

Winter Court: Shiro no Kaiu

**A One-Round All-Ranks INTERACTIVE Adventure for
Champions of the Emerald Empire**

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GM's Information

THIS TOURNAMENT SHOULD NOT BE RUN COLD!

This adventure is an All-Rank adventure. This means that characters of any School Rank will be allowed to play.

The world of Rokugan is a cross between feudal Japan and China. It is set in an age of honorable samurai, serving their Lords (Daimyos) and Empire. Remember that family names come before personal names. Akodo Toturi is from the Akodo family and his personal name is Toturi.

A note on female designations: If a samurai has the designation of -ko, then the samurai is a female. For example, if you see Samurai-ko, then this denotes a female samurai.

A note on commerce in Rokugan: Samurai are not supposed to care about worldly possessions, especially money. A samurai pays a commoner as if the money is meaningless, a concession to the commoner's silly needs. Between samurai, the exchange of money and merchandise is an exchange of "gifts."

Notes on this Adventure

This adventure is designed to run as an Interactive, in essence a LARP (Live Action Role-Playing) event, in which the players portray their characters directly for much of the time. There will also be the opportunity for the players to run their characters through a couple of "mini-adventures" which will be done in the normal table-top style. The total event should, if possible, be run in a five-hour time slot to give the players the maximum time to accomplish their goals.

We encourage conventions which run this event to incorporate additional "flavor" elements, such as costumes, authentic props, or catered Japanese food. These will add considerably to the experience of the adventure.

Restrictions on Player Actions

During the Interactive, all players and judges should observe the following restrictions and guidelines in order to ensure that the event runs smoothly.

- **No Touching.** Touching in public is a major Rokugani taboo, and should be observed in play. Any player who willingly touches another automatically loses a point of Honor. Repeated offenses can result in the expulsion of the player from the Interactive.
- **Resolving Events.** Players should seek, whenever possible, to resolve their interactions through role-play rather than by rolling dice. If a player absolutely wishes to perform an action that requires rolling dice, s/he should seek out one of the event judges to have their action adjudicated.
- **Making Purchases.** Players may spend Koku to purchase items from the Taka's Treasures booth. PCs cannot combine their money to make purchases, and the judge who plays Yasuki Taka reserves the right to refuse sales to anyone who displeases him. Yasuki Taka may opt to give certain players a 1-koku discount on the price of an item, if that player has done something to earn Taka's favor.
- **NPCs.** There are several NPCs who can potentially attend the Chrysanthemum Festival. These are listed at the end of the module. The three most important NPCs (Kuni Yori, Yasuki Taka, and Hida Sukune) should be played by the judges of the event. The rest of the NPCs are less vital to the story, and can be filled out with players who do not normally have Living Rokugan characters, or who would prefer not to play their normal character.

Adventure Background

The PCs and NPCs have gathered at Shiro no Kaiu, the castle of the Crab Clan's Kaiu engineers, for Winter Court. The Crab have invited an unusual number of samurai to share their winter, for reasons having to do with the ambitions of the Crab Champion, Hida Kisada. Kisada is plotting to make a strike for the Emerald Throne, and wants to see how many allies he can recruit in support of his ambitions... and how many enemies he will have to fight.

The Interactive takes place over the course of the Winter Court – between two and three months of "game time."

Shiro no Kaiu

The castle of the Kaiu Family is located on the northern end of the Kaiu Wall, where the forces of the Shadowlands seldom strike. Like all Crab castles, it is an extraordinarily powerful fortress, and the PCs need not fear the intrusion of the creatures of darkness – although the mini-missions may send some of them out in search of such creatures.

The PCs and their goals

Each of the Clan and Imperial PCs is here as a representative of their faction, and each Clan has specific goals and objectives they must try to achieve at the Winter Court. They also have certain assets – brides, gifts, and clan-to-clan grants – which they can use to achieve these goals. Clan-specific handouts are available for each Great Clan, and should be distributed to their representatives when they arrive. Certain Clans (the Crab, Scorpion, Unicorn, Lion, and Crane) should always be represented, by NPCs if there are no PCs available from them.

Ronin PCs will be here on their own, and have no higher goals.

Minor Clan PCs who have wangled invitations here may not necessarily have a “stake” in matters, depending on which Minor Clan they belong to. The Mantis and Fox Clans have specific shared goals, the Dragonfly share the goals of the Dragon (Mirumoto faction), and the Tortoise share the goals of the Imperial Families. PCs from other Minor Clans (the Badger, Falcon, Sparrow, Wasp, and Centipede) wish to play a different character or an NPC at this Interactive.

CHRONOLOGY: For those who are interested, this Interactive takes place between the adventures “In Time of War” and “A Walk Through the Mountains.”

The NPCs

The following NPCs will ALWAYS be at the Winter Court, and should be played by judges:

- **Kuni Yori, daimyo of the Kuni family and representative of Hida Kisada.** Yori should be played by the primary judge at the event. His primary goal here is to carry out the will of Hida Kisada, both by seeking allies among the other Clans and by making a secret alliance with the

Shadowlands. The actions of the PCs in the various mini-missions may (or may not) be able to thwart the latter goal. Yori also has a personal desire to punish the Scorpion Clan, because they refused to reveal to him the secrets they had discovered beneath Kyuden Bayushi.

- **Yasuki Taka.** The famous (infamous) merchant and daimyo of the Yasuki family is here, as usual, to peddle his wares. He is also here to recruit members to the Kolat. Finally, he is the gateway to the mini-mission “Jade Petal Tea.”
- **Hida Sukune, Crab general and youngest child of Hida Kisada.** Officially, Sukune is here to represent his father (who is busy manning the Wall and making secret preparations for war). However, Sukune suspects that Kuni Yori is up to no good, and wants to find out why the sinister shugenja keeps going into the Shadowlands. Thus, he is the gateway for the mini-adventure “Into the Shadow” and possibly also the mini-adventure “Fall of the 5th Tower.” His actions at the end of the Interactive will determine whether the Crab follow their historical path of allying with the Shadowlands, or instead break down in civil war.

The following additional NPCs are OPTIONAL and may be added to the cast if you have additional judges, new players, or players who do not want to run their regular character. A character sheet for each of them, giving their statistics and personal objectives, is included at the end of the module. Some of the characters can be either male or female, depending on what players are available.

- Asahina Tamako, a peaceful Crane shugenja determined to avert war. He is the daimyo of the Asahina family, and is here to follow up on suspicions that the Crab are plotting war against the Emperor.
- Shosuro Tajiki, Scorpion courtier and assassin. (OR, Yogo Asami, Scorpion assassin and seductress.) The Scorpions’ goal here is to keep everyone else at war while keeping the Scorpion Clan out of any wars itself. They also intend to punish the Clans which accused them of opium smuggling a few months ago. Shosuro

Tajiki also has the personal goal of learning more about the Kolat.

- Matsu Ketsui, young samurai-ko representing the Matsu family daimyo, Matsu Tsuko. (OR, Ijiasu, rising Lion general and former Akodo.) The Lions are here to maintain their advantage against the Crane, cement their current alliance with the Phoenix, and to seek allies for impending conflict with the Scorpion and possibly the Unicorn.
- Shinjo Taneka, a Unicorn samurai and magistrate obsessed with ending the illegal opium trade.
- Isawa Nobuyoshi, Phoenix Inquisitor. Nobuyoshi is here to seek the servants of Maho. He has no opinion on the Shiba-Mirumoto war but is very much in favor of the restoration of the Jade Champion.
- Mirumoto Azugiri, an idealistic young bushi here to test his swordsmanship and seek allies against the Phoenix. (OR, Agasha Momuko, a shugenja-ko here to seek peace for her own private demons.)
- Zurui, a clever and ruthless ambassador for the Mantis Clan, here to promote the Mantis Clan's ongoing petition for Great Clan status.

Running the Adventure

It is intended that the primary motive force in the Interactive will be the PCs pursuing their various Clan goals. Much of the session should consist of the PCs circulating around, interacting with each other, and negotiating.

There is also a major subplot in this scenario, involving Kuni Yori's plan to ally the Crab Clan with the Shadowlands and Hida Suskune's attempt to find out what Yori is plotting. This will be resolved by the mini-adventures "Into the Shadow" and "Fall of the 5th Tower."

There will also be the possibility for some of the PCs to go on another mini-adventure, "Jade Petal Tea." The primary judge (playing Kuni Yori) should keep tabs on as much of the event as possible, and initiate the mini-adventures when it seems appropriate.

Booth: Taka's Treasures

Yasuki Taka, the enterprising Crab merchant, has managed (as usual) to find a way of attending where many samurai have gathered. A fine chance to make a few koku, and perhaps get some help with a little task he has in mind...

Taka can sell certified items to PCs. Customers must pay for each item on their own (no pooling of resources), although they are free to buy items and then give them to other PCs. Taka may choose to offer a 1-koku discount to PCs whose actions or background makes him favorable to them (such as Crab PCs, PCs with Allies in the Yasuki family, and so forth). Conversely, he can also overcharge PCs who irritate him, and can always choose to refuse to make a sale.

Taka is also seeking a few energetic samurai to perform a task. A recent shipment of Jade Petal Tea for the Damned (the Tainted samurai who serve on the Wall) has failed to arrive from the monastery where it is grown. Taka needs some smart, tough samurai to look into the matter. In return, he will offer them some gifts: some jade tantos, a crystal blade, and a suit of demon armor.

Items:

Good-luck Tokens (2 koku, total of 8)
Fine-quality Fans (3 koku, total of 4)
Pouch of Jade Powder (3 koku, total of 7)
Crystal Broaches (4 koku, total of 4)
Excellent Puzzle Box (4 koku, total of 2)
Jade-tipped Arrows (4 koku each or 9 koku for three, total of 15)
Crystal-tipped Arrows (5 koku each or 11 koku for three, total of 12)
Fine Kimono (8 koku, total of 3)

Once Taka has accumulated at least four PCs who can do his task, they should be dispatched on the mini-adventure "Jade Petal Tea."

Timetable of Events

1. Opening Ceremony:

Once all the players are assembled, the Chief Judge (playing Kuni Yori) addresses the collected guests.

"Greetings, honored samurai. Welcome to Shiro no Kaiu. Although we stand on the very border of the realm of He Who Shall Not Be Named, I can assure you that the unmatched strength of the Crab Clan

will protect you. Be welcome in our castle, and enjoy our hospitality, poor though it may be. I am Kuni Yori, daimyo of the Kuni family and advisor to our mighty Champion, Hida Kisada. I speak with his voice. Accompanying me here is the honorable Hida Sukune, youngest son of our mighty Champion, who has taken time away from his duties on the Wall to represent his father's line among you.

Should you require any... material goods... the honorable Yasuki Taka will be glad to supply your needs. Enjoy the hospitality of the Crab Clan."

Once this speech is finished, the Chief Judge should briefly describe the rules and restrictions of the Interactive (including mentioning that there are mini-adventures).

Once the rules are explained, each player should pick up a copy of their appropriate Clan handout. Make sure players do not read the handouts of other Clans.

2. The Mini-Adventures

Assuming Yasuki Taka is able to recruit at least four PCs to go on his mission, this mini-adventure should be run about a third of the way through the round.

If Hida Sukune is able to collect at least four PCs to deal with his task, this mini-adventure should be run shortly after Taka's mission concludes.

A specific PC can only go on one of these two missions, not both.

3. The Fall of the 5th Tower

After the second mini-mission concludes, word arrives that the 5th Tower is under attack. PCs who participated in the second mini-mission ("Into the Darkness") should have the chance to inform Hida Sukune of what they have discovered.

If the PCs can tell Sukune about Yori's negotiations with the Shadowlands, he will be furious. He immediately sets out for the 5th Tower, and orders all Crab PCs here (and any Ronin who have hired on with the Crab) to accompany him as reinforcements. Other PCs can tag along voluntarily if they choose. All such PCs will find themselves in the mini-mission "Fall of the 5th Tower."

4. Conclusion

At the end of the time slot, the judges should assess the results of the various PC and NPC interactions and decisions. The chief judge (Kuni Yori) should then assemble all the PCs, inform them of any publicly visible results of the Winter Court, and have each Clan describe the public results of their negotiations.

The chief judge should also publicly announce any marriages (certed or between PCs) and, if possible, read out the certs for each marriage.

The judges should also privately collect the results of any secret negotiations or deals.

5. Epilogue: Confrontation

After all such announcements have been made, if the "Fall of the 5th Tower" mini-mission was run, the final confrontation between Kuni Yori and Hida Sukune will take place. Only PCs who participated in the "Fall of the 5th Tower" mini-mission will witness this event:

Hida Sukune, newly returned from the battle of the 5th tower, will accuse Kuni Yori of betraying the Clan and the Empire by allying with the forces of the Shadowlands. Yori, in turn, will proclaim that everything he did was at the orders of Hida Kisada. "The Great Bear realizes, as I have shown him, that we alone can control the forces of the Shadowlands and use them for our benefit. Once we have crushed our enemies and claimed the Emerald Throne, it will be a simple matter for us to turn on the forces of Fu Leng and crush them."

Sukune is furious. "I cannot believe that my father would order such an abomination. You must have deceived him."

"Believe or not, as you wish. These are the plans and orders of Lord Kisada. If you defy him, son or no, you are a traitor to your Clan."

Sukune struggles within himself for a moment, then declares: "No. If there are any traitors here, they are you and... and my father. I call on all true Crab to reject this foul alliance."

Yori smirks. "I call on all true Crabs to obey their Champion, and arrest this foolish boy."

If a majority of the PCs side with Yori, Sukune is arrested (and soon thereafter, sacrificed to the

Shadowlands). If a majority of the PCs side with Sukune, Yori retreats, and the Crab Civil War begins.

Rewards and Consequences

At the end of the Interactive, any PCs with Shadowlands Taint must make a Simple Earth roll with a TN of $5 + (5 \times \text{Taint Rank})$. If the roll is failed, the PC acquires one additional point of Taint.

All PCs who participate in the Interactive earn 2 XP.

PCs who play through “Jade Petal Tea” or “Into the Darkness” earn 1 additional XP (+1 bonus XP if they manage to kill the Moto in “Into the Darkness”). PCs who fight in “The Fall of the 5th Tower” earn 1 point of Glory, plus 1 point per Heroic Opportunity.

Other Glory and Honor awards should be given out by agreement of the three judges, based on actions in play.

Lion Clan: Your Objectives

From Matsu Tsuko, Champion of the Lion Clan, to my brothers and sisters of the Lion, Greetings:

At long last, our vengeance against the Crane is at hand. Vengeance for a thousand years of insults, and for the death of our beloved Akodo Arasou. Our rightful possession Toshi Ranbo has returned to the Lion Clan, and soon Shiro Kyotei will be returned to us as well. The young Emperor does not worship the ground the Crane walk upon, and marries a Phoenix in the spring. The Crane will not be able to hide behind this Emperor's kimono as they have done in the past. Let all praise the wisdom of Hantei the 39th.

It is likely that the Crane will seek allies to retaliate against us, and to prevent us from making any further gains upon the field of battle. We must block these efforts, which are merely proof of their desperation. It is always the way of the Crane to pay others to fight for them, and this occasion is no exception. In particular, we must guard that the Crane do not persuade our new allies in the Shiba family of the Phoenix to abandon us.

The Crane will no doubt also seek to retain their monopoly upon the offices of the Emerald Champion and the Imperial Chancellor. It is time to put an end to that as well. We must seek those offices ourselves. At the very least, we must make sure they do not fall into the hands of our enemies – the Crane and the Scorpion.

We believe that conflict will soon come between the Phoenix and the Dragon, most likely in the spring. The bushi families of both Clans have followed the path of War despite their superiors' urgings. We have made private arrangements with the Shiba family of the Phoenix to support them against the Dragon, in return for their help against the Crane. We must make sure these arrangements are not derailed in some way by the courtly maneuvers and slippery lies that the Cranes practice so well. We must also guard against the Dragon gaining allies of their own, especially since our assistance to the Phoenix will offer us, at last, the chance to wipe clean the shame of the Dragonfly Clan, which has sheltered for so long behind the protection of the Dragon.

With regard to our relations with the Scorpion – the filthy liars managed to turn aside our accusations in court, by murdering and dishonoring our witnesses. This will not stand. In the spring an army of Matsu will march through Beiden Pass to chastise the Scorpion for their crimes. No doubt they will seek to turn our wrath aside with their filthy tricks – do not let them fool you, or lead you into dishonor.

Sadly, the Scorpions' trickery has allowed them to avoid, so far, the righteous wrath of the Unicorn Clan. Thus the risk remains that the Unicorn may come into the war on the side of the Crane. We must avert this, and if possible persuade the Unicorn to ride against the Scorpion after all. The Scorpion will be well-deserving of the punishment which those horse-riding barbarians can inflict upon them.

Although at present we have no conflict with the Crab, sadly, they seem to have improved their relations with the Crane weaklings. Furthermore, why have they summoned so many samurai to their winter court? The Crab have been too open in their contempt for the Hantei line of late. Find out what they are plotting, and if possible, win them to our side, where Honor demands they be.

Finally, the Lion remain opposed to the Mantis Clan's petition for Great Clan status. Such a change would be an offense against the order which has governed the Empire since its founding, and should never be permitted. We care not how many of these Minor Clan families marry into each other – they will still be Minor Clans, unworthy of standing as equals beside those of us descended from the Kamis and Thunders.

Lion Clan: Game-play Effects

As a representative of the Lion Clan, you are ordered to strengthen your alliance with the Shiba family of the Phoenix Clan, and to prevent any other Clans from weakening that link. You are also directed to block any attempts by the Crane and Dragon to gain allies among other Clans (especially the Unicorn). Finally, you are directed to prevent the Crane and Scorpion from controlling the Imperial offices of Emerald Champion and Imperial Chancellor.

You can promise (or threaten) military action against any Clan to support your efforts. You can also offer marriages to two Lion brides, Matsu Chieko and Ikoma Shizuka, by way of cementing alliances and agreements. Finally, you can offer the gift of a suit of Akodo Armor. The head judge (Kuni Yori) has certs detailing the armor and the brides. You might wish to review these before promising them in marriage.

What You Know About the Other Clans:

Crane: The Crane have lost the city of Toshi Ranbo, which they stole from us two decades ago. Soon they will lose the castle of Shiro Kyotei as well. Only the favor of the Emperor protected them in the past from our righteous wrath. But now that they face our forces on the battlefield, their true weakness is exposed. Even the Hantei's mercy is not infinite. Now you need only block their desperate attempts to seek allies.

Unicorn: These barbarians still long for the City of the Rich Frog, although our magistrates are now administering it jointly with them. And they are still too friendly with the Crane Clan. An alliance between the Crane and Unicorn would provide the Crane with the strength to oppose us on the battlefield, and cannot be allowed. Better to drive the Unicorn into war with the Scorpion – they nearly attacked the Scorpion last autumn, and only the frantic lies and murders of the Scorpion prevented it. If that is not possible, at least do whatever you can to prevent them from allying with the Crane.

Crab: The Crab are up to something. They have mended their quarrel with the Crane, and this Winter Court portends some plan on their part. The Crab are not wealthy and their troops are tied up at the Wall, so they offer little threat to the rest of the Empire. However, they have a loose alliance with the Unicorn Clan. We should learn what they really want... and if it threatens us, stop it.

Phoenix: The Shiba family of the Phoenix has actively sought our help against the Dragon Clan. In return, we have asked for their support against the Crane. Although they have been somewhat reluctant to commit to action against that Clan, it now seems certain that war with the Dragon will erupt in the spring. We need only ensure that the Shiba do not falter, or listen overmuch to their peace-prattling shugenja.

Dragon: Since we have decided to support the Phoenix, we cannot expect any help from the Dragon Clan. We must ensure that they do not find any allies of their own for the war which seems certain to come this spring. In particular, beware of letting them improve their relations with the Unicorn.

Scorpion: Never trust a Scorpion. They seek nothing but their own power, and do so by the vilest and most dishonorable means. Only theft, lies, and murder prevented them from being condemned by the Emperor himself last autumn. We will chastise them in the spring, so they are undoubtedly planning all manner of mischief against us this winter. Beware of them, watch them closely, and do not let them turn others against us.

Minor Clans: The minor Clans are of no importance, unless they can aid us against the Crane. Even so, they should come to us as supplicants, not equals.

Crane Clan: Your Objectives

From Doji Hoturi, Champion of the Crane and Daimyo of the Doji family, greetings:

The year just past has been a tragic one for our Clan, marked by the death of my father, my younger brother, and numerous brave and honorable Crane bushi. The losses in the recent earthquake are exceeded only by the losses at Toshi Ranbo, where the savage, barbaric ferocity of the Matsu overcame the courage and skill of our samurai. The young Hantei Emperor has interceded a few times on our behalf, but with the capital and the Imperial courts still in such chaos, it is difficult for him to offer us proper support.

Therefore, we must at all costs ensure that we retain control over the crucial Imperial offices of Emerald Champion and Imperial Chancellor, both of which now stand vacant. By the proper application of gifts, rhetoric, and political pressure, it should be possible to persuade several of the Clans to support our candidates for those offices, and put forward only lesser prospects from their own ranks. By retaining these offices, we will regain the political power needed to overturn the Lion Clan's advantages in numbers and military skill.

Even so, the Lion may not surrender without bloodshed. We must also seek the strength of military allies in order to bring this war to a swift and honorable conclusion. The Lion have allied themselves with the Shiba family of the Phoenix Clan in their quarrel with the Dragon Clan, so the Dragon should be natural allies for us. Better still, it may be possible to ally with the Dragon while forcing the Shiba to abandon the Lion, by putting pressure on their Isawa masters. The Isawa openly seek the restoration of the Jade Champion – perhaps we can use this as leverage to force their support not only with the Shiba but also on other matters, such as the Emerald Champion.

The Unicorn Clan are a natural ally to us, but the recent problems with the Scorpion Clan have distracted them. We must seek to remind them that we are their truest friends. We know that they, too, gaze eagerly on the vacant Imperial offices -- perhaps some sort of compromise or accommodation can be reached which will bring them into the war on our side. That will quickly force the Lion to accept peace.

The Scorpion would seem to be our logical ally – after all, the Lion openly plan to attack them in the spring – but I know as well as any man that the Clan of Bayushi cannot be trusted. Ally with them if it seems the only possible route, but never trust them. At best they are friends of convenience, at worst betrayers.

The Crab Clan, thankfully, are one problem which has been solved, and peace now reigns on our border with the Defenders of the Wall. Perhaps we can improve matters further, and gain their support for our candidates for the Imperial offices. Perhaps, also, we can use their loose alliance with the Unicorn to further persuade the Unicorn to come in on our side.

The Minor Clans are of no concern to us, and if any of them show their faces at court, pay them no mind. We make a sole exception for the Mantis Clan, whose foolish ambitions of gaining Great Clan status offend us. Do not permit them to achieve any success in these impudent dreams.

Crane Clan game-play effects

You can, in concert with the other Crane representatives, offer a military alliance with any other Clan that borders the Lion (the Phoenix, Dragon, Scorpion, or Unicorn). Inform the chief judge if such an alliance is offered, what details it entails, and whether it is accepted. You may also, in agreement with the other Crane PCs present here, make one Clan-to-Clan gift (with a value of 1,000 koku) to another Clan in order to ensure their friendship. Inform the judge if you make such a decision. Finally, you can also make agreements concerning candidates for the Imperial offices (Emerald Champion, Imperial Chancellor). Again, inform the chief judge of any such arrangements.

You have two Crane brides (Doji Misami and Kakita Maiko) and four gifts (a Kakita blade, a jade-edged wakizashi, the fan of Inari, and a spell scroll) which you can offer in order to cement alliances (or break up enemy alliances). The head judge (Kuni Yori) has certs detailing each of these brides and gifts. (You may also arrange marriages of Crane PCs to PCs from other Clans, if it is acceptable to them.) You should probably review the certs before making any offers.

What You Know About the Other Clans:

Lion: The Matsu daimyo, Matsu Tsuko, is now Champion of the Lion following the dishonoring of the Akodo. This woman will push her Clan to its doom and beyond in order to punish us. Only the combination of military strength and political power will force her to stop. We must acquire both.

Unicorn: The Unicorn almost went to war with the Scorpion last autumn when the Lion accused the Scorpion of controlling the opium trade. Although the Unicorn Clan's dedication to fighting crime and corruption is admirable, we must convince them that defeating the Lion and restoring peace is more important for the future of the Empire. We know the Unicorn have designs on the Imperial offices, and formidable candidates which they have been grooming for both – perhaps we can use this to our advantage, offering them one of those offices in exchange for their support elsewhere. This would be an unpleasant trade, but perhaps a worthwhile one in these desperate times – after all, a Unicorn in either office would still favor us over the Lion.

Crab: The Crab's intentions this winter are uncertain. They were surprisingly willing to resolve their border differences with us last year, as opposed to their usual intransigence. Can we bring them in on our side, or use them to convince their Unicorn friends?

Phoenix: The Phoenix have often been our friends and allies in the past, but now their Shiba family has allied itself to the Lion. War with the Dragon seems quite likely this spring. We know the Isawa disapprove of this, and that they seek to restore the office of the Jade Champion. This should be enough for us to use them as leverage against the Shiba. If not, an alliance with the Dragon should work as well.

Dragon: It is usually so difficult to understand what the Dragon want. However, with war looming in the spring, their Mirumoto family is looking for allies against the Shiba. This surely offers an opportunity to exploit. In return, we can demand that they support our candidates for the Imperial offices.

Scorpion: The Scorpion are looking for allies, with the Lion planning an invasion and the Unicorn threatening the same. Perhaps we can use the Unicorn as leverage against the Scorpion, in exchange for their support on the battlefield and in other matters. They have strong candidates for the Imperial offices – do not allow them to win either one.

Minor Clans: The Mantis are increasingly open in their attempts to gain Great Clan status, and have announced the marriage of their champion Yoritomo to Kitsune Ryosei of the Fox Clan, to be followed by the merger of their two Clans. They have also been trying to gain influence with the other Great Clans, hoping for their support, although all they can offer in return is gaudy trinkets. You should oppose their goals whenever possible.

Crab Clan: Your Objectives

From Hida Kisada, Clan Champion of the Crab:

I believe the reign of the Hantei dynasty has entered its last, decrepit days. The young so-called Emperor is a sickly boy who spent a month in the hands of the Bloodspeaker Cult. Almost all other members of the Imperial line perished in the recent earthquake. The Empire can no longer be trusted to the hands of such a weakling, a last attenuated remnant of the blessed Hantei the First. Our own bloodline, however, remains strong, and no Clan has given more in the service and the defense of the Empire than ours. We alone are properly suited to rule this Empire of shrill squabbling children. Under the reign of a Hida Emperor, the fractious Clans would be forcibly united and their combined strength turned at last to the task which has waited so long – the destruction of the Shadowlands forever.

However, although I am laying secret plans to build our strength, we still dare not move without at least some help from the other Clans – or at the very least, knowing where they will stand when we do move. This is why I have invited all these puling courtiers to Shiro no Kaiu. You must gauge their intentions, plumb their strength, learn which of them can be won to our cause and which must be defeated or destroyed. This will be a struggle as difficult, as important, and as dangerous as your service on the Wall. You must learn which of these ambassadors can be trusted, and which must be put off with pleasant words or jokes.

In the last winter, our Clan managed to avert a war with the Crane, and this summer we made an agreement to demilitarize our borders. It is unlikely that the mewling Cranes will support our claim to the Throne, so we should see to it that they stay fully occupied fighting the Lion. That will prevent them from sending any of their troops to harass us.

The Lion are also unlikely to support us, since they are blind in their submission to the corrupt and failing Hantei line. Fortunately, their own foolish lust for wars of “honor” makes it likely that they will soon be fighting many opponents. We should make sure that the Lion are bogged down in too many conflicts to send more than a small part of their strength against us when we make our move.

To that end, we have much-improved our relations with the Unicorn, and even sent troops to their assistance. Now is the time to reap the benefits from that. Inform the Unicorn that we will support their annexation of the City of the Rich Frog, and also their candidates for the Imperial offices which now stand vacant. If nothing else, that should ensure that the Unicorn war with the Lion over the City of the Rich Frog. Even better would be to convince them to be our allies in truth. The Unicorn are not as bound by tradition as the other Clans, and may see the need for new, strong blood on the Emerald throne.

We cannot know how the other Clans will stand in regard to our plans, so you should tread softly and be sure of their positions before you reveal our true plans. It seems likely that the Phoenix will side with the Lion in war this spring. That makes the Dragon our logical allies, but their most important daimyo, Mirumoto Hitomi, is a demented girl who has sworn vengeance on my son Yakamo. However, I am told that this Hitomi is missing. Perhaps we can use that to our advantage.

The Scorpion cannot be trusted, but they may recognize the true danger of keeping the Hantei on the throne any longer. Perhaps we can gain their help by ensuring that the Unicorn attack the Lion instead of them. Indeed, they will soon be fighting the Lion themselves, and will perhaps be glad for allies. And there remains that matter of the secrets they found beneath Kyuden Bayushi, secrets which may concern the threat from the Shadowlands. On this matter, the Scorpion should recognize our own expertise, and defer to us.

Finally, we may find a fruitful alliance with the Mantis Clan, who are descended from our own bloodline. They may recognize that an Emperor Kisada would gladly extend them the Great Clan recognition which the Hantei deny them. That the Mantis Clan, under its aggressive daimyo Yoritomo, should be supported in its quest to gain Great Clan status.

Crab Clan game-play effects

You can, in concert with the other Crab Clan representatives, offer a military alliance (with up to 10,000 troops) to one or more Clans in order to ensure their support for your own Clan's actions.

You can also offer the gift of two Crab brides (Hida Kyoko and Kuni Tomo), a Kaiu Blade, and a suit of Kaiu-forged Heavy Armor to improve relations with any of the other Clans. (You can also negotiate the marriage of Crab PCs to other Clan PCs, with their permission.) The chief judge (Kuni Yori) has the certs which detail these items and the dowry which accompanies the bride. You should probably review these before any negotiations.

What you know about the other Clans:

Lion: The Lion are consumed with their war against the Crane, and now they expand to attack the Scorpion. They may also soon strike at the Dragon, if the rumors of their alliance with the Phoenix are true. This offers opportunities for us in many ways. With their forces stretched so thin, the Lion may not have the military strength left to resist us – and their enemies will be glad of our assistance.

Crane: The Crane are foolish, arrogant children who care nothing for the price we pay to keep the Empire safe. They will, as usual, try to buy their way out of any troubles that face them, bribing the other Clans with gifts and pretty brides. They are unlikely to support our plans, so keep them occupied with struggles against the Lion. We have a truce on the border with them – keep it in place until we are ready to strike. Above all, do not allow their honeyed tongues to trick you.

Unicorn: Our relations with the Unicorn have been greatly improved since last year. They wish to annex the City of the Rich Frog, a move which would put them at war with the Lion Clan. They are also obsessed with punishing the Scorpion Clan for the illegal opium trade – this would be less useful to us, since it would prevent them from warring on the Lion. We also know that they long to control one or both of the Imperial offices (Emerald Champion and Imperial Chancellor) – by supporting them on one or both of these, it should be possible to earn their further assistance.

Phoenix: The Phoenix are divided – their bushi are anxious for war with the Dragon, while their shugenja issue constant warnings against the rising power of Fu Leng. Unfortunately, their bushi seem to have formed an alliance with the Lion. Perhaps we can convince them to seek an alliance with us instead – after all, we could promise the ultimate defeat of the Shadowlands, thereby pleasing their shugenja as well. Also, we will support their campaign to restore the office of Jade Champion. Such an office would be elevated greatly under the reign of a Hida Emperor.

Dragon: Their Mirumoto family seem eager for trouble with the Phoenix, and desperate for help against the apparent Phoenix-Lion alliance. Do not let them draw us into such a struggle unless we can be sure of their support of our move against the Hantei throne. The daimyo of the Mirumoto is a foolish girl named Hitomi, who is obsessed with some sort of vendetta against Hida Yakumo, our Clan Champion's eldest son. We will have to work around that. Fortunately, we have heard rumors that she has disappeared.

Scorpion: The Scorpion have narrowly averted a Unicorn invasion, and they expect a Lion attack in the spring. This situation may make the weavers of secrets less arrogant and more willing to seek our help. Sound out their opinions on the Hantei dynasty carefully – do not let them trick you until telling all before you are confident of their own position.

Minor Clans: The Mantis have ambitions to become a Great Clan, and seek to unite the other Minor Clans behind them. Their champion Yoritomo has announced a marriage to Kitsune Ryosei, daimyo of the Fox, which will unite the two Clans. We fully support them on this. Their wealth and ships, allied to us, could be critical in any strike against the Hantei. Be aware that the Imperial families were seeking to draw the Mantis away from us last summer – do not let them succeed in this venture.

Unicorn Clan: Your Objectives

From Shinjo Yokatsu, Champion of the Unicorn, greetings:

Our Clan stands ready, as always, to prove that we are the true defenders of the peace and security of the Empire. Now, when two Imperial offices stand vacant and the Scorpion are revealed as purveyors of filthy opium across the Empire, is the time for the Unicorn to ride forth and show our true strength.

We have prepared able and talented candidates for the offices of Emerald Champion and Imperial Chancellor. Before any tournaments are declared, however, it will be useful to gain the support of some of the other Clans. Although the Crane will surely put forward strong candidates of their own, we may find the other Clans more willing to step aside and allow us to take our place as the Empire's true defenders, especially if we can offer them other things in return.

We have agreed to jointly administer the ronin city of the Rich Frog with the Lion Clan. However, we remain convinced that the city would be better served by direct administration from the Unicorn Clan. With the Lion already at war with the Crane, and likely to be at war with the Dragon and Scorpion soon, perhaps we can convince them to let us have the city in exchange for a promise of neutrality. Or perhaps their Crane and Dragon enemies will support our annexation of the city in return for our help against the Lion armies. Either choice is acceptable, although gaining the city without war is preferable to fighting for it.

Sadly, the Lion we were unable to persuade the Emperor to condemn the Scorpion Clan for their illegal opium smuggling, and as a result, we were unable to present our petition to take control of the legal medicinal opium trade.

With the Lion threatening to invade Scorpion lands in the spring, perhaps we can use the threat of similar military action to force the Scorpion to give us what we could not win in the courts. If not, it may indeed be time for the city of Ryoko Owari to return to our hands, so that we can take direct control of opium production. Still, we should be wary of entering a war which places us effectively on the same side as the Lion.

Our relations with the Crab are excellent at the moment, and we must learn what they are planning and why they have invited so many guests to their winter court. No doubt they have some goal in mind – it is well known that the Crab Champion, Hida Kisada, is an ambitious man who has spoken openly about the weakness and decline of the Hantei line. Perhaps he hopes to establish a regency over the young Emperor, whose health and welfare is so uncertain after the disasters of last autumn. We must learn what he seeks, and whether it is something we can support. The Crab are worthy allies, and we may should support his goals if we can do so with honor.

Finally, we have recently learned that the Champion of the Minor Clan of the Mantis has betrothed himself to our distant cousin Kitsune Ryosei of the Fox Clan, with plans to unify their Clans. No doubt this is a part of the Mantis goal of attaining Great Clan status. For now, we still neither favor nor oppose their efforts. However, this is certainly a major step on their path. If they prove themselves worthy of being a Great Clan, let them become one, for their bloodline is descended from Hida himself.

Unicorn Clan game-play effects:

You can, in concert with the other Unicorn Clan representatives here, agree to dispatch troops in the spring to occupy and annex the City of the Rich Frog. You can also agree to attack and annex the Scorpion city of Ryoko Owari. Inform the chief judge (Kuni Yori) if you take either action.

You may also, in agreement with the other Unicorn here, form military alliances with other Clans, or take military action against other Clans, should it seem justified for the good of the Unicorn Clan or the Empire.

You may offer a Unicorn bride (Shinjo Suiko), a Unicorn husband (Otaku Banu), a gift of a gaijin curiosity (a spyglass), and a Unicorn spell-scroll (The Horse's Nose) to cement agreements or alliances with other Clans. The chief judge (Kuni Yori) has the certs for these – you may wish to review them before making any offers. You may also arrange marriages for Unicorn PCs, with their permission.

What you know about the other Clans:

Lion: The Lion have accepted our joint administration of the City of the Rich Frog, but remain reluctant to let us take control of it. Fortunately, they are deeply embroiled in war with the Crane, and their alliance with the Shiba will probably drag them into war with the Dragon come spring. Furthermore, they have also threatened military action against the Scorpion come spring. With the Lion so overstretched, it should be possible for us to negotiate with them (and their enemies) from a position of strength.

Crane: The Crane have always been our friends, and with the losses they have suffered at the hands of the Lion, they will be eager – nay, desperate – to gain our military assistance. However, we should be wary of letting the Crane drag us too easily into their war. Only if they offer us much else of value, such as agreeing to support our candidates for the Imperial offices, should we fight at their side. Otherwise we may find more profit in neutrality.

Crab: The Crab are valiant (if crude and brutal), and last year they showed themselves to be honorable as well, sending troops to support our northern border. In return we dispatched some of our bushi to help them on the Kaiu Wall. We do not know what ambitions they seek to further at this Winter Court, but we know their champion Hida Kisada has a low opinion of the new young Emperor. We must learn what the Crab want. Certainly, there is reason to be concerned about young Hantei the 39th, after he spent so many weeks in Bloodspeaker captivity.

Phoenix: The Phoenix are divided between their peaceful and enlightened shugenja, the Isawa, and their more warlike bushi, the Shiba. A war between the Shiba and the Dragon Clan seems all but inevitable, come spring. Furthermore, it is now well-known that the Shiba have an alliance with the Lion. Perhaps we can find opportunities in this, or in the internal conflict between their shugenja and bushi. Also, perhaps we can use their desire to revive the office of Jade Champion as a tool to advance our own ambitions toward the other Imperial offices.

Dragon: We have never understood the Dragon, and perhaps we never will. Their bushi seem to be on the verge of war with the Lion – perhaps we can exploit this to gain their assistance in other matters. Certainly the Dragon have never shown much ambition toward the Imperial offices, so they may be willing to support our candidates in exchange for military help.

Scorpion: The Scorpion should have been condemned for their illegal opium smuggling before the entire Empire last autumn, but somehow they used their treacherous ways to avert the charges. However, we know they have been in disarray since the wife of their Champion was burned in Otosan Uchi, and we also know they expect an attack from the Lion come spring. The Scorpion are not in a strong position. Act accordingly.

Minor Clans: The Mantis seek to gain Great Clan status. Their champion Yoritomo will marry Kitsune Ryosei in the spring. Only time will tell whether they are successful. It is doubtful, however, they can offer us much in the way of help.

Scorpion Clan: Your Objectives

From Yogo Junzo, advisor to Bayushi Shoji, Champion of the Scorpion, greetings:

I speak to you on behalf of our Clan Champion, who is much occupied with other matters. Thankfully, his wife is now out of danger and recovering swiftly from her unfortunate injuries.

We have but little concern in the affairs which distract the other Clans at this Winter Court. Our principle goal must be to protect ourselves from the foolish aggression and ambition of the other Clans, lest they disrupt our vital services to the Empire.

The Crab Clan's ambitions are our principle concern. Hida Kisada has made no secret of his contempt for the Hantei dynasty, and in light of the fragility of the Empire, we cannot help but assume the worst about this sudden invitation to attend the Crab winter court. Kisada seeks allies for something, some grand ambition – we must learn what it is. If it threatens the Empire, it must be stopped.

The Lion and Crane clash on the battlefield, taking the lives of many brave samurai. A tragedy, but one which benefits us, weakening two of our enemies. Let it continue without respite. Both sides seek allies, and the more allies they gain, the longer and bloodier will be their war. Beware, the Lion speak of attacking us in the spring, claiming that we are responsible for the scourge of opium addiction upon our lands. Ensure that they will be too distracted with their other enemies to trouble us.

One of those enemies should be the Unicorn Clan. The Unicorn clearly wish to chastise us, and harbor ambitions against our city of Ryoko Owari, the center of legal opium production. It was once a Unicorn city, and they would make it so again if they could. The best distraction – and the best punishment for their continuing hostility – will be to drive them into a war with the Lion. There may be other ways as well, however. We know the Unicorn dream of sending their candidates to replace the fallen Emerald Champion and Imperial Chancellor. By offering to support their candidates, we may be able to buy their allegiance, or at least their neutrality. Of course, we would prefer to have our own candidates fill those offices, but a naive and foolish Unicorn in either position would be easily manipulated.

War between the Phoenix and Dragon, or at least between their bushi families, seems inevitable as well. We have heard secretly that the Agasha, the shugenja of the Dragon Clan, are so outraged at the prospect of war that some of them may consider switching their allegiance to the Phoenix! We can surely profit from this, especially since the conflict will involve the Lion as well. Perhaps the Dragon bushi may be willing to offer us help and favors in exchange for our secret assistance – not all alliances must deliver troops on the battlefield.

Thankfully, the rumors of what we may (or may not) have discovered beneath our stronghold of Kyuden Bayushi have been largely swept aside by the tragic disaster in Otosan Uchi. A party of Imperial investigators did arrive, but they were so worried about the status of the Imperial capital that we simply showed them a few caves and sent them on their way. See to it that the matter does not arise again. What we have actually discovered is a secret so vital and deadly that not even the Emperor Himself can be allowed to see it, lest it threaten His purity and safety. The future of the Empire and the continued imprisonment of the Dark One may rest on keeping this secret.

No other matters at the Winter Court concern us directly, so Lord Shoji directs you simply to pursue what course seems most prudent and effective at building the influence and power of the Scorpion Clan. One other directive he sends: the Mantis Clan seeks to unify with the Fox Clan of the accursed Three-Man Alliance. Anything which can discomfit or weaken this alliance will be welcome.

Scorpion Clan game-play effects:

With the agreement of your fellow Scorpions, you can form a political or military alliance with any other Clan or combination of Clans. You can also offer up to four Scorpion favors to Clan PCs, whether for the purpose of an alliance, or to encourage them to behave in a preferred way. You can also offer a marriage to a Scorpion shugenja, Soshi Yumiko. The chief judge (Kuni Yori) has certs for these. You are also free to negotiate Scorpion PC marriages to other PCs, with their permission.

Over the course of the Winter Court, you can learn SECRETS about the other PCs or NPCs. You can learn about their Advantages or Disadvantages, their Clan objectives, their personal secrets, or the information they have. Each Scorpion PC at the Winter Court may learn one such SECRET for free, simply by asking a judge. You may learn additional SECRETS by rolling **Courtier/Awareness**, **Stealth/Agility**, or **Investigation/Perception** (your choice) in front of one of the judges. The TN for the first SECRET is 20, +5 for each additional SECRET. (Place a checkmark on this sheet for each SECRET you learn.)

SECRETS learned:

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You know that the secret beneath Kyuden Bayushi concerns the possible return of Fu Leng. You also know that not even the Emperor has been informed of the secret.

What You Know About the Other Clans:

Lion: The Matsu family now rule the Lion. The Matsu are honorable, but also absurdly aggressive and quick to rage or take offense. With them in charge, it is hardly surprising that the Lion war with the Crane threatens to expand into conflict with the Dragon. If we encourage them, they will rush headlong into war with our enemies in the Unicorn Clan. This will prevent them from attacking us, at least not with any meaningful strength.

Crane: The Crane are in difficult straits, as the new young Emperor has not been as protective of them as his ancestors, and the deaths of the Emerald Champion and Imperial Chancellor have greatly weakened them in the courts. As a result, they cannot stand against the Lion with the ease they have shown in the past. This offers us great opportunities. They seek allies against the Lion – this is acceptable, but see to it that they do not gain enough allies to actually win. So long as they fight in a bloody stalemate, their energies will be distracted, and we will have free reign in the courts of the Empire.

Unicorn: Besides their designs on our opium trade and our city of Ryoko Owari, the Unicorn also wish to take control of the ronin city of the Rich Frog, which lies between their lands and those of the Lion. Such a move would almost certainly lead them into a war with the Lion Clan. They also desperately seek to claim the vacant Imperial offices, in order to “prove themselves” as part of the Empire. All of this should be fertile ground for us to cultivate.

Crab: We do not know what the Crab are dreaming of, and this is troubling. Find out, whatever the cost. Their Clan Champion’s ambitions could threaten all the Empire. Their Kuni family has probably not forgotten about the secrets we have found beneath Kyuden Bayushi, but they cannot be trusted with such information – especially now, when we do not know if they remain truly loyal to the Empire.

Phoenix: The Phoenix are divided, bushi against shugenja. This is useful, since it prevents them from causing us trouble. The Isawa may still seek to learn what we have under Kyuden Bayushi, but we must not give them too much information, lest they abuse it – it was they who stole three Black Scrolls from us years ago. Also, their ambitions to revive the office of the Jade Champion seem to be gaining ground. This should be discouraged, since it would give them too much political influence.

Dragon: The Dragon are as mysterious and troublesome as ever. Luckily, they are about to go to war with the Phoenix, and possibly split their own Clan. This is all to the good. Perhaps we can use them as tools against the Lion Clan.

Minor Clans: The ambitious fool Yoritomo is marrying Kitsune Ryosei of the Fox Clan, chasing his dream of Great Clan status for the Mantis. It is time for him to learn that it would be better to remain in Minor Clan obscurity.

Phoenix Clan (Isawa/Asako): Your Objectives

From Isawa Tomo, Master of Water, expressing the wishes of the Isawa elemental council:

These are terrible times for the Empire. The earthquake in Otosan Uchi, the death of the last Emperor, and the loss of so many other able members of the Imperial court, including the Emerald Champion and the Imperial Chancellor – all these things have shaken Rokugan to its foundations. Although the Master of Void is absent, the rest of the Elemental Council agrees that a great evil is rising, an evil of which this was just the first taste. The One Who is Not to be Named grows strong again, and Uikku's prophecies of the Dooms may be at hand.

Sadly, all too few of the other Clans recognize the danger. Even our own foolish Shiba family seems about to charge into war with the Mirumoto of the Dragon Clan, and has gone so far as to form an alliance with the Lion for that purpose. We will have no part in this foolish war, and must seek to avert it and show all sides the need for peace. We know that the Agasha family are most unhappy with the Mirumoto warmongering, so perhaps we can exploit that division to the benefit of all.

To ensure the future survival of the Empire, the time has come for the revival of the office of Jade Champion. Last year several of the other Clans seemed favorable to this, and we must remind them to support us. Those who still oppose it must be persuaded, or else outmaneuvered in the courts.

Finally, we remain curious about the reports that the Scorpion unearthed some sort of ancient secrets beneath their castle of Kyuden Bayushi. Although most of the Empire has forgotten about this matter, the Elemental Council would still greatly like to learn more of this matter, and whether it has any connection to our own growing concerns for the future of the Empire.

Game-Play effects:

You are empowered, in concert with the other Phoenix at the Winter Court, to offer three Isawa shugenja spouses (one male, Isawa Konatsu, and two female, Isawa Chisato and Asako Yaku) to other PCs, in exchange for their pledge of support for the revival of the office of Jade Champion. Each spouse comes with a spell-scroll from the Phoenix library. The chief judge (Kuni Yori) has the certs listing the dowry and other benefits associated with these spouses (you should review the certs before making any marriage offers). PC to PC marriages will also be useful, if all agree to them.

You can also make alliances or agreements with other Clans, or with the shugenja families of other Clans. General or military alliances must be agreed to by all Phoenix PCs present, but political agreements and shugenja alliances do not require the agreement of Shiba-family PCs.

Phoenix Clan: What you Know About the Other Clans:

Lion: The Lion armies are embroiled more deeply in their war against the Crane with every day that passes. They also are threatening to attack the Scorpion Clan in the spring, which would spread the war still further. Our own Shiba family has formed an alliance with the Lion against the Dragon, and the Dragon (or at least their Mirumoto family) are actively seeking allies of their own.

Crane: The Crane grow increasingly desperate for allies against the Lion. If our own Shiba family continues to rebuff them, they may seek help from the Dragon or the Unicorn. They are anxious to retain control of the Imperial offices (Emerald Champion and Imperial Chancellor) in order to maintain their dominance of the courts. We may be able to use this to force their support for the restoration of the Jade Champion.

Unicorn: The Clan of the Ki-Rin grows ever more ambitious. They still hope to annex the City of the Rich Frog, although other matters have moved to the foreground of their attention. Their hopes of taking control of the medicinal opium trade were dashed in the courts this last autumn, when the Lion Clan's accusations against the Scorpion were disproved before the Emperor. Now the Unicorn may dream of winning on the battlefield what they could not gain in negotiation. If so, that will make them effectively allied to the Lion Clan, an unusual move for a Clan which normally favors the Crane. Perhaps the reason for this is the Unicorn Clan's other new ambition, to take over the two vacant Imperial offices.

Crab: The Crab are the enemies of the Shadowlands, and therefor a natural ally in our quest to restore the office of Jade Champion. However, their Clan Champion Hida Kisada is also an ambitious man who is openly critical of the Hantei dynasty. The Isawa Council's divinations suggest that Kisada's ambitions are driving this Winter Court, although exactly what he plans remains a mystery. We do know the Crab have recently improved their relations with the Unicorn – do Shinjo's children support the Hida ambitions?

Dragon: The Dragon are divided, even as we are. Their Mirumoto family, left leaderless by the disappearance of their daimyo Mirumoto Hitomi, has followed lesser daimyo onto the path of war with our own Shiba family. Meanwhile, the Agasha family are deeply troubled by the prospect of war. It remains to be seen which way the other families (Togashi and Kitsuki) will swing in this debate. We do know that the Mirumoto are anxiously seeking military allies against the Shiba-Lion alliance.

Scorpion: The Scorpion love their secrets. While they have not been able to conceal the discovery they have made in the tunnels beneath Kyuden Bayushi, they have prevented any from learning just what that discovery is. Meanwhile, they are threatened by war on two fronts, from the Lion and the Unicorn. A Lion attack on the Scorpion seems almost certain, and the Scorpion may be seeking allies against it. We suspect they also harbor ambitions toward the vacant Imperial offices, although one can never be sure with Scorpions.

Minor Clans: The Minor Clans are unimportant, and will always be unimportant. This "unification" between the Mantis and the Fox will not change that. The sooner they give it up dreams of Great Clan status and accept their station, the better for all.

Phoenix Clan (Shiba): Your Objectives

From the desk of Shiba Tsumenitsu, daimyo in the Shiba family:

Although the Elemental Council desires peace with the Dragon Clan, it is plain that the insults and aggression of the Mirumoto family can only be answered with blood on the battlefield. It is time for the Shiba to stand up and fight for their own Honor, without our shugenja to hold our hands. If we back down now, we will lose face before the Empire, our ancestors, and our enemies.

To ensure victory, we have formed an alliance with the Lion Clan. When we march on the Dragon in the spring, the Lion will march beside us. Do not let this alliance be disrupted, either by the actions of other Clans or the well-intentioned meddling of the Elemental Council. We know the Crane would certainly like to convince us to switch sides, but at this time it is the military strength of the Lion, not the beauty and rhetoric of the Crane, which is most needed.

Beware, for the Mirumoto seek allies of their own. Do not allow them to find any, or this conflict will become a long struggle rather than a swift victory. We know that some among the Dragon oppose the Mirumoto in this war – perhaps we can use this to our benefit.

Aside from the Crane, the Unicorn are the Clan most likely to side against us, simple because geography and their long-standing friendship with the Crane will push them in that direction. Try to convince them to stay out of this conflict. We know they are angry with the Scorpion, so perhaps we can support them in taking action against that treacherous Clan – that will prevent the Unicorn from fighting the Lion, since the Lion Clan is also threatening war against the Scorpion.

We know that several Clans, including the Unicorn, harbor ambitions for the vacant Imperial offices (Emerald Champion and Imperial Chancellor). Perhaps we can use this to influence them against the Dragon, by offering to support their candidates.

Serve us with skill and honor this winter, and we will win a swift and glorious victory against the Mirumoto come spring.

Game-Play effects:

You have been directed to strengthen your alliance with the Lion Clan, and if possible to seek other allies for a possible military clash with the Dragon. The Crab may be especially useful in this regard, since the Mirumoto daimyo, Hitomi, is obsessed with her enmity for the Crab heir, Hida Yakamo.

In concert with the other Shiba here, you can agree to military alliances, direct military deployments, or military assistance in support of any agreement (or to block an opposing agreement). Non-military negotiations (political or economic agreements) will also require the agreement of any non-Shiba Phoenix PCs. Inform the chief judge (Kuni Yori) of any such agreements.

In order to secure alliances and block rival moves, you can offer two Phoenix brides (Shiba Atsuko and Shiba Moemi). You can also offer a Clan-to-Clan gift of value up to 500 koku. The chief judge has the certs listing the dowry and other benefits associated with these brides (you should review the certs before making any marriage offers).

Dragon Clan (Mirumoto/Kitsuki): Your Objectives

From Mirumoto Yukihera, daimyo and general in the Mirumoto armies, greetings:

In the absence of our daimyo Mirumoto Hitomi, I have taken it upon myself to lead our family until her return. These are grave and perilous times, a bold young leadership will be needed to guide us through.

We expect war with the Shiba family of the Phoenix by spring. They have allied with the Matsu family, who now lead the Lion Clan, and already two Lion legions have moved to our borders. Sadly, not all in our Clan recognize the danger facing us – indeed, many of the Agasha have threatened to refuse their support on the battlefield! Thankfully, the Isawa seem equally reluctant to support the Shiba against us.

It is unlikely that we can break the Phoenix-Lion alliance (although it will do no harm to try). We must find military allies of our own in time for the spring campaign season. The Crane are an obvious choice, but they are hard-pressed by the Lion already and will have little to offer us. Perhaps the Scorpion or the Unicorn will serve better. The Scorpion are facing their own military threat from the Lion, and may be glad of allies, even Dragon allies.

The Lion and Unicorn continue to show interest in the City of the Rich Frog. Both now have magistrates there, investigating the problems with opium smuggling. We do not wish either Clan to annex the city, for our Lord Togashi Yokuni directed us in the past that the city should remain neutral. However, he has said anything on the matter in over a year, and the necessities of the moment weigh on us heavily. Perhaps by agreeing to support a Unicorn annexation of the city, we can gain their support against the Lion and the Phoenix.

Whatever happens, we will not dishonor ourselves or lose face before our enemies.

Game-Play Effects:

You must find allies to counter the Shiba alliance with the Lion Clan. In concert with other Mirumoto/Kitsuki-family PCs, you can form military alliances, defensive agreements, and other such diplomatic arrangements. Inform the chief judge (Kuni Yori) of any agreements you make.

You can offer two Dragon brides – Mirumoto Tsumire and Kitsuki Yoiko – to cement alliances or disrupt the actions of the Phoenix. You may also arrange PC-to-PC marriages, with their consent. The chief judge has the certs outlining the dowry and benefits (if any) from the two brides; you should consult them before making any marriage offers.

Over the course of the Winter Court, you can learn one SECRET about any of the following: the other PCs and NPCs (their Advantages or Disadvantages), their personal secrets, their Clan objectives, or the information they have. Each Dragon PC may learn one such SECRET for free, simply by asking a judge.

Dragon Clan (Agasha/Togashi): Your Objectives

From Agasha Gennai, daimyo within the Agasha family,

The foolish Mirumoto family seems all too ready to rush into war with the Phoenix. With their daimyo Hitomi off wandering the Empire, no doubt pursuing her childish vendetta against the heir of the Crab Clan, the rest of her family is leaderless, and an ambitious bushi named Mirumoto Yuikihera has used this crisis to gain control. He has exploited the anger and jealousy of Mirumoto Sanbe, a general on the border, to drive the entire family to the brink of war.

It is a war which we are likely to lose, and lose catastrophically. The Phoenix have allied with the warlike Matsu of the Lion Clan, who are eager for the chance to finally avenge themselves on our poor allied in the Dragonfly Clan – and on us for sheltering the Dragonfly for so long. If we find allies to support us, all that will ensure is bloody stalemate, not victory. The only choice is not to fight at all. We must make the Shiba, and our own bushi, see the futility of their actions.

It may be too late, now, for anything but war. If war comes, most of us in the Agasha will stand apart from it. Our daimyo Agasha Tamori will support the Mirumoto – he prides himself on never disobeying an order – but I and many others will refuse. Perhaps we will even leave the Dragon Clan, if it comes to that. A Clan where an ambitious fool like Yukihera can rise to power, and where our champion Togashi Yokuni will do nothing to stop him, may be a Clan to which we can no longer belong. But that will be a decision for each of you in the Agasha family to make.

Game-Play effects:

Your goal is to prevent a war between your Clan's Mitumoto family and the Shiba family of the Phoenix Clan, and to disrupt any alliances and agreements which might encourage that war. You can make private agreements of your own (with the cooperation of other Agasha/Togashi PCs) to promote that goal.

To support your efforts, you can offer three gifts – two Dragon mitsugusuri (potions) and a Dragon spell-scroll. The chief judge (Kuni Yori) has the certs for these gifts.

Like the other Dragon here, over the course of the Winter Court, you can learn one SECRET about any of the following: the other PCs and NPCs (their Advantages or Disadvantages), their personal secrets, their Clan objectives, or the information they have. Each Dragon PC may learn one such SECRET for free, simply by asking a judge.

Dragon Clan: What you know about the other Clans

Lion: The Lion are now led by the warlike Matsu, and are deeply embroiled in war with the Crane. They are allied with the Shiba family of the Phoenix, and have moved troops to the border of Dragon and Dragonfly lands. Although it seems almost certain that they will join the Shiba in attacking, perhaps you can still convince them that the Phoenix will make poor allies, or that they would do better to seek the aid of the Dragon. We have heard that they plan to attack the Scorpion as well come the spring, and the Phoenix will not be able to help them with that.

Crane: The Crane have lost the two Imperial offices which were the heart of their power, and their smaller armies are suffering greatly at the hands of the Lion. They are desperate for allies against the Lion, but it is debatable how much they themselves can bring to such an alliance. Still, they are the obvious choice for any Clan which faces a Lion attack.

Unicorn: The Unicorn still seem to hope for annexing the City of the Rich Frog. Although in the past our Champion Togashi Yokuni stated that the city should remain neutral, he has been silent on the matter for over a year, so perhaps it no longer matters to him. Meanwhile, the Unicorn now also speak of annexing the Scorpion city of Ryoko Owari and taking direct control of the opium trade. They also dream of filling the vacant Imperial offices with their own candidates. All these ambitions are honorable, but perhaps unwise. Perhaps if we support them on the less dangerous matters, they can lend us assistance against the Lion.

Crab: Our Mirumoto daimyo, Hitomi, quests across the Empire seeking a duel with the Crab heir, Hida Yakamo, but he disdains her and treats her like a child. Thus our Mirumoto family has been left all but leaderless while war threatens with the Phoenix. We do not know what plans drive Hida Kisada to invite so many to his winter court, but our Champion Togashi Yokuni has proclaimed that the Crab ambitions cannot be allowed to succeed.

Phoenix: The Phoenix are divided, their Shiba family eager for war while the Isawa seek to counsel restraint. The Shiba have formed an alliance with the Lion. Meanwhile the Isawa seek their own ambition, to revive the office of the Jade Champion.

Scorpion: The Scorpion are facing difficulty, with both the Lion and the Unicorn threatening war. They may be more willing to humble themselves and seek the help of others than in the past. They still cling to their secrets, especially those concerning the caves beneath Kyuden Bayushi. Perhaps they will be less stubborn on that matter as well.

Minor Clans: Yoritomo of the Mantis has announced his betrothal to Kitsune Ryosei of the Fox Clan. Yoritomo seeks to elevate his Clan to our own level. While his energy and spirit are to be commended, he reaches too high. A mountain cannot be built in a year. He must learn patience.

Mantis/Fox Clan: Your Objectives

From the desk of Yoritomo, greetings:

Our Clan's efforts to gain Great Clan status, and to unify the Minor Clans behind our banner, have begun to bear fruit. The Imperial families have taken one of our brides, showing the favor of the Son of Heaven. The Crab have also announced their support for us. Perhaps most important, the daimyo of the Fox Clan, Kitsune Ryosei, has consented to be my bride. This marriage will unite the two oldest and most powerful of the Minor Clans, and marks the first true step toward our ascendancy into the ranks of the Great Clans.

War now tears the Empire apart, and many of the Clans will seek wealth or military assistance from us. The gifts and tools which I entrust to you will be much coveted by their diplomats. The help of the Mantis Clan, with our fleets of ships and our great wealth, could be vital to any one of the seven Great Clans. By skillfully making offers to different factions, it should be possible to win more and more support for our petition. The Crab already favor us, so by making clear the benefits which they reap from this choice, it should be possible to enlist others' help. The Crane and Lion should prove to be especially fertile ground, since their bitter war compels them to seek allies wherever they can find them.

We do not know what the Crab Clan seeks at this Winter Court, but we have hints. The Crab champion is an ambitious man, and dreams of one day sitting on the Emerald Throne in place of the Hantei. And who knows? Perhaps the Hantei dynasty is indeed coming to its end. A callow boy, of suspect purity, sits on the throne, and only one other blood relative of the Hantei line, his niece, survives. Let us see what proposals the Crab offer, and if they seem worthy, this may be the moment for the Mantis to step forward and shake the foundations of the Empire. If there are any of the other Minor Clans in attendance, seek alliance with them. Ultimately, I believe that we will not be respected until we stand together. The Wasp and Sparrow Clans are of particular interest to us, since they are allied with the Fox, and we have already formed a bond by marriage with the Sparrow.

The Imperial families have lately offered us support as well, but beware – they will never truly accept us as a Great Clan. Use what they offer, but do not concede too much – otherwise we will never take our proper place in the Empire.

Game-Play Effects

You can, in concert with any other Mantis/Fox PCs and NPCs here, offer a preferential trade agreement (value 1000 koku) to any one of the Great Clans. Inform the chief judge (Kuni Yori) if you make such an agreement.

You can also offer secret access to gaijin gear, to the same Clan or a different one. Again, inform the judge if you do so.

You may agree to a military, political, or economic alliance with any Great Clans or Minor Clans.

Finally, you can offer one Fox Clan bride, Kitsune Akima, to cement an alliance or agreement. The chief judge has the cert outlining the dowry and benefits of marriage to Akima. (You might wish to consult it before making any marriage offers.) You can also negotiate the marriage of Mantis and Fox PCs, with their permission.

Mantis/Fox Clan: What you know about the other Clans

Lion: The Lion are in an ever-expanding war, fighting not only the Crane but soon the Dragon and possibly the Scorpion. They are eager for money and military support. However, they also despise us as “Minor Clan trash.” They must learn to show us respect before we offer them our help. Furthermore, it is most unlikely they will accept the plans of the Crab. Perhaps it is best that we support their enemies.

Crane: The Crane will never respect us, for they believe their own wealth and influence is more than sufficient to protect them. Since they are the other Clan most loyal to the Hantei dynasty, perhaps this is for the best. On the other hand, if they are desperate enough, they may change their tone. In the meantime, avoid their pleasant smiles, which hide only mockery.

Unicorn: The Unicorn might be willing to support our petition, if they were not so distracted with their own affairs. They seem bent on war, though whether it will be with the Scorpion, the Lion, or both remains to be seen. Perhaps we can use them as weapons against those clans. Of all the Clans they are the least bound by tradition, and therefore the most likely to support both us and the Crab.

Crab: The Crab clearly have ambitions against the Emerald Throne, and this Winter Court may be a search for allies to their ambitions. We shall have to see if they have the skill, plans, and strength to support their ambitions. Certainly they have been the most willing to support our petition for Great Clan status, which disposes us to support them. And after all, our Champion Yoritomo is descended from their own great Hida Osano-Wo.

Phoenix: The Phoenix are stumbling into war with the Dragon, and are allied to the Lion. That makes them unlikely to support us, although we might be able to use their dreams of restoring the Jade Champion to extract something from them. Still, their Isawa Council is probably too confident in its own power and wisdom to ever respect us and our goals.

Dragon: The Dragon seem to actually seek the betterment of the whole Empire, so perhaps they may be persuaded to support us. Unfortunately, they are also interfering with our goal of uniting the Minor Clans, both by their direct influence over the Dragonfly and by their betrothal to the Centipede Clan heir two years ago. However, now they face a war against the Shiba-Lion alliance. This may offer us many opportunities.

Scorpion: The Scorpion are our enemy, and also the enemy of the Three-Man Alliance. They will crush our ambitions, given half a chance. Find some way of distracting or hurting them. Both the Lion and the Unicorn have enmity with them – use this as best you can.

Minor Clans: The other Minor Clans – especially the Three-Man Alliance – must be convinced to join with us. The Dragonfly are probably a lost cause, and the Falcon and Badger are too distant, but all the other Minor Clans – possibly even the foul Tortoise – should rightly join their strength to ours.

Imperial Families (Otomo/Seppun): Your Objectives

From the desk of Otomo Keisuke, daimyo of the Otomo and advisor to his serene majesty Hantei XXXIX:

War sunders the Empire. The Lion and Crane are at each others' throats, the Phoenix march on the Dragon, and the other Clans watch and wait for the best offer to join the conflict. Although clashes between the Clans benefit the Emperor, if the Lion make too many gains at the expense of the Crane, they will become a threat to the Hantei's power. Therefore, we should seek to strengthen the Crane so as to force the war to a stalemate. In particular, we should see to it that the Unicorn ally with the Crane and attack the Lion, rather than attacking the Scorpion (which would effectively ally them with the Lion).

The other matter which concerns us is this unexpected gathering in Crab lands. The Crab Champion has grown disturbingly open in his insolent contempt for the Imperial line, and this Winter Court may represent the beginning of a dangerous conspiracy against the Empire. Learn what they plan, and if possible, disrupt it.

What you know of the Clans:

Lion: The Lion cannot be allowed to win their war with the Crane, lest they grow too strong to be acceptable. Fortunately, their alliance with the Phoenix will stretch them thin. Bring the Unicorn into the war on the Crane side and the Lion will be properly constrained.

Crane: The Crane, beloved of the Emperor, suffer heavily in this war. The young Divine Hantei is still settling into his throne, and has little energy to spare for the Crane. We should help them indirectly by arranging alliances which will bring their war with the Lion to a stalemate.

Unicorn: The Unicorn are splendid tools, too honest and forthright to avoid being manipulated. They have many ambitions: to control the medicinal opium trade, to annex the city of the Rich Frog, and to see their candidates win the vacant Imperial offices of Emerald Champion and Imperial Chancellor. They will best serve our needs by annexing the City of the Rich Frog and going to war with the Lion. Push them in this direction, perhaps by lending your support to their candidates for the Imperial offices. They will have to forgo their ambitions on the opium trade for now – the Emperor has ruled that it remains with the Scorpion.

Crab: The Crab Clan's ambitions must be ferreted out. They have already formed loose alliances with the Unicorn and the Mantis – these must be disrupted, and they must not be allowed to gain any further allies.

Phoenix: The Shiba family has allied itself to the Lion, giving them a preponderance of strength over their enemies in the Dragon. We will have to counterbalance this on the Dragon side. Meanwhile, the Isawa Elemental Council gathers ever more support for the revival of the office of the Jade Champion. Although this is clearly an attempt to enhance their own power during a time of crisis, the beloved Emperor's decision to marry Isawa Kaede, the Acolyte of Void, makes it difficult for us to oppose it. Perhaps we should instead seek to ensure that a shugenja from a different Clan will be chosen as the new Jade Champion.

Dragon: It is difficult to know how to deal with the Dragon as a whole. However, their Mirumoto family is clearly in desperate need of allies against the Lion-Phoenix alliance.

Scorpion: The Scorpion are the Emperor's loyal Under-Hand, and the Emperor has confirmed that they will retain control of the medicinal opium trade. We must not allow the Unicorn to unfairly assault them after the Emperor has ruled in their favor. Bad enough that the Lion plan to attack them despite the will of the Son of Heaven.

Minor Clans: Most of the Minor Clans have no importance and offer no threat. However, the Mantis Clan seeks to unite with the Fox, as part of a dream of gaining Great Clan status. This would clearly be an improper violation of the Celestial Order, but in these troubled times, some of the Clans may be willing to support this foolishness in return for the aid of Mantis ships and koku. We may be able to avert this, and assuage their Champion's ambition, by offering the restoration of a Mantis family name – their old name was stripped away after their dishonor many years ago.

Imperial Families (Miya): Your Objectives

From the desk of Miya Satoshi, by the grace of the Son of Heaven daimyo of the Miya, greetings:

War sunders the Empire. The noble Lion at last seek vengeance against the Crane, while the Phoenix and Dragon are at each others' throats. Soon the other Clans will join the struggle. The Miya family must take its own place in this struggle, and claim the glory which has been denied it for so long.

The Lion are the Emperor's strong Right Hand, and worthy of our support. Although they hardly need the assistance of the humble Miya to triumph on the battlefield, we may be able to help them in other ways. Their enemies in the Crane and Dragon will seek to draw other Clans, especially the Unicorn, into the war. We can avert this by encouraging the Unicorn in their anger against the Scorpion Clan. If the Unicorn go ahead with their dreams of attacking the Scorpion and seizing the city of Ryoko Owari, this will effectively make them allies of the Lion, who also plan to chastise the Scorpion in the spring.

The other matter which concerns us is this unexpected gathering in Crab lands. The Crab Champion has grown disturbingly open in his insolent contempt for the Imperial line, and this Winter Court may represent the beginning of a dangerous conspiracy against the Empire. Learn what they plan, and if possible, disrupt it.

What you know of the Clans:

Lion: The Lion will soon win their war with the Crane, reclaiming their proper place as the strongest of the Emperor's servants. Do not allow their enemies to unite against them. Bring the Unicorn into the war against the Scorpion and you will assure Lion victory.

Crane: The Crane, once beloved of the Emperor, have grown arrogant and foolish over the years, and this war is their punishment. The Emperor will of course not allow his Left Hand to be destroyed, but they must be properly chastened before he bestows his protection upon them once more. Perhaps it will also be suitable for the next Emerald Champion to be from a Clan other than the Crane.

Unicorn: The Unicorn have many ambitions: to control the medicinal opium trade, to annex the city of the Rich Frog, and to see their candidates win the vacant Imperial offices of Emerald Champion and Imperial Chancellor. They will best serve our needs by attacking the Scorpion, and seizing the city of Ryoko Owari, the hub of the opium trade. Push them in this direction, perhaps by lending your support to their candidates for the Imperial offices.

Crab: The Crab Clan's ambitions must be ferreted out. They have already formed loose alliances with the Unicorn and the Mantis – these must be disrupted, and they must not be allowed to gain any further allies.

Phoenix: The Shiba family has allied itself to the Lion, giving them a preponderance of strength over their enemies in the Dragon. This will ensure that the war will be short and the Lion victory suitably glorious. The minor clan of the Dragonfly may be destroyed in this clash – but what of it? It is only a minor Clan, after all, hardly worthy of our concern. Meanwhile, the Isawa Elemental Council gathers ever more support for the revival of the office of the Jade Champion. Although this is clearly an attempt to enhance their own power during a time of crisis, the beloved Emperor's decision to marry Isawa Kaede, the Acolyte of Void, makes it difficult for us to oppose it. Perhaps we should instead seek to ensure that a shugenja from a different Clan will be chosen as the new Jade Champion.

Dragon: It is difficult to know how to deal with the Dragon as a whole. However, their Mirumoto family is clearly in desperate need of allies against the Lion-Phoenix alliance. Do not allow them to find any.

Scorpion: The Scorpion are the Emperor's loyal Under-Hand, but it seems clear that the medicinal opium trade would be better placed in the hands of the honorable Unicorn. The Emperor will see the wisdom of this once the Unicorn sweep away the graft and corruption of Ryoko Owari.

Minor Clans: The Mantis Clan seeks to unite with the Fox and gain Great Clan status. Although we cannot support such a violation of the Celestial Order, in these troubled times, some of the Clans may be willing to support this foolishness in return for the aid of Mantis ships and koku. We should steer the Mantis toward an alternative goal, the restoration of a Mantis family name – their old name was stripped away after their dishonor many years ago. In return, see to it that the Mantis support the Lion and not the Crane or Crab.

Zurui, ruthless Mantis ambassador

FIRE 3	AIR 3
	Awareness 4
EARTH 3	WATER 3
	Perception 4
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: Mantis bushi 2/Mantis Courtier 1

Honor/Glory: 1.2/1.6

Skills: Athletics 4, Battle 3, Commerce 6, Courtier 5, Defense 4, Etiquette 4, Kenjutsu 5, Nofujutsu 6, Sailing 4, Sincerity 5, Stealth 3

Advantages/Disadvantages: Crafty, Storm Legion

Appearance: Zurui is a deceptively heavy-set man who usually wears a pleasant smile, but the perceptive will note the powerful muscles beneath his fat and the calculating glint in his dark, observant eyes.

Personality/Background: Zurui is a completely loyal servant of Yoritomo, the Champion of the Mantis Clan. He is a practical and ruthless man, perfectly prepared to bend the rules of Honor in the name of his Clan. He will not hesitate to employ stealth, blackmail, and other dishonorable methods in pursuit of his goals – as far as he is concerned, the good of the Mantis Clan outweighs his own personal Honor.

Goals: Zurui's goal is to gain political and military allies for the Mantis Clan. In particular, he is trying to get members of the Great Clans to pledge support for the Mantis Clan's quest to gain Great Clan status itself. He is also here to strengthen the Mantis Clan's ties with the other Minor Clans, especially the Sparrow, Wasp, Fox, and Centipede.

Isawa Nobuyoshi, Dedicated Inquisitor

FIRE 3	AIR 3
	Reflexes 4
EARTH 4	WATER 3
	Perception 4
VOID 4	

TN to be Hit: 20

School/Rank: Isawa Shugenja (earth) 3

Honor/Glory: 3.8/4.5

Skills: Calligraphy 4, Courtier 1, Heraldry 3, Investigation 7, Jujutsu 3, Law 5, Lore (Maho) 6, Lore (Shugenja) 3, Medicine 4, Meditation 5, Shintao 7, Sincerity 3, Spellcraft 6, Theology 4.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Absolute Direction, Clear Thinker, Read Lips/Driven (to destroy maho and its practitioners, especially his brother).

Appearance: Nobuyoshi is an intense, sharp-eyed young man with dark hair worn in a strict, proper samurai topknot. His expression is always serious and often angry. The eye-shaped tattoos of a Phoenix Inquisitor are clearly visible on the palms of his hands.

Personality: Nobuyoshi is a dedicated Inquisitor who is obsessed with fighting the workers of *maho* and the servants of Fu Leng. Five years ago, his brother Isawa Gidayu disappeared, and Nobuyoshi spent many months trying to find him. He eventually discovered his brother just as the older man transcended his flesh and took on the mantle of the Dark Oracle of Air. Since then, Nobuyoshi has searched the Empire tirelessly for word of the Dark Oracle, and in the process has discovered and exterminated several small *maho* cult cells.

Nobuyoshi trusts anyone who is dedicated to the fight against *maho*, and is suspicious of anyone who obstructs or belittles that struggle. He is prone to leaping to judgment and making accusations on limited evidence, often assuming the worst in the absence of sufficient information.

Goals: Nobuyoshi is ostensibly here to carry out the goals of the Isawa family (trying to find a way to avert the looming Dragon-Phoenix war). However, he considers such duties less important than making contacts and alliances with other enemies of maho. He is particularly interested in sharing stories with the Kuni Witch-Hunters, and would also like to meet members of the Scorpion Kuroiban (Black Watch) given the chance.

Matsu Ketsui, Lion Clan bushi/duelist

FIRE 3 Agility 4	AIR 4
EARTH 3	WATER 3 Strength 4
VOID 4	

TN to be Hit: 20

School/Rank: Matsu Bushi 3

Honor/Glory: 4.2/3.4

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 3, Defense 2, Etiquette 2, History 4, Iaijutsu 7, Jiu-jutsu (hand to hand) 4, Kenjutsu 6, Lore (bushido) 4, Meditation 3, Sincerity 4.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Ancestor (Matsu Hitomi – spend a Void to re-roll an attack or damage roll), Death Trance, Higher Purpose (swordsmanship), Quick/Can't Lie

Appearance: Matsu Ketsui is an athletic young woman in her late teens, muscular and fit, stronger than some men her own age. Her stance is always militant and proud, and her hands are never far from the hilt of her katana. Although her face is pretty, she usually conceals it beneath a cosmetic “war mask” of white paint, with red arrows pointing down her cheeks. This is her way of showing her dedication to the Lion Clan: she is a bushi, not some simpering courtier.

Personality: Matsu Ketsui is a proud bushi, a warrior of the Lion Clan who has sworn an oath of chastity and means every word. She despises the more peaceful Clans of the Phoenix and Crane, believing that they are not true followers of bushido. Bushido is the Way of the Warrior, not the Way of the Courtier! Those who spend their time writing poetry or trading delicate insults are wasting time and energy that would be better spent in the dojo, practicing kenjutsu. Ketsui has dedicated herself to the sword, not only on the battlefield but in the art of dueling, and is widely regarded as the most promising young duelist in the Lion Clan. Ketsui is usually a cheerful girl (unlike many Lion), and she is never happier than when her sword is in her hand.

Ketsui is the niece of Matsu Tsuko, the daimyo of the Matsu family, and is here as Tsuko's personal representative, a duty she takes very seriously. She is determined to repay Tsuko for her trust.

Goals: Your goals are those of the Lion Clan – you have no personal ambitions, and seek only to strengthen the Clan's position, as directed by your kinswoman and Clan Champion Matsu Tsuko. In particular, Tsuko has personally directed you to do whatever you can to forestall any effort by the Crane to bring the Unicorn into the war on their side, or to disrupt your alliance with the Phoenix. Also, she has plans to send an army against the Scorpion in the spring, and advises you to watch against Scorpion attempts to divert the attention of the Lion.

You are uncomfortable with this sort of diplomatic role, especially since it involves things like negotiating marriages and fighting with words. You prefer to speak the truth and fight with steel. If someone gives you an excuse for a duel, you will take it gladly.

Ijiasu, Lion Clan general, former Akodo

FIRE 3	AIR 2
	Reflexes 3
EARTH 3	WATER 3
	Strength 4
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 15 (20 in light armor)

School/Rank: Akodo War College 2

Honor/Glory: 3.3/3.7

Skills: Athletics 4, Bard 2, Battle 5, Defense 2, Etiquette 2, History 2, Iaijutsu 4, Jiu-jutsu (hand to hand) 4, Kenjutsu 5, Kyujutsu 3, Lore (War) 2, Lore (Bushido) 3, Meditation 2, Oratory 4, Shintao 2, Sincerity 2.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Death Trance, Tactician/Can't Lie, Forsaken

Appearance: Ijiasu is a slim, well-built man in his late teens. He has a serious, dedicated air about him, and seldom smiles except for the minimum required of polite company. He feels most comfortable in full battle armor, and always looks a little out of place in a formal kimono.

Personality/Background: Ijiasu is a rising young talent in the Lion armies, a man destined to become one of the great battlefield leaders of the Lion armies, learning at the side of brilliant generals such as Ikoma Gunjin and Matsu Agetoki. He is also a young man filled with self-doubt. He has never heard the voice of his ancestors, never felt their guidance or protection. This absence constantly gnaws at his self-confidence and sense of Honor, and he pushes himself even harder in order to make up for it. He is has never told anyone of his secret, afraid that it represents some fatal flaw in his own soul.

Ijiasu is a loyal Lion, and follows the orders of his superiors precisely and effectively. The shame of the Akodo family has affected him less than most other Akodo, since he has already spent many years bearing his own secret shame. He is grateful for the trust which the Clan Champion has shown him by sending him to this Winter Court, and he is determined to represent the Lion Clan ably and successfully.

Goals: Besides the general goals of the Lion Clan, Ijiasu is personally determined to prove the honor and virtue of the fallen Akodo family to all who may see. He is also determined to lead the Lion attack on the Dragon lands (and their hateful ally, the Dragonfly) when the Dragon-Phoenix war begins in the spring. Therefore, he will do his best to support the Phoenix (especially the Shiba family), and to obstruct any Dragon attempts to win allies.

Shinjo Taneka (Unicorn magistrate)

FIRE 3	AIR 3
EARTH 2 Stamina 3	WATER 3
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: Shinjo Bushi 2

Honor/Glory: 2.2/3.7

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 2, Calligraphy 2, Defense 3, Etiquette 3, Horse Archery 4, Horsemanship 6, Iaijutsu 5, Investigation 5, Kenjutsu 6, Kyujutsu (Archery) 3, Law 5, Lore (Opium) 3, Poetry 2, Research 3, Sincerity 4.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Higher Purpose (destroy opium trade), Social Position (Clan magistrate)/Bad Reputation (suspected in murder of Lion ambassador), Bitter Betrothal (Otaku), Dark Secret (relationship with Yumi), True Love (Yumi the geisha).

Appearance: Taneka is a slim young man in his early twenties, of slightly below-average height. He has a somewhat haggard, driven expression, and always speaks very seriously and earnestly. His usual expression is a slight frown, and he grows tense around Lions.

Personality/Background: Taneka is a Unicorn Clan magistrate, obsessed with ending the threat from the illegal opium trade, which leads hundreds of samurai into dishonor every year. He is a humorless man who seldom smiles and never laughs. He is even more driven to destroy opium since the events of a few months ago, when he was framed for the murder of a Lion ambassador in the City of the Rich Frog. The city, a ronin settlement, is a major hub for the illegal opium trade, and Taneka is convinced that the frame-up (which luckily was not successful) was an attempt to block him from continuing with his investigations. The Lion Clan was only too ready to believe in his guilt, and he remains uncomfortable around them even now.

Taneka is not a man without weaknesses. The frame-up came so close to succeeding because he had fallen in love with a geisha, Yumi, and was visiting her that night. He was afraid to admit where he was because he is betrothed to an Otaku battle maiden. The Otaku view geisha as a disgusting male weakness, and if his affair with Yumi ever became known it would jeopardize the engagement and his family's future prospects. Luckily, the secret didn't get out, but he worries daily that it might. This has not prevented him from writing endless love-letters to Yumi, and sending her gifts whenever he can.

Goals: You are one of the primary movers behind the Unicorn Clan's current objective of annexing the City of the Rich Frog. You were bitterly disappointed last autumn when the Scorpion wriggled out of an attempt to pin the blame for the illegal opium trade on them – if that had succeeded, the Unicorn could have forced them to give up their control of the legal, medicinal opium trade. You are determined to punish the Scorpion in any way possible, and to bring the City of the Rich Frog into Unicorn hands. And of course, that will make your relationship with Yumi much easier to maintain in secret.

If your secret relationship with Yumi is ever threatened with public exposure, you will do almost anything to protect yourself. After all, if you are dishonored, the crusade against opium will surely fail.

Shosuro Tajiki, Scorpion assassin and Emerald Magistrate

FIRE 4	AIR 3
	Reflexes 4
EARTH 3	WATER 3
	Perception 4
VOID 3	

School/Rank: Shosuro Shinobi (assassin) 3

Honor/Glory: 0.4/3.7

Skills: Acting 6, Archery 6, Athletics 3, Battle 3, Defense 4, Etiquette 5, Explosives 3, Horsemanship 4, Iaijutsu 5, Investigation 3, Kenjutsu 4, Law 3, Medicine 4, Ninjutsu (shuriken) 5, Poetry 3, Poison 4, Seduction 6, Sincerity 5, Stealth 6

Advantages/Disadvantages: Apparent Honor (2), Dangerous Beauty, Heartless, Shadow Brand (1), Social Position (Emerald Magistrate)/Dark Secret (Shosuro assassin), Sworn Enemies (many).

Appearance: Tajiki is a charming, friendly Scorpion who wears a minimal silk mask which shows off his handsome features. He is almost always smiling, and makes sure to wear his Emerald Magistrate's sash where it is clearly visible. He wears the mon of the Bayushi bushi school.

Personality/Background: Tajiki is, in actuality, a ruthless Shosuro assassin and accomplished liar, a “trouble-shooter” who the Scorpion Clan dispatches to deal with problems that threaten their goals. He can put on a very good imitation of a bushi, but his real skills lie in stealth, assassination, blackmail, and seduction. His loyalty to the Scorpion Clan is complete and total. He regards bushido, etiquette, and the rules of Rokugani society simply as tools to be manipulated for his benefit.

Goals: Besides the general Scorpion Clan goals, your specific purpose here is to blackmail and compromise a member of the Unicorn Clan in order to disrupt their investigations into the Scorpion opium trade. If the NPC Shinjo Taneka is here, he should be your primary target. If he is not here, target one (or more) of the Unicorn player-characters.

Yogo Asami, Scorpion Clan seductress and assassin

FIRE 2	AIR 3
EARTH 2	WATER 2 Perception 4
VOID 2	

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: Shosuro Assassin 2

Honor/Glory: 1.2/1.2

Skills: Courtier 4, Disguise 8, Etiquette 4, Explosives 2, Investigation 5, Law 3, Locksmith 4, Mimic 10, Ninjutsu 6, Poetry 2, Poison 6, Seduction 7, Sincerity 5, Sleight of Hand 8, Stealth 8.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Benten's Blessing/Small

Appearance: Asami is a beautiful young woman with a strong resemblance to Bayushi Kachiko, the Imperial Advisor and wife of the Scorpion Clan Champion. In fact, she has sometimes served as Kachiko's double. She usually wears a thin silk mask to accentuate her looks.

Personality/Background: Yogo Asami is a ruthless Scorpion agent and seductress. Born a peasant, she used to serve as Kachiko's double. Later she was recruited as a Shosuro assassin, and married an aging Yogo to make her a part of the Clan officially. (He died soon after.) She is completely loyal to the Scorpion Clan and especially to Bayushi Kachiko. There is nothing she won't do on behalf of her Clan and her former mistress. She is a skilled actress (not surprising, given that she used to imitate Kachiko flawlessly), adept at counterfeiting emotions, and knows how to exploit male weakness and vanity (another skill learned from Kachiko).

Goals: Besides the general Scorpion Clan goals, your specific purpose here is to blackmail and compromise a member of the Unicorn Clan in order to disrupt their investigations into the Scorpion opium trade. If the NPC Shinjo Taneka is here, he should be your primary target. If he is not here, target one (or more) of the Unicorn player-characters. Seduction is the easiest approach, but finding out the Unicorn's secrets might be more fruitful in the long run.

If the Unicorn seem likely to succeed with their goal of taking over the medical opium trade, you have been instructed to push them into a distracting war with the Lion Clan. If there is any threat to your own Clan, you are to divert it by any means possible.

Agasha Momuko, Dragon Shugenja

FIRE 3	AIR 3
EARTH 3	WATER 2 Perception 3
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 15

School/Rank: Agasha Shugenja 2

Honor/Glory: 2.7/2.5

Skills: Calligraphy 2, Courtier 2, Heraldry 2, History 3, Lore: Shadowlands 4, Lore: Shugenja 3, Meditation 5, Shintao 2, Tanto 2, Tessen 3.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Quick Healer, Allies (Kaiu family)/Dark Secret (her dead fiancé summoned the monster which nearly destroyed the Badger Clan), True Love (Ichiro Koturi)

Appearance: Momuko is a pretty young woman from the Dragon Clan, with long hair tied back in a maiden's foxtail. She is a serious woman, and there is a hint of sadness about her face.

Personality/Background: Momuko is a quiet, gentle woman from a minor vassal family of the Agasha. Her gifts with the spirits allowed her to attend the family school and learn the ways of the spirits. While there, she met (and fell in love with) a young Badger named Ichiro Koturi. Unfortunately, due to a prior agreement, Momuko was betrothed to Koturi's older brother, a thuggish bushi named Hideo. This caused much grief and emotional torment for both Koturi and Momuko. Eventually, Koturi returned to his lands to investigate the mysterious disaster which befell the Badger Clan. Eventually, word came back of terrible devastation by an Oni, a monster which was apparently summoned by Hideo. Although the monster was defeated and Hideo killed, Koturi seemed to blame himself for the incident, and did not return. Momuko was left alone, wracked with guilt that her and Koturi's illicit affair might have been responsible for the near-destruction of the Badger Clan.

Since then, Momuko has felt uncomfortable with her work as a shugenja, and has turned to the path of the courtier to serve her Clan. This Winter Court is her first major assignment.

Goals: Besides the general Dragon Clan goals, Momuko has the specific personal goals of learning more about the threat of the Shadowlands, and of getting help for the rebuilding of the Badger Clan. She feels a deep sense of guilt over her illicit affair with Koturi and sees helping the Badger as a way to atone. She is also determined to learn more about the Shadowlands so she can prevent such horrors from striking again, at the Badger or anyone else.

Mirumoto Azugiri, Dragon Bushi

FIRE 3	AIR 3
	Reflexes 4
EARTH 3	WATER 2
VOID 3	

TN to be Hit: 23

School/Rank: Mirumoto Duelist (Swordmaster) 2

Honor/Glory: 3.7/2.3

Skills: Athletics 3, Battle 2, Defense 4, Etiquette 2, Heraldry 3, Jiu-jutsu (kaze-do) 2, Kenjutsu 5, Lore (Kenjutsu) 3, Poetry 2, Shintao 2, Sincerity 3.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Higher Purpose (perfection as a duelist), Irreproachable/Idealistic

Appearance: Azugiri is a tall, muscular young swordsman. Although his build is impressive, his face is rather plain, and several dueling scars disfigure his tanned skin. He wears no armor, only a loose green kimono and sandals.

Personality/Background: Azugiri is an idealistic young man who follows the code of bushido strictly and ferociously. He seeks practice duels with other samurai whenever possible (especially samurai from other Clans), seeking to hone his skills. He regards the perfection of swordsmanship as one of the highest goals to which a samurai can aspire, and is always grateful to any bushi who helps him on this quest.

Azugiri has no particular opinions on the current Dragon-Phoenix conflict – such matters are the concern of daimyo, not mere bushi. He does not allow Clan conflicts to get in the way of personal friendships, and treats everyone with equal courtesy and respect. “In these times of strife, the virtue of etiquette is all the more important, so that we may remain honorable samurai and not descend to the level of brawling gangs.”

Goals: Azugiri’s personal goal here is to perfect his swordsmanship by sparring with as many different bushi as possible. He considers sparring to be the first step in friendship, and will be very grateful and friendly to anyone who helps him advance his skills. As far as his Clan’s goals go, he will pursue them loyally and ably, considering it to be a fulfillment of bushido to carry out his orders as accurately and effectively as possible. He will regard this as perfectly consistent with his personal goals.

Asahina Tamako, Crane Clan shugenja and daimyo

FIRE 2	AIR 6
EARTH 2	WATER 3
VOID 4	

TN to be Hit: 30

School/Rank: Asahina Shugenja 5

Honor/Glory: 3/7

Skills: Astrology 9, Calligraphy 4, History 7, Lore: Maho 6, Lore: Shugenja 8, Meditation 8, Shintao 9, Tsangusuri 10.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Inner Gift (precognition)/Bad Health, Low Pain Threshold

Appearance: Asahina Tamako is a thin, short man in his early forties, but looks older. His head is balding and he has a long, white goatee beard. He is a sickly man and is often beset with a persistent cough. Despite this, he usually appears calm and placid, and never raises his voice.

Personality: Tamako is a man dedicated to the Asahina family ideals of peace, enlightenment, and study. Somewhat reclusive, he has spent almost his whole life closeted inside the Asahina temples, studying the Tao, the spirits, and the history of the Empire. His bad health is a legacy of his childhood, when he was left outside overnight during winter. That near-death experience may also be responsible for his occasional prescient visions and dreams, which have haunted him all of his life. This is the first time he has ventured out into the larger Empire.

Goals: Tamako has left the safety of Asahina lands because several recent dreams and visions have convinced him that terrible times are ahead for the Empire, unless the Clans can be convinced to end their wars. Peace is his sole and entire goal, and he will spend the Winter Court pushing all the Clans (including his own) to mend their differences and find a way of uniting under the new Emperor.