

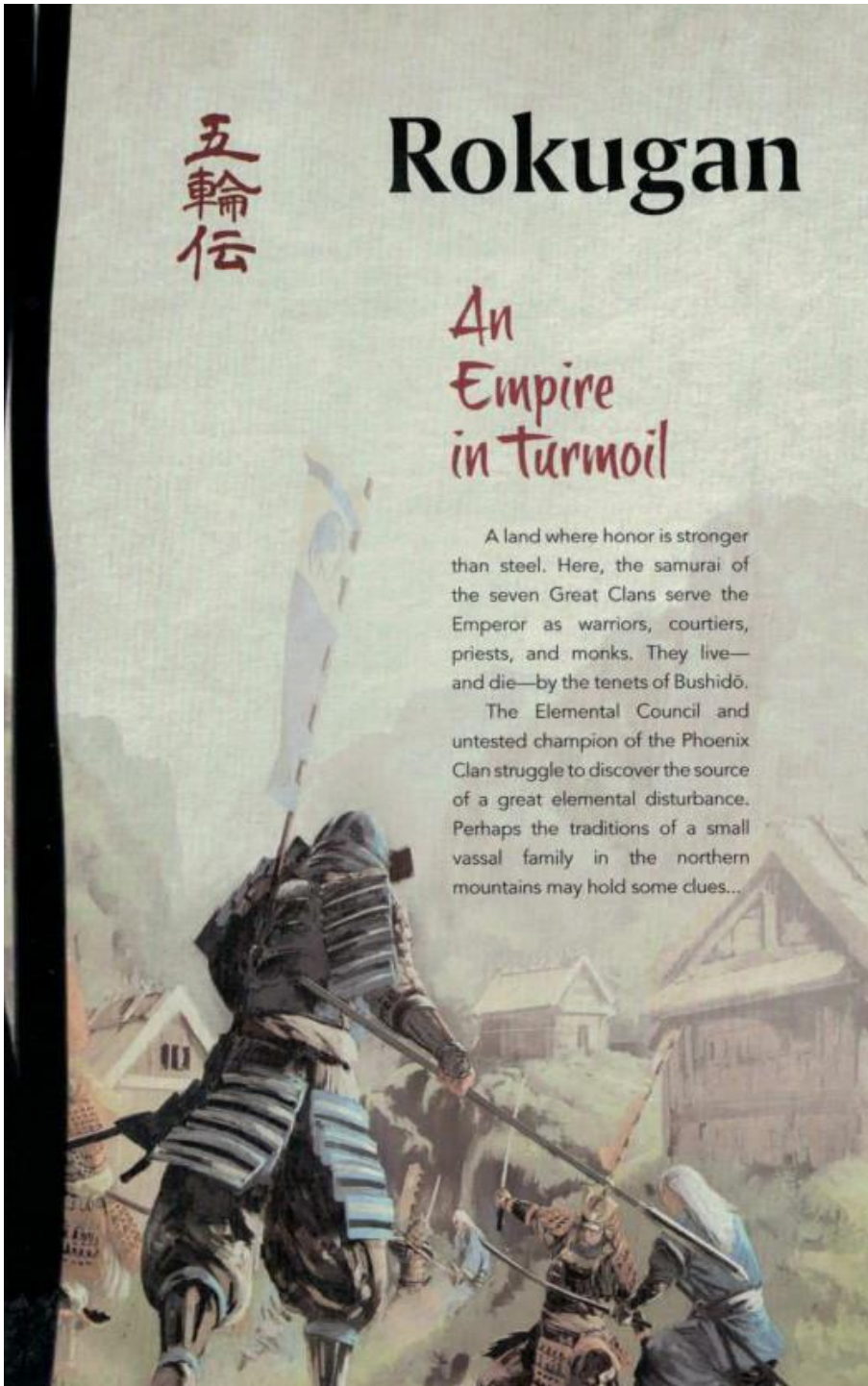
五輪伝

# 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 Elemental Council and untested champion of the Phoenix Clan struggle to discover the source of a great elemental disturbance. Perhaps the traditions of a small vassal family in the northern mountains may hold some clues...





## THE LEGEND OF THE KAITO FAMILY

Near the dawn of the fifth century, a time of great strife for the Empire, a demon appeared in the lands of the Phoenix Clan. This demon terrorized the northern mountain range bordering Rokugan, desecrating shrines and destroying villages, and threw the entire Garanto Province into disarray. With the Phoenix's Clan Champion's attentions fixated on greater events in the Empire, it seemed that nothing could stop the demon. But then, a lone woman, with only her bow and the aid of the kami, confronted the demon on a tall mountaintop. Unflinching beneath the great beast's shadow, she slew the demon with her arrow, and then gave her life to trap its spirit, freezing it deep in the bottom of a well.

That woman was Isawa Kaito. She was an accomplished archer and priestess, and her teachings have informed many of the shrine-keeper traditions observed to this day. Her legendary battle with the demon saved the Garanto Province—and perhaps all of the Phoenix lands—from a terrible enemy. In honor of her sacrifice, her family was raised in status, becoming a vassal family of the Isawa. A shrine was erected at the battle site with the well at its center so that Kaito's descen-

dants, continuing her unique traditions, could guard it and ensure that the demon would remain trapped. It is a duty the Kaito continue to observe today.

The Kaito are a tiny, rustic family of archer-mystics living in secluded mountain monastery among the Northern Wall Mountains in Garanto Province. Their holdings comprise their family estate, known as Sanpuku Seidō—Cliffside Shrine—and scattered villages within the surrounding valleys. Relatively isolated from the rest of the Phoenix and unknown to much of the Empire, the Kaito have developed their own unique practices in pursuit of their three duties to the clan. First, to train the clan's shrine keepers, second, to preserve their founder's techniques, and third, to protect their ancestral shrine from anything that might threaten it and release the evil trapped inside.

*"I will launch my arrow  
Over fog-lit peaks,  
But ask my heart's true nature  
And I freeze without reply."*

— Garanto Province Song  
attributed to Isawa Kaito

## Sanpuku Seidō, Cliffside Shrine

Named for the sheer cliffs that precariously support its foundation, Cliffside Shrine is sacred and ancient, situated high above the Kaito Valley in Garanto Province, where winter rules for most of the year. It stands three days north of Kyūden Isawa, a dot of civilization on an unruly frontier. From its cliff, miles of Phoenix lands can be seen to the south, and to the north, distant signs of Yobanjin settlements are visible beyond the Imperial border. Sanpuku Seidō is the lone ancestral holding of the Kaito, enshrining not only their artifacts and histories, but also the ancient well in which Isawa Kaito trapped the demon known in the provincial dialect as an *ateru*. The origin of this well is unknown, but Isawa scholars postulate it is the last remaining artifact of a Tengu village that predated the Empire.

Nestled nearby is the Kaito estate, a monastery complex built on the side of a mountain. Little more than a cluster of towers clinging to a frosty cliff, this monastery houses most of the Kaito samurai. The complex boasts a number of humble living quarters, a small marketplace, a simple residence for the daimyō's family and guests, and a cave complex that wends its way deep into the mountains. The mountain is believed to be sacred, and all along the winding path up its slopes, one can find numerous smaller shrines and holy markers.

Here, the Kaito live simple, rustic lives. They are as self-sustaining as the frigid mountain will allow, growing a few hardy crops and foraging along the slopes. They take the rest of what they need from the scattered villages in the valleys beneath them. There, foresters, charcoal-burners, hunters, mushroom gatherers, and masons reside in *minka* farmhouses and thatched huts, all of which have steep-pitched roofs to protect against heavy snowfall. Even the peasants here are closely attuned to the spirits, recognizing the crucial give-and-take between the natural world and their own lives.





far from towns and cities, the Kaito perfect their archery and meditate their founders' teachings. Few Kaito willingly stray from the place of their birth, although it is not unheard of for adherents of the shrine-keeper tradition to venture farther into the Empire for a time before returning, having learned new lessons. The isolation of the Kaito is explicitly encouraged by the daimyō of each generation. The distractions of the civilized world are seen as a detriment to each family member's inward pursuit: to become one with the kami through the practice of archery. The Kaito aspire to become "living shrines" in which the kami can freely dwell. In this way they hope to emulate their founder and enter into harmony with the true nature of the universe.

## THE KAITO FAMILY MON

As the Kaito family is a vassal of the Isawa, its mon is derived from the Isawa crest. It depicts a five-pointed star, symbolizing the interconnections among the five elements and the cycles of change and transformation of earthly life. Within the center of this star is a circle, symbolizing the well in which Kaito trapped the demon, as well as the moon, for which the ancestral bow of the Kaito, Mikazuki, is named.

## The Kaito Shrine-Keeper Tradition

Within the monastery complex is a humble, square-shaped dōjō enclosing a small shrine. This is the Dōjō of the Swaying Branch, the Kaito Shrine-Keeper School. It is in this place's quiet halls, cloistered garden, subterranean caverns, and mountainside archery range that students train in the ways of the shrine keeper and priest.

The shrine keeper serves an important role in the upkeep and protection of a shrine. They live in the shrine, tend to the needs of the spirits dwelling there, keep the shrine purified, and ensure its safety. They are also responsible for organizing the maintenance of shrine buildings, which entails the customary replacement of roofs and walls every generation as well as the proper disposal of the old materials and consecration of the new ones. When another priest or a *shugenja* attends a shrine, it is the responsibility of the shrine keeper to assist them in any rituals or ceremonies. In the absence of a priest, it is the shrine keeper's duty to undertake these ceremonies themselves, as is common at many of Rokugan's more rural shrines.

This requires a set of specialized skills and training. A shrine keeper must be able to assist visitors without impeding their worship, commune with the shrine's spirits, and maintain the balance of the sacred place. An encyclopedic knowledge of the different types of spirits and the characteristics of the various Spirit Realms is essential, as is familiarity with divination, wards of protection and banishment, and ceremonial offerings and, on occasion, the exorcism of malicious spirits and even demons.

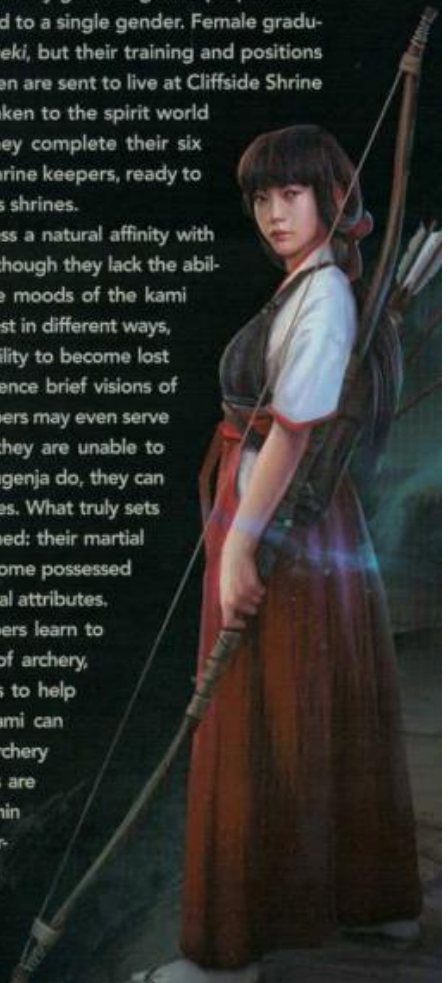
## THE TRAINING OF A SHRINE KEEPER

The Dōjō of the Swaying Branch accepts only a handful of applicants each year. Anyone of the samurai caste with an adequate recommendation may apply, but the school only accepts those who pass their initial inspection. This is because the Kaito's teachings include far more powerful mysteries and techniques than those traditions practiced by peasant laity and shrine keepers.

Members of the Isawa family born without the *shugenja* gift are common applicants, as are Shiba and Asako whose families need fresh shrine keepers. Even students from other clans may be accepted if they go through the proper channels. Acceptance into the school is not limited to a single gender. Female graduates are called *miko*, and others are called *geki*, but their training and positions are identical. Those lucky enough to be chosen are sent to live at Cliffside Shrine in the frosty mountains, where they can awaken to the spirit world without the distractions of civilization. If they complete their six years of training, they become full-fledged shrine keepers, ready to serve and protect any of Rokugan's countless shrines.

The most successful shrine keepers possess a natural affinity with sacred places and a rapport with the kami. Although they lack the abilities of true *shugenja*, they can still sense the moods of the kami and enjoy benefits of their favor. These manifest in different ways, such as a natural affinity with animals, an inability to become lost or without direction, or a tendency to experience brief visions of events long past. The most devout shrine keepers may even serve as oracles or mediums for spirits. Although they are unable to communicate directly with the kami as the *shugenja* do, they can become living conduits for the kami's messages. What truly sets a shrine keeper apart is twofold and intertwined: their martial prowess with the bow, and their ability to become possessed by the kami, who lend their arrows supernatural attributes.

Beyond their spiritual studies, shrine keepers learn to defend their sacred spaces through the art of archery, *kyūjutsu*, as well as to use archery techniques to help them become empty vessels in which the kami can dwell. Even when they are beginners, their archery is unnervingly accurate, as though their hands are guided by invisible spirits. As they advance within their school, they learn the secrets of imbuing arrows with spiritual qualities and the blessings of particular kami. These enchantments allow them to defend their sacred places from malicious *yōkai* such as ghosts, demons,







## SHRINE KEEPERS ACROSS ROKUGAN

The duty of the shrine keepers is to protect shrines, sacred places, and visiting pilgrims. Every well-maintained shrine in Phoenix lands can boast at least one Kaito-trained shrine keeper on the premises. However, due to the Kaito's small numbers, Kaito-trained shrine keepers are a rare sight beyond Phoenix borders, and only well-versed shugenja are likely to recognize them. Even so, shugenja and shrine keepers from other clans who encounter them quickly learn to respect their expertise.

While most miko and geki receive assignments directly from the Kaito daimyō (as requests for a knowledgeable shrine keeper are not uncommon), some observe a tradition that began with Isawa Kaito's youngest daughter, Kaito Maruko. After graduation, a keeper following this tradition climbs to the hazardous peak of Garanto Mountain, risking many dangers to reach the snow-swept summit. There, the keeper meditates for three days. Then, when their heart and mind are in accord, they fire a single arrow. It is said that the kami themselves carry the arrow to wherever that shrine keeper's destiny lies. The keeper seeks the arrow for weeks or even months until they find where it landed.

Often this journey takes them beyond the borders of Garanto Province. In one documented case, a shrine keeper's arrow stuck unnoticed into the palanquin of an Imperial princess visiting Phoenix lands. The miko, eventually tracking the arrow to the Imperial City itself, became the princess's personal spiritual guide and protector. This tradition has given rise to a superstition among Garanto peasants over the years: if a person ever finds an arrow sticking up from the ground, leave it be—to pluck it from the earth would be to invite a terrible calamity.

## The Kami Arrow

The tribes who dwelled in Rokugan before the Fall of the Kami considered the bow to be a sacred weapon. It was said that a plucked bowstring could banish demons, and sacred arrows were used to invoke rain and divine the future. Arrow divination was practiced by many of the scattered tribes predating Rokugan, including the Tribe of Isawa. After the formation of the Phoenix Clan, many of those tribes retreated deeper into the northern mountains, and the Isawa Tribe's tradition of arrow divination were gradually replaced by other techniques. The Kaito still keep these traditions alive, however, venerating the bow and utilizing the art of archery as a means to become more suitable vessels for the spirits.

At first glance, the Kaito's embrace of a martial art is quite unusual, seeming to violate the pacifistic principles of a family so close to the kami. Indeed, most shugenja eschew such weapons, as there is little synergy between the arts of death-dealing and the path of the kami, the very embodiment of life. Every life taken by a shugenja weakens their connection to the kami, and so shugenja only resort to violence when there is no other option.

## MIKAZUKI, THE CRESCENT MOON BOW

Enshrined within Sanpuku Seidō is the *yumi* once carried by Isawa Kaito herself: Mikazuki, the ancestral bow of the Kaito. Like most *yumi*, the bow is asymmetrical and taller than its wielders. It is made of laminated bamboo and catalpa wood, wrapped in rattan, and adorned with silk tassels and a silver bell. To the unknowing, it might appear to be purely ornamental, but even before it fell into the hands of the Phoenix, Mikazuki was an awakened object, or *nemuranai*, and a vessel for a kami. A single pluck of its bowstring can disrupt or pacify malicious spirits, and any arrow it launches is sacred, and therefore harmful to evil beings. Legends say the bow can also freeze water with an arrow, although the knowledge of how to do this was lost with Isawa Kaito.

Only the rightful Kaito daimyō can string Mikazuki. For all others, the string will snap or the bow will refuse to bend. The Kaito use this both to establish the succession line of their daimyō and to let the daimyō prove their own worthiness. Only once in its history has the bowstring snapped in the hands of the Kaito daimyō, resulting in that daimyō's voluntary retirement to some distant monastery.



## HEARTS OF ICE

While many of Rokugan's archery traditions associate the bow with the Air or Void Element, to the Kaito, the bow is aligned with Water. It is a flexible weapon—the bowstring is as a calm pool until an arrow is loosed with the ferocity of a waterfall. The gentleness with which the wielder must treat the weapon is attributed to the nature of Water, and so the Kaito seek to become as Water. When mixed with Air, the family's secondary element, water freezes. As ice, the Kaito are sharp, unyielding, and crystal clear in their intentions.

Both elements are central to the Kaito's philosophy and outlook on life. Their doctrine and training centers on when it is appropriate to be receptive to the kami, as water, and when they must steel their heart against the predations of yōkai, as ice. Outsiders will sometimes wonder at the manner of the Kaito, warm and friendly in one instant, then icy cold and emotionless in the next. Yet this is simply their way.

A careful balance of the extremes is required, but the Kaito must not dwell too long in between. Ice is inflexible, while water can be formless.

However, to the Kaito, archery is not a violent art, and the bow is not a tool exclusively used for fighting. Unlike other weapons, for which agility, haste, and strength are principal virtues, the bow teaches softness and patience. The yumi is inherently fragile; it is ruined if mistreated and breaks if drawn incorrectly. Impatient warriors will snap bowstrings or crack the laminated bamboo of the bow, while overzealous archers will run out of stamina before the bow is fully drawn. To fire an arrow successfully, one must adopt a different mind-set, one that the Kaito recognize as properly conditioning oneself for unity with the kami. To the Kaito, kyūjutsu is more than just the art of firing an arrow: it is the primary means by which they become living vessels in which the kami may dwell. In other words, when Kaito shrine keepers draw their bow, they become possessed by the kami, and when they release the arrow, it is the kami who guide it.

This accounts for the Kaito school's emphasis on technique and ritual. In order to become a kami vessel, one must become aligned with nature, and the mind must empty. There are many ways for miko and geki to achieve this, but due to their traditions and duty to the clan, the Kaito have chosen archery. To assist them in this goal, their kyūjutsu school teaches them additional techniques, such as mindful breathing, correct posture, meditative mantras, and the affixing of charms and prayers to arrows.

This can make a Kaito archer seem mystical compared to archers from other schools. Ultimately, however, kyūjutsu is the art of shooting targets, and the Kaito school is no different. Its students' means of drawing and firing are the same as at any other archery school in Rokugan; any differences in archery are purely philosophical and stylistic. In the end, Kaito kyūjutsu is still kyūjutsu,



albeit a martial tradition where the archery is assisted by the kami.

While possessed, Kaito archers can imbue their arrows with special properties. A mundane arrow might take on the sacred properties of jade, or change direction unexpectedly, or make a whistling sound without having a humming-bulb tip. Legends speak of greater feats, such as creating arrows that strike like thunderbolts, melt armor, or pass through flesh but snag the soul, tearing the spirit away from the body and pinning it to the ground. Kaito archery masters have not publicly claimed these otherworldly abilities in recent memory, but the testimonies of their venerated ancestors are not untrue. All Kaito ultimately aspire to be capable of such works, rising above the material world and becoming one with the kami through their art.

Kaito archery is not meant for mortal targets. Instead, the Kaito deploy their skills against invading spirits and sources of spiritual impurity. To keep their art pure, shrine keepers vow never to use their archery against human targets, some going so far as to swear off shooting at anything considered living. The act of killing is inherently distressing, enough to bring an archer out of the serene mind-set necessary for the kami to dwell within.

Even so, history recalls some Kaito who were so at peace with the natural world that such trivialities were no obstacle to them when it came to the defense of the Phoenix. As these Kaito used their art purely in defense of threatened shrines, Asako histories absolve them, referring to them as the "Icy Hearts of the Kaito." And of course there is the matter of Isawa Kaito herself, who was not above using her bow to do what was necessary...



# Customs of the Kaito Family

The Kaito family's customs are distinct from those of the rest of the Phoenix Clan, which is partly due to their isolation in the northern mountains.

## THE KAITO AND THE KAMI

The Kaito are not a true shugenja family. While a few each generation are born with the kami's gift (and are subsequently taken under the Isawa's wing), most have no innate ability to speak with the kami and cause them to manifest. Instead, the Kaito enjoy a different relationship with the kami, one that is less potent and less directly powerful, but still very real.

Isawa Kaito was close to the world of spirits. At certain hours, she could even see them, or so Phoenix histories attest. The kami were naturally drawn to her, amused and enthralled by her mere presence, and they were eager to bestow upon her their blessings. Kaito encouraged this relationship with offerings and whatever demonstrations seemed to please them. While she could not invoke the kami or cause them to manifest in the same way that shugenja can, her closeness to the spirit world made her a vessel in which the kami could dwell. By emptying herself and becoming one with nature, she could become temporarily possessed by the kami, allowing her to perform seemingly impossible feats.

When she finally passed from the world, the kami she befriended remained with her bloodline. They see no difference between Kaito and her children. They still follow them as they followed her, still amused, eager to bestow their blessings.

This is how the priesthood of the Kaito family differs from that of true shugenja. While shugenja deliberately invoke the kami and beseech them to manifest, the Kaito make themselves vessels for the kami. While this is not as visually impressive or distinctive as a shugenja's invocations, kami possession does allow the Kaito to excel in physical tasks, becoming keenly perceptive, unnervingly calm, supernaturally active, or able to endure harsh conditions. Most importantly, kami possession aligns one's *ki* with that of the Spirit Realms, allowing one to interact with even ethereal denizens of those realms. In essence, the end goal of a member of the Kaito school is to become a living shrine in which the kami can freely dwell. Such masters of Isawa Kaito's technique are cold, graceful, and serene, perfectly aligned with the natural world.

Unlike the "magic" of shugenja, which requires an innate and rare gift, the Kaito's techniques theoretically can be taught to anyone, although they come easier to those sharing a natural connection to the kami. Elsewhere in Rokugan, other samurai priests have developed their own techniques for treating with their local kami and maintaining their shrines and sacred places. Yet, just as Isawa samurai are the archetypal shugenja, the Kaito are the archetypal shrine keepers.

## BIRTH

Concerning childbirth, Kaito temper their joy over new life with hard-learned caution. The Kaito have many birthing superstitions, as both the parent giving birth and child are very close to death when the new life comes into the world. Whenever possible, a shugenja is in attendance, divining for the child's kami affinity mere hours after birth. A newborn who shows signs of great elemental aptitude is surrendered to the Isawa family without incident, owing to an ancient agreement between Isawa Kaito and the Elemental Masters. All others are simply blessed in accordance with Isawa traditions.

It is not uncommon among the Kaito for a newborn's grandparents to divine the child's path in life. To do this, the child is made to grasp an arrow, which their grand-

## THE VILLAGE PARABLE

Imagine a village. In this village lives a dog. The dog has no master, yet its presence benefits the village in many ways, keeping away harmful predators and alerting townsfolk when something is wrong. While none would mistake the dog for human, it is as much a part of the village as any other villager. For its part, the dog does not understand the behavior of the villagers and does not even think in such terms. It merely acts as a dog acts.

There is a man living in this village. He is prestigious and important, and wields much influence. Sometimes he will go to the field and call for the dog. When he does, the dog will come. The man offers the dog treats, and in exchange, the dog performs whatever tricks and tasks the man requests. Sometimes the man has the dog fetch him something, or he asks the dog to follow him for a while.

The dog does not know why the man desires him to do these things, but that doesn't matter so long as the man continues to reward him.

Also in this village is a woman. She is not as influential as the man, nor as prestigious, but she has a beautiful and true heart. Whenever the dog sees her, it runs eagerly to her side. It bounces around her, following her everywhere, performing tricks, hoping to please her. It does not expect any treats or rewards for these tricks. It just likes her. It wants to be near her, to make her smile, to aid and protect her. And although she cannot command the dog and has no control over it, she trusts that the dog will never harm her. That is the nature of their relationship.

The village is the natural world. The dog is the kami. The man is the Isawa shugenja. And the woman is the Kaito shrine keeper.



parent later releases at a target to the southwest. A number of things can be divined based on how the arrow lands, such as the child's future prospects, their health, and what challenges they may face in life. The arrow, referred to as a *jinsei-no-ya*, or life arrow, is given to the parents to commemorate their child's entry into life. It is kept at the family shrine until that child's *gempuku*, or coming-of-age ceremony.

## GEMPUKU

Kaito *gempuku* traditions vary greatly from those of the Isawa due to their lack of true *shugenja*. Before *gempuku*, Kaito children are considered genderless and "children of the kami." Therefore, the intended goal of a Kaito's coming-of-age ceremony is not only to prove that they are worthy of a place within the family, but also to help them retain some connection to the spirit world that might otherwise be lost upon entering the gendered world of adults.

The Kaito refer to the coming-of-age ceremony as *shufuku*, meaning "the first service." A Kaito undergoing this ritual is tested on archery, spirit identification, ward creation, and general knowledge of shrines and ceremonies, all under the supervision of *sensei* and the family *daimyō*. The final event is a pledge of loyalty and duty, followed by a plunge into icy water. After emerging, the student is presented with their adult clothing and a brush, with which they write their newly chosen adult name into the family genealogy. It is believed this plunge will permanently attract one of the many local water kami, who will follow the student for the duration of their life.

The new Kaito also receives a bow, often handed down from a grandparent, along with the life arrow created at their birth. The passing of this arrow symbolizes that the responsibility for that Kaito's welfare, and the perpetuation of Kaito traditions among their descendants, is now theirs.

## COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

The Kaito are a rustic and simple folk, and their views on courtship are far more relaxed than the Isawa's, owing in part to the lowered emphasis on the hereditary gift of speaking to the kami. They have fewer courtship traditions than other families. Romantic love is considered a gift and an expression of the kami's joy. As long as it is not perceived as clouding one's judgment, there is no shameful connotation to loving openly. Subtle public displays of affection, while not exactly welcomed, are typically ignored unless truly disruptive. Whatever comes naturally is generally accepted to be harmonious.

Arranged marriages are still common, however. The Kaito prefer to match childhood friends based on compatibility and propitious star signs. Unlike many families in Rokugan, the Kaito do not consider it shameful to request a specific match, although if it is declined, that is expected to be the end of the matter.

As the Kaito are a lesser family of the Phoenix, other families rarely marry into it. The few exceptions to this rule are the spouses of the Kaito family *daimyō*, their

children, and honored *sensei*. Otherwise, if a Kaito is not marrying another Kaito, Kaito samurai take the family name of the spouse they are marrying.

## FUNERALS

The Kaito's closeness to the spirit world lends them a more accepting view of death. They know it to be a part of the natural cycle, merely a step toward the rebirth of the soul into a new form. Even so, the death of a Kaito is a somber occasion, filled with many quiet rites to ensure the peaceful transition of the departed. The elements of Kaito funerals follow typical Rokugani tradition, with a few notable exceptions. For one, the family of the recently deceased remains completely silent throughout the ceremony and after. They do not wear overcoats, instead enduring the cold of the mountain. Additionally, floating paper lanterns are set adrift over the mountains to guide the departed to the next world.

Marking the end of the Kaito funeral is the release of the departed's life arrow. A small sachet containing some of the ashes of the departed is affixed just behind the arrowhead, and then the arrow is released to wherever the kami take it. It is believed that the farther north one can shoot the arrow, the easier it will be for the departed spirit to leave this world behind. For this reason, the arrow's launch is entrusted to an accomplished family member or *sensei*. If something goes awry, such as the bowstring breaking, or if the shot is fouled, it is considered a dire omen, and the departed's entire family extends their silence for weeks in atonement for whatever unspoken shame caused the problem.

## SUPERSTITIONS

The Phoenix hold more spiritual customs than any other clan, and the Kaito are no exception. Like most Phoenix, they consider supernatural signifiers to be irrefutable messages from the kami. Also like typical Phoenix, they tend to accept the superstitions of other families without question, taking them at face value and observing them reverently. This is due to the Kaito's incorporation of local folk beliefs into their curriculum and lore; even the strangest local superstition might one day be the key to a shrine's safety, and it would not do to offend unseen spirits.

Unsurprisingly, the Kaito hold a number of archery-related superstitions. For instance, a Kaito will never lean their bow against a living tree, as this is believed to sap the bow of its spirit. When a bowstring snaps in practice, this is believed to be good luck, and the archer should wait a day before restringing so that the bow can rest. Finally, when firing arrows, one should always drop the fourth one, continuing with the fifth. Indeed, the entire Kaito archery tradition could be considered superstitious, as the Kaito embrace a more spiritual practice of the art.



shrine-keeper traditions. For the sake of creating a future for her followers, Kaito asked them to live as the Rokugani did, which they reluctantly did. She sought to preserve what she could of the Hyöketsu ways by weaving them into Rokugani belief. Her true lineage was suppressed, her true origins forgotten. With time, few would remember that the Kaito were once Yobanjin. For a time, they knew peace.

However, as successful as she was, Kaito knew she would one day have to pay for her betrayal. One cannot take back a loosed arrow. She'd betrayed not only her family, but her entire people, perhaps most the very ones whom she had saved by forcing them to abandon their way of life. That day eventually came when, shortly after Kaito's eldest daughter's gempuku, Ateru returned. Wielding his signature bone dagger, Ateru incited an insurrection among those dissatisfied with life among the Rokugani. Soon the valley erupted into rebellion, with Ateru leading forces against those still loyal to Isawa Kaito.

Kaito knew this was her fate, and she'd prepared for this moment since she had first approached the Isawa. She sent her husband and children away and invited her enemies to strike her on sacred ground, choosing to make her stand by the sacred well where the water kami were strongest. Alone, using all her talents and martial skill and the will of the kami, she sacrificed herself to destroy Ateru and the renegades.

As Kaito lay dying, she realized that Ateru's dagger had become an artifact of Tōshigoku, the Realm of Slaughter. Ateru's spirit would not rest: it would try to destroy her family for the rest of time. And so, with her last breath, she prayed to the kami to seal his body in the well, freezing the water to imprison the hatred that had consumed his soul. None were present to know whether Kaito died with regrets about the arrow she had loosed those decades ago.

When word reached the Isawa, they were impressed. This was proof that the martial art Kaito had developed, one that mingled mortal and kami together, was effective in protecting their sacred lands. And so, the Isawa embraced her teachings and granted her family vassal status. Its members' sworn duty was to cultivate the arts of the shrine keeper and to protect the shrine at which she'd made her final stand. The Kaito's traditions were close to the original shamanism practiced by the Isawa Tribe, so the Isawa family had no objection to the preservation and teaching of Kaito traditions—especially as they benefited the Phoenix Clan.

To most of the Empire, and also to most of the Phoenix, only Kaito's last stand is well known. A famous travel diary by her daughter Tsuruko, written in the wake of her mother's death, states that Kaito was born a peasant of the Isawa and worked her way up to the position of priestess. In some ways, this account is correct, and few have the knowledge to object to it. The peasants of the Kaito still whisper of a barbarian princess who led them to this land, but the idle talk of peasants is hardly a matter any upstanding samurai would accept over official documents. The true lineage of Isawa Kaito was willfully forgotten.

Still, Shinsei once warned that three things are not long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth. One day, the frozen story will be thawed and a new arrow loosed. The Kaito will show their strength on that day, or be lost forever.