

## Customs

### Behavior

The society of Rokugan is a very polite one, and very firmly divided into three strata; your equals, your superiors, and your inferiors. Equals should be treated politely, but not overly so, unless of course you're trying to win their favor. To be addressed as an equal by someone who is in fact your superior is a high honor - and even then, you should continue to address him in a respectful manner, at least in public. Even if your lord or superior officer is also your best buddy, treating him as an equal in front of others will cause him to lose face, and yourself to be branded an ill-mannered lout.

Bowing is the standard gesture of greeting and farewell. The inferior bows deeper and longer than the superior. The most formal form of bowing, most often used at court or when summoned into your lord's presence, is kneeling and pressing one's forehead to the ground. A samurai may also prostrate himself in this manner while making a formal apology, to show his deep shame and respect for the one he has offended.

Showing strong emotions in public is frowned upon, as is making any form of loud noise; the walls are thin, so even if you're in your own home, you're bound to disturb someone. Besides, emotional displays run contrary to the stoic ideals of bushidō. Young people and non-bushi have a little more leeway in this, but not much.

There are three forms of polite address commonly used in Rokugan. An equal, or an inferior to whom one wishes to be polite, is addressed as (family name)-san, or (full name)-san if there are many people of the same family present. For a superior, the pattern is the same, except that the suffix is -sama. Finally, one's lord may also be addressed as "tono" ("lord"), or with the suffix -dono after his family name (that suffix can also be used for anyone else of high station or worthy of respect).

When having an audience with an important person, there will be guards present; this doesn't necessarily indicate a lack of trust, simply normal caution and the preservation of face. Only close family members and hatamoto have the privilege of seeing their lord whenever they want to. And unless your daimyō trusts you utterly, talking to him in private is OUT. If the treacherous advisor whom you're trying to overthrow is standing right by his shoulder whenever you talk to him, you'll just have to learn to work around that.

The Rokugani are very group-oriented; individualism has no place in this society. Belonging to a social group, whether it's a clan, a family, a squad, a village or just a gang of rōnin banding together, is necessary for the individual's well-being

Neither to evening  
Nor to morning does it  
belong;  
The melon blossom  
-- *Basho*

The haiku is the primary form of Rokugani poetry. It consists of 17 syllables, arranged in three lines of 5, 7 and 5 syllables respectively.

Spontaneous haiku composition is a prized skill among Rokugani nobles, and competitions are common. The 31-syllable waka (5-7-5-7-7) is an older form which is no longer popular in court. Western-style rhyming poetry is a Unicorn favorite which the other clans rarely appreciate, and almost never practice.

as well as for survival. A person who is thrust out of the social order will be pitied; one who voluntarily forsakes society, or flaunts social conventions, is likely to inspire both curiosity and revulsion. Note that becoming rōnin, or shaving one's head and joining a monastery, doesn't necessarily constitute "dropping out".

Gift-giving is an integral part of society. It's important to make sure that the gift is appropriate to the receiver; giving a gift which clearly has no thought behind it is an insult. So is giving away something which is beyond the receiver's means of returning, since this places him in your debt. A gift must be offered three times, and politely refused the first two, to give the giver a chance to show his sincerity.

Honesty is not always a virtue in Rokugan; while bushidō teaches complete sincerity, a samurai is expected to lie to protect his family, his lord or his honor. Thus, the greatest gift a Rokugani can have is the ability to appear absolutely honest even when lying through his teeth.

Bushidō is NOT the same as Western chivalry. Treating your enemy honorably is not necessarily the same thing as giving him a "sporting chance". Most samurai recognize sabotage, stealth and treachery as integral parts of strategy; after all, if you can cut off your enemy's supplies, attack him unawares, or disrupt his communications, you will have come that much closer to gaining victory for your lord. On the other hand, very few samurai boast of such tactics. That's why the Scorpions are so reviled; not only do they more or less openly admit to winning by treachery, but they use similar tactics even in the more genteel "battlefield" of the courts.

## Seppuku

Samurai commit seppuku for a number of reasons. Whatever the cause, it is important to remember that seppuku is an honorable death. No matter what the dishonor or inner conflict that drove someone to commit seppuku, it is considered to have been resolved by his death. Any further reprisals against his family or insults to his honor would be dishonorable.

The most common reason for seppuku is to purge oneself of dishonor. In such instances, the samurai has lost so much face or is so ashamed of himself that death is the only way to remove the stain. One might also choose death to resolve a conflict of loyalties, or to avoid capture or a shameful death. A samurai who has been sentenced to death, but whose crimes are not so heinous that they merit an ordinary execution, is also allowed to commit seppuku.

Committing seppuku to follow one's lord in death is called junshi. This custom is frowned upon in modern-day Rokugan,

as it is a waste of loyal retainers. Funshi is the act of committing seppuku to reproach another - for example, stating publicly that another has acted dishonorably, and then dying as the strongest possible testimony. Kanshi, finally, is one of a very few ways in which a samurai can legitimately protest his lord's actions. If he feels that his lord is behaving in a shameful or otherwise harmful way, he can write a letter detailing his grievances, and then kill himself. This is considered the highest form of loyalty.

Samurai women commit jigai, which is performed almost exactly like seppuku except that one uses a tanto or other small knife, which is thrust into the throat. Onnamusha, however, perform the same ritual as a man would.

In all but the most extreme circumstances, the person committing seppuku will have a second, a kaishaku. Choosing someone to be your kaishaku is a great honor, and implies the highest respect and trust; after all, it depends on the kaishaku if you will die cleanly and honorably, or suffer and perhaps dishonor yourself by showing it. Needless to say, a kaishaku who fails in his duty is seriously dishonored.

In a formal setting, seppuku takes place in a plain room or outside, in front of white curtains. Witnesses are always present. The person committing seppuku wears white clothing, and kneels on a cushion. Before the cushion there is a small table, on which the wakizashi is placed, along with the materials for writing a death poem, and a piece of cloth or sheet of paper with which to wrap the lower part of the wakizashi blade for a better grip. The kaishaku stands behind and to the left of the cushion, with his katana drawn. Water is ladled up from a bucket and poured over both sides of the blade, purifying it and allowing a cleaner cut.

Theoretically, the person committing seppuku is supposed to make two horizontal and one vertical cut in his stomach, the whole forming an "H" shape, before the kaishaku cuts off his head; in practice, the kaishaku will often strike when he seems on the point of screaming or falling over. A quick strike is preferable to such a dishonor.

#### Etiquette of Arms

The wearing of a samurai's two swords has been the subject of a number of learned treatises throughout Rokugan's history, and with good reason. The quality of a samurai's swords, and the way he carries them, is one of the most important clues to his status and personality.

First, it is important to understand that while every member of the samurai caste has a right to wear the dai-shō, very few except for bushi do so. Women generally do not wear swords

at all; male courtiers and shugenja, with few exceptions, wear only the wakizashi. Wearing the full dai-shō means announcing to the world that one is a skilled swordsman, and does not need protection in battle or proxies in duels; this is a statement that few non-bushi wish to make.

Secondly, not every bushi's dai-shō is a revered and glorious object passed down through generations of ancestors. In fact, it is far more likely to have been mass-produced by his lord's armorers. This does not mean that the bushi will treat his weapons any less carefully or respectfully, of course... after all, the sword is the soul of the samurai. But most bushi will buy themselves a new sword if they can afford one, and return the old one to the armory. Higher-quality swords are also common as prizes in tournaments, or gifts from a lord to a distinguished retainer. Once a samurai has acquired such a fine sword, he is certain to wear it proudly and pass it on to his heir... and eventually, that sword will become "the honored blade of my ancestors."

It is perfectly legitimate for a samurai to own several swords, and the choice of which one to use speaks volumes to the perceptive courtiers of Rokugan. A bushi who comes to visit wearing the sword he always carries into battle is saying "I am surrounded by enemies here" while wearing a blade received as a gift indicates a wish to honor the giver. Of course, this all assumes that the bushi in question is known to own several swords.

The way the sword is carried or set down also gives social clues. Low-ranking bushi usually thrust their swords almost vertically through their obi, so as not to bump into someone. Those of higher rank allow their swords to stick out behind them and to the side, clearing a larger "personal space" and indicating that this is someone who expects others to step aside for him. When entering someone else's home, guests who are of lower rank than the host leave their weapons by the door, unless given specific permission to bring them. (It is important to note that permission to bring your sword into someone else's home certainly does not mean permission to use them. If you must spill blood, do it outside.)

When offering a sword to someone else, the edge should always be turned toward you, even if the sword is sheathed.

When sitting, swords should be set down to the right, with the hilts pointing away from the host. If they are placed to the left, they are easier to draw, indicating hostility and suspicion, while pointing the hilts toward the host might be interpreted as lack of respect (if you thought he was any good with a sword, would you place yours where he could get at them?). Oh, and it should be pointed out that ALL Rokugani are right-handed. There isn't a single left-handed bushi in the whole Empire. Especially not in the Scorpion Clan.

The sword should be pulled out of the obi with the right hand, using the index finger to hold down the guard. Using your left hand, with the thumb on the edge of the guard, shows mistrust, or the intention to draw the sword.

When traveling, samurai put cover sleeves on the hilts of their swords to protect them. The sleeve also prevents an easy draw. Removing it, or leaving it off altogether, is a sign of aggression.

There are also very strict protocols for how a sword should be sharpened, polished, and displayed. Touching another's sword without permission is a dire insult, and may be cause for a duel.

Other weapons are not surrounded by the same mystique and elaborate traditions as the dai-shō, but some things are universal. First of all, while the dai-shō is also a symbol of rank, other weapons and armor are tools of war. In peace time, they should be kept on display in the home, or packed away. While traveling, unless one is marching to battle, armor is kept in specially made armor chests and weapons are protected by sheaths and dust sleeves. A samurai who went about his daily business clad in armor or carrying a naginata or tetsubo might find himself in trouble very quickly - the commoners would fear such an obviously violent person, while local guards and magistrates would take a great deal of interest in him... not to mention the insult he would offer to his hosts or the lord of the province by implying that they are not capable of keeping the peace.

## Names

The first thing to remember about Rokugani names is that the family name always comes first. The same goes for the "possessor" element in bynames of the "X of Y" variety; so, for example, the farmer Ryuichi from the village of Kinkawa would be known to outsiders as Kinkawa no Ryuichi.

Only the upper classes, samurai and Imperial nobles, have family names. The lower classes have bynames, as mentioned above. These may be based on the place where they live, their occupation, or on personal characteristics.

While the Great Houses of Rokugan take their names after their founders, the names of vassal families are often based on their place of origin, resulting in names such as Kiyama (yellow mountain) or Kawaguchi (mouth of the river).

Small children are given yōmyō, or child's names, six days after birth. Girls' names are usually related to flowers or other natural features, or to traditional "womanly virtues", and are most often kept for life. Common suffixes are -ko (little), -hime (princess, can also be used as formal address) and -mi



A samurai in full armor.



Light armor, such as might be worn by well-equipped ashigaru, or samurai on guard duty.

(beauty). Boys, on the other hand, are expected to change their names after passing their gempukku ceremony. Little boys' names usually contain the suffixes -waka (young) or -maru, which denotes affection.

Adult names for men come in two types. The first is the zokumyô, or order name, which simply denotes place in the birth order - Ichirô, literally "first man" is the eldest son. Other particles are often added to the zokumyô, yielding names like Daigorô ("big fifth man") or Matasaburô ("again third man", the third son of a third son). The -rô suffix may be dropped, as in Kenichi.

Zokumyô are given to all men when they come of age, but lest the Emerald Empire be swamped with Hida Ichirôs and Isawa Saburôs, men of the upper classes rarely use them as "public" names, or indeed at all. Instead, they have so-called nanori, formal or "true" names. These are derived from some lucky or desirable trait (like Tadashi, "honest" or "righteous") or a title, such as Mataemon (the -emon suffix derives from a word for "guard").

## Daily Life

### Clothing

Peasants' clothes are made of cotton or hemp, while samurai usually wear silk; other than that, the basic Rokugani wardrobe varies little. Men wear a fundoshi, a loincloth which wraps around the stomach and up between the legs, under the kimono; women's kimono are longer, and usually worn with a wrap-round underskirt. The cut and width of the sleeves, as well as the length of the garment, determine the exact style - this varies from peasant's garb, which is quite snug and often barely covers the undergarments, to samurai court kimono, which often trail a foot or more on the floor. Kimono have no pockets - instead, personal belongings are tucked into the wide sleeves, or behind the front flap of the garment. Bushi carry a special cord for fastening up the sleeves of their kimono to keep them out of the way before going into battle - a skilled swordsman can do this in seconds. The left side of the kimono is wrapped over the right - NEVER the other way around. That's how the dead are dressed. The kimono is secured with an obi, a band of fabric which is wrapped two or more times around the waist. Men's obi are narrow and secured with a simple knot, while women's are wider, often as elaborately decorated as the kimono itself, and is tied up to form a flat bundle (or, on formal outfits, a large, elaborate bow) at the back.

While peasants usually stop with the kimono, and perhaps cotton leggings or trousers if the weather is cold, samurai often wear two layered kimono, and a variety of outer



A samurai in kamishimo (note the placement of the mon).

garments as well. Male samurai usually wear a kamishimo, which is a combination of hakama (wide trousers, similar to a divided skirt) and a kataginu, a sleeveless, sideless vest which exaggerates the shoulders. Alternatively, a haori (a short coat) or a hitatare (a kataginu without the stiffened shoulders, but with sleeves and a decorative string across the chest) can be worn with the hakama. The hakama are impractical when riding, so a samurai going out on horseback usually wears kobakama, a more close-fitting type of trousers. Many Unicorn wear these all the time. The daimon, finally, is a huge kimono with very wide sleeves, decorated with oversized versions of the wearer's mon in several places, including on the hem of the sleeves.

In more formal circumstances, high-ranking samurai wear a kariginu, a long overcoat with a high, round collar and huge sleeves, which is either worn out or tucked into the hakama. Those who really wish to impress onlookers with their style also wear nagabakama, similar to ordinary hakama but with legs so long that they trail on the floor, making them extremely difficult to walk in. Needless to say, it is all but impossible to move quickly in such clothes, at least not without looking ridiculous; some courtiers claim that the styles were introduced for that very purpose, to limit outbreaks of violence in court. Eboshi (cloth caps) or hats are common accessories for samurai. Peasants often wear simple rice hats to keep the sun off their faces, or a hachimaki (headband).

Women of high rank wear at least two layers of kimono, and often an unbelted outer kimono which is worn loose, like a jacket. This outer garment may be pulled up over the head to serve as a sunshade or umbrella. Court dress is an even more elaborate version of the same thing - during some periods, fashion has demanded that a lady wear no less than twelve layers of kimono! The neckline of a woman's kimono may be altered into a high, elaborate collar, or lowered to show a hint of shoulder or cleavage if the lady wishes to be daring. (Of course, the outfits of certain Scorpion ladies do more than hint...) The sleeves are typically larger than a man's. Onnamusha wear men's clothing while in the field, and often at other times as well, but there are those (mostly among the Crane and Phoenix) who wear more traditional outfits on formal occasions.

The mon of the wearer's clan and family is incorporated into the design of most clothes, either as a repeated pattern or embroidered on the back, chest or sleeve.

Footwear for travelers and the lower classes is waraji, straw sandals. Samurai often wear zori (thonged sandals) instead. Tabi (split-toed socks) are worn under the sandals. Geta, high wooden clogs, are worn in bad weather to keep one's feet out of the mud. At such times, one may also use a paper umbrella or straw raincoat to keep the rain off.



A courtier in formal clothing (daimon and eboshi).

The Rokugani generally do not wear Western-style jewelry, such as rings and bracelets. (The Unicorn do, sometimes, but it hasn't really caught on.) Instead, they wear netsuke; elaborately carved toggles which are slipped into the obi to hold up the cord for the intro, a small lacquered box used to hold objects too small to be tucked into the sleeves. Samurai women use combs or pins to hold up their elaborate hairstyles.

Peasants usually wear drab colors, since they can't afford bright dyes. For samurai, formal wear is almost always in clan colors. Otherwise, young people wear brightly colored clothing with elaborate patterns, while older people's clothes have darker, more subdued colors. White is the color of death, and red the color of birth; during the marriage ceremony, the bride wears white clothes, which are gradually removed to reveal a red outfit underneath. This symbolizes her death to her own family and rebirth into her husband's.

Clothes are made in both winter and summer weights, and everyone switches from summer to winter wear on the same calendar date.

#### Hairstyles and Makeup

Male samurai wear their hair long, and bound up in various styles. Though the classic style, in which the top of the head is shaved and the rest of the hair oiled into a queue which is folded forward over the crown, is popular, there are a number of other hairstyles. The simplest version is tying the hair into a knot or ponytail at the back of the head.

Alternatively, the hair is wrapped with a ribbon so that it sticks out and up, like a brush; with this style, the crown may or may not be shaved. Many helmets have an opening on the back of the head through which the hair can be pulled.

Many Crane dye their hair white, in remembrance of the first Daidoji, while some Lion dye theirs golden. The Dragon frequently shave their heads entirely, monk-style, and sometimes decorate their bald pates with tattoos.

Samurai women (and geisha) wear their hair VERY long, either tied into a foxtail or piled up in elaborate braids and loops, secured by combs and pins. For a woman, having her hair cut off is a great mark of shame. Many ladies (and all geisha) also wear a great deal of makeup, primarily face powder and rouge. Pale skin is prized, and even peasant women never expose their faces to the sun if they can help it.

Onnamusha usually braid their hair while in the field, or use a sleeve-like cloth tube with drawstrings at the ends to hold it in place.

## Food

Rice is the absolute staple of the Rokugani diet; it's a rare meal that doesn't contain rice in some form. In addition, there are many different kinds of noodles, beans, sweet potatoes, water chestnuts, seaweed, pickles (vegetables are almost never eaten fresh), fruit, eggs, fish and shellfish. Because the taxes are paid in rice, the lower classes frequently eat millet or other grains instead. The Rokugani equivalents of "fast food", often eaten on the road, are onigiri (rice balls) and dango (millet dumplings).

Only the Unicorn eat red meat regularly; the Fivefold Path, with its ban on killing for food, was not yet universally popular in Rokugan when they left, and most modern-day Unicorn still follow the "unclean" ways of their ancestors in this regard. Samurai of all clans still love to hunt, however, and fowl makes a pleasant addition to the menu. Some even hunt boars or deer, though they don't necessarily eat the prey themselves.

Sake comes in dozens of different varieties, and can be served warm or cold depending on type. It is drunk from small, broad cups; in a formal setting, a servant or dining companion pours the drinks. Only a barbarian would drink sake directly from the bottle. There are also several kinds of brandy, shochu (like sake, but much stronger) and uishi, a gaijin beverage brewed by the Unicorn.

An average meal consists of a bowl of rice, soup, some seaweed or pickled vegetables, and fish. There are no banquet halls as such; food is served in whatever room suits the purpose. Each diner has his own tiny table, and instead of one large plate or bowl there is a small one for each dish. Soup is drunk from the bowl. It's considered VERY bad luck to put your chopsticks in your rice bowl so that they stand up - that's how it's done when you offer rice to the spirits of the dead. When passing food to someone else, you should pick it up with your chopsticks and put it in his bowl, instead of holding it out for him to take with his chopsticks; that's how the bones of the dead are handled after cremation.

## Architecture

### Houses

All Rokugani homes have some features in common. First, they are built to be cool in the hot summer months, rather than warm in the winter. Second, they are built of simple materials - wood, thatch or clay tiles, and paper. While this makes them highly vulnerable to fire, they are easy to repair or rebuild in case of earthquakes or other disasters.

A typical samurai home consists of several single-story buildings surrounding a small garden or courtyard. A house is basically a thatched or tiled roof supported by evenly spaced wooden pillars. Living quarters have ceilings and raised floors made of bamboo or wood and covered with tatami - mats woven of rush and straw. Tatami are made in a standard size of about one meter by two meters, and the size of a room is measured by how many tatami are needed to cover the floor (so, for example, a room that is 3 by 2 meters would be called a three-tatami room). Sitting down on the joins between the tatami, particularly where four corners meet, is unlucky. Other buildings, such as the kitchen, privy and storage houses, have packed earth floors. One is allowed to wear sandals in such spaces, but it is considered terribly uncouth to do so within the living area.

The outer walls are made up of shoji screens (sliding wooden frames covered with translucent rice paper) while inner walls are made of fusuma (basically the same as shoji, but with paper on both sides). The house is surrounded by the engawa (a raised verandah) which in turn is surrounded by wooden shutters. In bad weather, these keep in the warmth and protect the shoji, turning the engawa into an enclosed corridor around the exterior of the house; when the weather is warm and dry, on the other hand, both shutters and shoji can be slid aside, effectively opening an entire wall to let air and sunlight into the house.

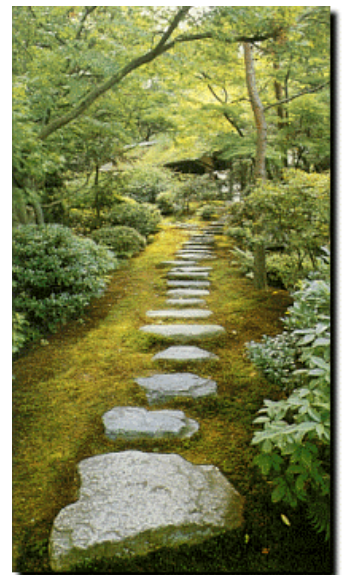
Within the home, there is a reception chamber which houses the tokonoma - an alcove in which the family's treasures are placed, along with a wall hanging which is changed according to the season. This room also contains a small altar dedicated to the ancestors. Other rooms may be used for whatever is necessary. The home is sparsely furnished with tables, cushions, and chests, some of which are used for storing futons (sleeping mats), quilts and pillows during the day. Braziers are used for warmth during the winter. One popular variant is the kotatsu, which consists of a brazier built into a table, high enough so that one can sleep under it. Some rooms contain folding screens for privacy. A formal audience chamber contains a raised dais for the lord to sit on.

Gardens are an important part of any samurai's home. Rokugani gardens are never wild, but rather are supposed to evoke a "perfected" form of nature. Carefully pruned trees, tiny pools and waterfalls, and artfully arranged rocks combine to evoke the illusion of a tiny "wilderness". Larger gardens often contain small huts where the owner can meditate or perform the tea ceremony.

A peasant dwelling is usually a single larger building. Few heimin can afford ceilings, raised floors, or paper walls; instead, walls are made of wood, or plaster over bamboo.



Interior of a house. This is a formal reception chamber.



A garden path, probably on the grounds of a castle or temple.

Instead of braziers, there is an irori (fire pit) which is used for heating and cooking.

Peasants living in cities usually have row houses; the price of the lot depends on its width, since access to the street is of vital importance. Workshops and stores are located in the part of the building facing the street, while the inner part serves as living quarters. Alternatively, buildings may have two stories, with the lower story being shop space and the upper one living quarters. Stairs are very steep, and the space underneath them is used for storage, making them look like a pyramid of drawers.

## Castles

Rokugani castles are most often built on a hill overlooking a plain, a location which is good for defense while still making it relatively easy to procure supplies and control the area's roads and waterways. The castle is usually surrounded by a largish town, which, like all Rokugani towns, is divided into districts; there is a separate area for the merchants, the craftsmen, the farmers, the entertainers and so on. The eta have a separate village a little way off from the city proper. Samurai live closest to the castle, sometimes within the outermost ring of moats and earthworks which makes up the first line of defense. Higher-ranking samurai, such as the daimyō's advisors and officers, have quarters within the actual castle compound.

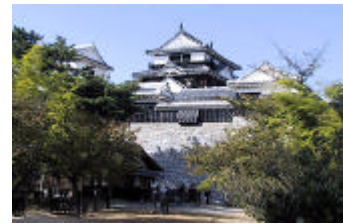
Inside these fortifications, the castle itself is built on a great stone foundation, often two or three stories high. All passages up to the top of the foundation are narrow, allowing no more than two or three people to move up them at a time, and overlooked by gatehouses and watchtowers. Atop it, there is one or more structures of wood and plaster, with interior stone walls as needed for support. The main keep may reach as high as six or seven stories altogether, while outbuildings are usually lower (one or two stories). These are the barracks, for those in the garrison who are bachelors (married samurai are given houses in the town), the private dwellings of the lord and his family, audience chambers, guest quarters, and so forth. Unlike a Western castle, the main tower is not the lord's dwelling; it is simply the final line of defense.

The castle is meant to serve not only as a fortification, but as a display of might and wealth. Thus, great effort is made to make it imposing and pleasing to the eye as well as functional. Elaborately carved gables, ornamental gardens and statues are common features, at least among the more aesthetically oriented clans; the Lion consider decorations of any kind to be effete, while the Crab tend to go in for oni skulls and similar "object lessons".

The castle of a family or clan daimyō is usually much larger



The Himeji-jo (Himeji Castle) is a good example of what a family or Clan daimyō's castle might look like.



Matsuyama Castle. Much smaller than Himeji-jo, this is a good example of a "standard" castle.

than described above, often incorporating several levels of foundations, huge courtyards and gardens, temple compounds and the like.

*(Note: for more information on castles, visit Eric Obershaw's site at [www.obershawonline.com/castle/index.html](http://www.obershawonline.com/castle/index.html). An excellent resource.)*

## Times of Life

### Childhood and Gempukku

The Rokugani have not yet invented the number "zero" so a newborn child is in the first year of its life. This means that a person's age can be as much as a full year less than the "official score." Most people celebrate their birthday on New Year's Day: the actual date and time of birth are recorded, but only for astrological purposes.

The child spends its first years in the care of the family. Rokugani children are not "little adults"; they lead carefree and usually quite pampered lives during these years. Of course, all that changes when the child is seven or eight years old. At this time, boys are sent to a school or dōjo for training, while most girls begin to learn the duties of a wife.

The gempukku, or coming-of-age, ceremony is typically performed when the child is thirteen to seventeen years of age. The child is expected to show a working knowledge of their profession, as well as family history and tradition; some clans demand that the new adult be able to recite his entire lineage, back to the founder of his family. For bushi, there are tests of courage and endurance as well. The Crab, for example, send their young bushi into the Shadowlands to bring back the head of one of Fu Leng's creatures. The more dangerous the beast, the more respected the new warrior will be.

After completing their gempukku, the new adults swear fealty to their clan and lord, and in most cases choose a new "adult" name (the name is often chosen earlier, but only becomes official after gempukku). *See the section on names.*

### Marriage

*(Note: the wife is not always the lower-ranking partner in a Rokugani marriage - indeed, in matriarchal families such as the Otaku and Matsu this is seldom the case - but to make it simple, I'll refer to the "standard model" in this document.)*

Every samurai is expected to marry and have children, in order to keep his family strong. The Lion and Crab take this duty especially seriously, because they lose so many bushi in



A statue of Jizo, the Fortune of children, pregnant women, and travelers. Crude shrines to him are often placed on street corners and roadsides, so that passers-by may sacrifice for their own welfare and that of their family.

battle. A marriage is also a good way of strengthening relations between two families, and younger relatives are frequently used as political bargaining chips ("Just to show you that my offer of alliance is sincere, I'll let my sister marry your cousin. That way, we'll be family.").

Marriages are always arranged by a third party, selected by the parents of the bride and groom-to-be. This nakodo, or go-between, is also responsible for arranging the marriage ceremony (and, for highly-placed couples, the attendant festival) and the dowry. Needless to say, a successful marriage broker gains high prestige. While most go-betweens make it a matter of pride to at least try to find a "compatible" mate, the prospective partners themselves have little say in the matter, and "love matches" are exceedingly rare. High-ranking samurai have even less choice than most, since political necessities only become harsher at higher social levels.

The match may be made while the couple are still children (or even before they are born). The actual marriage usually takes place a few years later, soon after gempukku.

The wife takes the husband's name and goes to live with his family. In theory, this means a total transfer of loyalties to her new family; in practice, the new family member often retains strong ties to her earlier life, and sometimes acts as a permanently placed agent within the new household.

The marriage ceremony is an elaborate affair, presided over by a monk or shugenja, and involving a ritual exchange of sake cups. The bride wears a red outfit with white outer garments which are removed during the ceremony. This is symbolic of her death to her own family and rebirth into her husband's. The ceremony is only attended by the go-between and the couple's immediate family.

The wedding is followed by a feast for the couple and their friends. There are no "honeymoons" as such; after the wedding, the husband is expected to withdraw to some suitable temple for a while in order to reflect on his new status and responsibilities, while the wife takes up her new duties as keeper of her husband's home and finances.

To make matters even worse, a wife cannot count on being mistress under her own roof. Especially in the case of the eldest son, the young couple often lives with the groom's parents, in which case the wife becomes little more than a servant to her mother-in-law, doing all the heaviest chores but having few of the privileges. The birth of a son makes her burden a little easier, but not much. Of course, for the wife of a high-ranking samurai, little in the way of housework is required. Instead, she takes responsibility for entertaining guests and managing the servants.

For a man, getting a divorce is quite simple: all he has to do is write a document saying that his wife is free of her obligations to him. On the other hand, divorcing one's wife for no apparent reason is a good way to make enemies of her family and generally ruin one's reputation, so such a step is still quite rare. One exception is childlessness; the primary purpose of a marriage is to have children, so unless the samurai in question was fond of his wife he would probably divorce her. Also, the head of the family or the husband's lord has the right to declare the marriage null and void, even against the wishes of the couple.

A wife has no right to divorce her husband on her own initiative, though she might ask him to let her go, ask his lord to dissolve the marriage, or, as a final resort, seek sanctuary in a temple. There are a number of Shinseist temples and nunneries in Rokugan who will protect such women. Even if the temple authorities cannot get the husband to agree to let her go, the marriage will be dissolved by governmental decree if the woman can remain in the temple for three years.

A divorced wife returns to her family. If she is pregnant at the time, her former husband takes responsibility for the child, provided it is born within nine months of their divorce and the woman has not remarried during that time.

Legally, a husband holds the right of life and death over his wife, their children, and all other members of the household. In practice, just as with the right of divorce, exercising this right indiscriminately might give one a bad reputation. Of course, if the wife dishonors the family, is caught in adultery, or otherwise incriminates herself, it is the husband's duty to kill her (and her lover, in case of adultery).

#### Concubines, Courtesans, and Geisha

It is the right of the higher-ranking partner in a marriage (not necessarily the husband, as previously noted) to visit tea houses, or otherwise find "entertainment" outside of the home. (And yes, there are male geisha and courtesans in Rokugan.) A samurai may also take a concubine - an official partner who is provided for in the same way as a wife, though she does not have the same privileges (control of household funds, etc.). Concubines may be former geisha, samurai women (though usually from the lower ranks) or even peasants. Since such a relationship is less formal than a marriage, there is less need to be concerned about the political and social aspects, so a samurai is more likely to love or desire his concubines than his official wife. Children born to concubines are legitimate and eligible for inheritance.

As is often noted, geisha are not prostitutes. They are highly respected entertainers, trained from a very early age in the fine arts of music, poetry, dance, conversation and the tea

ceremony. A geisha is still allowed to sleep with a client if she wishes, but he may never insist on it, and in fact many geisha feel that they have failed if they cannot satisfy a client's desires in other ways.

These ladies of the so-called Willow World are ranked according to their accomplishments in the arts, from those of the tenth rank who can hardly be considered geisha at all, to the rare jewels of the first rank, whose services are usually so expensive as to be beyond the reach of all but the wealthiest men.

Apart from entertaining, geisha also provide a much-needed emotional outlet. A man is not expected to love his wife or to confide in her - his role is to be the strong and stern master of the household. With a geisha, on the other hand, he is free to be himself - to laugh, cry, share his dreams and hopes, and all in a (hopefully) totally confidential setting.

Courtesans are a whole different story. They range in class from streetwalkers and bath-house girls to entertainers nearly as refined as geisha, but they all provide the same basic "service". The courtesans most often patronized by samurai are those women who did not quite have the necessary talent to become geisha, or who were not given that opportunity. They usually work in the refined setting of a tea house, and like geisha they have a strict ranking according to skill and innate grace.

While tea houses are a dream world to customers, the entertainers themselves are not always so happy. The girls and, to a lesser extent, boys are indentured to the house at a very early age, and for most of them the only hope for a better future is to be able to pay off their indentures and marry, or perhaps save enough to become okasan (owner) of their own house some day.

#### Retirement

Most samurai withdraw from the affairs of their clan as they grow old - usually at the age of sixty or so. Some choose to join a monastery and spend the rest of their lives in contemplation, while others only take on lighter duties. In fact, many samurai, especially daimyō, retire early but retain power behind the scenes for many years more, though their official and ceremonial duties are handed over to their heirs.