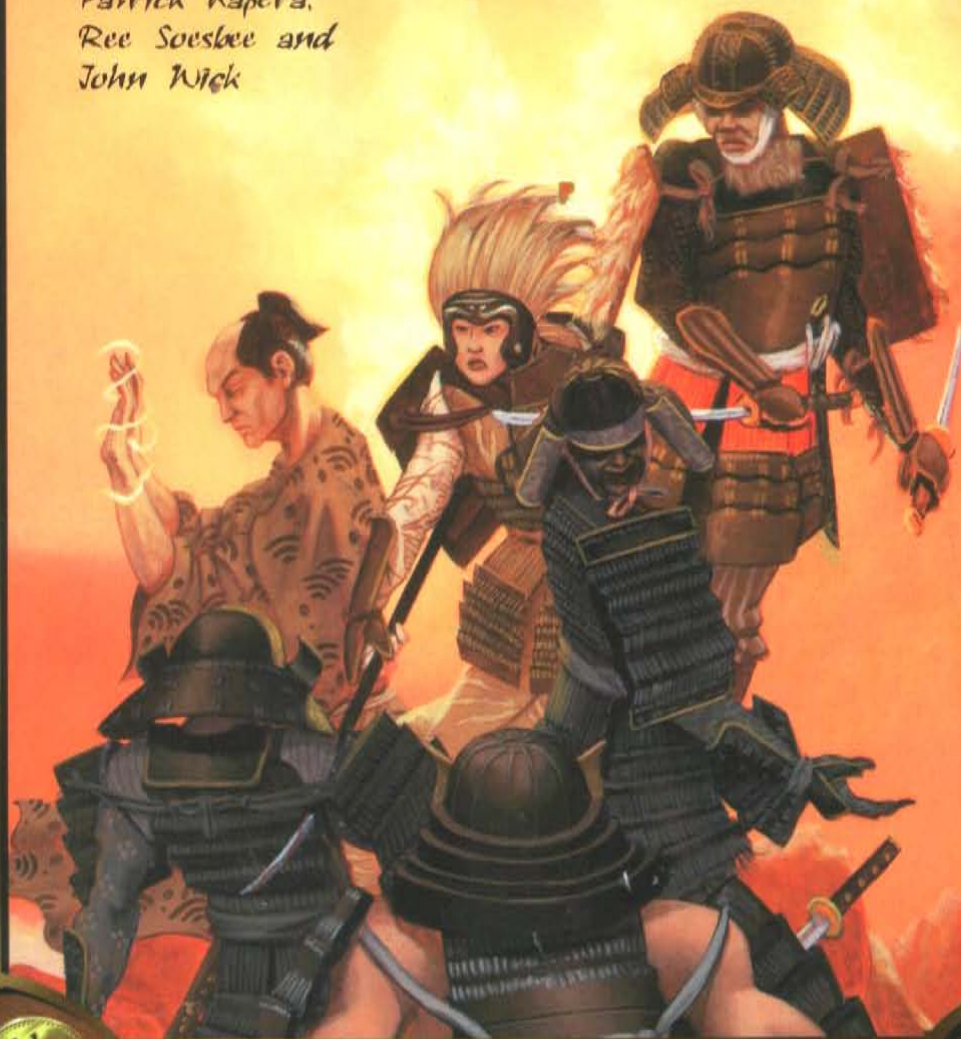


The Way of the Clans Book Six

The

Way of the Lion

by
Patrick Kapera,
Ree Soesbee and
John Wick



Legend of the Five Rings



Legend of the Five Rings

The Way of the Lion



*“Any man can be prepared to kill.
A samurai is prepared to die.”
– Akodo Toturi*



Credits

WRITTEN BY PATRICK KAPERA, REE SOESBEE AND JOHN WICK

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REPRINT THANKS

For the second printing of *Way of the Lion*, we asked to hear about things people really wanted to see changed. Those who answered the call included

Chris Bigg, Ray Colina, Corinth, Lucien Cristofaro, David J Dolph, Tim Ellis, Luc Gadioux, David R. "Sanzo" Henry, Thomas Iverson, G Michael Jacobs, Ron James, Shosuro Kanzaki, Kathleen, Rob Kenny, David V Krieger, Otaku KunLiu, David E. Loewen, Stewart

MacWilliam, Richard Maddy, Ian McAuliffe, Andrew McGregor, Craig Mercer, Andrew Meyer, Wayne Ogle, James Ojaste, Scott M. Parrish, Chris Payne, Dieter Pearcey, Ramón Peña, Devon E. Sanders, SkidMarxst, John Stepp,

Martin Sweeney, Jay Swygert, Tengu, Foxtrot & Vex, Kyle Voltti, and Jay Wrobel. (If we've left your name out, we're very sorry - we tried not to miss anybody from the 2.5 MB of email you sent us!)

Special thanks go to *Scott Gearin*, who went way above and beyond the call of duty in his contribution.

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Marcelo wrote *The Art of War* appendix and was our military advisor

Jim wrote a battle or two and was a great idea trampoline

Jennifer defined Jigoku and turned the Kitsu from a nebulous idea to something spiffy

Dave and Ray (our resident tacticians) made *Leadership* inspirational rather than just instructional

Finally, special thanks to the cast and crew of *Saving Private Ryan*. It arrived at the eleventh hour (with thirty seconds to go) and put us back on the path.

This book is respectfully dedicated to Dave Williams and Dave Seay -

The first taught Shinsei everything he knows about strategy and tactics.

The second knows more about courage than any of us ever will.

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Heart of the Lion

The clouds raced the wind from edge to edge of the sky's bright blue expanse. A thousand roars echoed, all merging in a scream of war. Armies with bright banners raised a thousand swords to the heavens, daring the darkness to oppose them.



That is where it begins. It is the middle and the end, for all things are a circle, and all lessons can be seen in the futures of our children ...



A warrior, his eyes shining, turned to a Lady. "It will be glorious, Matsu." A thousand times it had been said, and a thousand times she had answered with a tumultuous scream of war and pride. Akodo looked down, watching his soldiers march, shaking the earth. His plumed helm rippled in the wind as he held the reins of his horse tightly. Beside him waited a woman with eyes black as death, her lips stretched in an expectant smile.



Akodo Arasou and Matsu Tsuko stood on a hillside, the sun shining down on them. His eyes met hers as he tightened the strap of his helm. "It will be a glorious battle," he said, placing his katana in his obi. His eyes were bright with glory, his every movement rumbled with pride and confidence. Tsuko's only response was a fierce grin as she turned to the massed Lion forces on

the plain below. The sun crested the horizon with blazing fury, burning down on the castle and its army. Toshi Ranbo wo Shien Shite Reigisaho - the Castle of the Lion - stolen by Crane diplomacy. By Crane cowardice.

"It time we took back the castle of our ancestors." Arasou's voice was clear, and the men on the field cheered, their weapons catching the red of the dawning sun. "Who will fight at my side?"

His answer was a thunderous battle cry, led by the woman at his right hand. Before the sun had cleared the horizon, the battle was joined.



"To the right!" Akodo howled from his horse, charging beside his legions. "They flank to the right! Strike!"

The men charged, their swords cutting bloody swaths in their enemy. The aberrations, called up by Akodo's brother, screamed their hatred as they were trampled underfoot. Akodo looked south and saw Matsu's followers making a valiant stand against twisted oni, their hands dripping blood and poison. Matsu was a head above them, a tremendous sword in her hand. Shouting, she charged the largest oni. First to the right, her blow parrying its claws, and then a cut to the beast's legs. Sparks flew as the no-dachi bit into the creature's metal scales, and it roared in pain and fury.

Matsu.

Akodo smiled. What a wife she would have made! Her swordsmanship was unmatched, and every man in her command would give his life for her. The Lady of Lions indeed.

Suddenly, with a roar, ogres burst from a rocky ledge, falling upon Akodo and his men.



"Tsuko!" Arasou's shout. The clouds of dust raised by the horses choked his voice and robbed him of sight. "Tsuko!"

Before him, a Daidoji spear unit charged the Akodo; there was no time for thought. Arasou leapt into the fray, his father's katana shining dully through the smoke. The battle was not going well. Each time the Lion charged the castle, the Crane retaliated with burning pitch and

flaming oil. As Arasou removed the head of his opponent, he saw another Akodo die. Hatred tore through his body, and each blow became more enraged.

Arasou leapt at the Daidoji, spearing one man on his companion's yari and pausing to slice the hands from a second. *No mercy*, Arasou thought. *No mercy for those who would stand against me.*

To his right, a Matsu legion fell back as another hail of arrows rained down upon them. Tsuko and her soldiers rallied and plunged between the teeth of more Daidoji spears. In her eyes, the fire of combat burned with a fierceness that rivaled the explosions of pitch. "Matsu!" She screamed. She lifted her sword, her cry echoed from a hundred throats. The Matsu marshaled to fight again. Their armor bloodied, they followed Tsuko forward into the mass of Crane, stepping over the bodies of their kinsmen.

Arasou pointed with his katana. "There!" he shouted above the roar of the flames. "There is the breach!" Behind him, samurai rushed into the gap made by the Matsu, ignoring the screams of the wounded and the press of shattering spears.



Akodo smiled as he wiped the ogre blood from his katana. Three brave samurai had died valiantly, but they had seen the dark horde die. Akodo looked about, rain spattering his helmet. His pony was gone, cut from beneath him, and he stood surrounded by the dead.

"To the Emperor!" he cried, and raced toward the body of the battle. It had gone poorly. Akodo saw a tide of twisted figures, churning through Rokugan like a storm, scattering samurai before them. Near the Emperor, Kakita's men clenched like a knot, swords covered in blood.

Matsu stood alone, her honor guard destroyed. Her armor was torn, her face a mask of fury. Akodo charged to her, breaking through the fray with wide sweeping blows. From the side, an oni charged him. Akodo twisted beneath its grasping claws, trying to drive his sword into its chest. It was fast, and his blow only sliced the surface. Black blood splashed down on Akodo's face, blinding him as the oni laughed. Seeing only shadows, Akodo parried any movement, backpedaling to gain an advantage as he wiped the acrid liquid from his eyes.

He heard a grunt, and a scream, and lunged toward the hulking shadow. His blade met bone and sinew, but was torn from his hand. Another moment, but no return strike.

Akodo tried to see past the pain and blood. Standing above him was a woman, her hair tangled and wild. Her eyes narrowed, and she offered him his sword.

"Matsu!" Akodo cried, seeing that the demon had fallen, headless, to the ground. She reached for his arm and dragged him to his feet, leading him to safety. Many times, he heard the ringing sound of battle, but his eyes could make nothing clear. Men rushed past, and he heard Matsu scream orders in his name.

Finally, in the safety of the Emperor's encampment, a healer attended Akodo's wounds. "You will see again from the right eye, my lord, but the left ..." the man's voice faded uncertainly.

"It is all right." Akodo murmured. "I do not need two eyes to find my enemy." He paused. "Matsu?"

"Here." Her voice had no submission, no reverence. Only the faintest tinge of respect marked her position as his vassal.

"I should be at your side." His voice was harsh, rough with anger and despair. "But that cannot happen today. Take the armies." After a long moment, "You were right."

"We can never fight side by side, my Lord. No matter what you command." Matsu whispered. "It was never meant to be." He heard her laugh once, as the silken tent flap rustled, and then there was only silence. Silence, and the cries of the distant battlefield.



The Daidoji spearmen fell back behind the castle's moat, allowing the Lion's archers to pepper them with deadly arrows. Tsuko and Arasou did not falter, and their charge took them into the gates.

Back to back, the Akodo and Matsu fought, their katana cutting through bone and flesh. A hundred soldiers charged with them, down the gullet of Toshi Ranbo wo Shien Shite Reigisaho.

"Glorious!" Arasou howled at his betrothed as he wildly raised his katana. "There has never been such a day!"

A battle-cry ripped from Tsuko's lips, and her strokes matched Arasou's viciousness. Together





they fought, Matsu and Akodo, with deadly efficiency. A trio of Daidoji leapt from behind a palisade, their katanas flashing. Tsuko, with a vicious roar, charged the three, leaping through their guard and slicing one before they could react. The other two leveled their weapons, smiling warily as they approached.

Behind her, Arasou leapt forward, not noticing Tsuko's pause. He leapt into the Crane forces wildly, sword gleaming with blood. The Crane were swift, but he was faster. One struck at his legs, but he parried. Arasou leapt forward, twisting his sword as it passed through another man.

The Crane continued to back away, and Arasou charged after them, calling them traitors, cowards, dogs. He cut the air as they retreated, slicing where a man had just stood. At last, they did not retreat any more, and Arasou found himself drawn away, through the gates, into the heart of the Daidoji forces. One fell under his strike, howling as the Lion mercilessly sliced through his chest. Another struck Arasou's arm, leaving a bloody gash before his own head was removed by the Lion's blade.

Three more died before they could reach him, their broken katana clattering on the stone. Arasou gasped, his breath short and furious, as each stroke robbed another Crane of life. "Tsuko!" Arasou screamed, "Tsuko!"

But the rest of the Lion were dying around him, their charge destroyed by the Daidoji ambush. Blood poured into the moat, and more Crane came. "Tsuko!" The pain robbed him of breath, of vision. Arasou staggered, swinging his sword like a scythe, his arm shaking. He looked down at his chest, and the bone whispered whitely up at him.

"Tsu ... ko ..." His mouth moved, but no sound escaped. When the sun died and the land exploded into darkness, Arasou knew only rage.



We were never meant to fight side by side, my Lord. Her words echoed in Akodo's mind. He watched the monk approach. The strange little man would take Matsu into the darkness. Akodo lowered his head wearily and his fingers brushed the patch that covered his lost eye.

"It is time for us to go, my friend," the monk murmured. "Will you remember everything I have taught you?"

Akodo nodded wearily, his hand falling to his side. "Hai, Shinsei-sama. All will be remembered. By my word, I swear."

A pause. Then, "Do you wish to speak with her before we go?" The monk looked at the tall figure standing on the hillside, her black hair fanning like a banner in the brisk winter breeze.

Akodo looked once more, then turned away. "No. She knows my heart. No words remain."

As the tiny man walked away, his words rang in Akodo's mind. "No path is so narrow that a man must walk it alone. Be one with your brothers, and stand by them. In their strength, you will find your own."

"Matsu ..." he whispered, but they were gone.



Tsuko knelt before the throne of the Akodo *daimyo*, her oath of fealty sticking like raw flesh in her throat. Arasou's brother sat upon it as if he had a rod of iron between his shoulders. He had no grace, no skill with a sword, and little of Arasou's fierceness. In fact, this Akodo seemed more of a peacemaker than a soldier, and his eyes were those of a scholar.

He was a fool.

The glory Arasou had brought to the Akodo had died with him. Tsuko's eyes burned as she murmured the ancient phrases binding her and her family to the new Champion. Binding her forever to this weak-willed rabbit. *Arasou, my brave Arasou ... it is good that you are dead, and will never see what we have become.*

As she rose and bowed formally, the new Champion called to her, "Matsu Tsuko-san."

She glanced up at him, and even her tightly controlled veil of obedience could not cover the pale hatred in her eyes. The man on the throne paused.

"You have suffered a great loss. We all have." His eyes caught hers. "I hope that you and I can come to an understanding. The Clan of the Lion must fight as one."

Tsuko stared in fury, seeing only the usurper's face on her Lord's throne. "No, my Lord." She whispered, with only the faintest tinge of respect. "We will never fight as one. No matter what you command."

She bowed again, then, and turned to go.

"Tsuko ..." he questioned, his voice filled with
SOTTOU.

She turned then, and her jet black eyes cut to the bone. "You will never be Arasou."

"No," the new Champion of the Lion said, his voice echoing with sudden strength. "I will be Toturi, and you will follow my commands. That is all you need to know."

Tsuko's eyes narrowed, and her lips curled back in a feral snarl. Then, with effort, she bowed curtly. Behind her, the door slid shut with a whispered sigh. On the polished throne of his ancestors, the new Champion of the Akodo house closed his weary eyes.



Welcome to the sixth book in the *Way of the Clans* series. *Way of the Lion* is designed to help a Game Master flesh out his own vision of Rokugan's most honorable clan. Devoted to Akodo's code of behavior called "bushido", the Lion are the quintessential samurai.

How To Use This Book

We do not intend for this to be the "final word" regarding the Lion Clan. As usual, if your Game Master has a different vision of the Lion, expect to meet something entirely different on the battlefield.

The first chapter contains anecdotes and stories from the other clans regarding the Lion, giving you a feel for their philosophy and lifestyle.

The second chapter contains information about the vast history of the Lion. None of the other clans devote as much attention and detail to their history as the Lion. You will learn about

Akodo One-Eye, the valiant and tenacious Matsu, the mysterious Kitsu and the clan historians, the Ikoma.

The third chapter contains all the rules you will need to create a Lion character, including the famous Matsu bushi school, new rules for creating Ikoma bards, and the ancestor magic of the Kitsu shugenja.

The fourth chapter details the most famous Lions in Rokugan, including their Traits and Skills.

The fifth chapter lists five ready-to-play characters. All you have to do is photocopy the character sheet out of the book, and you're ready to go.

Lastly, we've included a whole bunch of information on Rokugan's famous battles, Akodo's book *Leadership*, the history and development of Rokugani tactics and strategy, Lion magic items, Lion ancestors and more.

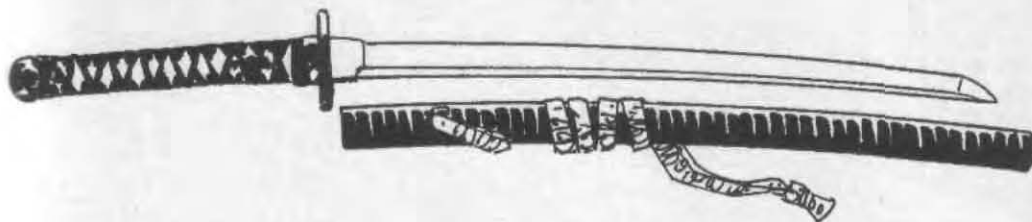
It is much easier to speak of Lion philosophy than to live it. For a Lion, there is no value in material wealth or political power; those are fleeting and temporary. What a samurai owns will be whittled down by the winds of time, but what he says and does... these things live on forever.

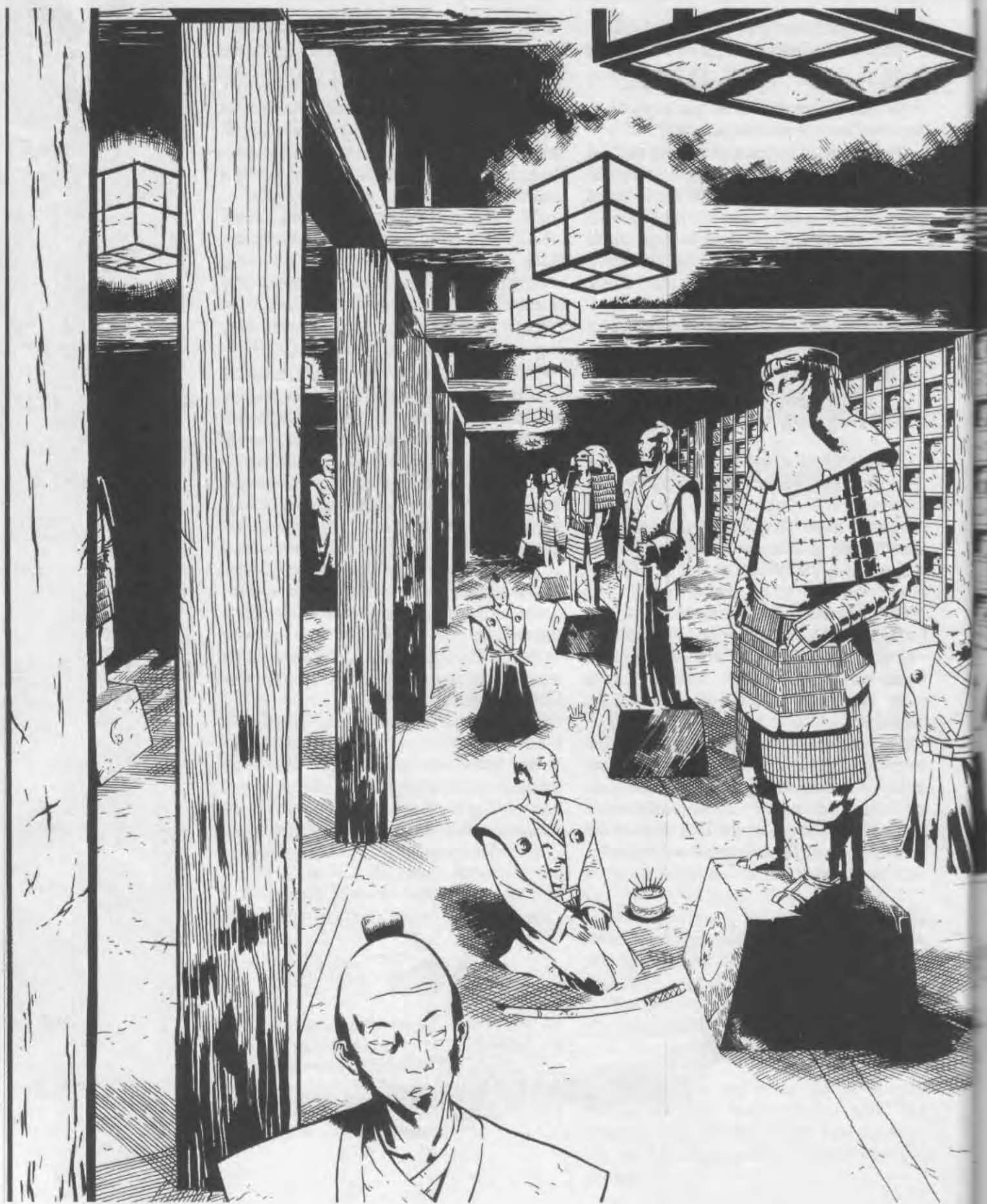
Shinsei said, "Choosing between two evils is still choosing evil." To a Lion, there are no truer words. The Lion's path is the most demanding, the most unforgiving, and sometimes, the most unrewarding of all the clans.

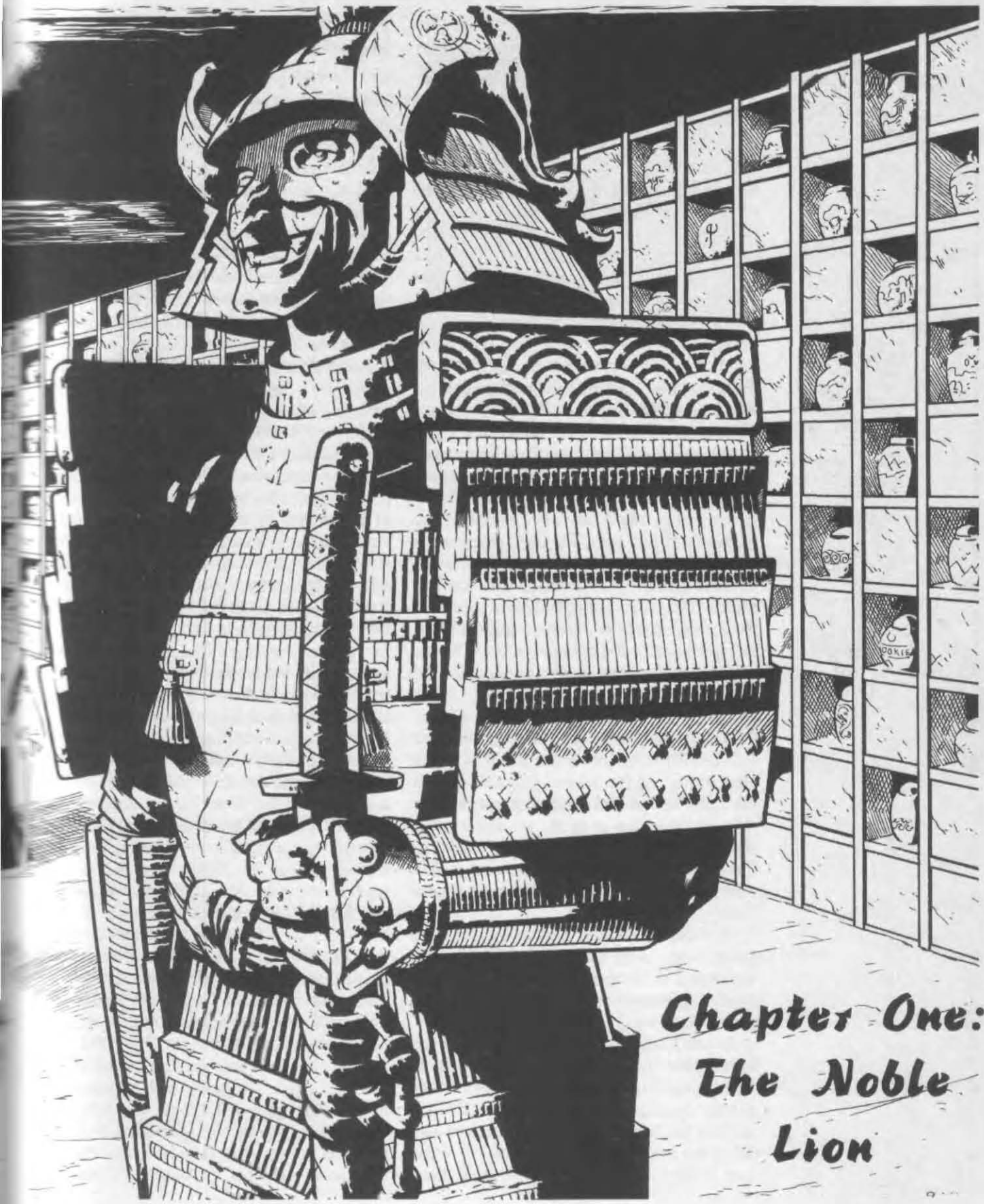
But if you are willing to walk it, I will show you the way.

And by the end, you will learn Akodo's first lesson:

A samurai's greatest strength is not what he is, but what he can be.







*Chapter One:
The Noble
Lion*



Chapter One The Noble Lion

FROM THE JOURNALS OF SHINJO GAEMON, DAIMYO OF THE UNICORN

For seven weeks the Ikoma have lived among us, hearing our stories of the Burning Wastes and teaching us the ways of combat within this foreign nation. We have been ordered by the Emperor to make peace with the Lion after our bloody battles of recent years. It has been a difficult journey to find harmony with the most warlike clan in this nation. To further our efforts, the Emperor Hantei has declared that the Ikoma *daimyo* should make his home with us for the spring, returning to the lands of their people after learning our ways, and sharing theirs.

The Lion are much like us, yet their ideals of 'honor' and 'purpose' often seem too high-minded to believe. Their *daimyo*, Ikoma Anakazu, speaks often to me, and his children play with mine in the fields around the castle. Our horses seem strange to them, not at all like the wilted ponies and mules which they use as battle steeds. Yet these Lion are not only swift to learn, but swift to apply that knowledge to further their combat skills.

Yesterday, as I sat with Anakazu and discussed the finer points of mounted strategy, his wife approached us, bowing low before her husband. "Our child," she said calmly, her face peaceful and at ease, "is missing, my husband."

It took him some time to answer, as his attention remained focused on a leaf passing by in a stream. When he spoke, his voice was as calm as hers. "Send the samurai to search the fields, the quarries and the river." His dismissing nod sent her to her feet, striding back the way she came. Lion women. Where most women walk, these

stride - where women should blush and smile, they are silent, and stare at you with the most unnerving gaze. They are very like our Battle Maidens, for all that the Ikoma rarely send their women to war.

The evening passed, and the sun began to set beyond the high mountains of our homeland. Anakazu's wife returned, but said nothing. The child, it seemed, had not returned. The night passed, and no word came from our guests - no pleas for assistance, no wails from the bereaved mother, only silence, and the clamor of training that went long into the darkening night.

When the sun arose, I spoke to Anakazu as his wife served us breakfast. "Shall I have the mounted scouts search? I'm sure your child is safe somewhere - these lands, and their paths, can be confusing. My men may be of use to you."

The Lion *daimyo* looked at me then, his gaze measured. With a polite pause, he said, "Yes, that might be appropriate - but not until your men have completed this morning's training. All things in their time."

As I looked in his wife's eyes, I knew that they would never have asked me for assistance. Although her gratitude shone behind her guarded stare, their child would have been lost forever in the rocky lands of the Unicorn before they asked for help from a stranger. Even after living among us for seven weeks, the Lion would not allow themselves to admit any weakness. Perhaps the child would have died, I do not know. All I know is that every Lion I have ever met before or since would have done the same.

We searched for the child throughout the morning, until the shouts of my men declared that they had found her. Anakazu and I raced to the spot to see what had occurred. When we arrived, one of the Shinjo house guard was kneeling beside the tiny girl, his tanto out and his hand shaking. With a swift cut, he severed the head from a black viper the girl was standing upon. Her foot had landed just behind the head of the serpent, pinning it to the ground with her slight weight. Anakazu's wife knelt beside her weary child and gathered the three-year-old into her arms.

"She must have been standing on that snake all night," one of the guards said, gathering the body of the viper into a sack. "If she'd lifted her foot, it would've bitten her before she could get away. Sure as I'm alive, she'd have been cold by the time we found her." He looked up at me and

at the little girl sagging in her mother's arms. "This little one is a brave girl, Lady Ikoma-sama. Are all your children so?"

Anakazu's wife stood beside her husband, the child in her arms already asleep. "I have only one child," she said as she looked into her husband's eyes, and her voice rang with pride. "But that child... is a Lion."

As she walked away, the Ikoma daimyo turned to me, his voice calm and emotionless. "That snake..." he pointed at the sack my bushi carried. "What do your people call it?"

"It is known as a 'tsanuri,' my Lord. The word means 'patient death.'"

He nodded, and together we watched his Lady carry the future of the Lion back to the palace of my people.

A TREATISE ON THE HEART OF THE LION CLAN, BY DOJII HOTURI

For the past month I have traveled through Lion territories as my father bade me, gathering knowledge of their ways and learning to think as they do, so that my father and his generals can better understand our enemies. By command of our Emperor, the war is to cease at once, and a son of each house will be fostered to the other - to encourage peace between us, say the Imperial Advisors.

My father has decreed that my brother, Kuwanan, will come here. Akodo Toturi will see to his fosterage personally. It is with a sigh of relief that my childhood friend has agreed to care for Kuwanan, and I know that all will be well. Toturi and I have spent much time together in recent months, and I know that he is not the dour, grim-faced man that my father deals with in the Imperial Court. He is a man of honor, and a man with a great heart.

While in the Lion lands, I have traveled the corridors of the Matsu Palace, and learned firsthand of the history of the Lion. To the Akodo, those tales are more than mere words on a sheaf of paper - they are the blood and bone of their family, the raw force which drives their clan. I cannot grasp their dedication. Perhaps, in time, my brother will come to understand, and he will teach us all...

I walked with Toturi today, as Toshimoko made the arrangements with the Akodo family for my brother's life here. The Lion Champion took me to the great Hall of Ancestors, a sacred place within the Lion palace, which few visitors outside their clan have been privileged to enter. He spoke to me of each one as we passed their statues, their shining blades of war hanging in alcoves, tended by the Matsu family. As if they were alive, Toturi gently touched each statue's face and bowed in honor of deeds both brave and valiant.

As I looked at Toturi, I could see his ancestors mirrored in his brown eyes. Despite their warlike nature, it is clear to me that their hearts possess more than simple, brutish souls. At last, Toturi stood before the great central statue, its massive marble hand outstretched as if in warning. It was the Lady Matsu, whose body was never recovered from the Shadowlands. The Lion Champion said nothing as I stood beside him, gazing into her proud face. Her white marble eyes looked at a point of light far beyond the palace, never noticing the visitors at her feet. It seemed as if she stared to the heavens themselves, ready to challenge their might. At that moment, a sudden chill swept through me, and I could almost see the great stone lips move in benediction. The weight of a thousand souls pressed close to my own, and I could not move for fear of awakening their voices.

When we left the hall, I clasped Toturi's shoulder with my hand. "When we stood in front of the Lady Matsu's statue, I felt something... a strange presence."

"Did you, my friend?" he said, and turned his face away.

"Is that what you feel each time you enter the Hall of Ancestors?" I asked him, awed. He looked up at the darkening sky for a long moment before he answered.

When he spoke again, his words struck me to the heart. Many times they have come to me in the night, and I do not know if I can ever understand the depth of their meaning. "It is what I feel..." he said, "...always." As the sun set below the mountains of the west, a chill breeze tugged at my white hair, and the sky grew as dark as an earthen tomb.



THE ART OF PEACE

Many of those who criticized Akodo's desire to gather a fighting force were quickly silenced by the new Emperor's support of his brother's quest. Because none of the humans they had come to rule had ever heard of war, it seemed unthinkable that such a mighty band of warriors would need to gather together as an army. Many feared that Akodo was simply gathering a horde to assault Hantei's newly won throne.

It was Shinjo who spoke out for her brother when the whispers became loud.

"Akodo is not practicing the Art of War," she said, "but defending the Art of Peace."

Her words were carved on the foundation stone of Akodo Palace, and there they remain, worn by time and weather.





AFTER THE FALL

After the fall of the children of the Sun and Moon, Lord Akodo traveled the land in search of warriors who would stand beside him as a fighting force. Historians have said that his quest was sparked by the knowledge that his younger brother, Fu Leng, still lived in the dark south. Others speculate that Akodo never fully recovered from the shame of losing the last battle to Hantei, and traveled the lands as penance.

Those who tell the tale, however, say that Akodo traveled because, as the eldest child of the Sun, he felt an obligation to see the world that had been created by her love.

ON A PEDESTAL WITHIN THE LION HALL OF ANCESTORS

What you see before you is a scrap of silk, stained and torn, the pattern faded as if worn for countless years in filth and darkness. On it, written in the dried blood of an unknown Phoenix, is the accounting of one Lion's death. It was found on the steps of Akodo palace long ago, smuggled there by an unknown visitor. Its origins are untraceable. The torn remnant lies in a simple alcove within the Hall of Ancestors, the only tribute to the last moments of a Lion's courage.

... I do not know her name. I do not know my own name anymore - but I know that I am an Isawa. I remember the magic. I only saw her once, I saw her as they carried her to the chambers of the Dark Man beneath the palace. She was as beaten as I, ruined and pale from captivity. They dragged her down the hall and threw her upon that butcher's table.

Her hair was long and golden, dirty and twined with bits of straw. Her hands were bleeding, and her face had been lashed and bruised. Still, she fell upon their table with no sound, and they chained her to the solid rock. I clung to the bars of my cage and watched as they drew the sting of the whip across her back, tearing through the last remnants of her kimono. Preparation. It is all preparation for the Dark Man. I have been there myself - waiting for Him. She did not scream, only groaned as the pain lanced through her. She saved her scream for the salt they placed upon her bleeding gashes after the whipping was done. When He came, the torturers threw her upon the floor before Him, and she struggled to rise.

They laughed at her effort, and kicked her legs from beneath her.



Hours passed beneath the watchful gaze of the Dark Man, the Master of these chambers. His gaze alone makes my wracked body shake, and should He have passed near my cage I would have fallen to my knees. I had been trained well, and I despise myself for it.

Her screams - high-pitched and anguished - rocked the stone corridors. Each hot iron was a memory to me, a familiar pain. Every scalding blow and piercing cut - I know them well. These

are things designed to draw your soul to the surface, to make you compliant. Thumb screws, broken bones; her pain continued through the hours and her screams grew hoarse and cold. At last, without a word, the Dark Man had her lifted over a tall pillar of sharpened iron, its point placed against her belly. Her own weight drew her down upon it, and her screams soon became choked with blood. The Man never spoke, and her agony tore the breath from her body.

He left her there, pierced on the spike yet still alive, and took His assistants to sunlit lands far above us. When they had gone, I heard her cry out as I had never heard before. A single word - "Matsu!" she cried. I drew my tattered courage and pressed my face to the cold bars.

"Tell Him -" I whispered to her, "Tell Him what He wants to know and it will be over. You will live, and the pain will end!" I hated myself for saying the words, but deep in my soul I knew them to be true.

She said nothing, trying not to move, not to drive the iron bar deeper into her stomach, but I heard her weep. A Lion's tears. I have heard tears before - I have heard weeping, wailing, begging, the tortured pleas of men dying in ways too horrible to remember. But her tears ... I swallowed my words. For hours, it was the only sound in the blood-covered chambers. I heard her gasp once, late that night, as she slid downward, and I held my head in my hands and rocked on the cold stone floor of my prison cell.

When He returned, the burly torturers lifted her from the pillar of sharpened iron, and I could hear the wet sound of blood spilling upon the floor. People can live for days with a wound in their belly - I know this. I saw my brother die that way. Was he my brother? I no longer know. But they dragged her, insides dripping upon the ground, before the Dark Man.

"Speak ..." He whispered, and I felt my own lips wanting to answer. "Tell me what I wish to know, and the pain will be over." A moan escaped me, but the Lion was silent, kneeling on the floor in front of the finely dressed sorcerer.

She raised her head then, and looked into His eyes. I saw her face, and I knew that she had once been beautiful - before the pain, before the dirt and blood, before the torture of living in this foul place. Within her eyes I could still see her beauty.

"Why do you insist on continuing this, little Akodo?" the Master said. "There is nothing to gain from defiance save your own death. Even

that I can give you. There is nothing I cannot give you, if you only do as I ask."

His smile was as cold as the iron of my bars, and I nearly screamed at the sight of it.

I saw her hand clutching feebly at her belly as if to hold herself inside, and her battered legs began to straighten. Slowly, impossibly, her hands filled with her own blood and organs, she straightened and stood before the Dark Man, her face filled with courage.

"This is your last chance," he hissed from the darkness, and I wept. "Your last hope for mercy. Do as I ask, and I will give you anything you wish. Anything." His hand reached out and touched her blackened cheek. "Tell me now. Call me Master, or kneel at my feet, and this will all be over. Anything you wish can be yours ..."

She looked deep into his dead black eyes. "I wish..." With each word, my body shook, the pain grew, and I felt my soul crumble beneath His power. Her breath choked, and her voice died. Then, with a last effort, she raised her head and spat into his face. "I wish I were back on the spike."

She died there, on the iron of the torturer's spear. But she never screamed again, never whispered another word. The spike still stands, in the Master's chambers, but it has never been used again. I do not know why I write this, I don't know who will ever read it. But the story must be told. It must be told and one day, perhaps, her soul will find rest. Her courage has given my own the power to find freedom. I hear the guards approaching. The Dark Man has need of His toy.

I will never return to this cell. Even if they break my mind and tear apart my body, my soul - and hers - will know peace ...

The letter was found on the steps of Kyuden Ikoma by an Akodo guard, who brought it immediately to the attention of the Lion daimyo. Its story has never been proven, although the "Dark Man" of the story fits the description of the Bloodspeaker Sorcerer, once known as Iuchiban. The torn remnant of silk now lies on a simple pedestal at the right hand of the statue of Lady Matsu, in the center of the Sacred Hall of Ancestors.



**A LETTER WRITTEN BY AKODO
RUJO TO HIS YOUNGER BROTHER
HIJU AT THE SITE OF THE BATTLE
OF BLOOD AND SNOW**

My brother -

I am on a tall hill, overlooking the remains of the battlefield our army has successfully acquired from the Scorpion. It is difficult for me to believe that only five years ago, I was where you are now, reading a letter from my older brother, written on a battlefield. Reading the same words I am about to write to you.

I think back now, remembering the voices of our ancestors, singing in my mind: so beautiful, so powerful, so overwhelming. There are



MON

The Lion were the first to use Clan Mon in battle, and the first to design a pattern which distinguished themselves from the other warriors on the battlefield.

These bright designs, painted on vertical flags attached to the warrior's back, allowed the Lion to regroup and find their comrades among a sea of chaos and battle.

Soon, other clans began to use *mon* to herald their armies on the field. Each clan developed a symbol which they felt best defined their *kami*. First, the Dragon, enigmatic and aloof, lifted the sign of their clan into the air above their palaces. After them, the others were quick to follow, and soon all seven of the Great Clans had heralded their existence to the armies of Fu Leng.

countless numbers of them, a perfect chorus, and their words seem so frightening, and yet ... there is something else. Something I could not find. Something I could not express. At least, not until this very moment, as I write these words to you.

The battle against the Scorpion was not as we planned it. The valley offered us little cover from their arrows, as they held the hill that I now sit upon. As our first line marched forward, holding their shields up against the arrow fire, their shugenja sent down fire that blasted them back, knocking many of the men into the ground. Even more were seared from their armor, and I heard the snap of bones and the screams of young men – younger even than myself – as their bodies were burned by the mystical fire.

Then the second rank advanced, their spears leveled and their lips as tight as traps. As they marched, the arrows fell. I saw one man so riddled with arrows that his face was ripped from his skull. Another was falling backward towards us, his movements pushing the arrows even deeper into his body. His screams echoed in my ears.

At that moment, I heard the general call our battalion's name. On pure instinct, I fell into position, but then looked to the left at the row of men who stood with me. For five years I have trained and fought with these men, and as we looked up at the hill at those who had fallen before us, I felt something surge inside of me.

It was fear. Pure, hateful fear, pulling at my guts and my legs, urging me to stand still. It pulsed through my body like a disease, calling me a fool, telling me that no man would be stupid enough to charge up a hill where hundreds of others had already fallen. But I looked at those men who stood beside me, and I suddenly realized they were looking at me.

They were *looking* at me.

They were looking at *me*.

Suddenly, I remembered who I was. Not who I was at home, with you and mother and father, but who I was to them. And what I meant to them.

I heard the general's order for charge, but even though I heard the words, I felt something else. I felt my soul fill with a song. A beautiful and terrible song. It was a song of wars long gone, and of deaths that no man will ever remember. It was a song of futility and of pain. So many dead. So little accomplished.

I heard the song of Akodo Jingawa, and the three hundred men who died to hold a mountain

pass so a handful of Scorpion spies could pass through on their way to poison Iuchiban's second lieutenant.

I heard the song of Matsu Hiruko, and the two thousand Matsus who charged against the *gaijin* at the Battle of White Stag ... all dead, killed by a magic we still do not understand.

I heard the song of Akodo Rinujo, and the five hundred who charged against the Unicorn and died, all to protect the villages from a threat they did not understand.

And all the songs made one great Song, and it sang to me this:

We have bled

We have suffered

We have burned

And we did this all

For you

A hundred thousand souls, all singing, all in pain, all watching. It is a Song whose words are too much for any man to hear. A Song whose demand is too much to ask any man.

But I am not a man.

I am a soldier.

I look at the men next to me, the men who call me *gunso*. Who follow my orders, obey my commands and look to me for the courage they cannot find.

I cannot show them my fear. I cannot tell them my fear. If they feel even a hint of what is rumbling through me, we will never make it up that hill, and we will join our brothers bleeding and dying and screaming.

I look at them, and let my eyes show them the fire they know is there. The Song resonates through my soul and into my voice as I call out the command. It is not my voice that speaks; it is the Song. The hundred thousand voices that they all hear in their own hearts, resonating on the battlefield. They hear that Song and their own eyes shine with the same brilliance I feel growing in my stomach.

The Song fills the air and echoes in their voices. And suddenly, I cannot control my own heart. It pounds beneath my chest with a painful ache. My feet move without any command from me. My hands grip my spear and the man beside me lifts our colors high into the smoky air. They soar out above us and our cry is in unison; the voices of every Lion that has ever lived cries with us.

And we charge.



I remember the sand slipping beneath my feet and I remember clawing at the earth with my left hand while I pushed myself with the spear in my right. Men fell behind us and men fell beside us, but whenever one of us fell, another was there to stand in his place. The Song filled my head, and I thought my ears would bleed with the sound of it. I felt two arrows hit my body, but the Song would not let me fail. Nor would it let me fall.

The climb lasted forever. For every step we took, it seemed the Scorpions added two more to our ascent. We pushed, we fought, we screamed each other's names. I felt tears rolling down my cheeks. Even if I died here, even if my soul were burned by the Scorpion's fire, I knew then, right then, that I would never again live a moment like this one. Death was there before me, looking me in the face, and there were tears in my eyes and a Song in my heart. And the Song was not greater than the fear.

But I was.

Right then, at that moment, I was.

We were.

We hit the Scorpion wall like a storm. They dropped their bows and picked up their swords and steel sliced through flesh and men fell, grasping at the remains of their bodies as they did so. The Scorpions retreated a step and we pushed

on. The Song in my head burst through my lips and I heard my men's cries mirror my own. The Song hit the Scorpions, blasting them back like the shugenja's fire. My katana sliced through three men before another arrow found my sword arm. I screamed and charged the man with the bow, the fear making his eyes quiver like the skin of a jellyfish. One slice. He fell. I never paused.

More blood. More bodies. The shugenja threw his fire again. Half my men were consumed.

But then the Scorpion lines broke and they were divided. The men behind us charged up the hill and the men to the left and right flanks followed their movement. In a matter of minutes, it was over. The Scorpions fell under our blades.

Then, as suddenly as it entered me, the Song was gone. Gone.

I fell to my knees as the carnage continued around me. I felt hands on my shoulders and water at my lips. "Drink this, sir," I heard a voice say and I looked up. I saw Matsu Ujinoko kneeling above me, her eyes moist. "You rest now."

I shook my head. "No. Call an Ikoma. Now."

That was nearly five minutes ago.

I have recited all of this to him as he listened and nodded. He will remember my words, that





much I know. Then, he will write them down for you to read.

I am almost finished now. Almost ready to join the Song that carried me here. Almost ...

I have one last thing to say. One last gift to give you, my brother. You are almost ready to become a man. Almost ready. But even after the ceremony, you will not have achieved that. No, there is much more. It is a much longer journey than that.

The Song. Someday, you too will add your voice to the chorus of our ancestors. When you do, you will feel as I do now: that what you add is not enough. The voice you bring with you will sound feeble and impotent when compared to the great chorus that sings to us from beyond this world of flesh.

But also remember this. No man could have climbed that hill. What I did this day was greater than anything I have ever done, and it is because the men standing beside me would not show me their fear. They loved me too much.

When you bring your voice to the Song, it will sound like a cricket's chirp. But when you sing with it ... oh, my brother ... there is no sound in the world that can compare.

I go now. My last breaths.

I am so proud of you.

Do not forget me.

I am watching -

And waiting -

For you.

The House of the Lion

The Lion Clan was founded nearly a thousand years ago, when the Kami fell from the sky. At that time, the number of men and women in Rokugan was small, and the seven Kami searched among them for "the finest". Shiba chose the wisest, Hida the strongest, and so on, but Akodo stood alone. "I do not look for men for to follow me," he said. "I look for men worthy to stand by my side."

The families of the Lion derive their names from the men who stood beside Akodo. The stories of the founders of each family are heralded in the Clan histories - from the insightful Ikoma to the bold Matsu - but all Lions choose to test their steel against the daimyo of

their family on the day of their *gempukku*. For them, it is more than a ritual, it is a celebration of the courage in their hearts and a part of becoming a true Lion.

For a thousand years, the Lion Clan has been the right hand of the Emperor, recording the political and military interactions between clans. Further, their role as the largest standing army in Rokugan has given them battle prowess unknown to any other clan in the Empire. While the Akodo and the Matsu gain glory on the field of battle, the Ikoma record all events and the Kitsu call forth the power of the ancestors to aid the clan in times of need.

To the Lion, those ancestors are more than spirits of past; they are a guiding force in their everyday life, walking beside their descendants, shaping their destinies. They are more than legend, more than myth or parable. They are more than a part of the clan's past, they are also a part of its present and future.

The families of the Lion derive their names from the followers of Akodo. Of them all, only the Matsu can claim that Akodo asked them to join his clan. Although all families serve the Lion banner with equal devotion and fervor, the Matsu house has always remained the Akodo's stout second. 'Behind the Akodo stand the Matsu' is the ancient saying, and even today, it remains true.

AKODO AND MATSU

Akodo went out in the world to seek men to stand beside him, to become samurai: those who were willing to die to protect the Emperor. For every man who stood up to Akodo's challenge, there were one hundred who met their fate at the end of his blade.

Unworthy.

Weak.

Cowardly.

Each man who died beneath Akodo's blade became a testament to the rigors of battle. For nearly three years, Akodo traveled through the lands, testing each mortal who came to him, yet none were worthy in his eyes.

Those who watched Akodo's bloody search were said to have chastised him in the Emperor's court, proclaiming him a scourge upon the land. Each year, Akodo would return to the palace for his brother's coronation anniversary. No followers came with him, no generals to lead the armies which waited for his command. "I do not seek

them," he would say to those who dared mention it in his presence. "They must seek me."

Slowly, Akodo's clan grew. Led by Ikoma and Kitsu, his troops began to form an army of great proportion. Yet, Akodo still was dissatisfied. After all his searching and valorous deeds, the Lady Matsu, possibly the greatest mortal warrior in the land, had still not come to be tested by his blade. When he did convince her to fight, their battle was said to have shaken the earth and the sky.

The rivalry between Akodo and Matsu has long been a popular theme in plays and song. The Ikoma historians tell the tale each year on the first day of winter. From Matsu's refusal to fight Akodo, to her violent rejection of his wedding proposals, and finally, when she turned to leave him and follow Shinsei, Matsu has been portrayed standing alone, sacrificing her life for the future of the Clan. Akodo, on the other hand, is often shown with his men, standing among loyal followers and trustworthy companions.

THE LION THUNDER

When the first battle with the forces of Fu Leng was fought, the first monk Shinsei gathered seven men and women to follow him into the heart of the Shadowlands. Their purpose was to strike at the evil within its lair, and each clan is said to have sent its greatest mortal. When the Lion Clan was first asked, Ikoma stepped forward. Before he could follow the monk, the Lady Matsu felled him with a fist to the face. She stood before Akodo and Shinsei with fire in her eyes, daring anyone else to deny her right. None did.



Dawn crested the peaks of the southern hills, setting Heigen no Otaku ablaze with the brilliance of another day. Akodo One-Eye halted a moment to exhale in relief - not just from the unnaturally cold night, but also from the plague spreading across Rokugan behind him.

Fu Leng had survived his plummet into the Festering Pit and made an unholy pact with the forces that he had discovered there. Now, under his vile leadership, they swept across the face of the world with all the contagion of the worst epidemic ever known. Akodo himself had seen his friends lost in battle, only to rise again beside his fallen brother.

Death itself had betrayed the Empire.

Nisiko, Akodo's wife, was sequestered at an outpost that had been besieged by the forces of the Shadowlands since one week before. Akodo had returned and engaged them, hoping to stave them off long enough for Crab reinforcements to arrive. But finally, two days prior, that ray of hope was extinguished. Word had come that the Crab had been ambushed en route and would not arrive in time to do any good.

In a last valiant effort, Akodo and his remaining beleaguered troops carved into the undead bodies between them and the dwindling Lion at the post. Several of the corpses they cut down were their former liegemen, companions - even lovers. Honor fled in the face of such atrocity, but Akodo would not be denied. Those who remained alive within the post would be saved, or he would die in the attempt.

His fury cast a harsh glare upon the oni and their brethren, and many of the weaker races cowered in fear or deserted the scene entirely, only to be slaughtered by the stronger beasts. Akodo's spearhead unit sliced through them with the precision of the finest katana handled by man.

Scattering monsters on all sides, Akodo and the few able bodies that had survived with him crashed into the post and cast frantic glares within. Several of the yojimbo lay horribly wounded at the threshold and a handful more huddled defensively near their charges. Nearly a dozen women and children, the families of those who now fought the forces of He-Who-Is-Not-To-Be-Named, blankly gazed back at their saviors, shock drawn deeply in their stark features.

Without a word, Nisiko wrestled to stand, the burden of her blooming belly fighting to weigh her down. Her yojimbo made to grasp her shoulder, but her piercing countenance caused him to pause. Uneasily, he stood at attention before Akodo as he approached his spouse, whose struggling breath shuddered through the room with the slow meandering of a dying animal.

Turning at the call of one of his men, Akodo suddenly realized how quiet it had become. Looking past those gathering at the door, he noticed that the legions of Fu Leng were retreating, only the dust of their passing visible behind their charge. Stepping out over bodies that had not yet revived, Akodo grimaced.

"Why?" was the only response he could muster.



MATSU'S THUNDER

When Shinsei came to gather the Seven Thunders for the first war with Fu Leng, it is said that Matsu was the first warrior he came to find.

According to the story, Shinsei watched as Matsu struck down the Ikoma who had boldly offered to go in her place, and he asked her why she should be allowed to go on the journey. Matsu's answer was swift: "Because there is no other."



THE OTHER CLANS

As the right hand of the Emperor, the Lion have had to work with all the other clans of Rokugan, but not always happily.

Crab: "The Crab should be honored for their strength at our most contested border, holding back the darkness so that no one need look on the repulsive things Fu Leng consorts with. But their lack of courtesy reminds is that an impudent man is an untrustworthy one."

Crane: "The Crane have no place in honored society. They are gluttons, gorging with abandon, taking no heed of others starving around them. They are proud to be rich, where we are proud only in service to the Empire and those who have come before. They are dogs."

Dragon: "Why is it that they spend so much time in their mountain temples? Could it be that they are afraid to experience what life truly has to offer the bold?"



Soon, he thought. Very soon, they would be forced to stand their ground and allow the women their rest. Five were heavy with child, Nisiko the worst of all. Akodo should have feared for the life of his unborn son, and those of the sons of his clansmen-in-arms. He should have feared for the lives of all born into this dark age. He should have feared the fate of all the generations to come.

But he was a Lion, and he could not afford to fear. He could not stand down, even if they took his son, his wife, and his clan. He would fight until his blood stained their clothes and his last breath crept into their hearts and poisoned them.

Yet his heart was as burdened as his wife, and he hoped for the aid of the Fortunes in this grave time. He had a few more hours to plan. The daylight would keep the evil beings at bay for that much longer; he and the others would be able to gain another several miles on them before pursuit resumed.

Questions still troubled him; questions about the unusual tactics of these hunters, and why they had not taken the chance to kill Akodo and his men when they could. Something was at work here that he could not see. Perhaps they wanted something from the living, or the living themselves...

Akodo was roused by the sudden clenching of Nisiko's fist about his arm. Her face was a palette of pain, her teeth gritting together in a stifling effort. She was close. They would not be able to travel much farther before nature would force their stand.

Calls from his men alerted him to the sight of ogres and oni upon the far hills behind them. The strongest of Fu Leng's demons had pressed on defiantly through the morning and, setting their sights upon the small unit, doubled their pace.

Akodo looked into the clouded sky and silently repeated his willful oath to the Fortunes. Then, looking about him, through his charges and into their spirits, he made his decision.

They would all die here, with honor.

"Lord!" The call issued from above, and near. A mounted scout, winded from his quick ride south, continued, "There is a home to the north, an hour's ride at most. It is defensible, and..."

His voice trailed off at the swelling might of corruption before him.

For the second time in his life, Akodo was sure that no words remained.



Glancing over at Koshu for the ninth time in two hours, Akodo wondered again at his obvious anxiety. The scout's eyes darted about him as if he were afraid something very near him would strike at any moment; even considering the awesome horde looming up behind them, his behavior was extreme. Questioning it would have been counterproductive, however, so instead he made a point of catching the man's gaze with his own and prompting his attention.

"How much farther, soldier?"

Startled, the scout quickly blurted out his reply. "Another twenty minutes." He seemed to clutch the reins of his horse more closely then, and his frame shortened in his saddle. "Perhaps less."

Akodo himself began to feel uncomfortable, as if the air about him were gathering too closely around him. He fought to retain his composure in the face of his men and their families, for if he showed weakness, then all the others would falter.

"There!" Koshu cried, pointing down into a ravine along the river that would become known as *Oboreshinu Boekisho Kawa*, Drowned Merchant River. At the confluence of the stream and the Way of the Elements stood a simple wooden structure, no more than twenty feet square. A small copse of trees surrounded it, the only noteworthy break in miles of monotonous terrain.

Nisiko was nearly unconscious as they approached from the rigors of the last several hours. Akodo lifted her frame from the horse and carefully headed for the building, noting with hollow satisfaction that it was made from petrified wood. Perhaps that would grant them a few moments' reprieve, he grimaced, but hardly enough time for the birth of five.

Just ahead of him, Koshu rushed to open the door, but came up short suddenly. Akodo made to shout at him for his awkward halt, but immediately noted his rigid stance.

"All around us... they're all around us..." Turning, the scout's face was pallid. "Can you not sense them, my Lord?"

A baleful roar across the hills behind him reminded Akodo of the beasts' imminent arrival. Incautiously, he pressed, "What is all around us, soldier?"

"Things," he stammered, "things we cannot see..."

"He is correct," came a voice from within the dwelling, a voice Akodo knew all too well. "There are."

The flaxen mane of Kitsu caught the waning rays of sunlight as he stepped out from the doorway, his brood of three peering out of the dimness behind him.

"Quickly. Inside. All of you!" he urged past a smile that irritated Akodo more than it comforted him.



"I know why Fu Leng's armies chase us, my friend," Akodo ventured. "My brother desires to be the only son of the heavens."

"You are wrong, Akodo-sama." Kitsu was very still, as if focusing on something outside or beyond the simple house they were in. "He desires to be the only heir..."

Akodo's stomach churned. He turned his gaze sideways toward the second room, where the women's stifled moans were soothed by the *eta* attending them.

"In the midst of this chaos, while his armies spread across the south, hordes of his minions sweep out across the Empire, seeking the *firstborn children of all the Kami*. I have even heard that Doji's first-born son is dead."

The statements were so matter-of-fact, Akodo found it almost laughable. "How do you know this, Kitsu?"

"They told me," he indicated the room about them with a broad gesture, and his eyes burned with an intensity only the truth could rally.

Nodding slowly at the words, Akodo looked about the room. His ragged men stood prepared for his next command, but fatigue and injuries betrayed their loyalty. They would be little match for the demons outside...

But that was not the point. Akodo stood, turned and strode to the door, beyond which he could hear the bestial howls of doom closing

upon the home. His sword was already drawn as Kitsu's voice again rang out to him. "Hold, lord!"

"This," Kitsu placed his hand on the door before Akodo, "is not your duty. Not today."

Following the direction of Kitsu's pointing finger, the Kami heard the first roar of life from within the second room. "That," Kitsu said flatly, "is your duty."

"And they," waving at the haggard men in the room, "are your duty. The future of the Empire is your duty."

Akodo did not know how to express what he felt then. Pride, not for himself, but for the greater good of all Rokugan. Pride for the Lion. And, as his son was first placed in his arms by an *eta* midwife, pride for his family.

"Remember, dear friend, if the Akodo fall..."

"Then the Hantei..."

"And everything else, falls with them." Kitsu placed his large hand upon the door and braced to exit.

Akodo, guilt at his inaction welling within him, looked down at his child, then remembered the others already here. Both sons and the daughter of Kitsu stood tall, their countenance level. "What of them?" he asked.

Kitsu looked on his children one last time, each in turn, and said, "They are here to remember."

It seemed as if a well of movement was clouding up around him. His eyes were a flame of red when he spoke. "Do not concern yourself with fighting today, Akodo-sama. That... is our duty."

When the door was opened, the anguished bellows of a thousand lost souls assaulted Akodo's ears. Above the clamor of death, he could scarcely hear the final words of his friend.

"*Shorai ga aru, Akodo.*"

"Have a bright future."

And he was gone.



No Ikoma records speak of Kitsu again after that day. The validity of the last passages relating to the founding of Shinden Shorai is questioned by many, as it is said that he walked across the stream and into the field of battle alone, but beside him fought the souls of every man that had fallen to Fu Leng's evil power.

His body was never recovered.

Shinden Shorai still stands.

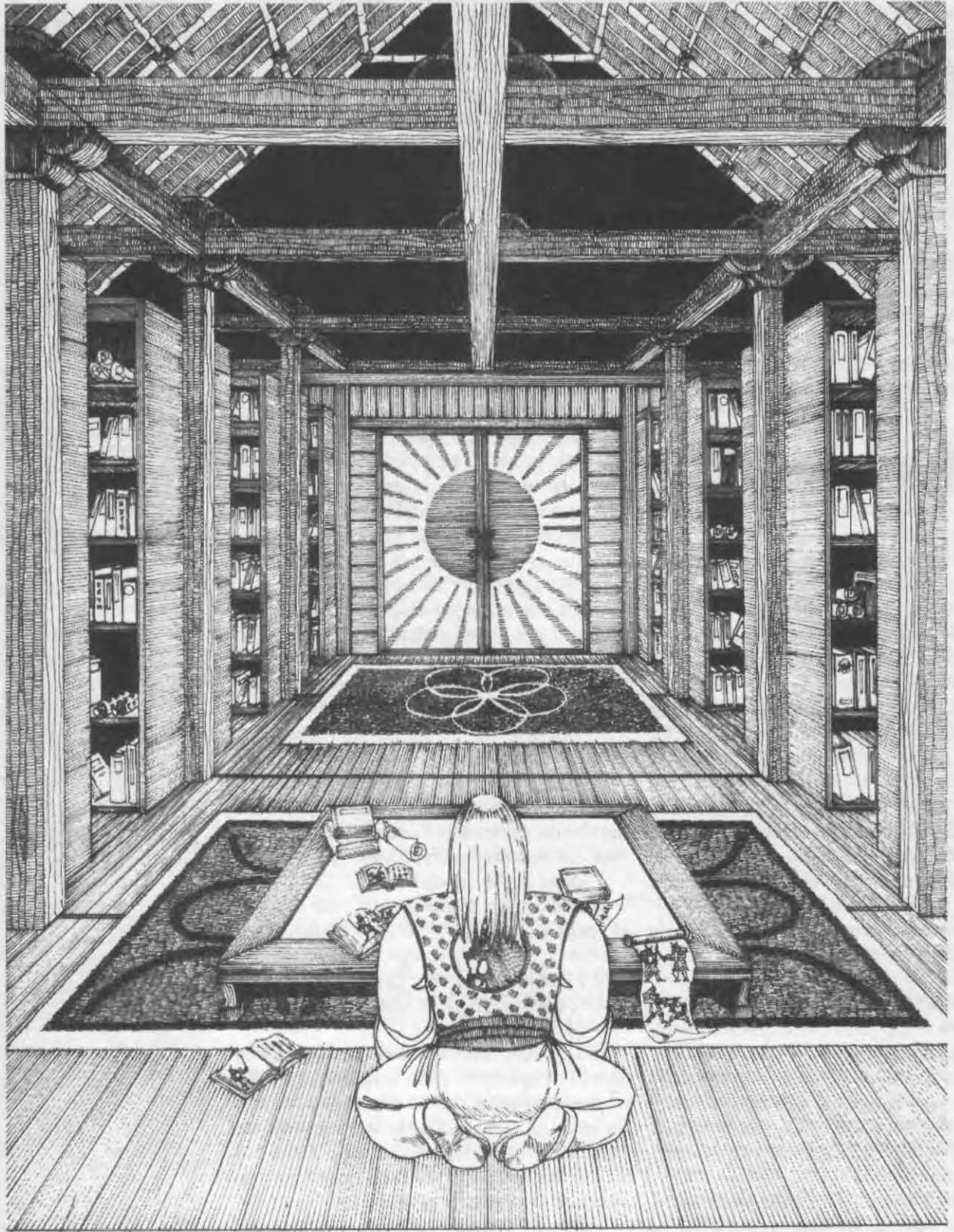


THE OTHER CLANS (CONTINUED)

Phoenix: "We have learned the secret of the Phoenix. They rely on the elements to save them, instead of using the elements to save others. We are better than they, because we know the truth of the Forge."

Scorpion: "Where the Crab lie with honor, the Scorpion lie with impunity. They say they are the Emperor's servants, but in truth they care little for him. Beware the man who gives his word to one person and his voice to another."

Unicorn: "They would make a powerful army, if their wild impulses could be contained. They are base, like the deer or the bear, and must be tutored as such."



Chapter Two



The History of the Lion



THE AKODO MON

The Akodo mon is a Lion's face, full of reserved dedication. It is a sharp contrast to the blunt fury of the Matsu mon; the division of the face presents the Akodo's dual nature, as both accomplished warriors and learned thinkers.



Chapter Two: The History of the Lion

The Families of the Lion

*The Akodo follow the way of the Lion
The Lion follows the way of the Emperor
The Emperor follows the way of the Tao
The Tao follows its own way.*

— Akodo Motaka

When the families of the Lion were formed, the bond they shared was their loyalty to, and faith in, Akodo and the Emperor. Through many wars, there has been infighting, causing hundreds of years of tension. The one thing which has held the clan together is faith in the Duty of Akodo: To defend the Emperor with their lives, and to uphold the will and honor of Hantei.

The Lion are also one of Rokugan's most honorable clans. They maintain the order of bushido and pay homage to their ancestors. Bushido, the way of the warrior, defines the morals and ethics of the samurai class in Rokugan, and provides a guideline for honorable lives. The Lion define the tenets of bushido, and further record the histories of Rokugan, so that heroes who have died by the code can be remembered with honor. From the bold Matsu to the stern Ikoma, the Lion visit the courts as well as the battlefields of the Empire, teaching and enforcing the code of bushido.

However, the most important thing in Lion Clan history is the art of warfare. They have elevated warfare from simple massacre to a complex system of strategies and

counterstrategies. Every Lion, whether a bushi, shugenja or courtier, is a soldier. They serve the Clan, and the Emperor. They are not afraid to die.

This attitude makes the Lion the most dangerous Clan in the Empire. The Akodo and Matsu can raise armies of loyal soldiers, trained and unafraid to give their lives, at a moment's notice.

The two smaller families of the Lion are noted for other contributions to the Clan. The Ikoma historians spend their lives organizing, recording and protecting the knowledge of the Great Library. The history of the Empire has been recorded in glorious detail, and heroic acts, as well as shameful ones, have been remembered. In this chapter, we show you some of those records, detailing the philosophy, culture, and legends of the Lion. It is important to remember that while the Lion are the keepers of history, they do the will of the Emperor and tell those tales which will flatter the Emperor's line. There may be a few conflicts between the chronicles in this book and the tales of other sources. No two men tell the same tale, even if they fought side by side in the battle.

The Akodo

*Nothing is more dangerous than a man who
thinks he's ready. — Akodo Oyataka*

The Akodo are the leading family of the Lion, known for their unswerving loyalty and dedication to the Emperor. Their name is ancient, borne through the ages by some of Rokugan's most famous heroes. Descended from the founder of the clan, the Akodo are innately aware of their ancestral ties.

The Akodo version of history tends to be dry, comprised of detailed renditions of battles and declarations of legendary heroes from whose line the family is descended. They feel that each action is watched by the Akodo of the past, and every decision is weighed as if in view of all daimyos, back to Akodo himself. Although history is recorded by the Ikoma, no Akodo is incapable of tracing their ancestry back to the original founder of the clan (although the reciting of such a lineage may take hours). Each Akodo is expected to recite his lineage on the day of his *gempukku*. This not only honors the brave men and women of the samurai's line, but also serves as a reminder: "I am a part of your family, a piece of the family's blood. I am your brother."

The structure of the Akodo is very clear-cut, and each member knows their place. A visiting Dragon once said of the Akodo, "They know how to turn 'I' into 'we,' and that is why they are strong." The Akodo family focuses on the whole, rather than on building a strong individual. Each man considers himself a soldier, a member of a larger group, and that gives the Akodo their greatest strength. Their motto, 'Duty, Honor, Leadership,' defines the three most valued qualities of the Akodo. While the history of the Matsu is filled with heroes who single-handedly overcame tremendous odds, the Akodo hero is a man who gave his life for his legion, or who sacrificed his own honor for the sake of the clan. To the daimyo of the Akodo house, his office is in service to the clan, to bring the Lion glory, not to raise his own.

Many of the duties of the Akodo daimyo take him far from the lands of the Lion. Expected to handle negotiations with the Imperial Court, the Akodo daimyo often leaves the actual fighting to the Matsu. This is not to imply that the Akodo do not fight - on the contrary, their force is the single most disciplined fighting legion in Rokugan. Rather, the Akodo are as comfortable off the field as on, and are expected to perform duties of honor and etiquette as capably as they handle their katana. While the Ikoma are the diplomats of the Lion, it is the Akodo who are trained to motivate men.

PREPARATION FOR WAR

The most essential element of combat power is leadership. Without a leader, an army will rout and be defeated. More than this, however, is the power of capable and competent leadership. A

well-trained leader will provide purpose, direction and motivation, both in combat and in times of peace.

The Akodo know this premise, and live by it. Each day in the Akodo house, a man is reminded by sight, sound and instinct that he is part of an army. Military formations march past, and the courtyard is filled with soldiers training. When an





Akodo is raised to the leadership of his unit, he takes his duties very seriously. The leader of the unit is responsible for every action that unit takes, honorable or shameful, and the personality of a leader affects the ability and personality of the troops he commands.

While leadership requirements differ, each unit must be appropriately maintained and organized, or the entire army will suffer. All leaders, as Akodo once said, must have 'brave souls.' They must be men with commitment, courage, integrity and honor. Of these four virtues, honor is the most important. Without honor, the leader will be no more than a butcher of men. A leader must also be a student of human nature, understanding how his bushi will respond in any situation, and making allowances to avoid their weaknesses and draw out their strengths.

Successful units are a result of planning, preparation, and cohesion. If a unit is divided, it will be easily defeated. If a unit follows as one man, then they cannot be defeated, even if a hundred stand against them. To the Akodo, this is a truth of the universe. It cannot be debated or

argued, and they have had a thousand years of history to prove its truth. Strength in numbers is not enough: Strength in unified numbers is the source of victory.

THE LION CLAN DAIMYO

The current daimyo of the Akodo is also the Lion Clan Champion - as is nearly always the case. Only three times in history, aside from temporary field promotions, has the Lion Clan Champion not been an Akodo. The first such occasion happened after the Battle at White Stag, in which the *gaijin* were thrown out of Rokugan. During the combat, the Akodo troops surrounded the Emperor, defending him from harm, as he traveled from Otosan Uchi toward the front lines to attempt a parley. The Crane, usual defenders of the Emperor, had been commanded to engage the *gaijin* in the ocean, gathering much of their merchant fleet and turning it to combat use. However, the Emperor was near the shore when a particularly large volley of *gaijin* weapons launched from a nearby ship. The Emperor, the Lion Champion, and all the Akodo troops



protecting him were killed instantly, and the Emperor's uncle was forced to take command of the Empire.

After the battle, the Akodo were demoralized – many of their best generals had been killed. Only wives and young children remained of the noble Akodo lines, and so a Matsu was called forth by the new Emperor to serve as the Lion Champion. The Matsu Champion rallied the Lion troops and crushed the last remaining bastions of gaijin power in Rokugan. That Matsu daimyo, Matsu Zaruko, ruled the Lion Clan for sixteen years, and was known as the “White Lioness,” because her coloration was strangely pale. Her white hair shone as a banner for the Lion, and her victories over the gaijin at White Stag are legendary.

The second non-Akodo Champion of the Lion is thought by some to be only an apocryphal tale, conceived by the Scorpions to trick their way into the Lion court. It is said that there once was an Akodo daimyo who died without an heir, and no clear line of succession could be determined from the surviving bloodline. For many years, the clan was ruled by an Ikoma regent, until the true line of succession had been determined by tests of courage on the field of battle. The Ikoma have no records of this occurrence, and dispute the accuracy of the report.

The third non-Akodo Lion Champion was Matsu Itagi. Itagi was a loyal supporter of the Emperor, and an enemy of the Crab. In a bold attempt to prove the Lion at least the equal of the Crab when facing an inhuman foe, he rode alone into the Shadowlands to seek and destroy the power at the heart of the dark realm, where he died defending the Empire. His shrine lies on the northern border of Crab lands, beside that of the contemporary Crab Champion, Hida Tadaka. More information on Matsu Itagi's fate is recorded in *Way of the Crab*.

Currently, the Champion of the Lion Clan is Akodo Toturi, one of the most unconventional and inventive generals in Rokugan. Toturi has had the advantage of studying both in the Akodo and the Matsu family schools, but was not adept at either style. He was removed from the Lion Bushi schools at a young age, sent to a monastery to learn strategy and tactics while his younger brother led the clan. He was called from his studies to take the mantle of Champion at the time of his brother's death, and has served the Akodo for less than five years. Thus, Toturi is still new to the duties of the Akodo daimyo, and while

his men serve him loyally, many concerns are quietly voiced over his ability to lead – mostly from the Matsu. More information on Toturi can be found in Chapter 4.

THE LION ANCESTRAL SWORD

The Lion Clan ancestral sword, Shori, is an ancient weapon wielded by Akodo himself. Nearly a thousand years ago, Akodo knelt before the Hantei throne and offered his eternal fealty to the Hantei dynasty. His service was so absolute, he declared, that he would never raise his sword unless it was for the Emperor. For that reason, the Hantei have long been the bearers of the Akodo sword, which has remained in a place of honor in Otosan Uchi. It rests on a simple ebony stand beside the ancestral sword of Hantei, awaiting the call of its master.

The reigning Emperor has occasionally called upon the Akodo oath and declared war against other powers in the Empire. At these times, the Emperor has summoned the Champion of the Lion into his court and returned Akodo's sword. The oath which the Lion sword symbolizes is the heart of the Lion Clan: “Duty to the Emperor. Duty to the Empire.”

The blade itself is unremarkable, shining dully in the light. Its hilt is carved of fine jade, wrapped with brass and gold wire, and its tsuba bears the simple carving of a great palace.

Nearly a thousand years ago, the Emperor commanded that a sword of fine gold and jewels be forged for his brother, Akodo. It is said that the sword was the keenest ever created, and that its beauty was legendary. Akodo lifted this sword in combat against the Dark Hordes when Fu Leng first attacked Otosan Uchi, and he carried it throughout the war which ensued.

During the war, Akodo took every opportunity to engage his dark brother in combat, but he was always swept away. Fu Leng knew that Akodo would kill him if they ever fought face to face, and he ordered his minions to combat his brother. However, on one occasion, his champions were not swift enough to keep Fu Leng from receiving a terrible wound which cut a great gash in Fu Leng's twisted body.

The Oni were quick to carry their Lord from the battle, and quicker still to engage the terrible Akodo so that he could not follow his brother's flight. After the war with the Dark One was over, and the Seven Thunders were lost to Rokugan, Akodo was called upon to pass down his sword to



GEMPUKKU RITUALS

While many societies have rituals to mark the passing of time, for the samurai in Rokugan, the most important is the gempukku ritual. Gempukku, the passage from youth to adult, marks the end of a life as a carefree child, and an initiation into a more serious world. When children are young, they are given certain leniency in their behaviors – and transgressions are taken far less seriously. On the other hand, people are not allowed to claim title or land until they have passed their gempukku. Until then, they are not considered responsible enough for the job.

Primarily, a youth must pass certain tests in order to be allowed this passage into the adult world. Tests of writing, knowledge of geography, the Tao, history and other subjects are common, as are tests of profession – fighting skills, for a bushi, or spell craft for a shugenja. typically, these tests occur when the child is between 14 and 16, and are held as an annual (or semiannual) event.

(Continued)



GEMPUKKU RITUALS

(CONTINUED)

In Rokugan, many of the clans have different styles and considerations for their gempukku tests and ceremonies. These have been established both to create a feeling of accomplishment, and to prove that the incoming youth is worthy to be a member of the clan. Of all the gempukku rituals in the Emerald Empire, those of the Lion are among the most harsh. The Matsu, for example, order seppuku from any child incapable of passing their strict tests. In this way, they believe, they are allowing them a single act as an adult – a generous decision, because the child has proven they are unworthy of adulthood.

Some clans keep their gempukku rites secret, depending on the leaders of the clan. The Phoenix, for example, are so cautious of their gempukku rituals that they refuse admittance to their castle for a week before and after the ceremony.

his heir. He would not. "This sword," Akodo said, "has drawn my brother's blood. However twisted Fu Leng may have become, a sword which has drawn family blood can never be revered." He broke the golden sword beneath his foot, taking up the simple katana which he had carried before.

It has served as the Ancestral Sword of the Lion ever since.

THE LION ARMY

The Lion Clan army is best known for two things: its ferocity in battle, and its sheer size. With over half a million men organized into thousands of units, the Lion armies are almost twice the size of the next largest army, that of the Crab.

The discipline with which the Lion samurai direct their lives is apparent in the organization of their armies. The command structure of the Lion armies are complex, but strictly defined and enforced. Every Lion samurai, from the youngest bushi to the Champion himself, knows their place and duty.

The first and by far the most important breakdown of the Lion army is within its two primary families, the Akodo and the Matsu. This ancient rivalry is reflected as clearly in the focus and training of their armies just as it is in the faces of its individual samurai.

The Akodo begin the training of their children beneath the words of the Akodo motto, "Duty, Honor, Leadership." These words reflect the Akodo belief in the strength that can be achieved when they support one another. Most drills at the Akodo training grounds emphasize coordinated efforts – working together to maximize their combined strengths. Thousands upon thousands of Akodo bushi train constantly to march and wheel on command, and to carry out complex tasks quickly and efficiently.

Whereas the samurai from the other families of Rokugan rely on feats of individual glory in combat to inspire their brethren, every Akodo knows that he is stronger with his brothers and sisters at his side than his opponent could ever be. If he falls, his brother will lift him. If his sword arm is struck down, his sister will fill the gap and fulfill his duty. If his courage ever wavers, his ancestors will fill his soul with the spirit of the Lion. Flowing like water around their opponents' uncoordinated attacks, the Akodo army

constantly redirects the opposing force, then falls upon them like the crashing waves.

Do not believe that the Akodo lack passion, however. While an Akodo does not hold the burning fury of a Matsu in his soul, the deafening thunder of thousands of his brethren performing the Lion's Roar and the resulting murderous charge inspire equal parts awe and terror in their opponents.

RANKS

Lion samurai depend on glory in order to understand their place in the hierarchy. To the Akodo, all men are the sons of Akodo One-eye, all considered equal in their kami's eyes. Their Champion is considered the spiritual "eldest son," the incarnation of Akodo himself and the heir to the throne of the Lion. Other "sons" must earn their place, and prove their worth to the family rather than relying on their birth to bring them glory. While this might lead to bickering and glory-mongering in any other family, the Akodo are more united than almost any other family in Rokugan. When a soldier rises through the ranks of the army, their comrades tend to cheer them rather than envy their success. This incredible camaraderie is part of what it means to be an Akodo. It is well-known that any who insult one Akodo insults them all. Thus, why would any soldier begrudge his comrade's fortune?

"Leadership"

AN ESSAY BY AKODO ONE-EYE

Akodo One-eye was the founder of the Lion Clan and Champion of its legions. He was also the creator of what is today called 'civilized warfare.' Although some might call that term a contradiction, it differentiates the random and haphazard conflict between roaming bands of troops from the organized and regimented battles which followed. Akodo's treatise on leadership was written near the end of the great warrior's life, as he was compiling a list of memoirs and lessons to pass down to his heir. However, he left half the text blank, understanding that as time passed, new truths would be revealed. Over that thousand year period, other daimyos have left their own thoughts on the empty pages, making the book less of a single authoritarian work, and more of a collection of thoughts on the three most



Emperor's land. In order to save him this, we must be willing to serve him with our lives and with our honor. If we fail in this, then we have been the cause of destruction, not the source of victory."

THE IMPORTANCE OF WARFARE

War is inevitable, like a spring fog, it creeps in from the sea and slowly covers the country in a cold, white shroud. It dissipates in time, but once it is gone, the land is never the same.

In time, your daimyo will call upon you and your men. You will serve and you will command. But before this time comes, you must prepare and study. Just as a child must learn to walk before he should run, you must study warfare before you make war.

You will learn that victory is not taking the lives of your enemy, but saving the lives of your own. You will learn that he who falters first is the first to fall. You will learn that the price of defeat is greater than honor or pride. Learning to win is not enough. You must learn how not to lose.

There are those who say warfare is selfish, and those who study it seek only to increase their own glory and position. They are fools and lead Rokugan to its doom.

I tell you now, that nothing is more important than the study of warfare. It must be foremost in a samurai's mind at all times. Warfare is the highest of all studies, for it protects all others.

If a leader does not command his generals to study of warfare, they will become uncertain on the battlefield, and hesitate when the important decisions must be made. This will cause the leader's army to fail, and when the leader's army fails, his one moment of uncertainty causes the deaths of many thousand.

And when the army is defeated and destroyed, the army of our enemy will march on those who thought that the study of warfare was selfish, and cut their heads from their bodies and leave them to rot in the dust.

GEMPUKKU RITUALS (CONTINUED)

After a child has proven his or her right to be an adult, he or she must then choose a name befitting his or her new adult status. No longer will the child be known as "first son" or "third blossom." He will be known by a new name, such as Hitomi, Dairyu or Kamo, and in recognition of his new rights and status as a member of the adult samurai class, he is given a wakizashi to wear in daisho with the katana. The wakizashi is a symbol of his new position, as well as a symbol of the awesome responsibility, for the wakizashi is the sword by which a samurai commits *seppuku*. Every samurai, whether bushi, shugenja, artisan or courtier, is given this wakizashi, and it is in many ways more symbolic than utilitarian.

important aspects of a Lion's life: Bushido, Battle, and Leadership.

Because some of the document contains Lion battle secrets, and other portions of the text are considered heretical, the manuscript has not remained in its original form through the centuries. Ancient versions are occasionally found in the Ikoma libraries, or the libraries of the monks of Shinsei - versions which, at times, have caused a public uproar. The texts which are considered 'canon' agree about certain basic premises of leadership and honor; other versions which detail subterfuge and deception are often reviled as Scorpion treachery.

In truth, Akodo's *Leadership* discusses several 'dishonorable' means of warfare: deception, for example, and thievery. However, an astute general will note Akodo's final words to his own text: "We are here to serve the Emperor. Protracted war wastes lives, wastes supplies, and wastes the



AKODO AND SHINSEI

All the founders of the clans have stories that tell of how they gained enlightenment from Shinsei.

This is Akodo's story.

For many years, the men of Akodo's armies followed bushido, but when Shinsei came over the mountains and presented a very different path to the Emperor, the disquieting rumblings within the Lion camps could be heard even in the mountain keeps of the Dragon.

When Shinsei spoke with the Emperor and listened to the Little Master's words, Akodo stood behind Hantei, frowning. Finally, while Hantei was in mid-sentence, Akodo spit 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.

"For this is way is not my way," he said.

That is the way of the world, and those believe differently are fooling themselves.

DUTY

Duty is the samurai's soul, your reason to live. Neglect your duty and you scar your soul.

Duty is the perfect gem with a hundred thousand facets. Each facet is the way you live, a way you act, a way you serve.

Fulfilling Duty is all or nothing. Black or white, there are no grays. Live for each facet, for if you dismiss even one, your gem loses all worth.

This is what it is to be samurai.

A SAMURAI'S PURPOSE

You are samurai. Train as samurai, live as samurai. Foremost, from the moment you rise at dawn to when you lay at dusk, keep in mind and heart the understanding that you must die.

When you surrender your thoughts to ambition, lust, greed, or any other thing, no matter how base or noble, you will hesitate for that one crucial moment when it comes time to sacrifice your life for your lord.

Samurai live. Samurai train to fight. Samurai fight to live. Only alive, can a samurai fulfill his Duty and protect his lord. The fine line to learn, is that while you are fighting to live, you must be willing to die. Duty beyond all things is the soul of a true samurai.

Living to fulfill Duty is why a samurai forgoes ambition, abstains from lust, and sacrifices his personal morals. Above all, this is why you are samurai.

IGNORANCE AND STUPIDITY

There are two kinds of fools: the ignorant and the stupid.

An ignorant man puts his hand into the fire because he does not know it will burn him. Once he is burned, he will never do it again.

A stupid man will keep putting his hand into the fire, because he will not learn.

When you lead men, remember this lesson. Teach them what they must know. A student is blameless for his ignorance. He only does what the teacher tells him.

GOOD AND EVIL

Shinsei says, "Nature does not recognize good and evil."

But I tell you now that men do recognize the difference, and to ignore the fact that they do is to ignore the way of the world and hope it to be a better place than it is.

LOYALTY

Loyalty is not learned, neither is it inherited. Unlike Imperial positions filled by right of blood, loyalty must be earned. Remember this as you



remember your name each morning, for once you forget, you have done your enemy's work for him.

Your men will enter your service as a babe enters this world into its mother's arms. They will be without loyalties, without obedience, without skill. Loyalty, unlike the others, must be given constant attention. Like a lone rose in a garden of weeds, without your care it withers and dies.

Build loyalty in your men. Build it taller than the highest trees, so your enemy cannot see its end. Build it stronger than the stoutest walls, so it may weather any storm. Build it closer than the beat of your heart, so it may never be lost. Build it always.

THE GENERAL

Lead with perception and intelligence.

With these two virtues, you need not be a master of tactics or strategy.

Nor must you be a master of command or ordinance.

Nor will you need to understand supply or terrain.

With perception, you shall find those who do understand such things, and direct them to their proper duty.

With intelligence, you will know not to get in their way.

THE FIVE MEASURES

Evaluate an army according to the Five Measures. As the Little Master said, all the world was made of five elements, your army is made of the Five Measures.

The Measure of Wind: An army begins with you, its general. If you are true and virtuous, you will lead from the light. Just as Lady Sun shines upon a falcon in flight, soaring without a shadow, you will lead your men quickly, because you never need to look back.

The Measure of Earth: When you understand the ground upon which you fight, the advantage is yours. An army on foreign ground, oblivious to its pitfalls and unaware of its boons, is vulnerable and easy to attack.

The Measure of Fire: Your must lead your army under the Emperor's Laws. When do, you give a soul of fire, for it knows its actions are just. When you do not, you suffocate the fire and rob the fuel from the flame. Your hound will no more trust you when you steal its food, than will your army when you steal its fire.

The Measure of Water: You must make your actions flow like a stream, passive and formless, then strike like a wave, powerful and overwhelming. Rigidity breeds stagnation, and on the battlefield, stagnation is death. Keep your armies fluid and prepared for change; understanding chaos is the key to victory.

The Measure of Emptiness: Lastly, there is Heaven. Understanding the passage of the stars is the final understanding. There is no explaining the Measure of Emptiness, only recognizing its virtue when it manifests. In nothing, there is everything.

THE WAY OF DECEPTION

To charge your army into battle without foreknowledge of your opponent's capabilities and weaknesses, brings you no glory and brands you a coward. Your concern is to the safety of the Emperor and that of your Clan. Blind death is swift death.

Instead, when facing the enemy, let him see what you what him to see. Show him your right hand, strike with your left. Hide all he does not need to see, for the sting of your slap will ease the pain of a sudden blade in his side.

ENTICE HIM WITH FALSEHOODS

When your enemy is entrenched and secure, lure him from his nest. Attack that which is dear to him to draw him from his ground. Take him from his sanctuary and take him on your time.

STRIKE HARD AND QUICK

When your enemy is more powerful than you, strike quick and hard, and retreat. Flow like the water, move with no form or shape or substance. Commanders without courage or confidence do not know how to retaliate against you. Those who understand your ways will know what you are doing, and know that their strength has been turned to weakness. They will know that you are the sagacious general, and those who know the ways of Heaven and Earth will retreat and go home.

HAMMER AND ANVIL

When a man has time to think, he can make plans.

When he has no time to think, but must immediately react, he can only make mistakes.



AKODO AND SHINSEI

(CONTINUED)

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.

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



Use cavalry and quicklegs to harass him. Give him no rest. Rotate your legions so they may rest while another marches.

Be the hammer and make him the anvil.

BREAK THE HEART

Just as a woman is relentless when she breaks with a man, so should you be with your enemy. Break his heart. Make him doubt what he fights for, and you have already won. Take away what he fights for, and he will surrender.

Kill the thing he fights for, and he will be consumed with anger... and error.

CHANCES

When you are faced with desperate odds, never rely upon one chance, but a thousand.

If your chances of victory are against you, make certain you give yourself as many opportunities as you can. If you trust all of your strength to one blow, a single error can destroy all of your chances. Believe with your heart and soul that each plan will succeed, but prepare for it to fail, and you shall be victorious.

AMBITION AND VIRTUE

A man of virtue never worries about his position; he concerns himself solely with virtue. There have been many men of position who concerned themselves with gaining more, but instead of seeking to become closer to heaven, they instead sought to become closer to the Throne. The second is a false path, and the first is the only path worth following.

NURTURE THE STRONG

When your enemy is stronger than you, nurture him. It is well known in nature that anything that is too strong will certainly break. Then, when he falters, you may attack at your leisure.

FIXED FORMATIONS

Those who choose to set their armies in fixed formations will find themselves crushed by a better general. Fixed formations do not allow your army to adapt and change, and those two are the key to victory.

CHASTISING THOSE WHO FOLLOW

Never chastise your followers in front of others who follow you.

Breed fellowship.

When the men begin to speak ill of you, you have planted the seed of doubt, from which only defeat can grow.

YOUR ENEMY'S ERRORS

Make examples of your enemy's errors, but do not make examples of your officers' errors. A man knows his own mistakes all too well.

Showing them the errors of others teaches them confidence in themselves. Showing them their own errors teaches them doubt.

THE ENEMY

This is how to defeat our enemy.

When he is strong, avoid him. Fight him when he is not ready and when he is disorganized, not when he is ready. Outmaneuver our enemy, and soon enough, he will make a mistake. When he has advantageous ground, goad him into attacking. Stay just far enough away so he must come to you. Taunt him, appeal to his anger. When he has virtue, spread dissent among those who follow him. If they doubt his virtue, they will not risk their lives for him.

QUICK LIKE THE WIND

A protracted war serves no one, least of all the Emperor. While we are engaged in a war that spans weeks or months, other enemies can take advantage of our weakness by crushing us before we have a chance to recover. Quick like the wind is how we should strike. By giving our enemy no time to think, he will make mistakes, making it easier to crush him.

A protracted war depletes our resources, starves our farmers and weighs heavy on the souls of those who serve us. A general who enters into a protracted war does so out of vice, and not virtue.

MY ENEMY'S FOOD

Never requisition more food than you need. When we defeat the army of our enemies, we will feed our men with our enemy's rations. By doing so, we accomplish many things.

First, there is less food our men need to carry on their backs.

Second, the more food we take from our enemy, the less they have to feed their own soldiers, seeding discontent in their armies.

Third, by rewarding our own men by sacking the supply lines of our enemy, we show them how cunning they are and how stupid their foe is.



VICTORY WITHOUT CONFLICT

If it is true that keeping a thing whole is better than dividing it, then it is also true for our enemy. Sparing an enemy is always better than destroying him, for showing him mercy only raises his opinion of you in his own eyes.

Therefore, defeating an enemy without destroying him is the most noble victory of all. By defeating an enemy without conflict, you save the lives in both armies, you save the backs of the farmers who must bear the price of your campaign, and you save the name of your lord and master by showing his own wisdom in employing such a sagacious general.

If you cannot defeat your enemy through non-violent means, defeat him with allies. If our enemy is outnumbered and surrounded by an

army of allies, he will capitulate, and we have again served our lord: we have shown his allies that through working together under his direction, we have preserved the peace of the Empire.

TWO ARMIES


If I am greater than my enemy, I surround him.

If I am twice the size of my enemy, I divide my forces and outflank him.

If I am equal to my enemy, I find his weaknesses and exploit them.

If I am lesser than my enemy, I outmaneuver him and strike him as a bee strikes the samurai.

In this way, the greater army forces the lesser to surrender. The double-sized army strikes fear



in his enemy's heart, forcing him to surrender. By exploiting his weakness, I show him the danger of fighting and force him to surrender. And finally, the smaller army makes itself a slippery nuisance, thus forcing the enemy to retreat to a position where it is more suitable for us to attack directly.

THE TEN ORDERS

1. Always carry a text with you. When you have nothing else to do, read. The mind must be exercised as well as the body.

2. When your lord calls to you, run to him, fall at his feet and speak his name loudly and proudly. Proclaim your loyalty to him with a shout that is painful to the throat. Be convinced in your loyalty, for if you are not, then your lord will not be convinced either.

3. Keep your sword close and ready and clean. Failing your sword is failing your lord.

4. Keep servants if you must, but only if you must. If there are repairs to be done on the house, make them. If there are rooms to be cleaned, clean them. Idleness is an enemy, and it is always best for a samurai to understand a thing before he requires another to do it for him.

5. Lady Sun and Lord Moon made us with a left hand and a right hand. In the left hand goes the text, and in the right hand goes the sword. Remember this.

6. When you come before a superior, drop your hands at your sides and bow lower than they. Dropping your hands away from your sword shows your trust. Bowing your head does this as well. These two actions say, "My life is yours to take if you wish."

7. Rise in the morning before your servants do and have half their duties done before they have even bathed. Men follow the example of those they admire.

8. Assassins creep in the late hours, so go to bed early. Then, when they creep in at midnight, you will be fresh and rested and ready.

9. Wash. A dirty man must itch and scratch. An itching and scratching man is slow.

10. Be ready to die.

The Death of Akodo One-Eye

Akodo was very old when he died, and did not expect to live much longer. Privately, he lamented

the fact that he had not died in combat, like his beloved Matsu and so many others before him. His loyalty to the Emperor overrode his desire for a glorious death, however; he would not sacrifice himself to fulfill some selfish concept of personal honor.

Perhaps the fortunes took pity on him, or perhaps his will was enough to shape destiny itself. Whatever the reason, he was granted his wish for a glorious death over one hundred years after he and his brethren fell from the sky. Times were good then, as the Clans were laying the foundations of Rokugani civilization.

Akodo, with his entourage, had journeyed to the Ikoma castle on the edge of Imperial territory. The Hall of Ancestors was being built nearby, and Ikoma's many sons were busy preparing the family library - which would catalog all of Rokugan's history from the beginning of time. These monuments would stand as testaments to the glory of the Empire, and Akodo wished to ensure they lived up to expectations. He had left his mighty armies in the care of his son, and traveled with a small contingent of men to oversee the final details.

The work was interrupted by the appearance of an Imperial scout at the castle gates. His flesh was bleeding from a hundred injuries and he was raving with fever, but he staggered across the courtyard with fierce purpose to where Akodo sat.

"An army, my lord! Thousands of them! Horrible beasts from the Shinomen Forest! They march upon us... through the pass..." the scout coughed up black blood as the words died in his throat. Akodo stared thoughtfully at the man's body for several moments.

"We must summon the Lion forces to destroy them!" someone cried.

"We must tell the Emperor of this threat!" called another.

"We must fall back and wait until these monsters show their faces!"

"No," Akodo replied calmly. "If they are in Shinomen Pass then we have less than three days. They would destroy the library and the Hall of Ancestors long before any army could reach them."

"But my lord," an Ikoma called reverently. "We cannot hold them ourselves. We have only a small unit of men - less than a hundred."

"A hundred Lions is more than enough." He rose to his feet, his eye clear and his face untroubled. "I will take them into the pass as soon

as they are assembled." None even thought to contradict him. Just before he left, he removed his daisho and gave it to the Ikoma. "See that my son receives these," he said. "And tell him that his father died with honor."

The next morning found Akodo and his impossibly small force entering the high peaks of the Seikitsu Mountains. They moved without speaking, each aware of their imminent death. But they were not sad and they were not afraid, for the Emperor's greatest Champion rode before them. Akodo's wrinkled face beamed with pride, and no one could recall him ever looking happier. Truly, this was where he meant to be.

They stopped at midday in a narrow bottleneck of the pass. In front of them, they could see the smoke of the opposing army, could hear the snorts and growls of their inhuman enemies. He deployed his men quickly, telling them to use the ground to their best advantage. They moved as one and smiled fiercely as they did so, for his strategy was wickedly cunning. They would die here, they knew it, but the enemy would pay dearly for its victory.

Akodo stood alone, some distance behind the army, and watched the enemy get closer. They were huge, too numerous to count, and as they saw his men in there way, he could almost hear them laugh. Good.

"Mother," he called to the unblinking sun. "Of all your children, I have stood alone, proud, unfettered by weakness and unclouded by sin. Now I ask for a boon – one service you can perform for a lifetime of duty. I ask that you watch the battle to come and remember how brave men die."

He waited and watched as the army advanced. He saw ogres and trolls tear into his forces – throwing men aside like paper dolls. He saw his *gunso* order a charge and the small contingent of men vanish with a shout into the enemy's maw. He watched his Lions fight as only Lions could, claiming five for every man who fell. The corpses of the dead formed a wall around them, and for a time, the inhuman monsters could not advance.

It didn't last. The ogres were too numerous and his men too few; each casualty drained a little more of their strength. His forces had soon dwindled to ten... then five... then one. Akodo watched with calm eyes as the last bushi fell under the trolls' claws – dying fearlessly as only a Lion could. Then, the horde advanced with slavering jaws upon him.

He stood as they approached, and drew in his breath one final time. As he did so, he reached down into his soul, to find the last bit of divinity buried in his mortal shell. Closing his eyes, he released it with a sharp tug – and roared with the fury of a thousand storms.

The sound reverberated across the mountains and throughout the Shinomen pass. Its force split the ground below it and shook the highest peaks



THE MATSU MON

The mon of the Matsu was crafted with their simple passion for war in mind. It shows a sword, carried in a Lion's paw, raised to the heavens in defiance of any who would challenge them.





THE MATSU GEMPUKKU CEREMONY

The coming of age in the Matsu school is not a time of joy and celebration, as it is in many other bushi schools. It is the time to prove one's worth rather than an acknowledgement of worth already achieved. It is as harsh, rigid and unbending as all other aspects of the Matsu family, but it also signifies a very great honor. Those who survive can count themselves among the best warriors the Empire has to offer.

The Matsu *gempukku* consists of a series of tests, each designed to confirm some part of the Matsu's character. The initial tests are based around martial prowess, and are ironically among the easiest the initiate will face. He or she must recite the tenets of Akodo's "Leadership" from memory, demonstrate a working knowledge of any twenty weapons of war, and use a katana to quarter a falling pomegranate before it strikes the ground.

To test endurance, the initiate is struck four hundred times with a bamboo rod. The blows leave no permanent marks, but are exceedingly painful and drain the initiate's stamina to the point of exhaustion.

with power. As Akodo's last breath slipped from his body, a single stone dropped from the top of the pass... then another... then another. Then, like a wave of rock, the mountains began to crumble. Within seconds, the army was buried beneath tons of earth and stone. The entire length of the pass collapsed, and not so much as a single goblin broke free. With his last breath, Akodo had destroyed all who had stood against him.

The Shinomien Pass has never been cleared, and today cannot be distinguished from the rest of the Seikitsu Mountains. A small shrine on a nearly inaccessible peak stands in testament to Akodo One-Eye's final sacrifice. He died as a Lion, and Lady Sun remembers.



*"In my sword, the wind. In my heart, courage.
In my eyes, death.
I am Matsu."*

— from *Kakita Morushijin's play, No Man's Bride*

The Matsu are a tall, proud family, whose dark hair is rarely dyed in the fashion of others of their clan. Their ancestress, the first Matsu, was the last companion to join Akodo, and the only one whom the *kami* sought to join him. Matsu is said to have been a tall woman, with iron in her eyes and a spirit of steel. Her prowess on the field of battle was unparalleled, and she singlehandedly slaughtered thousands of oni in the first war with the Unnameable One.

Matsu lived alone in a small village near the city which became Otsan Uchi, teaching her students how to fight against the occasional rampaging beast or bandit. Her students were among the most celebrated warriors of ancient

history, although none of their deeds outshines her own. When Matsu heard that Akodo was seeking warriors for her army, she had only scornful words for the samurai he gathered. When the *kami* traveled through her village, seeking men to fight him and join his household, Matsu spent the day practicing katas by the river — ignoring the daimyo's quest entirely.

At last, after Akodo had gathered all the finest warriors in the land, he returned to Matsu's village and sought her out. She took his courtship as an insult, and challenged him to meet her on the field of honor. The winner would win his army, and rule the Clan of the Lion, while the loser would serve the winner. Akodo added the condition that if she won, she would have to marry him. Matsu then added the condition that if he won, he would never ask her to marry him. Their famous battle occurred on the plain near the spot where her house stood, and it ended with the tip of Akodo's blade at Matsu's throat.

Although she did not have to marry him, Matsu joined the Lion Clan. It is also said that Akodo continued to try to woo her, but that she spurned all of his advances. When she did marry, she chose Akodo's fourth follower — a man whose name has long since been forgotten. In *Kakita Morushijin's* famous play about Matsu, *No Man's Bride*, the tale is told more elaborately. On her wedding day, Akodo came to Matsu and demanded to know why she had chosen this man over his own offers of marriage. Matsu's answer was simple: "If I marry you," she says, "then I will be the bride of Akodo. If I marry him, then he will be the husband of Matsu."

Since that day, all men who marry into the Matsu house take their wife's surname, and all men who marry outside of the house must forever leave behind the Matsu family name. The Fifth House of the Lion, recorded only briefly in the earliest Ikoma texts, has been completely absorbed into the Matsu house, and to this day no one remembers their name or their story.

The other families of the Lion Clan do not dispute the Matsu's natural leadership in battle. Although the Akodo give the orders, it is the Matsu who charge onto the field and direct the troops. If the Akodo are the brain of the Lion, it is the Matsu who are the heart. Matsu are hot-tempered, emotional, strong-willed and intractable, but they are also courageous, dedicated, loyal and fierce. The Matsu epitomize

every other clan's view of the Lion: both good and bad.

Where the Akodo embody the spirit of water, the Matsu hold fire within their breasts. Matsu leaders are chosen for their fierceness in combat and their prowess with a katana, rather than their ability to break down their opponent's strategy. As they have shown time and time again throughout the history of the Emerald Empire, the best laid plans and strategies are often like rice paper to a sword when turned upon by the combined fury of a Matsu charge. "Strategy is fine," say the Matsu, "as long as I get to drown my opponents in their own blood." Leadership among the Matsu is the ability to inspire your command to greater heights by your own example. A Matsu general never directs an attack, she leads it. A Matsu general would never call for a rain of arrows, he would pull back his bowstring. For all of the walking about and planning of the day before a battle, says Matsu Tsuko, on the battlefield it is a warrior, not a plan, who strikes down his enemy.

In addition to the spirit of fire within the Matsu samurai lives the purity of his honor. The Matsu believe that the purity of a samurai's spirit is as powerful a weapon as the sharpness of his blade. In fact, with their ancestors directing every turn of the blade, purity of spirit is more important. A dull blade will still cut deeper than the sharpest blade that is turned aside; the Matsu's ancestors will both shield the samurai from harm and direct the killing blow if he is worthy, diligent, and filled with noble spirit.

The Matsu are torn in their attitude of the Akodo's philosophy, just as the Akodo are undecided about the Matsu. The Matsu mock their cousins for their 'silly circle-walking.' The Akodo are quick to reply with derision about the lack of control displayed by the Matsu on the battlefield. But neither can deny the effectiveness of the other, and no army has seen as much success throughout Rokugan's history as have the armies of the combined families of the Lion.

Matsu live for battle. They find court dull, the arts 'foppish' and the Tao to be a riddle whose answer is best contemplated after death. It is only the Matsu idealism which sets them apart from the bullying Crab. Their vision of the importance of honor, justice and ethics separates them from the stony pragmatism of the Hida. The Matsu accept the code of bushido as an inviolate rule, sacred and profound.

On the whole, Matsu bushi are trained for war from age six, learning the way of the warrior and the lessons of the sword early, and reaching their gempukku when they are only fourteen years old. The Matsu encourage such young warriors to prove their worth to the clan through conquest of border territory, defense of the Emperor's palace, and other skirmishes. To say that the Matsu are controlled by the Akodo is like saying teenagers are controlled by their parents - it's technically true, but somehow the Matsu usually end up doing what they want to.

THE LION THUNDER

It is generally agreed that the Matsu are the fiercest family in the Empire. Their wrath is unforgiving, and their response to insult is swift. In these things, they follow the path of their ancestor, the original Matsu. She was the boldest fighter in the first War against the Dark One, leading Akodo's troops after he lost his eye and was no longer able to take the field.

When Shinsei asked Akodo to send the bravest of his warriors into the Shadowlands with him, the first one to step forward was Ikoma Jujinin, son of Ikoma. His voice was loud as he promised to follow Shinsei, and his prideful words rang out to the armies of the Lion. Then, as he turned to salute Akodo, Matsu stepped between them. With a single blow from her balled fist, she sent the Ikoma to his knees. With a cold glare, she snarled, "Does anyone else wish to challenge my right to go?"

Matsu left for the Shadowlands without asking Akodo's permission to leave. Historians have argued that Matsu did not turn to Akodo in order to spare him the pain of giving her permission to go. Other researchers have said that she didn't want Akodo to command her to stay, because she would have disobeyed him. Still others contend that Matsu simply didn't care what Akodo would have said, and did not think to ask.

Matsu left behind her husband and two small sons, shouldering her armor and taking only a katana. When her husband asked what she wished him to do with her other belongings, she is said to have told him to watch them carefully. "Keep them," she said, "Until I return." Her wakizashi has been passed down from son to son, never used or unsheathed since the day Matsu departed. It is said that one day she will return to claim it, and few wish to risk her wrath if those words ever come true.



THE MATSU GEMPUKKU CEREMONY (CONTINUED)

The Matsu is expected to remain conscious and standing throughout the test; failure results in dishonor and *seppuku*.

The next test does not directly deal in martial affairs; it embodies the initiate's patience and wisdom, his willingness to put his own needs aside for the sake of the clan. Surrounded by plates of steaming food, the Matsu must fast for three full days, meditating on the Lion's honor and his duty to uphold it. At the end of the fast, he is given a bowl of gruel to consume, which he must lick clean while still surrounded by sumptuous meals. In so doing, he acknowledges his appreciation of the Clan's support and demonstrates that he will never take more from the Lion than is his due.

Finally, a white hot poker, in the shape of the Matsu crest, is pressed against the initiate's flesh, scarring the skin and marking them forever as a member of the Matsu family. It takes only about ten or fifteen seconds, but the pain is truly exquisite and lingers long after the fiery metal has been removed.

(continued)



THE MATSU GEMPUKKU CEREMONY (CONTINUED)

Needless to say, no one is allowed to move, cry out or express discomfort of any sort during the process. If they do, they will be permitted to use their *daisho* once – to commit *seppuku*.

If all the tests are passed, the scar becomes a symbol of their status and a focus of their pride. Only those who wear the scar can be considered an equal on the battlefield, for only they have undergone the ordeal. The exact placement of the scar is based upon the bushi's particular skills, and is intended to represent his or her place in the cosmic cycle of the universe.

It is considered an insult to ask a Matsu where her scar is, like questioning her lineage or her martial skill.

Rare indeed is the Matsu who allows such a dishonor to linger for long.

Since that time, the Matsu house has grown in power, becoming the largest family in the Empire. The Matsu easily outnumber any other single house. They make up the majority of the Lion fighting forces, and over three-fourths of their family is in the military. Any Matsu who is not incapable of fighting joins the training camps at the age of eight, laboring to become a warrior. At fourteen, when they reach their *gempukku*, they undergo a brutal series of rituals, tests and challenges to prove their worth. Any Matsu who fails these tests is ordered to commit *seppuku*, and buried with dishonor.

History

Since the beginning, the Matsu have served beside the Akodo, lending their fierce prowess to the tactical foresight of the Lion Champion. There have been rebellions – times when the leadership of the Clan was uneasy, or open anarchy reigned in the Lion house, only to be controlled by force and dominance. Each Matsu daimyo is expected to prove their worth against the other contenders in combat; the victor is the one whose blade is swiftest, and whose ferocity overpowers all others. Although this contest is usually done with *boken* (wooden blades), it is not unheard of for it to be an actual fight to the death, with only the strongest surviving the contest.

Such brutality and violence is shunned by the Akodo, who do not understand the ferocity in the heart of a Matsu. They scorn it as open disrespect to the ancestors, and a waste of life. In all their years of association, the Matsu and the Akodo have yet to set aside their differences about this challenge. When the Matsu daimyo dies, the Akodo leave the palace, and will not return until a new daimyo has been chosen. The Kitsu, on the other hand, flock to the Matsu palace to watch the creation of the new leader. Where the Ikoma follow the Akodo, it has always been the place of the Kitsu to go where the Matsu lead.

The Matsu family represents some of the greatest warriors on the face of the Empire. Not even the mighty Crab ignore the threat posed by a Matsu army, and no sane man would knowingly question a Matsu's honor. To the Matsu, honor is more than a word, more than a record of one's standing within the Empire. It is their link to their ancestors, and the blood which binds them to their oath. Since their ancestor

gave her life to defend the Emperor, the Matsu have never faltered in their sacred duty.

The few Matsu who do not become bushi rarely follow the contemplative life of a monk. Instead, they become armorers, weaponsmiths, or historians with their Ikoma brothers. The Matsu prize the defense of the Lion Ancestral Hall nearly as high as their oath to the Emperor. The first son of the Matsu daimyo has the responsibility to care for the Hall and command the small force of men stationed within its ancient walls. Sometimes, others from the Matsu family will make the climb in the mountains above the Matsu palace, simply to join these warriors in their honored duty. Sheltered from fierce storms and snows by the mountains above Beiden Pass, the Ancestral Hall rises from the rock itself, with what some have called the 'proudest view in the Empire.'

Bushi of the Matsu school are taught their craft through a grueling test of fortitude and raw courage. Each day is designed to destroy all weakness, to shape the force of the chi inside the soldier, and to prove each warrior's worth. Bushi who fall are left to lie in the dust. The sensei are cruel, inhuman beasts (or so the students have said) with no compassion, no regard for their students lives, and no emotion. The Matsu sensei drive every ounce of weakness from the bodies of the Matsu troops, and teach them what they call the 'the heart of courage': dedication, loyalty, and honor.

THE LION'S PRIDE

One of the most renowned units in Rokugan is the elite force known as the Lion's Pride. Similar to the Unicorn Battle Maidens, the Lion's Pride contains only female bushi, and derives its origins from the very first group of women who came to serve Matsu. These women, hillmaidens and ronin, were accepted into Matsu's house without question, their swords placed at her feet. Since that day, the unit's tactics have remained virtually unchanged: find the leaders of the enemy, and destroy them. They charge into hopeless situations and remain behind to ensure the safe movement of their own commanders, even against impossible odds.

No men have ever been allowed into the unit. Men are considered 'irrational, antisocial creatures,' and the ruthless matriarchy of the Pride leaves very little room for negotiation. Each woman in the Pride is taught that the others are

her sisters, and that no warrior is to be left behind. Their tight-knit association often leaves other Matsu with the feeling that the Pride is a small family all to itself, unable (or unwilling) to share their camaraderie with the rest of their House. The Pride eat together, live in a communal house, and share their wisdom and knowledge only with the Lion daimyo.

When a new Lion daimyo is instated, they spend the first half-year of their tenure living with the Pride. Only under such intense conditions, it is said, can the daimyo be fully accepted by the matriarchal unit. Without this acceptance, the unswerving dedication of the soldiers could be lost. Even a male daimyo - although those are rare - endures this period. The ultimate outcome is either complete understanding or complete rejection.

THE DEATHSEEKERS

Originally, the Deathseekers were the legion which followed the fallen Lion general, Hayameru Shibai, a minor daimyo of the Matsu clan. The Matsu had been besieged within a small castle near the borders of Beiden Pass, assaulted by Scorpion forces. The Scorpions arranged for Hayameru to surrender the castle, betraying his Lady in exchange for his children's lives. Before the battle, however, his personal guard discovered the treachery and reported it to the Matsu. Hayameru Shibai was sentenced as a traitor, and his own men turned upon him and tore him to pieces. The last contingent of the Hayameru begged the Matsu daimyo to be allowed to commit *seppuku*, but because the armies outside the castle were about to attack, she could not risk losing so many of her dedicated soldiers.

Instead, she commanded them to find their path again, and if they wished to give their lives in the name of honor, they could do it on the field of battle. The Hayameru led the strike against the Scorpion when the dawn came, and because of their reckless ferocity and utter disregard for their

own lives, the Lion won the day. Since then, the Deathseekers have been the legion formed of the doomed and dishonored. They wear their title with honor, knowing that it is a badge of their desire to sacrifice everything for their family's name. When a man has been dishonored, or his house has failed, he often begs to be allowed to





THE IKOMA MON

The Ikoma mon is an arched portal surrounding nothing. Though others may see the Lion iconography upon it as more important, all Ikoma realize the significance of the portal itself. Through each portal lies knowledge and ultimate understanding, along with another portal and a greater vista. The path to comprehension is never-ending, as each new discovery leads only to more questions.



serve in the Deathseekers until the Ancestors choose to release him from his duty to his clan.

Often, the Deathseekers lead the Lion into battle. Their viciousness is only matched by their disregard for their own safety, and their desire to use their lives in a final attempt to reclaim honor for their lineage and their clan. They wear only the lightest of armors and carry the simplest weapons. Each goes into battle bearing a sacred cord of brown and gold around their right arm. This badge, meant to dedicate their souls to the House of the Lion if they should die, serves as a warning to any who would engage their unit.



From the High Histories of the Ikoma Library:

Akodo shook the dust from his shoulders and looked about the small town, taking in every detail. He threw himself from his horse and walked her to a tying post, eyeing the bath house. As he stepped across the street, a young boy ran out from behind a small home. He ran straight up to Akodo and stopped only a few feet from him. "Are you a kami?" the boy asked.

Akodo smiled and nodded. "Hai," he said. "I am Akodo."

The boy jumped and made the sound of the crow. "Ha ha!" he said. "Are you looking for samurai?" he asked.

"Yes I am," Akodo replied. "Do you know where any are?"

The boy nodded. "Only one. Ikoma. He's a samurai."

Akodo asked, "And where can I find Ikoma?" The boy turned and pointed at the sake house at the end of the row. Akodo nodded. "Thank you."

Many hours later, when Lady Sun fell to the Underworld, Akodo went to the sake house. When

he stepped through the doors, every man and woman fell to their knees and touched their foreheads to the floor. Akodo suddenly felt the weight of his obi and shrugged. He lifted his sword and gave it to the man standing at the door, who looked at it with trembling eyes.

"Do not fear the sword," Akodo said. "Fear the man who wields it."

The man nodded quickly and took the blade from the Lion's hands.

Akodo stepped forward. "I am looking for samurai," he said. "Men to stand beside me. Who here is willing to put their skills to the test?"

Akodo was used to the silence that followed that question, but this time, it was shattered by an ancient cackle. He looked over the bowing heads and saw an old man sitting in the corner. Akodo stepped across the room, his steady footfalls making the wood ache under his weight. "And who are you, that you laugh at..."

"You are very funny," the old man said.

Akodo felt his fury build in his belly. "Who are you, old man?"

The gray-skinned man smiled, revealing a broken ridge of teeth and only half a tongue. "Me? I am no one of importance. Not in the shadow of such a great lord as yourself."

The sarcasm oozed from the old man's lips into Akodo's ears, poisoning his temper even further. "Do you not know your place, old fool?"

"Obviously you do not know yours ... boy."

Akodo's fury reached its limit. He reached down and threw aside the table where the old man was seated. "I am Akodo, Son of Amaterasu."

"I know who you are," the old man said, impatiently. "But you do not know me. And how wise is it to challenge a man when you don't even know his name?"

Those words settled Akodo's anger only a little. "Very well," he said through clenched teeth. "Tell me who you are."

The old man smiled. "I am Ikoma," he said. "I am the strongest man in the world, for no man has ever bested me."

"A hearty claim," Akodo said.

"But a true one." Ikoma grabbed his cane and pushed himself to his feet. "Do you see this?" he said as his long finger touched a deep scar on his face. "I got that scar from an ogre's claw. He was strong, but I was stronger. I broke off his fingers ... one by one. And the ones I could not rip off," the old man grinned, "I bit off."



Akodo saw the glee in the man's eyes and was suddenly reminded of his brother Hida. The old man continued.

"And this scar here," he said, pointing to a grisly rip down his arm, "I gained when I discovered the geisha I had in my bed was a bog hag." Ikoma looked about at those who now watched him. "But she fled this place screaming when I was done with her."

Akodo saw the men nod and the women blush and knew the man was telling the truth.

Then, Ikoma pointed to his white eye. "And this eye was lost to me by some man who said he trained under Kakita." Ikoma pulled a Crane mon from his obi. "Apparently he did not train enough.

"And this one," he lifted his hair and showed Akodo a long, black scar along his scalp. "This one nearly did me in."

"You were lucky," Akodo said.

Ikoma frowned and shook his head. "No. the Fortunes have been at my throat my whole life," he said. Then he looked Akodo straight in the eye and said, "But I beat them, too."

Ikoma continued, showing each of his scars to Akodo, and with each scar, the old man told another story. Akodo soon found himself sitting and listening to his tales with a smile on his face.

Finally, Ikoma ran out of scars. "I am Ikoma," he said. "And that is why I am the strongest man in the world. If you want to fight me now, I will fight you. But know this, Son of the Sky; you may win this fight – for every man meets his better, sooner or later – but you will not walk away from it. You will be one eye short, and you'll be missing a finger or two, but if you are lucky, you may keep all your toes.

"So, if you're ready, let's go out in the street. Just you and me. No swords or knives. Just hands and fingers and feet and teeth and we'll tear each other apart until one of us screams our mother's name."

Ikoma stopped there and leaned forward a bit. "And know this, Son of the Sky."

Akodo leaned in to hear the old man's hoarse words.

"I don't know my mother's name."

The stare between the men seemed to go on forever, until finally, Akodo sat up straight and Ikoma followed suit.

"You are indeed the strongest man in the world, and I have no wish to fight you.

"At least," Akodo finished, "not today."

HISTORY

In all their time with the Lion, the Ikoma have been the historians, the recorders of great deeds, and the ones responsible for keeping the records of each battle fought on Imperial soil. Although some complain that they place too much emphasis on the place of the Lion within history, it cannot be contested that the Ikoma records are the single most intricate and complete history of the Empire. The scrolls compiled in Shiryo Ikoma would stretch for hundreds of miles if placed end to end.

Although the Ikoma record the histories, they are also fierce warriors, bold tacticians and deadly foes. Their bushi follow the Akodo path, learning tactics and strategy as well as physical weapon skills. In fact, it is not uncommon for an Ikoma to attend the Akodo school for at least part of their training, learning from the masters in order to bring that training to their own family.

The Ikoma are more peaceful than other families in the Lion Clan. Because of their interest in the accurate recording of history, they often see difficulties with a judicious eye, learning from each incident rather than treating it as a loss or a failure. This allows a skilled Ikoma general to provide a depth of understanding to his Clan's battle strategy that might have been lost. The ability to remain impartial, to maintain neutrality even in the face of violent emotions, has always been the Ikoma's most valued trait. It is what keeps them at the right hand of the Akodo, even in times of interclan politics.

Further, it is the Ikoma who are sent to the Imperial Courts, to bring a sense of balance and peaceful neutrality to Lion negotiations. To the Ikoma, the Imperial Court is simply another type of battlefield, with victories, losses, and its own unique strategy. The opponent is usually the Crane clan, with whom the Lion have had an unending rivalry. The constant dedication of the Ikoma, coupled with their near-legendary ability to see all sides of an issue, has brought honor upon their house numerous times.

Only recently, when Bayushi Kachiko was declared the Emperor's Advisor, did the Ikoma lose their tempers in public. This loss of face resulted in the swift *seppuku* of the offending Ikoma ambassador, and the removal of all Lion diplomats from the Emperor's presence for no less than an entire season. This tremendous setback was fiercely contested by the Ikoma, led by Ikoma Ujiaki, but to no avail. The Imperial courtiers, led



by Kachiko and Kakita Yoshi – an unlikely alliance – kept the Lion at bay.

THE IKOMA RECORDS OF LEADERSHIP

A copy of each of the four treatises on warfare – Akodo's *Leadership*, Kakita's *The Sword*, Mirumoto's *Niten* and Bayushi Tange's *Lies* are kept by the Ikoma, recorded in full with all annotations, critiques, addenda and arguments. The Ikoma are said to have the only complete, unedited version of Akodo's *Leadership*, as it has been changed through history to suit each Emperor's views on warfare. Current copies in the hands of the other clans are often 'edited' by traveling Ikoma historians, as they uncover 'more valid' sources of information in their libraries.

The truth is this: the actual text of Akodo's famous text was declared heretical by the seventh Hantei, who claimed that Akodo would never have written a treatise advocating deception and treachery on the field of battle. Since that time, the Ikoma have seen to the text as it is published for the other clans, maintaining a complete copy reserved for their eyes only. Only the Lion Champion truly knows the contents of *Leadership*, and it is said that all others are incomplete, incorrect versions of a vastly superior work.

When each Champion retires, they are expected to offer their journals to the Ikoma, in order to have the records of their battles included in *Leadership*. With each new addition, the Lion Clan's knowledge of warfare grows, and with each battle, the book of *Leadership* is increased.

KYUDEN IKOMA

Kyuden Ikoma, the ancestral home of the Ikoma family, is located at the base of the Mountain of Thunders. The sacred mountain within the Seikitsu range is said to have once been the home of the mythical kitsu, progenitors of the Kitsu family. Here, the Ikoma deal in politics and military strategy, and keep the peace between the constantly feuding Akodo and Matsu families. Often, Kyuden Ikoma is used as a meeting place for the diplomats of the Lion to host the emissaries of other clans, particularly the nearby Unicorn, with whom the Lion maintain an uneasy peace.

Once, long ago, Kyuden Ikoma was the farthest reach of civilization, and the lands of the Unicorn were empty and barbaric, their ancient

palace in ruins, and their villages empty. Then, approximately six hundred years ago, the Ikoma and Akodo families ventured westward. They rebuilt the palace which is now known as Shiro Otaku, and lived within its walls for many generations. The city of Toshi sano Kanemochi Kaeru is said to have been founded by the Lions, and although the Crane and Unicorn maintain the trade route which winds up through the northern mountains, it was once the Lion who held a tight grip over the passage to the distant Burning Sands.

The Omoidasu

The legend of Ikoma and his first meeting with Akodo is held in high reverence by the entire Lion Clan. While it may sound apocryphal, the Lion regard it as fact. To question the authenticity of the story is to question the validity of the blood of more than half the clan – an insult that must be expunged as quickly as possible.

The story of "Ikoma's Victory" tells much of the character of both the Akodo and the Ikoma families and their relationship. Ikoma filled many roles for Akodo, each of them revealing a different aspect of the man's complicated character.

With that story in mind, it is interesting to watch the thousand-year development of the Ikoma family. What began as a simple association of historians has become an order devoted to keeping the Way of the Lion true to their ancestor's words and deeds. The Ikoma Bard (or *Omoidasu*) serves a very important role in the Lion Clan. He is the historian, the keeper of the law, and – in a very real way – the Clan's heart, the only emotion they are allowed to express.

THE WARRIOR

"You know, I bet my teeth won't break on that pretty nose of yours."

Ikoma spent his younger years as a fighter. Not a samurai, but a dirty, bloody, shin-kicking, nose-biting, eye-gouging pit fighter. He usually fought for food, but occasionally he also fought for honor. Tales of him ripping apart a samurai for despoiling a young girl's virtue are among the most famous of the Ikoma stories that circulate Lion camps. He was a scrapper, and he had the scars to show it.

THE REMEMBERER

"Every scar has a story, son. That's why the Fortunes gave them to us. You can forget the pain, but you'll never forget the scar that it left behind."

While Ikoma spent his younger years fighting for his dinner, he was also a storyteller. "Mankind has only one failing," he used to say, "and it's that we forget." Ikoma was dedicated to keeping his memory keen and awake.

As the Kitsu teach, Rokugan's ancestors fade if they are not remembered. It is the Ikoma's duty to be the living memory of the clan, and never allow any action - brave, cowardly or otherwise - to be forgotten.

THE LAW-KEEPER

"But you know nothing of me, and I know everything about you."

As the living memory of the Lion Clan, the Ikoma are also its law-keepers. They are typically found by an Akodo or Matsu's side, quietly reminding them of the laws and of the consequences of their actions. They are the keepers of bushido and - in a very real sense - the conscience of the clan.

Nearly every Lion daimyo has an Ikoma advisor, even those who carry the name "Matsu." The Matsu recognize the necessity of the Ikoma, perhaps even more than the Akodo. Many Matsu think the Akodo are cold, heartless and calculating, not unlike the Scorpions to the south. The Ikoma, on the other hand, have the capacity to remain objective without compromising the passion that belongs in a Lion's heart.

THE MOURNER

"The Matsu are not the heart of the Lion, they are the guts. We are the heart." - Ikoma Ujiaki

Bushido forbids a samurai any expression of emotion. While he may seek revenge, he cannot allow anger or rage to enter his heart, or he spoils the purity of his quest. When a comrade falls on the battlefield, everyone knows that was his fate. His allotted time here was over, and it was time for him to move on.

Emotion is weakness. Emotion compromises discipline. A samurai has no room in his heart for emotion. At least in public.

The last role the Ikoma play in the Lion Clan is that of the mourner. When a samurai overcome with tragedy, the Ikoma is there to express the emotion he cannot. He cries, he screams, he curses those who he will wreak

vengeance upon, all in the name of the Lion who must keep his composure or lose face.





A BARD'S TRAINING

Becoming an Ikoma bard is rigorous work. Beginning at a very young age (six or seven), the apprentice begins studying the history of the clan and Rokugan. At the age of twelve, he is expected to recite the lineage of at least three families. If he passes this test, he is allowed to move on in his training. If not, he is relegated to the vast libraries. He is no longer a historian, but a librarian – a very different (and subservient) role.

One of Ikoma's most important lessons was "man forgets, but history remembers." His lessons to Akodo always revolved around the theme that one can learn to avoid the pitfalls of the future by looking to the past. Thus, in addition to learning

the Emperor's law and Akodo's bushido, the bard must learn a series of epic stories – each a dramatic re-telling of the Lion Clan's most famous deeds – and the lessons those stories teach.

While the other clans allow their histories to become "corrupted" by mythology, the Ikoma draw a firm distinction between the truth of their history and the folk tales that have sprung up around it. The difference between history and an "Ikoma tragedy" is simple: one is true and the other is an exaggeration. Historians maintain the history and bards tell stories. Each has its purpose, and the Ikoma do not allow them to become confused.

As explained above, many Ikoma bards serve Lion daimyos, but others have been known to wander Rokugan, or even serve at the side of other clan daimyos in return for favors. While away from home, the bard seeks stories... not for entertainment's sake, but to learn. "Every story is a lesson," Ikoma once said. "Those who dismiss the stories told to children have more to learn than a child."

The bards who wander return once a year to the school, to tell the stories they've gathered and add them to the Ikoma histories. Each bard has his own series of scrolls within the library; all of his or her stories are recorded within their pages. This practice makes record-keeping a bit of a chore, however. In order to find "The Story of the Magistrate and the Seven Gold Coins," for instance, a researcher must first find the bard who told it. Then, with that name in mind, he must scour the scrolls of that bard, looking for the tale.

Fortunately, the efforts of Ikoma Kaoku have made referencing the library easier. As chief librarian, Kaoku has dedicated his life to building



a reference system that is easier to use. However, his six decades of work have only scratched the surface of nearly one thousand years of history and stories. Many have criticized Kaoku's work, but Toturi has silenced those complaints with an recent sanction for him to continue.



The Kitsu is one of the most unusual, enigmatic shugenja families in Rokugan, and the only school which forbids entrance to non-clan members. The Kitsu family serve as lorekeepers, mythologists and diplomats for the Lion Clan, but their duties are greater than the typical shugenja. They are the keepers of the ancestral lore of their clan, rather than the physical histories of which the Ikoma are so proud. The Kitsu duty is not only to their daimyo and the Emperor, but to the thousands of Lions who have lived and died. The Kitsu are the keepers of their memories and the protectors of their spirits.

To the Kitsu, the spirits of their ancestors are still a binding force upon Rokugan. Through Kitsu magic, these spirits still have direct influence on the world of the living. Kitsu philosophy revolves around the dead, integrating the souls of the past with those of the living. The reason that the Kitsu school is so selective concerns the initial founding of the Kitsu house, the true story of which is often disputed between the Kitsu and Ikoma.

THE LOST LIONS

"It is an ancient tale, yes, and even after death, its call rings true in our hearts.

Would you hear it, my son? Would you know of our ancestors?

For certainly, they know of you..."
— Kitsu Sosenkiu

A thousand years ago, the race of men was created from the tears of the Sun and the blood of the Moon. Before that time, strange races wandered the world, creatures whose form seemed like that of animals. Many historians believe that this was the time of the Naga, strange snake-like beings whose torsos resembled those of men. Some Crab historians would also have us believe that a race of Nezumi formed a mighty society at the same time, living in cooperation with the Naga. If these legends are true, it lends even more credence to the myth of Kitsu and his four brothers.

If myth is to be believed, a third great race of creatures lived upon the land while the Naga and Nezumi flourished. These beings had the form of huge cats, with golden manes and ferocious claws. These creatures, known as the 'kitsu,' were mighty hunters and the keepers of the spirit realm, where ancestors linger to watch the deeds of their descendants.

When the humans were created, and the One Who Must Not be Named first fell from the sky, these ancient races were eradicated from the world on which we now live. The Naga descended into a great sleep, or became part of the rocky earth from which they had sprung. The Nezumi, according to a heretical Crab scholar named Kuni Mokuna, were scattered across the earth, losing whatever vestiges of civilization they had achieved. The kitsu chose not to attempt to live among the new masters of the world, and took refuge in the mountains which would one day be ruled by the Dragon.

At first, man did not recognize that the kitsu were a sentient race, and hunted them. The kitsu took this to be a declaration of war, and their savagery in return earned them much fear and hatred from the primitive clans of Rokugan.

At last, ordered by Hantei to contain the dangerous beasts, Akodo began the obliteration of the kitsu. The great lions were hunted and killed, their bodies burned without knowledge of their intelligence. At the end, the last few survivors of the race gathered together in a hidden valley, prepared to give their lives in defense of their leader. When the humans found them, Akodo himself leapt to the forefront of the battle, grasping the leader of the kitsu in a mighty battle-hug. Using daring and cleverness, the kitsu escaped, and his tremendous roar shook the walls of the high valley. Akodo was startled, falling to his knees as the ground rose up beneath his feet.



THE KITSU MON

The Kitsu mon bears a striking resemblance to their fallen ancestor, before he was made by Lady Sun to look like men.

Kitsu remember the past, those who have come before, and what they've done. Their mon is a memory, both of fallen Kitsu and his legacy.





He expected the lion to attack, to tear his head from his shoulders with its clawed paws - but the kitsu did not. It simply stared at Akodo with tremendous, hate-filled eyes, and waited for the man to rise to his feet.

"Hold," cried Akodo, and his warriors backed away from the combat. For a long moment, Akodo and the kitsu stared at one another. Then Akodo bowed to the kitsu, and the great lion narrowed its eyes and nodded its head. It was a simple matter to make peace with the strange, kami-like race, and a tentative treaty was formed. Although communication was difficult, the kitsu soon learned how to speak rough phrases in the Rokugani tongue. For years thereafter, the Kitsu shugenja say, Akodo traveled to that valley and atoned for the innocent creatures he had massacred.

Both the Akodo and the kitsu were warlike, but once the treaty was made, neither ever broke it. However, the kitsu did not thrive - perhaps it was the will of the gods, or perhaps the same disease which struck the legendary Naga had weakened their race. No new children were born, and the kitsu dwindled to five. At the end of his life, Akodo traveled to their hidden valley, and found only bones and empty rubble.

Here is where the myth grows strangest. It is said (and the Kitsu challenge any who claim that this is not the truth) that five men returned with Akodo from his final trip to the kitsu valley. Their hair was a magnificent bronze-gold, a color rarely seen in Rokugan. Akodo claimed that they were the last of the kitsu, transformed by the Sun Goddess into human form as a boon to her bold son. The men swore their fealty to Akodo, and took his daughters as their wives. The Kitsu family descends from these five men, and all claim to have blood ties to the ancient race whose cat-like form has given the Lion Clan its name. Whether these myths are true or not, the family seems to have a tremendous gift for spirit magic, granted by their blood and possessed only by pure-bred members of the Kitsu. Their grasp of modern Rokugani sorcery is weak, and their traditional ways are often scoffed at by the other shugenja of the Empire, but they have magics all their own which they do not share with those not of their blood.

Some say it is not possible for them to share their magics with others, that the spirits which they call will respond only to a descendant of the kitsu. This may be true, and it may explain

their connection to the ancestors so revered by the Lion Clan. The kitsu, by all accounts, were honorable beasts whose ability to dwell in the spirit realm as well as the mortal world may account for their slow vanishing. Perhaps the kitsu were unable to separate themselves from the spiritual world; if so perhaps their ancient souls still linger in that realm, ready to assist their descendants when they call.

HISTORY

Embedded in tradition, steeped in culture and formality, the Kitsu maintain their rituals for nearly a thousand years, stepping, moving, and chanting exactly as their ancestors did. How do they know the rituals have not changed?

Because their ancestors tell them so.

The Kitsu do more than worship their venerable ancestors, as the shugenja of other clans profess. They actually travel to the lands of the dead, seeking wisdom and knowledge from the spirits of the past. The Kitsu do not merely speak to their own ancestors in hope of guidance, but in fact, to the ancestors of all the Clans. It is said that Jigoku, the Land of the Dead, is filled with regret and emotion, yet many of the spirits of the past come to the Kitsu without prejudice. They see in the Kitsu a chance to alter what has been done. The Kitsu treat the dead with the ultimate respect, walking in their shadowy realm with caution and peace.

Sometimes, the Kitsu can even bring back the spirit of the dead for a few moments of precious life. With their inherited gifts, they can speak with the ancestor's voice, allow them to see through their eyes or actually incarnate within the Kitsu's flesh. Such magics might be seen as atrocities, if the realm of the Dead did not so venerate Kitsu magic. Any shugenja who criticizes a Kitsu's methods might find himself in peril, lost without the guidance of his own ancestors.

Kitsu children are not afraid of the dark. They do not cry at funerals and are always aware of the reality of death. They see spirits, talk to 'invisible' friends, and recount knowledge of things which occurred long before they were born. This instinctual understanding of the spirit realm is the mark of a trueborn Kitsu. Although some discount the Kitsu's origins as mere myth, to the Kitsu, it is purest truth. Their ancestors have told them so.

A child born to the Kitsu who shows little of the traces of the blood is a concern to all in the

small family. Because there are so few members of the Kitsu family in the Empire, each birth is a celebration, every child eagerly anticipated and recorded. When one is born without the talent, it is considered a tragedy. Such a child is not ostracized, but often feels so, as the others in the room speak to and hear voices which he cannot. While it is said that no trueblood Kitsu is ever alone, these children soon prove the exception to that rule. They are quickly married to another family, or encouraged to make their way in life through the Ikoma, Akodo, or Matsu bushi schools.

On a Kitsu child's sixth birthday, they are taken to the family council chamber, shown the histories of their lineage, and told the myth of the kitsu. The ritual performed there is sacred, and few outside the family have been invited to share in it.

THE KITSU GEMPUKKU CEREMONY

The mysterious Kitsu family also does not allow outsiders to witness its members coming of age. No one who has not undergone a Kitsu gempukku may enter the palace during this time; visitors are turned away without explanation. Before a Kitsu is given his or her daisho, they must recite in order the names of their ancestors, dating back to the time of the family's founding. They will praise each ancestor's specific deeds, citing their power and bravery, their wit and profundity. Clever Kitsu will put an element of their own studies into the litany, adding a previously unknown fact about a particular ancestor, or an insight on their lives that had not been expressed before. The lineage must be recited without error, and the ancestors must be evoked without confusion or mistake. In doing so, the Kitsu demonstrates reverence and understanding, as well as acknowledging his or her connection with them.

The ceremony ends with the initiate thanking all past Kitsu for their sacrifices on his or her behalf, and promising to adhere to their principles in the lifetime ahead.

Though it cannot be confirmed, and the Kitsu refuse to speak of it, it is said that the family ancestors gather to pronounce judgment on each initiate. If the shugenja-to-be cannot convince the spirits that they are worthy of the gifts, then they are stripped of their abilities and forced to leave the family in disgrace. A few of these tragic individuals have eventually turned to darkness,

and become notorious *maho-tsukai*. If, on the other hand, the initiate passes, the spirits embrace him or her warmly, beginning a period of profound understanding between ancient ancestor and living descendent. Such a connection is the purpose of a Kitsu shugenja's life.






Chapter Three



Character



REFERENCED ADVANTAGES

Many of the characters in the *Who's Who* section have Advantages and Disadvantages that are referenced from other books in the *Way of the Clans* series. Just in case you don't have one of those books, we've listed them here in the sidebars.

A HEART OF VENGEANCE (3 POINT ADVANTAGE)

(from *Way of the Scorpion*)

Pick a clan, any clan (should be a Great Clan). For some reason or another, members of that clan will always draw your wrath. Whenever you are using any Skill against a member of that clan, you always keep (not roll) an additional die. Gain a minor enemy from that clan.



Chapter Three: Character

In this chapter, you will find new creation rules for Lion Clan characters, including new Advantages, Disadvantages, Skills, and Schools. Information on designing Matsu bushi, Kitsu Ancestral Mages, and Ikoma Historians is also included. Lastly, at the end of the chapter is an extensive set of Heritage and Fortune Tables, which focus on the facets of the Lion most commonly encountered.

New Skills

BUIJUTSU (VARIES)

The weapons skills of the *L5R RPG* cover weapons with similar size and weight distribution. We have collected the entirety of them (referred to by Rokugani as *bujutsu*) here for clarification. For game purposes, if a character has one of these Skills, he is assumed to have the same Rank while using all weapons listed with it.

Iaijutsu is not included, as it is not a weapons skill *per se*, but the application of such knowledge. These terms do not supersede previous material, but may be used in place of those in parenthesis in future supplements. These are all Bugei skills.

- Bojutsu (Bo Stick): Bo, Jo
- Chisaijutsu (War Fan): Tessen
- Jiujutsu (Hand-to-Hand): Mizu-do, Kaze-do
- Kenjutsu: Katana, No-dachi, Wakizashi
- Kyujutsu (Archery): Dai-kyu, Yumi
- Nofujutsu (Peasant weapons): Jitte, Kama, Nunchaku, Sai, Tonfa (This is considered a Low Skill)
- Subojutsu (Tetsubo): Die tsuchi, Tetsubo, Ono
- Tantojutsu (Knife): Aiguchi, Tanto, Kama
- Umayarijutsu (Lance): Lance

- Yarijutsu (Naginata): Nagamaki, Naginata, Yari, Nage-yari, Sasumata, Sodegarami
- Ninjutsu: Ninja-to, Shuriken, Blowgun, Nageteppo, Tetsubishi, Han-kyu

Ninjutsu works a little differently from the rest of these Skill groups. At Rank 1, the character only learns how to use one of the tools listed at Rank 1. For every further Rank gained in the Skill, the character gains an additional Rank in the use of tools already known, and another tool at Rank 1.

LORE (ANCESTORS) (INTELLIGENCE)

In the Lion Clan, those who have come and gone, fought and fallen, are held in the utmost reverence. Even those who failed in their duty to the clan are remembered, if only to be learned from. Thus, it is considered honorable to know as much about one's ancestors – and the ancestors of your neighbors – as possible. This is a High Skill.

New Advantages

BALANCE (4 POINTS)

You have the ability to remain neutral – even level-headed – regardless of your inner emotional state. You ignore any comments designed to taunt you or make you react. In game terms, this means you ignore any modifiers to your Honor roll. Also, during Iaijutsu duels, you may Raise a number of times up to your Void + 2. Matsu characters may not purchase this Advantage.

BLOODLINES (KITSU ONLY; 5 POINTS)

You are the confluence of several pivotal bloodlines within the clan. The voices of your ancestors come to you without effort, at times to the point of annoyance. All spells and abilities directly involving any of your clan's ancestors keep an additional two dice, and ancestors cost you only half their original value in Character Points. Your ancestors check up on you from time to time, however, and they frequently drop in at inconvenient moments.

COMBAT REFLEXES (6 POINTS)

After initiative is rolled, you may switch places with the character whose action is directly before yours. For example, if you are third in line for

actions this turn, you may switch places with the character who is second. That person becomes the third in line.

NATURAL LEADER (7 POINTS; 4 FOR LION)

A character with the Natural Leader Advantage is able to bestow limited benefits on those who follow him. If another character is following a leader, he is able to use some of his leader's Skills. Whenever a character is following a leader's example (performing the same action as the leader), he automatically gains a bonus Rank in that Skill. If the character does not have the Skill, then he performs as if he had Rank 1. The leader's Skill must be higher than those who follow him, and must be at least Rank 3 in order for his followers to gain this bonus.

TACTICIAN (5 POINTS; 3 POINTS FOR AKODO)

You've been trained in the art of warfare by the Akodo War College, and you know how to look for opportunities in the clamor of battle. Whenever you roll on the Battle Table (and you are not in the Reserves), you may modify your final roll by 3 points, up or down (i.e. a roll of 13 can become either 10 or 16).

New Disadvantages

ANTISOCIAL (VARIABLE)

You have difficulty getting along with others. Perhaps this manifests as shyness, troubled speech, discomfort around people, or even bouts of depression. Whatever the symptoms, you find it hard to communicate your feelings properly or withdraw from contact with others.

Moderately Antisocial: 2 Points. All social skills keep 1 fewer die.

Extremely Antisocial: 4 Points. All social skills keep 2 fewer dice.

This may result in the character keeping zero dice, which is an automatic failure.

COWARD (VARIABLE)

You are secretly afraid. It might be that you lack confidence in your own abilities, or that you are sure that everyone is better than you are. Whatever the case, you roll and keep fewer dice when facing an opponent with a higher Glory.

Moderate Cowardice: 3 points, 4 for Lion characters. Roll and keep one fewer die when facing an opponent with higher Glory than you.

Extreme Cowardice: 6 points, 8 for Lion characters. Roll and keep two fewer dice when facing an opponent with higher Glory than you.



REFERENCED ADVANTAGE:

EAR OF THE EMPEROR (5 POINTS)

(From Way of the Scorpion)

The PC has a (semi-) direct line to the Imperial Court, whether through familial connections, favors, social or political influence or simple respect. The terms of the connection must be clearly defined before a PC with this Advantage can be brought into play, but once it is, the PC may invoke it at any time, gaining a bonus to their dice (rolled not kept) in Awareness when "suggesting" things to those in the Imperial Court. The best part of this Advantage is that, depending on the circumstances, the PC might not even need to be present in the courts, relying instead on easily-manipulated third parties to insinuate the desired information.



REFERENCED DISADVANTAGES

FASCINATION (2 POINTS)

(From Way of the Crane)

The character has a fascination with something – music, horses, ancient history – and will go to any length to learn new things about it. A character with a fascination for spellcraft might resort to stealing scrolls from other shugenja.

Someone who has a fascination with horses would go to any length to purchase (or otherwise obtain) one of the finest steeds of the Unicorn, and someone who was fascinated with Naga will leap at the chance to travel into the forests of Shinomen, searching for Naga ruins – even if the forest was crawling with monsters.

VANTY (1 POINT)

(From Way of the Dragon)

You are gorgeous and/or brilliant – and you know it. Unfortunately, the rest of the world doesn't seem to notice. You'd better make sure they know the quality of person they are dealing with!

You may spend a Void Point to ignore this penalty for one round.

DEATHSEEKER (7 POINTS)

You are a member of the elite Lion outcasts – the Deathseekers. Your family has been dishonored, your name erased from the records of the Lion Clan. The only way to redeem your family name is to give your life in combat against a superior foe. To achieve this, you must seek a situation where your death can benefit the clan, and you must die for the cause. Unless your family's name can be cleared, this is your only option. Remember, the Ancestors do not look favorably on those who shirk their duty...

As a Deathseeker, you begin the game with no Glory, nor may you ever gain any.

DISHONORED (3 POINTS)

You begin at Glory Rank 0 with no points. You are not a ronin, but you have to earn your Glory back. You can't spend any Experience Points you've earned until gaining Rank 1 Glory, and then can only buy up to three Skill Ranks, one Ring Rank, or one Trait Rank (total) per adventure.

FORSAKEN (2 POINTS, 3 FOR LION)

This is a particularly bitter handicap in which, for reasons of the player and GM's devising, the PC's ancestors do not listen to or aid him in any way, shape or form. No ancestor will ever, under any circumstances, talk to you. Other Rokugani will assume that someone whose karma is so bad that her ancestors shun her completely must have done something very wrong indeed. This is not quite as bad as a true Dark Secret, but it will certainly reflect poorly on the Forsaken character should the truth ever come to light.

IDEALISTIC (2 POINTS)

All Lion are extreme in their views of bushido. All adhere to it in at least theory, if not practice. Idealistic characters hew to a slightly more stringent code for behavior and ethics than those from the other clans. Whenever a Lion's Honor changes, points gained or lost are increased by 1 for every 5 (i.e. a 5 point gain becomes a 6 point gain, and a 1 Rank loss becomes a 12 point loss).

PROUD (1 POINT)

You know that you are the finest bushi or shugenja that has ever been produced by your

family's school. Your skills are honed, and the ancestors are on your side. It's not mere overconfidence – it's absolute arrogance. Nothing can stop you from fulfilling the destiny you're sure you have, whatever it is.

Obviously, it will be the grandest thing you come upon, and any who meet you should be informed of the caliber of person they are dealing with. One day, they will want to tell their children about you!



The Akodo War College is the branch of the Akodo Bushi School dedicated to knowledge of tactics, military history and strategy. Most importantly, however, this esteemed college's students (known as Tacticians) gain a keen understanding of how to practically apply the information they learn. This is why, more than any other clan in Rokugan, the Lion learn from the mistakes made in the past: both their own and those of the rest of the Empire.

Treat Akodo Tacticians just like Akodo Bushi from the *L5R RPG*, with the following changes to their basic package:

Benefit: +1 Perception

Skills: Archery, Kenjutsu, Battle 2, Bard, History 2

The Ikoma Bard School

For a thousand years, the Ikoma have served as the "living memory" of the Lion Clan, and the whole of the Empire. They record every event that they encounter, and bring them back to the Great Libraries for posterity. More importantly, they seek out the great epics of samurai that will become the legends of tomorrow. In this way, they have come not to be called heroes, but "heromakers".

Within the Lion Clan, the Ikoma serve many practical roles, acting as their courtiers, traders, and specialists in time of peace, and as messengers and recorders during war. Their

duties expanded with the growing tensions between the Akodo and Matsu families; often, Ikoma were brought into the conflicts as advisors to the peacekeepers assigned by Emperor Hantei. And when they not only proved effective but excelled in this position, many were transferred to posts further and further away from Lion provinces. Today, the Ikoma serve as diplomatic attachés to a great many regents in the Empire: mostly unaligned minor daimyos and the like.

THE IKOMA OMOIDASU (BARD) SCHOOL

The Ikoma represent the heart of the Lion, as they are the only family allowed to emote openly. While the rest of the clan practices restraint, withholding their passions for all but the fight, the Ikoma act as an outlet for expression normally considered dishonorable (*i.e.* crying, regret, fear, etc.). The great irony of this, however, is the fact that the Ikoma are, as a whole, quite a stoic family, generally internalizing their own pains in favor of those of others. But, as has been said, "that is their way..."

Benefit: +1 Intelligence

Skills: Bard, Calligraphy, Heraldry, History, Law, Lore (any 2)

Beginning Honor: 3.5





TECHNIQUES

Lion bards do not learn "techniques"; instead, they gain several abilities. The bulk of these relate to their selfless place in Rokugani society. Ikoma are the great storytellers of the Empire, and spend a great deal of time seeking out samurai whose experiences they can craft into sweeping tales of honor and glory. With each new story, comes glory for the samurai involved, and honor for the bard.

In game terms, this means that the bard must seek out a patron samurai at some point during his rise through every School Rank. He begins the game having already found and made known one samurai's tale (to achieve Rank 1), which the player is encouraged to document as his character would (thus further establishing his Gamemaster's world). He must then find another before he can achieve Rank 2. This can be more complicated than it sounds, as not all great warriors wish to have their stories told, and those that do often lead the Ikoma into dangerous situations before the tale is done.

After the events of the story are done and compiled by the Ikoma, he must take them back to his daimyo and present them at formal court. This requires an Intelligence + Bard skill check with a TN equal to the samurai's Glory x5. Should this succeed, then the samurai is heralded as a hero and gains Glory Points equal to the School Rank of the bard. These points can push the samurai's Glory to the next Rank without the express permission of his daimyo (though it would be a rare instance for a daimyo to deny a samurai who has just been so honored by an Ikoma). The one major restriction to this is that the Ikoma may never increase a samurai's Glory to a Rank higher than twice his own (i.e. if the Ikoma's Glory is 2.4 the samurai may not rise above 4.8 as a result of this ability). The Ikoma, for his part, gains a like number of Honor Points and, without GM intervention, a Major Ally in the samurai honored.

Finally, Ikoma do not lose Honor or Glory for losing face (expressing emotion) in public. They are the heart of the Lion, and their duty is to express what others cannot.



Because of their unique relationship with the spirit world, certain members of the Kitsu family are able to commune with the lingering spirits that haunt Rokugan. They are known as *sodan-senzo*; those who speak to the ancestors.

Many Kitsu have little or no trace of their ancestors' blood. These are trained at the Kitsu Shugenja School (as listed in the *LSR RPG*), and can use magic and receive spells as described therein.

Kitsu characters who wish to be more connected to their ancestors, however, must purchase the Kitsu Ancestry advantage. This permits them to communicate with the dead, but only those who go on to attend the Kitsu *sodan-senzo* school gain the full benefits.

The distinction among the three types of Kitsu – normal, Half-Blood, and Full-Blood – is not recognized by many in the Empire, but the Lion are well aware of it. During their *gempukku* ceremonies, their connection to the ancestors is tested and classified; from that moment on, all Kitsu know their place in the clan. The path of the ancestor mages diverges greatly from that of the spell-wielders. They are a link to the Lion's past, and a bridge to its future.

HALF-BLOOD KITSU ANCESTRY (KITSU SHUGENJA OR SODAN- SENZO ONLY: 3 POINTS)

Kitsu may not perform any Ancestral Magic without this Advantage. Half-Blood Kitsu may only Sense ancestors (see the rules for sensing ancestors, below).

Half-Blood Kitsu may attend either the Kitsu Shugenja School or the Kitsu *Sodan-Senzo* School. If they attend the Kitsu Shugenja School, their beginning spells are restricted. Instead of

receiving 3 Water, 2 Fire and 1 Earth, they receive 2 Water and 1 Fire. This represents the fact that the character has split his studies, and cannot perform either to its full extent. The shugenja may, thereafter, may learn new spells, however, they may never learn how to Commune with or Summon ancestors. Half-blood Kitsu who do not attend one of these two schools lose their connection to their ancestors, and may no longer Sense them.

FULL-BLOOD KITSU ANCESTRY (KITSU SODAN-SENZO ONLY: 6 POINTS)

Kitsu may not Commune with or Summon Ancestors without this Advantage. Only Full-Blood Kitsu, who carry the essence of the original Kitsu race within them, may attend the Kitsu *sodan-senzo* school.

This gift is powerful, but comes with a price. Full-blooded Kitsu shugenja may never cast shugenja spells of any kind, nor may they learn Techniques. Only the effects granted them by their natural talents are available to them.

Kitsu Sodan-Senzo Ancestor Magic School

Only those with Kitsu Ancestry are permitted to attend this school. Others do not have the appropriate connection to the ancestors. The *sodan-senzo*, however, learn how to make contact with ancestors, not just from the Kitsu family or the Lion Clan, but from all the major families in Rokugan.

A *sodan-senzo* may Sense an Ancestor of any power, whether it be a household ghost, a *shuten doji* of the Shadowlands or Akodo himself. However, they may only Summon or Commune with those spirits (Ancestors) whose Character Point cost is less than or equal to twice their current School Rank. In order to use Commune and Summon with spirits other than Ancestors (*i.e.*, spirits who do not have Character Point costs), use the spirit's Air Ring x 2.

Those of Full-Blood Kitsu Ancestry are able to see and speak with ancestors, and even draw ancestors into their own spirit.

There are three ways in which Kitsu interact with the spirit world. They are equivalent to the

ways in which common shugenja manipulate the Elements by working with the *kami*. Full-blooded Kitsu can Sense (*see*), Commune (*speak with*), and Summon (*channel or draw into themselves*) ancestors and their power.

Benefit: +1 Willpower

SENSING ANCESTORS

The way this works is both simple and complex. No mechanics exist, nor are any skill rolls ever made for Sensing ancestors. This should be roleplayed between the GM and the Kitsu player to their mutual satisfaction.

When Sensing an Ancestor, the shugenja can see, hear, touch and even smell the spirit. Most spirits can make themselves invisible at will, but they cannot hide from a Kitsu if he is using Sense. Further, although the Ancestor may not be present, the Kitsu can sense if a spirit has a connection to a particular person, place or thing.

COMMUNING WITH ANCESTORS

As with Sensing ancestors, no skill rolls are ever made for Communing with ancestors. It should be roleplayed between the GM and the Kitsu player to their mutual satisfaction. Remember, however, that ancestors are not all amiable, and often refuse to speak with the living (particularly if they died badly).

SUMMONING ANCESTORS

Summoning ancestors is more difficult than merely Sensing or Communing with them. A Kitsu may only Summon an ancestor whose cost is less than twice his School Rank. He may not make Raises of any kind while trying. Finally, the Kitsu must spend a Void point with every attempt (to represent the spiritual struggle of gaining contact).

The TN for Summoning is 5x the Character Point cost of the ancestor in question; the skill roll is made using the Kitsu's Intelligence + School Rank. Appropriate offerings can reduce this TN (GM's discretion.)

If successful, the Kitsu will feel himself filled with the presence of the ancestor, who will remain a number of hours equal to his Void Rank. This Ancestor does not have to be from the Lion Clan; they may be from any Clan. During that time, the *sodan-senzo* gains the ability (and detriments) granted by that Ancestor, as if the *sodan-senzo* had been created with that Ancestor. Multiple ancestors can be summoned into a single Kitsu at one time, but only up to the Kitsu's Honor.

"DO I HAVE A KHARMIC TIE?"

Kitsu who speak with Ancestors will be able to sense Advantages and Disadvantages that have to do with the spirit world. For instance, a Kitsu *Sodan-Senzo* will be able to sense Kharmic Ties between characters, determine if characters have an Ancestor watching over them, or if one of them is Haunted.





FEAR RATINGS

When opposing a Matsu bushi creating a Fear effect, opponents must make a Willpower roll against the bushi's Fear Rating x5. The bushi's Fear Rating is her School Rank +1.

Those who fail cannot use Void Points while combating her, and must also drop dice lower than the Fear Rating while taking actions against her.

Matsu Bushi School

The Matsu bushi are possibly the fiercest, most dedicated group of warriors in Rokugan. Although they are matriarchal, men are treated as equals within the battle corps. The males are easily as bold and daring as their more well-known female counterparts, and make up the majority of the Matsu armies.

Generations of warfare and years of training give the Matsu several advantages on the field of battle, and their rigid instruction and relentless practice before their *gempukku* teach them unswerving dedication and fortitude.

Benefit: +1 Reflexes

Skills: Archery, Battle, Hand-to-Hand, History, Kenjutsu, plus 2 other Bugei (not Defense)

Starting Honor: 3 plus 5 boxes.

TECHNIQUES

Rank 1: The Lion's Roar

When making a Full Attack, the Matsu bushi creates a Fear effect for all those who oppose her. The Fear Rating is equal to her School Rank +1.

Rank 2: Matsu's Fury

When making a Full Attack, the Matsu bushi may now make one additional Attack per turn.

Rank 3: With My Ancestors Beside Me

When making a Full Attack, the Rank 3 Matsu bushi rolls a number of initiative dice equal to her Honor.

Rank 4: The Lion's Claws

The bushi may now make two Attacks per turn. If the Matsu bushi is performing a Full Attack, then she can attack a total of three times per turn (see Rank 2 Technique).

Rank 5: Matsu's Courage

If the Matsu bushi is making a Full Attack, she ignores Action penalties she would suffer as a result of Wounds, up to her Honor Rank. Thus, if

a Matsu with an Honor of 4 is making a Full Attack, she ignores the -1, -2, -3 and -4 Wound modifiers. This does not apply to the "Down", "Out", or "Dead" Wound Ranks.



Heritage Tables

During character creation, each player has the option to roll on the Heritage Table for free – once. Thereafter, it will cost them 1 Character Point per roll, for a total of up to three rolls. Forward, young one! But know that while the actions of your ancestors can come to be the stuff of legend, those legends often prove troublesome to live up to. Their abject failure can also carry a price for you, but not always the one you expect...

HERITAGE TABLE 2: GLORIOUS ANCESTOR

ROLL	RESULT
1-3:	To Battle! Your ancestor honored his clan as a soldier of the Empire. Roll on Heritage Table 5 with a +3 modifier.
4:	Bloodlines. Beyond the blood of your original ancestor, you have the influence of several other key figures in the clan's history. Gain 1.5 Honor and 1 Void; in addition, if Kitsu, gain the Bloodlines Advantage.
5:	Ancestral Recall. At his gempukku, your ancestor not only recited his lineage to his original ancestor, but also those of all the samurai present. Gain 1-5 points of Glory and the Precise Memory Advantage.
6:	Hero. An attack on the Emperor while on envoy across the realm was thwarted by the courage and stout resolution of your ancestor. Gain 1-10 points of Glory and the Ear of the Emperor Advantage.
7:	Fame. Your ancestor was cited as an example in <i>Akodo's Leadership</i> . Gain 1 Glory.
8:	Inventor. One of your ancestors invented an important piece of siege weaponry. Gain 5 Glory, 1 Rank of the Siege skill, and 1 of the Craft (Artillery) skill.
9-0:	Glory. Your ancestor served two decades as an Imperial Guard. Gain 1 set of ceremonial armor (fine quality) and 1 Rank in Defense.

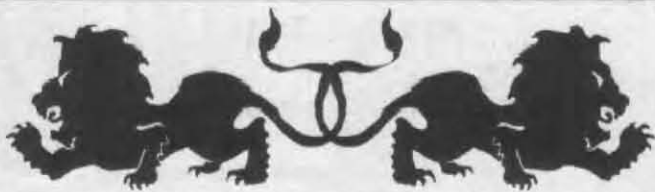
HERITAGE TABLE 1

Note: All ancestors referred to by table must be chosen by the player and/or GM.

1-3:	Glorious Ancestor. Roll on Heritage Table 2.
4:	Undistinguished History. No benefits or penalties.
5-6:	Shamed Ancestor. Roll on Heritage Table 3
7-8:	Uncertain History. Roll on Heritage Table 4.
9-0:	Something Else. Roll on Heritage Table 6.

HERITAGE TABLE 3: SHAMED ANCESTOR

ROLL	RESULT
1-3:	Run Away! Your ancestor was disgraced as a soldier of the Empire. Roll on Heritage Table 5 with a -2 modifier.
4:	Affront! One of your ancestors angered the spirits. None will answer you save him, and he is a rather pitiful being, not acknowledged by the others in Jigoku. Gain the Forsaken Disadvantage, but no points for it.
5:	Dishonored! Two brothers in your line, after suffering a bitter defeat at the hands of the Crane, became Deathseekers. Much later, they were killed in a futile battle in Crab lands, never having redeemed themselves. Their stain remains. Begin the game with the Dishonored Disadvantage, but gain no points for it. Of course, you could always go ask the Emperor for permission to follow in their steps...
6-7:	Coward! Your ancestor was afraid to fight. Gain the Cowardly (Moderate) Disadvantage, but get no points for it.
8-9:	Vain! Your ancestor owned a thousand mirrors. Gain the Vanity Disadvantage.
0:	Traitor! The Emperor was betrayed by an ancestor of yours, who bartered information critical to the peace of the Empire for money, power or to satisfy a debt. Now everyone looks to you with the same keen eye that should have been directed at him, and you are never to step into the royal palace.



HERITAGE TABLE 4: UNCERTAIN HISTORY

- 1-3: Drafted! Acted in accordance with his vow as a soldier. Roll on Heritage Table 5 with no modifiers.
- 4-5: Divine Inspiration. Your ancestor, a Crane, accidentally discovered the key strategy used in defeating an enemy while painting. Gain 1 Rank in the Artisan (Painting) skill, but lose 3 Honor (due to the derision of other Lions).
- 6: Spoils. One of your ancestors killed someone important from another clan in a duel. If Akodo, gain 1 Honor. If Matsu, gain 1 Rank in the weapon skill used. If Ikoma, gain 1 Rank in Battle or the appropriate knowledge skill (Lore, etc.). If Kitsu, gain the Bloodlines advantage. All families gain the Sworn Enemy Disadvantage from the proper clan as well, but no points.
- 7-8: Knowledge. Your family has always had close ties with the Ikoma. Gain a new Lore skill or another level in one you already have.
- 9: Truce. An ancestor spent time as an Ikoma Peacekeeper, traveling the Rokugan espousing mutual respect. If Akodo or Matsu, lose 5 points of Glory and Honor. If Ikoma, gain 5 of each. If Kitsu, gain nothing.
- 0: Hokkaku. Hokkaku is a Rokugani word that means "touched." On a trip into the spiritworld, your ancestor encountered a being he shouldn't have... Gain 2 points in both the Strength of the Earth Advantage and Compulsion Disadvantage.



HERITAGE TABLE 5: THE FORGE OF WAR

Notes: The soldier herein refers to the proper person (the PC or his ancestor) and the exact battle(s) in question must be determined by the player and/or GM. Akodo and Matsu add 1 to the roll; Ikoma and Kitsu subtract 1 (all cumulative).

- 2 or lower:** **Legendary Loss.** In a battle of epic scope that should have been an "easy win" for the Lion, they were crushed! In the confusion, none are sure just who was at fault. Worst of all, the soldier was at the center of the action when it happened! He or she suffers ignominious death on a roll of 1-5. Rokugan will not soon forget this tactical tragedy, nor the names of those who fought in it. Lose 1.5 Honor Ranks and 1 Glory rank, and gain the Black Sheep Disadvantage, with no associated points.
- 1:** **Shattering Defeat.** The soldier, an advance scout, is blamed for the loss of over 50 Lions in battle, including himself, when he failed to report the presence of several hundred enemy reinforcements. Some claim he was paid by the Scorpion to do so; others say that he was secretly in league with the enemy. You desire the truth. Gain the Higher Purpose Advantage.
- 0:** **The Crest of the Wave.** The soldier was not supposed to be involved. He was carrying important documents for the Emperor and was swept up in events too large to ignore. The scrolls were lost with him and never found again. Lose 1 Glory and gain the Black Sheep Disadvantage, but no points for it.
- 1:** **Bitter-sweet Defeat.** In a crushing defeat, the soldier held the line of defense just long enough for the bulk of his forces to retreat honorably, but was captured as a result. He spent several long months in an enemy prison or camp. Gain 1 Honor Rank and 2 Ranks of skills appropriate to the victorious clan.
- 2:** **Spy for the Clan.** For several weeks before an important battle with a major opposing clan, the soldier spent time among their troops – as a spy! Gain Lore (Appropriate Clan Battle Tactics)

HERITAGE TABLE 5: THE FORGE OF WAR (CONTINUED)

- and two Ranks in skills or normally schooled to them (can include skills normally only available to members of that clan). Despite his intelligence, however, the battle was lost. Death of soldier on a roll of 1-2. Gain 1 Glory Rank but lose 1-10 Honor.
- 3: Personal Demons. Charging the enemy line to save a Lion soldier that had been injured, the soldier was himself nearly killed. The wound he received should have been fatal, but was miraculously healed at a Unicorn's touch. Only a discordant bluish scar remained. The Unicorn was a phantasm, the ghost of a soldier fallen on the field many generations ago, and he lingers with the soldier and those close to him still... Gain 1-5 points of Glory but gain the Haunted Disadvantage, with no associated points.
- 4: Fear of Death. The soldier fled in the face of a superior force (which was nonetheless later defeated), and was excommunicated from his family. Lose 1 Glory Rank.
- 5: Mutual Retreat. Lose 1 Glory point. Obscure death of soldier on a roll of 1 (lose 2 Glory points).
- 6: Peace. The soldier was instrumental in negotiating a peace that lasted... three days. He was then killed in battle. Lose 1 Glory point.
- 7: Victory. Gain 1-5 points of Glory and a 3-point Sworn Enemy from the appropriate clan, with no associated Character Point gain.
- 8: Victory without Words. During an Iaijutsu duel with an opposing general, the soldier was so intimidating that his opponent walked away in shame rather than face him. You are said to have inherited his "eye". Gain the Death Trance Advantage.
- 9: Arrogant Victory. The soldier was distracted from his duties on the field by a personal Iaijutsu match. In a fit of

HERITAGE TABLE 5: THE FORGE OF WAR (CONTINUED)

- prideful vengeance, he ignored repeated calls for his aid. The Lion won the battle, but no thanks to him. Death of soldier (in the duel) on a roll of 1-2. If so, records of his place in the clan have been removed; gain the Dark Secret Disadvantage. Otherwise, gain the Dishonored Disadvantage.
- 10: Dishonorable Victory. The soldier was in command of a force that succeeded in battle, but under circumstances that were less than honorable (an ambush whose sole purpose was to fulfill the commander's glory, one that included the death of innocents, etc.) Gain 1 die of Glory but lose 1 die of Honor.
- 11: Prodigal Victory. As a child, the soldier's home was attacked by enemy troops and overrun. Although suffering a great loss – a parent or friend – he rallied several other young Lions into a makeshift force that procured their foes' banner and became the symbol of the Lions' ultimate victory. Gain 1 Rank of the Social Position Advantage.
- 12: Pyrrhic Victory. A vile demon released from beyond the Kaiu Wall by rogue Kuni shugenja was dispatched by the soldier, but it cost him his own life. Gain 1 jade pendant (a gift from the Crab), and 6-10 points of Glory.
- 13 or higher: Mythic Victory. The battle waged was against an honorable foe, and a long, difficult struggle, but the forces of the Lion were triumphant. The soldier knew this, of course, as early in the fighting, he or she witnessed the spirit of Matsu the Thunder, carrying the true Lion ancestral sword, onto the field! Glorious death of soldier on a roll of 1-5. Regardless, the battle and the soldier go down in history and are still honored today. Gain 1.5 Honor Ranks, 1 Glory Rank, and the Great Destiny Advantage.



LION FORTUNE TABLES (OPPOSITE PAGE)

The player may roll on these tables once only, at the cost of 3 CP. An even roll indicates that the Fortunes favor you, while an odd result means that they have forsaken you.

HERITAGE TABLE 6: OTHER INCONVENIENCES

- 1: Your ancestor ignored his duty to the clan and became an Imperial Magistrate of some standing whose accolades surface even today. Gain 1 Rank of Investigation and the Bad Reputation Disadvantage, but no points for it.
- 2-3: An ancestor was a sensei at the Akodo War College. Gain the Tactician Advantage.
- 4-5: For reasons appropriate for your family (honorable combat, noble research, communing with an important deceased clan figure, etc.), an ancestor was commemorated in the Hall of Ancestors. Gain 1-5 Honor.
- 6: You are the kind of person that gets along with everyone, unlike many of your fellow clansmen. Gain a Minor Ally that can be used "on the fly" whenever needed. Once chosen, however, it cannot change.
- 7: After being horribly wounded in battle, your ancestor turned his able fighting skills (and a fascination with an obscure technique) to the art of training. Although many laughed at his odd style, many of his students adhere to his teachings to this day. Gain 2 Ranks of one of the following: Bo Stick, Knife, Tetsubo, War Fan, Wrestling.
- 8-9: One of your ancestors saved the life of a famed armorer, who promptly commissioned an elaborate kabuto for him. Of fine quality and covered in the etchings of a dozen famous battle scenes, it has been passed on to you.
- 0: Some say that the love-hate relationship of Akodo and Matsu continues through the generations in their descendants. Some of those say that your ancestor's infatuation with a member of the Lion's Pride was foolishness. Everyone tells you that your feelings for a Deathseeker are utter lunacy. Gain the Kharmic Tie Advantage.

"FORTUNES FAVOR ME"

- 1-2: You dutifully served your clan on the field of battle. Roll on Heritage Table 5 with a +2 modifier. Reroll any result that indicates the death of the PC.
- 3: Due to the connection between your clan and the Imperial throne, you have been offered the position of Magistrate to the Emerald Champion.
- 4: You've just inherited a parcel of land, complete with an ancestral fortress. How unfortunate that it lies on the border of an enemy territory, and that they desire the land as well. To make matters worse, a *small retinue of soldiers await their new lord there, unsure of whether he will arrive before the enemy lays siege to them.*
- 5: After your *gempukku*, your uncle brought you a gift – a cat he says is the purebred descendant of one your ancestor owned. An ancient note written in that hero's hand says "Trust the cat. It will bring you wisdom and glory." You are expected to pass the cat's offspring on to your nephew in time.
- 6: *Your family is well-connected with the Lion military.* You begin as a Gunso in the army. Whether you accept the post or simply retain an honorary title is up to you.
- 7: You were trained by a sensei who fought in the Day of Falling Stars. Gain 2 Ranks in any Bugei skill.
- 8: The book your mother read to you from when you were small was actually a religious text presumed lost in the time of the *kami*. Gain 10 Insight and 1 Rank of Shintao. Too bad she disappeared one night many years ago, because you're sure you could gain more from it now...
- 9: The Emperor provides your family tax levies for services rendered. Two items in your starting outfit are of fine quality.
- 0: When you were young, you snuck into the Kitsu Choosing chamber and placed your hand within the sacred brazier. What you saw there scared you so much that you have blocked it from your memory, but as a result, you gain either an Innate Ability (if shugenja) or 1 Rank of Luck (if bushi).

"FORTUNES FORSAKE ME"

- 1-2: You dutifully served your clan on the field of battle. Roll on Heritage Table 5 with a -2 modifier. Reroll any result that indicates the death of the PC.
- 3: A second cousin was directly related to the Imperial line, making you a member of the Emperor's family. But his recent mysterious illness has raised suspicions, and the fact that you figured prominently in his will does not help. Gain a 6 point Inheritance: you'll need it.
- 4: You have always been lauded as a remarkable warrior who will win great wars, ever since the fight in which you rescued a *mute Matsu you were infatuated with from her abusive guardian.* But the truth of the matter is that you had nothing to do with it – she saved herself. In fact, you wouldn't consider yourself that much of a fighter at all... Gain the Dark Secret Disadvantage, but no points for it.
- 5: You were one of five Lions born at the Temple of Shorai. But there was a chaotic shuffling of infants shortly after, and none of you know whom the children belonged to. Thus, you could not recite your lineage at your *gempukku*, and still are not sure of it today. If Akodo, lose 1 Honor Rank. Otherwise, lose 1-10 Honor.
- 6: You were born in court under a foul moon, and have a birthmark upon your neck that some say looks disturbingly like a crane. Gain 1 die of the Unluck Disadvantage.
- 7: Your father was never home, and your *mother despised the military.* She has passed that hatred of violence to you. Gain the Soft-Hearted Disadvantage.
- 8: You were raised among the *heimin* prior to being accorded a place at your school by a mysterious sponsor. Two items of your starting outfit are of poor quality.
- 9: The failed courtship of a Matsu has resulted in her public denial of you. This would be unfortunate enough, but now there is another *involved who wishes to scandalize the scene.* Gain the Sworn Enemy Disadvantage.
- 0: No Bad fortune – yet. Don't worry, though. Doubtless your Game Master will forget it.



Chapter Four



*Who's Who in the
Lion Clan*



WHAT IS KAGE'S HONOR?

As far as the rest of Rokugan is concerned, Kage's Honor is 4.2. This means that any rolls made against his Honor are made at 4.2. Any characters who try to sense his Honor will find it to be 4.2.

In short, all Honor rules directed at Kage will use his 4.2 Honor ... unless it's convenient for Kage to use his parenthetical Honor.

Chapter Four: Who's Who in the Lion Clan

The Akodo

AKODO KAGE

Earth: 6

Water: 4

Perception 6

Fire: 4

Intelligence 6

Air: 5

Awareness 7

Void: 3

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 5

Honor: 4.2 (0.5)

Glory: 6.2

Advantages: Natural Leader, Major Allies (unknown), Blackmail (many), Crafty

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Kolats Master), Dependents (Toturi, Hiroru), Proud, Sworn Enemies (unknown)

Skills: Kenjutsu 5, Athletics 3, Hand-to-Hand 5, Defense 4, Battle 4, Investigation 2, Shintao 3, Acting 4, Commerce 4, Courtier 2, Etiquette 2, Law 2, Intimidation 2, Manipulation 5, Oratory 2, Sincerity 3, Lore (Bushido) 2, Lore (Burning Sands) 1

Kage, son of a lesser lord in the Akodo house, was one of many children, raised by a proud father and doting mother. He lived his childhood in the relative peace of the inner Lion lands, and when he came of age, he was sent to the Akodo Bushi School to learn the ways of bushido. He has always been considered a great asset to the Lion clan, a

strong warrior and a dedicated advocate of honor and the Code of the Warrior.

At a young age, Kage proved adept at the physical arts. He quickly mastered *kenjutsu*, and soon became the *sempai* (senior student) to the most prestigious Master in the school. Kage served the Akodo in many wars, nobly accounted himself in the face of the enemy, and proved his courage and honor on the field of combat. In addition to the art of the blade, he studied numerous methods of hand-to-hand combat. Kage was considered a master of such arts, and soon became a *sensei* in his own right, teaching the youth of the Akodo clan how to use their hands and feet in place of a sword.

As a youth, Kage served in the personal guard of the Emperor, as well as the armies of the Akodo. From the beginning, he impressed his sensei so much that he entered the ranks as an officer, skipping many ranks due to his natural proficiency at arms. This earned Kage enemies, but he proved a fit commander to his men. Kage



served in the armies of the Lion, rising through the ranks and commanding battalions of troops.

He was asked by to join the Imperial Guard by the Emperor himself. Once there, Kage distinguished himself in numerous battles, defended the Emperor's son and family, and served as an Imperial Magistrate within the city of Otosan Uchi.

One of Kage's more unusual traits is his hermit-like nature. Although he is cheerful and pleasant, he rarely speaks his mind, and often practices what he calls 'reclusive meditation.' This involves long journeys to the Phoenix mountains in order to soothe his restless soul and open his mind to the words of the Tao. His scholarship and ardent devotion to such matters has won him

much admiration, and many nobles prefer to be placed under his capable care when they visit the City of the Emperor.

Kage lived in Otosan Uchi as a young samurai, serving his daimyo and the Emperor, and learning much of strategy and the martial arts from other Magistrates. When he was thirty-two, he was invited to marry the Emperor's cousin, a young maiden named Hantei Arumihime. The wedding was celebrated, and it was whispered that he would assume the throne if Hantei the 38th did not soon have an heir. Only five years afterwards, as Hantei's new son celebrated his second birthday, Arumihime died of the plague. Kage was stricken with grief; he never remarried, and never had any children of his own.

Shortly after his wife died, Kage turned his attentions to meditation and the study of the Tao. On one of his retreats to the Lion monastery, he learned that the boy the monks were raising was in fact the first son of the Lion Champion. After learning the boy's story, Kage began to take more and more time to visit the monks and teach the boy the essentials of bushido and kenjutsu. The two became close, and Kage fostered the boy's keen tactical insight even as he taught him the use of the blade. When Kage was called back to the Akodo lands, he asked the Champion to grant him a lifetime boon - a boon which can be asked only once in a lifetime. The boon was to return Toturi to the Akodo, and allow him to continue under Kage's tutelage.

His boon was refused. Even when the old Champion died and his son Arasou became Champion of the Lion over Kage's protests, Toturi did not return to his family lands. When Arasou died in battle against the Crane, the Akodo were

forced to listen to Kage, and Toturi set foot in Shiro Akodo for the first time since his sixth birthday.

Since then, Kage has been revered as one of the most honorable men in the Akodo house. He also serves as the sensei to the next generation, training the most promising students, and giving the Akodo the benefit of years of accumulated knowledge. He also serves as an ambassador for his clan on occasion. Three months before Arasou's fateful attack on the Toshi Ranbo wo Shien Shite Teigisaho, Kage visited the Crane in order to seek a peaceful solution to the encroaching war. Although battle was not averted, his efforts saved many lives, and Crane courtiers now call him the "Gentle Lion". He was also instrumental in making peace with the Unicorn after a border skirmish led a small troop of Battle Maidens to ride off a cliff rather than die at the hands of marauding bandits. His council averted war, and he was given leave to withdraw the Lion troops who had invaded Unicorn lands while seeking the same group of bandits. Since that time, he has often visited the Unicorn lands, and is considered by many of the Shinjo to be a man of great wisdom and presence.

Currently, his finest student is the younger brother of the Matsu daimyo, Matsu Hiroru. Hiroru is bold, audacious, and clever, and some Matsu say that his training under the Akodo has ruined what would have been a strong fighting man. Certainly, his lessons have done nothing for his attitude, and Kage seems loath to correct Hiroru's arrogance on and off the dojo mats. Instead, Kage seems pleased that the young man has the confidence and security to apply his training so well, and favors Hiroru openly in competitions and festivals.

Kage is not a dishonorable man, but he knows that sometimes the rules of bushido must be broken for the good of the clan. He is willing to bend these rules (as he once taught Hiroru to do), but deep inside, he knows that bushido keeps civilization in Rokugan alive. Without it, all would surely fall to ruin, and dark forces take over the heart of the Empire. While he has done things in his past that others may find questionable, Kage justifies them with the inner knowledge that what he has done is, in the final judgment, for the good of his Empire.



AKODO

BIRTH AND DEATH UNKNOWN


(10 POINTS)

Supreme commander of the Emperor's armies, author of the most important document on

tactics and strategy, Akodo One-Eye was a tall, powerful man who rejected the teachings of Shinsei and lived his entire life serving another. It could be said that Akodo is the paramount of samurai virtue, and while that would be fair to the image of Akodo, it would not be fair to the man.

Despite what many say, Akodo did feel fear, doubt and even pity. He was not a stoic, heartless beast. He did love, although that love was never returned, and he lost much during the war with his brother, Fu Leng.

Lions who take Akodo as an ancestor gain his almost intuitive knowledge of battle and tactics. When rolling on the battle chart, they may roll 2 dice and keep the one they like. Also, their Battle Skill is always considered to be one Rank higher than it actually is (yes, this means they can have a Battle Skill of 6). Finally, the Natural Leader Advantage costs 1 point less for Akodo's descendants.



AKODO SHINJU

DIED 73?

(2 POINTS)

Akodo Shinju (whose name means "Pearl") was old One-Eye's best spy. It was said the man could impersonate the Hantei himself, and not even the Emperor's wife would suspect. Shinju's father was a Lion, but his mother was a Shosuro Scorpion, and she taught him everything he knew. When it came time for his gempukku, he begged for the right to join Akodo's army. From that day forward, the name Shinju has become synonymous with the word "spy" in the Lion armies.

One tale of Shinju's expertise tells of a time when Akodo faced an army led by three *maho-tsukai*. On the night before the battle, Shinju dressed in the uniform of the army and snuck down into their command camp. The wounds across his chest were maple syrup and the gashes across his face were Shosuro make-up, but they were convincing enough for the commanders.

AKODO TOTURI

Earth: 4

Water: 4

Perception 5

Fire: 3

Intelligence 7

Air: 4

Awareness 5

Void: 5

School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 4

Honor: 3.1

Glory: 9

Advantages: Allies (many), Ear of the Emperor, Great Destiny, Sensei (Suana, Kage), Tactician, Natural Leader

Disadvantages: Obligation (Kage), True Love (Hatsuko)

Skills: Athletics 2, Battle 5, Courtier 5, Defense 3, Etiquette 4, Hand-to-Hand 4, Heraldry 3, History 5, Iaijutsu 2, Kenjutsu 4, Law 3, Lore (many) 3-5, Meditation 4, Oratory 4, Rhetoric 3, Shintao 5, Theology 3

The first son of an Akodo and a Matsu, Akodo Toturi has lived a life of delicate balances. Before his birth, Akodo and Matsu samurai were not allowed to marry, not only due to the competition between their houses, but also to prevent the strife such a child would cause. However, Toturi's father, younger son of the ruling Champion, was allowed to marry the youngest daughter of the Matsu daimyo, provided their male children be raised as Akodo family members. Toturi's father changed his name from Akodo Daio to Matsu Daio and swore allegiance to their house.

Toturi's father did not choose this path out of love or power. The move was calculated to strengthen the loyalty between the feuding families. The Matsu had been gaining significant power through the many combats and skirmishes with the Crane, and threatened to usurp the Akodo power within the house. The Akodo were weak, and their armies had diminished. In order to keep the two families at peace, Akodo Daio married Matsu Sodohime.

When the family's first child was born, he was celebrated by the Akodo as an heir to his father's house. However, the Matsu, expecting a daughter, immediately turned upon the boy with suspicion - he would clearly be a weakling and a failure. At five years of age, young Toturi was taken to the Akodo dojos, to be trained in kenjutsu. Even at such an early age, Toturi's training proved

disastrous. The child was meek and thoughtful, more interested in the Tao than in warfare. Despite numerous sessions of instruction and drilling, Toturi simply seemed to have no talent, and worse, no interest in martial prowess.

The Akodo soon came to agree with the Matsu - the boy was useless.

In order to save face, Toturi's father sent his son to a monastery within the Phoenix lands. Isolated from his Clan, considered an embarrassment to his family, Toturi lived with the monks for more than ten years. He dedicated himself to the study of tactics and strategy, as well as writings of enlightened masters such as the famous Uikku. His teacher, Master Suana, was the Acolyte of Water in the Brotherhood, and took the boy into his care. He soon found that Toturi had a quick mind, a clever wit, and an eagerness to learn. He educated him in ancient texts, often studying late into the night over some obscure work of an ancient general.

The only Lion Clan member who paid any attention to the boy was Akodo Kage. Kage did not want him to grow up completely untutored in the martial arts. For ten years, he traveled to the monastery, claiming that he wanted meditation and time to study the Tao - but used much of the time to work with the struggling lad. When Kage retired and became the Akodo sensei, he asked Toturi's father to send for the boy, but his request was refused.

Back at home, Toturi's parents turned their attention to their second son, a boy born three years later. The child, Akodo Arasou, grew to manhood under the eye of the Lion Clan, who studied every move he made, afraid he might turn out to be a 'failure' as well. Arasou's force and courage was great, and his skill with the blade impressed even his Matsu sensei. The teacher soon refused to teach any other students and spent all his time guiding the boy's natural ferocity. Arasou seemed to have all the aptitude for war and violence that Toturi lacked, and although he was a difficult child, he was loved by the Matsu, who considered him a 'proper' son. Arasou was proclaimed Heir to the Akodo line on the day of his first major victory against the Unicorn. His skill soon became legendary, achieving heights of military conquest through strength, daring and cunning.

Arasou and Toturi met only rarely, when Toturi came home for festivals and formal occasions. The two children were as different as

night and day. Toturi studied life, contemplated tactics, and relied on intelligence and wisdom.

Arasou had little time for studies, preferring to spend his days learning new weapons skills and gaining strength. While Arasou hunted, Toturi meditated. Arasou challenged the bushi of other clans and fought with ruthless abandon, while his brother practiced martial arts to understand and unify the body and the spirit.

When Arasou was seventeen and Toturi was twenty, Arasou was betrothed to Matsu Tsuko, daughter of the Matsu daimyo. This was an unprecedented move, because if Arasou became the Champion of the Lion, it would mean the Matsu and Akodo leadership would be one. Nevertheless, both Arasou and Tsuko demanded that the match be made.

They were perfect for each other - brave, reckless, and daring, determined to prove the Lion's might against the other clans of Rokugan. They fought side by side, and loved boldly.

For nearly a year, they delayed the marriage. Arasou boasted that he would give his new bride the gift of Toshi Ranbo wo Shien Shite Reigisaho (Violence Behind Courtliness City), an ancient palace stolen from the Lion by the Crane. It was to be a neutral ground from which the two families would begin their union.

However, during the battle to capture the city, Arasou was killed. His uncle, the heirless Lion Champion, was wounded beyond hope of recovery. Soon after, the Lion Champion died as well. Too old to sire another son, Toturi's father was forced to recall him from seclusion to lead the Akodo.

Toturi was not ready to be a daimyo, much less a war leader, but he threw himself into the task with the skill and wisdom learned from Master Suana. Under his guidance, the Akodo grew in strength. Although Toshi Ranbo wo Shie Shite Reigisaho was never successfully retaken, the Lion thrived. However, Tsuko never became

reconciled to Arasou's death, and did not accept Toturi. She still considers him a pacifistic, weak-spined substitute for the glory the Lion would have gained under Arasou.

In three years, Toturi has never failed his duty to the Throne or to his clan. He considers strategy more important than bloodshed, a strange view which sets him apart from many Lion. His skill in tactics and his ability to negotiate have given him the reputation of a good daimyo, if not a good warlord. The years of studying hand-to-hand combat with the monks has given Toturi an advantage with kenjutsu, and he spends much time in the company of Akodo Kage. Under the guidance of Kage, Toturi is combining his talents, to become a competent and deadly swordsman. His style with the sword is unusual, relying on strategy rather than



AKODO SHINJU

(CONTINUED)

He handed to them a small piece of paper that read, "In five minutes, General Rijutsu will die." The lieutenant rushed the scrap of paper to Rijutsu's tent... and Akodo watched him from the top of the hill. Then, Akodo's shugenja awakened all the slumbering fire spirits that had been carefully concealed within that scrap of paper. The fire could be seen from the east walls of Ootosan Uchi.

At that precise moment, Akodo's army attacked. Without leadership, their armies soon surrendered.

Lions who take Shinju as an ancestor always receive a Heroic Opportunity on the Battle Table.



IKOMA

DIED 82?

(2 POINTS)

Akodo's karo, old Ikoma was an advisor, historian, judge, storyteller and (most importantly) Akodo's closest friend. Ikoma never married, and he was the first one to say, "A samurai has room in his heart only for his lord." Akodo called him "Migite" ("Right Hand"), and he was certainly that. Ikoma died a quiet death in a geisha house just on the outskirts of Crane territory. "I want to be surrounded by beautiful women when I die. And they will serve me sweet sake and sing me songs, and listen as I recount all the tales of my valor, honor and glory, and they will believe every word I tell them. That is how I want to die."

Ikoma's death is celebrated on the fourteenth day of the Monkey. Men are not allowed to venerate him. Instead, they pay geisha to bring sake, rice and sushi to Ikoma's shrine. The women stay there all day, quietly listening to the old man's stories

strength, but it is rapidly becoming popular with the Akodo house.

He is engaged to marry the dark-skinned Mistress of the Void, Isawa Kaede. Their wedding was arranged when both were infants, and now there is much debate about whether it will be allowed to proceed. The two have not met for many years, and Toturi knows little of the woman who is to be his wife. Only a few letters, written beneath the watchful eye of the go-betweens, tell him of his distant fiancé.

Toturi is a pale man, with a long dark mane of hair which has been dyed golden. He stands very tall, nearly six feet (impressive for a Rokugani samurai). Toturi rarely wears his armor, preferring the light robes and kimono of the monks. In the past, his attitude and courtly words have caused the Lion Clan to mutter uncomfortably, but his intelligence is gaining a reputation - in the court and on the battlefield.

The Ikoma

IKOMA RYOZO

Earth: 2

Stamina: 3

Water: 3

Strength: 4

Fire: 3

Air: 2

Reflexes: 5

Void: 2

School/Rank: Matsu Bushi 4

Honor: 1.5

Glory: 5.4

Shadowlands Taint: 0.3

Advantages: Death Trance, Magic Resistance (6 points), natural Leader, "Deathwatch" (see text)

Disadvantages: Bad Reputation (Tainted), Dark Secret (Mother's *maho*), Driven (Destiny)

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 4, Defense 3, Hand-to-Hand 2, History 1, Hunting 2, Iaijutsu 2, Intimidation 2, Kenjutsu 4, Knife 2, Lore (Shadowlands) 3

Often called the 'dark samurai', Ryozo was born twisted and deformed with shrunken limbs and withered hands. His first scream was so faint that many thought he would

die, but his mother sat beside his cradle and prayed to the Fortunes to save her son. In the morning, the child was different. His limbs had spread and straightened, and his hands were curled and strong.

It was called as a miracle, a gift of the Sun Goddess to his mother for her dedication and devotion. As Ryozo grew to manhood, his mother became revered among the Ikoma as a paragon of virtue. Ryozo was her only son. His father, a Matsu samurai who had joined the Ikoma, spoke very little of Ryozo's birth and rarely approached his wife after that fateful night. It was whispered that he did not want to mar her purity, or tempt fate by conceiving another twisted child.

The truth was this: he did not want to know how she had performed the miracle.

Ryozo's mother had been a secret dabbler in forbidden magics all her life, turning from one occult matter to another. Her journals, written in strange tongues, contained *maho* magics, illustrations of blood rituals and other dark wisdom. When Ryozo's father discovered them (after they had been married), he forbade her to practice magic, and burned the writings. They never spoke of it again, and no one else ever knew the truth.





Ryozo's mother retired to a convent in the Dragon mountains after his father was killed in a skirmish on the Unicorn borders. The child, now on the verge of his *gempukku*, never knew magic had rescued him from death, or of the blood pacts his mother had made in his name. Ryozo spends his time in combat and on the fields of Ikoma palace, serving the daimyo there and commanding troops. He is a fine warrior, and a superb leader.

One strange thing about Ryozo is his uncanny clarity in battle, the opposite of a berserker's rage. When Ryozo fights, time slows for him, giving him the ability to study everything around him. Ryozo calls this the 'deathwatch', and while he is in it, he loses all other contact. His body glows faintly, and his hands leave trails of shadow. Enemies claim his swiftness is unmatched.

Other Lion who see his aura recoil, but remember the tales of Ryozo's birth. Perhaps it is the power of the Sun herself, combating those whom she feels is not worthy? It is not their place to question the wisdom of the Sun.

Ryozo is a gloomy man, whose skin is much darker than the usual Rokugani. He considers his Taint to be part of his destiny, and he might be right. All attempts to identify or remove his Taint have met with violence. Ryozo believes it is a gift from Amaterasu - if he is Tainted, it must be because the Sun has chosen so. Ryozo does not consider himself dishonored by his 'birthmark.' In fact, he wears his Taint as a sign of his superiority. Although some may say it is a dark stain upon his soul, he trusts in the wisdom of Mother Sun.

IKOMA TSANURI

- Earth: 3
- Water: 3
- Fire: 2
- Intelligence 3
- Air: 2
- Reflexes 3
- Void: 3
- School/Rank: Akodo Bushi 1
- Honor: 2.8
- Glory: 4.9
- Advantages: Combat Reflexes, Death Trance, Luck (2 levels), Proud, Sensei (Toturi), Natural Leader
- Disadvantages: Brash, Obligation (to become daimyo)

Skills: Athletics 2, Battle 3, Courtier 1, Defense 2, Hand-to-Hand 1, History 2, Iaijutsu 1, Kenjutsu 3, Sincerity 2

All her life, Tsanuri has been reminded of her auspicious birth. She was born on New Year's Day, and when she breathed her first breath, a crow flew into the room and rested on her crib. It spread its wings and cawed loudly as it looked down on the child, then flew out as suddenly as it arrived. Afterwards, it was learned that a leper begging at the gate of the city below had been suddenly cured that night. Tsanuri's parents rejoiced at the omens, knowing their daughter was destined for greatness.

From a very early age, Tsanuri was surrounded by shugenja, each waiting for a further sign from the blessed child. They marveled at how quickly she learned, and Kitsu Agunori himself recommended the girl choose her own destiny.

**IKOMA
(CONTINUED)**

Lions who take Ikoma as an ancestor inherit the old man's keen intuition and understanding of the patterns of life. Once a game session, they may ask the Game Master a single yes-or-no question about their current situation in the game. The GM must answer honestly.





KITSU

BIRTH AND DEATH UNKNOWN

8 POINTS

The eldest living male of the Kitsu species, this being was one of the last five to be hunted down by Akodo during his youth. When his mate and three children were threatened by the samurai and his men, it was his sentient cry that halted the swing of Akodo's katana, and his fallen brothers who revealed themselves to the Kami.

Akodo learned a valuable lesson that day - that war and violence served only themselves. Nothing he could do would make up for the genocidal actions he and his soldiers had committed against the Kitsu, but he could still help those who remained.

When the troops came down out of the mountains, they were accompanied by a couple and their three small children, all with remarkable manes of gold and eyes that burned like crystal. They traveled for a time with Akodo, but later settled in a northern portion of what would become Lion territory.

Tsanuri was placed before three objects: a fan, a mempo and a scroll. Whatever symbol the child choose, she would follow. And so, on the fourth anniversary of her birth, all daimyos and their families were invited to witness Tsanuri's decision.

The three items were placed before her, and she looked at each in turn, but reached for none. She looked up from the items and to the throne of the Lion daimyo. Then, she stood, stepped over each of the items and walked toward the throne. Not a single sound emanated from the samurai in the room as the little girl passed the throne, passed the daimyo, and stood before the shaven-headed young man who stood in the shadows. She took the young man's hand and turned to face her parents, a smile on her face.

The young man was Akodo Toturi.

Tsanuri's parents were outraged. Her father shouted that Kitsu Agunori was a Scorpion imposter, and the whole incident was arranged to sabotage his family's honor. Agunori screamed, "If I had a sword, I would make you pay for your words!"

Tsanuri's father removed the katana from his obi and threw it to the shugenja. The blade clattered at the shugenja's feet, as all around stood in silence before the ominous threat of violence that fell over the room.

But through that veil of silence, Tsanuri stepped forward with Toturi's hand in her own. She knelt, picked up the blade (with Toturi's help) and returned it to her father. The Lion looked down at his daughter's smiling face, then at the young monk who held her hand. Then, he fell to the floor, touching his head to the floor. "Toturi-sama," he said, "teach my daughter your ways. You are her father now, for her true father has failed her."

That night, Tsanuri's father fell on his own blade and Ikoma Tsanuri left the lands of the Lion with Toturi.

For the next decade, she lived in the halls of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, learning history, philosophy and religion from the monks. Tsanuri showed promise in every endeavor she chased. But when Akodo Kage appeared for his regular visits, her true calling showed: her skills in *budo* were exceptional. Kage's old face smiled when as he watched the young girl master kenjutsu and kyujutsu, and when she showed a proficiency for strategy as well, Kage was overjoyed.

Toturi also welcomed Tsanuri's abilities. Until she came to live in the monastery, the only one he could discuss strategy with was Suana and Kage. With another learning at his side, Toturi's lessons were far less lonely.

When she turned fifteen, many of the brothers began a quiet protest regarding her presence in the halls. "A woman has no place among us," they claimed. As if by coincidence, at that time Akodo Arasou was killed, and Toturi was forced to return to his duties within the Akodo family. He returned with Tsanuri, the young girl beaming with potential.

Over the last few years, Tsanuri has served as Toturi's *karo*, administering his lands and accompanying him on diplomatic missions. She has proven an invaluable ally, but more importantly, she has proven to be a true friend.

Recently, Tsanuri has noticed a disturbing trend in the attitude of Lion bushi, especially the Matsu. While none would utter such things in her presence, lieutenants and colonels have discreetly informed her that many have questioned Toturi's authority, and her own. While Toturi disregards such talk, Tsanuri's concern has begun to gnaw at her.

To head off any difficulties, Tsanuri has spent much time with the Matsu; in particular, Matsu Tsuko. They are quite a pair to watch: one obsessed with the strength of fury, and the other with cold discipline. Through their regular practice, they have struck up a kind of tentative friendship (just recently, Tsuko referred to Tsanuri as "*doshi*", or "training partner"), which has accomplished two very important things. First, it has taught Tsanuri the virtue of a passionate heart, and second, it has proven to the daimyo of the Matsu that Toturi isn't a complete dullard. And as Tsanuri continues her conversations and training with Tsuko, she is beginning to feel the stirrings of Lion blood that - as Tsuko said - "has lain asleep for too long."

IKOMA UJIAKI

Earth: 4

Willpower 5

Water: 4

Fire: 3

Intelligence 6

Air: 4

Awareness 6

Void: 3

School/Rank: Ikoma Bard 5

Honor: 1.3

Glory: 6.4

Advantages: Major and Minor Allies (many), Ancestor (Ikoma), Ear of the Emperor, Heart of Vengeance (Crane), Read Lips

Disadvantages: Bad Reputation (Temper), Brash, Nemesis (Kakita Yoshi), Overconfident, Permanent Wound, Vanity

Skills: Bard 2, Bo Stick 3, Courtier 5, Defense 2, Gambling 2, Heraldry 3, Intimidation 5, Investigation 3, Kenjutsu 2, Law 4, Lore (Underworld) 4, Manipulation 5, Oratory 3, Rhetoric 3, Sincerity 4

Ujiaki's father was the last son of a famous family line, the largest of the three prominent Ikoma families. One of their greatest claims to fame is the marriage of a Hantei daughter to Ujiaki's great-great grandfather. Although their tie to the Imperial Throne is weak at best, Ujiaki's family still recites their lineage in the Hall of Ancestors.

Ujiaki is the foremost Lion diplomat, though he is also trained with the sword. He fought as a banner-bearer in battles against the Phoenix, serving the Emperor's cause when the Isawa failed to carry out an Imperial demand. He has been in combat many times, and was transferred to the diplomatic corps when he received a near-fatal wound. Since then, Ujiaki performs his duties with a savageness that matches his Lion battle-fury. He deals with every situation as a challenge, and takes defeat as a personal insult.

Ujiaki controls the political strength of the Lion. He is not afraid to use his contacts and allies to get the best of any situation, and rewards those who serve him. Combined with his physical strength, Ujiaki's sharp mind gives him an advantage in the court. He has been on the battlefields, and knows where the advantage lies. When the Crane ask the Emperor to have the Lion armies withdrawn, Ujiaki moves them to a strong position. When

the Phoenix argue, Ujiaki threatens. He is feared for his violent temper, but his yojimbo serve him with a fierce pride.

Unfortunately, Ujiaki is not a pleasant man. Clever and arrogant, he uses brute force to gain what manipulation cannot. His hatred of the Crane runs deep, and he loses no opportunity to oppose them or to create trouble in the Imperial Court. Because of Ujiaki's lineage, he was a diplomat to the court of Hantei, but his temper and rashness cost him his position - a loss which he blames solely on Kakita Yoshi, an old nemesis.

Ujiaki is clever, but not brilliant. He tends to latch on to an idea and never give up, even in the face of logical opposition. Ujiaki can't stand to be told that he is not one of the foremost minds in the Empire, and he uses threats and violence to back up his claim.



KITSU

(CONTINUED)

Kitsu founded a family of his own, culled from the fledgling shugenja of the area. He revealed the secrets of speaking with those long past, and walking with them beyond the veil of physical life. Eventually, these reclusive souls were reintegrated into Akodo's clan, their beliefs and customs incorporated into those of the other families.

Kitsu himself passed from this mortal coil long ago, on the day of the birth of Akodo's first son and the founding of Shinden Shorai. He single-handedly faced a large contingent of Fu Leng's armies intent upon the deaths of Akodo's family, though the Kitsu would claim that he was aided by the spirits of the thousands from all the clans fallen to the armies of He-Who-Is-Not-To-Be-Named.

Lions who take Kitsu as an ancestor may Sense spirits as a Half-Blooded Kitsu does.



The Kitsu

KITSU MOTSO

Earth: 2

Stamina 4

Water: 2

Strength 4

Fire: 3

Air: 2

Reflexes 4

Void: 2

School/Rank: Matsu Bushi 4

Honor: 2.3

Glory: 6

Advantages: Balance, Heart of Vengeance (Kitsu), Kaiu Sword, Tactician

Disadvantages: Forsaken, Vanity

Skills: Archery 2, Athletics 2, Battle 5, Defense 1, Hand-to-Hand 2, Jaijutsu 3, Intimidation 1, Kenjutsu 5

From birth, Motso was expected to join the Kitsu family shugenja school. However, when the tests were given to the young children, Motso



failed miserably. The ancestors did not speak to him, did not seem to hear him, and did not care.

For a Kitsu, this was the most horrible fate he could suffer, for it meant that he had too little of the blood of the Kitsu within his veins to cross into the spirit world. Eyes turned to the young Motso, and tongues wagged about his mother's faithfulness to her Lord.

Motso was devastated. All his life, his overbearing father had assured him that his place as heir was linked to his rightful calling as a shugenja, and yet the Kitsu forbade him from joining their ranks. Motso turned his hatred and anger inside, and kept silent about the pain he felt, joining the Matsu bushi school instead. Yet he never forgot his failure on the Day of Choosing, and he has never forgiven his ancestors for not giving him his 'rightful place' among his family.

It is rare that a Kitsu is born with too little of his ancestors' blood in him. It is even rarer that such a child is born to the daimyo's line. Motso was both. Yet at the school of the Matsu, he gleamed with an aptitude for combat that seemed to make up for his lack of magical talent. His sword was swift, but his keen intellect and tactical acumen made him unique.

Motso has served the Matsu family line since his *gempukku*, following their creed, and even wooing a young Matsu samurai-ko. But he has never married, never settled down, and never admitted to himself that he is anything other than content with his position in life. Motso has spent much time in combat, fighting with a cold ruthlessness that has won many victories. Some say that he is the ideal choice for a husband to Matsu Tsuko, now that her betrothed is long dead. Others whisper that he will be the next Keeper of the Ancestral Hall, though some argue that his abilities would be wasted in such a peaceful position.

On the battlefield, Motso is a truly fearsome opponent. His personal prowess, combined with his amazing skill for tactics, has won many battles. He prefers armor made of bronze, his helm covered with long locks of silk resembling the mane of a kitsu. Motso wears no faceplate at all, for his vanity insists that his enemies know precisely who has bested them.

Kitsu Motso is a vain, arrogant, angry man, his inner thoughts turned toward retribution and the destruction of others in order to appease his childhood pains. He has never forgiven the Kitsu shugenja for refusing to allow him into their

school, and because the ancestors of the Lion did not speak to him, he does not ask their advice before going into battle. Rather than burning incense at a shrine or calling a shugenja to say prayers over his battle-plans, Motso simply charges into the fray with a roar and a curse for his opponents' souls.

Motso's lack of respect has won him enemies in his Clan, but his brilliance with tactics has allowed him to maintain the prestige he has gained. He serves the Matsu troops as a *Taisa* (Captain), overseeing major battles and coordinating massive assaults.

KITSU TOJU

Earth: 3

Water: 2

Perception 4

Fire: 3

Intelligence 4

Air: 2

Awareness 3

Void: 5

School/Rank: Kitsu *Sodan-Senzo* 5

Honor: 3.3

Glory: 7

Advantages: Bloodlines, Great Destiny, Innate Abilities (see Spells), Full-Blood Kitsu Ancestry

Disadvantages: Bad Fortune (Stutter), Antisocial

Skills: Calligraphy 4, Courtier 3, Etiquette 3, Hand-to-Hand 2, Heraldry 3, History 5, Lore (Jigoku and the Spirit-world) 4, Lore (Shugenja) 2, Meditation 4, Shintao 4, Tanto 2

Spells: None (uses Ancestral Magic)

Kitsu Toju, brother to Kitsu Motso, is one of the finest shugenja in the Kitsu family. Struggling to overcome a stutter which has handicapped him since birth, Toju has risen from the youngest son of a daimyo to the head of the Kitsu *Sodan-Senzo* (Ancestor Magic) school, and daimyo of the Kitsu family.

Toju was a shy, quiet child, overshadowed by his elder brothers and lost in a dreamland of fantasy and imagination. Toju was not the cleverest of his brothers, nor the strongest, and it was commonly thought that he would grow up to be nothing more than a simple tutor or minor diplomat.

However, on the Day of Choosing, his full abilities as a shugenja were proven. While others could only make the fire dance and waver, in

Toju's hands the embers glowed white-hot, and flames leapt toward the stars. Indeed, in the fire's glowing vision, the spirit of one of the first kitsu stepped forth, holding a gentle hand out toward the shocked child. The assembly was amazed and



humbled, and all knew that Toju had been chosen by the ancestors to perform some great task.

Toju immediately entered the Kitsu family shugenja school, where he learned the rituals and ceremonies needed to properly honor their ancestors. Despite his stutter, Toju began to excel in these rituals, and the spiritworld seemed as comfortable to him as his own. In time, Toju became so at peace with his calling that he was able to forget his stutter in the intoxication of ritual.



When Toju is outside the spirit-world, he is a shy man, quiet and timid. His stutter prevents him from making any long speeches or rousing oratory. He moves cautiously, bundling his ornate robes about himself as if to hide from the prying eyes of others. Each movement is brief and hurried, and his hands shake with forced control. He leads his family through example, always remembering his place in the court as well as the needs of his people. While he is not a charismatic leader, he is well-loved, and with the wisdom of the ancestors, he has maintained the family honor and wealth.

When Toju is in a ritual, however, he is a different man. His eyes burn with passion, and his voice soars through sonorous phrases. His movements seem graceful and lithe, and all self-consciousness falls away like water. Toju speaks fluidly and the ancestors come to his call. No other Kitsu has such mastery of their craft as does Toju; the ancestors come to him like beloved brothers and sisters, ready to heed his summons.

Toju's pronouncements seem more like requests than commands. He is not a brilliant man, but he has a quiet wisdom which accents his tremendous skill.

The Matsu

MATSU AGETOKI

Earth: 5

Water: 2

Strength 3

Fire: 3

Agility 5

Air: 4

Void: 3

School/Rank: Matsu Bushi 4

Honor: 2.6

Glory: 4.5

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Large, Perfect Balance

Disadvantages: Benten's Curse, Overconfident, Proud

Skills: Animal Husbandry 3, Archery 4, Athletics 3, Battle 3, Etiquette 1, Hand-to-Hand 1, History 1, Horsemanship 5, Hunting 2, Kenjutsu 2, Lore (Horses) 4

During the first war with the Unicorn, the Lion forces were matched by their opponents' mighty cavalry forces. Unsettled by this new and powerful tactic, the Lion Clan daimyos vowed to create their own cavalry in response, one even greater than the Unicorns'. Simple in theory, of course, but difficult in practice. Without centuries of tradition and the Otaku's powerful steeds, they could never hope to equal their purple-clad rivals. Nevertheless, after two hundred years and the recent influence of Akodo Toturi, they've managed to assemble a number of well-trained mounted units to complement their formidable ground forces.

Matsu Agetoki is the current leader of the Lion's cavalry, a fierce and wild samurai who lives life in an intoxicating combination of anger and joy. He was enthralled with horses at an early age - he saw in them a freedom and a power that nothing else in Rokugan could bring. When he was three years old, he left his room to sleep among the horses in the stables, and has never looked back. He has shown an utter fearlessness while mounted, attempting feats that none save the Otaku Battle Maidens would even consider.



His killed his first man while in the saddle, at the tender age of thirteen. He was accompanying a patrol on the way back to Matsu castle, when they came across a group of bandits terrorizing an isolated farm. Using only a boken, Agetoki leapt into the fray, and pounded two bandits into unconsciousness. When a third attempted to flee, he charged after him, striking the bandit at full gallop directly between the shoulder blades. The hapless man died instantly. "Death is sweeter when you ride it down," was all the young Agetoki would say about the incident.

No one has ever doubted his role in the Lion armies, and since his *gempukku* he has bent every fiber of his being towards leading his clan's cavalry. He enters battle with the abandon of a Crab, charging enemy units almost without thought. Most of his commanders prefer to hold him back and use his unit's power to break the enemy for good, but he sometimes cannot wait that long. He often "jumps the gun" and sends his troops whirling down into the melee before they are truly needed. His men are well-trained however, and he has learned to unleash them only when conditions are favorable. No matter how much the tacticians gnash their teeth at his impulsiveness, he has never hindered a military plan or cost lives unnecessarily.

In personal combat, Agetoki emphasizes the philosophy of speed. He'll bring his horse up to a full gallop before engaging a foe, counting on momentum and his opponents' confusion to cut them down. He can wheel and turn with remarkable dexterity, and his mounts can maintain a breakneck pace for extended lengths of time. He is like a flame on the battlefield: spreading across and back in the blink of an eye. Legend has it he once plucked an arrow meant for his heart out of the air, without slowing. He denies such tales, but has done little else to discourage their spread. He likes the impression they give him.

Off the battlefield, he is much the same. While he understands the rules of etiquette, and would never dishonor his family by flouting them, there is a certain boisterousness to him that most courtiers cannot abide. He laughs too loudly at other people's jokes, and punctuates his speech with wide arm movements that other Rokugani find unsettling. He looks down on infantry soldiers as Unicorns do, although more out of pity than disdain. "The poor ground pounders," he once mused in private. "They suffer all of the

horrors of war and can never experience the true joy that battle brings."

Agetoki is a large, burly man with blazing eyes and a full mustache. He smiles broadly and often, displayed a tightly-packed mouth of gleaming white teeth. There are those who say no other Lion looks so much like the clan's namesake. He dresses in fiery red at all times (although his clothes are emblazoned with the Lion crest to prevent confusion with the Phoenix). In battle, he wears a wide red crest on his helmet and a finely ornamented suit of armor.

MATSU HIRORU

Earth: 3

Water: 3

Perception 5

Fire: 3

Agility 4

Air: 4

Void: 2

School/Rank: Matsu Bushi 4

Honor: 1.2

Glory: 1.5

Advantages: Blackmail (several), Crafty, Major Enemy (Doji Kuwanan), Quick

Disadvantages: Dark Secret (Isawa Nosuriko), Bad Reputation (Troublemaker), Obligation (Kolot)

Skills: Archery 4, Athletics 2, Defense 2, Etiquette 1, Forgery 2, Hand-to-Hand 3, Hunting 3, Iaijutsu 1, Investigation 2, Kenjutsu 3, Knife 2, Kaze-do 4, Locksmith 3, Lore (Ninja) 3, Lore (Kolot) 1, Manipulation 4, Mimic 3, Mizu-do 3, Ninjutsu 4, Oratory 2, Poison 1, Seduction 2, Sincerity 4, Sleight of Hand 2, Stealth 3

Hiroru is the younger brother of Matsu Tsuko, born at Matsu palace only weeks before his father's death. A solitary boy, Hiroru spent much of his time hunting in the woodlands of his clan, using a bow given to him by his elder sister. Before he was eight, he was winning tournaments. A bold child, Hiroru spoke his mind, and liked to use casual observation to shock and manipulate others.

As a boy, he attended the *seppuku* of the wife of Shiba Ujimitsu, and watched as the Champion of the Phoenix was unable to do anything to prevent his beloved wife's death. He learned that words have a power of their own. The right word can control anyone's actions - true or not. It was a powerful lesson.



MATSU HITOMI

423 - 441

(6 POINTS)

Matsu Hitomi was the most famous samurai-ko of the early empire. Though originally trained for the Lion's Pride, she broke with tradition and donned her brother's armor to avenge his death, unwittingly blazing a trail for women for centuries to come. Her fierce devotion to war earned her command of her late brother's unit, and they obeyed her word without question.

During a war between the Dragon and the Crab, Mirumoto Turan, Daimyo of the Mirumoto, came to the Lion Champion and asked for military assistance. Hitomi and her unit were placed under the command of the Dragon daimyo, and led several assaults against the Crab armies and their Scorpion allies. However, the daimyo sent Hitomi to attack the castle defended by her lover.

Although details are sketchy, Hitomi refused the order and killed the Dragon daimyo in his tent, then led her troops away from the field of battle.

Her death has become as legendary as her life, as she fought to escape the overwhelming Dragon forces and other Lion forces led by Akodo Godaigo.

(continued on page 75)



When the Champion's wife lay on the ground, her body growing cold in a pool of blood, her ten-year-old daughter broke from her father's grasp, running to the body and clinging to it. When Ujimitsu came to tear her away, she cursed his name, and the name of their ancestors. Ujimitsu froze, his courtiers watching, and then drew his sword and took his daughter's head. Hiroru, kneeling in the crowd with his mother, looked at the bodies of the two women - one who had died with honor, and one who had died in shame.

To him, they were both bodies, one no different from the other.



Hiroru never forgot that image, and has often thought of it through his life; he has been plagued by the concept of death as the equalizer of souls, not the judge of them. Although he is the second child of the Matsu, and therefore the destined Keeper of the Ancestral Hall, he has found no

comfort in their stone eyes. As the defender of the Ancestors, he bears a special burden: the souls of the dead speak to him as they would to a Kitsu. The statues know the bloodline of their Keeper, and know his heart, more than any other man on the face of the Empire.

When Hiroru was seven, his mother intended for him to attend the Matsu bushi school. He spent two years there, constantly referred to as the 'brother of Tsuko,' before he grew bored. He began playing pranks on his peers; first the typical amusements which all young boys engage in, then graduating to more dangerous diversions. Because he was clever, he was rarely caught, but his reputation as a troublemaker grew enormously.

Kage met Matsu Hiroru at a tournament of martial arts. Sensei from the Seven Clans gathered to choose students, and the Matsu and Akodo held the festival near the honored Hall of Ancestors. Akodo Kage first noticed the boy when Hiroru won the competition for his age, and defeated several older boys in personal combat. The revered sensei asked the Matsu daimyo to allow him to continue the boy's training, and she swiftly agreed.

For six years, Kage taught Hiroru many styles of fighting, both armed and unarmed. The boy proved an apt student, and the two men seemed to gain confidence in one another. To Hiroru, Kage was the father he had never known. To Kage, Hiroru was a son, and, more importantly, an heir.

Hiroru grew to manhood under the twin influences of his sister, Tsuko, who taught him that anything a Lion does to protect the Emperor is honorable, and Kage, who taught him that subtlety and the art of deception must also be honorable, if used in the defense of the Emperor. For many years, Hiroru delivered Kage's messages, and performed infiltrations and other acts - all in the name of the Hantei. Hiroru's natural affinity for pranks coupled with his ability as a martial artist made him a perfect spy; his arrogance and trust in his sensei made him implicitly trustworthy.

Outwardly, Hiroru has been the ideal Lion samurai: brave, noble and very arrogant. He is matched only by Doji Hoturi in ability as a ladies' man - a guise which Kage approves of, since it allows him to leave rapidly and be seen in the geisha houses with no questions asked. He was the young prince - powerful, noble and good



looking. He served Kage, and in turn, the Emperor's needs.

When the Emperor commanded the Crane and Lion to stop warring, and imposed the fosterage of the Crane daimyo's son into the Akodo school, Hiroru was furious. To him, it seemed as if the Crane had been given another victory - not only defeating the Lion armies before the fight could begin, but also placing a permanent spy in the honored dojo of the Lion. Hiroru continued his studies, while harassing the bold young Crane named Doji Kuwanan.

But there was another problem - Hiroru wanted a liaison with the same young woman that Doji Kuwanan was arranged to marry. Her name was Isawa Nosuriko, a gentle shugenja of the Phoenix Clan. It was easy to seduce the girl, and even easier to convince her that Hiroru genuinely wished to be wed. Once the liaison was complete, however, the offers of marriage turned into threats to dishonor her father if she did not keep silent about their affair. For three months, Nosuriko lived with her shame, until the night before her wedding to Kuwanan. Hiroru was to visit her again that night, but when he arrived, he found her body hanging by the neck from a ceiling beam.

Until that night, Hiroru had never considered himself a bad person. The idea of honor had been nothing more than a child's toy, used to justify and make excuses, rather than a code to live by. As a child, he could disassociate himself from the deaths of the two Phoenix ladies. But now he was faced with another dead maiden - one whose life had been extinguished because of his own deeds.

The rest of the Lion clan are unaware of what occurred that night. At dinner, the young man was his usual ebullient self, full of jokes, laughter and bold promises. However, late that evening under cover of a heavy rainfall Hiroru entered the Akodo house dojo, demanding to see Kage. Those who witnessed Matsu Hiroru's actions that evening remember the young man speaking to Kage in loud, uncompromising tones. Kage shouted, reprimanding his student. "You will obey me, Hiroru!" They remember the sound of metal against wood, and of a horrible scream of betrayal. But when the guards arrived to deal with the disturbance, they found only the honorable sensei, bleeding from a wound in his shoulder.

There was no sign of the proud young Lion samurai.

Although Kage says that Hiroru may be alive, the rest of the Lion Clan have given him up for dead. A body was found in the forests near the Scorpion border, defeated in combat with an ogre and torn to shreds by goblins. It bore Hiroru's mon and sword, as well as the only object he ever carried with him at all times: his father's dagger. Certainly, if Hiroru were still alive, he would have come home to his clan once his unusual bout of anger had ended. He has suffered no dishonor (the rest of the Lion do not know of his liaison with Isawa Nosuriko) and his sensei wishes to take him back with open arms. The Hall of Ancestors is tended by an Ikoma, waiting for the rightful son of Matsu to return and take his place as keeper and defender of the Ancestors. Their spirits wait for him to arrive, so that they can understand the nature of his soul.

If he were alive, he would have returned.

MATSU HOKITARE

Earth: 2

Willpower 3

Water: 2

Perception 4

Fire: 2

Agility 4

Air: 3

Awareness 5

Void: 3

School/Rank: Matsu Bushi 3

Honor: 3.9

Glory: 3.1

Advantages: Precise Memory, True Friend (Matsu Tsuko), Way of the Land

Disadvantages: Can't Lie, Compulsion (Curiosity), Fascination (Horses), Meddler, Sworn Enemy (Scorpion Clan)

Skills: Acting 2, Animal Husbandry 1, Appraisal 2, Athletics 2, Courtier 3, Defense 1, Hand-to-Hand 2, History 2, Horsemanship 2, Investigation 4, Kenjutsu 2, Shintao 2


Matsu Hokitare is one of the most unusual Lions. His adventuresome ways are ill-suited to his family's nature, and his curiosity often gets the better of his training. He has served as scout to the Matsu forces, a diplomat, and even as a performer in his family's court. His dexterity is remarkable, and he has traveled three times the length of Rokugan, carrying messages and scouting for his Lady, Matsu Tsuko.

MATSU HITOMI

(CONTINUED FROM
PAGE 73)

Godaigo and his forces eventually trapped her troops near a small peasant village now known as the Omoidoso Toshi, the City of Remembrance. Though the Dragon offered rewards and titles, Godaigo refused them, and left for the wandering life of a ronin. He was never seen again, and his tale has become apocryphal.

Once per day, someone with Hitomi as an ancestor may spend a Void point to reroll a to-hit or damage roll, taking whichever total the player prefers. A character with Matsu Hitomi as an ancestor may not for any reason attack a person to whom they have a strong personal tie.



Hokitare is a cheerful man, thin and wiry, with large teeth and a winning smile. He knows how to ride a horse, and on any visit to Unicorn lands, he can be found trying to wheedle steeds from the Battle Maidens. Every trip, Hokitare arrives with sweets for the horses, and gifts for the Battle Maidens. It is a long-standing joke with the Otaku that some day someone will marry the cheerful Lion and give him a chance to get close to one of the steeds he admires.

When he was first assigned as a diplomat, it was thought that Hokitare would bring his good nature to the negotiating table. Even Tsuko, who first sent Hokitare to the court of the Phoenix, spoke of the young man's outgoing nature with approval. Nothing could have been farther from the truth. Hokitare was forthright, shockingly honest, and quick-witted. If he saw an advantage, he pointed it out. If an opponent was getting the better of a deal, he asked about it - bluntly and in public. Once the Lion recovered from their initial shock, they realized Hokitare had saved

them from becoming trapped in a deal which would have lost them a significant amount of face. Swiftly, Hokitare was assigned to duty in the Scorpion lands, with the hope he would repeat his success. His ability to see through plots and ploys proved uncommonly successful, and Hokitare was given a permanent post.

Unfortunately, his career as a diplomat was short-lived. While in the Scorpion lands, he uncovered a brutal blackmail, masterminded by Bayushi Goshiu. When the Scorpion found out that Hokitare knew, they took him aside and offered him bribes. When that did not work, they tried threats, and even murdered Hokitare's younger sister in an attempt to keep the samurai silent. Despite this, Hokitare revealed all he knew of the plot to the Emerald Champion's court. After that, he was no longer safe in the lands of the Bayushi, and an intense hatred had been born. Hokitare was taken into the personal guard of the Matsu daimyo, and has been a part of Tsuko's retinue for nearly three years. Today, he gives counsel to his Lady, and also guards her from harm in battle.

Although Hokitare is not the best fighter or greatest tactician, he has one important trait: honesty. Hokitare can be trusted. He is forthright and brave, and mercilessly truthful. If his opinion is asked, he will give it. If he is questioned, he will answer with all he knows. Although this makes him an asset to the Lion forces, it also makes Hokitare unpopular with the Clan's enemies. Sooner or later, one of them will try to get even.



MATSU TSUKO

Earth: 4

Water: 3

Strength 5

Fire: 4

Agility 6

Air: 3

Reflexes 6

Void: 3

School/Rank: Matsu Bushi 5

Skills: Archery 3, Athletics 3, Battle 5, Hand-to-Hand 5, Heraldry 3, History 3, Iaijutsu 2, Intimidation 5, Kenjutsu 5, Knife 2, Lore (Bushido) 4, Shintao 1, Sincerity 1, Wrestling 2

Honor: 4.3

Glory: 8.5

Advantages: Death Trance, Strength of the Earth (4 points), Great Destiny, Natural Leader

Disadvantages: Brash, Driven (reveal Toturi as a coward), Lost Love (Akodo Arasou)

The eldest daughter of the Lion Clan's most powerful house, Matsu Tsuko never doubted her role in history. Since she was three, she has had greatness thrust upon her, and been forced to deal with its challenge. Tsuko's parents, the Matsu daimyo and her husband, spent little time with their daughter, pausing between battles only long enough to see that she excelled in combat. Tsuko had few friends, for her parents insisted that she never forget that she was the heir to the Matsu House. She was not allowed to forget, and neither were the other children.

Although her childhood was lonely, one voice spoke to Tsuko with love. That voice belonged to her uncle, Matsu Yasau. Yasau, an aging man with no children of his own, was the caretaker of the Great Hall of Ancestors. As is tradition for a brother to the daimyo, he had long ago dedicated his life to keeping Lion history. For hours, he would regale Tsuko with tales of her ancestors, filling her mind with magnificent battles and heroic deaths. Yasau taught the young girl history, and would lead her through the Hall of Ancestors, telling the tales of each figure as they walked.

Each night before bed, Yasau would take Tsuko to the statue of Lady Matsu, in the center of the Hall, and tell her to say good night to the Lady. Tsuko did, first with shyness and fear, and then later with honor and dignity. Late in the evenings, on nights when the thunder rocked Matsu palace and shook the walls of the battlements, Yasau would often find the four-year-old Tsuko sleeping at the feet of the marble statue as if praying for deliverance from her fear.

Tsuko was eight years old when Yasau died. Shortly thereafter, her parents came home from battle with the Unicorn. They decided that Tsuko should remain in Matsu Palace, and study kenjutsu with the Matsu *sensei*. Her mother stayed for some months, pregnant with her second child, but Tsuko never spent time with her. Her father continued the campaign, carrying out commands given by his wife. For nearly a year, the daimyo sat in her chambers, poring over maps and missives from the battlefield. The time she spent with her daughter was filled watching the young girl practice her *katas*, and teaching her the strategies being used by her father's men.

After Hiroru had been born, Tsuko's mother took her to the battle lines for the first time, to show her the truth about war. Tsuko faced the enormity of death, the valiant struggle of battle, and the courage of the Lion. She remained with her mother for three months, learning all she could. At one point, the Phoenix army raided the general's encampment: their samurai arriving by magic, charging past the guards and into the tents. Although the alarm was sounded, Tsuko and her parents were attacked by the suicide squad.

Where the battlefield had been full of screams, the fight in the tents was silent, punctuated by the clash of steel and the soft sound of blade against flesh. Tsuko leapt to her mother's side, holding only the wooden *boken* she used for kenjutsu. The Shiba warrior faced her quietly, her wooden boken sliding against his steel as he cut toward





AKODO GODAIGO

**BORN 410, DEATH
UNKNOWN**

(-2 POINTS)

Little is known about Godaigo, save that he commanded alongside Matsu Hitomi in her last war. There are many speculations as to why he aligned himself with the Dragon instead of her, but these must remain speculations. It is known that his forces eventually trapped her at Omoidoso Toshi. Godaigo and Hitomi last met at that village, and their moments together are only known by the villagers. His betrayal of Hitomi is legendary, and different interpretations of the tale have led to many folk stories.

Historians have no record of Godaigo's death, and there are those who say he is condemned to walk the earth forever, denied honor, denied rest, and denied even death. He is a symbol of all betrayers, a dark stain on the honor of the Lion, and remembered only for his crime against Hitomi, not the victories of his life.

If Godaigo is your ancestor, then your elemental Rings and Glory rank can never be higher than your Honor. If your Honor ever drops below the level of a Ring of Glory rank, then the Ring or Glory is considered equal to your current honor rank until your honor raises back above the Ring or Glory level.

her. With a flash, the child leapt toward the bushi, her boken striking the base of his throat. Even at ten, Tsuko was a warrior. Shouts broke the silence as Tsuko's opponent fell to the floor, hands grasping his crushed windpipe.

Outside the tent, more Phoenix were repulsed by the house guard, but it did not matter. While Tsuko tasted blood for the first time, her father was struck down. On the floor beside him lay the bodies of the Shiba, dead from the Matsu daimyo's sword. When she had dispatched her foe, she knelt beside him, watching the blood pool on the floor while the Matsu guard burst into the chamber. When the *eta* came to take away the bodies, Tsuko asked, "Why did the Phoenix come, knowing they would all die?"

With a salute of her bloody katana, her mother replied, "Because it was their duty."

"And my father?"

Tsuko's mother glared at her eldest child. "By even questioning his death, you insult its purpose."

They never spoke of it again.

When Tsuko fought at the Tournament of the Topaz Champion, four years later, her victory was unsurprising. She dominated all other competitors with skill and brutality. Since that day, her reputation has only grown. She led the troops against the Unicorn at the Battle of White Shore Village, and captured the banner of the Shinjo troops, forcing them to publicly ask for its return in the Imperial court. She has proven her ability by becoming Rokugan's greatest hero, leading with savagery and cunning. When her mother retired to the monastery of Shinsei, Tsuko became Matsu daimyo, and has led her family to victory against Unicorn and Crane alike. For nearly seven years, Tsuko has brought the Matsu family glory in both war and peace.

Three years ago, despite her mother's protests, Tsuko was engaged to be married to the Champion of the Akodo house, Akodo Arasou. They were two of a kind - loyal, courageous, and ruthless. Although many feared the marriage of the Matsu daimyo to the Akodo Champion was a portent of disaster for the clan, Tsuko and Arasou were determined to be wed. Arasou's death at the hands of the Crane was devastating for Tsuko. He had been her closest confidant, the only person she could have accepted as a peer and a friend. With his death, Tsuko was alone.

Tsuko sees Toturi as an impostor, a weakling monk raised to warrior's rank. She wastes no

opportunity to make her feelings known, and constantly watches for signs of weakness in the Akodo daimyo. In her heart, Tsuko knows that Toturi can never be the leader that Arasou was, and she is concerned for the future of her clan. How can she achieve the glory it deserves under the guidance of a Crane in Lion's clothing?

MATSU SEIJURO

Earth: 4

Willpower 6

Water: 3

Agility 4

Fire: 3

Air: 5

Void: 2

School/Rank: Kakita Bushi 3

Skills: Archery 1, Artisan (Acrobat) 1, Athletics 4, Battle 3, Defense 2, Etiquette 2, Hand-to-Hand 1, History 3, Iaijutsu 4, Kenjutsu 4, Lore (Crane) 5, Mountaineer 3, Shintao 2, Sincerity 2, Tea Ceremony 2

Honor: 2.9

Glory: 1.2

Advantages: Ambidextrous, Different School, Kakita Blade (4k3), Large, Quick

Disadvantages: Bad Reputation (Crane-trained), Driven (Success/Proving himself)

The samurai known as Matsu Seijuro became who he was through an effort to repair relations between the Lion and the Crane. When he was a boy, he was sent in a fosterage exchange to the Kakita Academy. Similarly, Doji Kuwanan arrived at the Akodo school to be instructed in the ways of the Lion. Seijuro was a very young boy when he was sent away, but even then, he realized the importance of his role. As a representative of his clan, he must set an example for the Crane around him: he must teach them to respect and fear the power of the Lion. From his first day of training, he endeavored to be the best student the Academy had ever seen.

As hard as he tried, however, he did not succeed in his quest. The Kakita students training with him had the benefit of history and instinct on their side; Seijuro had to remember his Lion heritage while embracing a new set of values and techniques.

To make up the difference, he pushed himself to the limits of endurance. He scaled the cliffs near the Kakita Palace in his spare time. The treacherous climbs helped him learn focus, a

well as strengthening his limbs. During training runs and other exercises, he would set a goal for himself, and challenge his classmates to meet or exceed it. He studied history and methodology with a fervor that took his sensei by surprise, and while he rarely finished first, he always pushed himself to the maximum his mind and body would allow.

His efforts paid off. While never reaching the perfection he demanded of himself, he impressed many with his dedication, and inspired many more to make the most of their potential. Most of the Crane who trained with him praised his endless drive, saying it helped them become better samurai.

If asked to take tea with their old classmate, however, they would give a much different response. "Seijuro is a competitor," they would say, "who has not learned the time and place for competition." Some of his teachers also expressed disquiet at the young man's intensity, but most dismissed it as 'typical Matsu behavior.'

He returned to the Lion lands with a Kakita daisho in his belt, ready to share what he had learned. To his surprise, his brethren dismissed his training as a childish joke. He was a casualty of politics, they said, and should not expect them to share in his 'sickness.' His companions routinely mocked him, and always told him that he could never be considered a "true" Lion.

That made him angry.

The first time he challenged a fellow samurai to a duel, his opponent promised to "let him off easy." That ended the moment the man's guts hit the floor. Years among the Crane had given Seijuro an uncanny skill in one-on-one situations, and never hesitated to use his abilities to the fullest. A second duel quickly followed the first, then another, then another. Any time Seijuro felt slighted, he would demand retribution; after killing his first six opponents, people learned to stop slighting him.

Then things started to change. Commanders began to ask his opinions on battle strategy. Fellow samurai nodded to him with respect instead of pity. And when matters of the Crane arose - whether it be an enemy general or a courtier they wished to threaten - he was always approached with the reverence of a sensei.

Not that this has changed him much. He still pushes himself to excel beyond his peers, and since his peers are now Lions, he must push all the more. He is very aware of his duties to his

Clan, and strives to live by the Matsu code of honor at all times. He refuses to feel hampered by his Crane training, turning it instead into a unique asset that no other Lion can match. His dueling skills, of course, are universally acknowledged.



Seijuro is a large man, his natural Matsu build enhanced by the constant exercise he puts it through. His eyes gleam with intensity and his face is marked by his furrowed brow. He dresses in traditional Lion garb, offset by his very different Crane daisho. He sees the contrast as a testament to all he has achieved. In battle, he hides his face behind a snarling mempo, and has learned to raise his voice over the loudest din. He chuckles evilly while he fights, as if to imply that he knows something his opponents don't. Considering his background, he may be right.





Chapter Five



Sample Lion Characters

Akodo Strategist

Born to prominent Matsu parentage, it was assumed you would be trained as a warrior, eventually to take your place alongside your mother in the Lion's Pride. But this would prove impossible. Your health was feeble during your first months, and only worsened over time. Your mother insisted that she was blameless, of course, and buried herself in her duties to the clan. Father was less brutal in his opinions, but equally evasive concerning his responsibility to you.

The boarding school you were enrolled in was dreary, save for one precious jewel - your closest friend, Yusiko. She was a beautiful girl with silver hair that shrouded her form when she sat and drifted behind her as she walked like an ethereal cape. She showed you how to fold rice paper into tiny, delicate figures, a talent they taught in her homeland. In their graceful angles, you could see limitless nuance...

Early on, you exhibited phenomenal talent with puzzles and mind-games, which allowed you escape from your grim life. You were asked to study different books than the others, and drill with different teachers that came from far away. They mentioned that you were perhaps still useful to your clan and their efforts. Your parents were thrilled at this prospect and demanded that you continue your schooling at the Akodo War College.

This sounded even more grim than your present circumstances, though, and you certainly didn't want to abandon Yusiko. But objections fell on deaf ears and mention of your friend only served to draw your parents' wrath. "She is your enemy," is all that they would say. You never saw her again.

At the College, you were exposed to all the clans' fighting styles, but in particular those of the Crane. Immense pressure was placed upon you to provide operable opposition to them. The idea that you were providing the means to defeat these clans - to cause death - was a deluge within your spirit for many months, until recently, your worst fears were realized...

A new lesson brought you to the site of a recent battle in which your suggestions were utilized and had been the deciding factor in the Lions' victory. A sickly feeling settled

down in the pit of your stomach as you observed the aftermath. It was disgusting: survivors crippled or mutilated, enormous property damage... and the loss of life... the bodies of the dead...

How can you continue? How can you go on killing as if the swords are swung by your own arm? How can you?

Yet how can you disobey your parents? Turn away from your clan?

How can you not?





Legend of the Five Rings

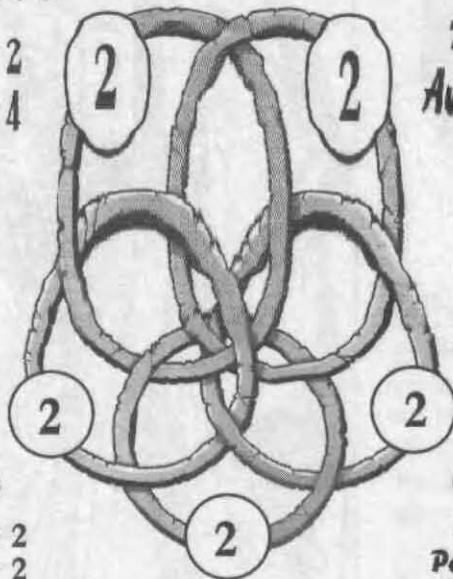
Name:
Akodo Strategist

Clan:
Lion

Profession:
Bushi

Fire

Agility: 2
Intelligence: 4



Air

Reflexes: 2
Awareness: 2

Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 3

Void

Void Points Spent:

Insight: 118

Techniques

The Way of the Lion

Primary Weapon

Katana 3k2

Primary Armor

Light (if any)

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

10 (15 w/armor)

Skills

Archery	1
Defense	1
Kenjutsu	1
Battle	3
Bard	1
History	3
Artisan (Origami)	1
Engineering	1
Heraldry	1
Lore (Famed Battles)	2
Lore (Bushido)	1
Siege	1
Oratory	1

School: Akodo War College **Rank:** 1

Wounds

4	-0
4	-1
4	-2
4	-3
4	-4
4	Down
4	

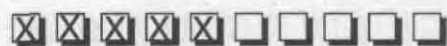
Advantages/ Disadvantages

Tactician	+3
Clear Thinker	+2
Bad Health	-2
Fascination	-2
(Military History)	
Soft Hearted	-2

Glory: 1



Honor: 3



Experience Points:

Ikoma Peacekeeper

You have worked very hard to be where you are today. Even with the benefit of a gracious lineage and the proper training, the position you sought has been difficult to acquire. Many favors were promised and much solicitation required. In the end, however, you rose above your station, honed your skills and sharpened your mind to a razor's edge. You are ready now more than ever before to be an appointed representative of the Empire – an Ikoma Peacekeeper.

Sometimes, late at night when your racing mind will not let you rest, you ponder why you thought being a champion of peace within the Emerald Empire was a good idea. None of the clans really desire an end to the bickering. And peace will never be possible until all outside threats (of which there are many) are quelled. But you cannot afford the luxury of doubt, and your clanmates – particularly the Matsu – would not tolerate it.

But the disquieting thoughts remain, surfacing when you take even a moment's respite, and they are growing stronger. For the last several months, you have been assigned to an unaligned regent traveling the continent where he is needed. His goals are the same as yours – to see peace and unity in your lifetimes – but his manner is far more erratic than you would like. He is forthright when he should be staid, implacable when he should be permissive, and lashes out when he should remain supplicating. You worry that his behavior will reflect badly on you, but you worry more that it will upset your endeavors, endangering the fragile alliances and unsteady truces you've worked so hard to maintain.

Last week, you were recalled into Lion lands to study a growing problem – the swelling friction between the Akodo and the Matsu. Your regent has followed, and this troubles you greatly. For if he had difficulty with some of the less-irritable clans, how will he fare with the angry Lion?





Legend of the Five Rings

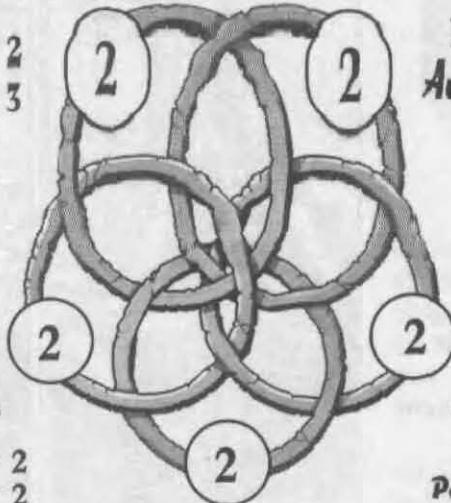
Name:
Ikoma Peacekeeper

Clan:
Lion

Profession:
Bard

Fire

Agility: 2
Intelligence: 3



Air

Reflexes: 2
Awareness: 2

Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 2

Void

Void Points Spent:

Insight: 124

Techniques

First Epic (Unaligned Regent)

Primary Weapon

Bo Stick 3k3

Primary Armor

None

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

10

Skills

Bard	2
Calligraphy	2
Courtier	2
Heraldry	2
History	3
Investigation	1
Law	1
Lore (Lion/Crane)	1
Lore (Politics)	2
Poetry	1
Rhetoric	2
Shintao	3
Bo Stick	2

Wounds

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

School: Ikoma Bard

Rank: 1

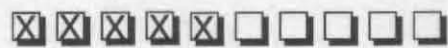
Advantages/ Disadvantages

Social Position	+10
Precise Memory	+3
Dependent (Regent)	-1
Obligation	-4

Glory: 3



Honor: 3



Experience Points:

Imperial Guard

"When you were but a impetuous young cub, I sat you on my knee and spoke to you for hours about the odysseys of your ancestors. You smiled broadly and your eyes sparkled brightly in awe of my many stories. I thought then, perhaps, that my efforts were in vain, that you would never remember how Ugatai took the Land's Fault or how Nomo suffered but never gave under the putrefying gaze of the Oni no Hodito.

"At your gempukku, I watched in silent admiration of the young man I had raised to understand and respect what had come before, but also to keep an able eye on the horizon. Your performance was flawless, every ancestor clearly noted and detailed, but you lacked the enthusiasm and excitement I remember so well from my youth. Has the world changed that much in so little time, or have I?

"When you went off to guard the Emperor and his nobles, I offered my sword as a gesture of my faith in your ability. I also freely spoke my support for your choices, that you might go knowing that I am behind you, alongside you. Yet I could not help but wonder if you were choosing this path simply to avoid another.

"And now that you are grown and ventured out into the world, I fear that you have no time for me. That perhaps my efforts have indeed been fruitless. That you care not for those who have come before you. But I am a foolish, doubting old man, not to be trusted to judge such things. I knew this last night when you came to sit at the edge of my bed to embrace me before regaling my night-hours with the stories I told you as a boy, and those of the new histories you were creating for us every day beyond the lands of our home.

"I think that I knew this all along.

"I am proud of you, my son, prouder than you will ever know..."





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Imperial Guard

Clan:
Lion

Profession:
Bushi

Primary Weapon

Katana 3k2

Primary Armor

Heavy

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

15

(25 with armor)

Skills

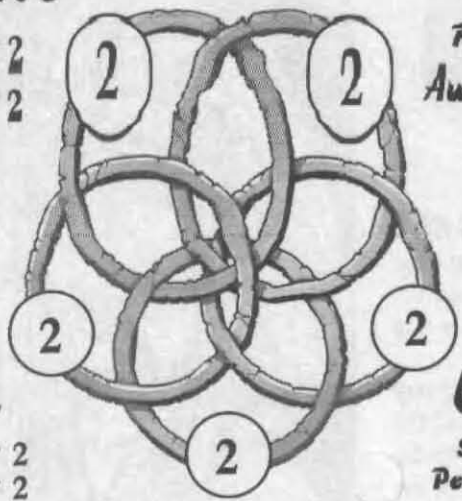
Archery	1
Defense	3
Kenjutsu	3
Iaijutsu	3
Battle	2
Bard	1
History	2
Athletics	1
Intimidation	1

Fire

Agility: 2
Intelligence: 2

Air

Reflexes: 3
Awareness: 2



Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 4
Perception: 2

Void

Void Points Spent:

Techniques

The Way of the Lion

Insight: 117

School: Akodo Bushi

Rank: 1

Wounds

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

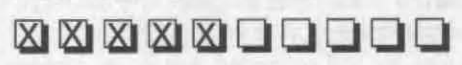
Advantages/ Disadvantages

Combat Reflexes	+6
Strength of the Earth	+2
Benten's Curse	-2
Proud	-1
Overconfident	-3
Driven	-3
(to make father proud)	

Glory: 1



Honor: 3



Experience Points:

Kitsu Shugenja

Many believe that the souls of twins born in Rokugan are in actuality mirror-halves of a single being, and that one's talent is the other's weakness, his strength the other's flaw. You are the proof. You are of full Kitsu blood, and have the talent to see into Jigoku. Your twin brother lacks it.

This condition puzzled the Kitsu, and the ancestors had very little to say on the matter. In fact, they were quick to avoid the question. Unfortunately, your sibling's inability to travel to the land of the fallen would force him to leave the schools of the Kitsu and seek training elsewhere.

So while you learned to walk with the gods, he studied the art of killing. This disturbed you. Regardless of the fact that you commune with the dead every day, the idea that another of your flesh would be responsible for the end of so many... Dread of the day that you would commune with the spirit of one struck down by his blade shuffled uncomfortably through your mind for years to come.

You kept in close contact throughout the following years, occasionally meeting at Kitsu gatherings. But the two of you never attained the close bond that it is said many twins do. You are of the classic Kitsu mindset - methodical and ritualistic - while he is more... aggressive. Although your clan-heritage demanded pride for his accomplishments, especially once he graduated onto the field of battle, a lingering fear that something was horribly wrong rarely escaped a day's thought.

Six months ago, you attended his funeral. Killed in battle retaking a border outpost, he was considered a hero by the Matsu. Still, the feeling that something was terribly wrong remained, even worsened. Seeking an answer, you sought to visit his spirit in Jigoku, but were unable to find it. Kitsu, your patron ancestor and guide through the afterlife, was uncharacteristically blunt about the situation. "Your brother has returned to Rokugan, shugenja, and has taken with him the key to understanding your twin truths."

You are still connected, you know, perhaps now more than ever before. You must find him to discover the final piece of the puzzle that has been haunting both of you all your lives...



Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Kitsu Wanderer

Clan:
Lion

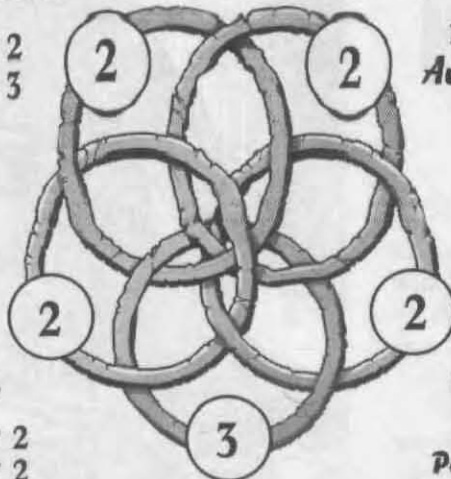
Profession:
Sodan-Senzo

Fire

Agility: 2
Intelligence: 3

Air

Reflexes: 2
Awareness: 2



Earth

Stamina: 2
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 2
Perception: 2

Void

Void Points Spent:

Insight: 126

Ancestors

Kitsu (2 points)
Shosuro Furuyari (2 points)
Shinjo (3 points)
Hiruma (5 points)
Kaiu (5 points)
(or any other Ancestors)

School: Kitsu Sodan-Senzo **Rank:** 1

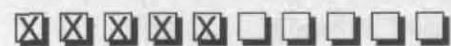
Advantages/ Disadvantages

Full Blood Kitsu	+6
Higher Purpose	+2
Haunted (Kitsu)	-4

Glory: 1



Honor: 3



Experience Points:

Primary Weapon

Wakizashi 2k2

Primary Armor

Light (if any)

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

10

(15 with armor)

Skills

Etiquette	1
Heraldry	1
History	2
Calligraphy	2
Meditation	3
Athletics	1
Defense	1
Hand-to-Hand	2
Kenjutsu	1
Lore (Jigoku)	1
Theology	1

Wounds

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

Matsu Deathseeker

"The Matsu stand behind the Akodo."

To Jigoku with that. How can you respect a warrior who spends more time planning than acting? How can you follow the orders of a man who would not commit to battle with the ferocity you continually rein in by not slicing his indignant nose from his face?

"The heart of courage is dedication, loyalty and honor."

Believe. Respond. Respect. You feel all of these things as you perform them. They are your reason for being here in this time, in this place. They define your worth. The true question is how you will uphold them. Will you take the cowardly sandals of your father, or the proud and mighty boots of your mother?

"Life is too short not to love and hate with equal abandon."

You have no family anymore. Your mother dutifully died in battle as a proper Matsu. Your father, the contemptible weakling, moved on to another woman (a Crane at that!) and has become a gardener, or somesuch. One is the source for all your faith in life and death, while the other is the wellspring of disgust and the measure of all that you desire not to become.

"There can be no greater glory than death in pursuit of a cause most noble."

Your warrior skills are unparalleled, your sword a proud addition to the Matsu line. But you can never join your sisters, not while the stain of your father remains on your soul. In life, there can be no honor for you. But death, however... death is something else...

You have requested, and been granted, the right to wear the brilliant badge of those who seek their end in combat. But you seek dignity, and distinction, both for yourself and for your mother. You also seek to throw wide the gates of your father's shame, so that all may witness the depth of his scandalous corruption. Perhaps your sacrifice can accomplish this. If not, at least you will go to your grave knowing you have purged your family of his hated blood.





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:
Matsu Deathseeker

Clan:
Lion

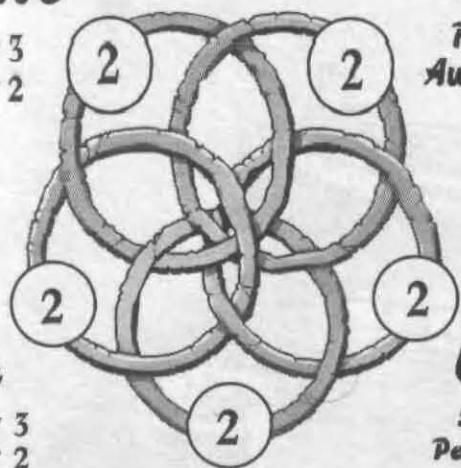
Profession:
Bushi

Fire

Agility: 3
Intelligence: 2

Air

Reflexes: 3
Awareness: 2



Earth

Stamina: 3
Willpower: 2

Water

Strength: 3
Perception: 2

Void

Void Points Spent:

Primary Weapon

Katana 3k2

Primary Armor

Light (if any)

TN to be Hit

(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)

15

(20 with armor)

Skills

Archery	1
Battle	1
Hand-to-Hand	3
History	1
Kenjutsu	2
Athletics	2
Intimidation	1

Insight: 111

Techniques

- _____ The Lion's Roar
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Wounds

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

School: Matsu Bushi **Rank:** 1

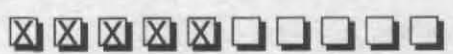
Advantages/ Disadvantages

Hands of Stone	+5
Quick	+3
Deathseeker	-7
Ascetic	-2

Glory: 0



Honor: 2



Experience Points:

- _____
- _____



Appendices





BUSHIDO: THE WARRIOR'S WAY

A man's words are like
his footprints: you can
follow them wherever he
goes.

Take care where you
tread.

This is the path of the
warrior. All men who call
themselves samurai are
measured by it. Those who
stray from this path will
perish. Those who adhere to
its teachings will prosper.

There are seven virtues a
samurai must possess:
Honesty, Courage,
Compassion, Courtesy,
Honor, Sincerity, and Duty.
A samurai cannot possess
one without the others.

Anyone who teaches
differently teaches a path
that is easy to master, for it
demands little. And any
man who demands little of
others, demands little of
himself. What manner of
man would seek such a
teacher?

Appendix I: The Art of War

The Armies of the Lion Clan

The battles that founded the Empire so long ago truly laid the foundation for the way war is waged today. To be blunt, they were a mess. Not with regard to the blood, gore, and killing that is inherent to war, but in their complete lack of organization necessary to maximize a fighting man's usefulness to his lord, to destroy his opponent, and to survive the battle to kill another day.

In this capacity, discipline is the key to victory.

In the beginning, Lady Matsu noticed that 'battle' was nothing more than armed mobs of samurai charging headlong into chaos, and whoever was in command of the field when the killing subsided was declared the victor. This was the way it had always been. Lady Matsu saw that it was time for change, and took it upon herself to organize these armed mobs into her vision of an 'army'. That force, the first of its kind in Rokugan, was deployed in line abreast, and in multiple ranks. To her, and to the enemy, it looked larger and more intimidating than a mob. During the battle it would be too much to ask an honorable bushi to give his opponent the 'fair' advantage of room to fight. After all of the effort it took to get these bushi into line, the battle would still break down into a disorganized mass of killing. But the new formation pleased Lady Matsu, and so it was until the day she staged a demonstration for Lord Akodo. Seeing how to improve upon her noble effort, Lord Akodo determined that it was again

time for a change in the 'proper' way to wage war. These were his revelations.

While each of Matsu's bushi was more than capable of holding his own in battle, getting into battle in an orderly fashion was the first "improvement" Akodo sought. He noticed that these bushi did not quite grasp the concept of marching in unison, let alone just walking at a regular pace.

The training ground he chose was a field adjacent to a village that had been destroyed in a hurricane, and was in the process of reconstruction. Seeing the village headman rebuilding the decking around his house, Akodo ordered him to cease. "Bring the planks here, and follow me," he boomed, and proceeded to walk one hundred paces in a straight line. "Lay the planks across each of my steps." With that complete, Akodo ordered his bushi, "Walk this path together, four men abreast. Make each of your steps fall on each plank, and make each of them fall together as a group. Do this until you march as I do." And so they did, sometimes for days on end, until they could march as formed units wherever they went, in unison, and at the same pace. This stroke of genius was named The Path of Akodo (or sometimes The Path of Splinters), which now leads to the gates of the Akodo War College. This is why every Akodo walks Akodo's Way, just as Akodo did.

SOLDIERS OF THE LION ARMIES

While many of the armies of Rokugan classify their troops by the kind of equipment they carry or the horses they ride, the Lion army is organized in a far more practical manner. Although it retains the standard troop types (Infantry, Archery and Cavalry), the soldiers of the Lion army are classified by the amount of experience they have as soldiers. Thus, Lion units are called *Itsumo no Heishi* (Regular), *Taiekigunjin* (Veteran) and *Joshitsu* (Elite). Akodo was determined to build *esprit de corps* in his army, believed that a greater level of performance could be attained if the troops constantly tried to prove their worthiness to the troops of a higher experience level.

ITSUMO NO HEISHI

All soldiers of the Lion Clan serve their first three years in the army 'regulars.' It was Akodo's belief that the newest and least experienced troops should be given the opportunity to prove

themselves in battle. Thus, unless the combat situation were severe, they often lead the assault.

From a commander's point of view, this places a tremendous amount of confidence in troops that have never tasted battle. The rigorous training received at the Akodo War College makes for very capable bushi, and that the victorious history of the Lion Clan is testimony to this philosophy.

TAIEKIGUNJIN

After three years, the surviving members of a regular unit are promoted to 'veteran' status. The standard deployment of veteran units is within the second position in the line. For tactical reasons, Akodo decided that his 'veterans' should provide a morale boost to slow or faltering regular troops and be ready to exploit a breach in an enemy line. The majority of units in a Lion army are made up of these 'veterans'.

JOSHITSU

With at least twelve years of service behind them, any surviving members of a unit will receive a promotion to the most prestigious designation in the Lion army - 'elite'. These units are the backbone of the Lion army. Their standard position is third in the line of battle, but it is no slight to their honor to be the rear of the line. Joshitsu units are the unbreakable line, unwavering in their morale. It is their responsibility to deliver the fatal blow to a breaking enemy, and their honor to pursue the routed. Some of the more famous elite units in the Lion army include the Emperor's Personal Guard, the Matsu House Guard, Akodo's Yojimbo, and the Ikoma O-Ban.

Troops of the Lion Armies

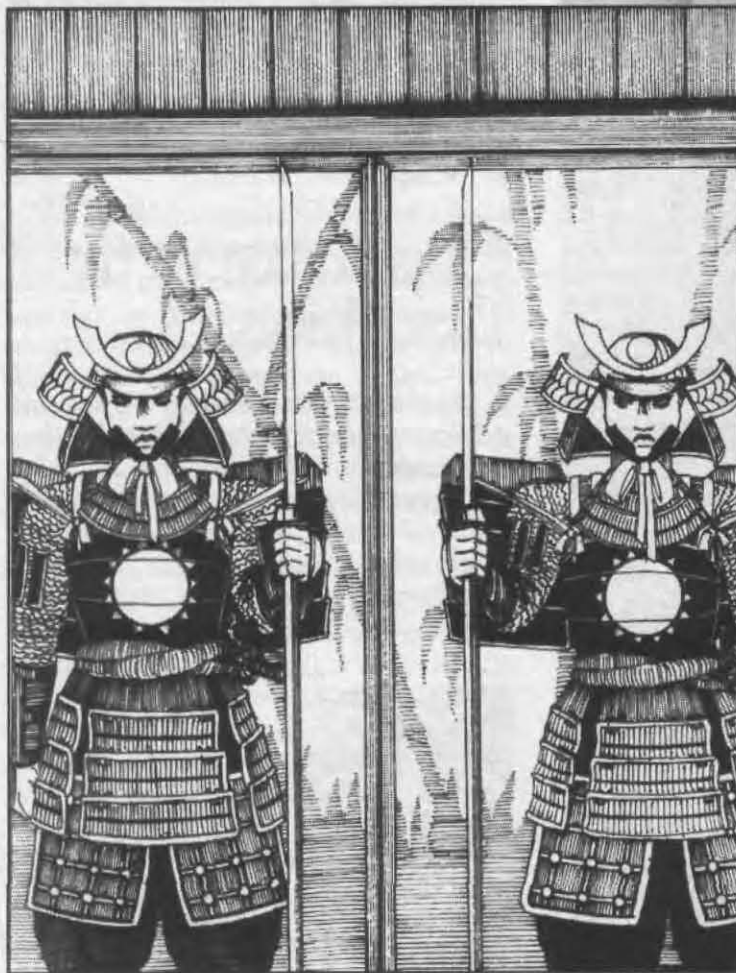
HOHEITAI (INFANTRY)

By the standards of the other Great Clans, all Lion footsoldiers must at least be described as heavy infantry. Lion infantry almost always are outfitted with heavy bushi armor, a daisho, and a naginata or yari.

ITE (ARCHERS)

Formal archer units began in the ranks of the Lion army. Offensively or defensively, archer units tend to take the heaviest casualties; in order to be

effective, they must be furthest ahead of their supporting infantry. Archer units will usually march out 100-200 paces in front of the infantry, and fire upon the enemy until their support is within 50 paces, at which time they withdraw through gaps in the line. As above, the archers are likewise outfitted with heavy bushi armor, a daisho, *yumi* (bow), and an assortment of arrows.



GISHI HOI (SIEGE ENGINEERS)

Having learned the ways of siegecraft from the Kaiu, Akodo adopted them into the training of his own ideal army. The engineers of the Lion, unlike their Kaiu cousins, use siege warfare primarily in the offensive. Siege units include battering rams, ladders, shield walls, and fire breathers. While employed defensively, they often set up dragon teeth traps (sharpened stakes, fixed in the ground and pointed at the enemy), dig entrenchments, etc. If the battle does not call for siege equipment,





MEN AND SOLDIERS

Akodo's rejection of Shinsei's teachings says much about Akodo's clan.

The most important lesson it teaches is Akodo's definition of "men" and "soldiers." Men were creatures of society and culture, those who reflected on ethics, art and metaphysics. A soldier, on the other hand, had no time for ethics, art, metaphysics... or even reflection at all. They were two completely different species, each defined by its own rules and boundaries.

In the following sidebars, we'll be presenting the Seven Virtues of Akodo's *Bushido*.

Remember, that in some way or another, all the Clans recognize *Bushido* as a legitimate tool for teaching samurai their place in the Celestial Order. Some place more emphasis on it than others, but none hold it as high as the Lion Clan... who regard it as more important than even Shinsei's *Tao*.

then the engineers are deployed as reserves. Engineers are equipped the same as the infantry.

KIMABUSHA (CAVALRY)

The Lion were the first clan (besides the Unicorn) to utilize cavalry in any way other than as a mount for its leaders. Akodo saw a use for the Rokugani ponies, but unlike the Unicorn, who treat their mounts as if they are soldiers, he opted to use the beasts as equipment. For several hundred years, Lion scouts rode ponies. Lion cavalry primarily performs reconnaissance and patrol, with occasional flank protection. Lion cavalry are armed as infantry, but always use the yari as their polearm of choice.

Organization of the Lion Armies

The Lion maintains the largest standing army in Rokugan. Approximately 500,000 Lion soldiers are available at the first hint of crisis. In fact, some Imperial military scholars speculate that the Lion stand so much "at the ready", that upon the calling of the Emperor, the whole of the army could be mobilized in ten days. While the other

armies of Rokugan refer to themselves in the singular tense, there are multiple Lion armies. In fact, there are ten standing Lion armies, two in each of the four Lion provinces, and two reserves that can be called upon as an expeditionary force or for garrison duty to protect lines of supply and vital geographical/logistical points.

RANKS IN THE LION ARMIES

One of Akodo's great innovations was the addition of a chain of command. As his army grew, he found it necessary to put samurai who displayed leadership characteristics in charge of units of varying size, each one answerable to his superiors. This improved communication, as well as accountability when honor and duty were in question. This ranking system has been adopted in varying degrees by the other armies of Rokugan.

Gunso (Sergeant)

The lowest rank of command, the *Gunso* is the most respected member of his unit, for he spends the most time close to the average fighting man. They are the officers in charge of training and drilling at the Akodo War College, and are accountable for how the men of their command



perform in battle. Gunso are responsible for the command of a *Guntai*.

Chui (Lieutenant)

Next in the chain of command is the Chui. At this rank, an officer needs to account for maneuvering and battle tactics while providing a personal touch concerning the leadership of his men. Chui are responsible for the command of a *Kaisha*.

Taisa (Captain)

The largest leap in the number of troops commanded occurs with a promotion to the *Taisa* rank. A *Taisa* no longer has the time to give personal attention to each of his troops; he has so many, and his mind must be devoted wholly to tactical matters. Questions of deployment and maneuver constantly come into play for the *Taisa*. A *Taisa* must have a keen eye and an excellent sense of timing, because at this level of leadership in battle, he will primarily be dealing with staff officers and messengers. *Taisa* are responsible for the command of a *Daibutai*.

Rikugunshokan (General)

The highest rank in the chain of command, a samurai given the tasks of *Rikugunshokan* has a tremendous amount of responsibility. Not only do they have to deal with the housing, feeding and arming of some 50,000 troops (and their support personnel), but when the battle is on, they are responsible for the field of battle chosen, and the initial deployment of the entire army. As with the *Taisa*, the *Rikugunshokan* can no longer be bothered with the personal matters of his troops; that is the responsibility of lower-ranking officers. His mind should always be on strategic maneuvering, and the most efficient means by which to carry out his orders from the daimyo. While this position offers a lot of prestige and glory, it is also very stressful, and only the most stout of heart can handle the rigors of such a high command. *Rikugunshokan* are responsible for the command of a *Go-Hatamoto*.

Note: We recommend that GMs disallow any Lion player character less than School Rank 4 to be placed in this command.

Shoko Kanbu (Staff Officer)

Because higher commanders have so much to think about, they are always in need of competent assistants to tend to the minute details of. For this

duty, Lord Akodo appointed capable individuals to the position of *Shoko Kanbu* - the staff officer.

To this day, the role of the staff officer has seen the least amount of change. When battle is on, their duties can range from transporting messages to assisting their commander with his armor and weapons.

In peacetime, they might fetch their commander's tea, or take notes at a war council. They track supplies and weapons, and organize the reports of the subordinate commanders. Their own reports must be accurate and timely. They are the first to greet their commander in the morning, and the last ones he sees before he sleeps.

The real disadvantage to being a *Shoko Kanbu* is that, should something happen to their commander, they are often left with nothing to do until they are reassigned. Only on the rarest of occasions would a staff officer take command for even a brief time. Furthermore, because *Shoko Kanbu* must always be available to their commanders at a moment's notice, they are largely exempt from fighting. If, however, the commander is attacked, his *Shoko Kanbu* must be ready to die for him.

Shoko Kanbu almost always hold the rank of *Gunso*, but a few will be as high as *Chui*; service in their capacity almost always leads to a promotion to command of a field unit eventually. For the most part, however, the *Shoko Kanbu* get little respect from basic fighting men.

Note that almost all *Ikoma* who serve actively in *Lion* armies have this rank and position.

Units Of The Lion Armies

Guntai (Squad)

The smallest unit in the *Lion* army is the *Guntai*, or 'squad'. This unit is made up of 20 troops, and is commanded by a *Gunso*. Standard deployment is four ranks of five men abreast, with the *Gunso* leading from the front.

Kaisha (Company)

The *Kaisha* is the basic maneuvering unit of the *Lion* armies. It is the lowest tier to use *hata* (flags/standards) to guide its movements, and to provide a rally/regroup point. This unit is made up of 7 *Guntai* (5 Infantry and 2 Archery; total of



GI

(HONESTY AND JUSTICE)

Be acutely honest throughout your dealings with all people. Believe in justice, not from other people, but from yourself. To a true samurai, there are no shades of gray in the question of honesty and justice.

There is only right and wrong.



REI (POLITE COURTESY)

Samurai have no reason to be cruel. They do not need to prove their strength. A samurai is courteous even to his enemies. Without this outward show of respect, we are nothing more than animals. A samurai is not only respected for his strength in battle, but also by his dealings with other men. The true inner strength of a samurai becomes apparent during difficult times.

152 troops), and commanded by a mounted Chui and his five mounted Shoko Kanbu, one of which acts as flag bearer for the Kaisha.

Standard deployment is a line of both of the archer Guntai at 100-200 paces in front of the infantry, then two lines of infantry, each two Guntai wide, with the Joshitsu Guntai making up the rear line. The Chui and his hata bearer are deployed in the center of the infantry formations.

Note that in units of this size or larger, the subordinate units (in this case Guntai), are numerically designated; if the commanding officer of the overall unit (in this case, the Chui) is killed or debilitated, then the commander of the highest-ranking sub-unit receives a field promotion and takes charge of the entire command. If he dies, then the second highest-ranking resumes control, etc.

Yobihei Kaisha (Reserve Company)

The reserve company is made up of two Guntai each of Shugenja, Gishi Hoi, and Kimabusha, a total of six (total of 131 troops). The Chui and his staff are mounted. All of the elements of this Kaisha are available to the Taisa to be deployed anywhere they are needed, and it is the responsibility of the Chui to best facilitate their use. Until needed, this Kaisha will usually be deployed near or around the Taisa's headquarters.

Daibutai (Squadron)

The Daibutai consists of six field service Kaisha, and a reserve (Yobihei Kaisha). There is a noticeable leap in command difficulty at this level: the commander is now faced with leadership of over a thousand troops. The Daibutai is always commanded by a Taisa, and his mounted staff. The Taisa need not be mounted; the Daibutai must be accessible to the messengers from his Kaisha Chui or commanding Rikugunshokan. There is no typical deployment doctrine; the Taisa's thinking must now be on a more strategic level.

Go-Hatamoto (Army)

Command of a Go-Hatamoto is by far the greatest possible promotion; it is made up of 48 Daibutai [total fighting strength (officers and men) of 51,100 troops], led by a Rikugunshokan. As with the Taisa, it is the responsibility of the Rikugunshokan to establish his headquarters, and have his mounted staff acting as and receiving messengers. Deployment of a Go-Hatamoto is

intended to give the Rikugunshokan the greatest advantage in battle.

The Way Of Akodo

The first Akodo was meticulous and thoroughly obsessed with organization. He looked on war as an art, and like all samurai sought to master it. But no one had mastered the art of war before him. Since he became its first master, he had the freedom to create, invent, and lay the foundation for the art of war.

THE AKODO WAR COLLEGE

"Learn from Matsu how to fight. I will make you a soldier."

— Akodo

The Akodo War College is the oldest military institution in Rokugan. Every summer another class of Lion bushi graduate as soldiers of the clan. Many families from other clans have secured a place in the school for their children, but few have completed the rigorous curriculum. Absolute discipline is mandatory, and even the slightest offenses result in brutal punishments. The course of study is divided into physical conditioning and drill (Summer and Fall), classroom studies of *bushido* and the history of war (Winter), then, finally, application of all they have learned in wargame exercises (Spring). Their instructors are selected from specially trained Gunso and retired bushi. The most exceptional students go on to join the Officer Corps, but every graduate is immediately assigned to the unit he will serve with.

While all Lions learn the basic elements of formation and drill, and all are assigned to a military unit they will serve with thereafter, not all attend the Akodo War College. Only those who want to make being a soldier the focus of their service to the clan and the Emperor or those dedicated to becoming Akodo Tacticians are required to follow this arduous path.

AKODO'S MILITARY INNOVATIONS

Taiko Drums

Although all went well in the first few mock battles that Akodo staged, another difficulty arose — how to get all of the army's elements to move

together. So he supplemented the support staff of his army with *taiko* drummers to create a tempo by which the entire force could march in unison.

Sashimono

In the chaos of war, it becomes very easy to lose track of the unit you may be assigned to, especially when the lust for battle overwhelms your focus. Akodo found himself frustrated once again by the disorder inherent in warfare.

His second innovation was the *sashimono*, a banner and pole that attaches to the back plate of a bushi's armor. Akodo decided that this flag would be emblazoned with symbols, to make it easier for his soldiers to identify their own units.

Divided into three sections each, the *sashimono* would bear the mon of the clan at the top, the family mon in the middle, and a blank field of the unit's assigned color on the bottom.

Hata

From the commanders' points of view, it would be very easy for soldiers to lose track of their *Kaisha* and *Daibutai*. Akodo realized this. Therefore, he used a *hata* to mark the location of the *Kaisha*, and the headquarters of his command and the *Daibutai*. The *Hata* is a vertically-mounted banner, roughly three *ken-an* (nine feet) in length and one *ken-an* (three feet) wide, mounted on a pole five *ken-an* (fifteen feet) tall.

The Way Of Toturi

Akodo Toturi is one of the most skilled, educated, and brilliant men in all of Rokugan, and there are those in the Lion Clan who hate him for it. For many hundred years, the Lion military system was the epitome of efficiency, and the model by which many of the other armies of Rokugan based their own.

Change comes very, very slowly to the Lion. The first Akodo was a samurai to be revered, and the foundation he laid for their army was thought to be flawless. The defeat of a Lion army was never considered a challenge to his system, but instead the result of poor choices by incompetent commanders.

Toturi's genius has brought an awareness that the first Akodo's model could be improved upon by tactics learned from the other clans. He is in the position to make his great war machine even

greater, even if some Lions still cling to the old ways.

Kaisha Kimabusha and Uma Ite

The most radical change Toturi made was the augmentation of the entire *Kaisha Nanatsu* (the Sixth Company) with horses, recreating them as the *Kaisha Kimabusha* (the Cavalry Company). Although he had difficulty learning how to ride, he eventually became skilled, and studied the battle tactics of the Unicorn. While other Lion generals sought better ways to combat the Unicorn cavalry with infantry, Toturi sought to learn their ways and defeat them with their own methods.

He further enhanced two of the squads in the new *Kaisha Kimabusha* and the two *Kimabusha* units in the reserve company to become the *Uma Ite* (Horse Archers). This change sparked great protest from more than a few of Toturi's *Rikugunshokan*, and many of the men who were to become these new cavalymen resigned or requested a transfer to other units. The first to step forward and accept his new commission, much to his brethren's dismay, was Matsu Agetoki.

The Way of the Soldier

THE MILITARY CAMPAIGN IN ROKUGAN

"A great general accepts none of the credit, and all of the blame."

- Akodo's Leadership

In order to run a truly effective military-oriented campaign, the players and the GM must have had some real life military experience, a great understanding of military etiquette, a willingness to accept the hierarchy of the chain of command, and the fact that another player, a peer, may end up their commander. Of course, this "ideal" group is rare, if it exists at all. While many games have potentially great military campaigns, the difficulty in role-playing this kind of game lies in the very thing that gives the military its structure: the chain of command. Role-playing games usually create a group of characters who begin as equals, and through experience and character development find their own place in the



YU

(HEROIC COURAGE)

Rise up above the masses of people that are afraid to act. Hiding like a turtle in a shell is not living at all. A samurai must have heroic courage. It is absolutely risky. It is dangerous. It is living life completely, fully, wonderfully. Heroic courage is not blind. It is intelligent and strong.

Replace fear with respect and caution.



"EVERY AKODO IS YOUR DOSHI."

Depending on what Rokugani dialect you're speaking, the word 'doshi' has many meanings. For the most part, it means peer, member, practice partner; it can even mean friend. But to Lord Akodo, it meant something much deeper... "brother."

The tradition of the *Kyodai* Ceremony began when Akodo brought order to the armies of the Lion Clan. No one questioned his favoritism of the samurai that took his name; that was his right as daimyo of the clan and the family. No one questioned his decision to place other Akodos in high ranking command positions, especially since he had personally instructed them in the art of war. No one questioned this because they all knew their place in the social order.

The relationship between Akodo and his samurai was nothing like the typical master-servant associations the rest of his Kami brethren held.

social strata that sets them apart from their former peers. A military campaign changes all of that, and disrupts the initial balance of power among the characters.

Ordinarily, when a player, in character, makes a suggestion that is mutually beneficial to the group, the rest of the group agrees, and the plan is implemented. Even if there's some disagreement, the group generally negotiates a plan that is acceptable to all. Now, imagine this same scenario in a military campaign: the suggestion becomes an order which the players who receive it must obey. What if they disagree? This places the game in a whole new perspective for now the players, and the GM must deal with

the question of insubordination, mutiny, and even treason.

In the situation presented above, the commanding player has few options. He can order the arrest or execution of the insubordinate commander, increasing discord and possibly alienating himself from the rest of the group; or he can give in and lose face as an effective leader. While inter-party conflict can be healthy, a complete breakdown of unity because the characters refuse to work together defeats the purpose of assembling a gaming group in the first place. What's a player to do?

The answer is fairly simple... don't place characters in direct command of the others. The following are some tips for running a group unified military oriented campaign.



THE COMMANDING GM

One of the best ways for getting around the chain of command, is to establish each of the characters as commanders of equal rank. In a military game run at a convention recently, all of the players were put in command of a *kaisha* (company), and the commanding general was played by the GM.

Unfortunately, if the GM decides to portray a egomaniacal, verbally abusive, "my way or the highway" kind of commander, then you can bet your koku that a mutiny will follow shortly. The best way to facilitate this kind of play, as with any good commander, is to give very general orders, defer to the judgment of the subordinate commanders (the players), and allow them to deal with the consequences of their actions on the Battle

Table or through role-playing with the GM as their commander.

THE COMMANDING PC

If one of the players is to assume command over others in the group, it's best to have the players nominate and agree upon the commander, and make the rest of them his immediate subordinate commanders. This situation also can suffer from an abusive commander, but if the other players voted for him, then it's their problem. The single most important thing to remember is that every suggestion from the commander is now an order, and must be obeyed. Discuss the ramifications of this with your players before deciding to go this route.

Now we turn to some things that need to be taken into account throughout the course of the military-oriented campaign.

LOGISTICS AND SUPPLY

"An army travels on its stomach."

— Napoleon (attrib.)

If you're going to war, the single most important thing you must take into account is how to feed your troops. Richard Holmes, in his book *Acts Of War: The Behavior Of Men In Battle*, states, "The effects of hunger are similar to many of those produced by tiredness. Hungry men are very susceptible to cold, get bored easily, take increasingly little interest in others, and eventually assume a 'don't care' attitude which resembles the zombie-like trance of utter exhaustion."

Imagine a siege in which the defenders' rations have run out, while the besiegers are well supplied. In an effort to get the defenders to capitulate, the attackers throw food over the walls to the hungry defenders, but only enough to feed one out of every ten men inside. How quickly do you think the castle gates will open when faced with the prospect of being fed by the enemy: how many men will die at the hands of their starving compatriots over a bag of rice?

So where do you get food? You can take it with you, but then you must take into account the line of supply from your starting point. Stretch it too far, and you risk being cut off from the gravy train unless you set aside valuable troops to defend it. You can forage for supplies in enemy territory or raid villages along the travel route, but if the


defender can afford to destroy his own supply base (e.g. the "Scorched Earth" tactics of WWII Russia) or was forewarned of your invasion and prepared for the defense, then you may end up with a lot of hungry troops ready to go home.

How do you transport all of these supplies? An army on the move isn't just soldiers marching in long tired columns, it's also wagons full of food, tents, armor and weapons, peasant blacksmiths and their tools, attendants, stable hands, etc. Safely assume that for every two soldiers, there are at least three *heimin* in support, but that's not to say that each soldier has his own attendant. Each *heimin* works to sustain the whole of the army, not the individual soldier. You may also safely assume that the army's supply train will have one wagon drawn by two beasts of burden for every *Guntai*. That's roughly 2400 wagons and 5000 beasts of burden for a 50,000 man army!

Let's also look at the size of the army in terms of physical space. With roughly three feet between each man, and on flat ground, in standard battle formation, end to end, a Lion army will stand at just over 2½ miles wide. Pretty intimidating! However, that same Lion army on the move, on a good road, including the *heimin* followers and wagon train will span a phenomenal 26 miles. That's right, the lead elements of the army will be 2½ days march ahead of the tail! The task of moving an army is truly challenging, and the preceding examples don't even begin to resemble a comprehensive list of the complications an army commander has to concern himself with.

MILITARY JUSTICE

Because of the social mores that guide the daily life of samurai, military justice is a very tricky subject. Responsibility and honor tend to cloud rational judgment. It is generally left to the judgment of the next rank up in the chain of command to render a decision on matters of military justice. In the eyes of a good commander, every soldier is important. Executions over small matters of duty lower morale, and may raise questions of loyalty among the ranks, not to mention quickly depleting the ranks of your most valuable asset... the fighting man. With this in mind, corporal punishment has become a viable alternative. Corporal punishment is looked upon as shaming only the individual, and not the family name. Methods of corporal punishment (physical and social) may include caning, flogging, reduction of rank, and various peasant duties. The



"EVERY AKODO IS YOUR DOSHI." (CONTINUED)

On the night of the first Kyodai Ceremony, Akodo summed up his relationship with his samurai, "Every Akodo is your brother, and so you are mine."

Akodo continued, "No enmity will exist between you and your doshi. If an Akodo battles another, they will both be punished as the murderer of his family. Serve your doshi as you serve me, in a partnership of equals, for our blood is the same color. Let no one shame your doshi or stain his family name, for his name is yours, and such acts incur the wrath of all those named Akodo. Never allow your doshi to die without honor, and never fear to give your life for him, for this is a service to the Emperor, and there is no act more sacred."

With these words, each one stood and gave his name unto the records of the family lineage. Thus it has been every year for almost a millennium, and everyone who bears the name Akodo knows who their doshi are.



MEYO (HONOR)

A true samurai has only one judge of his honor, and that is himself. Decisions you make and how these decisions are carried out are a reflection of who you truly are.

You cannot hide from yourself.

following are some examples of how to deal with matters of military justice.

Treason: Any betrayal of the army or any of its members to the enemy (a very broad definition of "enemy" should be taken here) is punishable by death. No excuses. How that death comes about is another matter. Remember that *seppuku* does not vindicate the perpetrator; it only saves his family the shame of his crime, and is therefore usually granted to all but the most heinous traitors. Treasonous acts that compromise the security of an entire army may result in the mandatory *seppuku* of the traitor and his immediate family or his execution like that of a peasant criminal... without honor. Few samurai will choose the path of treason when faced with such a harsh punishment.

Insubordination: Sometimes there's a fine line between offering a counter-suggestion to an order and refusing it. There is even a fine line between defying an order and treason. Insubordination is a touchy subject among players, and as stated above, tends to be a common point of contention in gaming groups. Insubordination is the failure to submit to authority. By the standards of non-military Rokugan society, this is a shameful slight to one's honor, and is usually "cleansed" through *seppuku* or the offender joining a monastery to reflect upon their offense and atone for it. It is no different in the military.

Warfare in Rokugan is "take no prisoner," and any man who gets away from a victorious army is truly lucky. The man who gets away comes back bent on revenge, and a man bent on revenge has nothing to lose. Also, to die in the service of one's lord is to die honorably. Thus, slaying the enemy is in a sense being merciful, by granting him an honorable death. The same goes with insubordination. To not punish this crime is to show the rest of the army that their leader is weak, and easily swayed by honorless traitors, and surely to let an offender "off the hook" with only the shame of his crime is to invite retribution from a man with a vendetta.

Orders are orders, and must be followed. To question the practicality of said order is not necessarily insubordination if it is phrased deferentially, as it is not necessarily a failure to submit to authority, but all of that would depend upon the demeanor of the commander.

Cowardice: There are no circumstances that excuse a coward. We are, of course, assuming that

that coward has been captured. First, he is stripped of rank, title, and weapons, particularly his *daisho*. Then he is brought before his family daimyo, the charges read, testimony about his act of cowardice heard, and punishment handed down. There are few punishments for this crime, the first of which is by far the most severe. The coward is stripped of his family name – his own name removed from the family tree as if he never existed – and cast out as a ronin, left to live with his shame. Slightly less severe would be the execution of the prisoner, without honor. Finally, the benevolent and merciful daimyo, out of respect to the family of the coward, may allow him to commit *seppuku*, but this is rare indeed.

MORALE

Some commanders, especially among the Lion clan, say that as long as his army has more troops than the enemy, through attrition, he will inevitably win the battle; weight of numbers is the key to victory. It's unfortunate that those commanders haven't read the many scrolls of the Ikoma depicting the numerous defeats of large armies by smaller ones that possessed a greater level of morale. The battle readiness of an army is based on several factors; fatigue, training, etc. However, Akodo felt that morale was of the greatest importance. Akodo once said that "even a well-fed man won't follow you if he doesn't believe in you."

The mental and spiritual health of an army is what truly wins battles. The following is a scale to help GM's gauge the morale value of a unit. This can be modified, by the player commanders Leadership and/or Battle skill rank. It can also be modified by food, fatigue, training regimen, leaders' moods, the weather... anything can affect morale with the bonus/penalty left to the discretion of the GM.

- Rank 10: Elite
- Rank 9: Veteran
- Rank 8: Trained
- Rank 7: Mercenary
- Rank 6: Recruit
- Rank 5: Untrained
- Rank 4: Peasant Levy
- Rank 3: Shaken
- Rank 2: Broken
- Rank 1: Routed

Appendix II: The Wars of the Lion

Battles

VICTORY WITH NO STRIKE

Six hundred years ago, the Lion made incursions into the lands of the Phoenix. After several generations of peace, the Clan had swollen past what their borders could hold: their peasants were overworked, and their rice ran low nearly every season. The time had come for exploration and expansion. The two most prosperous ways, of course, were into the lands of the Crane and the Phoenix.

The Crane, ancient enemies of the Lion, hid behind their fans and began political maneuvering, so the Lion allowed them to believe that they would bear the brunt of the assault. For months, the Crane maneuvered, until they had the upper hand. Believing that they had trapped the Akodo and Ikoma ambassadors into a non-aggression treaty, the Crane willingly agreed not to send armies against the Lion, if the Lion agreed to do the same. As if opposed to the idea, the Ikoma signed the treaty and the pact was made. On the very night that the Crane celebrated their 'victory,' the Lion invaded Tanima sano Futatsu Taisa, and marched upon the lands of the Phoenix.

Furious, the Crane found themselves outmaneuvered, manipulated and trapped by a treaty that prevented them from sending military aid to their beleaguered cousins. The Lion marched through the open plain, encountering little resistance until they reached Shiryo Shiba. Although many died on either side of the battle, the war continued until the Crane discovered a

way around the treaty they had created with the Lion forces.

The Crane cut off Lion supply lines and proclaimed a trade embargo. The battle at the borders of Nemuiaminari Yama, the mountains of the Phoenix, was interrupted by a force of Daidoji infantry 'bringing supplies' to the besieged Phoenix. Caught between the Phoenix and the Crane, the Lion were forced to negotiate a truce.

That truce gave the Lion the undisputed right to the lands which had once been held for the Unicorn, in the far north-west of the Empire. Those lands remained under Lion rule for nearly four hundred years, during which time they prospered into a thriving city, a splendid palace, and a prosperous trade route.

BATTLE OF THE HOUR OF THE WOLF

The battle of the Hour of the Wolf took place on the shores of the lake known as Aka Mizu-umi, the Red Lake, where ten thousand men died in one hour. At this tremendous battle, the Bayushi and Doji forces rallied against an invading army of Matsu, and were destroyed. However, the losses on all sides were great, and the lake is said to have turned red from blood. The bodies of many of the soldiers who died in the battle could not be recovered, for the rising waters of the lake washed them away.

The river which runs down from the lake is known as the Kama sano Okami Jikan, or the River of the Hour of the Wolf. The Hour of the Dog (8 P.M. to 10 P.M.) occurs just after sunset, when the darkness has not yet become complete. The Crane, obviously influenced by the treacherous Scorpion legions, launched a full-scale assault on the Lion forces once the sun had vanished from the sky. By the end of the Hour, the battle was ended, fires raged by the shore, and bodies floated on the surface of the lake.

It is written in the Ikoma scrolls that the battle was fought as a precursor to a Scorpion invasion of Beiden Pass, which was to occur after the Lion reinforcements stationed at Aka Mizu-umi (then known as the Lake of Shining Glass) had been destroyed. However, as the Lion successfully defended their territory, the invasion which the Scorpion had planned was ruined before it had a chance to begin.

Ghosts are said to walk the surface of the lake, those who were not properly sent to Jigoku after they had died in battle. Because of this unrest, it



JIN (COMPASSION)

Through intense training the samurai becomes quick and strong. He is not as other men. He develops a power that must be used for the good of all. He has compassion. He helps his fellow men at every opportunity. If an opportunity does not arise, he goes out of his way to find one.



**MAKOTO
(COMPLETE
SINCERITY)**

When a samurai has said he will perform an action, it is as good as done. Nothing will stop him from completing what he has said he will do. He does not have to "give his word." He does not have to "promise." The action of speaking alone has set the act of doing in motion. Speaking and doing are the same action.

is not recommended that any Kitsu visit the numerous shrines by the lake, nor that they call forth any of the dead who were massacred in the battle. However, if in great need, it is far better to call forth the wandering dead of Aka Mizu-umi, which arise only in spirit, than to summon those of nearby Mizu-umi no Fuko, where the rotting corpses walk the salty marsh around the blackened lake.

RED SNOW BATTLE

*He that overcomes by force
Has overcome only half of his foe
- Akodo Tactics, Akodo Tunuko*

Akodo Meikuko's failure is legendary among the Lion. Her attempts at displaying the pride and honor of the Lion cost her her life and the lives of over 15,000 brave soldiers. Those who lived to report the tale of Red Snow Battle, recall a sadness that could not be described. One Matsu said, "My leader's face, as she watched the slaughter of so many perfect warriors, was quiet and numb. It was as if too much reason had entered her mind too quickly."

I will never forget the first tear from her eye as she threw down the Akodo banner and begged the Togashi to allow her men to live. Togashi halted almost before she started speaking - as if he knew. The climb, the battle; they had cost us all but 2000 warriors. These soldiers would be allowed to return, to relate what had happened. Meikuko asked that she be allowed to commit seppuku there on the battlefield the next morning. "I require one day to prepare. I wish to give my tale to the great Ikoma Sekumi so he may tell the truth."

I was saddened and honored all at once, to be chosen for such a deed.

The next day was painful and perfect. Meikuko asked me to help her bathe. She asked that I take every note

of every motion down. She asked that I watch as she stooped to retrieve water for her tea ceremony. She asked that I record her task of drawing up a new scroll of her life and deeds. She asked that nothing here be forgotten. "The pride of the Lion has been tarnished here," she said. "It would be a shame to those Akodo after me if something were not learned here. Tomorrow, I become an ancestor to my children and their children. If they were to shame their soldiers with a hollow death, because they did not learn from me, then the pain of eternity shall be more than I might bear. Please see to it that I am not forgotten."

With that, I wiped my eyes. She possessed a beauty I only then realized. Somehow, knowing Togashi, as briefly as she had on that battlefield, taught her a sense of humility that could not be described, even by the greatest bard. The next morning, she and I walked out amongst the flames of war-pyres. Meikuko read her poetry, drank her tea, presented for me her *daisho*, and then took her life with only me there to bear witness. I will cherish that forever. May my



children read this and know that she was perfectly flawed.

When I returned to the Clan, with new eyes I wrote everything I knew. I wrote until my hands were hard with calluses, and my bones would not move from their frozen state. I wrote, so that this story would never have to be written again. Our libraries should only have one story of this kind.

I was there when we climbed mountains tall as the sky.

I was there when the ranks of soldiers were as thick as the ocean; my brothers had hunger in their eyes and pride in their bellies.

I was there when the snow was cold and hard and deep, and the men tired of marching.

Think of it. A Lion. A Matsu! Tired of walking. Tired of the march.

The winter was stronger than us. Stronger, and prouder.

As we trudged into the white frontier before us, as we climbed toward peaks reaching for heaven and unspeakable honor, the wind hollowed harder and faster and the snow rained upon us to deaden our tracks. And still we marched. Our pride pushed against a winter that refused to be broken. A season of daunting, unrelenting cold and pounding, unforgiving fury. A season of constant sorrow, as the sky bled and wailed at the loss of its innocence.

*The sky,
An easier fruit
To reach.
I was there
the year of the winter's fury
the year of the Red Snow Battle
the year earth stood too tall for man.*

20,000 Lion climbed a sheer wall of rock and snow. 20,000 Lion climbed with sword and bow, preparing to fight their enemy. None knew what to expect and none would ever say that it was worth the climb. I have failed my clan.

- Akodo Meikuko, *The Seppuku of Akodo Meikuko*, as transcribed by Ikoma Sukemi

20,000 Lion climbed through the peaks of Dragon lands. Tall, impassable peaks and unsure footing, combined with deep, slick, icy snow and a deafening blizzard, driving the marching Lion army back one step for every two.

A great lull had fallen upon Rokugan. The greatest clan of the Empire would have to remind

everyone what honor meant; what duty meant. The Lion have always been the Right Hand of the Emperor. The fight was just. Pride and honor were being challenged by a haughty, ignoble clan of "flying", shape-shifting, fire-breathing, invisible samurai and blathering, witless philosophers. The battle with the Dragon occurred when Akodo Meikuko knew the honor of her clan was challenged. The Lion under Meikuko's charge would be the messenger of Bushido to all Rokugani.

Later, "Red Snow Battle" would be known as 'Meikuko's Mistake' to the Lion. Later, the name Meikuko would be synonymous with mistake, and no Akodo or Matsu would use the name for their daughter again.


Mistake after mistake. That is why the Ikoma wrote it.

The snow made the climb difficult and many bushi died from the poor footing and strong winds. The cold tore at their bones, and the Lions cursed the mountain and the sky. Kitsu shugenja fought to abate the weather with minor rituals and spells of swiftness and sureness. But they were not prepared for this march, and the terrain proved too difficult to cross. As the snow grew deeper and the wind stronger, Meikuko pushed her soldiers even harder. The climb to the final stronghold would catch the Dragon off guard, but would cost so many bushi and attendants their lives that those surviving soldiers would take no pride in the endless climb - sapping their morale and exhausting their spirits.

Mistakes after mistake. That is why the Kitsu know it.

The tops of the mountains held an never-before seen view of the Dragon's secret world. They Lion had climbed for four weeks, and on the final night Meikuko forced her army to march until they finally arrived at the base of Kyuden Togashi. Looking upon the field that would be tomorrow's battle, the Akodo samurai gazed in horror at what they saw. Towers scrambled toward black sky. Castles with demonic spires curled around empty space. A palace made of a shifting, eerie light that mesmerized and frightened even the bravest samurai. Meikuko had showed them too much. She showed them where they would fight, and the images of horror could not be wiped away.

Mistake after mistake. That is why the Matsu cry it.



CHUGO
(DUTY AND
LOYALTY)

For the samurai, having done some "thing" or said some "thing", he knows he owns that "thing". He is responsible for it and all the consequences that follow. A samurai is intensely loyal to those in his care. To those he is responsible for, he remains fiercely true.



MATSU UNDERSTAND

There is no room for
pleasantry in war, only
fierce action.

There is no room for
subtlety in war, only
decisive choices.

There is no room for
failure in war, only the
glorious results.

Deny these things, and
suffer the consequences.

Meikuko fought the Dragon on their terms, in their land; the *ise zumi* knew they would come. The *ise zumi* let them make the climb to see if it could be made. The *ise zumi* allowed them to camp at night and see the images of the night. The masters of the arcane arts sought to know what makes a bushi so proud to think he can conquer an unknown enemy. And as soldiers died, at the hands of far brighter foe, the Lion learned the folly of too much pride, of too much arrogance, and of the curse of winter's hidden warfare.

Mistake after mistake. That is why the Akodo teach it.

RETURN OF THE UNICORN

(This text was written by the Ikoma historian, Ikoma Shabiko, shortly after the Unicorn had been accepted into the Emperor's court. Originally intended to sway the Emperor's favor from the newcomers, it has become one of the foremost texts on the Unicorn's initial return.)

Grand Lord, Child of the Sun and Emperor of this proud land, it is my duty as the daimyo of the Ikoma to speak with you on a matter of utmost importance.

Seven months ago, the strange horsemen of the South rode against your humble servitors, the Crab. They fought with weapons of flame, and their steeds, like Oni from Jigoku, destroyed the Emperor's minions. When they had passed through the lands of the Crab, they invaded the palaces of your cousins, the Scorpion, and Bayushi Osusa called the Lion, your right hand, to his aid.

For seven months, the Empire has fought this threat. We have bled and died against these uncultured ronin. We have died willingly, defending your land and your honor. When the Lion first met the invaders, we were greeted by a troop of men riding horses twice the size of our more civilized breed. Although their dialect was strange to us, we managed to make it known that we would not allow them to proceed any farther into the lands of the Emerald Empire.

When we spoke to their emissaries, we learned the truth. They spoke of their foul beasts as 'brothers,' they fed upon the flesh of the dead, and they wore the skins of those they had defeated in battle. Surely, my lord, they are from the Shadowlands. They arose from the Dark Lord's pit, and they have been sent, with human

form, to destroy us. And the Crane, in their *naiveté*, have chosen to aid them.

Learn from this, if you will: when the Lion offered their emissary the chance to commit honorable *seppuku*, he ran his katana directly into my Lord Akodo's chest. The battle was joined, and their forces arose into combat.

So swift were they that they must have been prepared to fight the entire time they 'negotiated' peace. Charging hooves, flaming arrows – their archers ride and shoot, a feat no ordinary human is capable of – crushed our honorable samurai. From the rear, their women raced, their steeds glowing with what can only be called the blessing of the Dark Lord.

And their shugenja. Casting from the backs of these beasts, as if they were joined to them in some blasphemous ritual, they tore fire from the sky and water from the earth. The spirits of the *kami*, I am assured by my Kitsu allies, do not hear the call of these creatures. If they are using magic, my Lord, it is nothing we have ever seen before. Only the Crab, who have great knowledge of the abilities of all of Fu Leng's creatures, might be able to destroy their power.

When the battle was over, and our soldiers taken captive – they were not even offered the chance to commit honorable *seppuku* – the Lion were released. Our families have been dishonored, our ancestors cry out for revenge, and the Shadowlands laughs at us for believing the lies these 'Unicorn' tell. If the Dark Lord still lives, my Emperor, he lives in the hearts of these barbaric creatures who seek a place in your Court. These barbarians, these meat-eaters and *gaijin*, they have stolen your land, your ear and your councilor. I beg you, do not let them steal your heart.

Ikoma Shabiko, daimyo of the Ikoma, loyal subject of the Sun and her true line.

THE BATTLE OF STOLEN GRAVES

Five hundred years ago, the evil wizard Iuchiban launched an attack against the Emperor Hantei. He raised an army of the dead within the very walls of Otsan Uchi, and sent marauding zombies to tear down the Imperial Palace. It was the Lion who stepped in to answer the challenge. A contingent of Imperial Guards, made up of Lion samurai and led by the great Lion magistrate Akodo Minobe, met the undead on the streets of



the capital and sent them screaming back to their ancestor where they belonged.

Initially, the zombies had the advantage. Unaffected by most of the blows they suffered, they pushed the guardsmen away from Iuchiban's fortress. The zombies were soon joined by a cadre of Bloodspeaker magicians, who cast their dark *maho* against the Emperor's defenders. For a period, it was enough to keep the Lion forces at bay.

But time and geography were not on Iuchiban's side, and soon the tide began to turn against him. The guardsmen quickly discovered that the zombies' invulnerability ended at decapitation, and began to dispatch them. The Bloodspeakers, though fearsome, were no match for their opponents in combat, and their magic could be ineffective against large numbers. Step by step, inch by inch, Iuchiban's forces were driven back towards the temple where their master awaited.

Minobe, standing at the vanguard of the fighting and striking down zombies left and right, was the first to breach the temple's defenses. His armor was encrusted with the ichor of his enemies as he bounded down the stairs, guardsmen pouring in after him. Iuchiban waited in the bowels of the earth, preparing a spell that would destroy the entire city. Before the *mahotsukai* could finish, however, Minobe stabbed him

through the heart. The spell shattered, and the evil shugenja fell to his knees. But through some dark providence, Iuchiban refused to die and lay thrashing on the end of Minobe's spear. He could not be killed by mortal means, so the Six Clans constructed a fearsome tomb for him where he remained imprisoned for many years.

With Iuchiban down, the battle was won. The animated corpses were returned to their graves and countless purification rituals cast upon the ground. The temple and the unholy knowledge it contained was burned to the rafters and salt sowed into the ashes. Akodo Minobe was honored as the noblest warrior of his time, and the Lion had again stopped a grave threat against Rokugan.

BATTLE OF THE SLEEPING RIVER

Two centuries after being imprisoned, the dark sorcerer Iuchiban escaped his prison and once more made war upon the Emerald Empire. He gathered his Bloodspeaker cult to him, and took them to a great plain near the Sleeping River – where the *eta* of the cult had gathered their dead. An endless field of corpses stretched before them.

Once they heard of the gathering, the Clans raised a huge army to stop him. They arrived on the plain just as the corpses rose once again. Row upon row of Iuchiban's zombies pressed forward, mumbling blankly beneath their porcelain masks.

WHY ONLY LOSSES?

Readers may notice that most of the battles we cover here result in losses for the Lion Clan. How can that be? The Lion are strongest and most powerful army in Rokugan. How come they keep getting their butts kicked?


The answer is this: they actually learn more from their defeats than their victories. Make no mistake, the Lion have won a lot of battles. For every loss we cover here, there are dozens of Clan triumphs, where they crushed their foes and sent them screaming into the Void.

Because there are so many, Lions tend to pay more attention to their defeats. After all, a Lion is *expected* to win. He *has* to vanquish his enemies. It happens so often, it becomes second nature.

Defeats, on the other hand, receive a great deal of scrutiny. Somewhere, something went wrong, and if they don't find out what, it might happen again. Lion children learn the stories of battles won, and study the tactics of victorious generals, but it's the mistakes they pore over time and again. *Remember this failure. Mark how it happened. And ensure that it never happens again.*

As for the other Clans, they trumpet every victory against the Lion to the skies. It just doesn't happen that often.





THE NIGHT OF FALLING STARS: ANOTHER VIEW

From a Kitsu sodan-senzo:

The Crane would have you think that this battle was solely the fault of the Lion, and that because of the actions of Matsu Aiguko, hundreds of their women and children died. The Lion would have you believe that the Crane are foolish cowards, too superstitious or afraid to face the fate that superior skill in battle brings.

They are both wrong.

The tragedy of that night was caused by pride. The Lions know pride well – their every decision is laced with it; the Crane are also proud, but for other reasons.

They are aristocratic – that is a form of pride. They are vain, and that is certainly another.

And they are ultimately sure of their place in the Celestial Order and the path they are to follow in service to it. But then, in this, we are prideful also, so both lie faultless.

The bushi in the surrounding army had been trained to deal with the undead, and did not hesitate at the sight of the shambling horrors. But spread out as they were, they could not halt a concentrated assault, which was exactly what Iuchiban gave them. The zombies surged against one specific point on the line, and although the bushi there fought valiantly, they could not prevent the undead from breaking through. Chaos reigned as the flanking forces moved in around the line of zombies, and what had been begun as a simple entrapment of Iuchiban's forces soon degenerated into a chaotic brawl. Samurai and shugenja fought side by side, as the dead clawed their way to escape. The Bloodspeakers engaged in the battle turned their horrid *maho* on any target which presented itself.

It was the Lion, again, who restored order to the ranks. With their swift discipline and unbending skill, they met the zombies' attack and drove them back into the plain. While they suffered horrible casualties, and lost many brave samurai they successfully turned the tide of the battle. What could have been a disastrous rout was contained, and while Iuchiban's forces caused significant damage, it was not enough to break the Clans' collective will. The battle continued – a war of attrition that only grew fiercer as the hours and days rolled past.

After seven days of fighting, the Clans finally declared victory. They had lost much – the dead and the wounded were almost beyond counting – but the undead army was completely destroyed, and Iuchiban had been captured yet again. He was placed back in his tomb, where he remains to this day. A small monument placed in the center of the field commemorates the brave samurai from all clans who fought and died to stop this threat.

THE NIGHT OF FALLING STARS

A view from a Matsu bushi:

Listen well. This is the story of the Day of Falling Stars, when the Crane showed their true face, and we were cursed by their cowardice.

You may have already heard the lies that pass as history, pretty Crane lies that stink like Scorpion fodder. I will tell you the truth.

We arrived at the walls of Shiro no Yugin with a force that outnumbered the Cranes by ten to one. We offered them the chance to surrender honorably, but they instead decided to throw refuse and filth down on our samurai and taunt

us. They knew they had the Emperor's favor, and any action taken against them would result in severe repercussions.

The taunting lasted for three weeks while we attempted to starve them out. They had secret tunnels that allowed them to bring in food from their fields. After that, it became apparent that we would have to storm the castle.

The general, Matsu Aiguko, charged the walls, but found the Cranes unwilling to fight. Instead of facing her, they chose to run. They threw themselves from the castle walls into the rocks far below, a coward's death. But even their deaths could not free them from their cowardice. Ghosts of the fallen wander the walls of Shiro no Yugin, begging to be forgiven for their crimes. So great is their hatred that no Kitsu may bring them solace, and every full moon all within the castle lock their doors and windows as the cowards seek the rest they will never receive.

THE BATTLE OF THREE STONE RIVER

From the annotated saga of Ikoma Hatsu I:

I was at the Battle of Three Stone River, when the Lion learned defeat. It was during the days of first strife between the Phoenix and the Lion, before the Treaty at Momoru Kuoki Toshi.

Field General Taisa Matsu Radeki was in command of the unit I was traveling with. He was a brilliant leader of men, but his tactics rarely included anything he could not see and touch himself. I had heard a rumor that he had fared badly in skirmishes with the Scorpion because he rarely prepared counter-measures against their intrigues.

Radeki was leading a Daibutai within the lands of the Phoenix when tensions between the clans arose. Seemingly unaffected, he ordered that his men continue in their duties as if nothing was amiss. No supplementary direction came from the *Rikugunshokan*, and all was assumed to be well.

We had camped for the evening in a shaded grove alongside a clean river. It was winter, so its surface was lower than usual. Three large boulders cut the flow of water in half, their surfaces smoothed and rounded by the current. Stains over their peaks suggested that they were submerged the better part of the summer season.

During the night, savage explosions ripped through the area. Whistling screams preceded



THE NIGHT OF FALLING STARS: ANOTHER VIEW (CONTINUED)

The truth of the matter is that several hundred died needlessly, and that their souls have not yet been put to rest. We, who walk with their sorrow, have tried in vain to comfort them, to bring them some relief from their eternal anguish. But, alas, they remain angry, lost, and, worst of all, helpless.

The most pitiful of them all is poor Daidoji Yurei, whose spirit returned there after his hollow death. He dedicated his life to liberating Shiro no Yugin from our clan, and failed. What cost a man's life before his pride? Yurei knows, but none can ask him. He will not speak to us, for he is mad, beyond redemption or hope of an end to his torment.

Can the miseries of those lost to pride and hatred be reversed? Repaired?

Never. But perhaps from this, a lesson can be drawn, if only in blood. For there is no other example so moving as that of loss, of death. The past echoes of Shiro no Yugin's tragedy may yet prove to ring true for our sons and daughters to come.

further bursts all around us and the trees were lost in goutts of flame. Radeki was already standing, his katana drawn, rallying his men. He managed to muster several *ite* into the trees (despite their well-founded fear at the condition of the rest), and thus discovered the location of the offending shugenja.

None of the archers reached the ground, consumed in elemental fury. Radeki called for a charge to storm the shugenja's ridge, but as they raged forward, a large volley of incendiaries was launched at them. Many were killed outright, and the rest were thrown aside with the force of a charging ogre.

Stillness followed, as the Phoenix paused to observe their handiwork. Dust and steam obscured the scene, but the bodies of many Lion lay in mangled pieces. One of them was Taisa Radeki.

From my vantage point, I could clearly see the resolution on the faces of my brothers-in-arms. Lion are not easily subdued, and if the Phoenix believed that the death of a commander was all they required to best us, then they were hopelessly outclassed already – at least regarding their understanding of the enemy.

From among the soldiers caught unawares in the initial attack, a single man stepped forward. Akodo Gensei, Chui of Kaisha Saisho, was a practical soldier, I had observed, one whose grounded judgement would commonly prevail, even in a situation as dire as this.

"Joshitsu!" he roared as loudly as he was able, "we are faced with a superior foe, with superior tools, dishonorably concealed behind superior terrain! We cannot hope to best them in our current state! We must stand down!"

Angry rumbles of dissension were quickly silenced. The men were unhappy with the command, but bound to obey.

The Phoenix, for their part, had taken an interest in the Lion's surrender. They were only partially concealed when, with the drop of Gensei's hand, a flurry of arrows squarely caught their front line. Their corpses fell heavily where they stood or over the ridge and into the river, spurring the Lion to charge once more with renewed vigor. Moments later, the elements blurred again, and twice as many Lion as shugenja were dead. The Lion would not be denied this time, and they scrambled into the waters and over the rocks with a fury born of desperation.

As they reached the opposite shore, however, the cliff-face itself exploded upon them, blanketing the second and third ranks in dirt and sludge. For a moment, the Lion stood immobile, stunned at the might of Phoenix magic. Taking the katana out of Chui Gensei's partially buried hand, Chui Daini Tenero raised it high toward the enemy and called forth for yet another charge.

Such is the temerity of the Lion. Know it.

Less than half of the Daibutai remained, and many of those lay wounded upon the long trail of battle. Barely 300 Lion took part in the arduous vertical climb; very few ascended past a few man-lengths before being swatted away by spells. Tenero led them, sure of his own ability to finish what his predecessors had begun.

At some fifty feet, the first Lion reached a shelf below the Phoenix. The Chui immediately ordered his men into a defensive position, with the *ite* up front. The angle was difficult, so arrows were reserved for those with the best aim.

One shugenja fell shortly, but the rest were wise enough to remain hidden thereafter. With neither force able to openly attack, it appeared that the battle was at an impasse.

But shugenja, are crafty sorts. Several breathless moments later, the shelf itself erupted in fire, which spread back under the lip of the ridge, consuming those hidden there. Many of the soldiers leapt from the shelf, their blazing forms crying in agony before crashing into the shallow stream below.

Those unfortunates clinging to the cliff-wall were knocked backward as well, to join their burning comrades in the river. Many of the lowest lived, I would think, but those close to the shelf had surely perished.

Absolute panic gripped the Lion then, and they broke. It was an ugly scene: the rank and file gone, soldiers scattering in all directions like ants in a flood. The voices of the few Chui that had survived the shugenja's final strike could not be heard over the chaotic retreat.

Of over 1000 bushi, less than 100 survived. After the massacre, the Emperor demanded that the Lion begin training shugenja as troops of war, but to this day, the Go-Hatamoto resist, claiming that if Akodo had thought they were needed, he would have included them himself.

I am Ikoma Hatsu's 23rd descendant, and I bear witness to the Battle of Three Stone River, when the Lion learned defeat. It is commemorated by Kitsu and the descendants of



THE WASP CLAN

That whelp who calls himself "Tsuruchi"? I hear a Crab once caught a whiff of the cur and nearly died from the stench.

His mother acted against the will of her clan, and sought Scorpion protection to do so. She sought protection in the arms of the Scorpion rather than face the responsibility of her actions. When her father presented her to the court, the Emperor himself said, "She has the eyes of a Hitomi." What irony.

But I have strayed from the story. Let me start at the beginning.

Akodo Tameko was the pride of her family. Young, strong and beautiful, she had a keen mind for strategy, and none could compare with her skill at the bow. She was engaged to be married, but fell in love with a Scorpion: Bayushi Uchinore.

Uchinore was master of the castle that stands just south of Beiden Pass in Scorpion territory. He seduced our daughter, and she bore his son, the boy who would come to be known as "Tsuruchi."

Uchinore used the boy against her, compromising her honor. She gave in to his demands and moved in to his castle, against her father's wishes. Uchinore kept her there as a concubine - a concubine! - for he was already married to another. Did he give up his duty? Did he refuse to marry the woman he was promised to? No, he did not.

the dead on the fourth day of the Horse, when a procession is formed at Momoru Kyotei Toshi and led to the site of the original battle.

No shrine has been erected on the site; it remains as it has always been, save for several barren patches caused by the coarse magics of the Phoenix. In the summer, the river is at its lowest level, revealing the three boulders my ancestor first noted in his chronicle. They are quite beautiful, and have been named for the three Taisa who died in battle there - Radeki, Gensei, and Tenero.

May their spirits walk proudly in jigoku, knowing that their deaths had some meaning. They proved that we could fail.

And we are all the better for it.

BATTLE OF KYUDEN TONBO, AND THE SIEGE OF THE GREAT CLIMB

To the north of the Lion lands are the lands of the Dragonfly Clan, a minor clan allied with the Dragon. The Dragonfly were instated by the Emperor at the request of the Dragon clan, over the protests of the Lion. The Clan formed when a Mirumoto samurai named Mirumoto Asijin married a shugenja maiden named Isawa Maroko. Their marriage was contested by Akodo Yokutsu, who had been engaged to the Phoenix, but to no avail. Over his protests, their clans supported the dishonorable marriage, blackening the name of Akodo. The Dragon Clan declared that if Yokutsu sought revenge for this insult, they would declare war on the entire Lion Clan, and Yokutsu was forced to live with his dishonor. After a brief battle near the village that had been provided for the young couple to rule, the Lion withdrew their troops, and the Phoenix made a settlement. They offered to allow the young Lion to marry Maroko's sister, if he swore to leave the two newlyweds in peace. Refusing the offer, he withdrew, swearing to avoid the lands ever after in bitterness.

However, years after the battle, the Agasha offended Yokutsu by bringing up the insult in the Emperor's court - something no samurai could ignore. The matter was officially brought before the Emperor, who declared that the wedding was illegal, and that the original bond was still valid - Isawa Maroko was to be immediately granted a divorce, and wed Yokutsu or commit *seppuku* for staining her family's honor. The Dragon were also told that their son, Mirumoto Asijin, was the cause of the shame, and should be dealt with

equally. Yokutsu asked to have her sentence repealed, but to no avail. Her insult to the Akodo was now public, and Yokutsu's Champion refused to allow it to be ignored.

Yokutsu was given five legions of his family's best men, to avenge his honor and claim his new bride. Unable to refuse, yet unable to ignore his vow to avoid the lands of the Dragonfly, Yokutsu marched upon the palace of the Agasha. While there, Maroko committed *seppuku* in the palace of the Dragonfly, and her husband came to seek retribution from the bold Lion warrior. Unable to allow the challenge to go unanswered, and eager to exact revenge upon the man who had stolen his love and his honor, Yokutsu battled and killed Asijin on the steps of Agasha palace.

Immediately afterwards, still bleeding from the contest, Yokutsu was challenged by the son of Maroko and her traitorous lover. Tonbo Kuyuden, their only child, declared the right to avenge himself upon his father's killer. Wounded and weary, the Lion nevertheless agreed. He knew he could not defeat the younger, fresh samurai, and gave his life valiantly. Afterward, the new Dragonfly daimyo slandered Yokutsu's name and claiming that the Akodo had died dishonorably. With these words, he established the hatred and undeclared war between the Dragonfly and the Lion.



The lands of the Lion stretch for miles through the innermost provinces of the Emerald Empire. Their plains are lush, their mountain ranges filled with timber and rich copper mines, and their fortresses are among the oldest in Rokugan. The Lion have no time for opulence, grace or rich trappings - their Shiryo and Kyuden are built for defense, use and practicality.

The Lion territories are bordered to the south by the Spine of the World mountains, a broad and impassable range of tall peaks covered in snow year-round. Their cold slopes are the homeland of the *zokujin*, a race of strange goblins. The Spine of the World is also the site of the Mountain of Seven Thunders, the historic gathering place of Shinsei and his mortal heroes during the first war with Fu Leng.

Peasants in the Lion provinces work the broad fields of Heigen no Otaku, gathering the rice which the armies of the Lion need to fuel their economy and feed their warriors. Although much of the Lion's wealth comes from trade with the Crane, Scorpion and Unicorn, the Lion save the best parts of their crop to trade with the Crab for valuable weapons and armor. Roads and travel guides are well-maintained in the Lion provinces, and the peasants are allowed to move freely through the territory. The roads, kept immaculate due to the decree of a long-ago Matsu daimyo, are a direct result of the Lion armies marching from border to border. The Lion needed speed to keep their lands safe, and in order move their tremendous force rapidly, they needed excellent roads.

To the north, the Lion lands border those of the Dragonfly, and through them, the lands of the enigmatic Dragon. To the south, the Scorpion and the Crane contest the Lion for rulership of Beiden Pass - the most hotly disputed piece of territory in the Empire. Ride west, and you will find yourself approaching the lands of the Otaku. In the Lion lands, no border is ever fully secure, no pass is left unguarded. If any clan wishes to war upon another, the Lion inevitably will become involved, because of their position as much as their military heritage. Within days, the Lion armies can march on any part of the Empire. Only the Crab do not border Lion lands, and a firm alliance has sprung up between the two clans as a result of the trade between them. Often, the Lion are called the 'Protectors of the Empire' because of their tactical position: no war can occur without the knowledge of the Lion, and no two surrounding clans can march without the Lion being aware of their movement.

This central position also has its drawbacks. The Lion have few places to retreat, and must allow allies to march through their territory to reach distant battlefields. Their roads are lined with flat stones, preventing the ground from turning to mud in the heavy rains of the spring.

Although they cannot be called 'cobblestone,' these roads are an improvement over the simple dirt-packed highways which twist through the fields of the other clans. Further, the Champion of the Lion some seventy years ago, Toturi's grandfather, commanded his armies to dig new roads, eliminating unnecessary deviations. The roads became straight, direct from one place to another, and the countryside was spotted with small watchhouses. These watchhouses are armed with five to ten men, and horses ready to carry messages with breakneck speed from one side of the Lion provinces to the other. Although the Matsu chided what they called 'samurai digging in the ground like eta,' the roads are a marvel of engineering.

NORTHERN PLAINS

The northern plains of the Lion are filled with rice paddies and training grounds for their enormous armies. They are primarily used for their resources, and the Lion continue to push for more effective means of raising food, knowing their armies will need it in time of war. Further, they seek to out-do the Crane's vast supply of grains and rice, in order to trade the Crab for weapons before their ancient enemy does.

The plains of the north split by the Way of the Elements Road, which divides the Lion lands from the Dragonfly. This road connects Otosan Uchi to the northern clans, including the Dragon and the Unicorn, and is a major trade highway. During the warm months, it fills with caravans headed for all parts of the Empire, traveling through Shiro sano Ken Hayai (Castle of the Swift Sword). The ancestral home of the Kitsu family, Ken Hayai is rumored to have been built on the bones of the last kitsu. Certainly, it is a tremendous palace, sprawling across the foothills of the Dragon. Visitors to the castle often complain of uneasiness and a feeling of dread, but the Kitsu shrug this off as ignorance. It is said that somewhere to the north of the castle lies the cave in which the kitsu met Akodo One-eye and forged the pact which gave the creatures human form.

Another interesting point of note is Mura sano Eiyu ni Suru (Village of the Reinstated Hero). Two hundred years ago, an Ikoma hero named Ikoma Suru spent seven years seeking his daimyo's killer. After months of searching, Suru finally tracked the assassin to this small village. Within days, he had located the man and killed the assassin. He was prepared to commit *seppuku*,



THE WASP CLAN (CONTINUED)

So, my daughter, you see how a Scorpion will force you to compromise your principles while maintaining his own.

But it was the Scorpions who came to us, offering a solution, promising to deal with Uchinore. When our armies marched on the castle, we expected Tameko to do the right thing, but the Scorpions killed Tameko as well. We do not mourn for her, my daughter: she shamed her family and her name and refused to acknowledge her slight. Tsuruchi stood alone and was forced to choose between his Lion and Scorpion heritage, but the boy reached deep in his heart and found blood so black that his decision even made the Scorpions gape.

The boy took what men were loyal to him and ran. Then, two years later, he returned, poisoned all the Lions within the castle and ran to the Crane for protection. The weaklings saw an advantage in an ally on the border between Scorpion and Crane lands and greeted the bastard child with open arms.

Now, any man who wears the *mon* of the Wasp is considered an Emerald Magistrate who answers only to the Crane and the Emperor. Very cunning, but not surprising. Despite his Lion blood, Tsuruchi has a Scorpion heart: the heart of a coward.



KENSON GAKKA

North of Beiden Pass, in the mountains bordering the Scorpion, stands another tribute to Lion courage. The city of Kenson Gakka and the castle which surmounts it are lasting memorials.

Their walls are fortified heavily, awaiting the day when the Scorpion will move against the Lion. Six hundred years ago, the Scorpion tried to take Ikoma Castle. In response, the Matsu killed every man, woman and child which lived within, and destroyed the palace which once stood within its walls. After they rebuilt the structure, the Lions declared it, and the city below, theirs. From this vantage, they can watch the border of Scorpion lands. For six hundred years, their vigilance has been rewarded with silence.

but the Champion of the Lion ordered him to instead take command of the village. He was reinstated, his debt to his lord repaid, and his honor restored. When he died in battle many years later, a shrine was erected in his memory on the spot where he killed his daimyo's murderer. That shrine stands today, and is considered a holy site to the Zocho, the South Wind.

Shiro Akodo (Loyalty Castle) lies on the border on the northern Crane provinces, an area which was once claimed by the Lion, but was lost to the Crane. Three years ago, Toshi Ranbo wo Shien Shite Reigisaho was lost to the political maneuvering of Doji Chuto, a general of Doji Satsume's personal guard. The Lion left the castle and it was claimed by the Crane, while rumors of blackmail by the Crane general spread like wildfire. Such rumors were never proved, and the Akodo daimyo who had controlled the city committed *seppuku* in shame. While many in the Crane thought this action reprehensible, Satsume had no choice but to reward Chunto with command over the castle and surrounding lands.

WESTERN REACHES

Kyuden Ikoma was once the westernmost palace of Rokugani civilization, during the long time when the Unicorn wandered the Burning Sands. When it was built, it served as a watch point from which the Lion could observe the wilderness around their growing Empire. Its walls were thick, and the land was dotted with towers and parapets from which flame would burn. The palace was called 'Sacred Watch' because it was the duty of the Ikoma to keep guard against the barbarians which once roamed through Unicorn lands.

Forty years after the Unicorn troops headed into the mountain passes to the north, the last remaining Ki-Rin marched through Ikoma lands, seeking refuge from the waves of uncivilized gaijin. These samurai served with the Ikoma for a generation, manning the watchtowers and fighting back the outsiders' vicious attacks. Once the assaults from the northwest became too violent for the Ikoma to ignore, the rest of the Lion clan began to eradicate the barbaric tribes of northmen.

The Fox clan, the last samurai of the Ki-Rin, had served as huntsmen, scouts and strike forces for the Lion. Once the threat was removed, they began to march back to the Unicorn lands - but

were halted by Matsu armies. The land had been cleared by the Lion, they were told, and it would remain in Lion hands. So the small army of the Fox traveled south, through Beiden Pass and into the empty lands below the mountains.

One of the most unusual and well-visited regions of western Lion lands is the famous Mountain of the Seven Thunders. From its snowy peak, one can see the land from which Shinsei came, and the bridge to the land of the Celestial Court. According to legend, Amaterasu gave birth to her eight children on this hillside, before her husband swallowed them. Only one road leads to the peak of the mountain, covered with carvings of the Thunders of myth, their statuesque faces worn into the rocky shale by the tireless labor of the monks. Torii arches line the path to the top, littered each day with the flowers of visitors. Stairs, worn not by carving but by a thousand years of footsteps, mark the path above the treeline, and the bitter cold keeps snow at the top of the mountain year round.

Just below the peak, where the mountain becomes too difficult to climb, a large, empty shrine has been erected, with seven golden tables beneath the stone ceiling of an ancient cave. Six of the tables are empty, but the seventh - decorated with a Scorpion Mon - holds a delicately carved mask made of a single piece of black marble. This mask, once carved for Shosuro by Bayushi's own hand, is the remnant of the Scorpion Thunder, the only one to return from the dark battle with Fu Leng. At the base of the tables lie offerings of incense, money and flowers.

Few travelers who come to the Mountain of Seven Thunders complete the walk to the Cave of Thunder. The way is long, taking nearly a week to traverse, and unpleasant weather can turn the slopes of the mountain into rumbling slides of mud. Those who reach the cave often take a small piece of rock from the floor with them when they leave, as a reminder of the sacred site. Such a stone is often passed down through generations, or burned with a great hero of the clan, as a token of esteem. Those given such a funeral are said to pass before the judgment of their ancestors, and be forgiven all their troubles in life.

The Goblin's Rest Road passes along the edges of the Spine of the World mountains, marking the only northern route through the mountain range. The road is named poorly, for it was not goblins which were found along the road, but rather a



tribe of wandering Zokujin, the 'copper goblins' which have been enslaved by the Lion Clan to work their mines. Zokujin legends say they were tricked by an ancient Ikoma into trading their freedom away, but the Lion maintain that they saved the Zokujin from certain death, and offered them work in exchange for food and shelter. Whichever tale is true, the only Zokujin still alive in Rokugan work in the Lion mines, and they toil with unceasing vigilance beneath Lion taskmasters.

The Zokujin are a remarkable race, possibly the only creatures in Rokugan which eat minerals. Although they can live on a diet of plant matter, they prefer to eat raw rock, digesting copper, gold and gems with equal ease. They must be watched carefully in the mines, for they will take an occasional 'snack' of the wares they mine. They can be taught to speak Rokugani, but they have their own language. Their voices sound like rumbling rocks, and their large eyes glow with faint light in the darkness of their surroundings.

Few scholars have taken the time to parley with the creatures, or see if they can be educated. Their only legends that predate their servitude speak of an artifact known as the Bloodwhite Stone, whose powers seem beyond mortal comprehension. If even half of their tales of this item are true, the Bloodwhite Stone is the creator of the Sun and Moon, and holds the secrets of all magic. Needless to say, the Zokujin are ignored, and their fantastic stories are disregarded as mere child's fables.

MIDLANDS

The midlands of the Lion are filled with rice paddies, food sources and other trade goods

produced by Lion peasants. Game is prosperous here, and the small forests which dot the land hold numerous deer and other quarry. The midlands fill most of the Lion lands, stretching from the mountain ranges in the north and south to the edge of Unicorn and Crane lands in the east and west. The Osari plains, located in the eastern part of the midlands, are the site of numerous wars between Crane and Lion. Each clan wishes to claim the rich pastures and rice fields for themselves. For the last seventy years, however, they have been firmly in the Lion Clan's grasp.

The Three Sides River travels along the southern border, carrying goods from the Osari plains and other parts of the Empire through Lion territory. The Scorpion, the Lion, and the Crane war over this river, sparking the conflict at the lake known as Aka Mizu-umi (Red Lake), where ten thousand men died. The small shrines which dot the shoreline are proof of the superstitions of locals, as well as the grief of the families whose sons died in combat. Each dawn, the waters of the lake are tainted with red, and some refuse to believe the effect is nothing more than the sun's light on the water.

The shouts of men echoing in the fog, and the movement of shadowy samurai above the waves, is not all which gives this lake the reputation of being haunted. Visitors to its ghostly shores speak of a woman, dressed in the white robes of mourning, walking by the lake's shore each night at dusk. She wears a shawl, and a brilliant golden fan hangs from her obi. Although her face is shadowed, her wailing and weeping can be clearly heard, and those who have approached her say that her kimono sails across the ground as if there were no feet beneath the hem. The Wailing

KENSON GAKKA (CONTINUED)

It is said that in the lowest halls of the palace, beneath the foundations which were laid long ago by Scorpion hands, there is a river of great beauty. Clear waters, small streams of gold glitter, and soft sand lines the corridors. However, the Lion draw their water from another source - a river known as Shiretsu no Matsu, or Matsu's Footsteps, nearly a mile from the castle itself. Perhaps the water of the underground river has been permanently tainted by Scorpion hands, or perhaps it is cursed by the thousands of dead which the Lion left to burn in the Scorpion palace. In any case, its bitter water remains untouched by the current master of the palace, Matsu Kioma.





Woman is a legend of unknown origin. Some say she is the widow of one who fell during the Hour of the Wolf, and others say she is a traveler who drowned in the lake more recently; none know for sure. There are those who say she guards a great treasure, the booty carried by the Crane army into the ill-fated battle and sunk beneath the lake.

Shiro Matsu is the palace of the Matsu family, located just above Beiden Pass, in the midland territories of the Lion. This brave fortress has often been besieged by Crane or Scorpion enemies, but has never fallen in battle. Its walls were built by Crab engineers, and its high halls are designed to withstand fires, earthquakes, and (some say) even the wrath of Fu Leng. It is said that no invader can enter its halls without the knowledge of the Matsu, and that no spy could possibly slip past the vigilance of their guards. Entry is impossible, as the cliffside forces all who approach to travel through a tiny pass. That pass, known as the *Lion's Teeth*, is one of the most well-guarded roads in the Lion territories, and contains more guards and guardhouses than any

other area in Rokugan. The fortress stands at the mouth of Beiden Pass, watching from a high distance each traveler and caravan which makes the arduous trek.

The purpose of Matsu Palace was originally to defend the Lion trade routes, keeping the roads clear for the movement of food and supplies. However, as time passed and the face of the Empire changed, Shiro Matsu became a critical place for reserve troops in the south, readying against either the Scorpion or the Crane. The Matsu palace is the natural center point for Lion military movement, and holds enough supplies, weapons and armor to outfit an additional 10,000 men above the normal standing armies of the Lion.

Shiro Matsu is also the hallowed ground of the ancestors, and the Hall of the Ancestors rises in stark relief against the hillside above the sheltered palace. Its foreboding walls glower down on any who dare to pass within sight, and the small path from the palace to the Hall is the *only relief from the towering cliffs*.

When the armies of Fu Leng spilled out of the Shadowlands, many places of importance to the Great Clans were established. For the Lion one of the most important is Shinden Shorai, the "Temple of the Future".

Originally the humble home of several *eta* families, this building serves a very special function for the Lion. Every family of the clan has its own belief about what it represents, but all understand its practical importance. All Lion women who wish to bear their children in this place - as Akodo's wife did with every one of their children - are allowed, even encouraged. It is where most noble Lion children are born; nearly all of the women of the ruling houses are transported here in their last weeks, so that they may bring their sons and daughters into the world under the blessed watch of their ancestors. The descendants of



the original eta remain here still, and function as midwives.

This is not to say that children born away from Shinden Shorai are considered less important or without the favor of those who have gone before. But this place holds symbolic meaning for the clan; as Kitsu said before vanishing into the Horde, "Shinden Shorai is a testament to our faith in the past, present and future - of the clan, and the whole of the Empire. Keep it ever close to your heart."

A small community of sorts has grown around the temple, including the caretakers and eta whose duty it is to care for the building and those who come here. Several small rice paddies now surround a host of utilitarian lodgings erected around the original structure. The well that stood when Akodo walked still provides water for inhabitants and visitors. In the heart of one of the most violently contested borders of Rokugan, this tiny place knows relative peace.

Tradition has maintained this place since its inception. When the Crane took northern Lion lands away, the border between the clans shifted dangerously close to the temple, and many Lion expected the Crane to extend their holdings to include it.

But the Kitsu steadfastly denied that this was a possibility. Since the birth of Akodo's first son, the shugenja of the clan have been Shinden Shorai's self-appointed defenders. They claim that none who would cause the place ill fortune can enter the ravine, and cite the events of a thousand years ago as proof. "If Fu Leng's greatest army could not take Shinden Shorai," they say, "then what hope do the Crane have?"

The truth of the Kitsu's claim has never been tested - at least, not by any who could corroborate their testimony. Several overly curious individuals and even a few miscreants have boasted that they would be the first to bring back details of the mysterious birthing rituals of the Lion, but none have ever been seen again. The Kitsu also claim that these souls walk with their fallen brothers in Jigoku, and that they alone can speak with them. "It is a terrible thing to know that no one will ever speak to you again," they say.

These birth rituals, while shrouded in secrecy, are not elaborate. The room itself is, in keeping with Lion decor, incredibly simple. A hearth, the heavy birthing table, and the necessary ventilation and draining cuts in the wood constitute the bulk of its features. Its only true

adornments are a number of crudely drawn cat-images upon the walls. Rumor is that these are drawn by the older brothers and sisters of the expected; it is important for them to be present at their sibling's beginning, or so it is understood. The drawings have something to do with guarding the place - an ancient request of the Kitsu - though no one is quite sure of their purpose. So many cats have been drawn, however, that the walls are full, and the children now sketch them on the floor, the ceiling, and scraps of paper, and hang them from the trees outside. As for the rest, Rokugani can only lay so much credence in tales of wild eta, jumping about and screaming like madmen to scare off evil spirits.

With the Kitsu busy protecting the temple, the Ikoma have taken on the recordkeeping duties. When a child is born here, an Ikoma is always on hand, recording the events precisely. He or she notes every word spoken and every emotion felt up to, during and after the moment of first breath; captures the names and images of all those present, and also, reputedly, of every ancestor who visits the baby in its first days of life (though this cannot be confirmed except through the Kitsu or Ikoma); they even note the positions of the stars, and events nearby, which may bode well or ill for the child.

This account serves as the first chapter in that Lion's odyssey, an ongoing chronicle of his or her life, preserved and maintained by the Ikoma family until death. The original draft is collected with those of every other Lion who has lived since the time of Akodo in the vast library at Shiryo Ikoma. Although this is considered a communal duty by the Ikoma, it is said that, periodically, a historian takes such an active interest in one child that she personally follows his or her life until one or the other dies. Often, these dedicated souls become intimately involved in the account, attaching themselves to the Lion as a friend or retainer.

While the Kitsu are forever linked to the past of this place, the Ikoma will always live in its present. The Akodo, and by extension the Matsu, both view Shinden Shorai as a guiding light for their future. Beside the fact that their children come into the world there, it represents a source of hope to them, and a foundation for the Empire as a whole. The legend says that those who fought alongside Kitsu so long ago were not only Lion. Thus, the name of the place, derived from the eta



THE LAKE OF SORROWS

The second lake in the Spine of the World Mountains is no more pleasant than the Aka Mizu-umi, and has even fewer visitors. It is known as the Mizu-umi no Fuko, or Lake

of Sorrows. Where the spirits of the Red Lake are interested only in continuing their ghostly battle, those souls called to rest in the Lake of Sorrows are violent and said to attack any who come within their territory. The spirits of samurai who fell in battle at nearby Beiden Pass rest uncomfortably here, rising from their shallow graves to defeat any who disturb their sleep. Bones litter the shore of the lake, washed up from its depths or uncovered by the lapping waves.

Shrines also cover the shore of Mizu-umi no Fuko, but their golden frames are bent and their wood warped as if by constant battering. The spirits of this place are not appeased by the simple offerings of travelers, families or monks, and are said to drag any who pass near them into a watery grave. Travelers are warned to avoid this area at all costs, and even the bravest Matsu does not tempt the ancestors by camping near the cursed place.



A GHOST STORY

A man was traveling on a narrow country road, returning from the funeral of his sister. His heart was heavy, and he did not reach the township where he had planned to spend the night when dark came. But thinking it could not be too much further, and not wanting to lie the night in the wet grass, he pressed on.

Lost in his thoughts, the man realized abruptly that he was no longer traveling alone. He saw the figure of a woman walking beside him. Her hair was long and loose, falling around her face and hiding it from view. Her garments may have been white or some other light color, but in the pale glow of the moon, they looked gray. The man immediately suspected his companion to be unnatural, and when he saw that she had no feet, his suspicions were confirmed.

Trying to keep his heart steady, he thought that perhaps the ghost of his sister had followed him from her grave out of loneliness. Wanting to test his theory, but still unwilling to address the *yorei* directly, he began to sing softly a song he and his sister had sung in childhood. As his voice rose shakily in the chorus for the second time, he heard a woman's voice seconding him. When it followed him into the second chorus, he turned to the spirit, his heart filled with joy.

greeting *Shorai ga aru* (i.e. "Have a bright future"), has become a declaration of their faith in the Fortunes' hand, and how it will guide the clan's role for the Empire

Appendix IV: The Spiritual World

Ghosts

A common Rokugani practice is the summertime telling of ghost stories. Whole villages gather in the fading light of day to listen to each other tell harrowing tales, and passing travelers are welcomed for the stories they bring.

Although many of these stories are versions of well-known tales, they often have their roots in truth. Many a traveler on Rokugan's dark roads at night has encountered a specter or *yorei*. Still others have been accosted in their own homes. These experiences are terrifying to the first-person observer, but they are the stuff of marvelous tales in the security of friends and relations.

Some *yorei* are the spirits who lost their way on the road to Jigoku. Having strayed from the path, they may not be able to find it again. In other cases, the forgetfulness that often accompanies death sets in, and the spirit forgets where it was going. A *yorei* wandering in such a state of confusion, unaware of its own death, may be a pitiful thing, or it may become angry and violent. In such cases, the loss of its memories may be accompanied by the departure of its reason. Such *yorei* are not intrinsically malicious, but they can be extremely dangerous and unpredictable in their mercurial temper.

Ghosts of this nature usually appear human initially, but cannot maintain the form for very long. Forgetful ghosts lose the memory of their

own shape and so cannot retain it. A sure way to tell a lost ghost is to watch it closely. Small bits of it will unravel, details will shift. The eyes may change color. Often they have two left hands or two right ones. These lost spirits are usually looking for something to grasp onto, and unwary individuals may find themselves the object of unwelcome interest.

In contrast to the disjointed ramblings of the forgetful ghosts, another spirit, commonly called a 'little ancestor,' is defined by its purpose. Little ancestors, also called punishing ghosts, are varyingly perceived to be family spirits watching the actions of their descendants or else kami with a particular bent for justice.

These spirits react to the ill deeds of the living, and their reaction is invariably in direct proportion to the 'crime' they perceive has been committed. Many of their activities are mischievous. For example, a housewife who consistently fails to keep her house clean may come home to discover her rooms filled with dust. Or if she does not clean her tub in preparation for company, she may find herself drenched suddenly with filthy water.

Young children who disregard their parents' warnings to stay indoors or not to wander off sometimes find that when they try to return home, they have lost their way. The children then wander for hours, unable to find their way in abruptly unfamiliar surroundings. Eventually they must call out to their parents, alerting them that they have snuck off. When the angry parents come to retrieve the child, they realize that he or she has not wandered far at all. The little ancestor has merely tricked them.

A samurai who has betrayed his lord could find himself in a great deal of trouble. There are many stories of men who did great wrong for greed or lust. One such story tells of a samurai who poisoned his wife so that he would be free to marry another. From that day forward, whenever he sought his own reflection he saw her face, stricken with death throes. Every time he tried to drink sake, the drink he poisoned her with, he tasted rotten death instead. Eventually these torments drove him to confess his crime and he was executed. This is similar to the work of vengeful ghosts, but does not require that the spirit of the wronged specifically remain for the haunting. As soon as justice was done, the existing spirits departed.

A third kind of ghost is that which simply will not or cannot leave because it perceives that it has too much left to accomplish. Mothers who have passed away while their infants are still very young sometimes stay near to care for the children until a mortal woman is found to do so, or the child is old enough to get along without her.

A yojimbo who failed to protect his lord may stay in spirit to guard that lord's son. In one case, an obscure monastery in the mountains is said to have had at least one brother who was closer to enlightenment than any other. Refusing to leave his life's work of translating a particularly long and difficult manuscript, he stayed on to continue after death, departing only when the task was finished.

A similar but more brutal tale is that of a Crab bushi who fell while defending the Kaiu Wall. A great oni tore him down and passed over the wall, but no Shadowlands creature has done so since. The bushi's ghost stands guard at his post on the wall, cutting down any monster foolish enough to approach him. The Crab no longer post a living guard there.

This last kind of spirit is similar to the *gaki*, or hungry ghosts, in that both have their singular tasks or obsessions. The determined ghost generally retains a fairly clear sense of his own identity, however, while the *gaki* more or less degenerates into one great hunger.

For whatever reason, the *gaki* is uncontrollably hungry for one particular thing. This thing may vary from the obscure to the obscene, from silk to corpses. A *gaki* appears in different forms, but most commonly as a dark cloud, or a soft ball of light. A favorite story throughout Rokugan is that of the clever monk who notices that the smoke from his campfire is not drifting, but stationary. In one version, the monk immediately begins to chant a protective sutra which traps the *gaki* in its smoke form. Then he calls on the spirits of the wind to have the *gaki* pulled apart. In another version, he realizes as he surreptitiously observes the creature that it will have to assume a partly solid form to drink his blood. He then pretends to prepare to sleep, but instead lies still with his staff held near to his body. When the *gaki* approaches its seemingly unaware prey, the monk jumps up at gives it a hard whack with his staff, knocking the thing's head clean off. The still-insubstantial body is forced to flee, and the monk burns the head, turning it into real smoke once and for all.

As each haunting is unique, so is each ghost story, customized and tailored by the teller to show just what he chooses. But the telling remains a favorite sport for peasant and noble alike.

The Honorable Dead

Rokugan is populated as much by its dead as its living. The past stands and looks with a noble visage on the future, like an expectant patriarch. In such a place, it is a sacred duty to speak with the spirits of those who have passed from the mortal world. This is the honor which falls to the Kitsu.

THE BRIDGE TO JIGOKU

From their earliest days, young Kitsu are taught the appropriate ways to venerate the dead. As they grow older, they learn also how to speak with them, and eventually, how to traverse the path to their realm.

Young Kitsu learn stories at bedtime of a road that crosses all the other roads in Rokugan. If you know just how to look for it, and how to walk upon it, that road will take you to a singular forest: filled not with trees, but with great tall stones, rising high to jagged points. The floor is also of stone, weathered and cracked by more time than man can measure.

The forest is thick, and the road becomes a twisting pathway, easily lost if he should falter. But if the traveler is judicious in his steps, he will find himself through the forest and at the edge of a great lake. Instead of water, the lake is filled with pale mist, swirling around itself, tendrils lapping at the shore like tentative waves. A narrow bridge stretches across the lake and disappears into the mists ahead. Its surface is smooth and soft white, like polished bone.

This is the bridge that leads to Jigoku, and only the very strong and very honorable can travel both ways across it.

This story is a slightly kinder version of what adult Kitsu learn in their lessons. The Lion as a clan have seldom been accused of too much sheltering. In fact, each Kitsu stands before a tribunal of elders shortly after their *gempukku*. They are evaluated in a number of ways to see if they have the temperament and endurance to walk the spirit path. The way is a rigorous one, and many are weeded out before they begin to



A GHOST STORY, CONTINUED

"Sister, I have missed you terribly!" he exclaimed, his arms thrown open. The woman turned to him, and for a second he thought he saw the face of a woman he did not know, a little plainer than his sister. Then as he watched, the face changed, the jaw growing long, the mouth opening wide like a snake's. The eyes looked at him from very far back in their sockets, small and bright in the centers. He could hear the song still coming from the yorei's gaping mouth, words forming although the lips did not move.

With a scream of terror, he threw himself backwards. Scrambling up, he fled into the field, not looking back, but hearing the horribly familiar song just over his shoulder. When he felt his heart would burst from running, he came to a trickling stream and dashed through. Falling to the ground on the other side, he looked back to see the yorei wandering back and forth on the far side of the bank, looking lost.

He eventually reached his own home, but in the nights that followed, he and his children could still hear *the thing singing*. It continued for months before he consulted a shugenja who instructed him to dig a shallow moat around his house and keep it always filled with water. After he did this he and his children were never troubled again. But to this day, none of his descendants dare travel abroad at night.



THE KITSU'S MASK

Whenever a Kitsu expects to meet with the dead, he wears his mask. To do otherwise is a gross breach of etiquette. Like many such things however, there are practical ramifications as well. When visiting Jigoku, where identity no longer holds consequence, the individuality of the Kitsu's face is offensive. In dealing with hungry shades haunting the mortal world, it is more of a safety precaution. If a Kitsu is unable to appease an angry spirit or lay it to rest, the mask insures that he and his family do not inadvertently become the objects of the haunting. Ghosts are very literal, and unable to recognize the Kitsu once he has removed his mask.

Every Kitsu makes his mask by hand. Reeds pulled from running water are shaped and dried, and then covered inside and out with paste made from rice gathered under the new moon. The mask must be crafted with great care, for it is the face that the Kitsu will wear in Jigoku after his own death. No man keeps his living face after death, but only the Kitsu choose which one they will wear in its place.

really learn. After all, to send a lesser man to speak to the spirits of the clan's greatest ancestors would be insulting past endurance.

Those judged to be of proper temperament, sufficient lineage, sound mind and strong body, begin their training. Initially this consists of detailed studies of Rokugan's history, especially its honored dead. Later, students learn the meditations that will give them the concentration and other skills needed to summon and speak with the departed. Those who show sufficient promise are taken into the final circle. They are taught the way to Jigoku.

More than a physical path, the road to Jigoku is a spiritual journey. Every man and woman in Rokugan, from the lowest *eta* to the greatest emperor, will make the trip once. But only a rare few learn to be familiar with the way. Each man's path to Jigoku is different. To some it is a road, well-traveled and easy. To others it is a rushing river that batters and drags the traveler over sharp rocks and foaming rapids. But always, the destination is the same. The forest of rocks waits for everyone, and even the dead might lose their way.

Rokugani culture is filled with stories of spirits returned uneasy from the lands of death, hungry or lost. In fact, many of these are the remnants of those hapless dead lost in those rocks. They eventually wandered out, not on the other side, but back on this one. One of the duties of the Kitsu is to guide these spirits back to the land of death, through the rocks, and over the bridge. No small task. The Kitsu must first be able to perceive the ghost, and then determine what the particular entity hungers for. This will allow them to gain the spirit's attention and lead them.

The journey over the bridge is a perilous rite in itself. The bridge is the last transition between this world and the next. As the spirits of the dead cross over, the last remnants of who they were in this life slip away from them, falling into the shifting mists below. These mists are the very substance of those identities, gathered from countless souls since the beginning of time. When the spirit emerges on the far side of the lake, it steps from the bridge and enters Jigoku.

ENTERING JIGOKU

The final thing that the most dedicated Kitsu learns is the nature of the after-life itself. Although it appears to be a place, similar in many

respects to Rokugan, Jigoku is actually less a location and more a state of existence.

Visitors to the spirit realm are often surprised at its mundane seeming. There are fields, forests and castles like those of the material world. But the geography, while reminiscent of Rokugan's, is not an exact mirror. Space works differently, as does distance, so that a familiar inland forest may be only a few yards from the ocean, or great chasms may be in the center of crowded towns.

Jigoku is populated with men, women and children. The landscape is tiered, with *eta*, *hinin* and *heimin* living in valleys of varying degrees of depth. Those ranked lowest in life are found lowest in the geography of the afterlife. They carry out tasks similar to those they performed in life, over and over. The act is symbolic of their place in the whole of Jigoku. A woman carrying the same basket of rice through the same field, endlessly emptying it into a larger basket, is like the nail that shields the tip of your littlest finger, or the blood that flows through your veins. She has her job, and carries it out to perfection again and again. And she'll continue to do so until the time to pass into a new world arises.

There is almost no color in the lower levels of Jigoku. It is not shadowed or dark, but bleached, like a field filled with too much light. Sound comes only faintly.

On the middle level of the landscape dwell the spirits of samurai and the honorable dead. This level will appear most familiar to visitors as it appears very similar to the material Rokugan.

The uppermost peak is where the Emperor's palace sits. It explodes with color so vibrant it dazzles, and sound so clear it deafens. In that palace, a hundred generations of Hanteis pass through the corridors in a glittering crowd. They shimmer like faceted gemstones cast into bright sunlight. And each of them passes the others blindly, holding court for his own following, oblivious to the presence of any other.

Each soul in Jigoku carries on in its own path. Although it may share space with another entity, it is not really aware of any other. A part of the Kitsu's skill is in finding the particular spirit they seek and gaining its attention long enough to interact. Spirits in Jigoku shed their identity before entering, and they no longer bear the faces they did in life. This poses a dilemma for anyone seeking them.

When a Kitsu, fully trained in his art, seeks to deal with the spirits of the dead, he begins an



arduous process. To begin with, the Kitsu must walk the long bridge to Jigoku, taking care to hold his own identity close to him. As he does so, he reaches out into the mist for the remnants of the person he wishes to speak with. As he crosses over, he gathers these fragments to him, shaping them into a tangible form. The manifestation of the identity is unique for each individual: sometimes an ancestral sword, sometimes a favorite ornament. The Kitsu then travels through the shifting landscape of Jigoku, seeking the spirit whose past he carries. Once he recognizes the essence of the one he's looking for, he gives them the item that contains their name and memories. The spirit then will recall who they were in life and may choose to answer the Kitsu's questions. When the Kitsu is finished, he takes back the object and with it the memories of the dead. When he travels back over the bridge, he scatters them into the mist again.

There is another resource that the Kitsu may choose to call upon in the land of the dead. From the time of the very first Kitsu, one member from each generation (usually the most skilled) has made one of the greatest and least understood sacrifices known. They have crossed into Jigoku after death, using all of their skill to retain their memories of life.

These lonely few cut themselves off forever from the wholeness that is Jigoku, although they continue to dwell there. And in the process, they remove themselves from any possibility of returning to life again in a new cycle. They form a 'living' history of Rokugan, an invaluable resource to the generations that follow them.

A more common kind of lingering ancestor is those who simply choose not to cross over at all. Rokugan's history and folklore are filled with tales of ancestors who stay to be of service to their descendants or who appear to help in times of great trouble or hardship. These are individuals who, by sheer force of will, have chosen to retain themselves and to stay on this side of the veil to finish work they perceive as undone. Such individuals may be from any clan, or any class. But however strong their force of will, if the living should eventually begin to neglect or forget them, they will slowly forget themselves, finally being drawn across into the afterlife forever.

Kitsu study is intensely rigid. For all the formality of living courts and cultures, the dead are ever more so. History, ritual and focus make up the bulk of the young Kitsu student's training.

Discipline, strength and resourcefulness make up the latter portion. When a student passes from novice (those who know the histories and the theory of dealing with spirits) to practitioner (one who meets with the dead) he passes through a series of initiations, culminating in the making of his mask.

Not every Kitsu achieves the degree of skill necessary to walk in Jigoku. Those who do not perform a variety of services and duties throughout Rokugan. They may help the bereaved grieve, bringing them comfort and understanding. They act as historical resources along with the Ikoma. And in addition to guiding confused spirits to the afterlife, they are often called on to deal with a wide range of hauntings and other spiritual matters.

Rokugan is filled with old wives' tales and superstitions, but in matters relating to the dead, the Kitsu are the authorities.

Nemuranai

THE BELL OF THE HEAVENS

This tremendous bell, made entirely of brass, hangs on a thick branch in the forest outside of Shiro Matsu. Its mammoth sides reach nearly twelve feet from the ground, and its lip is only a foot from the earth. On a flat rock nearby rests a brass *die tsuchi*, a hammer nearly as tall as a man. This great bell was forged at the command of a Crane daimyo who wished to embarrass the Lion Champion in the Emperor's presence. It was brought to the Lion during the Emperor Hantei XVII's birthday celebration.

The Lion accepted it with the assurances that a man who was pure of heart could ring the bell, and a sound like no other would be heard. The hammer was first given to the Matsu daimyo, who swung a mighty blow against it, but no sound was heard. Next, the Phoenix tried, but again, the bell was silent. Finally, after a member of each clan had swung the hammer against the great bell and failed, the Crane stepped forward. He tapped it lightly with the hammer, and from the bell came a tremendous chime.

Shocked, the assemblage was alive with rumor. Throughout the winter court, champions from each clan tried, and yet only the small Crane could cause the bell to sound.

At last, the Ikoma daimyo stepped forward and asked his Champion's permission to attempt the

WALKING JIGOKU

You'll notice that we didn't give you rules for entering and leaving the spirit realm of Jigoku.

The lands of Jigoku are subjective - you see what, in a way, you wish to see. Each entrance into Jigoku is different, fraught with its own dangers and puzzles, and unique from every other time.

We can't tell you what you'll find when you go to Jigoku. Only your GM knows for certain, and it's different every time. You might walk through a misty battlefield, a courtier's twisted palace, or the darkest pits of an Oni's lair.

Ask your GM. We're quite certain that *they* know the path to Jigoku. But be warned - once you arrive, it might not always be easy to find your way home.



ANCESTRAL SWORD OF THE LION

Shori (described on page 25) remains in Otsan Uchi until the Emperor requires its use. Those who wield *Shori* may attack a number of times per round equal to their Honor. This is the wielder's total number of attacks (non-cumulative with other effects).

feat. Quietly, he approached the bell, swung the hammer, and a great chime pealed through the Emperor's palace, even louder than the first. When he was asked how he had foiled the Crane, Ikoma Osudo only smiled and replied, "The bell has no sound."

The Crane conceded the bell to the Lion, and it was carried to the forests of the Matsu, placed on the branch of the greatest oak, and left as a lesson to all those who think themselves 'pure of heart.' In the hundreds of years since, the limb of the ancient oak has so twined itself about the bell's top that it has become an integral part of the tree. It is often called the 'Heart of Matsu Forest' for this reason.

THE MEMPO OF MATSU HITOMI

Matsu Hitomi, possibly the most famous samurai-ko in history, once wore this mempo into battle at the side of the Lion forces. When she was forced to betray her commander and flee, she left her armor behind so that she would not dishonor her ancestors. Its golden mask is in the form of a Lion's jaw, elaborately tooled and covered in small mirrors which catch the sun and shine it into the enemy's eyes. On the field of battle, the mempo shines brightly, enabling anyone – including enemies – to find the wearer. Only the boldest samurai-ko of the Lion have been granted the right to wear this precious artifact into battle.

The mempo grants the user a free raise to all battle (Battle, Kenjutsu, Athletics) skills when in a combat of greater than twenty warriors, and shields the user from one die of damage each turn. However, should the samurai-ko who bears the mempo ever commit a dishonorable act on the field of battle, the spirit of Matsu Hitomi herself will arise from the mists and slay the offender.

HANTEI'S TESSEN

Once owned by Hantei XXIII, this unusual fan is forged with the golden symbol of the Lion on one side and the brilliant chrysanthemum of the Emperor on the other. When the daughter of the Emperor chose to marry a Matsu, her choice was scorned by many politicians and courtiers. Her father, a wise man, decided to allow his only child to marry as her heart wished.

Some claimed that the marriage was no more than a political ploy, chosen by Hantei Retsuhime to ensure her own rulership rather than obeying the dictates of a powerful husband. Others said

that the Hantei maiden did indeed marry the bold samurai out of love, and still other records of the time maintain that the only son of the Doji house eligible for marriage was a terrible boor. Whatever the reason, the aged Emperor gave the Matsu house this tessen as part of the gifts exchanged between the two houses on the day of their wedding.

Although it is made of bronze, it is as strong as steel, and cannot be broken by the blow of a katana. It gives the user a bonus to attack (add twice their Strength to the roll), and allows them to keep 3 dice in damage rather than a tessen's usual damage rating.

ANCESTRAL ARMOR OF THE LION

The High Histories of the Ikoma say that the Armor of the first Akodo daimyo (called "*Junsui*" or "Purity") was forged of the first steel made by the Crab, and given to Akodo One-eye by Hida himself. Its shoulder-plates were said to be able to stand the weight of a hundred boulders, and its *do* was enameled with a picture of Amaterasu herself. The armor's bearer has constantly been shown in the histories as a person of honor, truth and loyalty.

Until the last Akodo Fuso, the most recent bearer of the Ancestral Armor, was a traitor to his clan and his family. During the Battle of the Cresting Wave, the Lion were called to Crab lands to help defend the wall. It is whispered that Fuso made a secret deal with a powerful Oni, promising to provide the Shadowlands a means of getting through. In return, the Oni offered to grant him unparalleled battle skills.

The break was successful, and only the swift intervention of the Dragon clan prevented the Oni from finding a passage north of the wall. However, Fuso's deal with the Oni was already complete, and in return, the Oni had endowed the ancestral armor with a new power.

Since that time, it has remained within a secret alcove of the Lion Ancestral Hall, awaiting one who can purge the Oni's dark gift. Anyone who bears the armor can spend the experience and raise their skills to six for as long as they are its rightful possessor. While the character has the armor, these skills will be at 6, but should they lose the armor, they will remain at 5 until the armor is returned to the character's possession. The armor cannot be left behind, and must be worn as often as possible. Only while in the Emperor's court or some equally pressing

situation can the user refrain from wearing the brightly enameled do. Further, the character gains the ability to spend as many as three points of Void in any combat round.



The Akodo Tacticians

by Noel Meyer

STRONGHOLD

The Ancient Halls of the Lion

DYNASTY DECK: 41 CARDS

Events

- A Soul of Thunder ToV ... U
- Imperial Gift Jade ... R
- Doom of the Dark Lord Promo ... *

Holdings

- 3x Copper Mines Jade ... C
- 3x Jade Works Jade ... C
- 3x Gambling House Jade ... U
- 3x Merchant Caravan FK ... C
- 3x Small Farm Jade ... C
- 1x Charter of the Lion Clan Jade ... F

Personalities

- 3x Matsu Gohei OE ... C
- 3x Matsu Agetoki OE ... U
- 3x Ikoma Ryozo Jade ... U
- 2x Matsu Chokoku SL ... C
- 2x Ikoma Kaoku Jade ... U
- 2x Ikoma Tsanuri FK ... U
- 1x Ikoma Tsanuri (Exp.) Jade ... R
- 1x Kitsu Motso SL ... R
- 1x Matsu Tsuko (Inexp.) SCC ... R
- 1x Matsu Tsuko OE ... R
- 1x Akodo Toturi (Inexp.) SCC ... F

Regions

- 2x Doji Plains FK ... U

FATE DECK: 40 CARDS

Actions

- 3x Block Supply Lines Jade ... C
- 3x Charge Jade ... C
- 2x Counterattack Jade ... U
- 2x Fires of Retribution SCC ... C
- 3x Focus Jade ... R
- 3x Iaijutsu Duel Jade ... C
- 3x Rallying Cry Jade ... U
- 3x Refugees Jade ... C
- 1x Ring of Earth Jade ... U
- 1x Ring of Void Jade ... U
- 3x Strength of Purity Jade ... U
- 3x Superior Strategist C&J ... R
- 3x Superior Tactics Jade ... C
- 3x Test of Might Jade ... C

Followers

- 1x Matsu House Guard SL ... U
- 1x Lieutenant Tsanuri SCC ... R

Items

- 1x Anc. Armor of the Lion Clan .. EE ... F
- 1x Jade Throne HE1 ... R

While not a typical speed deck, this builds up much more power than a fast attack deck does and can still take down the occasional early province. The Historian makes your people bigger and your tacticians are already big. Pump up their stats, and one personality is often enough to take down a whole army. Within the first three turns you'll want to get out as much gold as possible and get up to 10 honor. Discard the first couple of expensive people who turn up - you'll get more of them later.

Use the high-focus cards freely for gold through the caravans, force through the tacticians, or as focuses for duels. Also remember that this deck can gain a lot of honor from duels and buying personalities. The Imperial favor is an important tool, and military isn't the only way to win.





"Big Lion"

by Chris Bergstrom

STRONGHOLD

The Ancient Halls of the Lion

DYNASTY DECK: 48 CARDS

Events

- Imperial Gift Jade ... R
- Inheritance Jade ... R
- Lions Attack the Crane SCC ... R

Holdings

- 3x Blacksmiths Jade ... C
- 3x Copper Mine Jade ... C
- 3x Gambling House Jade ... U
- 3x Iron Mine Jade ... C
- 3x Jade Works Jade ... C
- 3x Merchant Caravan FK ... C

Personalities

- 3x Akodo Matoko SCC ... C
- 1x Akodo Toturi (Inexp.) SCC ... F
- 3x Ikoma Kaoku Jade ... U
- 3x Ikoma Kimura AoD ... C
- 2x Ikoma Tsanuri FK ... U
- 1x Ikoma Tsanuri (Exp.) Jade ... R
- 1x Kage (Exp. 2) Jade ... R
- 1x Kitsu Motso SL ... R
- 3x Matsu Agetoki OE ... U
- 3x Matsu Gohei OE ... C
- 1x Matsu Tsuko (Inexp.) SCC ... R
- 1x Matsu Tsuko OE ... R
- 1x Toturi (Exp. 2) ToV ... R

Regions

- 3x Doji Plains FK ... U

FATE DECK: 40 CARDS

Actions

- 3x An Oni's Fury C&J ... U
- 3x Counterattack Jade ... U
- 3x Defenders of the Realm Jade ... U
- 1x The Egg of P'an Ku OE ... R
- 3x Fires of Retribution SCC ... C
- 3x Focus Jade ... R
- 3x For the Empire ToV ... U
- 3x Geisha Assassin Jade ... R
- 1x His Most Favored SL ... R
- 3x Lies, Lies, Lies Jade ... R
- 3x Rallying Cry Jade ... U
- 1x Ring of Earth Jade ... U
- 1x Ring of the Void Jade ... U
- 3x The Fog of War SCC ... C

Followers

- 1x Matsu House Guard SL ... U

Items

- 1x Anc. Armor of the Lion Clan .. EE ... F
- 1x Anc. Sword of the Lion Clan .. IE ... F
- 1x Armor of Earth FK ... R
- 1x The Dragon Pearl SCC ... R
- 1x Flying Carpet ToV ... R
- 1x The 12th Black Scroll ToV ... R

Effective in both Multiplayer and one-on-one, "Big Lion" is a formidable deck that is extremely fast for its size. At first glance, it seems the fate is very haphazard. Because it is a tactician deck, most of the Fate Deck has a 4 or greater focus.

The cards with less than 4 focus are staple cards for most attacking decks (Rallying Cry, etc). The fate is mostly reactions, and is extremely preventive. The fate is extremely fluid, and can be easily changed to suit your cardstock and opponents in your area. For multiplayer, you may want to substitute in some of the good high-focus multiplayer cards like Salute of the Samurai or Political Dissent.

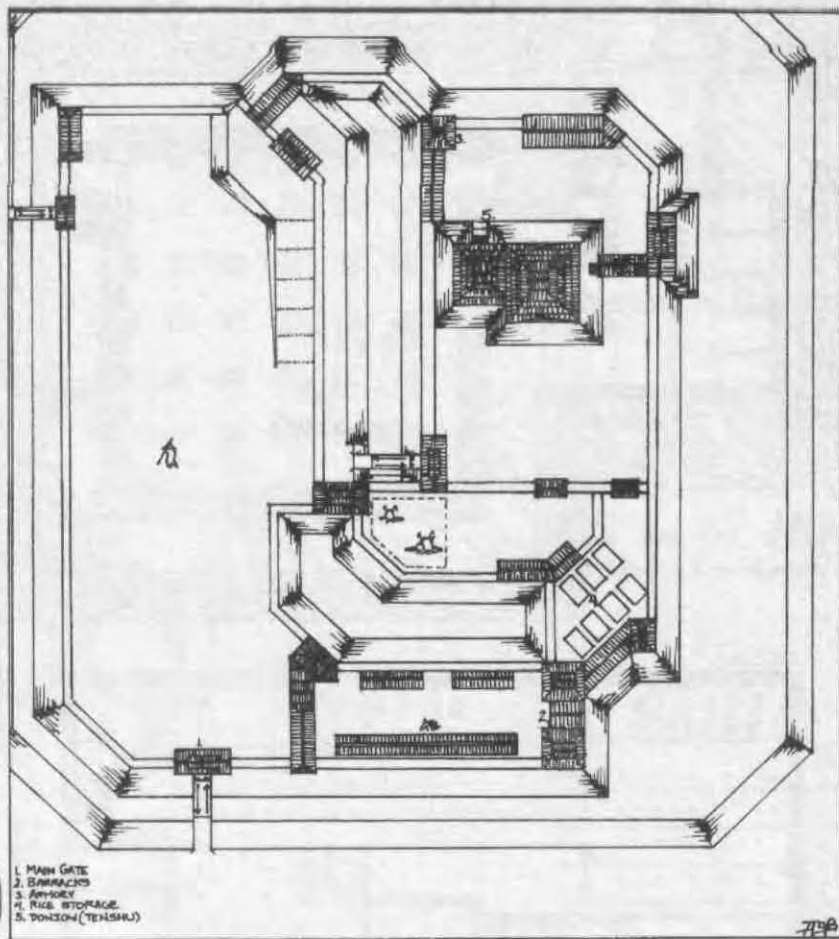
The Dynasty runs on the big production of its holdings. Your Gambling Houses and Merchant Caravans almost always produce 4 gold, and, combined with Doji Plains, give you a distinct speed boost. Your Blacksmiths can produce a lot also, coupled with your Iron Mines.

Use the small, cheap Lions to boost your honor up to 10 so you can play the bigger ones. If you get an early Gohei, Kimura, or Matoko, make sure to purchase them for full cost so you can reach that 10 honor plateau. After that, you should purchase most everyone for the clan discount (even though there is enough Personal Honor in the deck to make it above 40). With lots of Big Lion Tacticians, you should do well in late battles. Good luck, and Happy Hunting!

SHIRO AKODO

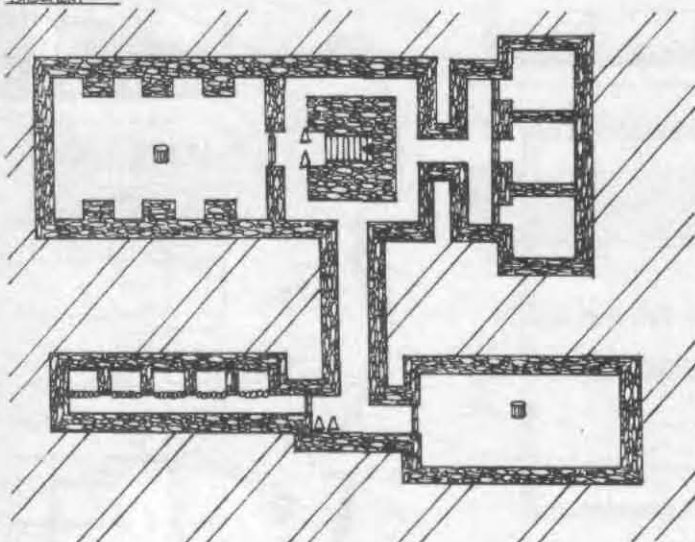
KEY		

1" = 10 FT

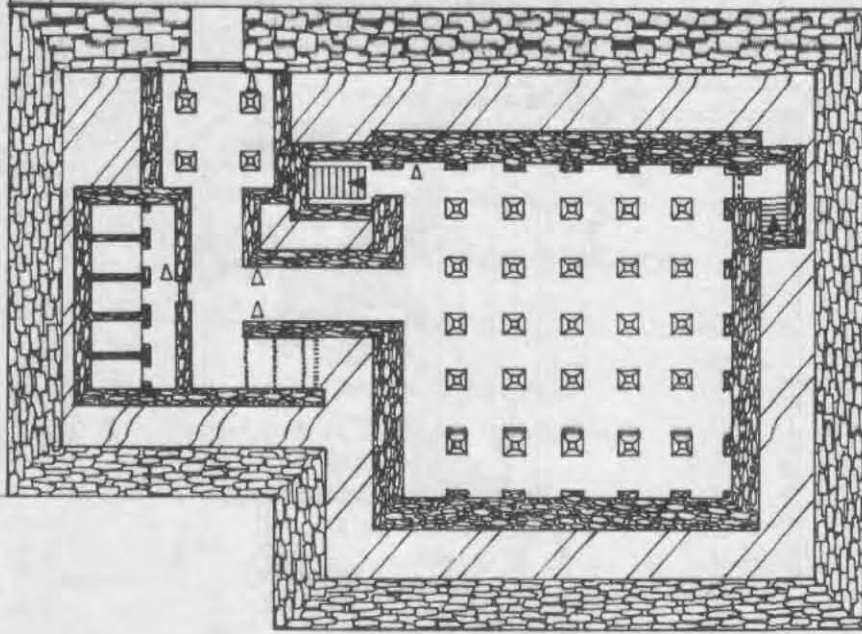


DONJON

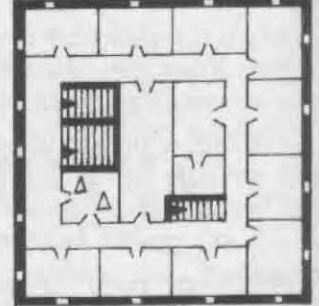
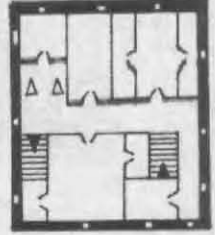
BASEMENT



1st Floor



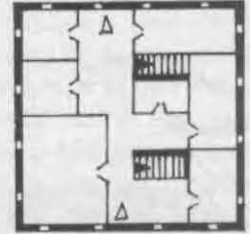
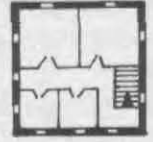
4th Floor



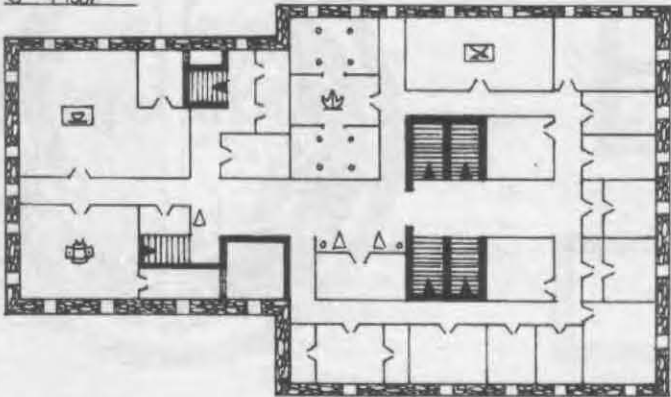
2nd Floor



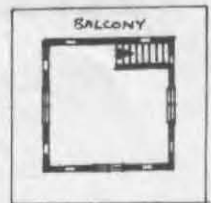
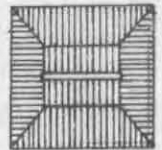
5th Floor



3rd Floor



6th Floor





Legend of the Five Rings

Name:

Clan:

Profession:

Fire

Agility:
Intelligence:

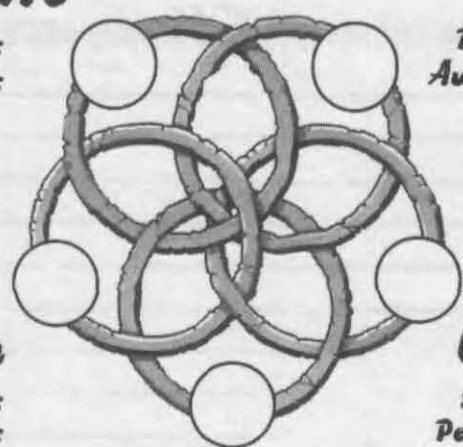
Air

Reflexes:
Awareness:

Primary Weapon

Primary Armor

TN to be Hit
(Reflexes x 5 + Armor)



Earth

Stamina:
Willpower:

Water

Strength:
Perception:

Skills

Void

Void Points Spent:

Spells

Insight:

Wounds

<input type="checkbox"/>	-0
<input type="checkbox"/>	-1
<input type="checkbox"/>	-2
<input type="checkbox"/>	-3
<input type="checkbox"/>	-4
<input type="checkbox"/>	Down
<input type="checkbox"/>	Out
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dead

School: _____ **Rank:** _____

Advantages/Disadvantages

Glory:

Honor:

Experience Points:



Legend of the Five Rings

Name:

Clan:

Home Province:

Allies and Enemies

History and Glorious Deeds

Weapons & Equipment

Gifts, Bestowments and Recognitions

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years, they have had a single
purpose: Protect the Emperor ...
at any cost.

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 - Excerpts from *Leadership* and *Bushido*
 - Information on warfare in Rokugan, including armies, tactics and advice on roleplaying a military campaign
 - New Skills, Techniques, Advantages and Disadvantages, and Lion Ancestors
 - Information on the Lion provinces and Jigoku, the spirit world



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