

Ancient History

~~The following is a brief history of the Kolat from their first encounters with the Shadow Guard to the modern day Empire.~~

~~Before the Empire (approx. 1500 years ago). The Kolat originate in a small kingdom far to the east of Rokugan (possibly Pavarre). The exact origins of the Kolat are clouded in mystery, but it is generally believed that the group was founded by shugenja who opposed the worship of the Kami. This "denomination" of shugenja felt that the Kami were simply powerful beings that managed to have been lucky enough to enjoy favor in the Celestial Order. They therefore should not be worshipped as gods. Over time, the Kolat came to believe that all supernatural beings should not be worshipped as gods.~~

~~The Kolat was an underground movement for centuries, and was prone to in-fighting. This conflict was over how to deal with the Kami. Some shugenja still 'pray' to the Kami, treating them as machines or tools. Others wish to destroy the Kami and take over the Celestial Order for themselves.~~

~~It wasn't until the Fall of the Kami did the Kolat begin to have a unifying ideology—that of resisting the Empire and its leadership, the Haneti dynasty. Many power-hungry warlords also joined their ranks, hoping to protect their territories from the Kami's military. The Kolat fought against the Kami for years, but were ultimately defeated. The survivors went their separate ways. Some of them returned to the eastern kingdom, others went north and joined with the barbarian tribes there, and the rest fled west to the Burning Sands.~~

~~But though this "old" Kolat was mostly destroyed, they left behind scrolls detailing their subversive techniques.~~

~~And while many people willfully bowed to the will of the Kami and accepted their arbitrary whims, there were those who sympathized with the Kolat's resistance efforts. They found the scrolls, and from there, built up a new Kolat, usurping the name and traditions of the "old" Kolat and claiming them as their own. This "new" Kolat then went underground, waging a gradual war of attrition against the Kami.~~

~~It is properchized by some shugenja that the descendants of the "old" Kolat may one day return from their exile, and overthrow their usurpers. Some Imperial scholars even go further and claim this has already happened.~~

Operating Under the Radar.

The Kolat are an ancient order, older than Imperial Rokugan itself, and their extensive spy network has existed under the noses of the Hantei Emperors for centuries. The Kolat's age and history means their structure is a complex one, with unknown chains of command and hidden motivations.

The nature of the Kolat means that they have no conventional territory under their direct control. Instead, the Kolat have established a complex web of secret cells that operate independently of one another. Each cell is devoted to a specific task, with little knowledge of the wider organization.

Kolat cells are always on the move, rarely staying in one place for too long. The few people who are aware of the Kolat's existence and know the names of more than a few cell leaders are often on the move too. Operating in such a manner makes it nearly impossible to root out the Kolat.

The only thing that remains constant is the group's willingness to resort to violence and terror to achieve their goals. Most of the cells are willing to wait patiently for the right opportunity to arise, but there are also "sleepers," who are fully aware of their Kolat allegiance, but have not yet been ordered to take any action. These individuals work day jobs, and can potentially go for years or even decades without taking part in any violence. Nonetheless, they're always ready to strike if the order is given.

The most important members of the Kolat are its so-called "Kolat Masters." The identities of these individuals are known only to other Kolat Masters and high-ranking members of the order, and even then, only on a need-to-know basis. The Kolat Masters are the leaders and instigators of the order, and their identities are known only to the Hand himself. The Hand is never publicly known as such, and in fact the position may be subject to regular rotation. The Hand alone has the authority to give orders to the other Kolat Masters, though in practice this role is fulfilled by whoever happens to be the most skilled in covert operations at any given time.

The Kolat's Agenda

The Kolat have waged a secret war against the Empire for centuries. While the group's activities rarely make the Emperor's daily briefings or the public news sheets, their actions have been felt by all. From simple sabotage designed to wear down the Empire's resources to the funding of pirate kings who stir up trouble along Rokugani waters, the Kolat have been quietly making their presence known for quite some time.

The Kolat's agenda is not to destroy the Empire, but to "liberate" Rokugan from what they see as an oppressive government. The group is not composed of cowardly shadows or ignorant peasants that comprehend the Empire's greatness only when subjected to its military might. The Kolat consist of educated and dedicated monks, shugenja, couriters, and other noble samurai who are fully aware of the benefits of living within the Empire. They see the problems with the system, not from a philosophical or social point of view, but from a strictly practical one.

The Kolat believe that without the Emperor, Rokugan will flourish. The group does not seek to harm the people, but merely the system that controls them. The Emperor must be brought down so that Rokugan may be free.

They do not seem to have plans to "replace" the Emperor, as other rebel groups do. They merely believe the Empire will fall apart on its own if it continues its current actions. They do expect to 'guide' the future of the Empire, but their primary focus is stopping the Haneti dynasty from ruining Rokugan further.

The Kolat do not have an overriding plan, as their plans are more widespread than most rebel groups and do not focus on a single purpose. They seem to be focused on doing what is best for the Kolat, as opposed to what is best for the people they supposedly fight for. While this may sound like a flaw in their plan, the Kolat's system of "democratic" leaders and thinkers serves as a check on any foolish thinking that might creep into their deliberation ~~makes sure that the flaws in a plan are recognized before they go into action.~~

Kolat Sleepers

Kolat doctrine states that, in order to be prepared to overthrow an unjust government such as the Empire, one must first become familiar with all aspects of that government. As such a Kolat sleeper agent will seek to become a citizen, learn to serve the Empire and even rise to a position of minor power. These agents are called "Tame" agents by the Kolat.

Tame agents are divided into five levels of threat, with only the fourth and fifth levels having been "activated" as loyal members of the conspiracy.

The first level of Kolat agents are the lowest priority for capture and elimination. These are citizens who have not displayed pro-Kolat behavior, but whom the Kolat have identified as potentially useful. They are allowed to continue about their business, but will be contacted by a second level Kolat member if needed.

The second level are "Silent Voices" who have been contacted and indoctrinated into the conspiracy, but have not displayed pro-Kolat behavior. They are given a whisper code to display their loyalty when necessary. These agents are only contacted if a higher level member has need of their skills.

The third level are "Listeners" who have been indoctrinated, shown loyalty and actively engage in pro-Kolat behavior. These agents are given general instructions to escalate the level of disruption in the Empire, but not any specific plans.

The fourth level are "Speakers" who are given specific plans and instructions to carry out activities that will harm the Empire. These are the lowest level of Kolat operative that the Empire needs to identify and eliminate quickly.

The final level, "Watchers", are the most dangerous of the Kolat. These are Kolat agents who have complete understanding of the Kolat operative and structure, and are responsible for overseeing the lower levels. These are the individuals most likely to be found out and eliminated before they can act. By eliminating the Watchers, you make it less likely that the Listeners and the Speakers can cause any significant harm to Rokugan. But if the Watchers survive the

purges, they have a good chance of becoming "Kolats Masters", and using the society's resources for their own secret agendas.

To their sleeping agents, the Kolat provides a codename based on a color and an animal. The color notifies other Kolat of the individual's intent and the animal indicates what type of communications the agent will be used for. Thus a "Yellow Monkey" could be a sleeper agent, a "Green Deer" a silent voice, a "Red Hawk" a listener, a "White Spider" a speaker and a "Black Bear" a watcher.

The exact number and color of the Kolat's codenames is a closely guarded secret, as is the identity of the various code names.

Preserving Secrecy

The Kolat have made great strides in their attempts to bring down the Empire, but have found themselves in a difficult position. The more they attempt to harm the Empire, the more attention they draw to themselves and the more quickly the Empire responds, eliminating the Kolat's advantage. Without the element of surprise, they fear the Empire might be able to root out their conspiracy entirely.

The current plan to deal with this problem is to create urban chaos, starting in Ryoko Owari and Ootosan Uchi. Urban chaos will distract the Empire and allow the conspiracy to gather strength and draw attention away from the more rural areas, where the conspiracy can grow back safely.

The Kolat knows that an Empire army is likely to strike at them, despite their best attempts at avoiding detection. Therefore, they need to be able to defend themselves against such attacks. To this end, they're attempting to train and arm a specialized group of warriors. The plan is to create super-soldiers who are mentally and physically superior to the average soldier. Unfortunately, this plan isn't going very well, as they're having a tough time finding people to fit the criteria and putting them through the training.

~~Another obstacle the Kolat has had to face is the simple fact that activities by Kolat sleepers are drawing attention. It is the strong opinion of many, that if the Sleepers are detected and traced back to the source, that it will lead directly to the conspiracy. In this case, the Empire would focus all its might on eliminating the conspiracy and then reinstating order. The goal of a new rebellion, even if successful would be to topple the Empire, wouldn't be achieved. Instead it would lead to years of chaos.~~

The conspiracy is split on two strategies to deal with the problem of secrecy. ~~on two strategies to avoid this problem~~

The first strategy is to continue the programs as before, but go further underground. These people want to create false fronts, sponsor criminal organizations, and subvert existing rebel movements. The goal is to make it difficult, if not impossible, to truly trace any activity back to the Kolat.

The second strategy is to cut back on Sleeper activities, while the conspiracy attempts to re-group and train their "super-soldiers" to fight the Empire should a full-scale assault take place. The cut back in Sleeper activities would hopefully allow the conspiracy to last long enough to mount a serious challenge to the Empire.

What If...Kolats Win?

In a perfect world, the Kolats would overthrow the Hantei Dynasty. After over a thousand years of rule, the Hantei would bow to the vastly more knowledgeable members of the Kolats. The most important decision following this change is who to place in charge.

If the Kolats choose to follow the path of logic, Rokugan enters a new era of enlightenment. The Kolats have long held that emotion must be removed from the judicial and political arenas. In theory, this would lead to a perfectly logical system of sorts. Free will and creativity would eventually be seen as illogical, and phased out of existence. Society would be perfected.

If the Kolats choose to follow the path of power and ruthlessness, Rokugan enters a new era of strife. With those that oppose the new order swiftly eliminated, the Kolats have free reign to do as they please. This new system of their making is far more oppressive than the one it replaced.

And if they choose both paths? What an odd thought. Let us discuss it.

The Kolats are hated by most of Rokugan, save perhaps a few of the Crab and Phoenix. The hatred is earned, of course: the Kolats have been manipulating events in Rokugan from their inception. They allowed the Empire to endure centuries past its expiration date as part of their plots to overthrow the Kami (for if they allowed the Empire to collapse "prematurely", the Kami may reassert their authority and create a better form of government).

Having eliminated the Hantei, the Kolats have little opposition to their rule. They ensure that only the most logical and intelligent people are allowed to breed. Emotion is an unnecessary distraction from ruling the Empire.

The Kolats rule with an iron fist. Resistance is seized and met with equally ruthless retribution. The Scorpion clan and the Lion clan are hunted to extinction. Any other potential threats are eliminated as well, most notably the monasteries and temples. The Kolats find religion to be an irrational distraction for the less intelligent masses.

The Kolats rule for centuries, but their regime stagnates. The same families who descended from the Kolats Masters of old have a monopoly on power, and their offspring grow increasingly inbred. The Kolats' original ideology of human potential is lost. Intellectualism is equated to superiority, and they rule the dumb masses.

The population doesn't grow under Kolat rule. They are too busy surviving. The Great Clans still exist, but only as shadows of their former selves. Under Kolat rule, the great families have lost much of their influence. ~~With no one to fight, the warrior traditions of Rokugan fade away. The Hida still exist, and are ruled by a succession of particularly thick-headed Chiefs of considerable girth. They are easily incorporated as a separate warrior caste under Kolat rule.~~

The Kolat make sure to maintain a substantial military. They need the strength to quell any potential uprisings by the dumb population.

The Crab clan remains independent of Kolat rule. They are too far away, and more importantly, they are a warrior culture that the Kolat have no intention of conquering. The Crab clan become the Kolat's allies of necessity. They are allowed a great degree of autonomy, but must provide soldiers for the Kolat invasions of the Shadowlands. This suits the Crabs just fine. Their hatred of the Shadowlands and anything associated with them overrides all other loyalties.

~~The Kolat was able to conquer most of the Shadowlands, and manage to seal off the Festering Pit of Fu Leng. However, they still had difficulty in cleansing the land of its ambient Taint and making it useful for resettling by "humans". Some of their magical experiments had caused an unnatural winter throughout most of Rokugan, a fact that the Kolat desperately try to hide. The Shadowlands are now known as the Forever Winter. The Kolat's magical experimentation has expanded the territory of Rokugan. The Kolat use their magic to force the growth of Rask's vegetation, and even bring some of it south. This causes an unnatural winter throughout most of Rokugan.~~

~~The Kolat are determined to eliminate all threats to humanity and ensure the survival of the species. This includes werebeasts. The Kolat's ongoing invasions of the Shadowlands cause various creatures there to retreat south, decimating the southern Rokugani cities.~~

~~The Kolat bring Kiho monks to Rokugan, where they are tasked with hunting down werebeasts and other beasts. The Kiho become an elite order of inquisitors who rival the Isawa in power.~~

The Kolat have no need for the Celestial Order. They do not acknowledge the fickle gods of Rokugan, and their humanocentric ideology renders the spirits and Fortunes useless. Instead of relying on deities, the Kolat now utilize a more "reliable" method of magic - maho. They found a way to "minimize" the risks of using maho, and now use this form of magic exclusively.

The Kolat continue to study the effects of long-term use of maho, finding ways to make their spells "safer" and "more effective". Their top minds are still as sharp as they were centuries ago, and actually more logical with less emotion. However, their reliance on maho is causing unforeseen consequences. The Forever Winter is just one example. They do not care, as they do not have to suffer the effects.

Adventure Seeds

- The Furo Rebellion: A rebellion in the east is being led by a Kolat operative, a man who goes by the name of Furo. He is leading a rebellion against the Empire, and sabotaging the Emperor's efforts in the region. It is vital that the rebellion be crushed as an example to others.

Furo, however, is very aware of his status as a Kolat operative. He knows that if the Empire discovers him to be a member of the secret society, his rebellion is as good as dead. He will do everything in his power to resist arrest or surrender and would do whatever it takes to keep his affiliation secret, even if it means jeopardizing his own life in the process.

~~The Emperor's armies suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Shadow Guard and their barbarian allies, making his position even more tenuous. The Emperor's friends are few and far between.~~

- The Sneak: One of the Emperor's most trusted advisors has been providing information on the Empire's military to the Kolat. His wife is a member of the society, and will take the information he provides and pass it along to her comrades. The information allows the Kolat to more effectively target the Empire's military, and has been instrumental in destabilizing the Emperor's control over his realm.

The traitor, however, has grown tired of simply giving away information. He is convinced that the Haneti dynasty will fall soon anyway, and wants to play a more direct role in its destruction. ~~He has asked to be directly integrated into the Shadow Guard, to fight along side with them against the Empire.~~

You must decide whether to grant this man's request, or have him executed as a traitor to the Empire.

- The Forest Alliance: The Kolat has established a loose alliance with a group of bandits and tribes called the Forest Alliance. The Bandits are mostly focused on self-serving banditry, but have been requesting gunpowder from the Kolat. In exchange for weapons, the Kolat has been receiving information about the Empire's military strength in the area.

The Kolat intends to use this information in order to mount a surprise attack on an Imperial outpost, and needs to decide where to focus their efforts. ~~The Shadow Guard has been requesting quantities of gunpowder weapons, bullets, and dynamite from the Kolat for this purpose.~~ You must find a way to disrupt the alliance between the Forest Alliance and the Kolat, possibly by interrupting the trade of gunpowder, or defeating their surprise attacks so that the Kolat don't see the point of maintaining the alliance.

- The Vengeful Spirit: One of the Scorpion clan's most effective assassins has been a woman known as the Vengeful Spirit. Operating under the alias of a Kolat operative, she has been providing information and intelligence on the Kolat's military strength in the

area to the Scorpion Clan. While her intelligence is always accurate, there is a problem.

The Vengeful Spirit is a rogue agent. Her loyalties do not lie with the Scorpion Clan, the Empire, or the Kolat. They lie with herself. Once she has provided the information she knows and feels she can no longer be of use, she is prone to take matters into her own hands and attempt to kill her Kolat contact, or even a high ranking member of the Scorpion Clan, and then strike off to form her own rebel organization. This is a gamble the Scorpion Clan can't afford to lose.

You must decide whether to use her as a one-woman army, or find another way of gathering the information she provides.

- The Royal Eyes: The Kolat has had an ongoing intelligence war with the Empire's spies, mainly the infamous spy-masters of the Scorpion clan. The Kolat hopes to bring the spy-masters out from the shadows and into the light, to be eliminated by more direct means. The Kolat has had some success in this regard, but the Scorpion clan is incredibly clever at unmasking Kolat agents as well. Both sides want to expose each other's dirty laundry, and are using increasingly dishonorable means.

You must decide whether to continue with this ongoing intelligence war, or attempt to take things into your own hands. After all, sometimes one must sacrifice honor to protect the Empire. But if too much honor is sacrificed on the altar of pragmatism, even Empires begin to lose their sense of purpose and meaning.

~~—The Emperor: The Shadow Guard has been tasked with being the vanguard of the Empire's military. As such, it is their job to keep the Emperor safe from harm. As the plans for war continue to be drawn up, the Shadow Guard finds itself with a unique opportunity.~~

~~The Shadow Guard has received intelligence that the Emperor is planning on visiting Rask. This is an extremely rare event, and it's only happen a handful of times in the past two decades. The last time the Emperor visited Rask was twenty six years ago, and the Empire's grip over the territory has only gotten stronger since then.~~

~~The Shadow Guard has the opportunity to take out the Emperor himself. A single bullet is all it would take. Should the Shadow Guard go through with it, the future of Rask and the Empire would be up for grabs. The Shadow Guard would be able to assume control of both, and bring an end to the war once and for all.~~

~~The only thing is, the Shadow Guard doesn't have just one Emperor to worry about. They have two.~~

~~Emperor Ferdinand is the direct ruler of the Empire, and his son Martin is the Shadow Guard's Emperor. Should either one of these men be killed, the Shadow Guard's fate~~

~~after the assassination would be in jeopardy. If you are to decide to kill one of the Emperors, you must be sure that you are willing to deal with the consequences.~~

Kolat Advice

The Kolat is one of the more interesting factions that work against the Empire, and in my mind they are always looking for opportunities to strike at the Hantei Emperor. I believe they are also perfect for a campaign since they offer the potential for a strong recurring villain that the players will have to deal with on an ongoing basis, and that can be threatened to constantly go after the players.

I think the Kolat are perfectly set up for a long term campaign because even though they are a terrorist organization, or perhaps especially because they are a terrorist organization, they offer the players the potential for internal conflict. Many of the Kolat's agents really believe in their cause and don't want to see the Empire fall, they just want to take it over. There are also those who are dedicated to the organization first and are willing to do whatever it takes to further the Kolat's cause, even if it means endangering the Empire and the people in it.

This can set up all kinds of interesting conflicts among the party. Do they trust anyone that openly associates with the Kolat? Maybe a close friend or family member has joined the Kolat. Are they a double agent working for the Haneti dynasty, or is their loyalty genuine? Could the whole organization be trusted? What about the other organizations that oppose the Celestial Order, like the Perfect Land Sect? The players might find an organization that they like better, or at least one that doesn't want to see the world burn. Should they still associate with the terrorists? These are all questions that can cause great internal conflict within the party, especially since they may need to turn to the Kolat for help later.

Of course, the Kolat can offer tangible benefits as well. They can offer access to better equipment and training facilities. The resources of an entire organization dedicated to overthrowing the Emperor are at your fingertips. Of course, you are going to have to deal with their constant demands ~~for progress on the mission~~ as well as any assignments they may have for you.

This is the type of campaign I would run, but obviously you can change anything to fit your table's playstyle. ~~Feel free to use organizations from different sources such as Pathfinder or other role playing games.~~ The important thing to remember is these organizations should offer opportunities for plot, but also create challenges for the players to overcome.

As always, have fun!