied his copy of the Tao of Shinsei and he understood. While many Rokugani spend their lives trying to become one with the elements, these people had an instinctive understanding of the Shinsei truism that all is one.

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.

Monasteries range in size from tiny, with only a handful of members, to immense. Many receive patronage from the bushi, who consider it meritorious to support a monastery. Typically, this is where the samurai plans to retire.

HERMITS

Some monks choose to live alone in secluded places, typically the Spine of the World Mountains or the Great Wall of the North, to seek enlightenment in private. They build small huts high in the mountains, or live in freezing caves. They grow their own food and dress in rags. Villagers leave food and supplies for the hermits to find. Many legends tell of ancient mystics descending from the mountains to perform miracles. Some of them are true.

Membership

There are two kinds of monk, the retired samurai and the traditional monk.

Those who shave their heads, change their names and retire to a life of quiet contemplation on their fortieth birthday are the monks most people think about first. They are by no means the most numerous. Often, those who join a monastery prepare for their next lifetime. They spend their remaining days meditating, composing poetry, reading sutras, painting and practicing calligraphy. Some of Rokugan's greatest art treasures were created by retired samurai. Most, however, become thoroughly bored, and many samurai simply refuse to go off quietly and make room for the younger generation. This kind of monk often finds it difficult to acquire the kind of spiritual powers commonly associated with monks and holy men. They don't have contemplative minds and they hunger for action.

By far the most common monk is the one who spends his entire life studying Shinsei's teachings. What separates monks from shugenja is the degree of their dedication. While the shugenja studies the Tao of Shinsei, he also learns about the old religions; he doesn't shut himself away in a monastery, shunning the outside world.

Typically, the monk joins a monastery as a young child, deposited on the monastery's doorstep by his or her parents (female monks are called nuns, and they too shave their heads). Though monks are not part of the social order, many come from the peasantry; because they take vows severing ties to family and clan, most bushi wouldn't think of giving up a son or daughter to a monastery (though it becomes less unthinkable for a third or fourth child, especially for poorer *ji-samurai*). They can look forward to a lifetime of study and hard work. This kind of monk is more likely to acquire the ability to perform kiho.

The Monastic Life

Monks lead a spartan life filled with menial chores, endless study and ascetic practices.

The typical day begins at dawn, with a simple breakfast of rice and pickled vegetables. Next comes the morning meditation, during which a monk carrying a 'wake up stick' whacks those who confuse 'mediation' with 'sleep.' Lunch is, again, simple, perhaps some cooked vegetables or tofu and more rice. Afterwards comes formal instruction, *Risshi* and *Sozu* instructing small groups of monks in Shinsei's sutras. Some monasteries allow individual pursuits, encouraging their members to achieve enlightenment on their own terms. Retired samurai might while away the day with painting or reading, for example. Some monks, chosen on a rotating basis, perform chores, such as cleaning the latrines or tending the gardens. In the evening comes prayers or more meditation, then bed.

Roleplaying a Monk

Most monks spend their lives either in seclusion or wandering the countryside. Sometimes, a monk may be found in a nobleman's entourage, but they never stay for long; their vows typically keep them apart. Those samurai who became monks at *inkyo* might take on the role of avenger, coming out of retirement to strap on the *daisho* once again and defend the laity from some danger. Stories of the monk who ends up routing a band of brigands are quite popular with the peasantry, and happens more often than most believe.



Some monks move among the laity, begging for food and spreading Shinsei's teachings. In return, they offer their services, telling fortunes or offering blessings. Often they're asked to pray on someone's behalf, in the belief that this buys salvation for the individual. A few monks give instruction in Shinsei's teachings when they pass through a village, though there are no organized schools for the heimin.

The Brotherhood of Shinsei believes it is their mission to protect the laity from the dangers of the Shadowlands, sometimes sending out monks to defend Rokugan. The world is a troubled place and some monks travel Rokugan's roads, fighting injustice and carrying the light of Shinsei's wisdom. Such monks may be chosen because of their devotion to Shinsei, or maybe as a test of their devotion. Or perhaps there is some other, more enigmatic reason.

No matter the circumstances of a monk's adventuring career, he is expected to adhere to the rules of the Brotherhood. He must conduct himself in an upright manner and abide by Shinsei's Eight Lotus Petals. No murder, no drunken fights, no amassing treasure. Playing a monk character, while it imposes certain restrictions, can be a fun, rewarding experience.

HONOR AND THE MONK

Honor applies to monks just as it does to samurai, but does so differently. Although monks are beyond such worldly concerns as duty to clan or family, Honor still applies. Honor is a measure of the monk's adherence to the teaching of Shinsei and his monastic vows. A monk with high Honor is devout, pure of heart and selfless. He helps those in need, takes his duties seriously and resists worldly temptations. A monk with low honor might be lazy or wretched, does not take his vows or studies seriously and revels in physical pleasures.

Characters with a high Awareness can sometimes sense a monk's Honor, affecting their reaction to the character. Those with a low Honor are surrounded by an air of impurity. Monks with a high Honor have a sense of nobility and holiness about them that is unmistakable.

Most monks stay cloistered at their monastery, practicing their esoteric practices, their principles rarely tested. A monk who performs the bare minimum expected of him may never face an honor test (although particularly lazy monks will lose honor). Those who wander Rokugan find

themselves tempted more often. Any time a monk performs an act contrary to the Path of Purification, the character loses a number of Honor points (determined by the GM). Performing a virtuous act, such as helping a person regardless of caste or giving a pauper your last morsel of food, the monk gains Honor points; such an act must be selfless (i.e., you can't do it to earn the Honor Points). See "Honor Ranks and Points" in the *L5R RPG* (page 58).

Occasionally, a monk may have to take a "Test of Honor." Use the rules presented in the *L5R RPG* (page 104).

GLORY AND THE MONK

Monks are neither samurai nor peasants; they stand a little aside from the Celestial Order. Technically they are considered heimin, but it is an arrogant samurai indeed who will mistreat a gently smiling follower of Shinsei. As such, all monks have a Glory of 2, and this Glory Rank never changes.



Monks and Magic

The goal of the Brotherhood of Shinsei is not the acquisition of magical power. This is, however, the natural outgrowth of their esoteric practices. Monks are capable of amazing feats. Some people may think kiho more powerful than spells. That's what happens when you tap the power of the Void.

What makes monks different from shugenja is the way in which their magic works. While shugenja call on nature spirits and tap the energy of the Five Rings, a monk's power flows from within and without. It flows from without because the monk calls on the very power of the universe, beyond Celestial Courts and elemental Rings – the Void. Yet a monk can only do this through rigorous training of his mind and body. Thus, the door to the universe is through the self, as Shinsei taught. The Brotherhood calls this kiho.

Kiho is the magic available to most Brotherhood Monks. They may not use spell scrolls because they reinforce the artificial distinctions monks are trying to overcome, nor do they learn to read them.

EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

Brave men may be forgotten; brave deeds never so.

You need no armor, you need no sword. You need only to know that you cannot be defeated.

Destiny does not believe in secrets. When something is meant to be, it is obvious to all but the foolish.

When your enemy is certain you cannot act, victory is within your reach.



SO WHAT CAN I DO NOW THAT I'M ENLIGHTENED?

For mechanics on how to become enlightened and what an enlightened character can do, please turn to page 113.

Enlightenment

A pair of beggars huddled around a small fire in a winter storm.

"I wish it were not so cold!" said the first.

"I can arrange for that," said the second.

"Then do so," said the first, "and quickly!"

With that, the second beggar put out the fire.

The greatest goal of those who follow the Tao of Shinsei is to reach enlightenment. The concept of enlightenment is tenuous and cannot be fully

expressed in words. In fact, the very concept of illustrating enlightenment in words defies the concept. Enlightenment is beyond description, a higher state of consciousness that can only be understood by those who have attained it.

Though by its very nature enlightenment is wordless, enlightened individuals throughout the ages have written endless koans to help others along the Way, as the road to enlightenment is often called. The paradoxical nature of the koan is often ignored by the unenlightened, and the philosophical riddles are disregarded as mere babble. Ironically, the truth behind many koans is to demonstrate their untruth. In the end, words are necessary for understanding but become a burden to true understanding, and must be disregarded. For this reason, the koans of the Brotherhood are paradoxical, confusing, and intentionally self-negating. As Shinsei himself once said, "Enlightenment can only be found without words, but cannot be approached without words."

Anyone can become enlightened, from the lowliest eta to the most powerful emperor, though those who live their lives according to the tenets



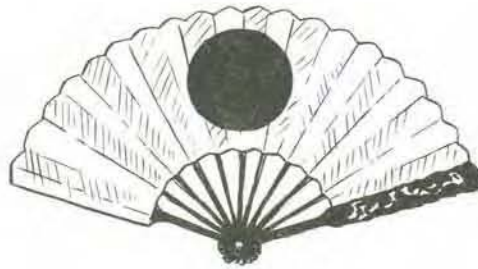
of Shinseism are said to stand a better chance at finding the Way. Karma is certainly a factor, and an enlightened soul can hardly hold his elevated position if he wishes ill upon others. Enlightenment is by no means permanent; those who are unworthy will find themselves cast back into doubt and confusion just as quickly.

The most basic concept of enlightenment is simplicity. The enlightenment brought about by following the Way is immediate, an instant and complete perception of reality. Just as all things in nature are permitted to be themselves, no more is required for a human soul to reach its full potential than merely to realize itself. As all souls are different, so is every path to enlightenment different. What one individual finds to be enlightening, another may not. Each must follow his own path amid the constraints and freedoms of reality.

A popular approach in the quest for enlightenment is the practice of deep meditation, a state in which the soul blends perfectly into the dance of the elements. It is a form of meditation in which the mind is encouraged to focus upon nothing. Through this state, the mind reaches a perfect state of non-being. It is said that a minute in this state is like unto a minute of enlightenment.

The monks of Shinsei believe that enlightenment can be most easily found in the casting off of material things. Some sects extend this belief so far as to include the body itself. Fear, desire, regret, the three greatest sins in Shinseism, all stem from the needs and weaknesses of the body. If there were no physical self, what would one fear? What could one possibly desire? What need would there be to regret? For these monks, the body is as much a corruptive force as any enemy. Only by rising above the body, by setting aside its weaknesses and allowing the soul to flourish, can the true nature of the self be unleashed.

Another popular concept behind the idea of enlightenment is the idea of restfulness. Only one without ambition can find the goal. Consider the idea of a man climbing a mountain. A monk of Shinsei would suggest that only the climber who does not wish to reach the top has a hope of achieving his goal. The climber who thinks only of the top divides his focus by half. The climber who further wonders what he will find when he arrives divides it by one third. The climber who quests to reach the top before all others has the



least hope of all. Similarly, those who seek most rigorously the goal of enlightenment have the least hope of finding it.

There are many dangers upon the road to enlightenment, what the followers of Shinsei call "false paths." The skills that one learns in the practice of Shinseism – proper concentration, cultivation of a ready mind, mastery of the elements, a powerful and fluid character – can potentially provide an unworthy soul with great power, an illusion of enlightenment that seems true but leads only to ruin. Many great souls throughout history have believed their path to enlightenment to be straight and true, only to be brought low by their own arrogance.

An added danger is presented by the presence of evil spirits such as kansen, which find no end of amusement by tormenting pious monks. Such creatures can find the elemental powers of a skilled monk irresistible, and quickly lead such a powerful individual down a false path to corruption. This is always a sad event, and the Brotherhood seeks to redeem a traveler on a false path wherever possible.

It is generally agreed upon that Shinsei was enlightened (certain sects, especially the Questioners, doubt this, but they make a practice of doubting everything). However, has any other soul gained enlightenment? This is a difficult question. Technically, the answer is yes. Many large temples, such as the Four Temples, conduct secret "tests" to determine an enlightened soul. The abbot of the temple presents those that pass with certification of enlightenment.

Of course, a material document is hardly proof of spiritual enlightenment, and many temples laugh at the very idea. Those who find enlightenment are likely to live out their lives in obscurity, for those who find the Way are unlikely to seek fame and fortune for their accomplishment.



KOANS

A popular teaching method of the Brotherhood is the *koan*, or "public proposition." These are short statements that seem to make little or no sense, meant to illustrate the truth of reality. These seemingly simple statements have deeper meaning on many levels that may be found only through reflection and meditation. Often, the purpose of a koan is nothing more than an attempt to demonstrate the uselessness of words, a fact that many new to the study of the Tao find frustrating.



EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

There cannot be two
suns in the heavens or two
Emperors on earth.

The Tao of Shinsei is
more than clever sayings
and trite wisdom; the
wisdom of Shinsei contains
the secrets of the Universe.

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

One must bow to offer
aid to a fallen man.

True nobility comes not
from being superior to
another man, but from
being superior to your past.

Types of Monks

The Monks of Rokugan

There are countless monasteries and temples scattered across the face of the Emerald Empire, each with its own customs, schedules, duties, and traditions. Each monk must be familiar with the ways of his particular monastery. After all, someone must see that the needs of the brothers within are met, and it is the responsibility of all monks to look after one another.

Inevitably, however, each monastery has a key figure who sees to it that the duties are disseminated appropriately to the different brothers. These men, the abbots of Rokugan's monasteries, use a number of factors to determine what duties each individual brother must perform. The majority of these duties are based upon the time and actions of the monk since joining the temple. One external factor that is commonly considered, however, is the station of the monk's birth.

There are two distinct types of monks in Rokugan. The first, and more frequent, are those monks from the ranks of the peasantry. For whatever reason, these men and women left their lives as farmers, merchants, craftsmen, or even geisha behind to embrace the path of Shinsei. Despite the hardships of the heimin's life, few peasants view the life of a monk as a significant improvement. Hours of meditation, days and weeks of fasting, rigorous physical conditioning... these are not things to which the common farmer of Rokugan aspires. For a peasant to take up the study of the Tao

voluntarily, he must have had a moment of enlightenment so profound that it forever alters his world view; such moments of pristine clarity are rare among the heimin. Furthermore, postulants must undergo a grueling and often nonsensical series of tasks when they ask to be permitted into the monastery's ranks, and many peasants fail to stay the course. More commonly, those of peasant stock become monks when they are given as a child to a monastery or temple to raise.

The second type of monk found within Rokugan's monasteries is the retired samurai. According to commonly held conventions, a samurai who reaches the age of forty should, after a lifetime of service to his lord, family, and clan, shave his head and enter a monastery to seek enlightenment. Although in actuality a samurai may join a monastery at any age, the truth is that few do so precisely at age forty unless circumstances prevent their further service to their lord and clan. The Great Bear Hida Kisada and the Grey Crane Kakita Toshimoko are the two most prominent samurai who have long since passed their theoretical age of retirement, yet continue to serve their clans.

LOW-BORN MONKS

Monks who were born of the heimin class most often come to join monasteries when they are young. Families of farmers who cannot bear the burden of another mouth to feed have been known to leave their infant children within temples or outside monasteries, desperately hoping that someone will care for the child when they cannot. Frequently these orphaned children find homes in other heimin families. Other times they are taken in by the monks themselves.

Beyond the small number of those peasants taken into monasteries as children, there are relatively few of the heimin class who join the ranks of the monk in their youth. The brother monks of Rokugan believe that only those who truly seek enlightenment should be permitted within the walls of their monasteries, and they spend the first several months of a new entrant's life within the monastery assigning him seemingly pointless tasks to test his resolve. These tasks test both the mental and physical fortitude of a new monk, for both are required to achieve the true harmony of mind and body that enlightenment requires. Being sent to the peak of a great mountain to retrieve a large stone or

being assigned to count the number of stones that comprise the floor of the temple are excellent examples of these tasks.

Those who endure these chores for several months manage to convince the brotherhood that they are sincere in their desire to seek enlightenment. They will continue to have arduous tasks set before them, but ones of a more utilitarian nature such as cleaning the temples or memorizing long passages from the Tao of Shinsei. As the years progress, these routines instill considerable mental and physical discipline in the monks. This permits them to fast for days on end, meditate within the freezing waters of a winter spring, or walk upon coals.

In short, it frees their spirits to seek a higher understanding of the world.

At the age that samurai are beginning to retire and join monasteries, monks from the peasant classes are beginning to develop a true understanding of the universe. They are the abbots of the monasteries that accept new brothers from the samurai class. They guide new monks on the beginning steps to enlightenment. And it is they who set the arduous tasks before their newest brothers to test their resolve, just as they were tested years before. They know that the hardships they set before others will aid their new brothers in finding their paths to enlightenment, just as they did themselves so long ago.

The monks most frequently encountered by the peasantry of Rokugan are former heimin themselves. Although they have left their former lives behind, the monks remember the hardships and thanklessness of the role that the farmer and simple villagers of the Empire have set before them. One of the first lessons a monk learns is that he is part of a greater whole, and he must aid others in order for his own consciousness to ascend. Thus monks move among the peasantry of Rokugan, aiding them in their tasks, working alongside them, and offering them the guidance that so many desperately need in their lives.

Monks born of the heimin class are more often associated with the study of the Fortunes. Although virtually all monks study the teachings of Shinsei in varying degrees, the concept of the Fortunes is considerably easier for the heimin mind to grasp as they begin their lives as monks. These monks spend many years in study, focusing on the Tao and the theology of the Fortunes. Fasting, meditation, medicine, and various craft skills are also common among these monks.

RETIRED SAMURAI

Monks who have joined the ranks of the monasteries from the samurai caste are a varied lot. Many of the most notable and enlightened souls to have served the Brotherhood throughout Rokugan's history have been former samurai. However, some of the Brotherhood's greatest failures were also samurai who could not make the adjustment to their new lives.

Discipline is rarely a problem for these former samurai. Their entire lives have been lived according to a rigid, inflexible code of conduct that has honed their bodies and minds to a razor edge. When they enter a monastery, they do so physically and mentally conditioned to begin the path to enlightenment.

Spiritually, however, very few of them are adequately prepared for their new lives.

In their former lives as samurai, these new monks were accustomed to being treated with deference and accommodation. They were the chosen few, the nobility of the Empire who looked down upon the heimin and hinin as lesser creatures. Overcoming this perception of themselves as greater beings is the most difficult step facing the newly-robed monks. This sole hurdle can take years or even decades to overcome, and many monks fail to reach enlightenment because of their stubborn arrogance.

Another staggering task the new monk must overcome is the embrace of humility and poverty. Although in theory the samurai is a compassionate, humble being, in truth many are proud, even haughty individuals who see many of the mundane tasks set before them as monks to be beneath them or unclean. The notion of aiding the peasants in the village outside the monastery as they work the fields is a truly horrifying notion for many former samurai.

Those monks who are able to overcome the mental trappings of their lives as samurai are ready for the spiritual growth that leads them down the path to enlightenment.

As the Tao of Shinsei is so highly revered by the samurai caste, monks from that class are much more likely to focus on the study of Shintao over the Fortunes. Since the proclamation of Hantei Genji that unified Shintao and the worship of the Fortunes, there are few monks who are not learned in the ways of both. Nonetheless, many retired samurai spend much more time studying the wisdom of Shinsei than



CASE STUDY: HEIMIN MONK

As a child, an outbreak of plague struck Nobuo's village, leaving the boy without any family whatsoever. With no one able to take him in, he joined a nearby monastery. For years he was given only the most menial of tasks, as the monks felt he was too young to find his true path. Nobuo, however, took every chance to hear readings from the Tao, and he listened closely. During his seventh year at the monastery, a casual conversation with the abbot in the garden resulted in Nobuo's appointment as a full brother monk.

Nobuo is now well beyond the age at which many samurai retire. He has remained at the same monastery his entire life, and is now the abbot. Although fit for his age, Nobuo has long since abandoned the physical conditioning of the monks, choosing instead to spend more time in study and meditation. A lifelong disciple of the Fortunes, he often travels to villages around the monastery and asks the Seven Fortunes' blessing upon the people and crops there. He knows that the hardships faced by the heimin are part of their role in the Celestial Order, and he attempts to offer them whatever comfort he can to ease their burden.



CASE STUDY: RETIRED SAMURAI

Hikado is a monk who resides at a small temple within the northern reaches of the Crab lands. Five years ago, he was known as Hida Arashi, a valiant Crab bushi serving alongside his brothers on the wall. A dreadful injury caused him to retire rather than drain the resources of his clan with a lengthy recovery. His years as a monk have not been easy. Adjusting to the stark surroundings was simple enough, but the constant studies and the work among the heimin were difficult to embrace for a Hida warrior.

Now, however, Hikado relishes his new life.

Though he reveres Osano-Wo both as an ancestor and as a mighty Fortune, he has learned that the Tao of Shinsei holds wisdom he never imagined. He spends long hours each day studying the truths it contains. This fills him with a sense of belonging that he never truly felt as a warrior, and he marvels at his place within the Celestial Order.

Other parts of the day are filled with Hikado's other training. He practices a variant of kaze-do with the other monks, keeping his body as fit and sharp as his mind. His chores at the temple include the maintenance of the garden, another task that settles his spirit and helps him achieve harmony of the mind and the body.



following the ways of the many Fortunes. However, those samurai who felt a particularly close bond with their ancestors during their lives as warriors may choose the Fortunes, as the worship of ancestors falls within its auspices.

The studies of ex-samurai monks can vary considerably from their fellow monks. Although they of course study the Tao of Shinsei and the Fortunes, they focus considerably more on various martial skills than their brothers. Athletics, unarmed combat, and the use of peasant weapons are frequently studied topics. Although some might view the study of martial skills to be in conflict with the desired outcome of enlightenment, the opposite is actually true. The conditioning of the body helps establish harmony between the mind and body. Also, the familiar physical exercise that was so much a part of their lives while they served as samurai is a relaxing, comforting activity for these monks. It helps them to clear their minds and focus upon the new and unfamiliar goals set before them.

DUTIES

A monk's origin often has bearing on his duties within a monastery. During the course of a monk's studies at any given temple or monastery, he will sooner or later perform virtually every chore or task involved in its operation. This allows the leaders of the temple to determine what callings best suit the individual monks in their lives of service. Generally speaking, however, there are duties that monks who hail from the heimin class are more suited to perform, just as there are tasks more appropriate for retired samurai.

Monks who have experienced the life of the peasantry often begin their tenure in a monastery with menial tasks such as cleaning and repair. This is familiar work for them, something they are accustomed to that helps settle their minds and gives them a comfortable routine to follow.

As they become more attuned to their new life, they gradually are given more academic and spiritual tasks, such as the studying of the Tao and lengthy meditation on their role in the world. They are also given many of the monastery's most charitable works to perform, such as maintaining the small temples that dot the countryside and working with the heimin to ease the burden of their lot in life.

Conversely, monks from the samurai caste follow almost the opposite routine. When they first enter the monastery, they are given academic tasks. A samurai's body and mind are already disciplined, and they must be introduced to the manner of task to which they are accustomed. Easing them into their new lives usually involves studying the Tao, fasting, and meditating to achieve wisdom. As the former samurai become more comfortable with their new lives, they are given more humbling physical tasks. Before entering the Brotherhood, such tasks would have been utterly unthinkable to the samurai. Following their period of meditation and introspection, however, they begin to see the value of these simple tasks to focus their mind, body, and spirit toward the same goal.

An additional task normally undertaken by the former samurai among the Brotherhood is the limited diplomatic function of the monasteries. The samurai who control the land in which a monastery is located frequently come to expect certain tasks or services of the monks, and requests from the daimyo of the land are not uncommon. The monks from the samurai caste are frequently called upon to deal with the requests of the daimyo, as they understand the thinking and workings of samurai society. Fortunately, most of the requests entertained by the monks are services that they would gladly provide anyway: requests for blessings, invitations for the Brotherhood's wisdom in negotiations, or aid in the construction of a new shrine or temple. On some occasions, however, there can be conflicts of interest between the monks and the samurai who occupy their lands. In these cases, the insight of the retired samurai among the brother monks is invaluable in defusing a potentially dangerous situation.

MONASTERIES AND TEMPLES

Hardly any temples in Rokugan are composed exclusively of monks either from the peasantry or from the samurai. The leaders of the Brotherhood



are careful to ensure that a mixture of monks from all walks of life is found at each temple throughout the Empire. Nonetheless, a monk's origins have a large impact on the type of temple in which he serves, the studies he undertakes, and even the path to enlightenment that he attempts to follow.

The simple Shintao shrines and temples to the Fortunes that dot the countryside of the Empire are most frequently maintained by monks from the peasant stock. These small, utilitarian sites have little more purpose than to serve as a location for peasants to offer prayers and leave offerings to the gods in hopes of bringing a bountiful harvest, although traveling samurai may also visit these shrines. There is little in the way of a library; frequently these shrines have at most a single monk with a crude and abridged copy of the Tao for the education of the heimin.

Retired samurai monks more commonly occupy larger, more isolated temples. The seclusion from the rest of the Empire helps them free their minds and spirits to focus on enlightenment. Some of the larger of these

isolated temples are notorious for their sohei, or warrior-monks. The most prominent example, the Temple of Osano-Wo on the Plains of Thunder, is populated largely by former Crab samurai and the stockiest of the peasant-born monks. New temples and monasteries are also beginning to appear throughout the Empire that subscribe to the tenets of the Shinden Yaruki Jakko temple in the capital. This blend of Shintao and bushido is attractive to many monks who hail from the samurai caste.

The different mixture of monks at varying temples throughout the Empire sometimes results in different outlooks for the organizations. A temple populated mostly by retired samurai positioned in the lands of the Lion will have a considerably different outlook from a temple of monks from the heimin class located in the Phoenix Clan holdings. Although the Brotherhood believes in allowing individual monasteries to pursue their own teachings and paths to enlightenment, it is not unheard of for rivalry or even subtle hostility to occur between temples of opposing viewpoints.

EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

The elements are not the means to an end... they are the beginning and the end.

As an ocean to a small stream, the leader to his people, this is the Tao to the world.





TALE OF SHINSEI AND THE TWO CRANE THUNDERS

After Doji Yasurugi's death, Shinsei said sadly, "His soul is gone and we are lost without it"

Then came a tearful gasp and a shuddering "No."

From behind them, Doji Konishiko stepped forward and knelt beside her brother. Her eyes were dark and shattered, and tears fell from them like salt sea foam. Shinsei's eyes

widened at the sight of her, and he watched as she lifted her dead brother's new-forged sword. Tears streamed down her face as she looked into her mother's blue eyes. "His soul is here," she whispered.

"And here." Shinsei bent down and his hand cupped the girl's chin. The monk stared into her eyes for a moment, as if recognizing some essence which was within her. "You are his twin," he said softly, "the twin of Yasurugi?" The girl nodded and Shinsei burst into laughter, shocking in the cold silence of the once bright pavilion. "Then we are not defeated yet! You share the soul of Thunder. All is not lost while you still live!"

The laughter of the monk echoed through the room, bringing light where there had been darkness and hope where all had been lost.

The Tao of Shinsei

"Every day on the Carpenter Wall, I picked up something new.

Every day in the Four Temples, I leave something behind."

-Tetsuya, Shinpu of the Four Temples, former daimyo of the Kaiu

The foremost religious text in the Emerald Empire is, without a doubt, the Tao of Shinsei. For the Brotherhood, the Tao is the first step on the path of enlightenment.

The Tao was not written by Shinsei. Most of the Tao was first transcribed by Shiba, from the reports of witnesses, or from direct dictation. Some say that the Tao is far too large and expansive to have been the words of Shinsei alone and claim that sections seem to have been added at a later date.

Variations do exist in the voice of certain sutras, inflections that suggest multiple authors. Does this imply that perhaps there was more than one "Shinsei?" Perhaps they were scholars whose duty it was to restore the Tao and, in so doing, added a bit of their modern experience? It is entirely possible, and a feasible explanation for the Tao's durability through the ages.

Historians are quick to point out that the Tao is not original, but that Shiba's manuscripts were mostly destroyed. The current incarnation of the Tao is pieced together largely from memory, but that does not necessarily mean that the words are not Shinsei's.

The Tao consists of many dozens of scrolls, divided into three "books." The first book is the Book of Discussion, detailing the conversations Shinsei held with the Kami, as well as various tales of Shinsei's travels. The later sections seem to be meant as parables, as they are clearly

apocryphal. If Shinsei had traveled as extensively as the Book of Discussion suggests, he would never have reached the Shadowlands in time for the Day of Thunder. Again, radical scholars maintain that this suggests that there was more than one author, and that the term "Shinsei" refers to any one of dozens of enlightened individuals throughout history, perhaps reincarnations of the original Shinsei himself.

The second book of the Tao is the Book of Duties, essentially an instruction manual for monks. The duties of the Brotherhood are structured in precise detail, with 225 laws governing monk behavior. The laws are given in order of severity, from minor offenses to egregious crimes. Each is accompanied by a story presenting the tragedies that befell individuals who disregarded the rules.

The third book of the Tao is the Book of the Soul. This book is not Shinsei's, but was added later by the Phoenix founders of the Brotherhood as an attempt to resolve discrepancies between the Tao and kami worship. This book contains discourses on mysticism, dissertations on shugenja doctrine and behavior, and perhaps the most highly developed treatise on psychology ever written. The Book of the Soul is meant to be a tool by which monks may assist laypersons on the path to enlightenment, but its observations on behavior and the human condition have been an invaluable tool to magistrates, as well.

Commonly available copies of the Tao are by no means complete. The most complete copy rests in Gisei Toshi, where it was pieced together after the great fire centuries ago. Few are aware of the existence of this "True Tao," and most of those that know of it are forbidden to look upon it. Even the Brotherhood is not allowed near the remains of the original Tao, a fact that causes friction between the Phoenix and the monks of Shinsei even to this day.

The reason the Phoenix guard the Tao so jealously is unknown. Most believe this simply stems from the Phoenix Clan's wish to fulfill their duty in protecting the Empire's religion. Some believe that the Phoenix wish to maintain a monopoly on wisdom and are loath to share any of the potential power of the true Tao. Others believe that the Phoenix hide the Tao because it holds some terrible secret, that the original teachings of Shinsei bear a revelation that would shock Rokugani society to its core.

They're right.

The Secret of the Tao

The darkest secret of the Tao is simple.
Humans are more powerful than gods.

In a society built by the kami, based upon reverence, obeisance, and total obedience toward them, to discover that they are inferior could turn the entire Empire upon its ear. The reasoning behind Shinsei's belief is more complex than it appears. Divine personages do indeed have more raw might than a human. The physical world, however, is unimportant. Reality cycles through many different states of consciousness and the physical is merely one. True power, true ability to endure and emerge triumphant, stems only from knowledge of one's true place in the cosmos. Divine personages do not have the capability to truly know themselves; their power twists their perceptions. Because they believe they can do anything, they will never know their true capabilities. A human, ironically, stands at the other end of the spectrum. Because mortals are capable of so little, they often impose no limitations on themselves.

For a mortal, anything is possible.

A Fortune will never find enlightenment.

The Asako know this better than most and invoke this knowledge when training their henshin. The Phoenix have seen what an enlightened henshin is capable of and the false paths that may befall a soul who drinks the power of immortality. Knowledge of mankind's power will ruin the very innocence and openness that allow him to transcend his lowly position. By reaching too high, the unprepared soul is cast forever low. The Phoenix thus carefully protect the Tao's secret, lest the knowledge destroy itself. Those that seem ready to handle the knowledge are invited to become henshin.

This is not to say that henshin are the only beings capable of enlightenment. The monks of Shinsei regularly achieve enlightenment. The darkest secret of the Tao is known to a few wise sages of the Brotherhood; the realization is natural to those who have recognized their true place. However, these sages have come to the same conclusion as the Phoenix – that the world is not ready for such knowledge.

RULES OF THE BROTHERHOOD

The Brotherhood of Shinsei follows a series of strict regulations, most of which are laid out in excruciating detail in the Book of Duties. A copy can be found in nearly every monastery.

Every twenty days, monks gather at their temple or monastery for a reading of the Book of Duties. At this time, monks who are guilty of any violation of the rules are expected to step forward and confess. The Book of Duties lists no punishments. As a result, punishments vary from temple to temple, from exile to disfigurement. Many temples offer no punishment, expecting the monk to be honorable enough to recognize his flaws and deal with himself appropriately. The offense is forgotten and never mentioned again. "To speak is a moment's shame. To remain silent is a lifelong shame" is a tenet attributed to Shinsei.

Those who are found guilty but do not confess are cast out of the monastery and shunned. No further punishment is offered, though the monks notify the appropriate authorities in the case of heinous crimes. Overall, it is believed that the monk's own karma will punish him in time. The law of karma states that there is no unjust pleasure or pain. All good and evil are a product of one's own deeds, either in this life or another. Those who do evil will inevitably be punished. Those who do good will be rewarded by elevation to a higher level of existence in the next life.

The most notable of the laws of the Brotherhood are as follows: do not eat meat (except for fish), avoid causing violence, do not cause death to any being, remain celibate, avoid intoxicants, speak no harmful language, do not defile any sanctified place, and never, through action or omission, allow evil or ignorance to flourish.

In addition to that which the monk must not do, the Book of Duties is very specific in regards to what a monk is expected to do. A monk must become a paragon of the following virtues: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, referred to as the Eight Petals of the Lotus. Statues of Shinsei often depict a lotus at his feet as a symbol of these virtues, and some strict sects believe that enlightenment cannot be obtained without mastery of all of these virtues.

Female monks (nuns) are welcome in the Brotherhood although, as the Phoenix scholars



THE TAO AND THE CRANE

When the Asahina joined the Crane they brought with them much of the knowledge of the Tao which the Phoenix Clan stores in their vast libraries. However, rather than treating the Tao of Shinsei as separate from life, a thing to be studied and pondered, the Asahina believe that the Tao applies to all living things, and that reality is a seamless web. Within this web all things are interrelated, and something which touches part of that structure touches the whole of reality. Thus, by changing one part of the world for the better, the Asahina believe that they are changing the whole of the world.



TALE OF SHINSEI AND BAYUSHI

A fable, beloved by the Scorpion, has Shinsei telling a tale to Bayushi before he entered in the contest of the Kami.

"There was once a little frog who lived by the riverside. One day, a scorpion wandered by and asked the little frog if he would carry him across the river.

"The scorpion said to the frog, 'Carry me across the river.' The frog said, 'I will not. For if I do, you will sting me.' The scorpion said, 'I will not. For if I do, we will both drown.'

"The frog saw wisdom in the scorpion's words, so he let her climb on his back and began swimming across the river. About halfway across, he felt a painful sting in his back.

"The frog felt the scorpion's poison flow into his heart, and as death closed in on him, the both began to sink into the cold water. Just before his nose slipped under the waves, the frog said, 'Scorpion, now we will both drown!' But the scorpion smiled..." Shinsei paused again and turned to look at Bayushi "...and she said, 'But little frog, I can swim.'"

After that, Bayushi entered the contest... and lost.

who first formed the Brotherhood were men, men have traditionally held power. However, nuns are treated no differently than monks and are presented with the same rights and privileges as male members of the Brotherhood. Most monasteries are strictly divided by sex to avoid possible complications cohabitation may cause on vows of celibacy. In contrast, some monasteries believe that untested vows lead to a false path, and encourage interaction between monks and nuns, trusting them to fulfill their vows without drastic and unnatural separation.

In addition to the standard restrictions and expectations, many monks impose additional rules upon themselves. A vow of silence is not uncommon. Rather than face the possibility of speaking words that are impure or angry, some monks choose never to speak at all. A good number of monks historically regarded to have gained enlightenment are said to have never spoken. Though some believe the enlightenment

of these individuals was due in part to their vow of silence, this was not always the case. Silence is more frequently a product of enlightenment. Just as nothing in the physical world affects an enlightened soul, little remains to move him to speak.

Certain sects and temples reject sections of the Book of Duties. Monks that serve the Temples of Bente and Bishamon are allowed to marry and have families. Bishamon and Bente are quite popular among the common folk, and it is thought that this distinction fosters closeness and understanding between lay people and monks.

THE TEACHINGS OF THE BROTHERHOOD

Though the training of a young novice can vary radically from one temple to the next, there is a certain vein of tradition that is maintained. Those who train to become monks are expected to master certain skills so that they might become better spiritual advisors.

The six main teachings of the Brotherhood are as follows:

Monks are expected to display mastery of the obscure and mystical. This includes not only a basic knowledge of spells and kiho, but also esoteric passages of the Tao. These "lost" sections of the Tao hold hidden wisdom invaluable to a monk. Monks are expected to display mastery of the mundane. This includes commonly quoted Shintao sutras, psychology, medicine, and other modern practices. The medical discoveries of the Brotherhood of Shinsei in the last few centuries have had a dramatic effect in enhancing the condition of life in the Emerald Empire, mostly in sanitation and herbalism. Monks are expected to display knowledge of theoretical science, and the ability to





explain the unknown. This is especially useful in the philosophical debates that arise between members of the Brotherhood, or for explaining supernatural phenomena. Monks are expected to display a capacity to speak fluidly, especially in regard to the Tao. A monk must be eloquent if he is to be a successful teacher. Monks are expected to display familiarity with poetry. The breezy, ephemeral nature of haiku is closely tied to Shinseism. It has often been said that haiku is the language of the Tao. Finally, monks are expected to display familiarity with military matters. Monks are pacifists, forbidden to take lives, but the necessity of maintaining strength and defensive capabilities in order to better combat evil is recognized as a necessary practice. The sohei (warrior-monks) have embraced this study beyond all others and are regarded as the finest martial artists in Rokugan.

Monks do not teach novices in the traditional Rokugani manner. Monks lead by example or by the assignment of duties meant to indirectly strengthen the body and spirit. Those who do not grow frustrated, who see through the apparent tediousness of their labors to the true purpose, are worthy of the training.

WORSHIP IN THE BROTHERHOOD

There is no worship of the Tao. The path to enlightenment is more philosophy than religion and demands no worship. However, monks are holy men with a close tie to the spirit world. Monks of Shinsei are often called upon to perform religious services in honor of the Fortunes, kami, or ancestors. While shugenja often perform services for the samurai class, monks are more commonly called upon by farmers, merchants, and other low-born individuals. Monks are not samurai and are thus more accessible to the general public.

Rokugani seldom gather in great numbers to worship, usually at festivals and important ceremonies. Religious observance tends to be a private affair. Those who visit a temple or shrine to worship do so alone, sometimes requesting the aid of a monk or shugenja in their prayers.

The Empire's countless temples, monasteries, and shrines are a testament to religion's importance to the Rokugani people. Every city has at least one temple maintained by the Brotherhood, and even the smallest peasant village still has a small shrine to a kami or fallen hero.

Though the Brotherhood of Shinsei functions as a united whole, it is surprisingly divided. The Brotherhood separates itself by sect (philosophical differences in interpretation of the Tao). However, the monks of Shinsei realize these divisions as differences of opinion and nothing more. Shinseism is an extraordinarily tolerant religion, accepting of a diversity of ideas. In fact, the illusion of a single Rokugani religion is a product of this tolerance. Ancestor worship, Fortune worship, worship of the kami and mikokami, and peasant superstition are separate religions bound into a single whole by the all-pervasive Tao. Those who follow the Tao are encouraged to adopt those tenets of religion that suit them and discard the rest. New ideas and interpretations are welcome, as long as they do not harm or exclude others. This may seem incongruous in an Empire as traditional as Rokugan, but where the Tao is concerned, change is a tradition.

For this reason, the monks of Shinsei get along well despite philosophical differences. Though they might enjoy a heated debate, they rarely carry arguments to a personal level. In fact, many monks adopt tenets of other religions, applying them to the Tao itself. The only religion that the Brotherhood finds truly disagreeable is *maho*. The monks of Shinsei will go to nearly any lengths to put down the practice of *maho* and can be relied upon to provide support to any Witch Hunters or Inquisitors that require it.

SECTS OF THE BROTHERHOOD

The various Shinseist sects all agree in one respect. Enlightenment can be found by those ready to receive it. To become prepared to receive enlightenment, one must master the Tao, "the Way." What exactly "the Way" is and how one must master it is where sects begin to diverge. Some of these sects are no larger than a few dozen individuals, though most are widespread, with a few members found in every major temple.

Clinging to one sect or another can be a factor in the internal politics of the Brotherhood. Members of the sect followed by the Hantei gain great favor in the eyes of religious scholars, and a monk in the same sect is likely to receive favors and advancement. As surprising as it may be to see such politics among a group of ascetics, it seems that human nature is the same everywhere. The following are the six largest sects of the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

THE SCORPION AND THE TAO

Bayushi refused to send Shosuro against Fu Leng. There is speculation that Bayushi did not trust Shinsei, a sentiment that exists in many Scorpions even to this day. The most venomous attacks on the Tao of Shinsei come from Scorpion scholars who doubt its authenticity. As the Scorpion scholar Soshi Muyoko wrote, "If Shinsei actually said everything that is in the Tao, he would be still saying it."

But even more significant than Bayushi's refusal is what occurred when Shinsei left with his Seven Thunders. The next morning, despite his objections, and despite his orders to the contrary, Shosuro rode out with Shinsei to meet Fu Leng. She was the only Thunder to ride out without the approval of her clan's progenitor.

Shosuro was also the only one to return.



KAZE-DO

After Togashi Kaze's death, his non-violent fighting form passed on to the bugei as jiu-jutsu. Many samurai, having observed the style, developed their own open-handed fighting techniques. These were more violent and better suited to the battlefield. Kaze's original philosophy was nearly lost, but for the efforts of the Monks of Kaimetsu-uo. They are the only source of Kaze's wisdom in its truest form.

Those who want to use martial arts (particularly cinematic martial arts) can use this simple rule-of-thumb. The character declares his action, describing in detail what he hopes to accomplish. The gamemaster then assigns a TN based on this description, and the playing rolls dice according to his character's Agility + Hand-to-hand skill. Let common sense prevail.

For example, Tenjin wants to perform a spinning back kick to knock the samurai's sword out of his hand. The gamemaster figures the Target Number would depend on the samurai's Reflexes x 5 (lets say $3 \times 5 = 15$), plus an additional 10 points. The total TN for this move is 25.

For more detailed treatments of empty-hand combat, see Kaze-Do in Appendix Two of *Way of the Dragon* and Mizu-Do in Appendix Two of *Way of the Crane*.

Shinmaki

These monks place a great focus on the esoteric teachings of Shinsei. They believe that enlightenment can only be found in that which is difficult to understand. Otherwise, everyone would be enlightened. These monks place great focus upon the "Diamond Sutra," a collection of writings outside the Tao that claims to be a variant telling of the life of Shinsei. The variations from the original Tao are slight, but the Shinmaki maintain that it is the smallest differences that are most important. The Shinmaki eat no meat whatsoever (not even fish) and have remarkably complex rituals regarding the worship of ancestors and Fortunes.

Lotus

The monks of the Lotus believe that only through strict adherence to the Eight Petals of the Lotus can one find enlightenment. In addition, they place a high value on *zanji* (empty mind) meditation, reaching deeply altered states of consciousness by focusing their minds upon nothing. Some of these monks can often be found chanting the phrase "Homage to the Lotus Sutra" repeatedly. The Lotus monks believe that a single completely sincere utterance of this phrase is enough to gain enlightenment.

Questioners

Questioner monks place great value on the removal of earthly possessions. To gain enlightenment one must look past the physical, to see the world for the illusion that it is. Questioners are even more ascetic than the typical monk, having no monasteries of their own. These monks tend to be good-humored and a bit mischievous, as their willingness to shatter the preconceptions of others often leads to good-natured pranks. The Questioners are extremely fond of koans as a learning tool and create more koans than any other sect.

Shintao

Though scholars often use the terms "Shinseist" and "Shintao" interchangeably, the term Shintao also refers to this specific sect. The Shintao believe that enlightenment is gained through discarding all notion of self. Any hint of egotism, any hint of self value or obsession with that which one has created, can disrupt the chance of enlightenment. Any observation of the self, for good or ill, is a negative observation. As a

result, the Shintao focus on meditation, regarding excessive study as forging an unnecessary attachment to the material world.

Yamabushi

The "mountain men" of the Brotherhood build their monasteries primarily along the Great Wall of the North and the Spine of the World. These monks have a close bond with nature, and believe that only through experiencing the dance of the elements in its purest form can the soul be set free. Mountains are particularly popular, as the yamabushi feel a certain kinship with the powerful mikokami at the hearts of mountain ranges. Yamabushi tend to have an acute connection to the elements, and the Elemental Acolytes are the foremost monks of this sect. There are always five Acolytes, chosen for their wisdom as well as their mastery over particular elements.

Sohei

The sohei are more of a vocation than an actual sect. Within the peaceful structure of the Brotherhood, the necessity remains to ensure that its temples and teachings are protected. The sohei are an answer to this necessity. These "warrior-monks" focus entirely upon military matters, building their strength and martial prowess so that they will be prepared to deal with any threat. Though they are slow to anger and seldom interfere in the struggles of the Great Clans, the sohei are among the most tenacious warriors in all the Empire.

Temples of the Brotherhood

The Brotherhood has a presence in every city and village in the Empire, from a single monk tending a lowly shrine to the enormous temples found in large cities. These religious institutions, along with the general sentiment of cooperation among the various sects of the Brotherhood, gives the monks of Shinsei a network of communication like none other. The monks see everything. The monks hear every rumor. The Brotherhood is everywhere. As listing all the temples of the Empire would be an endless task, the four most significant are described here. Each of these holds a special place in the structure of

Rokugani religion, and each has a unique approach to the Tao.

THE FOUR TEMPLES

The Four Temples are located near Kyuden Seppun, where Rokugani religion was born. These temples hold countless artifacts and relics, not the least of which are its four sacred bells. Though the monks of Shinsei are reluctant to interfere with politics, the Four Temples are their mouthpiece to the courts. The head of the Four Temples is invited to the capital at least once a year to report all significant religious developments directly to the Emperor. As the head monk of the Four Temples speaks for the entire Brotherhood, this monk is also considered to be the leader of the Brotherhood. (The Hantei is the titular head of the Shintao religion, but rarely interferes with its activities.)

THE TEMPLE OF OSANO WO

The Temple of Osano Wo stands south of the Plain of Thunder. Though the duty of caring for the Plain falls to the Miya, the sohei here have adopted the duty of protecting it. Only once in Rokugan's history was the territory invaded. The sohei retaliated immediately and brutally, defeating a larger Unicorn force despite their lack of cavalry. Since that day, the monks of Osano Wo have become the most feared sohei in Rokugan. They are credited with the invention of several weapons, not the least of which are the ono and nagimaki. The sohei of Osano Wo are easily identified, as each undergoes a brutal ritual of scarring and mortification before he is allowed to defend the Brotherhood. These monks wear elaborate wraps around their faces and bodies, both to cover their sacred scars and to protect them from the endless storms that wrack the area.

SHRINE OF THE SEVEN THUNDERS

The Mountain of the Seven Thunders has only a small monastery, but the duties of its monks are quite important. It is their duty to maintain the Shrine of the Seven Thunders, a colossal monument to the sacrifice of those who journeyed forth at Shinsei's side. Each of the heroes is carved onto the face of the mountain, each standing at least sixty feet in height. The monks maintain the statues and carry the wishes of supplicants to the spirits of the Thunders.

It is believed that the souls of the Thunders dwell within the mountain and lend the monks

their power, giving these yamabushi astounding elemental abilities. The monks of the Seven Thunders believe that only five of the Thunders are actually present in the mountain, but see no reason to present this distinction to the outside world.

TEMPLES OF THE SEVEN FORTUNES

The Fortunes are the protectors of mankind and are believed to watch over mortals on their quest for enlightenment. Scattered throughout Rokugan, the Temples of the Seven Fortunes are sometimes dedicated to a single Fortune, or just as frequently to all seven. The monks serve as caretakers and advisors in these public temples and thus are closer to the general populace than any other order of monks. These monks are the most personable, the most social, and the most visible of any order.

One of the most notable differences between these monks and others arises among the monks of Bishamon and Benten. These monks do not take the vow of celibacy so common to the Brotherhood. They are allowed to marry and have families, and their descendants are born into whatever social class the monk held before retirement. Ostensibly, this is done so that the monks of these popular Fortunes will be closer to the people.

TEMPLE OF KAIMETSU-UO

Matsu Taki stood in the clearing of stone pagodas, armed for battle. The ancient columns were overgrown and some leaned dangerously off-kilter. Taki stood still, opening his senses, waiting for the attack. "Wait for the opponent to reveal himself," his Akodo sensei had taught him.

Suddenly, a flash of orange, then blackness. His opponent had pulled his jingasa over his eyes! Righting it, he wheeled around. Nothing but underbrush and pagodas. Taki drew his sword.

"It makes a cup useful, gives a window its purpose." a voice taunted. Taki recognized the saying. Nothingness. He searched the treeline for the monk. Though this was only an exhibition, he didn't like being made the fool. "You're good at jumping like a frog and hiding like a hare," Taki said, taking a few cautious, circling steps, "but you cannot fight the Lion."



EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

While others lament on what they should have done, the wise man prepares for what he should do next.

Guard your words carefully, for you own every word you speak.

Following a false light only leads you deeper into darkness.

Your soul – your life energy – is not bound by flesh. It can reach where your fingers cannot.

Shinsei said, "Who binds you?"

The Emperor said, "No one binds me – I am the Emperor."

"A contradiction in itself," said the monk with a smile.



THE SEVEN THUNDERS

Each is an idealization of an aspect of Shinsei, embodied in the seven samurai who followed Shinsei into the Shadowlands. Whether each was a reincarnation of a 'great being,' or Shinsei taught them to channel these beings, remains a mystery.

- 1) Crab samurai, Avatar of Protection
- 2) Scorpion samurai, Avatar of Destruction
- 3) Phoenix shugenja, Avatar of Rebirth
- 4) Dragon samurai, Avatar of Knowledge
- 5) Crane samurai, Avatar of Honor
- 6) Unicorn shugenja, Avatar of Mercy
- 7) Lion samurai, Avatar of Purity

Swiftly, his opponent came hopping over a pagoda and attacked furiously, striking Taki's hara-ate, sode and kote. When he looked down, he was nearly naked. His armor lay in pieces on the ground. Taki growled.

"Oh, the lion's roused," the monk taunted.

Angry, Taki let loose a flurry of swings – left, right, left, a cut to decapitate – chasing the monk backwards. He sidestepped them all. Letting out a ferocious kiai, Taki charged, sword held high. A loud snap brought him out of his rage. At his feet, his blade lay snapped in two.

"Enough! I've seen enough!" cried Matsu Tsuko.

This is an example of one of the many sects of Shinseism. While the Path of Purification prohibits monks from participating in violence, the monks of the Temple of Kaimetsu-uo study the martial arts. These budo are not meant for combat, concerned instead with spiritual discipline. The individual elevates himself mentally and physically in search of self-perfection. Through this 'meditation in motion' a monk enters a state of no-mind, the kata, or forms, meant to exercise and augment a person's chi.

The Temple of Kaimetsu-uo has its origins in kaze-do. The samurai warrior is a formidable fighting machine. Armed with katana and wakizashi, dai-kyu and specialty-tipped arrows, yari and light, sturdy armor, the samurai caste had no need to develop open-handed martial arts. Bugei skills are almost all jutsu, as in kenjutsu (sword), bojutsu (staff), naginata-jutsu (naginata) and iaijutsu (fast draw), intended for combat. It was the Dragon Clan monk Togashi Kaze who developed his open-handed style, called kaze-do.

While Shinsei's Path of Purification prohibits monks from participating in violence, the monks of the Temple of Kaimetsu-uo take upon themselves to relieve suffering in the world. They venture forth into the world to combat evil. A popular genre of tale among the heimin is the pious monk who comes to the village to beat up brigands/gaki/corrupt magistrates. (Just as popular are the stories of the evil monk, corrupt with power, who terrorizes the countryside.) Like the knights errant of Arthurian legend, these monks travel the countryside righting wrongs.

The Temples

There are three recognized Temples of Kaimetsu-uo. Each follows a strict hierarchy or ranks. A Rank 5 monk is better than a Rank 3 monk, and has more responsibilities to the order. Each temple has an abbot and several adepts. While part of the same sect, each temple is independent of the other. Amazingly, little variation has crept into the teaching of each school. Every Temple of Kaimetsu-uo teaches the same techniques. Each monk attends classes to learn the martial arts, and gets individual instruction. When he achieves the first rank in the martial arts, the monk begins to channel his chi in ways unavailable to most people.

As storytellers tell it, Togashi Kaze was on one of his characteristic walkabouts when he came to a monastery in the mountains. Outside, the fields were untended and overgrown. The place looked deserted, yet the gates were firmly locked. Kaze pounded on the gates and demanded entrance in a loud voice. Suspecting the presence of a gaki, he prepared to break in when the gate finally opened. Kaze was greeted by an apparition far worse – a skeleton of a man, not undead, but weak and starving. Kaze asked for, and received, permission to stay. What he saw of the next few weeks astounded him – the monks were so intent on meditation that they neglected all else, and they refused to consider doing anything else. Kaze took it upon himself to help these monks.

Proclaiming that he had a new type of meditation to show them, he took them out into the unswept courtyard. There, he showed them the simplest kata of kaze-do. At first, the monks were skeptical, and Kaze had to be careful lest he tire them out too quickly. But soon the monks took to kaze-do, combining it with their meditation techniques. Thus was born a new sect of Shinseism. They called themselves the Monks of Kaimetsu-uo, after the son and avenger of the Fortune of Thunder.

SHINMAKI

A few farmers from the outlying fields rushed into the mura dragging a cart and yelling. Passersby looked into the cart or heard what the farmers said and they joined in. Soon, the entire village was in an uproar. Little Heizo, firstborn son of a peasant farmer, had fallen into a disused well.

The farmers had managed to drag Heizo's broken body out of the hole and rushed him to



the mura, hoping to catch the village yamabushi. Villagers clustered around while someone ran to the shrine. What seemed like hours later, someone returned with the bad news – too late, the yamabushi left early in the morning for a farm several hours away. This news sent up new cries.

Then, a soft voice cut through the confusion. "I can help the boy."

As one, everyone in the village square turned to a monk standing in the road. The crowd parted, and the monk instructed the farmers to lay the child out – carefully – on the ground. Poor Heizo looked like a broken little bird.

Next, the monk sat on the ground next to Heizo, folding his legs into the appropriate meditation seat. When he arranged his hands in the position of healing, the villagers knew – the monk was of the Shinmaki sect. The world seemed to stand still, as though holding its breath. Villagers would later say it did.

When the monk next opened his eyes, little Heizo stood up, whole and unharmed.

Another example of a sect of Shinseism, Shinmaki is a highly esoteric practice combining aspects of magic and Shinsei's Sutras. The basis for their beliefs is a mysterious document called the 'Diamond Sutra,' which claims Shinsei and

the Seven Thunders were one and the same. Although reticent to talk about their sect, a few monks have provided tantalizing clues. What is known for certain comes from Isawa Yamashiro, a Phoenix Clan shugenja who gained the confidence of the monastery.

Admittance to the Shinmaki sect is as enigmatic as the sect itself. What makes initiation difficult is that there are seemingly no requirements. One person might be accepted immediately – no questions asked. Another might have to undergo a rigorous testing process. Yet another person might simply be turned away. The nature of these tests varies as well – it might be a physical test, such as standing on one foot beneath a pounding waterfall, or it might be mental, such as moving a pebble without touching it or a simple question and answer session. No one knows how the sect determines a person's eligibility.

Gaining acceptance, the monk undergoes a secret initiation ritual, of which no monk has ever spoken. Those initiated into Shinmaki's secrets do not generally share the sect's teachings with outsiders. 'A little knowledge is a dangerous thing' seems to be the group's position. Members engage in esoteric practices meant to reveal the hidden meaning behind the Diamond Sutra. Each level reveals a new layer. To those unprepared to

SHUGENJA AND MONKS

One of the differences between shugenja and monks is 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 his fellow man.





THE LION AND THE TAO

When Shinsei spoke to the Emperor and listened to the Little Master's words, Akodo stood behind Hantei, frowning. Finally, while Shinsei was in mid-sentence, Akodo spat on the ground, turned, and walked away.

Hantei stood, angry that his brother had insulted the Little Master.

"Why have you done this?" he demanded.

"This way is not my way," Akodo replied.

Shinsei said, "It is not my way, it is the way of the world."

Akodo turned back, the fire reflecting in his eyes. "The path of introspection and rhetoric is for men, not for soldiers."

Shinsei simply said, "The way cannot be one thing, for if it is one thing, it cannot be another."

Akodo drew his sword from its saya and all about gasped. "Your way is not my way." He raised his sword as it gleamed in the firelight. "This is my way." Then he walked away. When he returned to his lands, he ordered that no copy of the Tao of Shinsei should ever be allowed within the walls of any Lion dojo. The Emperor called on Akodo and told him that he would reverse his order. In fact, a copy of the Tao should be included in every Lion dojo.

comprehend these teachings, Shinmaki can be dangerous, driving the uninitiated insane.

According to the sect's founder, Basso, the Diamond Sutra is heavily encoded to hide Shinsei's occult teachings. Using metaphor and symbolism, the text requires a master to reveal the truth within. On its face, the Diamond Sutra claims that the Seven Thunders were all avatars of Shinsei. Shinsei is a divine being, present in every cycle. Before this world, there was another, and it had its own Shinsei. There are many Shinseis, all reflections of the same supreme intelligence. In the current age, these avatars came together to combat the evil that is Fu Leng. Recently, a few monks have begun to believe in a 'future Shinsei' who will return and usher in a new age.

In addition to the Diamond Sutra, the bushi tell tales of esoteric practices such as meditating in the presence of dead bodies or copying sutras onto dried flesh. It is said some monks choose to live in tiny, dark cells, necessities passed through a small slot in the door. They do not come out for years, and do not speak with anyone while they meditate. Isawa Yamashiro reports that they visualize each of the Seven Thunders in turn, concentrating on one until they've mastered the vision. When the Thunder is as real to them as a person, they converse with it, learning from it. Shugenja generally believe these practices conjure up the spirit of the fallen hero from Yomi, though when they've tried communing with the Seven Thunders with their spells their efforts met with failure. Meanwhile, such mystical practices are the exception rather than the rule.

Organization

Shinmaki monasteries are small and out of the way. Typically, a master teaches one student at a time. They do not adhere to the typical monastic hierarchy, eschewing titles such as Risshi and Sojo. Members are egalitarian, unconcerned with each other's status, though they gain initiation into new teachings when they achieve a new Rank. They adhere, however, to Shinsei's Path of Purification. Every year the entire sect congregates in the mountains at the sect's headquarters for some unknown reason.

Playing a Shinmaki Monk

What separates these monks from the bulk of the Brotherhood of Shinsei are their unorthodox beliefs and practices. They are not scorned for

their beliefs, but are instead welcomed as an official sect of Shinseism. Those monks with a high degree of spiritual attainment often seek out a Shinmaki master to take them the rest of the way to enlightenment. Shinmaki is just another way to embrace the void.

When you play a Shinmaki monk, be sure to act a bit 'off.' The people of Rokugan adhere to many strict social mores – they do not touch dead flesh, they value sincerity over honesty, and so on; even the Brotherhood of Shinsei acknowledges the Celestial Order. Shinmaki monks do not. If an eta approaches a group on the road, a Shinmaki monk is likely to say hello and strike up a conversation. Monks of this sect have no problems with speaking their mind. They do not see a purpose behind all the bowing and smiling.

Say mystical things like 'Only the dragonfly knows what is in the frog's heart,' or quote from the Tao of Shinsei a lot. Take a vow of silence for the day. Suddenly stop and tell someone's fortune. You're not crazy, nor should you be disruptive of everyone else's fun. It's easy to try to be the center of attention, demanding the gamemaster's attention. Don't be a pest. Be enigmatic.

History of the Brotherhood

Traditionally, monks try to stay out of the public eye and avoid interfering with politics. However, there are a few important historic events in which the Brotherhood could not help but play a part.

THE WAR AGAINST FU LENG

The war against the Shadowlands was also the birth of the Brotherhood, when Shinsei first appeared to the Kami and brought his message of enlightenment. Shinsei's journey into the Shadowlands has been well documented, and the general belief is that the little man died during his mission.

He did not.

Shinsei's mission was not completed with the defeat of Fu Leng, and would not be completed for another thousand years. One day, Shinsei knew, Fu Leng would escape, and the next band of Thunders would need a Shinsei to guide them. Shinsei's descendants would never be safe from the enemies of Rokugan, so the little man simply

returned to the obscurity in which he began. Shinsei has had a long and distinguished line of descendants, carefully hidden in plain sight within the order of the monks of Bishamon. Sometimes, the descendant is a monk. Sometimes, he is merely a farmer who serves the temple. Always, he is prepared.

Only the head of the Four Temples, the Elemental Acolytes, and the Hantei are aware that Shinsei's descendant lives, and even they are not aware of his identity.

DESTRUCTION OF THE TAO

Seven hundred years ago, a great fire swept the halls of Gisei Toshi, nearly eradicating Shiba's original transcript of the Tao. Afterward, most of Shinsei's teachings had to be recreated from memory. Ironically, this event brought the Phoenix to a level of greater understanding with the Brotherhood, many of whom were called forth to help in recovering the Tao.

For the Brotherhood's indispensable assistance in salvaging the Tao, select monks are still welcome in the libraries of the Asako which preserve the fragments of the Tao. Certain sections of the Tao are forbidden to those outside the Asako family, but monks who have won the trust of the Phoenix will be allowed to study the rest of the original Tao at their leisure.

BATTLE OF THUNDER PLAIN

The histories of the Unicorn do not record this event as a battle so much as a tactical error. One hundred and twenty years ago, hostilities were brewing between the Iuchi and Kaiu families. The Iuchi daimyo decided to settle the matter with a single, swift, decisive attack on a Kaiu village on the northern end of Crab territory. The Iuchi's path led him through the Plain of Thunder.

The sohei of Osano Wo knew the reason for the Unicorn's attack and were not about to let the sacred Plain be soiled by the vanity of arrogant war-mongers. The sohei attacked brutally, using polearms to dramatic effect against the Unicorn cavalry. The Unicorn did not expect the ambush, and when they turned their magic to defense, the kami did not respond. The sohei harried the battered Iuchi forces for several days, hounding them back to their own provinces. Since this event, relations between the sohei and the Unicorn have been strained, but the Iuchi have sought no retribution. Such a resounding defeat was quite an embarrassment for the Iuchi, and

they would rather forget the incident than make matters worse.

THE GOZOKU

At the beginning of the fifth century, the Hantei was a pawn of the Crane-Phoenix-Scorpion gozoku political consortium. The Lion and Crab were weakened by the gozoku's schemes, and the Dragon were strangely silent. Hantei Kusada searched for a method to weaken the consortium for many years, and struck upon the Brotherhood as a possible resource. The monks of Shinsei were thus dragged kicking and screaming into politics.

As he was the head of Shintao religion, the monks were obligated to obey the Hantei's commands, even at the cost of their own holy vows. Many monks entered into careers as spies, informants, and saboteurs. Through this secret network, the Hantei interfered with gozoku interests and obtained information on their operations while maintaining a semblance of innocence. The situation did not last for long. When four monks were discovered spying on the Crane Champion, the gozoku knew who was responsible.

Kusada denied knowledge of the monks' activities. The gozoku had already forced Kusada into obedience through blackmail, and he could not risk threatening the lives of his family for the lives of a few monks. He immediately dismantled his secret network, but could not save the four monks from execution.

Ironically, historians regard this maneuver as the gozoku's first mistake. The peasantry was outraged at the execution of four holy men. Monasteries that had been previously neutral to gozoku affairs turned against the consortium with righteous fury. Sohei began to assault gozoku caravans. Other monks boycotted religious services in Crane, Scorpion, and Phoenix provinces. The gozoku struck back ferociously against the "rebellious" Brotherhood, arresting Gaman, the master of the Four Temples, and burning three sohei monasteries. This only served to make matters worse, and the peasantry cried out in anger against it. The great social and cultural advances that flourished under gozoku rule were forgotten; all that was remembered at the time was that the gozoku were attacking the servants of Shinsei.

It was a death knell.



THE LION AND THE TAO

(continued)

Akodo immediately agreed. When he returned, copies of the Tao were placed next to copies of Leadership, but even to this day, each and every copy remains unopened



TALE OF HIDA AND THE MONK

Hida's brooding after his defeat at the contest of the Kami was broken by the appearance of a little old man with a shaved head, dressed in simple robes. A raven sat on the old man's shoulder. He sat down opposite the hulking Hida, who did not stir at his approach.

"Why are you angry, my son?" the old man asked. Hida didn't look up.

"I am angry because I am weak, and because my strength could not save me from my weakness."

The old man smiled – sadly it seemed – and spoke again.

"Knowing your weakness is a form of strength, First Crab. Seek the truth in that, and you will never be beaten again."

Hida's head rose from his hands as he looked at the old man.

"But my weakness caused me to fall first," he replied.

"No. Your inability to accept your weakness caused you to fall first. But now you know it, and in knowing it, you transform it into strength. Lies are told by those who would deny their weakness. The truth can only live in those who see what they are."

The gozoku quickly realized their mistake and called off all action against the Brotherhood. The peasant revolt was stymied, but the dent the Brotherhood left in the gozoku's armor was too great. Their power diminished, leading to the ascension of Empress Hantei Yugo-zohime several years later.

Since that time, the daimyo of the Great Clans avoided conflict with the Brotherhood, knowing full well that the monks carry the hearts of the people. For their part, the Brotherhood is ashamed at its behavior during the final days of the gozoku, and the monks try their best to keep a distance from politics.



Fall

*"Cherry blossom words
Wind blowing in a man's ear
Who is enlightened?"*

~Hiruma Megumiko, Crab Clan Warrior-Poet

"Master, how can you say such things?"

The old man's eyes glittered mischievously and he grinned that toothy grin warning of a lesson misunderstood. "I say them because they are true. Of the few things we can say with certainty, I can say this is true."

Chimes danced quietly nearby, filling the air with the light of the setting sun spun around us in a myriad of colors and music no pen could write. For a time my master simply listened, hearing, I suppose, the chimes and watching their colors. I questioned him again, asking, practically begging, him to explain.

"I said Shinsei was not enlightened. No more so than Akodo, or Bayushi, or any number of persons to whom you may give deference."

I insisted that every book spoke of Shinsei's great wisdom and that he reached enlightenment where so many fell short. I spoke at length of his discourse with people across Rokugan, his lessons, his riddles, and how he served to guide people toward the understanding of the ways of the universe. During my lecture the old master listened patiently, smiling and nodding on occasion. He sipped tea as I spoke. He smiled as I elaborated. Finally I finished, satisfied that I had seen through his deception.

He laughed at me.

"Listen carefully to what I will say now. For the lesson is not always carried by the words of men. You see, many believe that the nature of the universe is to hide itself from mortal eyes. That we must search and meditate upon all around us to see and grasp the simple truth that is enlightenment."

The master fell silent for a moment and stared at the sunset, taking in the colors and sounds of the evening.

"However, perhaps the answers are being told to us all the time and we have just forgotten how to hear them."

A question raised itself in my mind. Rather than ask it, I sat quietly listening, not to the master, who sat silently, but to the world.

"Akodo was a soldier, for that was what he must be. Hantei, the emperor, for that was what he must be. Shinsei walked this world as a teacher, for that is what he must be. None of them, in your eyes, must ever be thought of as enlightened, for in that is the greatest trap of all."

I listened.

"Let me tell you of the beginning of understanding, of the first question. A tale that few know and even fewer will speak."

Spring

*"Do not believe anything I would tell you."
– Master Keya Xi*

Born of a human woman, she came to this world in the days just after the Kami fell to Rokugan. The Kami drew men to their sides and began to form the families that would one day give birth to the clans themselves. Before her

sixteenth birthday she carried the name "Sakura." She carried that name all her life.

Sakura heard the tales of the Kami and sneered at their names. She heard of the legendary arrogance of Akodo, the bluster of Hida, the deceptions of Bayushi, and the compassion of Shinjo. Indeed she heard the tales and frowned at every mention of every name. At last when her mother said she would join with the Kami, Sakura raised her voice to the heavens in defiance of her mother's decision.

"To come from the heavens does not bestow upon them knowledge of the heavens. They suffer from fear, jealousy, anger, love, and all the passions that we 'unfortunate humans' suffer! They no more know the movements of the universe than you or I! Yet, to venerate them will move us that much further away from ever understanding the universe or our place in it!"

Mother and daughter turned from each other then, each following the path set before her – one to serve the Kami, the other to understand this world into which humanity was born.

Sakura found her way to the heartland of Rokugan. There she set her small home, and listened, watched, and thought. In the heartland, she made the greatest discovery of her life.

The master smiled at me then and asked if I had any idea what this discovery may have been. I blinked and stated that I could not know her mind or what she had learned.

A young wanderer sat before Sakura on a large flat stone in a field just paces away from the large plum trees that grow in the heartland. Sakura warned him that if she told him what she had learned, his own path to understanding, or enlightenment, would forever be more difficult. He said he understood and would hear her anyway, afterward deciding for himself the value of her words. She clapped and then leaned over to whisper to him.

"The wind blows."

The wanderer frowned as a raven cawed from a nearby tree.

"I do not understand."

Sakura nodded, just as I nodded to you, and spoke again. "The tree feels this wind, as do the grasses, the rock you sit on, and even you and I. Yet, do they not all move differently within this wind?"

Cawing again, the raven took flight in the sudden breeze. Nodding, the wanderer, who

became her first student, smiled at her words. He understood.

"But most importantly," Kaya Xi said with a twinkle in his eye, "he knew she was wrong. Just as you will know I am wrong. For to find the answers you seek, we must all be wrong."

Summer

"If you seek the tranquility of nature it is best to ask the hare that is caught within the talons of the falcon." ~ Sakura

As Sakura grew older, in these earliest days, more and more students came to hear her words. The first student stayed by her side, always finding fault with Sakura's words. Others journeyed far and wide into Rokugan carrying understanding and questions with them. Though they were not enlightened, as to you no one must be, each held a distinct, if incomplete, understanding of the world around him. These wandering students stayed in humble villages and used their knowledge of the world to aid the peasants.



TALE OF HIDA AND THE MONK

(continued)

Hida stared in wonder as the old man's words sank in.

"Why did you tell me these things?"

"Because you wanted to hear them."

With that, the old man bowed and went on his way.

THE TAO AND THE CRAB

When a Crab reads a passage of the Tao of Shinsei, or hears a piece of wisdom from a monk, his immediate reaction is to translate it into something pragmatic. "How does this affect the real world?" he'll ask. "What actions should I take that will bring it about? How can its lessons be repeated in a significant fashion?" Rather than waiting for enlightenment to come, he goes and seeks it out. Rather than concerning himself with the afterlife, he applies what he learns immediately



SHIBA AND THE TAO

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 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 onto Shiba's, conveying a message: You cannot appreciate history, because you will live forever.

They listened and the world told them of coming floods. They watched and nature warned them of coming droughts. All the things farmers now know came from these wandering teachers. Now they give thanks to the Kami teachers, or often Shinsei, when in fact the knowledge was given to them by a humble man in simple clothes who once heard Sakura speak.

In time, these wandering teachers settled in their villages. Always maintaining a distance from the villagers, as Sakura did Rokugan. Always teaching the villages of the changes coming in the world, as Sakura did them. Always each one fell into the same trap of enlightenment.

The master sighed heavily and began tracing small letters into the sand at our feet with his walking stick. I watched the words forming there and shook my head quietly, again missing the lesson. Envy, he wrote, blindness, sloth, greed, arrogance.

He looked up at me then, nodding. "None of them were 'enlightened,' as I now know. Perhaps they believed they were. They followed the patterns of Sakura every day. They bathed when she did, ate what she did. They mimicked her actions of meditation. Of course, what did they meditate upon if Sakura never told them?"

"They were wise, and giving with that knowledge, but they were also mortal men and as all men they were flawed. Even today you see this. We follow the same rituals every day believing that this will grant enlightenment.

"I tell you now, no path to enlightenment ever succeeded. You must know this."

As nature continued in its cycle of growth, death, and rebirth, so too did these wandering teachers grow and die, only to be reborn. This was a golden age of man's understanding. Some precious few took the lessons of Sakura and did not believe them. They would speak with the people of Rokugan and teach them to know the words of nature and they would teach them the false teachings of Sakura. For they realized that there is no simple way to enlightenment, to understanding. One cannot simply follow another's path, or meditate as another does. You must allow the universe to show you the path that will bring you to enlightenment. Indeed, you must understand that enlightenment is not a goal, it is a journey.

Yet, for the most part, men saw these monks as enlightened teachers. So much so that many monks believed them. Houses became temples.

Habits became rituals. Monks became men of power and influence. So new traditions arose: poverty, celibacy, and utter withdrawal from the world around them.

I shook my head in disbelief. "Master, I don't understand. Is it not the way to meditate upon the Void, to eschew the formative world for the spiritual one?"

My master nodded sadly. "Remember, I am speaking of the first days and the first questions. We did this to try to free ourselves from the relentless traps of the seeking. I will try to explain. You cannot listen when you are not hearing. The early teachers, even those of today, found themselves serving as counsels in disputes. Peasants relied on their foreknowledge of nature so they could plant, harvest, and not starve.

"We were trapped. Trapped fulfilling the obligations our understanding brought with it."

I noticed then that he spoke of "we" as though perhaps he lived during these times. Perhaps a previous life that he remembered so well.

So the students of Sakura and the first student tried to free themselves from the trap of obligation only to find the trap of lies. It is the nature of enlightenment to trap the unwary. Many do not possess the strength to overcome these traps of the mind and instead fall prey to them. In the next life maybe they will learn their error.

Sakura, the story tells us, wandered during this time. She admonished those teachers she found caught struggling within traps. Sakura told them not to believe her words, nor the words of others. Her ways and the ways of the world would not bring them to understanding.

However, during this time enlightenment took on a life of its own. Scholars learned of these monks and their tragedy. They debated and formalized the meaning of enlightenment, raising this word, as scholars often do, to a divine form unattainable by men save those of particular greatness. Monks met with scholars and, desperate for escape, took heed of their words and forgot the first question. Temples grew in importance and they taught the people religious ceremonies. While these teachings and religions brought people closer together and unified Rokugan, they ensnared us even more until, at last, no escape was possible.

Fall

*"Distant thunder warns of present danger."
~ Naka Kuro*

As the religion of Rokugan brought people together, as the traps of enlightenment captured the teachers, dark clouds loomed on the horizon. The dark brother of the Kami, Fu Leng, arose from beyond Rokugan and determined to seize this land and rule over man. Terrified of the abominations of the Shadowlands, the people flocked to the sides of their "protectors" and cried for salvation.

Sakura, within her small home in the heartland, screamed to the heavens, "Enslaved by the light or enslaved by darkness is enslavement!"

Fewer students came to her then. They heard her words and shook their heads sadly at her. Could she not see the blasphemies? Did she not hear the screams and wailings of the walking dead and terrible oni that slaughtered her people? In the Kami the people saw their salvation. They saw the might the Kami wielded against their brother. In Sakura they saw a mad woman who simply dismissed the greatness of the Kami, a bitter woman who hated the Kami simply because they existed.

Without the Kami, Fu Leng's evil would swallow the world.

The master smiled at me. "The monks and shugenja discovered the secrets of a religion that would hold our people together. Yet this very religion that trapped the monks, keeping them from enlightenment as they strove for it, would turn even more people away from the first question."

My master fell silent then. For a long time he watched the stars overhead and listened to the winds whisper through the leaves. Suddenly I heard a voice, as clearly as you would hear the voice of anyone who spoke to you. The voice told me of the master's great sadness and that he had suffered a terrible loss.

A trap, I was sure.

He nodded at me then and my blood ran cold. Did he know what I thought? Did he somehow guess that I had learned of the trap holding him from enlightenment?

"Humanity lost a great deal during those days. The rituals and religion were still young and we could have escaped the trap. Yet the terror

inspired by Fu Leng was so great that we may have cast aside that willingness to hear, that desire to learn, and the freedom to act in order to save our souls and the land itself. Life is a great gift to us and, while many declare absolute knowledge of reincarnation and rebirth, know that we truly do not know."

During the darkest hour of these days, when it seemed that Fu Leng was unstoppable, a new wisdom entered Rokugan. He brought new questions, new ideas, and new visions. Most importantly, he returned the gift of Sakura to us. The first question of Sakura was again spoken aloud in Rokugan.

Shinsei gathered seven people. Not Kami, but mortal men, because, "Fate favors mortal men." These we call the Seven Thunders. One of each clan, as the story is told.

"But why only people of the clans?" my master asked with a glint in his eyes.

"I don't know. I would think that Sakura would have desired to see common people strike against Fu Leng."

"Each Thunder was common, as you call them. They carried the blood of mortals, yet in the eyes of the peasants they represented their saviors, the Kami. The perfect union."

The choice of the Thunders was a deliberate one. Shinsei knew the Emperor would never entrust the Empire to "mere mortal men." Yet the strike against Fu Leng was more than a battle against the evils of the Shadowlands.

For mortal man to battle a Kami was the declaration of man's place in this world. A statement that we must master our own destiny and that the universe will not coddle those who do not seize the life that is given them. Shinsei knew this just as he knew that to defeat this darkness he would need Hantei's blessing.

The Thunders died. However, without compromise, humans declared their place and their importance within the celestial order

Winter

"The grasses feel the wind, as does the rock, the tree, and even us. Yet is it truly the same wind that each feels?" ~ Shinsei

"The first question, at last, was answered by Shinsei and the Seven Thunders. Mortal man declared his place next to the Kami. As Sakura



SHIBA AND THE TAO

Unlike his brother Togashi, Shiba wanted to be a part of the world, but as time went on he found himself more and more cut off from it. He found solace with the arrival of Shinsei. The wise little man understood Shiba's isolation, and spoke 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, the burned and torn remains of which still rest in the library of Gisei Toshi.

Shiba sequestered himself from the Empire and turned his attention to Shinsei, and to ways he could keep his wisdom alive. He continued to study the Tao and worked to spread its teachings. 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.



THE KOLAT AND SHINSEI

The conspirators received word of Shinsei's appearance. The little old man did not come from the stars, nor did he wish to rule over other men. He was not a god, not even a fallen one. But he spoke words of wisdom, and a philosophy that encompassed the entire universe. More importantly, Hantei listened to him, and he risked his entire empire on the man's ability to stop Fu Leng. Such a man was everything they wanted to be. When the Tao of Shinsei became available, they pored over it as they would a holy scripture, searching for ways his thoughts could help them. After nearly two and a half decades they reached a conclusion.

All things, the conspirators believed, are fleeting and temporary; Shinsei spoke as much in his Tao. Life, power, even the gods themselves were all part of an endless cycle. The ultimate purpose of the Celestial Pattern, they decided, was to produce a real and unchanging notion or object that would exist for all of eternity. Humanity was the only means by which the Pattern could fulfill its destiny. So they'd engineer the placement of a perfect man into the right circumstances at precisely the right time.

Thus, the Kolat was born.

knew, our place in this universe is special, different, and unique among the fortunes and Kami. So in time the darkness receded and the monks and shugenja returned to their traps.

"And the first answer was lost."

I looked at my master as he fell silent, the tale finished. In his words I saw the rise of the monastic world. I knew the impossible task set before us to find enlightenment and to teach this knowledge. From him I heard the words of Sakura, yet...

"Master," I asked cautiously, "what happened to Sakura in all this?"

He smiled at me then and looked up at the bough on which a great black bird sat watching us quietly.

"Perhaps when Shinsei and the Thunders defeated Fu Leng. Perhaps when the first question was answered and lost, and perhaps when Shinsei's time came and went, the wanderer, the first student, came to Sakura. The old woman looked at her favorite student and perhaps she smiled. Perhaps Shinsei bowed to her and spoke of the defeat of Fu Leng. And finally perhaps when Sakura heard these words and knew the answer she laughed with joy and leapt into the air transforming herself into a crow. A crow that perhaps alighted on Shinsei's shoulder and would thereafter whisper into his ear.

"Perhaps they continued to travel together, teacher and student, arguing in the ways only friends can and knowing their places in this universe as only mortals can."

My master rose then as the bird above us took flight. He left the monastery that day and I never saw him again. Only occasionally, I would hear tales of a wandering teacher that would stay at a village and teach the farmers to know of coming rains and droughts. During those times I would think of his story and words. Did Sakura ever exist or is she merely a metaphor for all people? Was Shinsei truly one person or was Shinsei the wandering teachers that gave Rokugan knowledge and wisdom?

Does it matter?

In closing, my brother, I leave you with one last thought. Know that when the times comes for you to seek enlightenment, know with all your heart that everything I've ever told you is wrong.

— Akodo Toturi

The Way and the Seven Fortunes

Rokugan's religion is derived from two separate wells: the worship of the Kami and the the Seven Fortunes, and the teachings of Shinsei and his path to enlightenment. Over the years since Shinsei brought the Tao to Rokugan, the two faiths have merged into a united whole, but their separate foundations and beliefs are still clearly visible. Rokugani do not view these two forms of faith as contradictory, but rather as two different views of the same mountain.

THE SEVEN FORTUNES

The worship of the Seven Fortunes is the worship of human but often wrathful gods, beginning with the Sun and Moon, the divine Emperor (closely tied to the Sun Goddess), the Seven Fortunes, the Lesser Fortunes, and the ancestors. This is the religion of the samurai and the state; the Emperor himself is closely tied to the Sun Goddess, the various clans were founded by the Children of the Sun and Moon, and the shugenja are its priests. Indeed, shugenja are the primary keepers of the rituals, the summoners and namers of the fortunes, and the supplicants responsible for leading the proper rituals and making the proper offerings for each season.

The worship of the Fortunes occurs in urban and rural shrines, and in each home at the ancestor's altar. The various large temples are almost always devoted to particular Fortunes when they are built, though over time the original Fortune may be supplanted by other Fortunes. Smaller shrines offer acknowledgement and reverence of the lesser kami, or place-spirits.

The shrines and temples of the Fortunes can be quite elaborate, and like the ranks and precedence of samurai nobles, all temples are arranged in a hierarchy, just as priests and kami are. The lesser shrines carry the suffix *-jingo* or *-sha*; correspondingly greater shrines are *-gu*, and the greatest are *-taisha*. These shrine titles are awarded on the basis of petitions and donations. The donations are given to a particular family, a devout branch of the Asako. These priestly shugenja have always been responsible for judging the worthiness of the various shrines and for recording their standing within the Empire.



HANTEI AND THE TAO

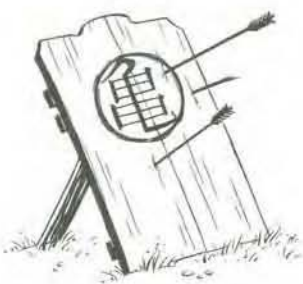
Hantei Genji made great strides to establish Shinseism into the Empire. Shortly after his coronation, he proclaimed that the religion of the Seven Fortunes and the words of the Tao were of one mind, and that both religions should be viewed as aspects of the same belief.

Because it is the chosen religion of the Emperor, the study of the Tao and the practices of Shinseism are common to all parts of the Emerald Empire. The Tao is held in great esteem by the Hantei house, and each Emperor has been required to read the entirety of the text before he ascends the throne.

The worship of the Fortunes also includes the celebration of particular holidays. These festival days are part of the Celestial Order, celebrating the proper passage of time and the proper observances of the year, from rites of planting and harvest, to the blossom festivals and the rare festival rites performed when a new emperor or empress first assumes the throne. Naming days, gempukku, and marriages are usually celebrated with far more reference to the Fortunes than to the Tao.

Unlike the Way, which seeks to release the soul from the kharmic wheel, the worship of the Fortunes acknowledges that most souls fail in this task. This leads to the worship of the ancestors, or, more practically, calls for guidance from one's ancestors. Monks are quick to point out that worshipping the Fortunes improves the chances of enlightenment; failure to show proper piety can only be the sign of a disturbed mind.

The worship of the Fortunes is a matter of ritual and of custom. It has no single unifying body of scripture; while the methods of placating an angry Fortune vary from town to town and village to village, many of the forms of prayers, chants, and rituals are the same from place to place. Shugenja and monks teach that this is a proof of the orderly nature of the world, and a reflection of the Celestial Order.



THE WAY

The Tao is the other half of Rokugani religion; it is built on the foundation laid down by Shinsei, and is often called variously the Tao of Shinsei, the Tao of the Five Rings, or the True Tao. The Dragon Clan especially has embraced Shinsei's philosophy, and all monks follow it to some degree. The Way teaches that the world is a web that entraps the soul, and Shinsei taught that one must rise above all earthly passions and temptations. This gave rise to the secluded

monasteries remote from any city or town, where monks live apart in search of enlightenment.

However, many monks believe that true wisdom can only be found by interaction with the world. Thus, monks must be aware of the world while remaining unmoved by its passions. The primary worship in the Tao is personal education and striving, rather than a matter of community harmony. It stresses meditation rather than festivals, and it offers fewer earthly pleasures of ritual, rich offerings, and divine favors. Instead, it offers release from the world.

The followers of the Way, while learned, are rarely in agreement. New teachers and new interpretations of the Tao are, if not common, at least not unusual. Some followers believe that the sutras themselves, the holy writings, have merit as sacred objects, and collect them or even wear them as talismans. In temples following these beliefs, worshippers pray over the scrolls or sleep beneath them, hoping that the Tao will impart its holiness to those who remain close to the sacred writings. Others believe that any idol of Shinsei, or even offerings before his carved words or tablets, are a false path; that Shinsei merely taught how one might become enlightened, rather than prescribing how all the faithful can become enlightened. Although actual battle is unlikely between adherents of rival schools, the proper interpretation consumes a great deal of time for followers of the Tao; unlike the worship of the Fortunes, there is no easy fallback to customary rituals.

By comparison to most shrines of the Greater and Lesser Fortunes, the temples of Shinsei are simple affairs, and their spartan halls and chambers often echo with the voices of monks debating the true meaning of Shinsei's teachings, or trading riddles, or seeking to outdo each other in showing their mastery of the thousands of scrolls of the Tao that they have memorized. Discussion and debate are prized arts among the monks. Unlike the settled shugenja who minister to a single family or village for decades, many Taoist monks are wanderers, seeking further wisdom from other shrines, from prayer at holy sites, and from contemplation of many aspects of the world they seek to ascend beyond. These wandering monks often share their knowledge or teach a lesson to novice monks as the price of shelter in a shrine on the road. In this way, the Tao continually passes from soul to soul throughout the Empire.



Chapter Three



Character



EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

At times, the voice of
peace must ring like
Thunder.

A black heart hides
many secrets. The blackest
heart hides the deadliest
secret of all.

We tell the tales of
heroes to remind ourselves
that we also can be great.

Appreciation of beauty is
the beginning of wisdom.

Chapter Three: Character

New Skills

ATEMI (INTELLIGENCE) (MONKS ONLY)

The art of nerve and blood flow manipulation, taught to many who study the internal arts of the body. With these complex practices the character may cause a wound to stop bleeding, a nerve to go numb (thus killing the pain of a wounded samurai), or restore feeling to a nerve that has gone numb. The TN for this skill is typically 20 to stop the bleeding of a small (up to five-inch) cut or to affect all the nerves in one limb. Masters of this art have been known to use their nerve manipulation techniques in self-defense, but the TN for such rolls are at +20. This is considered a High Skill.

DIVINATION (VOID)

Using certain tools, this skill allows the character to catch a brief glimpse into the future. The foresight is not a mental picture of any kind, simply an answer given by the tools. The character must spend one hour in meditation and ritual for the divination, at the end of which he may ask the GM one question. The question cannot pertain to any event beyond one week ahead per the character's rank in this skill. The GM then assigns a TN according to the difficulty or importance of the question, and makes the roll for the character in secret. Failure means either an unreadable answer or (in the case of missing the TN by more than 15) a completely false answer. This is considered a High Skill.

ESCAPE (AGILITY)

This is the simple art of getting out of bonds of any kind. Any situation from being simply bound at the wrists to being completely wrapped in chain falls under this skill. However, Escape only covers slipping out of the bonds. Characters who are jailed or trapped in a room, for example, will need some other way to get out. The TNs for Escape can range from 10 (simple rope bindings around the wrists) to 45 (completely wrapped in metal chain). This is considered a Low Skill.

EVASION (REFLEXES)

Sometimes the only place to hide is not behind a door or around a corner, but just out of sight of the only person in the room. Taught to assassins and many other unsavory people across the Empire, this is an effective way to stalk a target for almost as long as the assassin wishes. The character with Evasion simply stays behind his target or out of sight, and does not need to make any skill check until the target for some reason begins to suspect that a person is following him. The TN for Evasion is the target's Awareness x 5. Someone warning the target of a stalker ruins the Evasion completely. This is considered a Low Skill.

FASTING (WILLPOWER)

Those who are more religiously inclined than the average Rokugani occasionally observe holy days and festivals by fasting. Characters with this skill are able to fight off the effects of starvation for a total number of days equal to their Stamina. Each day past this limit, the character must check Willpower + Fasting at a TN of 10 times the number of days he has fasted. Failure means the character must eat something soon or pass out from starvation. This is considered a High Skill.

KNOW THE SCHOOL (INTELLIGENCE)

A character with this skill picks one particular bushi school that he has attended or studied with



some regularity. The character gains Free Raises against anyone using that school equal to his rank in this skill. In addition, anyone trying to use that school to strike this character has his TN raised by 5. This is considered a Bugei Skill.

KOKYU (VOID) (MONKS ONLY)

This discipline teaches the character to focus his chi to maintain the balance in his mind, body, and spirit. Any time this character fails a roll against poison, fear, or any effect that would affect his mind, he may spend a Void point and make a Void + Kyoku check against the same TN he failed to roll, plus 10. If the Kyoku test succeeds, the test passes. This is considered a High Skill.

SENSEI (INTELLIGENCE)

Teaching in itself is an art form; those who wish to do so must learn how. This character may impart knowledge of his own skills or school Techniques to others who are ready to learn them. The GM may dictate how much time this takes, at the end of which the character with the Sensei skill rolls Intelligence + Sensei at the rank of the skill or Technique being taught times 10. The roll includes the Intelligence of both the student and the teacher. The sensei may not teach skills or techniques above his rank in this skill (i.e., a character who is a rank 3 Sensei may not impart rank 4 Shintao to another). This is considered a High Skill.

ZANJI (VOID) (MONKS ONLY)

A form of meditation that is more focused on the Chi around the character than within. The character must meditate at least five minutes, at the end of which he rolls Void + ZANJI at a TN of 15. If the check is successful, the character is aware of all sentient beings (animals, humans, goblins, etc.) within twenty feet for each Void point the character possesses. This may be performed many places where simple meditation cannot, but requires the full concentration of the caster. Distractions (such as a full, noisy room) add anywhere from 5 to 20 points to the TN of this roll, whatever the GM feels is appropriate. That which is not alive, nor connected to the Void in any way, is not detected by this skill. For instance, fallen warriors animated by the power of the Shadowlands, or those completely absorbed by the Darkness, would not be detected by this skill; but Naga, with their connection to the Akasha, would be. This is considered a High Skill.



New Advantages

BRINK OF ENLIGHTENMENT (10 POINTS, MONKS ONLY)

Your soul has been reborn many times. You are nearly ready to join the chosen in the Celestial Heavens, and many recognize this. Reflecting your soul's accomplishment, you begin the game with +1 Void, and all tests to deceive you are at +15 TN.

CLAN BACKGROUND (1 POINT)

For whatever reason, this character was once a member of one of the Seven Great Clans. Pick a Clan and family. At character creation, you may choose skills and advantages as if you were from that Clan. Some within your old family probably still remember you, so why and how you left is usually important. This advantage may only be picked by a character that is no longer part of a Clan (Great or Minor), such as ronin and monks.

ELEMENTAL HARMONY (5 POINTS)

Any character may choose this advantage, though typically monks are the only ones to really reap its benefits. Elemental Harmony is chosen for one particular element, and this advantage may be purchased multiple times for different elements if desired. The character's spirit runs strongly with the power of the chosen element, and the character's Ring is considered to be one higher for the purposes of determining kiho Mastery Level only. This advantage does not affect spell Mastery Levels, nor does it affect the kiho's actual use. Only when selecting new kiho is this advantage ever likely to come into play.



EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

Study what the pine and cherry blossom can teach. Man is not the only keeper of enlightenment.

Two men can brave what one man cannot.

You can steal a samurai's weapon and armor, but you can never steal his honor.



**ADVANTAGE: NOBLE
BIRTH
(3 POINTS)**

By default, monk characters are not considered samurai. They fall between heimin and samurai in the Celestial Order. Monks who wish to retain their samurai status must take this advantage. (From *Way of the Dragon*, page 40.)

SAGE (2 POINTS)

Books and knowledge are nearly as important to you as food and water. It is well known you are a seeker of wisdom and words, and many come to you when they want to know about the past and present. Your devotion to the texts has given you an excellent memory for the events they record and the lessons they impart. All Lore and History rolls you make roll and keep one additional die.

**SHINSEI'S SERVANT (10 POINTS,
GM APPROVAL)**

While many monks study the Tao and claim to be the servant of Shinsei, you can claim such a title in a far less metaphorical sense. The blood descendant of the first Shinsei is alive in Rokugan, and it is your duty to do everything in your power to defend and serve him. There are very few in the Emerald Empire who know the identity of Shinsei's kin, and it is a jealously guarded secret. You gain several advantages and disadvantages as a result of your knowledge and duty. Your character is blessed with the Sensei advantage, with no less than the descendant of Shinsei himself as your mentor! However, the beasts of the Dark Kami will stop at nothing to destroy him when the second Day of Thunder draws near. You cannot tell anyone the secret you hold, for one of his greatest safeguards is his anonymity. Should anyone learn even what sort of knowledge you are privy to, your life would become an endless series of escapes.

Shinsei's wardens are trained in secret by some of the finest minds of the Empire. You begin the game with an extra 15 character points to spend on skills only. There is a sparse network of men and women such as you spread throughout the Empire, and you are likely to be recognized by another of your calling at a temple or shrine. Because of this, your character will be privy to more than the usual amount of hospitality and assistance from the brotherhood of Shinsei.

If this character ever breaks his monastic oaths, or slips below 2 personal honor, the Servants of Shinsei will almost certainly cast him out from their order. The only possible exceptions to this rule are when the servant must do somewhat dishonorable deeds in the name of their master, which can be forgiven for the greater good. Those who are cast out of the order are very seldom allowed to leave openly, as the information they hold is too precious to be left to

someone now seen as untrustworthy. While the brotherhood is above killing in cold blood, more than a few souls have ended their own lives rather than be committed to spend the rest of their days in enforced imprisonment and meditation within a temple's walls.

STUDENT OF WATER (5 POINTS)

While many generals seek to improve their position on the battlefield, you take a slightly different approach to warfare. Instead of looking to take advantage of your enemy's mistakes, you look for ways to encourage him to stumble. Whenever your opponent rolls on the Battle Table



(and you are not in the Reserves), you may adjust his total by exactly three points in either direction.

TUTOR (1 TO 5 POINTS)

You are a mentor to several students who come to learn from you. These students are usually seeking your knowledge in a skill, but with GM's approval, it can be in School Techniques. You gain one student for each point you spend on this skill, whom you may call upon once per session in an appropriate manner. As you are their teacher, they have little choice to refuse you, but you are expected to have time to teach them or gain the reputation of a worthless sensei.

New Disadvantages

CAST OUT (3, 6, OR 9 POINTS)

Somehow you caught the attention of a religious sect or certain temple, and not in a flattering way. Those who are aware of your indiscretion treat you with little more than scorn, and holy men who know your history see you as practically filthy. The more points spent on this disadvantage, the bigger the temple or more widespread the tale of your blasphemy.

DISBELIEVER (3 POINTS)

To you, the Fortunes have forsaken man. The Kami were slave masters, and Shinsei was nothing but a hopeful parable. In the Emerald Empire, such thoughts are practically treason, as they go against Hantei himself. You may or may not be vocal about what you think; in fact, you must try to avoid religious discussions at all costs, lest your true feelings be discovered. But remember, no matter how quiet you are or how well you lie, some say those thoughts are going to get you in trouble...

FORCED RETIREMENT (2 OR 4 POINTS)

Not all members of the samurai caste join the Brotherhood of their own choosing. Many have shamed their family or Clan in such a manner that the best course of action was for the offending person to be forgotten, shave his head, and join the monks. You are one such person. Your former Clan either ignores you politely (2 points), or avoids you completely, and is likely to cut you down if you press your luck (4 points).

GOSSIP (5 POINTS)

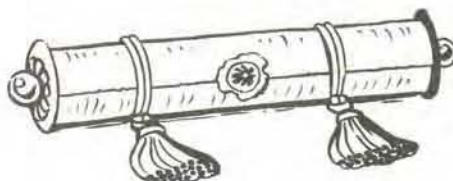
You tell all your friends they can confide in you. You're a great listener, and have heard the darkest secrets of many samurai who trust you. Unfortunately, you're not so good at keeping such entertaining information to yourself. The only thing better than being so trusted by so many people is being known as such a wealth of hidden knowledge by others. Whenever you learn a closely guarded secret or delicate information of any kind, you must make a simple Willpower roll to resist blurting it out to the next 'trustworthy' friend you encounter. The TN for this roll is 5 x the Glory of the person involved. If there are many unfortunate subjects, always use the highest Glory among them.

TOUCH OF THE VOID (2 POINTS)

Somewhere in your family line, your ancestors gained a close connection to the Void which has manifested itself in you. While your "attunement" allows you to use an extra point of Void a day, you are often unable to control your power. Each time you expend a point of Void, all people (including yourself) within a five foot radius must roll their Willpower against a TN of your Void x 5. Those who fail the roll feel the backlash of your power, becoming dizzy and disoriented. The effect lasts for as many turns as your Void rank; during this time affected characters roll one fewer die on all rolls.

WRATH OF THE KAMI (3 POINTS PER ELEMENT CHOSEN)

There is something about you that the spirits of Rokugan do not like. Perhaps your soul was born unclean, your ancestors wish to show their disfavor of you, or you have offended them in some way. In any case, the kami of the Empire go out of their way to harm you when they are directed to do so by a shugenja. Choose one or more elements. Any time a spell of any element chosen is cast to harm or hinder you directly, the caster gains a Free Raise.



DISADVANTAGE: ASCETIC (3 POINTS)

You aren't interested in material wealth or temporal power, glory or gaudy fashion. This world is only a transitional place between one reality and the next, and you have passed beyond the need to cling to it.

Ascetic bushi own one kimono, one pair of sandals, one obi, and their daisho. Ascetic shugenja own one kimono, one pair of sandals, one obi, and a pouch full of scrolls.

Maybe - maybe - they own a hat.

These are the only material objects you will ever own. You are unconcerned with Glory, but Honor is still very important. After all, a liar is concerned with the immediate consequences of his actions, and thus, clinging to a material world. (From *Way of the Dragon*, page 41.)



EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

"TALE OF TOGASHI AND SHINSEI"

As Shinsei spoke, the Kami asked questions. The only one who was silent was Togashi, who listened showing no sign of understanding or interest. Suddenly Togashi stood, looked at Shinsei, and walked away into the forest.

Mirumoto and Agasha followed and found him alone. He said, "I will not move until I understand."

They brought him food and sake, but he refused to move, or eat, or drink. Nine days passed this way, with the sun rising and setting and Togashi motionless in the center of a circle of food and drink. Then they begged Shinsei to speak to him, but he shook his head and said, "When the student is ready, the teacher is there."

(Continued on opposite page)

Creating a Monk Character

STEP ONE: BEGIN THE PATH

Write "Monk" under "Profession" on your character sheet. You do not begin with family or clan.

A monk has severed all connections to the clan or family to which he belonged (if any), starting anew with a fresh slate. Though some samurai occasionally acknowledge relatives who have retired to a life of contemplation, the monk's path must be traveled alone. Thus monk characters receive no family Trait bonus, even if they are descended from the family of a Great Clan. Characters who do not purchase the Clan Background Advantage were not born to the samurai class at all.

All monk characters receive a +1 bonus to their Void.

The monk may now choose one of the temple archetypes listed later in this chapter. These supply the monk with his beginning skills as well as a special benefit in lieu of a school Trait bonus.

STEP TWO: CUSTOMIZE YOUR CHARACTER

The monk's Glory begins at 2 and never increases or decreases. All Traits and rings (except Void) begin at 2. You now receive 25 Character Points to customize your character in the normal fashion. All monk characters are considered to have the Ascetic disadvantage, but receive no bonus Character Points for it. This disadvantage does not count toward the maximum 10 points of disadvantages a character may select.

STEP THREE: KIHU

A monk character begins with three kiho of his choice. A Rank 1 monk may purchase

additional kiho during character creation at the cost of twice its Mastery Level in Character Points. None of these kiho may have a Mastery Level greater than the monk's Ring + Rank.

Whenever a monk's Rank increases, he may learn an additional two kiho. The amount of time it takes to learn new kiho is up to the GM, but should be a time-consuming process. Even at higher Ranks, a monk's choice of kiho is restricted by Mastery Level, and he may never have a greater number of kiho in an element than his Ring in that element.

Monk School Archetypes

Monk characters do not attend a school per se. The road to enlightenment is a personal thing, and all who follow the Tao do so in their own ways. However, each of the major temples in Rokugan follows a general path toward enlightenment and tends to pass similar ideas and philosophies on to its students. A monk character can choose any one of the following temples as his starting school. This does not necessarily indicate that the monk attended the temple in question, but his teachers followed the same general philosophies as that temple.

The Four Temples

The Four Temples that surround Kyuden Seppun are the heart of the Empire's religion. The shinpu of these temples believe that enlightenment cannot be gained by separating oneself from the world, but only by going forth and living in it. These monks frequently serve as advisors, especially to generals or other military figures. This archetype works well for other temples that associate regularly with the outside.



Starting Honor: 2, plus 5 boxes
Skills: Courtier, Etiquette, Hand-to-Hand, Meditation, Shintao, Zanji, any one Skill
Benefit: Monks of the Four Temples roll an extra die when using any High Skills.

The Temples of the Seven Fortunes

The Seven Fortunes have countless temples throughout Rokugan. The monks that serve these greater deities believe that the truest strength comes not from the Fortunes, but from wisdom. The Fortunes are not meant to coddle mankind, but help mortals in their quest for wisdom. As a result, these monks are among the most educated individuals in Rokugan. These monks believe that only through the refinement and cultivation of the mind can true enlightenment be gained. This archetype works well for any temple with a high concentration on learning and internal dialogue.

Starting Honor: 2, plus 5 boxes
Skills: Atemi, Hand-to-Hand, History, Meditation, Shintao, any Lore skill, any High Skill
Benefit: Monks of the Temples of the Seven Fortunes begin with an additional kiho.

Shrine of the Seven Thunders

The yamabushi of the Shrine of the Seven Thunders are extremely reclusive, rarely venturing from their mountain retreat. These monks believe that enlightenment can only be found in solitude, in peace, and in quiet contemplation. These monks occasionally venture down from the mountains to visit the world from which they have separated themselves. Many are intrigued by the variety of the outside world, or challenged by the prospect of bringing enlightenment to the Empire. These individuals may remain outside the temple's boundaries indefinitely. These monks tend to be clumsy and uncertain in manners of etiquette, but their honor is unquestionable. This archetype works well for any reclusive temple focused on solitary meditation.

(Note: Though the Elemental Acolytes are all given their titles by this temple, they need not have begun their training here.)

Starting Honor: 3, plus 5 boxes
Skills: Fasting, Hand-to-Hand, Meditation, Mountaineer, Shintao 2, Zanji

Benefit: A monk from this temple may choose to focus on one element, choosing all of his starting kiho from that element. If he does so, his Mastery Level in the corresponding Ring is considered to be 1 higher than normal.

Temple of Osano-Wo

The Temple of Osano-Wo is known as the birthplace of the sohei, warrior monks as fearsome as any bushi. The sohei are normally peaceful, but retaliate violently against any blasphemy or unwarranted incursion into their territory. The sohei believe that enlightenment and mastery of the art of war are by no means mutually exclusive. These monks are relentless, resourceful, and reliable. They can be terrible foes or powerful allies. Any temple with an emphasis on martial arts and weapons training will work well with this school archetype.

Starting Honor: 1, plus 5 boxes
Skills: Battle, Meditation, Shintao, two Bugei Skills, any Hand-to-Hand skill 2

Benefit: A monk from this temple may keep an additional die of damage on all Hand-to-Hand attacks. (This is cumulative with Stone Hands, if that Advantage is taken.)

The monk may add one weapon of choice to his starting outfit.

Temple of Kaimetsu-Uo

The three Temples of Kaimetsu-uo follow an amended Path of Purification. Instead of being prohibited from violence, monks of Kaimetsu-uo are not allowed to initiate violence, but may react defensively. Many monks never see a fight, preferring to remain cloistered and practice their martial arts. In addition, monks are prohibited from exhibitionism (both bragging and showing off), and many eschew weapons (although the Temple's rules do not prohibit them). The rest of the monastic charter remains in effect.

EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

"TALE OF TOGASHI AND SHINSEI"

(CONTINUED)

On the morning of the tenth day, Togashi could barely speak. His vision was clouded, but he saw Shinsei step to the edge of the circle and kneel. Togashi told him, "I will not move until I understand."

Shinsei smiled and nodded. "Neither will I," he said and he sat down in the circle next to Togashi.

Togashi's eyes filled with astonishment and then he smiled. He nodded and a nightingale flew into the circle carrying a branch from a plum blossom tree. Togashi ate the sweet fruit from the branch, and together he and Shinsei ate the food that encircled them.



THE TAO AND THE CRAB

When a Crab reads a passage of the Tao of Shinsei, or hears a piece of wisdom from a monk, his immediate reaction is to translate it into something pragmatic. "How does this affect the real world?" he'll ask. "What actions should I take that will bring it about? How can its lessons be repeated in a significant fashion?" Rather than waiting for enlightenment to come, he goes and seeks it out. Rather than concerning himself with the afterlife, he applies what he learns immediately.

Starting Honor: 2, plus 5 boxes
Skills: Defense, Fasting, Hand-to-Hand (Kaze-do), Meditation, Shintao, any one Skill
Benefit: A monk from one of the Temples of Kaimetsu-uo receives the Bland Advantage (from Way of the Phoenix, page 50) for free.



Monks hail from all walks of life. Samurai, peasants, even lowly eta are invited to follow the path of Shinsei, but the path is not easy. Shintao monasteries practice a rigorous program of training and tedious menial labor for novices, meant to weed out the lazy and curious. Some would-be initiates return with tales of bizarre and pointless tasks, such as fetching buckets of water from a river five miles away when a nearby stream would have done just as well, moving large piles of rocks to the other side of the courtyard only to then move them back, or peeling the bark from trees with their bare hands. Most peasants who join the Brotherhood happily return to work the fields after the first week.

A monk player character is assumed to be one of the rare few that not only has survived the initial training process, but has triumphed, gaining a sliver of enlightenment in the form of kiho. Kiho are similar to spells, for each falls under the domain of a particular element. Unlike spells, kiho do not use scrolls, but draw upon the monk's own elements and natural skill.

Kiho can most easily be defined as two parts martial arts and one part magic. Each kiho symbolizes a step in the dance of the elements, a small piece in the puzzle of creation. Though many of these spectacular feats can be explained by mental discipline or athletic ability, some are completely inexplicable. In an attempt by the scribes of the Brotherhood to clarify the strange

powers they possess, kiho have been classified into four categories: Mushin, Aiki, Kharmic, and Zanshin.

MUSHIN

The term mushin means "thought without thought" and is suggestive of the rigorous, repetitious kata practice these kiho demand. Mushin kiho depend upon physical contact, practiced to the point where action no longer requires thought. Unless the kiho says otherwise, all are delivered via unarmed attacks. Only one mushin kiho may be used with each attack.

Many, but not all, mushin require subtle strikes upon the body's nerve centers; these strikes are known as atemi. Atemi often do no damage; most atemi are delivered by a single fingertip. Clever monks can use these techniques without initiating combat. Unfortunately, armor covers many of the vital nerve areas necessary for atemi. An opponent gains double the TN bonus normally provided by armor against any atemi-based kiho. A character with the Atemi skill can make additional (not free) Raises equal to his Atemi skill on all Atemi attacks.

AIKI

The meaning of the word is as ephemeral as the art itself, but "united life force" is the closest translation. These are the most passive and defensive of kiho, depending upon deep meditation and strictly regulated patterns of consciousness. The monk bonds his chi to the power of a particular element, adjusting the flow of energy through his body and mind, altering his abilities and natural defenses dramatically. Many aiki bear terrible drawbacks as well, so it is recommended that they be used carefully, if at all.

A monk may only use one aiki at a time. Activating an aiki or switching from one aiki to another requires either fifteen minutes of meditation or a single action and expenditure of one Void Point.

KHARMIC

Kharmic is perhaps the most powerful force in Shintao philosophy. The kharmic wheel spins, distributing every soul its due, and returning every action to its point of origin. Kharmic kiho draw upon a bit of this power and are among the most potent kiho. Unfortunately, each kharmic has a specific trigger, and these kiho have no effect unless their trigger occurs. A monk may

only have one kharmic kiho active at a time, and can switch from one to another via fifteen minutes of meditation or a single action accompanied by spending one Void Point.

ZANSHIN

The term zanshin is abstract, roughly translating to "supreme awareness." Zanshin kiho defy explanation. Any kiho that does not fit neatly into one of the other three groups is a product of zanshin. Zanshin kiho produce incredible effects, comparable only to magic. Only the most skilled and enlightened monks can master the arts of zanshin, and even they seldom understand how their powers function. There are no limitations to how many zanshin a monk may have active at one time, though most require expenditure of Void in order to be used.

NON-MONKS AND KIHU

Though the Brothers of Shinsei are the undisputed masters of kiho, these strange displays of elemental mastery are not their exclusive domain. Shugenja may also gain a certain degree of kiho mastery, as can other individuals whose training focuses upon martial training and spirituality. The ise zumi of the Dragon, the henshin of the Phoenix, the Kitsu family sodan-senzo of the Lion, and the Kuni tsukai-sagasu (witch hunters) of the Crab are types of non-monks who may learn kiho.

Initial kiho must be chosen during character creation, or when advancing in rank. A non-monk character may only know one kiho per Rank. Non-monk characters must pay a number of Character Points or Experience Points equal to twice the Mastery level of the kiho. Further, the character must have some knowledge of the Tao (Meditation and Shintao skills at Rank 1) and spend a great deal of time in private meditation before learning the kiho (six months is a good minimum).

Non-monks are bound by very strict limitations regarding kiho choice. Shugenja may add only half their Rank (round up) to their appropriate Ring to determine Mastery level. Non-shugenja must use only their Ring. Like monks, a non-monk may never have a greater number of kiho in one element than his rank in the corresponding Ring. When using a kiho, effects that depend upon their user's Rank function as if their user were Rank 1 for all non-monk characters.



Note: Though the following descriptions often refer to "monks," any character capable of using kiho may use all the effects listed.

Earth Kiho

HEART OF STONE

Type: Kharmic

Mastery: 3

The spirit is never so strong as when it is tested. This kiho symbolizes this truth, granting the monk the durability of stone in the face of destruction. When this kiho is active, the monk



THE TAO AND THE CRANE

When the Asahina joined the Crane they brought with them much of the knowledge of the Tao which the Phoenix Clan stores in their vast libraries. However, rather than treating the Tao of Shinsei as separate from life, a thing to be studied and pondered, the Asahina believe that the Tao applies to all living things, and that reality is a seamless web. Within this web all things are interrelated, and something which touches part of that structure touches the whole of reality. Thus, by changing one part of the world for the better, the Asahina believe that they are changing the whole of the world.



THE LION AND THE TAO

When Shinsei spoke to the Emperor and listened to the Little Master's words, Akodo stood behind Hantei, frowning. Finally, while Shinsei was in mid-sentence, Akodo spat on the ground, turned, and walked away.

Hantei stood, angry that his brother had insulted the Little Master.

"Why have you done this?" he demanded.

"This way is not my way," Akodo replied.

Shinsei said, "It is not my way, it is the way of the world."

Akodo turned back, the fire reflecting in his eyes. "The path of introspection and rhetoric is for men, not for soldiers."

Shinsei simply said, "The way cannot be one thing, for if it is one thing, it cannot be another."

(Continued on opposite page.)



may spend a Void Point after he receives Wounds in order to reduce to 10 all dice that roll greater than 10.

REST, MY BROTHER

Type: Mushin

Mastery: 3

This kiho was first discovered by a retired tsukai-sagasu. After spending a lifetime striving to defeat the creatures of the Shadowlands, he learned to direct the purity of his chi against those twisted by corruption. The kiho draws out the inherent purity of the target's soul, bringing it into conflict with its Taint and causing terrible damage as darkness and light war within the target's soul. The tsukai-sagasu was quite pleased with the results and began teaching the kiho to any others who could master it.

When using this kiho, any attacks the monk makes against an individual with the Shadowlands Taint roll and keep an additional number of attack and damage dice equal to twice the target's Shadowlands Rank. Note that this technique is ineffective against creatures without a Shadowlands Rank (both native creatures of the Shadowlands and uncorrupted opponents), as there is no inherent imbalance for the kiho to draw upon. This kiho has also been used as an effective, if blunt, method of rooting out those

who secretly carry the Taint, as it can be delivered with a single touch.

This kiho can be used with a weapon or with bare-handed attacks.

This kiho has a Mastery Level of 2 for all Crab characters.

CLEANSING SPIRIT

Type: Aiki

Mastery: 4

The monk who has reached this state of consciousness has learned to circulate pure chi through his body, removing all external impurities. While this kiho is in effect, the monk receives a bonus to all rolls to resist poisons and corruptive influences (drugs, alcohol, poison, etc.). Any attempts the monk makes to resist any corruptive effects roll a number of bonus dice equal to the monk's Earth. By spending a Void Point, the monk can attempt to cleanse himself of poisons that normally have no antidote. In this case, the monk must also roll his Earth vs. a TN of 30, with no bonus dice.

A master of this kiho can even attempt to cleanse himself (and only himself) of the Shadowlands Taint or corruption by the Lying Darkness. This is a difficult process, requiring at least a week of meditation. At the end of this time, the monk spends a Void Point and makes an Earth roll vs. a TN of 40. He may then reduce his Shadowlands Taint by one box, permanently. Five successful attempts will remove one Shadow Point, permanently.

Like many aiki, this kiho has its drawbacks. While the spirit is protecting the body, the mind is unguarded. Any attempts to possess or influence the monk's mind with either magic or social skills receive a number of free Raises equal to the monk's Water.

GRASP THE EARTH DRAGON

Type: Aiki

Mastery: 4

This kiho allows the monk to fuse his spirit with the stability of the Earth Dragon, drawing upon vast reserves of inner strength. While under the Earth Dragon's power, the monk cannot be forced to lose consciousness by any outside forces short of actual death. Further, any dice penalties (including those caused by wounds) are lowered by an amount equal to the monk's Rank. While under the effect of this kiho, the monk's spirit is



encased within the stoic nature of Earth, rendering him unable to speak. If the monk loses contact with the earth for more than a few seconds, this kiho's effects are negated and he must meditate for fifteen minutes or spend a Void Point to activate it again.

Tsuchi-do

Type: Mushin

Mastery: 4

Many Earth kiho focus upon stillness and stability. Tsuchi-do is not one of these kiho. Tsuchi-do is an incarnation of the raw fury of the earth, the power of the avalanche and the rage of the earthquake. Tsuchi-do is a fierce and unrelenting embrace, crushing opponents with the limitless power of the earth.

To use this kiho, the monk must first deliver a Hand-to-Hand attack with two Raises, roughly seizing his opponent about the body. If the monk makes four Raises, his opponent's arms will be pinned, leaving him unable to attack. (This attack does normal Hand-to-Hand damage.)

If the victim's arms are not pinned and he chooses to attack, his attack rolls are divided by two (rounded down). If he chooses to break free, he must succeed in a contested Earth roll against the monk. (This can be attempted once per round.) Each round the monk maintains the hold, he automatically rolls damage dice equal to his Earth + Rank, keeping the a number of dice equal to his Earth.

Note that a monk can take no other actions nor move while holding a target in the grip of tsuchi-do. The immobile monk's base TN to be hit is a mere 5.

Root the Mountain

Type: Zanshin

Mastery: 6

This kiho focuses on the mastery of the itten, a point just below the navel, the repository of the soul and the body's center of gravity. By focusing Earth in the itten one becomes nearly impossible to topple or move. At any time the monk may make an Earth roll vs. a TN of 25 to activate this kiho. (This requires the use of one action.)

While the kiho is active, any attempts to lift, throw, or otherwise forcibly move the monk face a Target Number of the monk's Earth x 15. The monk may make a number of attacks each round equal to half his Earth, rounded up; these cannot be ranged attacks. The monk may not move, but

his TN to be hit is unchanged (what he lacks in mobility is made up for by the durability this kiho grants). The downside to this kiho is its total immobility. The monk cannot declare Full Defense or Full Attack, and may not move until he spends an action to make another Earth roll vs. TN 15 to negate the kiho's effects.

Walk Through the Mountains

Type: Zanshin

Mastery: 7

A master of this kiho has attained a profound fellowship with the earth. By spending a Void Point, the monk may pass through earth and stone without harm. Neither the monk nor the stone become immaterial; they simply cease to affect each other. This kiho lasts for a number of minutes equal to the monk's Earth, during which the monk may breathe normally and move freely.

This kiho can be risky, for the inside of solid stone is completely dark. If the monk should become lost, he may become trapped with no further Void to spend. (The monk is not harmed if trapped in stone, though he may suffocate if he cannot replenish his Void quickly.) Occasionally, monks who wish to understand the true nature of earth use this kiho to disappear into the heart of a mountain. Some never return.

Using this kiho also allows travel across quicksand, quagmire, or any other unstable earthen surface as if it were solid ground for the same duration.

Water Kiho

Freezing the Lifeblood

Type: Mushin (Atemi)

Mastery: 3

This is one of the most basic atemi. The monk makes a simple fingertip strike, usually directed at the throat, spine, or heart, causing no damage. If the monk strikes successfully, he may spend a Void Point to make a contested Water roll against his target. If the monk wins the contested roll, his target is paralyzed for that round and a number of rounds afterward equal to the monk's Rank. A victim of this kiho may make another opposed Water roll each round in order to resist the kiho's effects, but must spend a Void Point every time he wishes to do so.

The Lion and the Tao

(CONTINUED)

Akodo drew his sword from its saya and all about gasped. "Your way is not my way." He raised his sword as it gleamed in the firelight. "This is my way." Then he walked away. When he returned to his lands, he ordered that no copy of the Tao of Shinsei should ever be allowed within the walls of any Lion dojo. The Emperor called on Akodo and told him that he would reverse his order. In fact, a copy of the Tao should be included in every Lion dojo.

Akodo immediately agreed. When he returned, copies of the Tao were placed next to copies of Leadership, but even to this day, each and every copy remains unopened.



THE TAO AND THE UNICORN

Iuchi followed Shinjo on her quest outside Rokugan. There he was mystified to discover shugenja in foreign lands. They called themselves "sorcerers", "warlocks", "magicians", and "wizards." He wondered how it was possible that a shugenja could work magic without invoking the aid of the Seven Fortunes, as their influence didn't stretch far from Rokugan. Iuchi studied with them, trying to understand their powers. He also studied his copy of the Tao of Shinsei and he understood. While many Rokugani spend their lives trying to become one with the elements, these people had an instinctive understanding of the Shinsei truism that all is one.

MUSUBI

Type: Kharmic

Mastery: 3

As water is forced down, the surrounding water rises up in greater strength. Such is the power of this kiho. To use musubi, the monk must first declare a Full Defense. If an attacker fails to strike him, the monk can strike back the following round, rolling an extra die on his attack roll, plus another extra die for every 5 by which the attacker's roll missed. This attack can only be directed against the opponent who failed to strike the monk.

SLAP THE WAVE

Type: Mushin

Mastery: 3

Slap the Wave is undoubtedly one of the most dramatic of the Water kiho. The monk summons his chi into a powerful kiai shout, accompanied by a deafening clap and expenditure of a Void Point. These gestures send ripples through the elements, confusing and disorienting everyone in the area.

Anyone who hears the slap must make a Water roll vs. the monk's Water x 5. If this roll fails, he becomes disoriented, subtracting a number of dice equal to the monk's Water divided by two (round up) from all actions. This effect persists for a number of rounds equal to the monk's Water. Note that both friends and foes are affected by this kiho; only those entirely without

hearing and the character who delivers the slap are immune.

This kiho is used often by traveling monks to quell angry mobs or to escape groups of pursuers.

CHI PROTECTION

Type: Mushin (Atemi)

Mastery: 4

Also called chi gung, this is the most potent healing kiho. Strangely, this atemi applies many of the same nerve-center strikes and joint manipulation techniques used in the infamous Death Touch. The practitioner delivers a number of fingertip strikes and painful-looking manipulations to his subject over the course of ten minutes. At the end of this time, the practitioner spends a Void Point. Both characters then add their Water together and make a single roll vs. a TN of 30. Wound penalties for both practitioner and target affect this roll. If successful, a number of Wound levels are healed equal to the practitioner's Water, plus one for every Raise. A character may use this ability to heal himself; simply roll as if the monk were his own subject.

This kiho may also be used to counter the effects of any other nerve-strike atemi kiho. In most cases, the monk must simply strike the affected character with a fingertip attack, spend a Void Point, and make a contested Water roll against whomever delivered the original atemi. If successful, the atemi effect is immediately negated. Certain atemi attacks require more involved methods of healing, detailed in their own descriptions.

SPEAK TO THE SOUL

Type: Zanshin

Mastery: 4

Through use of this kiho, the monk allows his own spirit to resonate in harmony with an inanimate object. By touching a person or object, then spending a Void Point, the monk immediately learns the subject's elemental makeup. He learns which element (or Ring) is strongest, and whether the spirit of an inanimate object is awakened (i.e., a nemuranai). This kiho will also notify the monk whether the subject is corrupted by the Taint, and it reveals the touch of the Lying Darkness as an absence of all elements. (If the monk is not familiar with the Shadow, this could be more confusing than informative.)



RIDE THE WATER DRAGON

Type: Aiki
Mastery: 5

This powerful aiki fills its user with the spirit of water, greatly improving his healing capabilities. The character heals Wounds equal to his Water each minute the aiki is in effect. Unfortunately, this kiho renders the user somewhat sluggish as the excess of Water collects in his muscles. Any damage rolls the monk makes while this kiho is in effect automatically keep the lowest dice.

THE BOUNDLESS DEPTHS OF WATER

Type: Kharmic
Mastery: 6

The master of this kiho learns that there is no end to the body's endurance; as long as the spirit survives the body may be enticed to endure. If a monk's Wounds reach Down, Out, or Dead while this kiho is active, the monk automatically spends 2 Void Points and regains a number of Wound levels equal to his Water + Rank. If the monk does not have at least 2 Void Points to spend, the kiho does nothing. This kiho will not revive a monk who has been killed. This kiho puts an extreme shock upon the monk's systems. He can make no maneuvers except Full Defense for 10 rounds minus his Water + Rank. The kiho will not activate during this recovery period.

SPIRIT OF WATER

Type: Zanshin
Mastery: 7

This extraordinary kiho allows the character to step between the bonds of the elements, momentarily disappearing from reality. The monk simply steps out of sight, spends a Void Point, and reappears anywhere in his previous range of vision. It is unknown exactly where the monk goes in the interim, or how he traverses the intervening distance. It is known, however, that the kiho will not function if anyone can see the monk. He must step out of sight, or the kiho fails to work. Only the monk and whatever he can easily carry are affected.

Fire Kiho

AI UCHI

Type: Kharmic
Mastery: 3

This is the most basic, and perhaps the most powerful, of all kharmic kiho. The monk waits for the moment when his attacker is most vulnerable: the moment of a successful strike. At the beginning of any round a character with this kiho may declare that he intends to attempt a kharmic strike, lowering his TN to Be Hit to 5. As soon as he is struck with any blow that would cause Wounds, he counterattacks before damage is rolled, striking the target automatically. The monk may not make Raises on this attack, but gains a number of free Raises equal to the number of Raises made by his attacker. A kharmic strike attack may be delivered a number of times per round equal to the monk's Fire divided by two (round down). Only one counterattack may be made per each successful strike against the monk.

Note that the kharmic strike does not prevent Wounds. Both the monk and his target make damage rolls simultaneously.

CHANNEL THE FIRE DRAGON

Type: Aiki
Mastery: 3

This kiho grants incredible resistance to extremes of heat and cold. Temperature extremes no longer bother the monk, not even the most chilling blizzards or boiling heat waves. The monk can withstand extraordinary temperature extremes for short periods, walking across hot coals or seizing frozen metal in his bare hands with no effect. In game terms, any fire or cold damage the character receives always drops a number of dice equal to the monk's Rank. All damage dice from heat and cold that roll below the monk's Fire are also dropped.

While the monk is under the effect of this kiho, his concentration and focus become nearly impenetrable. The distractions of the outside world are shut away, and there is only the moment. The monk may speak only in one-word sentences. Such a character is easily surprised (+10 TN to all rolls to perceive ambush).



THE SCORPION AND THE TAO

Bayushi refused to send Shosuro against Fu Leng. There is speculation that Bayushi did not trust Shinsei, a sentiment that exists in many Scorpions even to this day. The most venomous attacks on the Tao of Shinsei come from Scorpion scholars who doubt its authenticity. As the Scorpion scholar Soshi Muyoko wrote, "If Shinsei actually said everything that is in the Tao, he would be still saying it."

But even more significant than Bayushi's refusal is what occurred when Shinsei left with his Seven Thunders. The next morning, despite his objections, and despite his orders to the contrary, Shosuro rode out with Shinsei to meet Fu Leng. She was the only Thunder to ride out without the approval of her clan's progenitor.

Shosuro was also the only one to return.



EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

"TALE OF HIDA AND SHINSEI"

Hida's brooding after his defeat at the contest of the Kami was broken by the appearance of a little old man with a shaved head, dressed in simple robes. A raven sat on the old man's shoulder. He sat down opposite the hulking Hida, who did not stir at his approach.

"Why are you angry, my son?" the old man asked. Hida didn't look up.

"I am angry because I am weak, and because my strength could not save me from my weakness."

The old man smiled – sadly it seemed – and spoke again.

"Knowing your weakness is a form of strength, First Crab. Seek the truth in that, and you will never be beaten again."

(Continued on opposite page.)

FALLING STAR STRIKE

Type: Mushin (Atemi)

Mastery: 4

This is a subtle, yet potentially deadly, atemi strike. After a successful fingertip strike, the monk may spend a Void Point and make a contested Fire roll against his opponent. If this roll is successful, the opponent is struck blind for a number of rounds equal to the monk's Fire. All Perception checks or other actions dependent upon sight receive a +20 TN for the blinded character, and he is likely to fall or injure himself as he stumbles about. The blinded character gains only half his normal Reflexes bonus to his TN to Be Hit.

KUZUSHI

Type: Mushin

Mastery: 4

Kuzushi is the art of unbalancing an opponent. It is a quick, precise attack to an opponent's joints or other vulnerable areas. Kuzushi itself does no Wounds, but maneuvers the opponent in such a way that future attacks will be more effective. For every 5 by which the monk succeeds in his attack roll, he gains a free Raise to attack that same opponent in the following round. These free Raises are only applicable to this opponent, and must be used in the round immediately afterward. Note that the monk does not necessarily have to take advantage of the free Raises; they can be used by any character attacking the same opponent.

Kuzushi may be delivered with a weapon or a Hand-to-Hand attack.

BREAKING BLOW

Type: Mushin

Mastery: 4

Also called "tamashiwara," this kiho focuses the mind and body to the execution of one goal: destruction. Using nothing more than his bare hands, the monk can deliver a blow to shatter stone, crumble wood, or split a samurai's armor. Though many kiho are subtle and reclusive arts, tamashiwara can be very competitive. Some masters have broken as many as a dozen wood planks or clay bricks with a single blow, and proudly hold open challenges to surpass these records. It is not an uncommon sight to see traveling monks meet one another at festivals in order to compare their skills. The greatest masters can approach a pile of bricks, invite a spectator to

select a specific brick, then shatter the pile with a single blow, leaving the selected brick unharmed.

To use tamashiwara, the monk must simply make a bare-handed attack. First, the monk spends a Void Point and makes an attack roll against the object (in the case of inanimate targets, the attack roll is unnecessary). The monk then makes a Fire roll against a predetermined Target Number (see below). The affected thickness can be doubled for every Raise the monk makes on his Fire roll.

Ceramics/Glass – TN 5 – 1" thickness

Wood – TN 10 – 4" thickness

Brick – TN 15 – 3" thickness

Stone – TN 20 – 2" thickness

Metal – TN 25 – 1" thickness (Note that the somewhat suicidal notion of punching a moving katana should require several Raises, to say the least. Such a tactic will also automatically allow the person holding the katana to gain initiative on the sword-punching monk.)

If successful, the monk has successfully "broken" the target, knocking a hole the size of his fist. Though the effect is small against walls or other large structures, an aptly-placed break can threaten even a castle's stability.

When used against a living opponent, the Breaking Blow allows the monk to roll and keep a number of extra dice equal to his Fire for damage. This technique requires such focus and precision that it can never be attempted during a Full Attack. Directing the Breaking Blow specifically at an opponent's armor requires three Raises and does only normal Hand-to-Hand damage to the opponent. However, the Armor's TN bonus is permanently reduced by an amount equal to the monk's Fire.

DANCE OF THE FLAMES

Type: Mushin

Mastery: 5

Fire dances and sways as it burns. It is everywhere at once, never still, never unprepared. The master of the Dance of the Flames has learned to fight like fire, spreading his attack among all that dare to come close. While using a single Hand-to-Hand or weapon skill, a practitioner of this kiho may make multiple attacks in a single round.

The character must divide his attack dice between targets, both rolled and kept. For example, consider a monk with 3 Agility and 2 Bojutsu who is facing three opponents. If he

wishes to attack more than one, he could attack the first by rolling three dice and the others with one each, keeping one die for each attack roll. Every target that is successfully struck receives Wounds normally. This mushin kiho may be used with a weapon, or bare-handed.

PURITY OF SHINSEI

Type: Zanshin

Mastery: 5

The monk who has mastered the Purity of Shinsei has gained absolute control of his inner fire. He can summon this fire, using it to light his path or strike fear into the minions of darkness. By spending a Void Point, the monk's skin glows with an unearthly light. This radius of the light is equal to ten feet times the monk's Fire, and is bright enough to read or travel by. Creatures of the Shadowlands, the Lying Darkness, and Gakido are irrationally afraid of this light, and are affected by it as if the monk had a Fear Rating equal to his Fire (frightened creatures who do not have Void drop a die for all actions). This kiho lasts for a number of hours equal to the monk's Fire. Canceling the glow does not end the kiho prematurely.

HITSU-DO

Type: Aiki

Mastery: 6

This incredible kiho inflates the Fire in its user's body, causing his hands, eyes, and weapons to light up with flame. At all times while under Hitsu-do's effect, the character rolls extra dice equal to his Fire for his attack and damage rolls. Real flame billows from the monk's limbs and eyes, leaving a sparkling corona as he moves. The art of Hitsu-do is an intimidating and amazing sight, and a rare one. The masters of this kiho are few, for the price of its power is steep.

At the end of every round that Hitsu-do is in effect, the character takes Wounds equal to his Fire. These Wounds cannot be negated or healed until the kiho is deactivated. Fortunately, the kiho shuts down if the monk is knocked unconscious.

This kiho has a Mastery Level of 5 for all Phoenix characters.

Air Kiho

FORTUNE'S BREATH

Type: Aiki

Mastery: 3

The monk who has mastered this state of mind knows the art of the true breath; his breath is so strong, pure, and lasting that he needs little air to survive. While this kiho is active, the monk can go without air for a number of minutes equal to his Air x 5, and may replenish himself with but a single breath. This kiho's drawback is that in casting so much of his spirit upon the winds, one becomes vulnerable to hostile spirits. Any harmful magic cast upon the monk automatically receives a free Raise.

WAY OF THE WILLOW

Type: Kharmic

Mastery: 3

Way of the Willow borrows much from the mizu-do fighting style of the Crane. If the monk declares Full Defense and his opponent declares a Full Attack, the monk may interrupt his opponent's initiative and throw him by making a contested Air + Hand-to-Hand roll vs. his attacker's Agility + Weapon Skill. If successful, the attacker is hurled a number of yards equal to the monk's Air, in a direction of the monk's choosing. Normal Hand-to-Hand damage is inflicted, plus falling damage if applicable. The opponent's attack is canceled, and he is knocked prone.

This kiho has a Mastery level of 2 for all Crane characters.

STAIN UPON THE SOUL

Type: Mushin (Atemi)

Mastery: 4

This is a simple atemi technique, a fingertip attack that inflates the target's nerve centers with elemental Air to cause tremendous pain. Once the attack roll is successful, the monk may spend a Void Point and make a contested Air roll. If the monk succeeds, the target receives dice penalties to all of his skill rolls equal to the monk's Air divided by two (round up) for a number of rounds equal to the monk's Air. The kiho's effect is cumulative if applied multiple times. The fingertip attack causes no Wounds.

Victims of this kiho claim that the sensation is like nothing else, beyond pain and into some other realm of agony. Those who have felt the



EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

"TALE OF HIDA AND SHINSEI"

(CONTINUED)

Hida's head rose from his hands as he looked at the old man.

"But my weakness caused me to fall first," he replied.

"No. Your inability to accept your weakness caused you to fall first. But now you know it, and in knowing it, you transform it into strength. Lies are told by those who would deny their weakness. The truth can only live in those who see what they are."

Hida stared in wonder as the old man's words sank in.

"Why did you tell me these things?"

"Because you wanted to hear them."

With that, the old man bowed and went on his way.



MONK STARTING OUTFIT

Kimono, traveling pack,
1 koku, 1 peasant weapon

Stain avoid encountering it a second time. As an interesting contrast, a few militant sects of monks practice this kiho upon themselves as a form of body hardening and mortification.

SOUL OF THE FOUR WINDS

Type: Aiki
Mastery: 4

This strange kiho was introduced to the Brotherhood by the Iuchi, who discovered it during their travels across the Burning Sands. Unlike most aiki, it is more a series of movements and counter-movements than a specific mindset. It is a highly defensive kiho, allowing the monk to perceive harm quickly and move out of its path with little effort. The monk using Soul of the Four Winds gains a bonus to his TN to Be Hit equal to his Air + Rank + Defense, but may not declare a Full Attack.

This kiho has a Mastery Level of 3 for all Unicorn characters.

THE WIND'S TRUTH

Type: Aiki
Mastery: 4

While most aiki involve meditative trances that resist physical hardship, the Wind's Truth is something different. The monk who fills his soul with the Wind's Truth finds his perceptions heightened in subtle ways. He sees the souls of others painted clearly upon their faces, and sometimes hears what is meant rather than what is actually said.

In other words, he develops a good ear for lies.

Any attempts to lie to or seduce the monk have their target number increased by his Air x 5. Further, whenever the monk hears someone speak, he may spend a Void Point and make a contested Air roll. If the monk wins, he immediately knows whether the speaker is lying.

The drawback is this: while the monk's perceptions are focused upon the subtle, he tends to miss the obvious. Though he can easily perceive the intentions of another being's spirit, he becomes clumsy in his interactions with the material world. Any non-social skill rolls made while using this kiho roll three fewer dice.

This kiho has a Mastery Level of 3 for all Scorpion characters.

THE GREAT SILENCE

Type: Zanshin
Mastery: 4

This strange kiho is the bane of courtiers and shugenja. Activating it is a simple task: the monk must meet eyes with his target and spend a Void Point. This allows the monk to make a contested Air roll. If this roll is successful, the target becomes overwhelmed by the monk's chi, temporarily stricken mute.

Only a single target is affected. The kiho lasts for a number of minutes equal to the monk's Air, or until the monk spends another Void Point for any reason.

Like most zanshin, how this technique works is a mystery. Those affected by the Great Silence have described its influence as "a cold shadow, gripping the throat and filling the lungs." Many monks eschew its use. It is theorized that the Great Silence draws upon the darkest regions of the soul, and that prolonged use may lead to madness.

STEAL THE AIR DRAGON

Type: Aiki
Mastery: 5

This strange kiho allows the monk to enhance the elemental Air within his own body, expanding it to create a cloud of distraction and insignificance. As long as the monk makes no threatening moves, does not speak, and bears no obvious weapons, other intelligent beings will ignore him. He might walk into the heart of a heavily guarded library, past the yojimbo and guard dogs of a powerful daimyo, without raising an eyebrow. The monk is not invisible, he just seems to belong. He is insignificant. Usually, he will be forgotten. Particularly alert or dedicated individuals (like all Seppun Miharū) can make a contested Air roll to notice the monk. Once one person begins drawing attention to the monk, others catch on swiftly, making contested Air rolls with a +5 bonus for every other individual who has seen through the illusion.

If the monk is not seen, he will be forgotten as long as he leaves no evidence of his passing. If he leaves any noticeable trace, those who failed to notice him will suddenly "remember" that he was there. For instance, a monk enters a room full of diplomats, turns over a chair in the corner of the room, and leaves. Though the diplomats fail to notice the monk, one later happens upon the overturned chair and comments upon it.

Immediately, everyone in the room begins to remember the monk that passed through, though they have no idea why he seemed so insignificant earlier.

The penalty of this kiho is extreme. As long as the monk lingers in the Air Dragon's embrace, his bugei skills and mushin kiho function as if his Rings, Traits, and Skills had a value of 1.

FLEE THE DARKNESS

Type: Kharmic

Mastery: 6

The monk has focused his mind to the exclusion of outside forces. His chi is constantly alert to all attempts at external manipulation. Any attempt to control his mind (whether it be a spell or a courtier's Rank Technique) will activate this kiho, increasing the monk's resistance dramatically.

In game terms, the GM alerts the character when the kiho has detected some sort of outside influence. If the character wishes, he may spend a Void Point to double the TN to affect or control him, or double the result of his roll to resist the effect. Even if the monk does not choose to spend Void to resist, the kiho will still alert him that an attempt was made to subvert his will.

Void Kiho

SELF, NO SELF

Type: Aiki

Mastery: 3

Beyond mere meditation, beyond zanji, there is a state of mind in which all concept of self, all concept of lack of self is discarded. The body, the mind, the spirit become everything, become nothing. A monk who can enter this state swims freely in a realm of pure Void, in the midst of the elemental dance.

A monk under the influence of this aiki can meditate for five minutes (TN 20) to completely replenish his Void Points. However, the monk's detachment from the crude physical world limits the body's capabilities. While this kiho is active, the monk cannot make Raises.

ANCESTRAL GUIDANCE

Type: Zanshin

Mastery: 4

Though the brothers of Shinsei do not depend upon kami for their fantastic abilities, they often serve as go-betweens with the spirit world. The souls of the ancestors sometimes speak to monks, offering their advice or pleading for help.

A monk who has mastered this kiho can attain a deep trance, spending a Void Point to summon whatever spirits happen to dwell in the area. Normally, this kiho calls upon shiryō, but it has been known to occasionally summon other varieties of spirits or, rarely, the Fortunes (if they wish to answer). The monk instantly knows the identity of the spirit who answers, and may ask a number of questions equal to his Void. Bear in mind that spirits are known for cryptic replies, and are not bound to tell the truth. It is up to the monk to interpret what he hears.

This kiho has a Mastery level of 3 for all Lion characters.

TOUCH THE VOID DRAGON

Type: Aiki

Mastery: 4

It is said that the enhanced state of consciousness this strange kiho provides is a crucial step upon the path to enlightenment. The monk opens his chi and allows it to flow into the land. The chi of the environment flows back in turn, providing him with its strength. While the monk is affected, his kiho function as if one of his Rings were one level higher. The Ring that is affected depends upon the environment and local geomancy. Caves are strong in Earth, rivers and waterfalls are often strong in Water, etc. The ebb and flow of the elements is such that the benefit is never certain. A Perception + Shintao roll with a TN of 15 can easily predict the result in a given area, but the benefit is typically Air or Earth.

If the GM is uncertain what element is strongest, he may roll one die on the following table to determine the answer randomly. If a 10 is rolled, reroll and add to the result.

1-5 Earth (if near a river or sea, switch with Water)

6-9 Air

11-14 Water

15-19 Fire

20+ Void



NEW WEAPON: SHOBO

The shobo is a short cylinder of iron, perfect to wrap a fist around. It is similar in function to brass knuckles, except that halfway down its length a single iron ring is welded to the shaft, allowing the shobo to be held in a variety of positions. The shobo can be used with the Hand-to-Hand skill, allowing the user to roll an extra die for damage on bare-handed attacks.





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

Like many aiki, becoming one with the Elements has certain drawbacks. First, any spirits residing in the area become aware of the monk's presence. The more intelligent spirits will be able to read the monk's spirit as it wafts across the environment, immediately learning what kiho he is capable of using.

Second, the monk should never use this kiho in any area that has become Tainted by the Shadowlands. Doing so invites the corruption of Fu Leng into the body and spirit, causing the monk to gain a point of Taint for every round the kiho remains active.

This kiho has a Mastery Level of 3 for Dragon characters.

RYOKU

Type: Mushin

Mastery: 5

Literally "strength," Ryoku suggests a strength of spirit so pure that it utterly dominates an opponent. To deliver Ryoku, the monk releases a shocking kiai shout and makes an open hand punch or chop against an opponent, doing normal Hand-to-Hand damage. After damage is rolled, the monk may choose to spend any number of his remaining Void Points. These spent Void Points do not cause additional Wounds, but the target is forced to spend an equal amount of Void Points as his chi is disrupted. If the monk forces the target to spend more Void Points than are currently available, the target may not recover Void for a number of days equal to the difference. This technique has no effect on opponents who lack a Void Ring, though it will function against the Akasha Points of a Naga.

UNATTUNEMENT

Type: Kharmic

Mastery: 5

Unattunement is a difficult kiho to master, but a powerful one. It has no purpose except defense. When another's magic overwhelms the monk, the monk's chi strikes out in retribution. The kiho makes no attempt to protect or defend its user, and does not affect the attack in any way. It simply reaches out during the attacker's most vulnerable moment and severs his connection to the elements.

For this kiho to activate, someone must voluntarily use a spell or kiho directly upon the monk. The monk may then spend a Void Point to make a contested roll with his opponent,

contesting the Monk's Void plus Rank to the opponent's Ring (the Ring of the spell or kiho used) plus Rank.

If the monk is successful, his opponent's connection to that element is severed for a full day. This effect negates the use of all spells and kiho that depend upon that Ring. The affected Ring and its associated Traits are also lowered by one (to a minimum of one) for the same duration. Even rest and meditation cannot re-establish the connection.

For example, a Rank 3 Soshi Shugenja with Air of 4 attempts to cast Command the Mind upon a Rank 4 monk with a Void of 5. The monk spends a Void point to use Unattunement. He rolls 9 dice, keeping 5 (Rank 4 + Void 5). The Soshi rolls 7 dice, keeping 4 (Rank 3 + 4 Air). The Monk rolls a 45, the Soshi rolls a 36. The Soshi's spell still takes effect, but the Soshi cannot cast any more Air spells, and his Air is effectively a 3 for the next day.

DEATH TOUCH

Type: Mushin (Atemi)

Mastery: 6

The dim mak, or Death Touch, is the most feared and deadly of all atemi. Its name is whispered in hushed tones, and tales of its use always carry a hint of fear. It has been described as cruelty incarnate, causing a slow, rotting illness that condemns its victim to a living hell.

Delivering dim mak requires only the faintest brush of the fingertips, no more, no less. To deliver the technique with excessive force would disrupt its function. Only a gentle touch will do. The monk must make a normal attack roll with three Raises, signifying the care and precision he must take. The technique may not be used while the monk is making a Full Attack or has any aiki or kharmic kiho active. If the attack is successful, the monk spends Void equal to his target's Rank and makes a contested Void Roll. If this roll succeeds, the dim mak sets in and the target is likely doomed.

Nothing happens at first. In fact, the victim may be unaware that anything has happened at all. Soon, though, the curse takes effect. The body begins to rot. Wounds fester instead of healing. The spirit is restless, causing terrible nightmares and preventing a good night's sleep. The victim finds that no amount of rest will stem his exhaustion.



In game terms, the character heals as if his Stamina were one rank lower, and healing spells must Raise twice to have any effect at all. The victim slowly loses Wound Points every day at sunrise and sunset, equal to the Rank of the monk who placed the Death Touch. These Wounds cannot be healed by any means until the dim mak is removed. This continues until the victim dies.

There are two known cures. First, the Death Touch can be removed by the monk who delivered it. This is an easy task, requiring a second touch and a Void roll with a TN of 15. Second, it can be removed by a monk skilled in Chi Protection. This is a painful and arduous process for both the victim and the healer, requiring a week of meditation and acupressure treatment before a cure can even be attempted. At the end of this time, the healer must pit his will against the monk who placed the curse. The TN to cure the dim mak is equal to five times the Void + Rank of whoever placed it. The healer rolls only his Water, subtracting whatever Wound penalties the victim suffers. If the healer also knows dim mak, he may add 15 to the attempt to cure it. If the healer fails, the curse worsens, inflicting 2 additional Wounds at sunrise and sunset until cured.

This kiho is considered a perversion of the teachings of Shintao. Its use is reviled and despised among the peaceful Brothers of Shinsei. Most monks who practice it do so only to better

understand how to cure the curse. Rumors persist of a secret sect of monks who stand outside the teachings of the Brotherhood who use the Death Touch as its name implies.

KUKAN-DO

Type: Zanshin

Mastery: 7

This is among the most powerful of the zanshin, a risky but potentially deadly tap into the power of Void. The monk fills his chi with Void, and then extends it into an opponent, locking both of their spirits in a deadly embrace. For as long as the monk chooses, both individuals are held in stasis, unable to draw upon the elements for any purpose.

To use this kiho, the monk must make eye contact with his victim and spend a Void Point, then make a contested Void + Rank roll. (If the target is a Naga, roll its Akasha + Rank instead. If the target has no Void or Akasha, roll against five times the target's Earth + Rank.) If the monk succeeds, then neither the monk nor the target may use any magic, kiho, rank techniques, tattoos, or other Rank-derived benefits until the kiho's effect ceases. Skills, advantages, disadvantages, and Void/Akasha Points are unaffected. This technique lasts until the target moves out of visual range, the monk ends the effect, or the monk dies or loses consciousness.

HAPPO ZANSHIN

Type: Aiki / Zanshin

Mastery: 8

Happo Zanshin is a near legendary kiho. It can only be learned from another master, never spontaneously arrived upon. Happo Zanshin grants "eight directions awareness," making the monk aware of everything within ten feet. When used, the monk simply spends a Void Point and rolls dice equal to his Void. For every 10 he rolls, the radius of Happo Zanshin is extended an additional 10 feet. Everything within the kiho's radius, every detail, every hidden door, every concealed object, is revealed to the monk. He sees, hears, smells, tastes, and feels everything within the radius. Darkness and even physical obstructions are no barrier, though certain spells and wards will prevent its intrusion.

Monks with the Precise Memory advantage find this kiho particularly useful, using it to take accurate "snapshots" of a large area for later analysis.





Retirement

Samurai that retire to a life of monastic solitude are welcome among the Brotherhood; after a lifetime of hardship they have earned the solitude of a monastery. The needs of these individuals are seen to with courtesy and respect. Retirees are not required to perform menial labor or debase themselves as novices would. They are rarely asked to undertake missions for the Brotherhood. Retired samurai are given a quiet room among other retired samurai with whom they can socialize. They are then politely ignored for the rest of their lives.

Those few retirees who emerge from their chambers and begin to walk the path of the Tao of their own accord are not encouraged or assisted. The path of true enlightenment is personal, and the path of a retired samurai is harder than most. Experienced monks know better than to interfere. After a career of experiences, preconceptions, prejudices, and suppositions, retired samurai find that much of what they have learned is merely a burden. Only if they can set aside what they have learned and begin again do the other brothers take notice.

How to Retire an Existing Character

Many factors can lead to retirement. Age, injury, disgrace, poverty, or a simple desire for peace can lead to a samurai discarding his daisho and joining a monastery. Any character may retire, be he shugenja, courtier, or bushi. Simply decide to retire, put aside the daisho, and you're retired. Congratulations, you're a monk.

Oh, you wanted kiho, too?

Well, you asked for it.
Here's what you have to do...

STEP ONE: SEVER ALL TIES

The character must give up his clan and family name. He must renounce all lands and titles he owns, shave his head to show his devotion, abandon the samurai caste, and give up his earthly possessions. He must also find a monastery that will accept him. Usually, this is not a problem, but if the character was particularly belligerent to the Brotherhood he may find nothing but closed doors. In the view of the Rokugani social system, the character is now a monk (Glory Rating of 2 which never changes, the Ascetic disadvantage but no Character Points for it). He has all of the social standing and religious duties of a monk, but is otherwise unchanged. The character will continue to gain experience and Insight toward his previous school until he undertakes the next step.

STEP TWO: FIND THE NEW PATH

To begin this step, the character must have enough Insight to gain his next Rank in his current school, without learning that Rank. A Rank 5 character must gain at least 276 Insight. The character must have Shintao and Meditation skills of at least Rank 3. If the character intends to become a true Brother of Shinsei, he must also now spend 10 Experience points and a year in meditation. If the character ceases his meditations for more than a day at any time during this process, the process is aborted and the 10 Experience Points are wasted; he must start afresh.

During this time, the character reflects upon his life and considers what he has experienced, applying it to the Tao. At the end of this time, he makes a Void + Meditation roll against a Target Number of 30. If the roll is unsuccessful, the character must continue meditating, making another Void + Meditation roll against a Target Number of 30 every month until successful. When the roll finally succeeds, the character emerges from the temple as a Rank 1 monk of indeterminate school. (A retired character gains none of the benefits of monk school archetypes.) The character may spend 5 Experience Points at this time to learn one kiho.

A note about retired characters: those who have completed this step may no longer walk their previous life paths. Old Rank Techniques are

permanently frozen. Shugenja have an even more difficult time as they begin to internalize their understanding of the elements. Retired shugenja lose any free Raises or school abilities (meishodo, tsangusuri, wards, mizugusuri, and the Phoenix ability to spend multiple Void on a spell) and may never learn or research new spells. All innate abilities are lost. Spells which depend upon the character's Rank function as if his Rank were zero. Further, all spells are frozen at their current level of power. For example, if a shugenja retires with a Fire of 3, his Fire spells will always function as if he still had a Fire of 3 even if he later increases his Fire. In effect, the new Insight the character has gained can no longer be applied to his old ways. It is time to walk a new path. (For this reason, the GM should require shugenja to record their Rings at the time of their retirement.)

STEP THREE: UNLEARNING

This is the final and most difficult step, one which many are unwilling to take. A retired samurai who has completed step two may continue to meditate for an additional number of months equal to his Rank x 5, at the end of which time he must make a Void + Meditation roll at Target Number 30 every month until successful. When this roll succeeds the character loses his highest Rank in his previous school, forever forgetting the associated Technique and all other abilities granted by that Rank. A shugenja must voluntarily abandon half of his current spells, forever renouncing all ability to cast them. A shugenja who unlearns Rank 1 must give up all of his spells. Ise zumi cannot embark upon

this step; they cannot discard the power Togashi's blood has given them.

The character now increases one Rank as a monk and learns more kiho. The number of kiho learned is equal to the Rank the character unlearned plus one. For example, a Rank 4 Hida Bushi has completed steps one and two and now wishes to begin Unlearning. Once he succeeds on his Void roll, he is considered to be a Rank 3 Hida Bushi and a Rank 2 Shintao Monk, and learns an additional 5 kiho (giving him a total of 6). There is no limit to the number of Ranks that may be unlearned, if the character has enough time and patience. The greater amount of experience the character has to draw upon, the more difficult the Unlearning process is, but the more rewarding when finally successful. For a diligent student of the Way, the efforts of a lifetime may finally coalesce into a final sublime chance at enlightenment.

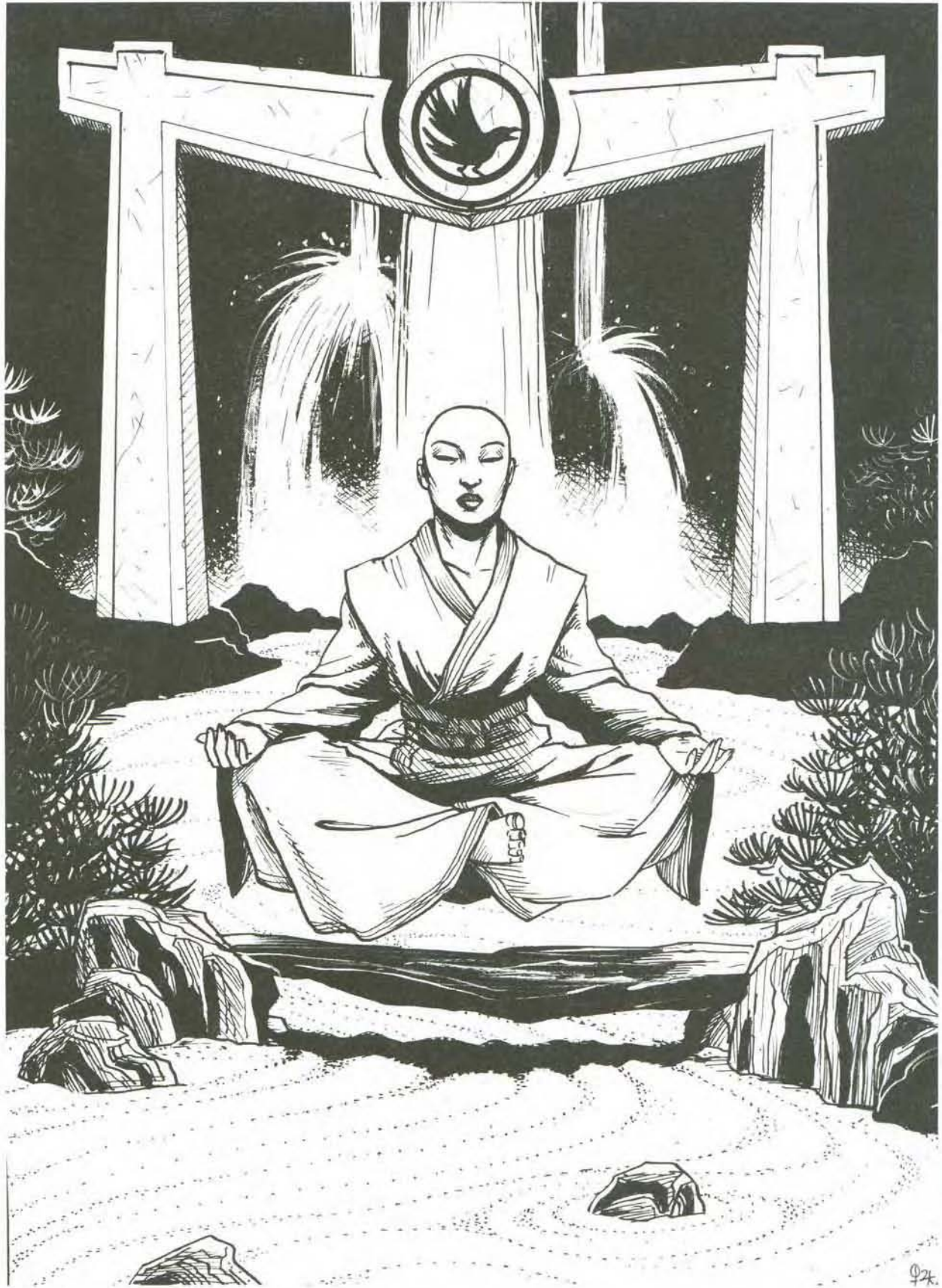


EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

Those with pure purpose have the strength to never fall.

In the beginner's mind, there are many possibilities. In the expert's, there are few.

Wisdom comes in finding the opportunities that dilemmas provide.



97.

Chapter Four



*Who's Who Among
the Monks*



Chapter Four: Who's Who Among the Monks

SUANA

Earth: 3
Willpower 5
Water: 6
Perception 7
Fire: 3
Intelligence 4
Air: 4
Awareness 5

Void: 5
School/Rank: Temple of
Osano-Wo 5

Honor: 2.5
Glory: 2.0

Advantages: Blood of Osano-
Wo, Clan Background (Mantis),
Clear Thinker, Elemental
Harmony (Water), Major Ally
(Toturi), Tactician

Disadvantages: Ascetic,
Fascination (Sun Tao), Soft
Hearted, Sworn Enemy
(Yoritomo)

Kiho: All Water Kiho, Soul of
the Four Winds, Self/No Self,
Death Touch

Skills: Atemi 3, Athletics 3,
Battle 6, Bojutsu 3, Bonsai 3,
Defense 4, History 4, Jiujutsu 4,
Leadership 5, Meditation 5,
Shintao 5, Theology 3

The young man who would
become Master Suana was born
on the Island of Spice in the
shadows of the City of
Lightning. Suana showed great

interest in tactics and strategy from early on; his family was lucky enough to own an incomplete version of the Book of Sun Tao (a copy of the Scorpion manuscript), and the young Suana devoured the legendary general's wisdom. In his mind, he could see the movement of troops and supplies. He could feel the tide of battle and sense the interplay of one strategist against another. In games of war and strategy, he was unparalleled. It was hoped that after his gempukku he would become a great officer in the Mantis navy.

Secretly, Suana feared the prospect of becoming a warrior. Within his soul, two opposing forces raged. On one hand, he embraced the teachings of the great general. On the other, he recognized Sun Tao's greater message – the value of the art of war to the end of the preservation of peace. Suana felt that he could never take a life, or give the order to do so. For all his knowledge, Suana knew that his skill would





never be of use as anything more than an academic curiosity.

Realizing his limitations, Suana stepped away from the katana at his gempukku and joined the Brotherhood. Suana's relatives were outraged, especially his younger cousin, Yoritomo. The Mantis heir, already a samurai, accused Suana of cowardice and challenged him to a duel. Yoritomo's father refused permission, claiming that if Suana wished to join the service of the Fortunes it was his right. Suana thanked the daimyo for his mercy and left the islands to find his destiny. Yoritomo promised him that his slight upon the family's honor would not be forgotten.

Suana began his path, ironically, at the temple of his ancestor, Osano-Wo. The sohei were much like Suana. They, too, saw great value in the study of battle but were pacifists at heart. Suana began his training among them, but did not remain for long. In the twenty years since, Suana's life has known few boundaries. He constantly travels, taking in as much of the land as he can, experiencing all that he is able. Many times, Suana has been offered a position in charge of a temple of his own, but he always demurs. Suana has proven himself to be a master of many skills – healing, strategy, history, all are the same to him. His versatility is that of water itself, and he holds the title of Acolyte of Water. He visits the Temple of the Seven Thunders to check in on the other acolytes regularly, but rarely stays for long. His journey is too important.

The only temple Suana might call home is a small monastery near the Shrine of the Ki-Rin. After being presented with the remarkable gift of one of Sun Tao's original journals by Togashi Yokuni, Suana lingered there for seven years to study the volume. During his tenure, Suana happened upon a young Akodo who had been cast out by a disappointed family. On a whim, Suana invited the lonely child to help him decipher some of the more difficult portions of the scroll. The young Lion's mind was quick and agile; he was of inestimable help in copying the scrolls into a more readable format.

During the months that followed, the boy observed many subtle nuances in the ancient general's work that Suana had overlooked, proving himself to be a cunning young man. Suana took the boy as his student, teaching him more of strategy, tactics, history, and philosophy. Suana was surprised to later discover that the boy was the brother of the Lion Champion, and even

more surprised when the young Toturi was recalled to become Lion Champion himself. Toturi's recent fall from grace disturbs Suana greatly, but he believes it cannot be anything more than a temporary condition. He senses a certain greatness in the young Lion, and true greatness can never be held down for long.

Suana has occasionally considered joining Toturi's Army, but has decided against it for now. The Acolyte of Water believes there is a reason he was called to the Brotherhood. The Mantis did not need another general; they had Yoritomo. The Brotherhood, on the other hand, may have need of a master of battle. Though Suana loathes the prospect of combat, he knows that the day will come that the Brotherhood will call on him. He is ready to do what he must for what he knows to be right.

So Suana travels the land, memorizing as much of the terrain as possible so he will be prepared when he must fight for it. He fears that dark day is not long in coming. The new Hantei cares little for peace, and has been notably silent in relations with the Brotherhood. Though the monks of Shinsei remain neutral in times of crisis, the conflict of the Great Clans continues to grow in scale. It will not be long before the peaceful monks are drawn into combat.

Suana is not the eldest Elemental Acolyte; that honor goes to Togashi Jodome. However, when the five are in dispute, it is always to Suana that the others defer, as his calm, thoughtful nature is well known. In temperament he has been compared to the sea – he is calm, giving, and distant, but when angered his fury is second to none. He is every bit the son of Osano-Wo, though he struggles on a daily basis to keep his wrath in check and maintain his pacifistic ideals.



MONK ANCESTORS

Players who take one of the monk ancestors in this book should note that they operate slightly differently in philosophy than regular ancestors. Usually, a character gains an ancestor through favorable birth. It is not so for monks. A monk ancestor always chooses the monk upon whom he bestows his blessing. The character has garnered the ancestor's attention and has been chosen to receive his gift. Blood and station have no bearing. Only the ancestor's beliefs matter.



EISAI

Earth: 2
Willpower 3

Water: 2

Fire: 2

Air: 2

Void: 4

School/Rank: Shrine of the
Seven Thunders (Void) 1

Honor: 2.5

Glory: 2.0

Advantages: Brink of
Enlightenment, Elemental
Harmony (Void), Great Destiny,
Inner Gift (precognitive episodes)

Disadvantages: Antisocial (4),
Small, Unluck (1)

Kiho: Kukan-do, Self/No Self,
Ryoku

Skills: Bojutsu 1, Fasting 1,
Hand-to-Hand 1, Meditation 3,
Mountaineer 2, Shintao 3, Zanji 1

Little is known of the young nun named Eisai. Even her true name is unknown, and the monks of the Temple of the Seven Thunders have renamed her as they saw fit. The name, "prodigy," is fitting, for even at her young age Eisai bears a true talent in manipulating the power of Void. The kiho she has mastered are unusual for one her age, and she breezes through her lessons with almost no effort.

No one in the Temple knows where Eisai came from. No one seems to remember how long she has been there or how she arrived, though it seems she must have begun her training very recently, as she is in her early teens. She never speaks and seems unable to do so. She is a complete enigma.

At times, even Eisai seems confused as to her purpose. She spends many long hours in the mountains, staring up at the massive stone faces of the Thunders as if seeking an answer. If she has ever heard any reply, she is unable to share it.

The only soul she truly seems to communicate with is Koichi, Acolyte of the Void and master of the temple. The two are often seen speaking to one another, using an odd language composed of gestures. Eisai seems comfortable in the Acolyte's company and treats him with the respect others might show to their sensei. Koichi does not recall



ever having taught her anything. For a time, the Acolyte's normally serene exterior was ruffled by the mystery that is Eisai, but after several weeks of pondering, Koichi laughed out loud and joined her in the vigil at the foot of the Thunders. Ever since, he has called the young monk "sensei" in return.

Eisai is always somewhat distant and often seems hardly to notice when others are near. In fact, her heightened perceptions of reality are such that little affects her; she notices when others are near, but simply does not seem to care. The only time she snaps out of this reverie is when visitors from the Dragon arrive at the Temple. Every time a Dragon emissary introduces himself, Eisai becomes active and alive, searching his face for something. Whatever she may be seeking, she has not found it, and always drops back into her daze shortly thereafter.

A curious visitor recently asked the esteemed Acolyte why he showed such deference to one who was obviously his junior.

"Because of what she has taught me," Koichi replied.

"And what has she taught you?" the other man asked.

"Do you see the black stone, resting at the foot of the mountain?" Koichi asked, pointing.

The man squinted. "Yes," he said, "I see it."

Koichi nodded and walked away.

In recent months, Eisai has continued to display abilities that baffle her colleagues. She has a strange ability to sense death; whenever an elder member of the Brotherhood is about to pass on, Eisai always arrives to bring him comfort. Whenever a great battle is about to erupt in the distant Empire, the monks of the Temple are always the first to know. Eisai can always be found staring off in the direction of the carnage days before any messenger arrives, weeping with great sorrow. Her abilities chill the blood of some of her brethren, and one or two believe she is not human, but a spirit in disguise. Koichi keeps these accusations safely away from Eisai and laughs whenever he hears them.

"Eisai?" he will say. "I would say that Eisai is more human than any of us, and how unfortunate for her that it is so."

As the Clan Wars grow fiercer, Eisai has become steadily more depressed. The young nun has retreated into herself, sometimes spending days at the foot of the great images of the Thunders, staring off into the distance with a blank, melancholy face. Recently, a young monk claims to have visited her during one of these episodes, sitting by her for hours as she watched a battle between the Lion and Crane a thousand miles away. She was crying, her eyes red from sorrow and exhaustion.

"Is the combat so terrible?" the young monk asked.

Eisai nodded and wiped a tear from her chin. The monk sat silently for a moment.

"It's going to get worse, isn't it?" he asked.

Eisai nodded again and looked off to the southwest, toward the Shadowlands.

The young monk felt an overwhelming sense of depression, for he had much love for Eisai. To see her bereft of hope drained his own will to continue. With a cracked voice, he asked one final question. "What must we do?"

Eisai looked at him then. She did not speak, for she never spoke, but the young monk claims that the meaning suddenly became clear in his mind.

"We will do what we must. We can do nothing more."

With that, she stood and left him where he knelt.

IKUDAIU

Air: 4

Awareness 5

Earth: 3

Fire: 3

Intelligence 5

Water: 3

Perception 4

Void: 4

School/Rank: None

Honor: 2.2

Glory: 2.0

Advantages: Allies (many among the Dragon Clan)

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Kolat), Obligation (Kolat)

Skills: Calligraphy 3, Cipher 1, Conversation 3, Courtier 3, Etiquette 4, Fasting 2, History 2, Meditation 3, Shintao 3, Tea Ceremony 3, Theology 4

Kiho: Stain Upon the Soul, Steal the Air Dragon

Prior to his retirement, Ikudaiu was a Dragon diplomat stationed in Otosan Uchi. He spent nearly two decades within the Imperial City, serving his clan with honor and dignity. Ikudaiu was one of many children in his family, all serving with distinction in Dragon holdings throughout the Empire. He was particularly close to his youngest brother, a bushi named Mirumoto Akuai.

For a short time before his actual retirement, Ikudaiu spent time with his brother, who served as a magistrate in the poorest, most mountainous

TSUKINO

(4 POINTS)

Tsukino did not come from the samurai caste. He was not a noble who retired to contemplate the Tao. Rather, he was a farmer. During a famine, he refused to turn over his entire crop to his Phoenix lord. Intrigued by the man's bravery (for he surely knew that his refusal would mean death), the daimyo asked Tsukino why he defied the will of his lord. Tsukino answered simply that he could not feed his large family on what would be left. He further inquired if his family starved to death, who would grow the crop to feed his lord the next year when the harvest was better? The daimyo was struck by the simple wisdom of this heimin but found himself forced to punish insolence. He allowed the effrontery to stand, but ordered Tsukino to live out the rest of his days as a monk contemplating the mysteries of the Tao.

Characters with Tsukino as an ancestor may take an additional 2 Wounds per Wound Level, a reflection of his recognition of the importance of the overall health of the Empire.





HIDO (3 POINTS)

Prior to becoming a monk, Hido was a Crab bushi who led many expeditions into the Shadowlands. He became proud of his accomplishments and came to believe that there was nothing Fu Leng could throw at him he could not defeat. He was very wrong.

As he returned triumphant from his last expedition, his party met a wounded samurai-ko just south of the Kaiu Wall. She told him that she had been attacked and the rest of her group slaughtered. The beasts responsible had moved on and were probably at the Wall already. Hido led his troops forward and was attacked from behind as the treacherous samurai-ko turned out to be an oni in disguise. It fell upon his men and killed a third of them before they realized what had happened. Hido's entire regiment was slaughtered in the ensuing battle with the Dark Lord's foul servant, and he barely escaped with his life. The oni took his right hand before succumbing.

(Continued on opposite page.)



Dragon provinces. For the first time in his life, Ikudaiu saw true poverty. The peasants who worked in this province were exhausted, sickly, and perpetually hungry. The majority of the food they produced went to pay Imperial taxes. On occasion, Akuai was forced to work the land with the peasants or risk seeing many of them starve. Ikudaiu saw the other samurai look upon Akuai with disgust for his actions, and the aging samurai felt the smoldering embers of anger.

Confused by his emotions, Ikudaiu nonetheless returned to Otosan Uchi for his retirement. He received a prestigious and honored position at the Temple to the Seven Fortunes, a position reflecting his immaculate reputation as an honorable and spiritual man. Shortly after his appointment, Ikudaiu was approached by Tetsuya, one of the leaders of the Brotherhood, and asked for a favor.

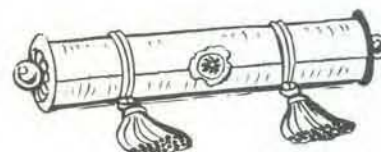
The old monk wanted Ikudaiu to look into the practices of Taro, the monk overseeing the Temple of the Seven Fortunes. Tetsuya explained that he feared Taro's long isolation and silence had unhinged the old man's mind, and Tetsuya wished to ensure that his friend was well and in good health. Ikudaiu readily agreed.

It took several months, but Ikudaiu finally managed to coax Taro into speech. The two held many long conversations, at first about philosophy and religion, but later about all things in the Empire. In time Ikudaiu found himself dwelling heavily on Taro's strange philosophies. They brought to mind the events he had witnessed while visiting his brother. Eventually, he came to share Taro's beliefs and was introduced to some of his allies within the city.

Months later, when Tetsuya again spoke to Ikudaiu about Taro, the old Dragon smiled and assured Tetsuya that he had nothing to worry about. Taro was certainly eccentric, but clearly one of the more enlightened souls Ikudaiu had ever met.

Since the failed coup of the Scorpion Clan, Ikudaiu has thought less about his new philosophy of life, occupied as he has been with rebuilding the Temple and alleviating the suffering of the masses. Concentrating thus on his other duties has quenched some of the anger he holds near his heart, and he has begun to wonder if throwing his lot in with Taro may have been a mistake. Surely, Taro's path cannot lead to the enlightenment he seeks. Ikudaiu fears that Taro (or worse, Taro's allies) will discover his doubts, and he wonders if it is possible for him to speak with Tetsuya without being found out.

He fears it is not.



TAKAO

Air: 3

Earth: 4

Fire: 6

Water: 4

Perception 5

Void: 4

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja

3

Honor: 3.2

Glory: 2.5

Advantages: Great Destiny, Great Potential (Fire), Precise Memory, Social Position (Acolyte of Fire)

Skills: Astrology 3, Calligraphy 4, Cipher 4, Investigation 3, Jiujutsu 5, Kenjutsu 1, Meditation 5, Oratory 3, Shintao 5, Sincerity 3, Spellcraft 2, Theology 4

Spells: Sense, Commune, Summon, Evil Ward, Fire From Within, Inflammation, Know the Shadows, The Light of Lord Moon, Wind-Borne Slumbers

Kiho: Kuzushi, Ryoku

As an infant, Takao was left upon the steps of a monastery in the lands of the Phoenix. His ancestry is a complete mystery, but the monks chose to take him in when they noticed a raven within the branches of a nearby tree regarding the child with startling intensity.

Raised within the confines of a Taoist monastery, Takao has been surrounded by serenity and contemplation his whole life. At the tender age of five, he was found meditating within the temple alongside the brother monks. He learned to read at an early age and began devouring the Tao of Shinsei. The monks frequently had to remind young Takao to eat.

When Takao was seven, the ailing Master of Air Isawa Eju visited his shrine. Eju's meditations were interrupted when he overheard the young boy asking questions of the other monks. The insightful nature of Takao's questions intrigued Eju, and he was shocked to discover that they came from one so young. Eju returned to the tiny monastery several times a week, each time speaking with Takao for hours on end and teaching him the basics of the ways of the kami.



Many Phoenix were appalled to hear that one of their own, even one of the great Masters, would teach their ways to a simple monk child. Eventually Eju was forced to bring Takao before the other Masters to justify his actions. Even the stern Isawa Tsuke was taken with the young boy's inherent grasp of the theories and ways of the spirits, however, and Eju was given permission to continue the boy's tutelage.

Shortly after meeting with the Elemental Masters, Isawa Eju was summoned to Ootosan Uchi on clan business. With the blessing of the monks, Takao accompanied him. For a short time he found himself the center of attention in the Imperial City, as it became trendy among courtiers to converse with "the child scholar of Shinsei." In time, however, the courtiers' attention wandered and Takao was free to resume his studies.



HIDO

(CONTINUED)

Shattered by the loss of his troops and his sword hand, and shamed that he had been so easily deceived, Hido begged his lord for permission to commit seppuku. He was denied, but was allowed to become a monk. Hido became renowned for preaching the virtues of humility and careful examination of a situation before deciding on the truth.

Characters with Hido as an ancestor get a Free Raise to any Perception roll.



MIZUMOTO (3 POINTS)

Mizumoto was a Crane courtier from the Doji family. He had a distinguished career in the court and is credited with helping to secure the Crane's dominance of the Imperial Court early in the history of the Empire. His success in court was due in large part to his keen intellect. He had a knack for thinking through problems and devising unique solutions. His intelligence was renowned throughout the Empire.

After retiring, he became a monk and spent the rest of his life contemplating the mysteries of the Tao of Shinsei. In this regard, he was perhaps more valuable to the Empire, for he made numerous observations and interpretations of Shinsei's words that have since been accepted as canonical. In the early days of the Empire, he was thought to be one of the foremost authorities on the meanings of the sacred texts.

Characters with Mizumoto as an ancestor may keep one extra die when making an Intelligence check or using any Intelligence-based Skill. The character does not get an extra die to roll, but only keeps one extra die from those available to him.

Unfortunately, Isawa Eju succumbed to his long-term illness within a few months of arriving at Otosan Uchi. Left without a home, Takao was taken in by Asako Ochiya, a district governor in the Outer City. The two became very close as Ochiya continued Takao's education, and less than a year after arriving in the Imperial City Takao became the youngest hatamoto ever appointed within Otosan Uchi.

Tragedy was to strike again within the capital of the Empire, however. Two years after Takao arrived alongside Isawa Eju, the Scorpion Clan laid siege to Otosan Uchi, killing the Son of Heaven and laying waste to the Ochiyo district. Takao desperately tried to prevent the deaths of the monks, but dozens were slaughtered and numerous temples completely destroyed in the fighting.

Takao has remained the hatamoto of the district following the coup and the retirement of Asako Ochiyo. He continues his studies with both the Phoenix and the Brotherhood, and desperately hopes that the fires of war spreading through Rokugan can be extinguished before they consume the entire Empire.



TETSUYA

Air: 4

Reflexes 5

Earth: 5

Willpower 6

Fire: 5

Water: 4

Perception 5

Void: 6

School/Rank: None

Honor: 3.8

Glory: 2.0

Advantages: Allies (Brotherhood of Shinsei), Clear Thinker, Hands of Stone, Noble Birth, Perfect Balance, Social Position (Shinpu of the Four Holy Home Temples), Way of the Land (Imperial holdings)

Disadvantage: Ascetic, Soft-hearted

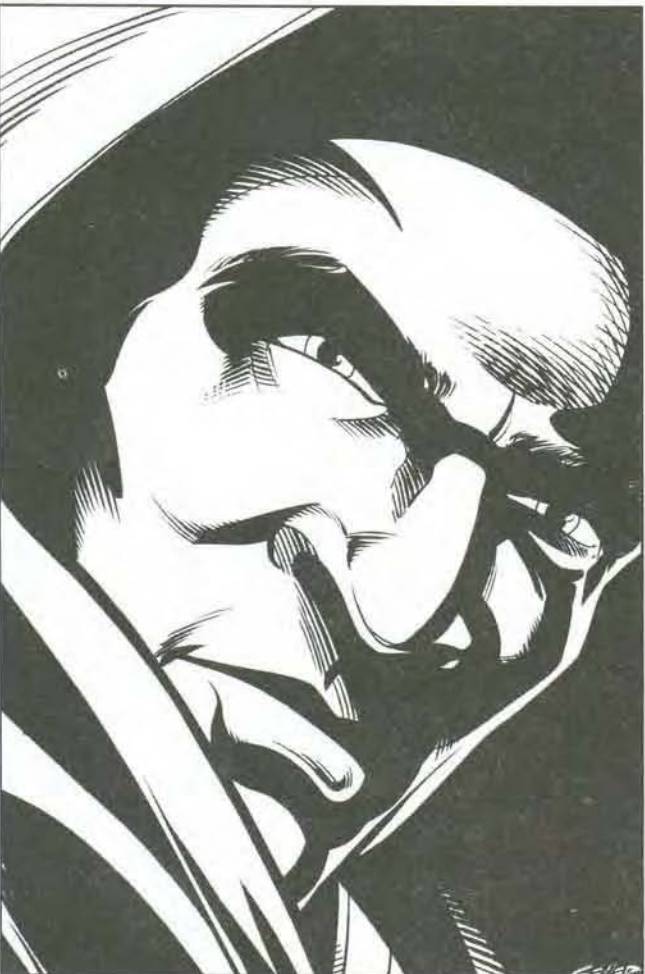
Skills: Advanced Medicine 3, Athletics 4, Calligraphy 5, Courtier 2, Defense 4, Etiquette 3, Jujutsu 5, Lore (Various) 3-5, Meditation 5, Shadowlands Lore 3, Shintao 5, Tea Ceremony 5, Theology 5, Zanji 3

Kiho: Slap the Wave, the Boundless Depths of Water, Root the Mountain, Soul of the Four Winds, the Purity of Shinsei

The wandering ascetic monk Tetsuya is one of the most influential individuals in the Brotherhood of Shinsei. He travels from temple to temple, ensuring that the physical needs of the brothers and the spiritual needs of the peasantry are being met. The temples that fall under his jurisdiction include such distinguished facilities as the Temple of the Seven Fortunes and the four grand temples surrounding the Seppun palace in Otosan Uchi. He enjoys his work, particularly the traveling.

Tetsuya was once known as Kaiu Oshuda, the daimyo of the Kaiu family. He spent decades in service to the Hida and the Crab on the Great Wall that separates the Empire from the Shadowlands. His life was filled with horror and death. His innovative engineering designs saved the lives of hundreds of his brethren, but he found little joy in his work, for it brought only death. The loss of even the life of the foulest oni or weakest goblin child was tragic for Oshuda.

What Oshuda loved most were the beautiful temples of the Crab lands. The serenity, the simple but elegant architecture...these were the things that spoke to his soul. He spent much of what little free time he had designing grandiose temples that would never be built. In those quiet



however, he had seen the engineer's designs of temples throughout the Empire.

Kisada gestured toward the drawings. "These are yours?"

"Hai, Hida Kisada-sama," Oshuda replied.

"Few among our clan have such a gift." Kisada regarded Oshuda briefly, taking in the anguish that the Kaiu lived each day. "You have served me well, Oshuda. I release you from your duties. Do as you must."

Less than two weeks later, a new daimyo ruled the Kaiu family, and Kaiu Oshuda was no more. In his place there was only a simple monk serving in a small monastery on the outskirts of the Yasuki family.

For over two decades, Tetsuya has selflessly served the Brotherhood of Shinsei. He radiates the inner peace that fills his soul, and many older monks look to him as an example of a truly enlightened spirit. His absolute reverence for life and his compassion for the lower classes of Rokugan have gained him much esteem in the eyes of the heimin and hinin. He has steadily risen in status among the Brotherhood as well. He has not actively sought this perceived

moments he truly felt at peace. Then he would realize that he was needed on the wall, that his temples would never be built, and he would succumb to a deep depression. His friends and family felt great concern over his long bouts of morose silence, but his continued attention to his duties shifted their attention to more pressing concerns.

When Oshuda was approaching the age of forty, it was widely suspected among his family that he would retire to a monastery despite the fact that the Crab frequently ignored the social conventions that dictated such a practice. Many looked upon him with scorn, believing that such a choice could only reflect Oshuda's cowardice and desire to avoid the conflict upon the wall.

Oshuda returned to his quarters within the palace of the Kaiu after a lengthy stint on the wall to find the Great Bear, Hida Kisada himself, awaiting him. Kisada had come to request, perhaps even command, Oshuda to remain among his brothers in the clan. While waiting,

increase in rank and responsibility, nor does he shy away from the duties his brothers seek to bestow upon him. In his heart, Tetsuya believes that he is but a simple servant of the Empire and that these duties are his solemn responsibility.

Tetsuya was away from Otosan Uchi when the Scorpion Clan failed in their attempt to overthrow the Empire. Upon hearing the news, he rushed to the Imperial City only to find many temples destroyed and countless brothers dead from senseless conflict. This has only strengthened Tetsuya's resolve to avoid violence whenever necessary. He spent time with the surviving monks of the capital, helping to restore order to their ranks. Finally, he felt that his duties there were complete and he returned to his wanderings from temple to temple. The few short months he had spent in the capital had changed the Empire. War now looms on the horizon, and the peasants hurry about their tasks in fear. Tetsuya knows that he must do something, but he knows not what.



AMIKU

(4 POINTS)

A former Ishiken, Amiku was shamed on the field of battle. During a skirmish, he attempted to use his abilities to alter the terrain and thereby slowed a Lion charge. However, he lost control and became fascinated with the patterns of the universe interweaving themselves. As a result of his failure, the Lion charge crashed into the Phoenix line, routing it.

Amiku was devastated by his failure and resigned from the Council of Elemental Masters. He believed that he had become too dependent on his Ishiken abilities and so shaved his head and became a monk. His study of the Tao led him to realize that the fault was not his study of Void magic. Rather, he saw that he focused only on the Ring of Void and had lost the perception of oneness with all other things. He spent the rest of his days preaching a holistic view of the universe, and his claims that Shinsei himself saw the patterns of Void in all things (and thus reached Enlightenment) remain controversial to this day.

Characters with Amiku as an ancestor may spend 1 extra Void Point per action than they are normally allowed.

KOICHI - ACOLYTE OF VOID

Earth: 2

Willpower 3

Water: 2

Fire: 2

Air: 2

Awareness 3

Void: 4

School/Rank: Shinsei (Void) 2

Honor: 2.8

Glory: 1.3

Advantages: Bland, Innate Ability (Drawing the Void), Ishiken-Do

Disadvantages: Ascetic

Skills: Calligraphy 2, History 1, Investigation 3, Meditation 4, Lore (Prophecies of Uikku) 3, Shintao 3, Theology 2

Koichi was a promising young Ishi before he became a monk. Some thought that he might even have been able to challenge Isawa Kaede for the position of the next Master of Void. His innate link to the Element of Void seemed to make him a natural for the position.

Then something unorthodox happened. Koichi became interested in the Prophecies of Uikku during his studies at Kyuden Isawa. During his contemplation of them, he came across one that spoke to him. It read, "When Fu Leng shall rise again, the Children of Isawa shall become corrupt and fall, but one of their number shall be preserved. He shall know the truth of Shinsei's Way, and shall contemplate it through the fullness of all things. Then he shall teach the Masters the truth of Void."

Over time, Koichi became convinced that an Ishi must leave the Isawa and become a monk, or the entire family would be destroyed and become servants of the Dark Lord. He presented his interpretation to the Isawa Council, and, after they had discussed the matter at length, they concluded that Koichi's interpretation was incorrect.

Disturbed by the Council's proclamation, he began to fear for the safety of the family and for the Clan itself. His master told him to trust the decision of the Council, but Koichi found that he could not. A few months later, he left the Phoenix Clan, shaved his head, and became a monk.

Since then, he has spent much of his time studying the prophecies. He has attempted on



more than one occasion to establish a link with the fabled Uikku himself, using his Void powers to reach across time itself. He has yet to meet with any success.

Koichi finds that the other monks at his temple have a difficult time relating to him. The Ishi powers coursing through his blood and his growing belief that he is the prophesied savior of the Isawa family have made him a pariah even among others in the Brotherhood of Shinsei. He has been known to sit in quiet meditation for days at a time, causing his brothers to wonder what he might be contemplating.

The Council of Elemental Masters frowns upon his decision, believing him to have acted out of hubris, but they have not officially condemned his action. It is a strange and lonely path that Koichi travels. He is convinced that the Fates have chosen him for some terrible purpose, and his peers secretly wonder if he may be mad.

TOGASHI JODOME – ACOLYTE OF AIR

Earth: 2

Water: 2

Fire: 2

Agility 3

Air: 3

Void: 3

School/Rank: Shinsei (Air) 3

Honor: 2.9

Glory: 2.1

Tattoos: Bat, Full Moon, Phoenix

Disadvantages: Soft-Hearted

Skills: Calligraphy 1, Craft (Cobbler) 1, Hand-to-Hand 2, Meditation 3, Nazodo 2, Shintao 3, Theology 2

Togashi Jodome served the Dragon Clan as an Ise zumi faithfully for many years. He was a worldly monk, going out among the people and sharing his wisdom with them. He found that he could best serve the clan by working among the people of the Empire rather than cloistering himself away from them.

However, tragedy befell him two years ago when he learned that his family had all died from a plague that struck his homeland near Shinomen Mori. Grief-stricken, he found he could no longer wander among the people of Rokugan, for every face he saw reminded him of his father, his mother, and his sisters. He returned to Kyuden Togashi and embarked upon a life of quiet contemplation of the Tao.

A year later, he still had found no ease for his discomfort. Despite his understanding of the teachings of Shinsei and his dedication to the Dragon Clan, he could not conquer the sorrow that filled his heart. He began to slowly waste away in the mighty stronghold – not physically, but spiritually.

At last, he was summoned before Togashi Yokuni himself. The Dragon daimyo asked him what was troubling him. Jodome apologized to his master, but said that he could not shake the sadness of the death of his family. "I helped so many people, Togashi-sama," he said, "but I could not help my own blood. Of what use can I be to anyone?"

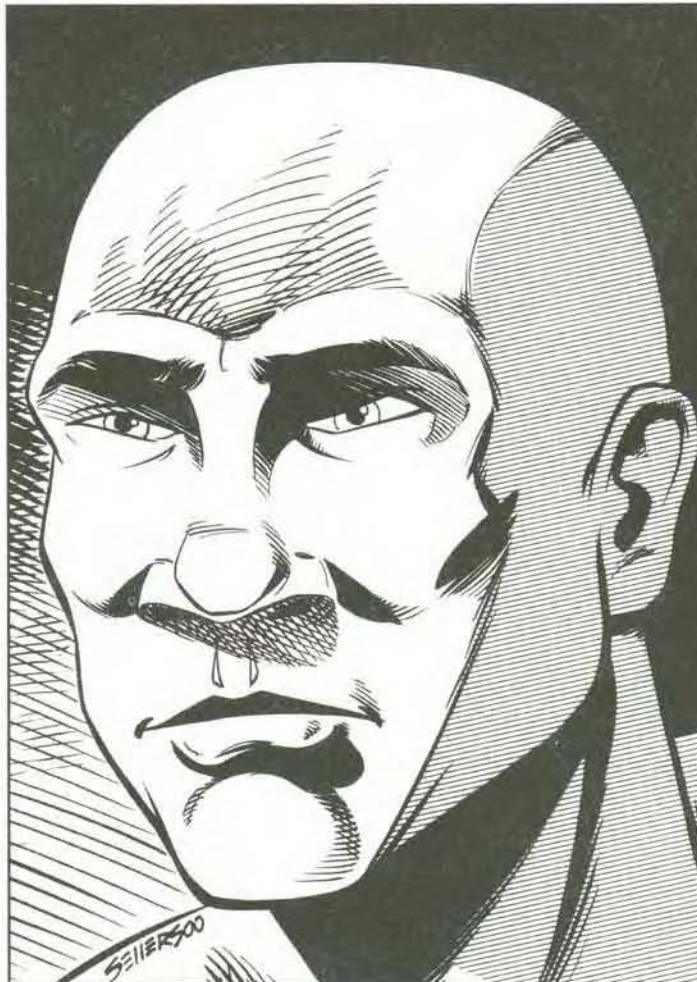
Yokuni nodded sagely and responded, "I know the loss of family more acutely

than any other in the Empire, Jodome-san. Yet you must ask yourself this: how many people can you help locked away here, ignoring the troubles of the world?"

Jodome could not answer. His master then sent him to the Temple of Osano-Wo.

"It is time you went back out among the people, Jodome-san," he said. "Make your studies at the Temple so that you may serve as an example to the people. The time is coming soon when you will be able to help more of them than you think."

Jodome left as his daimyo instructed. He threw himself into work at the temple, and he felt his pain ease a little, for the temple master would not allow him to contemplate nothing but his own tragedy. Jodome still carries a heavy heart, but for the first time in nearly two years, he is meeting the world head-on again. In this, he has once again become a fine example for the people of Rokugan.





HITOSHI – ACOLYTE OF EARTH

Earth: 2

Water: 2

Fire: 2

Intelligence 3

Air: 2

Void: 2

School/Rank: Shinsei (Earth)

2

Honor: 2.7

Glory: 1.6

Advantages: Strength of the Earth, Level 2

Disadvantages: Black Sheep

Skills: Calligraphy 2, History 2, Lore (Shadowlands) 3, Meditation 3, Shintao 3, Theology 2

Hitoshi comes from a large family of Crab warriors, the eighth child in a family beset with tragedy. He had four older brothers and three elder sisters. Today only one of them is alive. His brothers were all killed defending the Empire from the Shadowlands. One died on the Kaiu Wall. The other three met their end on Shadowlands excursions. Two of his sisters, fierce Crab samurai-ko, met similar fates. The third married a Hida warrior who was slain in battle during a skirmish with the Crane.

Hitoshi's father, Hida Kazuki, was once a strong man. However, watching nearly all of his children perish made him crack. He became overwhelmed with sorrow, and he did not wish to see his final child, Hitoshi, come to a bad end as well. Thus, shortly after Hitoshi completed his gempukku, Kazuki ordered him to become a monk, hoping to spare him the disastrous downfall of his siblings.

Hitoshi was deeply shamed by this decision. He wanted to become a bushi as well and take up arms against the beasts that had destroyed his family. He was further ashamed of his father for becoming so emotional. However, he could not bring himself to dishonor his family by refusing his father's command, and so he acquiesced.

Since taking his vows, Hitoshi has discovered that he has some talent for the study of the Elements. He became an Acolyte of Earth in short



order, mastering his abilities at an unprecedented rate. He also became obsessed with the Shadowlands, spending all of his spare time researching the mysteries of Fu Leng's corrupt realm.

His masters speak highly of him and of his dedication, but they secretly worry that the young monk is more interested in exacting revenge for the deaths of his brothers and sisters than he is in attaining Enlightenment. On the rare occasions when he journeys back to his homeland, he is looked upon with pity and sometimes even disgust. He follows the path his father set before him, but it is obvious to those who know how to look that he resents it deeply.



HANOSHI - MONK SCHOLAR

Earth: 2

Water: 2

Perception 3

Fire: 2

Intelligence 3

Air: 2

Reflexes 3

Void: 3

School/Rank: Shinsei 4

Honor: 4.3

Glory: 3.8

Insight: 210

Advantages: Clear Thinker,
Different School (Kitsuki), Way of the
Land

Disadvantages: Meddler,
Permanent Wound, Soft-Hearted

Skills: Calligraphy 3, Courtier 2,
Heraldry 2, History 4, Horsemanship
2, Kagaku 1, Ichi Miru 2, Investigation
4, Lore (Unicorn Travels) 4, Meditation
3, Shintao 4, Sincerity 3, Theology 4

Hanoshi's story is an unusual one. He came from the Shinjo family, but he expressed a desire from an early age to study the ways of the Kitsuki. His father, recognizing that the boy had unique talents and interests, asked the Kitsuki daimyo for permission to allow Hanoshi to study with them. To everyone's surprise, he agreed.

Hanoshi showed talent for the strange investigative methods of the Kitsuki Magistrates, but his masters there saw something else in the young Unicorn. After a few years they sent him back to his family, saying simply, "We cannot teach him what he needs to know."

The young Shinjo then began to study the history of his own clan in earnest. By the time he had completed his gempukku, he was an authority on many of the strange things the Unicorn had encountered on their 800-year travels north of the Empire.

Hanoshi embarked on a career as a courtier for the Emperor's Court, but he soon found that politics didn't suit him either. He became an Imperial Magistrate and set out across the Empire, solving problems in the Emperor's name.

This new career was both a blessing and a curse to him. The skills the Kitsuki had taught



him allowed him to spot trouble easily, but his growing thirst for knowledge led him to meddle in affairs where his assistance wasn't requested. He was very nearly killed by a Scorpion bushi when Hanoshi's unsolicited investigations uncovered a Scorpion plot to assassinate a Lion courtier who was becoming increasingly troublesome in court. A deep scar across his belly that still aches serves as a reminder to be careful when undertaking an investigation. Still, Hanoshi won great fame across the Empire as a sharp-minded researcher and a champion of the Emperor's justice.

As he grew older, Hanoshi found that solving problems for individual lords no longer sated his curiosity for mystery. He retired a few years later, becoming a monk. As a member of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, he began researching the mysteries of the Tao, and he has now become on an authority on the ancient manuscripts as well.





KAZEMU (2 POINTS)

Kazemu was a Scorpion courtier who won much fame in court as a master manipulator and great respect within his own clan for his ability to craft long range plots. He retired late in life because he was an invaluable aid to his clan.

However, when Bayushi Daijo succeeded his father as daimyo, Kazemu became frustrated. The new lord hatched a dangerous plan to ensnare the daughter of a Matsu lord. He hoped to force the girl to marry a Crab daimyo, thereby making the Crab beholden to the Scorpion and planting a spy in the Hida court. Kazemu advised against the plan because it was full of holes and very dangerous. Daijo refused to listen. He proceeded, and the plot backfired. The Lion were enraged, and they attacked the Scorpion, killing many bushi and claiming some Scorpion territory in the process. Kazemu became convinced that his time had passed, and retired to a life of quiet contemplation, unable to understand the impetuosity of youth.

Characters with Kazemu as their ancestor get a Free Raise to any action involving an Awareness check.

Hanoshi sees a wholeness to everything. His knowledge of the many foreign things the Unicorn saw on their journeys, the unorthodox investigation methods of the Kitsuki, and his grasp of the Way have made him one of the greatest scholars in the Emerald Empire. He has a holistic view of all he encounters, seeing the connectedness of all things in a way that far surpasses that of the average Ishi. He is often quoted as saying, "I shall clasp my hands together and bow to the cornerstones of the world." No one has ever figured out exactly what he means by this, but it is generally assumed that he refers to the oneness of all things and his perception of it in everyone he meets.

Hsi Tsu

Earth: 2

Water: 2

Perception 3

Fire: 2

Intelligence 3

Air: 2

Void: 2

School/Rank: Shinsei 2

Honor: 2.5

Glory: 1.9

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Kharmic Tie (2)

Disadvantages: Driven, Haunted

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Courtier 2, Investigation 2, Lore (Yorei) 3, Meditation 3, Shintao 2, Theology 1

No one has ever heard Hsi Tsu's story. He has refused to tell anyone from where he comes or how he came to be in their company. He talks, but never about himself. Hsi Tsu has wandered a good portion of the Empire. Whenever he finds a temple, he stops for a while - usually about three months. Then he's off again. This has led to wide speculation among the Brotherhood of Shinsei as to who he is, where he comes from, and where he might be going next.

Most theorize he is from the east. His accent suggests he may be from the Mantis islands, but

his mannerisms hint at Crane training. The shape of his eyes is similar to a minor branch of the Matsu family. For all his observers know, he could be anyone.

The stories of his wandering are told more by peasants than other monks, but even his brethren can't help but speculate. Some say he became a monk to avoid a vengeful lord who pursues him to this day. Others theorize that he seeks to discover as many paths to enlightenment as possible and so travels to speak with as many people as possible to best see varying viewpoints. Still others believe, despite his vows, he suffers from the simple malady of wanderlust.

The truth of Hsi Tsu's origins and his constant wandering is darker. He was, in fact, a Mantis. His mother has familial ties to the Matsu. At an early age, he studied with the Doji so that he might one day become a courtier. Hsi Tsu is nephew to Yoritomo himself, and everyone assumed he





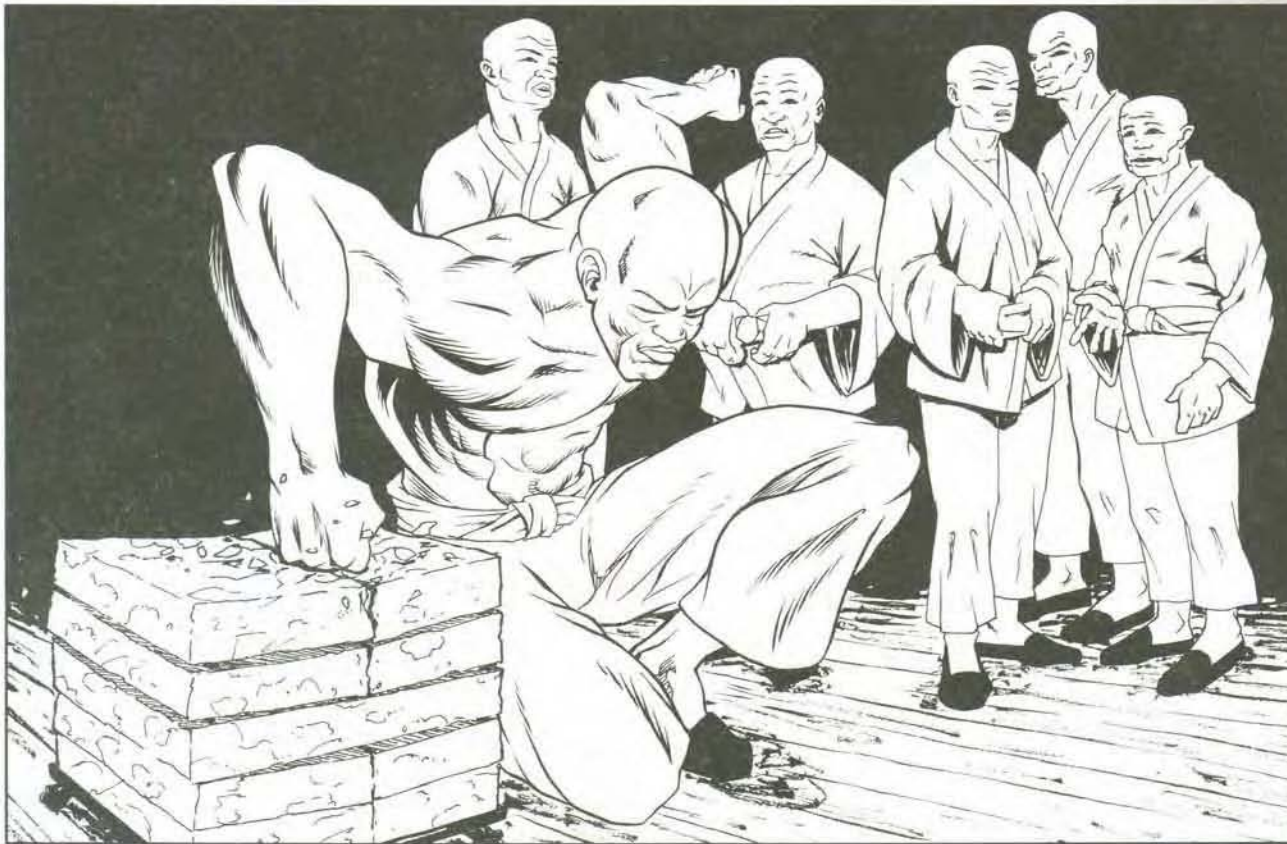
would serve the minor clan as a liaison to the Emperor's Court in Otosan Uchi. It was not to be.

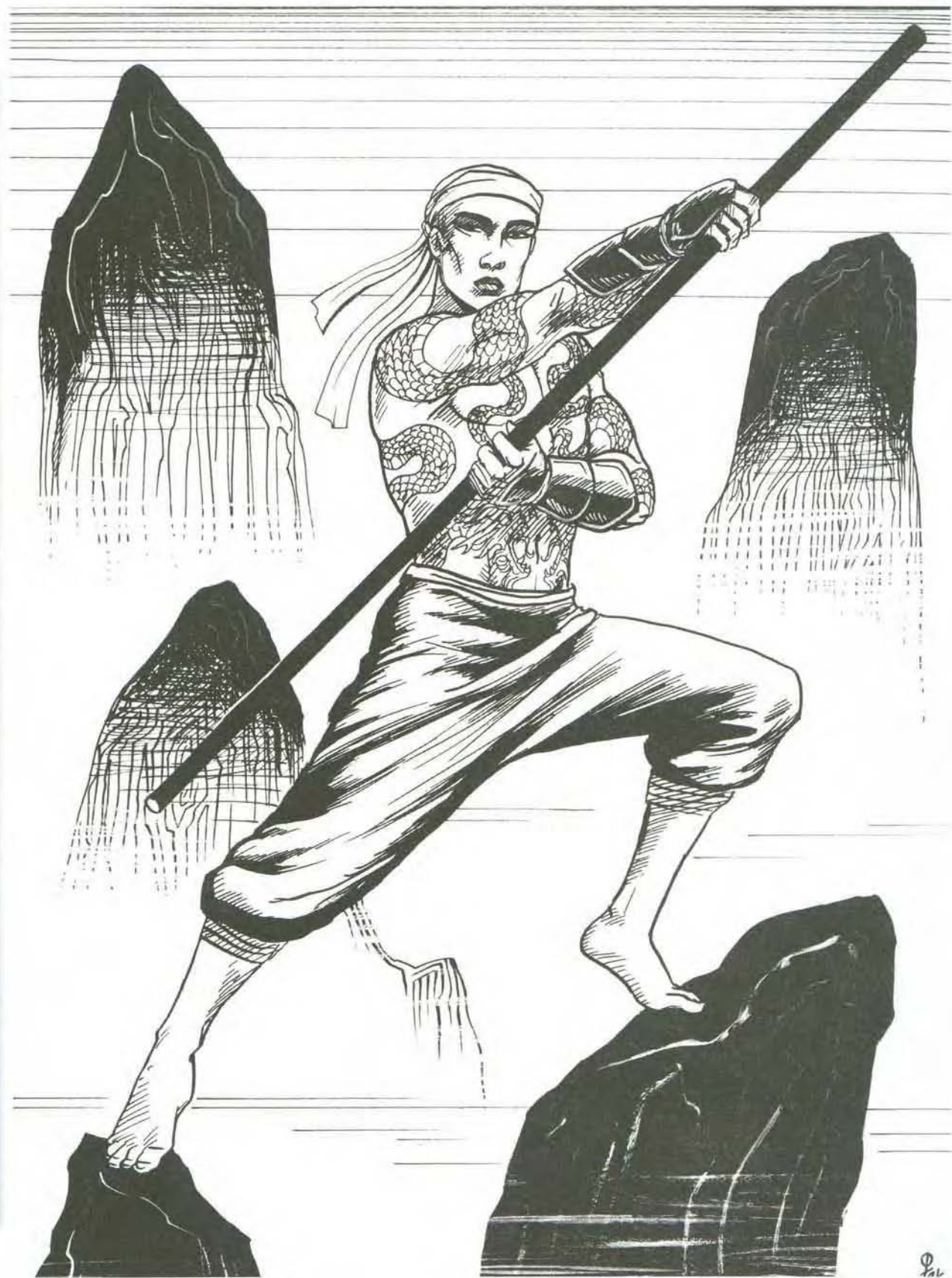
Shortly after completing his gempukku, Tsu began to have visions. An ancestor of his (also named Hsi Tsu) began appearing to him offering messages of doom for the Empire. At first he dismissed the visions as fatigue, heat, or other convenient excuses. When they didn't vanish, however, he became convinced that he was haunted. Tsu made inquiries into how one vanquished a ghost, hoping to rid himself of the nuisance. Then one of his ancestor's prophecies came true: a Mantis ship bringing his sister back from Doji lands sank in a tempest. Hsi Tsu became convinced that this was more than a simple haunting.

Without informing his family, he left his duties, changed his name to that of the spirit that haunted him, and became a monk. At first he redoubled his efforts to uncover how he could vanquish the yorei he believed to be haunting him, but he has come to believe that it is no ghost that speaks to him. Tsu is now convinced that this spirit represents some karmic tie to Rokugan's past and an omen of its future.

His ancestor has told him to seek out the Path of Enlightenment. Tsu receives visions of where to go. He has been told that the greatest threat to the Emerald Empire has resurfaced, that the land is doomed, that the Mantis Clan will rise to a new level of greatness in the anarchy that results, and that he must do what he can to preserve the integrity of the Rokugani people. He stops his travels long enough to aid those he meets, both peasant and samurai. When his mission is completed, he receives another vision telling him where to go next. Compelled to seek the answers to the cryptic mysteries his ancestor imparts, he resumes his wandering until he again comes upon people he can aid. He does not speak of what he has seen. He only assists those he can before moving on.

Hsi Tsu's road is a lonely one. He is driven to protect the Empire from the threats of which he has been warned but finds himself unable to speak of these matters. He believes he can do more good by simply helping others, and he hopes that one day his travels may cease, the mysterious mission he has undertaken completed.





21

Chapter Five



***Sample Monk
Characters***

Urban Philosopher

There is a world outside the city. The masters of the temple have told you this again and again.

Perhaps they are right, but what's the point? If you cannot master the small world that is the city, then how can a larger world be any more sensible?

No, leaving Otosan Uchi is not the answer. You must remain here. You must puzzle out the courtly webs of intrigue, the commerce, the back alley seduction, the cheap loss of life, the prosperity of the ultra-rich and the misery of the commoners. What does all of it mean? How does it fit into the Way? And how, oh how, can all of these people be so woefully unaware of truth yet manage to live out their lives in apparent happiness?

It is not true happiness, your sensei says. Those who revel in the material have accomplished nothing. You reply that the samurai and the fish vendors and the beggars and the courtesans certainly seem happy. Since the material world is ephemeral and illusory, who can say that their happiness is any less real than the serenity the Tao brings? Is not their path to enlightenment as valid as your own?

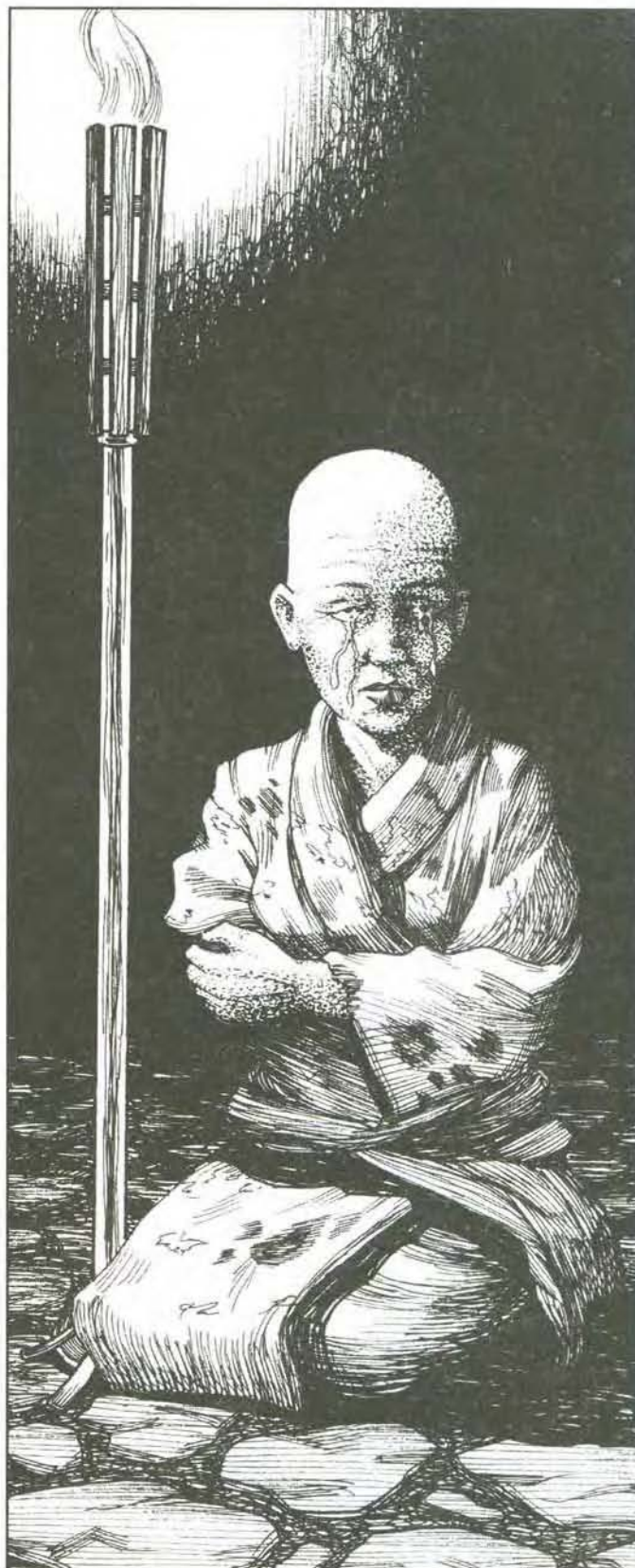
Your sensei chuckles and nods at such questions, though he clearly does not agree. In the meantime, the question burns your mind. If the Tao can only be reached through separation from the material world, then what is the point of the material world? Surely the lives of these people amount to something more than a cruel joke laid down by the Kami! Surely there is some meaning, some value besides a negative example. Isn't there?

Until you find the answer, you swear that your place is not outside the city, but within it. Deep, deep within it. Already you have found a place among a group of samurai. They are good and honorable people in a city rife with corruption. They commend your martial prowess and your keen eye for ferreting out the truth. You accept their praise humbly, but feel that you do not deserve it.

Truth?

What do you know of the truth?

If you knew any "truth," would you even be here?





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Urban Philosopher

Clan:
Dragon

Profession:
Monk

Primary Weapon
Bo 2k2

Primary Armor
None

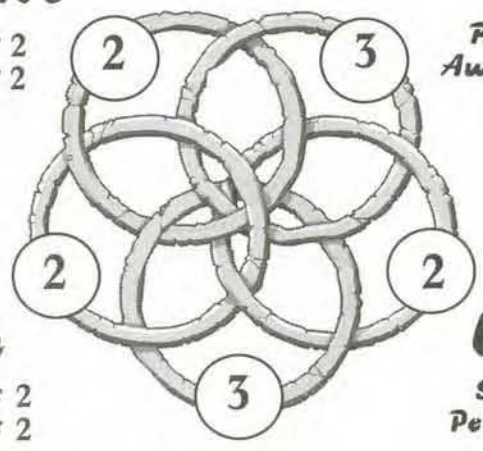
TN to be Hit
(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)
15 (19 with Soul of the Four Winds)

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: 130

Kiho

Slap the Wave, Soul of the Four Winds, The Wind's Truth

Skills

Bojutsu	1
Courtier	1
Etiquette	2
Hand-to-Hand	1
Meditation	2
Kenjutsu	1
Nazodo	1
Shintao	1
Zanjin	1

Wounds

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

School: Four Temples **Rank:** 1

Advantages/ Disadvantages

Clan Background
(Dragon) +1
Voice +2
Ascetic -0
Contrary -3
Meddler -2

Glory: 2

Honor: 2



Experience Points:

Lost Soul

The monks tell you that your mother died during childbirth, that you tore your way from her belly like a monster. Already the touch of the Dark One was strong upon you, but the brothers could not bring themselves to harm an innocent. You were raised to the Tao, instructed in the gentle harmonies that run through the earth. The masters hoped that one day you would be able to master the darkness that lies within you, that one day you would cure it.

You had high hopes, for you feared the inky darkness that crawled just beneath your skin. The day you mastered the Cleansing Spirit was the happiest in your life, for you knew that soon you would be free.

That was the day your father's spirit first appeared to you and gave you the vision.

He showed you a land of power and majesty, a land full of life, a land that varied with the slightest spark of the imagination and that would bend eagerly to the will of anyone with the strength to tame it. A land of unlimited potential, a land of dark but awesome beauty.

Your father's ghost showed you the Shadowlands.

That day you fled the monastery. Following your father's frantic urgings you make your way slowly south, to the Carpenter Wall. What you will do when you get there, what your father plans for you, you haven't a clue. He merely gibbers that your ability to communicate with spirits will be most useful, and that when you find his tomb he shall introduce you to some of his "friends."

Of course, you have doubts. You know that you aren't acting rationally. You know that you should return to the monastery as soon as possible to begin cleansing the madness that claws ever deeper into your mind.

Unfortunately, your doubts grow weaker with every passing day.

You're not sure you want to be cleansed.





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Lost Soul

Clan:
None

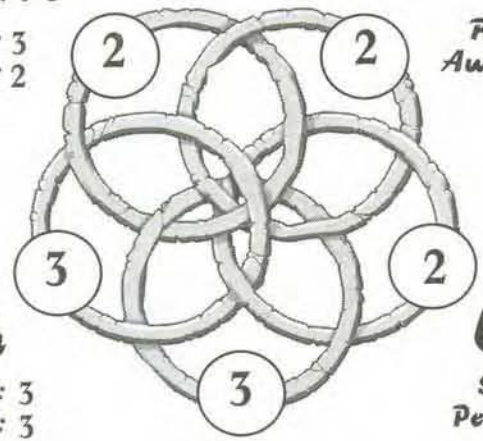
Profession:
Monk

Fire

Agility: 3
Intelligence: 2

Air

Reflexes: 2
Awareness: 2



Earth

Stamina: 3
Willpower: 3

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 2

Void

Void Points Spent:

Insight: 132

Kiho

- Ancestral Guidance, Cleansing
- Spirit, Rest My Brother, Tsuchi-do
- _____
- _____
- _____

Primary Weapon

Hand-to-Hand 0k1

Primary Armor

None

TN to be Hit (Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

10

Skills

Atemi	2
Hand-to-Hand	2
History	1
Lore: Shadowlands	3
Meditation	2
Painting	1
Shintao	1
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Wounds

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

School: Temple of Bishamon **Rank:** 1

Advantages/ Disadvantages

- Heartless +2
- Strength of the Earth +4
- Ascetic -0
- Fascination
- (Shadowlands) -2
- Haunted -4
- Shadowlands Taint -5

Glory: 2

Honor: 2

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Experience Points:

Enlightened Acolyte

You were born to a poor heimin family. Your father brought you to the monastery when you were old enough, hoping to find a home for you there. The elderly head monk was reluctant, as the monastery was also quite poor. He turned to you and asked a simple question. "What do you know of the Tao?"

"Nothing," you replied.

"And what do you expect to learn?" he asked. The other monks gathered about, eager to hear what you would say.

"Nothing," you said honestly, for you had only come to relieve your father of the burden of feeding you.

The monk chuckled and replied that it was the wisest answer he had heard. The other monks just seemed confused. You were a little confused, too, but soon you caught on. It turns out philosophy isn't nearly as hard as it looks. It's pretty obvious stuff, really, just seeing the world for what it is. Even the kiho aren't very difficult, once you get the hang of them. The other monks seem a little jealous at times, and you feel sorry for them. You think they're silly, but you feel sorry for them. Isn't it silly to dislike someone just because you think they understand things better than you? You think so, especially when it comes to the Tao, because you don't understand anything.

There's nothing to understand. You don't need to understand anything. Leave the world alone and it understands itself. That's what they don't understand.

The head monk smiles when you say things like that, and the others seem to grow even more agitated. You tried to help them, to show them why you see things the way you do, but that just flustered them all the more. The head monk explained that it wasn't just that you catch on more quickly; the truth is you've become a terrible distraction – a teenage girl in an order of celibate monks.

To make matters worse, you've begun to inherit your mother's looks. You have eight brothers and seven sisters because of your mother's looks.

As sad as it makes you, you realize you'll have to leave. The head monk would never ask you to leave; you doubt he even blames you. Still, you feel terrible about the effect you're having on the others. They'd be better off if you left so they could think clearly.

Besides, if you've learned so many wonderful things inside the temple, you're just dying to know what might be outside...





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Enlightened Acolyte

Clan:
None

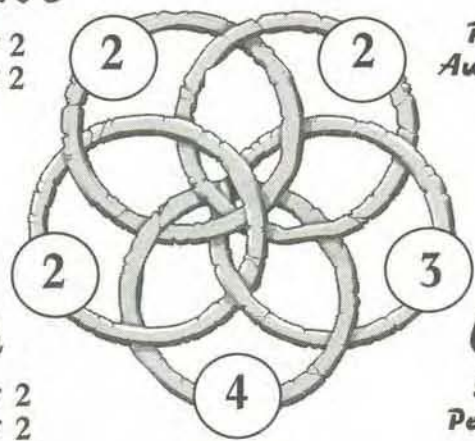
Profession:
Monk

Fire

Agility: 2
Intelligence: 2

Air

Reflexes: 2
Awareness: 2



Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 3
Perception: 3

Void

Void Points Spent:

Insight: 137

Kiho

(+2 Water Mastery) Freezing the
Lifblood, Ride the Water Dragon,
Speak to the Soul

Primary Weapon

Hand-to-Hand 0k1

Primary Armor

None

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

10

Skills

Fasting	1
Hand-to-Hand	1
Meditation	2
Mountaineer	1
Shintao	3
Zanjin	1

School: Shrine of the Seven Thunders **Rank:** 1

Advantages/ Disadvantages

- Brink of Enlightenment +10
- Dangerous Beauty +2
- Elemental Harmony (Water) +5
- Ascetic -0
- Bad Reputation (Distracting) -2
- Can't Lie -3
- Gullible -3
- Idealistic -2

Glory: 2

Honor: 3

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Experience Points:

Wounds

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

Warrior Monk

Any other night and it might have meant the death of your whole family. There isn't a day that goes by that you forget that. There isn't a day that the memory doesn't hammer into your heart and you find yourself wanting to reach for a bottle to calm your nerves.

Which is ironic, since that's what got you into this mess in the first place.

The Wall is no place for cowards or fools. You were weak, once, and luckily for the Clan only one person paid the price. The day before your gempukku your brothers and father found you passed out in the signal tower, a bottle of sake in your hand. While you slept, a group of goblins had attempted to scale the Wall. A call for reinforcements went out, but you did not respond. If the goblins had not been put down shortly afterward, your failure would have meant your life. The life of your brother, who died holding off the goblin warlord, was punishment enough. You were cast out.

You could not bear the thought of life as a ronin. You could not be a pretend-samurai. No. You determined to make amends. You found a home among the sohei, the warrior-monks of Osano Wo. The training was grueling, punishing, downright torturous, but you collected every shred of pain and stored it carefully away in your soul. You knew you deserved every bit; every agony is yours to cherish forever as punishment for your ignorance and weakness. There is nothing you can do that will bring your brother back, but if you can channel a bit of that anger to a just end, to smite evil and bring down the unrighteous in your brother's name, then his soul will be at peace.

Your sensei tells you that you have embarked upon a false path, but you must follow it to its end lest you learn nothing. What does he know of your path? He assumes you follow a path at all. What do you need to learn? Peace? Peace is for those who deserve it. Enlightenment? Enlightenment is for those who have earned it.

You deserve neither.





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Warrior Monk

Clan:
Crab

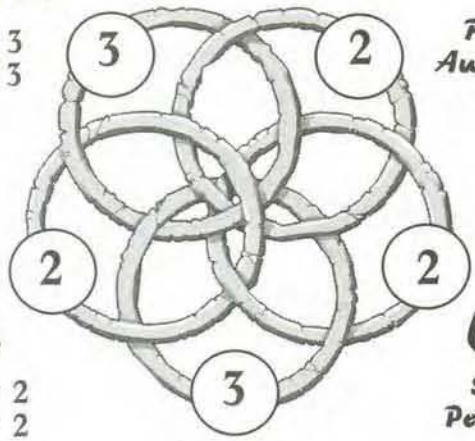
Profession:
Monk

Fire

Agility: 3
Intelligence: 3

Air

Reflexes: 2
Awareness: 2



Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 2

Void

Void Points Spent:

Primary Weapon

Hand-to-Hand 0k2

Primary Armor

None

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

10

Skills

Battle	3
Defense	3
Hand-to-Hand	2
Intimidation	2
Meditation	2
Nofojutsu	2
Shintao	1

Insight: 137

Kiho

Ai Uchi, Heart of Stone,
Falling Star Strike

Wounds

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

School: Temple of Osano-Wo **Rank:** 1

**Advantages/
Disadvantages**

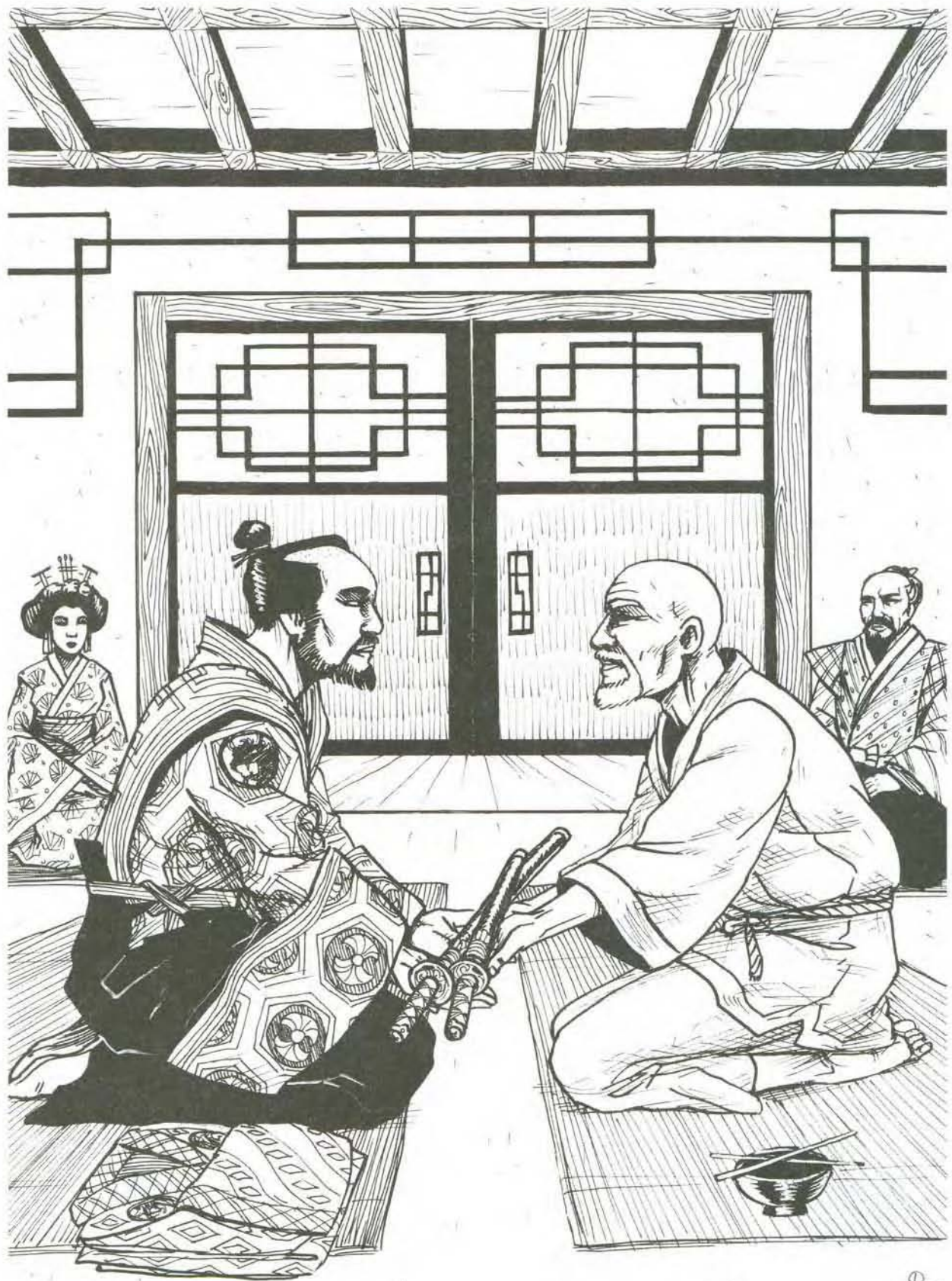
Clan Background (Crab) +1
Combat Reflexes +6
Large +1
Ascetic -0
Benten's Curse -2
Compulsion (Sake, TN 25) -4
Driven (Punish Self) -3

Glory: 2

Honor: 1

☒☒☒☒☒☐☐☐☐☐

Experience Points:



Appendices





EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

"TALE OF SHINSEI AND THE TWO CRANE THUNDERS"

After Doji Yasurugi's death, Shinsei said sadly, "His soul is gone and we are lost without it"

Then came a tearful gasp and a shuddering "No." From behind them, Doji Konishiko stepped forward and knelt beside her brother. Her eyes were dark and shattered, and tears fell from them like salt sea foam. Shinsei's eyes widened at the sight of her, and he watched as she lifted her dead brother's new-forged sword. Tears streamed down her face as she looked into her mother's blue eyes. "His soul is here," she whispered.

"And here." Shinsei bent down and his hand cupped the girl's chin. The monk stared into her eyes for a moment, as if recognizing some essence which was within her. "You are his twin," he said softly, "the twin of Yasurugi?" The girl nodded and Shinsei burst into laughter, shocking in the cold silence of the once bright pavilion. "Then we are not defeated yet! You share the soul of Thunder. All is not lost while you still live!"

The laughter of the monk echoed through the room, bringing light where there had been darkness and hope where all had been lost.

Appendix I: The Fall of Shihoden Temple

The following story can be used as a short adventure by the GM, or a monk PC could choose to use the story as a background, in which case the character would be the lone survivor.

The Tale

The following passage was related to me by a wandering monk named Ishi whom I encountered in my most recent travels to the Crab lands. The man was, as you might imagine, considerably shaken by the event. From what I have been able to gather, the incident, which occurred in the Kuni lands, is only some six months old. I thought it pertinent to bring it to the Council immediately as the implication that it could occur anywhere in the Empire is disturbing. What the rest of the Masters deem prudent to do with this information is, of course, at their discretion.

—Isawa Tadaka in a report to the Council of Elemental Masters

I had just finished my morning sutra and was preparing to leave the temple to contemplate the Tao on a hill that overlooks our dwelling. It is a calm, peaceful place – unusual for that part of the world – and I find that it helps me to relax.

I was about to leave when a lone Crab shugenja wearing the mon of the Kuni family stumbled to the gate. He looked awful, and his gait was awkward, as though his muscles and his bones wished to do two different things. He slumped against the gateway arch and begged for succor. Naturally, I brought him before my master.

He then told a strange tale about a party of Crab who had gone to the Shadowlands on a mission. There they had been beset by a terrible oni that had possessed several of his comrades and killed the rest. His kinsmen, no longer themselves, had pursued him north into Rokugan. They had driven him away from the shelter of the Crab fortresses so he had been unable to seek any aid against them. He begged my master to shelter and to heal him so that he could help them combat the crazed bushi when they arrived.

My master and I exchanged doubtful glances. We had never heard of an oni capable of possessing several men at once. Still, my master thought it best to give the shugenja shelter and rest that we might learn more. Having made his decision, he sent me out to continue my studies. I left the temple for the hillside I mentioned to begin my contemplation.

As I arrived at my customary spot, though, the dreaded bushi the Kuni had mentioned arrived at the temple gate. There were four of them, and I thought that an oni capable of possessing four strong Crab warriors must be fearsome indeed. Compelled by curiosity and a sense of danger, I left my spot and made my way back. I thank the Fortunes that I did not arrive in time to intervene.

I could see the bushi shouting at my master, who had met them in the courtyard. As the argument escalated, the Kuni shugenja appeared behind my master. What I saw next haunts my dreams. The hapless fellow's skin split apart and fell away, revealing a swarm of bloated black insects. I have no way of knowing for certain, but it seemed to me that each was the size of a man's finger.

The swarm spread out to wreak their havoc. A host of them descended upon my poor master and devoured him, tearing him to pieces in the process. Two of the Crab warriors met similar fates; the other two retreated from the temple. The rest of the swarm began tearing at my brothers, and their screams echoed on the morning air.

As I arrived at the gate, dumbstruck by the horror I had witnessed, I saw that one of the surviving bushi was, in fact, another Kuni shugenja. Gripping a scroll, he uttered a prayer to the Fortunes; a tremendous gout of flame engulfed him and raced toward the corrupted temple grounds. Within moments, the entire structure was ablaze. I could hear the screams of my brethren mixed in with the unnatural howls

of the strange Shadowlands creature. By mid-afternoon, the temple had been consumed, and there was no sign of the terrible beast that had laid it low.

CHALLENGE

A shugenja by the name of Kuni Yoma arrives at the temple. He appears to be badly hurt, his kimono is torn and ragged, and he looks as though he hasn't eaten for days. One of the characters happens to be at the gate when he arrives, and he begs for shelter. If pressed he will tell the character that he is being pursued by bandits and is no longer strong enough to defend himself. He will amend this story (assuming he has to tell it) when he meets the temple master in the Focus section of the adventure. At the moment, he is simply trying to gain access to the temple, and he will use whatever wiles are necessary.

Any character that encounters Yoma gets a Perception check at TN 15. If it succeeds, the character notices that Yoma moves strangely. He has a pronounced limp that appears unnatural somehow. If asked, Yoma says that the bandits (or his comrades, depending on which story he is telling) drove the butt of a naginata into his hip. He hopes that it is only dislocated and not broken. Characters who make a Medicine check at TN 15 will know that it should be extremely difficult for him to walk under such circumstances if he could walk at all. The shugenja says that he used spells and sheer will to reach them, if confronted.

A character that specifically tells the GM he is examining Kuni Yoma gets another Perception check, this time at TN 25. If successful, the character spots numerous strange welts on Yoma's skin, a side effect, he explains, of the beatings he has endured.

Focus

Once he is in the presence of the master, Kuni Yoma tells the tale of his journey to the Shadowlands. He claims that several of his kinsmen were slaughtered by a strange oni none of them had ever seen before. The beast then possessed the remainder of his party, and, to his shame, Yoma fled. The tainted Crab then pursued him back across the Shadowlands and north of the Kaiu Wall. They forced him away from every Crab stronghold and slaughtered anyone they encountered. He apologizes for inadvertently

leading the corrupt samurai here, but hopes that the monks can help him defeat them.

The temple master will be skeptical. The story is pretty odd, after all. However, he is not an expert on the Shadowlands and so doesn't feel comfortable openly questioning the veracity of the tale. Any character with the Shadowlands Lore Skill can make an Intelligence check at a TN of 20. If it succeeds, the character will also be skeptical, though he will realize there are so many variety of oni that it is possible Kuni Yoma is telling the truth. If the roll fails (or the character doesn't have Shadowlands Lore) the story seems plausible, if a bit suspicious.

The master agrees to shelter the unfortunate shugenja until he can contemplate the matter further. Any characters present will be sent to resume their daily activities following the interview.

STRIKE

A short time later, Yoma's surviving comrades – two shugenja and two bushi – arrive at the temple having tracked him down. They demand to see the temple master immediately, wanting to know if they have spotted the rogue shugenja. The master comes to see them in the courtyard of the temple, and they tell him that it was Yoma who was possessed by a terrifying oni who slew their comrades, and they have been tracking him across Rokugan seeking to purify or destroy him.

Having heard Yoma's story, the master is doubly cautious (as should be any characters who heard Yoma's tale), and he tells the Crab samurai that he must contemplate the matter to determine whom he should believe. This outrages the Crab, who demand that Yoma be turned over to them immediately and berate the master for not doing so.

As the argument escalates, Yoma comes out into the courtyard. The Crab bushi draw their katana and warn the master to take cover. Yoma then reveals what he really is. His skin splits in several places and falls to the ground in tatters, unleashing a terrifying swarm of giant black insectoid creatures. Any character who made a check to realize something was wrong (made the Medical check, noticed the welts, or succeeded at the Shadowlands Lore roll) can roll initiative having been on guard as a result of suspicion about Yoma. However, he must subtract 2 from the result since the oni's emergence is incredibly gruesome. No other characters can act in the first



EXCERPTS FROM THE TAO

"TALE OF SHINSEI AND BAYUSHI"

A fable, beloved by the Scorpion, has Shinsei telling a tale to Bayushi before he entered in the contest of the Kami.

"There was once a little frog who lived by the riverside. One day, a scorpion wandered by and asked the little frog if he would carry him across the river.

"The scorpion said to the frog, 'Carry me across the river.' The frog said, 'I will not. For if I do, you will sting me.' The scorpion said, 'I will not. For if I do, we will both drown.'

"The frog saw wisdom in the scorpion's words, so he let her climb on his back and began swimming across the river. About halfway across, he felt a painful sting in his back.

"The frog felt the scorpion's poison flow into his heart, and as death closed in on him, the both began to sink into the cold water. Just before his nose slipped under the waves, the frog said, 'Scorpion, now we will both drown!' But the scorpion smiled..." Shinsei paused again and turned to look at Bayushi "...and she said, 'But little frog, I can swim.'"

After that, Bayushi entered the contest... and lost.



SHUGENJA AND MONKS

One of the differences between shugenja and monks is 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 his fellow man.

round of the combat. They are paralyzed by fear and loathing of what they have just witnessed.

The oni spreads out and attacks as many characters as possible in the first round, focusing on the Crab samurai (who know how to kill it) and the temple master (because it is trying to maximize the chaos it causes before returning to the Shadowlands). Any character that attempts to attack the beast will have the favor returned on the oni's next available action. If a character is killed by the oni, the foul "insects" will burrow into the character's body, attempting to take its skin so that it may escape and continue its mission.

The only way to kill the monster is with fire. The Crab know this and shout this information to any character who can hear them on the second round of the combat. The GM should make it very difficult to do so without destroying the temple. The Fires that Cleanse (the spell used by the shugenja in the story) is effective but causes the temple itself to catch fire. Ultimately, if the characters can isolate the oni within the temple and burn it to the ground, they can destroy the creature. However, this should be Fu Leng's victory. Even if the oni is destroyed, it should have been able to wreak considerable havoc on the temple and the devotees of Shinsei first.

ONI NO YOMA

EARTH: 4

WATER: 3

FIRE: 3

AIR: 4

Rolls when Attacking: 5k3

Rolls for Damage: 6k3

TN to be Hit: 25

Armor: 5

Wounds per Level: 20: -1; 40: -3; 80: Dead

Special Abilities: Multiple Attacks (see below); Possession (see below); Revolting (see below); Invulnerability

This particularly nasty oni takes the form of a swarm of enormous black insects. The individual creatures are each longer than a large man's index finger and three times as fat. They have huge maws with which they tear at the flesh of their intended victim. The swarm has a hive mind, allowing the individual creatures to coordinate their attacks.

When it fights, the swarm spreads out and attacks as many people as it can successfully manage. Oni no Yoma can attack up to seven

characters when it is at full strength. These "mini-swarms" descend on their opponents and begin biting and tearing at their flesh. Swatting individual insects has little effect since there always seem to be more to replace them. As the oni takes damage, the Wound penalties it suffers also reduces the number of attacks it can make by its Wound Level; after taking 20 Wounds, it may make six attacks per turn, and after taking 40 Wounds, it may make only four. Note that while the creature can attack up to seven characters, it does not get to make seven attacks on a single character. The special ability simply allows it to attack multiple characters at once.

If Oni no Yoma kills a character, the insects bore into the skin of the dead samurai and begin feasting on his innards. They also begin to multiply. An hour after the victim's death, the creature can take the character's skin much like a bog hag and masquerade as a human until it is ready to strike again. Shedding this skin takes a single round, and any characters who didn't notice something was amiss before the oni throws off its disguise cannot act in the first round of the combat, so stunned are they by the revolting action. However, those who observe the oni in disguise get a Perception check at TN 15 to notice that he moves strangely.

The oni can be killed only by fire. Regular weapons do not harm it, nor does crystal. Jade weapons do half damage, but will not kill it permanently. The foul insects must be immolated.



Appendix II Monks in Rokugan's Society

Virtually all interactions between Rokugani citizens is governed by a rigid code of etiquette based upon the precepts of the Celestial Order, which of course states that the samurai caste is above the heimin and hinin classes. What then of the monks, who exist outside the Celestial Order?

The social standing of the monk class is nebulous at best. Although technically heimin, in practice they fall somewhere between the samurai caste and the peasantry. While they are beneath the samurai in station, only the most dishonorable, unlearned bushi would dare disrespect the enlightened wisdom of the Brotherhood of Shinsei.

Just as samurai treat monks with deference, the heimin treat every monk they encounter with the utmost respect and courtesy. Rare is the peasant who has not received a blessing or act of kindness from a monk. To the heimin, the members of the Brotherhood represent the kindness and charity of the Fortunes themselves, and the idea of offending them brings with it the image of horrible, divine retribution. The Fortunes are not forgiving to those who fail to respect their followers. As a result, peasants treat every monk they meet as if he were their own grandfather.

MONKS IN COURT

Although they care little for the social politics of Rokugan, it is not unheard of to find monks in the courts of the Great Clans. This usually comes about when the monk in question feels that there is something to be learned at a particular location. Some of the more theologically minded Phoenix lords have large numbers of monks attend their winter courts for months on end.

Generally it is considered good fortune for a daimyo to have a representative of the Brotherhood within his court. During the course of difficult negotiations, the lord may seek the wisdom of an attending monk. With a simple smile and a quotation from the Tao, the monk can defuse a potentially hostile situation. Visiting courtiers may find the monk's influence far less fortuitous, however, particularly if the monk's "wisdom" seems to be more advantageous for their rivals in court.

It is possible for a monk to have considerable influence over the actions of others. Both in the chambers of court and upon the roads of the Empire, samurai commonly consult the wisdom of a monk before setting upon a course of action. If the samurai's path is endorsed by the monk's words, the samurai gains much honor in the eyes of onlookers. If, however, the monk's enlightened wisdom recommends another course, the samurai can lose honor for ignoring the monk's words.

A commonly recounted tale is that of Mirumoto Hatsume, the daimyo of a small province in the lands of the Dragon Clan. He boldly claimed during the Winter Court at Kyuden Agasha that he intended to lay claim to the western portion of the Dragon Heart Plain that bordered his lands so that his province might provide an even greater bounty for the Dragon and the Emperor. In front of his fellow court guests he asked the wisdom of the visiting monk Nodoka. To Hatsume's surprise, the monk recommended against the action, citing passages of the Tao that endorsed moderation and contentment with one's lot. Angrily, Hatsume vowed that he would proceed, losing face with the court.

In the spring, Hatsume did annex the lands on the outskirts of his province. The heimin of his villages worked diligently, but Hatsume had overextended the amount of land they could successfully cultivate, and the province was unable to meet its tax requirements that season. The daimyo of the Mirumoto would likely have forgiven such a shortcoming, as Hatsume had paid extra in several previous seasons, had he not heard of Hatsume's shameful treatment of the monk Nodoka at court. Instead, he stripped the proud Hatsume of his province.

Though below the station of samurai, a monk is far from powerless.

There have been instances when monks have taken advantage of their position. This poses a



THROWING THEIR WEIGHT AROUND

Players may wonder what possible influence a monk character could have in a group of samurai. After all, no one really has to listen to him, do they?

Make no mistake, it's a challenge to be the lone monk in a party.

However, talented role-players will find that a word to the wise at the right moment can have great impact. When the other characters in the party are dominating the scene, a monk can make his wishes known with a subtle quote from the Tao and a meaningful glance. Samurai characters who consistently fail to consider the monk's point of view are looking at serious loss of Honor.

Other characters in the party that possess the Shintao or Theology skills should have an appropriate respect for the monk. These characters are perhaps more religious in nature than their comrades, and are much more likely to treat the monk as an equal.

Be careful not to abuse this privilege, however. A contrary, forceful monk will quickly receive a visit from other members of the Brotherhood who are "concerned" about the monk's chosen path to enlightenment. He could very well end up polishing the path-stones of a monastery high in the mountains of the Dragon lands.



SHIBA AND THE TAO

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 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, conveying a message: You cannot appreciate history, because you will live forever.

perplexing problem for the daimyo in question. While he could easily have the monk executed (they are still heimin, after all), doing so would result in an enormous loss of honor. Yet the situation cannot be permitted to continue. Cunning daimyos resolve this situation by sending a message to a shinpu, abbot, or other ranking member of the Brotherhood and explaining that he fears he and his court are an unenlightened influence upon the visiting monks. Further, if the monk is seduced from the path of enlightenment by the trappings of court, the daimyo fears that his palace will be avoided by the Brotherhood in the future, a fate he desperately wishes to avoid. The recipient of such a message generally comes to understand the truth of the situation and takes steps to correct it.



There are literally thousands of monasteries, temples, and shrines scattered across the face of the Emerald Empire. While linked together in the grandiose Brotherhood of Shinsei, each is largely autonomous, with its teachings and unique philosophy dictated by the elder monks of the individual facility. As a result, two monks who hail from different temples in different parts of Rokugan can have radically different skills and ideas about enlightenment and the role of a monk in the Empire.

An attempt to catalog all of the shrines and temples that exist in Rokugan would be all but impossible. Instead, the largest temple in each province keeps a record of all holy sites within its region. The largest temple in the lands of a single clan, in turn, keeps records of the largest temples in each province. This continues upward until the largest, most prominent temples in the Empire have reasonably accurate accounts of the number

of shrines, temples, and monasteries in Rokugan. Unfortunately, even these records are inaccurate, as new shrines are constantly built by the populace just as old ones fall into disuse or are destroyed by various means including bandits, battles, and natural disasters.

There are essentially three types of temples found in Rokugan, each with its own distinct philosophy and practices. Naturally, there are countless variations of each of these three types, but the majority of holy sites throughout the Empire can be categorized into one of these broad archetypes.

Perhaps the most frequently occurring temples are those which subscribe to the Taoist regime, accounting for nearly half of all the temples in Rokugan. Although they revere the Fortunes, the monks of these temples focus primarily on understanding the wisdom of Shinsei through the study of his teachings. Taoist monks are considerably more reclusive than those of other philosophies, accounting for the relatively low number of wandering monks in the Empire. It should also be noted that Taoist monks are far more ascetic than their brothers, eschewing worldly goods in the search for enlightenment. Taoist temples are found throughout the Empire, but are most common in the lands of the Phoenix and Dragon.

Temples dedicated to the worship of the Fortunes are also quite prevalent. Like their Taoist brothers, they recognize Hantei Genji's proclamation uniting the worship of Shintao and the Fortunes, but they choose to place more emphasis on the Great Fortunes than on Shinsei's teachings. Monks of this persuasion are much more likely to venture forth into the Empire to seek adventure and excitement. The Fortunes they revere were once flesh and blood like the monks themselves, after all, and attained true wisdom and enlightenment only after a lifetime of experience. Hence, the sohei warrior-monks are almost invariably from the philosophy of the Fortunes. The single most prominent example of this philosophy is the Temple of Osano-Wo, which lies upon the Plain of Thunder and whose monks are responsible for conducting the Test of the Emerald Champion whenever the need presents itself. Temples of this persuasion are most frequently found in the lands of the Crab Clan, with a lesser number found among the Lion and Unicorn Clans.



Although less common than those devoted to Shintao or the Fortunes, it is not unusual to encounter temples devoted to the worship of ancestor spirits, a practice that technically falls within the boundaries of Fortune worship. These temples are invariably maintained almost exclusively by retired samurai from a single clan and usually see a considerable number of visiting bushi. The Tao and altars to the Fortunes are present in these temples, but almost as an afterthought rather than as the focus of the facility. These temples are most likely to become embroiled in the politics of the Great Clans due to their heavy concentrations of retired Clan samurai. Though some monks choose to journey forth from these temples in search of the experience that so ennobled their ancestors, the monks of these temples are still less likely to wander Rokugan than their Taoist or Fortune-centered brothers. These temples are most prevalent in the lands of the Lion Clan, although a large number can also be found in Crane lands as well.

Prominent Temples in the Empire

Most temples and monasteries throughout Rokugan are relatively small, serving no more than a few dozen monks at most. A small number of temples, however, are considerably larger. These holy sites are the centers of religion in Rokugan and are the terminus of thousands of pilgrimages each year. Each of these temples sees large numbers of new monks begin their journeys toward enlightenment before they are sent by the Brotherhood to other temples that best suit their individual needs and strengths. In this way, these temples influence the philosophies and attitudes of temples throughout the entire Empire. Although they may actually receive the bulk of their training and initiation in much smaller temples far away, thousands of monks proudly claim one of these temples as the point of origin on their path to enlightenment.

THE HALL OF ANCESTORS

The Hall of Ancestors in the lands of the Matsu family is perhaps the single most venerated location within all of the Lion lands. Thousands of

samurai visit the great hall each month to pay homage to their ancestors.

The Hall of Ancestors is unlike other temples in many respects. First and foremost, the grounds are actively maintained by the samurai of the Lion Clan. Elsewhere in their lands, the Lions leave these tasks to monks or heimin, but here it is considered a great honor to perform these humble tasks for one's ancestors. The monks who reside at the hall are almost superfluous in that they have very few duties within the Hall itself. They conduct certain mundane daily rituals, but the majority of the sacred rites conducted within the Hall are performed by the Kitsu sodan-senzo. Certain cleaning tasks are left to the monks, but the majority are handled by the Matsu and Akodo. The monks care for the scrolls and histories that are kept within the great hall, although only under the supervision of the Ikoma. In short, the monks have few duties within the Hall.

The brother monks who are stationed here are frequently dispatched to small temples and shrines throughout the Lion lands. The Hall itself serves as their point of entry into the Brotherhood and as a holy site for regular pilgrimages and lengthy stints of meditation. While the samurai



SHIBA AND THE TAO (PART 2)

Unlike his brother Togashi, Shiba wanted to be a part of the world, but as time went on he found himself more and more cut off from it. He found solace with the arrival of Shinsei. The wise little man understood Shiba's isolation, and spoke 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, the burned and torn remains of which still rest in the library of Gisei Toshi.

Shiba sequestered himself from the Empire and turned his attention to Shinsei, and to ways he could keep his wisdom alive. He continued to study the Tao and worked to spread its teachings. 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.



SHIBA AND THE TAO (PART 3)

Shiba's original text grew as he followed Shinsei through the countryside looking for the Seven Thunders. As they passed through villages, Shinsei would stop and converse with the peasants. From these conversations come the final chapters of the Tao.

When they finally reached the City of Isawa, Shinsei commanded Shiba to lay down his pen. The text was finished and would forever remain here. At first, the Isawa argued about the little text, calling it "blasphemous," for it was against the religion of the Fortunes, and they decided to begin a detailed study to find its flaws. They soon began to find ways to integrate the Tao with the worship of the Fortunes, and within a few generations the manuscript rested in a sacred place of honor.

Much of the research on the Tao in the Isawa library is recent, because a fire destroyed much of the library 700 years ago. Even the priceless original manuscript was nearly destroyed. Only fragments survived the blaze. Now the remnants of the Tao barely cover one table top, where they once filled the space of a hundred scrolls.

(Continued on opposite page.)

who visit the Hall are almost invariably interested in their ancestors, the few who seek wisdom regarding the Tao or the Fortunes are guided on the path of wisdom by the monks there.

HEAVENS' WISDOM TEMPLE

Although not well known among the greater populace of Rokugan, the Heavens' Wisdom Temple is widely noted within the Brotherhood of Shinsei. Located within the lands of the Asahina family, the temple is populated almost exclusively by former Cranes. The former artisans who reside here have transformed the simple structure into one of elegant beauty without sacrificing its quiet serenity. The study of astrology that so characterizes the Asahina family continues here unabated, and messages from the Heavens' Wisdom Temple are taken quite seriously by the other temples of the Brotherhood. While many samurai may scoff at the notion of omens and prophecy, the Brotherhood does not.

While both the Tao and the Fortunes are studied at the Heavens' Wisdom Temple, the central theme is the deciphering of the world's truths through astrology. The monks who study here believe that the Fortunes display their will and wishes through the heavens, and that Shinsei himself derived his great wisdom from the omens in the skies.

Applicants to the temple are welcome here as they are in virtually all temples throughout Rokugan, regardless of their former station or allegiance. However, those unfamiliar with the ways of the Asahina typically find the philosophies embraced at the Temple of the Heavens unconventional and confusing. Few non-Cranes remain more than a week, and the total number of monks within the temple who originate from clans other than the Crane is extremely low. In the history of the temple, hardly any peasants have joined, as the teachings are almost beyond their comprehension.

Although accepting of other doctrines and philosophies themselves, the monks of the Heavens' Wisdom Temple are not looked upon favorably by the monks of certain other temples. Most notably, monks who revere the more forceful and ardent Fortunes, such as Osano-Wo or even Ebisu, consider them naive academics who squander their days in the pointless scrutiny of minor events.

SHINDEN YARUKI JUKKO

One of the more recent philosophies to develop, the subscribers of the Shinden Yaruki Jukko movement combine the study of the Tao of Shinsei with the code of bushido. The faith seems to have originated from a temple in the southern Lion lands before it was destroyed in what appears to have been a Scorpion plot of some sort. Since then, the temple has been rebuilt within the walls of Otosan Uchi and is flourishing there. The monks of this temple (and others that have adopted its philosophy) are considered sohei. They believe that they must follow the tenets of bushido as do the samurai. Accordingly, they defend the heimin of Rokugan from bandits, seek out criminal elements to eliminate, and train peasants in the arts of self-defense. Many retiring samurai have sought out temples of this disposition upon leaving their family and clans behind.

The primary temple of this discipline in Otosan Uchi was devastated during the Scorpion Clan Coup several years ago. The sohei within were unwilling to accept the heretical actions of the invading Scorpions and fought against them. Although they were responsible for the deaths of several Scorpion patrols, they could not defeat the superior numbers and armament of their foes. Over three-fourths of the monks dwelling at the temple at the time of the coup were killed. Fortunately, nearly twice that number have joined since then, and the temple has been restored to its capacity once more. (See *Otosan Uchi*, Book Two, pages 69-70.)

THE TEMPLE TO THE KAMI

Only a handful of monks are trained at this sacred facility each year, and none receives a permanent post within the Temple itself. That honor belongs to the lone caretaker, a mysterious and tragic man named Shioda. Each year the wonder and the majesty of this place brings tens of thousands of shugenja from across the Empire to marvel at the beauty of the kami. The most spiritual among them receive glimpses of true enlightenment from the spirits found here, and when they choose to retire, these shugenja often request permission to attend the needs of the Temple to the Kami.

Monks newly accepted into the Brotherhood of Shinsei can frequently be found undergoing the most basic instruction in the ways of the Tao, the Fortunes, and the life of a monk. However, the

number of shugenja who request this posting upon their retirement far exceeds the number accepted. Only those most spiritual and truly deserving shugenja are granted such an honor, and only then if recommended by a member of the Council of Five. Upon the completion of their training, these new brothers are scattered across Rokugan to temples and monasteries in the lands of all the Great Clans.

The monks who begin their studies here are permitted to choose whatever path suits them best, but the vast majority choose to study the Tao. This may be a result of the backgrounds of these monks (only former shugenja study here; no bushi or heimin are accepted), or it may simply be that the kami here are more predisposed to associate with those who study Shintao rather than the Fortunes.

Although almost universally respected by others, the monks who hail from the Temple to the Kami occasionally come into contact with their more visceral brothers, notably those who follow the path of Osano-Wo taught at that Fortune's great temple in the south and those who embrace the new philosophy of the Shinden Yaruki Jukko. In both cases, the monks of the Temple to the Kami find the latter to be far too centered in the realm of the physical rather than focusing on the spiritual world that surrounds them.

THE TEMPLE OF THE FIVE ELEMENTS

This ancient and most holy site is one of the oldest temples in Rokugan. It was supposedly founded by one of the first great Elemental Masters upon her retirement. The records of the Isawa indicate that she meditated upon the Tao and fasted for many days before attempting her final act of magic: a week-long ritual that created the temple itself from the raw essence of the elements. Many of the master's students were so awed by this incredible feat that they joined her in retirement to continue their studies with her.

The Temple of the Five Elements is widely regarded as one of the foremost centers for the study of the Tao in the Empire. Since its founding many Elemental Masters have chosen to retire to this temple, some of who reside there to this day. A rigorous routine of study and meditation is the norm here, although there is considerable time allowed for each monk to follow their own paths. Although physical conditioning is not as

emphasized here as at other temples, the monks of the Temple of Five Elements frequently capable of incredible feats of skill as many of them have mastered several basic kiho, the first steps on their paths to enlightenment.

The monks of the Temple of Five Elements are almost universally respected by all other temples in the Empire. Unfortunately, there are those among the monks here, particularly the younger, more adventurous brothers, who view themselves in somewhat of an elitist light, believing that other temples are not as distinguished nor as prestigious as their own. As they advance in years and progress in their study of the Tao, these conceits invariably subside.

THE TEMPLE OF THE FORTUNES' WRATH

While the Phoenix are renowned for their devotion to the study of the Tao, there are a few temples within their lands that predominantly focus upon the worship of the Fortunes. The most prominent of these is the Fortune's Wrath Temple.

In the earliest days of the Empire, the Phoenix Clan eschewed the worship of the Fortunes as a primitive, anachronistic practice. They had embraced the Tao and all the power that came with the teachings of Shinsei. A samurai named Kaimetsu-uo demonstrated to them very clearly that the Fortunes were a powerful and present force in Rokugan.

Seeking a disguised assassin, Kaimetsu-uo and his men demanded that the man, whom the Phoenix believed to be a simple courtier, be turned over to them. The lord of the palace where the man had sought refuge was proud, and refused to turn him over to a samurai making unsubstantiated claims of murder. In reply, Kaimetsu-uo called upon his father, the murdered Osano-Wo, to aid him, and a bolt of lightning from the heavens split the gate of the palace at the moment Kaimetsu-uo struck it with his blade.

The Phoenix lord was a changed man. Years later, following his retirement, he founded a temple to the Fortunes, particularly honoring mighty Osano-Wo himself. The temple remains to this day, and many more ardent Phoenix and Dragon bushi choose to retire there. The monks who study there are somewhat trapped between two extremes. The Taoist monks of the Phoenix lands regard them as somewhat coarse and unenlightened, while other monks who study the Fortunes throughout the Empire consider them



SHIBA AND THE TAO (PART 3 CONTINUED)

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.



too contemplative and weak to be true disciples of the faith.

THE TEMPLE OF OSANO-WO

Revered by the hardiest of bushi, the temple to Osano-Wo is the most martial temple in the Empire. The sohei monks who train there are some of the most dangerous hand-to-hand combatants in Rokugan.

Monks of this temple who wander the roads of Rokugan frequently come into quiet conflict with their more conservative fellows in the Brotherhood of Shinsei, who discourage the seeming belligerence of the sohei. When traveling lands occupied by more traditionally minded temples, the sohei of Osano-Wo usually attempt to observe the wishes of the Brotherhood.

The monks of this temple reserve spartan but functional quarters for the Emerald Champion, whom they view as one of Osano-Wo's chosen (although the Emerald Champion himself rarely seems to share this view). Doji Satsume's death during the Scorpion Clan's attempted coup was a great tragedy to the monks here, and they mourned for a full month for him following their period of mourning for the Hantei. They have been waiting for the Emperor's command to prepare for another Test of the Emerald Champion to see who will replace Satsume, but the Hantei's lengthy illness has made this concern secondary to the Imperial Court for now.

THE TEMPLE TO THE SUN GODDESS

The single largest temple in the capital of Otosan Uchi, this temple is also one of the largest in all of Rokugan. Its beauty is a thing of legend throughout the Empire, a testament to the unwavering resolve of the monks who dwell here. The entire temple, while simple in its construction, is meticulously cleaned each and every day. The sunlight glints off of the freshly shined walls and path-stones until the entire building seems to glow with its own inner light.

The monks here are the epitome of the charitable, philanthropist image of the monk class. Upon the conclusion of their duties each day they move among the heimin of the city, bringing relief to the sick and the hungry. Although there are those who disagree with the particulars of their doctrine, none questions the charitable acts they perform.

Appendix IV: L5R CCG Monk Decks

Old School in the Mountains

—by Rick Raven

DYNASTY DECK — 42 CARDS

Events

Imperial Gift
Inheritance
Peasant Revolt
Wisdom Gained

Holdings

1 x Grove of the Five Masters
3 x Jade Works
2 x Merchant Caravan
3 x Prayer Shrines
3 x Small Farm
3 x Temple to Shinsei

Regions

2 x Akui Cliffs
1 x Golden Sun Plain

Personalities

3 x Asako Hosigeru
3 x Heichi Chokei
3 x Hoshi Maseru
1 x Hoshi Maseru (Exp.)
3 x Hoshi Wayan
2 x Ikudaiu
3 x Shioda
2 x Yoshun

FATE DECK — 43 CARDS

Rings

1 x Ring of Air
1 x Ring of Earth

- 1 x Ring of Fire
- 1 x Ring of Water
- 1 x Ring of the Void

Items

- 1 x Armor of Osano-Wo
- 1 x Armor of Sun Tao
- 1 x The 12th Black Scroll

Actions

- 2 x Ambush
- 3 x Avoid Fate
- 2 x Deadly Ground
- 2 x Dragonly Tattoo
- 2 x Entrapping Terrain
- 3 x Flooded Pass
- 3 x Iaijutsu Art

Spells

- 3 x Rise From the Ashes
- 3 x Walking the Way

Kiho

- 3 x Banish All Shadows
- 3 x Dharma Technique
- 2 x Double Chi
- 2 x Touch the Lands
- 1 x Void Strike

Sensei

- 1 x Kaede Sensei

Utilizing the House of Tao stronghold, this deck is designed to win through enlightenment. Many players habitually use the House of Tao ability to start with the same Ring every game, but this flexible deck permits you to consider your opponent's likely strengths before choosing a Ring. Though starting with the Ring of Earth is probably your best bet for defense, spell-heavy decks may have a problem if you start with the Ring of Air. Being able to tailor that against your opponent is a good ability, and then playing all four other Rings should fall into place quickly.

The Way of Fire

-by Seth Mason

DYNASTY DECK — 41 CARDS

Events

- Chrysanthemum Festival
- Emperor's Peace
- Enlightened Ruler
- Kisada's Funeral
- Peasant Revolt
- A Soul of Thunder

Holdings

- 3 x Large Farm
- 3 x Merchant Caravan
- 3 x Prayer Shrines
- 3 x Small Farm
- 3 x Temple to Shinsei

Regions

- 1 x Golden Sun Plain
- 2 x Shinsei's Shrine

Personalities

- 3 x Gekkai
- 3 x Hanoshi
- 3 x Hoshi Wayan
- 1 x Hoshi Wayan (Exp.)
- 2 x Ikudaiu
- 3 x Norio
- 3 x Shioda
- 1 x Takao (Exp. 2)

FATE DECK — 42 CARDS

Rings

- 1 x Ring of Earth
- 1 x Ring of Fire
- 1 x Ring of Void

Actions

- 3 x Avoid Fate
- 3 x Come One at a Time
- 3 x Entrapping Terrain
- 3 x Fires of Retribution
- 3 x Flooded Pass
- 1 x His Most Favored
- 3 x Iaijutsu Art
- 2 x Iaijutsu Challenge
- 3 x Iaijutsu Duel
- 3 x Imperial Edicts
- 3 x The Sun In Shadow

Kiho

- 3 x Banish All Shadows
- 3 x Dharma Technique
- 3 x The Wind's Truth

Sensei

- 1 x Hantei Sensei

This deck uses the House of Tao stronghold, starting with the Ring of Earth in play. Against opponents you know won't attack, it may not hurt to play Ring of Fire instead. From there, you duel, defend, and work your way to an Honor Victory. Use Hantei Sensei to filter either Sneak Attack or Rise From the Ashes from their Fate Deck. Gekkai is a fierce duelist; combined with Come One at a Time, he can destroy hordes of attackers and fill your hand all at once. Kisada's Funeral helps keep other honor runners down while you can laugh it off with your Ring on the table.





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:

Clan:

Profession:

Fire

Agility:
Intelligence:

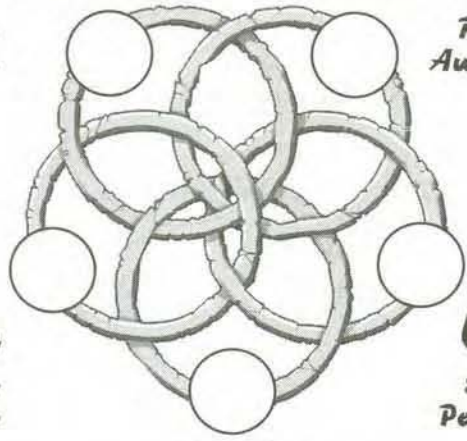
Air

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/Kiho

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: 2

Honor:

Experience Points:



Legend of the Five Rings

Name:

Clan:

Profession:

Fire

Agility:
Intelligence:

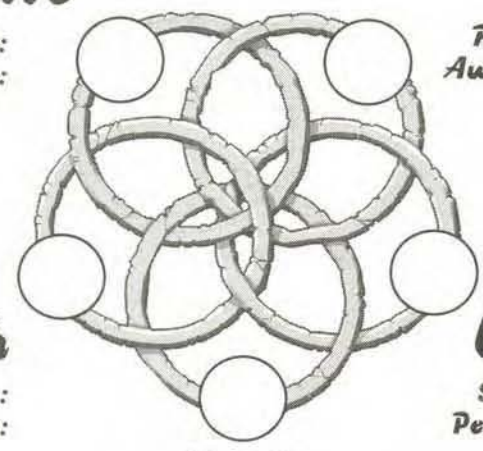
Air

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/Kiho

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: 2

Honor:

Experience Points:



For centuries,
the Brotherhood of Shinsei
has sought to understand the secrets
of the Tao. Isolated from society by their
sacred vows, they have hidden the greatest
secret of all: it is time for Shinsei to return to
Rokugan and guide the steps of man.
The path of wisdom lies within.

The Way of Shinsei

- Eleventh in the *Way of the Clans* series, *The Way of Shinsei* introduces the monk class to Rokugan, including new skills, abilities and new ancestors.
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