

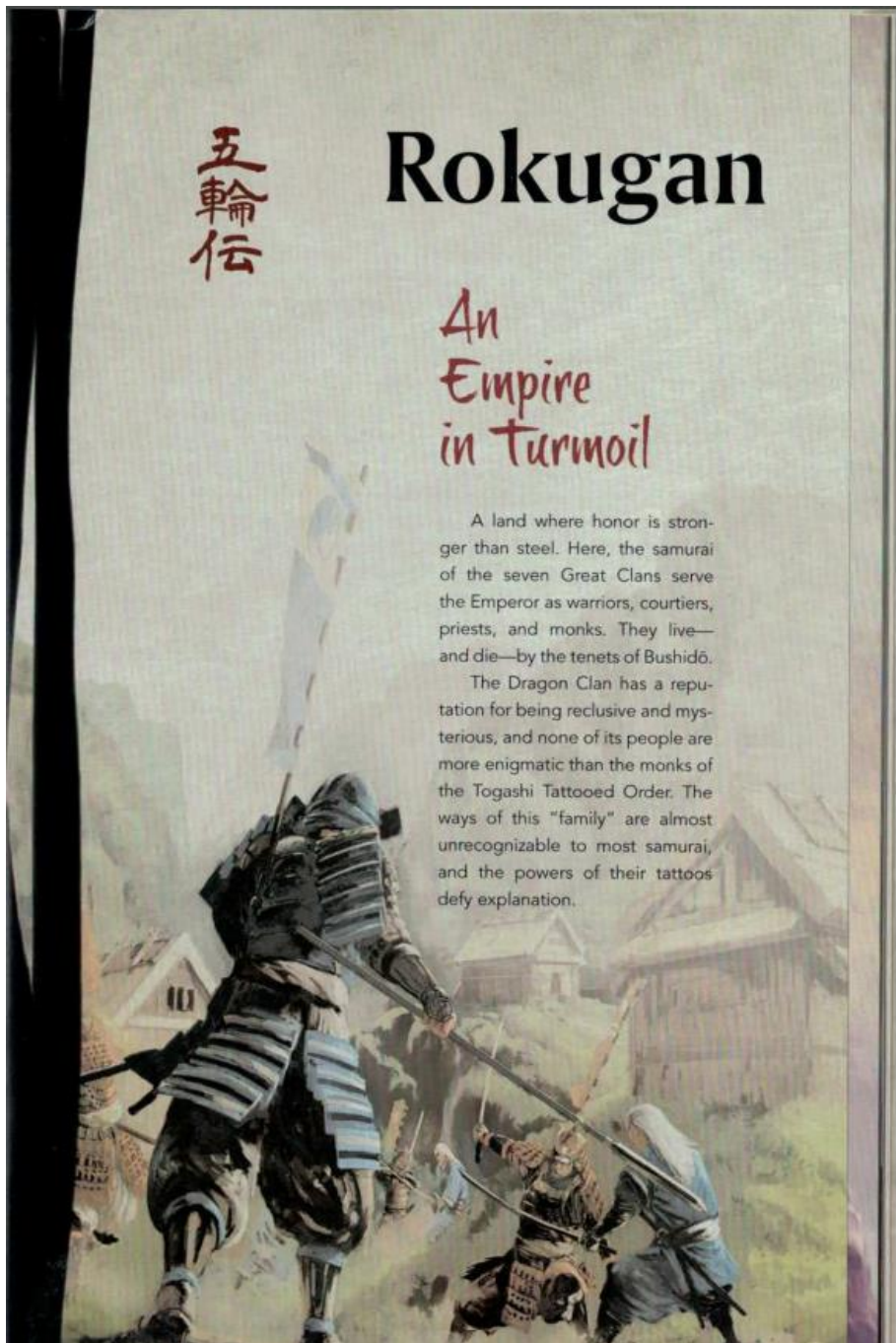
五輪伝

Rokugan

An Empire in Turmoil

A land where honor is stronger than steel. Here, the samurai of the seven Great Clans serve the Emperor as warriors, courtiers, priests, and monks. They live—and die—by the tenets of Bushidō.

The Dragon Clan has a reputation for being reclusive and mysterious, and none of its people are more enigmatic than the monks of the Togashi Tattooed Order. The ways of this “family” are almost unrecognizable to most samurai, and the powers of their tattoos defy explanation.



The Origins of the Togashi

When the Kami Hantei cut his siblings from the stomach of their father, the depraved Lord Moon, they fell to the Ningen-dō, the Realm of Mortals. One of them, Fu Leng, fell through the earth to Jigoku, the Realm of Evil, and became corrupted. Hantei himself became the first Emperor of Rokugan. The other seven founded the Great Clans of Rokugan, in most cases taking mortal lovers and bearing or siring children to carry on their names.

Togashi-no-Kami was the exception. Reclusive and enigmatic by nature, he joined the others in creating the Empire of Rokugan, but he did not participate in the Tournament of the Kami to choose the first Emperor. And although he founded the Dragon Clan to pursue his ideals of individualism, destiny, and the quest for Enlightenment, he did not found a family. Uniquely among the samurai families of Rokugan, the Togashi of the Dragon Clan are not a family at all—at least, not in the sense of people bound together by heredity.

History remembers the names of Mirumoto and Agasha, two of Togashi's early followers who founded families of their own, but not of the three who dedicated themselves entirely to learning from the Kami. Caught up in his own contemplations, Togashi neither heeded them nor turned them away. The three silently followed him on his travels, always at a respectful distance, and meditated when he did, asking nothing of their sensei save the right to be in his presence.

This continued until the nascent Dragon Clan emerged from the northern mountains and joined the rest of the Empire. On that day, Togashi-no-Kami turned to his three patient students and asked them how long they would follow him. They answered as one, saying, "For the rest of our lives, and all the lives to come."

Togashi-no-Kami laid his hand on each of them in turn, marking their skin with mysterious symbols. Then he turned and pointed at a distant mountain peak. "Build a place for me there," he said, "and I will reward you."

The three set to work right away. To their joy, they discovered the marks had changed them: one had the strength of a hundred, one could work without sleeping, and one could fly like a bird. Together, they labored for an entire year at the top of the mountain. The result was a beautiful monastery: the High House of Light.

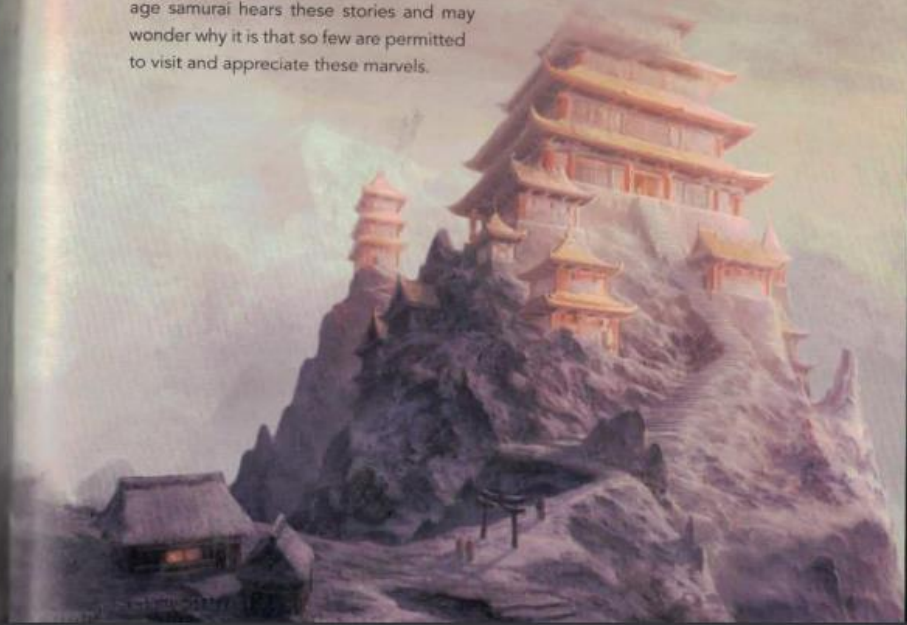
Ever since, this remote fastness has been home not only to the Dragon Clan Champions, but to the order that bears Togashi's name. The names of its builders, meanwhile, have been forgotten...and perhaps they were never more than a myth to begin with.

The High House of Light

The High House of Light is a breathtaking sight. It lacks the graceful delicacy of Crane architecture and the monumental grandeur of the Lion, but its presence in the harsh mountains of the North creates a seemingly impossible juxtaposition between human achievement and the untamed splendor of the wilderness. Within its walls, the aesthetic is an austere one: meditation halls with vast expanses of polished wood floor, gardens of raked gravel, and walls of unscalable smoothness.

Although the site could serve as a fortress, it has never been assaulted, nor is it likely to be. More than its isolated location protects it: some spiritual force seems to keep it hidden, so that only invited visitors and those on their way to join the order can even find it. For others, the mountains seem trackless and without end, offering no hint that a community of people lives anywhere nearby.

As a result, the monastery is nearly as legendary as its inhabitants. Most Rokugani hear only tales of its Library of Echoes, staffed by Togashi chroniclers and filled with stories of Rokugan's past; its Garden of the Elements, dedicated to Earth, Water, Air, Fire, and Void; its Plum Blossom Hall, where every day a monk brings a single flower from an everblooming tree and lays it in an alcove in memory of the plum blossom that once fell for Togashi-no-Kami. The average samurai hears these stories and may wonder why it is that so few are permitted to visit and appreciate these marvels.



THE DRAGON'S SON

Although members of the Togashi family are not descended from their founder, it is not quite true to say that Togashi-no-Kami has no descendants.

To most, the unassuming monk named Togashi Hoshi is simply another follower of Togashi who seeks Enlightenment. Yet he is much more than an ise zumi: he is an immortal shapeshifter—and

Togashi's son. At times, he serves the monks at the High House of Light, while at other times, he wanders the Empire and the Spirit Realms. By taking different forms, he has kept his true identity secret from even the most scholarly of his order, and even he does not yet know why—for his destiny lies upon its own path.

Joining the Order

The Togashi family is synonymous with the Togashi Order of tattooed monks, or *ise zumi*: a collection of people connected by shared training and oaths. Their origins, however, are much more varied.

No one is born into the family, but neither does the order recruit. Instead, from time to time, a child—or sometimes even an adult—feels a sudden conviction that it is their destiny to go to the High House of Light. Many of these individuals are members of the Dragon Clan, but the call knows no borders; people from as far away as Crab Clan lands or the Islands of Spice and Silk have been known to journey into the mountains that conceal the monastery.

Nor are they all samurai. Although the *ise zumi*—uncommonly among monks—belong to that class, those who seek to join them may be samurai, rōnin, or peasants; some rumors even claim hinin, the caste at the bottom of the Celestial Order, have joined the ranks of the tattooed monks. No one questions a person when they arrive at the monastery; if they have succeeded in finding it, they clearly belong there.

Sometimes it happens that aggrieved parents try to bar their child from going. This meets with little success. Those who are called will ask for the blessings of their family and lord, but if those are withheld, they may run away—years later, if need be. Those who feel the call inevitably find a way—perhaps only in their next life.

NOVITIATE

The training of the *ise zumi* is an odd hybrid of samurai and monastic education. Like monks of the Brotherhood of Shinsei, tattooed monks study theology extensively. Togashi-no-Kami was visited by Shinsei, the Little Teacher, after the Day of Thunder. According to legend, when Shinsei asked Togashi why he isolated himself in the mountains, Togashi explained that he would not move from his meditation until he understood. To this, Shinsei responded, "Neither will I." For the nine days of their meditation together, Shinsei refused to eat or drink or move from where he sat. On the tenth day, when Shinsei was near death, Togashi finally understood that his quest for wisdom had affected the world around him. A plum blossom fell into his lap, and he was enlightened.

But the theology of the *ise zumi* does not focus solely on the Tao of Shinsei. The *ise zumi* also study the Great Fortunes and the countless Lesser Fortunes upon whom the religion of the Empire centered in the days before the Kami. In addition, they study the Spirit Realms, the Kami who founded the Great Clans, the mikokami that make up the physical world, and the honored ancestors.

They also practice *jūjutsu*. True mastery of the elements requires one to develop the body as well as the soul. Even those who do not expect ever to engage in a real fight often develop great skill in unarmed combat through training. A few undertake the study of weapons as well. Further, like their Brotherhood counterparts, *ise zumi* seek to master the "inner teachings" of kihō, which allow them to stretch their capabilities beyond ordinary human limits. An *ise zumi* may be able to see with an eagle's clarity, feel the tremors of faraway footsteps, or even heat their body to searing temperatures.



But unlike ordinary monks, ise zumi also learn the history and etiquette of samurai society—including the virtues of Bushidō. They see much less division between the latter and the ethics of monastic life than their colleagues in the Brotherhood do, and while they do not devote as much energy and zeal to protecting their honor as the average Lion or Crane might, insulting an ise zumi can still be a dangerous risk to take.

The years of novitiate serve additional purposes: to erode the divisions that separate the trainees and give them new identities as members of the Togashi family. A novice of samurai origins who thinks this makes them superior to their peasant-born sibling soon finds himself broken of that notion, and a former Matsu and a former Kakita will be made to cooperate in training exercises until the rivalry of their former families ceases to mean anything to them.

Life at the High House of Light is harsh and simple. Novices carry out the vast majority of the work performed by heimin servants at other dōjō, from sweeping the paths to cooking meals to washing laundry. Even full monks are quite willing to perform humble tasks when necessary, if there is no novice around to take care of them.

But for all the strict discipline of monastic life, ise zumi enjoy certain elements of freedom. Even as novices, they are permitted and encouraged to pursue hobbies: the study of history; creation of ink wash paintings; mastery of the bow; or practice of any other scholarly, artistic, or martial skill that calls to them. There is wisdom in everything, and tattooed monks are encouraged to seek that wisdom wherever they can.

GEMPUKU

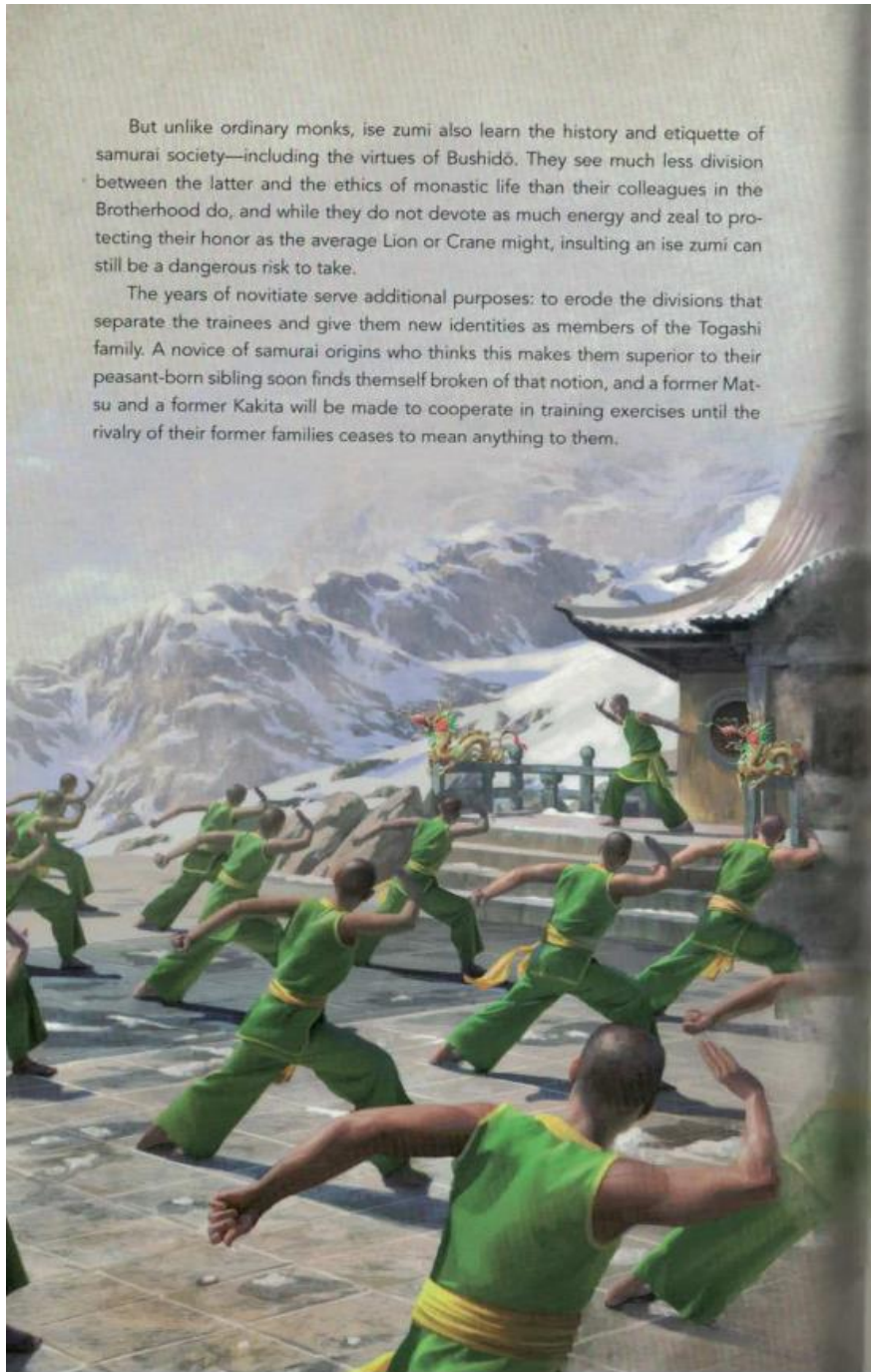
Although few outsiders are aware of it, when ise zumi finish their novitiate and become adults, they undergo a gempuku rite of passage designed to test their mastery of the skills they have studied.

For would-be tattooed monks, this test takes place in three stages. The first measures their skill in jūjutsu by requiring them to fight against the senior jūjutsu sensei or other master of the form. This is not a duel, with the novice failing if they lose; expecting a student to defeat an experienced monk would be profoundly unfair. Instead, the sensei's goal is to evaluate the novice's skills, making certain they have no serious weaknesses of form, strength, or tactical reasoning.

Once this first trial ends, the novice moves on to the scholarly examination. Three sensei oversee this, spending hours questioning the candidate on matters of theology. Brute strength without wisdom and understanding of the world would do the order no good; here again, the evaluators' purpose is to expose any shortcomings, any areas of ignorance that mean the novice is not yet ready to join the ranks of the full monks. Coming on the heels of the jūjutsu match, this examination also tests the candidate's endurance and concentration.

If the student passes both of these trials, they retire to a secluded chamber with a single sensei, who places a candle in front of them and guides them through a new form of meditation. Repeating the question "What do you remember?" the sensei leads the candidate back through the memories of their current lifetime...and, if they are truly ready, into memories of the lives that came before.

This, many say, is the true gempuku, and the first two trials are merely pageants. An ise zumi is one who knows the truth of themselves and their past. Without that, skill at jūjutsu and knowledge of theology are nothing. Only once a monk completes their gempuku are they worthy to receive their first tattoo.



“AND ALL THE LIVES TO COME”

The pledge made by the founders of the ise zumi order was no mere boasting. It was a promise, and one that every tattooed monk after them has upheld.


Once an ise zumi, always an ise zumi. Regardless of where their karma takes them in the next life—to the lands of another clan, to humble or exalted birth—every member of the Togashi Order eventually returns. This is the source of the call felt by those who seek the High House of Light; they subconsciously remember their pledge, and they return to the monastery to take up their service once more.

The scholars of the order's history say this cycle is intimately linked to their tattoos. The power of these marks is not easily mastered; without the proper preparation, the risk to one's physical and spiritual well-being is too great. Finding balance with these energies and channeling them to their purpose requires not just years but entire lifetimes of training. Great masters like Togashi Mitsu are the product of centuries of effort.

Any given monk does not remember all of their previous lives, of course. Passage through Meido washes souls clean of their memories; in most cases, only fragments remain. But the training of an ise zumi teaches them to access those fragments, drawing on them to broaden their understanding of proper action and to use their tattoos effectively. In some cases, the tattoos they receive in a particular lifetime are a response to the previous one, expanding on the lessons of karma or unlocking deeper secrets.

Odd little echoes can linger as well. The peculiar hobbies some ise zumi take up, even during their novice years, are often remnants of some earlier incarnation's activity. It is rare for a monk to be able to call on such skills directly, manifesting great ability without new training, but on occasion it happens, especially in times of profound need.

The karmic destiny of ise zumi is one of the order's most well-kept secrets. Even the leaders of the other Dragon families are not aware that the ise zumi return to the order repeatedly through many lifetimes. Any ise zumi who completes their gempuku and remembers this truth is deeply unlikely to share it with an outsider—after all, they have protected that secret before.



The Hierarchy of the Ise Zumi

Compared with the elaborate ranks of the armies of bushi or the bureaucracies of courtiers, the hierarchy of the ise zumi seems nearly nonexistent. Once novices become full monks, there are relatively few titles or positions of authority they can aspire to—nor are they expected to do so, as desire, along with fear and regret, is one of the fundamental three sins of the cosmos.

Almost every notable position within the order can be classified under the title of *sensei*, or teacher. There are teachers for jūjutsu, for meditation, for calligraphy, and for the different branches of theology. Unlike the *-sama* honorific given to lords elsewhere in the Empire, *-sensei* simply marks a person as “one who was born before another,” acknowledging that person's seniority and greater experience. Seniority is the main source of authority at the High House of Light, whether among novices or full monks—though its force is complicated by the recollection of previous lives, such that a younger monk like Togashi Mitsu may be acknowledged as senior by virtue of their accumulated experience. This hidden variable often confuses outsiders.

Other positions are born of logistical necessity. A neglected library will soon see its precious scrolls lost to mold and insects, so the Togashi chroniclers and their

assistants are kept busy airing, copying, and adding to the monastery's collections. There are monks in charge of the kitchens, of monastery upkeep, and of procurement of supplies from elsewhere in Dragon Clan lands. They, too, are addressed as *sensei*; after all, their experience in such practical matters is vital to keeping the High House of Light functioning. Finally, a very few—such as the *ise zumi* tasked with serving the Clan Champion and the *iemoto*, or head of the order—have authority of a more conventional variety, such as most samurai would recognize.

DEALING WITH DISHONOR

When *ise zumi* err, the initial response has more in common with Brotherhood discipline than with the punishments of samurai. Small infractions call for fasting, penitent labor, and meditation on one's mistakes. Novices may be beaten, but this is seen as toughening them as much as inflicting pain for the sake of justice; full monks rarely face physical punishment. Penalties such as fines and demotions mean little to monks who possess almost nothing and have very little hierarchy within their ranks. When it comes to serious matters of dishonor, the Togashi face a peculiar challenge. Given the order's many secrets, they are deeply reluctant to make a member *rōnin*, lest the outcast spill such matters to the outside world. And both the dishonor of execution and the more honorable end of *seppuku* serve very little purpose, except to put the order's *sensei* through the work of training that person all over again in their next lifetime.

For those offenders, there are alternatives. A form of symbolic suicide, drinking a medicine called *kiyomizu*, or "purifying water," takes the place of *seppuku* and allows the repentant monk to be spiritually reborn, washed clean of their failings. An unrepentant monk, by contrast, might be imprisoned for life, with others tasked to reeducate them so they will not carry their mistakes into the next incarnation. Far, far rarer is the penalty of true exile, which has only been carried out a few times in the order's history. This severs the offender from their school, family, and clan far more thoroughly than mere *rōnin* status: it strips them of their tattoos, leaving their skin scarred and bare, and breaks the karmic chain that would lead them back to the order after reincarnation. Such people are no longer *ise zumi*, in this life or in any of the lives to come.

NAIMYŌ AND GAIMYŌ

A strange dichotomy runs through the Togashi Order. Many of its members enter the High House of Light for training and never leave again, renouncing the wider world of the Empire. Others journey extensively through the lands of other

clans for a variety of purposes. Among the *ise zumi*, these are known as *naimyō* and *gaimyō* respectively: inside and outside lives.

The reasons for this division lie in the peculiar nature of the Tattooed Order. The character used to write "life" in those two words specifically refers to a person's mortal existence: a lifetime, a step along the path of reincarnation. Any given *ise zumi* generally spends several lives as a *naimyō*, then one as a *gaimyō*, then returns to the High House of Light for another span. This gives them the opportunity to hone their power before employing it in the world. Outsiders may wonder why the Dragon Clan puts so much effort into training people to master skills they never use for practical ends, but tattooed monks think on a much longer time scale: skills practiced in this lifetime can find their purpose in the next.

Such thinking also ties into *ise zumi* philosophy regarding the balance between contemplation and action. Much like a duelist of the Kakita takes pride in their ability to center themselves and then defeat their opponent with a single perfect strike, an *ise zumi* learns to study the world around them and find the single point at which they can intervene to change events. If that point does not come in this lifetime...there is always another one after it.

Asceticism

The concept of monasticism is almost inextricably intertwined with asceticism, and in this respect, the Togashi are not much different from Brotherhood monks. Within the High House of Light, food is simple and served in moderation—though a courtier or *shugenja* would be astonished by the "moderate" quantities required to support the physical labor and martial training of *ise zumi*. All but the most senior monks sleep in communal dormitory rooms and maintain a rigorous schedule of training, meditation, and labor.

But the true meaning of asceticism is not poverty or denial: it is non-attachment. Most monks own very few personal possessions, and more importantly, they do not desire more.



A HIDDEN DESTINY

Outsiders wonder why ise zumi practice many martial techniques and other skills, yet live out their lives atop a mountain where those skills never see practical use. The ise zumi know the answer but have an unanswered question of their own: Why does the order exist at all?

They understand that in some lives they are *gaimyō* and that, in those cases, their tattoos and abilities may make a difference in the world. But why did Togashi-no-Kami choose to imbue some of his followers with a power so complex and difficult it takes lifetimes to master? Why bind them to reincarnate into the order, instead of allowing them to drift from fate to fate as other souls do?

No ordinary monk knows the answer to that question. Possibly

the head of the order, *does*—but it is equally possible that the only person living who can say for certain is the Dragon Clan Champion. Regardless, more than a few ise zumi have considered this question and, in light of their founder's foresight, reached a chilling conclusion: that Togashi-no-Kami had a vision of some future moment in which their unique powers would be needed.

This thought generally does not frighten them. The ise zumi have dedicated countless lives to the order; most are eager for the moment when they will be called upon to act. If anything troubles them, it is the question of what will happen after that: what will become of the ise zumi when their original purpose is achieved?

If an ise zumi goes out into the world and attends a courtier's lavish banquet, they will not refuse the rich food, but they will eat in moderation and refrain from making a habit of such behavior. If a high-ranking samurai offers them a gift in gratitude for their assistance, they need not give offense by refusing it—but later, if they find someone in need of that item, they will give it away without hesitation.

Ise zumi almost never marry. For the samurai of Rokugan, the main purpose of marriage is the continuation of the family or the forging of political alliance. Given that the Togashi family perpetuates itself by other means, children are unnecessary, and the Togashi's reclusive tendencies means they make poor material for politics. On rare occasions, however, ise zumi have sired or borne children, usually to achieve some greater purpose—sometimes political, but often more mysterious than that.

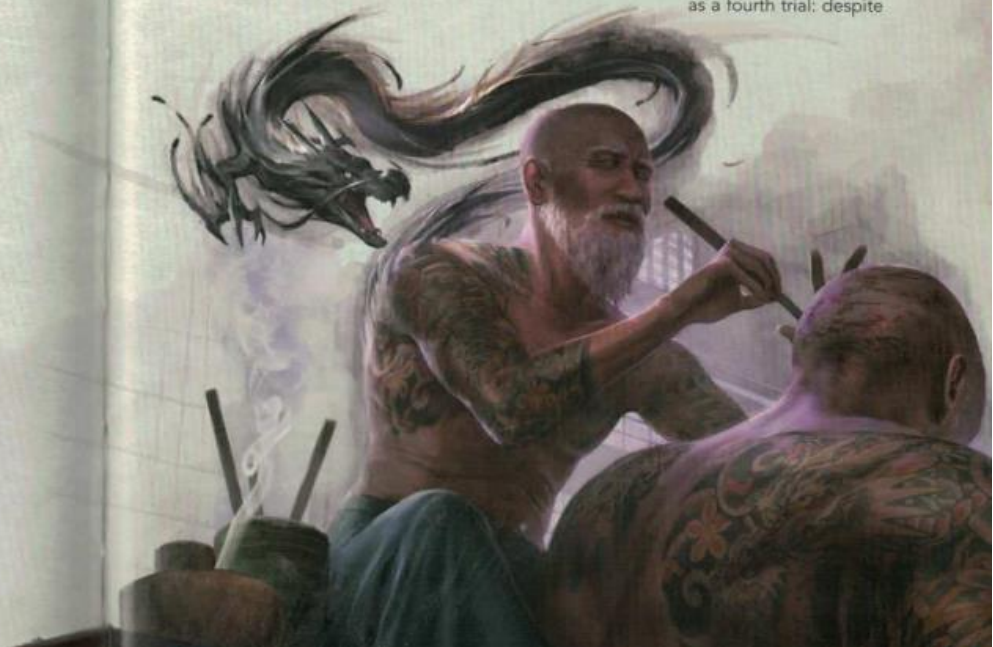
Apparent diversions from asceticism can be a point of great contention within the order. In the end, only an individual monk can be certain whether they engage

in sensory pleasures without becoming attached to them, or whether their assertion of nonattachment is mere justification for indulgence. Those who are truly strong in spirit can appreciate the transient joy of such things and then release it without any lingering regret. But they are few in number, and many fewer than sometimes claim that status. In the end, it is easier to abstain than to test one's will—although that can be a mark of fear, which, like desire and regret, is one of the three sins. So the debates continue, and they are unlikely to ever end.

Ise Zumi Tattoos

The images inked into the skin of Togashi monks are famous even in the farthest reaches of the Empire. People who have never met an ise zumi still recognize the concept of a "tattooed monk": they are stock figures in popular entertainment, with actors painting artwork onto their bodies. Unscrupulous bandits and other criminals have been known to frighten the credulous with their own ordinary tattoos, claiming those hold great power.

Although Togashi monks sometimes get ordinary tattoos for decorative purposes, all of their spiritual marks are inked by the order's tattoo master. The first two of these are awarded at the end of the *gempuku* and, in a way, can be seen as a fourth trial: despite



all their training in this lifetime and the ones before it, not everyone can withstand the energy that floods their bodies. Most fall unconscious for at least a day, and some wind up with their health permanently damaged.

While all full monks have at least two tattoos, more senior members of the order often have more. In fact, the number of tattoos a monk possesses is itself a kind of seniority. Age and time in the order also play a role in establishing seniority, but since the masters and sensei may grant additional tattoos as a form of reward or increased responsibility, the less unmarked skin a monk has, the more respect they earn. Most tattoos take the form of natural phenomena, such as animals, flowers, trees, clouds, or other such symbols. Abstract designs are less common, and often signal more unusual effects. Only rarely does a tattoo depict a human-made object like a torii gate or a folding fan.

The ise zumi maintain extensive records of tattoo images and their effects to aid new monks in identifying the purpose of their tattoos. Many common marks take more or less the same form and have had the same effect throughout the centuries; still, a known effect can show up with a different image, and a familiar image can have an unfamiliar effect. Dragon samurai who are not ise zumi often get ordinary tattoos as a sign of solidarity with their more mysterious brethren.

When the purpose of a tattoo is not well-known, it can take a monk quite some time to work out how to use it. A few come out of their tattooing with an instinctive understanding of a mark's power, but most have to engage in meditation and experimentation before they

grasp it. Experimentation may also help a monk learn to use a tattoo in additional ways, strengthening or decreasing its effects or applying those effects in unusual circumstances.

Although the effects of the tattoos often resemble those of kihō, the spiritual techniques commonly developed by monks, the Togashi tattoos differ in their degree of potency and in that they must be uncovered or lightly covered in order to work. Ise zumi do not wear light clothing and simple fabrics for purely ascetic reasons or simply to show off the beauty of their decorations; it is necessary for them to unleash their full power. Much of the hardship they endure as novices is intended to strengthen their bodies so they will not need armor or warm, heavy clothing to protect themselves, which would interfere with their tattoos.

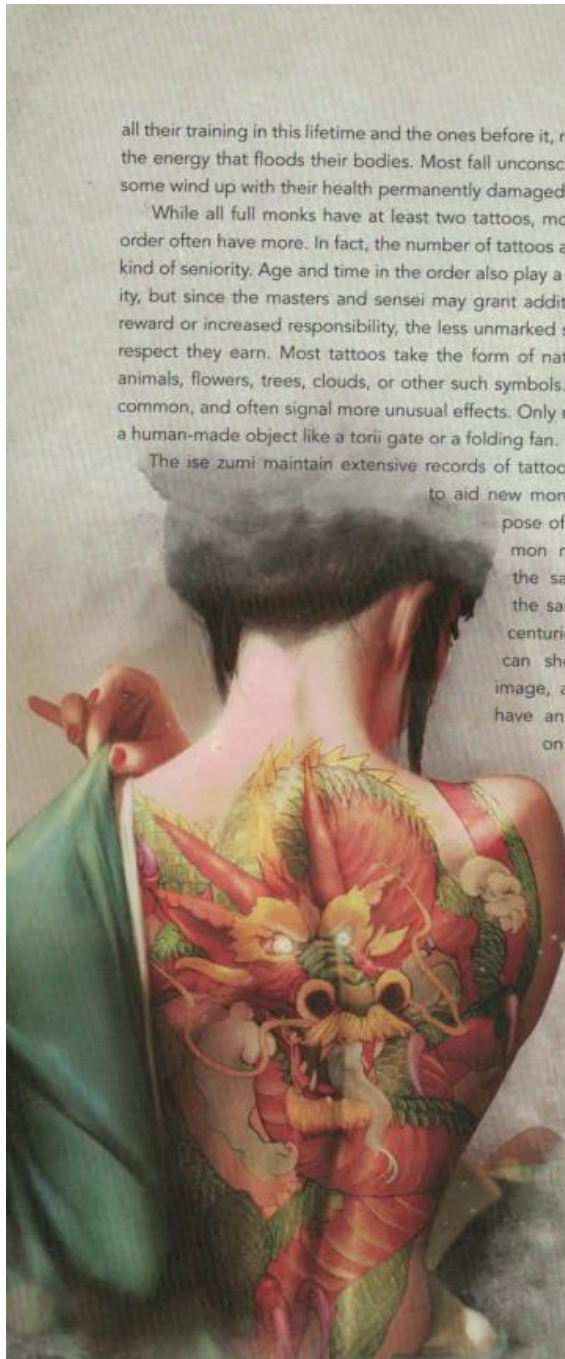
Enlightened Madness

Deep in the records of the order, in scrolls only a select few are permitted to read, there are tales that explain why the ise zumi must work for lifetimes to master their tattoos. These tales relate what happens when an unprepared spirit is subjected to the divine energies of the ink. This condition is known as "enlightened madness."

THE SECRET OF THE TATTOOS

Even among the ise zumi, very few know the source of their tattoos' power. Customarily, this secret belongs only to the clan champion; the clan champion's heir; the *iemoto*, or head of the order; and the current tattoo master. To share it more widely could be devastating, because to an outsider's eye, it looks a great deal like *mahō*: the blood magic granted by *kansen*, the elemental kami corrupted by the power of Jigoku, the Realm of Evil.

Like the power of *mahō*, the power of the tattoos arises from blood. However, in the case of the tattoos, the blood is that of Togashi-no-Kami himself, contained in a *nemuranai* vial that never runs dry. Mixed into ink, it imbues tattooed images with supernatural force. This has no connection to the *kansen* that seek to sway mortals with Jigoku's influence—but the ise zumi have no desire to explain that to Kuni Witch Hunters, Asako Inquisitors, or the Scorpion Clan's Black Watch. Because of this, the source of the tattoos' power is withheld even from most members of the order.



The quest for Enlightenment, which frees the soul from the endless cycle of reincarnation, is a major preoccupation of many Dragon samurai, who each seek their own path to that end. But just as there are many roads to Enlightenment, so too are there many roads to enlightened madness. Although it can be found in any corner of the Empire, it is more common among the Dragon, and most common of all among the ise zumi. Still, it is extremely rare, with fewer than one case being reported each generation.

At its heart, it is an affliction caused by glimpsing the truth of reality; instead of being strengthened by the experience, the sufferer's soul and mind shatter. What outward effect this has varies from person to person. Each becomes obsessed with the conviction that they alone understand the true interrelatedness of things, the essential meaninglessness of physical existence, or both. Some turn catatonic, but most begin taking actions that seem inexplicable. When these actions are trivial and empty, they do no one harm, but a person afflicted by enlightened madness is just as likely to commit heinous crimes in their attempt to convince those around them that none of it matters, or to bring about some cosmic end only they can see.

The cruelest part is that the afflicted are not without wisdom. They are not "mad" in an ordinary sense, but driven by half-understood truths. Unfortunately, the half they fail to understand means they may wind up doing more harm than good.

