

Welcome to Roleplaying in the Emerald Empire

It is an era of sudden change and upheaval in Rokugan. Mortal schemes, natural calamities, and celestial turmoil alike have disrupted the political, military, and spiritual equilibrium of the land. Long-simmering rivalries and fresh betrayals ripple through the courts and on the battlefield. The Chrysanthemum Throne is beset by threats from without and within, and the honor of the seven Great Clans shall be put to the test. Who among the clans will prove strong enough to guide Rokugan in these tumultuous times? Will their names be lifted up beside those of the honored ancestors, or will they fall among the ranks of the Empire's most infamous villains?

In the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game*, players take on the roles of individual samurai whose honor and loyalty will be put to the test. These samurai serve their lords as warriors, courtiers, priests, or monks and embark on adventures filled with drama, suspense, humor, romance, and horror. All the while, they must grapple with their human emotions and choose between following their heart's desire or doing what society—and the Code of Bushidō—demands of them. These personal stories of triumph and tragedy will reverberate across the Emerald Empire and shape the very future of Rokugan.

The *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* provides players and game masters with the tools to tell stories of samurai drama within the Emerald Empire. The following pages contain rules for creating characters sworn to serve one of the seven Great Clans and for running game sessions filled with intrigue and conflict. A wide variety of skills, techniques, passions, flaws, and more allow players to customize their character mechanically and narratively. The custom dice mechanics enable players to contribute to the unfolding story and determine whether their character succeeds, by how much, and how much it will cost them. And the fantastical feudal setting of Rokugan provides a rich tapestry of majesty and wonder where these stories can unfold.

The Code of Bushidō

The Way of the Warrior, or Bushidō, elevates samurai from the rest of society while also chaining them to near-unattainable ideals. Samurai must embody righteousness and honor, loyalty and duty, and courtesy and compassion, as well as courage in the face of death. A samurai is expected to uphold these virtues in their every word and deed, even when these ideals conflict with one another.

A samurai's reputation for adhering to the Code of Bushidō reflects not only on the individual, but upon that samurai's household, family, and clan. Should they prove unable to live up to these expectations, only ritualized suicide can wash away the stain to their honor. According to Bushidō, there is no room in a samurai's life for anything that would get in the way of these ideals. Love and ambition, pride and greed—even happiness—are to be sacrificed for the sake of Bushidō. Yet, samurai are still human, made from the mingling of Lady Sun's order and Lord

Moon's chaos. The tenets of Bushidō would not be ideals to strive toward if they were easy to realize in daily life. Characters in Rokugan are measured by their own faith in, and devotion to, the Code of Bushidō through their honor rank.

The Samurai's Struggle

Many Rokugani plays have been written chronicling the impossible choices facing a samurai as their human feelings, or *ninjō*, conflict with their obligations to society, or *giri*. Those things that would get in the way of Bushidō are real and meaningful forces in a samurai's life, and it is the rare soul who can resist their call completely. The stories and the drama of the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game* revolve around the tension between these two conflicting forces. One of the fundamental choices a player must make during character creation is to select opposing *ninjō* and *giri* to represent a samurai's inner desire and the external demands placed upon them by their lord and by fate. Whether a samurai chooses happiness or duty in a given moment has narrative and mechanical consequences not only for themselves, but for all of the Emerald Empire. When they serve their lord with distinction, tales of their glories may spread to the corners of the Empire or even be recorded for the ages. A samurai's fame and reputation for service is measured by their glory rank.

The Way of Five Rings

At the dawn of civilization, when humanity looked to understand the surrounding creation, the greatest philosophers determined that the world was composed of the five elements: Air, Earth, Fire, Water, and the Void that holds the other elements together. These elements, also called rings, were represented in the sacred spirits of the land and the natural world, but also in society and the human psyche. Air is the weather and the wind, the invisible and the innuendo, and the swiftness of a bird of prey. Earth is stone, wood, and metal, as well as a donkey's stubbornness and a tortoise's patience. Fire is the gentle warmth of the sun or the rage of a wildfire, but also the spark of innovation, the passion of devotion, and the ferocity of a wildcat. Water is an octopus's adaptability and flexibility; it takes the shape of its container, be it a puddle, river, or endless sea. Void is the emptiness of the night sky or nirvana, at once present and transcendent.

Sensei across Rokugan teach samurai-in-training to observe and express these different elements in all that they do. In the *Legend of the Five Rings Roleplaying Game*, characters are defined by their strength in different elements. This strength is represented mechanically with a numeric value on a scale of one to six, called a character's ring value. In every task they undertake, they must choose an elemental approach, and the suitability of one approach over another can give them the edge they need or diminish their chance of succeeding.

The World of the Samurai

In Rokugan, it is said that honor is stronger than steel. While even the finest blade can bend and break or twist under the heat of the forge, the Emerald Empire's society has been folded in the forges of politics and war for more than a thousand years, and it has not yet broken. The society of Rokugan follows a divinely ordered pattern set down by the eight Kami, who shared their celestial blessings with the mortal realm. Rokugan is a land of strict social stratification, where an improper look at the wrong time can mean death. *On*, or face—the concept of a samurai's stoicism and outward self-control—is paramount in Rokugan. To lose one's face is to lose one's status and reputation in society, and potentially one's life.

The root of the word samurai is, literally, "one who serves." The samurai rule the Emerald Empire as nobles and lords, but they also serve

others—whether the people of Rokugan below or those samurai who sit as lords above them. Most samurai fall into one of three broad categories: *bushi*, who train their martial skill; courtiers, who engage in deadly political games; and *shugenja*, who serve as priests and conduits between the mortal and sacred realms.

Government and Power

Rokugan is a feudal society: all of the land belongs to the Emperor, who bestows the rights of stewardship on champions and daimyō within the Great Clans, who in turn pass on the tasks of administration to lesser-ranked samurai.

All Imperial authority and patterns of life proceed from the Hantei, the Emperor, who is descended from divinity and sits on the Emerald Throne. He is attended primarily by his jeweled champions (the Emerald Champion in particular) and by the clan champions, the leaders of the Great Clans. The clan champions are masters of the Great Clans, overseeing the families sworn to each. These families are descended from the heroic mortals who swore fealty to the Kami.

The clan families are themselves ruled over by daimyō (literally, “the great names”), lords of the families, who hold the power of life and death over their kin and command absolute loyalty. Their individual lands are divided into provinces, the divisions of land in Rokugan, which are ruled over by lesser daimyō—who themselves rule over district and city governors, lords of rich lands and wealthy cities. The clans and their representatives vie for dominance in the courts of these daimyō, prevailing over others with silk and steel.

The way of the samurai is the way of the warrior. Most are trained from birth to fight for their lords and lay down their lives if need be. When ownership of a territory falls into dispute, or when threats from beyond the Empire’s borders imperil the very existence of the Empire, the daimyō of the clans mobilize their armies and fight for their champion or on behalf of the Emperor as part of the Imperial Legions. The Emperor permits his vassals to take a share of the annual rice harvest so that they may arm themselves for war and defend the lands they have been entrusted with.

Not all wars are won on the battlefield, however. Samurai skilled in the subtle arts of the courtier fight their battles with honeyed words and mocking, tittering laughter behind face-concealing fans. Their arena is the courts, be they the provincial courts of city or family daimyō, the castles of the clan champions, or the famed yet deadly Imperial Court. In these places of delicate and indirect speech, impeccable etiquette is a better defense than the finest katana when a samurai walks into court. Courtiers seek out one another for private meetings, each expressing their clan’s wishes indirectly and sealing treaties with honor and promises rather than ink and parchment.

Winter is harsh in Rokugan, and battles cannot be fought in the bitter cold and impassable snow. Yet winter is when court is most active, for there is little else to do except attend court. The Emperor’s Winter Court is a highly selective social event, with higher stakes and rewards than any other.

Crime and Punishment

The task of stewarding the land for the Emperor requires a samurai to execute the Emperor’s will. This includes the Emperor’s laws, which are collected and enforced by the Emerald Champion. The maintenance of order, law, and justice in Rokugan—in that order of importance—is one of the primary responsibilities of the samurai. Crime in Rokugan is much the same as anywhere else; theft, assault, murder, and arson are all known within the Emerald Empire.

The Celestial Order

Belief and religion are inculcated into a samurai from birth—and before, from the time of their last death. Spirits and gods are a fact of life for samurai, and faith folds with honor a thousand times over in the steel of a samurai’s soul: faith in the gods, faith in the cycle of reincarnation, and faith in the divine mandate that binds the Empire together.

The Emperor is a divine being, charged by Lady Sun with overseeing the mortal realm. The blood of literal gods—the Kami—runs through the veins of the Great Clans’ ruling families. The will of Tengoku organizes all of existence into a hierarchy. This system—the Celestial Order—is sacred and unquestionable, ordering both Heaven and the Emerald Empire. From the Emperor to the lowest *burakumin*, all are born with a dharma, a sacred duty of the soul; the performance of this duty in life is how a Rokugani’s karma is measured, determining their judgment in Meido and potential rebirth into a higher or lower caste.

To enforce laws and maintain an orderly society within their borders, provincial daimyō appoint special investigators called magistrates. These magistrates are loyal to clan and daimyō, and are assisted by *yoriki* (lesser-ranking samurai) and *budōka* (armed peasant vassals) in tracking and apprehending criminals. Historically, two classes of magistrate have attended to Imperial crimes: Emerald Magistrates, appointed by the Emerald Champion, and Jade Magistrates, appointed by the Jade Champion. The former investigate crimes crossing multiple clan boundaries or involving national personages. The latter were shugenja tasked with investigating crimes against religion or black magic involving the Shadowlands, but the office has not been filled in centuries.

Crimes committed upward, or against those of higher social rank and against the social order, are taken quite seriously by magistrates. Crimes committed downward, such as a samurai’s theft from a peasant, are rarely investigated or taken seriously unless the peasant has the backing of another samurai. Rokugani criminal justice is based on honor, and considers only one form of evidence to be valid: eyewitness testimony. Fines, public reprimands, and house arrest are common punishments for samurai—although if there’s any doubt as to the samurai’s guilt, the defendant may challenge the offender to a duel, the winner of which is considered beyond reproach.

Commerce and Currency

Rokugan’s economic system is based on the land tilled by farmers and protected by the samurai. The Emperor properly owns all land, yet leases it to the clans, which hereditarily lease it to their daimyō in turn. Given the limits between roads—often dangerous and unpaved affairs—many provinces become lawful lands unto themselves, where the daimyō acts as an extension of the Emperor over the peasants who work the rice paddies. It is rice—a vital crop that keeps the Emerald Empire alive—that provides much of Rokugan’s wealth. Barley, wheat, millet, soybeans, and rye are also common crops grown by farmers, but it is a yearly stipend of rice that forms the basis for currency in Rokugan: koku. The clans able to harvest the most rice are among the wealthiest in the Empire, and therefore the most influential politically, but to directly conflate wealth with power would be an insult to the importance placed on honor and virtue in society.

Trade and commerce are indispensable for Rokugan to thrive, but it is considered dishonorable for samurai to involve themselves in such mercantile pursuits. Their primary concern should be with serving their lord, not personal enrichment, but virtue and reality can sometimes diverge. Nevertheless, to maintain a veneer of civility, samurai leave monetary matters to non-samurai, who in turn seek the patronage of a powerful lord. This allows samurai to engage in trade and currency manipulation without sully their honor with crass, uncouth avarice. Those few clans and families that flagrantly involve themselves in trade are looked down upon by the others, who see greed as incompatible with absolute loyalty.

Most souls are reborn, returning to live new lives in mortal bodies—a belief that predates even the Empire. However, Rokugani also worship their ancestors, a seeming contradiction. Each soul’s dharma accords them a destiny preordained by Heaven; so long as that destiny goes unfulfilled, the soul will be reborn. Only when dharma is completed is the soul permitted to shuffle off the Celestial Wheel and enter Yomi, the Realm of the Sacred Ancestors. The fear of death holds little purchase in Rokugan—so long as it remains untainted by Jigoku, the Realm of Evil, a soul will return again to the Emerald Empire until it fulfills its destiny.

Those Who Serve

The samurai, “those who serve,” rule Rokugan in the name of the Hantei. The class consists of many social ranks: The *kuge*, or houses of the nobility, consists of the Emperor and Imperial families, the family lines of the

clan champions, the heads of vassal families, and the greatest servants of the Hantei. The *buke*, or chivalric houses, comprises all other samurai, including provincial daimyō and city governors, magistrates, and others. The vast majority of the *buke* are warriors, courtiers, and shugenja, down to the *ji-samurai*, or half-samurai—those not allowed the name of their lord, including rōnin. Samurai are not permitted to question or oppose someone of higher social rank without extreme justification, or treat those of equal rank with anything less than complete respect and courtesy. They may treat those below them however they please, although Bushidō still governs their actions.

Those Who Work

The vast majority of people in Rokugan are the *bonge* (also called *heimin*, or “half-people.”)

These peasants keep the nation running by cultivating the land, crafting the tools and implements of daily life, and transporting those goods across the Empire by land and sea. Farmers who grow rice and other food are considered the most important of the *bonge*. Below the farmers are the raftspeople: carpenters, blacksmiths, brewers, and practitioners of the other skilled trades. Below them all are merchants, regarded with contempt by all others since they do not actually make anything themselves.

Seldom permitted to carry weapons (save for ashigaru, peasant military levies, and budōka, armed retainers to samurai), *heimin* have few defenses, physically or socially. As a being with a higher social and spiritual status, a samurai may demand anything from *heimin* who belong to their lord without recompense, and can kill any *heimin* who disobeys or fails to show respect. Yet, the samurai are also responsible to *heimin*, as described in the Celestial Order; the *bonge*’s dharma is to work the land and obey the samu-

A Samurai's Life

Most samurai are either born into the ranks of the *buke* from long-serving family lines or adopted from another noble family. Some are adopted from rōnin or vassal families who pledge themselves to a lord.

Samurai youth have very few expectations placed on them and aren’t expected to maintain their face. Most want for nothing. So long as they obey their parents, they have no cares until sometime between ages eight and twelve, depending on the family or clan. They are then enrolled in a family dōjō to train for their adult responsibilities. This training varies in length depending upon its nature (shugenja students in particular often have widely varying educational careers, depending on when and how strongly their gifts with the kami manifest themselves) and the capabilities of the student, but typically lasts about four years.

Training

For the upper classes of samurai, learning one’s place in the Empire means training at the family dōjō, practicing techniques perfected over centuries of effort and mastery. Students with another clear aptitude are often transferred to another family dōjō within the same clan and given instruction on how to best use their talents to serve. On rare occasions, they may even be traded to another clan, an arrangement that requires a great number of favors and concessions. After they have met the requirements of their sensei, a samurai is deemed ready for *gempuku*.

Gempuku

The greatest day of a samurai’s young life is the day they become an adult, graduating from their academy dōjō in the coming-of-age ceremony and becoming a full-fledged member of the clan. Usually, this occurs sometime around a samurai’s sixteenth year, although both earlier and later *gempuku* aren’t uncommon. Most involve tests of some sort, to ensure the samurai has learned all they were required and are capable

rai, and it is the samurai’s duty to protect the *heimin* and administer the Empire. Slaying a *heimin* means answering to that *heimin*’s lord.

Most samurai treat *bonge* with indifference. A rare few are outright cruel. *Heimin* must always be completely respectful and obedient toward samurai, but they seldom feel anything other than fear for the upper castes. Samurai who demonstrate an abundance of compassion are rewarded with true loyalty.

Those Who Do Not Belong

There is a third class, called *burakumin*, or “hamlet people,” who are sometimes known as *hinin*, or non-people. Due to their proximity to death or dishonorable acts, these criminals, torturers, undertakers, butchers, and tanners are considered unfit as companions for samurai save in the direst of circumstances. Even a kindly lord’s speech might be discolored by the pejorative term *eta*, a slur meaning “abundance of filth.”

Burakumin are considered deeply unclean, and associating with them too often requires the samurai to undertake special purification rituals. *Burakumin* must live in special villages on the outskirts of society, and they are deeply afraid of samurai. More so than *bonge*, *burakumin* can be killed for no reason at all, without any consequences. Testing newly forged blades by cutting down the nearest *hinin* isn’t uncommon.

Entertainers who aren’t samurai, including geisha, are also technically *hinin* for a special reason: because they are non-people, a samurai may fully relax around them with no social stigma. The stress of maintaining one face’s can and will wear on even the most stoic of samurai. In the company of a geisha, under the gentle strains of shamisen music, a samurai may laugh, or complain about their lord and family, or cry at their lot in life.

of performing their duties with excellence. Should the young samurai pass, they are gifted with a *wakizashi*—traditionally their grandfather’s, although more often a replica made in the same style—and expected to serve the clan faithfully.

Marriage

Love has a place in Rokugan: that of pillow books and wistful poems to one’s beloved, for marrying for true love is rare. Marriage in a feudal society is predicated upon what’s best for the family and alliances, and thus the talent and bloodlines of young samurai are often traded for favors and strategic resources. For a samurai to balk or refuse this is considered the same thing as refusing any other commands from their daimyō: grounds for *seppuku*—and thus, most samurai wouldn’t even consider questioning it.

Retirement

After a lifetime of service to the clan, when their physical faculties begin to wane, many samurai choose to become monks, retiring to a monastery to contemplate the mysteries of Shinsei and the Tao. The expression is to “shave one’s head,” referring to the practice of cutting one’s topknot, the symbol of their samurai status (though since many clans adopt a wide variety of hairstyles in the modern era, this remains colloquial). The samurai surrenders their *wakizashi* to the clan before mulling over a lifetime’s worth of wisdom in peaceful contemplation. Not all samurai choose to retire; some continue to serve their lords well into old age, while others find a noble death in battle.

But retirement serves a deeply practical purpose. Though a samurai’s clan obligations are in theory severed after a lifetime’s service, most monks stay on their family’s lands, providing a deep wellspring of institutional knowledge and wisdom the clan may continue to tap long after the samurai’s steel has grown dull with age.

Funeral

The last act of a samurai—death with dignity—is a solemn affair. While many samurai seek an honorable death in battle, this isn't always possible. When a samurai dies, their deeds are read before a group of dignitaries and loved ones gathered around an ornate pyre built to represent the elements that make up a samurai's soul. The body is cremated and the solidified, burnt bones picked out of the ashes with specialized chopsticks, for the dead must never be touched.

Seppuku is another possible end for a samurai—ritual suicide to cleanse the family and the individual of the samurai's dishonor. Successful performance of seppuku generally redeems the samurai's shame, allowing them to try to seek honor and dharma again in a different life.

Losing One's Lord or Honor

The exception to the samurai way of life is the lifestyle of a rōnin, literally “wave-man,” one tossed by the vicissitudes of fate. A samurai need not accept seppuku to cleanse their honor—they may choose to forsake their

duty and leave. Though many rōnin do not conform to the stereotype of honorless, masterless samurai—some are simply the children of rōnin born to their station, acting with greater honor than many samurai of the Great Clans—enough do that they are automatically assumed to be untrustworthy and without decency.

Many samurai voluntarily become rōnin for a single year, typically in the year or the second following their gempuku. Considered to be a healthy outlet for a young samurai's desire to prove themselves, this allows them to sharpen their skills and temper their attitudes with experience. Having experienced hardship in the outer Empire, many return and swear fealty to the clan anew with true loyalty rather than an inculcated sense of duty.

While a rōnin is technically still samurai, they have no lord, no clan, and no family—and thus, no purpose. Rōnin are forced to find work as mercenaries or bodyguards, eating dumplings bought from foul heimin merchants and earning their straw bedding with the skill of their blade. Some resort to banditry or crime to gather the coin they need to live, but at least this is still an earning wrought by skill at arms.

Even the lowest rōnin is higher than the bonge.

The Land of Ten Thousand Fortunes

Faith is a real and tangible thing to Rokugan, and only the foolish choose not to believe. The kami are demonstrably real, the gods are easily angered, and signs of magic and wonder can be seen even in the distant corners of the Empire—if not by a samurai or peasant, then by someone whom they know and trust.

Merged by the second Emperor, Hantei Genji, Rokugan's religious beliefs encompass three different forms of worship: ancestor worship, or the worship of a samurai's blessed antecedents who have ascended beyond the wheel of reincarnation; Fortunism, the direct worship of the gods; and Shinseism, the study and practice of the Tao of Shinsei.

The most fundamental of religious observances revolves around the worship of a samurai's own ancestors. From Yomi, the spirits of one's forebears watch over their descendants, receiving prayer for guidance, aid, and good fortune. Nearly every house in Rokugan contains an ancestral shrine where family members offer prayer and dedication to stone statues of kin, asking for blessings, protection, and intercession.

The Seven Great Fortunes

Many powerful Fortunes exist. Emma-o reigns supreme over Meido in his role as Fortune of Death and Judge of the Dead, while Megumi, Fortune of Heroic Guidance, often appears to aid minor samurai throughout the Empire. It is the sacred right of the Hantei to declare a new Fortune, elevating deceased former mortals to the ranks of divinity. Such was the fate of Osano-wo, son of Hida and Fortune of Fire and Thunder. Still, seven Fortunes rank above all others:

- Benten**, Fortune of Romantic Love
- Bishamon**, Fortune of Strength
- Daikoku**, Fortune of Wealth
- Ebisu**, Fortune of Honest Work
- Fukurokujin**, Fortune of Wisdom and Mercy
- Hotei**, Fortune of Contentment
- Jurōjin**, Fortune of Longevity

In some regions, Fukurokujin is replaced by Kisshōten, the Fortune of Happiness, Fertility, and Beauty. The Seven receive a disproportionate amount of worship and obeisance, but their purviews are treasured above all others in Rokugan.

Beyond the spirits of their own, the people of Rokugan revere and appease the elemental spirits of nature, agriculture, and other domains. This worship of the spirits and gods who dwell in Tengoku and the myriad lesser spirits dwelling in Ningen-dō is known as Fortunism. Temples and shrines to the Lesser Fortunes exist in the hundreds, and the sanctuaries celebrating the Seven Great Fortunes dominate the skylines of the Empire's greatest cities. Although they are usually invisible to the eye, the kami have a few servants who can hear and speak to the kami. These mortals are known as shugenja, and their invocations to the Fortunes and the elemental kami can produce miraculous effects.

While Fortunism celebrates diversity, another line of philosophical thought emphasizes unity. Called “Shinseism” for the man who promulgated its core beliefs, the ideology focuses on a core of simplicity: all the universe comes from the Void, and all will eventually return to it. Embracing the oneness of the five elements, or Rings, and living in accordance with the principles of an ordered society could, according to Shinseism, enable one to transcend the cycle of rebirth and attain Enlightenment. These teachings were recorded in full during Shinsei's audience with the first Emperor and became known as the Tao of Shinsei. Following the Tao means acting in accordance with virtue and the harmony of the universe, which itself leads to order and the furtherance of good over evil. The Tao is studied and debated by the Brotherhood of Shinsei, a vast collection of monastic orders, each with an individual approach to study and practice. This religious heterodoxy occasionally gives rise to potent heresies, and many divergent sects of Shinseism have appeared over the centuries.

Mortal Intermediaries

The kami interact with Rokugan through natural phenomena, but they make their will manifest to devoted mortals. Spirits may accept sincere devotion by blessing a lay priest from the peasant caste with their frequent attention. Such priests cannot compel miracles from the kami, but they can bless fields, sanctify ritual spaces, perform weddings and funerals, practice auguries, and create good luck charms and talismans blessed by their favored deities.

When a samurai is chosen by the kami and manifests the ability to communicate with the spirits, they are called shugenja and given specialized training. Under the tutelage of other shugenja, the samurai learns prayers, offerings, devotions, and invocations designed to entreat the assistance of the kami, sometimes in spectacular and miraculous ways. Titanic fireballs, stealing the thoughts out of another's head, creating great fissures in rock, or washing away the despair of battle—with the proper prayers to the kami, all things are possible.

Bushidō

Literally “the way of the warrior,” Bushidō is the code by which all samurai in Rokugan strive to live. Samurai are taught to embrace the ideals of Bushidō and strive ever toward them, at the expense of personal gain. Not even the Kami upheld Bushidō without flaw; the strictures put down by Akodo are nearly impossible to maintain in their entirety, and the struggle to maintain them consumes a samurai’s existence. Many clans emphasize one virtue over others, but all clans acknowledge the different virtues to varying degrees.

The virtues of Bushidō are:

Gi: Righteousness

“Be acutely honest throughout your dealings with all people. Believe in justice, not from other people, but from yourself. A true samurai knows in their heart that there are no shades of grey in the question of honesty and justice. There is only right and wrong.”

Righteousness is not a matter for debate; it is sunlight glinting off the katana, bright and painful to the eye. There is only truth and falsehood, justice and injustice. Yet Righteousness may be forsworn or delayed in the course of a samurai’s duties. Courtiers and magistrates alike must remain truthful and committed to justice even as they manipulate other courtiers and turn a blind eye to lesser injustices; some families make an art warping the light of truth just so.

Yu: Courage

“Rise up above the masses of people who are afraid to act. A samurai must have heroic courage. It is absolutely risky. It is dangerous. Only in acceptance of one’s death may a samurai live their life completely, fully, wonderfully. Courage is not blind; it is intelligent and strong. Replace fear with respect and caution.”

Every samurai lives three feet from death at all times. A samurai must be prepared to give their lives for their lord, their clan, and the Empire at a moment’s notice. To die in service to one’s lord furthers one’s karma, and thus samurai eagerly embrace the idea of a noble death in service to their family.

Jin: Compassion

“Through intense training, the samurai becomes quick and strong. They are not as other people. They develop a power that must be used for the good of all. They have compassion. They help their fellows at every opportunity. If an opportunity does not arise, they go out of their way to find one.”

Samurai are above the heimin and hinin of Rokugan, but the root of their title is those who serve. Most embrace Compassion in the abstract, defending the commoners of the realm from military incursion and being butchered by rival clans. Few take the virtue to the logical extreme of preventing abuse of the lower classes, although clans such as the Phoenix take the virtue extremely seriously, educating the heimin to a degree unheard of elsewhere.

Rei: Courtesy

“Samurai have no reason to be cruel. They do not need to prove their strength. A samurai is courteous even to their enemies. Without this outward

show of respect, we are nothing more than animals. A samurai is not only respected for their strength in battle, but also by their dealings with others. The true inner strength of a samurai becomes apparent during difficult times.”

The social order isn’t just important to Rokugan—it is, in a literal manner, what the Heavens rest upon. A samurai is required to maintain appearances and withstand adversity, exhibiting courteousness even when faced with the most vile lack of it. It is for this reason that courtiers practice indirect insults and the art of the subtle insinuation. While it may be socially appropriate for those of higher rank to lose their temper, their own integrity is proven by maintaining Courtesy.

Meiyo: Honor

“A true samurai has only one judge of their honor, and that is themselves. Decisions you make and how those decisions are carried out are a reflection of who you truly are. You cannot hide from yourself.”

Meiyo is the most subtle, yet the most basic and all-encompassing virtue. Samurai without Honor cannot truly follow the other virtues of Bushidō, for they act as others expect and not as their own conscience dictates. If their own honor is intact, however, they will follow the ways of Bushidō and pursue justice without flaw or failure, even when commanded otherwise by their lord. For this reason, honor can also justify disloyalty and cause samurai to disobey their lord; without moral backing, the other virtues are hollow.

Makoto: Sincerity/Integrity

“When a samurai has said they will perform an action, it is as good as done. Nothing will stop them from completing their deed. They do not have to ‘give their word,’ nor do they have to ‘promise.’ The action of speaking alone has set the act of doing in motion. Speaking and doing are the same thing.”

Samurai must express Sincerity in word and deed, acting with complete and total conviction, whether they serve themselves or their lord. A convincing manner is more valued in Rokugan than the absolute truth, for the samurai who speaks with sincerity has committed the totality of their being to the sentiment. For samurai to do anything less is a slight upon their clan, their lord, and their honor.

Chūgi: Duty and Loyalty

“For the samurai, having done some ‘thing’ or said some ‘thing,’ they know they own that ‘thing.’ They are responsible for it and all the consequences that follow. A samurai is intensely loyal to those in their care. To those they are responsible for, they remain fiercely true.”

More so than honor, Duty and Loyalty are central to the martial spirit of Rokugan. Samurai are expected to do their duty to their lord and their subordinates without hesitation or reservation, no matter the cost to their own honor. Of course, any duty given by their lord is expected to be within the bounds of Bushidō and bring honor to the samurai by obeying it... but this expression of duty is rarely seen. Should a samurai feel their duty conflicts with the other virtues of Bushidō, they may commit seppuku in protest, a rare exception to needing a lord’s permission to end one’s life. The sentiment is impossible to ignore: the lord has forfeited the samurai’s honor, and no one without honor is fit to serve.

The Great Clans

Rokugani society is based on a clan structure, with seven families descended from the Kami ruling over other families descended from those who swore fealty. Over the centuries, each family has gravitated toward a certain role or duty within the clan, although it's common for families to trade promising students who show talent in an area that differs from that of their ancestors. The Great Clans of Rokugan are diverse and powerful, dividing huge swaths of the Empire between them and commanding many thousands of samurai from families great and small.

The Crab Clan

"Courage. Duty. Sacrifice."

The Crab stand out in any gathering of samurai, given a wide berth both for their stature and for their gruff, brusque manners. The defenders of the Empire have little time or inclination to practice social niceties; they stand guard upon the Kaiu Wall, an enduring symbol of tenacity against the horrors of the Shadowlands. Often, they grumble that their duty is taken for granted, that their fine and honorable samurai succumb to the horrifying Taint while the effete and the careless play at games in an Empire kept safe by the spilled blood of the Crab.

The Crane Clan

"There is a proper technique for all things."

The Crane are the Left Hand of the Emperor, in service as the political aides to the throne. It's traditional for the Hantei to choose a samurai from the Doji family as their spouse, more Emerald Champions have been Kakita than any other family, and the samurai of the Daidoji family serve as some of the finest shock troops in the Emerald Empire. Yet the Crane make their greatest contributions in culture: many of the finest poets and craftspeople hail from their academies, and their duelists have few rivals save one. They are the masters of court, with the wealth and status to prove it.

The Dragon Clan

"Find your own path."

For a thousand years, the Dragon Clan has watched over the others, recording the history of Rokugan. Aloof and enigmatic, the armies of the Dragon march only rarely, intervening in the clashes of the Great Clans for seemingly inscrutable reasons. From the strange and powerful Tattooed Monks of Togashi to the investigators who challenge the system of justice in the Empire, the Dragon seek to ensure the Empire does not become too self-focused and solipsistic. It falls to them to ensure that the future of the Empire transpires in an orderly and elegant manner.

The Lion Clan

"For my ancestors!"

To be a samurai is to live and breathe Bushidō, but to be a Lion is to exemplify it to all others. The Lion's roar heralds the call to battle and honor. For centuries, the Lion have dominated the military tactics and strategy of the Empire, pioneering new techniques and battle methods that other clans take years to adopt. Now, this clan's samurai seek to apply the wisdom of their ancestors to the trials of the modern era.

The Minor Clans

The Great Clans dominate the politics and military of Rokugan, but several Minor Clans exist, founded by brave heroes whose selfless service to the Emperor resulted in awards of land and titles. Most Minor Clans are roughly equal in power to one of the individual families of the Great Clans, though some—such as the Mantis—are powerful enough to command greater respect. Many fulfill specific niches or duties within the Empire. In theory, their members receive the same social respect as any other samurai from the Great Clans. In practice, ignoring a Minor Clan samurai outside of their region of control carries few repercussions.

The Phoenix Clan

"Master the elements and be reborn."

Other clans guard the Empire's borders, even the Empire's future, but the Phoenix guard the Empire's soul. It is the duty of the Phoenix to keep safe the myriad religious paths of the Empire, defining them and arbitrating their differences. Scholars of the Tao and servants of the spirits are found among the Phoenix's ranks more than in any other clan; the wisdom the Phoenix have gleaned from both traditions has led them to foster peace and understanding among the other clans, even if it means sacrificing themselves in the process.

The Scorpion Clan

"I will be your villain, Hantei."

From behind their masks and veils, the Scorpion smile grimly at the performance of their duty, for it is their sacrifice to be hated even as they execute it perfectly. What other clan could perform the role of loyal villain? It was the Scorpion Kami's contention that enemies need not be external to the Empire, and thus, the Scorpion fight fire with fire. They keep all clans united in hatred against them, yet divided so that no one clan can challenge the line to whom they owe undying loyalty: the Hantei.

The Unicorn Clan

"One cannot capture the wind."

The Clan of the Wind spent hundreds of years outside the Empire, returning in a glorious cavalry charge that shook the other clans to their core. The barbaric ways they adopted in their exile continue to shock and disgust the other clans, yet the Unicorn remain fierce in their duty and unwavering in their honor. Of all the clans, they are best suited to uncovering foreign manipulation and infiltration, for they faced innumerable horrors and traitors in their wandering years.