

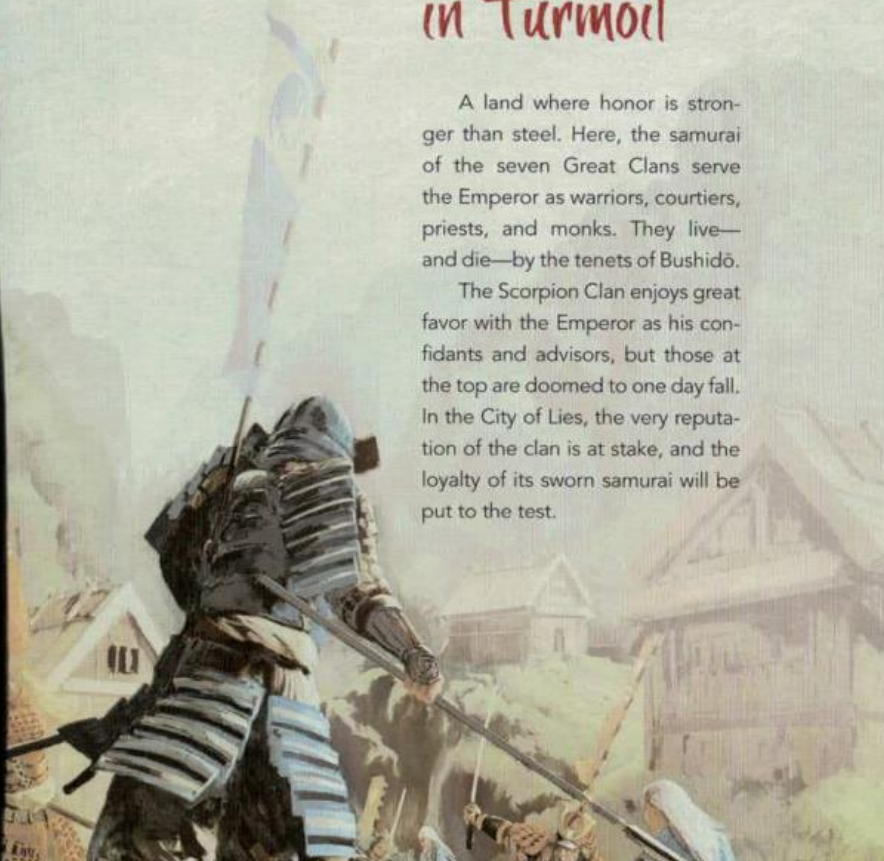
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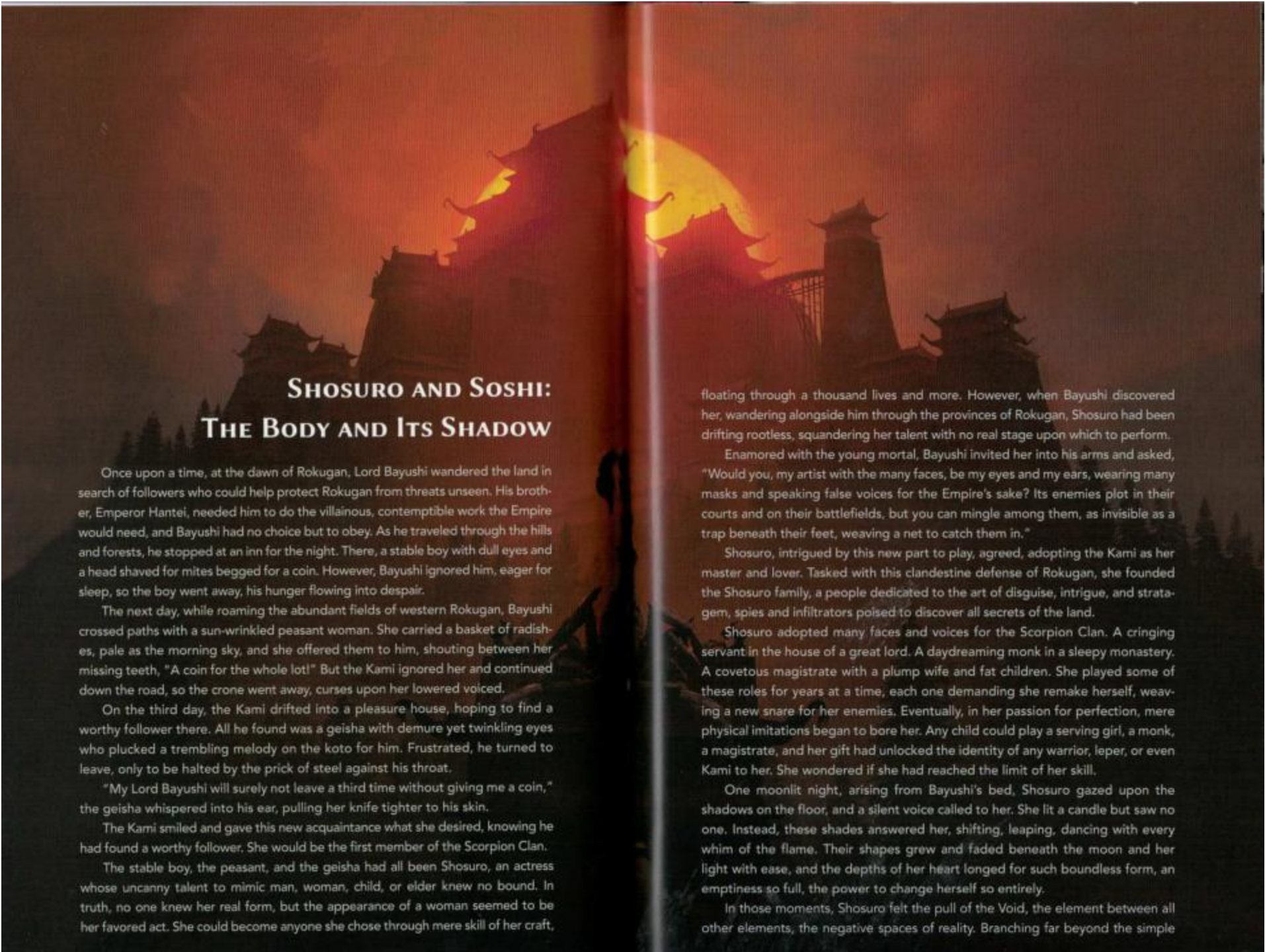
# Rokugan

## 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 Scorpion Clan enjoys great favor with the Emperor as his confidants and advisors, but those at the top are doomed to one day fall. In the City of Lies, the very reputation of the clan is at stake, and the loyalty of its sworn samurai will be put to the test.





## SHOSURO AND SOSHI: THE BODY AND ITS SHADOW

Once upon a time, at the dawn of Rokugan, Lord Bayushi wandered the land in search of followers who could help protect Rokugan from threats unseen. His brother, Emperor Hantei, needed him to do the villainous, contemptible work the Empire would need, and Bayushi had no choice but to obey. As he traveled through the hills and forests, he stopped at an inn for the night. There, a stable boy with dull eyes and a head shaved for mites begged for a coin. However, Bayushi ignored him, eager for sleep, so the boy went away, his hunger flowing into despair.

The next day, while roaming the abundant fields of western Rokugan, Bayushi crossed paths with a sun-wrinkled peasant woman. She carried a basket of radishes, pale as the morning sky, and she offered them to him, shouting between her missing teeth, "A coin for the whole lot!" But the Kami ignored her and continued down the road, so the crone went away, curses upon her lowered voiced.

On the third day, the Kami drifted into a pleasure house, hoping to find a worthy follower there. All he found was a geisha with demure yet twinkling eyes who plucked a trembling melody on the koto for him. Frustrated, he turned to leave, only to be halted by the prick of steel against his throat.

"My Lord Bayushi will surely not leave a third time without giving me a coin," the geisha whispered into his ear, pulling her knife tighter to his skin.

The Kami smiled and gave this new acquaintance what she desired, knowing he had found a worthy follower. She would be the first member of the Scorpion Clan.

The stable boy, the peasant, and the geisha had all been Shosuro, an actress whose uncanny talent to mimic man, woman, child, or elder knew no bound. In truth, no one knew her real form, but the appearance of a woman seemed to be her favored act. She could become anyone she chose through mere skill of her craft,

floating through a thousand lives and more. However, when Bayushi discovered her, wandering alongside him through the provinces of Rokugan, Shosuro had been drifting rootless, squandering her talent with no real stage upon which to perform.

Enamored with the young mortal, Bayushi invited her into his arms and asked, "Would you, my artist with the many faces, be my eyes and my ears, wearing many masks and speaking false voices for the Empire's sake? Its enemies plot in their courts and on their battlefields, but you can mingle among them, as invisible as a trap beneath their feet, weaving a net to catch them in."

Shosuro, intrigued by this new part to play, agreed, adopting the Kami as her master and lover. Tasked with this clandestine defense of Rokugan, she founded the Shosuro family, a people dedicated to the art of disguise, intrigue, and stratagem, spies and infiltrators poised to discover all secrets of the land.

Shosuro adopted many faces and voices for the Scorpion Clan. A cringing servant in the house of a great lord. A daydreaming monk in a sleepy monastery. A covetous magistrate with a plump wife and fat children. She played some of these roles for years at a time, each one demanding she remake herself, weaving a new snare for her enemies. Eventually, in her passion for perfection, mere physical imitations began to bore her. Any child could play a serving girl, a monk, a magistrate, and her gift had unlocked the identity of any warrior, leper, or even Kami to her. She wondered if she had reached the limit of her skill.

One moonlit night, arising from Bayushi's bed, Shosuro gazed upon the shadows on the floor, and a silent voice called to her. She lit a candle but saw no one. Instead, these shades answered her, shifting, leaping, dancing with every whim of the flame. Their shapes grew and faded beneath the moon and her light with ease, and the depths of her heart longed for such boundless form, an emptiness so full, the power to change herself so entirely.

In those moments, Shosuro felt the pull of the Void, the element between all other elements, the negative spaces of reality. Branching far beyond the simple



art of acting, she communed with this power, learning its shapes and abysses, mimicking the ways it manipulated the room around her. Soon, it revealed a new role for her—to play the part of shadow, to shape worlds from its fabric. Slowly, over years, Shosuro learned its language, forsaking her old path for that of a shugenja. Despite patient mastery of her new skill, this power was full of hungry prayers. It demanded more of her time, her talents, her traits, her very body in order to be wielded. The more she gave, the more it wanted. Frightened by its greed, she fled from its call, wringing her hands, tearing her hair, clinging to her lover Bayushi, afraid of losing herself.

The Heavens spun the Karmic Wheel, and years later, the Empire bled as the malevolent powers of Jigoku, the Realm of Evil, threatened to swallow Ningen-dō, the Realm of Mortals. Jigoku's champion, the fallen Kami Fu Leng, battled to cover the entire world in darkness, foul sorcery and armies of corruption at his command. On the terrible Day of Thunder, seven mortals rose to challenge him. Shosuro stood among them.

Led by Shinsei, these Seven Thunders fought Fu Leng in the Shadowlands, each falling, one by one, against his overwhelming power. In their death throes, Shiba stayed the churning hordes of oni and the undead while Isawa sealed their eternal enemy into the Black Scrolls. Both sacrificed themselves so that Shosuro could escape the Shadowlands with the scrolls. But it was not enough. Fatally wounded, her strength all but spent, Shosuro clutched her dangerous cargo, the armies of the Shadowlands not far behind. Despair gripped her soul, the bitterness of failure and a thousand years of darkness mere moments away.

So the shadow within her whispered. Its demand hung heavy in the air, pulsing between the elements in the Void. She could survive to complete her task—and see her beloved Bayushi again—if she surrendered herself to it. In an ultimate act of abandon, she accepted the shadow's bargain and relinquished her body and form—her pleasures, her memory, her spirit—to be remade in the darkness's image.

From this abandoned self emerged Soshi, a man with shadow branded upon his skin, his very soul, looking upon the world with new eyes, incarnated with new purpose. By becoming one with shadow, he was unbound by the constraints of mortal form. He could bend and flatten and travel with the dark—he could manipulate light and darkness to fashion intricate illusions, tricking the light in humans' eyes, making them believe the impossible. Manipulating the Void, he could transform reality.

So Soshi wandered Scorpion lands, testing his newfound skills. On the first day, he wandered to the base of the Seikitsu Mountains and stared up at their vast slopes. Communing with their shadows, he crept into a crag of their tiniest stone and stretched himself as vast as their highest peak. On the second day, he sped through rich fields, flickering between each stalk of rice as their shadows swayed and crossed.

On the third day, he caught a glimpse of Bayushi wandering along the road in mourning. Soshi approached his old lover, this time not in the form of an old peasant or beautiful geisha but as a mere silhouette, hiding within the gnarled shadow of an enormous muku tree. As Bayushi passed, believing himself to be alone, Soshi summoned his newfound power to craft an illusory rain. Surprised at the sudden shower of heavy drops from clouds that had not been there moments ago, the Kami paused,

feeling the accompanying chill in the air, smelling the dampness of the earth rise. The illusion drew Bayushi to the shelter of the muku tree, and once again, the Kami felt the longed-for prick of steel at his throat.

"Does my Lord Bayushi fear the sunlight?" Soshi asked, embracing his old lover as he released the illusion, pulling the knife tighter against Bayushi's skin.

Bayushi gazed upon Soshi as the shugenja pulsed with the power of the shadow brand, ever-changing and ethereal, dancing between the elements to create shapes that had no body, illusions with no true form, and the Kami knew he had acquired another follower. He gripped Soshi by the arm and drew him close, his voice low and tender, "You are now my servant with no faces. You will fathom the depths of the Void, opening its doors for our clan to pass through, and you will make our enemies see what does not exist, sink into what has no depth, caught in a net of their own making. And you shall stay by my side."

Soshi agreed, this new Scorpion path unfolding before him. Tasked with the study of the secrets of reality, he founded the Soshi family, shugenja dedicated to the power of shadow, sacrificing all to discover and fashion the new shape of Rokugan.





## SHINOBI AND NINJA

Many in Rokugan are familiar with the term "ninja," though few can say it with an air of solemnity. Everyone knows that no such beings exist, and crude fables of these skulking assassins circulate among all circles of culture. For example, the peasants on the lands surrounding Otosan Uchi often whisper of the crimes of a ninja named Wokō, a rogue cast out from one of the Great Clans. Haunting the capital city's alleys at night and sneaking past Imperial guards, he murdered unsuspecting merchants for their fat purses and evaded capture by using forbidden magic. These and other tales of ninja never fail to depict ignominious villains who desecrate the tenets of Bushidō and to explain the fantastical nature of these criminals. A few tellers of these tales even recall rumors of an official Imperial ban centuries ago that forbade the use of such retainers and their shameful tactics—stories riddled with gossip about Bayushi shugenja and dark powers—but much of that talk has since faded into the vague, mundane reality of public knowledge.

Beyond the crass talk of the lower castes in unruly taverns hides the truth about these tales, which is that few clans are truly above the need for sly means should circumstances require it. Theft, infiltration, sabotage, and assassination sink far below the tenets of Bushidō, yet occasionally,

honor may be a brittle dais upon which to gain victory. Sometimes, a servant must stoop to dishonorable tasks to achieve their masters' designs, sacrificing himself to keep their daimyō and clan pure. These samurai who would forfeit their own personal honor, fulfilling these most dishonorable duties for the good of the clan, are called shinobi: those who use stealth, those who endure.

In their role as the underhand of the Empire, the Scorpion retain the greatest number of shinobi, but other clans have members willing to make this sacrifice. Shinobi are motivated only by clan need, acting merely as weapons in the hands of their masters. Should they degrade themselves further to act for money or personal gain, they would become no better than the detestable Wokō, rōnin without purpose, which makes the term "ninja" a grave insult to the shinobi profession.

Due to the dishonor and exclusive secrecy surrounding their activities, shinobi exist as nonpersons, or members of the hinin caste, the lowest in society's Celestial Order, retaining no practical or even legal status. This means shinobi often abandon their real public lives to adopt new identities from all statuses and clans in order to infiltrate and manipulate as necessary. Although to kill a shinobi has no legal consequences, the discovery of one surely leads to gossip and scandals as people wonder about the shinobi's clan of origin. A shinobi's caste allows their clan to disavow responsibility should they get caught, making the shinobi truly a lone servant with no allies.





## RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

Young samurai and the occasional peasant who show particular proclivity and skill in agility, precision, stealth, or mercilessness may be handpicked to become shinobi. Before being extended an invitation to join a shinobi school, they must first pass secret tests administered by shinobi sensei who measure their capacity and willingness to adhere to the Three Oaths. For example, shinobi sensei may observe a potential student's propensity for discretion when privy to social secrets or their willingness to relinquish personal claims for the good of the clan, if they pass these trials, then the sensei approaches them with the proposition to join a dōjō.

Of the students who accept and abandon their former lives—the price of dishonor and existence as a nonperson—many adopt one or more less-conspicuous identities in the public eye, though some may retain their real identity only for the sake of appearances. Still other shinobi may destroy their public persona entirely to allow them to disappear discreetly from society. This may take the form of the clan fabricating their imprisonment or exile, or having the new shinobi fake their own death through an accident or illness. These measures allow the shinobi to fulfill their missions while avoiding the watchful eyes of enemies, especially enemy shinobi, who might find cause for suspicion.

When a shinobi successfully living out the Three Oaths' tenet of Patience reaches retirement age, meaning they have become incapable of physically or mentally performing their duties, the remaining tenets of Sacrifice and Secrecy also demand completion. This means that the shinobi must be slain to preserve their secret knowledge. This is often done by the shinobi's students or disciples. Ideally, if the old shinobi successfully passed on their knowledge to the next generation, then the contest ends in the students' favor. However, very rarely, the old shinobi may win, and worse yet, decide they are not yet ready for retirement.

In one infamous case, a sensei of the Scorpion's Tail School became corrupted. Though the causes were never determined, her clan leaders determined her unfit to continue as a shinobi. However, when her students went to dispatch her, she killed every single person in the dōjō and escaped to eradicate nearly all of the school's remaining practitioners. The Scorpion's Tail techniques were lost for several centuries.

### DOUBLE-EDGED BLADES

Ninjutsu training includes not only the techniques needed for infiltration, reconnaissance, and assassination, but also how to detect and defend against enemy shinobi. This includes securing buildings and camps, as well as ferreting out possible scouts and spies among a lord's own people.



## SHINOBI SCHOOLS

Because all shinobi schools are secret, some of the most elite dōjō are not even known among other shinobi of the same clan. The clans maintain a shroud of mystery over how many actually exist. Each shinobi school operates only according to its respective clan's requirements, taking orders from its clan champion, or sometimes those delegated authority from a previous clan champion to give the future leaders of the clan plausible deniability. In some cases, a new clan champion might even disband a dōjō when they feel it has outlived its usefulness, although some schools continue in secret, waiting to be called upon again to serve. The shinobi schools' emphasis on meeting clan need directs their various curricula; students training as shinobi only learn ninjutsu to the degree of proficiency needed by their clan. Rarely, a clan might assign a shugenja to become a shinobi, creating a formidable weapon.

Shinobi dōjō are scattered throughout Rokugan. Some exist in remote, hidden locations, while others operate in plain sight under false pretexts. The most prominent Scorpion shinobi dōjō is the Shosuro Butei Academy, located near Shosuro Palace. It operates publicly as a prestigious fumemboku acting school, and it secretly trains its shinobi students to specialize in impersonation for the purposes of infiltration. Other schools include the Thunder's Dagger Dōjō, which instructs Shosuro martial artists; the Brother's Gift Dōjō for Shosuro assassins and infiltrators; the Acting Academy for Shosuro impersonators; and the Hidden Moon Dōjō, where Soshi kagenari users and those branded by them are trained.





## THE THREE OATHS

Because shinobi disobey the tenets of Bushidō for the sake of their masters, they must live by their own ethics, a code called the Three Oaths. Though the need for Honor does not govern them, these ethics are a sacred duty of the shinobi just as Honor is for the samurai. To break any of the Three Oaths would signify the deepest betrayal of clan trust and a denial of the Celestial Order, resulting in instant termination. Each shinobi school of the different clans derives these three tenets from various sources; the Scorpion shinobi dōjō draw them from Shosuro's writings about her craft, as recorded in secret shinobi texts.

### SECRECY

*"The lips of a mask do not move.  
An actor's lines are as characters  
carved in stone."  
— Shosuro, A Chronicle of  
One Hundred Million Sacrifices*

Secrecy defines the shinobi way of life. Involved in a world of covert missions, infiltrations, and concealed motives, where protecting the anonymity of masters and associates requires the utmost confidentiality on every level, shinobi must maintain this rule above all. A shinobi who has not mastered the art of Secrecy cannot accomplish their missions.

### SACRIFICE

*"Ten thousand deaths mean  
nothing to the actor, whose  
reincarnation wheel spins daily."  
— Shosuro, A Chronicle of  
One Hundred Million Sacrifices*

Shinobi own nothing, yet must be prepared to give up more. They surrender their families and friends, possessions, titles, personal identities, emotions, and even autonomy. They are expected to sacrifice everything and anything to fulfill their purposes. These choices come without the glory, veneration, or even acknowledgement extended to other servants of the clans, making them more temble than the sacrifices of other samurai and even more selfless.

### PATIENCE

*"Neither Sun nor Moon  
dictate my move.  
Only the part can do that."  
— The Book of Silence*

Patience always has purpose. This oath refers not merely to timing and opportunity but also self-governance of impulses and reactions. A patient shinobi is never provoked, even by pain or death, because Patience indicates a perfect mastery over self and situations, even when the shinobi is faced with the unexpected.



## DISGRACE AND DISHONOR

Once a student joins a shinobi school, they begin formally learning ninjutsu in addition to completing their basic training as warriors or courtiers. Unlike other samurai, upon completion of their training, shinobi do not have a gempuku ceremony. Having relinquished all ties to their public life, they can invest little meaning in such ceremonies. However, this is when students may be appointed a new identity as part of a clan assignment. Those schools that focus on impersonation, such as the Shosuro Acting School, may have students craft a new persona for themselves as a test, and often, the creation of that first role is considered just as sacred a ritual as a gempuku.

There are hundreds of varieties of ninjutsu, and they fall into two categories: *fumemboku* (disgraceful) and *fumeiyo* (dishonorable). Ninjutsu considered *fumemboku* are the inherently neutral acts that can be dishonorably implemented and thus discredited, depending upon the situation. For example, skills such as acting, gathering information, and stealth can be learned and practiced by anyone in honorable situations. However, if they are used dishonorably, then their users are disgraced. *Fumeiyo* are exclusively dishonorable arts and usually are only performed by shinobi. These include acts such as sabotage, poisoning, and assassination, which cannot be done honorably, no matter the circumstance. This category also includes the specialized martial arts that use shinobi weapons, like the *shuko*, *shuriken*, *senbon*, and *fukiya*. Shinobi generally use these weapons from concealed locations against enemies at a distance, not in situations of honorable hand-to-hand combat, making them solely dishonorable means of attack.

The categorization of *fumemboku* and *fumeiyo* exists to help Great Clans evaluate whether they could use the services of a warrior or if they have special need for a shinobi. Under the Three Oaths, a shinobi simply does whatever they are commanded without complaint. Thus, their actions are judged not according to Bushidō parameters of what is honorable and dishonorable, but rather with respect to whether their results are ideal or flawed. For example, the *fumeiyo* act of poisoning is never honorable by Bushidō standards, which is why it is done by shinobi. However, if a shinobi were to get caught and poison themselves to uphold the Three Oaths' tenet of Secrecy while embodying Sacrifice and Patience, this could be considered an ultimate shinobi accomplishment ideal for that situation. The highest ideal of a shinobi is to uphold all three principles in every situation.



## POISONCRAFT

One of the most dishonorable ninjutsu techniques is the art of poisoning. Shinobi learning to master the art of poisons begin with the Philosophy of the Five Venoms, the theories and foundational practices observed from poison in animals. The sources of the Five Venoms are the snake, spider, centipede, scorpion, and wasp. Poisoners are taught to retrieve and distill the poison from these animals for various uses, a nuanced and perilous art in and of itself. Shinobi also are encouraged to look to those animals as exemplars of their craft; they learn to emulate characteristics such as concealment, accuracy, and speed. In ancient times, poison alchemists placed one of each of the animals of the Five Venoms into an iron pot to fight. They believed that the venoms' potency would compound as the animals killed each other, with the last one alive embodying the culmination of all their power. Many other animals throughout Rokugan are also used for their mild to fatal toxins, such as jellyfish, puffer fish, snails, toads, lizards, bees, ants, and butterflies.

Beyond the animal sources, some plant-based poisons are among the most dangerous and versatile. The Shosuro Gardens boast several hundred varieties of toxic flowers, shrubs, trees, other plants, and mushrooms grown specifically for use by the Shosuro Poisoners Academy. Shinobi schools rarely craft antidotes to their thousands of concoctions. However, many Scorpion families retain *shugenja* specifically trained in the art of drawing poison from the body, just in case. Still, such measures are often futile, for the most potent of poisons spread so quickly that a *shugenja* cannot be summoned to attend to the victim in time.





## GIVING FORM TO SHADOW

Kagenari no Koto, "the art of shadow's form," calls upon the power of darkness that lay within Soshi and was adopted by him. Although its traditions have been passed down through the Soshi family over the centuries, the art is shrouded in secrecy. Even among the unconventional and furtive Scorpion Clan, its use is borderline forbidden due to its little-known and dangerous power, and it is only utilized under the gravest of circumstances. Instead, most Soshi shugenja rely upon the more traditional method of communing with the Fortunes to ask for their blessings. Only the highest-ranking daimyō of the Scorpion families are aware of kagenari's existence and the location of the dōjō where it is taught, and even then, such knowledge is imparted on a strictly need-to-know basis.

The ways of kagenari are taught only to the most promising members of the Soshi—those who are chosen by the Soshi family daimyō. The selection process is mysterious, but many of those chosen are said to have an innate connection to the Void. Although some truly gifted students go on to be trained in the way of shinobi as well, practitioners of kagenari may instead imbue a non-kagenari practitioner with the shadow's blessing through a brand, a marking which imprints the powerful properties of shadow directly onto the skin.

Kagenari and its associated shadow brands give its wielders the ability to control and literally become one with shadows, allowing them to alter the constraints of their physical form, such as shape, size, and movement, to match the surrounding darkness. When cloaked in the shadows, the branded can see the unseen and cast their senses to places far beyond their physical limitations. They can detect the nothingness in others and manipulate its power to daze or disorient their targets. Only the Ishiken—the Void shugenja of the Phoenix Clan—are capable of similar feats.

The process of being shadow branded is long and excruciating, with varied, sometimes unforeseen and unprecedented, results. The rituals must be undertaken during the dead of night under a new moon, when darkness reigns, with the light of but a single candle to guide the practitioner's hand. The kagenari masters and their students gather in the deepest of caves, subterranean vaults, or abyssal tombs, or in the legendary Hidden Moon Dōjō itself, the stronghold of the Soshi. The rituals of the Hidden Moon Dōjō are said to be especially lavish and excruciating, all the better to heighten the potency of their brands. Many rituals may accidentally terminate in death, while some effects may not manifest until months or years after the branding. Many of those who survive the ritual have no memory of the event, and often, there is no body remaining when the branding ritual goes wrong.

To the trained eye, the brand appears as an intricate black labyrinth of swirls and knots on the skin, resembling a tattoo. There is speculation as to whether changes in pattern affect the bearer. The mark can be administered to different

parts of the body, but those marked rarely get more than one brand due to the extreme risk. Although the brand can be seen clearly in dim light, some observers have noticed that it may completely disappear in the light of the sun. There have also been accounts of shadow brand bearers who can no longer endure the light of day, having dedicated themselves wholly to the darkness. Still other reports claim that eventually, branded persons may disappear altogether, swallowed by their own shadows. The fact that elderly shinobi bearing shadow brands are exceptionally rare seems to suggest that this is so.

## KAGE-DŌ

*"In the beginning, before the universe was created, there was only Nothing. In its perfection, it was alone, but whole. Through fear, desire, and regret, the Nothing was fragmented into ten thousand shards of reality, which coalesced into the jealous gods and the warring elements.*

*"To seek the Realm of Shadow is to return to the beginning. There, pain and suffering is no more, for nothing exists to distract from the Truth.*

*"It is the fate of the universe to return to the beginning. All that was done shall be undone."  
— Soshi, The Way of Shadow*





## SECRET SHINOBI TEXTS

Master shinobi lead and teach at the shinobi schools. Over the centuries, the styles, practices, and teachings of those sensei have been gathered into secret shinobi texts. Many of these are recorded using code, some remaining secret and off-limits even to shinobi students. Though dozens of publications exist, three of those implemented by the major dōjō are the most famous.

**A Chronicle of One Hundred Million Sacrifices:** This volume, compiled by Sensei Chiyome, is the most used primer for all training of shinobi. It contains the basic knowledge, practices, and principles for the shinobi way of life. In it are numerous sections that shinobi must master before being allowed to accept missions. Besides instructions on emulating the Three Oaths, the volume includes definitions and degrees of espionage, overviews of defensive and offensive strategies, the basics for controlling and manipulating emotion and overcoming pain in its various forms, and details of the inevitable sacrifices that accompany these activities.

**The Book of Silence:** This text covers the art of silent killing, and though its origin is unknown, it has been largely adopted by some of the more elite assassination schools, such as those within the Brother's Gift Dōjō and the Thunder's Dagger Dōjō. Its pages include diagrams

of the body marked with specific points for attack. One section outlines the crafting of specialized tools and weapons for the task, while another records strategies for overcoming obstacles such as water, walls, and guard animals while using environmental factors like weather or daylight for advantage. *The Book of Silence* emphasizes the doctrine of losing all markers of identity in order to blend with one's surroundings, insisting that novices begin training for these practices by taking a vow of silence.

**The Sea of Merging Rivers:** What is referred to as a single text is actually a vast collection of scrolls, each unique to its province, leaders, or shinobi. These scrolls record the history of clandestine shinobi activity over the centuries, with room for additions as they unfold. Information regarding strategy, training, weapon use, leadership, and philosophy are recorded in these volumes. Some scrolls contain similar material, as schools may cross paths or trade students. Some also include passages taken from the lost writings of Shosuro and Soshi, affording their owners rare and formidable insight into shinobi power. These scrolls are scattered all over the secret shinobi libraries of Rokugan, and few master shinobi have read more than two or three. No one knows how far or deep this sea goes.



